Under Pressure?

Creative entrepreneurialism and its impact on Dutch metal musicians

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Abstract

With only established professional musicians being in the spotlight while many others are striving for equal professional music success, creative entrepreneurship's precariousness can be underestimated. Ambitious musicians often assume that mastering their skills is sufficient to create professional opportunities and a stable command over their music career. However, music industry practices demonstrate that various additional non-musical factors are essential for success, making most performing artists struggle to attain or sustain career success as professional musicians. As fluid "hands-on" labour is a widely spread ideology that blurs music industry rules, chances for a steady livelihood decrease. In the Netherlands, this is especially true for metal music as non-mainstream community music. This paper investigates how (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurialism in a field where creative entrepreneurship has become the norm. Qualitative data from ten in-depth interviews with Dutch metal musicians was used to find that (a) musicking forms intrapersonal social bonds and encourages self-actualisation, (b) occupational instability threatens mental health and confidence in one's self and music, (c) music industry practices facilitate music production for a few musicians and exploit the majority, (d) metal fans equally motivate musicians' career enthusiasm and disqualify musicians' musical endeavours through convenient consumerism. In this sense, the paper argues that creative entrepreneurialism has become an essential aspect of viable metal music careers, withstanding negative consequences for many musicians in regards to 1) precariousness and 2) (mental) health outcomes.

Keywords: Creative entrepreneurship, entrepreneurialism, musicpreneurship, intellectual property, identity work, occupational instability, precariousness, metal music, music therapy, the netherlands

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Introduction

With only established professional musicians being in the spotlight while many others are striving for equal professional music success, creative entrepreneurship's precariousness can be underestimated. Many musicians assume that writing a hit song like Queen's "Under Pressure" would sign them to a label and formulate professional opportunities that secure their music career and income. However, studies have shown that a creative entrepreneur's external-environment factors, such as industry practices and audience behaviour, direct chances of failure or success and force most performing artists to struggle to attain or sustain career success in making a living entertaining audiences. To be a creative entrepreneur is to offer goods and services in a culture of risk-taking and co-dependency, both of which vary in degrees and contest an entrepreneur's adaptability and managerial resourcefulness. Describing this entrepreneurial musician, the term "musicpreneur" became frequently used by music marketing educators, agencies, and scholars (Haynes & Marshall, 2018; Schwetter, 2018; Homan, 2015; Kubacki & Croft, 2011) alike to define musicians who combine artistic and managerial skills to develop their careers. The term also encompasses the advantages and drawbacks of being a professional musician. Thus, a musician wishing to be professional and successful must compute managerial and organisational dexterities that fashion prospects to sell their music and make a comfortable living from creative work.

This is also true for metal music, a popular yet commercially unreliable genre. And despite the genre's institutional legitimation in the Netherlands (e.g., as shown through metal-focused programmes in the educational institutions Metal Factory and Rockacademie), the field cannot rely on governmental support. Hence, most metal musicpreneurs begin their careers as young "professionalised hobbyists" aspiring to make a full-time career in non-mainstream community music. Often acting as a band to divide tasks and benefit from each other's strengths, these metalhead producers make music for metalhead consumers in DIY identity labour that transcends music per se and stimulates an economy of intellectual property. In this regard, studies on the creative economy suggest variably compensated entrepreneurial competition, implying that metal musicpreneurs also endure similar consequences. Therefore, these individuals make for a sociologically complex subject worth investigating based on metal music production's inherently entrepreneurial and niche nature. Isolating metal musicians from the community and interpreting their experiences can shed light on occupational precariousness and the relational function of a music profession.

This paper builds on previous interdisciplinary literature and further studies the occupational precariousness of creative entrepreneurship from the perspective of metal musicpreneurs. With the research question, *How do (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurialism?,* qualitative data from ten in-depth interviews will be interpreted through a reflexive thematic analysis. The theoretical framework will, firstly, identify metal musicians who intend to sell experience goods and services as independent entrepreneurs. Secondly, it will cognise how they make their music and independently promote it to critical industry professionals and audiences. In other words, this section will focus on creativity and learned entrepreneurialism, shedding more light on the relationship between artistic determination and external forces determining the validity and success of an artwork. Who benefits from the creative economy, and how can a musician adapt? Thirdly, it will compare music production and reception experiences, highlighting producers' vulnerability and how it confronts critical reception. Hence, it will answer why these musicians make what they make and how audiences can motivate or disrupt occupational stability, thereby discussing the complex relationship between metalhead musicpreneurs and metalhead consumers.

Following a theoretical framework in line with social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, reflexive thematic analysis of the data will discuss the entrepreneurs' observations and critiques as they explain the exploitive practices of the micro-and-macro external environments, such as scarce remuneration, legitimacy strategies, and uncooperative legislation. It will explore power structures and how occupational music production converts fan-and-fan relationships to hierarchical offer-and-demand models. By the end, the analysis will have shown the impact of occupational precariousness on selfhood and creativity. Thus, this paper will contribute to a growing field of metal studies by spotlighting the behind-the-scenes and identifying factors that cause occupational precariousness. By setting out these factors, the paper will give insight into entrepreneurialism in non-mainstream popular music and provide tools for further research on metal entrepreneurs and how to make their environment more artist-friendly and durable. A limitation section will set out areas of improvement for this research and propose potential expanding studies on the subject.

Theoretical Framework

As the thesis aims to understand music professionalism's precarity and to argue its intense impact on the health and creativity of professional metal musicians, this section will first investigate creative work and how entrepreneurial tools adapt to the music sector. Second, the focus will shift from general music work to disclose entrepreneurship for the metal musician specifically. Accordingly, this second part will study metal musicians who intend to or already make a living from music production. By examining metal musicians' entrepreneurial endeavours within a non-mainstream music scene's professional conditions, their development from bedroom producers to professional stage performers can be tracked and analysed. Finally, a third part will interpret the social aspect of a metal music occupation and establish the meaning of music-making that transcend an artist's composition.

Creative work and entrepreneurship

As defined by Ruth Towse (2010) and Colette Henry (2007), creative labour and economy develop, produce, and exploit artists' intellectual property. In other words, at the essence of creative work, there is an artist's creativity (Varbanova, 2016), collectively developed with other organisations into final immaterial[1] goods to be distributed and sold to an audience for an experience, where after-purchase consumer experiences elevate or decrease the artwork's value (Varbanova, 2016). While cultural economics focuses on music management's structural foundation and functions, cultural sociology prioritises the social aspect of music-making, among other things. In the attempt to illustrate the social dimension of a cultural production system, Howard S. Becker's (2008) analysis of 'art worlds' can be a starting point. He argues that Art manifests as an activity of either individual or collective processes that enable a final artwork to exist. In a creative economy, music is an artistic product that comes into being through a musician's taste, skills, and labour and a sequence of collaborations between professional music makers and their sector of cultural production. While partnerships guarantee the final form of a product, the artist's endeavours guarantee the very existence of the product and cause for collaboration. To reflect the relational activities suggested in Becker's work, music production can be analysed from one of two angles. First, scholars such as Haynes and Marshall (2018) focus on cultural entrepreneurs personally. This approach shows in music sociology's growing emphasis on why music is produced in a certain way and what motivates musicians to create it

[1] David Hesmondhalgh (2015) refers to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) definition of cultural products as 'immaterial goods', and culture and art as a result of 'immaterial labour'.

(DeNora, 2004). Second, other creative-labour scholars such as Koos Zwaan et al. (2010) concentrate mainly on industry activities and success variables. This approach tackles production tasks and hierarchies that "manufacture" the cultural field and direct an entrepreneur's occupation.

1. The creative entrepreneur

As literature has not fully agreed on a solid understanding of creative entrepreneurs, it can be a sign that cultural entrepreneurship goals depend on individual personality and ambitions. In the Entrepreneur magazine, Daniel DiPiazza (2016) writes about the marketing author Seth Godin, who defines entrepreneurs as those who build and run projects with external investment. Additionally, François Colbert (in Chong, 2009) and Lidia Varbanova (2016) discuss creative entrepreneurs, explaining that a (music) entrepreneur acts as a leader and organisational manager, who originates a musical product and strategically uses the micro-external environment (industry, market) to build a wider audience and a thriving music career. Thus, a musician must be entrepreneurial if music professionalism is a goal. Contrastingly, Staffan Albinsson's (2018) interview data with pop and classical musicians report that most interviewees are reluctant to self-identify as entrepreneurs due to a misconception of the term. Indeed, many musicians in the study associate entrepreneurship with money and the economic sector, i.e., with quantitive qualities. Therefore, money's association with art is in question; does it facilitate or hinder music and does it benefit the artist and external parties equally? In other words, should there be a moral (see Banks, 2006) inquiry into the music business and what are the motives of the industry professionals?

Firstly, understanding the initial stages of a product is essential to answer these questions. Preceding monetary compensation or music consumption – and therefore, the audience's aesthetic judgement – a composition needs to be created, rehearsed, performed, recorded, and distributed, among other things. In a typical practice, an aspiring professional musician, formally or informally develops their skills, experiences hobbyist performing, then gradually pursues a music occupation. Traditionally, the record-deal ideology (Arditi, 2020) meant that a musician would seek a record deal with a label to, at least, record their compositions. However, Haynes and Marshall (2018) argue that the music industry and popular-music consumption changed due to the digitalisation of music and social media's development into a "hands-on" business platform. In turn, the industry's transition required (popular) musicians to develop entrepreneurial behaviour to promote, record, and distribute their music without the obligation to have a record label and such. In other words, Albinsson (2018) concludes that whether musicians self-identify as entrepreneurs, their occupation enforces entrepreneurship. Although, this represents mainly musicians who either intend to or already make a living from their music.

According to Varbanova (2016), scholars have written very diversely on (creative) entrepreneurship but have drawn a similar conclusion; that an entrepreneurial leader can be self-serving, innovative, ambitious, autonomous, and visionary. In taking a risk and competing in a market with an original product, the (music) entrepreneur is zealous and analyses the micro-external environment to plan a collaboration with said environment and avoid obstacles that could hinder (musical) success. So, as Miller (1983) maintains, entrepreneurialism is a personality and behaviour as well as a process. In principle, creative work in itself requires an artist to be authentic, resourceful, perspicacious, and self-sufficient with multiple skills that not only manifest in creativity, artistic talent – in this paper's case, musicianship – but also in technology, business, and teaching (Thomson & Jaque, 2017). Accordingly, Becker (2008) examines two extremes of labour division in Art; either someone exercises '"a bundle

of tasks"' (citing Hughes, 1971) or labour is divided into one task per individual. In music specifically, Albinsson (2018) states that each musician finds themselves frequently combining these artistic and managerial functions.

I argued earlier that music's core is individual creativity (Varbanova, 2016). Musical skills together with creativity give a musician their sonic and brand identity. Davidson and McPherson (2017) explain that 'a musician [is continuously] in the making' (Wallace, 2017) and reveal that each musical project necessitates musicians to undergo a process that challenges the core of their artistry. In other words, talents and gifts turn into skills that shape a performance, which further enriches and improves knowledge of one's craft and instrument. This process suggests that a song's external judgement comes after a pre-established self-critical evaluation from the musician. For instance, before deciding on a final version of a song, the band Tool, who is famous for taking years to release an album (Grow, 2018), undergo a 'discontinuous mode of production' (Colbert in Chong, 2009) refining their ideas and performances. In other words, creative labour endures indefinite performance evaluation. On the one hand, this evaluation can encourage job-induced anxiety and stress (Zwaan et al., 2010, Dobson, 2010). On the other hand, live performing adds the pressure of instant feedback from a live audience who can equally show positive or negative energy that "makes or breaks" a show for the artist.

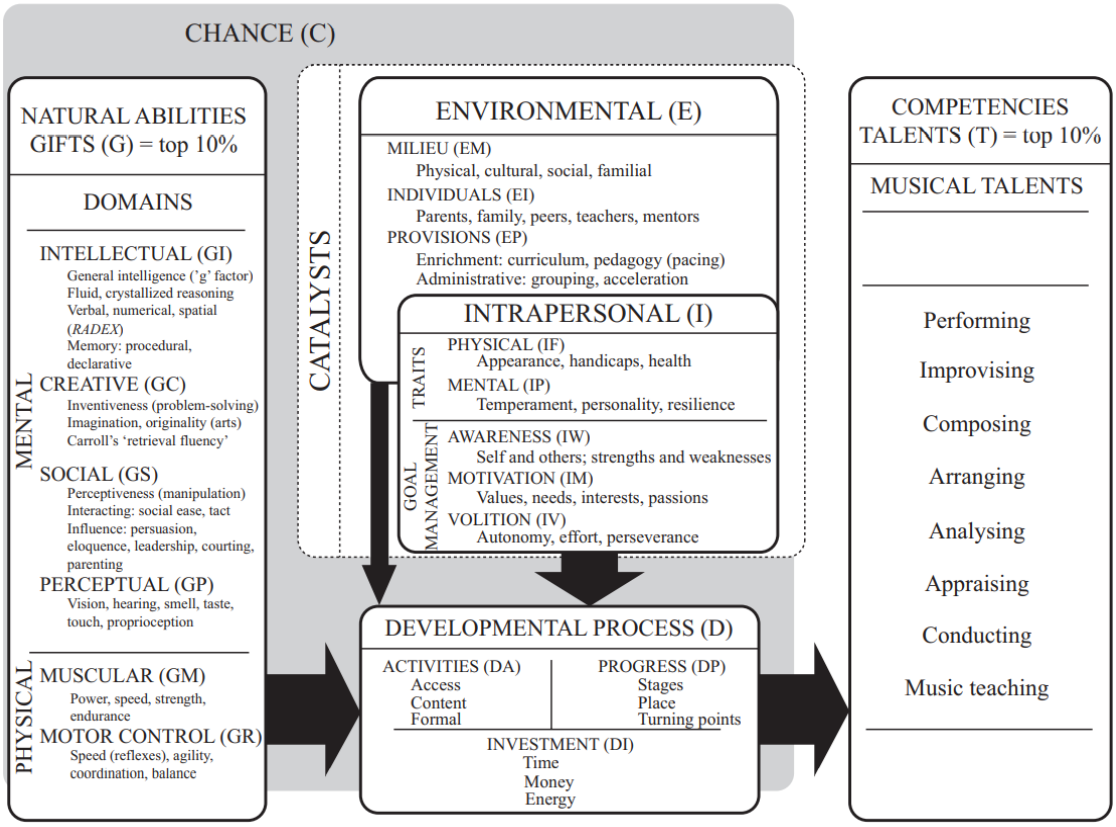

Figure 1. Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent components (in Davidson and McPherson 2017. The authors adapted it from Gagné 2009, p. 64)

While external factors like audience feedback are critical, scholars such as Zwaan et al. (2009), Gagné (in Kaufman, 2013), and Davidson and McPherson (2017) contend the presence of an internal development which in itself motivates a musician's increase of competence and, therefore, the entrance into high-achievement entrepreneurship. Internal development refers to the (creative)

entrepreneur's craft and managerial progress as well as ambitions and is linked to personality, as previously argued. Thus, before further tackling the external factors that can aid or disrupt a creative occupation, a referral to a musician's personal development is in order. In this light, Davidson and McPherson's (2017) article on musical abilities and development is a good foundation because it showcases (Fig. 1) a musician's internal parameters for skill and creative improvement. The authors note that a musician may start as a 'gifted' individual who has the potential to grow musical 'talent' through a systematic learning process. Then, a musician achieves 'superior skills' through a musical-learning process, combining 'natural abilities' and 'intrapersonal catalysts' in an entrepreneurial mode. The authors base this theory on Françoys Gagné's concept of 'chance', where chance, as the factor of 'predictability (controllable vs. uncontrollable)' (in Kaufman, 2013, p. 197), combines specific *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)* components. For example, a musician becomes skilfully competent in improvisation only if they practise it, learn to listen to other players, master their instrument, control their physical and mental coordination well, and are, at the very least, willing to improvise.

Further, Fig. 1 shows that it is the combination of individual and environmental components that allows for a superior skill to develop, more professional prospects, and opportunity creation (Acs & Audretsch, 2010). Neither Gagné nor Davidson and McPherson develop the chance factor beyond technical skills, but I must note that the chance factor also contributes to familiarising a musician with the decorum of the music business. A musician's experience teaches how to act in specific scenarios, adapt to hierarchies, fix a problem, handle equipment, promote oneself, make out a good deal from a bad one, et cetera. In other words, Zwaan et al. (2010; 2009) note that when a musician "catches a break", their success is not secured; they must continue their entrepreneurial activity to maintain the success. In this light, a 'musician's mentality'[2] (Friedmann J., 2015, p. 118), professional attitude, and endurance impact their career success (Zwaan et al., 2010, 2009). But then, Fig. 1 also shows that an experience per se is shaped by intrapersonal traits.

Indeed, a musician's intrapersonal traits can affect their chance factor. To illustrate, looking into Zwaan et al.'s (2009) article "So you want to be a Rock 'n' Roll star? Career success of pop musicians in the Netherlands" can clarify this idea in more detail. These scholars reveal that a musician's 'demographic situation' is closely related to career success. Initially, the authors find in their results that musicians with the most social support and professional experience were male (physical appearance), highly educated (milieu), and in a relationship[3] (individual relations). Then, further results show that music education is irrelevant to career success and social support, making experience-based musical skills enough. Finally, results show that an experienced and well-connected musician can evade the initial background variables.

[2] In brief, Friedmann (2015) investigates the theory that a musician's relationship with music-making is spiritual and equal to a religious bond with an immaterial force larger than life or themselves. In the book *My Bloody Roots from Sepultura to Soulfly and beyond*, Max Cavalera (2014) – the founder of the bands Sepultura and Soulfly – writes that while depressed and rebellious after his father's passing, 'music was [his] salvation' (p. 15) because it was 'speaking to [his] soul' and offered an 'escape' (p. 16).

[3] Emperor's Ihsahn (Unni, 2013; Godla, 2018) confides that his wife directly impacts his music by being his primary and most-trusted critic and moral supporter.

2. The success variables

Zwaan et al.'s (2010) prospective longitudinal study of the behaviour of Dutch pop musicians also suggests a constructionist frame of a music occupation. Indeed, after tracking their behaviour over three years, Zwaan et al. set out three crucial parameters for a successful career, where musicians can make a comfortable living from music-making. To secure a stable music occupation, a musician must guarantee three key performance metrics: a significant professional network, a strong professional attitude, and vigorous social support. A musician's professional network and representation strengthen a positive and professional attitude (Zwaan et al., 2010) consisting of 'hard work, perseverance and resilience' (Zwaan & ter Bogt, 2009, p. 94). For instance, a musician's manager, colleagues, or label can increasingly recommend their music and, thus, strengthen the musician's faith in their skills and vision. Consequently, the musician's social support follows and is nurtured by said career enthusiasm and determination (Zwaan et al., 2010). If a musician reflects dissatisfaction with their job or music, the audience might not appreciate this negativity or see no reason to listen to the music. Hence, a musician's decision to work with the right industry professionals like managers, booking agencies, labels, or/and publishers improves chances of success and self-fulfilment (Zwaan et al., 2010; Passman, 2010). But these professionals also benefit a musician in other ways.

