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MASCULINITIES AND CHRISTIAN METAL: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
AUGUST BURNS RED LYRICS

By

Brian W. Bowler

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

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ABSTRACT

Masculinities and Christian Metal: A Critical Analysis of August Burns Red Lyrics

By

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Utah State University, 2016

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyze the lyrics of a Christian metal band through the lens of men and masculinities. Heavy metal music is known for its controversial and transgressive elements in its music, lyrics, and image. Through their transgressive performances, metal musicians challenge power structures informed by hegemonic masculinity. Christian metal musicians perform what Moberg calls a “double-controversy” or a double-challenge to hegemonic masculinity, as they transgress the traditions and hegemonic masculinity of the metal scene.

While many metal bands write lyrics about social issues, it is not typical for a Christian metal band to do so. Generally, Christian metal artists write lyrics on topics of spirituality and personal struggle. However, August Burns Red (ABR) have written songs on social topics, and they have taken a critical stance toward fellow Christians. Thus ABR participate in a multifaceted challenge to hegemonic masculinity through their music and lyrics. Through the lyrics of “Treatment,” ABR argue for social tolerance and inclusivity, challenging the bigotry and intolerance of hegemonic masculinity. The lyrics of “Treatment” also stand as a challenge to conventional individualistic narratives of metal music. Through the lyrics of “The Wake,” they argue for environmental consciousness, challenging the human-over-nature power structure that is informed by hegemonic masculinity.

(77 Pages)

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INTRODUCTION

A *YouTube* video documents three metal bands on tour in Europe (Impericon). We get to see band members answering interview questions throughout the day as they prepare for the show. Two of the bands, August Burns Red (ABR) and The Devil Wears Prada (TDWP), reveal the influence of Christianity when ABR's vocalist mentions bringing his Bible on tour, and we watch ABR and TDWP each pray together before going on stage for their sets. In the comments section of the video, we read the following:

555Lemmy666: christian bands are so damn confusing

David Wissel: How so?

555Lemmy666: i don't kno it's just confusing and shizophrenic [sic]

TheMADmetalguy: +555Lemmy666 your [sic] confusing, and most likely cuntophrenic

The confusion expressed by 555Lemmy666 is a relatively common reaction to heavy music performed by Christian artists. "Christian metal," a highly contested and somewhat ambiguous genre label itself, has received criticism both from Christian communities and metal communities (Moberg, "The Double Controversy..."). Christians might claim that the music and its "satanic" origins are inherently unredeemable, and therefore metal cannot be Christian. At the same time metal fans, like 555Lemmy666, perceive a conflict with Christianity and the transgressive ideology that has always informed heavy metal's rhetoric. In addition to the initial confusion expressed by 555Lemmy666, TheMADmetalguy's responses also illustrates a misogynistic, and often homophobic, tone that is stereotypically associated with heavy music cultures. This rhetoric of othering with gender or sexually discriminatory language is a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, and it is pervasive in the heavy music scene.

The online music scene is a site rich with examples of hegemonic masculinity, and online communities have become an integral part of the music industry. Discourse on these online spaces reveals the tone of the culture surrounding the music. The above conversation quickly moved from confusion at the perceived conflict between heavy music and Christian beliefs and practice to an expression of masculine power over the Other. In doing so, TheMADmetalguy dodges the issue brought up by 555Lemmy666, and that issue is one I wish to address. How does a Christian band operate within the rhetorical atmosphere of the metal scene? Rather than attempting an empirical survey of all Christian metal bands, I will look to understand how one band from this video—August Burns Red—navigates and performs gender and religious identities through its lyrics.

August Burns Red (ABR), the headline band of the tour featured in the video mentioned, have been together since 2003 with a consistent lineup since 2006 when they recorded their breakthrough album, *Messengers* (2007). The band is known for their heavy metalcore sound and high-energy live performances.¹ They are also known for their Christian beliefs that inform the lyrics and the band members' beliefs and lifestyles. August Burns Red sits at a performative crossroads of religion, music, and gender. This thesis will examine how masculinities are performed in the band's lyrics, focusing specifically on the way that their lyrics both criticize and exercise hegemonic masculinity.

When I began this project, I imagined that Christian metalcore bands would have a unique way of performing masculinities through their music. For example, I thought

¹ Metalcore and other metal subgenres are discussed in detail in the section "Hegemony and Performance..."

their lyrics might come across as less abrasive or violent than their non-Christian metalcore counterparts. However, I have discovered that Christian metal bands tend to conform to the conventions of their genre or subgenre. What sets them apart is simply the ideological lens through which they articulate their lyrical themes—whether they involve violence, politics, or personal struggle. The articulations of those themes still follow the rhetoric of the heavy metal genres which will be further discussed in the next section, “Hegemony and Performativity in Masculinities and Metal Music.”

Having a Christian identity, however, does allow these metal bands to direct their lyrics to a Christian audience as an insider. Countless metal bands have written lyrics critical of religion, but from an outsider’s perspective. For example, “Unanswered” by the deathcore band Suicide Silence addresses prayers that are never answered and contains the lyric, “Where is your god? Where is your fucking god?” By asking this rhetorical question, Suicide Silence suggests that there is no god and criticizes people who believe in and pray to a supreme being. Alternatively, the Christian deathcore band Impending Doom writes, “Where you’re going there is no fame or glory / Bashing everything I believe,” in their song “Angry Letters to God,” insinuating that those who criticize and mock Christianity will go to Hell after they die. These two songs share many of the same musical characteristics—harsh screamed and growled vocals, minor key signatures, and heavily distorted guitars. Also, the lyrics are written in a similar rhetorical form, where each song has a speaker, “I,” who directs an argument to a generalized “you” to criticize their point of view. Both songs also invoke images of violence and death to emphasize their argument. What separates them is that one song is written by an atheist and the other by a Christian, each arguing in favor of their respective non-religious and

religious worldviews using the same musical and lyrical movements to convey these contradicting messages.

A significant body of scholarly work has been done on gender and sexualities in metal music, and some academics have written about Christian metal. This thesis will begin to bring together these existing conversations on gender and religious expression in metal music to create a focused qualitative case study of masculinities performed by and through one Christian metal band.

CHAPTER 1

HEGEMONY AND PERFORMANCE IN MASCULINITIES AND METAL
MUSIC

The purpose of this section is to establish the theoretical framework for my argument. To do this, I will provide definitions for the following terms: *performativity*, *hegemonic masculinity*, and *scene*. “Performativity” will draw from theories developed by Judith Butler, among other post-modernists, to establish what gender *is*—that is, a *doing* or *process*, rather than a thing of substance. “Hegemonic masculinity” is a term popularized by sociologist R.W. Connell in her book *Masculinities*, originally published in 1995.² Hegemonic masculinity describes the way in which gender operates as a system of power, namely where men have power over women, and where some men have power over other men. Finally, “scene” serves to describe the shape, operation, and intersectionality of music subcultures. This term will be important to understand as it relates to the ways that lyrics help represent the culture and ideologies within an evolving music scene.

Gender and Masculinity

In the ongoing conversation on gender equality in academic and popular discourse, many still debate the very definition of gender, some calling it wholly a social construct, some claiming that gender is a natural development of a person’s biological sex.³ My working definition of gender will stem largely from the concept of

² I will be using the second edition for references, published in 2005.

³ Popular sources, including self-help books such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray 1992) and *Why Gender Matters* (Sax 2005), often promulgate gender essentialism and the gender binary.

performativity. Not only does this theory reject the gender binary and essentialism, which assert that gender is limited to “men” and “women” and predetermined by biological sex, the theory of performativity defines gender as a “doing” (Butler 24), where gender is conceptualized as a set of actions and behaviors one *performs* rather than a set of attributes that make a person what, or who, they *are*.

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler contextualizes her argument on gender performativity in conversation with theories developed by de Beauvoir, Kristeva, Irigaray, Foucault, and Wittig. She expounds on the idea of gender being a social construct and explains how gender should be understood as a verb—a process—rather than a noun or adjective to describe what or who a person is.

[G]ender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing. (Butler 24-25)

First, Butler builds her argument for what gender is not; it is not a person, place, thing, or idea. According to her, gender does not exist within the “metaphysics of substance;” it is not a tangible item or concrete concept (Butler 25). Instead, gender is “performatively produced,” or constructed through a series of actions that match or challenge cultural concepts of gender. To illustrate, a “man” is not a man because of his reproductive organs or chromosomes. Rather a person is being a man through the socialization of his body and combination of language and behaviors which match or

The ideas of essentialism and binary have also been reified historically by Western tradition (particularly Judeo-Christian religious philosophy) and early modernist thought, such as Freud’s psychoanalytic theories. Some important feminist works that have contested the gender binary and gender essentialism include *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir 1953), *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963), *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990), *Gender Thinking* (Smith 1992), *Space, Time, and Perversion* (Grosz 1995), *Delusions of Gender* (Fine 2010), and *Essentially Speaking* (Fuss 2013).

depart from the cultural construct of “man.” His gender is defined by how well he lives up to the cultural values that construct a man, and if he falls short, he may be told to “man up,” “be a man,” or “take it like a man.” In other words, gender is not a thing, or category, which a person *is* at a given point in time and space. Instead, gender is a part of the act of identity a person is *performing* over a given period of, or at a point in, time and space. Given the infinite variety of possible performances, the language used to signify sex and gender becomes problematic. For example, the term “gay” may be a fair term to describe a person’s sexual orientation, but the term becomes problematic when generalized and applied to “the gay community” or when a political pundit discusses the “gay agenda,” as if every person with a queer sexual orientation had identical cultural and political values and goals. It is no more fitting to assume that “man” or “men” can be useful in identifying a person or group in a very meaningful and accurate way without being guilty of ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony.

Butler comments on the difficulties that arise when gender is at the forefront of social identity, and when gender is merely supplemented by other social identity constructs when describing an individual or group: “It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category ‘women’ that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to be complete” (15). For Butler, the individual human experience is too complex to allow a simple signifier to accurately represent any person or group of people. In addition, to place a construct of the gender binary—such as *man* or *woman*—at the forefront of identity inadvertently validates the gender binary and devalues other aspects of identity such as sexuality, race, and class.

In this sense, gender is not only performative, but it is intersectional, meaning gender is merely a part of a larger tapestry of human experience, identity, and performance. Queer individuals, people of color, and working class men and women each experience different forms of oppression, discrimination, or privilege depending on their social environment, culture, and personal experiences. Furthermore, variance between experiences of individuals in different settings cannot be adequately summed up by arbitrary social constructs. The complexity of intersectional identities gives way to pluralized gender signifiers, namely “femininities” and “masculinities,” meaning there are multiple ways to act as a man or woman.

