Metal Onna-bugeisha

Japanese women and the challenge to hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal's transnational flow

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Christopher Morris**, certify that this thesis, **"**Metal Onna-bugeisha - Japanese women and the challenge to hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal's transnational flow" is entirely my own work and has been completed during my enrollment at City, University of London. I affirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted previously for any degree or qualification at this University or any other institution.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand how and why heavy metal in Japan has accepted, absorbed, and normalized female participation while women have remained marginalized in the rest of the metal world. Heavy metal music and its corresponding culture have long been considered both a social and sonic masculine space rooted in notions of hegemonic masculinity regardless of where its transnational expansion has developed scenes. Despite shifts over the last few decades in the gender complexion of metal's increasingly diverse global audience and increased female participation in the fields of metal journalism and metal-inclined academia, hegemonic masculinity is still considered part of heavy metal's bedrock constitution thus sustaining and animating the genre's aural and visual tropes. However, in Japan, women operate at the commercial and artistic core of heavy metal music and have done so as a well-kept secret largely escaping the notice of Western metal fans and media, and certainly the attention of metal academia. I have identified four key components to this phenomenon which are all unique to the Japanese cultural context. These include the absence of masculine associations with instrumentation and music socialization in Japan, 'occidental longing' and constructions of an often private and personal 'oppositional femininity,' a divorce of masculinity from standards of genre authenticity, and the use of a public 'familiar femininity' to gain acceptance in Japanese popular culture. The result of this examination then calls into question long-held theories of heavy metal's masculine essentialism in understanding how localized cultural domains and subdomains of music develop in the transnational flow of genres.

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Introduction

July 14, 2017. It was another humid summer day in Kawasaki, Japan, a large industrial city in Kanagawa prefecture just south of Tokyo. A crowd of heavy metal lovers with hand-fans, cold drinks, and an enthusiasm undampened by the oppressively muggy weather, had swarmed the streets surrounding the famous Club Citta, a 1400-capacity live music venue in the heart of the city. Mary's Blood and Cyntia, two prominent Japanese heavy metal bands of the moment, both major label recording artists, were to co-headline the show. Also performing would be an all-star guitar ensemble featuring the lead guitarists from both groups and other noteworthy Japanese metal guitarists. Waiting for entry, the metal crowd passed the time in the manner of most music taste-culture communities, discussing favorite groups and entering conversation over best albums, future live events to be attended, and that night's concert performance expectation. In addition to the artists we were about to see, we all discussed other assorted acts such as Babymetal, Bridear, Mardelas, Aldious, Show-Ya, and many others. This was likely similar to discussions taking place at any other metal show in any other country, but with two notable exceptions. The first is that the artists under discussion this night were all Japanese. The second is that the artists were predominately women. In the case of that evening's draw to Club Citta—Mary's Blood, Cyntia, and the night's special guitar ensemble, the 'World Guitar Girls Collection'—the artists were *all* women.

This was not an anomalous night. Though the world of Japanese heavy metal boasts plenty of male metal artists, talk of heavy metal in Japan, the second largest music market in the world (IFPI Global Music Report 2023), involves significant conversation regarding female artists. This is unavoidable if Japanese metal is the subject of knowledgeable conversation as

fans, domestic heavy metal magazines, music shop displays, and metal concert listings make abundantly clear: Japanese metal has a large and profoundly impactful female presence. What is truly remarkable about this fact is that no other country appears to have, or appears to have ever had, female participation in heavy metal performance anywhere approaching this degree.

Metal music and its corresponding culture have long been considered both a social and sonic masculine space rooted in notions of hegemonic masculinity regardless of where its transnational expansion has developed scenes (Heesch and Scott 2016, Hill, Lucas, and Riches 2015, Kahn-Harris 2007, Walser 1993, Weinstein 1991). Despite shifts over the last few decades in the gender complexion of metal's increasingly diverse global audience (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2016) and increased female participation in the fields of metal journalism and metal-inclined academia, hegemonic masculinity is considered part of heavy metal's bedrock constitution thus sustaining and animating the genre's aural and visual tropes (Walser 1993, Weinstein 2009). Keith Kahn-Harris has argued that masculinity is part of heavy metal's *essentialism*, along with whiteness (another arguable point) and heteronormativity, and thus a core characteristic of the genre (2016). The glaring gender imbalance within metal's performative ranks with men holding dominion over the genre's musical execution, and a heteronormative masculinity being the genre's primary gender identity performance, appears on the surface to support the claim. Though as metal's reputation remains masculinist, Japan fuels the antithesis and has done so as a well-kept secret largely escaping the notice of Western metal fans and media, and certainly the attention of metal academia.

The West' and therefore 'Western' are admittedly problematic terms in social, geopolitical, and cultural contexts. However, I use the terms in this study for multiple reasons. Japanese people who speak English, from basic levels to full fluency, as well as Japanese

musicians, journalists, and scholars whose work is referenced throughout the study, tend to collapse the world outside of Asia into the general category of the abstracted West. The use of the terminology is also ubiquitous in the body of existing research while also dominant in fan discourse and the music business in general. Though perhaps a more accurate description is 'Euro-American' in reference to a cultural domain or domains, in my experience the use of the 'West' is far too pervasive and engrained into to all levels of discourse to ignore and almost more problematic to disregard than it is to keep.

Those familiar with the current state of heavy metal music and culture may jump to defend it as a more diverse performative space than ever before by citing increases over the last few decades in the number of highly visible and successful metal bands with female vocalists. Such bands as Finland's Nightwish, Arch Enemy from Sweden, and Germany's Leave's Eyes, among many others, have experienced major success and such bands are typically referenced by fans and the heavy metal media as 'female-fronted metal' (Heesh and Scott 2016). The label of 'female-fronted' categorizes the female participation as a noteworthy exception to the gender make-up of the typical metal band and draws attention to its difference from the heavy metal norm. While the global metal landscape is indeed more diverse now than in decades past, the number of women singing in metal bands has not sparked a trend in increased or diverse female participation on other instruments in heavy metal. The guitarists, bassists, or drummers populating the pool of musicians behind any presence of Western female frontwomen are still overwhelmingly male.

Outside of being singers, women in other performative roles in Western metal barely haunt the borders of genre relevance with few achieving *any* measurable success in *any* era. Guitarist Nita Strauss has certainly planted her flag in the metal world in the band of legendary

proto-metal shock rock legend Alice Cooper, as well as emerging as a respected solo artist. Halestorm has achieved success with band leader, singer, and guitarist Lizzy Hale at the helm. Lita Ford was one of only a few women to achieve fame and some commercial success as a metal performer during the genre's golden period of the 1980s. Ford did so as vocalist but also guitarist, songwriter, and her own band-leader just as Lizzy Hale did two decades later, but both backed by all male session and touring musicians.[1] Katherine Thomas, known by her stage name The Great Kat, achieved mild notoriety in the 1980s as a virtuosic metal guitar player, though she is most well-known among musicians rather than the general fan base and never achieved any significant commercial success.[2]

Western all-female metal bands are even fewer and farther between and very few of renown have emerged in the genre's near five-decade history. Formed in the UK in the late-1970s, Girlschool appeared as part of the 'new wave of British heavy metal' (NWOBHM) as did the short lived (though occasionally reunited) Rock Goddess, though neither achieved a level of success like that of most of their male peers. The late-1980s saw success for the American band Vixen with a number of entries on the US Billboard sales chart and significant rotation of music videos on MTV. The Swiss five-piece metal outfit Burning Witches has risen as a name of note, though their impact on the genre is yet to be determined. Reaching for more examples, perhaps 1990's heavy alt-rock/garage-punk band L7 and the heavy genre-shifting band Kittie can be argued as having enough crossover appeal to metal fans to be included in the discussion, but this would then still only be a small handful of all-female acts of *any* note in the metal and broader hard-rock community since the genre's inception.

[1] https://www.biography.com/people/lita-ford-17169494
[2] https://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-great-kat-mn0000073032

Yet a cursory Google search, a glance at a heavy metal section in any Japanese record store, or perusing the pages of Japan's heavy metal magazines reveal a long list of Japanese female metal artists making waves at all levels and with all instrument roles represented. The list of all-female bands is seemingly endless. In addition to a few of the names already mentioned in this introduction, there is (or has been) Fate Gear, Zettai Club, Ganglion, Band-Maid, Galhammer, Doll$Boxx, Nemophila, Whiskey Dust, FullMoon, Lipstick, Lovebites, and countless others operating at various levels of success from small clubs to large concert halls, but all finding purchase in the crowded marketplace. There is a plethora of groups comprised of both men and women, with women just as often found playing various instruments as they are holding microphones. Exemplified by such acts as D-Drive, Unlucky Morpheus, Gunship 666, and more, Japanese bands do not trap women in any singular role. 'Guitar heroes' such as Saki from Mary's Blood and Nemophila, Toki from Aldious, Yuki from D-Drive, solo artist Rie a.k.a. Suzaku, and child prodigy guitarist Lisa-X have achieved a level of notoriety, thus becoming the icons of metal's primary instrument. This is also the case for drummers like Marina from Aldious and Natsumi from Bridear, bassists such as solo artist and session player Kiyoshi, and indeed powerhouse vocalists such as Mari Hamada, Fuki, Maki Okayama and Marina Hebishi, to name but four.

From major-label impact players to independent buzz-worthy up-and-comers, Japanese female metal performers are not just operating on the fringes of a heavy metal culture. They are instead functioning at the commercial and artistic heart of the domestic metal market. *Burrn!* Magazine, the country's number one heavy metal publication, dedicates an annual edition of its special issue series 'Metallion' to the country's female metal contingent. *Burrn!* has also published a special edition dedicated solely to Aldious, arguably the most successful

contemporary all-female metal band in Japan at the time of writing. Yamaha Music Media has done the same for Mary's Blood. There are annual all-female rock festivals (no men allowed to perform) highlighting metal including Nagoya's *Electric Lady Loud* and Tokyo's *Naon No Yaon*, the latter produced by Japan's first successful all-female hard-rock/metal band, Show-Ya, who are still recording and touring after almost forty years.[3] Metal has also found its way into the aesthetics of female-driven J-pop with Japanese 'idol,' a youth-centric and talent agency manufactured Japanese pop-culture phenomenon (see Chapter 5), drifting firmly into metal territory thus creating a genre hybrid. The international idol-metal sensation Babymetal and other acts such as Necronomidol, BiSH, and Pass-Code, have all made names for themselves utilizing genre hybridity. Male J-pop 'idols,' a contested term when it comes to genre or taste-culture delineation regarding the country's 'boy bands,' have avoided the crossover thus making idol-metal the exclusive domain of girls.

The aim of this study is to understand how and why heavy metal in Japan has accepted, absorbed, and normalized female participation while women have remained marginalized in the rest of the metal world. The questions emerging from Japan's recalibration of metal's gender dynamic are myriad, but governing my research are three overarching questions—one which examines the genre, one which addresses the artists, and one which explores the fandom which supports it all.

1) What does Japan's reversal of metal's global gender-imbalance reveal about the genre's gender politics in the context of its transnational flow? If heavy metal came to Japan with its reputed masculine bent, that predisposition has been renegotiated or discarded. If it did not, what constitutes heavy metal's essentialism, and how we assess the defining characteristics of a genre

[3] http://show-ya.jp/biography/

and its culture, are then up for renegotiation. 2) What is it about the social and cultural positionality, and attitudinal complexion, of the Japanese female metal performer which is distinct from her rare Western counterpart? 3) How has Japanese metal's different gender complexion shaped Japanese metal fandom and how has this fandom then informed and shaped that complexion?

The ramifications of what can be learned go well beyond music as metal is also a new space for reexamining how female identity and place in Japanese culture may be re-examined and renegotiated. Heavy metal provides a fresh context for exploring how women in Japan are challenging persistent gender ideologies in a patriarchal society still guilty of institutional misogyny (Iwao 2008, Kelsky 2006) and still in many ways in control of the industry in which these women are performing.

My place in it all

Back at Club Citta, I reveled in the brilliant performances. My head was banging and my horned fist was raised throughout the show, all the while Mary's Blood was displayed on my chest via the metal fan's requisite black t-shirt. Their logo was also quite visible on my right forearm in the form of a tattoo. They are not the only band I have represented in such a manner. Other pieces of related Japanese band art have been branded into my skin, thus absorbing fandom into my physical being as an immutable aspect of my identity. I am, above all else, a fan, but being a fan and thus a taste-culture insider engaged in active participation is only one of the positionalities from which I approach my interests. This no doubt colors my academic exploits, yet it informs my avenues of inquiry and breathes life into the questions I seek to answer.

It was in 1986 at the age of 11 that I officially joined the metal militia complete with mullet, torn jeans, and black t-shirt collection. Drawn to its power, scope, technical wizardry, and the emotional vigor with which it fueled the transgressive adolescent (and masculine?) imagination of American suburbia, metal became my life's defining soundtrack and metal fandom my sense of emerging social identity. 'Heavy metal' is a broad genre encompassing what is now a seemingly ever-growing list of subgenres and families of subgenres. But I was attracted to all of it. My own musicianship was also triggered by the genre. Taking up bass guitar, I spent my teens learning the dynamics of garage band friendships and how rock-star dreams are formed, dismantled, and reconfigured to accommodate the growing inconvenience of an impending adulthood while traveling its inherent route of self-discovery.

Formal music study at a community college in Sacramento, California followed, including some time as the college's commercial music department session and on-call studio bassist where put I my fretless skills to the test in numerous genres. Within that eventually realized inconvenient adulthood, a semi-professional career as a musician manifested. For nearly a decade, my musical pursuits led me in and out of recording studios, clubs, and record company contract negotiations—some of these endeavors proving fruitful, some not. Combined with brief stints on the road, including an international tour (never Japan, unfortunately), and dealings with management, lawyers, and the shifting sands of retail distribution, copyrights, and publishing, this period of my life served as a valuable education in the music business from a genre-rooted point of view. All of these adventures also happened to coincide with seismic shifts in the music business. My time at the college saw the rise of the MP3 and the home digital recording revolution. The earliest years of trying to carve out a career for myself as a musician intersected with the Napster file-sharing controversy and the breakdown of long-held business models by

labels and independent musicians trying to gain a foothold in the new wild-west of the music business.

However, self-discovery dealt its hand and even just teasing the edges of any kind of tangible professional advancement (or 'making it' as we all still say) was somehow dishearteningly vacant of joy or fulfillment. A return to higher education in my thirties to entertain other interests sparked a new academic enthusiasm with heavy metal eventually finding its way back to the forefront. This fresh engagement with metal, contextualizing my fandom in a world of scholarly analysis, reinjected some of the joy missing from my years as a performer, but Japan was yet to enter the picture.

That episode began with an innocuous e-mail from a friend sometime in late 2013. I was living in London not long into a disappointing postgraduate program for Scandinavian Studies via which I had hoped to explore issues of national and cultural identity in relation to the controversial Norwegian black metal scene of the 1990s (see Khan-Harris, 2007). A little lost in trying to find my footing as both a metalhead and postgraduate researcher, distractions such as this simple email were quite welcomed. The email contained a link and the short message which read 'So here's a thing you might want to know is a thing.' Clicking on the link, my fandom and eventually the course of my life dramatically shifted. The video was for the song 'Gimme Chocolate!' by a trio of young, engaging Japanese girls singing, dancing, and smiling in as bubble-gum pop friendly a manner as possible, but it was in juxtaposition with the accompanying sounds of brutal metal guitar riffs and damaging drums. They were called Babymetal. Like so many others when first exposed to Babymetal, who I discuss in Chapter Seven, I was somewhat confused and easily drifted to cynicism and judgement as I entertained heavy metal elitist notions of authenticity and then skepticism over pop-music constructions

appropriating my beloved metal aesthetics. However, by the end of the video I had been won over. I thought it was phenomenal and wanted more.

Babymetal had caused a stir in the global metal community (Goodman 2015). The anomaly of teenage girls sporting dimples and pigtails bringing a young and overtly feminine image to heavy metal, with a healthy dose of Japanese *kawaii*—a sense of cuteness and love of all things adorable which seemingly permeates every aspect of contemporary Japanese culture (Craig 2000, Ratner 2016, Okazaki 2013)—was shocking and, to some, groundbreaking. To many fans it was an afront to heavy metal's core principles of anti-establishmentarianism, rebellion, and the genre's masculinist disposition (Kahn Harris 2013, Walser 1993, Weinstein 2009). To fans like me it was fresh, dynamic, and simply brilliant. In a way it was itself anti-establishment and rebellious in its delivery of an unexpected challenge to metal's status-quo, but its injection of a youthful femininity, and a non-Western one at that, was often seen as threateningly *un*-metal. Social media debates raged, and still rage, about the act's authenticity and merit for genre inclusion as magazines and websites devoted to metal culture gave the act and the controversy a forum. Do dimples and pigtails have a place in heavy metal?

In January 2015 I made my first trip to Japan to see Babymetal's sold-out performance at the 25,000 capacity Saitama Super Arena just north of Tokyo. My love affair with Babymetal spawned an interest in the country, culture, and language. Later that year I returned for a longer journey which exposed me to a corner of heavy metal's global expansion long unknown to me. I became a devotee of myriad artists and frequented record shops (yes, they are still relevant in Japan) and venues to increase my exposure. I was welcomed by fans into the domestic heavy metal order and gained an education in the who's who of the Japanese metal bubble. It was through this enculturation that I was confronted by the unavoidable and surprising truth that

women in heavy metal appeared to be thriving in Japan. Babymetal was not a mere anomalous presentation of female participation and femininity in metal, but the most contemporary and famous exemplification of a long-standing unique component of Japan's take on heavy metal. I recalled from previous studies in Japanese history that in feudal Japan *Onna-bugeisha* were the female warriors who fought alongside male samurai. The term translates to "female martial artist" or "female martial warrior". In many ways, the Japanese female metal musician was a reminiscent figure: a metal warrior.

Though awarded within a different discipline, that first MA of mine introduced me to the field of ethnomusicology as it was the area in which I had been unknowingly working during that postgraduate run. Upon reflection on the avenues of my research, I realized ethnomusicology was a perfect fit for my interests and was no longer, if it was ever, just for anthropologists wanting to examine 'traditional musics.' As Jeff Todd Titon argues, ethnomusicology is 'the study of people making music' with people creating a 'cultural domain' forged by the ideas people have about music (Titon 1992). Different cultures producing different ideas about music offer localized and varied cultural domains. How music genres behave in flow between these cultural contexts producing differences in the cultural domains of music was an intriguing path to follow. This set a second MA in motion, this time in ethnomusicology, and my interrogation of Japanese heavy metal began in academic earnest. With such a marriage of interests comes certain advantages and pitfalls, especially regarding complex developments in my unique and multiplicitous positionality in the field. However, before I am to discuss my position in the field, it is useful to introduce how I discuss and conceptualize that field.

Terminology and defining the field

Japan is a beautiful and bewildering, and thus occasionally frustrating, country of contradiction and juxtaposition. No matter how much time I spend immersed in its culture and exposed to its customs, whether navigating massive crowds under the LCD lightshows that are the Shibuya or Shinjuku wards of Tokyo or spending time in the serenity of Miyajima Island near Hiroshima, I am usually left charmed and perplexed. Japan is plugged into the modern world, and in many ways drives modernity with its tech and popular culture exports, but tradition is ever-present. Women in kimonos will text away on their iPhones while sipping Starbucks coffee. Shinto shrines can be found nestled between busy office buildings and 24-hour convenience stores. Everywhere one turns there is a drink vending machine, well-tended and well-stocked, even on temple grounds. Japan can also often reveal a surprising low-tech reality behind a hi-tech image. Though the country is known for being on the cutting edge of consumer electronics, fax machines and CD players are still relevant. DVD rental remains viable, as does the rather mind-blowing concept of music CD rental. Robots may assist customers in making reservations, but the restaurant may not accept foreign bank cards—and a majority of ATMs don't either.

Then there are the sociocultural contradictions. A cultural emphasis on codes of etiquette does not stop public drunkenness from being commonplace and completely tolerated. The Japanese can be overwhelmingly polite with a heartfelt kindness and gentility, yet xenophobia and hints of racism are ever perceptible (Pollman 2015). In the madhouse of Tokyo's stereotypically busy streets and train stations, there is a slow-moving, mobile phone enraptured malaise sometimes bringing the hustle and bustle to a crawl as people enter their own little world with little to no situational awareness. Respect is paramount in Japanese culture yet, as discussed

throughout this work, many Japanese women still endure the disrespect brought on by an old-fashioned patriarchal society.

Japan's cultural domain of popular music is not immune to such curiosities. Borrowing from Christopher Small's (1998) theory of 'musicking,' addressing music as a process rather than just a product, the Japanese have their own way of *doing* popular music. How music is consumed and enjoyed, how fandom is developed and enacted, and how music is performed, all exhibit unique Japanese cultural flavors producing musicking idiosyncrasies. These peculiarities in the cultural domain of popular music are then fed into the identity and functionality of various taste-cultures, such as that of heavy metal. A taste-culture then populates what I see as a *cultural subdomain* constructed by ideas regarding each taste-culture's genre but acting within a broader framework of institutionalized principles about engaging popular music. I make use of Herbert Gans' term 'taste-culture' (2008) in reference to the community, the 'imagined community' in the Benedict Anderson sense (1983), of like-minded fans who bring their ideas about music into action and animate the heavy metal subdomain. I prefer this to other labels, including Keith Negus' (2010) concept of *genre culture* which I avoid here because I believe it is more useful in its intended use of referencing a relationship of genre to industry rather than as people forming a taste-driven community.

It is still tempting to use the term *subculture* despite the word falling out of academic fashion. The word is so frequently used in a casual and colloquial way that it can be challenging to keep it from the tip of one's tongue, including in Japan. In discussing metal fandom with the Japanese, the word comes up in borrowed English as the abbreviated 'sabukaru' ('sab' for sub, and 'karu' as an abbreviation for the Japanese pronunciation of the English word 'culture' pronounced phonetically in Japanese as 'karuchya') and still has some academic significance.

(see Miyazawa 2014, Otsuka 2001). In Japan, the term also holds negative connotation which betrays some of its English conceptual origins and leans toward demeaning the group being referenced as immature and not yet legitimate in social standing (Kanasaka 1968). Subcultural theory, as put forth in the 1970s by University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), has long been considered problematic for other reasons. The notion of subculture as the interplay of youth, taste in music, and style, as deviance from dominant cultural ideologies in reaction to structural changes in society (Hall and Jefferson 1976), has been criticized for everything from lack of inclusiveness (McRobbie 1991) to rejection of individual identity (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995) and the sociopolitical circumstances of variations in cultural production (Clarke 1981).

Andy Bennett has been critical of the way in which the term subculture has managed to live on after its acceptance waned thanks to appropriation by popular media and use in the public sphere as 'little more than a convenient 'catch-all' term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect' (Bennett 1999, 599). I disagree as I find a 'catch-all' term to be quite convenient, and the ubiquity of the word and its casual usage can work to the advantage of communication and the sharing of ideas. After all, it became a catch-all term for a reason: it works.

Regardless, Bennett offers up 'neo-tribe' as a post-subculture idea (1999). Bennet claims that subculture 'imposes rigid lines of division over forms of socialization' (1999, 603) and neo-tribe accounts for a sense of fluidity. Adopting French sociologist Michel Maffesoli's concept of mass society creating tribalism rather than mass individualism (1996), Bennet believes this term solves the issues of CCCS-imposed rigidity in social groups which must undergo development and changes in shifting styles and tastes with the times. However, the fluidity and casual nature

of how subculture is used in the public sphere actually solves this problem. Subculture does *not* fail to account for a changing of the times or a shift in rules and regulation, because a subculture in any moment can apply whatever parameters it wishes at the whims of the people who comprise it, as inconvenient as it might be for certain academics. Basically, subculture's rigidity is an imagined intellectual restriction. Simply adopting a more casual definition by easing CCCS boundaries and agreeing to accept that fluidity can apply to terms, just as much as academics like Bennett feel it should apply to social groups, seems easy enough to accept. Paul Hodgkinson has attempted such rehabilitation of the term defining subcultures as a means of socialization utilizing 'identity, commitment, consistent distinctiveness and autonomy' (2002, 29). Yet the subculture still inspires an academic grimace.

Keith Kahn-Harris has correctly pointed out that there is a 'reductive essentialism' in the way Bennett, in his use of the electronic dance music taste-cultures of the UK in the 1990s as his scene study of choice (1999), applied Maffesoli's concepts, as well as failure to include concepts which connect people within the given group.

> For one thing, the concept is of little use as an analytical structure, since it is essentially a description of a form of sociality and affect that arises from such things as dancing in nightclubs and going on protest marches. There is a kind of reductive essentialism here that treats a disparate range of activities as essentially alike. This approach does not help us to understand why someone would go on a march rather than go dancing. Nor does it help us to understand the texts and institutions that particular social formations create. (Kahn-Harris, 2007; 28, Kindle Edition)

A tribe must still retain boundaries and exhibit order, otherwise it cannot be defined at any moment in time as different from any other group. Contemporary political tribalism, that of sports team fandom, and religious divisions among believers are examples of modern application of the term which complicate tribe's use as they indicate that rigidity in social group formation is

essential to the term. It does not *de*regulate modern social solidarity. The term's purpose is to define boundaries and regulate socialization accordingly.

My sympathy for subculture notwithstanding, to avoid the academic fray, *taste-culture* feels more acceptable and, more importantly, accurate. While operating in the Japanese domain, the term easily circumvents whatever negative connotation may still be lingering in the casual Japanese usage of *sabukaru*. Taste-culture maintains a meaning of community via a unifying theme (taste) thus more specific than subculture or tribe. It also swerves around the term 'genre culture' by not preferencing the business mechanisms at play which might influence or shape the community. Taste-culture is also a timeless term unencumbered by how a genre's defining characteristics may change over time. The term allows for recognition of fixity in a moment of time while not disregarding inevitable change in what constitutes a particular genre. Genres are fluid, and therefore the culture created by taste preferencing a genre as its defining characteristic is also fluid. Taste-culture also solves the problem of subgenre overlap in fan communities. While the boundaries of genre, and therefore subgenre, can be under constant contestation, a taste-culture indicates a community, however imagined it may be, forged by converging interests *within*, rather than *by* a genre or subgenre. For example, if a black metal fan and a progressive metal fan agree on a band, they are still both part of the broader taste-culture of heavy metal, and the more specific community of fandom for the agreed upon artist, but the two fans do not cross paths in the communities of their individually preferenced subgenres as each may argue they are not part of the other's genre-based community. Taste-culture allows for this type of specificity.

A common term I try to either avoid or use with precise purpose is *scene.* Some have argued that scene is a suitable replacement for subculture (Berkers and Schaap 2018, Kahn-Harris 2007), and therefore perhaps renders taste-culture an unnecessary label. However, I do not

believe it is a competing term for such theoretical conceptualizations. Keith Kahn Harris wrote that 'scene seems to be implicitly holistic in defining something that encapsulates music making, production, circulation, discussion, and texts' (2007, 13) as he sympathizes with researchers looking to escape problematized subculture and post-subculture theory. While I agree with his general definition of scene, I disagree that it can be used in reference to the community of people essential to its existence. To reference a metal scene is not to identify the community as such, but rather an interactive space. It is more a network of places, texts, and activity than a group of people engaging in those activities, and even Khan Harris leaves the groups of people themselves out of his list of what is included in a 'holistic' definition.

John Irwin has argued that one of scene's meanings in everyday use is a space with the designation of activity as something 'subcultural' (1997). If we substitute taste-culture for subculture, I tend to agree with Irwin as he correctly identifies scene as a space of action rather than a grouping of people. Scene is a pluralistic concept of both a physical space, encompassing the actual areas of engagement or *musicking*, and a shared philosophical space (Lefebvre 1991) governed primarily by taste. A scene therefore comes to life by the actions of a taste-culture and not by virtue of that taste-culture or its artifacts simply existing. The taste-culture's actions within a scene are informed by the conditions of the subdomain. This is where there is a distinct difference between the concepts of a scene and that of a music subdomain, which on the surface may appear interchangeable. The actions of a taste-culture which animate a scene are governed by cultural disposition in regard to music. The subdomain is then a larger cultural context of ideas about music within which a scene can be built.

Scene is also a difficult concept to apply to macro interactive music spaces such as that within a country or region because of incredibly micro and niche spaces based on

genre/subgenre, city, neighborhood, or any theme which unifies them, being so profoundly different regardless of any aesthetic connective tissue. For example, the Los Angelas metal scene of the 1980s with its network of clubs, promoters, bands, newsletters, labels, agents etc was very different than that of New York City. The Florida death metal scene of the 1990s was very distinct from the nationwide nu-metal phenomenon. It is almost impossible to define an 'American metal scene' at any point in time without being forced into defining a scene at every mention. Subdomain is therefore more well-rounded and holistic than scene, takes into consideration cultural contexts, can encompasses scenes no matter how broadly or specifically the term might be applied, while also being inclusive of the community rather than just referencing a space of interaction.

In my experience, the uniqueness of the Japanese metal subdomain is most palpable and easily understood within two physical sites of activity which became my most familiar zones of action and interaction in the field: the record store and the 'livehouse'. It was in these two spaces that my Japanese metal enculturation really took place because they presented opportunities for the most varied engagement between artists, fans, and business. Other spaces tend to be designated for certain types of community members engaging in a specific isolated scenic activity (musicians recording in studios, for example), but record shops and livehouses are where it all comes together and where I spent most of my time in the field.

The record shop

On that first trip to Japan in 2015, I felt a mix of joyous nostalgia and shock as I walked down one of the main avenues in Tokyo's entertainment and shopping district of Shibuya and saw a massive seven-story Tower Records complex. Spending most of my adolescence in

Sacramento, California—once the location of Tower Records' corporate headquarters and site of its first retail store opening in 1960—the chain played a major role in my youth and the evolution of my fandom. In the mid-1990s, I even took a temporary job at the Tower Records international warehouse and distribution office in West Sacramento, a prestigious post as Tower Records was for so many years *the* cool company to work for. Displaying a seemingly evergreen hipness and acting as a welcoming space for all music lovers, Tower Records was nothing short of iconic.[4] Proving not so evergreen after all, the company went out of business in 2006 in the wake of lost viability for the compact disc and a failure to adapt to quick shifts in the market. I then learned that the chain lives on in Japan, having completely separated from its American corporate roots before the final liquidation, and is iconic all over again with over 80 locations across Japan.

At the Tower Records flagship store in Shibuya, all seven floors of the massive building pulsate with activity from open to close. It acts as a beacon, a landmark, and a community center. It is where friends meet, hang out, go on dates, grab a coffee (at the Tower Café), and listen to the latest releases via listening stations. It is where music is bought, sold, talked about, explored, debated, and celebrated. It is where artists hold autograph sessions, give in-store performances called 'mini-lives' (*live,* pronounced 'raibu,' is a borrowed word in Japanese for a concert or performance, though usually not referring to classical or orchestral music,) and promote their releases, tours, and merchandise. Pop stars and rock stars will have their photos taken in the shop aisles and autograph a wall or poster leaving a psychic imprint communicating with fans long after they have left. A similar dynamic is at work at Tower's smaller locations as well as for Japan's other three major chains—Disk Union, HMV, and the smaller though still active Shinseidō.

[4] See documentary 'All Things Must Pass,' Universal 2015.

This relic of 20th century music consumerism and throwback to music community center retains its swagger in Japan due to the sustained retail and cultural value of music sold in physical format. While the vinyl LP has made a stylish and somewhat up-market comeback worldwide, the CD is the primary music product in Japan. Unlike pretty much everywhere else in the world, the CD is king in Japan and the Japanese pay premium prices for it without protest. In 2017, CD sales were responsible for 80% of domestic music revenue (RIAJ, 2018). Prices are quite high with a 'standard edition' CD, regardless of genre, costing ¥2500 (approximately £17) or more and 'deluxe' versions of a release including a short DVD can range from around ¥3000 (£22) to ¥5000 (£34). CD singles are still popular as are EPs, or 'mini-albums' containing six to eight tracks, costing a little less than full releases. By comparison, the average 2018 retail price for a new full-length CD in the UK was £8.68 (statista.com). DVDs fare no better. In 2018, a Mary's Blood live concert DVD, not the Blu-ray version, cost me ¥4800 (£33) at Disk Union. Despite the price tag, sales are strong. Government regulation setting minimum prices in the industry and special agreements between record labels and retail distribution networks support the unique market (Yamaguchi 2016). There is a legally established minimum pre-tax price for a brand-new full-length CD of ¥2500 preventing discounting and price wars (Noor 2016) though there is a booming market for secondhand CDs with used music product available at shops such as Book-Off and Disk Union. However, most supportive of the system are the domestic consumers who are easily acquiescent to this market structure keeping CDs in staggeringly (by comparison to other markets) high demand.

The dedication to the CD and resulting passion for record stores separates Japan's mainstream music consumerism from that of other countries and appears to have numerous instigating factors. For decades Japan has been a 'culture of consumption' (Anderson and

Wadkins 1991, Synodinos 2001). 'We love tangible *things*' my friend Ryo, a 31-year-old metal musician living in Nagoya told me in native level English. 'We love things we think we want to keep and eventually discard them anyway so we can buy more things.' Part of Japan's cultural domain of popular music is an appreciation of goods considered collectible. CDs fall into a category of 'fan goods' and are more generally considered artist merchandise rather than just representing music on a plastic disc (Miller 2014). They can often be released with multiple collectible covers and the common deluxe editions may feature bonus DVDs with videos or live performance footage. One male metal fan in his 20s with whom I spoke in the metal section of Shibuya Tower Records made this aspect of his consumer habits quite clear.

(CDM – Christopher David Morris)

CDM: What bands did you buy today?
Customer: Aldious, Rami, and I needed this old KISS CD to complete my collection.
CDM: I love KISS too. I used to have all the albums on vinyl, but I just have them on Spotify now.
Customer: Ah, I like Spotify sometimes, but I love the CDs on my shelf. They look so cool. I have them in order of release. The bonus editions have their own shelf.
CDM: Do you buy all of the editions?
Customer: Of course. I have to have them all! (laughs) I need more shelves now.
CDM: But the songs are the same on each version?
Customer: Music is the same but everything else is different.
(anonymous Tower Records customer, interview conducted in Japanese, 21 February 2018, Tokyo, author's translation)

Special perks for CD purchase can also be offered by the store. Everything from posters and plastic folders featuring images of artists to patches and badges can be given away during promotions. Massive pop-idol sensation AKB48 even pioneered the concept of concert tickets included with CD purchases (Sisario 2014) and multiple copies of CDs might be required in order to gain access to special in-store events. It was by these means I was able to meet Mary's Blood for the first time at a Tower Records store in the southern city of Fukuoka in 2016 as part of a series of Tower Records appearances. I purchased the regular edition of the CD at the

Shibuya Tower Records upon its release, but in order to attend the meet and greet event I had to buy the deluxe edition at the same shop hosting the event. The CD has become a symbol which represents a more active fandom and a key to unlocking additional levels of engagement. Robert Taylor, a music correspondent for the Japan Times, described this consumer practice as a way of feeling more connected to one's favorite artists and financially supporting that artist in the process (Looi 2016). CDs and in-store events can be the gateway to a feeling of greater familiarity and a personal investment which breeds loyalty and continued desire to see the artist thrive (see Ogawa 1988). All of this draws fans to record stores and a great deal of my research was conducted in these shops talking to fans, artists, employees, and browsing the shelves, listening stations, and magazine racks.

Japan's heavy metal subdomain uses these stores as nodes in a network of activity making use of delineated space for the genre. This goes beyond the genre-categorized shelf space common in music retailers and has taken on a larger communal retail identity with full floors or mini-stores within some shops to cater to the metal community. While there is of course a heavy metal section at the larger Tower Records locations, Disk Union offers the Heavy Metal Shop at its Shinjuku location. The walls are adorned with classic metal album covers from all over the world as well as signed posters from Japanese metal stars and advertisements for local shows. With metal blaring over the in-store sound system, aficionados pore through boxes of LPs, scour CD shelves, peruse magazines, and sift through racks of band t-shirts.

Maho, a 33-year-old metal-fan with whom I spoke at Disk Union Shibuya, shared her thoughts on metal and Japanese record stores.

CDM: Do you often shop here?
Maho: Yes. Maybe a few times every month.
CDM: What do you like about this shop?

Maho: Everything is metal. I can look at CDs and vinyl and magazines all here. And everyone here likes metal. The staff. The customer. Everyone. I can get things to have the band sign later. Sometimes they have special offers like posters or something. It's just very cool.
CDM: I bet you have a big CD collection.
Maho: Oh yes (laughs). Too big. My apartment is only small, but CDs are everywhere.
CDM: Do you ever stream music or just buy CDs?
Maho: Only CDs. I have bought CDs since I was a child. I don't want to stop. And I like it here. We all like coming here.
(Disk Union customer, conversation in English, 16 October 2018, Tokyo)

The dominance of physical product in the marketplace and popularity of the record store reveal quite a bit about not just how the Japanese consume music, but about why Japan can sometimes relish what can be seen as outdated elsewhere. In Japanese culture, change is often adopted slowly, being quite resolute in a resistance to anything new (French 2001). Massive cultural shifts have historically been inflicted upon Japan from external forces, and with self-directed (though at times foreign assisted) success producing a booming post-war economy, Japanese culture can often insist on clinging to the tried and true even in the shadow of economic downturns, globalization, and the encroaching social and cultural modernity an interconnected world inspires (see Holroyd and Coates 2014). As a female guitarist who wished to remain anonymous revealed to me, there are also fears regarding a change to how musicians earn money if there was a shift in the domestic attitudes about music consumption.

CDM: Do you make a living as a guitarist?
Guitarist: Not yet but it is almost there. We have a new album coming out and more lives to play so I think this year I will do OK with money.
CDM: People still buy CDs here even though they are so expensive…
Guitarist: Yes! Thankfully (laughs)! We have high prices but I think people like to pay it because they know it helps us. Some fans say 'I heard you on Apple Music' but buy the CD too.
CDM: How much do CD sales help you?
Guitarist: It helps us a lot. Without CDs it would be much harder to make money and almost impossible to make music. And we are Japanese! We like *stuff* (interviewee's emphasis)!

> **CDM:** Do you think streaming or downloading will ever become more popular (in Japan)?
> **Guitarist:** No. I don't think we like that. It would mean too much change. What happens to Tower Records? Same as in the US (bankruptcy)? Where would we go if we had no CD shop? No, no. We can't let that happen. People might lose work. I might lose money. We cannot have that kind of change. We know CDs and like CDs. It is the way it is. **(**anonymous, interview in Japanese, 21 April 2018, Tokyo, translation by Yukari T.)

'Let's meet at Tower' is a common mantra. Stopping in at Disk Union's Heavy Metal Shop is for many a standard part of their schedule. As retail hub, community center, and a general space for engagement between artists and fans, the record store in Japan is a space vital to taste-cultures, intersections of myriad scenes, and Japan's particular way of musicking.

The livehouse

While popular music obviously reaches all corners of Japan, it is the sprawling urban centers which are the major arteries of the country's cultural domain of popular music. Though I have traveled to see lives as far south as Fukuoka in Kumamoto prefecture, and as far north as Sapporo in Japan's northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido, I typically root myself in Tokyo with easy trips on the famous shinkansen (bullet train) to other big cities like Osaka or Nagoya to experience certain artists in action. I have seen concerts in massive stadiums, outdoor amphitheaters, and large arenas in these cities, but most heavy metal performances tend to be in livehouses.

Livehouses (borrowed English and pronounced *raibuhausu* in Japanese) constitute Japan's network of popular music 'clubs' but displaying some distinct differences with their foreign counterparts. A livehouse is a non-seated (with rare exception) space intended for musical performance, not for drinking, and can range in size from a tiny capacity of only 25 or 30 people, to larger venues of over 1000 such as Club Citta in my introductory anecdote. Any

indoor space designed for live musical performance under the size of a sports arena typically falls into this category, but average livehouse capacity tends to be on the smaller side at around 200 to 500. They are everywhere in Japanese cities, liberally sprinkled throughout entertainment districts and can even be found scattered out near business or residential areas. In some districts such as Tokyo's Shibuya and Shinjuku, it can often feel as if there is one in every building. Though they can appear anywhere, livehouses tend to be basement level venues and can be found under business offices, retailers, or *kombinis* (the Japanese abbreviated borrowed term for the American convenience store) with small, often innocuous, signs pointing the way from a busy street or alley cluttered with similar signs for everything from cafes and massage parlors to restaurants and mobile phone repair. Few livehouses appear to be genre specific with pop, idol, garage rock, metal, or punk being featured on any given night in a busy calendar of events. Livehouses are also eclectic in the levels of professional success a night's artist may represent. A major label act may perform one night, while unsigned artists may perform the next.

Japanese artists, particularly those in rock, metal, and idol, maintain rigorous livehouse performing schedules. Japanese artist's itineraries resemble less the traditional notions of a tour and are more like a never-ending run of entries in the livehouse circuit with no apparent rhyme or reason to the venue size, position on the bill, or even how recently they may have been at the same livehouse. I again turn to Mary's Blood to demonstrate the seeming randomness of livehouse selection. Mary's Blood's 'Change the Fate' headline tour came to an end in January 2017 at the 900-capacity Ebisu Liquidroom in Tokyo, yet one month later they performed in a 150-capacity Tokyo livehouse in support of another band, only to return to Ebisu Liquidroom for another headline show the following month though their tour had officially ended. I then saw them later in a 500-capacity livehouse in Nagoya followed by a 200-capacity livehouse in

Yokohama, not far from the previously mentioned 1400-capacity Club Citta in Kawasaki as part of a new 'tour.' In early 2018, they performed at Tokyo's Akasaka BLITZ, a 1200-capacity livehouse on the city's east side. I next saw them at a 300-capacity venue in Shibuya.

In other countries, tours indicate a prolonged travel schedule and will pass through a city at whatever venue mirrors the artist's current level of popularity, not to return until the next tour. Nationally-or internationally-known acts do not tend to simply add small shows before large ones, appear at the same venue again a month or two later, or go from headline to support on a whim unless it is a special occasion or exclusive engagement such as a fan club show, label event, or Las Vegas residency for example. For acts not operating at the highest levels of Japanese mainstream pop stardom, the erratic nature of a livehouse circuit schedule is just part of musicking in Japan.

Fans will try to follow their favorite artists from livehouse to livehouse, their personal schedules permitting, to maintain support while artists, management agencies, or labels work with local promoters to put on themed events to keep them coming. As long as it is not part of an otherwise named 'tour,' an event will be labeled in accordance with something linking the participating groups such as 'Girls Power vol 2,' 'Metal Attack,' or 'We Rock U,' all in stylized English. Artists perform rather short sets, sometimes even just twenty minutes as they share the bill with numerous acts (four or more) hoping to expose another act's following to their presentation. There is rarely a clear headliner, though the artist who may be responsible for hosting the event might appear as the night's primary draw. This does not mean the artist goes on last. In many ways, this feels more like each show is a showcase rather than a concert.