Accessing a highly skilled team offers a broader professional network that enables the musician to develop their occupation and turn 'reputation value into financial value' (Zwaan et al., 2010, 2009; Becker, 2008; Beckert & Rössel, 2004; Bourdieu, 1996). To explain, Jøsang and Ismail (2002) note that a reputation system collects and spreads information about an individual's behaviour, then collects feedback information. The authors argue that candid and honourable behaviour generates trust and that public decisions favour trustworthy individuals. Accordingly, unfavourable behaviour can taint reputation. In January 2021, the guitar player and founder of Iced Earth, Jon Schaffer, acted as one of the rioters at the US Capitol. Fans helped the FBI identify Schaffer from their search images and stopped supporting the band – some even disposed of their Iced Earth merchandise (Kennelty, 2021). Comparably to fans, the remaining bandmates and the label Century Media Records de-associated with the band and condemned Schaffer's actions. So, supporting Jøsang and Ismail's (2002) observation, a creative entrepreneur's behaviour can influence their success pattern. But the reputation system is not easily predictable because audience behaviour varies subjectively, and industry professionals' behaviour can depend on social support. While Iced Earth's label and management ceased their association with the project, Ghost's team continued their alliance with the band despite the lawsuit controversy between Tobias Forge and ex-bandmates, which divided audience opinion (Blabbermouth, 2018). This implies that some entrepreneurs' behaviour is less damaging to and more tolerated by their business team and suggests that the audience is, to some extent, forgiving uncandid conduct.

Accordingly, a musician's reputation value strengthens the cultural interest. As Scott (2012) and Weatherston (2013) explain, (music) entrepreneurs convert non-existent capital into a cultural interest that eventually gains economic capital. So, when industry professionals see the potential success of a product or the existent demand for the product, they decide to finance it. Having a different perspective but agreeing on the final result, Dacin et al. (in Albinsson, 2017) argue that cultural entrepreneurs seize opportunities to achieve social or cultural value. So, a professional musician collaborates with industry professionals to reach and distribute the music to broader targetted segments. In other words, a musician's music gains the interest of an external party who invests money and energy into its growth as a business. In such a case, does the external party affect

the cultural entrepreneur's music in any way? Not necessarily. Zwaan and ter Bogt (2009) reveal that their respondents – A&R managers and musicians – believe that intuition and authenticity (p. 96) make better music. The respondents don't explain what either term means but suggest that they lead to audience approval and higher success chances.

Therefore, referring back to the intermingled-agency concept that both an entrepreneur and their micro-external environment (industry and market) have on one another's activities (Becker, 2008; Bourdieu, 1993; Varbanova, 2016), this relational and collaborative process either facilitates or complicates a creative entrepreneur's occupation. An example of facilitation is a consumer-musician dynamic; as a concert's moral code is to please the (paying) audience, the artist must achieve that. Nonetheless, if the instant feedback in a live concert is positive, the musician becomes enthusiastic and performs in better spirits to sustain the enthusiasm. Contrastingly, an example of a complication is an investor-musician dynamic; referring back to Century Media dropping Iced Earth, the bandmates who condemn discriminative behaviour and terrorism still cannot continue with the label under the name Iced Earth. In this sense, career success depends on external aesthetics and judgements and an entrepreneur's conduct. To this end, Tia DeNora (2004) implies that musicians both have an agency on the social construct and production system as well as depend on it. So, while an artist can argue that their art is the foundation for collaboration, music industry professionals (record companies, publishers, et cetera) can dispute that their resources assure the art's final representation. These relational occupation hazards are also relevant to metal music as a non-mainstream genre. The following section will study how musicians experience precariousness and the degree of mutual leverage that metal music gatekeepers and musicians have on one another. Before developing these ideas, I will first introduce the metal music field.

Precariousness in metal entrepreneurship

Metal music has had a controversial image since its emergence in society, the media, and academia (Messick & Aranda, 2020; Kahn-Harris, 2007) due to its argued heritage of 'counter-hegemonic discourse . . . against the mounting technocratic nature of western capitalist society (Roszak, 1969)' (as cited in Bennett, 2009). While some highlighted its significance in metalheads' lives (Varas-Díaz & Scott, 2016; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Weinstein, 2000; Arnett, 1996; Walser, 1993), others held it responsible for morally misleading its fans (see Thompson et al., 2018). However, this paper's concerns are neither to trace the debated origins of metal music nor to analyse its creative content. In line with the research question, this section aims to shed light on the cultural production of metal music and producers' position in society as they cater experience goods to an 'alternate community' (Savigny & Schaap, 2018) with a 'counter-culture' (Bennett, 2009). So, to reveal metal music producers' position, a combined analysis of academic papers and metal autobiographies[4] provides a balanced view of such occupation.

Metal autobiographies are limited in number but remain helpful in conceptualising the musician's perspective. Those written by Behemoth's Adam Darski (2015) and Sepultura's Max Cavalera (2014) show that metal musicians' alternative views and aesthetics result in underground conditioning of metal music and its sub-genres. For instance, in *Confessions of a Heretic* (2015), Adam Darski (aka Nergal) writes that underground music can be consumed by millions while remaining 'out of the

[4] Music autobiographies are generally written by established artists, but can provide valuable insight into the early career trajectories and development.

mainstream' (p. 146) because of its thought-provoking symbolic messages and extreme aesthetics. He further explains that '"Underground", first and foremost, is a message brought to people via music, and [Behemoth's] message is undeniably extreme' (p. 146). So a metal musician's chances and professional experience are shaped by and within this underground conditioning. Correspondingly, musicians are generally on borrowed time in a cycle of socio-economic and political forces to which they have to defend their art as cultural entrepreneurs (Banks, 2019; Albinsson, 2018; DeNora, 2004). Similarly, Lidia Varbanova (2016) writes that macro-environment factors (PEST factors) such as politics, economy, society, and technology have trends and barriers that exert a hierarchical impact on one's music occupation (p. 68-49), which sustains a cycle of tension between metal musicians and their external environment. But as Darski and Bennett suggest, this tension can spark creativity and inspiration for a socially-constructive commentary imbedded in music.

One of the pioneers of (academic) metal studies, Deena Weinstein (2000), observes that most metal bands start with socially aware or sensitive young (male) friends playing and writing music together until they become skilled and professional. In other words, metalheads are a deemed youth subculture rebelling against their environments through music (Hoffin, 2020, Purcell, 2003). Although I will develop this point in the next part, I can note briefly that aspiring metal musicians have sought to regain power and control over their lives through musical stimuli (Messick & Aranda, 2020; Thompson et al., 2018). So, metal musicianship starts as a form of personal entertainment rather than a business. The entrepreneurial nature of metal music shows in a DIY ideology, where musicians authentically (Frandsen, 2015) write and play their self-composed music under one formal entity.

The most common entity in metal production is the band frame. It reflects the collective effort (Becker, 2008) in management and organisation through assigning tasks for each other and dividing the production process according to skill and interests (Arditi, 2020; Friesen & Epstein, 1994). Hence, this collaborative approach to making music together has its advantages in developing the singular individual's aspirations. Not only does a band frame divide tasks, but it also divides expenses. I previously discussed Scott's (2012) and Weatherston's (2013) insight that a musician has no initial capital, so paying session musicians to play a live performance or record an album might not be a practical solution for some. Having a band maintains individual goals while sharing the burden of entrepreneurship. Still, it also poses a leadership issue that can result in confrontations or lineup changes because members have to compromise and follow the wishes of one leading member. For example, the Dutch band Delain announced in February 2021 that all members but the keyboard player – who is also the band's founder – had quit the band due to collaboration difficulties. Over time, individual priorities and preferences shift, which can affect the ensemble's cohesion and an individual's cohesion. For instance, interviewed about the band's decision, Wessels (M-PX, 2021) responds in tears that Delain's dissolution caused her an 'identity crisis' (see Hepworth-Sawyer et al., 2020) because she could no longer work on a project that had been in her life for sixteen years. She continued to note that one is what they do, and by no longer being Delain's singer, she finds herself lost regardless of her success in other activities.

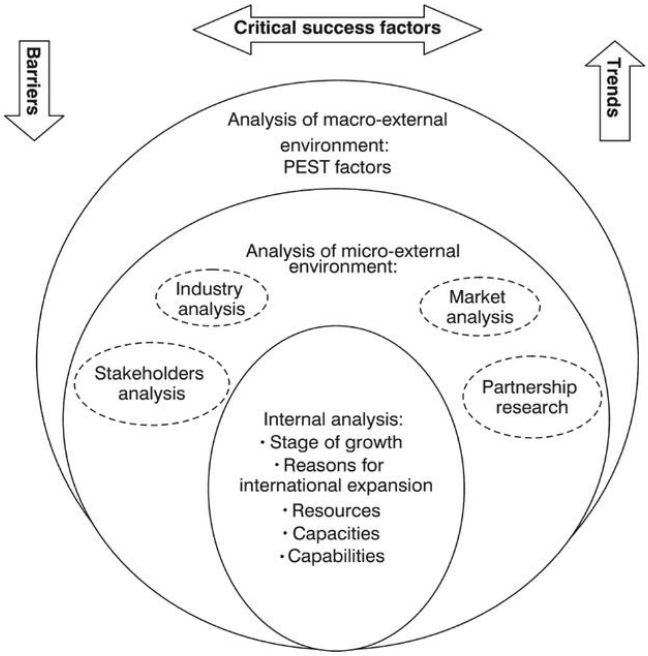

Figure 2. Main Elements of External and Internal Environment in Art Entrepreneurship (in Varbanova 2013)

However, more challenges can arise from the relational aspect of metal music production that centre around a musician's micro and macro external environments. In this view, recalling the argumentation that (metal) music production relies on DIY practices, Michael Scott's (2012) research offers the perspective that such methods result in a 'flexible labour market' (p. 242) where the entrepreneur is fully liable even if the fault lies elsewhere. For example, suppose a music video is not well produced due to a limited advanced budget from a label. In such a case, the label can argue that it was the band who hired a non-professional filming team. So, to illustrate the creative entrepreneur's relational system, Lidia Varbanova (2016, 2013) introduces a list of main elements of the external (and internal) environment (Fig. 2) that a musician ought to consider and analyse before starting a new project. The author argues that these main elements also control the international expansion of artistic projects, but as metal musicians have international projects (based on touring, music streaming, and international labels and publishers), their entrepreneurial business fits into Varbanova's map.

The map shows how politics, economy, society, and technology (otherwise, macro-external environment or PEST) occupy an overarching position in the hierarchy. The second level of power consists of the industry and the market. Finally, the map shows that the (music) entrepreneur depends on both external environments' tendencies. Similarly, Timothy J. Dowd (2004) introduces Richard Peterson's 'six-facet model of the production nexus' (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 313) that either expedite or obstruct a musician's musical production; organisational structure, industry structure, markets, occupational careers, technology, and law. So, referring back to the research question, 'how do (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurship?', Dowd's division will be adopted to examine a (Dutch) metal musicpreneur's external environments.

1. Organisational structure

As previously argued, although consumed by many, the extremity of metal music pins it to the non-mainstream scenes of popular culture. Dowd (2004) posits that the distinction between high and

popular cultures is decided by those with authority – they determine the superiority of classical music and traditional culture. This "high vs low" shows on the Dutch cultural policy plan of 2021-2024 (Fig. 3) as it lists sub-categories of Performing Arts and supports Dowd's hegemonic analysis of culture. In effect, in line with Dowd's argument, Bennet (1998) and Turner (2015) note that cultural policy reflects the governmental authority in culture production as it subsidises 'heritage-based cultural institutions' and fortifies 'political economy' (Turner, 2015) with focus on diversity and internationalisation. In light of the Dutch categorisation of Performing Arts, music production's organisational structure withstands flaws caused by cultural policy shortcomings.

Figure 3. Dutch Basic Cultural Infrastructure 2021-2024 for Performing Art (from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)

Indeed, a look into the subsidy numbers from the Dutch cultural policy of 2021-2024 of Performing Arts supports this distinction theory where some forms of music are more institutionally encouraged. The chart shows the government highlighting tradition-oriented cultural institutions (such as Opera companies, theatres, symphonic orchestras) and political economy (such as Youth companies). In detail, the Dutch government supports heritage-based and diversity-oriented Arts by allocating 55,65 million euros to symphonic orchestras, 32,26 million to Opera companies, and 10,24 million to Youth companies, as opposed to 5,38 million to music ensembles – including metal bands, should they prove eligible and apply – and 5,79 million to festivals. In this policy, festivals and music ensembles are persuaded to attract new and international audiences and produce innovative and interdisciplinary Art that promote the country.

In this respect, Turner (2015) argues that cultural policy regulations limit the creative economy's potential and narrow their focus on 'the investment in the individual' creative entrepreneur or the individual consumer rather than on culture and community as a whole (p. 536). However, the Dutch cultural policy shows that this investment targets consumers and uses entrepreneurs as creative tools (see Borén & Young, 2016) for a politico-economic agenda. Accordingly, the Netherlands appears to support Paul DiMaggio's theory that traditional music is pure and only seeks to minimise debt – thus, deserving of institutional support – while popular music seeks to maximise profit (in Dowd, 2004). And so, it is implied that by supporting non-profit forms of Art and music organisations (as opposed to the individual musicians), the Dutch government assumes that popular-culture musicians are successful

enough to earn a profit. Whereas, only if popular-culture venues, for example, were to be (widely) subsidised would they venture into programming more diverse musical acts, including metal artists (see 3voor12, 2001). Hence, the government proves misinformation on popular music (including metal) and its isolated entrepreneurs. So, it can be assumed that an inclusive cultural policy can help to elevate metal music and change its reputation.

2. Industry structure and market

While Peterson's model separates between all six models, I coupled industry and market based on Zwaan et al.'s (2010) notion that social support motivates industry professionals' interest in a musician owing to their lucrative objectives. To explain exchanging music for money, cultural economists defined music as an immaterial and experience product catered to an audience and developed through a relational system between musicians and their external environment. Further building on this idea, Roy and Dowd (2010) refer to the sociological understanding of music as an exchange object on a freelance market. The authors explain that the objectification of music allows for copyright ownership and commercial publication. Similarly, Michael Scott (2012) conceptualises music and favours as exchange-value in the Bourdieuian framework. He explains that compositions and recordings generate interest of external parties and, consequently, compensation for service or payment for possession. So, referring back to creative entrepreneurship and the creative economy's definition as a developer, producer, and exploiter of artists' intellectual property, the commodification of music allows the recording industry to quantify an otherwise qualitative and aesthetic form of Art (Hirsch, 1972; Varbanova, 2013). Entrepreneurs' lack of capital necessitates their collaboration with organisations to enable their music's mass commercialisation (Varbanova, 2013; Scott, 2012). In effect, Hirsch (1972) posits that this necessity gives the upper hand to the creative industry. So, recalling the question from the first section, what are the motives of the industry?

Cultural organisations seek lucrative projects and filter out music that does not follow the 'new fads and fashions' (Hirsch, 1972) or market 'trends' (Varbanova, 2013). This process ignores music's quality and focuses on the consumers' entertainment (Hirsch, 1972), experiences and identity (DeNora, 2000, 2007), and the profit maximisation for cultural organisations (labels, publishers, booking agencies, etc.). In this sense, musicpreneurs' drive and passion (Arditi, 2020; Laaksonen et al., 2011) to make music increase the number of musical acts, while the music industry's filter process creates a competition between these acts. Scott (2012) believes that it is misguided to exclude entrepreneurs' material motives from their passion for music-making. So, if music-making is presumed a full-time profession for some musicians, and if music distribution is presumed a full-time profession for external parties (such as a booking agency or a streaming service like Spotify), is there a difference in their business legitimacies? Can these agents both achieve surplus values systematically?

Moreover, Peterson and Berger (1975) and Arditi (2020) divulge that specific big organisations monopolise the (recording) industry. These organisations possess resources otherwise unachievable to entrepreneurs or independent organisations. In doing so, the monopolising companies control other organisations, artists, and their market. Dowd (2004) notes that monopolising organisations do not have to offer favourable conditions to musicians as they are confident in their leverage. For example, Century Media Records and Nuclear Blast Records[5] can afford mass promotion and

[5] Sony Music bought Century Media Records (Christman, 2015) and Believe Digital now owns a majority stake in Nuclear Blast Records (All That Shreds, 2018).

distribution. So, they translate their power into their contracts and their music filtering. Another example is that of most festivals being continuously headlined by the same popular bands because promoters and directors favour success patterns (Dowd, 2004; Arte, 2020).

These examples highlight the risk-taking factor of musicians' entrepreneurship (Varbanova, 2016, 2013; Zwaan et al., 2010; Dowd, 2004; Hirsch, 1972) and the music industry's competition and chance factors. In fact, Marion von Osten's (2007) analysis of the creative sector demonstrates that the music industry manipulates music's intrinsic qualities to render it mechanical and discursive in a hegemonic, culturalised economy. Comparably, Matteo Pasquinelli (2007) concludes that the 'social factory' decides the value of music products through 'collective dependency' (Bourdieu, 1993) along with mass promotion and distribution. For instance, the singer Mariangela Demurtas (2021) from Tristania and Ardours spoke to Doro's touring guitarist Luca Princiotta about her voice and music trajectory in an Instagram Live video on her page. She recalled the fans' reaction upon her joining the band after Vibeke Stene's departure (44:30). While the band hired her with enthusiasm and respect, fans met her with name-calling and hatred. She described it as the feeling of being denied her stage dream and audience love. Although external demotivation is not alien to other creative or non-creative fields, it remains most destabilising to entrepreneurs whose only professional occupation and formal education revolve around external aesthetics judgement, such as (metal) music. Thus, referring back to commercial organisations seeking to satisfy consumers and accompany their daily activities (Arditi, 2020; DeNora, 2000, 2007; Dowd, 2004; Hirsch, 1972), bands are pressured to produce albums and tour successively without a guaranteed monetary compensation (Scott, 2012). The press and audiences further support the ideology of over-working an artist (see Arditi, 2020); when musicians are on tour promoting their current album, they are often asked if they have already begun writing the next one.

