

Musical Identity in the Contemporary World

Thematic Content Analysis about the Creation of Musical Identity among Emo Rappers

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Abstract

Music plays an essential part of our everyday lives and often serves as a representation of people's tastes, values and beliefs. Musical identity illustrates the combination of these aspects among a particular group of people who engage in the same style of music and provides the basis for studying the development of music and its impact on the society. In the early 2010's a number of adolescents independently shared their beats on the streaming service of SoundCloud and created a new sub-genre of emo rap. Emo rap has a unique aesthetic of emotional lyrics with a dark and depressive character, sparking controversy and was the fastest growing genre of 2018 on Spotify. That is why, this research is set out to explore the construction of musical identity of emo rap, by taking a closer look at the artists' lifestyle and the societal issues they are concerned with. It is expected that musical identity is closely connected to the lifestyle choices these adolescents make and how they present their ideas about the current state of the society. The sub-genre emo rap has not been academically researched before and the aim of this study is to contribute to the existing literature about musical identity with this contemporary sub-genre and to explore the youth development in the 21st century. The foundation for this study was primarily found in literature about identity development, youth development and musical genres of emo and hip-hop/rap. The research was done by a qualitative thematic content analysis of pre-recorded interviews with these artists and short reflections about them, providing a closer look to their background, beliefs and musical production. Three main themes emerged after analyzing the data: self-expression, musical production and concerns over today's society. The core finding about this group of rappers was the fluidity of their identity, whether it is shifting their style of musical production or appearance. The main reason for this is their aversion towards mainstream values and tendency to challenge the rigid lines of the society, labelling and categorization. This is also represented by their diverse cultural influence, particularly the positive attitude towards Japanese culture, watching anime and the apparent influence of Japanese culture in their artwork aesthetics. These artists talked about their experience with depression and anxiety which eventually fueled their music, served as a self-expression and helped them battle these feelings. At the same time, there was a strong collectiveness and support amongst these young musicians, which enabled them to develop as artists and caused the sub-genre to grow. Future study should focus on the audiences of emo rap, its influence and their perception towards it. Additionally, the impact of Japanese culture on these youngsters was an interesting finding and it could be interesting to further explore the reason behind its influence on the Western culture.

Key Words: emo rap, musical identity, contemporary, youth development, fluid identity

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1. Introduction:

*“Help me find a way to pass the time (to pass the time)
Everybody telling me life's short, but I wanna die (I wanna die)
Help me find a way to make you mine (make you mine)
Everybody telling me not to, but I'm gonna try
Now I'm getting high again, tonight”*
(Lil Peep, 2017, track 6)

The emotional lyrics of a song written by the late Lil Peep, *The Brightside* demonstrate the general idea behind the emo rap sub-genre. After Peep's death, Smokeasac who contributed on making this track and was the producer of Lil Peep's album *Come Over When You're Sober pt. 1* and Peep's close friend, posted a tribute to him on his personal website. Smokeasac illustrated Peep's genuine devotion to music, and in a way addressed his musical identity as stated: “I watched his body tremble, he was singing so loud and the look in his face was genuine. He was pouring his heart out into these songs” (Smokeasac, n.d.). The omnipresence of music has great impact on us as individuals and it is safe to say that music creates and expresses a part of our identity, not only as an individual, but as a community as well (Hargreaves, Miell, & Macdonald, 2002). That is why this study focuses on the ways in which musical identity is constructed through the emo rap sub-genre in the digital age.

The world of popular music is filled with different genres with various backgrounds and fanbases. Within the last few years, a sub-genre called “emo rap,” also referred to as “SoundCloud rap” or “sad rap” has been on the rise, gaining popularity especially among teenagers and youth. At the end of 2018, Spotify announced that emo rap was the fastest growing musical style in the streaming service (Trapp, 2018). The main characteristic of this subgenre is that these rappers are not afraid to express their true emotions, that are mostly of a controversial and depressive character, creating its unique image. Not only are these musicians creating their own music, but the already well-known artists are also reaching out to feature them in their artworks e.g. Frank Ocean collaborating with Yung Lean, or Noah Cyrus featuring the late XXXTentacion.

Researchers have been exploring musical identity and the definitions and explanations of what constructs a musical identity vary substantially. This is because these studies were often based on a variety of genres in different time periods. In general, I would start with defining musical identity according to Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) who present it as musical tastes and preferences which can form an important statement of people's values and attitudes. Additionally, composers and performers use their music to express their own distinctive views of the world (Hargreaves et al., 2002). Dawe and Bennett (2001) also who believe that music serves as a representational resource, meaning that particular communities use it as means of communicating and

presenting their identity to others (in Bennett, 2005). Hand in hand goes the lifestyle which these artists present to the general public, as it can be seen as a major part of their musical identity. Veal (1993) indicates the key concepts of analyzing lifestyle is to analyze it as a combination of activities and practices that “fit together,” and that they are based on: a) consistent moral or aesthetic principles; b) similar characteristics like age, income, location or family situation (Veal, 1993). The construction of musical identities and lifestyle are central concepts in this thesis which will be explained later, taking into consideration that the emo rap genre emerged online and has controversial expressions.