Postcolonial and postmodern feminists have offered criticisms of mainstream Western feminism, the study of masculinity has also involved the concept of plurality.⁴ Connell’s *Masculinities* pioneered and helped popularize the concept of plurality as it applies to masculinity (Connell 76). She argues that the complexities of individual human experience influenced by culture, language, socioeconomic status, and sexuality negate the possibility of a homogeneous *masculinity* or *manhood*, despite a persistent assumption that there is such a thing as a “real man.” The illusion of a “real man” is representative of *hegemonic masculinity*, a term suggesting that within any given patriarchal culture, there exists a form of masculinity that claims power and authority at the top of a gender hierarchy.

Hegemonic masculinity constitutes a set of power dynamics in which certain performances, deemed masculine or manly, are esteemed above feminine performance

⁴ Notable works of postmodern feminist thought: hooks, bell. *Ain’t I a Woman?* 1981.; Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 1987.; Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. 1990.; Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. 2003.

and subjugated masculinities. Performative dimensions of gender are “fundamentally linked to power” as some gender performances are esteemed to be of greater cultural value than others (Connell 42). For example, a man who drives a more expensive car than another man, suggesting greater wealth, will be given more social rewards for possessing culturally valued resources that validate his masculinity. Owning and driving a new BMW is a performative act tied to the relationship between wealth and masculinity. As this example illustrates, hegemonic masculinity occupies a dominant position of power and extends beyond men’s subordination of women.

“Masculinities are constructed in a field of power: 1) the power of men over women; 2) the power of some men over other men” (Kimmel, “Invisible Masculinity” 30). Men who perform in ways that are perceived as less than the “real man” ideal fall into a position of subordinate masculinities and are oppressed by the patriarchal system alongside their female counterparts. Kimmel writes, “Invisibility reproduces inequality. And the invisibility of gender to those privileged by it reproduces the inequalities that are circumscribed by gender” (30). By examining the relationship between masculinity and power, Kimmel provides the rationale for hegemonic masculinity encompassing forms of discrimination and intolerance:

Men's power over other men concerns the distribution of those rewards among men by differential access to class, race, ethnic privileges, or privileges based on sexual orientation—that is, the power of upper and middle class men over working class men; the power of white and native-born men over non-white and/or non-native born men; and the power of straight men over gay men. The constituent elements of "hegemonic"

masculinity, the stuff of the construction, are sexism, racism, and homophobia.

(“Invisible Masculinity” 30)

The key element in understanding masculinities is the role of power, specifically social power and the distribution of social capital (Connell 42). The power dynamic in hegemonic masculinities generates a great deal of anxiety among men because hegemonic masculinity demands conformity to the mythical norm. Nonconformity is met with insults, violence, and othering. Ironically, the complexities of individual human experience influenced by culture, language, socioeconomic status, sexuality, age, etc. negate the possibility of a homogeneous *masculinity* or *manhood*, despite a persistent assumption that there is such a thing as a “real man.”

Here it is worth mentioning that expressions of hegemonic masculinity can vary from culture to culture and within different historical contexts. In *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996), Michael Kimmel chronicles the evolution of popular ideas in American culture from the “self-made man” in early America—measured mostly in ownership of property and capital—to white-collar middle-class men of the twentieth century. Kimmel accounts for hegemonic masculinity as it relates to white men in the United States while other works, such as bell hooks’ *We Real Cool* (2004) have studied the lives of black men in United States and the struggle to navigate hegemonic masculinity in a society that devalues them, and the creation of hegemonic masculinities within their own cultures. Other ethnographic works examine manhood in cultures outside of the US. One notable example that highlights the differences between Western and non-Western masculinities is an account of tribes in Papua New Guinea, wherein young men swallow the semen of older men as a rite of passage into manhood (Herdt). A

homosexual act like this surely might seem antithetical to the homophobic nature of hegemonic masculinity in Western cultures, but it remains an important part of those Papua New Guinea tribes' construction and performance of masculinity.

Gender and Metal

Gender and masculinity are amplified when it comes to extreme forms of music: heavy metal being a prime example. When I began this project, I thought metal was wrought with examples of hegemonic masculinity. I pictured metal musicians and fans as macho men who had a strict code of what is masculine and what is feminine. The more I learned about metal music, however, I have found that metal more often acts as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity than an exercise of it.

Gender, power, and performance have been the focus of some key works in metal music studies. In *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993), Robert Walser explores metal as a site for gender construction and performance. Walser explains that “notions of gender circulate in the texts, sounds, images, and practices of heavy metal, and fans experience confirmation and alteration of their gendered identities through their involvement with it” (109). In other words, metal musicians construct and perform their gender, and the audience receives the constructs as an affirmation of their preconceived ideas about it, or they see the band's performance as a challenge to gender and may change their ideas about it in response. Walser goes on to describe the instability of gender performance within metal music: “metal's negotiations of the anxieties of gender and power are never conclusive...representations [of gender] can never be definitive or totally satisfying [which] means that they are always open to

negotiation and transformation” (110). Heavy metal is not meant to offer answers or resolutions to the problems of gender. Instead, the culture of heavy metal has often gone at lengths to problematize gender and masculinity. Metal artists have a tradition of challenging gender norms, as is further explored by writers David Pattie and Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone.

In *Rock Music in Performance* (2007) Pattie states, “there is no reason why simple gender categories should be used in the analysis of rock performance; such simple categories do not exist, and arguably have never existed,” suggesting that using an essentialist gender binary is moot for studying metal music (44). Beside rock and metal musicians’ constant “queering” of gender, Pattie argues that “rock music in performance is predicated on...masculinity in crisis” which “allows the codes of male behaviour and identity to be mixed and matched with such abandon” (44). According to Pattie, rock music is inherently masculine, but its masculinity is unstable and ever-changing. In response to Pattie and Walser’s arguments, among others such as Deena Weinstein (*Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*, 1991; *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 2000) and Laina Dawes (*What are You Doing Here? A Black Woman’s Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal*, 2013), Clifford-Napoleone wrote *Queerness in Heavy Metal Music: Metal Bent* (2015) to argue that there is a false but popular narrative which suggests that metal music is mostly produced and consumed by white, heterosexual, cisgender men; and Clifford-Napoleone asserts that heavy metal “is resolutely a queer space” (5). She points to prominent musicians in the metal scene who either identify as LGBT or who are outspoken LGBT allies and cites a case of musicians calling for a boycott of products sold by a company owner who once made a homophobic remark. In

spite of appearance and popular (mis)conceptions, and in spite of Internet comments riddled with sexist and homophobic slurs, the metal scene is anything but homogeneous and heteronormative.

Masculinity and Metal Lyrics

Since gender performance is such an overt aspect of metal culture, the metal “scene” then becomes an ideal place to study hegemonic masculinities. If gender is a performative power struggle, what arguments are being made in metal music’s discourse community concerning gendered power? The metal community contains numerous places to look for answers to this question, whether it be the girl selling band T-shirts at a concert, controlled violence in a mosh pit, or YouTube comments where users insult each other with “pussy” and “faggot” and comment on videos of bands with female players about their bodies versus their musical talent. All these are sites of the metal music “scene” which I will define more thoroughly. Aside from these ethnographic fields, however, metal music and lyrics provide a space where hegemonic masculinities are performed. Analysis of the lyrics will be the primary focus of this study, and some attention will be given to the music as it provides a sonic texture for the delivery of the lyrics.

Masculine power permeates heavy metal as songwriters create “ideological representations of manhood, demonstrating individualism through extreme domination, or conversely, through extreme suffering” (Rafalovich 20). Metal lyrics will often illustrate a dialogue between a first-person speaker and an outside party, signified by a generalized “you.” Through the song, the individual speaker will seek to gain power over

the “you” who has wronged the speaker, thus regaining his position over the other and rising in the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity. One example of this is Rage Against the Machine’s song “Killing in the Name Of” and the lyric, “Fuck you, I won’t do what you tell me.” This line is infinitely applicable to situations faced by the band’s audience wherein they feel they are the victims of power imbalance. The generalized “you” is used so that listeners can feel empowered to take on the conflicts and challenges in their own lives. This structure between the wronged speaker and the outside party creates a context for engaging with issues of hegemonic masculinity.

In his analysis of metal lyrics, Rafalovich illustrates that “lyrical themes in contemporary metal music are increasingly introspective and describe an antagonism between the self and outside forces” (23). In commenting on the themes of individual masculinity, he states, “Seeking comfort in others is rarely explored as the self retreats into isolation, hatred, and self-destruction” (23). In contemporary metal lyrics, then, the first-person speaker is left to stand alone and face his trials and adversaries “like a man.” I will be examining lyrics as artifacts of the culture and evidence of conversations that many may not know are taking place in the metal scene, and may not realize are evident of hegemonic masculinities at play.

Heavy Metal as Music Genre and Scene

In conjunction with lyrics, it is important to indicate what musical elements define heavy metal as a genre, how metal subgenres and scenes are defined, and what methods can be used to interpret the musical rhetoric of the metal genre. Derek B. Scott notes that “music and language are both signifying practices and both make use of arbitrary

signifiers” (9). This is not to state that music *is* language, but rather that it operates in the same way. Just as language is a combination of linguistic elements combined to carry ideas from author to audience, so too are musical elements arranged to carry metaphysical ideas and emotions from musician to listener. With the comparison between language and music in mind, we can think of genres and subgenres of music as languages and dialects. People in the heavy metal scene—or, more colloquially, metalheads—speak a common musical language.

Robert Walser describes that the musical language of metal as one that “articulates a dialectic of controlling power and transcendent freedom” (108). Heavy metal, Walser argues, is about musical extremes: “Metal songs usually include impressive technical and rhetorical feats on the electric guitar, counterposed with an experience of power and control that is built up through vocal extremes, guitar power chords, distortion, and sheer volume of bass and drums” (108). Metal music is arranged with volume, speed, and electronic distortion in a way that acts like an assault on the senses. Hence, metalheads will use terms like *heavy*, *crushing*, or *brutal* to describe music that has impressed or moved them in a positive way. Heavy metal is an aggressive articulation of power through its music and lyrics.

Another definitive characteristic of metal music is its engagement with transgression. More recently, Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and Levine wrote an article titled “Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture” in which they explore metal music’s tradition of transgression: “[W]herever it is found and however it is played, metal tends to be dominated by a distinctive commitment to ‘transgressive’ themes and musicality” (2012). Metal musicians have a tendency to go against the norms and expectations of

musical composition and instrumentation. This is what led early metal musicians, such as Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, and Black Sabbath, to overdrive and distort their guitars—because guitar players were not supposed to overdrive their amplifiers. As metal has evolved, distortion has remained a key element of the musical language.

This idea of transgression gets complicated when considering that a genre is supposed to have a set of common musical traits. If playing metal means going against the conventions of popular music, would playing clean classical music be a more “metal” thing to do than shred on an electric guitar? Some might argue that is so, especially some of the progressive metal artists such as Between The Buried And Me who like to mix classical strings, piano, and clean singing with their thrashing guitar riffs and drum beats. After all, one of the most successful metal groups of the 1980’s was Queen, and they were notorious for their use of operatic musical styles. Metal subgenres tend to evolve as artists mix that which is not thought of as metal with that which already is.