3. Occupational careers

Having discussed the cultural position of metal music and the risky industry and market that metal musicpreneurs interact with, this section supports Scott's (2012) and Dowd's (2004) theory of unstable occupational music careers. The definition of an occupational career is that it means having one type of job throughout one's lifetime career (Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001; Super, 1980, 1953). While "occupation" refers to a specific or focused activity, a "career" refers to the pattern of job occupations in an individual's lifespan (Super, 1980, 1953). For example, a professional singer might have an entire singing career without any occupational changes. But another professional singer might have a discontinuous singing occupation while holding a full-time job as a museum curator. These exemplars mean that the first singer has a stable occupational music career and the second singer has an unstable occupational music career – although, paradoxically, the second singer might have a more stable financial situation. However, reasons for occupational instability are diverse such as the entrepreneur wishing for more professional stimulation or the entrepreneur not being financially secured from one occupation. According to Scott (2012), the second model is prevalent in the popular music industry, where most musicians earn close to nothing and struggle to focus on music professionally.

The concept of what makes a professional remains hard to define, and it is even harder concerning professional (metal) musicians where lines between amateur/semi-professional/professional individuals are blurred. For example, Robin S. Downie (1990) writes that monetary reward distinguishes professional individuals from amateurs, where professional individuals are paid for their skills and knowledge. Downie explains that professionals do not necessarily have better expertise than

amateurs, but the mere remuneration of a full-time occupation gives the individual a more official status. Eventually, Downie concludes that even that definition is not the full picture and notes that perhaps professionalism can be philosophically and sociologically evaluated according to the occupation's desirability in society as well as its interdisciplinary characteristics that transcend specialised knowledge. If continuous music consumption proves desirability, why do studies show musicians financially struggling (see Haynes & Marshall, 2018)? Recalling Zwaan et al.'s (2010) success parameters for a music career and the flexibility of labour within the micro-external environment, I can add that the mobile nature of music-making reinforces career instability. Indeed, Zwaan et al. (2010) discuss 'creative workers and boundaryless careers' (p. 11), arguing that musicpreneurs often are 'not bound to a single organisation but often hired on a project basis' (p. 11). While this professional fluidity can have advantages of individual freedom and flexibility, Dowd and Blyler (2002) find it also harmful because few musicians experience stable and sturdy occupational careers in music. In fact, Zwaan et al. (2010) warn that even the established musicians risk a reclining success.

Discussing Black Sabbath's trajectory, Ozzy Osbourne (Osbourne & Ayres, 2010) writes in his autobiography, *I Am Ozzy,* that getting signed in 1970 – after years of activity – had little to do with the band's music. He explains that occult and horror literature and films were bestsellers and that the Manson murders were always on television. Consequently, the circumstances made the band's dark aesthetics and name intriguing. He continues to explain that 'when it comes to getting a deal, all these little things have to come together at the right time. [A band would] need a bit of luck, basically' (The Witch and the Nazi section). Thus, Osbourne's experience proves curious as to how the band manages to remain successful both mainstream and in metal scenes, affirming Françoys Gagné's concept of chance and Bourdieu's collective dependency. As a direct result of chance and interdependency, a lack or scarcity of societal motivation and facilitation limits occupational prosperity (Albinsson, 2018). Thus, (metal) entrepreneurs experience a risky and unreliable field, and, appropriately, many musicians have different occupations throughout their career to both finance their living and their music. However, the financial deficit is one of many shortcomings in creative entrepreneurialism.

Another barrier is gender marginalisation (Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001). Metal studies scholars have often identified the metal scene to be predominantly white, male, young, and heterosexual (Berkers & Schaap, 2018; Shug, 2017; Bennet & Rogers, 2016; Hill, 2016; Clifford-Napoleone, 2015; Khan-Harris, 2007; Wilkins, 2004; Weinstein, 2000). As an illustration, the band Kittie (Loudwire, 2018) discuss their gendered experiences in the music industry. The band, comprising all female members, reveal that colleagues have often made sexist remarks or doubted their musical skills based on gender. Floor Jansen (2021) has also interviewed Simone Simons regarding women's role in metal scenes. Both singers reveal that colleagues' behaviour is less gendered, but fans tend to be inappropriate and harass female musicians (see also Everley, 2019). On this note, Hill (2021) writes on the blog of Metal Studies that women often get sexually violated in live shows. The article reports that a violent act was found to cause possibly permanent physical or mental damage (para. 4). As a result of combatting gender and sexual orientation discrimination or violence, female musicians tend to adopt an androgynous behaviour and appearance that sway interchangeably from the social constructs of masculinity and femininity (Kemp, 1985). This androgynous behaviour allows musicians to defy socially defined sex roles and to adapt to different situations faced in their professional environment.

Another shortcoming to which musicpreneurs must adapt concerns physical obstacles, such as ailments or accidents. Musicians' lifestyles and occupation have physical consequences on their

careers. Thomson and Jaque (2017) explain how 'injuries that disrupt performance work schedules are disorienting and often frightening' (p. 329). First, the authors observe that some injuries can be remedied or coped with by musicians who passionately develop alternate strategies and techniques. For instance, Obscura's Christian Münzner developed focal dystonia in his left-hand fingers. He explains the neurologic disorder as 'a loss of voluntary motor control in extensively trained muscles' (AbyssZine, 2012, qst. 19). As a direct result, Münzner 'ha[s] to reduce [his] performance and practice amount to a healthy degree' (qst. 19) and play with a glove to encourage sensory stimuli. Second, other injuries can 'manifest as loss of range of motion, endurance, and fine motor control accompanied by pain' (p. 332). While female menstruation is not an injury, it does represent a performance handicap for certain female musicians. A study on female singers' menstrual cycles shows that menstruating singers feel that their singing lacks artistry because they experience challenging body coordination, breathing and vocalisation (Ryan & Kenny, 2009, p. 107-108).

4. Technology

I previously introduced metal music as a contrasting culture (Bennett, 2009) – in the section on organisational structure – using Roszak's description of the West being a technocratic capitalist society (in Bennett, 2009). This implied that metal music transcends and escapes the technological 'lifestyle engineering' business (Kellner & Heuberger, 1994), meaning that metal music creators are not subject to fads and demands of the market(s) to which they cater their music. But in reality, new technologies play a crucial role in music promotion and distribution, so metal entrepreneurs have to adapt to the modern demands of the digital music business. Findings from Haynes and Marshall (2018) and Khaire (2017) argue how digitalisation challenges established forms of the music business while also paving the way for musicpreneurs to communicate and sell their music to their audience independently.

The authors point out that digitalisation and globalisation allow creative entrepreneurs to attract and sustain an audience and provide an extra opportunity for them to monetise their content. Nevertheless, data shows musicpreneurs feeling reluctant to be entirely optimistic regarding these new technologies. For example, Baym (2012) states that direct fan-musician relationship on social media can be equally friendly and abusive. Both tendencies are evident in Incantation's Facebook post in 2020 condemning the recent cyber-bullying of their publicist. Upon her modelling the band's merchandise on social media, the publicist and band were cyber-bullied by fans due to the woman's appearance. As a result of this event, the publicist quit her collaboration with the band. However, the band's statement was met by other fans' support to the involved parties (Appendix A). In this sense, the same market that supports the band's music is unpredictable in its behaviour on social media and can either support or disapprove of certain content. In this light, digital audience behaviour becomes almost separate from the album and live performance reception and requires unique market analysis that musicians might not grasp.

Additionally, creative entrepreneurs worry about copyright infringement because digitalisation enables artworks' illegal duplication and distribution (Khaire, 2017). For example, many fans distribute their purchased or illegally downloaded song of their favourite band on YouTube, which can equally help create interest and deviate audiences from the band's official revenue streams. So, if a band have their music available for streaming already, some potential streams can be lost when listeners consume the content from a different source. Similarly, algorithms or content-recommendation systems continue to serve the unequal wealth distribution and capitalist heritage of western society (O'Dair & Fry, 2020) because these systems often recommend already-popular content and creators.

Consequently, both factors result in low income for small-scale creators (Khaire, 2017) and false audience-building (Schwetter, 2018). Indeed, Haynes and Marshall (2018) argue that the recommendation system results in 'invisible visibility' (p. 1989) and thus, musicians are more likely only to reach old audiences than new ones.

Nevertheless, emerging technologies continue to offer an unprecedented advantage of creating one's opportunities regardless of their subsequent performance metrics. Schaap and Berkers (2014) study aspiring metal musicians who use YouTube as a platform to manifest music skills through music covers. The research focuses on women's tokenism in the physical and virtual metal scene and analyses YouTube reactions to such content. Interestingly, the analysis finds seemingly supportive male viewers who "mansplain" performance techniques to the female cover artists and therefore undermine women's serious music production. In reversing this study's focus back on women's interest in digital mediums, Hill's (2016) discussion of women's visibility in physical metal scenes becomes relevant. She argues that gender statistics in metal scenes are inaccurate because various reasons make women appear to be rare tokens. For instance, sexual harassment and social anxiety are why some female fans and aspiring musicians remain active online alone (Hill, 2016). Schaap and Berkers (2014) further suggest that sexist professional pressure undermines personal achievements and focuses on the gender and appearance of the performer. So, Hill argues that female fans are not tokens and might exist in equal numbers to male fans, as chamber fans (p. 29, 30). To (female) musicians, bedroom production can remain a work model (e.g., Violet Orlandi and her new band). Such a model shows in the growing interest in Patreon among metal musicians. For instance, former Delain singer, Charlotte Wessels, announces that she intends to focus her creativity on Patreon (Pasbani, 2021) instead of a band. On Patreon, she composes, produces, and releases songs from her home studio that fans do not seem to distribute on other websites illegally. So, the question remains whether audience behaviour is positive because these websites necessitate the fans' proactive clicking and exclusivity.

Furthermore, new technologies have been helpful to creative entrepreneurs during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, facing concert bans and safety measures of physical distancing, various labels and management agencies suggested concert live-streaming to their bands. Century Media Records broadcasted the Isolation Festival on YouTube in May 2020 with bands from their roster, such as Borknagar and Lucifer. Visually linking the bands' albums, the label ensured both the promotion for these artists and revenue for bands and label. Alternatively, some bands such as Enslaved participated in virtual festivals such as the Norwegian Verftet in March 2020. These concerts were free but encouraged direct donations to bands. Other groups opted for independent productions such as Behemoth's "In Absentia Dei" in September 2020. This show was all accessible through ticket purchasing, which allowed the band to earn some revenue. However, this digital performance was subject to illegal duplication by audience members who uploaded them on YouTube for free (see Low, 2016). In fact, some fans expressed on social media that they would not purchase tickets and wait for a free upload of this performance.

In this regard, band manager Kristen Mulderig (Alexander, 2021) and scholar Khaire (2017) note that consumers have a 'problematic expectation' (Content Should Be Free section, para. 1) that digital content must be without charge. Mulderig (Alexander, 2021) expressed that the music industry has been incapable of resolving technological challenges. And as she points out, this audience behaviour defeats the point of bands finding alternate revenue before and during the pandemic. However, monthly subscriptions to streaming services and ticket purchases for live streams show that

consumers are willing to pay for music again. Still, the convenience of paying fifteen euros for a premium monthly subscription to Spotify to access a buffet of all-you-can-listen-to proves more appealing than spending the same price on one album a month (see Stone, 2020). In this sense, musicians are more exploited by the industry than by the market, so they require a fairer royalty system that better adapts to the streaming age.

5. Law

Music's exploitation by the industry is a pre-established argument in this paper by now, but can the industry legally exploit music makers? And does the market value intellectual property? Dowd (2004) posits that music law is under-analysed in social sciences despite the music business' foundation on intellectual property. In parallel, metal studies seem to overlook legislative boundaries encountered by underground music musicians as both entrepreneurs and taxpayers. Rising from those underground scenes, Ozzy Osbourne (Osbourne & Ayres, 2010) briefly notes in his autobiography that Black Sabbath always ran the risk of lawsuits whenever their label saw obstacles (The Witch and the Nazi section) and that their lack of business understanding made them dependent on management. In this regard, independent entrepreneurship requires (metal) musicians to adapt to both macro-and-micro external environments. However, recalling creative labour's flexibility and the Do-It-Yourself attitude of metal music, entrepreneurship functions according to mere symbolic rules through etiquettes and contracts where favours often become the means of exchange. So, Aldrich and Fiol (1994) distinguish two sorts of 'institutional strategies' for entrepreneurs to legitimise their work; 'cognitive legitimacy' and 'sociopolitical legitimacy' (p. 396). Both strategies demonstrate how the entrepreneur's external environment can legally exploit their work.

Cognitive legitimacy means that metal musicians embrace the industry's structure and behaviour as they are without defying them. Because many (metal) musicians' objectives are to pursue their passion for music-making and to play big stages (Filth in BangerTV 2015), they accept and compete to be 'taken for granted' by the industry (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). 'By increasing confusion about what standards should be followed' (p. 635), the industry strategically makes musicians liable. First, the Dutch music law firm Musica Juridica BV explains on its website that the music industry generally functions through verbal agreements. But verbal contracts rely on professionalism and trust, so entrepreneurs risk the partner's breach of contract, in which case they must prove that such schemes were pre-agreed.

Second, a label's mission is to provide bands with capital, promotion, and distribution resources 'to turn their music into saleable mass commodities' (Schwetter, 2018, p. 191). So, a label signs bands agreeing on a certain album number (Passman, 2010) and provides the band with a recording advance budget, then pays itself from the sales revenue (Passman, 2010). With new bands, labels often sign them for one album (Passman, 2010), but the contract would include a clause of exclusivity, giving the label potential future options should the music prove lucrative. But most metal bands take between two and three years to write and release an album, so the extended time in-between albums binds the band to the label for as long as it takes them to reach the contract's album number. This means that regardless of the band's growth level in those years, they remain bound by the contracts' first agreements because only successful bands with intelligent and persuasive managers or lawyers have a chance to update initial terms before the contract's expiry. Third, arguing in favour of risk-taking when working with aspiring bands, investing companies always present self-benefiting written contracts. For example, by exclusively signing with a label, a band gives away their (master) recording

ownership (Schwetter, 2018; Passman, 2010), which guarantees the label a percentage of the broadcasting and performing royalties (Passman, 2010). In fact, labels now often offer a "360-degree deal", which entitles them to earn money from all band's revenue streams, including streaming, touring, merchandise, endorsements, and so on (Schwetter, 2018; Passman, 2010). So, as 'cognitive legitimacy' entails, musicians allow the industry to exploit knowledge and skills to reach audiences and develop their entrepreneurial project.

In this regard, Arditi (2020) argues that record companies adopt a vertical labour division where bands are 'independent contractors for the record labels because of the way labels write these contracts' (p. 155). While these contracts organise entrepreneurship, they do not empathise with musicians' intentions when seeking record deals. In light of this record-deal ideology and system, successful bands such as Triptykon decide to no longer be represented by an external label and license their music's distribution instead. However, Schwetter (2018) notes that success is an exception because most bands 'generate little revenue with their pop-musical activities and only reach a limited audience' (p. 192). Thus, Becker (2008) argues that rights and duties need to be assigned and maintains that the law's position is to provide entrepreneurs with security for and beyond their art. Therefore, a failure to authoritatively assign rules to the music industry and carry 'civic order' (Becker, 2008, p. 5) can threaten (metal) music's existence. As evident during the safety measures of the Covid-19 pandemic, governments have an impact on the industry and entrepreneurs and can regulate the business. Building on this paper's section on the organisational structure of culture, I add that cultural policy gives music entrepreneurs 'a political role' (Albinsson, 2018, p. 350). Still, compared to other occupations and industries, this political role seems almost symbolic, supporting Aldrich and Fiol's (1994) second institutional strategy legitimacy, 'sociopolitical legitimacy'.

Sociopolitical legitimacy ultimately gives equal responsibility to an entrepreneur's micro-and- macro-external environments to facilitate entrepreneurial activities. In other words, the industry's and government's politico-economic balance ensures the successful development of an entrepreneurial project. For example, in the post-Covid period, insurance companies might refuse to take the risk or lack the capital to insure live shows against infectious diseases, in which case, government support will continue to matter (Snapes, 2021). However, Aldrich and Fiol explain that government support depends on sociopolitical approval of (new) cultural ventures, which is time-consuming. Consequently, entrepreneurs 'ultimately must co-opt, neutralize, form alliances with, and otherwise come to terms with, government agencies' (p. 661). Relating this to the Netherlands, a Dutch professional entrepreneur who offers goods and services must register their business in the Chamber of Commerce (*Kamer van Koophandel* or KvK) to determine legal liabilities such as debt and taxes (Ondernemersplein, n.d.). Company registration at the KvK ties to the music industry as it enables a musicpreneur to invoice collaborators and receive royalties from Buma/Stemra (Dutch copyright authorities) under the Dutch Copyright Act. In practice, the tax government's website clarifies in the *Frequently Asked Questions* section that Buma/Stemra collects royalties on behalf of the musicpreneur and annually notifies the *Belastingdienst* (Dutch Tax and Customs Administration). According to their partner website Business.gov, the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration also expects the musicpreneur to file taxes such as the annual income tax and the quarterly turnover tax referred to as VAT.

However, sociopolitical legitimacy concerns for creative entrepreneurs transcend business duties. Referring back to and further building on globalisation, music's internationalisation transcends the

digital realm of streaming and social media because touring productions remain a preferable method to reach audiences abroad (Varbanova, 2016). However, musicians continue to meet international creative entrepreneurship barriers, such as a lack of understanding of logistics and international border customs (Varbanova, 2016). While coordinating international shows is the task of agents and (tour) managers (Passman, 2010), not all bands can employ a comprehensive or expert professional team. For example, in his autobiography, Lemmy Kilmister (2002) often talked about international barriers at the beginning of the band's trajectory. On Motörhead's 1988 tour with Alice Cooper, the band joined the tour a month later because the American immigration department needed time to process their work permit applications. Though Kilmister writes that the immigration department 'took so long' (chap. 10), the reality might have been different in the sense that the band's application was filed later than legally advised. This speculation builds mainly on their busy touring of England and Europe right before the US tour and because Kilmister writes in disfavour of certain business team members.

Metal music and its social dimension

1. Social cohesion through mood regulation

Thus far, I have discussed metal musicians as entrepreneurs who make, perform, and sell music and have argued that the industry exploits their business. However, this section asks why these professional entrepreneurs choose to live off of (metal) music. In other words, if a composition can be an object, what does appeal to musicians beyond that object? How can music surpass activity and objectivity and become an experience? In the effort to answer these questions, various scholars have deemed music to deliver interactive social cohesion in the human world by shifting one's emotional state and helping one communicate with others (Snowdon et al., 2015; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010). In other terms, although music regulates the psychology of a music listener or maker, this psychological manipulation determines their behavioural communication with their physical realm. In line with this school of thought, Tia DeNora (2007) identifies music as 'the technology of the self' (p. 277), arguing that music accompanies people's quotidian activities and regulates their emotions. The scholar explains that individuals choose to use music in the process of 'emotion management' (p. 277) that prepares the musicking (Small, 1998) individual to face social settings and responsibilities. So, DeNora establishes that a chosen music (style) becomes a background soundtrack that accompanies persons and modulates their minds during or in preparation for chosen or enforced (social) activities. Studies on metal music fandom find that extreme music offers 'high sensation' (Arnett, 1998) and 'arousal' (Kneer, 2016; Miu et al., 2016; Sharman & Dingle, 2015; Silvia, 2005) to listeners.

