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Helping Behavior in Heavy Metal Concerts

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Abstract

This study tested whether the gender of research confederates at heavy metal concert mosh pits would affect the helping behavior they receive. One male research confederate and one female research confederate each entered a mosh pit at various heavy metal concerts 30 times and then fell down. If and how they were helped by other concert goers was then coded as receiving direct help, indirect help, or no help. A chi-square found statistically significant differences in the way the two research confederates were helped, with the female research confederate receiving more indirect help than the male research confederate, and the male research confederate receiving more direct help than the female research confederate. This study suggests that there is ample opportunity for help in a mosh pit.

Keywords: sex differences, helping behavior, altruistic behavior, mosh pits, moshing

The heavy metal genre of music tends to be stigmatized by the general public. Mothers discourage their adolescents from wearing the black clothes and from playing their loud music, Christian organizations protest Marilyn Manson shows, and some countries (e.g., Russia) do not allow certain heavy metal bands to perform there (Lifton, 2014). Some of this stigma may be well deserved, as the black metal scene has been responsible for church burnings in northern Europe, for example (Hartmann, 2011). One could argue that it is unwarranted, however, and that the heavy metal scene has become a scapegoat for the ills of society. This study assess just how dangerous heavy metal concerts are by determining the effect of gender on the helping behavior of heavy metal concert goers.

Moshing, or slam-dancing, is a form of dance that is expressed at rock, punk and heavy metal concerts today, that usually manifests itself in a disorganized mob of attendees bumping, pushing, and shoving into one another to the beat of a song. Its origins trace back to the 1970's Los Angeles hardcore punk scene, as the concert goers found it to be an appropriate form of expression for the music that was being played (Wilcha, 2002). There are many

different mosh pit styles one can find at a heavy metal concert, such as the circle pit, the wall of death, and hardcore dancing. Different bands evoke different styles (a thrash metal band's mosh pit would be very different from a metalcore band's mosh pit), and moshing changes based on the geographic region of the concert (east coast vs. west coast moshing) (Wilcha, 2002). Moshing is often perceived as violent. Those who go into a mosh pit risk falling and being severely injured by being trampled or stepped on by those still moshing above them. While injuries can occur, moshing may not be as harmful as commonly believed, however.

To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on moshing behavior, let alone on the helping behavior that may occur during moshing. We can nevertheless apply findings from the helping behavior literature to the mosh pit. Halnon (2006) found that the heavy metal community, and concerts in particular, are very inclusive of fans, and exhibit high levels of collectivity and community. Correlational data show that heavy metal fans share similar self-esteem, attitudes toward authority, needs for uniqueness, and religiosity (Swami et al. 2013). This similarity and inclusiveness is beneficial toward helping behavior, as

perceived similarity to others produces feelings of sympathy or empathy toward the individual (Miller, Kozu & Davis, 2001). These, in turn, are positively correlated with helping behavior (Roberts, Strayer & Denham, 2014; Schmidt & Weiner, 1988). When someone falls down moshing, another concert goer is likely to feel sympathetic toward that person and help him/her.

With regard to the potential helpers, Isen and Levin (1972) found that when people are in a good mood they are more likely to help someone. People are also more likely to help when music is being played that is appealing to the listener (North, Tarrant & Hargreaves, 2004). We can assume that concert goers are in a good mood when listening to music they enjoy, so it should follow that when heavy metal music is played to fans of this genre, they should become aroused, not angry (Gowensmith & Bloom, 1997). In fact, only fans of other genres become angry upon hearing metal music (Gowensmith & Bloom, 1997).

Witnessing someone fall in a mosh pit is considered an emergency, as any metal concert goer knows it is very dangerous to fall down in a mob, and Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood (1990) and Shotland and Hutson (1970) found that people receive help more frequently when in a perceived emergency than when not in an emergency. Polzella and Foris (2014) have also found that those who go to music concerts in general are more likely to engage in pro-social (helping) behavior than those who do not attend such events. Furthermore, in the electronic music concert scene, there are organizations (DanceSafe, Zendo Project, Bunk Police) that lobby for and provide help in concert situations in the form of education dissemination, harm reduction techniques for drug users, and providing adequate hydration.

The gender of the individual in need of help also plays a role in helping behavior. Women are helped more than men in both emergency and nonemergency situations, and men are more likely to help in a physical (vs. emotional) setting, such as a concert, than women are (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Shotland & Hutson, 1979).