Just as a common language can contain an infinite variety of dialects, genres of music also give way to a never-ending list of subgenres. Subgenres of metal are constantly evolving, and definitions are created organically and often debated within the metal scene. August Burns Red has been categorized as “metalcore,” a portmanteau of metal and hardcore, signifying the styles of heavy metal and hardcore punk both being used in the music. However, “metalcore” lacks a formal authoritative definition, and the term itself is somewhat arbitrary. Ergo, the function and definitions of music genres are similar to gender. Definitions are non-fixed and are determined by how closely a performance adheres to a socially constructed pattern.

A contemporary example of the discussion surrounding genre can be found in a video discussion between anthropologist Sam Dunn and musician Liam Cormier (Banger TV). Their discussion was broadcast live, and they received real-time feedback from the heavy metal community as they organized and revised a list of metalcore bands in an attempt to define the genre. Dunn and Cormier conclude that the music is characterized by screamed and growled vocals similar to those in death metal and black metal. Choruses and bridges are often punctuated with melodic “clean” vocals. Songs will often be played at high tempos, sometimes reaching over 200 beats per minute. Guitars are played with heavy electronic distortion. The music composition is characterized by its use of fast minor key riffs and breakdowns—segments with a slowed-down tempo and palm-muted “chugs” from the guitar. Lyrics of metalcore will use personal narratives to discuss political and social topics.

Heavy metal and its subgenres make up music scenes. The term *scene* is used by participants and scholars to describe communities and subcultures in the world of music production, consumption, and fandom. Many scholars have commented on “scene” as a theoretical framework and type of ethnographic site. To introduce the term, Marcus Moberg defines it as it relates to the relationship between music and listener communities.

Essentially, a scene is formed when a number of people in a certain place, with a shared passion for a particular kind of music, come together and develop a wide range of other practices, discourses, aesthetics and styles in relation to that particular form of music. Hence, the term scene is also frequently used by people within popular music

cultures, most often as a means of conceptualizing being part of a community of shared musical passions and interests. (Moberg “The Internet...” 83)

With Moberg’s definition in mind, “scene” can be thought of as the place where subcultures happen. People who inhabit a certain space and listen to similar music create clothing styles, language patterns, and behaviors that become associated with that location and music genre. In other words, members of the LA hardcore punk scene will act, dress, and talk in certain ways that authenticate “true” LA hardcore punk. If a person travels to Boston, or Washington DC, they may encounter a different localized hardcore punk scene with its own social code. The Boston hardcore scene may share many of the styles and practices of the LA scene, but there will almost certainly be notable differences. Clifford-Napoleone describes a music scene as “the cultural space within which newcomers are initiated, educated, and transformed into insiders...a musical scene is less defined by the sound than the social interactions that render such scenes authentic” (17). In this sense, “scene” is more than a synonym for “subculture” because it signifies the “space” where subculture is practiced, constructed, and deconstructed. Jodie Taylor elaborates the point of scenes being transient sites, stating, “a scene produces an array of signifiers that dynamically mediate and synergize local and global aesthetics, which in the process of their unfolding contest sameness and coherency and convey indeterminacy, differentiation and flux” (147). In other words, scenes are always changing as new music is produced and performed, and as scenes interact with one another and spread. This means that a scene has an ongoing and ever-evolving conversation laced with hegemonic masculinities and gender performance, often captured in lyrics.

Scenes are ever-evolving sites of performance and identity negotiation. The scene members, from the guys and girls on stage and in the moshpit to the kid listening to the music in their bedroom, are engaged in a performance of gender. The musicians perform their gender, or at least an onstage persona or character that is gendered. Gender work goes on in the crowd as men pump their sweaty, and in many cases, shirtless bodies against one another, and as the audience witnesses the gendered performance on stage. Genders are performed through the lyrics, especially in metal as the songwriters negotiate power struggles with undertones of masculine individualism. Each gender performance is interwoven with and driven by power dynamics (hegemonic masculinity), developing a culture and ideology that is articulated through music filled with angst, crisis, and aggression. It is the perfect place to witness gender and masculinity turned up to eleven.

CHAPTER 2

“SO SICK OF YOUR BIGORTY”: CRISTIAN METAL AND THE RHETORIC OF
SOCIAL TOLERANCE**Introduction**

Recent scholarship in metal music studies has indicated that there is a false perception of heavy metal fans consisting almost exclusively of a homogenous group of heterosexual, white men (Dawes; Clifford-Napoleone). Some have also noticed that the metal community tends to resist directly discussing issues such as racism or discrimination based on gender or sexuality. As Laina Dawes observes, “The resistance to discuss the alienation of black and queer fans is symptomatic of the reluctance to acknowledge that the participatory and behavioural traits of what is perceived as the ‘traditional’ metal fan no longer represent how the culture operates” (387). Omitting discussions of gender, sexuality, and race allow the “mythical norm” of metal musicians and fans to go on existing, not only in the culture, but also in scholarship on metal music. In *Queerness in Heavy Metal Music: Metal Bent* (2015), Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone addresses the lack of “queerness” in the academic conversation on metal music and gender.

Heavy metal scholarship has focused almost solely on the roles of heterosexual hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity in fans and performers. The dependence on that narrow dichotomy has limited heavy metal scholarship and has resulted in poorly critiqued discussions of gender and sexuality that serve only to underpin the popular imagining of heavy metal as violent, homophobic, and inherently masculine...[T]he academic writing about heavy metal...presupposes heterosexist and heterosexual fan base for heavy metal and consequently ignores the creation of a queerscape in heavy metal (11).

This “imagined community” of metal musicians and fans, discussed by Dawes and Clifford-Napoleone, gives way to two invisibilities in the metal scene. The first is the invisibility of heavy metal’s queer and non-white performers and fans. The second is the privilege invisible to those white heterosexual men who make up the majority in the heavy metal music scene.

The key element in understanding masculinities is the role of power, specifically social power and the distribution of social capital (Connell 42). Social rewards are given to men who exhibit the qualities valued in their culture. In the US and other western countries, white, middle-class, and heterosexual men receive greater social rewards than men who are people of color, are working class, or are homosexual. And so it is in the metal music scene. Despite evidence that heavy metal’s audience is far more diverse than has been imagined, there remains a perception that metal musicians and fans are made up of a homogenous group of middle-class white men. Those who do fit the metal scene’s mythic norm are consequently, and often invisibly, rewarded with social capital. In spite of the prevalence of hegemonic masculinities in the metal scene, metal music and lyrics have often centered on themes of social power and resistance to personally and politically oppressive powers.

Political topics and social justice have long been popular themes in heavy metal music. For example, Black Sabbath criticizes the social inequality between the politicians who initiate wars and the working class people who fight on the front lines through the lyrics of their song “War Pigs.”

*Politicians hide themselves away
They only started the war
Why should they go out to fight?*

They leave that role to the poor

Black Sabbath not only criticizes the violence and brutality of war, they also address the issue of class struggle. Many heavy metal songs focus on similar lyrical themes—politics, violence, and class struggle. However, “discussions centered on racial and sexual discrimination face resistance” (Dawes 388). It is rare for a band to take a political stance that is explicitly pro-feminist, anti-racist, or in opposition—both in content and form—to manifestations of hegemonic masculinity.

Enter the Christian metal band August Burns Red (ABR). Their song “Treatment,” from their 2013 album *Rescue and Restore*, openly criticizes prejudice and argues for tolerance and diversity in ways which clearly stand against the “constitutive elements of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity” described by Dawes, Kimmel, and Connell. The song does not target racism or sexual discrimination specifically, but those and other systems of intolerance are implied and alluded to in the lyrics.

In 2013, ABR released *Rescue and Restore* under the Christian music record label Solid State Records. The album peaked at number nine on the *Billboard* 200 and number two on the *Billboard* Top Christian Album charts. The music of *Rescue and Restore* has been regarded as a challenge to the rote conventions of the metalcore genre, with songs breaking from the traditional verse-chorus structure, and including progressive instrumental segments of song that transition from distorted electric guitars to clean electric and acoustic movements (Kelham; Ramanand). If these sections contain lyrics, they are delivered as spoken word instead of being screamed by the vocalist. Examples of this include the bridges of “Spirit Breaker” and “Beauty in Tragedy.” These movements,

often inspired by classical composition and poetry, will then build back into the traditional metalcore sound of louder drums and distorted electric guitars.

When asked if they had a favorite song on the new album, guitarists Brent Rambler and JB Brubaker said they liked writing and recording “Treatment,” the second track. This song was also mentioned as a favorite in *CCM Magazine*’s review of the album.⁵ Brent Rambler, rhythm guitarist who wrote the lyrics for “Treatment,” describes it as their most “ballsy” song to date (“August...In Studio with Brent...”). According to lead guitarist JB Brubaker, who composed the music, the song is about “keeping an open mind and not judging other people who are different from you” (AltPress). The song’s message, therefore, has broad implications regarding treatment and tolerance, and it can be interpreted and applied to a number of situations. Ultimately, Brubaker is stating that the song is about promoting and advocating acceptance and diversity; it is against bigotry and prejudice. One listener may hear an argument against religious discrimination, while another hears a song about racism or homophobia.

When I attended an ABR concert in February 2015, I spoke with a young man named Nicholas, who was wearing an August Burns Red T-shirt. He spoke of seeing the band for the first time in 2013 at the *Vans Warped Tour* and being a fan ever since. I asked about Nicholas’ background as a music fan and whether any personal religious ideology influences the way he listens to the music. Nicholas said he plays the drums and is studying percussion at the University of Utah. Although Nicholas is not religious, he said that because of ABR’s lyrics, especially in “Treatment,” he respects the way that ABR practice and preach their religion.

⁵ *CCM Magazine* is an abbreviation for "Christ. Community. Music."

I don't really choose to be religious. I don't fully agree with it. Uh, I love the way [ABR] approach it...I feel like a lot of the lyrics...they're very almost chastising, especially in *Rescue and Restore*. Chastising against people who are religious and are on their high horse, like, they're self-righteous, or they use it as excuses. Like, I like how big they are with just 'no matter what religion you are, here's our message, this is what we believe in but no matter who you are, just, we want to be good to you, and you should be good to everybody else and just show everybody respect, no matter what.'

I love...where they're like, "Stop dwelling on what happens when we die, Start helping others while we're still alive," like, "You crown your religion instead of your king."

I found it remarkable that someone who is not religious would cite the song "Treatment" as their reason for respecting ABR's Christianity. Instead of writing lyrics with a condescending or reprimanding tone directed towards nonbelievers, in this song, ABR chastises fellow Christians. This atheist ABR fan enjoys and admires witnessing a group of Christians publicly inviting other Christians to be more accepting and tolerant. The message of the song seems to resonate with their fanbase, and it earns the respect of those listeners who do not share the band's Christian beliefs.