DeNora's work equally studies music listeners and makers. While many listeners process feelings and organise their lives by expressing themselves through their fandom, others also start composing music. This behaviour continues the cycle of what Scott Burnham calls 'heroic' musicians (as cited in DeNora, 2004), whereby heroic musicians become skilfully technical and social machines that consciously and unconsciously reinterpret the world in their music and help guide their listeners (Messick et al., 2020). Heroism is not the driving factor of music-making for most of these entrepreneurs because, as Herbert Spencer (in Kleinman, 2015) explains human vocalisation's musical function, an individual articulates needs and expresses emotions through distinguished tones. In this respect, metal musicians make high-sensation music to liberate themselves from negative experience (Pritchard, 2014), express and communicate personal thoughts, emotions, and needs. This conscious and unconscious baggage that a musician possesses is what Staffan Albinsson (2018) refers to as 'identity work' (p. 349) based on K. A. Appiah's (2001) notion of *collective professional identity* (in

Albinsson, 2018). Identity work refers to an experienced creative entrepreneur being a sort of sponge that absorbs data from their environment. The data helps them adhere to entrepreneurship's collective behaviour, which in turn grants them cognitive and socio-political legitimacy.

To develop the theory, Albinsson (2018) distinguishes a complementary personality system that displays personal development and environmental adaptation. First, a musicpreneur uses a 'musician identity' to compose music that speaks to them personally (p. 349). Second, a musicpreneur uses an 'entrepreneur identity' to act as a multi-faceted and self-reliant entrepreneur striving to communicate and sell their creative work (p. 350). In other words, these entrepreneurs invest time, energy, and skills in the prospect of monetising their inherent 'personality trait' (p. 353) of creativity and musical aesthetics. Focusing on the *musician identity*, a relevant example comes from Djerv's Agnete Kjølsrud and Stian Kårstad (Sonic Shocks, 2012) discussing the band's music and how it comes together sonically. Initially, Kårstad explains that the band's compositions depend on each member's flow, personality, and musical background. Then, Kjølsrud clarifies that the band compose music that feels best to them individually and collectively. Also, ex-Venom guitarist Jeffrey Dunn (Banger TV, 2015) posits that his childhood with his grandfather's love for old horror films resulted in his interest in the occult and, in turn, defined the image and sound of Venom. And thus, the chance factor in a personal trajectory determines which genre(s) and expressive components a musician grows into and produces.

I argued that outsiders often misinterpret metal's expressive content. The content is not meant to be taken literally and instead presents abstract food for thought. But how does metal music express and communicate the musician's reflections? DeNora (2007) says that a song is the culmination of one's Self at the time of writing. Agreeing that metal music creatively bears emblematic messages, Matthew P. Unger (2016) contends that the music 'produce[s] symbolically social discourses of identity, difference, and transgression' (p. 17) and, thus, befits a creative expression of social relations and the interpretation or meaning of these relations (Roy & Dowd, 2010). Ultimately, the extremity of metal permits creating a persona or metaphysical universe during an idea's textual (Unger, 2016; Purcell, 2003) and sonic (Hillier, 2020; Mynett, 2019) expression that one may not articulate or imagine in the bounds of real life. Hence, the music creatively becomes a vessel for musicians' (cathartic) thoughts and emotions. In light of this belief, Enslaved's guitarist Ivar Bjørnson (Banger TV, 2015) communicates his opinion on extreme music and how he composes his own. He posits:

> *It's not important to be extreme at all, actually. It's not important how fast you can go or how much of a tough guy you are. It's about how far you're willing to put your emotions into your music that makes it extreme metal for me. (44:07)*

In this sense, Bjørnson's statement implies that materialising personal thoughts in music is at the heart of metal. So, metal is expressed through emotions and convictions of all sorts that one might not fully voice in a conversation.

So far, while this part has clarified that metal musicians direct their inner thoughts and feelings into their music (Thomson & Jaque, 2017), I have not yet delved deeply into answering why metal musicians express themselves in their music and how this activity relates to social cohesion. Referring to DeNora's (2007) theory again, music is a medium for musicians to react to or process their social construct. For instance, they can make sense of or relive an event; they can process an emotion by confronting it; they can track their skill development and view their songs as achievements, and so on. When these musicians are in the musicking process, they may 'make knowledge, including self-

knowledge, and within this focus, . . . transcend difficult, stressful, or extreme times and circumstances' (Small, 1998, p. 279). In other words, musicking may provide therapeutic or meditative benefits to musicians. To illustrate, ex-Opera IX and Cadaveria singer Raffaella Rivarolo (Galea, 2020) reveals that Cadaveria's single "Matryoshcada" is written about her battle with and treatment of cancer. She adds that the music video replicates real moments during her treatment and her self-rediscovery journey as a survivor.

Various metal musicians such as Nightwish's Floor Jansen (Everley, 2019) had stepped away from making music because of mental health, then came back with songs recounting their experiences. This practice reaffirms the theory that metal music is a musician's coping tool with their milieux and personal experiences. Retaking Jansen as an example, the vocalist (Floor Jansen, 2021) converses with Evergrey's guitarist and singer Tom S. Englund about their relationships with entrepreneurialism and the therapeutic benefit of music-making. Jansen states that 'music is emotion' (08:04) and that musical creativity necessitates genuine feelings to communicate meanings relatable to listeners (05:22). Both agree that honesty is the essence of their lyrics and vocal compositions, creating a musical diary and coping mechanism. Interestingly, Englund posits that while writing about one's life is a conscious and unconscious decision, facing these thoughts in performances is 'double draining' (06:22) due to the honest and personal content. Accordingly, Englund implies that while initial compositions bring mental peace, the entrepreneurial aspect of Performing Arts presses the musician to relive unwanted events or emotions that would have been otherwise at bay. So, if vocal and lyrical self-expression is a double-edged sword for a creative entrepreneur, how can the musical process regulate emotions?

Perhaps an interesting theory to consider is that of E. T. Gaston (1968; in Zanders, 2018, p. 218), which argues that music-making can shift a musician's thinking and proposes three principles to achieve social cohesion through a music healing process. First, 'the establishment or reestablishment of interpersonal relationships'. Second, 'the bringing about of self-esteem through self-actualization'. Third, 'the utilization of the unique potential of rhythm to energize and bring order'. Relating the first two principles to Jansen's and Englund's discussion of the writing process, honesty enables intrapersonal relationships with the musical material and the individual's milieu. The composition can intuitively materialise memories of past experiences and where and with whom the individual lived. Then, the intrapersonal relationship provides self-actualisation and self-esteem. For example, it is common for musicians to give credit to "the muses" for writing a song. By acting on their instincts and not setting musical expectations, they spontaneously develop a piece of music, and it is common for them to call the finished songs their "babies". Self-actualisation occurs through the instant evaluation of personal development and the sense of achievement.

While musicians create intuitively by adapting 'external and internal sources' (Hill. J., 2017; Thomson & Jaque, 2017, p. 9), a chance factor (Gagné in Kaufman, 2013; Simonton in Thomson & Jaque, 2017) determines the final shape of the musical decision and composition. Patrick K. Freer (2010) argues that this is an improvisational process that makes musicians enjoy creating and gives them self-esteem because they circumvent formality, notice higher musical skills[6], and become flexible and innovative. In line with this theory, psychiatrists and academics van Assche et al. (2015) conduct an empirical

[6] Spontaneous improvisation frees musicians from expectations. The goal becomes to have flow and rhythm without a pre-determined destination. Practising improvisation, however, can feel stressful if the musician is evaluating that skill specifically.

study on the potential therapeutic benefit of music on depressive patients. The study concludes that improvisation pre-verbalises patients' emotions and encourages well-being. Accordingly, rather than talking about inner thoughts, musicians shape them into initial drafts of songs. A fitting definition of improvisation that goes in line with this idea is that by Christopher D. Azzara (in Freer, 2010), who posits that 'improvisation in music is the spontaneous expression of meaningful musical ideas – it is analogous to conversation in language' (p. 3) and can be practised and trained. This is also supported by drummers JP Bouvet and Shawn Crowder (Shawn Crowder, 2021), as they discuss finding a flow when improvising rhythms.

Gaston's third music therapy principle is achieving order through rhythm, and although rhythmic patterns are highly relevant to metal music, psychologists and researchers Obleser et al. (2017) find rhythm curiously complex. They explain how rhythm results from the awareness of one's environment, i.e., the 'external stimulus' (p. 1), and the perception of interval repetition or a pattern and, thereafter, the oscillation's prediction (Breska & Deouell, 2017). Similarly, researcher Helen Allen-Williams (2013) explains that rhythm perception 'help[s] movement fluency and create[s] anticipation within the music that stimulates and reorganises movements towards . . . the resolution of the musical tension' (p. 34). She continues noting that music rhythms help musicians reconnect with their bodily rhythms and thus achieve self and environment awareness (p. 35). So, rhythm provides a sense of reflexivity.

Because rhythm is a prominent facet in metal music, metalheads are often headbanging, moshing, or hand gesturing when musicking (Eischeid et al., 2019). Relevantly, metal musicians are similar. Small (1998) argues that the body's reflexive sense and sensibility encompass meanings, and Eischeid et al. (2019) contend that control-seeking is one of these meanings. In this light, when musicians improvise a song to manage thoughts, they are potentially seeking to regain control and feel accomplished. So, self-actualisation regains these musicians the power over their lives. However, musicians are entertaining performers, so rhythmic awareness may function differently on stage. Indeed, when performing, musicians play and listen simultaneously, so they spontaneously synchronise 'matching movements to a beat . . . because the temporal dynamics of rhythmic sound (e.g., its periodicity) drives [their] attention' (Dalla Bella, 2018, p. 378), becoming one with the rhythm. In other words, 'the focus turns inward, as if one's sensitivity to details, timing inflections, and tiny timbral nuances is inversely proportional to musical variation on a larger scale' (Câmara & Danielsen, 2018, p. 6). This focus is key to drummers' control of their typical double-bass and blast beats (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 32), guitarists' control of their routine "shredding", vocalists' control of breath and timing, and so forth. So, body movements 'may include anatomical and physiological adjustments of the body to best manipulate the musical instrument, and sensorimotor adaptations designed to optimize sensory feedback (from proprioceptive, tactile, visual, or auditory inputs)' (Palmer, 2013, p. 406). Hence, the meaning of control-seeking in a concert setting is maintaining a successful show for the audience and promoters. Kirschner and Tomasello (2010) find that 'expressiveness of music . . . communicate[s] mood, affect[s] and distinct[s] emotions between performer and listener' (p. 357). Thus, a music performance can positively regulate collective mood and encourage 'prosocial' group behaviour (p. 362).

2. Social cohesion through collective activity

a. Collaboration

While I previously argued that music bears therapeutic or meditative qualities for control-seeking individual musicians, it is also a collective passion shared by like-minded groups of people. In other

words, it is a passion of a network of individual musicians creating a world of their own. An in-depth study by Laaksonen et al. (2011) on metal entrepreneurs shows that passion is the driving factor to seek opportunities and initiate music projects. Accordingly, the article cites three important definitions of passion from different academic fields; (a) passion is a creative and emotionally invested ambition, (b) passion is a hopeful positivity that induces motivation, and (c) passion orients an entrepreneur's strategies for self-representation (p. 19-23). In other words, entrepreneurialism is an extension of an individual's personality and interests. Recalling Miller's (1983) and Albinsson's (2017, 2018) shared view on cultural entrepreneurship being a personality trait, it is worth arguing that a musicpreneur's identity work (Albinsson, 2018) or a musician's role identity (Laaksonen et al., 2011) trigger their passionate behaviour of opportunity-seeking to reach musical goals through collaborations. Curiously, Laaksonen et al. (2011) find that an entrepreneur has multiple personalities with three alternately salient identities; the founder who gathers and organises resources, the inventor who recognises and creates opportunities, and the developer who expands the economic and social support of a project (p. 23-24). So, if there are different roles in one musician, why do most metal musicians create bands?

Founding bands with a clear labour-division system enables each member to achieve personal goals through collective musical activity (Arditi, 2020; Becker, 2008). Therefore, metal bands are founded because of communal passion and 'burning desire' to make their favourite music without personal limitations (Laaksonen et al., 2011, p. 19, 27). While limitations of knowledge or capital are minimised, Laaksonen et al. (2011) reveal that passion can only motivate and facilitate project initiation; the band members need entrepreneurial skills to professionally proceed. Indeed, the study argues that passion can only psychologically equip and help an entrepreneur face their environments' risks and obstacles (p. 23, 31). A conflict of interest between the entrepreneur and their collaborators or industry professionals can drain their energy and blur their focus. Likewise, some musicians experience burnout (Jansen, 2021; Everley, 2019) if they find that their band is not successful despite the energy spent on the music. Thomson and Jaque (2017) posit that 'physical exhaustion is directly related to long hours required to achieve skill mastery' (p. 365). Further, the authors argue that 'success in [music] is based on meeting high expectations; performers and their audience internalize these expectations' (p. 365). In this sense, musicians become sensitive to their occupational shortcomings. Accordingly, individual entrepreneurial passion is not enough without external motivation and assistance, so some metal entrepreneurs retire prematurely. For example, Marco Hietala retired from Nightwish, criticising the industry (Hadusek, 2021).

Other musicpreneurs like Sarah Jezebel Deva (ex-Angtoria/ex-Cradle of Filth) temporarily retired from the industry (Deva, 2020). The singer returned after recovering from occupation-induced mental health issues and spoke against hierarchies and dishonest conduct in the industry that disrupt group cohesion (Appendix B). Immediately collaborating with other artists on new music, she also expressed her renewed passion for music-making. The drive of starting over can be easier with a solid network and fanbase, but the concept is viewed differently depending on scholars' schools of thought. On the one hand, Thomson and Jaque (2017) and Laaksonen et al. (2011) argue that passion forces entrepreneurs to miss producing and performing music. So it aids them to start up new projects by inducing positivity and motivation – both of which were previously argued in this paper to be imperative factors in successfully building and sustaining social support (Zwaan et al., 2010). On the other hand, Arditi (2020) argues that an entrepreneur needs the strength and cohesion of a collective effort and division of labour to initiate and sustain a project.

To develop his perspective, Arditi refers to Émile Durkheim and, firstly, describes a band as 'a quintessential case of organic solidarity because each band member performs an essential task in the division of labor' (p. 157). This view supports the understanding of music as an activity (Becker, 2008) and that a musician's collaborations enable them to earn a living (p. 161). Thus, each band member is irreplaceable – if not the individuals personally, then their instruments. One example of a band's collaborative writing can be that of A Perfect Circle. Describing the writing process of the record "Eat the Elephant", the band's guitarist and producer Billy Howerdel and singer Maynard James Keenan (Apple Music, 2018; Grow, 2018) clarify that the band's songs and core sound start with Howerdel's solitary compositions. The development of the band's general sound and lyrical attitude come from Keenan's vocal compositions and arrangement of Howerdel's ideas. Secondly, Arditi argues that a band shows characteristics of Durkheim's mechanical solidarity because band members become a family with a strong emotional bond (p. 158-159). To illustrate, in 2006, Alice in Chains were interviewed by Matt Pinfield on "Sound Off" (Shirley Cobain, 2018) to discuss their reunion three years after the passing of their singer Layne Staley in 2002. The band's guitarist Jerry Cantrell expresses his deep attachment to his bandmates, calling the band's reunion 'being reunited with [one's] family' (02:16). In this light, Arditi argues that band members 'support each other' (p. 159) within the bounds of the industry's informal economy (Arditi, 2020, p. 159; Laaksonen et al., 2011, p. 27). Therefore, collective passion encourages an entrepreneur's occupational satisfaction and hustle.

b. Reception

Much like collaborators, audiences bring forth motivation and positivity that give meaning to a musician. As previously discussed, Zwaan et al. (2010) argue that audiences are essential to the success and well-being of creative entrepreneurs. In other words, professional musicians provide experience goods and services to audiences whose opinion makes or breaks one's music occupation. While metal musicpreneurs are primarily reflexive fans of the music (Laaksonen et al., 2011), their work and image are subject to the aesthetic judgment of other fans whose taste becomes more relevant than the musicians'. Andy R. Brown (2010) theorises that audiences deliberate on existing data of genre-development and past releases, from which they can draw comparisons and conclusions. In his terms, Brown writes that deliberation entails that the value of a band's work is founded on 'terms of assessment and evaluation which speak the language of classification and judgement' (p. 126). In this light, works by Hillier (2020), Smialek (2016), Spracklen et al. (2014), Weinstein (2000), Walser (1993) and many other scholars demonstrate that metal fans are critical of which bands' music can be identified as "true" metal and represent the general community. To visually imagine this behaviour, an amusing – yet sociologically critical – scene in the 2004 film "Mean Girls" (Movie Clips, 2018) shows how individuals' interests and behaviour are coded to ensure a homogenous identity and image of the group they wish to enter. So, similar to the film's protagonist's experiences, there are unofficial initiations for bands in metal communities, and each album risks the bands' memberships being revoked.

Much of what metal studies highlight is the vital position of the metal community (and its sub-scenes) in the isolated metalheads' lives. Deena Weinstein (2000) calls the world of metal music a 'sociological bricolage' (p. 13), noting that the music partly contains data of the 'social dimension' (p. 8-9) that members of these communities ought to learn, comprehend, and follow. But various scholars limit metal communities to (working-class) brotherhood boundaries, narrowing culture down to the misogynistic (working-class) male who uses metal camaraderie to protest against and reinvent his social status (Bennett, 2008, p. 423). In this sense, reflexive metalhead scholars can underdevelop the

falseness of camaraderie in the community for its very norms of distinction conserve its culture. Brown (2010) observes that 'the minimum basis for participation in metal youth culture requires the purchase of commodities and an understanding of their symbolic significance and uses' (p. 106), which can explain metal fans' lingering attachment to purchasing and listening to physical copies of their favourite bands' albums (Spracklen, 2019, p. 145). Therefore, the coded behaviour in audience participation preserves the discursive 'heritage' of metal music (Spracklen et al., 2014), where genre transformation and trends are kept to a minimum (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 130-131). Purist fans feel that change in their transgressive music (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 131) reflects a loss of their identity, so they may reject a band's music for these conservative reasons.