Contrary to the behavioral patterns of concert attendees in the West, one's position in the livehouse crowd is not held for the entire evening as Japanese fans rotate the closer positions to

the stage giving the next band's fans a chance to be upfront. They do so eagerly and politely with the expectation that the favor is returned. These multi-act shows stand in contrast to the 'one-man' concept, which is a single act as the only performer. The one-man, pronounced *wan-man* in Japanese using borrowed English, feels more like a concert than showcase with lengths between 60 and 90 minutes. Shows featuring two or three acts maintain the naming convention as 'two-man' and 'three-man' shows, though it appears to stop at four acts. The tradition of rotating of the closer crowd spots is maintained. Fans will line up to enter venues, even for the most intense of metal shows, in a quiet and orderly fashion, and they tend to remain quiet and respectful of space in often cramped confines. Drunken behavior, though tolerated in bars (izakaya) and on the street, is quite rare.

From the newer local acts in Tokyo to the national powerhouses, this is where metalheads come together to chant, mosh, stagedive (carefully and politely of course), and lift their devil horns in the air. The 'salaryman,' the typically overworked and overstressed white-color corporate employee, appears in his white-shirt and tie perhaps with a metal shirt underneath. Some bands are fine tuning their sound and perfecting their craft while others come to set the standard. New bands are observed with the folded arms and judging stares which betray the intense, yet polite, listening and evaluation of the metal connoisseur while the established acts get the nods of approval and fierce cheers through the expertly executed loud guitar riffs and thunderous drumming.

When it is over, the fans head to *buppan* (sale of goods). The merchandise tables are always lined up against the back or side walls and offer everything from t-shirts to CDs to hand towels and wristbands. Japan is, after all, a 'culture of consumerism' and the need for 'fan goods' is as strong in metal as any pop genre. Band members from groups big and small regularly sell

their own goods or at least appear beside their staff to talk with fans, sign autographs, or take pictures. I was taken aback at one of the smaller Mary's Blood performances when lead guitarist SAKI made her way to the table, seemingly appearing out of nowhere, and said hello to me as I bought some band related trinket. Flyers promoting upcoming shows are abundant, handed out before and after the show, as fans look at which livehouse they may attend tomorrow, next week, or next month. I spoke with Nabe, a 42-year-old metal fan at a livehouse called Tokyo Wildside who nicely summarized what livehouses mean to the metal community.

> **CDM:** Do you attend many livehouses?
> **Nabe:** I try to go a few times a week. I look forward to it.
> **CDM:** What do you look forward to the most?
> **Nabe:** The music but also the people. This is where I feel I can be metal. I can be rock. I discover new music.
> **CDM:** Do you like to go to bigger shows from touring bands or do you like the livehouse?
> **Nabe:** I really like the livehouse. Big tours are ok but I have to wait a long time (between them). I can get metal tonight here. I can get metal tomorrow night too. There is always metal somewhere in a livehouse. (interview conducted in Japanese, 3 May 2018, Tokyo, translationby Yukari T.)

Methodology and positionalities in the field

Research methodology for a project like this takes on a few predictable dimensions. Textual analysis of the written, the visual, and of course the sonic is combined with fieldwork as both an observer and participant in Japan's heavy metal subdomain. I am still a passionate fan, necessitating my participation as consumer as well, buying the coveted artist goods, attending hundreds of Japanese concerts (metal and otherwise), and spending time discussing metal with fellow fans in the aforementioned record stores and livehouses—and in a few izakayas (bars/pubs). In a less predictable turn of events, as I will discuss later, I began to enter the Japanese music business in a more professional capacity during my research, offering a new perspective to the observer/participant dynamic. The ethnographic component of the research has

been by far the most fruitful. One cannot effectively understand the gender dynamics and sexual politics of a field without being both immersed in the field and actively talking to the people who are holding the ideas which are under examination. Between 2015 through Japan's full re-opening from COVID lockdowns in late 2022, I travelled to Japan 30 times with an average stay of approximately six weeks. I held conversations with fans, musicians, music business professionals, and retail staff in mostly informal settings before and after shows and in the aisles of record stores. While many musicians were reluctant to allow me to use their names, I was able to put together a varied collection of interviews with musicians active in the subdomain and representing different levels of amateur and professional achievement. When the dust settled, I had conducted 51 different interviews with fans in Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, spoke with 28 different female metal musicians in a formal manner (untold how many more in a casual manner given my ubiquitous presence in the taste-culture), and a few J-pop idols as well. This allowed for triangulation from other genres and positionalities which greatly informed my understanding of Japanese metal unique relationship with gender.

Stretching from approximately 2015 to Japan's re-opening after COVID lockdowns in 2023, I travelled all over Japan for concerts, interviews, fan gatherings, and general tourism, though most of my research was based in the heart of Japan's entertainment industry, the slim triangle of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. Japanese metal enculturation has made research easier than if rapport and subdomain access were behind a 'sabukaru' blockade. Heavy metal's global community, established around a shared musical canon of genre architects and the flag-bearing musicians who followed, allows for welcoming subdomains across borders, and I exist within the network of those subdomains rather than observing from the periphery. With almost 40 years of engaged metal fandom under my belt as well as experience within the business of heavy metal

music, I feel safe in proclaiming a deep knowledge of heavy metal's intricate musical and social mechanisms and there is no risk of condescension in my work with no attempt needed to reconcile or resituate the genre within a different worldview in order to understand it. Additional levels of access with artists have come from notoriety as a somewhat 'famous fan' after having gained a reputation for frequent trips to the country and being a consistent presence at concerts, on social media platforms, and taste culture events (such as meet-and-greets). Then becoming professionally involved in the business, I have been privileged to meet members of most groups of which I am a fan with some becoming clients and others even friends. This has extended to some of the people involved in the business side of the equation with managers, producers, record label representatives, and live event promoters entering my network. Such access can be a blessing for fieldwork, and I appreciate what it has afforded me regarding my research, but it is not completely unproblematic.

While my methods are largely predictable in scope, a comprehensive and consistent research methodology, an applicable ethnomusicology paradigm for the kind of research necessary for my interests, just does not exist. There is, as Bruno Nettl has phrased it, an interface 'between a comprehensive methodology and techniques that speak to special problems' (2005, 108) when faced with making something out of all of this experience and data. 'Special problems' necessitating creative flexibility and fluidity in methodology causes me to wonder if a 'comprehensive methodology' can even exist. 'Special problems' might even be a little deceptive. To call them 'problems' hints at considering certain situations troublesome in the context of a methodology, and 'special' suggests categorizing them as rare in terms of relating to a comprehensive approach. I would prefer to reference these special problems as 'consistently

unique challenges' as I find them to be the norm, as are the required shifts on the fly in the application of a strategy to handle them.

Early on, some artists and their representatives raised eyebrows at both my research interests and my suspected motives for establishing contact. For example, after learning of my academic pursuits, a musician I had come to know personally and in a band I quite enjoyed, feared I had befriended them just to advance my research. This caused her to question my honesty as a fan and the legitimacy of my praise for her work. 'So you just want to study us?' she asked me. Disappointed by the thought I was observing them as subjects rather than sincerely participating in the fan/band dynamic, she pulled away. Another group had discovered via conversation with other fans that I did not like the band's music and was only intellectually interested in what they may offer. My eventual attempts at contacting them for an interview were met with silence, and I learned a valuable lesson regarding the politics of sharing opinions in the field where feelings can be hurt and fans talk to other fans as well as to the artists themselves, if accessible. This is nothing new to the ethnomusicologist. The 'what do you think you're doing?' (Nettl 2015, p219) response can be set in motion by numerous triggers of unintentional offense. For some it can be the intrusion of an outsider. For others, like in this instance, it is the perception of academic curiosity versus authentic support and appreciation of the performer.

Many interactions with business personnel after requesting interviews reveal maintenance of a public distance and not wanting to appear *too* friendly with certain fans, even if my work was understood. As one manager stated, 'It wouldn't look good if it looks like you get special treatment.' Part of this, according to a staff member of a different but highly successful band, is the tightly controlled protectionist nature of the artist's brand—a 'what's in it for us' mentality—which saturates the Japanese popular music business at all levels (Stevens 2008). There is a

meticulous way of conducting business which is upheld regardless of whatever levels of success have been achieved. Artists tend to be hyperaware of how they are viewed, how they might be viewed, and how this impacts their business model. Talking to an academic might not fit the model in some instances.

The fact that I am both a Westerner and a heterosexual man has also put me in a sometimes troubled position. I was bluntly told early on by a drummer and good friend 'We are very complicated. Only Japanese women understand Japanese women. You are not Japanese and not a woman.' Her smile and laugh let me know she was being good-natured, but the comment was completely serious. The literal truth of her statement is self-evident; however it was an important statement for me to hear. It is one thing to be intellectually aware of one of my positions, but it is another thing entirely to know my potential subjects are aware of, and actively thinking about, that positionality. This was a stark reminder that while I may be a metal taste-culture insider, I am always going to be a Japanese cultural outsider. As J. L. Witzleben wrote, researchers are always going to be insiders in some way, but outsiders in others (1997).

Being a *gaikokujin* (a foreigner) in Japan, or *gaijin* in the sometimes casual or even rude common form, is beset with cultural complications. Japanese communication has a reputation for being plagued with ambiguity and an often-impenetrable vagueness (Akasu & Asao 1993, McClure 2000, Yamada H. 1997) the likes of which foreigners can find difficult to navigate. I found this true in my experience. The Japanese word for this is *aimaina* and it is not just reflected in the language, but in a general approach to communication as even while communicating in a second language, a Japanese person may demonstrate an uneasiness with being direct. There is non-verbal communication and implicit meaning known as *ishindenshin* (Itasaka 1978, Midooka 1990) which necessitates a 'reading between the lines.' A modern but

quite popular Japanese expression, '*kuuki ga yomenai'* meaning 'can't read the air,' has gained colloquial traction to comment on those who fail to grasp *ishidenshin* in any given situation. It has even been stated that *aimaina* is an exclusive trait, or 'spirit,' within the language (Haugh 2003).

During the course of my research, my Japanese language skills predictably increased and my conversational Japanese, at least until the COVID-19 pandemic brought travel to Japan to a halt, had improved greatly. However, knowing that my skills were likely not enough and the aforementioned vagueness and the cultural nuances of native speakers in a native context would pose challenges, I employed a translation assistant. A trusted friend, Yukari T. is an artist management assistant from Yokohama, studied English in London, and was more than happy to help me on my journey. 26-years old when we first worked together, Yukari not only offered me the insights of a native Japanese speaker, but also insight as a female working in the Japanese music industry. Her ability to pick up on the subtleties of conversation, body language, and her understanding of the context of any given situation added a dimension of understanding I would never have gained with straight translation. For a cultural outsider such as myself, this all takes some getting used to. In one early interview, Yukari told me 'she says one thing, but I think she might mean differently.' When I asked how she could tell, she said: 'because I am Japanese.' However, over time, it became a little easier with the employment of a hyper-situational awareness and a great deal of experience.

Regarding my position as a gaijin who is also a heterosexual male taking an interest in the affairs of Japanese women, a sensitive navigation of intercultural sexual politics has been vital. This has caused some awkward and admittedly humorous situations in trying to assure certain artists with whom I was attempting a friendly and academic connection that my intentions

were not sexual or flirtatious. In one of myriad exchanges, a guitar player expressed disappointment that I was not going to ask her out on a date but instead wanted to discuss music and gender. She even laughed and said 'I was going to say no, but I wanted you to want to go out with me! I thought you liked me!' One-on-one interview requests were only occasionally met with acquiescence and while no one has stated it plainly, body language and tone hints at a suspicion I may be using my research as means to meet women. When it has come up, this has been alleviated with further polite and respectful conversation and a willingness on my part to discuss my research in whatever way suited them best, including not meeting at all but instead establishing online contact. The suspicion of ulterior motive is one not just naturally born of heterosexual men and women engaging each other in the field, but also one of curiosity regarding a possible Orientalized and exoticized sexuality in how I see them. 'So…you like Japanese women?' I have been asked with a wink, playing into what might be seen as a preference at best, or fetish at worst.

An underlying suspicion of sexualizing 'the Other' as if straight out of the writings of Richard Burton with an entitlement of sexual possession via Western superiority (Arondekar 2005) became an almost distracting fear at times. Unfortunately, being a part of fan communities in the West which appreciate women in Japanese metal, seeing the East as a 'sexual domain' (Kabbani 1986) is not as uncommon as I wish it were, so it has been important to me to make my intentions quite clear understanding that musicians may have good reason for such suspicions. I have been asked outright by many female musicians, and even some fans, if I had a Japanese girlfriend or wife…or both. Andrew Kulick in his contribution to *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork,* wrote of similar expectations regarding his work as a white straight male (WSM) in Korea. It was expected that a WSM spending significant time in

Korea would inevitably end up with a Korean wife (1995). He did. This attitude also exists in Japan. ‘Do you want to marry a Japanese woman?’ was not an uncommon question. It is a fair curiosity given my immersion in Japan, but it reinforced my concerns that I could be seen as duplicitous or even predatory.

However, this is not a one-way street. The reverse is also a reality. One male musician in a mixed gender band once told me ‘our guitarist likes foreigners!’ and she was ‘curious what we were like’ nudging me to chat to his female bandmate. In another instance, the vocalist of a relatively new band became visibly nervous and shy around me despite her flirtatious tone during online contact. Karen Kelsky writes of the white Western man as being sometimes used by Japanese women as sexual object and an opportunity for Occidental escapism, rebellion against cultural sexual norms, and self-exploration (2008). These particular episodes, and other minor ones along the way, were harmless but I thought it best to avoid seeking further participation from those artists so as to avoid sending ‘mixed signals’ and risk any hurt feelings or gaining a problematic reputation. Each encounter refreshed the awareness that everything about how I presented myself—tone of voice, body language, choice of words in another language, and knowledge of Japanese social protocol—was an important part of engagement with the subdomain to establish an honest, respectful, and safe, foundation for rapport.

Making the leap from fan to a trusted confidant is complicated enough as artists learn who they can trust and determine why that person should be let into a more personal inner circle, but there is also a sense of privacy and personal space which is palpable in Japanese culture one does not want to risk compromising. This requires a deeper sensitivity to the psychology of how the Japanese approach relationships. *Hedataru* is the Japanese word roughly equivalent to estrangement or alienation but also refers to both the state before intimacy is achieved in human

relationships and a state to which people can return if there has been a fracture in the bond. *Najimu* is that bond and the state of intimacy a relationship can enter given enough time and trust (Davies and Ikeno 2002). Graduating from one state to another is a tricky process. The sharing of opinion and strong personal preference, such as in one's views on being a woman in metal, is *najimu* and therefore antithetical to Japanese social norms for a new acquaintanceship or friendship and simply not part of a traditional Japanese psychological disposition (see Iwao 2006). The desire to talk about one's art and motivation is not 'a given.' Personal feelings are shared only after patience and humility have been established and *hedataru* has been respected.

It is not so much the knowledge of personal information which is seemingly of socio-cultural concern but the diffusion of that information. *Who* knows *what* and *why*. This has come about via the reluctant Japanese cultural acceptance of the information society and entry to the Internet age where personal expressions and personal details flow freely. The Western tendency towards individual importance, social media driven personal access to others, and the resulting popularity of making one's personal life more accessible, has created intercultural conundrums in a culture prizing the group's needs over the individual (Nakane 1970), and at times offering intracultural contradictions regarding notions of privacy (Nakada and Takanori 2005). It is common for Japanese users of social media to post photos on social media of a day's activities, just as in so many other cultures, but with all faces covered by something such as a blurring effect or a 'Twitter (now X) sticker' (a graphic within the platform which can be placed anywhere over a photo or video). Many times, when taking photos with friends I am asked 'is posting this ok?', extending to me the courtesy of choosing if my image is disseminated. Only with permission is a face allowed exposure. It is public sharing with a simultaneous insistence on privacy. This extends to an artist's brand. The desire for fans to know as much as they can about

their favorite acts works in concert with the desire of artists to establish a connection with their audience by sharing information. Yet gaining trusted connections with fans can come up against cultural inclinations to keep a sense of privacy so as not to offend anyone, arrest business, or disrupt *wa* - the Japanese cultural concept of social harmony. The result is a carefully managed public image. A managed public image is of course standard practice the world over as artists craft a saleable and knowable personality, but many Japanese artists have essentially designed a pseudo-*najiru* while maintaining *heditaru.* Breaking through this to gain access to core beliefs, principles, and perspectives poses a unique challenge, as there just might be a psychological X sticker disguising some true thought or opinion.

My positionality has one more complication. In 2017, a friend and I started a live event booking, promotion, and tour management company thus making use of my network in ways which benefitted the artists rather than just my fandom or academic interests. During the course of researching and writing this thesis, the company became successful and diversified to include a record label, merchandising and design services, and music production. By the time I entered my final year of the PhD program, the company had become quite well-known in the Japanese music business and is considered a top-flight player in the industry. This became a double-edged sword in relation to my research and writing. While the access to artists and my witness of and participation in backstage and business dynamics is exceptional, how I am viewed has taken on a new tone. I have come to represent not only a fan, not only a researcher, but an opportunity. An answer to the question ‘what’s in it for us’ has begun to present itself for many of the acts I encounter. This has the potential to inspire a new development in pseudo-*najiru* and prompt answers to questions more representative of what a subject thinks I want to hear, thus increasing chances of an overseas business opportunity, and putting honesty in the exchange at risk.

Additionally, there is a lurking fear of expectation. Performers who may not otherwise feel inclined to discuss their own positionality may feel a sense of obligation as if it is expected of them to discuss my interests in a sort of quid-pro-quo. This poses an ethical dilemma of unintentional coercion.

Late in research and writing saw a final and troublesome complexity arise. With such deep professional access to the careers of these women, I became aware of realities of the Japanese music business unknown to international fans which contradict many of the assumptions, beliefs, and expectations held by those fans, including myself. It affected the way I saw these musicians and their place in Japan and the Japanese music business. This includes songwriting and production, how images and identities are crafted, and the strategic marketing behind a *'gaaruzu bando'* (girls band), particularly to an international audience. At times, I have struggled with which trails to follow and what influence this should have as it pertains to this thesis. It has been tempting to go down the rabbit hole and drift into exposé or even abandon the project out of disappointment, tainted fandom, and a new-found jadedness. Instead, these revelations have served to accomplish three important and positive things regarding my research. The first is that it all forced a sharper focus on the purpose of my research as the fact remains that women are ever-present and relevant in Japanese heavy metal and *how* and *why* this is the case still deserves examination despite the distractions of new but perhaps not relevant knowledge. The second is that some of the following chapters which address concepts of perceived authenticity and that of familiar feminine presentations benefited from my greater clarity regarding business mechanisms and domestic audience engagement. The third is a greater detachment from fandom, thus I hope improving my overall objectivity.

I have embraced these complexities. This interconnectedness was too valuable, and I relished the immersion, complications and all. Each situation was unique and sometimes called for role compartmentalization. I did not attempt interviews if the sexual tension or apprehension was palpable. I did not bother artists with whom I am working with requests for interviews, but instead simply observed, made notes, and sought permission to use certain observations in my research, if appropriate. The result presented here attempts to navigate sociocultural, sociosexual, and professional minefields of friendship, fandom, research, customs, and business interests with a simple mix of honesty, respect, and a less simply achieved hyperawareness of everyone's position in a given situation.

Summary of Chapters

This has been an admittedly long introduction but necessary due to my complex positionalities as a researcher, the uniqueness of the field, and the need for some theoretical discussion to set the stage for smoother sailing ahead. The following chapter examines deep wells of literature in various fields which all intersect in ways essential to my research. The most important works and theories in the areas of Japanese popular culture and music, heavy metal studies, Japanese cultural history, and gender construction are all explored laying the bedrock for my research while also exposing the gaps in that body of knowledge allowing for the development of new theories and approaches. In Chapter 3, I explore the history of women in Japanese heavy metal and the precedents set which have allowed women in contemporary Japanese metal to flourish. Chapter 4 looks at heavy metal as a mechanism of transgression in Japan with a particular appeal to women. This transgression results in an alternative construction of feminine identity and draw to the West— an 'occidental longing' (Kelsky 2008). Chapter 5

investigates what I see as a divorce of notions of masculinity from perceived authenticity in heavy metal taste-culture thus ridding heavy metal culture of many of the perceived obstacles to female participation in Western metal. Chapter 6 examines the idea that while Western heavy metal may take on the image of the familiar masculine, Japanese culture brings to metal the 'familiar feminine' which has created an atmosphere of acceptance in the world of entertainment for female metal musicians who are still inwardly constructing an alternative sense of self. In Chapter 7, I draw it all it together reflecting on the key components of the thrivancy of women in Japanese metal while coming to terms with the challenges of my research, the nature of genre, and where metal studies can, and should, go from here.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

Japan's 'Gross National Cool' (McGray 2009), the desirability and trendiness of Japan's pop-culture output since the 1980s, has rendered the country's culture industries impossible to ignore as a global soft power (Toyoshima 2008, Iwabuchi 2002). The Japanese popular music landscape has therefore been the source of much academic interest regarding its domestic production, consumption, and international appeal (Craig 2000, Matsue 2016, Mitsui 2014, Stevens 2008). Japan's diverse and prolific popular music output has also inspired interest at intersections with other famous pop-culture offerings or national identifiers in myriad ways. This has included 'kawaii (cute) culture' (Yano and Hosokawa 2017, Hughes and Keith 2015, 2016, Stevens 2008), animation, called *anime* in Japanese (Manion 2005, Grajdian 2016), and technological advancement and experimentation (McLeod 2016).

Genre has been well represented. The Japanese post-war fascination with jazz is thoroughly documented (Atkins 2001) as are the domestic genre originals of enka, a ballad-genre combining Western soft-rock/pop and traditional Japanese elements (Yano 2002), and idol, a youth-driven genre focusing on music as a vehicle for general celebrity (idols are also models, actresses, etc) mixing varied subgenre aesthetics (Galbraith and Karlin 2012, Kiuchi 2017, Mitsui 2014). Visual kei, meaning 'visual style,' which is addressed in Chapter 3 in its historical and aesthetic relation to heavy metal in Japan, has been a popular subject of academic engagement with its extreme take on glam, diverse musical style appropriations, and a gender performance fluidity by its overwhelmingly male performers (McCloud 2013, Hashimoto 2007). Garage rock revivalism (Neglia 2014) and even Noise have received focus (Novak 2016), yet despite heavy metal's global popularity (Wallach, Berger, and Green 2011, Dunn 2008, Kahn Harris 2007, Walser 1993), heavy metal in Japan has been largely ignored by popular-music

inclined academics. This includes those who focus on Japanese popular music as well as those in the now well-established field of heavy metal studies.

Carolyne S. Stevens, in her 2008 book *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity, and Power*, never mentions heavy metal in any capacity, even though metal has had a long history in Japan. Toru Mitsui's oft-cited edited volume *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music* (2014) offers only two brief and inconsequential mentions of the genre by Jun'ichi Nagai and Yashitaka Mori. Nagai adds heavy metal to a list of genres which produced a diverse live event business in Japan coming out of the 1970s, while Mori references metal only as an aesthetic approach within the genre of visual kei. Jennifer Milioto Matsue's survey, *Focus: Music in Contemporary Japan* (2016) references her history with ethnographic research in Tokyo's 'underground hardcore scene,' yet metal is never discussed as part of Japan's overall music schematics. She mentions in passing pioneers X-Japan, the band which birthed visual kei and the most commercially successful rock band the country has ever produced,[5] but no reference to the metal subdomain (or *scene* as Matsue would likely have called it) the band helped construct, dominated for years, and continues to inspire. Matsue gives Babymetal recognition in the introduction and conclusion, yet as bookend anecdotes and an example of contemporary Japanese cultural representation and pop-culture curiosity. There is no mention of the act's relationship to the domestic metal market, what spawned it, or why it is successful. Matsue's 2009 book, *Making Music in Japan's Underground: The Tokyo Hardcore Scene*, makes casual mention of metal as part of a broad 'hardcore' music scene (reinforcing my assertion that scene is just too nebulous a word to be useful) in which she conducted extensive fieldwork, but with no articulation of metal as a separate taste culture, instead using the term 'hardcore' as a catch-all

[5] see documentary *We Are X*, Kijak 2016.

for hard, fast, and aggressive guitar-driven music, even though 'hardcore' itself is often considered a genre of its own with origin in punk. Metal as genre and as *scene* are rendered invisible.

When it is engaged, Japanese metal is often reduced to quick nods to one or two Japanese acts while a lion's share of the already scant attention is given to the country's relationship with Western metal, thus focusing on the country as an import market rather than home to a subdomain. The band Loudness, for example, which experienced strong domestic success but only limited international success in an attempted entrance to the 1980s Western metal mainstream, has been namechecked in metal research for decades as an example of the genre's international complexion and appeal (Berger, Green, and Wallach 2011, Kahn-Harris 2007, Walser 1993). This is likely due to the band being one of only two truly international metal acts, along with X-Japan, the country had produced during metal's rise to global mainstream chart prominence in the 1980s. Not only have these references been as if there were no other artists of note within Japan, but they have been with no context or investigation into the subdomain which birthed the group. As mentioned previously, Babymetal's importance is not going unnoticed in contemporary research (and will likely be namechecked for years to come) though the focus seems to steer clear of Japanese metal and leans towards cultural export, international reception, and what mysteries Euro-American minds can unravel about the alien worlds of J-pop or Japanese popular culture at large (Matsue 2016, Plourde 2016, Keith and Hughes 2016).

The ignoring of Japanese metal is also curious given that heavy metal outside of North America and Europe has not been completely marginalized in academic circles. Examinations of heavy metal in China (Wong 2010), Israel (Kahn-Harris 2007, 2016), South Africa (Hoad 2014), Nepal (Greene 2011), and Muslim nations in the Middle East and North Africa (LeVine 2008),

suggest that heavy metal studies as a field is doing a decent enough job avoiding Euro-American centrism. Overlooking Japan might be due to the country's metal subdomain being unable to inspire researchers who are more interested in looking for geopolitical issues intersecting with heavy metal production, and the assumption that Japan's metal market is fixated on the West. The latter makes the country appear as a rather boring target market for Western cultural export and nostalgia rather than having meaningful heavy metal output in its own right.

In a rare look into the business of heavy metal in Japan, Kei Kawano and Shuhei Hosokawa have suggested that 'homegrown' artists had been marginalized in Japan's metal marketplace to make way for the foreign acts which define the genre's true 'style aesthetic' (2011). Affinity for Western metal in the Japanese market was partially explained by the authors as an appreciation for *yōshikibi*, meaning 'stylistic beauty,' as Japanese fans accept heavy metal's core aesthetic principles as residing within metal's Western authority (ibid). Though the authors offer the caveat that the initial research was conducted in the late 1990s and therefore some articulated points may not age well, the historical narrative they put forward does reveal a long-standing reputation of Western-centrism within Japan's metal taste-culture. However, I do not believe there is evidence that this focus was at the expense of domestic vibrancy (see Chapter 3).

The overlooking of the Japanese metal subdomain by metal academics is also a bit shocking considering that gender has been a hot topic since the defining works of metal studies in the early 1990s. Deena Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: Its Music and Culture* (1991) and Robert Walser's *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993), set the scholarly tone for metal's masculine code (culturally and musically) with theories of female 'excription' (Walser's own term to describe the complete writing out of women in heavy metal) and rampant sexism keeping women stuck on the outskirts of the genre. A few decades removed

from the initial impact of Weinstein and Walser's works, though criticized and reassessed over the years (Heesh and Scott 2016), their influence regarding gender and metal is still soundly felt. Brad Klypchak wrote that 'The woman is solely accepted (in metal) provided she stimulates masculinity standards' (2007) upholding one of Weinstein's primary points. Thorston Hendrichs leans heavily on both scholars in his writing on metal and the representation of the US working-class male hero, liberally quoting from both to affirm metal's hegemonic masculinity (2016). Keith Kahn-Harris has also addressed the marginalization of femininity while drawing on ideas from Weinstein and Walser (2007, 2016) showing that gender imbalance is not going unnoticed, but examples of expansive feminine inclusion are just not on his radar.

The point here is that masculine dominance is not a dated concern in metal's academic circles, nor should it be, given metal's observable gender imbalance outside of Japan. However, discussions on how metal might be emerging from its masculine dominance have drifted from the male-female binary examinations to the more politically fashionable area of queer studies and politically driven post-gender theories, perhaps due to the closet exits of metal legend Rob Halford of Judas Priest and the controversial Norwegian black metal enigma Kristian Eivind Espedal, known by his stage name Gaahl. Kahn-Harris has pursued possibilities in metal for homosexual inclusion (2016), Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone has written on 'queerscapes' (2016) and even Weinstein has contributed ideas on 'gender play' (2016). These avenues are certainly addressing challenges to hegemonic masculinity, but women and their roles in metal are seemingly lost in the academic ether.

Yet issues of female participation in Japanese metal can still pop up here and there in some contemporary scholarship. Pauwke Berkers and Julian Schaap in *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production* (2018) took up the discussion of women in metal, and in the process did

so with some specific references to Japan. Unfortunately, though predictably, the study betrays a lack of knowledge of the Japanese metal subdomain as well as genre misinformation and deeply flawed data gathering. Using a web-scraper on pages in an online heavy metal database, the authors concluded that women constitute 7.8% of the musicians involved in heavy metal production in Japan, a statistic I will certainly challenge later. The database they used was *Encyclopedia Metallium: The Metal Archives,*[6] an independent website updated by the public in the same way as sources such as Wikipedia. Essentially, the web-scraper gathered data about the number of female musicians and the countries they were from. Gathering info from such a site in this manner is riddled with problems. The public contributions to the site rely on the knowledge, and therefore the inherent biases, of fans. If Japanese metal fans are not contributing to the site, the database is skewed with information from those who are not as in tune with the happenings in other regions of the world. Among so many other issues, such sites are also not reliable for obtaining information on many independent label artists, un-signed artists, or session and support players, who contribute to musical production. As of this writing, many Japanese groups, past and present, with female members such as Lipstick, Azazel, Moth in Lilac, Ark Royal, M.D.M.S, Olivia Sugar, Fake Island, Spider Lily, Lovender, and plenty more, are not listed.

Interestingly, the 7.8% participation figure was still among the largest proportion of women in heavy metal production by country, revealing that even with significant drawbacks to the methodology used, Japanese heavy metal was still identified as having a more inclusive subdomain relative to other parts of the world. But the authors also fell into other traps. It was argued that women are clustered in various subgenres in Japan including 'J-metal' and this 'partly explains the relative high percentage of women in metal music production in Japan…'

[6] www.metal-archives.com

(Berkers and Schaap 2018, Kindle Edition, loc 478)[7]. The authors offer no support for why participating in J-metal would assume a friendlier environment for women. Among the many issues with such an absurd statement is that J-metal is *not* a subgenre in Japan. The specific definition and history of the term J-metal I will address in Chapter 3, but in short, it simply means metal made by Japanese artists primarily for a domestic audience. Adding a country to a genre label can be used to reference stylistic twists in the transnational flow of the broader genre or subgenre (New Wave of British Heavy Metal, Norwegian Black Metal, Swedish Melodic Death Metal, for example), but this is not indicative of subgenre creation, and would still in no way explain how women fit into the J-metal equation even if J-metal were indeed a subgenre. If Japanese women are making metal, it stands to reason it is going to be J-metal, just as Koreans participating in pop music likely do so in K-pop. Basically, the author's explanation does not actually explain anything. It just re-identifies the artist as Japanese.

Often, it seems as though those looking from an external cultural perspective categorize another country's musical output as a subgenre. Berkers and Schaap used Spotify data which promotes this flawed idea, as gathered by EveryNoise.com, regarding which genres are more 'feminized.'[8] But what aesthetically constitutes J-metal even if it were a subgenre, what sonically constitutes a 'feminized' subgenre, and why J-metal if it was a subgenre would be more accepting of female participation, are issues never addressed.

The authors do at least offer up a single sentence wondering if metal as reaction to patriarchy in the country's sociopolitical temperament could play a role (2018, loc 735) but

[7] 'Loc' in citations refers to 'location' in a Kindle edition or other e-book where page numbers are fluid due to variation in displays and readers.

[8] everynoise.com/everynoise1d.cgi?vector=femininity&scope=all

follow the inquiry no further. They also continue to fail in adequately understanding their own genre demarcation in Japan as evidenced by their lumping in of Babymetal with J-metal in general, which is an inappropriate categorization. Babymetal is an idol unit which came from the world of J-pop in a successful appropriation of heavy metal aesthetics creating what is more accurately labeled a genre hybrid. While Babymetal is an important part of Japan's heavy metal output and has been begrudgingly accepted in global heavy metal circles, it has never really been a part of J-metal, particularly if the status of subgenre is granted. Understanding the act's origins and proper place in the Japanese popular music landscape is essential to understanding Babymetal in other terms, such as appropriation of metal aesthetics by women in J-pop (see Chapter 7). Like Wallach, Matsue, and others before them, Berkers and Schaap continue the trend of addressing Japanese metal as somewhat superficial or inconsequential.

Another reason the role of women in metal is addressed less often in contemporary scholarship is the assumption of progress for women in metal made via the singular performance role of vocalist. There is a significant body of work on sex segregation in musical instrumentation with a focus on gendered stereotypes with theories accounting for a lack of diversity in instrument choices by, or available to, female musicians. Research has indicated that instruments have been socially gendered and saddled with expectation for what both males and females are more likely to play (Clawson 1999, Marshal and Shibazaki 2012, Wrape, Dittloff, and Callahan 2016, Wych 2012). With guitar and drums typically gendered male (Frith and McRobbie 1978, Walser 1993, Wych 2012), and keyboards (piano) more generally considered feminine (Steblin 1995, Berkers and Schaap 2018), the core instrumentation of metal is coded masculine.

Musical socialization in formative years then has an effect on perceived access to metal bands for girls as the boys drift to the more masculine instruments via interest and expectation and into a resulting ritual of male bonding through band formation (see Walser 1993, Weinstein 2009, Whiteley 1997, Clawson 1999). Voice can then be seen as an 'in' to the metal community for women, and with female role-models in that position already, there is a visible viability, and no barrier of a gendered instrument, for females to enter a metal subdomain. But female participation seems stuck at this position in the West. Increasing numbers of metal female vocalists are championed as trailblazers and used as evidence of changing gender dynamics though nothing outside of this accepted gendered position in a band has changed.

In *Heavy Metal, Gender, and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (2016), a collection of essays which at the time constituted the first of its kind for the topic, the editors offer this in the introduction:

> An important reason that gender studies still needs to deal with the phenomenon of heavy metal is that the stereotypical image of it as an irony-free culture, where the conservative hegemonic masculinity ideals still apply must be dissected. Fortunately, now it is easy to name some internationally well-known areas of the field of heavy metal, where it seems that supposedly fixed gender roles and ideas of sexuality are on the move. Women on the metal stage were still an exception in the 1980s, but this has changed significantly in the 1990s, and even more through to the 2000s. (Heesch and Scott 2016, 3)

The authors go on to mention the success of only female-fronted Western metal bands as evidence of 'roles and ideas' being 'on the move.' Mentioned are Angela Gassow (ex-Arch Enemy), Doro Pesch (solo artist, ex-Warlock), Sabina Classen (Holy Moses) and Britta Görtz (Cripper), all singers fronting otherwise male bands. Researchers have been looking for progressive change, slow and incremental if at all, of female metal participation on-stage over the last three decades in only this one role. The increased number of visible vocalists hardly signal anything has 'changed significantly'. If women with microphones indicate anything is 'on

the move,' it is at a snail's pace in the West while Japan has quietly surged ahead. Even Weinstein concedes there is progress yet still a gender-trap with the vocalist role (2016).

In this same volume, there is much made of hegemonic masculinity, women in western metal fandom, and even gender in 'postmodern metal.' Japan does come up as a location of interest for Rosemary Overell's look into masculinity in extreme subgenres in Osaka (2016) and Maria Grajdian in her exploration of the 'dynamics of gender' in anime soundtracks (2016), looking to how gender is musically outlined in heavy metal theme songs for Japanese animated films and television series. Yet the very fact that women constitute such an important part of Japanese heavy metal is either not of interest or simply escaping notice.

Overell's work is an example of metal studies' current preoccupation with subgenres. Themes unearthed by examination of how metal is engaged and reimagined within different cultural contexts have become tethered to subgenre taste-culture. Political disenfranchisement, heritage and identity, and religious concerns have become all the rage in these studies thanks to the subgenre focused work of scholars such as Kahn-Harris, whose 2007 book *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* seemed to get the ball rolling. These studies are highly valuable for, among other assessments, being subdomain case-studies as metal is prone to highly varied local reimagining in its transnational flow. Jan Herbst's examination of the development of the 'Teutonic' sound of power metal in West Germany (2019) explores how such aspects as local production resources and heritage can develop and propel a subgenre subdomain with a global influence, yet, similarly to my study of Japanese metal's female contingent, can also be largely ignored in academic circles. Marcelo Velloso Garcia and Vítor Castelões Gama's research of the Brazilian metal scene and the emergence of 'Native Metal' from within the cross-border journey of thrash metal looks at the roles of political upheaval, ethnicity and cultural identity in

subdomain development (2020). These are but two examples of subgenre development in heavy metal's never-ending world tour.

But a seeming majority of these subgenre-focused micro-metal studies also tend to focus on masculinity as a prime mover. The over-examination of black metal's macho self-sustaining Nordic identity crisis (see Olsen 2010, Spraklen, Lucas, and Deeks 2013, Trafford and Pluskowski 2013, Kahn-Harris 2007) has been popular. The previously mentioned works on heavy metal in China (Wong 2010) and southeast Asia (Wallach 2010) were both concerning constructions of masculinity within their respective metal subdomains, and Rosemary Overell has tackled aggressive masculine expressions in grindcore (2010), an underground subgenre mixing extreme metal and punk (see Mudrain 2016). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in these micro-metal studies, researchers are appearing interested in gender regarding where and how masculinity is still pronounced and essentialized while other constructions are marginalized, thus emboldening heavy metal's masculinist character rather than investigating progression from perceived masculine essentialism. Masculine essentialism then appears as if it might be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Heavy metal has inherited that perceived essentialism from its broader rock music context and lineage which has, at times, appeared to cloud scholarly engagement with metal, perhaps further distracting researchers from following paths of contrary evidence. As Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone notes, there is an assumption of metal as 'sexually exclusive,' a term taken from Frith and McRobbie's *Rock and Sexuality* (1990, p375) and is echoed by Weinstein and Walser (Clifford-Napoleone, 2016). Though Clifford-Napoleone is guilty of the micro-metal studies fascination and the preoccupation with 'other others' of which I have been critical, she makes an excellent point. Clifford-Napoleone was writing on representation of queer metal fans

and musicians, yet her observations are applicable to any non-heteronormative approach to masculinity in the genre. She writes, 'scholars typically focus on the performed masculinity and heterosexuality of heavy metal as *factual*, and reify it by excluding other possibilities' (2016). Nestled between Frith and McRobbie's 'cock rock' (1979) and Sheila Whiteley's proclamation that 'Rock's function is to confer masculinity' and is a 'male rite of passage' (1997, xix), the reality of heavy metal as a space for something other than hegemonic masculinity is lost in popular music studies' assumptive 'white noise' by 'white boys' rock narrative (Bannister 2017).

However, these assumptions are there and must be dealt with. Hegemonic masculinity, methodical constructions of masculinity across time used to justify subordination of femininities and alternative masculinities (Connell 2005), is then an essential theoretical aspect of approaching gender and metal. Its importance in this study extends beyond the concept as a part of the assumptive essentialism of heavy metal to a backdrop for examination of gender performance and identity for Japanese female metal musicians. The roles and expectations which come with such constructions, not just within the subdomain of heavy metal but also in the country's social, cultural, and political climate, make Japan's upheaval of metal's gender politics all the more intriguing.

Japanese society is steeped in a tradition of patriarchy and misogyny, though the reasons this developed are not as obvious as one may think. Famed Japanese social anthropologist Chie Nakane wrote that 'It is well known that Japanese women are nearly always ranked as inferiors; this is not because their sex is considered inferior, but because women seldom hold higher social status' (Nakane 1970, 32). Her argument was that sex is trumped by status in Japan with social order and hierarchy creating a seniority system; a vertical society. Though it has been contested as a model (Befu 1980, Kelly 1991), the description of Japan as a vertical society, the preference

of a ‘senior’ and ‘junior’ relationship within a circumstantial institutional frame over that of rewarding attributes and individual achievement, remains a defended description of Japanese society by some (Hata and Smith 1986, Oishi and Nakane 1997, Kohno 1997, Doi 2014) and easily observable in day-to-day experience across many sectors in Japanese society. Yet sex and status in this vertical structure are difficult to divorce. The country’s patriarchal hierarchy assigned women a lower status within that vertical system based on gendered roles (Charlebois 2014). As outlined in Wakita Haruko’s 1992 work *Women in Medieval Japan: Motherhood, Household Management, and Sexuality,* the political and legal structure of pre-modern Japan shaped the societal standing for women in Japan for centuries to come with a focus on marriage and childrearing, the role of caregiver, as directing primary female identity construction (2006).

Researchers engaged with contemporary Japanese gender performativity indeed reveal this philosophy, a divide between breadwinner and caregiver is still at the heart of Japanese gender relations (Charlebois 2014),. The construction of the ‘salaryman’ breadwinner masculinity seemingly dominates the landscape of research on Japanese masculinity and is seen as the current hegemonic model (Dasgupta 2005, 2009, 2015, Hidaka 2010, LeBlanc 2012). The loyal corporate employee of Japan’s white-collar workforce, locked into what he has been sold as lifelong seniority-based (the vertical society) salaried employment, has been the preeminent image of the modern Japanese man providing for a family and contributing to the backbone of the post-war economy (Allison 2001, Taga 2006, Tokuhiro 2010, Yamada M. 2001, Charlebois 2014,).

Romit Dasgupta was prolific in his exploration of how that social expectation influences conceptualizations of Japanese manhood (2000, 2003, 2005, 2013). He argued that salaryman masculinity did not just emerge but was culturally manufactured. He went so far as to say that

the salaryman has become synonymous with masculinity in light of pride in, and recognition of, the corporate soldier's role in Japan's post-war success story. This created a simultaneous masculine and corporate ideal 'premised upon a particularly powerful discourse of state-sponsored patriarchal industrial-capitalism' (2000, p192). This reinforces the idea set forth by Wakita (1992) that the patriarchal vertical system which began centuries ago—relegating women to the household and assigning men to earning a living—is still operating in present-day Japan.