In the public eye, the subgenre is connected to overdoses, self-medication prescription pills and youth who wants to suppress their emotions and numb their feelings, (Petridis, 2018) unveiling the question of a social problem potentially leading to a moral panic. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) define a social problem as any situation which leads to death or disease, decreases life expectancy and has a negative effect on the quality of life on a large scale. Consequently, moral panic can lead to fear or social problems, as it occurs when there is a concern over a particular behavior due to the consequences it leads to, and is seen as a potential threat towards the people engaging in the behavior (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) and threat to society. Sparks of moral panic in 1980’s with the emergence of heavy metal music serve as an exemplary case for moral panic within the music scene. It emerged due to glorifying drug use, promotion of adolescent sex and sexist values, which was believed to potentially cause violent and lawless behavior (Gay & Lynxwiler, 2000). According to media coverage, emo-rap/Soundcloud rap is sparking the same kind of concern through violent behavior, drug promotion, sexual abuse and death (Petridis, 2018). Since emo rappers promote a much darker message than normal mainstream music does, they can be seen as an identifiable deviant group who represents the centerpiece for public fears (Gay & Lynxwiler, 2000; Matos, 2018). Petridis described the genre as: “Perhaps SoundCloud rap simply offers a voice to marginalised, disaffected American youth, and that it’s easy for marginalised, disaffected American youth to slip into criminality and violence” (Petridis, 2018).

Concerns about this sub-genre strengthen as virtually each major member of this group is connected to some accusations, are already in prison or dead, which can be also seen as an aspect of a musical identity. Although Lil Peep often rapped about suicide and overdose, nobody expected that it would actually happen in the prime of his life, while he was gaining the most recognition and even seen as the icon of millennial style and pioneer of next generation music. This was due to his artwork which consisted of combining contemporary tracks of trap music in combination with early 2000s pop-punk; and his unique style and fashion choices (Amarca, 2017). Gustav Ahr who went by the name Lil Peep, overdosed at the age of 21 in the fall of 2017, while he was on the tour of his album *Come Over When You’re Sober (Part 1)* (Grow, 2017). Suicide was ruled out in this case, with the closing statement being that the death was accidental because of the irresponsible combination of Fentanyl and Xanax which led lethal consequences (TMZ, 2017).

In June 2018 the emo rap scene was struck by another tragic death of 20 year old Jahseh Onfroy, known as XXXTentacion. This time it was not an accidental drug overdose but a murder. Whereas Lil Peep was seen as a person with a good heart and no ill intentions towards others, XXXTentacion was deemed to be a troubled young man facing multiple charges including assault or battery witness tampering (Suarez, 2018). According to court documents, he was shot and killed during an attempted robbery, where the four men charged with his murder tried to steal a Louis Vuitton bag filled with \$50,000 (Coscarelli, 2018). These two deaths happened which within the time frame of a few months in 2017/2018, were highly publicized and brought a lot of attention to their music, with the popularity of the music climbing the top charts in the UK and US.

Based on the previously provided information, the following research question will be used: 'How is musical identity created through the emo rap sub-genre?' Since it is a complex issue concerning numerous aspects that helped make this sub-genre, these sub questions will help with answering the main research question by clarifying particular aspects in more depth:

'How is their lifestyle represented?'

'Which societal issues are represented?'

Emo rap has evolved by sharing the attributes of emo music and hip-hop/rap. These have started as separate genres, therefore, numerous researchers investigated the characteristics and aspects of emo music (Bailey, 2005; Definis-Gojanovi, Gugi, & Sutlovi, 2009; Phillipov, 2010), and even more were interested in hip-hop/rap (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Brooks & Conroy, 2011; Clemmons, 2014). However, emo rap as a combination has not yet been given attention from the academic perspective. I believe it is important to investigate emo rap's musical identity from the viewpoint of it being a unique genre. Emo rap should be analyzed because of its negative reputation in order to get a deeper understanding of its aesthetics, and also because it has been rising in popularity during 2017/2018 and growing more popular ever since (Caramanica, 2017). The formerly mentioned genres of emo and hip-hop/rap both emerged between 1970s-1980s (Bailey, 2005; Zanfagna, 2017) where the presence of digital media was not so dominant. "Each generation is exposed to a unique set of events that defined their place in history and shapes their outlook " (in Jones, 2011, p.2). Considering the opportunities of the digital world, people have more freedom to develop their identities and image based on their personal preference (Bennett, 2005).

To explore the emo rap sub-genre, the idea of musical identity will be used as a basis. There is an on-going research about musical identity and this study will add to the theory of musical identity in the contemporary society of ever shifting influences, innovations and freedom of choices. The academic gap between these young rappers and all previous musicians is also caused by the fact that these artists have grown up in a digital environment interacting with digital and networked technologies on a significant scale (Jones, 2011), which is considered as a part of their success since these rappers are self-made artists who shared their works with the world through the streaming service of SoundCloud. Deeper understanding of this sub-genre will contribute to the long tradition of

studying musical identity by further developing the concept of musical identity in youth culture. Not only is this important because it contributes to the ongoing debates about the role of popular music in youth culture and deviance by focusing on the emo rap sub-genre, but also because it is a unique contemporary musical genre which emerged in a digital world thanks to the advancements and accessibility of modern technology and streaming services.