For example, the guitarist and producer of the German black metal band Dark Fortress joined the new Finnish Grunge band Rootbrain as a lead guitarist and producer. Promoting Rootbrain's music on Dark Fortress' Facebook page, V. Santura received some criticism (Appendix C). So, although some appreciated the musician's versatility, others condemned him for playing music other than Black metal. One comment reads, 'Congrats for trying new things, but this is utterly shit. Horrible generic pop' (Dark Fortress Official, 2020). Metalheads can be purist (Goldberg et al., 2016, p. 10-11), in which case they may judge anything other than the genres they prefer as commercial or pop music – terms that are used derogatorily in metal scenes. So, these adverse reactions can dissuade musicians and increase occupational precariousness. Nonetheless, as this example shows, musicians still uphold their self-constructed authenticity (Peterson, 2005, p. 1089) and make music that inspires them regardless of unfavourable reactions. This ideology is at the heart of Devin Townsend's diverse sound, or Leprous', Ulver's, and Ghost's – to name a few bands – change in musical direction. And though these bands might not interest 'purist' fans, they still attract 'mixer' (Goldberg et al., 2016, p. 12, 26) fans or new audiences.

Moreover, meaning is not created exclusively through digital reactions or album sales but also live performance. Roy and Dowd (2010) note that bands further create meaning through live shows' social collective activity (p. 189-190, 191), where a live concert allows direct interaction in a physical reunion between fans and their favourite bands. For example, the lack of direct interaction makes Covid-19 live-streams an awkward temporary alternative for artists because a live performance is usually a co-produced experience and 'ritual' (Thomson & Jaque, 2017, p. 311; Small, 1998, p. 207), in which performers and audiences empower and motivate each other (Small, 1998, p. 215). In other words, 'performers prepare with the full awareness that their audience will help shape the performance, for example, through their spontaneous laughter, applause, and vocal "noises" . . . (Broth, 2011)' (Thomson & Jaque, 2017, p. 311). In this sense, both co-producers are feeding off each other's energies. Through this interaction, musicians 'can get full and immediate feedback about their music, something they can never have in the studio' (Weinstein, 2000, p. 84). Accordingly, despite the possibility for mistakes and mishaps to occur, the ideal is for the performers to maintain the 'flow' (Thomson & Jaque, 2017, p. 311) and immediately improvise their way back to the composition's core, rendering wrong notation irrelevant as long as the band is assertive and manages to translate their identity to their fans (Small, 1998, p. 214-217). And translating 'who they are' (Small, 1998, p. 212) to fans is an opportunity for musicians to stimulate their market and encourage loyalty. This arousal can only occur if the audience's 'demand for aesthetic, social, and situational' (Kushner, 2003, p. 116) stimulation is satisfied by the show.

I have debated so far that music production is a relational and collective process uniting musicians and industry professionals to develop a piece of art and sell it to an audience. Dividing the theoretical framework into three sections, I have explained music entrepreneurialism as a duality of musician and entrepreneur identities. A passionate and resourceful attitude sees the music's potential and encourages pursuing music professionally and earning a living from it. Then, I have argued that a musicpreneur has better chances of success if they seek legitimacy within an organisational structure, legislation, market and audience behaviour, and technology, and adapt to occupational career instability. Finally, I have reasoned that music production regulates mood and stimulates healing and social cohesion through intrapersonal relationships. The following sections will investigate how these theories apply to Dutch metal musicians, specifically.

Methods and analysis

To answer the research question, *How do (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurialism?,* I collected qualitative data with ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with Dutch metal musicians. From a micro perspective, interviews shed light on the field's interaction etiquettes and values with which an entrepreneurial musician makes contact. And thus, this method allows the interpretation of such interaction and its impact on entrepreneurs. This means that it is essential not only to be able to extract precise information but also to provide a personable atmosphere for the respondents through story-triggering questions that would then allow for elaborate answers recalling personal experiences and feelings. Set during the Covid-19 pandemic, the empirical research relied on Skype interviews as an alternative method to face-to-face interviewing, to which there are advantages and disadvantages (Bryman, 2016, p. 492). Bryman reports on a consensus that online interviewing may be an unreliable method because (a) respondents may fail to proceed with the agreement to be interviewed, (b) the interviewer may experience internet-quality instabilities or technical difficulties during the meetings that potentially harm the flow of the interviews, (c) the interviewer may find difficulty to record and transcribe the interviews, and (d) respondents may alter their answers according to the visual identity of the interviewer. Addressing these valid concerns, I confirm that I lost two potential (snowballed) interviews due to probable loss of interest, and that the internet quality occasionally interrupted the interviews. However, transcriptions were facilitated by audiovisual recordings and online transcriptions. Additionally, adapting one's answers to questions according to the interviewer's identity can occur even in face-to-face interviews; thus, it cannot be a valid reason to overlook Skype interviewing. And because I did three interviews without a camera at the request of interviewees, a comparison between potential attitude change was possible, and I can refute the argument as there was no detected bias.

Moreover, the pandemic normalised virtual meetings such as on Zoom or Skype to ensure safety and physical distancing. So, interviews proceeded as scheduled without risking interviewees' safety and health during the pandemic. This normality also proved comfortable for interviewees as they retained the privacy of their personal spaces. Finally, the Skype interviews – condensed into a two-week period with two interviews a day – were flexible. Two interviewees could push back their appointments at the last minute, and one other interviewee could spread the meeting onto two days due to their hectic schedule. Therefore, these advantages of Skype interviews outweigh the limitations and make the data collection process more manageable and appropriate for physical-distancing measures.

Sampling

The sampling process consisted of a mix of 'purposeful sampling' (Palinkas et al., 2015) and 'snowball sampling' (Brikci & Green, 2007). I wrote a public announcement on social media (Appendix D), which was later shared among and by music colleagues[7] in March 2020 – a month before the interviewing would begin. This led to three respondents reaching out to me. Also, I privately contacted nineteen respondents on social media – seven of whom replied favourably. This brought the final sample to ten interviewees. All interviewees were Caucasian, four identified as women, and two were internationals residing in the Netherlands for at least over a decade. And despite the extensive recruitment through the purposive sampling, the number of interested individuals started as low as five people to then double to ten final interviewees.

The sample consisted of professional metal musicians (Table 1) whose business is registered in the Netherlands, as it was easier to narrow the research to a local sample. For this study to guarantee more relevant and valid data, I disregarded amateurs. I also did not distinguish between semi and professional musicians due to the lack of a unanimous theoretical understanding of what constitutes a professional musician. The sampled musicians could have other occupations in or outside the music field. However, they had to be paid for their music service, record music, perform live, tour, have a network, and have fans. In this respect, these metal musicians had to have (a) earned money at least from one album or a show, (b) toured at least once locally or abroad, (c) been signed by music labels at least once and are well connected, (d) been a member of a band whose social media account had at least one thousand followers. Essentially, the distinction displays musicians' investment in their music occupations and their intention to earn money from music, but these criteria do not have to all simultaneously coexist to represent a professional musician. Further, the theory suggested the impact of demographic traits and the micro-external environment on creative career success. Thus, such details were transcribed into a table[8] to facilitate a relational interpretation of events.

[7] The phrasing "music colleagues" suggests reflexivity. I have been involved in the music industry as a (semi)professional singer and session musician, but my priority has been academia so far. Mostly based in the metal scene, my personal network participated in snowballing candidates for data collection.

[8] Some details such as relationship status, age, and social support can become outdated.

Table 1. Sample Demographics and CV

Social media support[2]	Touring	Occupation	Education	Citizenship	Offspring	Relationship	Age	Gender	Name[1]
+100 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Composer	Music (HBO) Humanities (HBO)	Foreign resident	no	yes	40s	Male	**Alexander**
+2 M	Local, abroad	Musician	Music (HBO)	Dutch	yes	yes	40s	Male	**Adriaan**
+5 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Photographer, Salesperson	Music (HBO – unfinished) Computer science (MBO)	Dutch	no	no	30s	Male	**Bart**
+70 K	Local	Musician, Salesperson	Music (MBO) Marketing (HBO)	Dutch	no	yes	30s	Female	**Maartje**
+30 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Cleaner	Music (MBO)	Dutch	no	yes	20s	Male	**Jaap**
+70 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Music teacher, IT	Music (MBO) Computer Science (HBO)	Foreign resident	no	no	40s	Female	**Femke**
+10 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Music teacher, Student	Music (HBO) Social Science (HBO)	Dutch	no	yes	20s	Male	**Johan**
+2 K	Local	Musician, Professor, Researcher	Music (HBO) Behavioural Science (HBO)	Dutch	no	yes	30s	Female	**Marleen**
+1 K	Local, abroad	Musician, Marketeer, organiser	Marketing (HBO) Event	Dutch	no	no	30s	Male	**Arno**
+1 K	Local	Musician, Sound engineer	Music (HBO) Humanities (HBO – unfinished)	Dutch	no	yes	30s	Female	**Stella**

[1] Names have been altered.

[2] The theory suggested that social support is directly linked to success measurement. So, Facebook "page like" for the interviewees' bands can give a small idea about success. However, these numbers might not accurately represent experienced success and the results might confirm or reject success. The reasoning for choosing Facebook is that the platform might be more widely used by different segments than other social media.

Data collection

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. They had a biographical structure and narrative-based questions to explore the developing interaction of musicians with their glocal metal community and creative field. To that end, interviews were flexible; preliminary readings and reflexive experience shaped the interview guide, but questioning adapted to interviewees' trains of thought and experiences. In this light, while the biographically structured interview guide contained 29 questions, the final number varied from one interview to another. For example, the sixth interview had 46 questions, and interviews were variably lengthy – with a minimum of 1:02:57, a maximum of 2:05:30, and a mean of 1:34:19, leaving enough time for thought elaboration. Therefore, the interview guide only ensured covering the core topics on fandom, musical development, and entrepreneurial development and left space for particulars.

Interviews were scheduled for two weeks in April 2020 in the Netherlands – between April 17th and April 29th – during the COVID 19 pandemic and self-distancing measures. Interviewees digitally signed a consent form and chose a recording method a month before the interviews – audiovisual or auditory (recordings used the built-in Skype recorder, the OBS Studio recording software, and an external audio-visual recorder). At the end of sampling, I gave interviewees appointment windows, and they decided their date and time. All interviewees spoke fluent English, and thus, interviews proceeded in English, which avoided the translation step and allowed the verbatim transcriptions' immediate analysis. The transcriptions were initially processed by the academic service Wreally then I manually edited them.

Finally, despite my initial worries about the online interviewing's quality, most respondents were serious, stationed in calm places, and invested in the meeting. However, it was noticeable that two married interviewees were stationed in the same room as their partners, and two interviewees were interrupted by friends a few times joining in the conversation. In this light, the two former respondents might have manipulated family questions, and the latter two respondents might have manipulated thoughts on networking and collaborations. One of the two latter respondents was slightly drunk and had music playing in the background. Upon my request to gain the music down, the interviewee changed location and explained that alcohol calmed their anxiety about the interview.

Analysis

As previously stated, the research was rooted in preliminary readings and reflexive experience. With the guidance of Tuckett (2005), I did the interviews and transcriptions with simultaneous memos, remarks, and open codes on the interview guide. Then, using the coding programme Atlas, I created thematic codes, reducing data to more prevailing themes each time (Appendix E). Then, data analysis was guided by a 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2021), 'informed by social constructionism and symbolic interactionism' (Tuckett, 2005). Firstly, the reasoning is that the sample consisted of ten respondents, and thus, it was too small to make an extensive Grounded Theory coding (Tuckett, 2005) that represents an ambitious subject. Secondly, the analysis is reflexive because I acted both as an academic with critical thinking and experience and as someone familiar with the field, interpreting the data with insider knowledge. As such, although I was not necessarily familiar with the respondents, I understood the topic and the work field. Thirdly, the analysis was constructionally informed by a relational theory, where the career field and social interactions shape meaning and behaviour. Metal musicians were believed to fit into this theory's interpretations.

Based on research expectations and the theoretical framework, symbolic interaction and constructionism were relevant to (metal) musicians for their relational career developments and their abstract relationship with (artistic) creativity and music (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Denzin, 2010; Tuckett, 2005; Young & Collin, 2004; Doan, 1997; Becker & McCall, 1990). According to Young and Collin, constructionism is rooted in vocational psychology and can elucidate professionals' cognitive understanding of their career field and behaviour codes. Because the theoretical framework deliberated relational factors for creative career success and how entrepreneurs internalise normative behaviour to increase success opportunities, the definition that constructionism concerns how 'social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction' (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375) applies to the research at hand. In accordance, musicpreneurs' cognition and behaviour are shaped by norms in (a) an entrepreneurial milieu, (b) a musical milieu, and (c) a metal community, and the symbolic interaction between such environments. Thus, the themes' biographical nature can translate the result of such interactions on the vocational experiences of the sample.

Results

This paper's research question asks how (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurialism. As previously discussed, and expected, the ten semi-structured interviews showed that their music occupation enforces creative entrepreneurialism. Learning entrepreneurial and managerial skills on the job, interviewees were not fully prepared for the precariousness of music-making and found the industry unreliable and stressful. Therefore, the biographically structured thematic analysis will, firstly, discuss how metalhead fans self-actualise and create intrapersonal bonds through music. Secondly, it will delve into how some fans become absorbed in playing instruments and making music and how these technical achievements prepare them for a vocation. Thirdly, the discussion will cover the enforced entrepreneurial beginnings of "professionalised hobbyists" and how they learn to sell and perform music to a market. Finally, it will shed light on the professional musicians' occupational precariousness and how they confront instability in their work, finances, relationships, and (mental) health.

Finding social cohesion through music

Interviewees admitted the impact of their friends and families on exposing them to and strengthening their bond with music. Some examples showed a passive role in music exposure, like Marleen's parents playing much music in the house or Alexander's cousin collecting music records. Other examples showed an active role, like Bart's cousin forcing him to listen to bands or Arno's aunt and uncle renting a drum set during a holiday 'so [he] could play drums in the woods'. Formally, most interviewees had a musical education during a young age, like piano or choir lessons. Although it is common in European countries for parents to sign up their children for choir and piano lessons as extra-curricular activities, some interviewees attended higher music schools to explore music-making further. In their early music introductions, genre distinction was not yet established, and the young interviewees either felt spellbound by music in general or a specific instrument. Those recognising metal genre(s) listened to and knew of metal precisely because of their families. For instance, Jaap noted that his father listened to metal, so it 'snowballed from there' for him. In this sense, this family environment introduced metal music to these young people and normalised this genre for them.

In this regard, interviewees argued that their introduction to metal music brought them closer to what they claimed as their 'authentic' selves. Upon attending their first concerts, they discerned that the

metal audience acts as a community that admires and creates metal music. Johan stated that the metal scene drew in outcasts and established a home and a scene for them. The music felt relatable and convivial, reflecting the young individuals' interpretations of the world. According to interviewees, different aspects of metal music resonated with their emotions and sparked their interest in musical creativity, evoking personal and musical ambitions. Interviews further unveiled that artistic expression through music acts as a form of therapy by transferring abstract emotions and convictions into music. The guitarist Stella noted how her introverted personality had benefited from playing an instrument and being creative. Music playing and making opened her mind and allowed her to develop 'just [by] dealing with emotions' and co-creating with other people. She continued to define music-making as 'a little bit of therapy'. Drummers Jaap and Arno feel likewise; they said that metal drumming, with its double bass and blast beats, was too 'intense', exerting all their energy and focus, but equally served as a relief from built-up aggression a meditating activity.

Upon establishing a sense of belonging and musicality, music-making became a tool to build friendships and communicate. Although creativity was described as a solitary activity primarily, interviewees said that music was a social endeavour. In other words, after creating rudimentary concepts alone, interviewees shared their ideas with friends and played the music together. Music consumption helped them connect with like-minded people, and music-making helped them co-create Art and enhance their skills. For example, Johan, Arno, and Bart said that they seldomly finished projects, so they needed to collaborate with others to complete songs. As these aspiring musicians evolved their music trajectories by playing with their friends or classmates, the 'chemistry' in this friendly activity offered emotional support, a creative foundation, and a learning opportunity that continued to give significance to their professional endeavours over the years. For instance, Alexander noted that making music with his comrades gave him meaning and a world to which to belong. Stella was enthusiastic about playing at an important festival in the Netherlands. She explained how the company of her bandmates grounded her on stage despite her anxiety;

> *I had not been as nervous in all my life, I think. I thought I was going to die or something. (Laugh) . . . I could not look at people because it was so terrifying really, but . . . my bandmates were with me. . . . That's also a thing that's really helpful, of course – when you do it together. It really feels like a front or something.*

Stella's thoughts and emotions echoed what other interviewees said regarding the social nature of co-creation. Confronting the world with friends from within the bounds of music creation empowered these musicians and gave their voices a platform that regular conversations could have discouraged.

Developing the musician identity

First and foremost, musical creativity and passion are the roots of the interviewees' music careers. Various interviewees expressed that their emotional response to music – especially the textual and musical intensity and uniqueness of metal music – triggered creativity and a need to devise something of their own from a young age. Imagination and inventiveness were embedded in their personalities, rooting their creativity in ambition and meaning-making. In this regard, finding music-making therapeutic, the musicians' creative process was initially not synonymous with quality. In other words, the interviewees were often more concerned with expressing themselves emotionally and musically regardless of their skills at the time. Oftentimes, the young musicians wished to develop skills and songs to imitate the grandeur of their musical idols. For instance, Bart sarcastically noted that he

overestimated his skills when joining SENA (European guitar awards) after only one year of playing the guitar. Stella continued to write riffs for her albums before she could play them. And Alexander continued to write what felt to be authentic music regardless of accompanying instrumentalists' skills. This unrestrained musical self-expression was considered the first step into emotional and intellectual growth; thereby, musicians' skill progress and personal development often overlapped.

To this end, interviews showed an incessant skill evaluation; interviewees continued to practise and assess their development in the hopes to reach the artistry of their influencers. Femke said that regardless of how long she had been a professional singer, she continued learning the craft and 'improving [her] skills'. Most interviewees suggested that experience was a tool to improve; while some interviewees began their practice by covering favourite songs, others immediately initiated their music-making by composing their music. And while some played their instruments alone initially, others instantaneously learned their instruments in groups by playing in school or basements. Describing writing his first songs and playing them with his friends in their basement, Alexander humoured:

> *I had the perfect vehicle to write whatever I want and that's exactly what I did. So, yeah. Man, I came with a song almost every week, and we would rehearse it, make it, get super excited about it, play it twice, and throw it away and have the next ones. Because I just couldn't stop writing. (Chuckles) So again, as much I was drawn to certain kinds of music, I also always had this compulsive need to make stuff.*

As Alexander illustrated, making music was compulsive and personality-driven. The repetitive experience allowed him to satisfy creative urges and practise his writing skills. He continued to explain that his musical ambitions motivated him to look for professional experience regardless of remuneration. So, to practise his guitar skills, he offered his services to anyone in demand of a guitarist.