Tomoko Hidaka, building on Dasgupta's research, has traced the history of salaryman masculinity from its early 20th century roots to the present charting the changes and similarities across time as dictated by social structure, including the slow-to-change misogynistic traits inherent within the vertical system (2010). While slightly flawed in its limited ethnographic scope (three families from the same geographic region), when taken in context of the research which came before and after, Hidaka's contribution adds to the evidence of salaryman masculinity as a social masculine ideal. Taking a multi-generational approach and drawing on Connell's gender construction theories, her research supports Connell's definition of masculine hegemony as salaryman masculinity persisted across generations to marginalize femininities and maintain a patriarchal norm.

However, in the wake of Japan's economic downturn in the 1990s, some academics have argued that salaryman masculinity may not be as hegemonic as Dasgupta and others have believed. *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa* by James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (2003) takes an interesting turn in shedding a light on alternative Japanese masculinities through inquiries into homosexuality, the labor class (beneath salarymen), differing notions of fatherhood, and other marginalized expressions of manhood. Masculinity embodied through athletics in Japan has been of interest to researchers (Barber

2014, McDonlad 2009, Chapman 2004) as has *otaku* masculinity via the rise of the computer-geek persona in tech-happy post economic-bubble Japan (Frühstück & Walthall, 2011). *Otaku* is a word used to describe someone who is obsessed with a particular subject or field such as music, manga (comics), gaming, and films (Condry 2011). In terms of gender performance, there is focus on the geek-chic aspect of Japan's otaku masculinity (Frühstück & Walthall 2011) with men shedding loyalty to the company for a loyalty to an obsessive hobby (see Condry 2011). Maki Fukusawa (2006), Steven Chen (2012), Justin Charlebois (2016), and Judit Kroo and Yoshiko Matsumoto (2018) have also offered *herbivore* masculinity as an example of an alternative construction. Representing the ambitionless male not looking for marriage and family, herbivore masculinity appears to be a reactionary construction to an undesirable salaryman fate (Chen 2012). Tom Gill has perhaps put forward the best critique of the hegemony of salaryman masculinity in noticing the failure of the salaryman template to trigger passions of authentic male aspiration as men accept such a fate and 'drift into this role with a weary shrug of the shoulders' (2015, p174). Pointing directly to Dasgupta's research, Hill makes an issue of the common theme of interview subjects identifying other professions and pursuits as being considerably more masculine and desirable for affirming masculinity than the salaryman architype (ibid).

Though nuances of salaryman masculinity are in flux with the changing times (Hidaka 2010, Nemoto 2008), the salaryman is always the familiar central figure. He is the central node in the network of gender constructions. He is always the point to which researchers feel compelled to present a counterpoint or 'alternative' and represents a cultural expectation of masculine responsibility (see Allison 2001, Charlebois 2014) even if one's personal masculine ideal differs. It is a continuous presence and consistent construction across time (Hidaka 2010) marginalizing other assembled notions of gender. This brings salaryman masculinity in line with

Connell's definition of what constitutes hegemony (2005). The salaryman therefore maintains an ideological and sociocultural supremacy, if not a personal one, and does so by its own inertia rather than as a manifestation of expressed will. Perhaps most importantly for my research, it is also the masculine construction which breeds the most pronounced Japanese feminine construction.

Research on Japanese femininity tends to refer to the salaryman ideal to understand the continued emphasis on 'caregiver' or 'housewife' femininity. In his 2014 book *Japanese Femininities*, Justin Charlebois, also basing his work on Connell's gender theory, paints a definitive picture of the relational dependence in Japanese society between salaryman masculinity and a housewife 'emphasized femininity.' Emphasized femininity is defined as the counterpart to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) that is 'practiced in a complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity' (Messerschmidt 2011, 203). In using discursive psychological research analysis of qualitative interviews with Japanese women, Charlebois reveals dominant discourses which reify traditional gendered notions with women as natural domestic caregivers (2014). The domestic support then becomes vital for professional achievement enabling men to offer the devotion their companies demand of them (2011).

Ofra Oldstein-Gidoni's ethnographic study of the modern Japanese housewife explores the ways in which the Japanese state, via a variety of mechanisms, reproduce and maintain the social role of the housewife in various forms (2012) keeping gender roles firmly delineated between caregiver and breadwinner. The corporate sector, as related to and effected by state agencies and policy, is referenced by Oldstein-Gidoni as being fundamental in upholding a patriarchal status-quo thus affirming professional roles as a framework for continued gender

construction. Susan D. Holloway's 2010 ethnographic study *Women and Family in Contemporary Japan* reveals a demand on the housewife to oversee everything from the household budget and their children's education to even packing their husband's bags for business trips or preparing their bath (p37). Though Holloway's ethnographic subjects were few (four women), they were part of her research over a three-year period and conclusions are supplemented with both survey data and placed in broader historical social contexts, such as traditional gendered role reinforcement in the educational system. The system is organized to prepare boys for a university track geared towards success in landing a corporate job (Charlebois 2014).

Caregiver emphasized femininity has become more than expectation—it has become a Japanese cultural assumption (Holloway 2010, Kim 2007, Dales 2009). It goes beyond the clichéd cooking-and-cleaning sexist stereotype to a broader presumption of total domestic care. This has been echoed in much of the literature on women in the modern Japanese workplace as these assumptive roles have spilled into the professional lives of the working Japanese woman and her often subordinate relationships with male superiors in the corporate hierarchy (Saso 1990, Matanle, Ishiguru, McCann 2014). Kumiko Nemoto has well articulated the reflections of the patriarchal vertical social system in the office and identified a structural or 'organizational masculinity' responsible for a 'vertical sex segregation' (2013). This refers to the delegation of lower company positions and clerical work to women which Nemoto identifies as a primary culprit in continued gender inequality (p155). The roles these women fill can take on the appearance of their assumptive domestic duties. In *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies,* Yuko Ogasawara explains that women at Japanese firms were called 'office flowers' with the implication that 'they served a decorative function and

thereby inspired men to work hard' and supporting them at every turn (1998, xvii). Basic office secretarial duties have been combined with the serving of tea, cleaning, and running errands for their male superiors (xvii). An emphasized femininity to support the salaryman masculinity while also on the job is a stalwart philosophy and has shown few signs of abating since Ogasawara's writing (see Yu 2009, Kimoto 2005, Charlebois 2014).

Some researchers have tried to seek out a shift in gender power dynamics in other ways than challenging structural masculinity, most notably Ogasawara. While her engaging book paints a vivid picture of the bluntly gendered reality of the Japanese workplace, she also argues that working Japanese women have turned the tables on the system by becoming indispensable in their subordinate roles and exert a great deal of power and influence in the office (1998). This is exercised via manipulations of the relational dependence with highlighted 'strategies' such as refusal to complete work, gift-giving, and even gossip and flirtations to gain leverage in an office environment. However, Ogasawara's championing of manipulations to shift the balance of power simply serves to articulate what ground can be rescued from *within* the patriarchal vertical structure rather than challenging it. This is done while reinforcing accepted stereotypes about women and assumed female traits (see Belk and Snell 1986).

These ideas followed in the footsteps of Sumiko Iwao's rather controversial 1993 book *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality.* Iwao sometimes wrote from a position which betrayed a defensive impulse emphasizing and reframing small perceived societal changes as progressivism. A lack of urgency felt by Japanese women to escalate the pace of progressivism is defended as a rejection of social and political mobilization due to a cultural disposition eschewing confrontation (2008 p27-28). The lack of urgency reveals a lack of will which I would then argue is a product of submission to a hegemonic masculinity and resignation

to emphasized femininity. She noted being 'flowers' of the workplace as no longer how women were necessarily seen due to increases in full-time career-minded employment coming out of the 1980s (p222), but also revealed that many women were still referred to as *ochakumi* meaning a 'tea fetcher' (p274). Some women were told roles were not gendered in the office, but the expectation was still felt to adhere to the old-fashioned norms, with women not taking issue with the expectation (p275). Iwao even challenges notions of what 'equality' really means positing a different perspective on the concept of gender equality for the Japanese woman compared to a Western idealism (p17). As understood by Yu, Benton, Charlebois, Kimoto, Chang, and others, there has been little progression in broader cultural attitudes on assumptive gender roles since Iwao and Ogasawara published their seminal works.

Iwao was a little more careful than Ogasawara in her defense of the Japanese woman's reaction to structural masculinity by contextualizing her arguments in a framework of evolving pluralism for female identity in Japanese society. Some of her conclusions, such as the quiet winning of freedoms via an escape of masculine societal expectation, are also important considerations in how Japanese women may have more social autonomy than believed (p15). This is also where Iwao offers a component of this study's theoretical framework. Understanding how Japanese women think and behave and the way they have come to find advantages within a limiting social order offers space for consideration of pluralistic 'breeds of women' (ibid) which still holds merit today. In 2015, Anne Aronsson explored the professional and domestic lives of Japanese women who are part of this gradual pluralism; the full-time career woman. Drawing on Ogasawara and Iwao to establish the backdrop against which these women are operating (2015 p12, 53, 58-59), Aronsson's *Career Women in Contemporary Japan: Pursuing Identities, Fashioning Lives* exposes that even 17 years after Ogasawara's work and 22 years after Iwao, the

professional track at Japanese firms is still an uncertain one in a male-dominated context and these women are forging different identities within that context which gives them a sense of recognition and fulfillment.

Social anthropologist Karen Kelsky has contributed to this conversation, and provides one of the most important components of my theoretical framework, in her research on one of these 'breeds': the internationalist Japanese woman. Published in 2001, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams,* Kelsky expertly articulated the trend of young Japanese women becoming internationally minded to locate and take advantage of opportunities to escape 'an expected life course' of limited social, professional, and familial structures (2001, loc. 96). The pull to the West and toward Western ideals (which the author characterizes as 'occidental longings') creates an opportunity for the creation of alternative femininities. This not only becomes an example of Iwao's 'breeds' in increasingly pluralistic identity construction, but it also creates a philosophical template for what Charlebois would call 'oppositional femininity' (2014). I use Kelsky's matrix in more detail in Chapter 4.

This vast literature across intersecting fields has provided the necessary historical and cultural insight regarding pop-culture, gender relations, and societal behavior in Japan which frames and contextualizes my research. I believe that the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity in Japan, the reputation for hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal music, and the opportunity for alternative and oppositional femininity which is created, provides fertile ground for a study attempting to discover why Japan offers such a unique spin on heavy metal's gender politics. The trends in research in Japanese popular music, metal studies, and gender in heavy metal have also left an important vacancy. With the country's metal subdomain rarely considered worthy of mention and its slight academic attention being limited in scope, wrapped in misunderstanding,

and often reduced to a source of pop-culture novelty or market for Western music export, an examination of Japan's powerful female metal contingent can fill in many gaps in the scholarship.

Chapter 3 – History and Precedence

Heavy metal is a diverse 'genre.' It is perhaps best characterized as a sort of 'meta-genre' encompassing a vast array of subgenres, from the fast and aggressive thrash metal to the melodic and symphonic strains of power metal, the dark and brooding doom metal, and the guttural intensity of death and black metal. Each subgenre brings its unique style and cultural influence, united by a shared passion for musical intensity and expression. When relevant, at various points throughout I will delve into some of the nuances of metal subgenres, but largely I'll be speaking of the 'meta-genre' of heavy metal music and its culture.

Examining Japanese heavy metal's upending of the genre's perceived gender norms necessitates a look to the historical development of the Japanese metal subdomain. This chapter sets the stage for discussion on Japanese metal with an outline of heavy metal's history in the country. A historical narrative of heavy metal in Japan is important for two reasons. The first is that it allows for an introduction to important names, concepts, and terms to be found throughout this thesis. The second, and most important as it is key to laying the foundation of my overall argument, is that such a narrative demonstrates that heavy metal did not come to Japan as a fully formed genre. This means it could not have traversed borders with any biases with which the genre had been ascribed over time. The Japanese subdomain developed organically on the heels of its Western origins but remained under construction in real time alongside its Western inspirators. I then look at larger trends in Japanese popular music during this period which were favorable to female rock music participation more broadly. These favorable developments include the presence of role models as well as a different approach to music socialization compared to the West. I will then demonstrate how this translated to Japan's heavy metal subdomain's formative years and the role women ultimately played in its development and growth. The historical context of metal's development in Japan, and the sociocultural and pop-

culture forces at play, provides fertile soil for other key components of my argument to follow which enabled and normalized the participation and thrivancy of female artists in contemporary Japanese heavy metal.

Development of a subdomain

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kei Kawano and Shuhei Hosokawa have written on the business of heavy metal music in Japan and in doing so wove a historical narrative about the genre's history in the country (Kawano and Hosokawa 2011). In this account, the authors consider the 'marginality of homegrown bands' as a core characteristic of Japan's relationship with metal (2011, 248). They acknowledge a 1970's rock music appreciation in Japan with tours by proto-metal acts such as KISS and Led Zeppelin, and with this is mention of peripheral domestic live music and DJ events (p.249). Yet there is no mention of Japanese bands active in the 1970s and 1980s which were relevant to any domestic production of heavy metal, where it is referred to again in borrowed English as '*hebi-metaru'*.

Kawano and Hosokawa's narrative explains that Japan's heavy metal community was forged when the genre appeared as an import from Britain and the United States, circa 1980, triggered by a surge in titles classified at Japanese retail shops as being heavy metal. This was largely thanks to efforts of revered music critic and radio host Masanori Itō who introduced the band Iron Maiden and other genre-defining artists which became known as the 'New Wave of British Heavy Metal' (NWOBHM) to a Japanese audience via his DJ appearances and radio show. Tours of Japan early in the careers of Iron Maiden and fellow NWOBHM pioneers Saxon helped root Japanese metal fandom. The community then coalesced in 1984 with the publication of *Burrn!,* the first Japanese heavy metal magazine. Japan became a successful sales and touring market for many Western artists and as the decades passed, *yōshikibi* (stylistic connoisseurship)

allowed ‘classic’ metal artists who had fallen out of fashion in their home markets to find an enthusiastic audience as they were ‘still big in Japan’ (Kawano and Hosokawa 2011, Reid 1993). Looking at one, and only one, issue of *Burrn!* in 2011, Kawano and Hosokawa believed that the absence of Japanese artists in its pages was evidence that marginalization of domestic acts continues after the era of the initial research they conducted in the late-1990s (Kawano and Hosokawa 2011, p248).

When I first read this account in 2013, I believed its spin on Japan’s metal subdomain to be accurate. Until late 2013, I was only familiar with a handful of Japanese artists who made rare international headlines and I paid the country’s heavy metal output little mind. Growing up in the US, Japanese bands were largely invisible in metal magazines, on radio, or MTV, yet the stories of American and European metal bands traveling to Japan on tour were legendary. American heavy metal magazines such as Metal Edge, Hit Parader, and RIP, treated Japan as the import-happy consumer culture in love with the West that Kawano and Hosokawa would later describe. Airport mob scenes, sold-out shows, and live albums by Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, and others, exoticized the country as a mecca for imported metal consumption. In November 2016, I saw the veteran Swedish band EUROPE perform at The Roundhouse in London on a tour celebrating the 30th anniversary of their hugely successful album *The Final Countdown*, and during one of the songs a video montage of their first trip to Japan was played. The way in which Japan embraces Western popular culture was still a source of entertainment and bemusement three decades later.

This narrative was also compatible with observable and anecdotal evidence from my first few adventures in Japan. The international stars of heavy metal were seemingly always on the cover of *Burrn!* and American and European names from metal’s glory years had photos and advertisements ever-present in Tower Record’s metal section. I was even more convinced when

in 2016 I attended a presentation by Masanori Itō himself at Tower Records Shibuya where he was displaying part of his classic metal memorabilia collection (all from famous foreign artists). The crowd was a sea of t-shirts and denim jackets proudly displaying Iron Maiden, Ozzy Osbourne, Mötely Crüe, KISS and myriad other logos from foreign heavy metal legends with whom Itō had developed a journalistic rapport or friendship. There was not a single Japanese artist t-shirt in sight. My Japanese was poor at the time and I barely understood his presentation, but considering the artifacts he was discussing, domestic metal was indeed appearing marginalized.

Did anyone in Japan care about Japanese artists? Was there even a subdomain to speak of? The answer was yes. My attention had simply drifted to the familiar and I was happy to see such artists from my own rolodex of fandom still appreciated. Itō's business was Western metal imports as he is not famous for addressing domestic metal music production with the same urgency. Confirmation bias was at work. Domestic metal artists were not being ignored, and many did indeed appear on his famous radio show, including Japanese female artists, but they were not at the center of Itō's work or the reason for his renown. Stepping back and reevaluating the Japanese metal landscape, I noticed that Japanese artists had comparable retail promotion and taste-culture media representation while their concerts were just as well advertised, and many were sold out when I tried to get tickets. I just did not recognize them and therefore did not really notice them.

The more involved I became in Japan's metal subdomain, the clearer it was that 'homegrown' bands have *never* been marginalized. A pantheon of artists domestically revered for their artistic and commercial contributions to the Japanese subdomain existed since the earliest days of the genre. It did not take much digging before an alternative history revealed itself.

Heavy metal in Japan, and Japanese metal artists, can be traced back to the same era as metal's emergence in the United Kingdom. Even Itō has discussed metal's heritage in Japan dating back to the late 1960s and his personal hard-rock awakening in 1972 (Itō 1993, 1999, Dunn 2008).

The dark psychedelic rock group Flower Travelin' Band, formed in 1968, have been pointed to as Japan's earliest heavy metal antecedent and compared by fans more than favorably with Black Sabbath—largely considered the world's first heavy metal band (Weinstein 2009, Walser 1993, Larson 2004; 183)—regarding the creation of what would become metal's signature sound (Campbell 2013). It was on their 1970 album *Anywhere* that Flower Travelin' Band covered the Black Sabbath track 'Black Sabbath,' the original being released that same year on Black Sabbath's eponymous debut album making the two bands contemporaries in the era of heavy metal's aesthetic creation. But Black Sabbath's emergence was the influence on Flower Travelin' Band, not the other way around. Sabbath came first and had an impact on the young Japanese group via easy accessibility from record label international distribution, something Japanese acts still struggle to attain until well into the Internet era. So while Japanese artists were following metal's development so closely as to even cover material within the same year of international release, the immediacy of heavy metal's reach and impact from West to East is evidence of Western ownership of the emerging genre.

And what was the 'genre' at that time? While the first use of the term 'heavy metal' to describe a genre of music remains debated, Deena Weinstein's excellent detective work offers reasonable evidence to credit music journalists Lester Bangs and Mike Saunders with using the term to describe a style of music in issues of *Creem* magazine in 1970 (Weinstein 2013), the same year as *Anywhere*'s and *Black Sabbath*'s release. With the term 'heavy metal' first gaining some traction as genre terminology with artists like Black Sabbath, and the band's influence on

musicians in Japan evidenced by Flower Travelin' Band's cover and the recognition of stylistic similarity, I feel confident pointing to 1970 as the birth of heavy metal in Japan just as it was in the United States and Europe.

Japan's metal subdomain then remained under construction in myriad ways for the rest of the decade, however discussion with Japanese metal fans of that generation suggests that the term heavy metal was part of fan and media discourse in Japan from at least the mid-1970s. Mako, a 55-year old metal fan from Tokyo, recalls his first experiences with heavy metal:

> My school friend told me about heavy metal when I was maybe 11 or 12 years old (1976/77). He showed me KISS in Music Life magazine. KISS looked so strange and cool and exciting. I asked my friend what they played and he said, 'heavy metal.' Then he played albums for me by Black Sabbath and KISS and Deep Purple. I loved heavy metal from that point…We saw BowWow as the opening act for KISS so Japan had its own metal bands. Our own Japanese bands on stage with KISS in Tokyo was very exciting. (Mako, interview conducted via email, January 2019)

Another fan, 58-year old Hiroshi from Saitama, remembers a radio broadcast using the term.

> **CDM:** How long have you been listening to heavy metal?
> **Hiroshi:** Since I was a teenager. 1970s.
> **CDM**: How did you discover metal?
> **Hiroshi:** The radio played some songs. One day the DJ said 'heavy metal' and it was Black Sabbath. JOQR [the station] would play it.
> **CDM:** Did the radio play Japanese metal bands too?
> **Hiroshi:** Yes, but back then there were not many. Mostly foreign bands. But they played BowWow and others.
> **CDM:** Do you remember the other bands?
> **Hiroshi:** Japanese metal only just started. BowWow. Earthshaker in the late 1970s. Eventually Loudness and Seikima II in the 1980s. I remember Show-Ya and EZO. (interview conducted via Skype in Japanese, 1 February 2019, translation: Yukari T)

Both of these accounts place Japanese recognition of heavy metal as a genre classifier in the 1970s through mediation including rock radio and possibly Japanese music magazines like

Music Life[9] as well as gaining conversational use among fans. Keith Negus' concept of genre as an organizing mechanism for companies producing and promoting musical product and the managing of fan aesthetic expectation is applicable here (1999). The fans had the term in hand and held expectations of how these bands might sound and appeal to them. Both of the fans interviewed also referenced a Japanese act, BowWow, a group which started in 1975 and went on to sign with Japanese major record labels over the course of a career spanning more than two decades, indicating a recognized relationship at the time between 'homegrown' acts and the mediated genre.

However, furthering the idea that metal was indeed a Western genre, or considered as such by fans and media, my interview subjects all referenced KISS, Black Sabbath, or Deep Purple and 'mostly foreign bands' as being what was on the radio with BowWow playing second fiddle, or rhythm guitar to Western metal's lead. With KISS being the band who headlined the famous Nippon Budokan and the Japanese act BowWow supporting the shows rather than other way around, the dominance of the Western genre originators becomes apparent. The Japanese groups were not touring internationally or even receiving record distribution across borders making it difficult to consider the early Japanese metal output to be on even footing. It is clear via BowWow's participation, however, that early Japanese domestic metal development was well underway and gaining purchase with, and in a retail sense *from*, a domestic audience.

The arrival of additional international acts which Itō helped popularize in 1980 and 1981 did spark a boom in enthusiasm for heavy metal in Japan just as those bands had inspired in their domestic markets. This era appears to be when the genre became a more well-known mainstream commodity and heavy metal as a term became far more common in musical discourse (Walser

[9] In looking through a few issues of Music Life magazine from the late 1970s, I could not find an exact reference to 'heavy metal,' though 'hard rock,' and 'heavy rock' would appear.

1993, Weinstein 2009) contributing to Kawano and Hosokawa's decision to pinpoint this period as the launch of metal in Japan. But this greater interest was not entirely rooted in foreign metal imports. There was an explosion in the Japanese subdomain with artists inspired by both early international and domestic metal and shaped the genre in Japan moving forward. With the domestic success of many of these groups and the way in which they are revered today, it is difficult see Japanese metal as having been domestically marginalized.

Examples of successful Japanese metal bands evidencing a thriving domestic metal market were not difficult to find during Kawano and Hosokawa's period of research. The often-referenced Osaka-based band Loudness released their debut on Nippon Columbia Records in 1981 and would go on to tour internationally, win positions on domestic and international sales charts, and offer Japan's first metal 'guitar hero' in Akira Takasaki. At the time of writing, the band has released 36 albums, charted on Japan's ORICON album charts 49 times, and is still touring, recording, continuing to take magazine covers and are referenced by many Japanese metal artists, regardless of sex or generation, as a primary influence.

The heavily KISS inspired band Seikima-II is never mentioned by Western commentators, academic or journalistic alike, but they are one of Japan's top-selling and well-known acts. Their musicianship, combined with kabuki styled tongue-in-cheek demonic themes and theatrics, brought them quick attention after their 1982 debut. They have to date sold over 11 million albums in Japan, released multiple concert DVDs, and embarked on sold-out tours of Japan's larger venues. They were famous enough in Japan to warrant their own special edition videogame by leading game developer CapCom, *Seikima II Akuma no Gyakushū*! (Seikima II - The Wrath of Satan!) and the lead singer, Demon Kogure, has permeated Japanese popular culture, appearing in advertisements for everything from camera film to tech companies to banks

and credit cards, as well as becoming a color commentator for televised sumo wrestling. Their influence remains with many artists, including Mary's Blood and Nemophila lead guitarist SAKI who has named the group as her primary inspiration referencing them in interviews and mentioning the band in her social media profile introductions.

Perhaps the most important act proving that domestic metal marginalization is a myth is X-Japan. Starting simply as X and later renaming themselves due to international trademark complications, the band achieved superstardom eventually selling over 30 million albums in Japan and selling out arenas across the country, including the 55,000-seat Tokyo Dome on 18 different occasions over a decades-long career (Aaron 2014). Though the band's appeal went far beyond heavy metal taste-culture and into mainstream rock and pop appreciation, not unlike many of the famous bands from the US and Europe during metal's 1980's commercial breakthrough, X-Japan was decidedly metal and was promoted as such over the years by *Burrn!*, Billboard, and Rolling Stone. In an interview with Rolling Stone, band founder and composer Yoshiki offered comments similar to some of the fans I interviewed regarding metal's early years in Japan and how he classified his stylistic inspiration when starting the project:

> I asked my mother to take me to the KISS concert in Japan (1977)…so they were kind of the entrance point for me for hard rock music. I also started listening to Led Zeppelin, then Iron Maiden, and then from there, pretty much every single hard-rock or heavy-metal (band) or anything super-heavy…(Rolling Stone interview, Aaron 2014)

With an over-the-top take on the already flamboyant outfits, hair, and make-up some Western metal bands were beginning to popularize (known as 'glam metal' see Weinstein 2001), X-Japan became mega-stars for their look as much as their music. The band was so influential in Japanese popular culture that their slogan 'Psychedelic Violence Crime of Visual Shock' on the

cover of the 1989 album *Blue Blood*, launched what would become known as 'visual kei' (visual style), a rock and metal-based genre celebrating theatricality with a highly articulated feminine appearance taking the British and American concepts of glam to extremes never before seen. Visual kei eventually broke with metal in the 1990s becoming a 'sabukaru' unto itself, with a focus on fashion rather than music, which eventually occupied a wide stylistic birth from heavy metal and punk to goth-rock and electronic dance music. Visual kei was a Japanese cultural and music phenomenon in the 1990s and early 2000s producing numerous chart-topping and stadium-filling artists, and it is still a relevant and highly visible part of Japanese popular culture. The commercial and cultural impact of X-Japan hardly reeks of marginalization.

These artists are not exceptions proving the rule, but tips of icebergs. EZO, Outrage, Saber Tiger, Anthem and a long list of artists continued the trend of hard rock and heavy metal domestic production. However, there is a perceptible differentiation in Japan between metal from abroad and domestic metal, and how they are engaged by fans and media. There is a difference between *marginalization* and *differentiation* which might be where Kawano and Hosokawa were first led astray. What has been perceived as marginalization can more accurately be described as a bifurcation as Japan's metal subdomain created what became known as 'J-metal.'

J-metal, *Burrn!,* and *Burrn! Japan*

Kawano and Hosokawa missed something quite obvious. Never mentioned by the researchers, *Burrn!* launched the parallel title *Burrn! Japan* in 1986. This publication devotes attention exclusively to Japanese metal giving recognition to the domestic subdomain by means of the same high-end glossy production, positioning on newsstands, and in-depth coverage, as the original does for foreign artists. The title is still in print today. The two magazines became

dual taste arbiters in Japan's heavy metal subdomain. Defining a genre is sticky business and is based on the related concepts of what fans want and what draws money operating within given taste parameters mediated through fan culture and music business mechanisms like genre specific magazines (Frith 1996, Negus 1999). With the original launch of *Burrn!*, the Japanese metal community quickly developed a reputation for connoisseurship, passionate debate, and a rigorous adherence to genre standards (Itō 1993) and this carried over to *Burrn! Japan*. Upon its debut in 1984, the *Burrn!* Publications became the central field of contest for what makes metal truly metal in Japan and perceptions of authenticity are still under *Burrn!*'s jurisdiction as a publisher (encompassing their family of titles, including the newer *Metallion* magazine), so the launch of *Burrn! Japan* can be seen as an extension of the primary magazine's status offering affirmation of the value of domestic metal production within the subdomain. While *Burrn!*'s publications define and mediate heavy metal taste-culture and shape the subdomain, *Burrn!* and *Burrn! Japan* represents two different perspectives on the same overarching genre. Japanese metal is still metal, but in a localized manner made by and for a Japanese connoisseur market. The separation has led to the commercial and aesthetic category delineation of 'J-metal' which should not necessarily be confused with a subgenre delineation and is consistent with the way in which the Japanese popular music business has come to reference its own output—J-pop, J-hip hop, J-rock, and so on. As Carol Stevens explains, adding the roman letter 'J' before an English word is a signifier to a global audience indicating a Japanese version of an already known entity. Japanese marketing capitalizes on a self-awareness of Japan's pop-culture exports, 'an international gaze domestically created and applied' (2008, 30). Heavy metal's bifurcation in Japan is therefore not unique in Japanese popular culture and highlights an intentional self-segregation rather than a marginalization. In Japanese society, there is an awareness of the

country's own cultural output and like to acknowledge it as such. My conversation with metal fan Maho at a Disk Union shop highlighted this domestic perspective when our chat descended into a humorous circular defense of J-metal's uniqueness.

> **CDM:** Do you listen to J-metal?
> **Maho:** Yes. I like many Japanese bands.
> **CDM:** Who do you like?
> **Maho:** Loudness. Everyone likes Loudness. Saber Tiger is great. Show-Ya. Fuki. Galneryus I just got into. They have different sounds.
> **CDM:** How is the J-metal sound different?
> **Maho**: It is Japanese
> **CDM:** But is the music different?
> **Maho:** Yes, it's Japanese language and style is very Japanese.
> **CDM:** What makes the music style Japanese?
> **Maho:** The artists are Japanese.
> **CDM:** But what makes the style different?
> **Maho**: It's J-metal.
> **CDM:** How so?
> **Maho:** They are Japanese
> (Disk Union customer, interview conducted in Japanese, author's translation, 16 October 2018, Tokyo)

Not articulated here by Maho, but likely what she means by 'style', is the fact that there are musical identifiers of Japanese music—melodic and harmonic structures often found in Japanese popular music in general—one could identify to take domestic ownership. Japanese chord progressions tend to rely heavily on particular patterns, such as the 'royal road' progression. Called ōdō shinkō in Japanese, it is the IV^{M7}–V^{7}–iii^{7}–vi progression creating a pleasing circle of fifths progression if the song is in a major key (Ramage, 2023, vol 45, 238). The major-7, even in the minor-key reliant world of heavy metal, is quite common. Many progressions also have a tendency to be much longer, sometimes far outpacing the standard four-chord progressions so ubiquitous in American and European music. This creates opportunity for twisting melodies seeking a more winding path to resolution, if they resolve at all. These melodies are also less open to vocal interpretation than those of Western songs with the vocal

play and individual characteristics of voice and emotional expression, so expected in Western music, taking a backseat to strict and orderly obeyance to the melody as it was written (Marty Friedman, YouTube interview by Rick Beato, May 2023)[10].

Domestic structure preferences aside, Maho brings up the obvious and vital component of language. Japanese metal is similar to Japan's other pop and rock offerings in its referential self-containment and one of the reasons for this is the Japanese language. Metal is an English-language dominated genre and English has long been considered a requirement for international appeal across popular music styles (Negus 1999, Stevens 2008). This seems to have been particularly true in a pre-Internet era when record labels, radio stations, and magazines were the primary points of mediated fan access.

Japanese audiences tend to judge and appreciate lyrics sung in English as part of metal's 'style aesthetic' (Tôgô 1998), not unlike the Japanese appreciation for English language jazz vocals after WWII and the ensuing interest in Western pop (Craig 2000). But Western audiences never had much of a chance to embrace Japanese metal on the heels of international efforts by Loudness and X-Japan to see if interest flowed both ways. Lack of English language skills keeps multinational record labels from reaching out to many Japanese artists (Stevens 2008, Craig 2000), and insecurities about English contributes to the Japanese side of the equation maintaining its isolationism. Outside of a few notable exceptions attempting songs in English (Loudness, X-Japan, Show-Ya), metal bands and their networks of music business professionals attempting to represent their interests have rarely seemed willing to reach towards the international market on international terms.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_SHZkqsIDQ

Language was the only specific aspect of J-metal which Maho could point to as distinctly Japanese, and simply knowing the artists were Japanese was enough to influence her perspective on the particulars of style aesthetics. My interview with Hiroshi also touched on this subject as he referenced the importance of hearing his own language in heavy metal.

> **CDM:** Were those Japanese bands (referenced earlier) popular at the time?
> **Hiroshi:** Yes, but some of my friends just listened to music with English words. They thought it made them cool, I think.
> **CDM:** Did you think it was cool?
> **Hiroshi:** Yes, but Japanese is also cool. Many of my friends and I liked hearing singing in Japanese.
> **CDM:** How did it feel to hear Japanese?
> **Hiroshi:** So cool. It was for us and was…maybe…a new understanding. It did not have to be only in English. It did not have to be trendy and from overseas. Metal was worldwide. Our (Japanese) trend too. Metal can be for everyone. (interview conducted via Skype in Japanese, 1 February 2019, translation by Yukari T.)

Hiroshi made it clear that a cultural identifier such as language made it possible to connect in a more profound way to the broader genre and that the genre did not belong to an exclusive group, in this case, English speakers. J-metal was then imbued with a localized authenticity legitimized by *Burn Japan!* with its singular focus on Japanese artists and written in Japanese by Japanese journalists. The fact that such a publication was born from the original taste-culture gatekeeper reveals a need to recognize the importance of domestic metal output in a domestic context within an English-language genre gone global. However, an interesting side-effect was a reinforcement of the insular disposition of the Japanese music industry keeping J-metal from crossing borders. Language connected a global genre to a local audience yet isolated the Japanese music output from a potential global audience. J-metal catered to an exclusive group of its own. J-metal was certainly marginalized internationally by virtue of linguistic inaccessibility and an insular cultural presentation, but all while being celebrated and thoroughly authenticated domestically. The only way to view Japanese metal as being marginalized in its

own country, as done buy Kawano and Hosokawa, is to view it from the Western-centric perspective of cultural inaccessibility and allowing attention to drift only to the familiar when examining an unfamiliar subdomain.

Marginalization did, however, eventually hit the genre as a whole when the 1990s saw a decline in interest following the commercial peak of heavy metal in the 1980s. This lull was also felt in Japan. The Japanese metal taste-culture was largely dominated by debates of authenticity for the increasingly popular category of visual kei and foreign trends in grunge, nu-metal, and other Euro-American led experimentations rising from traditional metal's fall from mainstream favor. Most of these new trends failed to meet the Japanese subdomain's standards for what constituted heavy metal (Kawano and Hosokawa 2011). Instead, Japanese heavy metal loyalists continued to appreciate *yōshikibi* and held true to more traditional genre aesthetics. It was then when numerous international acts found themselves marginalized in their home countries as they faded from fame in the shadow of shifting trends. Many of these 'classic' bands still found an enthusiastic audience in Japan (Kawano and Hosokawa 2010, Reid 1993) and were then signed or licensed by Japanese major labels. Japanese artistic stabs at foreign trends birthed a smattering of domestic groups, but *Burrn!*, *Burrn! Japan* and the community it helped sustain, stayed loyal to tradition.

Authenticity in metal is not a clear case of a sonic checklist, but there is a code that at least allows something to stand for metal judgement. Metal emphasizes straight forward power, speed, and forcefulness (Pareles 1988). There is a weight, a discernable thickness, to its production with overamplified and overly distorted guitars controlled through technical skill and applied precision. The guitar riff is the compositional center while rhythms are pounding and emphatic and vocals can fly with passionate and precise melodic arcs or exhibit aggression and

theatricality through various inflections, as long they are emotionally transmissive. These are the pillars of metal's authenticity as aural expression of its themes of rebellion, aggression, sexuality, fantasy, individuality, and fights against injustice and oppression. However, arms crossed and looks askance usually accompanied with a phrase such as 'I know metal when I hear it…' seems to be the default judicial stance. Connoisseurs weigh offerings against that which came before, a canon of heavy metal's architects, and though Walser reminds us that genres are anything but monolithic (1993), demarcations are essential in order to have something called 'metal' (Weinstein 2009) and the Japanese community seemed to become stricter than elsewhere in drawing and maintaining these parameters.

Connoisseurship

Some of this appreciation in Japan appears to come from a respect of musicianship and metal's required technical prowess. Heavy metal prizes discipline, dexterity, and artistic craftmanship in composition and arrangement (Walser 1992, 1993). Stereotypes of metal as a simplistic and unrefined musical style with assumptions of talentless instrument abuse have long been dismantled. In their book *Faking It: Authenticity in Popular Music,* Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor rather shamelessly denounce heavy metal as intrinsically inauthentic, correctly addressing its penchant for the spectacular but labeling heavy metal, particularly in the 1980s, as superficial and crass (2007, 192). This is ironically a lazy and crass evaluation of metal which misunderstands the intensions, expressions, and needs of metal artists and audiences while completely dismissing the technical requirements and physical dexterity it demands from a disciplined pool of musicians. The genre has appropriated classical music's fetish for virtuosity revealing a 'high culture' reality to a mistakenly perceived 'low culture' genre (Walser 1993). In

Japan, which has taken to Western classical music (Inoue 1967, Hewett 2006, Mehl 2013) and developed a culture of jazz connoisseurship (Atkins 2001), heavy metal fits right in.

'We are taught music, classical music, in school,' my friend Ryo told me during the same conversation referenced earlier. 'I did not think of it until I was an adult, but the strictness and the discipline of Western classical music is very Japanese.' Music education is a core component of the Japanese school curriculum and Western classical music has been a part of Japanese music education since the Meiji era (1868 – 1912) (Inoue 1967, Abdoo 1984, Sonoda 2014). Music appreciation and the development of musical knowledge and skillset is then something the Japanese are exposed to at a young age. 'We take it very seriously.' Ryo continued. 'As children, we want to do our best to succeed and make our teachers and family proud so we appreciate music that is demanding.' The discipline of heavy metal musicianship mirrors the heavily structured nature of Japanese society, and this finds its way into fandom as well as musical execution.

> Being a metal fan is like being an academic here [Japan]. You have to have read Itō, you have to read *Burrn!.* Sometimes a [metal] magazine will have musical transcriptions. I have friends who read musician magazines who are not even musicians. You don't want your metal friends to think you don't understand how music works. We are not punk, we are metal. It would cause shame maybe [laughs]. Don't bring shame on your metal family [laughs]! Like Loudness or Yoshiki [from X-Japan] might disown you.' (Ryo, metal musician, interview conducted in Nagoya, August 2018)

Beyond the sonic there is also the denim, leather, chains, boots, and closet full of black t-shirts representing the bands we so proudly claim as metal. Music subdomains tend to retain core fashion principles of their inhabiting taste-culture, and metal is no different. A crowd at a metal show in 1987 may not look too dissimilar from a crowd in 2022. Though love for the high teased, sprayed, and moussed hair styles of the 1980s have receded in the West, they still appear

in certain Japanese circles. In addition, the mullet has maintained its fashionable swagger in contemporary Japan and is quite common in the heavy metal subdomain, with bands and fans alike. Metal is certainly seen in Japan as having a tradition in those aesthetic regards and perhaps like other aspects of the Japanese disposition, tradition must be respected and revered.

Into the 2000s, visual kei flourished while some Japanese ‘modern metal’ bands such as Maximum the Hormone, Crystal Lake, and Crossfaith, became commercially successful yet still struggle to win authentication from the heavy metal traditionalists. However, *yōshikibi* was alive and well in J-metal with artists such as Destrose, Galneryus, Outrage, and Sigh staying true to their style aesthetics. A few visual kei bands were accepted into the metal community. Versailles and its off-shoot group Jupiter for example maintained a more consistently traditional metal sound while keeping a flamboyant image. Sex Machine Guns, founded in 1999, opted to strip away their visual kei look over the years in favor of a more traditional metal image with music to match, thus gaining metal subdomain acceptance.

It was in the mid to late-2000s that the division between metal and visual kei finally reached its crescendo as the two rarely intersected and artists effectively chose sides. It is this contemporary era which saw more female artists and all-female bands than ever before take the metal spotlight in Japan, but it was the not the first-time female metal artists had significant impact on domestic metal production. Japanese metal began showing signs of what many dubbed the Japanese ‘girl’s metal boom’ around this time (Smith 2016, West 2018). but calling the rise of female heavy metal artists a ‘boom’ only indicates when more people took notice when in fact women have been active, influential, and impactful in Japanese metal since the 1980s. In my discussion with an anonymous guitarist in the 'girls band’ scene, the ‘boom’ was more of an external observance.

CDM: There are web forums and some magazines calling this a 'girl's metal boom.' What do you think about that?
Guitarist: Ehh, I dunno. 'Boom' is a weird word. We (women) have always been here though.
CDM: Always?
Guitarist: Yeah. ShowYa, Galhammer, Terra Rosa, Mari Hamada. I just think foreign people noticed when Babymetal became famous. (conversation in Japanese, 19 June 2017, Nagoya, translation by Yukari T)

Japan, girls and cultural capital

Long before Babymetal baffled Western onlookers and bands such as Mary's Blood and Aldious were at the center of a perceived 'boom,' women were a part of the Japanese metal picture. This involvement was not triggered by any specific sociopolitical motive or movement and appears to have happened organically. In stark contrast to the female exclusion and the boys club reputation of Euro-American heavy metal subdomains, women were highly visible at the dawn of Japanese metal in the early 1980s, just as they were in the wider landscape of Japanese rock music. Female exclusion, or even female excription as Walser has stated (1993), in Western metal subdomains has been tied to a lack of access to cultural capital for aspiring female rock musicians and the lack of female role models in metal to perpetuate progress (Clawson 1999, Kahn-Harris 2007, Walser 1993, Weinstein 2001). Investigating why these trends existed in one cultural context and not in others suggests that broader sociocultural forces may have more influence on heavy metal's gender politics than the hegemonic masculinity believed by many to be inherent to the genre itself.

Heavy metal's masculinist disposition is inherited from the gender divide in metal's broader rock music lineage. As Frith and McRobbie wrote, rock music 'works with conventions of masculinity and femininity that situate both performers and audiences along clear gender

lines: males as active participants, females as passive consumers' (Frith and McRobbie 1990). Of course, some things have changed over the decades in rock music's acceptance of female participation, though not necessarily in band formation which is observed in the statistical minority of all-female rock bands, but the gendered nature of rock music performance is still prominent in the hyper-aggressive world of metal- aggressiveness being a trait typically gendered as masculine (Mussweiler and Förster, 2000, Weaver, Vandello, Bosson, and Burnaford, 2010).