One might expect the bystander effect to inhibit concert goers from helping someone in need (Latane & Darley, 1968), as there are a good number of people around the person who has fallen in a mosh pit. Venue security guards and the heavy metal bands performing on stage, however, regularly tell the audience that if someone falls down while moshing, to pick them up and make sure he/she is safe, thus increasing the chances of helping behavior (Beaman, Barnes, Klentz & McQuirk, 1978; Shotland & Heinold, 1985).

In Ohio in 1979, fans rushed into a venue to see the rock band The Who play live, resulting in the death of 11 fans, what became known as “The Who Concert Stampede.” Although this was not an example of moshing per se, we can still apply this incident to the experiment at hand because of the similarities in settings. Of the 38 people interviewed by the police at the time, 29 reported either helping someone who had fallen down, receiving help after falling down, or observing others giving help to those in need (Johnson, 1987). Only one of the 38 individuals reported competitive, self-interested behavior during the stampede. This real life example suggests helping behavior does occur in concert settings.

Given the lack of studies on moshing behavior, this experiment will test the effect of research confederate gender on helping behavior in various heavy metal concert mosh pits. Helping behavior was coded as either direct help, indirect help, or no help, and the hypotheses were that both research confederates would be helped if they fell

while moshing, but that the female research confederate would receive more direct help than the male research confederate .

Method

Participants

The participants in this experiment were all of the attendees who participated in the mosh pits of the Aeon, Cannibal Corpse, Behemoth and Enslaved music concerts that took place in the Mid-Atlantic region. These were all successful bands that have released music and toured for a very long time, some reaching back to the 1980's and 1990's. The individuals attending these shows are committed and experienced fans of heavy metal, and understand the norms of concert behavior better than those going to see newer heavy metal bands. The bands also represented an array of different metal subgenres so as to get a more representative population of fans and metal mosh pits. Aeon and Cannibal Corpse are Death Metal bands, Behemoth has a Black Metal sound, and Enslaved fits under Progressive Metal. All these genres are well established, have a long history, and are well respected by the metal community.

As the experiment occurred in natural field settings, the participant concert goers were unaware that an experiment was being conducted (as were the venues holding the concerts and the bands themselves). The highly populated and poorly lit settings also contributed to the difficulty of obtaining precise demographic statistics of the participants beyond what was the dominant age, ethnicity, and gender (i.e., young, Caucasian men). However, survey research has found fans of the heavy metal genre tend to be Caucasian men in the Generation X and Millennial cohort group. (Mizell, 2005)

Materials and Procedure

As the experiment occurred in a natural field setting, and no harm was being inflicted on them, participants were not given informed consent nor debriefing forms. A male or female research confederate was randomly assigned to enter a mosh pit and pose as a fellow moshing participant, mimicking the moshing style of those around them. The research confederate would then pretend to lose his/her balance and would fall in a way that is natural for the situation. The research confederates fell for a total of 30 times each across various concerts and in different sections of the crowd to avoid moshing with the same participants. After each staged fall, the research confederates would describe to the lead experimenter (in a blind fashion) – who was also attending the concert but not moshing – how the fellow moshing participants reacted to witnessing the confederate falling. The experimenter then coded the behavior in one of three ways: 1) No Help, if they did nothing to help the fallen research confederate, continued their moshing behavior as usual, and the research confederate had to get up on his/her own; 2) Indirect Help, if they acted in ways that enabled the fallen research confederate to get up on his/her own in a relatively safe manner, such as temporarily suspending the moshing around the area of the research confederate, holding off other moshing participants around the research confederate, or verbally indicating to be weary of the fallen research confederate; or 3) Direct Help, if participants physically helped the research confederate off the ground.

The research confederates were two undergraduate students from a small liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic area. The male was African-American and of average height and weight. The female was Caucasian, of average height and below-average to average weight. The male research

confederate was very experienced in rock and metal music, their concerts, and moshing in general. The female research confederate was also familiar with rock concerts, specifically punk concerts, but had never been in a mosh pit before.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the observed and expected frequencies of direct, indirect, and no help received by the two research confederates during each of the 30 staged falls. The research confederates received help (both direct and indirect) 82% of the time. The male research confederate received direct help 77% of the time, while the female research confederate received direct help 57% of the time. The female research confederate received help overall (direct and indirect) 87% of the time, however, compared to the male research confederate who received it 77% of the time. The female research confederate was also the only one to receive indirect help (30% of the time), while the male research confederate never received any indirect help.

A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the observed and expected frequencies of direct, indirect, and no help received by the male and female research confederates. A statistically significant difference was found, indicating that gender does affect helping behavior: $\chi^2(2) = 10.72, p = 0.005, \phi = .42$.