It is popular among youngsters; however, a lot of criticism has come from the older generations. Generation gap within music preference is not an unusual phenomenon, where as it is an “age-old” tradition for parents to dislike their children’s music (Binder, 1993). Naturally, this concern is due to its depressive nature, connection to substance abuse, alienation and other aspects that parents do not particularly appreciate their children doing. As has been mentioned, emo-rap is publicly connected to numerous problems which potentially spark a reason to worry, such as drug abuse, depression or suicide among the youth of today. Youth culture has been researched by vast amount of researchers, looking at their development from the perspective of subcultures (Bennett, 1999; Fine & Kleinman, 1979; McKerron, 2003), lifestyle choices (Lieberg, 1995; Stebbins, 1997) or their music taste (Arnett, 1991; Inglis, 2007; Lacourse, Claes, & Villeneuve, 2001) to name a few. From the societal perspective this research aims to contribute to the understanding of youth development of 21st century. Other researchers (Gay & Lynxwiler, 2000; Lucas, Hough, & Fisher, 2011; North, Desborough, & Skarstein, 2005) have studied music’s connection to deviance and rebellion, but not for this contemporary genre. Looking at the musical identity and youth development from the perspective of emo rappers might shine some light on the general development of youth nowadays.

The method that will be used is thematic content analysis with the focus on interviews/podcasts with the main performers of the subgenre e.g. Lil Peep, Bones, XXXTentaction to name a few, and short documentaries about them on YouTube. This will provide an insight on the artists’ lives, concerning topics about their music career and personal life, leading to a better understanding their lifestyles and what shapes their musical identity. Since these podcasts/interviews are foremost in a video format, their appearance will also be taken into consideration as a part of their musical identity.

In order to explore the musical identity of emo rap and youth development, this research will be divided into four main parts. Firstly, the theoretical background will provide an insight to the on-going debate about identity, collecting information about individual, collective and musical identity. Next, I will discuss the existing literature on numerous aspects of youth and development; and will look at music from a broader perspective, explaining emo and hip-hop genres and the role of digital technologies in today’s music making. The continuing part will explain the steps in which this research has been carried out, the reasoning of the chosen methodology of content analysis and data collection. The following part will focus on the analysis of data and their evaluation. Finally, the concluding section will explain the findings in more detail, and evaluate how they contribute to answering the main research question.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Music and Identity

Musical styles and genres are not only about the music as a form of entertainment, they also create identity and a sense of belonging. In trying to exactly understand the construction of musical identity of emo rap subgenre, this next section will explain the concept of identity first.

2.1.1. Identity and the Self

Each individual has their own unique identity, the part of themselves which tells them what is wrong or right, defines their goals and values (Elliott, 2008). There is not one general agreement on the definition of identity, however, throughout the years of research various definitions of individual identity have been proposed. Initially, there was the approach of essentialists who regarded to identity as a stable concept. Following emerged the postmodern approach which defines identity as a more fluid concept. This next section will guide the reader through the evolution of identity and its development starting with the essentialist approach to the post-modern.

Identity has not always been such a complex issue as it is nowadays. In the past, the concept of identity was often taken for granted and people generally defined themselves based on one aspect of their identity, e.g. gender which eventually determined a social meaning and an individual's experience (Moya & Hames-García, 2000). In those times identity was seen as transparent and uninteresting (Bendle, 2002), creating for stable characteristics. The stable aspects of identity are foremost the public aspects of identity consisting of characteristics like name, age, gender or profession (Ruud, 1997). Additionally, the traditional theory was also based on the experiential side and referred to it as ego-identity. Erikson's approach on identity focuses on the social development of a person from a child to an adult. He uses the term ego-identity to describe the conscious notion of individual uniqueness along with the unconscious longing for the continuing of identity experience, understood as a sense of feeling comfortable in one's skin and knowing where they belong in life (in Kroger, 2006). This proposes a certain continuity and stability of one's identity. In this sense, the identity is built around a certain center or a core. Here the core can be understood as a characteristic which is deeply embedded, foundational and defining (Bendle, 2002).

Increased interest in identity emerged with the development of capitalism, making the issue of identity more important. At this time, a postmodern approach of identity emerged based on the consumeristic culture (Turner, 1988). According to Bennett (2005) the postmodern era is defined as an era which brought the opportunity for individuals to become decentered. The choice between the variety of images, texts or commodities enabled countless possibilities of identification from which people could choose, which could lead to fragmented identities and shifting personas (Bennett, 2005). Globalization, feminism and proliferating voices were just few of the aspects that generated these changes and promoted the emergence of the postmodern era, leading to a new unexplored field of self-exploration (Macionis & Plummer, 2008). The new concept of a decentered identity illustrates the

weakening and destabilization of the core (Macionis & Plummer, 2008). In other words, there is no one central identity, but the individual identity is co-created by more identities with a certain stability to be formed into individual one (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). The concept of postmodern identity by Hall (1996) represents the idea that one does not have a “fixed, essential or permanent identity” (Hall, 1996, p.277) and that the thought of a coherent identity is only a fantasy. It is formed and transformed by the individual in different times according to the way they are presented in a particular cultural system (Hall, 1996). Complementing the theory about identity in the postmodern world, Ruud (1997) differentiates between the individual identity from the perspective of stable public aspects of identity discussed previously, and the personal experiential aspects. The personal experiential side is based on self-awareness and experiencing the world from a unique place, one’s own body, or in other words personal identity (Ruud, 1997; Snow, 2001). These are the characteristics and meanings attributed to oneself by the individual, making them personally distinctive from others (Snow, 2001). Now I will turn to the personal experiential representation of identity within the postmodern approach.