Crucial to understanding how Japanese women appear to have avoided this obstacle and seamlessly engaged heavy metal music production is an examination of the difference between Japanese and typical Western music socialization. A lack of the appropriate social capital in the West and an accrual and leveraging of such capital in Japan is key. I draw here from Pierre Bourdieu's articulation of forms of capital which outlines a difference between financial, social, and cultural forms (1985).

Cultural capital is a collection of acquired assets, a body of knowledge, gained consciously and then passed on via socialization and enabling social mobility (1993). Bourdieu explains that cultural capital exists in symbiosis with concepts of *habitus*, the disposition of the individual also acquired by socialization, and *field*, the social space of contest over what constitutes capital and how it is accrued and leveraged. When looking at early rock, and then later metal, subdomain access for women in Japan, the habitus, field, and then the building and spending of cultural capital, paints a unique picture of music socialization.

Mary Ann Clawson writes that 'early processes of aspiring to be a musician, learning to play, and becoming part of a band are shaped by gender' (1999). Accruing capital in such a power structure as the social networks of heavy metal has been difficult for women due to music

socialization's long-standing sex segregation. The institutionalized relationships in Western heavy metal subdomains are driven and delineated by heteronormative masculine expression and are difficult for women to leverage unless there is accommodation made to conform to male determined roles for female participation (Klypchak, 2007, Weinstein 2001). The associated gender stereotyping of musical instruments is a primary aspect of musical socialization erecting a barrier to appropriate capital. As discussed in Chapter 1, research indicates that instruments are socially gender-typed with flute, violin, clarinet, and piano, being gendered feminine while the guitar (often in the research including bass guitar), drums, and brass have an association with masculinity (Clawson 1999, Waksman 2001, Marshal and Shibazaki 2011, Wych 2012, Wrape, Ditloff, and Callahan 2016).

Heavy metal's centerpiece is the electric guitar, and with its other core instruments of drums and bass guitar also gendered masculine,[11] instrument choice and access, as socially influenced by gender, have roles to play in the socialization of heavy metal music. Musicians have a tendency to form or recruit for bands from the basis of sex-segregated friendships—tight units of homosocial solidarity—especially in formative teenage years (Clawson 1999, Bayton 1998). In heavy metal in particular, band-formation is considered a ritual of male-bonding (Frith 1990, Weinstein 1991, Walser 1993) and, at least according to Robert Walser, a space for masculine identity building (1993) whereby its purpose is a place in which girls are made to feel unwelcome

The habitus at play is one of institutionalized homosocial solidarity and socially gendered instrumentation in a field where contest for these resources is male-driven and defined. Changes

[11] Mary Ann Clawson's work regarding gender and the role of bass player in the American 1990s alternative rock scene (1999) offers a slight challenge to this, but putting that particular scene in historical context, it appears the female rock bassist was an insular alternative or indie rock genre trend with no lasting effect beyond its era.

in the power structure of the field leading to changes in habitus require an impetus. In Western heavy metal, the absence of prominent role models to offer inspiration in championing female participation in heavy metal performance and instigating changes in field and habitus is clear. Where are the women who broke into the clubhouse proving that others can do it too? As previously discussed, an overwhelming majority of women in metal occupy the role of vocalist, and despite passionate claims by artists, fans, media, and academics alike that gender roles are 'on the move,' women remain in what Deena Weinstein calls the 'vocalist trap' (2016). Academia and music journalism have been touting new waves of female guitarists or celebrating the occasional all-female metal band as a change in metal gender politics finally being on the horizon. However, I cannot help but notice that these articles, just as those about female performers in other rock music genres, appeared in the late 1980s, 1990s, the 00's and beyond, with none of the predicted changes in genre gender-politics actually emerging. Perhaps the orchestrated attempt to draw attention to the women highlighted in such writings is guilty of creating a feminist echo-chamber hoping to advance the cause. Yet reiterating how unique, special, or revolutionary a female metal performer might be simply doubles-down on women as the continuous 'other.'

While female role models in Western metal are not obvious by virtue of number or prominence, they can be found when sought. Lita Ford, Lizzy Hale, Nita Straus, previously mentioned bands such as Girlschool, Vixen, and Burning Witches, and the increasing number of vocalists, trapped in that role as they may be, are there and waving a flag of sorts, though perpetually calling attention to their marginalization and status as 'the other.' It might be that girls in the West with heavy metal aspirations find the paltry number of female role models to be evidence that the odds of success are not in their favor, thus reinforcing a feeling of

disempowerment. Perhaps being labelled as a disempowered social class satisfies a desire for socio-political venom to keep up a fight and is in some psychological way more desired than actualizing normalization within a particular cultural arena or changing a specific subdomain's power structure.

Regardless of reason, the few have not become the many, and the social networks and power structures of Western heavy metal remain unchanged, as does the sex segregation of music socialization via gender-stereotyped instrumentation. Women in Japan have had a different experience regarding the attitudes defining the parameters of music socialization, an experience within a vastly different field and born from a different habitus. This set a woman's role in rock music in Japan, and then eventually heavy metal, on an altered course. The result was an accrual of significant cultural capital and the means to leverage it within a subdomain women had the opportunity to help define and contour rather than protest for inclusion.

The Runaways

This early involvement can be traced to the influence of an American band called The Runaways. The American teenage all-female rock/punk group achieved fame shortly after their major label debut album in 1976. They have been showered with the usual compliments for such a group as 'trailblazers' and 'pioneers,' responsible for 'breaking barriers,' and 'paving the way' (Robsen 2011, Michel 2010, Day 2010, Chiu 2013) but the effect in their home country was fleeting and dwarfed by their commercial triumph and lasting impact in Japan. Runaways lead guitarist Lita Ford, who later became one of only a few women in the West to have a robust heavy metal career, wrote of the band's arrival in Japan in her memoir.

> We stepped off the plane and were greeted by pandemonium. All we could see or hear were thousands of Japanese, all in the process of losing their minds. Runaways fans! There were so many of them and they were going so crazy that the security guards had to form a human barrier with their arms latched together to hold them back. (Ford 2016, loc 899)

Band co-founder Joan Jett also recalled their special welcome.

> I remember some of the girls getting really scared…I was thrilled. That's what you join a rock 'n' roll band for, to cause this kind of craziness. It felt like The Beatles to me. (Jett interview, Robsen 2011)

The Runaways were among the top imported acts of the era in Japan holding elite company with KISS, Led Zeppelin, and ABBA (Robsen 2011). Nowhere else did the band enjoy such success and nowhere else did the band draw so many female fans as the crush of fans at airports, hotels, and in sold out concert halls, were mostly teenage girls. On the band's *Live in Japan* album, tour video footage, and Japanese television appearances, the euphoric crowd noise is the distinct high-pitched squeal of thousands of girls.

The Runaways' standard audience everywhere else in the world heavily leaned male. In memoirs, interviews, and as outlined in the film made about their career, they were generally seen as a male fantasy come to life playing the role of musicians in a rock band for the sake of entertaining men rather than *being* a rock band in their own right. But in Japan they were the idols of a generation of young girls. In an interview with the Japan Times in 2011, former Runaways vocalist Cherie Currie believed they offered Japanese women something they had been longing for:

> I feel that [Japanese] women were very repressed…We were speaking for the girls, and I think that really resonated with them. And we were living a dream; I think that's what everybody wants in life. (Robsen 2011)

This begs the question: why did this not occur elsewhere for The Runaways? Why did the band not tap into the feminist inclinations of political movements of the day in the European and American markets? There are many factors that must be taken into consideration including taste in the music being produced, the manner of marketing, media reception and portrayal, and perhaps most importantly, how or even *if* the group aligned with Western notions and needs of feminist philosophy of the late 1970s in the first place. Simply put, in Japan the Runaways were the right band at the right time. It is then not surprising that following the Runaways' Beatles-esque treatment in Japan, all-female rock groups began to pop up in the late 1970s such as Rokuninkan Onna, Grace, Love Juice, Carrot, and Tango Europe.

I interviewed a woman named Hibiki, a Tokyo native who I met through a connection at a guitar shop in Shibuya. 58 years old at the time of the interview, Hibiki recounted her experiences in high school in the late 1970s as a fan of the Runaways and as an aspiring rock musician:

> We loved them. We all begged our parents to buy us guitars and drums. All the girls at school wanted to be like them…we could hang out together and learn to play. All of the girls in school wanted to start a band…we called ours Girl Bomb. It was very silly. Sometimes we just learned a few chords and a beat but then went to get ramen and sweets. That's why we were not very good for a long time but we had fun. I am still friends with some of them. I have only brothers. The girls (bandmates) were like my sisters. (Interview conducted via Skype, 3 June, 2019)

Here, the 'homosocial solidarity' discussed by some academics in regards to band formation is flipped from the masculine to the feminine. The presence of role models and a shared sense of excitement in a unifying fandom brought about a female-bonding. Hibiki added emphasis on the closeness of those bonds with friends noting the long-lasting nature of the friendships and the importance of female relationships in light of her predominately male family.

When asked about the guitar and how family or male classmates reacted to her wanting one, Hibiki had an interesting reply noting 'I only remember conversations about money and lessons and if I would continue to study hard. All the girls wanted a guitar. It was just normal and I was a normal teenage girl.' The gender stereotype for the electric guitar did not seem to exist in Hibiki's world and her comments about all of the girls wanting a guitar and how normal it was suggests her experience was not isolated.

Echoing some of Hibiki's sentiments is Asuka. Choosing to go by a pseudonym, Asuka has worked her way into a top executive position at a major record label in Japan. Asuka, now in her early 60s, was emphatic in our conversation about the influence of The Runaways. 'It just is not possible to overstate their importance. 1977 was such a landmark year' she told me in near perfect English. 'Not only did KISS likely change this country's relationship with live music forever, but the Runaways were absolutely a phenomenon. I was there!' Recalling the group's arrival, she also compared it to the Beatles:

> There is famous television footage of the Beatles going to America and how they were received at airports and at hotels. It was just like that. The Runaways were so big in Japan! My friends and I were crazy about them. We all wanted to have our parents buy us instruments! I was not so lucky but my best friend got a small drum set and she began to play. She was later in a band which had some minor success. She teaches drums now. It's not exaggerating. We all wanted to be them [The Runaways]. (Skype, December 21, 2022)

When asked about the long-term effect of the Runaways, from her perspective in the music business, Asuka held little back:

> There is a before the Runaways and an after the Runaways. It was palpable. Those women were not just typical stars or idols. I had a poster and I would bow to it every day in reverence to Runaway-sama [*sama* is a honorific in Japanese]. They were angels from abroad. It is the only way to describe it. Without them, I don't think you'd have all of the girls' bands. At least not the heavy ones. All of the girls' bands in punk, hard rock, and metal in Japan can be traced to the Runaways. Every girl everywhere…we wanted to be the *Japanese* Runaways and learn guitar! (Skype, December 21 2022)

As with Hibiki, the electric guitar avoids masculine association for Asuka. The history of the instrument in Japan is one of an imported Western cultural artifact but which may have only temporarily teased male-dominance. The electric guitar first gained traction in the country with the 'ereki-būmu' (electric boom) from 1964 to 1967 when the electric guitar exploded in popularity on the back of mid-20th century rock and roll making its way to post-war Japan's youth culture (Maruyuma and Hosokawa 2006). Researchers appear to agree that the 'ereki-būmu' was male-driven (Fermanovsky 2023, Cope 2007) with Michael Fermanovsky proclaiming that it was the 1990s which saw more profound female engagement with the instrument (2023, p.153, Kindle Edition). Fermanovsky never explores why the 1990s may have seen such a shift and offers no sales data to back it up, but The Runaways' arrival in 1977 and the string of all-female bands in the early 1980s previously mentioned seems to directly contradict that idea.

But regardless of decade, the electric guitar in Japan managed to escape masculine coding. Along with role-models, there may also be a more culturally and historically significant reason for this. There is a rich tradition in Japanese culture of women as entertainers using string instruments and having to live up to the expectation of skillful performance, and even mastery, of these instruments. This is best exemplified by the traditional Japanese geisha and while a thorough examination of the relationship between gender and instrumentation in Japanese cultural history is too far outside the parameters of my research, the geisha and her role in Japanese society deserves mention as possible connective tissue to the acquisition of social capital through musical prowess, particularly via two instruments related to the guitar; the koto and the shamisen.

The image of a Japanese woman performing with such instruments is a familiar one in Japan and is woven into the cultural DNA. With iconic white porcelain face paint, elaborate hair styles (wigs known as shimada-style), and kimonos, the geisha is one of the most long-standing and utterly recognizable symbols of Japanese culture. A literal English translation for geisha is 'entertainer' and the profession has a history of holding extraordinary social status. Though the golden period of the geisha is considered the Edo Period between 1603 and 1868, the geisha's roots can be traced to eighth-century Japan in the imperial center of Kyoto. Wealthy males and imperial elite of the era looked to both sexual and non-sexual entertainment services from the geisha (Gallagher 200). In the 1700s, houses of pleasure called yūkaku emerged fulfilling a demand for non-sexual entertainment and grew rapidly with the most accomplished women also acting in dramatic, comedic, and erotic scenes, all termed *kabuku.* This led to the performing of nuanced and elaborate dances with a now very familiar label: *kabuki* (Downer 2006, p.224). By the 18th century, the term geisha had been officially adopted for the profession, with non-sexual entertainment remaining highly prized. A geisha was expected to play many instruments, as well as sing, dance and act, and even learn the ways of business so as to engage their businessman clients in sophisticated conversation. World War II saw demand for the geisha fall into decline but the profession reemerged during American occupation where it gained international popularity when its cultural exoticism and allure were used to attract foreign customers from the military and the new world of tourism alike (Dalby 1983).

Among the instruments a geisha was expected to play were two stringed instruments; the *koto* and the *shamisen*. The koto is a 13-string bridged zither which came to Japan via Chinese travel and trade during the Nara Period, roughly 710 to 794 (Dalby 1983) and has been designated as the national instrument of Japan. In its earliest stages, the koto was associated with

nobility and the Imperial court as part of an ensemble called *gagaku* (Wade 2005). The popularity of the instrument grew among the general population and developed a reputation for the romantic when finding itself under the studied hands of the geisha. The best historical evidence we have of its romantic allure is within the classic Heian Period (11th century) literary work 'The Tale of Genji,' when the titular character falls in love with a mysterious woman after hearing her beautifully play the koto, yet never laying eyes upon her (Shikibu 2019). It is only her skill on the instrument which draws him in.

More closely related to the guitar, the *shamisen*—literally translated into English as 'three strings'—is derived from the Chinese *sanxian* and came to the far southern Japanese island of Okinawa in the 16th century, where the name was adapted to Okinawan dialect as *sanshin*. It is a three-string lute, played with a plectrum, with a guitar and banjo-like structure utilizing a long neck, tuning pegs, and hollow body with a stretched skin across it creating a reverberating drum just like a banjo. The shamisen established itself as a nationally recognized instrument upon adoption in the mainland city of Osaka, where it was added to the musical accompaniment of kabuki and the comedic *bunraku* puppet theater (Wade 2005). Likely because of its relationship to kabuki, the shamisen became a desired instrument in the skillset of the geisha alongside the koto. The early 20th century saw the shamisen become the primary instrument for *inaka bushi* or *hinta uta* (country/rural song). This genre spawned songs hailing the virtues and struggles of working, farming, and family life.

There does not seem to have been any academic research devoted to a relationship between the history of the geisha and that of the acceptance of female rock musicians regarding choice of instrument, social expectation of skillset development, and the acquiring of social capital. I delve more deeply into the Japanese social expectations aimed at female entertainers in

Chapter 5 with a focus on contemporary popular music and popular culture, but I believe there is significant potential for future research regarding this long cultural lineage of female entertainers and their instruments. A long history of highly-skilled female musicians drawing support from all social classes may trigger a feeling of familiarity. The image of a woman with an instrument, particularly a stringed instrument, plays into a sense of Japaneseness and cultural heritage. It is fertile ground for future research.

In the presence of a pop-culture phenomenon with corresponding role-models and perhaps cultural history regarding women as skilled entertainers on stringed instruments, music socialization in Japan appears to have avoided instrument gender-stereotyping of the core instruments of rock music. The social capital is available for girls to not just access instruments, but then also access each other in the social networks necessary for learning to play and forming and joining bands. It is then not likely a coincidence that following the Runaways' Beatles-esque treatment in Japan, all-female rock groups began to pop up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From Princess Princess to Shonen Knife and the 5, 6, 7, 8s (featured in the Quentin Tarentino film *Kill Bill* vol 1), to the chart dominance of pop-rockers Scandal to contemporary livehouse circuit bands like Mutant Monster, Risky Melody, and Anarchy Stone, to major label sensations Silent Siren and Girlfriend, Japanese all-female bands from across the rock music spectrum became, and remain, commonplace. Covering that broader history is outside the scope of this project, but one of the bands from J-metal's first generation became central figures in the rise of women in Japanese metal as the role-models who would bridge the gap between The Runways' brand of punk rock, and what became Japanese heavy metal: Show-Ya.

Show-Ya and women in early J-metal

Show-Ya formed in 1981 only months before entering the 'ladies' band division' of the Yamaha sponsored 'EastWest Music Grand Prix' competition with Rokuninkan Onna, Grace, Love Juice, and others. The number of participating bands, and the existence of the 'ladies' band division' in such a prominent contest, indicates an awareness by the music industry (via Yamaha's involvement as sponsor) of the presence and importance of female bands in the wake of the Runaways' phenomenon. Show-Ya lost to Tango Europe but entered again in 1982 and won the division. With a sound reminiscent of Euro-American blues-based hard rock acts which ushered in the first era of heavy metal such as AC/DC, Deep Purple, and Led Zeppelin,[12] their victory brought them a contract with EMI Records and finally a debut album released in 1985. Their first single was immediately accepted into mainstream Japanese popular culture. 'Suteki Ni Dancing' was used in a Japanese Coca-Cola TV and radio advertising campaign bringing them mainstream notoriety and a string of television appearances. In the footsteps of Loudness and X-Japan, Show-Ya's label and management attempted to break into foreign markets. Their debut album had been mixed at Abby Road studios in London and the band had the opportunity to perform in the UK during this early period, but no attempt was made to seriously market the band outside of Japan until 1987. Working with producer Andy Johns (Rolling Stones, Van Halen), a shot at international genre integration was made in the heart of the global genre's most commercially viable scene; Los Angeles, California. After a few spot shows in LA, their showcase event at the famous Roxy Theater in Hollywood in 1990 was more than well-received, according to an LA Times review of the event:

[12] The band performed cover versions of such songs as Led Zepelin's *Immigrant Song* (https://www.setlist.fm/setlists/showya-33d8c49d.html) and AC/DC's *Whole Lotta Rosie* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXIHbTmw1oE) and Deep Purple's *Burn* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGnCRsWcOlY).

> ‘Did you hear I'm breaking up L.A. Guns to join Show-Ya?’ joked Hollywood rocker Tracii Guns after the show. But Guns and the hard-rock fans and musicians he was standing with at the show were legitimately impressed by Show-Ya's mastery of contemporary heavy metal styles and staging, and by the band's exuberant performance. Whatever novelty factor exists in the band's cultural and gender make-up was supplanted quickly by the professional quality of the show. (Hochman 1990).

Show-Ya never did find purchase in the US market but Show-Ya’s good fortune in Japan continued. Their career hit arena sell-out status and the band had accepted a role as mentor, or *senpai* in Japanese, to Japanese female artists. This role was evidenced in 1987 when Show-Ya began producing *Naon No Yaon*, an all-female concert event held at the Hibiya outdoor amphitheater in Tokyo. Despite the proportionally large number of Japanese female bands compared with the US and Europe, singer Keiko Terada recalls that the event began as a means of bringing female artists together in what she believed was an absence of bands rather than an abundance of them:

> Until female bands emerged, I asked idols, female singers, female pro-wrestlers, and actresses to appear. Rather than being a rock music event, it was a ‘female artist’ event at the beginning. From that point on, the number of female bands gradually increased and it took the shape we see now. (Terada Interview, Takeichi 2016)

Strangely, Terada gives little recognition to the other Japanese female bands of any genre who came before 1987, including those with whom Show-Ya competed in the EastWest competition. ‘Until female bands emerged’ is an odd choice of words as other bands were clearly present. It may have been that the female bands were already ubiquitous only to an outside perspective with a domestic perspective still finding the number of bands small in comparison to all-male groups. Perhaps she was referring to female bands who were commercially successful on Show-Ya’s scale. This may explain why Show-Ya’s friendship with the pop group Princess Princess (commonly abbreviated as Pri Pri) was so vital to the *Noan No Yaon* project. The project brought

the two stylistically different bands together with the pairing credited for inspiring the next generation of female artists:

> I thought it would be nice if two stubborn women's bands from the era could work hard together to perform, so let's hear their voices was my feeling. That was the original idea… I think that the increase in the number of female bands was after Pri Pri joined in. I think that there were so many kids who admired Pri Pri and started bands. Pri Pri released 'Diamonds' in 1989 and it sold like crazy so immediately the number of girl's bands started to increase…It was around that time, when it became possible to do events only with female bands. In 1990-91, I did a two-day event and the first day was an amateur day and there were around 2,000 entries. (Terada Interview, Takeichi 2016)

Noan No Yaon was an annual event until 1999, one year after Show-Ya first disbanded. The event returned in 2008 after Show-Ya reunited and resumed making music and touring. Noan No Yoan is still running and is an annual fixture with a regular rotation of all-female rock and heavy metal bands such as Mary's Blood, Cyntia, and Gacharic Spin, as well as indie groups and solo artists. The 2017 edition of the festival was the platform for the debut of SAKI's World Guitar Girls Collection project which became the buzz-generating metal showcase in my Chapter 1 opening anecdote. *Naon No Yaon* is also notable for using all-female production staff, which is something I first noticed as a fan in attendance, wondering if that was coincidental, and then discovered was purposeful via the event's Japanese Wikipedia page and confirmed in subsequent conversations with event personnel and artists.[13]

Not only has Show-Ya continued to produce *Naon No Yaon* as an annual event, but since their reunion in 2005, the band has also continued to record new albums and tour Japan with status as one of the country's preeminent metal bands and 'girls band' progenitors. Show-Ya became the first all-female Japanese metal band of note, but many such Japanese bands entered the picture in the mid to late 1980s, again perhaps escaping Terada's attention due to their less

[13] https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/NAON%E3%81%AEYAON (in Japanese) I have since noticed male stage-hands and technicians but have not been able to determine if this was a temporary change in policy.

commercially successful efforts and fringe subgenre association. Bands such as Valkylie, Velle Witch, and Xenalith Oger served up demos and independent recordings playing a part in regional subgenre scene development, particularly in more extreme heavy metal subgenres such as thrash and speed metal. Their initial recordings are dated as early as 1986 suggesting women were forming metal bands at least as early as Show-Ya was in the studio recording their debut album.

Solo artists and women in mixed metal bands had also become more common. Osaka-based band Terra Rosa with vocalist Kazue Akao, which may be the first Japanese 'female-fronted' mixed gender band to achieve fame, released their debut album in 1987 and is still grabbing occasional features in *Burrn!* and *Burrn! Japan*. Misako Honjo launched her career in 1982 as a solo metal vocalist with support from Loudness guitarist Akira Takasaki. Takasaki wrote music with Honjo and produced her first two albums, with Loudness largely handling roles of her support and studio players. Her trajectory was the opposite of Show-Ya, in that later work in the late 1980s and into the 1990s was more pop oriented but still used a production team of heavy metal artists and musicians. Honjo never reached significant commercial heights, but her contributions have not gone unrecognized among Japanese metal connoisseurs making appearances in *Burrn! Japan* and still attracting audiences on the livehouse circuit.

Heavy metal singer, songwriter, and producer Mari Hamada is Japan's bestselling heavy metal solo artist with a resume boasting number one singles, top 10 albums, and a series of concert DVDs.[14] Singing punk rock in high school bands in the late 1970s in the aftermath of the Runaways' success, she developed as a vocalist and made her professional debut in 1983. Her style would morph from metal to pop-rock in an unsuccessful attempt to crack mainstream Western markets in the 1990s, well covered by Keith Negus in his book *Music Genres and*

[14] https://www.oricon.co.jp/prof/246627/

Corporate Cultures (1999), and then back to metal. Heavy metal is where she has stayed with albums such as *Mission* (2016) and *Soar* (2023), favoring complex and anthemic power metal which still allows her to dominate charts, magazine covers, and sell-out large venues. She has taken the mantle of Japan's 'metal queen,' a title hoisted upon her by fans and media[15].

Though heavy metal's global fortunes took a downward turn in the 1990s (Kawano and Hosokawa 2011, Weinstein 2009) women maintained a consistent presence in Japanese metal. The melodic metal band Aphasia, death metal band Galvanic Death, and the punk-ish thrash metal band Yellow Machinegun were among the all-female acts from the era. Women in otherwise male groups appeared in such bands as cult avant-garde metal favorites Boris with female lead guitarist and occasional keyboardist Wata (Jarmucsh and Licht 2009), Yōsei Teikoku and their vocalist Yui, progressive metal Gonin-ish with guitarist and vocalist Anoji Matsuoka, and Maximum the Hormone with drummer Nao. Maximum the Hormone began in 1998, and their experimental and eclectic 'nu-metal' or 'metalcore' style caught on with audiences, even among more traditional metal fans who appreciated the band's technical prowess, taking them to stardom in the 2000s.

The new millennium began strong for women in Japanese metal with thrash metal band Gunship 666 forming around lead guitarist Masami Toriumi, the debut of power metal band Jikuu Kaizoku Seven Seas featuring EITA on lead guitar, and 'brutal romantic deathmetal' band Reexamine with Noriko 'Robin' Okimoto on guitar. Okimoto was also a guitarist for Sungoddess and an original member of the outrageous band Flagitious Idiosyncrasy In The Dilapidation (FID) from 2001 to 2006. She rejoined the band a few years later making FID once again an all-female lineup. 2003 brought forward the female extreme metal Tokyo trio Gallhammer who later

[15] https:/www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8czZJmbLyM%20

signed with British label Peaceville records on the advice of Norwegian metal band Darkthrone[16] and became an acclaimed band in the international extreme metal underground (Blabbermouth 2010). Power metal band Tengusakura formed in 2006 and released their debut album in 2009, presenting the striking image of playing power metal while dressed in kimonos. Though short lived, the band is sometimes mentioned as one of the first acts of the 'girls metal boom' to come in the years ahead (West 2018).

If the concept of a 'boom' is to be accepted, there are three artists who can rightly be credited with what is now the current era of female metal sensations. Beginning as Destroya in 2005, the band Destrose gained some prominence in 2006 but never achieved the heights they could have due to a revolving door of members (Rushesko 2016). However, Destrose is the nexus of contemporary J-metal's profound female contingent with the splinter groups formed by former members becoming some of the most meaningful acts in the current Japanese subdomain including IBUKI, Mary's Blood, Nemophila, Mardelas, Octaviagrave, Disqualia, Fate Gear, Lovebites, and Lonesome Blue.

The other all-female band at the heart of Japan's 'girls metal boom' is the aforementioned Aldious beginning in 2008. The Osaka power metal band started their own record label, Bright Star Records, and their 2010 debut album *Deep Exceed*, and their second album *Determination,* cracked the top 15 on the ORICON indie charts. The group's third album, *District Zero* reached number 7 in 2017. *Burrn!* magazine then devoted an entire special edition to Aldious titled *Ultimate Aldious.* Previous artists selected for such releases include X-Japan, Metallica, and Iron Maiden, placing Aldious in exclusive metal company. I will discuss Aldious in detail as a case study in Chapter 4.

[16] Rockers NYC TV, Vivian interview, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EMbRBySp9Q

The third trigger is arguably online viral sensation Babymetal. While the Jpop-metal fusion experiment first caught fire in 2013, long after Destrose and Aldious had emerged as the prominent forces in a new generation of female metal artists, it was Babymetal which attracted international attention. Though Babymetal is not a band and is a project acting as more of an experimental music brand, its unique take on metal and the debates it inspired in the global heavy metal community illuminated what was happening in Japan's overlooked musical domains, thus inspiring the retrofit label of 'girls metal boom' upon the metal subdomain's notice by external observers. As referenced earlier in the quote by one of the guitarists I interviewed, "Boom" is a weird word. We (women) have always been here though…I just think foreign people noticed when Babymetal became famous.'

Conclusion

The history of heavy metal in Japan was in need of a new narrative. Japan has had its own heavy metal subdomain since the first access to Western artists identified as heavy metal was enabled by international record distribution and the Japanese media which supported it. This then led to the self-imposed J-metal demarcation of homegrown talent and recognition of Japan's domestic metal taste-culture. Women were not only a significant part of Japan's heavy metal subdomain from the beginning, but helped construct that subdomain, its taste-culture, and were impactful in various subgenres and scenes across the country. Women quite organically found their way to buying instruments, starting bands, and finding and developing role models along the way. The ubiquity of women in Japanese metal cannot be understood or properly examined without this historical context. The setting of precedence for Japanese women in metal leads to the question of why they are drawn to making and performing heavy music in the first place. In

my discussion of The Runaways, I touched on the idea of the American rock group tapping into something in the collective Japanese female psyche, which was not lost on The Runaways' members. In the next chapter, I will identify and analyze what that *something* is which draws Japanese women to heavy metal and has kept them engaged, active, and inspired over decades of shifting musical trends.

Chapter 4 - Transgression, oppositional femininities, & occidental longing

Heavy metal is an antithetical soundtrack to social acceptability. The genre's constitution is that of anti-establishmentarianism, escapism, and empowerment (Walser 1993, Weinstein 2009). Consistently explored and expressed in metal's sound and image, these themes resonate with ready and willing audiences across the globe. It is a global genre embodying transgression: transgression of sound, rules, and expected modes of behavior (Harris 2013). Within this transgression there is 'an invigorating freedom' as Keith Kahn Harris has phrased it (2013), which draws people to heavy metal music and culture. Metal music has become a 'potent source of meaning and identity' in the face of a disapproving establishment (Wallach 2010, p4,). Essentially, heavy metal tends to thrive where there is something to be opposed, escaped, or transgressed.

In this chapter I establish heavy metal as a means of transgression for Japanese fans, particularly women seeking an alternative path in a patriarchal and still often misogynistic society. Set against the scenery of Japanese hegemonic masculinity, heavy metal music and culture in Japan is an enticing and accessible mechanism for the circumvention of the sociocultural expectations and limitations placed on Japanese women. As a product of Western popular culture, heavy metal is not just any mechanism but a *Western* mechanism encapsulating the ideas and ideals of an external cultural influence, part of a historical trend of what sociologist Karen Kelsky refers to as an 'occidental longing' (2006). Heavy metal provides the tools to construct an 'oppositional femininity' moving away from Japanese sociocultural gender norms and the subordinate 'emphasized femininity.'

Metal and the individual in Japan

In a nation well-known for city streets teeming with a single-minded herd of salarymen, an emphasis on a group-over-individual ethic, and strict social conformity (Bauman 1994, Ishida 1996, Smith 1994), it is hardly a shock that the themes of heavy metal music and culture found purchase in Japan. In the documentary film *Global Metal* (Dunn 2007), Tom Araya and Kerry King of the legendary American thrash/speed metal band Slayer recalled the band's first performance in the country. Fans, as in any other arena in the world, rushed the stage in excitement as the music began, yet security directed them back to their assigned seats as they panicked at the crowd's perceived disorder. The rules and regulations of concert behavior have relaxed over the decades and Japanese fans now act as others do in such a setting: cheering, screaming, moshing (slamming into each other in an opened pit in the crowd) or crowd-surfing—albeit in a more polite manner than in other parts of the world. But there was an initial expression of transgressive behavior at that first Slayer performance. There was a need for fans to succumb to visceral urges so often repressed in Japanese culture.

In an interview for the Dunn documentary, the Japanese heavy metal journalist referenced in Chapter 2, Masanori Itō, expressed the opposite opinion stating:

> I think Japanese metal fans' way of thinking is different from Western peoples' way of thinking. For example, if you ask them if metal expresses their feelings of oppression and dissatisfaction, most of them would probably say 'No.' In the West, if you're looking for rebellion or feel isolated in society, you would be drawn to metal music. This is not the case in Japan (Itō interview, Dunn 2007).

The comments come as heavy metal is placed in the context of a society emphasizing order and conformity, and is somewhat echoed in the next clip as Katsuya Minamida from Kobe University draws attention to the respectful behavior of fans picking up their own trash after a heavy metal

concert. But displays of a culturally engrained politeness is not necessarily signaling an absence of internalized individual desires for expression, a commentary on prescribed life trajectories, or the psychological impact of immense societal and familial expectations. Minamida refers to a return of the 'courteous self' following a concert where there was an outward projection of a more rebellious image. The clip is followed by footage of a Japanese female metal fan attending LOUD PARK, an annual heavy metal festival in the Tokyo area, making the metal horns symbol with her hand and sticking out her tongue while laughing. She then becomes embarrassed not knowing what to do next and shyly giggles on her way out of frame—a perfect example of Minamada's idea of projecting an image one moment and reverting to a default disposition of humility and shyness the next. However, why the rebellious image gains traction as even temporarily modified behavior in Japanese society is not addressed by either of the interviewees.

Itō and Minamida may not appear to believe that a desire to express dissatisfaction or frustration is what draws Japanese fans to heavy metal, but in my conversation with Japanese metal fans, it appears the commentators are mistaken. The lure to the genre remains just as much about transgressive impulses as it is in other countries. Heavy metal fandom is perhaps even more about those impulses in Japan compared to what triggers fandom in Western cultures, where individualism is not suppressed but celebrated. Itō and Minamida are themselves products of Japanese cultural conditioning and therefore may not even recognize an authentic exercising of personal transgressive impulses in a stifling society. Even if they are honest in their assessment or observation of behavior, their perspective is naturally Japanese.

Anthropologist Robert Smith writes that 'there are strong pressures to conformity, which many have seen as the source of the deepest psychological malaise in Japanese society' (1994). The malaise is palpable. The glassy stares of sleepy overworked riders on a public train or

subway car, the heavy drinking at izakayas after work, the sighs of resignation to one's status or position, all create an unavoidable tableau. 'I don't think Japanese people are generally happy, but they don't know why,' Mikio, a 30-year-old Japanese metal fan from Tokyo told me via an email exchange. His fluent English rant leaving no room for error as he reinforces Smith's recognition of malaise.

> A lot of people walk around with blank looks on their faces. Japan is like The Matrix I think.[17] We have hobbies and personal interests but we suppress so much of what we feel as individual personalities (email interview with Mikio, received August 7 2019).

The use of heavy metal as a means to counter the suppression of individualistic expression for Mikio is quite clear as he goes on to say:

> I think that is why some Japanese have an interest in metal. We feel it releases us. We are told from when we are kids that hard work and family will make us all fulfilled like we are one mind. We never were told that we should do what makes us happy or satisfies ourselves…What is happy? We don't really know, but maybe we know in some emotional way that we are NOT happy (email interview with Mikio, received August 7 2019).

An old Japanese proverb 'deru kui wa utareru' was often brought up when I discussed the subject of conformity and suppression of the individual in Japan. It translates to 'the nail which sticks out is hammered down.' 'I hate that saying, but it's true in Japan.' Ryo, told me. The 31-year old metal musician and Nagoya native I referenced in previous chapters was not shy about his assessment of Japanese society during the same conversation. 'You just keep your head down and go with what everyone else is doing. There is the idea of *wa* here and it's hard to swallow sometimes. Just keep the peace.'

[17] This is a reference to the film *The Matrix* and its subject of reality as a simulation and manufactured illusion.

Wa is the concept of group harmony and the favoring of a communal good over any sense of individuality. It is a concept that gets to the heart of Japanese social philosophy and is considered essential to maintaining social, familial, and professional relationships (Genzberger 1994). The word is written in kanji as 和 meaning 'harmony.' Its origins, however, are quite telling. The kanji was changed in Japan in the 8th century from the original character 倭. The difference is that the original Chinese character is a compound character which was used to reference Japan by the Chinese and did so in a degrading fashion. The Chinese character's components can be read as meaning a people who are submissive, meek, compliant, and other derogatory descriptions (Carr 1992). While the kanji character changed when adopted in Japan, the meaning behind it has been reframed by the current kanji. Its original meanings did not necessarily disappear completely. Instead, I believe the ideas of obedience and meekness have been maintained but considered virtuous rather than deplorable within the concept of *wa.* This puts emphasis on the social good that comes from such a frame of mind rather than submission and meekness being contemptable traits.

The stifling of individual desire and self-centered instincts is vital to *wa,* but heavy metal champions non-conformity and questions the status-quo. Resisting the malaise, or emerging from it, is a part of what heavy metal offers to Japanese fans. In Dunn's documentary, a Japanese metal fan was interviewed with his comments placed directly after Itō and Minamida. 'Usually I wear suits and a neck tie…that is my normal everyday life. Listening to hard music like metal at home or at a concert changes my daily life dramatically' he confessed. During the segment, he makes a hand motion indicating a shift, a 180-degree turn from one mode of behavior to another. It is implied there is a turning away from something, hinting at a contradiction with Itō's

assessment of heavy metal's appeal but lends credence to Minamida's notion of behavioral shifts. Ryo also spoke about metal fandom this way.

> Listening to metal makes me feel like I am my own person. I feel I don't have to be just part of Japanese society. When I worked a day job I am part of it [Japanese society], but then after…metal makes me feel like I can be myself and accomplish anything. Then I go back to work. I am frustrated, then there is necessary release. We go back and forth. (interview in English, Tokyo, 2 March 2019)

Nabe, with whom I spoke at a livehouse about his concert-going habits and is quoted in Chapter 1, revealed a desire for escape from conformity and a craving for individualistic expression.

> Here (the livehouse) my work is done. Honestly, I don't mind work. It's something I have to do and I am satisfied with a day of good work. But it is not who I am. If we were all defined by a job we would all be the same person. In Japan we sometimes feel like we are all one person. Metal is in my heart and shows my true feelings. (Nabe, interview conducted in Japanese, translation: Yukari T, 3 May 2018, Tokyo)

As discussed in a previous chapter, Ryo and Nabe took different paths—one a musician and the other a salaryman—a common thread in their stories is individual expression and a longing for a sense of identity separate from conformist expectation. Nabe and Mikio also referenced a similar feeling of an almost hive mentality, Nabe believing being defined by a job would make everyone feel like 'the same person' and Mikio expressing a feeling of the Japanese being of 'one mind', with both wanting to avoid such social prescriptions.

It seems as though Itō and Minamida were looking at how Japanese people may *act* and treat each other day-to-day rather than how people may *feel*. In Dunn's documentary, the comments from the salaryman-by-day metalhead-by-night is followed by a quick clip of a group of three female metal fans, one speaking while the others smile and nod in agreement. 'It (metal) makes me feel happier when my feelings burst wide open.' 'Happier than what?' is the unspoken question and an unavoidable one on the heels of Itō's idea of rebellion and the fighting against

feelings of personal alienation being a lure to metal for only the Western metal fan. While I am not certain of the motive behind Dunn's editing choices, it seems as though the placement of this interview segment is intentional. It plants a seed of doubt as to whether Itō's assessment of heavy metal's lure of transgression and expression not applying to the Japanese fan's mentality and behavioral disposition is true and indeed just the observation of a Japanese cultural outlook. For some women in Japan, that lure is at least just as strong, and under the conditions of contemporary Japan where traditional roles and modern sensibilities clash with cultural influences brought about through imported pop-culture and globalization, the siren call to heavy metal for women may be even stronger.

***Ryōsaikenbo*, the Office Lady, and the spaces in-between**

As discussed in Chapter 1, Japanese society is still an overtly patriarchal system with a distinct focus on a woman as caregiver as counterpart to breadwinning salaryman masculinity (Charlebois 2014). What it means to be a Japanese woman is then a social construction of 'emphasized femininity.' R.W. Connell defines 'emphasized femininity' as the relational complement to hegemonic masculinity (1987). James W. Messerschmidt goes further in articulating the relational dependency of the concepts, writing that emphasized femininity is 'practiced in a complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity' (2011). The hegemonic masculine order can maintain its position if the femininities it intentionally excludes from influence, power, or even level participation, operate in the subordinate spaces created by that order, thus propping up and reifying that hegemony.

Sociocultural conformity for women in Japan tends to have two intersecting paths of expectation within the construction of an emphasized femininity. *Ryōsaikenbo,* a word meaning

'good wife, wise mother,' is a late 19th century term used to describe the ideal societal role for Japanese women, and it remains a part of contemporary Japanese thinking (Sievers 1983, Davies and Ikeno 2002, Koyama 2012).

I spoke to a female guitar player in a prominent band wishing to remain anonymous, whom I will refence as Guitarist A, who explained her experience and frustrations with the concept of *ryōsaikenbo*.

> My father sometimes says it [*ryōsaikenbo*] My bandmate's boyfriend too. It is still a part of how men see us. I don't want to make coffee in the office as practice for the husband. OL [an 'office lady'] is part of *ryōsaikenbo* now. Wife and mother at the office, wife and mother at home (Guitarist A, interview, February 16 2017, Tokyo).

Keeping these expectations alive in 21st-century Japan is maintenance of *wa.* Men are expected to devote themselves to the job, women are expected to devote themselves to the home and family, and the smooth continuation of a harmonious state and functioning economy is thus dependent on the exclusion of women from varied corporate and economic participation (Allison 2010).

This attitude stems from the post-World War II mentality that women constituted a flexible unskilled sector of the workforce which could act as an economic 'cushion' as the socioeconomic realties of an era may dictate (Yamanaka 1993). The Japanese corporate and career structure has then systematically excluded women from access to the professional development and opportunities afforded to Japanese men. Due to a lack of professional skill development, and because they are believed incapable of devotion to the company due to family concerns, many professional avenues remain closed to the modern Japanese woman (Ogasawara 1998, Iwao 2008).

However, this exclusion has created opportunity of sorts. Sumiko Iwao, once professor of psychology at Keio University in Tokyo, writes that the corporate and social systems constructed by Japanese men have resulted in their own entrapment by the inertia of Japan's economic system and the peer pressure to uphold its maintenance (Iwao 2008). Iwao argues that the exclusion of women has in fact left them surprisingly emancipated by their own marginalization. Women may face peer pressure, but are not subject to the social or professional inertia which can be considered limiting to the pursuits of men.

> One manifestation of this is that outside the corporation one is more likely to find an adventurous or creative spirit in women than in men. Women are the intellectual and artistic upstarts of society today, exploring new endeavors and expressing their raw energies in diverse forms, while men remain largely confined to the old established norms and codes of traditional hierarchical society (Iwao 22, 2008).