The lyrics of "Treatment," and similar ABR songs, set them apart from other Christian metal bands in that they direct aggressive criticism at fellow Christians in regards to large social issues. Christian metal bands like Fit For A King, For Today, Impending Doom, Norma Jean, and Underoath have focused their lyrics on personal struggles with topics like relationships, addiction recovery, and mental illness.

Sometimes a Christian metal band will approach a political or social topic, such as Fit For A King's song "Slave to Nothing" or For Today's song "Under God," each of which bemoan the secularization of American culture and calls upon Christians to raise their voices against vain materialism. For Today writes, "This dying nation needs your hope,

so stand up and testify. Let your light shine in the darkest night. Never hold back, never give up the fight.” The lyrics are directed at fellow Christians, but they are an invitation to be an example to nonbelievers rather than a charge to tolerate and accept them.

In other cases, Christian metal bands like Underoath extend invitations to Christians and non-Christians alike to seek God for help in their personal struggles. In their song, “In Regards to Myself,” they write, “It’s all worth reaching for / The hand to pull you up.” The “hand” seems to refer to the hand of God who will help them rise above their personal trials. This intent is further evidenced by a moment in Underoath’s live DVD *Survive, Kaleidoscope* wherein their lead singer proclaims his belief in Jesus Christ and extends an invitation to the audience to seek Him for help with their own problems. A similar mini-sermon can be found in The Devil Wears Prada’s live DVD *Dead & Alive* when their vocalist declares, “We believe in Jesus Christ.” It is not uncommon for Christian metal bands to take a moment and testify to their audience in this way. What is uncommon is for a Christian metal band to address fellow Christians about social tolerance in the way that ABR do in “Treatment.”

In addition to resisting hegemonic masculinities through the content of the lyrics, “Treatment” also challenges some of the traditional hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity through its mode of address. Situated in a position of power, hegemonic masculinity is often represented in strongly individualistic terms (Kimmel, *Manhood...*; Rafalovich). Rafalovich’s argument about masculinity and the construction and delivery of metal lyrics is based on the assumption that masculinity is tied to individualism, but “Treatment” is concerned with larger groups and communities, further challenging the cultural assumptions about manhood. “Treatment” revises and adapts the individualized

mode of address that Rafalovich describes to set up a new set of power dynamics within its lyrics. Instead of presenting a dialogue between two opposing sides—the speaker and a generalized “you”—ABR’s “Treatment” addresses the “extreme suffering” of an oppressed or marginalized group at the hands of the “extreme domination” enacted by their oppressors (the generalized “you”), effectively making this song into a three-way power struggle.

In the song “Treatment,” the generalized “you” has been exercising abusive, hegemonic power over a marginalized group, and the speaker in the song then intervenes in this conflict and tries to correct the behavior that the hegemonic “you” is directing toward another group. Because this “other” for whom ABR’s speaker advocates are victims of people operating from a position of hegemonic masculinities, ABR’s lyrics challenge the traditional power dynamics associated with hegemonic masculinity by acting as an intervener. Granted, “Treatment” may be read as addressing a subject who is female or group that includes women who hold positions of power. However, masculinity should not be thought of as only belonging to men, but rather as a system of values and behaviors that can be adopted by a person of any gender, class, or race. Hegemonic masculinity is the process of gender hierarchy and should not be confused with the substances of that process.

Another way that “Treatment” challenges traditional expressions of hegemonic masculinity concerns the central “voice” of the song which is expressed as a communal collective rather than an individual. The speaker in this song is always referred to by the first-person plural pronoun of “we,” and in my reading, I will use the term *speaker* to refer to this collective voice. Importantly, it is not clear who “we” are exactly. “We” can

be read as referring to some or all of the band members; it may also refer to participants in the metal or Christian metal scenes. The plural speaker also appears to be a voice that the listening audience would align with since the speaker is portrayed as having the moral high ground over a second party who I will refer to as *subject*. The subject is a group exhibiting cultural and ideological hegemony, and they are indicated as being a religious group, most likely Christian. The speaker seems to think the subject is judgmental, self-righteous, condescending, as indicated by the lines “Stop dwelling on what happens when we die” and “You crown your religion instead of your king.” The marginalized party for whom the speaker advocates will be referred to as the *other*. In the song, the *speaker* challenges the *subject* into confrontation over their “treatment” of the *other*. Included at the end of this section is a copy of the lyrics where the speaker, subject, other, and imperative statements from the speaker to subject are highlighted.

The song offers sharp and aggressive criticism against its target subject, but the lyrics are a call to repentance more than a condemnation. Specifically, the song condemns the unjust, offensive, and (according to the speaker) un-Christian actions of the subject. Due to the aggressive nature of the music and lyrics, the song could be read as an instance of othering or masculine dominance, but, within the context of the metal genre, the song is an appropriate invitation to be more inclusive. The song’s appeal for inclusivity and acceptance is another challenge to hegemonic masculinity, which values a homogenous and hierarchal social structure.

It is important to recognize, however, that as much as “Treatment” seems to challenge and attempt to transform the power dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, it also complicates in these power dynamics in some ways. As an intervening voice, ABR’s

speaker may be viewed as exhibiting some aspects of hegemonic masculinity by imposing their power and privilege and speaking on behalf of the oppressed rather than giving way to the voice of the oppressed. In fact, the oppressed “other” does not seem to have a voice at all. The only dialogue is between the masculine speaker toward the masculine subject who has feminized the “other” through intolerance. The speaker expresses their frustration with the subject, and they acknowledge the hurt that is felt by the “other,” but the “other” is not given a platform to speak for themselves, at least, not in this song.⁶

It should also be noted that this is not ABR’s only song to address themes of tolerance or passing judgement, nor is it their only song with political undertones. The lyrics of “An American Dream” (*Messengers* 2007) echo a satirical punk ballad criticizing the lifestyle led by many Americans and the tendency toward ethnocentrism. “White Washed” (*Constellations* 2009) opens with the lines “Push your controlling values aside / And examine your own life / It’s not about my beliefs / It’s about personal choice.” Their song, “Identity” (*Found in Far Away Places* 2015) is about longing for acceptance from family, and “Ghosts” (*Found...*) is a song centered on the plight of the homeless. For the rest of this chapter, however, I will focus exclusively on the lyrics of “Treatment,” which lay a foundation for understanding and examining how a Christian metal band challenges hegemonic masculinity through both the content and form of their music. Through a close analysis of the song “Treatment,” I will show how ABR challenges intolerance and inequality, attitudes which are often symptomatic of

⁶ Granted, other ABR songs do seem to give voice to the oppressed in such songs as “Identity,” where the speaker has been judged and marginalized by the generalized “you;” and “Ghosts,” in which the speaker represents a voice of the homeless in America.

hegemonic masculinities present in their music scene and religious communities.

However, due to some of the rhetorical conventions of the metalcore genre, and due to the simple fact of each band member being a middle-class, Caucasian, straight man, the song still carries connotations and attributes of hegemonic masculinity.

Treatment

The song begins with a fast guitar riff followed by a crushing wall of electronic distortion, blast beat drums, and screaming vocals. These sounds create an aggressive and energetic timbre, meant to jolt the listener. Already, the song appeals to the testosterone-driven, high-energy masculinism expected in extreme metal. The lyrics then begin with an imperative statement from the speaker (“we”) to the subject (“you”) that articulates a criticism of the subject’s lifestyle and the effects of a damaging discourse involving hateful, harmful speech.

*Stop turning life into a stagnant routine
 Maybe it's better to bite your tongue
 The more animosity you spit out, the less we want to hear
 Maybe it's better to bite your tongue*

The speaker addresses the subject’s rote repetition of discourse that breeds “animosity” and demands that this discourse should stop. In describing the routinized habits or actions of the subject, the speaker uses the word “stagnant,” which denotes a stand-still state that cultivates infection and disease, suggesting that the subject’s pattern of behavior has facilitated a moral or ethical deterioration. Interestingly, the speaker begins with a strong and direct imperative statement, instructing the subject to “stop,” followed by a more passive statement, “Maybe it’s better to bite your tongue.” This statement may be read as passive-aggressive, a biting sarcastic remark, but it can also be interpreted to imply that

the subject, *you*, is an individual or group with whom the speaker shares a common culture or beliefs because ABR is a Christian band addressing a Christian subject, as evidenced in lyrics later in the song. The speaker may even agree with some part of the subject's argument, but the subject's rhetorical methods fail as their confrontational language causes the speaker—and possibly object—to grow increasingly disinterested in what the subject has to say. If the subject's goal is to convince the object to change their behavior or lifestyle, then the speaker suggests that the subject will fail due to the tone of their argument.

The next lyrics begin with a lamentation about the consequences of hateful speech, and they point to the subject's negative condition that results from their "animosity."

*Too many hearts filled with hate
 Too many hands clenched in fists
 Relax your grip
 Open the gates, open the gates
 Too many hearts filled with hate
 Let acceptance in*

In the first two lines, the speaker laments that there are "too many hearts filled with hate" and "too many hands clenched in fists." These lines suggest that the speaker is sad to see the subject act with such bitterness and grasping for a sense of control. Not only does the subject's hatred negatively affect the "other" who they seek to control; these motives and behaviors also leave the subject in a sorry state. The speaker's lamentation moves on to include the demand that the subject "relax [their] grip" and "open the gates," implying that the subject is guilty of being exclusive or fundamentalist in their attempt to maintain control over the lives of others. The invitation to "let acceptance in" implies that the

metaphorical “gates” may not have just been keeping people out, but blocking positive attributes from entering the subject’s heart. In this invitation to let go of negative emotions and embrace positive ones, ABR’s speaker challenges one of the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinities—the repression of emotions save those rooted in aggression (Brand; Connell; Levant; Zakrzewski).

After addressing the subject and presenting their initial invitation to be more accepting, the speaker states their purpose, which is to declare their desire for more diversity in the world and express their frustration with the subject’s intolerance.