Interestingly, interviewees expressed that regardless of experience, skills continue to improve with practice, making their artistry ever-adjusting to projects. To this end, Femke expressed that she continued studying and practising her singing despite 'feel[ing] very confident about what [she] can do with [her] voice, and that [she] can express a lot of things with [her] voice'. Pleased with her evolution, she re-assesses and criticises her previous work. Like most interviewees, Femke's technical development triggers perfectionism and deprives her of listening to older work without detecting limitations. In this sense, musicians' ambitions and internalised standards can make them overly analytical of their musicianship. For most interviewees, music-making came with a craving for over-achievement, coupled with artistic insecurities (see codes in Appendix E), as they would continuously confront their dexterity thresholds.

Essentially, interviews exhibited some proficiency-induced pressure because music-making was vital to these musicians and because their musical styles in metal music had specific sonic attributes. Asked about what characterised metal music to them, the musicians spoke of 'heavy guitars', 'pounding drums', 'aggression of the sound', 'groove', 'scream[ing]', et cetera. And struggling with the boundaries enforced by these cultural and sonic features, Alexander spoke of his rocky path into instrumental execution and the reason he preferred writing over performing. He said that 'the technique for playing [the guitar] never came easily to [him] – it was always a bit of a struggle'. He

expressed that his skills had ‘a very clear limit [which] took some time to digest’. Similarly, Marleen said that she was in a time of ‘really [having] to re-find [her] joy in singing again’. She explained that she had been excessively self-deprecating to her singing, being ‘so focused on perfection and wanting to achieve crazy things’ during the last few years. In doing so, Marleen lost the fun in music-making, which in turn also frustrated her. Echoing her exasperation, Johan entertained the notion that musicians are never satisfied with their level because they compare it to other musicians’. He said, ‘I think, the hardest part, especially when you're a perfectionist, it's never good enough (Laugh). So, you don't finish stuff because it's not as good as stuff made by your heroes’. This expecting attitude only came with the ambition to make music professionally.

Pursuing a vocation

Vocational music production was an outcome of compulsively creative personalities and an idolisation of antecedent musicians. Interviewees internalised standards set by their predecessors whose music and genre fuelled their interest in music-making. In particular, Johan explained that his ‘interest in making music grew . . . parallel to discovering new stuff and discovering new bands’. The music gradually became about more than listening to records or playing an instrument as a hobby. For instance, Alexander became interested only in music and went out of his way to become a full-time professional musician. He explained;

> *It was always super clear because once I got absorbed by music . . . , it was literally the only thing that interested me. . . . So, it was much more than just the question ‘What kind of work do I want to do?’ It was literally like ‘It's this or nothing!’.*

As Alexander noted, music absorbed him and became a vocation. All interviewees sought cohesion and divulged how they could never imagine themselves exclusively working in other fields. Jaap repudiated waking up at early hours for jobs he hated, believing that musical activities always made him look forward to a day of work. So, acting upon this inclination through a sense of idealism, developing professional experience and recognition for their music came in stages for most interviewees; some musicians joined bands, and others attended higher music education.

Those who did not pursue higher music education had two reasons. First, parents advised following a more secure career path. For instance, Marleen said that her parents had not seen a future in music and endorsed her scientific education. She partially heeded to these reservations and followed traditional education and occupation but continued to make music part-time. Second, music institutions rejected aspiring metal musicians due to their young age or palpable metal-music techniques[9]. To illustrate, Arno said that music schools had rejected him for hitting drums ‘too hard’ despite ‘[having] a good ear’. One institution offered him a pre-year which he defiantly refused, and studied Communication Marketing instead. Like Arno, some interviewees were discouraged by music schools. Upon the establishment of the HBO, Rockacademie, in 1999 (and the MBO, Metal Factory, in 2013), metal music education became an institutionalised option, so Marleen studied at Rockacademie after her Masters in Biology. She said it was ‘so much more emotional to be working in music than it [was] in science’. Academia had ‘academic skills . . . to acquire and protocols . . . to follow’ so ‘it [was] all pretty set out’. Instead, she felt that music education focused on the musician's

[9] As a music genre, metal music has relatively specific sonic characteristics that a musician has to follow (Mynett, 2019; Unger, 2016; Cope, 2010).

emotions, needs, and personal goals, which increased her creativity. According to these testimonies, music education is not always an option for aspiring metal musicians. Just as a conservatory can help an individual's music career, it can also shake their motivation and trust in arts education. For example, Stella said that, although music education helped her in different ways, she found it challenging 'to stay connected to [her] creativity' because Rockacademie focused on 'educating their students to make money'. In her opinion, her education had a business rather than an artistic approach. Paradoxically, most interviewees admitted that having a business strategy is their only way to guarantee music success.

Nonetheless, even the artistic approach carried entrepreneurial tendencies. Some music careers began with friends learning their instruments, jamming, writing songs, rehearsing, recording, and then seeking opportunities to play those songs live and promote the band. Still seeking personal cohesion, most musicians found themselves happier and most creative during the writing process and on stage as these activities flourished on artistic and emotional flow. Arno argued that music-making becomes a tasking job once the writing process is over, stripping creativity off its raw and improvisational status. So, for most musicians, expression was and remained an intrinsic priority. Echoing this principle, Femke recalled the launching stages of her first band's official music:

> *From the moment on when we started writing songs and that I started putting my influences in, then I think basically all of us were really [contemplating the idea of pursuing music professionally]. We didn't really know how, but we were all following the dream of being discovered and trying to make a career out of that. . . . At that point, we did start doing our own recordings and own productions and start playing gigs and playing in band contests and stuff like that to try to get out there.*

Femke clearly noted that none of her band members knew much about entrepreneurship and having a music business, so they pursued informal access to the industry and endeavoured to secure attention by competing with other bands and proving worth.

In most cases, interviewees agreed that performance was a natural development for a musician. There was confusion to define a 'typical' professional musician, so interviewees highlighted live performance and remuneration as indications of professionalism. Johan exclaimed, 'I wanted to learn the songs of my favourite bands, and also be in a band when I get older. That's also what happened, obviously'. He continued;

> *We say "professional" – well, define "professional" – but the first band with which I did gigs in the Netherlands was when I was 15, 16 maybe. Then, it kind of grew from that. The next band I played in, which was more like a thrash metal/hardcore punk kind of band, was [from] when I was 16 until I was 20. And we also did foreign gigs, like in Germany and Belgium – that's about it, I think.*

So, according to Johan, gigging distinguishes professional musicians. But as I argued in the theoretical framework regarding the loose definition of professionalism, Johan's notion raises questions if musicians whose music business is digital, such as Charlotte Wessels with her successful Patreon, are constrained to amateurism. Interestingly, urged to further dwell on the gigging economy and the professional position, Johan contemplated the music industry's flexibility and the complexity to distinguish a professional musician from a semi-professional or even an amateur. He posited;

No, I don't think you have to [perform live]. Well, most professional bands do gigs, most bands do gigs, most bands I like do gigs (Chuckles), but I don't think you have to earn an income with your music to be professional.

As this explanation suggests, there is a conspicuous struggle to narrow professionalism to a precise understanding. Johan found either remuneration or performance could be factors to distinguish professionals. But he also implied that following a cognitive legitimacy strategy of gigging likens some musicians to others and "prove" their professionalism.

However, none of the interviews related amateurism and professionalism to technical and artistic expertise. In other words, a musician's vocational perception of their music and ambitions indicates professionalism, and thus, entrepreneurial behaviour enabled these musicians to transcend hobbyism. In this regard, asked about a musician's priority in their occupation, Femke replied:

In the beginning, I was all about just writing music and recording and performing, and that was it. And now I realise that there are a lot of different aspects that I also have to cover and I also have to think about. More on the business side, but I actually really enjoy that as well. I've always thought that you can keep learning. It doesn't really matter how much you know or how much you've learned, you can always learn something new, and I really like learning and improving my skills and my craft and my business.

So, like Femke's inference, all interviews established that a musician's entrepreneur identity is a pivotal factor in legitimising their music occupation – although, unlike Femke, very few enjoyed this occupational facet. By ensuring managerial and entrepreneurial tasks and knowledge, a musician converts hobbyism to professionalism. This entrepreneurial mindset enabled the musicians to tackle administrative and corporate bureaucracy, which according to most interviews, was tedious. While not many revelled in bureaucracy, everyone deemed it compulsory – even if they all left it to the last minute.

Corroborating inadequacy in administrative and corporate bureaucracy, some interviewees who could hire a business team talked more about the signification of registering themselves as Zelfstandigen Zonder Personeel (Self-Employed Without Employees) or their bands as a *Vennootschap Onder Firma* (General partnership). For example, Marleen raised a positive point about this Dutch administrative process for musicians; she felt that being a formal business symbolises professionalism. It became 'convenient that [she] could . . . send an invoice because . . . it does make people consider [her] more as a professional. [It] helped to get a more professional image, especially for venues who sort of expect that [she is] an entrepreneur.' Accordingly, Marleen alluded that invoices distinguish entrepreneurs. Comparatively, Johan re-raised another point that questioned "professionalism" in the music business and implied its undefinable nature. He said;

A lot of people define "professional" as earning an income . . . with doing what you do. And, obviously, for making art in general, it's not that black and white. . . . I always had the viewpoint in the back of my head 'Well, I want to earn my income as a musician, or I will not be a real musician'. But it's not that black and white.

In this sense, with Johan's belief that the industries of Performing Arts are too flexible to contribute to a clear understanding of professionalism, and although a private person can claim payment with a

compensation statement (*Gageverklaring*), Marleen's theory is that only a registered musician's invoice shows sophistication and professionalism.

In this sense, professionalism requires entrepreneurship. The combination of remuneration and entrepreneurial tasks distinguish professionals and amateurs. While amateurs may show entrepreneurial behaviour to secure live concerts or build audiences, they still do not have official status as a professional business thus may seek remuneration or favours as private persons. Further, in Marleen's account, venues, which are part of the music industry and should be quite accustomed to musicpreneurship, would find invoices more professional. Therefore, a musical profession is again defined according to remuneration and entrepreneurship. However, the question remains, can a KvK registered musician who has not toured or earned a living from making music for some time still be called a professional? Think of inactive (registered) metal musicians during the pandemic, are they no longer professional?

Confronting occupational precariousness

Precariousness is the interviews' dominant theme, and following the structure of the interview questions, the analysis will proceed from a micro to a macro level. So, on the more direct level, the musicians discussed a fluctuating dissatisfaction with individual development that touches on musicianship and personal cohesion, between which the line is often blurry. Being an essential part of music-making, performing compositions in a studio recording or on stage required constant training. For some interviewees, such as singers and drummers, bodily or mental constraints such as fatigue or anxiety sometimes hindered performance. For example, Marleen and Maartje often felt insecure about their singing for not living up to their standards. Most interviewees described distress and artistic insecurities that often destabilised their sense of worth and urged self-comparison. Older musicians were more confident and more equipped with self-assurance owing to their vast experience with the business. For example, Alexander said;

> *'Should I do this or not?' And then [my friend] said to me – I will never forget – 'Look. You write for God and for the history books. So what, if nobody likes it!? So what, if nobody even hears it!? So what, if everybody thinks it's terrible!? That hasn't stopped the pioneers of the past. That's not important. What is important is that you have this vision and that you have to put it to paper so that it exists because even if nobody listens to it, if there's a score or a recording of it, it exists; you have given it a physical manifestation!' And this thing that "you write for God and the history books, and you shouldn't care about anything else", which is what she implied, really made a difference because then I thought like 'Okay, so I'll just do what I want to do'.*

Thus, Alexander learned that fulfilling his passion and self-achievement was reason enough to continue making music regardless of doubts.

Also being indispensable parts of music-making, ambition and creativity equally facilitate a music occupation as they invade a private life and impose imbalance. In that capacity, the musicians conceded workaholism, explaining that either artistic insecurities transferred to personal relationships or that free time was semi-inexistent in their private lives – a product of which is an incongruence in personal relationships and health. Their work lacked a standard schedule and office hours in the sense that they could not detach from their musician and entrepreneur identities and engaged in work whenever creativity demanded. In more detail, Maartje, Stella, Arno, and Femke acknowledged their

music occupation's impact on their relationships to the extent of losing partners. Firstly, Stella noted that music highlighted creative differences and her and her ex-partner's inability to compromise. Secondly, Arno admitted working day and night regardless of his partners' wishes, so he made projects with them to justify spending time together. He additionally confessed never committing to a non-creative partner or one with mediocre talent and passion, considering that he could never honestly give them positive affirmations. Thirdly, Maartje said that ex-boyfriends often had gotten jealous of her male fans or had wanted her to pay more attention to them. Eventually, some interviewees such as Arno, Bart, and Femke decided that romantic relationships and children were distracting and cannot be a part of their lives.

Generally, the musicians regretted that playing live and touring led to less time with family. Many felt remorse for not being reliable or available to their families' and friends' phone calls, events, or rites of passage. Intriguingly, the older the musicians got, the less inclined they became to prioritise their music over their families. Adriaan felt sorry for missing several of his children's birthdays and other family events, then admitted that, eventually, he and his bandmates would have to lamentably decide whether touring would be more significant than their families. Hence, Adriaan and Alexander said that after around two decades of being full-time musicians at the expense of their relationships, they intended to start changing their habits and spend more time with their loved ones. They both contemplated, however, that their business could suffer as a result.

In addition, musicians encountered collaboration obstacles. Interviewees worked more often with friends than with new acquaintances but confessed difficulties in either situation. Various interviewees discussed instances of creative or logistical differences with bandmates that either had necessitated a compromise or had resulted in separation. Adriaan explained, 'Sometimes, you have to have the conversation; "Is everybody still wanting the band to grow? And what [do] we need to do to make that happen?" Then, you can put stuff in perspective more.' As Adriaan stated, band members develop different needs, aesthetics, or visions over time, influencing decision-making. Bart lost two successful bands because of singers wanting other projects. Johan quit a band because two bandmates never compromised. And Maartje disliked her bandmates personally but stayed in the band because she needed their song-writing skills. These examples go in line with Adriti's (2020) labour division discussion in the theoretical framework. In dividing tasks and skills, musicians who lack entrepreneurial passion and knowledge can push their own goals through the ensemble. Thus, the risk of lineup changes created a constant career instability threat because some members are indispensable to others' goals. Interviewees, such as Bart and Femke, had to start over after their groups had disbanded. Bart expressed that he hated entrepreneurship and solely wished to compose and perform music, which resulted in his constant need for other band members to create and maintain opportunities. Notwithstanding whether each band member can also be a fully functional musicpreneur, joined efforts craft an equilibrium with better success chances.

Success parameters are enforced by the industry and the market, as Zwaan et al.'s (2010) and Dowd's (2004) theories discussed. Being at the mercy of gatekeepers and audiences, interviewees made various artistic and logistic concessions. For example, Bart explained that it was depressing to be at the mercy of external appreciation. So, discussing music occupation, interviewees frequently spoke about their network. Many discussed their dealings with labels, agents, venues, promoters, sponsors, et cetera, and exhibited nuanced perspectives about these industry professionals. Predominantly, they admitted their need and gratitude for their business teams but raised questions on mutual trust

and appreciation. For example, Maartje expressed her unhappiness with various members of her management and told a story of having been scammed by a previous manager. Marleen told a story of one networking event during which she had realised that musicians have little to no chance to impress cultural gatekeepers if they are not already admirers of the musicians' art.

She recalled industry professionals shunning her friend at the Music Day event and noted, 'Everyone told her "No" and "It's awful" and "It's not good enough"'. Accordingly, her anecdote recapitulates how many interviewees had dreamt of becoming established then faced an opposite reality where various bands compete in a record-label ideology, which lessens the chances for each band to be the lucky one. For instance, Femke said that her former band had expected to be discovered and signed just for being passionate and active. Alexander noted that the dream of establishing one's self in the music industry could become a sense of entitlement and delusion. For instance, even though studies show a chance factor redirecting music occupation, musicians can still believe that opportunities emerge from individual work impressing industry and market. An illustration shows Arno, who was angry at the mention of luck vis-à-vis his success. As the interview proceeded, he admitted that perseverance alone does not guarantee establishment in the industry. In fact, Alexander argued that labels sign musicians in whose work they are already interested.

Musicians' experiences showed no clear distinction between being signed for their musical quality or for being potentially lucrative to their labels. Johan explained how labels always have leverage and build rosters that enable them to remain some of the leading labels in the industry and how, in that climate, a band could be dropped quickly. In the same vein, Adriaan estimated that every investor in the music industry seeks profit maximisation at the expense of musicians. He noted that the press participates in this mentality, explaining, 'In the early days, we wanted to be in that magazine to sell albums. Now, they have to get us in the magazine to sell the magazine'. However, Adriaan was one of the few successful musicpreneurs in the sample. His experience showed more occupational stability than most interviewees.

As Dowd's (2004) theory of occupational stability argued, the average creative entrepreneur experiences occupational instability, moving from one mobile job to another. In line with the theory, interviews showed that only three out of ten musicpreneurs experiences occupational stability. In other words, the data demonstrated a great divide between full-time musicians and musicians who had double occupations with a less straightforward career path. Indeed, only three interviewees made a living from music-making. Most musicians said that there was little to no chance of securing a livelihood from being a metal musician and that, in retrospect, their teenage selves had been unreasonable to think otherwise. For example, Femke found it naïve and 'ridiculous' that her former band had thought a label would sign them and 'give [them] a bunch of money'. Alexander also said that, in reality, most bands have 'shitty contracts' that make money for everyone else but the artists. Bart also argued that most venues symbolically pay musicians, that the fee would barely cover the trip to the location. He explained that splitting a low fee with a full band usually results in zero payment for the individuals.

Additionally, Alexander and Marleen said that even the little money one would make from music, they spend on paying an accountant to do taxes. In fact, according to Marleen, an accountant asked her for ninety euros only to respond to some general questions for thirty minutes. For other more detailed calculations regarding show fees and other logistical payments, Alexander said;

Each of [our albums] sold about the same, quite well with 10,000 or more, and up to this day we have not seen a single cent of royalties from the label because the contract is so shitty and because there's always [an] excuse to not pay the musicians. . . . Well, live concerts; we tour with three bands – and not three beginning bands but bands that people actually want to see. The public comes, and it's a successful tour, but actually what you get – as a package, not a band, but as a package per show – [cannot be profitable]. A common amount is 1200 euros; the bus that you need to get to the gig cost you 1400 euros. That means that your entire fee plus everything you make on t-shirts is used only to pay the bus to get there. So, usually – at least in these admittedly extreme genres that I'm active in in metal – there is no income; you get a bit of pocket money from some author's rights that not even the label could take away from you because there's still a law that requires for you as an author to actually receive at least a part of the author's rights, so you get that sometimes.