Iwao's idea of this unintentional emancipation, or perhaps better phrased as consequential emancipation, is found in the spaces created by a lack of expectation in the workplace and the few options specifically created for women within the male-driven culture outside of the prescription of a corporate life. Karen Kelsky agrees, writing that 'Japanese women are exploiting their position on the margins of corporate and family systems to engage in a form of defection from expected life courses' (loc. 95, 2006). Prevented from accessing the relative safety and security of the corporate avenues available to men, the result is a pursuable freedom born from that marginalization. The spaces allowed for emphasized femininity have thus incubated the construction of an 'oppositional femininity,' defined as 'refusing to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination' (Messerschmidt 2011).

I do not believe Iwao did a thorough job in articulating just what these freedoms are in a practical sense, though it was admittedly not the point of her survey. Simply saying women can now do anything they want to, such as Iwao's reference to becoming writers, educators, or run

for office, all because they are less incumbered by social systems than men (Iwao 2006), is a bit too vague a position and even somewhat naïve in its glass-half-full rendering and rather sweeping generalizations. Iwao's book focuses heavily on the shifting dynamics in marriage and the home and the broader positive changes in Japan's employment statistics, but with little attention paid to expectations of behavior, dress, subordination, limits on power, responsibility, pay, and upward mobility. Iwao painted a picture of women making the most out of not having much expected of them. Her illumination of the creation of spaces by virtue of consequential emancipation is still important, but what are these freedoms exactly and how are they located, activated, and engaged?

This is where Karen Kelsky fills in the blanks. The freedoms are the life-style options where Japanese women make use of an imagination for which they have the free time and the transgressive motives to develop and then deploy. Heavy metal is already drawing female fans in Japan as a means of escapism and expression as it becomes part of their lifestyle outside of work and home, but the avenue of heavy metal music performance is a specific pursuit that adds depth and detail to the untapped potential in Iwao's astute detection of women as 'artistic upstarts' in Japanese society with an 'adventurous and creative spirit.' Iwao's belief that women are expressing 'raw energies in diverse forms' is a near perfect summation of what is not just the fandom of heavy metal, but also the execution of heavy metal music in a subdomain which is predicated on those 'raw energies.'

The hit Netflix original animated series *Aggretsuko* (a combination of Aggressive and Retsuko, the name of the lead character) does an amusing and witty job of highlighting a Japanese woman's place in contemporary Japan and the emotional and psychological fallout of

trying to live up to expectation within limiting sociocultural parameters.[18] The Japanese series, set in Tokyo, features anthropomorphic animals in human roles lead by the eponymous character of the 25-year-old red panda trying to cope with life working in an office and being single. She tries her best every day to avoid a pessimistic, fatalist outlook dealing with the frustrations of a Japanese woman in Japanese society. Handling an overbearing and chauvinistic boss (not coincidently depicted as a pig), an interfering mother, and awkward dating scenarios, all lead Retsuko to seek an outlet. The outlet is heavy metal. Not just any metal, but intense and brutal death metal. She finds her solace in karaoke bars unleashing her rage into a microphone and expressing everything she wishes she could in her normal life to all of those who frustrate her. Aggretsuko pokes fun at plenty of gender stereotypes and Japanese cultural conventions, and places an emphasis on a woman's frustrations, transgressive impulses, and how heavy metal aides as a coping mechanism.

In the series' first episode, Retsuko unleashes rage into her microphone as she tucks herself away in an office restroom. To a death metal soundtrack she screams:

> 'Pushing us around when we can't fight back!
> Neanderthal knuckle-dragging chauvinist pig!
> Looking at your face just makes me sick,
> How can any person be such a dick!
> Shitty boss! Shitty boss!' (*Aggretsuko,* season 1, episode 1, 2018)

In sharp contrast to the previously referenced comments of Masanori Itō in the Dunn documentary, the writers of Aggretsuko are clearly revealing the connection between frustration, angst, and a desire for transgression with heavy metal music. The need for cathartic release and heavy metal as the vehicle for it is the premise of the Japanese created and produced program.

[18]Sanrio. (2018–2023). *Aggretsuko* [TV series]. Netflix. https://www.netflix.com/title/80198505

In my time in Japan I have met many Retsukos. Before a Mary's Blood concert in Nagoya in 2017, I spoke with a female metal fan named Misa, an unmarried 26-year-old and local resident, about her fandom and where metal situates itself in her life.

> **CDM:** Why do you listen to heavy metal music?
> **Misa:** It is exciting and very powerful. I feel more energy and feeling than from pop music or other kinds of music. I feel freedom.
> **CDM:** Freedom from what?
> **Misa:** Freedom from family, work, and stress.
> **CDM:** What is your job?
> **Misa:** I am in an office all day. In the day, I have my work suit. I say things like 'Yes sir,' 'of course sir.' Here I have metal. I am free tonight.
> **CDM:** You are free from the job?
> **Misa:** Yes, among other things.
> **CDM:** Are you happy at the job?
> **Misa:** I am grateful to be working and earning a salary, but I am not happy in my life sometimes. I don't know what will make me happy in my life, but heavy metal makes me happy right now. I can let my feelings out.'
> (conversation in Japanese, 11 June 2017, Nagoya, translation Yukari T.)

Misa reinforces the sentiment of the Dunn documentary's female interviewees in letting her 'feelings out.' She also makes a distinction between what makes her happy 'in her life', meaning lifestyle, career, and the 'daily life' the documentary's male interview subject referenced, and what makes her happy in the moment. Like the female interviewee and the animated Retsuko, she is 'happier' engaging metal as it expresses something she longs to release and escape her status-quo. This was also the case in my conversation with Aya, a 30-year-old woman also waiting for entry to see Mary's Blood perform. 'Every day I produce for the company, but I am tired and feel obligation. Here I feel something more' (Aya, Mary's Blood fan, conversation 11 June 2017, Nagoya).

Misa and Aya, like Retsuko, are examples of the *office lady* (OL), the female counterpart, though not an equivalent in any social or professional hierarchy, to the salaryman. A Japanese man endures the burden of expectation to find a single lifetime career track with a corporation,

entirely devote himself to the work, and have a family at home which understands his place in Japanese society (Ogasawara 1998). The OL is one of the very few prescribed paths a woman might take in an often seemingly ontological social order. OL positions have not traditionally been career paths with opportunity for much professional advancement and leaving the job of being 'flower of the workplace' once married is the expectation (Kelsky 2006). The jobs are service-oriented, often clerical, and sometimes referred to as 'pink collar' jobs, with ceilings on upward mobility (Wickman 2012). The OL position, lower paid and subordinate, may see women employed by greater numbers than in decades past (Iwao 2008), but it is set against the backdrop of a stark reality; the never-receding gender gap regarding opportunity, pay, workplace political empowerment, and other factors. These factors were among the indicators used to rank Japan a sobering 110 out of 149 nations in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report from the World Economic Forum. This is only a slight improvement from the embarrassing placement of the 114th position in 2017 and 2016 (of then 144 countries).[19] Misa later added 'Women in Japan are not treated like women in the West. I hear there are problems for the woman sometimes in America or Europe, but not like Japan. We are…very backwards looking.'

Occidental longing and oppositional femininity

Recognizing that there is a space for the expression of transgressive energies and then actually pursuing operation within that space to create an alternate reality—actual escape as opposed to escap*ism*—are two different things. Taking the leap from addressing something like heavy metal as a mechanism for escapism and emotional release to using it as a vehicle for creating a new course, and thus an entirely new destination, for one's life requires an additional

[19] http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/ *Accessed 20 Dec 2019*

push. It requires an inspiration which counters a certain degree of cultural and social conditioning—an inspiration which is decidedly *un*-Japanese. If emphasized femininity in Japan is ripe for transgression, then the rise of oppositional femininity leads me to believe it is the result of an external cultural influence. While external influence is not necessarily the only inspiration for oppositional femininities among Japanese women, there is a strong connection to be made as the idea of what to do with newly found opportunities or newly won freedoms has to come from somewhere. Karen Kelsky has made that connection and argues that life-course defections from the Japanese norm have come via a turn to the West as a 'liberating foreign realm' (Kelsky loc 94, 2006). I argue that heavy metal has become a part of this potentially liberating process: it is a genre with occidental origins, occidental stars, symbolizing occidental ideals influencing behavior and decision-making within a Japanese cultural context.

Kelsky's work narrowed in on the specifics of this idea of liberation-within-marginalization which Iwao never fully articulated. This is the personal and professional growth of Japanese women by an 'investment in the foreign' (Kelsky 2006, loc 93). The external influence was set in motion and explored by means of job opportunities, overseas study, language learning, and pursuit of romantic relationships, by internationalist Japanese women on journeys of self-discovery. Among women so inclined, there is a reassignment of loyalties from a traditional culture and the economic systems of the nation-state, maintenance of *wa,* and prescribed duties to others, to a new and often utterly unfamiliar sense of self which is inspired and contoured by Western modernity. The West is therefore having a profound effect on the notion of Japanese female identity. In Kelsky's words, this occidental longing has been both 'transgressive and transforming' (Kelsky 2006, loc 135).

This transformation, which I identify as being one of emphasized femininity to oppositional femininity, has been steadily increasing for the last few decades, particularly following the somewhat ineffectual implementation of Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) passed in 1985 and put into action in the spring of 1986. The EEOL is at the heart of what can be considered a sort of paradigm shift for gender relations in Japan and inspired a westward gaze for Japanese women. A wave of hopefulness following the law's passing brought more women, or at least single women, to Japan's urban centers to follow a promise of expanding educational and professional opportunities (Kelsey 2006, Kosiesho 2000). Legal requirements for employers to establish equal opportunities added specificity to previous ineffectual attempts at reducing employment discrimination such as the Act on Equal Opportunity Between Men and Women in Employment and the Working Women's Welfare Law, both passed in 1972, as well as the 1947 Japanese Labor Standards Act. These previous acts were broad, poorly enforced, and seemingly only gave lip-service to ideas of equality in employment practices for recruiting women (See Bennet 1992, Maloony 1995, Parkinson 1989). While the EEOL appeased the United Nation's 'Decade of Women' initiative concerning Japan's poor performance on gender equality, it was not updated until 1997 and then again in 2005 and 2006, suggesting slow and incremental progression. The 1997 revisions only targeted curtailing discrimination for certain aspects of hiring practices and promotion criteria, while the 2005 and 2006 revisions aimed to increase an employer's responsibility in ending sexual harassment in the workplace.

The most immediate effect of the EEOL was the rise in the number of employed women (Iwao 2008), but in capacities such as the office lady which placed a ceiling over their newfound, and still unequal, opportunities. The EEOL has been soundly criticized for its shortcomings such

as a limiting dual-track system offering the choice of either a standard office employee (the office lady) or an inflexible management pathway, failure to establish punitive measures for companies in violation of the law, and a focus on arbitration rather than on meaningful judicial solutions in cases of corporate noncompliance (Bergson 1986, Molony 1995, Mun 2011). The rise in employment of women was also rather short-lived, perhaps leading to the 1997 revisions of the legislation to address recruitment and hiring practices. However, the EEOL, as flawed as it was, was also likely the victim of more sweeping national circumstances. The 1990s was a turbulent decade for Japan. The country was gripped by economic recession after the burst of the 1980s economic bubble. This resulted in what has been called Japan's 'lost decade,' or even 'lost decade*s*,' as the country experienced a severe economic slow-down which continued well into the new millennium (Pesek 2014). Corporate hiring thus slowed reducing the gains in female employment made in the late-1980s (Molony 1995).

Slow rewards in the years following the EEOL may then be among contributing factors in a perceptible shift in decision making and behavior for Japanese women with consequences far beyond the comings and goings of corporate offices. The genie was out of the bottle and women's expectations for themselves and their circumstances were no longer as bound by traditional sociocultural expectation as before the EEOL, and this is reflected in some curious trends which began around the same time of the EEOL's passage.

Among the first indicators of behavioral change was the nation's sliding marriage rate in the late 1980s, particularly in urban areas which saw an EEOL-inspired population increase (Kato 2018) and accelerated an already downward trend in the nation's birth rate (T.B. 2014, Hirosima 1992). This was a shock to Japanese society as data revealed that despite government efforts to fix the issue, birth rates were still dropping, and without a change in trajectory the

current population levels could not be sustained. This could result in declining tax revenue, labor shortages, and an aging population relying heavily on government welfare. (Ohashi 1993, Kyodo 2017, Zuagg and Kobayashi 2019). Women were simply less interested in marriage and family once other options, whether real or phantom depending on one's view of the EEOL and its predecessors in 1972, were placed before them. The frightening notion for the more traditionally minded Japanese was that it was not just a change in demographics or the nation's economic outlook due to smaller families, but it was what that change was signaling: a completely new ideological outlook for Japanese women altering the course of Japanese society as a whole, not just their own lives.

The temporary rise of women's employment following the EEOL and the decline in marriage and continued decline in birth rates were therefore unlikely coincidental, and by the time the 1990s began, other trends emerged which also cast doubt on the timing being a coincidence. A previously unheard-of freedom of movement and individual consumerism for Japanese women had set focus on the West; the curious 'other' representing not only foreign countries but foreign ideas. By 1990, Japanese women started to outnumber men two-to-one in traveling to Western countries for study, work, or leisure as they looked elsewhere for satisfaction after unfulfilled EEOL promises. Before the recession had begun to cut into employment rates, a bloated domestic economy—propped up by the hegemonically masculine system—allowed an increasing number of single women to earn significant income in Japan but spend with advantageous rates of exchange in those Western countries, primarily the United States (Kelsky 2006).

When the Japanese recession hit in the early 1990s, though employment rates for women fell and the EEOL came under feminist fire for being more of a suggested framework for reform

than reform itself (Mun 2011), it was seemingly too late to expect women to reverse course from developing a more pronounced individualistic identity rooted in oppositional femininity. This gaze westward does not appear to have waivered in the decades since, with marriage and birth rates yet to recover to pre-EEOL levels, and in 2018 birth rates hit their lowest-ever level since that statistical record began in 1899 (Giordano 2019, Zaugg 2019). Each year since, Japan has hit a new record-low birth rate. In 2022, the trend has continued with Japan now in a reported full-blown population crisis (Yeung & Maruyama, 2023).

Life courses & heavy metal

It does not then feel coincidental that the first wave of significant Japanese female heavy metal participation discussed in the previous chapter also came during the EEOL-era shift in Japanese gender relations. Taking an interest in, and starting to perform, transgressive music and starting bands with like-minded women who share a longing and pull towards the inherent 'invigorating freedom' of that music is just such an expression of Western-inspired oppositional femininity. The first piece of evidence for this is the reception and success in Japan of The Runaways who, as discussed in Chapter 3, set the stage for Japanese women in rock music by bringing the oppositionality and transgression of punk rock played by American women to a country with a female audience ready to embrace an embodiment of an accessible occidental feminism. By the time Runaway-mania had eased in the wake of the band's demise, a generation of girls had normalized their presence in Japanese rock music, which allowed a leveling-up not just from gaining access to the social networks afforded by musicianship, but also the ability to recognize and set professional goals, becoming an example of Kelsky's occidental longing and

life-course defection. This goes beyond the ideas of a Japanese woman 'earning a living' and enters the more profound realm of 'designing a life.'

Occidental longing operates on two different levels. There is physical displacement with the West as an actual *place;* a literal site of escape from a 'backwards' (as my interview subject Misa said) Japan, pulling the internationalist Japanese woman overseas for a complete recontextualization of the new self. Then there is the *idea* of the West and what that can mean if applied within Japan, effectively allowing a new self to reshape the old context over time. In Kelsky's ethnographic studies, the West was a constructed 'site of rescue' for the frustrated and marginalized Japanese woman inspired to either physically leave Japan or attempt a refashioning of the Japanese woman's experience in the image of the West (Kelsky loc 134, 2006). Both means of interaction with the 'site of rescue' have been on display in the approach women have taken in J-metal, with perhaps none more demonstrative regarding the influence of the EEOL-era paradigm shift than Show-Ya.

In a 2016 interview, lead singer Keiko Terada celebrated an example of Kelsey's life-course defection as an element of the group's success and longevity.

> It's a very big thing celebrating 30 years as we did last year…Show-Ya is a miraculous band. Lots of things can happen in a woman's life, don't you think? Especially that a woman might marry or have children. But among us only Miki [guitarist] got married, she is not divorced, but had no children. This was very wise! (Terada Interview, Takeichi 2016).

Terada believed the group was exceptional in their life-course defection and praised the rejection of traditional expectation as 'wise' to the benefit of the band's career. Show-Ya's career trajectory also lines up with EEOL-era trends for Japanese women in more ways than just a refusal to conform to expectations about marriage and childrearing. Coinciding with the statistical upswing in Japanese women exploring their options via travel to the West, 1988 saw

Show-Ya move to London to both record and perform for the first time overseas. 1990, when Japanese women really began outnumbering men in travel to the West for professional pursuits, was the year that Show-Ya relocated to Los Angeles to record their next album with renowned American hard-rock/metal producer Beau Hill in an attempt to break into the North American market (Hockman 1990).

At the time, only two prominent female heavy metal artists were successful in the United States: Lita Ford, coincidently the former lead guitarist of The Runaways, and the Los Angeles based all-female pop-metal band Vixen. While there was no trend of female success in heavy metal in the West, the broader idea of potential career advancement in a new consumer market, and the land of heavy metal's *yōshikibi* and most dominant contemporary artists, was a lure away from Japan regardless of the role Western women played in Western metal at the time. This was in line with the idea of Japanese women pursuing the West as *place* and Kelsky's 'site of rescue.' The choice of location for the Show-Ya's recontextualization, choice of album producer, decisions to avoid marriage and family, and the timing of these strategic moves suggest that heavy metal was in play as an occidental influence in a life-course defection.

Show-Ya was also covering their ideological bases by simultaneously engaging both with the West as *place* and the West as *idea.* In 1987, one year after the implementation of the EEOL, Show-Ya began producing the previously discussed event *Naon No Yaon*. In the interview I quoted in Chapter 3, Terada's comment 'let's hear their [women's] voices, that was my feeling' and the idea that both Show-Ya and Princess-Princess were 'stubborn' hints at a sociopolitical motivation for the event rather than an attempt to only drive revenue or appease a record label or management business idea. Terada is suggesting that the event was in some ways an act of transgression by 'stubborn' women, not too subtle a reference to how Japanese society likely

perceived them and their forthrightness at the time. Though Japanese female artists in various rock music subgenres (including heavy metal) were already outnumbering their Western counterparts by the time *Naon No Yaon* was launched, the timing of Show-Ya's creation of the event and the subsequent travel overseas to explore their horizons exemplify the external cultural influence in believing that there might be more possible for a Japanese woman's life trajectory. While Show-Ya failed to gain traction in Western consumer markets in 1988 and 1990 with the West as place, the *Naon No Yaon* event is certainly an example of the West gaining traction as an idea. Even through pandemic setbacks under the strictest COVID-19 protocol in the world, the event did not miss 2020 or 2021 and is still going as of 2023. The event's draw of female musicians from across Japan, including many heavy metal musicians, is evidence of the long-term influence of EEOL-era hopefulness and the desire to reshape the Japanese female domestic experience.

Contemporary heavy metal also has its examples of artists taking their cue from Show-Ya. A second guitar player with whom I spoke under the promise of anonymity, referred to here as 'Guitarist B' and who had applied to perform Show-Ya's *Naon No Yaon* event in 2019, used her own family as an example of what she wanted to avoid in her life and made connections to Western thinking in the process.

> My sister had a baby. My mother wants me to have one but I refuse. I have to stay focused and having a family will distract me from my career in music. This [music/metal] is my life. My friends in bands all think the same as I do. We feel more like we are not Japanese when we are with our parents. Maybe they think we are more American or something. But together [with my friends) we are maybe a new-Japanese. (Guitarist B, interview conducted 19 January, 2019).

Coming after revealing her parent's commentary on feeling she and her friends are more American, the term 'new-Japanese' indicates the implementation of the West as a philosophical

field reshaping Japan and recognizing it as such. She claims to speak for her friends in other bands, suggesting that she is not alone among contemporary metal musicians in throwing off the shackles of a lingering social expectation, and continuing Show-Ya's call for 'stubborn' women to be heard. The phrase 'new-Japanese' is also interesting in its divorce from the concept of actually being seen as Westernized. It was her parents who she believed thought of her and her friends as 'more American' while she chose instead to reclaim a sense of Japanese-*ness*, a claim to Japanese identity but under a set of different philosophical conditions than what may mean 'Japanese' to others, particularly an older generation.

Except for a desire to embark on international concert tours or play at Western metal festivals as a means of professional advancement, talk of Japanese female metal musicians leaving Japan for any recontextualization of the self is rare, and expressions of a desire to make a career in the West are almost non-existent. Saki, the lead guitarist of Mary's Blood and Nemophila has indicated via interviews and social media that travelling to perform in the West was 'a dream'[20] and all-female band Bridear has expressed excitement over European tours because it is where their heroes are from (Smith, interview 2017) but no public comment I could find has hinted at a desire to leave Japan and stay overseas on any kind of a long-term basis.

Bridear is my top client and, with their permission to recount this conversation having been granted, a representative of their management company has at least expressed that the band may achieve greater success if they were to base themselves out of an American or UK city. The band members themselves however have seemed quite apprehensive. An anonymous staffer at Bridear's management agency at the time, Allfuz Inc., was blunt in his assessment. 'I don't think their [Bridear's] future is in Japan. The best thing for them may be to relocate overseas for a

[20] https://jrocknews.com/2021/12/marys-blood-goes-hiatus-april-2022.html

while. It's difficult for them of course to make that decision, but you never know.' When pressed on the matter, he believes there are cultural and professional pressures to remain in Japan which influences their decision.

> They would need to earn enough money to support themselves. It is difficult enough to do that as a musician in Japan. If they have yet to break through financially in overseas markets they will feel better off staying in their home country even if the odds of making more money after relocating increase substantially. In that way it is also a bit of fear of change holding them back. That is a very Japanese trait unfortunately. (Allfuz staffer, conversation in Tokyo 20th February, 2023)

There are also few attempts, at least publicly revealed, by any of these artists and their representatives to sign deals with multinational major record labels. Instead, the band's Japanese labels have signed Western distribution or licensing deals with much smaller labels and done so on single release terms rather than deals for back catalogues. By 2019, Mary's Blood and Aldious, the two most prominent female metal bands in Japan at that time, had released two albums each via the UK-based independent label JPU Records, a label exclusively releasing Japanese music overseas. My own company launched a similar label in 2021—Setsuzoku Records—and with many releases from female artists such as Bridear, IBUKI, and Exist Trace now under our belt, there is still little indication of artists seeking career relocation or personal recontextualization. The West as *idea* rather than *place* is quite prevalent.

Despite J-metal's thrivancy, heavy metal is still representative of the West, and the West is still the source of metal's ultimate authenticity via adherence to *yōshikibi*, just as it was when metal first emerged as genre in Japan. The bifurcation discussed in Chapter 2 still exists, with J-metal running parallel to Western metal and still deferring to Western metal as standard bearer. Guitarist B, in the same conversation which I quoted earlier, said: 'J-metal has many cool bands but we all love the Western bands. Western bands are why J-metal exists. Metallica, Slipknot,

Iron Maiden, we love that music' (Guitarist B, interview conducted 19 January, 2019). Two of these bands were American and one was British, with all three being internationally famous with massive followings in Japan.

With long-term physical relocation not on any of the band's radars, contemporary female heavy metal artists are seemingly less interested in physical recontextualization in a 'site of rescue' but certainly continuing the trend of a Western-inspired philosophical refashioning, living a life and pursuing activities for individual principle rather than succumbing to Japanese societal gender norms. Guitarist B made this connection of Western influence on the actions of Japanese female musicians within Japan as well as working within the spaces the masculine-driven social system unintentionally creates:

> We can be more free than the men sometimes. We are not expected to work hard or pay for a family alone. There is time to make a different life and different dream *in Japan* (my emphasis) to maybe not have a family or do something different. So we started a metal band. Metal gives our dream energy. (Guitarist B, interview conducted 19 January, 2019).

Here, metal is not the 'dream' but the fuel for a dream. The dream is equated with a different life, Kelsky's 'defection,' made possible by heavy metal and executed domestically rather than by relocation.

Adopting Western ideals and philosophical individualistic principle is a form of protest of sorts against those expected Japanese life-courses, but this is not necessarily an intentional political move or a cog in some broader Western-inspired feminist machine to force hegemonic masculinity into retreat. The playing of heavy metal music to construct an oppositional femininity is indeed a subversion of Japanese gender norms, but there is little desire among Japanese women to mobilize such activity into political cause. Though metal is known for its loud and abrasive manner, these female musicians are operating on a more subtle level, making

no grand claims in their lyrics, interviews, or social media profiles about changing Japan or launching orchestrated feminist movements among their domestic fans. As Iwao has noted, Japanese women have been making social progress in ways more in tune with their cultural demeanor:

> Japanese women themselves have been changing, winning an astonishing degree of freedom and independence quietly and unobtrusively, largely without the fanfare of an organized women's movement or overt feminism…pragmatism, nonconfrontation, and a long-term perspective, are the rules that govern this change, which I call the quiet revolution. (Iwao p.22, 2008)

Conclusion

The participation of Japanese women in the domestic heavy metal subdomain can be easily identified as a domestic application of Kelsky's theory of occidental longing being used as a means to subvert traditional gender expectation and its emphasized femininity. Embodying the notion of Western modernity with its 'invigorating freedom,' combined with a transgressive constitution reflecting the principles inspiring the Japanese woman looking for more out of life in Japan, heavy metal has been situated perfectly within broader frameworks of Western attraction for female musicians, internationally minded but domestically pro-active, to seize as their own domain. This is evidenced no better than by the career trajectory of Show-Ya and how the band members framed and explained their decisions. From recognition of the West as physical *place* for the attempt at international recording success, to the continuing of the *Naon No Yaon* event representing the domestic application of the West as an *idea*, Show-Ya's history demonstrates that metal has been a force in inspiring interference with expected life courses. The timing of that interference points to an era of sweeping change in the mindset of the Japanese woman.

That shift in mindset appears to be the result of the paradigm shift in the Japanese sociopolitical landscape with the implementation of the EEOL. The resulting pull to the urban

centers in the 1980s, the seeking of opportunity afforded by marginalization, acting on Western cultural longings, and the transgression of gender expectations through the constructions of an oppositional femininity, all occurred without formal mobilization and visceral political anger. It might be ironic to call heavy metal part of a 'quiet revolution,' but in Japan, participation in a domestic subdomain of a transgressive Western genre without trumpeting a feminist political objective is congruent with the Japanese behavioral disposition. This harkens back to Minamida and his take on the return of the 'courteous self.' It is culturally engrained to be polite, non-confrontational, and non-disruptive, but that does not mean that the desire for transgression is not there. It is just voiced differently.In Chapters 3 and 4, I presented arguments for what has paved the way for Japanese women to find heavy metal as an outlet. In Chapter 5, I will begin to examine the unique Japanese cultural conditions which keeps women continuously accepted within the Japanese heavy metal subdomain and how they operate within it to maintain their thrivancy.

Chapter 5 - Divorcing masculinity from perceived authenticity

I mentioned in Chapter Two that the slippery notion of authenticity is an important aspect of heavy metal culture and has often been connected to masculine codes believed to be embedded in the genre's aesthetics and cultural practices (Weinstein 2009, Walser 1993) and these codes are still considered a primary factor in the maintenance of heavy metal's stubborn gender barrier (Berkers 2018, Heesh and Scott 2016, Kahn-Harris 2016). The cultural gender-coding, particularly regarding notions of power, has created what Deena Weinstein believes is a fundamental obstacle to women in heavy metal, writing that a 'bias against women is rooted in the delineated meanings of heavy metal music' (2009, p66). One of the ways women in Japanese metal have been able to thrive as heavy metal performers contrary to their Western counterparts appears to be a divorce of these assumed masculine codes from standards of authenticity in the Japanese heavy metal subdomain. It is not that these masculine codes or familiar masculine tropes do not exist in Japanese metal, but they do not appear to be broadly sought out or accepted by fans, musicians, or within music business circles as essential to what constitutes heavy metal in sound, behavior, or expectations within the subdomain.

This chapter examines the relationship between Western heavy metal and masculinity as it pertains to the taste-culture's requirements for, and perception of, authenticity, and how the Japanese subdomain differs. In speaking with five different heavy metal fans from the United States and the United Kingdom, and adding some of my own memories and reflections growing up as a heavy metal fan in the United States, we see examples of how masculinity is ingrained in metal's authenticity discourse. Then using two case studies, arguably the two most famous and successful all-female metal bands from Japan during my research, Aldious and Mary's Blood, I

illustrate how the contemporary Japanese metal subdomain authenticates female participation without emphasized masculinity or rejection of femininity as core principles. While offering different expressions of femininity, both bands satisfy the intense requirements for a perceived heavy metal authenticity in Japan, revealing that the marginalization of femininity is not as essential to heavy metal as has often been believed.

Theories on authenticity

Popular music cultures have long valued a perceived authenticity (Frith 1983, 1987, Moore 2002, 2012) and heavy metal culture can apply the most rigorous of standards. My aim in addressing notions of authenticity here is not to argue those standards or define authenticity in any grand sense. Nor do I stake claim to a new viewpoint on the murky and already well-traversed subject. Here, I often refer to authenticity as 'perceived' in order to make it clear that I am avoiding absolutism on the broader subject and instead focusing on how fans, musicians, and media might be defining and using the term, collectively and individually. My purpose is to ask on what grounds do heavy metal fans come to legitimize or reject the sound, style, and execution of the music, so that we may identify and better understand differences in those standards effecting female artists in Western and Japanese metal subdomains.

There are a few overlapping theoretical approaches to conceptualizing authenticity which I find useful in analyzing metal taste-culture's application of those standards in both Japan and the West. Allan Moore's 'tripartite typology,' asking *who* as opposed to *what* is being authenticated, is a good starting point (2002). Perhaps most applicable in Japan is what Moore calls 'authenticity by execution,' or a 'third person authenticity.' This is when 'a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded

within a tradition of performance' (2002, p.220). As I will illustrate in the case studies, the Japanese fan's focus on the importance of a performer's technical abilities, musical intent, and the metal performance tradition, work well within Moore's 'authenticity of execution.' However, 'representing the ideas of another' and the 'tradition of performance' are also applicable to audience perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in Western metal. The 'ideas' and 'tradition' can be perceived as masculine if the cultural context of those ideas and traditions so dictate. Moore's two other types are first-person authenticity or an 'authenticity of expression,' in which integrity is conveyed in a manner perceived as unmediated, and a second-person authenticity, or 'authenticity of experience,' in which the audience feels their life experience is being validated. These two ideas seem to be more applicable to Western metal constructions of authenticity as will be illustrated by my conversations with Western metal fans.

Peter Kivy offers the concept of a 'personal authenticity' defined as 'the sense of a performance which is authentically one's own, emanating from one's own person—authentic, in other words, as opposed to derivative or imitative' (Kivy 1995, p.108). The idea of what constitutes the derivative is relevant regarding the ways in which Western fans can approach the thought of women performing a perceived male genre, while defining an artist's perceived originality within a genre becomes a point of interest among Japanese fans. The sense of a personally authentic expression here can also be woven with Moore's 'third person authenticity' as it pertains to individual skill and performance.

Richard Taruskin's idea of what constitutes an authentic performance also lends itself well to analyzing the way in which women are evaluated in heavy metal. He writes: 'Authenticity…is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that, even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge'

(1995, p.67). Though Taruskin's work is entrenched in 'early music,' there is something to be gleaned here in its application within a popular music context. There are two ways to apply this in regard to heavy metal and female performers. One is understanding the process of authentication as being a gendered experience for the Western metal fan. Authenticity from the fan's perspective is knowing what the artist means by the gestures, symbols, and a masculine positionality, and then seeing themselves reflected in it *as* masculine or seeing themselves *in relation* to that masculinity. The other way, in the Japanese metal world, is authenticity as individual intent and the confidence in executing that intention. The female performer knows who she is and acts in accordance with that knowledge and this is conveyed to, and accepted by, the audience. In what follows I consider how these different approaches to authenticity bifurcates authenticity discourse creating an attitude of metal authentication amongst Western fans perhaps obstructing female participation and an attitude among Japanese fans which does not.

Masculinity and metal authenticity

In Chapter Two, I introduced some of the components of authenticity discourse in heavy metal regarding how the aesthetics of the music are judged, most of which have been culturally coded as masculine. This included the emphasis on power, speed, and forcefulness, overly distorted guitars, powerful drums, controlled technical skill and precision, among other sonic and creative choices distinguishing it aesthetically from other forms of rock music. These are the aural expressions of the genre's themes, explored in its symbolism and fantasy escapism, and culturally coded as masculine (Walser 1993).

The symbols of masculinity and, as Weinstein phrases it, the 'value of masculinism' and a rejection of values coded as feminine (2000, p221), are easy enough to locate if looking to subscribe to the theory of masculine essentialism. The metal taste-culture uniform of t-shirt, jeans, and leather or denim jacket act as an implicit rejection of clothing traditionally culturally coded as feminine. This allows the female fan or musician to be seen as 'one of the boys' according to Weinstein (p221) while clothing accentuating a woman's sexual appeal conforms to a masculine code of heteronormative objectification.[21] Either way the code is considered masculine. Accoutrements such as spikes and chains symbolizing masculine-coded traits such as violence and aggression are ubiquitous, pendants of Thor's hammer (phallic and powerful), particularly in the subgenres of power metal, Viking metal, or black metal, or references to the occult (Olsen 2008, Yrjana 2015) as well as the wielding of the guitar itself as the perceived great phallic symbol (Frith 1981, Brown 2007, Waksman 2001) are everywhere in heavy metal.

Stage mannerisms of metal performers have been scrutinized and reduced to masculine posturing or pandering as the default mode of ritualistic stage behavior of metal artists. This includes a wide standing posture, gestures of aggression, and male-centric sexual innuendo. Lyrically, with a vast majority of vocalists still male, and an even greater majority of metal songwriters being male, the point of view is then overwhelmingly masculine and can therefore be seen as more relatable to men. Throughout its history, metal has indeed at least appeared as being by the masculine, of the masculine, for the masculine.

[21]This is debatable within contemporary Western metal particularly with the rise of women as vocalists and an increase in numbers for the female audience. I would concede that dress for the male gaze might be a dated point, however, in a historical context it is an undeniable part of at least early metal culture which shaped modern perspectives on metal's sexual politics.

In addition to inheriting the perceived masculine performativity of its broader rock music heritage, Western heavy metal's aggressive masculinist disposition also appears to have roots in the social context of its emergence in the 1970s. Young men were left to negotiate their masculinity within political and economic environments where they had no power or capital but were under social pressure of masculine expectation as it related to that power (Walser 1993, Ludas 2011, Bannister 2017). Weinstein believes that metal emerged as a predominately white genre due to the 'historical accident' of the time and the places of its inception (UK and USA) but that the rejection of femininity is by purposeful design as it became, unlike whiteness, part of the genre's ideology (2000, p67). I fundamentally disagree. The socioeconomic conditions of the time which created a desire for masculine affirmation and expression can be similarly labeled an accident of history. In the UK and USA where metal emerged and developed, the 1970s was an era of economic recession and social turbulence marking an end to post-war economic growth. With deindustrialization leading to job losses, changes in marketable skills, fewer opportunities for professional advancement, and an increase in women working to provide for the family (and themselves) coming out of the 1960s and the sexual revolution, the notions of a masculinity born in the booming post-war era were sent into a crisis (see Bednarik 1981, Horrocks 1994, Robinson 2000, Beynon 2002). Metal's development at a time of 'crisis' for masculinity is no less an accident than the conditions which contributed to its lack of ethnic diversity.

The theme of 'masculinity in crisis' is so dominant in the field of male studies that Bryce Traister argues that a history of the field 'writes itself as an actual history of American masculinity *as* crisis' with conflict and the quest to define and redefine masculinity becoming constitutive (2000, p287). In this light, masculinity appears to always be in a defensive position against encroaching threats. The threats to the social definition of manhood—breadwinner,

physical labor, blue-collar ethics and pride—and thus the insecurities which developed, find potential cathartic resolution in heavy metal. But as Walser writes, 'metal's negotiations of the anxieties of gender and power are never conclusive' and 'these imaginary resolutions of real anxieties must be reenacted over and over again' (1993, loc 2506). Of the theme of masculinity in continual crisis, Judith A. Allen notes that masculinity seems to be 'always in process, under negotiation, needing to be 'shored up,' reinforced, buttressed against its many enemies' (2002, p199). In its machismo, pursuit of various forms of power, and assorted symbolism, heavy metal developed a masculine defense mechanism presented as a truth of heteronormative male identity—an absolute—constantly reaffirming itself rather than being reimagined in the context of new conditions.

In speaking with Western heavy metal fans about ideas of masculinity in metal culture, several revealed a common degree of absolutism in what they believed constituted masculinity across time. Michael, a 48-year-old American visiting Tokyo to attend concerts, shared his feelings on metal and masculinity during the genre's peak period in the US in the 1980s.

> I remember growing up in the 80s and looking at [metal] videos and feeling like that's what a guy should be. I mean, I had pimples and didn't have a car yet so I was kinda insecure. I was like 13 or 14 [years old]. But I knew what a man was. Gene Simmons [KISS] or Nikki Sixx [Mötely Crüe]. Like that. To me they were real men. I wanted to be like that. (Michael, interview in Tokyo, February 2019)

I followed this up asking if he still believed that was a representation of what 'a guy should be.' 'Yeah I think so' he said. 'Unless you're gay or something. Not that there's anything wrong with that (laughs).[22] It's…I don't know…the way I still feel about myself I guess.'

[22] This was a play on a famous episode of the American television comedy *Seinfeld* (season 4, episode 14, 1993) in which a string of misunderstandings forced main characters into affirming the truth of their heterosexuality while trying not to sound homophobic around people who incorrectly believed those main characters were homosexual.

Brian, a 49-year-old semi-professional rock musician and 80s metal fan from the United States echoed this.

> **Brian:** I hated those other guys in high school trying to be…like football players and those kind of guys, ya know? I didn't want to be like those posers. We [metalheads] all hated those guys, right [laughs]?
> **CDM:** What did you want to be like?
> **Brian:** I wanted to be like…when I saw guys in bands on Headbanger's Ball [MTV's popular heavy metal program in the 1980s and early 1990s] I felt like that was it. It wasn't about being cool and playing sports. They were strong and rich and had women.
> **CDM:** Was that what you wanted for your own life? Strong, rich, and having many women?
> **Brian:** Didn't *you*? If you say you didn't you're lying [laughs]. They did what they wanted and lived their dream. man. I mean I never became rich, and I'm not surrounded by girls, ya know [laughs], but whatever.
> (interview Portland, Oregon USA, 14 December 2019)

The image of 'real men' as 'strong and rich and had women' is tied to the images from heavy metal music videos. The dismissal of other types of teenage male identity and their social cliques signals a belief in masculine absolutism in his chosen taste-culture. The implication here is that boys in these other social cliques were inauthentic and trying to be something they were not (posers), as opposed to his own discovery of 'real' masculine role models in metal, as they all navigated adolescence.

It is notable that Brian included me in his comments using my metal fandom to constitute the 'we'—acknowledging that heavy metal fans as a group, the taste-culture, shared a certain philosophical stance about ourselves in relation to others—in seeking some affirmation. He was correct. I certainly would have been lying if I did not admit to my own images of a masculine ideal growing up as a metalhead and such recollections from my adolescence were points of easy connection and conversation in the field. KISS co-founder Gene Simmons, perhaps even more famous for his legendary off-stage sexual adventures and opinionated manner as his musical reputation, was one of my masculine ideals. Every man wanted to be him and every woman

wanted to be with him,[23] or so I was led to believe. My first heavy metal t-shirt purchased at my first metal concert in early 1988 was an illustrated depiction of Gene Simmons on a throne wearing a cape—symbols of wealth, power, and authority—surrounded by three women with one of them wearing a collar and chain with Gene holding the other end. The back of the shirt reads 'It's a dirty job, but someone's gotta do it'. It was the epitome of heteronormative male sexual fantasy reified within a heavy metal context.

Along with Michael and Brian's comments, this experience from my own metal culture history articulates a particular type of masculinity as a conceptual desire. The KISS t-shirt represented an ideal positioned as something to be sought: a masculinity positioned as a goal, and an attainable one at that. If Gene Simmons could achieve it, so could I. So could *we.* My teenage reaction was to aim for such a status, feeding into fantasies of rock stardom and the inevitable but mysterious world of being a man. Gene Simmons and the business minds behind the decision of how he and KISS presented their brands within heavy metal culture were strategic in playing into what the largely male audience was looking for, though among the additional memories triggered was the female response. To this day I can recall the female fans in attendance buying the shirt themselves (as well as the similar shirt featuring other KISS co-founder Paul Stanley) and their lewd comments and sexualized dress and behavior—the stuff of dreams for a 13-year-old boy with bad skin and sporting a mullet trying to figure himself out. The masculine tropes had seemingly willing female support feeding into those attractive notions of sexual domain and power. Women tossing undergarments onto the stage at Gene and Paul's feet didn't hurt either.

[23] The origin of this phrase is debated but its first appearance may have been Raymond Mortimer's Sunday Times review, 30th March, 1963, of Ian Fleming's James Bond novel, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. 'James Bond is what every man would like to be, and what every woman would like between her sheets.'

In Western metal subdomains, something calling itself heavy metal but not exhibiting these masculine traits appears to have its authenticity called into question. In order for a female performer to be accepted as performing legitimate metal, she must conform to certain standards related to the masculine identity on offer. Again I recall a friend during my early teens being adamant that American metal guitarist and singer Lita Ford was not metal because 'girls playing metal look wrong' and she was 'trying to be manly' so calling it metal was 'weird.' Others disagreed, but usually because they found her attractive. My friend Kevin had said that Doro Pesch, the lead-singer of the influential German band Warlock, was definitely metal because she had a 'rough metal voice' and was 'super hot.' It was a more familiar tone to her voice which had been coded as masculine and her appearance fitting within heteronormative masculine expectation that allowed for her inclusion into his pantheon of legitimate heavy metal.

These recollections are admittedly vulnerable to being influenced by time and distance which tend to contribute to a memory being more about remembering the last time something was remembered than a memory of an event itself. Though the conversations remain vivid in my often-reliable memory, I am lucky enough to still be friends with Kevin, 46-years old at the time of the following exchange and still a metal fan. We were able to discuss these moments via a text message conversation leading to some useful reflections.

> **CDM:** You loved Doro. Do you remember why you didn't like other women in metal?
> **Kevin:** Doro was hot. Had that heavy metal voice. Who else was like that? Vixen didn't sound like that LOL
> **CDM:** I just bought a Vixen shirt, lol
> **Kevin:** No shit! Haha you still like that soft serve LOL. Rock but not metal. Not hard enough.
> **CDM:** Were they not hot enough for you either? lol
> **Kevin:** Not hot at all haha. Guitarist maybe but not the others. Also soft music. You know I never liked that stuff.
> **CDM:** What female metal musicians have you liked since then? I know you didn't like Nightwish because of the vocals when they became famous, right?