The more personal concept of individual identity is centered around one’s self, with the ‘self’ being as a reference to our own person, what we feel and think about ourselves (Ruud, 1997) . According to Mead (1934), the self is seen as an object to itself which is influenced and shaped by one’s social experience, making the self a social structure (Mead, 1934). It can be regarded to as the self-concept, which is the collection of attitudes and beliefs about the self, reflecting one’s personality, likes and dislikes, or what are their capabilities (Maddux, 1990). This notion is constructed by one’s immediate environment, such as family, school or workplace; enhanced by the type of entertainment the individual consumes (Bennett, 2005; Elliott, 2008). Language and conversation also play a major role in creating the self. Whether it is a conversation with one’s self, or seeking for an audience, it illustrates the thinking process and the symbols which then give meaning to the interaction (Mead, 1934). What is more, people are also capable of behaving themselves, accordingly, based on the other person with whom they are communicating. Therefore, they identify with their viewpoints which makes it easier to understand their position or feelings, e.g. feelings of sadness and empathy when our friend’s family member dies (Elliott, 2008). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that immediate environments change, people grow and progress in their educational journey, switching schools and eventually make a shift to an employment. Just as the person progresses in life through these different environments and stages of life, the ‘self’ adjusts and thus is in a constant process of changing. The individual even changes the whole self, according to the community to which they belong to, and to the situation they find themselves in (Mead, 1934).

Frith (1996) defines this idea as the self-in-progress, meaning that the identity is based on a particular experience or the way people deal with experiences. These can be routine activities people engage in, expressing their agency in what they do. Agency is the level of active engagement people have towards shaping their personal and cultural experience (Elliott, 2008). The self-in-process is further supported by Bennett (2005) who also refers to identity as a fluid rather than fixed construct.

Bauman (1997) even determines that adopting, changing or replacing identities, in a postmodern world based on disposable consumerist images and items, is just as easy as changing an outfit (in Bennett, 2005, p.41). Stuart Hall's (1996) input on identity also agrees with the notion, claiming that it is formed with unconscious processes over time, and it always stays incomplete as a process or in a state of being formed (in Pozarlik, 2013).

This instability in one's self can lead to a state of moratorium, which means that the individuals have not found their identity yet and are in the process of searching for their identity-defining commitments, which provokes the feeling of anxiety (Kroger, 2006). Moratorium state is particularly connected to adolescents transitioning to adulthood, often leading to a crisis period, being unable to commit to concrete goals, style or beliefs. This often results in bewildered appearance based on internal preoccupation with unresolvable questions of adulthood (Marcia, 1966). However, this idea of searching for an identity suggests the continuity and stability of one, which is inconsistent with the idea that identity develops over time and is fluid. While both ideas of stable and fluid identity have their backgrounds, the fluid identity seems more up-to-date with the ever-changing landscape of today's world, where people have to adapt accordingly.

Some authors argue that digitization brought a new approach to the creation of identity. Turkle (2005) examined the human spirit in a computer culture and came to a conclusion that people are very insecure about understanding themselves, leading to questions of existence. In this sense, people reach beyond nature and use a computer as a new mirror which helps them see and find themselves (Turkle, 2005). This is one of few ways in which today's technology changes the creation of one's identity and the self. Being online enables the identity of an individual to advance in various ways, may it be the development of competencies and learning, supporting academic development or strengthening social competencies and skills (Bannon, McGlynn, McKenzie, & Quayle, 2015; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Additionally, the youth's use of social networking sites or internet communities help them experiment with identity issues by enabling them to evolve a virtual self and to participate in safe online behavior (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). On the other hand, although it provides for a diversity of influences, it is also argued that social media enable the creation of 'prefabricated formats,' which can lead to a standardization of an identity, therefore a new entanglement in the digital age (De Been, Arora, & Hildebrandt, 2015). Looking at the literature so far, it is evident that the processes of identity construction change through societal developments and the concept of identity is created by the experience one has lived through, meaning that the personal identity is not only focused on the individual as such, but on the social aspect which helps create it.

The "need to belong" is an essential part of human nature, and so is the membership of a social group as it is crucial to the development of individuals' self-concept and social behavior (in Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). In this sense an individual has to possess a social identity. Social identity as it has been defined by Calhoun (1997) and Stryker (1980) allows for individuals to locate

themselves in a social space, usually accompanied by social roles also referred to as “role identities” and “categorical identities” (in Snow, 2001). This kind of categorization enables individuals to locate themselves in a particular social category, in other words how they portray themselves as a member of a social ingroup in comparison to other groups of humans. In this scenario, they experience their self-image which is derived from the social categories, towards which they feel a connection, leading to emotional and evaluative consequences of group membership (Hornsey, 2008).

However, forming a social identity is not as simple as it may seem. We all know those individuals who have a problem with human interaction, and quite frankly fear it, thus having an impact on their social identity development. In connection to the previously discussed impact of digitization on the identity development, the computer offers new forms of expressions. This is known as the “schizoid compromise,” (p.280) helping people with fear of social interaction overcome loneliness and fear of intimacy, providing companion without emotional demands, and interaction without putting themselves at risk (Turkle, 2005).