These calculations denote that metal musicians could not make a comfortable living from music-making.

Curiously, not many interviewees gave examples of their payments with concrete numbers despite questions hinting interest in these details. While this non-transparency regarding income might have been motivated by discomfort to share confidential information about financial status, it shows a homogenous behaviour where financial disclosure is avoided. Asked about how she sets her fees, Femke imparted how it was virtually impossible to have a fixed price. But it was awkward to ask other colleagues what their fees were, so it was difficult for her to know the average payment to demand in exchange for her singing services. This lack of transparency also meant that many musicians would lower their prices in fear of price competition and investor or client alienation. So, the lack of financial details contributes to the fluidity and non-transparency of the music industry. It also raises questions; are fees too low that they are embarrassing? Is it fear of price competition with other musicians? Do clients hire cheaper musicians at the expense of better ones? Is it against the nature of a musician or artist to speak of money, i.e., does economic morality hinder creative entrepreneurship and livelihood? In this light, interviewees such as Marleen and Stella confided that they found it almost impossible to precisely specify a price for their art for various reasons, such as their artistic insecurity. So, interviewees such as Marleen sought other occupations on top of musicpreneurship to free their musical creativity from monetary binds.

Having more than one occupation was a solution for seven interviewees. These jobs included sound engineering, website development, sales, biology, and music teaching. Some musicpreneurs further pursued multiple musical projects and concerts to get credited and paid within the music industry. For example, Marleen, Bart, and Jaap worked as session musicians, and Arno produced different drum loops and merchandise for potential consumers. All of these examples present multi-faceted entrepreneurs assuming various tasks to meet their goals. Nevertheless, some of these interviewees were unsympathetic to musicians who decide to focus on music-making despite low earning. For example, Arno felt frustrated by colleagues who avoided other activities heedless of financial precariousness. But he also admitted the influence of his business education on his opinion that more musicians should adapt to the capitalist system and not complain. These complaints are motivated by an identity crisis and loss of confidence from occupational instability. In fact, three full-time musicians felt shaken by the interview question regarding their retirement plans, admitting an adamant refusal

to think of their future when they would no longer work or get paid. Comparably, although multiple occupations provided comfort, security, and fulfilment, part-time musicians did not feel like 'proper' or 'typical' musicians. They implied an identity crisis because they thought that "real" musicians needed to devote themselves entirely to music, which the full-time musician Alexander also argued.

Relating their occupational instability to the (metal) industry, musicians felt most betrayed by the music industry for the conditions in which metal music is. Alexander encapsulated his exasperation at the state of metal musicpreneurship, remarking that various 'legendary' colleagues were also bitter about the metal industry. He explained that metal 'is a genre that lets its children starve completely'. He continued to justify his attachment to playing metal by saying;

> *So, the fact that I am still doing metal is just because I'm an idiot, and I can't stop it because I'm stupid enough to still want to do it. But in professional terms, it's a bloody hobby because if I take my guitar and I sit down in front of [the] door of my house, and I play some random covers, I will earn better than as the singer [of my country's] biggest black metal band.*

As seen in this passage, Alexander argued that despite metal being the full-time occupation of many musicians, the industry conditions it as a hobby and makes it virtually impossible to earn a living. For further evidence, Alexander noted that he could earn a more stable income by playing mainstream music or doing as people often tell him – to compose 'commercial jingles' or music like 'Hans fucking Zimmer'. However, his passion and honesty kept him from pursuing music to which he did not relate (i.e., inauthentic music).

Other prevalent themes touched on market and technology, which were evidently intertwined in the theoretical section. A market technocracy was confirmed in the interviews, focusing on a virtual relationship between musicians and their audiences. But firstly, musicians discussed their reflexive perception of the audiences to which they presented music, noting a multifaceted audience behaviour. So, like many other aspects of the music industry, musicians' liaison with fans and the metal community changed. Interviews showed that a music occupation created a distance between artists and the community they belonged to because it no longer felt like a home but rather an audience and potential consumers. For example, Maartje expressed that people being 'starstruck' changed her attitude and behaviour. Most musicians were introverts to whom audience engagement was overwhelming, so they used their music as an interactive tool, which meant that live performance was manageable, but the after-show conversing with the crowd was forced.

Although they could not separate their musician identity from their fandom, musicians had insight into metal music's sonic constitution as they once had been purely metal fans themselves. However, various interviewees, once recognised for a particular style, regretted being pigeonholed by fans and the industry. Femke said, 'I wish I wasn't [pigeonholed], but I'm afraid I am anyway. And it's not because I want to be in a mould; it's because we cannot help it, but all of us want to put everyone else in a mould in order to understand them'. Adriaan noted that because of this mould, he would lose his fanbase should he ever make music that is not 'at least . . . metal-ish'[10]. However, profiling (metal) musicians also touches on demographic parameters. Interviews generally showed that metal fandom is gendered and that fans act differently according to which metal genres they listen or to which

[10] He also noted that his network was limited to metal and that he would not have connections helping him enter a new market.

instruments they like and play; fans who play instruments tend to criticise artists technically or seek advice. Being profiled as a female metal singer, Marleen – who was a singer in a progressive metal band – said that fans force the "female-fronted" tag onto her band regardless of their music genre. She explained that the term either attracted audiences for the wrong reasons or made them avoid listening to the band altogether. On the one hand, people often refused to listen to her band's music because it was women-made or were surprised that the band's music did not sound like it had been made by women or had a symphonic direction. On the other hand, people listened to the music expecting a particular sound. In other words, metalheads associated the "female-fronted" tag with female operatic vocals and symphonic arrangements due to a list of previous bands described as such (After Forever, Within Temptation, etc.). Thus, the band eventually prohibited promoters from referring to them as "female-fronted" and consciously set photoshoots to avoid this cliché layout of singers in the front centre of a promotional photo, distinguishing female singers from instrumentalists.

Another example came from Jaap, whose band played Death metal. His experience with fans showed a great deal of audience behaviour changing according to gender, instrument, and genre. He said that 'people usually forget about [him]' not only because 'they don't see the drummer' but also because his 'bandmates are all women except [for him] and [the] bass player'. He continued to say that people who went to talk to them after a show were all men who wanted pictures with the female band members. Commenting on the gendered behaviour, female interviewees posited that fans often sexualised female musicians. Marleen said that fans of "female-fronted" metal 'see women as sort of goddesses and queens'. This ideology, in itself, created a level of discomfort for her as the worship object. In a sense, sexual objectification of female musicians led to sexual harassment after shows or online bullying by the gendered audience.

Hence, audience behaviour forged a system of hierarchy between musician and fan. Gendered fandom made female musicians self-conscious about their image and behaviour and often led to androgynous comportment and attire to avoid or confront misconduct. Interviewees illustrated how both appearance and confidence were triggers to some patterns of harassment. Interestingly, fans deemed anything female musicians wore erotic and perceived confidence as either a sex attire or an authorised call for respect. In either case, female musicians sensed a risk for confrontation. Switching to an entrepreneurial identity, Femke realised that fans only bought albums from musicians they cared about and to whom they connected. So, she tried to strengthen that bond and created a controlled public environment based on friendship. Nonetheless, Femke was also aware of the limitation of this friendship because fans were destructive sometimes. For example, her overprotective fans interfered with her private life, threatening her ex-partner after their amicable separation.

What allowed for Femke's bond with her fans and eventually their interference in her private life was social media. Interviewees used social media to promote their musical activities, hoping to attract industry professionals and consumers' attention. And as the discussion above suggested, very few interviewees expressed a positive relationship with social media. Firstly, Stella thought that her marketing posts could quickly become spam. Secondly, although social media provided these musicians with a platform that directly interacted with the audience and promoted musical activities void of the intermediary of a label, it was overwhelming. While social media helps reach the audience, it also allows fans to contact the artist. It became part of the creative entrepreneur's job description to interact with fans personally on social media; otherwise, sales could be affected. Artistic reputation became intertwined with the personal reputation so that a creative entrepreneur equally ought to be

musically equipped and personable. The obligation to be further attentive to their audiences generated pressure seeing that interviewees were almost all introverted people or people who valued their privacy and solitary time. Bart, Arno, and Johan said that because fans used social media to reach them to an overwhelming extent, they felt that limiting their answers helped maintain a level of privacy and distance. Stella and Marleen limited their digital presence entirely.

Nevertheless, all interviewees agreed that new technologies could facilitate a musicpreneur's music endeavours giving them (invisible) visibility and (false) independence (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). For example, Arno live-streamed his songwriting sessions and asked fans to contribute ideas[11]. Maartje created a Patreon account and asked fans to suggest covers or songwriting ideas. Marleen's and Stella's bands did Crowdfunding campaigns and successfully financed their records with fan donations. And Johan and Jaap promoted themselves as guitar teachers and gave digital lessons. In addition, Adriaan noted how sponsors approached him because he had many social-media followers. And Johan found autonomy with programming software to write advanced demos without his bandmates. In a sense, new technologies offered many opportunities for success and cohesion within the digital bounds of entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, metal music production is obscured within metal entrepreneurship's abstract framework by organisational structure and legislative barriers. As discussed in the theory section, the underground musicians always felt an organisational obstacle to their entrepreneurial growth. The Dutch government's strategies to aid the music industry elevated anxieties about occupational instability. Indeed, the Dutch Cultural Policy was a prominent topic whenever discussions led to details on career formality, money, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Commenting on the government support to culture during the pandemic, Arno communicated that although he trusted the government's expertise, he felt that its cultural support was flawed. He stated, 'The 300 million for the culture; that doesn't go to me and other guys, it goes to the main museums and public stages'. Generally, interviewees acknowledged the Dutch government's positive role in subsidising culture but believed that their underground music scene was unacknowledged.

Like the above statement, many interviewees isolated themselves from the Cultural field. In other terms, although culture has its ministry and receives subsidies, the isolated musicians felt othered with policies and bureaucracies formulated to suit unrelated fields. Some interviewees related such structural limitations to their formal registration procedure at the Chamber of Commerce (KvK). Marleen posited that the KvK complicates musicians' registration procedure owing to the generalised and misleading information available. She noted, 'It's quite overwhelming, and it's not something anyone enjoys.' Echoing Marleen's experience, Alexander became irritated when discussing the cultural policy and the administrative and corporate bureaucracy; he criticised how legislation quantified music like the goods and services of the Shell company. Accordingly, interviews showed a strange relationship between the government and musicians. There are some misunderstanding and miscommunication that make musicians feel betrayed. So, they argued that the Dutch government

[11] Bart's relationship with fans generally focused on the content of his music; he deliberated on making authentic music with personal meanings that eventually could help fans with similar struggles. This approach was also supported by Marleen. It reflects the 'heroic musician' theory (Scott Burnham as cited in DeNora, 2004) discussed earlier in the "Social cohesion through mood regulation" section.

should pay more attention to the isolated individuals that make the culture and entertainment industry and subsidise metal music more.

Because most venues and festival promoters that programme metal bands do not receive a subsidy, touring conditions can unnerve musicians. Indeed, deliberations on live performance and touring unveiled stories about audience behaviours and details of venues or bookings that musicians felt they had to endure. For instance, interviews showed that most metal bands play in small venues and stages. Some experiences proved momentarily difficult but not regrettable. However, Alexander noted that he had played shows in which stages were made of beer crates. He recalled;

> *You will . . . have to set up your instruments while standing up to your ankles in a puddle of piss because that's just where the backstage is; or no backstage – you (Chuckles) change into your stage outfit on the public toilet because there is no backstage. There's not even a stage; there's just a bunch of beer crates that you're supposed to stand on. And that's reality for an extreme metal band, actually. And there's this certain level of loss of dignity that is less in classical music than in the underground.*

Alexander's experience directly compares high and popular culture, working as a successful classical composer and a moderately-niche metal musician. As a successful classical figure, subsidies and grants provided him with comfortable concerts and touring life. As a metal musician, he toured with a full band in a van and played on crate-structures. On the other spectrum of metal success, Adriaan had a well-established band, accessing better venues and touring in all-inclusive nightliners.

But most interviewees shared Alexander's metal music trajectory, meaning that the average metal entrepreneur cannot play medium-to-big venues or book a nightliner. So, Alexander drew vivid imagery of touring as an average metal musician. He said;

> *You earn nothing, (Chuckles) you lose a kilo per day, you don't sleep, you eat like shit, you have crappy sound, and you have to deal with so much unpleasantness, that the joy you get from that one hour that you actually get to play has to be more than the bullshit around it or the things you like about it. . . . At a certain point, you really have to wonder like 'What was the point of this tour?' if it's a bad tour and you have some gigs that there's hardly any people or whatever . . . . Sometimes, you play in front of a lot of people, but if they're all just staring at their phones while you're baring your soul on the stage . . . , you feel like 'What if I had stayed at home; nothing changed so why did I sacrifice this week of my valued time to play in front of 400 drunk zombies that are passed out on the last day on a grindcore festival?' (Laugh).*

Alexander's description of a tour unveils various negative pointers that outweigh the positive effects of sharing one's music with an audience. In the same vein, Femke recalled the conditions of tours she had been on, which created a love/hate relationship towards touring for her;

> *I've always loved touring. I love it, it destroys me every time, and I'm always happy to be home. . . . There is always one day on the tour that I just want to go home to mum. (Laugh) . . . Like you're just fed up with everything. We did a lot of support . . . , and support bands are always like a second-class citizen. So, we had our fair share of crappy or non-existent backstage areas with no food and no*

shower. (Chuckles) So I mean, it's hard. It was super hard. . . . I always want to be on tour. At some point, I can't wait to be back home because I'm tired, I'm exhausted, and I just want to be in my bed and my shower. But every time we come back [home], the next day, I wish I was back on the tour bus.

So as both Femke and Alexander expressed, musicians have a complicated relationship with touring and playing live. On the one hand, they can perform and share their art with different audiences, enriching their self-actualisation and perception. On the other hand, conditions for most metal musicians are not favourable, creating psychological mayhem that encourages bitterness towards and an almost masochistic relationship with performing arts.

Conclusion

This paper sought to answer the question; *How do (Dutch) professional metal musicians navigate their careers between intrinsic artistic expression and pressure-inducing entrepreneurialism?* Data collected from ten in-depth interviews with Dutch metal musicians provided more details on the subject. These details reflected a juxtaposition between music-making and the business of music production. Therefore, I can answer the research question in three parts; (a) how musicians interact with external environments that control success chances, (b) how musicians confront precariousness threatening their occupational stability, (c) how musicians reinforce intrapersonal relationships and (mental) health through music while the business destabilises them.

Firstly, to overcome hurdles presented by the macro-external environments, i.e., PEST factors (politics, economy, society, and technology), and micro-external environments, i.e., industry and markets (Varbanova, 2016), metal musicians adopt three different approaches. (1) They develop a resourceful entrepreneur identity that seeks help from music collaborators and industry professionals to develop their musical projects. They found bands and divide tasks according to technical and managerial/organisational skills and convert cultural interest into capital through exchanging favours and music. An entrepreneurial passion (Laaksonen et al., 2011) allows them to confront obstacles and continue their discontinuous production of music (Colbert in Chong, 2009). (2) They adopt legitimacy strategies (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994) that follow their external environments' behavioural and administrative codes. Thus, facing the PEST factors, they register their companies to exchange invoices and pay taxes, follow a record-deal ideology (Arditi, 2020), hire a business team around them to benefit from its network and prestige, sign contracts, receive royalties, and experience playing in subsidised versus non-subsidised venues. However, musicians remain confused by the industry's labour flexibility and civic (dis)order that serve a culturalised economy (von Osten, 2007). These legitimacy strategies partly force corporate behaviour on individuals, who are otherwise variably intrinsically motivated by an entrepreneur identity and a musician personality. (3) They seek independent visibility through digital promotion and distribution to bypass field competition and the industry professionals' filtering strategy. Digital presence allows them to increase success probability and strengthen social support. For instance, interviewees' professional experiences verified Gagné's chance system (in Kaufman, 2013; Davidson & McPherson, 2017) and Zwaan et al.'s (2010) success parameters and demonstrated a direct interaction with the market on social media.

Secondly, with chance factors directing the business legitimacy of entrepreneurs who trade music, metal musicians experience occupational instability and to circumvent precariousness, the research found musicians using three strategies. (1) While entrepreneurial passion invests in social media to

increase the reputation value (Zwaan et al., 2010, 2009; Beckert & Rössel, 2004), the musician identity limits social media interactions as it stimulates self-doubt and demands constant attention. Musicians' relationship with the metal community changes as they become music producers and sellers. While they still idolise some musicians and bands, they consider fellow fans a market and potential audience whose aesthetic judgement is often blunt on social media. To this end, interviewees characterise social media as a 'necessary evil', for example. (2) As musicians need the market and cannot avert digital or physical negative audience behaviour, they must diplomatically adapt to situations such as gendered, racialised, or attention-demanding conduct. Male musicians find that the market judged them for their music and skills, so they continue to improve their skills and produce music to which they personally can relate and hope that some audiences would appreciate it. Female musicians find that the market judges them for their music, craft, and gender. They often experience implicit or explicit sexism and harassment, so they acclimate by adopting androgynous behaviour even if their physical appearance follows socially constructed masculine or feminine roles. In this sense, data confirms the success parameter of demographic traits (Zwaan et al., 2010), contributing to occupational instability. (3) Reflecting on Downie's (1990) examination of professions and whether a job must be valuable to society, audience reactions to and consumption of musical products confirm the value and demand for metal music. However, there is a gap between a representative demand and actual business growth because industry professionals underpay musicians. This, for example, shows when correlating musicians' social media following numbers with whether they make music full-time. To counter these conditions that render a music occupation in the field unreliable, most metal musicians occupy additional jobs within or outside the music industry to increase their revenue streams.