*We're here to say the world needs more diversity
We're here to say we're all so sick of your bigotry*

Here, the collective speakers express both an argument and a critique. First, they argue for more diversity. Second, they criticize the subject’s “bigotry,” which stands in the way of diversity. As mentioned previously, this argumentative theme of promoting diversity and rejecting bigotry has multiple implications and yields to a wide array of interpretations and applications. “Bigotry” has often been used in context of racial prejudice or religious persecution, and it has surfaced in recent years’ discourse on LGBTQ rights. The lyrics may be read as a call for ethnic, cultural, religious, or sexual/gender diversity. The song could be interpreted as an argument against xenophobia and advocating for immigration rights. Regardless, these lines establish that the song’s argument centers on inclusion and promoting diversity. ABR’s speaker also wants to call attention to the personal, not just political, implications of the subject’s words and actions:

*Pay attention to the choices you make
Step back and look at all the hearts that you break*

Here, the speaker takes on an advisory tone and asks the subject to examine the consequences of their “choices.” The speaker is asking the subject to self-reflect on their behavior and seriously consider the ramifications of their intolerant words and actions. Specifically, the speaker emphasizes that one of the major consequences of the subject’s intolerance is the “hearts that [they] break.” This focus on a broken hearted “other” reveals an important connection regarding the usual tone and focus of hegemonic masculinity. Connell states that hegemonic masculinity is “defined by dominance and assertiveness,” and, “The moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity basically involves choosing passivity” (132). In the world of hegemonic masculinity, the only feelings that matter are those rooted in anger and will lead to power. In this world, a “real man” is not concerned with how many people’s feelings are getting hurt, yet ABR’s speaker wants the subject to value the emotional impact that their words and actions have on the marginalized “other.” By making this argument, ABR stands against hierarchical exclusivity and verbal aggression, which are characteristic of hegemonic masculinities.⁷

In the next two lines, which are sung twice, the band introduces the spiritual or religious dimensions of the song as listeners receive evidence that the subject is Christian (or otherwise religious) when the speaker calls on the subject to shift their focus from the afterlife back to the everyday struggles of mortality.

*Stop dwelling on what happens when we die
Start helping others while we're still alive*

⁷ In Connell’s chapter “The Social Organization of Masculinity,” she defines relations among masculinities in the forms of hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization; and she examines the social hierarchy of masculinities and how they operate (76-81).

The speaker's argument implies that "helping others" would be the more fruitful, and perhaps more Christ-like, course of action than dwelling on who they think are hell-bound sinners and trying to be heaven-bound saints. According to ABR's speaker, focusing on the afterlife is futile and leads to too many broken hearts, when, in contrast, there is meaningful service to be done "while we're still alive" –service which would have the positive effects of potentially mending the broken hearts and placing both the "other" and the subject in a more elevated moral and emotional state. The speaker continues by inviting the subject to examine themselves and their social impact.

*Step back
 You need to look in the mirror and ask yourself
 "What good have I done? What are my true intentions?"
 It's your right to say what's on your mind
 Yet it's their right to keep feeling alive*

Here, again, the speaker emphasizes the need for the subject to examine themselves and their deepest motivations. By engaging in this self-examination, the speaker seems to think that the subject will recognize that their "true intentions" are to control the "other." Through their words and actions, the subject has been trying to persuade or force the "other" to either convert to the lifestyle or identity the subject desires, or they want to push the "other" away completely and shut them out. The speaker admits that the subject has the right to express their beliefs, but the gravity of the right to "feel alive" should outweigh the subject's desire to share their thoughts with the speaker and with those for whom the speaker advocates. A metal listener might expect a more direct "shut up" from the speaker to the subject, but through these lyrics, ABR's speaker maintains a peculiar respect for their subject "you," demonstrating the speaker's desire not to silence their opponent but to reform them. The members of ABR do not want to be guilty of

hypocrisy, and to silence or oppress the speaker's subject "you" would make the speaker guilty of othering. In a way, the lyrics model the change they want to see in the subject. At least, they do not want the lyrics to mirror the subject's rhetorical methods that have only alienated the target "other" instead of persuading them.

However, in the following lines, the speaker mimics the subject's discourse toward the "other" to emphasize the gravity of the subject's faults. At this point in the song, ABR's speaker uses a satirical tone as a rhetorical strategy. By speaking as the subject and exaggerating their argument, they try to demonstrate the implications and connotations of the subject's message to the "other."

We'll carve out your heart, rewire your mind

Stripping your soul of everything that makes you unique

Interpreting the song as a message to Christians in regards to their treatment of homosexuals, these lines can be read as an allusion to conversion therapy or reparative therapy, which has been practiced within Christian sects in an attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation. Read through a lens of cultural or ethnic inclusivity, the lines parody an attitude of ethnocentric assimilation, acting on the "other" to reform their language, beliefs, and practices in order to assimilate to the dominant culture. Likewise, in a battle of religious nationalism and ideology, the subject wants a full conversion of the "other," "stripping [their] soul of everything that makes [them] unique."

In this instance—using mockery as a rhetorical strategy—ABR and their speaker have used a strategy characteristic of hegemonic masculinities. By mocking, they marginalize. Mockery is a power move meant to empower the speaker by disempowering the subject. Even though the intention of the speaker is to argue against hegemonic

masculinity by way of the subject's treatment of the "other," "Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type...It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations" (Connell 76). In other words, hegemonic masculinity does not promote or exhibit/express homophobia and racism in every cultural setting. True, homophobia and racism have been notable manifestations of hegemonic masculinity throughout western history, but hegemonic masculinity is the process of exalting a set of gendered characteristics, rather than the specific characteristics being exalted. If ABR is saying, "real men don't discriminate against social minorities, and, if they do, we're going to shame them in our music," then they have taken a hegemonic stance.

After this moment of performative mockery, the speaker resumes their own point of view, and they enter to mediate the conflict between subject and "other." In the next two lines, listeners are presented with all three parties, as represented through three pronouns in reference to the speaker (we), subject (you), and object (them).

*We'll wipe the slate clean that brought them to their knees
Will that make you believe in the tolerance you need?*

In these lines, the speaker takes an active role to transform the conditions ("the slate") that brought the "other" ("them") "to their knees." The image of the "other" kneeling connotes submissiveness or the experience of being overpowered by the subject. There is also an additional connotation of kneeling in prayer, perhaps asking God if he would remove the conditions that have caused the "other" to be ostracized. The speaker asks, rhetorically, if removing the conditions that have brought the "other" into the submissive position would convince the subject to develop social tolerance toward the marginalized

“other” that they have treated poorly, an idea which is further complicated by the next line,

You crown your religion instead of your king

The speaker accuses the subject of exalting their religion—the outward system of ordinances, practices, and rhetoric—above their god. With this statement, the speaker suggests that the subject is not a good or worthy Christian. Interestingly, when religion is addressed explicitly, the speaker makes the boldest and most direct criticisms toward the subject. It seems that acknowledging the role religion plays in the power struggle between the speaker, subject, and object brings the hegemonic power structure to the forefront of the rhetoric.

Although the content of these lines is meant to criticize the power dynamics of oppression and intolerance that often define hegemonic masculinity, once again, the tone and position of the speaker are, at the same time, complicit with the same power structures of hegemonic masculinities. Here the speaker is guilty of falling into a hegemonic pattern by suggesting that the subject elevates their religion above their “king” while the speaker is not guilty of the same folly. The speaker implies that they know their god better than the subject does—that they are closer to Christ, or at least their version of Him. This implies that there is a way to be a “true Christian,” just as hegemonic masculinity implies that there is such a thing as a “real man.”

The song concludes with a final statement from the speaker to the subject in the form of an invitation to believe and act in accordance with the principles of acceptance, diversity, and inclusion.

*It's time for a movement to stand up and believe
 Believe that being distinct is not a disease
 Open the gates, let acceptance in
 Open the gates
 Relax your grip of disapproval*

After lyrics about self-reflection and criticism, the speaker finally invites the subject to “stand up” and be part of a movement toward acceptance and diversity. The speaker asks the subject to “believe that being distinct is not a disease,” meaning that whatever defining characteristics that set the “other” apart should not be seen as a negative or as making the “other” inferior. Then the speaker returns to the image of opening the gates to “let acceptance in,” and reiterates the imperative “relax your grip,” re-emphasizing their central argument for the subject, *you*, to let go of the desire to control the “other.” The final line adds that the subject is holding on to “disapproval.” Disapproval works as a mechanism of hegemonic social power to evaluate how well a person measures up to cultural values. In terms of hegemonic masculinities, disapproval can present itself in a parent’s disapproval of a child who has come out as gay or has become pregnant out of wedlock or a child who is marrying outside of the family’s religion or culture.

ABR and Masculinities

Despite the fact that ABR still performs some of the hegemonic process in their discourse between the speaker and subject, they are able to challenge the hegemonic masculinities that are at the root of intolerance and bigotry in the metal scene and contemporary Christian cultures. In this song, ABR “embrace[s] notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity” as a resistance to heteronormative constructs of hegemony (Heywood 257–58). Not only do they challenge hegemonic masculinities through the

content of their lyrics, but they also challenge the traditional masculine form of metal lyrics which usually emphasize and value individualism as a masculine trait. Instead of showcasing an individual combating a generalized “you” which represents an outside force that has harmed the speaker, ABR’s “Treatment” deals with three plural parties, and the speaker challenges a subject, “you,” who has actually harmed a third party. Instead of engaging in a two-way confrontation, ABR’s speaker enters a three-way power struggle, and each of the three parts are presented as being communal entities.

Despite these challenges to the hegemonic process, the speaker in “Treatment” places themselves on a moral high ground in relation to the subject—a common process of hegemony in Christian metal lyrics (Jousmäki, “Epistemic...” 58). But this raises the question, can a challenge to hegemony be made without ethnocentrism? Is it possible to challenge social injustice, the systematic process of placing one set of cultural traits and values above another, without being guilty of trying to impose one’s own esteemed and culturally-specific system? Furthermore, is it right, or best, for an ally with privilege to be the voice that challenges the status quo? Can ABR, a Christian metal band of five white, middle-class, heterosexual men, effectively challenge the structures that oppress groups without those qualities? Does their lack of giving voice to the “other” hinder the effectiveness of their message to the subject? Or is it beneficial for allies to use their social power and follow the rhetorical patterns of the dominant culture—in this case, the lyrical conventions of metal music—in pursuit of change? Dawes gives us some insight into how these lyrics can benefit and empower people of color and queer listeners.

One of the desirable traits about heavy metal is also one of its greatest detracting factors. From the unrelenting aggression and assertion of power within its music, black and queer youth who face a disproportionately

higher level of verbal and physical assaults in the larger society find empowerment. By consuming the music and adopting its cultural signifiers they can access stereotypical 'masculine' power, which is often denied to them in their everyday lives. (Dawes 387)

Through the music and lyrics, non-white and queer listeners are able to experience the sensation of social power which they often lack. Of course, some could argue that just listening to a song and feeling empowered does not necessarily constitute concrete social change. But others, like me, would respond by saying that it is a step in a positive direction. Although "Treatment" may be an imperfect attempt at challenging the hegemonic masculinities of Christian and metal cultures, it marks an important voice in support of "queerness in heavy metal," and it gives way to fostering a productive dialogue on hegemony and social power.