In 1995, sociologist Alberto Melucci presents a definition of collective identity from the point of sociology as a process. This definition highlights the network of active relationships between the individuals of a given group, based on their interaction, communication and the way they influence each other in making decisions (Melucci, 1995). The general understanding of collective identity is based on a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” among the individuals of a particular group. This feeling evolves through a particular level of emotional investment in real or imagined attributes and experiences, which then create the sense of collectivity and common unity (Hornsey, 2008; Melucci, 1995). This creates a strong bond between the individuals of a particular collective identity, and based on the importance of the collective feeling of that group, in-group-out-group categorization becomes the basis for evaluating other people outside of the group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Brewer and Gardner (1996) claim that collective identity does not require personal relationships among the group members. According to them, interpersonal identities are based on more intimate dyadic relationships derived from inclusion in small, face-to-face groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). What is more, Polletta and Jasper (2001) believe that the collective identity makes an individual who is intertwined within a particular group, may it be friendship or support network, it largely affects the existence of the whole group (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This further promotes the idea that social identity is based on a very personal level. I use a specific conceptualization of identity relevant to this study, musical identity, that is represented by different activities, characteristics and customs, including music (Rice, 2007). That is because:

Among all of the activities humans possess as means by which to create such a powerful sense of identity and community, music may be among the most personal and the most meaningful. (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002, p.152).

2.1.2 Musical Identity

Music is a key instrument to realizing identities (Turino, 1999). There have been numerous researchers investigating music in connection with identity (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996; MacDonald et al., 2002; Ruud, 1997) to name a few. However, after examining them I found that there is not one precise definition of musical identity. Each dealt with music's importance towards the creation of identity from a different perspective. This next section will illustrate the most relevant findings about music in connection to identity. To begin, DeNora (2000) introduces her book about music in everyday life by addressing the importance of music:

The power of music to influence mood and create scenes, routines and occasions is widely recognized and this is reflected in a strand of social theory from Plato to Adorno that portrays music as an influence on character, social structure and action. Music in general is a major part of creating the individual and collective identity (DeNora, 2000, p.1).

To support the notion of music being an important aspect of people's everyday lives, Trevarthen (2002) indicates that just like language, music must be learned. He believes that this is an on-going process from infancy, and that even as infants, people are able to understand musical behavior and play a role in musical awareness. This is indicated by the baby's vocal and gestural responses, selective orientation towards the musical sounds (Trevarthen, 2002). Musical identity develops as people grow as it is "processes of reflection, symbolization, homology and expression" (Rice, 2007, p.24), and it has been previously established that identity is a self-in-progress.

Musical identity can be seen as a dynamic and changing aspect of one's life. Ruud (1997) suggests that music is the metaphor for identity, in the sense that it plays a significant role in the construction of identity throughout one's whole life. Individuals develop musical identities throughout their adolescence, which are then illustrated by aspects like personality style or social roles, essentially giving the groundwork of self-image construction (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012). Continuously, Frith (1996) explains that music constructs people's identities over time in a way that they crystalize particular moments and special experiences in their lives. According to him music is an individualizing form. Because of its looseness of reference, music enables people to absorb the songs in the means of their own lives, making the reference immediately accessible (Frith, 1996). Therefore, suiting their own identity based on the moment. Martin (2006) proposes that young people seek and listen to a type of music which they feel represents their own feelings, in a way finding comfort in the sense that others feel the same. In the introduction, a definition of musical identity was presented in regards to musical tastes and preferences which then shape people's values and attitudes (Hargreaves, Miell, & Macdonald, 2002). Additionally, Gracyk (2004) mentions that if people listen to music they are not passive, but a part of a cultural process where they use music to fulfill various functions based on the particular social context and location (Gracyk, 2004). Developing the concepts of individual and social identity, music helps individuals construct their sense of identity due to the instant

experience it provides to the body, time and sociability, allowing people to place themselves in an imaginative cultural narrative (Frith, 1996). For example, music easily enables people to recall memories or events they evoke with a particular song, shaping the meanings connected to the particular song (van der Hoeven, 2018).

Bleich and Zillmann (1991) mention that musical preference is mainly influenced by peer groups in which people find themselves in. Not only is identity created by music, but also the type of identity a person has then influences their preference in music, may it be personal beliefs, experiences even genetic disposition (Bleich & Zillmann, 1991). Additionally, youngsters listen to some artists or particular genres as a reflection of contemporary youth values with which they want to be identified with (Boyle, Hosterman, & Ramsey, 1981). There is vast amount of research which indicates there is a relation between musical preference and person's lifestyle and social status (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996). Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) found that intense and rebellious music like rock, alternative or heavy metal is preferred by people who are open to new experiences; socially-outgoing individuals prefer more upbeat and conventional styles of music like country, soundtracks or pop. To provide an example, urban music is usually popular amongst 18-24 year olds, where classical music is preferred and enjoyed by educated middle class (Prior, 2013). This idea was developed by Bourdieu, who also emphasized the social, economic and political context which influences one's aesthetic judgements (in Negus, 2013), in other words the cultural entertainment they choose according to their social divisions based on lifestyle and class background. Whereas these studies connected high class to more sophisticated music like opera or classical music, Peterson (1992) suggests that members of higher-status groups do not limit themselves to just this genre of music, but prefer listening to non-elite, less sophisticated musical genres as well (R. A. Peterson, 1992). Broad musical taste was common among higher-status groups, because it was believed that people from these groups have a wider and more diverse social network, thus had more influence (van Eijck, 2001).