Kevin: Nightwish was soft serve. Arch Enemy is hardcore I love them, WAR ETERNAL! [reference to a popular Arch Enemy song]
CDM: Do you like Angela [ex-vocalist] or Alissa [current vocalist]?
Kevin: Both but Alissa more.
CDM: Why is that?
Kevin: Gorgeous girl. Badass sexy woman WAR ETERNAL!
(Text message exchange, 2 January, 2019)

Kevin offers quite a bit to unpack. He confirmed his opinions from adolescence and those same sentiments persist today. Reaffirming Doro Pesch's physical attractiveness and a more 'heavy metal voice' as reasons for his continued approval of her heavy metal inclusion, he dismisses the band Vixen as both not attractive enough for him and for being 'soft music.' The use of the adjectives 'soft' and 'hard' are easily gendered, and soft is correlated with 'poser stuff,' pretenders to authentic metal. The Finnish band Nightwish, featuring classically trained soprano vocalist Tarja Turunen in the first decade of the band's existence, was put into direct competition for Kevin's judgement for authenticity against the Swedish band Arch Enemy, who are known for having female vocalists performing a hyper-aggressive death metal vocal growl (commonly referred to in fandom as the harsh vocal or death-growl). In championing the song 'War Eternal,' the theme of war and the vocal performance style coded as masculine, he wastes no time in selecting his favorite of Arch Enemy's vocalists, the 'gorgeous' and 'badass sexy woman' Alissa White-Gluz. He made it a point to reference her as sexy tying it into her more masculine-coded vocal performance. 'Badass sexy' neatly sums up his gendered requirement for authentic metal from a female performer.

While Kevin's rejection of femininity in authentic metal is rather blatant, I spoke with others who revealed a more subconscious rejection of femininity with exceptions only under certain masculine conditions. Daniel, a British 34-year-old metal fan attending a London performance by the female-fronted Finnish band Battle Beast, spoke with me outside the venue.

CDM: How do you feel about women playing heavy metal?
Daniel: It's normal now, isn't it? So I don't think about it. Of course it's fine.
CDM: What bands do you like that have women in them?
Daniel: Battle Beast of course. Doro. I like Nightwish. Arch Enemy.
CDM: All of those have female vocalists. So you like the voices?
Daniel: Yeah it's good, man. It's cool to see a girl scream the death metal vocals and also do the big power metal vocals. It's a cool contrast.
CDM: A contrast with what? Just the visual of…
Daniel: Just, you know, men doing it. Not just visuals no. Like, hearing girls do the male vocals instead of just, like, female vocals.
CDM: What are male vocals compared to female vocals then?
Daniel: You know, lower voice or higher voice. Like Nightwish used to have that opera singer [Tarja Turunen] back in the day [1990s to mid-2000s], right? I didn't like that too much. But the current vocalist [Floor Jansen], I like her style. It's more real metal to me. Noora from Battle Beast. She's very tough, very metal. (Interview, London, 30 April, 2019)

Daniel began by affirming that women in metal were 'fine' and it was now more common suggesting taste-culture acceptance. However, without much reflection, he ascribed gender to vocal characteristics establishing a male vocal style which was dominant in his taste and a female vocal style intimating that women who execute a masculine style are being suitably metal. John Shepherd, in his argument that musicological analysis should lean more on timbre rather than melodic and harmonic construction, highlights 'raspy' versus 'soft' vocal tones and connects 'raspy' to masculine aggressiveness and a female nurturing to 'soft' vocals. He argues that rock, mentioning Mick Jagger and Bruce Springsteen, and heavy metal, noting popular band Mötely Crüe, typically exclude feminine timbres as a means of 'keeping women external to a man's life and 'in their place.' (1991, p.168). Daniel's phrasing supports this assumption of gendered timbre and its exclusion from 'real' metal but without rejecting women outright.

Andrew, a 27-year-old metal fan from Chicago visiting Tokyo, mirrored Daniel's sentiments.

CDM: Do you like any metal bands with female members?
Andrew: Yeah. Arch Enemy, Nightwish, Within Temptation, bands like that are good.

CDM: You like the vocals then?
Andrew: When it's cool, yes. But not just because they are women.
CDM: What makes it cool for you? What do you look for?
Andrew: Just something that's real metal. Sounds like real metal.
CDM: What sounds like real metal?
Andrew: Just vocals powerful enough for the music. Nothing too weak.
(interview, Tokyo, 29 February 2020)

'Powerful' and the rejection of weakness equals the 'real' for Andrew, and 'powerful' and 'weak' are synonyms in this context for 'hard' and 'soft,' coded masculine and feminine, as he references the same bands. The conversation went on to cover female musicians as well as vocalists and, again without much reflection, there was a rejection of the non-masculine.

CDM: Do you listen to any bands with female musicians or just vocalists?
Andrew: uh…I don't think so. There aren't many are there? Burning Witches, maybe? They have some cool stuff but I haven't really listened to much. Who else is there?
CDM: Nita Strauss, Lita Ford. Lizzy Hale. You're right though, there are not many from Western countries.
Andrew: Oh yeah, there are a lot in Japan though right?
CDM: Yes, quite a lot.
Andrew: I've heard of those kind of groups, the girl groups. Looks a little silly though sometimes.
CDM: Silly? How so?
Andrew: Small Japanese girls playing metal. Kind of cute I guess. I mean that's cool if that's your thing. Not really metal though. Maybe just rock I guess.
CDM: What about women who are not Japanese? Like the ones I mentioned.
Andrew: um…yeah…I don't know them very well. But even Burning Witches, it's definitely metal but you have to get used to the look. Woman playing metal drums and guitar. It looks odd. Sounds good though.

Andrew's comment about the Japanese female metal musicians looking silly was related to their size and 'looking cute'. Small and cute are coded feminine while also hinting at inferiority and therefore a potential for domination, and classifying the music as metal was therefore in question as he dismissed the musicians into the broader category of rock. This recalls Shepherd's comment of rejecting feminine timbres keeping women 'in their place' (p168).

Curiously, Andrew did not dismiss the music of Burning Witches as sounding *un*-metal. He only questioned the look of women playing metal and did not therefore disagree that women *can* play heavy metal music. The Japanese acts did not fare so well, though he did not mention specific artists as he was unfamiliar with the subdomain. The juxtaposition of the sound he finds acceptable with a look he had to 'get used to' demonstrates that his association of the music with the masculine ('definitely metal') and the visual of women playing it ('it looks odd') are to him incongruent. A concept that is not masculine requires effort to be accepted, though the ladies of Burning Witches dress, posture, and perform just as their male contemporaries. Clad in leather and chains, scowling at the camera in their videos or delivering hard stares and attempting an aura of intimidation in photography or on stage, their femininity is on display only as much as the contours of their figures in the tight metal uniforms allow. Kevin's phrase 'badass sexy' is applicable. There are enough of the masculine codes adhered to that a fan could 'get used to' the fact, or ignore the fact, that they are women.

These conversations give credence to what has been argued or assumed in most heavy metal scholarship: masculinity is embedded in metal culture authentication discourse. This is not by any means an indictment of every metal fan or male artist as sexist, misogynistic, or unwilling to make room in metal for women and femininity. But my interview subjects do reveal that a connection exists between what is conceived as 'authentic' metal and that which is coded as masculine, even regarding those who feel, or admit, that women in metal are becoming more generally accepted. It is also important to point out that my interviewees all identified the masculine with 'real' metal, but their appreciation of subgenres was diverse. Andrew liked the newer Nightwish (power metal) but not the old with a different singer, Arch Enemy (melodic death metal) was appreciated by Kevin. Daniel enjoyed Battle Beast (power/traditional metal)

while Michael and Brian enjoyed Mötely Crüe and KISS ('hair metal,' 'pop metal,' 'mainstream metal'). But regardless of subgenre appreciation, masculinity and that which is coded masculine were pervading themes in what they considered to be authentic heavy metal.

To illustrate differences in authenticity discourse in the Japanese heavy metal subdomain, I thought it best to refer to specific female Japanese artists rather than a general look at taste-culture gatekeeping. This is for two reasons. The first is because most conversations on this topic with Japanese metal fans tended to become artist-centric as fans were less likely to discuss more abstract themes such as genre aesthetics or authenticity yet were eager to share their perspectives on their favorite groups. The second reason is that I feel more interesting and useful observations can be made given that there are differences in how femininity is addressed and expressed by two very different bands, Aldious and Mary's Blood, with differences in the perspectives of their fans.

Through conversation with fans, public comments from the band members, and a look at the career trajectory of both groups, we will see that masculinity is not a persistent theme or factor in determining heavy metal validity for the women's performance or subdomain participation. I also aim to illuminate ways in which these artists have presented their expressions of femininity and identities as women to be seen by the public as true to their personalities, intentions, and artistry. This has allowed the bands to be perceived by fans and media as authentic metal performers. Noticeably absent from the following case studies, but a key component in Western heavy metal's gender politics just discussed, is the role of sexuality in the Japanese band's presentation and subdomain reception. This subject deserves more focused attention and is therefore addressed in detail in Chapter 6.

Aldious

I met Shuhei, a Japanese male metal fan in his early 30s, waiting outside of a Mary's Blood concert in Tokyo in 2016. We have stayed friends and I tend to see him quite often at many of the metal shows I attend in Japan. A dedicated fan of a few of the all-female groups, his favorite band is Aldious.

> **CDM:** What is it about Aldious that makes them your favorite?
> **Shuhei:** It is perfect metal. The strong melodies and two guitars are addictive. Marina is the best drummer in metal. That's a fact, not an opinion.
> **CDM:** It's the musicianship then?
> **Shuhei:** Songwriting too. They have to deliver good songs with good playing. Just good playing is not enough. Just good songwriting is not enough. Both are required.
> **CDM:** Many Japanese fans say this.
> **Shuhei:** It is what helps make honest metal. True metal. Aldious is true metal. (interview conducted in Japanese in Tokyo, 30 January 2020, translation by Yukari T.)

Aldious has been credited with pioneering Japan's 'girl's metal boom' (Rushesko 2016, Smith 2017, see also Chapter Three). First coming together in Osaka in 2008, the quintet released a debut EP in 2009 and their full-length debut album *Deep Exceed* in 2010. The album reached number 15 on the Oricon chart (Japanese pop charts) and other albums and singles have since charted well, signifying a degree of consistent success. In the last decade or so, Aldious has been praised by and featured many times within the pages of *Burrn!* and *Burrn! Japan,* landing numerous covers along the way, including almost every 'all-female' special issue.[24]

Their concerts, often in mid-sized livehouses, are regularly sold out in Japan's major markets. The members have been featured in music instrument magazines to discuss their craft

[24] As of this writing, they have appeared on every cover of *Metallion's* 'girls metal special' except for one, which featured Rami, ex-lead singer of Aldious. It is worth noting that the rear cover of each of these issues features prominent paid advertising of Aldious which I confirmed was the reason for the constant placement of the band on the front cover. This speaks to the band's strong marketing rather than fame or fan demand, but fame and prominence come from good publicity.

and performance aesthetics, given instrument clinics, and are featured in advertisements for high-end musical equipment. In March 2020, just before pandemic restrictions went into effect, stage outfits and signature instruments, including Marina's massive triple kick-drum drum-set and Toki's bright pink custom guitar, were on display at Tokyo's Shinjuki Marui Annex event space where the group also held a packed autograph session. Aldious is in no uncertain terms a success within Japanese heavy metal.

Self-described as 'ultimate melodious,' the mixed abbreviation of which led the band to its name,[25] the band is often labeled as 'power metal' by fans, media, and retailers.[26] Codified and popularized by a plethora of European bands in the 1980s and early 1990s, particularly from northern Europe, power metal is known for being tight, fast, musically complex, and with an emphasis on melody. Arrangements are often uplifting in the genre's use of major keys or lifts out of minor key dirges, and the songwriting highlights an anthemic approach focusing on the pre-chorus (often less important in other subgenres) and grand choruses, chants for audience participation, and satisfying use of tension and release. Power metal's production enhances these aspects. Everything is heavily layered yet discernable so as to accentuate the technical talents of the musicians; the studio mixing favors the vocals, followed by the guitar—using twin guitar orchestrations often with moments of sophisticated harmony (see Sharpe-Young 2003, Dunn2008, 2012). Toki and Yoshi are the guitar duo providing the precision riffs, solos, and harmonies the style demands. Both receive high praise from Japanese metal media (Kayata 2016, Maeda 2020, Yamamoto 2020) and fans (see below) for their technical proficiency. Toki in

[25] https://www.hmv.co.jp/news/article/1004130111/?

[26] Examples of the subgenre classification https://raijinrock.com/ja/aldiousre:no の最大の格好良さ/ (media)
http://japan-metal-indies.com/html/link_banner/link.html (fan forums)
https://youngguitar.jp/music_reviews/aldious-determination (instrument focused magazine)
https://www.amazon.co.jp/Deep-Exceed-Aldious/dp/B003YUKFTO (retail)

particular has become one of Japanese metal's 'guitar heroes'—a famous figure on the instrument looked up to by aspiring and fellow musicians—and she is commonly found in advertisements in music magazines or on guitar shop walls as an endorser of ESP brand guitars, including her own signature model, a bright pink V-shaped instrument, simultaneously weaponized and feminized, with her name and a higher price tag attached. Drummer Marina also falls into the category of the connoisseur-approved virtuoso. Stepdaughter of world-renowned drummer Terry Bozio (Missing Persons, Frank Zappa), Marina is often praised for her skills by fans and Japanese music media alike (Maeda 2020, Yamamoto 2020) with three endorsement deals to her credit; DW (Drum Workshop), Sabian Cymbals, and signature Vic Firth drumsticks. The band also includes bassist Sawa, whose experience encompasses a number of all-female death metal bands[27] and is an endorser of ESP electric basses, and at the time of writing, R!N, the band's third vocalist following Re:NO and original lead singer Rami, each providing the band a different lead vocal style.

Rami brought to the group a voice which satisfied the subgenre's standard tropes of a broad range, dynamics, projection, and the ability to hit the higher notes to which fans of the subgenre are accustomed. The mid-range and gentler ribbon-like delivery of the next vocalist, Re:NO, who was with the band the longest at 8 years, was often criticized by Western metal fans for being too soft or weak for the music. One rather amusing quip by an English-speaking metal-forum member compared Aldious to 'Metallica fronted by Sade',[28] alluding to a metal-meets-smooth-jazz effect. However, many Japanese fans generally complimented Re:NO's richness of

[27] Death metal is a subgenre of hyper-aggressive metal generally deemphasizing melody for a focus on rhythm and utilizing a growling vocal performance sometimes referred to as the 'death growl.'
[28] https://forum.metal-archives.com/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=110520. Sade is a British-Nigerian singer-songwriter who had pop success in the 1980s. Her style is a cross hybrid of pop, smooth-jazz, and soul music.

tone and less forceful delivery. Owaki, a male fan in an Aldious shirt outside of the 2019 *Naon No Yaon* fest told me: 'Her voice is softer than Rami's but works with their music. She does not pretend to sing like other metal singers or try to sound like Rami or sound like men. She is herself' (interview, Tokyo, 28 April 2019). Owaki's appreciation is rooted in a chemistry between the music and the perception of Re:NO's natural delivery. She maintained feminine sensibilities, not shying away from softness and perhaps her more 'nurturing tone' (Sheppard 1991, p.168) but this was addressed by the band most often as an asset for Aldious rather than a detraction (Interview, Robsen 2017).

The group's latest vocalist, R!N, combines the two previous styles. This makes her the most diverse of the three, and even though Aldious is R!N's first metal band, there is yet no evidence of resistance to her in Japanese metal culture. Her arrival in the group and its fan reaction provides a unique perspective on subdomain acceptance.

> **CDM:** What are fans saying about R!N? She has not been a metal singer before.
> **Shuhei:** That does not matter. She has the presence in her voice. The other choice they considered was Saki, ex-Cyntia, and she was a metal vocalist. But it does not matter.
> **CDM:** Why doesn't that matter?
> **Shuhei:** Because R!N can pull off the songs. That's most important. When R!N sang on the last tour I think fans immediately accepted her. The songs sounded real. She was a metal singer all-along I feel. She needed the right band. (interview conducted in Japanese in Tokyo, 30 January 2020, translation by Yukari T.)

Shuhei is not alone. Ryo, who I quoted in Chapter Three, extended his compliments, agreeing that R!N appeared comfortable in her new context. 'The chemistry was there when she did the tour [a 2019 tour split between potential vocalists R!N and Saki as a means of audition]. She became metal on that stage without much effort to fit in. It was very natural.'

'R!N is perhaps a better metal singer than Re:NO anyway' Shuhei added. 'Re:NO was great, but R!N sounds richer. More like a woman than Re:NO who maybe in comparison sounds

younger and less mature.' Shuhei was more concerned with how R!N exhibited maturity, something that contributed to a 'better metal singer,' turning the conversation into youth versus maturity, and ostensibly the sound of a girl versus that of a woman, rather than considering feminine or masculine traits. R!N, not a metal singer or even a fan of metal before Aldious (Interview, unijolt.com, Hayes and Nelson 2019) can be accepted as metal because the context is deemed suited to her natural ability and maturity as she just 'needed the right band' to find what fans believe to be her true-self ('She was a metal singer all-along'). Just as with Owaki, authenticity is constructed by Shuhei and Ryo by virtue of sound, chemistry, and a voice and delivery which is natural for the individual.

What is intriguing here is that the honesty seen as emanating from the performer does not appear to require a pre-existing disposition in order to be accepted as heavy metal. Honesty is determined through the actual performance rather than personal background informing the performance. As referenced earlier, Peter Kivy offers a category of authenticity into which this may fit, a 'personal authenticity,' not autobiographical in nature as Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor prescribe (2007), but instead, as earlier quoted, 'the sense of a performance which is authentically one's own, emanating from one's own person—authentic, in other words, as opposed to derivative or imitative' (Kivy 1995, 108). This can also be extended to the instrumentation and the member's general behavior and demeanor as part of their overall performance.

> **Ryo:** Aldious checks all the boxes. Yeah, they have the chops [musical skill and execution] and play metal the right way.
> **CDM:** The right way?
> **Ryo:** Yeah they have the style down. They aren't what some would call posers.
> **CDM:** What would a Japanese fan see as a poser?
> **Ryo:** Someone faking it. Sometimes you can see that band members are trying too hard. That's not metal. Aldious is one of those groups that doesn't look like they are trying too hard.

CDM: What would be an example of trying too hard?
Ryo: You know when groups pull faces? Mugging in a metal way, things like that. It isn't authentic. That's one way. Many early Japanese metal bands did this in the 80s. They wanted to look like the bands from America or Europe. It's like metal cosplay.[29] Aldious doesn't do that. Neither does Mary's Blood.'
CDM: What did you mean by 'check all the boxes?' What are those boxes?
Ryo: Is there high skill? Does it sound like what metal sounds like? Is there a sense of freedom? Are we individually reflected in it? Can you bang your head?
CDM: Aldious checks those boxes. Therefore, they are metal?
Ryo: Totally.

Those who try to fit in against their natural inclinations ('trying too hard') are disqualified from authentication as perceived effortlessness carries significant value. There is a checklist in Ryo's summation involving sonic principles, playing styles ('they have the style down') and an expected listener reaction which agree with many of the comments from other Japanese fans here and in previous chapters. The intersection of this proper stylistic execution and natural ability is where authenticity is seemingly constructed. R!N is not 'faking it' because she is considered to be good at the performance without forcing herself to be. Toki is not forcing heavy metal power chords and complex solos. Marina is not pretending to be able to play double-kick patterns or struggling to keep up the speed. As noted above, in his tripartite typology of assessing authenticity, Allan Moore offers the notion of an 'authenticity by execution' which also feels appropriate to apply here. Though Moore used tribute bands to illustrate the point, the sonic checklist and playing styles of heavy metal have come from a long tradition of metal performers who set the standard, which is suited to the abilities of the musicians in Aldious and satisfies the process of authentication.

Personal authenticity is also relevant to the group as women as well as musicians. Ryo adds: 'Aldious wouldn't be real metal if they tried to look too tough or manly. It would be

[29] Cosplay is the hobby of creating outfits for 'costume play' and taking on the mannerisms of the subject, usually at conventions and competitions.

dishonest. They are being honest about who they are and the music they make. That's a pretty metal ethic' (email 03/02/2019). The band exhibits perhaps the most feminine image of the Japanese all-female bands in their appearance and gender identity performance. The group's stage-wear has typically utilized flowing gowns and elaborate dresses, heels, costume jewelry, and assorted accessories quite far from customary heavy metal optics. Band founder, guitarist, and co-songwriter Yoshi declared this as quite intentional and used her talents as a costume designer to see her tastes in fashion and music merge.

> It is not just my hobby anymore [costume design]. If nothing else, I tried to make the costumes something that you cannot wear easily in normal life. Because I wanted to show the whole band as somewhat ornate, I decided when we began to go in a dressy direction… (Yoshi interview, natalie.mu, Tasuya 2017).

Marina has said of the band's fashion philosophy: 'I think every woman wants to look great all the time!' (Interview, Robsen 2017). While not every woman would agree with the literal statement, Marina's point appears to be that they wanted to express themselves as women and maintain femininity in indulging a shared desire to dress in accordance with their own standards of femininity (see Maeda 2015).

> We like pretty things, it is true that we are wearing dresses, but I guess that is the kind of self-expression that is part of being a woman. I think that we are women doing what we want to do, that's Aldious (Yoshi interview, natalie.mu, Tasuya 2017).

It is easy to critique this comment under the lens of contemporary sociopolitical discourse. However, whether Marina and the band have accepted and indulged that which is culturally coded feminine because they legitimately feel it expresses who they are or if they are conditioned to believe it is what constitutes femininity is largely irrelevant. The fact that it is a culturally coded feminine expression at all is what matters when juxtaposed against the

masculinist nature of the genre and its expectations and expression through fashion. Marina is most often wearing, even on stage as she performs, evening gowns and costume jewelry. Toki is usually in her signature pink party or maxi dresses, accompanied by elaborate jewelry. Yoshi sometimes mixes dresses with leather and boots, or sometimes eschews them for high collared shirts paired with long pants. Bassist Sawa is known for her 'kawaii' (cute) look drawing on Tokyo's 'Harajuku fashion' of frills, lace, and use of appropriate accessories perceived as cute—kitten stockings, for example. Re:NO and Rami entered the stage in dramatic and sometimes regal gowns, softly swaying back and forth with the rhythm rather than attitudinizing the performance. Though the group participates in metal's signature headbanging, on stage they do not physically mimic masculine-coded heavy metal stage antics. The women smile and engage the audience with little regard for the gesturing and posturing so often associated with metal performance and adopted by previously mentioned female Western artists such as Burning Witches, Doro Pesch, or Arch Enemy's Alissa White-Gluz. These Western performers also adhere to what is considered heavy metal's masculine coded dress, with dress and stage action perhaps each informing the other.

Regarding the group's visual presentation, Marina has spoken on her own surprise at the perceived incongruity of that which is coded feminine presented with a sound coded as masculine.

> My father (Terry Bozio) is American, and when I told him I was thinking about joining Aldious, I showed him their music videos. He said something like 'Are these girls really performing like this? Girls who look like princesses, performing this kind of music'… I was a little surprised by that reaction…(Marina interview, unijolt.com, Hayes and Nelson 2019)

The gender coding of Western metal was firmly influencing her father's initial reaction to what he saw as a stark juxtaposition. Marina's reaction to *his* reaction is very telling. The female

Japanese musician was shocked at the Western male musician's shock at the perceived incongruity. The band's instrumentation, songwriting, arrangements, production, and physical playing styles 'check all the boxes,' but in Japanese metal, do these aesthetic traits hold the same gendered connotations as they do in Western metal? Marina's surprise indicates not. In my interview with Shuhei, he provided a fan's perspective on the perception of masculine coding in Aldious' music.

> **CDM:** What do you think of metal styles being thought of as masculine?
> **Shuhei:** How is it masculine?
> **CDM:** It can be very aggressive and fast and angry. Do you think women playing this style are trying to sound like men?
> **Shuhei:** I don't think the style has anything to do with men or women. It's sound and it is feeling. Why do you think it is a masculine sound?
> **CDM:** It is how some fans feel in Western countries, I think. Hard is for men, and soft is for women. Some people feel this way.
> **Shuhei:** Ah yes that is a way of lookng at it. Well Aldious can be soft. They look soft, of course. Yes they are women so maybe that makes for better soft songs. I don't know. But wanting to play fast and heavy is not just for men, of course. If it was, then women couldn't play it. But they can. So it's not dishonest of them as women. 'Female Warrior' (song title) might be dishonest for men though (laughs).
> **CDM:** For lyrics, yes. But what of the music, like the guitar playing?
> **Shuhei:** Men can try to play like Toki but I think many will fail. She is so skilled. If the style is for men or women, then are men trying to play a female style and that is why they are not as good? (interview conducted in Japanese in Tokyo, 30 January 2020, translation by Yukari T.)

Metal aesthetics as masculine was alien to Shuhei and, while his tone was a little defensive, perhaps because he is not unfamiliar with having to defend Aldious against detractors, he comes back to the concept of honesty and skill. In his estimation, if women can play the music then the music cannot be inherently masculine.

Interviews with the band by Japanese media also rely heavily on talk of songwriting, musicianship, or the challenges in the recording process. In *Ultimate Aldious*, a section, called

'Weapons,' was dedicated to their choice of equipment (Maeda 2016).[30] This likely served the desires of manufacturers who are eager to maintain their instrument endorsements, but it also served the connoisseur fan who is interested in the tools of the trade. It is from this column that I actually began to use a term which found its way to the title of this thesis. In the Tower Records magazine *Bounce,* Marina discusses technical performance challenges to certain songs (Michinoku, 2020). In one of their many cover features in *Metallion*'s all-female metal special, Yoshi discusses songwriting and chemistry with potential new members (Maeda 2020). The image, while certainly mentioned in Japanese media coverage of the band, typically in juxtaposition with Western-inspired music/image expectation, is clearly secondary. When being women in metal is addressed, Aldious is granted recognition as leaders and role-models.

> Originally, the words 'women's metal' referred to the collective name of western bands with female vocalists such as Arch Enemy and The Agonist. It became recognized in Japan as we used it when we debuted…There are a lot more girl's metal bands now than before, and they increasingly say 'We're so happy to meet Aldious!'.... We're not conscious of doing any particularly awesome things ourselves, so sometimes we feel like 'I don't know what to say!' (Yoshi interview, Tasuya 2017, author's translation)

In this introduction to a band interview in 2017, the author first addresses the group as leaders in the world of all-female metal bands and immediately shows interest in the music and the group's creative process.

> Aldious, who can be said to be the major players in Japan's 'girl's metal' [original author's quotes] scene, released their first new album in a year and a half: *Unlimited Diffusion.* While focusing on metal, each member brings a unique musicality incorporating melodic pop and other genres, making one feel the band's unique stylistic beauty. The band's flexible creativity has made it possible for all members to make

[30] When discussing this particular magazine section, I have been reminded that 'weapons' can be seen as a word coded masculine. However, I disagree, particularly in this context. This is from a Japanese publication using an English word, so it is not appropriate or accurate to assume masculine coding of a term is applicable when another language adopts it for style or affect. Given that 'onna-bugeisha' and 'onna-musha' fought alongside the samurai and were trained in using weapons, an instrument of war is not necessarily coded masculine, or non-feminine, in Japan.

> further progress as songwriters, and succeed in developing a more colorful and diverse album.
>
> …We interviewed them as they entered their 10th year in June, discussing the story of the new album, the transition to the current lineup after many member changes, and the musicality this helped cultivate. (Morhide 2017, author's translation)

Mary's Blood

Aldious maintains maybe the most feminine image for women in Japanese metal, but not every female artist follows suit; women employ myriad feminine projections. With a very different look, sound, and attitude, Mary's Blood is accepted as authentic metal in similar fashion to Aldious, with no gender obstacles and in satisfying the criteria for a personal authenticity. In the process, they also reveal another side of authenticity some listeners seek but a band like Aldious cannot satisfy.

Formed by ex-members of the group Destrose, a band often argued as the original spark of the current 'girls metal boom,' in 2009 (Ruchesko 2016), Mary's Blood was a major name in metal by 2012. Their debut single was released in 2010, an EP followed in 2011 with the single 'Last Game' appearing on the Oricon charts. After a few member changes and a follow-up single reaching number 17 on Oricon,[31] the band was signed to a major label and settled on the now most recognized line-up of vocalist Eye, drummer Mari, bassist Rio, and lead guitarist Saki.

Professionally, the band's accomplishments give them a position in the subdomain similar to Aldious. Mary's Blood have been on three different major record labels (Nippon Columbia, Victor/JVCKenwood Entertainment, and Tokuma Japan), released numerous DVDs from their often sold-out tours (at livehouses of various sizes, see Chapter One), and members also appear

[31] https://marysblood.futureartist.net/biography

as endorsers of high-end musical equipment; Saki with Killer Guitars and Mari with Tama Drums. The members are as equally inescapable as Aldious in J-metal magazines, particularly when women are the focus. Yamaha Music has released a special edition magazine devoted solely to the band, and members appear nearly every month in instrument-based publications and broadcasts such as Young Guitar, Japan Bass Player, and Drum & Rhythm. Saki has especially caught the attention of the J-metal community and has established herself as arguably Japan's top female guitar player. [32] She is not only the guitarist and co-songwriter for Mary's Blood but also her second band Nemophila, has made numerous guest star appearances, sustains a side project with Western metal star Frederique LeClerq (Kreator, ex-Dragonforce), and is leader of the previously discussed World Guitar Girls Collection. Like Aldious, Mary's Blood are, by any metric, a success in Japanese metal.

While Mary's Blood has also been called power metal,[33] they are instead more often referred to in Japan as just heavy metal, with magazines and Japanese language websites and blogs seemingly avoiding subgenre delineation. After consulting with numerous fans over the years, before and during my time as a researcher, the consensus appears to be that the band is a unique hybrid of subgenres including power metal, thrash metal, and 1980s mainstream or 'hair' metal'—a superficial but not entirely undeserved label because of the focus on fashion and hair styles of the time. Takashi, a male Japanese metal fan and musician in his late thirties who was willing to talk to me at length about his favorite band, supported the style description.

> **CDM:** What style of metal do you feel Mary's Blood perform?
> **Takashi**: They are heavy metal, but not anything too specific.
> **CDM:** Sometimes they are called power metal. I always felt there was more.

[32] Saki, Young Guitar interview and demonstration, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=RkKhXhHlLJE

[33] This tends to be in many English language metal websites, wiki pages, and at retail such as JaME.com, Metal-archives.com, their English language Wikipedia page, and Amazon.

> **Takashi:** Yes, I can see that at times. But there is an explosive quality and an energy. Like they are bristling with electricity. Riffs are like thrash metal I think. But yes they have strong melody sometimes like power metal.
> **CDM:** So you feel they blend styles?
> **Takashi**: Yes. Mari listens to thrash, we know this. She loves speed. But Saki is so gifted. She is influenced by 1980s rock and metal, power metal too. You can hear the 'old school.' We [at concerts together] have heard her perform cover songs from many metal legends. Kiss, Europe, Bon Jovi, Mr. Big. She brings that influence and can play them all so well. (interview conducted in Japanese, Tokyo, 29 December 2019, translation by Yukari T.)

Mary's Blood begins to differ here from the discourse surrounding Aldious by benefiting from a conversation broader than skill and execution. The group is discussed in a different context; one of legacy and lineage, and can draw from metal subgenre aesthetics to be considered legitimate metal in nuanced ways.

Thrash metal came to prominence in the United States in the mid-1980s with progenitors such as Metallica, Anthrax, and Slayer. Thrash's aesthetic hallmarks are faster tempos and sometimes complex rhythmic changes with less of a focus on melody from the guitars in both the riffs and solos. Guitar composition favors chromatic scales and the physical playing style is usually more physically aggressive than other subgenres, and it is complemented by drum performances with a relentless forward momentum creating a more frenetic energy. Thrash metal vocals are diverse, sometimes melodic, and sometimes grunted or shouted. Melodic vocals are generally 'raspy' in tone, and there is more of an emphasis on rhythmic delivery than pure melody. Mary's Blood lead singer Eye is certainly more melodic with a soulful tone, perhaps accurately described as occasionally 'raspy,' and employs significant use of dynamics in songs such as 'On the Rocks' (Revenant, 2018) and 'Bite the Bullet' (Bloody Palace, 2016), but she is not unaccustomed to the howls or shouts of a more aggressive thrash projection such as in the track 'I'm Dead' (Bloody Palace, 2016).

The references to 1980s rock and 'mainstream' metal or 'hair metal' are also accurate for Mary's Blood. The style was popularized in metal's most commercially successful era by acts such as Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, and Ratt. The style is centered around pop songwriting sensibilities with strong hooks and choruses with an emphasis on melody for the vocals and guitar, primarily designed for radio and MTV airplay. The guitar riffs use chord progressions rather than the tense and static tonic reliance of palm-muted rhythm patterns which can overwhelm thrash with a degree of sameness. The riffs are hook-laden with thick distortion and a heavy application of reverb. The rhythm tends to have more groove than the metronomic accuracy of power metal or relentlessness of thrash, perhaps best exemplified from Mary's Blood on the track 'Ready to Go' (Bloody Palace, 2016). Ballads are popular in the subgenre as well and were often responsible for radio hits of the era. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was a hugely successful style in Japan and was a primary influence in the creation of 'visual kei' and inspired the earliest J-metal artists such as Loudness and Seikima II.

The metal stylistic merger on offer may on the surface appear an unlikely success, but Mary's Blood impresses fans in their ability to create the amalgamation. Riffs reminiscent of the 1980s are played with the frenzied energy of thrash while vocal melodic lines are delivered over up-tempo drumming. Solos flow in and out of dizzying speeds and legato melodic lines which reach into power metal territory inspiring audiences to sing along with the instrument such as they can with the anthemic chorus.

Daisuki, a 32 year-old Mary's Blood fan from Saitama has his appreciation of the band grounded in this stylistic diversity and with musical skillset leading the charge.

> **CDM:** What appeals to you most about Mary's Blood?
> **Daisuki:** Well, musically, they are the most diverse. I feel they can appeal to any metal fan.
> **CDM:** They really are diverse, I agree. What are your favorite elements?

Daisuki: Guitar. I feel so much organic energy in Saki's playing. [The guitar riffs] are the most metal riffs in J-metal because they represent all of metal. You can hear different metal styles in them and the history of different players.
CDM: You can detect her influences?
Daisuki: Yes. She does not mimic her heroes though. She is now the hero. Shredding is amazing and then comes the melody![34] Like Malmsteen[35] but then like a Kiss solo or maybe Kirk Hammet from Metallica with the wah-pedal, something like that. She makes it come together.
CDM: Are there different styles of Mary's Blood songs you like more than others?
Daisuki: Yes, but it is difficult to find fault when the musicians can cross borders [subgenre styles] with no effort. It becomes impressive even if I don't like the melody or slow tempo. I can appreciate the musicianship. (Interview conducted in Japanese, 29 December 2019, Tokyo, translation by Yukari T.)

Musicianship takes the spotlight and effortlessness again becomes part of the conversation. 'Organic energy' was a phrase Daisuki used in English so the meaning was clear and returns us to Kivy's notion of 'personal authenticity.' Saki has earned the position of guitar hero and even received a nod from Daisuki, and earlier from Takashi, as the embodiment of metal's history on the guitar. This also lends itself to Moore's 'authenticity by execution' as Saki succeeds in performing the heavy metal canon. This is both literally true in terms of the classic songs she and the band have covered during live performances, and figuratively as fans hear 'the history of different players' in her work. This is similar to the way in which Aldious is bestowed authenticity as member's performances are 'embedded within a tradition of performance' (Moore 2002, 220) but differently nuanced as the tradition is part of Mary's Blood's base of knowledge. They know the tradition rather than just perform from within it, exemplifying Richard Taruskin's idea mentioned above of what constitutes an authentic performance. Authenticity is knowing what you mean, where that knowledge comes from, and knowing what you are when acting in accordance with that knowledge. (Taruskin 1995, 67)

[34] Shredding is a metal soloing technique playing complicated scales and arpeggios incredibly fast yet accurately and with clarity.
[35] Yngwie Malmsteen – famous Swedish virtuoso metal guitarist]

Takeshi and Daisuki's observations are representative of Mary's Blood fan comments I have been hearing for years. They seem aware of and celebrate the metal traditions that are present in the band's sound and this begins to explain why, of the all-female Japanese bands, it is at the Mary's Blood concerts that I see the most diverse range of heavy metal t-shirts; a reflection of the diverse tastes of the fandom and a show of respect for the band's influences (see chapter 2). I first noticed that Chabo, a 50-year old fan from Tokyo, authenticates Mary's Blood, among other ways, via the band's respect for the genre's global lineage, but with particular attention to their position in J-metal.

> **Chabo:** Saki loves Jeff Beck, the rock guitar legends and also the great players of metal. You can hear it in the songwriting. The riffs and the solos. She knows her history, as a player I mean.
> **CDM:** Is that important to you as a fan? That she shows this influence?
> **Chabo:** Oh yes.
> **CDM:** Why is it important to you?
> **Chabo:** That is how you know Mary's is real heavy metal. They know where the sound comes from and the inspiration is legitimate. It is not a forgery.
> **CDM:** Are there specific influences you think make Mary's real heavy metal? Specific bands?
> **Chabo:** Mari likes Slayer for example, so that is one. Slayer is as metal as it gets. Saki loves Seikima II and Show-Ya. She respects Akira from Loudness. This helps bring foreign metal and Japanese metal together. Mary's has a place in that history of metal. They are not just a good band. Mary's is also a very important band, for sure. (Interview, conducted in English, 3 March, 2020, Tokyo)

When asked about Aldious and if they were 'not a forgery,' he only commented 'they are talented women,' but it was clear he was not impressed. A female Mary's Blood fan in her 40s, with whom I spoke briefly about Aldious, confirmed what Chabo did not.

> **Kikiko:** I think they [Aldious] are of course metal. But Mary's…ummm…they are part of something bigger. One can play heavy metal as a style, but Mary's…they are the essence of heavy metal. Aldious is of the moment, I think.
> **CDM:** Aldious has been around for a decade. Are they really 'of the moment?'
> **Kikiko:** That was not my meaning. Aldious was created by the times. They are not connected to the metal which came before.
> **CDM:** So you accept Aldious as metal?

> **Kikiko:** Well yes, the sound is all there, of course. But Mary's is, like I said, bigger. Aldious has the discipline of the metal style and yes, they have some good songs. Mary's Blood is a part of heavy metal's story. Like X-Japan or Seikima II. That is, I think, more important.
> **CDM:** Why is that more important?
> **Kikiko:** I am old and have loved heavy metal since I was a child. I feel connected to band members who lived the same way. Maybe we love the music the same way.
> **CDM:** If Aldious influences other bands, are they part of the history of heavy metal?
> **Kikiko:** Hmmm…maybe. That will be for future fans to decide.
> (Interview, Disk Union Ikebukuro, Tokyo, Interview conducted in English, 30 December 2019)

Aldious fans would likely disagree that their favorite group is not connected to the history of metal as it can be argued those who codified the style are present in Aldious' performance; by technique if not by direct knowledge of the original source material. Otherwise, Aldious would not 'have the style down' as Ryo phrased it, nor have won legions of fans and subdomain access via taste-arbiters like *Burrn!*. But this is an internal taste-culture debate. The difference is inconsequential from an external perspective as both bands are accepted by similar routes of adherence to musical codes and sonic tropes of the genre and the musician's skill and execution, but they differ in subgenre diversity and recognition of a metal lineage.

In a stark difference from Aldious, Mary's Blood did not have an image they personally wanted to express when the group first formed, instead relying on the advice of a stylist hired by their management. In an interview just after the release of their third full-length album, *FATE*, Saki spoke of the switch to deciding on their own look.

> About the outfits this time, for the 1st and 2nd [albums] we had a stylist, and she said 'let's do it this way,' but for the costumes for the FATE photo sessions we just met up beforehand and decided only on the brand of clothes and each one of us had to come up with preparing our own outfit. There was a lot of unexpected deviation when the four of us gathered on that day (laughs). It is not that we were worried, there was no one who struggled and ended up dressed like a boy, in Mary's Blood, a woman is a woman…
> (Interview, Saki, Motonaga 2016)

The final comment was challenging to translate but full of insight. I checked my translation with two native speakers, one male and one female, to confirm my choice of words and my understanding. Both agreed with my translation and the meaning to be drawn from it. Saki was saying that they had no concern someone would arrive for the session dressed in a way which did not reflect them as women since they were now out from under the influence of their previous stylist. Yukari added 'she's saying each member is a woman who knows she's a woman. No one will try to look like a guy even without a stylist present.'

Femininity for Mary's Blood is intentional, and personal, but it took two albums to get there. The cover and promotion material of Mary's Blood's first album, *Countdown to Evolution*, sees the women dressed like 1970s pop stars in shimmering white and in front of a pink-ish background striking fashion poses. In the only music video released from the album, for the song 'Burning Blaze,' the wide shots show the rest of the outfits. Short skirts and heels.[36] While the band would not talk to me about it directly, an anonymous band staff member in Nagoya confirmed the awkwardness.

> They just did it because they took the advice. This was how all the girls in J-pop were dressing. They probably thought 'girls playing metal, it's still girls so sex them up.' Only Saki was kind of comfortable, I think. So they switched to the really metal look for *Bloody Palace.* (Anonymous staff interview, Nagoya, 7 November 2019)

The 'really metal look' for the second album was leather, mesh, and studs. The almost motorcycle biker-inspired outfits were less obviously trying to be pop-sexy but reminiscent of my friend's Kevin quote about the 'badass sexy' look of the Arch Enemy singer. It was stereotypical metal, but still trying to be sexy. 'The stylist tried to avoid the look of the previous album and go with what she believed was heavy metal' the same staff member told me. 'They

[36] 'Burning Blaze' music video: https://youtu.be/08GNcXDuSMY?si=WyztfGqpcObveCou

had more fun with that I think. More confident but it was not really showing who they were. But it was better than the disco dresses.'

The staff member's comments offer additional context to the band's stage-wear from the Bloody Palace tour. Members had replaced parts of the outfits and the make-up and hair looked more natural. Saki showcased the biggest change ditching her leather jacket and straight hair with bangs for a gothic dress and a more glamourous hairstyle. In a 2015 interview for the YouTube channel XtreMusiX Japan, Saki revealed her personal style as preferring 'Gothic Lolita.' Taking more control of their individual looks started here.