Annotated Lyrics

(Speaker, Subject, Other, Imperative)

Stop turning life into a stagnant routine
 Maybe it's better to bite your tongue
 The more animosity you spit out, the less we want to hear
 Maybe it's better to bite your tongue
 Too many hearts filled with hate
 Too many hands clenched in fists
 Relax your grip
 Open the gates, open the gates
 Too many hearts filled with hate
 Let acceptance in
 We're here to say the world needs more diversity
 We're here to say we're all so sick of your bigotry
 Pay attention to the choices you make
 Step back and look at all the hearts that you break
 Stop dwelling on what happens when we die
 Start helping others while we're still alive
 Stop dwelling on what happens when we die
 Start helping others while we're still alive
 Step back
 You need to look in the mirror and ask yourself
 "What good have I done? What are my true intentions?"
 It's your right to say what's on your mind
 Yet it's their right to keep feeling alive (feeling alive)

We'll carve out your heart, rewire your mind
 Stripping your soul of everything that makes you unique
 We'll carve out your heart, rewire your mind
 Stripping your soul of everything that makes you unique

We'll wipe the slate clean that brought them to their knees
 Will that make you believe in the tolerance you need?
 You crown your religion instead of your king
 It's time for a movement to stand up and believe
 Believe that being distinct is not a disease
 Open the gates, let acceptance in
 Open the gates
 Relax your grip of disapproval

CHAPTER 3

“WHAT YOU SAY YOUR FATHER CREATED”: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY
AND “THE WAKE”

Introduction

Metal artists have written about environmental issues using their own genre’s conventions which often include disturbingly violent images. For example, the song “Reclamation” by the band Lamb of God includes these lyrics:⁸

*The skyline is set ablaze with regret
Ashes cover a falling silhouette
The city will reap what it's sown and ignite
Watching as the city burns tonight*

Detailed images of a burning city highlight the impending doom of pollution and deforestation rather than the beauty of nature, creating the darker tone sought after by metal bands. Some bands, such as Wolves in the Throne Room, Wild’s Reprisal, and Cattle Decapitation dedicate almost all of their music and lyrics to environmentalism or animal rights.

It should not be surprising, then, that Christian metal band August Burns Red’s album *Found in Far Away Places* (2015) opens with a song about the “destruction of our planet, the misuse of resources and our inability to see the ramifications of it coming if we continue to live the way we are living” (Ramanand). Much like “Treatment,” the message of “The Wake” has political undertones and is apparently directed at

⁸ Despite the name, the heavy use of religious terms and imagery in their albums and songs, and the fact that their singer Randy Blythe has written that he does believe in God “for lack of a better term,” Lamb of God is not a Christian band (Blythe 57). This is relevant to mention because this thesis is focused on Christian metal, and the name Lamb of God can be misleading.

conservative Christians who may hold anti-environmentalist sentiments or be prone to climate change denial.⁹

Through my analysis of “The Wake,” I will show how ABR challenges the hegemonic masculinity that informs a paradigm of dominion over Earth and which leads to pollution and anthropocentric exploitation and misuse of natural resources. The connection between environmental issues and gender power has been explored by ecofeminists of recent decades. Karen Warren defines ecofeminism as “the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other” (xi). Ecofeminists see the oppression, subordination, and exploitation of people and nonhumans alike as consequential of hegemonic masculinity which informs cultural attitudes of dominance and power.¹⁰ RW Connell explains the connection between environmentalism and hegemonic masculinity further:

The environmental movement...posed a challenge to hegemonic masculinity through its own ethos and organizational practices...Dominance is contested by the commitment to equality and participatory democracy. Competitive individualism is contested by collective ways of working. Organic ideologies are not necessarily counter-sexist...But the emphasis on personal growth tends to undermine the defensive style of hegemonic masculinity, especially its tight control over emotions. (128)

⁹ Empirical studies have demonstrated a negative correlation between religiosity and environmentalism, particularly among Christians in the US (Clements, McCright, and Xiao, 2013; Clements et al. 2014; Cui, 2014; Sherkat and Ellison, 2007). However, studies have also demonstrated that environmental concern and behaviors vary between religious sects, and the evidence suggests that self-reported liberal political leanings are a stronger indicator of environmental support than religion (Clements, McCright, and Xiao, 2013; Zaleha and Szasz, 2015).

¹⁰ There is disagreement among ecofeminists on exactly how to best confront the problems of gender inequality and environmental issues, but most agree that patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity are the sources of the oppression and exploitation of women and the destruction and exploitation of earth’s resources and nonhuman life.

Connell points out that, even though not all facets of the environmental movement are explicitly feminist, environmentalism undercuts hegemonic masculinity in a number of ways. In Connell's study of "men who have attempted to reform their masculinity, in part because of feminist criticism," she interviewed six men who had experience with the counterculture and environmental movement of the twentieth century (120-121). These men who engaged in environmental efforts and were exposed to feminism developed greater capacity "to be sensitive, to have depth in emotion, [and] to care for people and for nature" (132-133). By exposure to and participation in environmental and feminist efforts, the men developed non-hegemonic qualities that allowed them to connect with people, especially women, and nature in more intimate and egalitarian ways.

It should also be noted that there is some divide among environmentalists concerning the value in preserving and protecting nature and whether the environment ought to be preserved for its own sake or for the sake of the human population. Some, referred to by Rosemarie Tong as human-centered environmentalists, "emphasize that we harm ourselves when we harm the environment" (Tong 257). Human-centered, or anthropomorphic, environmentalists focus on how humanity's exploitation, misuse, and abuse of natural resources negatively impacts the human population. Others, referred to by Tong as earth-centered environmentalists, see intrinsic value in nature itself and believe it ought to be preserved for its own sake, regardless of the consequences facing the human population. Earth-centered environmentalists point to "Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the main players in the devaluation of the environment" and criticize human-centered environmentalists for their anthropomorphism (Tong 257). Because ABR's lyrics are informed by a Judeo-Christian traditional ideology, they exhibit human-

centered environmentalist approach and focus on the harm that people do to themselves when they harm the environment.

“The Wake” is not explicitly an ecofeminist text. The song’s lyrics do not address sexism or the connection between sexism and environmentalism directly, and band member comments have not indicated any cognizance about the connection between feminist and environmentalist sentiments in their work. However, applying an ecofeminist lens to these lyrics can shed new light on how this Christian metal group engages with environmental issues to challenge hegemonic masculinity in ways that question and revise attitudes of dominance over women, minorities, the underclass, and the earth. Appropriating the masculine rhetoric of metal may seem like an inappropriate or problematic medium for addressing environmental issues due to the genre’s aggressiveness, heavy reliance on electronic effects, and destructive lyrical themes; but when considering the metal scene as a discourse community, I find that metal rhetoric is an ideal medium for addressing environmental issues for ABR’s audience of Christians and metal fans, as well as for challenging aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

Applying an eco-feminist lens to the “Wake” illustrates how this song uses environmental arguments to challenge hegemonic masculinity in three specific ways. First, the song resists hegemonic masculinity through its use of intentional ambiguity and multiple meanings. Second, the song challenges the logic of domination of hegemonic masculinity through the self-reflective and self-critical persona of the song’s speaker. Third, the song challenges the traditional power structures associated with narratives of Christian patriarchy by transferring power to the earth and nature.

With its intentionally ambiguous title and lyrics, the song resists being held to a single definitive meaning. By inviting and allowing for multiple legitimate interpretations, ABR have established that there is not a single, correct way to listen to their music. In this regard, the lyrics of “Wake” argue against the masculine logic of power and dominance, which tends to insist on a single, authoritative voice or view. Although the song is ambiguous, it is not so abstract as to not have a central theme or argument. According to Rafalovich, ambiguity allows for the masculine power expressed through the music and lyrics to be applied to a listener’s own life and circumstances. Rafalovich observes, “The individualistic and masculine ideology of domination...can be applied to any entity” (29). Thus, ambiguity in the song lyrics’ form gives way for broader generalizing and spreading of the masculine aggression of metal music. However, ambiguity also can, and does in the case of “The Wake,” offer a challenge to the mode of hegemonic masculinity through its resistance to an exact meaning. Hegemony demands that there be a “right,” “real,” or “correct” way of performing gender or cultural roles. A text that gives way to multiple valid interpretations resists being defined, and thus resists the hegemonic form.

The second way in which “The Wake” challenges hegemonic masculinity concerns the way the song’s speaker engages in self-implication and critical reflection. Through the song’s narrator, ABR invites their audience to consider ways in which they may be adding to the problems facing the environment. According to the song’s lyrics, no person—at least, in the developed western world—can be held truly blameless for environmental destruction. Hegemonic masculinity traditionally informs attitudes of self-interest and pride, but “The Wake” reminds its audience of the impending consequences

of waste and pollution and encourages them to reflect on their own role in producing that waste and pollution. This act of self-implication is further evidenced by guitarist Brubaker's comments about the song, "It's hard to get people as a whole to change their lifestyles, and I'm guilty as well – I don't want to stop driving my dumb gas-guzzling car around" (Ramanand). Rather than focusing all of their negative criticism outward, ABR and their song's speaker admit to being part of the problem of environmental destruction, and this admission that the speaker is part of the problem marks a departure from and challenge to hegemonic masculinity on the part of the speaker. Hegemonic masculinity denotes an exalting aggrandizement of the individual self above others, but ABR's speaker is self-implicating, even self-deprecating. Rather than giving himself a self-congratulatory pat on the back, ABR's speaker abases himself and joins the collective human subject in accepting his and their guilt, which marks his separation from hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, the third way the "Wake" challenges hegemonic masculinity is through the way it reconfigures traditional power structures between humans and nature. Advocating for environmental responsibility resists the patriarchal logic of dominion and domination that has informed patterns of using the earth strictly as a resource for humans to use and exploit at will. The lyrics draw attention to the ways in which nature can and will deliver the consequences of pollution and carbon emissions back to the people whose history has been responsible for changes in climate. As ecofeminists would argue, mankind's destruction of the planet is a consequence of androcentrism, rather than anthropocentrism. The patriarchal pattern of dominance informs the subordination of women, minorities, and the earth itself. Through the patriarchal lens, each of these

entities are feminized and infantilized through their being overpowered and controlled by the men in a patriarchal society. By reversing these power dynamics and subjecting humans to the power of the earth, ABR challenge the patriarchal logic of dominance in a unique way.

The Wake

Examining the connection between hegemonic masculinity and environmentalism in “The Wake” begins with an analysis of the speaker. “The Wake” is an example of what Rafalovich describes the “broken self” who “conveys relentless suffering and the futility of outside intervention” and suffering from objective domination. Objective domination “describes the crippling effects of traumatic events, failed relationships, or general life circumstances” (22-23). Since lyrics of “The Wake” center on the consequences of pollution, we can view the speaker as broken by “general life circumstances,” feeling helpless at the thought of what the future holds for humanity if people continue to misuse natural resources. The song departs from Rafalovich’s argument, however, when the speaker becomes part of a collective rather than an individual facing their suffering alone. This may not be a huge departure from masculine individualism, though, since the speaker is not “seeking comfort in others” but is instead retreating into “isolation, hatred, and self-destruction” that happens to include a larger body of people that the individual is a part of (Rafalovich 23). In my analysis, I will explore some of the possible interpretations that vary depending on the subject being addressed by the speaker. Each interpretation offers different implicative arguments about masculinities, and that fact that the song lyrics suggest and support both possible

interpretations allow the song to introduce multiple equally valid perspectives, resisting the assertion of a single dominant view or voice.