Going back to basics, the general enjoyment and choice for entertainment started with increasing economic affluence after Second World War, when countries started growing economically (Bennett, 2000). It can be argued that the economy has had an impact on cultural development, therefore even the socioeconomic status of a person determines their preference. On the other hand, study by Williams (1972) evaluated that socioeconomic status had little significance when creating attitudes towards musical styles (R. O. Williams, 1972). This result can also be drawn from the study by Hargreaves, North and O'Neill (2000) who research the importance of music to adolescents, gaining the sample from a school with all socioeconomic statuses. Their research did not confirm any correlation between music preference and socioeconomic status of the youngster. It did, however, show differences between males and females when it comes to music preference and when they listen to music (North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000). Further study supports this notion, observing that females prefer softer, pop and urban styles of music, while males prefer the monotonous dance style.

However, there was minimal difference in rock genre (Mulder, Ter Bogt, Raaijmakers, Nic Gabhainn, & Sikkema, 2010).

While in the previously mentioned literature, musical identity is being presented in the terms of personal and contextual characteristics of their everyday life, using emotions and how that affects the individual, the next idea examines the musical identity as an expression in the more technical, performance aspect while playing the music. Self-expression of the artist can be produced by the vocal identity of an individual. This looks at the way the artists use their voice, if they slur or articulate words, use pure or breathier tone or how they pace their delivery (Clarke, Dibben, & Pitts, 2009). It can be seen as the personal distinction that the artist puts into their music, a unique trait that makes it easily recognizable. To make an example, imagine Van Gogh's Sunflowers. Art enthusiasts can easily distinguish this artwork and establish it is from Van Gogh, not because it has his name on it, but because of his signature style in which he made this painting. It is important to take this representation of musical identity into consideration in researching musical performance and personal style while the artist is playing the music. This is especially beneficial if one is to explore the style behind a musical performance either live or from records.

Frith (1996) makes a point that music is seen as a measure by which musicians express their self-understanding: "Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them" (Frith, 1996, p.111). Former studies about subcultures indicate that taste in music is also seen as a constructive element to the subcultural lifestyles and identities, which are bonded with particular values, e.g. rock with deviance and social awareness (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012) or pop lovers being ego-centered and doing as they please (van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). A study which examined the musical identity of jazz musicians implies that the way musicians talk and their musical identity is closely tied together and influences one another (Macdonald & Wilson, 2006), meaning that the examined jazz musicians possessed similar verbal presentation, which also implies an identity. That is because people within groups that are more permanent, e.g. Jazz musicians in a band, build their own way of communication using lingo or jargon, which is important particularly to their group (Strauss, 1997, p.23).

2.2. Youth Culture: Subculture and Neo-Tribes

When looking at the society as a whole, it is important to see beyond the identity of self and research it from a social perspective of social identity. Every individual is a part of something bigger - whether it is being a member of the family, employee at work or their belief in a particular religion. When examining musical genres, these identities have been characterized as subcultures or neo-tribes.

Goth, rock, hip-hop, musical styles, among numerous others, are not only known for their characteristic tunes, beats or lyrics, but also have been defined by many as subcultures, known as a way of life. Youth culture in particular developed in the post-war period, after 1945 due to rapid shift in the sociocultural status of youth, which led to the emergence of subcultures (Bennett, 2000). Subcultures define tight coherent social groups that converge young people, style and music of interest

(Bennett, 1999). The more traditional definition of subcultures is: “The concept of subculture at its base is concerned with agency and action belonging to a subset or social group that is distinct from but related to the dominant culture” (Blackman, 2005, p.2). Each subculture is a group of people with various patterns of behavior and alternative values from the mainstream, determined by one’s place in the world, such as class, religion or locality (Blackman, 2005; Hodkinson, 2009). Therefore, subculture can be thought of as a membership, where the idea of belonging is structural or network based (Fine & Kleinman, 1979). However, in recent years people’s identities, tastes and lifestyle choices are not so strongly connected to the social status they were born into. Hodkinson (2009) argues that with the expansion and diversification of media, traditional values of subcultures are becoming less important as leisure industries promote a personalized consumer identity. Therefore, contemporary youth style should be understood as complex set of choices made by every individual (Hodkinson, 2009). This is due to the increasing influence of large-scale commerce on youth, where particular goods, clothes, experiences are designed into lifestyles, however, the consumeristic part makes them shift frequently. Just as the influences on youth change, their self-identity changes with them, as identity comes from the outside, not the inside (Bennett, 1999; Frith, 1996; Hodkinson, 2009). Therefore, the concept of subcultures has been criticized, and researchers attempted to rethink the concept of subculture by using more contemporary knowledge about today’s culture.

Frith (1996) explains that music in particular is a unique cultural form because it defines a space without boundaries, therefore it travels between various societal groups. Music provides a sense of identity and belonging because it enables individuals to place themselves into imaginative cultural narratives through direct experiences of time and sociability (Frith, 1996). However, youth culture in means of music, dancing or clothes does not have to be connected to only a particular subculture, but can be enjoyed and engaged by the larger majority of youth (Bennett, 2000). Subcultures illustrated social groups of youth belonging to working class, connecting them through their experience of subordination (Blackman, 2005). To address the recent identification in contemporary society, researches have explained that the concept of neo-tribes allows the youth to shift between musical and stylistic preferences, promoting the fluidity of youth cultural groups. Thus, it is important to look at the social groups formed by youth nowadays as floating memberships with fluid boundaries (Bennett, 1999). The concept of fluidity is also supported by the definition of scenes. Scenes are explained as fluid cultural spaces which enable individuals to build musical alliances and draw musical boundaries (Gerstin, 1998). The reason for looking at emo rap from a different perspective than as a stable subculture is because there are already some questions around its short existence, and that is if it will survive and maintain its qualities once it transitions into the mainstream (Caramanica, 2017).