The *FATE* album cover showcased a much more comfortable looking band. Eye in long leather pants and sandals, Saki in a gothic lolita dress and large boots, Mari in a simple black dress and Rio in a longsleeve-short skirt combination. The tradition of changing the image for each album has continued with the subsequent releases featuring dramatic, striking, and theatrical changes but none of them playing on masculine heavy metal conformity or anything which reduces them to sexualized pop-starlets. The female fan Kikiko who I quote earlier also praised their fashion choices and what the looks may say about them. 'It looks like they are confident now. Comfortable. You can see in the poses that they are enjoying this, I think. They take such bold chances with style and color. They look so cool.'

Best summarized by lead singer Eye in a 2016 interview, the look has come to complement the band's attitude and approach to music while they feel they are finding their place among those who came before them.

> When I think about it again, it feels like we're a band where lone wolves have gathered together…but when I look at Mary's Blood… it seems like a band that does not look soft or likely ever to lose heart. When I first started I thought that I wanted to be able to become like the girls I admired, so I feel like we're approaching that little by little. Maybe we feel like independent female warriors.
> (Interview, Eye, Motonaga 2016)

Conclusion

Aldious and Mary's Blood stand as the premier examples of Japanese women making music that is authenticated by their fans and media base as heavy metal, and they have achieved this by embracing their femininity rather than masking it. Just as with musical instruments in Japanese culture (chapter 2), there does not appear to be a cultural gender-coding of metal aesthetics. The fan reaction has not challenged notions of masculine identity and they do not appear to be succeeding by conforming to or deploying masculine metal tropes. Authentication as a 'real' metal band does not therefore rely on masculine coded constructions, expressions, or permissions by the media, fans, or by the musicians themselves.

While masculinity was not a factor in determining the authenticity of the groups as legitimate metal bands, both bands reveal that expressions of femininity and their identities as women *do* contribute to constructions of authenticity by Japanese fans. Embracing that femininity, in myriad forms, can be important to the Japanese listener as an element of personal honesty; a trait which is central to performing 'real' heavy metal. The band members' adherence to expressing their intentions and artistry contributes to this authentication and each fan with whom I spoke, and the words of some of the performers themselves, have shown this to be the case.

Unlike my conversations with Western fans, sex appeal and standards of attractiveness did not emerge as themes in the case studies of Aldious and Mary's Blood. While sexuality was an important component of my discussions with Western fans regarding the expectations and possible acceptance of women in metal, it was absent from the Japanese fan's discourse on authenticity. This does not, however, mean that sexuality does not have any presence in the

Japanese metal subdomain. It is in fact a pervasive and utterly inescapable component of the Japanese metal subdomain for female artists. The subject was by no means in this chapter ignored, only saved for a thorough and deserving examination as it held little relevance to authenticity discourse.

Chapter 6 – The 'familiar feminine,' Idol, and ludic sexuality

I have so far addressed the ways in which Japanese women have contributed to the creation of Japan's metal subdomain, outlined motives for their participation, and how authentication is achieved in a taste-culture which can apply strict authentication standards. In those examinations, a sexual dimension has failed to emerge as a theme or influencing factor despite the theme's prevalence in both Western metal domains and the scholarship devoted to them. This does not mean that there is no sexual component at play for female artists in the Japanese subdomain, but it occupies a somewhat different role than likely imagined. In Japanese metal, sexuality—a word which I use here in its broader meaning of the encompassing of matters pertaining to sexual behavior and relations rather than a delineation of identity or related proclivity—is alluded to more than directly referenced and is characterized by ludic behavior expressed through gendered tropes. These tropes are part of a culturally familiar sense of femininity established and perpetuated in the broader culture by the fascinating and complex figure of the Japanese 'idol.'

In this chapter, I will explore how this culturally familiar notion of the feminine is constructed, expressed, and observed in Japan and then echoed in Japanese heavy metal. Western metal's sexual codes and the expectations of the 'familiar masculine' appears to have been replaced with that of the Japanese 'familiar feminine' while exhibiting a sexual dimension in line with Japanese cultural expectation. This then contributes to continued Japanese subdomain thrivancy for female metal artists. The 'familiar feminine' is not to be confused with the notion of 'emphasized femininity' as discussed in Chapter 4. Nor is it necessarily at odds with the concept of the 'oppositional femininity' women are constructing which I address in the same chapter. The motives to design and follow an alternative life-course and the presentation of

femininity which feels familiar and comforting are distinct. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, there is observation of femininity and a multi-dimensional and often non-sexual fantasy component within the interaction between artist and audience rather than an expectation for a fully realized relationship in the real world.

Assumption of the male gaze and the absence of masculine metal codes

From the beginning of my interest in this topic, I had assumed that the sexual allure of female metal artists in Japan would be key in any discussion on their omnipresence and success. I was not wholly incorrect, but how sexuality was integrated and expressed in Japanese metal did not match my initial assumptions. The first time I looked through a female-focused edition of a Japanese metal magazine in 2015, I immediately felt that the artist's visual representation was constructed for the 'male gaze,' a perspective for which feminist theory asserts that women and the world are seen through the eyes of the heteronormative masculine, and purposes everything in its view with being for the pleasure of the masculine (Mulvey 1975, 2009). In the shadow of this perspective, part of my assumption of the essentialism of sexual allure and the male gaze was a self-awareness of indeed acknowledging many of the women as attractive but then adopting appropriate social and academic conventions in order to identify the problematized and politicized nature of sexuality in entertainment and marketing. There was also an accompanying Western cynicism. Sexual attractiveness has been an important theme in female acceptance in Western heavy metal culture, and I had been instinctually observing Japanese metal through the same lens with the same assumptions of intent and meaning to perceived sexual presentation. Just as with *musicking* in Japan, there are cultural idiosyncrasies in the realm of the sexual to be recognized and analyzed.

The women featured in that first metal magazine I encountered—my first real exposure to the scope of female involvement in Japanese metal—were not all posed or dressed in an overtly sexual manner. Sex appeal in metal, as I had come to identify it by Western metal's masculine codes, as well as the adopting of metal's masculine visual tropes (poses, facial expressions, fashion, etc) were virtually non-existent. Most of the women were dressed glamorously rather than provocatively, fashionably as opposed to gratuitously, and some with appropriate hair and make-up for glamor magazines or other such arenas. Some artists were casually attired while a few embraced countercultural street fashions. Upon first glance, most foreign readers would not likely discern it was even a heavy metal magazine.

This was not anomalous. That magazine exemplified the visual branding of women in Japanese metal at large. While there is certainly attention paid to aesthetically pleasing presentation, the apparent inconsistency in how this is achieved—high fashion juxtaposed against street wear, or glamor versus counterculture—in the absence of Western heavy metal sexually coded imagery, is striking. A variety of feminine expressions without reliance on the genre's Western visual tropes is presented to a still largely male audience. This suggests that the Japanese metal audience is not demanding such a coded presentation as Western metal fans expect and are not responding to that which triggers a sexually driven response in the Western metal tradition.

The 'male gaze' does not appear to function in the same way in Japan as it does in Western cultures, or at least not all of the time. While the images in the magazine in question could be argued as satisfying what Mulvey (1975, p.8) describes as the 'primordial wish for pleasurable looking', it is not in line with familiar metal tropes. What I believed a domestic metal

audience may have found sexually attractive was just an assumption based on my Western metal expectations. Additionally, the assumption that sexual allure is the principal cause of women's prominence and success in J-metal, as some obvious catch-all reason for men watching and listening, dismisses the discernment shown in Japanese fan appreciation of the genre and is discordant with much of what I have discovered and explained thus far. If there is a sexual allure being sought by the Japanese audience, it does not appear to have anything to do with specific heavy metal coding.

As John Fiske writes, 'Every text and every reading has a social and therefore political dimension, which is to be found partly in the structure of the text itself and partly in the social relations of the reader and the way they are brought to bear upon the text' (1989, 97-98). What may be inherent in the text is not necessarily understood and appreciated by a cultural outsider's view. The reader is also bringing an expectation to the text and responding to it from within a particular sociocultural framework. In the instance of my viewing that magazine for the first time, I found myself not just bringing to the engagement my projected meanings, and heterosexual positionality, but it was a Western mind doing the projecting onto the Japanese structure of the text in question. It is far too easy for something to get lost in translation.

Sexuality in Japanese metal discourse

There is no observable intersectionality between the sexual and arenas of connoisseurship, authenticity, or subdomain access and participation in Japanese metal. Like other motifs, it is siloed within fan and media discourse but still emerges in certain contexts. Between songs and after the final bow at concerts, men often initiate a variation on catcalling. The names of favorite members are shouted and occasionally punctuated with cries of 'so cute!'

or ‘beautiful!’ While it is not catcalling in the most offensive sense of the street harassment women can sometimes endure (Baptist and Coburn 2019, di Gennaro 2019) or the aggressive Japanese ‘pick-up’ variety one can hear on the streets of any major Japanese city, known as *nampa* (see Abel 2011, Nagamatsu et all. 2019), it is nonetheless intended as appreciation of attractiveness. In lines for meet-and-greets there are inevitably male fans who declare that a certain member is a favorite because of beauty or ‘cuteness’ and offer a compliment only to be thanked as a matter of routine. Fans will discuss their favorite outfits or photos of the artists making comments about physical appeal with hair styles, make-up, and fashion choices all up for discussion. But not once in the hundreds of conversations I have had with Japanese friends and fans has the conversation devolved into sexual commentary. The lack of thematic intersectionality in discourse leads me to believe that none of it has an effect on the artist’s credibility as metal musicians in the eyes of the domestic fans. Sex, or the desire for it, is never broached, crude comments are non-existent, and speculation on personal lives—at least publicly—is kept to a strict minimum. It is perhaps best described as a respectful sexualization. It is simple acknowledgement of attraction rather than outright objectification.

The difference between sexualization and objectification is sometimes not well defined, and I think deserves some attention here. The American Psychological Association’s definition of sexualization is that it occurs when ‘individuals are regarded as sex objects and evaluated in terms of their physical characteristics and sexiness.’ The later portion is reasonable, but the first is assumptive. It assumes ‘objectified’ status accompanies an evaluation in sexual or physical terms. The Collins English Dictionary offers a more accurate definition, defining sexualization as ‘to make or become sexually aware’ and ‘to give or acquire sexual associations’ without being drawn into the political fray of using the term ‘objects’ to imply objectification in its definition.

Sexual objectification certainly exists but the two concepts are not always intertwined, and it should never be assumed that sexualization is on its own a form of objectification as sexual awareness does not imply a reduction or belittlement. The ways in which male Japanese heavy metal fans discuss the women in terms other than sexual attractiveness renders objectification less applicable here as the female performers are not automatically reduced to a single characteristic. There are clear boundaries most Japanese fans do not feel comfortable crossing, likely a consequence of a culturally engrained politeness and socially conservative values regarding sexuality combined with the earned respect of the previously discussed musicianship and the appearance of agency and diversity in their feminine expressions.

One particular post-concert experience of mine best exemplifies this. After a Mary's Blood performance in 2017, I joined a few friends and fans, both Japanese and foreign, at a restaurant close to the venue. When discussion turned to the photos the band members were posting on their social media accounts, compliments for how cute or pretty the members looked in their posted images were expressed. A foreign fan made the simple comment 'and nice tits!' towards a member who was showing only slight cleavage in her stage outfit. The Japanese fans, all male, waved off the comment, patting the foreign fan on the back and commenting 'silly foreigners, always so direct' or 'maybe so but let's not speak of it.'

Going back to Fiske, what are Japanese fans bringing to the interaction in terms of their collective 'social relations?' Are there sexual expectations from the visual representation and feminine constructions of metal artists and how do the artists satisfy or embody those expectations? Image composition and components commonly described as 'sexy' are certainly there and offer fodder for 'male gaze' reductionism. Stockings, short skirts, heels, the occasional display of cleavage (though this is not often highlighted) all may make an appearance, but they

do not dominate the overall aesthetic. Any choices of the intentionally sexual for hetero-masculine appetite and other feminine expressions becomes difficult to ascertain when they are so diffused and incorporated within a broad spectrum of fashion trends, poses, and expressions.

But over the years, observing fan reaction to visual representation, and some behavioral patterns of artists, some commonalities from this broad array of femininity on display do begin to emerge. Regardless of fashion choices, commonalities in poses, image composition, and gestures began to reveal themselves. There is attention often brought to the performer's legs in various poses (no matter the garment). The use of the peace sign held up to a cheek is strikingly common, as is posing standing erect with one foot crossed over the other or one knee slightly bent and turned just a bit inward, often accompanied by a tilt of the head. Modest puckering or pouts are routine as are bright smiles—particularly antithetical to heavy metal aesthetics—which accompany the 'metal horns' hand gesture. The holding of a finger close to the mouth or on the chin is prevalent, often with what appears to be an attempt at 'doe' eyes or a look of youthful innocence. The themes present are too consistent to be coincidental. They point to an expectation of the audience for how women should present themselves, how the women want to present themselves, or perhaps a combination of both. But if one thing is certain, these commonalities are not an expectation of heavy metal aesthetic conformity. It was when I noticed that these similarities existed outside of metal in other areas of Japanese popular culture, and certainly popular music, that I could begin to develop a framework for analysis. There is a distinct *Japaneseness* rather than a *metalness* to the presentation and sexual allure is accomplished through sexual allusion within that presentation.

So what is it which constitutes this Japaneseness, where does it come from, and how did it find its way into Japanese heavy metal? Studies of representations of Japanese women in

Japanese popular music are few and far between, particularly in English. I emphasize Japanese women and Japanese music here to avoid confusion with how Japanese fans and media engage foreign female artists. As mentioned in chapter 1, analysis at the intersections of music, female identity, feminine expression, and sexuality are not common in research on Japanese popular music. Research and journalism on diverse female Japanese acts such as Babymetal (Davies 2016), punk group Shonen Knife (Cogan and Cogan, 2006), and J-pop phenomenon Kyary Pamyu Pamyu (Oi 2014) consistently focus on the location of authenticity from a Western perspective, fashion, or the exporting of pop-culture curiosities. Enka, with its ballads of romance and nostalgia from mature female voices, manages to get a hint of interest here and there (Yano 2010) but it has no resonance in other genres or taste-cultures, and therefore no influence on them or on Japanese popular culture more broadly.

There has, however, been significant interest in the study of Japanese 'idol' and its many cultural intersections. The focus on idol is not without merit as the Japanese idol has been the standard-setting feminine construction in Japanese popular culture for the last few decades (Hughes and Keith 2016, Galbraith and Karlin 2012, Tajima 2012, Huamon 2018). The allusion to the sexual and a sense of playfulness around it found in Japanese popular music can be traced to the idol's construction and expression of femininity, as can most other elements of fan-artist interaction and expectation. It is through understanding the Japanese idol that we can understand what Japanese fans and artists are bringing to that interaction. Idol-informed femininity has permeated Japanese culture and can be detected through what has become a predictable set of visual identifiers and gender tropes; a collection of gestures, archetypal poses, and behavioral patterns curated by this particular cultural phenomenon. Idol's diffusion of a Japanese feminine

ideal is recognizable in the visual presentation and mediated personalities of women in Japanese metal.

Idol – history, significance, and influence

It is important to establish just what 'idol' is and what the term means as a genre and a Japanese cultural phenomenon in order to grasp how and why it has had such a profound influence on female identity in Japan. Even using the word 'genre' is perhaps misleading, though it is not entirely incorrect. Labeling it as a genre may give it musical context for the uninitiated, but the word Idol primarily acts as a classification for a sort of public notoriety or a type of celebrity with a particular type of appeal and function.

Idol is not a global genre nor is it well-known or often explored outside of Asia. Idol's appeal and marketing strategy has been remarkably insular compared to the way other popular music genres tend to look outward with a view to expansion. Even exposure of Japanese idols in other Asian markets took time to gain traction as pop-culture exchange between Japan and its neighbors grew more agreeable over the decades (Aoyagi 2005). This insulation has shrouded idol in an aura of inaccessibility and a sense of contemporary pop-culture exoticism for cultural outsiders. While rooted in the word's more general meaning as in its use by TV shows such as 'American Idol,' 'Pop Idol,' or in phrases like 'matinee idol' referring to an entertainer to be *idol*ized, the Japanese idol denotes something more specific which has evolved from that general meaning.

The use of the word idol in Japan can be traced to the 1963 French film *Cherchez l'idole* (*Find the Idol* or *The Chase*), or as it was titled in Japanese, *Aidoru wo sagase,* and its hit theme song performed by a young Sylvie Vartan (Aoyagi 2005). In the wake of the film's success in

Japan, young singers (pre-teen to teenage) were referred to as *aidoru*, the Japanese pronunciation of the word, later to be stylized in English as 'idol.' While the term was generically applied in the 1970s, it was the idol's domination of Japanese pop-music in the 80s, the 'golden age of idol' (Ashcraft 2010, Galbraith 2012), which can be considered the creation of idol as a genre distinct from other J-pop offerings of bands, singer-songwriters, electronic musicians, or enka (Matsutani 2017). The 1990s saw a decline in popularity for female performers but success for Japanese 'boy bands' causing a commercial and cultural schism between male and female idols. The term 'idol' then became more associated with female performers while 'boy bands' found their own place within J-pop. In the late '90s and early 2000s, the modern age of idol began as female performers returned to prominence thanks to the success of the group Morning Musume (Stevens 2008, Ashcraft 2010, Matsutani 2017). The idol now appears distinct from its former 'boy band' contemporaries and operates within its own cultural parameters.[37]

Modern idols are, true to the phenomenon's roots, quite young, ranging from grade-school through mid-20s and generally considered cute, pretty, or beautiful. They do not play instruments as part of their performance and groups are not 'bands' and never referred to as such domestically. An idol can be a solo act or part of a group, though groups are far more common. Idols are found, developed, and managed by talent agencies who cast performers into song-and-dance ensembles (often called 'units') or sometimes conceptual roles based on themes. Momorio

[37] This is contested. In-depth examination of the use of the term based on gender of the performer is outside of this work's domain, but there are observable signs of idol becoming a reference to only female performers. Some in media and academia refer to males, particularly those under the entertainment agency *Johnny's and Associates*, as idols (Aoyagi 2005, Glasspool 2012, Nagaike 2012, Y She 2023), and the term idol can be thrown around quite casually to mean any young celebrity musical performer of influence, but fans seem less inclined. Female fans of boy bands tend to reject the term, referring to their area of interest as 'pop' or 'Johnny's.' This is supported in the music retail sector as 'idol' sections in record shops appear to be exclusively for female performers while male artists are firmly part of 'J-pop' or even 'Johnny's' as retail categories. Those of an older generation may still refer to male stars as idols, so perhaps a generational shift is underway. However, I expect this to be fluid as trends in music, genre, and scene terminology are always in flux.

Clover Z for example had an anime/sci-fi image with girls taking on color-coded roles openly inspired by the Japanese toy and television phenomenon *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, and Sakura Gakuin (Cherry Blossom Academy) is a schoolgirl idol troupe with sub-units based on extracurricular activities (Babymetal began as the group's 'heavy music club'), to name but two. The girls are not considered extraordinary, which lends to their appeal. Unlike western pop stars who are marketed as 'larger than life,' Japanese idols are presented as 'life-sized'—accessible, girl-next-door types—barely above average in their singing or dancing ability (Aoyagi 2005, p310-311). The management agencies, or *jimushou* in Japanese, maintain strict control over image and presentation, overseeing every aspect of an idol's career and indeed an idol's life. There is strict secrecy concerning elements of a personal life, including a dating ban so as to maintain an aura of purity, innocence, and a feeling of romantic availability yet unattainability. They appear single therefore creating an odd equality among fans (Aoyagi 2005, Stevens 2008, Galbraith and Karlin 2012).

While cuteness and beauty are prized, imperfections are celebrated as part of that equation, and this denotes the difference between 'idol' and 'star' in Japanese popular culture: a crooked tooth, larger than average ears, the need for glasses, etc, can all be seen as desirable kawaii traits. This is the first sign of a lack of adherence to Western notions of sexual desirability in areas of popular music. It is perhaps a reflection of the Japanese concept of *wabi-sabi,* the Japanese philosophy of beauty adopted from Buddhism, meaning to appreciate imperfection due to the transient nature of all things with true beauty found in that which is 'imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete' (Koren 1994, 12). The appreciation is of anything, living or inanimate, and celebrates such things as the asymmetrical, the cracked or broken, and the simple

and modest (imperfect in that it is not the most grand). Standards for the idol are thus culturally defined and revered from within this aesthetic perspective.

The wabi-sabi nature of the idol is also a product of the Japanese cultural disposition of not standing out too much and devaluing the personal ego for the sake of the group (Herd 1984). The idiom in Japanese 'deru kugi wa utareru'—the nail which sticks out is hammered down—which I mentioned previously, is relevant here. It is an expectation of conformity and not the haughty ideal of perfect, permanent, and complete, which could be embodied in excelling to the point of making others look bad. Ironically, the idols do stand out through being chosen as idols in the first place and thus experiencing a degree of fame and success, and fans are encouraged to select a favorite (their *oshii*) to establish loyalty to the ones who may 'stick out' to them. It is an obvious though unspoken acceptance of the need for individuals to excel while using wabi-sabi as allure for support within a hierarchy. The 'life-size' factor is a component of the idol's unique quest for their own authenticity within their relatability. With the girls of an age where they are experiencing relatable life-changes and the pursuit of goals, the fan-idol connection is expressed through a balance of protectiveness and encouragement as the fan roots for the authentically amateurish (wabi-sabi) performer to do her best (Herd 1984, Stevens 2010).

Gratitude is expressed to fans when idols hold meet-and-greet events. Idols are also known to establish a social media presence, making contact with fans appear personal through the 'liking' of posts or even a direct reply. Idols also offer what is called a 'cheki', a polaroid or insta-photo with a fan and made available for purchase during post-performance sale of goods. The 'cheki' becomes a personalized piece of memorabilia which is often, but not always, signed and the photo-taking experience includes 'chat time' where the fan and idol can interact, usually one or two minutes. The illusion of intimacy maintains fandom and inspires loyalty. The idols

who maintain these illusions of intimacy and exhibit wabi-sabi, yet make their best effort, thrive in what has become an ironically very competitive and challenging corner of popular music where some rise above others in a hierarchy of success—even within the same performing troupe or unit.

The music is composed by writer/producer teams and used more as a vehicle for the personality and marketability of the idols as celebrities and the ease of audience participation rather than for the sake of musical expression in its own right (Stevens 2008). As one Japanese idol fan told me in passing: 'The music isn't that important. We want to sing along and dance, but the girls and their own style is most important.' Mainstream idol music is most often easily accessible pop with simple catchy melodies, but this has been countered in the last decade with *chika* (underground) idol. Existing on the edge of J-pop, chika idols exist in many ways like independent bands, flooding the livehouses with experimental images, themes, and sounds. The easy melodies and simple beats of 'traditional' idol give way to metal, punk, electronica, or even rockabilly or prog rock as idols sing, dance, and engage smaller but intensely passionate audiences. Heavy metal aesthetics are quite prominent in chika idol with artists such as Necronomidol, Satanic Punish, Broken by the Scream, Pikarin, and many more adopting the sounds, fashions, and imagery of heavy metal culture.

The idol infrastructure, however, remains. Producers conduct auditions, dance routines are carefully choreographed, and the performers are endearing, character based, and just shy of polished so as to attract support for their improvement and growth. What the fans respond to is the same, whether from a chart-topping stadium act or an independent live-house group. The idea of the chika idol may be a reaction to the traditional idol becoming a standard image and ideal of

youth and femininity, perhaps even of perfection, perhaps making chika's embrace of underground counterculturalism a new embodiment of wabi-sabi.

Idol is defined and judged less by the music's compositional merit and more by its business infrastructure, presentation, and cultural reception. Idol taste-culture is therefore not in tune with the notions of authenticity found in rock or heavy metal and there is little to no attention paid to music as an artistic expression (Taylor 1992).[38] Authenticity is still a commodity but evaluated differently. It is sought in the performer as female embodiment of an achievable ideal of the imperfect—Japanese youth as a symbol crystalized in a projection of Japanese 'girlhood' (Hughes and Keith, 2016). In the performance, authenticity is celebrated as one's best effort and perseverance under difficult conditions such as the pressure to perform, fulfill a dream, balance imperfections to win affection (Frühstück 2005). Unlike heavy metal, there is no emphasis placed on skill and instrumental or even vocal appreciation and connoisseurship in the fanbase is absent. The idol supporter is referred to as *otaku* (obsessive fan of something) and is a genre-culture identity just as any other. But along with the idol as performance identity, they both reflect broader cultural values and therefore a broader cultural identity. The idol otaku and the idol herself are, as Hiroshi Ogawa has written, 'quasi-companions' and have developed through mutual fantasy a sort of professional intimacy (Ogawa 1998). The otaku *supports* as the idol *achieves.* This symbolizes the navigation of modern Japanese life as fan and idol move forward together as contemporaries, as mentor-apprentice, or even as parent-child or siblings.

When the idol industry began in earnest in 1971 (Kimura 2007), the first multi-girl idol group debuted under the name *Sannin Musume.* While this has been translated as *Three Young Girls* (Galbraith and Karlin 2012), that is technically incorrect. The literal translation is *Three*

[38] There is evidence this might be changing (see chapter 6).

Daughters. The encouragement to view the performers as those whom the fans, and the culture, can guide, oversee, and protect, is implicit. There is an implied duty to help them succeed. This had cultural and national significance in a post-war Japan discovering its new identity and finding its way during and after reconstruction to become a global superpower and establishing a Japanese identity divorced from less savory recent history. As idols grew and flourished, so did the country (Aoyagi 2005). As noted by Japanese social critic Akio Nakamori, idols symbolize growth and because they are 'personal manifestations of the shared public desire for growth, they symbolize national growth itself. The fact that idols are socially demanded implies that there is a shared national vision for growth.' (Nakamori, quoted in Aoyagi 2008, p318). This symbolism, encouraging participation through quasi-companionship and its sense of intimacy, was established at the very beginning of idol as not just a genre but an industry, so as idols became central to Japanese popular culture, so then did this manner of engagement between fan and female artist.

Though music and concert performance are the core of idol, the concept has permeated every level of Japanese pop-culture, which cannot be said for any other category of female entertainer. This likely began with the idol's crossover from stage to television in the 1970s. Galbraith and Karlin argue that it was television which really launched idol as a business of intimacy with televisions being available to the average Japanese family coinciding with the emergence of idols that same decade (2012). While the connection between the development of intimacy and the rise of idol as on-screen personality is debatable (TV perhaps reducing intimacy via increased mass mediation thus creating need for the personalized fan engagement of modern idol culture), the cross-platform marketability of the idol, performing music as well as skits on variety shows, acting in television and film, and the inevitable extension into modeling,

cemented the idol as a presence in visual media. They could be seen regularly by every Japanese individual engaging the modern culture around them. This is one of the many ways in which idol may have upstaged a female-centric genre such as enka as a broader cultural influence. Enka appeals to an older audience while the idol's appeal to all age groups, while simultaneously being a product of contemporary youth culture designed for fan and performer to grow together in addition to cross-platform mass mediation, created an image of the Japanese feminine which could last across time.

However, it is important to recognize that while the desire for the symbol of growth or the need for intimacy and quasi-companionship may have its roots in the historical context from which idols emerged, what is now the standardized imagery and modern cultural meanings of the idol is influenced by a commodification of this type of femininity in Japanese culture (Stevens 2005, Black 2012). The jimushou, overwhelmingly male run, essentially controls the zeitgeist if their idol machines of cultural production are as influential to female identity as I and others maintain (Marx 2012, Aoyagi 2005). There are ways in which artist agency and a reclamation of feminine identity have manifested outside of traditional idol and in some areas which have been influenced by idol, but I think it is important to at least note here that the hegemonically masculine jimushou has its say in what constitutes persistent notions and ideals of Japanese femininity.

This is also certainly the case in the realm of Japanese heavy metal. Jimushous are ever present in the workings of the 'girls band' sense and the way in which these bands present themselves. Artists such as Show-Ya, Mary's Blood, and Nemophila are part of the Masterworks Corporation. Bridear has been a part of Alfuz Inc. Babymetal, an idol group at its core, was manufactured and managed completely by the agency Amuse Inc. The list goes on. The jimushou

system's shaping and presentation of commodified idol femininity has had its influence on Japanese femininity and popular culture at large, but it also has had a direct influence on the presentation of female heavy metal artists. While the countercultural and transgressive elements of metal are still present, the standardized imagery of idol femininity are inescapable in metal. But before I examine the threads of idol femininity in metal, it is essential to discuss the standardized imagery and expectations of idol femininity which the jimushou has helped to cement in Japanese popular culture.

Standardized imagery and the kawaii factor

The standardized imagery of the idol is inescapable in Japan. Any image search for Japanese idols will result in a gallery of tropes. From the most successful major label acts such as AKB48 to the most underground chika idols, the visual identifiers emerge. Outside of idol, models on billboards, television commercials, and magazine ads strike similar poses. Women on the street pose to take photos which are compositionally indistinguishable from idol marketing. Scrolling though social media, selfies from idols or those from female friends look no different in composition. Neither do the images from female rock bands or J-pop stars as they echo Aoyagi's idea of idol/female visual standardization.

This standardized collection of poses and gestures are a combination of the *kawaii* and the demure. The influence of the 'kawaii factor' plays into idol's visual identity, as a relationship between cuteness, youth, and innocence creates synergy with the quasi-companionship and intimacy required of the symbolism (Hughes and Keith 2016). As briefly discussed in chapter 1, kawaii is, roughly speaking, the Japanese notion of cuteness which has become an unavoidable concept in every facet of Japanese culture. Cuteness is a very generic translation and while the

word kawaii can be used as a direct translation for the adjective *cute*, it does not encompass the entirety of the meaning. Kawaii is easy to recognize but complicated to unpack. Some scholars have defined it as a reference to anything considered small and delicate, embodying immaturity, but only used in a positive sense (McVeigh 1996, 2000, Yano 2009, Burdelski and Mitsuhashi 2010, Asano-Cavanagh 2014). This tends to be true to the everyday usage and its cultural permeation. From describing pets and babies, to characters from animation and tiny colorful snacks, kawaii is a catch-all term.

Yuko Asano-Cavanagh argues that the word emphasizes and propagates gender appropriateness in Japanese society (2014). In linguistic analysis using semantic primes, she was able to identify a more precise meaning to the complex term, boiling it down to 'when people see this thing, they can't not feel something very good' and 'kawaii triggers uncontrollable affection towards certain objects or persons' (2014, p352-353). Asano-Cavanagh's work identified 'features considered salient for young Japanese women' and these are traits appreciated in and expected of Japanese women. Kawaii school uniforms may attract more female enrollment, fashion magazines encourage kawaii dress and behavior, even writing styles may be kawaii if they are rounded and soft (Allison 1991, Miller 2004, Aoyagi 2005, Tobin 2006, Yano 2011). But the concept is sold in Japanese society to boys as well as girls. Young boys can be described as kawaii and they are just as expected to be attracted to the kawaii in terms of toys, clothes, and animation. As males grow older the word and concept are still applicable in expressing outward appreciation of things if not sought after in themselves. Males at all ages use the word to describe the small or quaint, the cute or delicate, and yes, an attractive girl or woman. Teenage boys can be seen with kawaii television or video game characters on their backpacks and even salarymen coming to and from the office openly play games on their phone with kawaii animation.

It seems as though kawaii is appreciated by males at all ages but not necessarily embodied by them, while kawaii is appreciated and embodied by females at all ages. We can see here the connection of the idol to kawaii as Asano-Cavanagh's description of kawaii triggering 'uncontrollable affection' is perfectly accurate for the appeal of the idol. Each desired characteristic of the idol is something definable as kawaii and therefore a part of the feminine.[39] This is then distilled to Aoyagi's prominent signifiers for visual representation. Even the peace sign, a curious adoption in Japanese culture where it is more well-known as just a 'V-sign' (Burnett 2014) has idol connections to the feminine in its increased use since the 1980s. Jason Karlin , University of Tokyo professor of Japanese media studies, theorizes that the cultural phenomenon of girls using the symbol in photography was adopted from the Western trend of the peace sign gaining prominence in the 1960s and into the 1970s, but used now aesthetically from the desire to make one's face appear smaller, and thus cuter, playing into the kawaii expectation and the want of being appreciated by that culturally encouraged standard (Karlin 2012, Burnett 2014).

In my own professional experience, my questions to heavy metal artists about the gesture have led to casual explanations such as 'it's just cute,' or 'it frames our faces,' and 'it's friendly.' All of those replies at least anecdotally support the idea that there is an adherence to an expectation of feminine openness and accessibility as established by the idol. The male heavy metal artists I have asked regarding their own use of the symbol reply with something along the lines of 'it's just cool' or the Western 'peace' or 'I'm cool if you're cool.' The difference in explanation speaks to a masculine versus feminine usage. The raising of a woman's hands to her face in an effort to frame it is also not just for the peace or V sign. It is done in all manners,

[39] This could factor into the divergence of the male/female idol classification as girls continue to embrace and embody the kawaii as it becomes less salient for male performers.

though always with the hand somewhat open, never clenched. A single finger and thumb may be extended, and curled fingers often representing an animal paw (a direct reference to something cute) are quite common. A popular variation is the open palm and extended fingers creating what can be read as a flowering or blooming effect. The symbolism here is easy to read as fresh, cute, approachable, fun, youthful. The stretching of the hand acts as a means of comparison with the face allowing it to appear smaller and thus more kawaii.

The demure aspects, such as standing with one leg in front of the other or having the hands clasped at the midsection, appear to create an impression of the docile or at the very least, the patient and kind while also somewhat presentational. The leg positioning alludes to the sexual at times as it is most often done when the idol is wearing a dress with a slit, a skirt, or shorts, though there are common exceptions. It also exhibits a softness which may contribute to a sense of approachability. In this way, it can also be connected to the kawaii in as much as it is a strictly feminine pose and complements the other codified imagery. Such a posture can make one's presence smaller and slimmer, never aggressive or overbearing. The contrast with heavy metal bravado is quite striking and while seemingly a mismatch with the aesthetics of a brazen genre of defiance and transgression, such demure posturing tends to win. No Japanese fan of metal could really tell me what they found appealing about the stance as I was met with a universal answer of 'it's just how they stand.' An appeal is there certainly, but at least through simple observation I can draw some conclusion as to the position's appeal in the context of idol imagery. A modified version of this is a straight leg rigid position with the feet together and similarly clasped hands. It deglamorizes the visual impact somewhat and recalls the previously mentioned concept of 'good wife, wise mother' (chapter 1) and this is still relatable to a feminine ideal. It denotes modesty, and I theorize that this also lends itself to an aura of accessibility and a

worthiness of affection. When idols began appearing on television in the 1970s and then during the golden era of the 1980s, video footage and print media indicates that idols would stand in such a way when being interviewed and this was echoed in other genres. At modern idol events, they can do this as they 'line-up' to address the crowd in their talking segments, designed for a moment of intimate audience engagement called the 'MC.' This has translated to all manner of genres, including heavy metal, adopting the practice under similar conditions. When being introduced to a female metal artist myself, or even introducing female artists in business and media networking situations, the women will line up in order to introduce themselves. Questions to fans as to the appeal of the stance brought similar shoulder-shrugging as the other crossed leg position, but one fan at least offered a clue with 'she looks like she's waiting for me.'

Sexual allusion

The idol's appeal, and therefore the appeal of the feminine identity they have influenced, is not explicitly sexual despite some journalistic and academic work (overwhelmingly from Western perspectives) claiming otherwise (see Kim 2011, Martin 2013, Udagawa 2018). Idols can be presented in ways which could lead to sexual response such as swimsuit photo shoots for example, but more consistent and blatant sexual allure would be less agreeable for the various quasi-companionships idols and their audiences are seeking. When the sexual is present, it is less a sexual allure and more of a sexual allusion as the familial, the friendly, the mentor-student, and the fantasy of the unattainable romance (sexless by definition because they are designed to be unattainable and the idols undatable) must all be satisfied at one time or another.

To satisfy the desire for the more sexual, there is a subdomain of idol culture called *gurabia aidoru,* a Japanese pronunciation of 'gravure idol,' which addresses voyeuristic appetites

for the risqué. The soft-core sexualized imagery of semi-nude bodies in lingerie, bikinis, and suggestive poses separate it from idol's primary domain, though it still uses idol's traditional tropes of the feminine and can use the kawaii in a more fetishistic manner. The signifier of 'gravure' was born from within the domestic idol culture using the borrowed English term *rotogravure,* meaning a method of printing using a rotary press with intaglio cylinders for long printed runs of magazines (Lilien 1972). A loose translation of the Japanese 'gravure idol' is then 'magazine model.' The term is not a labeling from external cultural positionality, despite its etymology and borrowed status, but indicates a desire in Japanese culture to compartmentalize more sexual themes in idol discourse.

Gravure idol materials are still tame by Western standards of sexualization, but this delineation within idol culture is perhaps an effort to disassociate the mutual fantasies and quasi-companionship of cultural idol symbolism from the one-sided fantasy of the sexual which can develop from the private rather than the cultural imagination. There is a flood of work on idol and its possible sexual dimensions (see Kim 2011, Suraya and Mukitiono 2013, Aoyagi 2005, Aoyagi and Yuen 2016) and the sexualization of the kawaii (Akita 2005, Sabre 2008, Peek 2009, Zank 2010). But what is important here is the absence of overt sexuality in idol-influenced Japanese femininity and an absence of the overtly sexual from the expectation of the general audience or any particular taste-culture, such as that of heavy metal.

As Jason Karlin writes in his study of television marketing and the Japanese idol, sex appeal is almost never a significant factor in marketing effectiveness in Japan. Sexual inuendo is also virtually non-existent in television advertising, and if it does appear it can face significant public backlash (Ang 2017). Part of this might be due to women traditionally constituting such a large segment of the television audience (Karlin 2012), likely because of the intense work

schedules of men and the housewife role of women. But Karlin also reveals that in Japanese marketing studies, the most favorable characteristic for celebrities appearing on television has been *koukando*—likability (Karlin 2012, Sekine 2002). This indicates that the idol's lack of direct sexual allure is part of what makes an idol professionally successful and universally accepted as a representative of the Japanese feminine. Idols must attempt a connection with such a wide audience through mass-mediation that the dominant factors in the efficacy of that mediation supersede other possible types of appeal. The most likable idols who are capable of generating affection through the varied types of quasi-companionships sought by an audience sit atop the idol hierarchy, attract the most fans, generate the most revenue for their jimushou, and shape the cultural ideals of feminine expression. As all-female metal bands line up to meet fans or post their interactions on social media, it is difficult to not see the influence of idol appeal.

One of the quasi-companionships though is still that of the unattainable romantic. While it is sexless, there is still a physical attraction at work. Sexuality is not directly engaged, but the *possibility* of a sexual reading of a presentation allows for sexual allusion. I discussed this with a chika idol, a friend and not a client, who wished to remain anonymous and is referred to here as Kiko. Her work as both a 'song-and-dance' idol as she termed it, in a metal inspired group, and as a gravure idol allowed for insight into appealing to multiple quasi-companionships and the use of sexual allusion.

> **CDM**: How do you think fans sometimes see or think of you?
> **Kiko**: Sometimes I think it is like a girlfriend they wish they had. We [idols] try to make them feel special because they are [special], of course. We appreciate them. I am flattered if they find me cute and they might want a girlfriend like me.
> **CDM**: How do you know when to project a different image, like sister or daughter or girlfriend, to different people?
> **Kiko**: Oh I do not think like that except for when I do gravure shoots. Then I want to be cute but sexy. But I am just me when I am just performing as a song and dance idol.
> **CDM**: But how do you appeal to different fans?

Kiko: What I mean is that I am myself so the fan can choose. Maybe he sees his sister or maybe a future wife. It is up to him.
CDM: So they see what they want to see?
Kiko: Yes that is it exactly.
CDM: Do you ever think maybe something is too sexy for one type of fan or maybe too much like a sister for another type of fan?
Kiko: Hmmm, that is an interesting question. Sometimes, yes.
CDM: How do you handle those moments?
Kiko: Like I said, I try to just be me and let them see what they want to see, feel what they want to feel. I never go too far with an attitude or action. I want all fans to enjoy my performance. Maybe in that way I am more conservative with certain parts of the performance.
CDM: How so?
Kiko: I do not want to offend anyone, so I try not to be too much like the gravure idol when I am being a song and dance idol. Things like that.
CDM: Is it difficult to try and attract different types of fans?
Kiko: At first it was. I was maybe too sexy. I wanted boys to like me (giggles). But boys liked me even when I was not sexy. So I relaxed and became more confident in myself as a performer…we (idols) want to be successful and make a connection with many fans. I think…we all know this. It is kind of…our responsibility as a performer, I think.
CDM: How do you know when maybe something is too sexy?
Kiko: (Laughs) Sometimes some of the fans will really cheer and look very happy if I do something a little bit sexy (giggles) but others will just look maybe a little embarrassed. I think it is cute, actually. It is sweet they may not want to see me that way. But I feel like I want to please the gravure fan too. So I have to do little things. Maybe hints. Not too much.
CDM: Like what?
Kiko: This one is funny. Sometimes I pull at my top because I know someone may think it is exciting my outfit might fall, but then another may think it is good that I avoided embarrassment (giggles). I learned that from another idol. Both types of fans are happy for different reasons.
CDM: No one wants to see their sister or daughter have an embarrassing moment.
Kiko: Yes! Exactly!
(conversation in Japanese via Skype, 22 January 2021, translated by author and Yukari T.)

Kiko made it clear she aims to be liked by fans who may view her differently from one another, highlighting likability as a primary characteristic, necessary for broad appeal. Not wanting to leave a fan unaccounted for in her performance, she only alludes to the sexual in a ludic manner. There was a self-awareness early in her career leading to a correction from allure to allusion, which she believes has served her well. Sexual allusion allows for fans to continue

seeing ‘what they want to see’ without allure acting as an obstacle for the engagement of other types of quasi-companionships.

The technique of correcting a staged potential wardrobe malfunction was learned from another idol, which suggests allusion is shared practice. Not wanting to appear too sexy was also something she related to a general idol philosophy as they take on what is viewed as a shared responsibility: to create a variety of quasi-companionships. She referred to this during the conversation as ‘*kankei’* in Japanese (a relationship through rapport) and I translated this as a type of ‘connection’ for the sake of fluidity in English. But Kiko’s most telling comment is probably that of aiming to be ‘what they want to see as a woman’ as part of the shared responsibility of the idol. It indicates an awareness of the burden of Japanese feminine representation and an acknowledgment that an idol is the embodiment of varied roles of the feminine with allure taking a backseat to allusion in order to appease the widest view of the Japanese woman.

Maiko, a 19-year-old full-time idol from a large troupe, who does not engage in gravure idol modeling, made similar comments regarding Japanese feminine representation.