The beginning lyrics of “The Wake” leave some ambiguity about the song’s speaker and whom the speaker is addressing. Rather than assuming a definitive interpretation of the lyrics, I will introduce some working terms for the three characters or parties involved. The first I will refer to as the “speaker” who is a singular masculine character, so I will refer to this speaker using masculine singular pronouns (e.g., he, him, his). The speaker addresses the other two characters in different verses of the song’s lyrics. Throughout most of the song, the speaker refers to a group I will refer to as the “human subject.” The human subject may be taken to represent humanity as a whole, but the speaker’s argument is more specifically directed at Christians in the developed world, as evidenced by lyrics referring to industrial development and the human subject’s belief that their “father” created the earth. When referencing the human subject, I will use plural pronouns (e.g., they, them, their). The second character addressed will be referred to as the “God subject” who is essentially God, the fatherly figure of the New Testament. Therefore, I will use capitalized masculine pronouns when referencing the God subject (e.g., He, Him, His).

The song begins using abstract ideas and the “generic you” to invite multiple meanings and interpretations of its lyrics. Although the relationship between speaker and subject is a source of ambiguity, the opening lines clearly introduce the themes and tones of violence and destruction, and we start to see masculine power dynamics at play. The speaker addresses the subject through a generalized “you” implied by imperative statements and signified through the use of the possessive form “your.”

Destroy everything
Cleanse
Wipe away the filth
Set fire to your waste
Burn everything
Back into dirt
Burn everything

From the beginning, these lyrics offer two possible interpretations for the subject. On the one hand, the imperative to destroy and burn everything could be interpreted as a hyperbolic invitation to the God subject. On the other hand, the imperative to destroy and burn everything could also be read as a facetious remark toward the human subject. In the case of addressing the God subject, the speaker would be asking Him to destroy people and the things they have built by exploiting natural resources. There are instances in the Bible in which God has “cleansed” the earth by destroying the people, such as Noah’s flood. The “filth” would then refer to a sinful society and their idoloc creations that they have built out of earth’s resources. The God subject interpretation also alludes to mankind being created from the “dust of the earth” when the speaker directs the God subject to “burn everything back into dirt.” In Genesis, the Lord tells Adam that he will become dust again at the end of his mortality, hence the expression “ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” Alluding to the biblical passage serves as a subtle reminder from the speaker to the human subject that people’s bodies and everything that people make are all composed of borrowed material from the Earth which was created for man to have dominion and stewardship over.

On the other hand, if we interpret these lines as directed toward the human subject, the hyperbole remains, but the tone changes to one more satirical. Instead of inviting God to destroy the people, the speaker invites the people to destroy the creations

of their own hands, emphasized in the imperative, “Set fire to your waste,” implying that mankind has produced much that is wasteful, both in terms of actual garbage and sewage as well as the large and arguably unnecessary buildings and consumer products. In this case, the things that humans have created of earth’s resources, or “dirt,” would still be returned to dirt by burning them.

The first point to focus on here concerns the way both of these interpretations are presented as equally logical and acceptable options, which, from the beginning, causes this song to resist the hegemony of definitive meaning. The intentional vagueness of the lyrics works, as Rafalovich has noted, to allow for multiple interpretations that translate a masculine power struggle to an infinite number of possible scenarios.

In addition to promoting multiple interpretations, these lyrics also invite the audience to think critically about power relations. Whichever interpretation the audience accepts, the speaker emphasizes the helpless state of the human subject and the power possessed by the God subject. In the first interpretation, the speaker engages with the God subject and invites Him to smite the earth and the people who inhabit it. This reifies the belief in an all-powerful patriarchal and omniscient singular deity who created the earth and the people therein. With this ideology implicit in their argument, this interpretation seems to validate the patriarchal logic of dominance. This interpretation, therefore, would not provide a strong case for dismantling the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, if we consider the second possible interpretation, where the speaker addresses the human subject, then the lyrics seem to more effectively challenge the hegemonic masculinity of the human subject by suggesting that their creations ought to be destroyed. In this reading, the works of the human subject’s hands are degraded and

called “filth” and “waste.” This challenges hegemonic masculinity by devaluing human creations. Because hegemonic masculinity is self-aggrandizing, it suggests that a person’s creations are important or productive, but ABR’s narrator denies this notion and invites the audience to entertain the thought that what people have built is insignificant.

The next portion of the song begins to demonstrate the speaker’s acts of critical self-reflection and implication, which challenges the individualistic and self-aggrandizing nature of hegemonic masculinity. The speaker transitions from the positions of individual and critic to place himself as part of a guilty collective who deserve punishment.

Although much of the rhetoric of “The Wake” is externally focused on “people as a whole,” there is a sense of accountability represented through the speaker’s inclusion of himself, signified by the plural pronoun “we,” in the following lines wherein the speaker addresses the God subject and asks Him to flood the earth.

*Flood, drown the earth
It’s what we deserve*

The speaker’s invitation to God or nature to flood the earth is, again, reminiscent of the great biblical flood in *Genesis*, which God used to “cleanse” the earth of sinful man. Instead of asking to be saved, as Noah did, the speaker feels they “deserve” to drown in the flood as well. Invoking images of self-destruction falls in line with Rafalovich’s argument about the broken self, but by admitting their own role in abusing the Earth and speaking as a collective “we,” the speaker can also be viewed as challenging the defensiveness and competitive individualism of hegemonic masculinity, especially as it relates to participation in environmentalist causes (Connell 128). In other words, rather than pointing an accusatory finger solely at outside forces or persons, the song lyrics

encourage men to take accountability and see how they, too, are at fault. In this sense, “The Wake” is both an example of hegemonic masculinity in its rhetorical form as Rafalovich’s “broken self” facing “objective domination,” but it is a challenge to hegemonic masculinity in the substance of its argument for a more environmentally conscious society.

In the next lines, the speaker switches focus and takes a facetious and accusatory tone to address the human subject. Although in the previous lines the speaker had included himself as part of the human force that has been abusing the earth, the speaker now separates himself from the other human subjects and adopts hegemonic masculine rhetoric by directing criticism at a generalized “you.” In doing so, the speaker tries to reveal the irony of the human subject’s actions by suggesting that they “rehash” the pollutants that the human subject produces and destroy the creations of the god that the human subject professes to worship.

*Rehash the poisons
You breathe in the air
Tear down what you say your father created
Constructing buildings over buildings
Conceal history like a shameful scar*

The first two lines of this section suggest that the human subject is repeatedly acting foolishly or with malicious intent by using the word “rehash” to illustrate the irony of an unsustainable lifestyle. To “rehash” means to reuse or repeat without any improvements. The following line, “Tear down what you say your father created,” alludes to the Earth being a creation of a masculine deity, created for His children—mankind. This reminder and allusion to the Judeo-Christian creation myth continues to play into the theme of masculinity and nature when as the monotheistic god is given a masculine identity.

“Constructing buildings over buildings,” employs a similar irony that is implied by “rehash” and builds on the theme of self-reflection and complicity. In addition, the irony of “buildings over buildings” is compounded by the simile in the following line, “Conceal history like a shameful scar.” Not only is mankind repeatedly doing damage to nature and themselves, there appears to be an ulterior motive. The “history” of civilization, constructing buildings and consuming Earth’s resources for human gain, brings shame to those who are able to acknowledge the destructive and violent pattern. Like a person who commits self harm, ABR’s speaker suggests that the human subject continues to build as a cover-up or distraction from the damage that has been done. Bringing attention to the concealment of history and the shame associated invites the listening audience to think of the human subject as not only guilty but vulnerable—a trait in contrast with hegemonic masculinity, which emphasizes strength and stoicism.

The next lyrics bring attention to earth itself and begin challenging the hegemonic power structure by reconfiguring the power dynamic between the human subject and the earth. The speaker discusses the earth’s age and importance and even begins to grant it some agency. Shifting the focus onto the earth itself is interesting, given the anthropocentric paradigm that the song has been informed by up until this point. As these lyrics progress, the speaker remains focused on the negative consequences facing the human population but suggests that the earth will outlive the people who live on it. These next lyrics point out how long life has been on the earth and argue that people’s negligence will eventually lead to their demise.

*This world has lived for a million years with more to come
It's only a matter of time until you choke on your indifference
Struggling to breathe as the water fills your lungs*

*Trying hard to scream as it rises into your throat
The reckless, the careless
Will reign until the oceans rise*

In the first line of this verse, the speaker points out that life on earth predates history and will continue. As time goes on, the speaker tells the human subject that they will “choke” on their “indifference,” arguing that the human subject’s indifference about the way they live and treat the environment will lead to destruction. ABR’s guitarist JB Brubaker refers to this experience of choking on indifferences as a “rude awakening” (Ramanand). Brubaker has said that one of the song’s themes is “our inability to see the ramifications of it coming if we continue to live the way we are living.” The consequences of an industrial urban lifestyle will sneak up on humanity in due time. Again, the human subject is destined to reap what they sow.

Here, we also can see a significant shift in power as the earth and nature prove to be more powerful than the people who try to subdue and control it. This subverts the traditional dominion narrative, where man is given power and dominion over the earth and all living things on it. By attaching dominant power to the earth, these lyrics dismantle hegemonic masculinity by decentralizing the power that the human subject assumes and giving the power to create and destroy to the earth. The imagery of people drowning continues to show this shifting power dynamic as nature asserts control over people. This image also continues to hold people responsible for this destructive power, however, since the flooding illustrates one of the consequences of human-induced climate change: rising sea levels. The lines “Struggling to breathe as the water fills your lungs / Trying hard to scream as it rises into your throat” add realism to the metaphor of choking on indifference. This point is re-emphasized with the lines “The reckless, the careless /

Will reign until the oceans rise.” Here, the song continues to assert the powerlessness of mankind compared to nature, and the human subject’s inability to escape the consequences. By emphasizing the destructive power of nature as a result of their wasteful lifestyle, the song disempowers the human subject while also holding them accountable for this destruction.

The song’s final lyrics tell the human subject to “wake up” and recognize the consequences of their actions, or of their negligence. Here, the song shifts back to its human-centered focus but still acknowledges the powerful forces of nature, suggesting once again that mankind is at the earth’s mercy.