Thirdly, regarding the social facet of metal music production, musicians find and create social cohesion through music. Music-making regulates individuals' mood and enhances their sense of worth and healing. Additionally, founding bands unites like-minded individuals who bond through aesthetic and cultural inclinations and work towards a shared goal. Data confirm these theories, where interviewees talk about self-expression, meditation, bonding, sense of achievement, spontaneous creativity, et cetera. They believe that one becomes 'absorbed' by music and creates a business around something that brings them 'happiness' and 'freedom'. Their music provides a platform to interact with fans who create scenes and communities around the product and music style. However, while music-making motivates social cohesion, the music business causes artistic insecurities and external factors that cloud the otherwise positive creative experience. The qualitative business's legitimacy barriers and occupational instability question professionalism in music-making, promote workaholism, and ingrain self-doubt in entrepreneurs and disinterest in social relationships. For example, data confirms that while entrepreneurship is risk-taking, failure to secure a successful music business disturbs musicians' sense of worth and cohesion. Hence, occupational hazards forge a duality of music vocation and entrepreneurial pressure that destabilise mental health and musical worth. I.e., occupational instability results in a blurrier art remuneration morality where musicians slightly divided in opinion. For instance, although few interviewees decide to make music part-time, more interviewees deem it urgent to reform the external environment and obtain occupational legitimacy to exchange experience goods/services with fair remuneration. The occupational instability causes musicpreneurs to criticise and doubt their abilities and hesitate to self-identify as 'typical musician[s]'. Thoughts in the vein of "I am not good enough" and "My work is not appreciated enough" often accompanies their (musical and administrative) tasks. Thus, although the theory section asked why musicians still professionalise in music production despite precariousness, the paper concludes that there is no concrete answer. For example, one interviewee puts it bluntly; 'the fact that I am still doing metal is just because I'm an idiot, and I can't stop it because I'm stupid enough to still want to do it'. Hence, musicians have an unconscious and irrational strategy where they focus on music-making's

therapeutic aspect and disregard occupational precariousness because otherwise, their rational decision would be to stop.

These findings on the occupational precariousness in professional metal music production contribute to a growing field of metal studies by spotlighting the behind-the-scenes. Unlike the ubiquitous studies focusing on (metal) musical legends and the textual analysis of their music, this research presents metal musicians as competent entrepreneurs seeking to legitimise a qualitative business and circumvent occupational precariousness. However, this analysis also substantiates other metal studies on gendered and racialised audience behaviour. It supports the maturing interest in (metal) music-induced therapy, such as in the awareness campaigns initiated by the online resource Heavy Metal Therapy (HMT). And it confirms precariousness-induced stress and anxiety, as shown in Musgrave and Gross's (2020) book/reports commissioned by the charity Help Musicians. Finally, the paper agrees with Albinsson's (2018) reflection that 'musicianship is a profession to which many are called, but few are chosen' (p. 351). The paper's discoveries could help decrease confusion within the metal music industry and motivate legislation that would benefit music-makers directly.

Limitations

Although the current findings provide a plausible insight into Dutch metal music professionalism, shortcomings might have affected this paper's academic contribution to music sociology and metal studies. Firstly, my foreign background primarily limited research on the local Dutch administration and professional music history. Secondly, the limited diversity in the samples narrowed the research. Although I contacted diverse musicians, the final sample was only ten Caucasian interviewees, four of whom identified as women. Thus, a more inclusive sample is needed in future studies. Thirdly, metal-focused sources narrowed their analyses to textual analysis of metal and rarely covered the individual experiences of musicpreneurs. On the rare occasions that resources covered professional backgrounds, they mainly focused on band history. So, while the autobiographies written by metal musicpreneurs were scarce but helpful to this research, information on metal entrepreneurship was little.

Finally, my reflexive nature as a metal auditor and (semi)professional musicpreneur might have under- or overdeveloped or entirely disregarded specific points on (Dutch) metal entrepreneurship. To avoid and, to some degree, compensate for reflexive subjectivity, I relied on abundant references to refer more to critical thinking than to internalised previous observations. In this sense, while profuse references risk questioning the author's critical eye, fewer authority-justified arguments risk the paper's integrity.

Based on this paper's limitations, I urge further research to delve deeper into (a) the professional implications of cultural policies and music laws on metal musicpreneurs. For example, the interviewee Arno argued that a Universal Basic Income could vastly improve creative entrepreneurship. (b) The differences and similarities that location imposes on metal musicpreneurs. For example, interviewees often compared countries and audiences, noting that precariousness varied from one place to another. (c) The impact of ecological and technological developments on metal music professionalism. For example, interviewees discussed Patreon, Spotify, and international barriers. But more research can delve into the environmental concerns on cryptocurrency and Art like NFTs and what artists should do. In this sense, I urge future studies to focus on music sustainability and the various ways to reform the music industry and help the musicpreneur and the environment thrive. (d) The physical obstacles

and risks of music occupations such as work-induced illnesses or accidents. For example, although I discussed a few ideas in the theoretical section on occupational career instability, I found that the scope of the topic was larger than my paper. For example, studies show that a musician's lifestyle and occupational anxiety/stress risk (i) fatal sleep deprivation (see Li et al., 2017) and dangerous drinking behaviour that both cause deadly liver-related diseases (Li et al., 2017; Kenny & Asher, 2016; Dobson, 2010), (ii) violent deaths and injuries in road accidents due to touring and tight schedules (Kenny & Asher, 2016; Cridlin, 2017; Sabaton, 2019).

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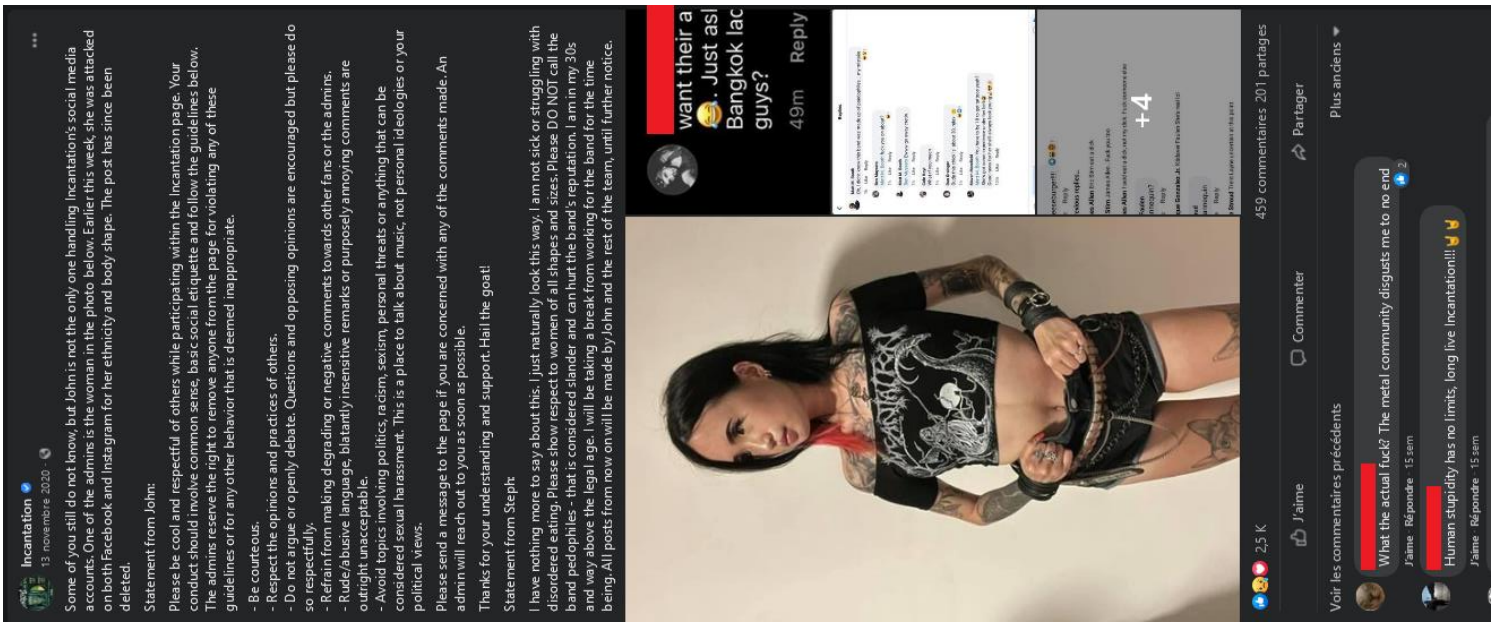
List of figures

Appendices

Appendix A

Incantation screen capture: Facebook statement on cyber bullying

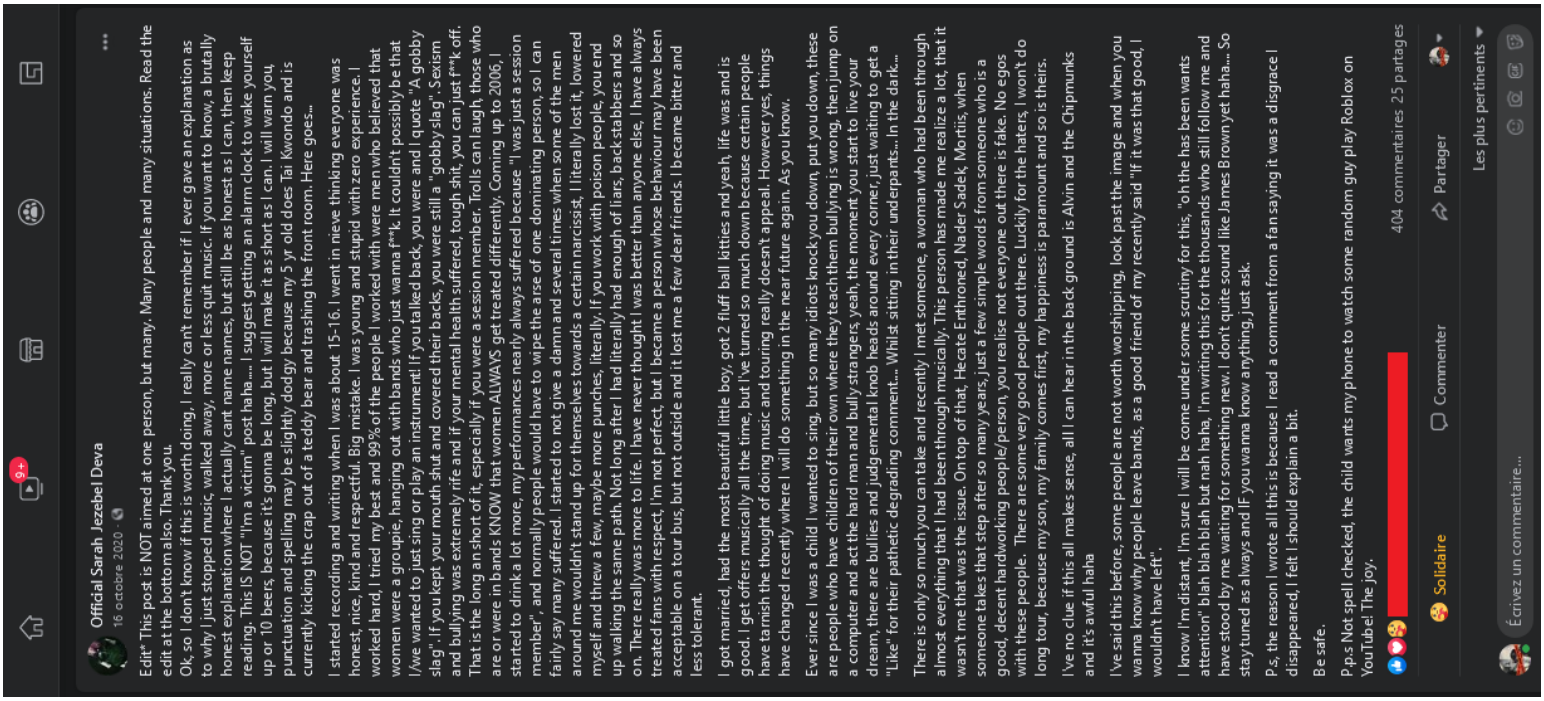


Appendix B

Dark Fortress screen capture: Facebook publication of Rootbrain music with V.Santura

Appendix C

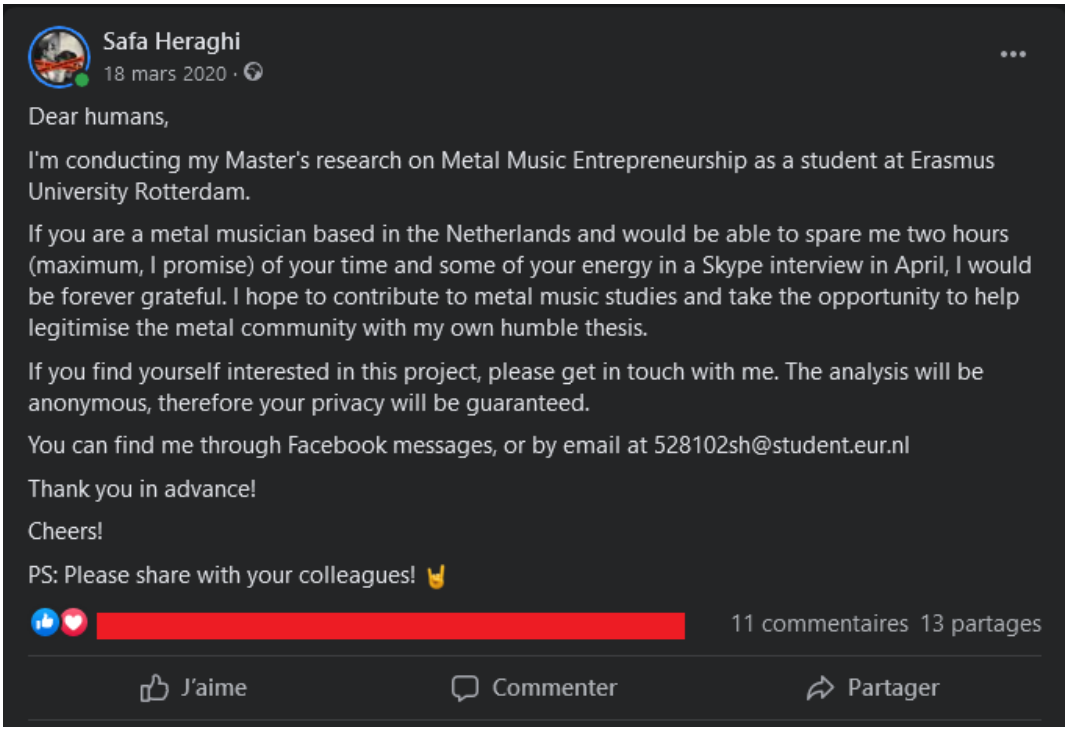
Sarah Jezebel Deva screen capture: Facebook statement on music retirement and industry practices



Appendix D

Safa Heraghi screen capture: Facebook sample recruitment announcement

A broad announcement purposefully disregarding the "professionalism" criteria to encourage interest. The recruitment followed specific criteria after private correspondences and knowing more about the candidates.



Main thematic codes	Themes	Sub-themes	Quotation examples
Creative entrepreneurialism	Innate entrepreneurialism	Vocation	It's this or nothing!' So, it was difficult in the beginning because, as I said, I didn't get actually any encouragement to try and become a professional musician.
		Band formation	some classmates asked me if I wanted to play in the band and I was like ' I can't play anything' and he was like ' Yeah, that doesn't matter" .
	Learned entrepreneurialism	Investments	I would rather hire a PR person to do promotion for me and then I know what I' m paying for and then I'm keeping the rest of myself instead of signing off the rights to something that I made so that someone else can profit from it.
		Professionalism	I can complain about labels being a business and thinking of music as a product, but I have to think of my music as a product as well because I have to know who would be interested
		Formality	I sent the invoice without the BTW but I found out you have to enable that rule before you can do that . . . I thought it was a big mistake but, in the end, it was like ' Oh no, you can fix it easily. It's no problem' but I was like ' Oh, shit, no! I fucked it up! Oh, no! I'm gonna be a fraud or something like that' . It's like a beginner's fault.
Occupational precariousness	Capital	Low income	last year, I got just the album finished, so for that end of the year, I got 2,500 euros, and out of all the gigs, I think a maximum of 500. So that's not that much. That's it for the whole year. Can you imagine?! . . . you can look it up how many gigs I had. I don't remember myself, but it should be at least thirty.
		Poor remuneration	It's basically using the metal band, because people are going to buy drinks and there's going to be a whole night of nice things going on, but the band, they get maybe 50 euros for gas – depending on how big the bar is, of course.
	Double occupation	Professionalism	I always had the viewpoint in the back of my head ' Well, I want to earn my income as a musician or I will not be a real musician' . But it's not that black and white.
		Part-time occupations	It's something that you have to take into account – especially if you want to grow. If you have a job where you cannot take time off, then that's difficult.
		Retirement	I don't want to be the typical musician guy who has to play in his 60s to be able to make his living.
		Re-investments	I'm a professional musician. I get paid for what I do – most of the time at least – and for my band, it's mostly investing (Sarcastically).
	External environments	Industry	I know a few people that are full-time professional metal musicians and some of them are very well-known and honestly, I have the feeling they all hate it and they all are bitter about how badly the market has treated them. Even though they are quoted as legendary and like superheroes and whatever. It is a genre that lets its children starve completely.
		Market	Some people look at you or look at the band or see your pictures and they automatically assume that 'Oh, yeah, that's a band I don't wanna hear.
		Government	I trust that people who run the country do the best they can to do it with the means they have, and that's just saying like the 300 million for the culture; that doesn't go to me and other guys, it goes to the main museums and public stages.
		Technology	I don't really like it, but you have to do it. For myself, I have to do it to get endorsers; to get brands to endorse me so I can get free stuff. Yeah, people think you're a better musician when you get free stuff.
		Family role	I have kids and [the singer has a kid] and that affects the touring. We try to avoid show dates on birthdays of our kids. . . . It's pain in the arse. But that's a struggle, and sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.
		Society roles	They're like ' Okay, does it earn you money?' or something like it. It's a little bit seen, of course, like fun and hobbyist stuff.
Social cohesion	Musical devotion	Musical interest	When you are absorbed by music, you completely forget about everything else including your private life and it wrecks relationships and jobs and families (Chuckles).
		Skill development	It's like zoning off; where you just keep on practising and practising these things over and over. I can do it, so I have no problem in getting a little autistic on it, and I think that does drive my life a little bit sometimes, so it's good.
	Creativity	Artistic insecurities	I also realised I wasn't the best out there, so I could basically also better take the opportunity I got. Now I'm actually very good technically at singing, but I really wasn't and I knew there were better ones out there – that was the problem.
	Mental health	Catharism	On the creative side, just dealing with emotions; just put it in music and a little bit of therapy. (Chuckles) Something like it. It just feels comfortable.
	Collaboration	Band foundation	This creative aspect of it and the togetherness aspect of it, let's say – that you do this together with other outcasts that nobody wants to talk to, – that was absolutely crucial that music and, specifically, our own music got established as the centre of my world utterly and completely.
		Bandmates	Sometimes, it's frustrating for me because I'm dependent on another guitarist or singer or something like that because I can't do anything solo.
	Metal community	Fandom	And I remember back then – I don't feel that like that anymore – but that really felt like home. These people are different and I feel like I belong here. I think a lot of people, especially at that age who listen to metal, feel that way.
		Reception	I think at a certain point you just wanna have fun and if you have fun and the people see it, then they have fun as well. So, you get this interaction which elevates you to a higher level or whatever.