Discussion

This experiment studied helping behavior in mosh pits, specifically the effect of gender on mosh pit participants' helping response to fellow fallen participants. The hypotheses were that both of the research confederates would receive help during each moshing trial, and that the female research confederate would receive more direct help than the male research confederate. The data supported the

first hypothesis, with the research confederates being helped 82% of the time. The second hypothesis, however, was not supported. The male research confederate received direct help more times than the female research confederate did. The two research confederates were helped in different ways.

These findings both support and do not support those of past studies. In general, women receive more help than men in all situations (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Shotland & Hudson, 1979). The female research confederate did receive more overall help (direct and indirect) than the male research confederate did. However, the male research confederate received more direct help than the female research confederate did. In terms on indirect help, the typically male participants of this study allowed the female research confederate – but not the male research confederate – to get up on her own, perhaps being more respectful of her personal space, and more hesitant to physically touch her than the male research confederate. This could play into the reputation that concerts have gotten, as women who attend metal concerts and get into mosh pits (or go crowd surfing) are prone to getting touched inappropriately by male concert goers ("Staind" 2014). Performing bands have been known to stop concerts abruptly to confront male concert goers who are inappropriately touching a female concert goer ("Staind" 2014). So it could be that, in order to combat this trend, male concert goers are giving female concert goers more space so as not to offend them (the female research confederate never reported being inappropriately touched during this experiment). In terms of overall help, however, the findings are in line with research done by Johnson (1987) that showed that the majority of people interviewed at "The Who Concert Stampede" reported

witnessing helping behavior significantly more than witnessing no help at all.

The main limitations in this study were the confounds created by the research confederates' different experience levels with mosh pits, as well as their different ethnicities. One who has a lot of mosh pit experience will understand the flow, will know when to brace oneself, and when to expect certain behaviors or consequences of actions they or fellow moshers may engage in. This could explain two aspects of the findings. The first is that the male research confederate did not receive any indirect help, whereas the female received it 30% of the time. An experienced moshers would understand the dangers of being on the ground in the middle of a mosh pit, and would aim to get up as soon as he or she fell. So perhaps the male research confederate was not on the ground long enough to elicit indirect help from the other moshers. The female research confederate, being inexperienced, might have spent more time on the ground and therefore been more likely to receive indirect help. Another aspect is the rate of direct help between the two research confederates. The experienced moshers would know where to fall and not to fall, and know that falling on or around people would make them more likely to be helped, whereas falling in the middle of the pit or where people are not very near might make the confederate more likely to receive indirect help or no help. Some evidence of this is that the male research confederate reported that people caught him while he was falling on a couple of trials, which was coded as direct help. Participants may also respond differently to helping fellow moshers who are of similar or different ethnicities (Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005).

The findings from this study indicate higher levels of helping behavior in mosh pits than may be expected and that gender affects

it. It suggests that, even in a setting that is commonly viewed as dangerous, individuals are still willing to offer help. It supports Halnon's study that metal fans are particularly inclusive, as we can see by the availability of help in this environment. These results also suggest that mosh pits and heavy metal concerts do not deserve the scrutiny and stigma they currently face. Further research could investigate the qualities and motivations of people who help others in mosh pits, to determine if empathy resulting from shared interests drives the behavior (Miller et al., 2001). As ethnicity was a confound in this study, further research should also investigate if moshers' helping behavior differs as a function of their and others' ethnicity. Given the growing popularity of electronic music concerts such as EDM or Electronica, further research could also look at helping behavior in other music concert settings. Future studies could also investigate cohort effects, to determine whether changing gender norms have resulted in different gender differences in helping behavior from those found in the 1960's and 1970's.

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Appendix

Table 1

Observed and Expected Frequency Counts of Direct, Indirect, and No Help to Male and Female Research Confederates

<u>Type of Help</u>	<u>Gender</u>		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total Falls</u>
<u>Direct Help</u>			
Count	23	17	40
Expected Count	20	20	40
% within DV	57.5%	42.5%	100%
% within IV	76.7%	56.7%	66.7%
% of Total	38.3%	28.3%	66.7%
<u>Indirect Help</u>			
Count	0	9	9
Expected Count	4.5	4.5	9
% within DV	0%	100%	100%
% within IV	0%	30%	15%
% of Total	0%	15%	15%
<u>No Help</u>			
Count	7	4	11
Expected Count	5.5	5.5	11
% within DV	63.6%	36.4%	100%
% within IV	23.3%	13.3%	18.3%
% of Total	11.7%	6.7%	18.3%
<u>Total Falls</u>			
Count	30	30	60
Expected Count	30	30	60
% within DV	50%	50%	100%
% within IV	100%	100%	100%
% of Total	50%	50%	100%