*Wake up
And save yourself
The sea will reclaim
What it worked to create
Wake up
Save yourself
Pick up the pieces
Ask for forgiveness*

The speaker invites the human subject to wake up so that they might save themselves, which denotes a return to the power of the individual. The human subject, although generally treated as a collective, is now being addressed with the singular pronoun “yourself.” This individualizes the song’s message for its listening audience who are, in essence, the human subject. Power is also given to the sea as it is personified and given the ability to “reclaim / what it worked to create.” The sea can then be thought of as an extension of the God subject because it is given creative powers. Being an extension of the God subject might give the sea a masculine quality, which would bring it into confrontation with the hegemonic power struggle between the human subject and God or

nature. By implicating the human subject and the listening audience, ABR invite their audience to engage in self-reflection and examine their behaviors that extend, implicitly, from hegemonic masculinity and the logic of dominion.

The imperative in the song's final verse, "Wake up," gives one of multiple meanings to the song's title. The title, "The Wake," may be a reference to the speaker's invitation to the human subject to awaken to an awareness of their mistreatment of the earth and recognize the consequences that will follow. The title could also be reference to the waves that follow an object moving through water, serving as a metaphor for the wake of destruction humanity leaves in its path as it builds, civilizes, and domesticates the natural world. Third, "wake" can mean a watch or vigil over a deceased person, which can suggest that this song bears witness to the death of humanity at the hands of the natural world that they have mistreated. Having equally legitimate interpretations of the lyrics and song title once again signifies an intentional ambiguity on the part of the songwriters which furthers its resistance to hegemony.

Each meaning of the title has its own connotation—one hopeful (wake up), one generative (creating a wake), and one less hopeful (a wake regarding death). The first addresses man's blindness to environmental issues which can be interpreted as a challenge to privilege. Male, white, cisgender, and heterosexual privilege describe the inability to comprehend the problems faced by women or minorities because the person is not immediately affected by those issues. People in the developed world are able to turn a blind eye to the consequences of climate change because they are not immediately affected by it. The imperative, "wake up," invites them to see and acknowledge the real effects of unsustainable living. The second interpretation is a recognition that the

creations of man are and have been destructive. This acts as another direct challenge to that which man cannot see. A wake created by moving through water trails behind the object in motion. Therefore, the wake is invisible to the being that causes it. This interpretation of the title implies a look back at the effects of mankind's presence on the earth, and it invites the self-implication and contemplation discussed earlier in this chapter. The final meaning invites mankind to reflect and mourn the deaths that they have caused through hunting, agriculture, industrialism, and deforestation. Again, ABR wants their audience to see and ponder on that which they may have been blind to. In each case, ABR invite their audience to acknowledge and understand the causes and effects of climate change, and this serves as a metaphor for mankind to check their privilege.

Annotated Lyrics:

(Imperative verbs, Generalized “you”, Earth/Nature)

Destroy everything
 Cleanse
 Wipe away the filth
 Set fire to your waste
 Burn everything
 Back into dirt
 Burn everything
 (TO GOD SUBJECT)
 Flood, drown the earth [2x]
 It's what we (SPEAKER AND HUMAN SUBJECT) deserve
 (TO HUMAN SUBJECT)
 Rehash the poisons
 You breathe in the air
 Tear down what you say your father created
 Constructing buildings over buildings
 Conceal history like a shameful scar
 This world has lived for a million years with more to come
 It's only a matter of time until you choke on your indifference
 Struggling to breathe as the water fills your lungs
 Trying hard to scream as it rises into your throat
 (GENERAL STATEMENT, NOT DIRECTED AT HUMAN OR GOD
 SUBJECT)
 The reckless, the careless (REFERENCING SPEAKER AND HUMAN
 SUBJECT)
 Will reign until the oceans rise
 (TO GOD SUBJECT)
 Flood, drown the earth [2x]
 It's what we (SPEAKER AND HUMAN SUBJECT) deserve [5x]
 (TO HUMAN SUBJECT)
 This world has lived for a million years with more to come
 It's only a matter of time until you choke on your indifference
 Struggling to breathe as the water fills your lungs
 Trying hard to scream as it rises into your throat
 Wake up
 And save yourself
 The sea will reclaim (NATURE WITH AGENCY)
 What it worked to create
 Wake up
 Save yourself
 Pick up the pieces
 Ask for forgiveness

CONCLUSION

My analysis of August Burns Red lyrics has demonstrated that Christian metal bands can and do engage in queering and challenging power structures informed by hegemonic masculinity. In “Treatment,” ABR challenge the unconventional structure of the parties involved in the song’s narrative. Rather than emphasizing individuality, the speaker is a collective body represented through plural first-person pronouns. The song also challenges hegemonic masculinity through its central argument for inclusion, acceptance, diversity, and tolerance. With “The Wake,” ABR use environmentalism to challenge hegemonic masculinity and its logic of domination. The song also poses a challenge to hegemonic masculinity through its resistance to a singular definitive interpretation and through the way in which the song’s narrator implicates himself in wrongdoing.

Examining Christian metal through the lens of hegemonic masculinity has opened up new ways to understand the negotiation of masculinity and social power. I have shown how Christian metal musicians perform a multifaceted challenge to hegemonic masculinity. What Moberg calls the “double controversy of Christian metal” is a double challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Because hegemonic masculinity is culturally specific, the metal scene and subgenre scenes inevitably develop a code of hegemonic masculinity that is particular to the culture of the scene. Hegemonic masculinity in the metal scene is, albeit paradoxically, measured by an adherence to patterns of behavior and performance deemed transgressive to the larger mainstream culture that surrounds the scene. Metalheads conform to nonconformity.

Put in more concrete terms, the political ruling class of the United States has often invoked Judeo-Christian religious rhetoric with phrases like, “God bless America” and “In God we trust.” This signifies a culture dominated by Christian principles and ideology. Therefore, the US metal scene has developed a tradition of being critical toward Christianity and organized religion because Christianity represents authority, power, and conformity to the mainstream culture. The hegemonic masculinity of the metal scene is then determined by an adherence to being anti-religious in lyrics and performance. Metal bands use Satanic imagery, not necessarily because they follow the tenets of the Church of Satan, but to give an artistic middle finger to the largely Christian ruling class and mainstream culture of the US. The more rebellious toward religion a metalhead can be, the more masculine he (or she) is. Christian metal challenges these assumptions about what is transgressive and masculine by transgressing the metal scene’s code of hegemonic masculinity when they write lyrics from a Christian perspective and favor Christian principles such as faith and repentance. At the same time, Christian metalheads perform a challenge to the hegemonic masculinity of Christian culture by appropriating a music genre that is traditionally anti-Christian. Being a Christian metalhead is a double-rebellion and a double challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

This project gives way to opportunities for further research which include broadening the scope of bands analyzed and doing ethnographic fieldwork. ABR is only one of many contemporary Christian metal bands. Examining other bands will provide new insight and comparison with the ways in which they engage in performative

masculinities.¹¹ Comparing lyrics with non-Christian metal bands would also reveal whether there are significant differences in the ways Christian and non-Christian bands approach, resist, and perform masculinity. For example, ABR's song "Identity" could be compared to Miss May I's "Deathless." Both songs were released in the summer of 2015, and they each deal with the theme of a first-person narrator seeking acceptance from a generic "you." One immediate difference is MMI's use of profanity in the line, "I fucking gave everything." What is the significance, if there be any, of using profanity versus not? What other similarities or differences in the rhetoric or mode of address might we find if we took a closer look? What do the similarities and differences say about masculinities and social power?

Another opportunity lies in focusing on the musical aspects in conjunction with the lyrics as a challenge or adherence to hegemonic masculinity. This would include an examination of how Christian bands participate in musical transgression in relation to other Christian metal bands and their non-Christian counterparts. This is important because ABR has been writing music that is increasingly progressive and steps outside of the traditions of metalcore. For example, their most recent studio album, *Found In Far Away Places*, is marked by the incorporation of distinct non-metal genres such as country western, jazz, and eastern European folk music. I would want to look at the band's motivation for writing more progressive music and how their fans have reacted to ABR's musical evolution—particularly if they have lost or gained fans as they have made efforts to expand their sound. The band's motivation and the audience's reaction will help

¹¹ Contemporary Christian metal bands for lyrical comparison include As I Lay Dying, Blessthefall, The Chariot, Demon Hunter, The Devil Wears Prada, Emery, Fit For A King, For Today, Haste the Day, Impending Doom, Mortification, Maylene and the Sons of Disaster, Norma Jean, Oh Sleeper, P.O.D., Stryper, Theocracy, Tourniquet, Underoath, War of Ages, Whitecross, Wolves at the Gate, and Zao.

inform the ways that musical rhetoric interacts with the lyrical rhetoric as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity—particularly how hegemonic masculinity informs genre conventions and what happens when those conventions are challenged.

Opportunities for ethnographic research would provide insights into the gender dynamics of the fan base of the metal music scene in ways that a literary analysis cannot. Researchers could choose to explore masculinities either in the online music scene or by observing behaviors and interviewing patrons at live metal shows. Interviews provide the opportunity to ask fans about their interpretations and reactions to a band's lyrics. Fan responses would give valuable insight into what messages are being received by a band's audience and if it affects their views on gender or power in any way. Band members themselves would also make for strong interview subjects as they can be asked more specific questions about the intent and meaning of the songs they have written. An interviewer would also be able to ask musicians about their perceptions of gender and power in the music scene that they are a part of. Activity and work that Christian metal musicians do outside of their bands—such as churches, charities, clothing companies, nonprofit organizations, social media activity, blogging, or book writing—would be worthy of research as well.

A musician's business and philanthropic efforts can also reveal messages they want to send to the music community. For example, ABR vocalist Jake Luhrs started a non-profit organization called Heart Support which is an online community for young people in the music scene dealing with mental illness, addiction, and emotional struggles. He also cofounded an athletic clothing line called More Weight Apparel which uses weightlifting as a metaphor for becoming stronger through the vicissitudes of life. Both

his non-profit and clothing business engage with gender and power. Heart Support allows men in the music scene to be emotionally open and vulnerable in ways not usually encouraged by mainstream patriarchal society. More Weight deals explicitly with men's and women's bodies in the fitness industry which is wrought with issues of gender and sexuality.

The field of men and masculinities will benefit from my research and arguments on Christian metal because it adds a conversation largely untapped by scholars in that field. Men's studies has looked at religion, and some men's studies scholars have done work on music cultures. My writing brings these subjects into conversation through a medium that is often polarizing in American culture. Extreme metal is often either loved or hated by the people who hear it. People will get vehemently defensive on either side, saying that metal is angry useless noise or that it is the only style of music worth listening to. Add the fact that some of these bands are Christian, and people begin scratching their heads. I have seen this response in my family, my friends, and in fellow academics at the American Men's Studies Association annual conference. This topic raises eyebrows, and it raises questions. I have been surprised by some of the answers that I have found. With my work and with further research, we may uncover many more questions and some important answers about men and masculinities in the contemporary metal scene.

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