Emo rappers are foremost young adults in their early 20s, most of them starting their careers when they were teenagers and therefore this next part explains the youth culture in connection to music, to better understand what impact it has in the research. Adolescence is traditionally linked with self-exploration and ‘identity crisis,’ where adolescents explore different identities, eventually

choosing a particular style and developing their own identity (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002). Previous research revealed that listening to music is the most popular leisure activity among youth (Fitzgerald, Joseph, Hayes, & O'Regan, 1995) and thus it plays a major role in identity development, whereas studies show that music is primarily connected with identity formation and mood management by fulfilling emotional needs, relieving tension, stress and expressing emotions (North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000). Additionally, music provides a range of emotions, moods and experiences in between which individuals can move freely (Bennett, 1999). In order to explore the construction of emo-rap's musical identity, it is important to point out that youngsters use music to communicate values, attitudes and opinions to others, therefore "all adolescents use music as a badge" (North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000, p.258).

Rebellion and deviance are often connected to the stages of growing up. After presenting the vision of what youth culture consists of based on their music and lifestyle preferences, this next part will in general illustrate what drives youngsters to rebellion and how it is interconnected with music.

2.2.1. Deviance and Music

Music plays a major role in the creation of youth identity, "where music is seen as a vehicle of social bonding, creating a bond by excluding others from the group" (Gracyk, 2004, p.5). Adolescents take part in deviance in many ways, for some it is an edgy way of clothing or multicolored hairstyles; for others it is the use of vile language or joining dangerous activities. The main goal is to make sure their parents disapprove of what they do (Bleich & Zillmann, 1991). As mentioned earlier in the section about identity and the self, the notion of 'de-centralization' in one's identity is taken from term of 'normalization,' being influenced into an inevitable change in one's identity due to the outside forces of modern world. The combination of power and knowledge – including public institutions such as school, hospitals, mental institutions among others. These institutions then dictate what should be seen as 'normal' (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005) and thus can be argued that some individuals who do not see themselves as 'normal' take part in changing their identity just to fit in, and be 'normal'.

Deviance and rebellion among youth are defined in variety of scenarios, either based on relationship to a certain kind of music (North et al., 2005), education (Newman & Wilkins, 1974), or in online gaming (Downing, 2009), to name a few. To define the concept of deviant behavior, Newman and Wilkins (1974) applied this term in connection to a particular individual or a group of people who are disconnected from the mainstream society. Deviants do not fulfill the requirements of so called 'normal' social or moral behavior, and are often stigmatized by a low social status, frequently referring to them as "mentally ill," "criminal," or "sick" (Newman & Wilkins, 1974). A study by Arnett (1991) which looked at the relationship between heavy metal and reckless behavior provides more examples where deviance can be monitored, calling them actions of reckless behavior in relation to driving, sexual behavior, abuse of various kinds of drugs, shoplifting or vandalism (Arnett, 1991).

In terms of deviance and music, there is evidence that liking ‘problematic’ music constructs a broader pattern of deviant lifestyle choices (North et al., 2005). Adolescents who listen to more rebellious, ‘deviant,’ styles of music e.g. heavy metal or rap are deemed more likely to engage in deviant and delinquent behavior (North et al., 2000). The formerly mentioned study by Arnett (1991) indeed supported these ideas by finding that youth listening to heavy metal was different from their peers. Males who listened to heavy metal were more likely to have driven while drunk, already experienced sexual encounter, had smoked marijuana or tried using other illegal drugs like cocaine. Girls also acted in a more deviant way and also showed lower self-esteem than others (Arnett, 1991). This was later supported by a study which also proved that the ‘deviant’ forms of music were connected with psychoticism and reactive rebelliousness, accompanied by marijuana abuse and carrying a weapon in public (North et al., 2005).

As a result, media portrayed this music negatively, which however had a rather positive impact on the people listening to the music, as it connected them as ‘outsiders’ and contributed to the creation of their subcultural identity (North et al., 2005). In connection to media, there is a theory that authentic subcultures are merely a media construction, where the individuals gain a sense of themselves and the position towards society from the way media represent them (Bennett, 2000). The idea of rebelliousness and deviance sparks interest among the youth and makes it more popular. According to a study done by Lucas, Hough and Fisher (2011) the ‘bad’ reputation results in popularity and good business, and that in hip-hop and rap, in particular the ‘street’ credibility, sparks an interest among the audience, and simultaneously drives album sales. This can be connected to the spreading of ‘problematic’ music among youngsters, and the reason why they listen to it. It is connected to the rebellious and deviant manner in a sense that: “Lyrical themes that were angry/rebellious, playful/quirky/witty and laid-back/reflective exhibited a significant positive impact on sales performance” (Lucas, Hough, & Fisher, 2011, p. 190).