> **CDM:** Some fans look to an idol to be like a family member, or maybe a girlfriend. Do you try to give an image of a particular role?
> **Maiko**: Yes, that’s true. I tend to be like the sister I think. It is our job to represent a girl that the audience can relate to.
> **CDM:** Did you design that role or do you think fans put you in that role? Or maybe management?
> **Maiko:** It is natural for me I think. It is what the audience sees when I express myself as a girl. They like to get that feeling of a sister or girlfriend or something like that. If their sister makes them feel affectionate or protective, maybe I can also produce that feeling.
> **CDM:** What is it that makes it a natural role for you?
> **Maiko:** I am short and have dimples, so I think the audience sees me and thinks ‘oh kawaii!’ like they would say to their little sister. I am also naturally affectionate, maybe like a little sister would be. Looking for attention and doing things to be noticed.
> **CDM:** Have you ever tried a different role?

> **Maiko:** No, I think this is natural for me so it is my true self and the audience makes that connection with me. They expect to connect with me in this way. If I tried something different, maybe it would seem false and I would disappoint someone.
> (Maiko, interview in English via Skype, 1 March 2021).

Maiko believes being 'a girl that the audience can relate to' is the job of the idol. Though she feels she connects to her audience via an expression of the authentic self, there is still the concern over failing to fulfil the audience's expectation which convinces Maiko to stay in this role. Deviating from the expectation of her representation of a feminine ideal would lead to disappointment.

This is perhaps the Japanese application of the 'male gaze.' The projected femininity is cast in some role in relation to the masculine. Sister, daughter, girlfriend, or even the invocation of the 'good wife, wise mother', are all from a masculine view of idyllic representations of femininity. Under the auspices of the male-run jimushou, they appear designed and sought after by a predominately male audience. It is not necessarily sexual, and often intentionally in avoidance of sexuality, but a pleasure derived from viewing is still present, just in the form of a variety of quasi-companionships rather than just one 'primordial wish.'[40]

Idol Femininity and Metal

In a 'Merry Christmas' social media post from Aldious, band members in fuzzy Santa hats make a cat paw gesture to the cheek or flash the metal horns ina manner similar to the use of idol hand gestures all with large smiles. The power-metal band Lovebites are typically seen in photos wearing matching white dresses, posed with the familiar idol leg positions, stroking their

[40] There are arguments to be made against this which may be found in an examination of female idol fandom, female agency in the commercial manipulation of hetero-masculine expectation (Iwao 1998) or, touching on a previous point, the mass-mediation of early idol standardization with a largely female television audience. All of which are viable avenues for continued research.

hair. SAKI from Mary's Blood poses with a doe-eyed expression and puckered lips looking upward for a selfie, BRIDEAR bassist Haru plays with her hair and stands with one knee bent looking certainly demure, but almost childlike (a remarkable contrast to her growling 'death' vocals. Examples such as these are not just plentiful, but so ubiquitous as to be canonical.

Fan engagement by the artists also indicates an extension of idol behavioral influence beyond the visual. Artist's social media posts offer requests to support their projects, place an emphasis on hard work, or an attempt to overcome challenges and grow. Scrolling through social media threads, such examples are difficult to miss. The following was an X post, Twitter at the time, by Mary's Blood guitarist SAKI accompanied by a photo showing off her eyelash extensions.

> 'I've been shooting [photos] with extensions and making them look flashy (metal horns emoji) I'm busy, but I'll do my best, so please look forward to it!!! I'm excited! ～(((o(´> ω< `) o)))' (@_chakixx_ - X, 21 January 2021, my translation)

She begins by placing an emphasis on accentuating a feminine aesthetic (eyelash extensions) and using an emoji of the heavy metal horn gesture as a reminder that she's representing metal before the declaration of work ethic and the putting forward of one's best effort, mimicking the idol appeal for support. The final text-character emoji is a kawaii representation of excitement, with tightly closed eyes, the animal-like nose in the middle, and parentheses used to indicate vibrating or shaking with excitement or nervousness. In just three lines SAKI draws attention to her femininity (the eyelashes), contextualizes it musically (the metal horns), depicts herself as hardworking and putting forward her best effort (plea for support), and indicates how the audience should be excited for the results due to the work (quasi-companionship) and then all wrapped up with the emoji (the kawaii factor) and the posed selfie.

In another example, metal vocalist IBUKI tweets a New Year's message to fans ending with 'please work with me again next year!' This is a common expression from Japanese musicians when ending one period and entering another (New Year, following a birthday, an anniversary of being in a band, etc). When working with a female metal band in 2019, I was asked to include a similar message in an English language piece of promotional material. Because it did not translate well in an English language context for Western fans, I asked why, and was told by a band member that 'the audience is on this journey with us so we work together.' The quasi-companionship motif is as consistent in metal as it appears to be in idol. Unlike the Western pop or rock artist who thanks fans for more generalized commercial as well as moral support, the Japanese variety is most often framed as a partnership.

This issue arose with another musician preferring anonymity, a professional bassist in her early 30s. My intention was to discuss sexual allure and the role it played in their success as it pertained to particular members, but it went in a direction familiar to that of a discussion on idol.

> **CDM:** Why do you think the guitarist gets so much attention?
> **Bassist**: She interacts (with fans) most often. We all do but she does it the most and it really strengthens the bond (with the fans).
> **CDM**: Do you want to interact more?
> **Bassist**: Not really. I think maybe they think I am shy. It's part of my appeal, I think.
> **CDM**: How do you describe your appeal?
> **Bassist**: They imagine me like a family member. It's because they think I'm cute and maybe look younger. Maybe the singer is more like the girlfriend. She's taller too.
> **CDM**: Does that bother you at all?
> **Bassist**: Of course not! That's really good. The band can have fans who feel differently about different members. It's my personality to be friendly or be like family.
> (Interview in Japanese at a Tokyo livehouse , January 3 2020, translation by Yukari T.)

Here we see the acknowledgement of different quasi-companionships and the importance that has for support of the band. Even the characteristic of shyness was seen as contributing to likability, and she also believed it was authentic as it worked to her advantage in the group. Her reference to cuteness allows the kawaii factor to enter the picture as she associates her familial

appeal with also looking younger and being smaller (more kawaii) than the taller singer. Though my focus was initially on her reaction to the fan's interaction with the guitar player, she shifted to referencing the singer as the one with a 'girlfriend' allure. Though we never revisited her impressions of the guitarist, the guitarist's interactions with fans suggests a third role within the group beside the familial and the unattainable romantic. The guitarist fulfills the need for intimacy ('strengthens the bond') just as an idol would, and it keeps the fans happy and engaged.

How the quasi-relationships and the particular roles in which female performers find themselves take shape is certainly up for debate. In the case of idols, the jimushou will cast girls according to which role suits their talents and appeal. For metal bands, however, how roles are determined seems more organic, with some women not falling into specific roles at all but varied roles being cast upon them by fans. This fan-driven role allotment is not always the case, particularly if a jimushou is involved in creating the group, but bands which begin in an organic fashion tend to have the roles determined in a similarly natural way, A member of another band, who I refer to as 'performer' as she did not even want her position in the band to be identified, spoke with me about how fans attempt to see her in different ways.

> **CDM:** Some bands seem to have roles in the group like 'the sexy one' or 'the sister' or 'the friend.' Do you feel your band is like this?
> **Performer:** Maybe a little. Too much of that appears too much like idols and we are not idols. But it happens.
> **CDM:** Do you think fans have placed you in a role like that?
> **Performer:** Well, maybe. [another member] is considered sexy and she is just being herself. [another member] is called cute all the time. I am just me and I get a few different reactions.
> **CDM:** What kind of reactions?
> **Performer:** Some say I am pretty or sexy, but sometimes I get comments about reminding a fan of family. [to be seen as] Mother is shocking! It is kind and comes from a good place in their heart but it makes me feel old.
> **CDM:** Do you feel you have to live up to any expectations of the fans for how they see you?

> **Performer:** Only with music. They can see me however they want as long as they are kind and respectful. (interview in Japanese, Skype, 24 March 2021, translation by Yukari T.)

The performer was not cast into a specific role but appears to fulfill whatever the fan may be looking for. While she does not intentionally exhibit any specific character traits to draw a reaction, she is aware that fans mark these roles out for the band members.

The ways in which fans can speak of bands also reflects this. Aldious again provides an excellent case study. Returning to my conversation with Aldious fan Ryo (chapter 3), he hinted at various character types within Aldious, which did not register with me as relevant until I began analyzing fan engagement through the lens of idol femininity. My initial purpose in this part of the interview was to see if Ryo thought the women were sexually appealing and if this might cloud his judgement of what constituted 'authentic' metal. But he suggests a few connections to idol femininity.

> **CDM:** How do you feel the band's appearance affects them?
> **Ryo**: It's obvious they are attractive women, but we still must appreciate the music otherwise we can look elsewhere for just girls who are nice to look at.
> **CDM:** They do play it up sometimes with the dresses...
> **Ryo:** Yes but they are just being women. I think they are honest with themselves and the audience. Sawa is very cute and Toki is very sexy…those legs and the big smile…yeah. Sawa and Toki are such cute personalities too, the way they act.
> **CDM:** Do you think that's authentic?
> **Ryo:** Oh yes. Marina is very beautiful and elegant, and she carries herself that way, doesn't she? Toki too. But they are incredible talents. Sawa is very cute of course too, that's her thing. But that is all real. They are honest and genuine people, as well as expert musicians. They are not trying too hard. That is the real woman who is performing. (interview in English, 2 March 2019, Tokyo)

He points out Sawa and Toki as being very cute or sexy, using 'kawaii' in Japanese for Sawa, makes a point of Toki's smile, and connects their appearance to their personalities. The comment 'that's her thing' regarding Sawa and the 'kawaii' really suggests the recognition of roles and expectation. Though the traits under inspection are indeed mediated, he believes these

traits to be an accurate representation of the personality of the performer, which I originally had only thought important for the purposes of illustrating the Japanese fan's approach to authenticity. Drummer Marina is off-handedly mentioned as beautiful and elegant, but without the 'kawaii' reference, thus placing her into a different 'role.' The 'genuine' to which he is referring is more than the belief in the expression of the authentic self, which is of course still present, but rather what he sees as the authentic familiar feminine. His final comment that it is the 'real woman who is performing' I first interpreted as only belief in the expression of genuine personalities as it related to authenticity, but there is an additional reading: the members of Aldious represent what Ryo sees as his expectation of a 'real' Japanese woman because they exhibit traits of the familiar feminine.

Revisiting my conversation with Shuhei, he makes a few isolated comments which also support these conclusions. 'It's difficult not to cheer R!N on as new vocalist. It must be very challenging, and she is trying her best and brings a mature voice.' This is synchronous with the idol-inspired quasi-companionship and reiterates the importance of the seemingly authentic self, though now also read as what is seen as authentic Japanese femininity. The statement was made shortly before casually saying 'Did you know Sawa really likes cats? She has paw prints on her bass. It's so cute.' Sawa has been cast quite clearly in the 'kawaii' role while R!N, who I believed at the time was only being discussed in the context of singing maturely as a reflection of the authentic, is cast separately as mature *as opposed* to the kawaii. Different role with different traits, but still representing the familiar feminine worthy of support and growth under those idol-esque 'challenging' conditions.

The physical attraction to many of the artists admitted by fans, even though it is often swept aside when other themes emerge in conversation, is courted in ways which are also

congruent with idol femininity. Alluding to the sexual in playful ways without gratuitous display and without offending those who may build an alternate quasi-companionship is very common. Sawa from Aldious is again a good example.

While being cast by fans in the kawaii role within the familiar feminine, she very often is pictured wearing a top showing cleavage and is photographed in positions to make sure it is noticed, though without being the center of attention. However Sawa is positioned it is never at the expense of her kawaii factor. Her skirts are never too short, shoulders are rarely bare, and she is invariably the metal bassist embodiment of the kawaii idol. The sexual is but hinted, not unlike the way that Kiko expressed her attempts to satisfy multiple expectations from the audience. All members of Aldious play with sexual allusion like this to some degree. As previously mentioned, Toki will draw attention to her legs while maintaining a bright smile and Marina will hold herself high in a backless gown, though both participate in the tropes of the idol with gestures, poses, and aspects of fan engagement.

The most striking example of ludic sexuality while exhibiting idol femininity in metal is BAND-MAID. While some fans debate if the band is metal (not dissimilar to Babymetal), their hard rock cross-over appeal, overlapping fan base, and inclusion in metal media warrants inclusion in the research. Costumed as maids, the quintet uses idol femininity by casting themselves in roles which hold a peculiar place in Japanese popular and otaku culture. Appearing in various Japanese manga (comics), the costume of the maid became part of the previously discussed cosplay culture in Japan appreciated by females as ‘kawaii’ and by males for perhaps both the sexual allure of an already sexualized foreign trope and fantasy (primarily the ‘french maid’) as well as the desire to establish intimacy in quasi-companionship (Galbraith 2011). This birthed the Japanese phenomenon of the ‘maid café’, where girls dress as a kawaii interpretation

of the maid (sexual allusion built in with stockings, short skirts, and the explicit job of serving customers). This arose in the otaku center of Tokyo, the entertainment district of Akihabara, known for its many comic, toy, video game, and anime shops as well as unsurprisingly many idol theaters and idol product retailers. Maid cafés offer more than food and kawaii-uniformed servers. The girls will also perform song and dance routines, offer merchandise, take chekis with customers, thus becoming an immediately accessible retail or service idol. The attempt at quasi-companionships and the development of pseudo-intimacy with customers who select their favorite maids and root for their success just as they do idols, makes the maid trope and the concept of the maid café additional vehicles of idol femininity. Former maid café server, Miku, decided to juxtapose the maid image with hard rock, and after leaving her position created BAND-MAID in 2013.

The group casts each member as a different type of maid. Guitarist and vocalist Miku is the 'traditional' maid cafe maid in a mixture of the kawaii and fetishistic cosplay. Singer Saiki has been defined as the 'witch' maid, spellbinding and intentionally cold and intimidating (alluding to the dominatrix). Bassist Misa is the 'assassin maid' in a James Bond-inspired femme fatal role. Lead guitarist Kanami is demure and more traditional, kind and compassionate. Drummer Akane is playful and tomboyish, able to play with the children and still take care of her duties (BAND-MAID Q&A, Sakura-con, Seattle, WA USA, 25 May 2016). Many desired aspects from quasi-companionships are present and all can play with the sexual without directly engaging it, leaving the rest up to the imagination of the otaku tendencies of their audience to which the band refers as 'Masters & Princesses.' In perhaps their most audacious character-driven music video, for the song 'Don't You Tell Me,' the five women ruin the dinner party of their masquerade-masked male hosts and upper-class guests by taking control of the evening and

rebelling against those who ‘cast’ them in maid roles. The ending image, with the band standing triumphant in a mess of a dining hall, depicts Saiki standing over her employer with her foot on his back as he assumes a defeated subservient position. While the static frame from the video has an overt fetishistic quality to it, within the narrative of the video it remains suggestive and playful without being gratuitous.

The manner in which the band celebrates the familiar tropes, and both embodies and manipulates idol femininity, is as close to direct sexual reference as Japanese popular music gets. Yet it is done with such playfulness in character assignment and references to idol culture and otaku expectation that it is simultaneously tribute and parody. Founding ex-maid café maid Miku does not degrade her former occupation nor do the women in the band speak ill of the culture which has embraced the maid trope and its Akihabara-rooted idol associations. The very existence of BAND-MAID can be seen as acknowledgment of the adoption of idol femininity in the culture and the expectations of exhibiting that femininity, and the ludic sexuality allowed, expected, and accepted, in other genres. The familiarity of the idol and the ways in which the maid characterization is a vehicle for idol femininity allows everything BAND-MAID does to appear familiar, playful (avoiding not only direct sexual reference but also politically impotent Japanese feminism), and easily acceptable and relatable for the quasi-companionships and manufactured intimacy demanded by the audience.

Conclusion

Familiar idol-influenced femininity then dominates what first appeared to be Japanese metal’s myriad feminine expressions. While there is still variety in fashion and theme, they are incarnations of the same fundamental feminine construction based on the cultural resonance of

the idol. The history of the Japanese idol allows us to see how intimately the concept and its tropes have been woven into Japanese popular culture producing a 'familiar feminine.' How idol femininity is constructed and reproduced gives us a baseline for understanding how Japanese women in the world of heavy metal present the feminine and why it is so easily accepted in Japanese culture. The differences in demand and fulfilment in feminine representation and interpretation of a sexual dimension between Japanese metal and Western metal subdomain are then put into perspective. Aloofness or a hardened Western inspired heavy metal visage does not fulfill the Japanese audience's culturally conditioned need for quasi-companionship or intimacy. This at least in part answers what Fiske had inspired me to ask about the expectation of the Japanese fan. While the uninitiated assume sexuality and the 'primordial wish' are always at play in heavy metal, the cultural and contextual reality is far more nuanced. The expectations the fan might bring to texts and performances are the idol-influenced symbolic connections to the Japanese female as embodiment of cultural growth via a familiar sense of Japanese femininity. In the absence of heavy metal specific codes for female participation, the 'familiar feminine' makes the artists accessible and culturally relatable. Sexual allusion rather than primal allure is part of that accessibility, but the artists who manage to establish quasi-companionships through the lens of likability and worthiness of support, satisfying the culturally dictated expectations of the audience, tend to thrive. This thrivancy gives J-metal's female participation a cultural inertia likely not replicable in other countries or regions.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand how and why female participation in Japanese heavy metal has been accepted and normalized while the marginalization of women in metal is still the norm in seemingly every other region. I have argued here that historical and sociocultural conditions unique to Japan have allowed the development of a heavy metal subdomain—in adoption of Jeff Todd Titon's concept of music as a 'cultural domain' (Titon 1992)—which was not subject to the conditions and temperament of the genre's Western origins. While the overall argument I have presented is multi-dimensional, I believe the development of such a different subdomain can be broken down into four key components—all dependent on that unique Japanese context.

Each key component contributes to addressing the research questions driving this study. Did heavy metal come to Japan as a masculinist Western cultural expression only to see that masculinism renegotiated or thrown out? What does this then tell us about the genre's gender politics in the context of the music's transnational flow? Is there something in the social and cultural positionality and, as I called it in the introduction, the attitudinal complexion, of the Japanese female metal artist which is drastically different from their rare Western counterparts? How has Japanese metal's reversed gender complexion shaped Japanese metal fandom and how has this fandom then informed and contributed to that complexion?

The first key component, explored in Chapter 3, is the absence of masculine associations with instrumentation and music socialization within the broader domain of Japanese rock music. Access to the core instruments of heavy metal and a social network of similarly inclined aspiring female musicians allows for subdomain participation as well as a role in subdomain

development. The drive to participate in heavy metal was never socially contested, and therefore Japanese women were never forced to navigate masculine driven power-structures specific to making heavy metal music. This then challenges the notion that heavy metal as a genre and taste-culture has an inherent masculine code. It is instead the cultural context in which the genre finds itself which appears to superimpose gender biases. This is in direct contrast to the findings of Berkes and Schappes who have claimed quite plainly and confidently that:

> Furthermore, we found very few cross-national differences…Our data seem to support the theory of travelling masculinity (see also Weinstein, 2011), showing that masculinist genre conventions and expectations travel along with the global diffusion of metal music. (2016, Kindle edition, loc 1483)

This assessment is simply not true. The methodology used to collect data in their study was flawed, as discussed in Chapter 2, with its limitations and inherent biases therefore leading to questionable conclusions. Japanese metal demonstrates that the genre can and does exist with a high proportion of female musicians operating at the artistic and commercial core of the subdomain without 'masculinist genre conventions.' Though heavy metal music originated outside of Japan, perhaps 'arrival' is a problematic way to frame it. As women were part of the construction of that subdomain in Japan, it must also be reiterated that heavy metal was in its infancy when that construction began. The Japanese could construct a subdomain free from certain characteristics which were yet to be defined or considered as essential elsewhere.

The second key component, examined in Chapter 4, is the concept of occidental longing as it relates to the aspirations of many Japanese women. Applying anthropologist Karen Kelskey's theory of occidental longing—the assessment of the West as a 'liberating foreign realm' (Kelsky 2006, loc 94)—heavy metal can be seen as embodying the notion of Western

modernity and a means to subvert traditional gender expectation and its emphasized femininity in Japanese culture. Heavy Metal's 'invigorating freedom,' (Kahn-Harris 2013) appeals to and inspires Japanese women who are looking for something more out of life within the borders and social context and confinement of Japan. Combining this invigorating freedom with a transgressive constitution, heavy metal has been situated within broader frameworks of Western attraction for female musicians to seize as their own territory.

In Chapter 5, I used case studies to illustrate the third key factor: the absence of masculinity as a necessary component of heavy metal authenticity. Masculinity does not appear to play a role in fan and media judgement of what constitutes that authenticity. However, both Aldious and Mary's Blood illustrate that embracing femininity, in myriad forms, can be important to the Japanese audience and media as an element of perceived personal honesty which is central to performing 'real' heavy metal. The band members' adherence to expressing their intentions and artistry in what is again *perceived* as an honest fashion contributes to this authentication. In addition, the demand for highly skilled musicianship inherent in Japanese culture's general approach to music appreciation sets a standard for subdomain acceptance which is not dependent on or defined by notions of masculinity.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss how the 'familiar feminine,' in contrast to the presence of the 'familiar masculine' in Western heavy metal culture, contributes to normalization. While there is still variety in the expression of the feminine, they are all incarnations of the same fundamental feminine construction based on the cultural resonance of the 'idol.' Aloofness or a hardened Western inspired heavy metal visage does not fulfill the Japanese audience's culturally conditioned need for quasi-companionship or pseudo-intimacy with a female performer. In the absence of specific heavy metal codes for female participation, the 'familiar feminine' makes the

artists accessible and culturally relatable. Sexual allusion rather than a primal allure is part of that accessibility, but the artists who manage to establish quasi-companionships through the lens of likability, and therefore satisfy the culturally dictated expectations of the audience, tend to thrive. This thrivancy gives Japanese metal's female participation a cultural inertia likely not replicable in other parts of the world.

Methods, a new career, and COVID-19

When I first set out on this project, I had an exceptional head start. I had been a metalhead for well over three decades and had formal music education plus genre-focused industry experience on my resume. My time in Japan and the personal and professional connections I had made helped establish a solid foundation. What had become essentially part-time living in Japan had inspired my second MA and a thorough enculturation in the Japanese metal subdomain. Yet a smooth start with plenty of momentum was not an indication of a smooth journey ahead or easy stride across the finish line.

I wrote in Chapter 1 about some of the challenges and advantages from my multi-dimensional positionality. Being a white Western heterosexual male comes with its own set of complications and potential preconceptions when in Japan exploring the activities of Japanese women. This was also the case as a heavy metal culture insider while being an outsider to Japanese culture. Yet complicating the situation more profoundly was my emerging status as a facilitator of that 'liberating foreign realm.' My business endeavors (gauging international interest, pitching opportunities, negotiating contracts, etc) were originally not so impactful and could be considered quite casual. The first concert for a Japanese group I was ever responsible for promoting was about six months into my first research year. It was fulfilling, exciting, and

educational but the client was not a metal band and was a mixed group with a male drummer. At the time I had no designs on working with artists professionally in this capacity any more than just helping here and there on a part-time basis. It was not to be a career, or even a job.

Now crossing this academic finish line a number of years later, I find myself running my own record label and having been involved at some point in every aspect of bridging the gap between the unique domain of Japanese music and Western markets. This has consisted of tour management, merchandising, artist management, and a record label with offices in the UK and USA with eyes on some sort of extension into Japan for both domestic support and international preparation. With 28 acts as clients since 2017, only four of the bands I have worked with have had male members and there is but one male solo artist on the label roster—who happens to dress like a woman. 'Other others' are inescapable, I guess. While I have worked with numerous genres, to no one's surprise heavy metal has become my focus. It was somewhere in the second year of my doctoral candidacy that I came to realize that observation and analysis were no longer the defining parameters of my involvement in the subdomain. I was shaping and directing careers.

The Westward gaze for so many female heavy metal artists landed on me, and I placed myself in their line of sight first as fan, then as researcher, then as businessman. I have been the producer of albums, executive produced and assisted in editing music videos, overseen branding and marketing campaigns, and facilitated Western media interviews, press, and performance. I have taken all-female bands on tour, literally driving them across Europe and putting them in front of judging foreign eyes. How these artists were seen and evaluated by Euro-American metal taste-cultures became my job. Creating an international presence for these artists has also had an effect on their careers at home. Some travel more, some have changed aspects of their

branding, and in one instance two groups fell apart and another rose from the ashes all because of a series of events I set in motion.[41]

None of this affects why Japanese women are so prevalent in J-metal, the assessment of which is my purpose here, but it *did* impact my ethnographic research. The way I was treated by the artists and fans with whom I spoke, the way interviews were conducted, and who I ended up approaching for my ethnographic studies were all altered. I do not believe this has impacted my conclusions to any significant degree, but it certainly influenced my methods and presentation. The more involved I became in the industry, the more uncomfortable I felt approaching clients for their insights.

I took two routes which I felt were ethically appropriate and strategically beneficial. The first was that as my company and reputation in the business grew, I sought artists with whom I was not in any way professionally involved. Independent artists who had been active in the subdomain for a while were also more eager to talk, but even those artists were quite insistent on anonymity. Their comments, however, felt more candid and less controlled by management. It took some time to realize it, but this ended up benefiting the research. Names were less important than honest discourse, and looking outside of my network allowed me to tap into a broader pool of artists, all without sacrificing my professional integrity or the ethical dimensions of my research. A few of those artists became clients along the way, and perhaps they engaged with me hoping for a future professional opportunity. If this was their agenda, so be it. I was at least able to enter conversations with a clear understanding of the social dynamics at play knowing I was not the one using academic and personal discussions to nudge them into a business relationship.

[41] This was the end of Lipstick, the end of Mary's Blood and subsequent rise of Nemophila, but that is a more journalistic story for another time and place.

The second route was looking more closely at published media from these more well-known artists. Obviously, I had scoured interviews and articles already published in Japan, but I was convinced that they were less useful than one might think. The first interviews I had read in my earliest phases of J-metal fandom rarely discussed female perspectives in the subdomain and were tightly controlled. Many followed a typical recipe of formulaic questions and robotic answers, so what was I going to learn from mediated artist projections when I knew I would be able to discuss things directly with the artist herself? This proved to be a naïve dismissal of the texts at my disposal. Revisiting an artist's Japanese public press, I began to understand how useful it truly was as I gained insights into relationships with fans, skill levels, behaviors, manners of speech, social cues, and clues to the nature of their own occidental longings. Mining these for substantive quotes allowed me to cross-reference them with other data to find points of confluence, contrast, or support. Since these sources were already in the public domain, names could be used with little ethical risk or uncomfortable pressures on friendship or business. Any useful comments made by these artists in personal conversation or via interview could then still be credited as anonymous, giving me the best of both worlds in terms of data gathering and respecting the wishes of the artist.

I consider myself quite fortunate to have conducted most of this ethnographic research before the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, from living part-time in Japan to being blocked from entering the country during the pandemic did have its impact. Japan enacted some of the strictest COVID control measures in the world, completely barring tourism for almost three years and, early on, even restricting re-entry to Japan for many of its citizens. The follow-up conversations I was looking to have were moved online to Skype or Zoom calls, email or some other platform. The lack of face-to-face interaction severely changed the dynamic with

my interviewees. Their replies became more formal, and conversations became less fluid and less frequent. The near cancellation of the entire live entertainment industry also forced many fans and artists into states of depression. They were less interested in talking about their experiences, opinions, or observations and became increasingly distracted by how they might continue to earn a living or even play music at all. Fans had no outlet, and many brought communication to a close. 'What's the point?' one metalhead said to me in a particularly glum chat. Many bands dissolved, some livehouses went out of business, and with international touring brought to a screeching halt, with my own company cancelling six tours, many clients quit communicating with me altogether.

By this point I had already reached most of my conclusions, but it was a frustrating and demoralizing final stretch for the project. My attention turned to saving my company and pivoting to a different business model (starting a record label). The how and why of women flourishing in Japanese metal had to take a back seat to figuring out how Japanese metal itself was going to flourish. Perhaps the most unfortunate effect of the pandemic restrictions as they relate directly to my research, was how a diminishing Westward gaze and the dimming of hopes for making professional progress, both internationally and domestically, led artists to look inward to take a more restrictive Japanese cultural view towards both their professional endeavors and their life courses. Some female musicians found themselves drifting towards the more prescribed life courses discussed in Chapter 3 out of financial urgency and the inability to access their desired alternatives. Tower Records and Disk Union were non-essential. Day jobs became more of a necessity in a stagnant tourism-dependent economy which languished in a slow post-COVID reopening with a crashing yen. Larger acts and more well-known names could tread water, but they were still susceptible to the shift in mindset. The momentum and enthusiasm for overseas

travel was quickly dampened when travel was banned and the ‘stay at home’ mantra which gripped the world like a plague of its own morphed into ‘stay in Japan’ for the Japanese, both physically and psychologically. How will this affect occidental longing or the Westward gaze of the Japanese woman in the longer term? Could we see a generation of Japanese women less likely to travel, less likely to long for different life paths, and therefore less likely to just pick up a guitar?

As I had feared, once prospects for international travel were shattered in 2020 for the Japanese, the domestic music business took heavy losses as the livehouse and the physical product/retail business model became problematic. Of course, it impacted music domains everywhere, but the Japanese music business had become reliant on a particular business model (see Chapter 1) with many artists, labels, and agencies unprepared for change. The apprehension to adopt new business models or entertain altering long-standing mindsets which I discussed in the preceding chapters was on stark display. Unprepared and unable to change swiftly, some groups disbanded or went on hiatus. Others tried live-streaming events from empty livehouses. The notions of ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’ and ‘we’re all in this together’ managed to work for a short while, but the numbers eventually decreased. Interest waned. The atmosphere of actual live music in a venue with other fans is not replicable under such anti-social conditions as banning gatherings or, if gatherings were to occur, even cheering. Record labels suffered steep losses, particularly those which also acted as the management agency for groups ranging from idol units to heavy metal. One agency staff member confided in me that a pair of cancelled arena shows in Japan for an idol unit resulted in loss equivalent to about two million US dollars, and a lawsuit with the venue and a promoter nearly led the agency to bankruptcy. Another company

had to resurrect a defunct group post-pandemic as it was the only act keeping the company afloat.

Upon my return to Japan at the end of 2022 for the first time in two and a half years, I was disturbed by the slow progress of recovery in the Japanese music business. Compared to my experience in Europe and the United States, where everyone seemed ready to enthusiastically reignite the live entertainment industry, the cautious and conformist nature of Japanese society was proving a sadly predictable barrier to a return to pre-pandemic life. Some livehouses were permanently closed while others saw a slow and measured reopening under strict capacity and behavior requirements, first by the national government and then fine-tuned under authority of their city or ward long after events had already returned to full capacity elsewhere in the world. To add another layer of frustration, along with the mandatory wearing of masks (via venue rules and peer pressure rather than direct government intervention), most regions of Japan maintained a policy of banning cheering altogether. This was not exclusive to live music as sporting events, theatre productions, and seemingly any legally allowed gathering barred almost all speech other than quiet masked whispering to fellow attendees or staff. In the summer of 2022, a Japanese soccer team was punished by league officials with a fine for not adequately discouraging fans from cheering.[42] While cheering returned to livehouses and other events via only small smatterings of defiant attendees in late 2022, venues were allowed to be lenient only if they reduced attendance capacity to half of previous levels (Bassel 2023).

In the autumn of 2021, my company managed the first international tour of a Japanese artist since the onset of the pandemic. Japan's borders were still closed, not opening to proper

[42] https://japantoday.com/category/sports/japanese-soccer-team-fined-%C2%A520-million-because-fans%E2%80%99-cheering-violated-covid-19-guidelines-1

business travel or tourism until October 2022, while most other countries had lifted travel restrictions allowing artists to at least dip a toe back into the waters of international touring where it was available. While there were still some restrictions in place regarding capacity in various venues depending on local protocols, Bridear's European tour put the band members in front of fans who were allowed to express themselves for the first time in almost two years. Their relief and joy of experiencing such an environment was a major topic of conversation throughout the tour. 'We feel like a band again!' guitarist Ayumi relayed to me after an amazing cathartic performance in Amsterdam.

Most artists were far less adventurous. As I attempted to convince artists to resume their paused international efforts or as I resumed my own efforts to create first-time opportunities for new clients, the overwhelming response was negative. They were crippled by a fear of travel which indeed reduced interest in professional growth abroad. The 'stay at home' mantra I referenced earlier was in full effect. Catching the virus was only one of the fears at play. The other was a fear of how putting oneself even in a position to catch COVID, and then potentially spread it to others, would likely result in a sense of shame. This peer pressure to adhere to rules, or even suggestions, was a major principle in Japan's COVID control efforts, and remained that way well into 2023.

A reflection on the literature and research extendibility

Exploring the ubiquity of women in Japanese metal has cemented my concerns that there is an overall Western-centrism and a projection of Western social concerns within heavy metal research in general. This has contributed to what I have come to see as an illusion of masculine essentialism. It is only from the perspective of the Western popular music domain and its heavy

metal subdomain, and therefore a Western frame of mind and frame of reference, that research has really been conducted. Fan assumptions, some of which I outlined via my ethnographic interviews, then often follow suit. Researchers frequently begin as fans so the two perspectives are linked. As I wrote in Chapter One, I too looked at heavy metal through the circumstantial lenses I had been given, and my view had been quite limited.

In my literature review in Chapter One, I was critical of the quest to fit the more topical Western political discourse of the day into a series of 'micro-metal studies' particularly regarding subgenre and various sociopolitical intersectionalities. It appears to me that myriad intersectional interests have been at the expense of truly exploring broader and still relevant topics which inspire and inform all of that smaller niche research. What Weinstein and Walser explained in the early 1990s has become so foundational that it has been not just accepted but absorbed into the DNA of heavy metal studies, and therefore these are the most commonly referenced heavy metal theories in popular music and culture studies. There has been little true challenge to these theories—to what I am inclined to describe as an assumed 'metal studies essentialism'—even though a challenge had been sitting in Japan all along.

The uncritical reproduction of some of those foundational ideas has colored the examination of the crossed paths of heavy metal and *other others;* yet more communities, identities, and affiliations drawing attention and gaining social traction. If the starting point for the research is always that heavy metal is an unwelcoming space because it is so intrinsically and defensively masculine that it dismisses women, then the assumptive conclusion is that it dismisses other others as well. If heavy metal's sexual codes are *not* inherent in the genre, as I have argued here, then what we may glean from studies of other intersectionalities takes on a different character. Research would become less rooted in genre *essentialism* and more

productively rooted in genre *interpretation*. This could lead to vastly different conclusions. Asserting that masculinity is part of heavy metal's essentialism feels like intellectual surrender for the ease of acquiescing to the demands for attention by other others and the trendiness of social justice du jour. I fear gender is too muddy a field, or for that matter too muddy a word, in contemporary discourse to avoid relegation to the passé as the once easily digestible concept succumbs to nebulous and trendy postmodernist thinking.

There is some hope though. This is the first era I can recall in heavy metal's storied history that the genre's Western 'familiar masculine' and assumptions of masculinity as a core heavy metal principle have come under any sort of real challenge from fans. Academia may then follow. Given Japanese metal's history of female participation, and current robust resume, it could have happened earlier but jumping into the global heavy metal line of sight has long been elusive for Japanese artists. Linguistic challenges with lyrics, promotion and fan engagement, an insular domestic music business, and a history of failed attempts dampening enthusiasm for trying, have all had an influence in keeping Japanese metal siloed. With SHOW-YA and Mari Hamada the only two female artists to try to expand internationally in earnest (see Chapter 3), the prolific history of women in Japanese metal had never really collided with Western metal taste-culture sensibilities. However, the rise of Babymetal during the era of the internet and social media has opened a portal to the Japanese metal subdomain, and in many ways the larger cultural domain of Japanese popular music, and curiosity from fans and media has led to wider exposure of what is happening behind Japan's curtain. Academic research now has an opportunity to change as well.

To do so will require three shifts in approach. The first is the reconsideration of essentialism and how subdomains develop sociocultural characteristics. Heavy metal, as

uncovered in my work, is more likely a vehicle of transgression which reflects the temperament of where it finds itself in transnational flow rather than a stoic dictator of monolithic rules across borders. The concept of transgression is more important than who is doing the transgressing or what is being transgressed. Heavy metal does not arrive in a new country as a fully formed ecosystem inflicting a checklist of foreign attitudes on its taste-culture. It is a genre ripe for unique subdomain creation and idiosyncratic localism without using every page from another country's subdomain playbook, even if that country (or countries) founded the genre (see Herbst 2019).

The second is to approach Japan as more than the land of extended careers for Western heavy metal artists of decades past. It is true that these artists can find favorable conditions in Japan for their own thrivancy but, as I lay out in Chapter 3, it does not solely define Japan's relationship with heavy metal. Kawano and Hosokawa's work is the most egregious example. To insist that the taste-culture and the business of heavy metal in Japan dismisses domestic product using *Burrn*!'s failure to feature Western artists to support that claim—while ignoring a sister publication, *Burrn*! *Japan,* that was specifically developed to focus on domestic heavy metal music—is a head-scratching oversight. Lazy fandom is more excusable. One gets immersed in one's own subdomain and settles into favorite bands, reliance on familiar media, and can more easily interact with whatever is presented to them within their own subdomains. If an old favorite act is still touring Japan, this may be the Western fan's only immediate window to Japan's relationship with the genre. For researchers, turning over a few more stones or actually buying a plane ticket and going to a livehouse or record store once in a while should not be such a stretch.

The third necessary shift is that heavy metal's general presence in Japan could use much more academic attention. In terms of the broad spectrum of studies in Japanese popular music,

both international and Japanese scholarship tend to ignore Japanese metal made by Japanese artists for a Japanese audience. The glaring omission of heavy metal was discussed in my literature review, and it is worth reinforcing this observation. Jazz, enka, dance pop, garage rock, noise and other local subdomains have plenty of ink spilled and hours of laptop glow cast over them, yet heavy metal is a phantom. Similar to the trendier interests of Western metal's 'micro-metal studies,' Japanese heavy metal is seemingly only of interest when the 'visual kei' genre and its connections to metal are the subject. With cross-dressing, male homoeroticism (other others), and connection with other pop-culture streams such as anime, manga, and gaming culture, the other others lure attention away from other viable and influential areas of research.

I am not sure exactly what drives this dismissal, but I have a few ideas. It could be the aforementioned assumption that Western metal is all there is to worry about in Japan and researchers believe it is someone else's academic turf. It could be a feeling of heavy metal as a genre and taste-culture being overexplained and over-explored with nothing left to learn from Japan's offerings. Hardly true, but I can see how the inclination could take hold with so much scholarship over the decades dedicated to headbanging in the West. Could this be changing? Interest in the Japanese idol as a cultural phenomenon and research on the intersection of youth identity and Japanese femininity within its own entertainment industry subdomain seems vibrant. Idol's adoption of heavy metal aesthetics, which I addressed in Chapter 6, could lead researchers down the scenic route, rather than the direct path, to discover the importance and impact of Japanese metal. The strong academic interest in Babymetal is a good sign. But perhaps the biggest reason for this dismissal is the insular nature of Japan and Japanese culture. As Keith Kahn-Harris wrote about extreme metal scenes:

> ‘The scene’s very real ‘achievements’ are virtually unknown because the scene is so strongly oriented towards maintaining its insularity. In other words, the problem with the scene is that it *doesn’t* matter enough, but it definitely *should* matter more.’ (2006, p163)

This quote keeps popping up in my mind as I consider Japan. Japan and most of Japanese pop-culture, just like the Japanese language, is shrouded in an aura of inaccessibility. Japan is insular. Japan is siloed. Japan is just…complicated. What is happening in the subdomain of Japanese metal should matter more, but it’s Japan’s own insular design which keeps it at arm’s length. Can that ever really change? I’m not sure. There are counterexamples of attempted globalization. Novak’s aforementioned exploration of the Noise genre (Novak 2013) is one. In my own work I have addressed the success of Babymetal and the international touring of Loudness in the 1980s. But these are outliers, and often fleeting in the international limelight. Why do Japanese acts fail to break the charts or remain relevant and consistent beyond a few moments of trendiness? True breakthroughs into charts and perennial international scene presence (such as the attempts discussed in this work of Mari Hamada and Show-Ya) do not happen. Korean pop can fill stadiums the world over and do so across generations. American rock bands can sell out arenas in every corner of the globe. But where are the worldwide Japanese stars in their genres? It is the curse of an insular industry in a seemingly insular society.

The more we observe the country’s cultural output as an insular curiosity, the more I wonder if the Japanese will fold back into themselves as an externally gazed upon wonder. External examination brings both praise and criticism. In Japan, criticism can often be met with silent resignation and periods of self-reflection to wonder what someone has done wrong, what has been done to offend, and what can be done to correct course. But if that criticism is about Japan itself, or *Japaneseness*, there is a risk of encouraging continued cultural isolationism. A change in this atmosphere has to start somewhere. Maybe we can begin by acknowledging that

Japanese metal, complete with its own female metal warriors, its onna-bugeisha, actually matters.

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Discography

Aldious
Deep Exceed (2010) – Bright Star Records.
Determination (2011) – Bright Star Records.
District Zero (2013) – Bright Star Records.

Babymetal
'Gimme Chocolate!!' (Single, 2014) – BMD Fox Records, Toy's Factory, Amuse, Inc.

Band-Maid
'Don't You Tell Me' (Single, 2017) – Crown Stones Japan.

Black Sabbath
Black Sabbath (1970) – Vertigo Records.
Live Evil (1982) –Vertigo Records.

Flower Travellin' Band
Anywhere (1970) – Philips Records.

Judas Priest
Unleashed in the East (1979) – Columbia Records.

Loudness
The Birthday Eve (1981) – Nippon Columbia.

Mari Hamada
Mission (2016) – Tokuma Japan Communications.
Soar (2023) – Victor Entertainment/Setsuzoku Records.

Mary's Blood
Countdown to Evolution (2014) – Victor Entertainment.
Fate (2016) – Victor Entertainment.
Bloody Palace (2015) – Victor Entertainment.
'Last Game' (Single, 2015) – Victor Entertainment.

The Runaways
Live in Japan (1977) – Mercury Records.

Scorpions
Tokyo Tapes (1978) –RCA Records.

SHOW-YA
Masquerade Show (1985) – Eastwood/EMI.

Terra Rosa
Honest & Faithful (1987) – Mandrake Root Records.

X Japan
Blue Blood (1989) – CBS/Sony.

Deep Purple
Made in Japan (1972) –Warner Bros. Records.