On the other hand, some studies claim that listening to ‘deviant’ music does not necessarily mean that it provokes deviant personalities and behavior, rather that it creates a safe space for these individuals and ‘normalizes’ actual forms of youth deviance (Bennett, 2009). Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) observed that music preferences can be divided into four dimensions, one of which is ‘intense and rebellious’. It is positively connected to individuals being open to new experiences, sports, self-perceived intelligence alongside communication ability. This results in curiosity, enjoyment in risk taking and physical activities (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). An interesting view by English (2007) was presented, stating that popular music is open for interpretation:

“ ‘Meaning’, however defined, is contingent, malleable, transitory, and reached only through subtle negotiation. The idea that any text, musical or otherwise, possesses a single, absolute ‘meaning’ is difficult to sustain, since it rests on an assumption that it contains a deliberate

message, which is decoded by the reader in the way it was encoded by the producer, and which is accepted uncritically” (Inglis, 2007, p.601).

Supporting this can be one example by formerly mentioned research, where the boys listening to heavy metal did not differ in beliefs about alienation or suicide from their peers who did not listen to this genre (Lacourse et al., 2001). Additionally, 1990’s gabber music culture sparked some controversy in the society. The media portrayed them as uneducated, violent and sexist individuals, who listened to monotonous and extremely loud music while taking drugs to enjoy the experience. The sparks of moral panic appeared when the “demonic music” as described by the media became one of the most popular music among the Dutch adolescents. Surprisingly, after conducting a study with the youth engaged in this style, the findings showed that they were indeed a bit different from the other youth with their clothes and taste in music, however, their way of life, attitude towards life or drugs has been rather similar to the other adolescents (Verhagen, van Wel, ter Bogt, & Hibbel, 2000).

This information presents why the more alternative and underground genres can spark some concern, because to a certain degree they do seem to have a negative impact on the developing youth in terms of personality traits and lifestyle choices. However, there is also evidence which illustrates that regardless of the musical style youngsters listen to, whether it is ‘demonic,’ and heavily promoting drugs, it does not automatically correlate with the youth being affected and behaving in this deviant behavior.

2.2.2 Lifestyle

As was mentioned previously, postmodern society brought many opportunities for individuals to self-actualize and express themselves, promoting the idea of a fluid identity. Postmodernism is believed to be the manifest in aesthetics (Moore, 2004). Just as music preference among youth, despite some shared elements, their lifestyles vary from individual to individual. The general meaning of lifestyle can be understood as the way people live their everyday lives.

The concept of lifestyle was created as another alternative to subcultural theory, with the aim “to examine and interpret the cultural sensibilities of contemporary youth” (Bennett, 2000, p. 25). However, just as there are more views to identity formation, there are two views to living life in connection to lifestyle: *way of life* and *lifestyle*. The shift between these two groups was made possible by the consumeristic culture we now live in, which provides a vast accumulation of material culture, resulting in endless opportunities for consumer goods and places for purchase or consumption (Featherstone, 1990).

Way of life is based on the formerly mentioned traditional, public aspects of identity, meaning class, education, community etc. This approach has a rather restricted meaning, focusing on the specific status groups (Bennett, 2018; Featherstone, 2007). Lifestyle is a creative project. It is connected with the individual’s personal taste aesthetics and the general outlook, where individuals evaluate their environments and make judgements and decisions upon those observations (Bennett,

2018). As a result, the reflexive identity is formed, where one self-fashions and creatively improvises in order to form a lifestyle (Binkley, 2007). Lifestyle can, therefore, be also regarded to as 'individuality'. It is believed it is a form of self-expression and stylistic self-consciousness. This is set by certain choices the individuals makes in life in regard to personal taste and sense of style, which then results in one's image, speech, entertainment choices, eating and drinking habits, among others (Featherstone, 2007). It is in a way rethinking the connections between patterns and tastes in popular entertainment like music (Bennett, 2000). Eventually, in the post consumeristic world people also group themselves together accordingly based on their lifestyle preferences (Bennett, 2018) and not only by stable aspects of environments like school, or a job as was common in the past. Music preference as an aspect of self-identity places people in a particular core group of people with same music tastes (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012). On the contrary, Lawson and Todd (2002) claim that lifestyle patterns are generally consistent across an individual's life, or at least one particular domain of life (Lawson & Todd, 2002) which fits more with the concept of way of life, than a lifestyle.

Since music plays such a major role in our lives, it can be argued that it is an essential part which creates our lifestyle, as it is chosen by each individual based on personal tastes, and same goes for lifestyle. It is overall a combination of activities people do whether for occupation or entertainment, alongside the self-expression and the way they want to portray this to the outside world.

2.3. Musical Genre

Popular music is seen as a primary source of entertainment among youth around the world, being used in an array of situations from clubs, live concerts to TV commercials or cinema movies (Bennett, 2000). Therefore, it is only logical to expect that the music varies in styles, thus creates musical genres. Tzanetakis and Cook (2002) defined musical genre as:

Musical genres are labels created and used by humans for categorizing and describing the vast universe of music. Musical genres have no strict definitions and boundaries as they arise through a complex interaction between the public, marketing, historical, and cultural factors (Tzanetakis & Cook, 2002, p.293).

Even the definition of musical genres suggests a sort of flexibility, where there are no particular boundaries limiting musical styles. Musical genres play a major role in how people express themselves and how they create their self-image. This means that the aim of music in people's lives is self-definition, musical identity (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012). Musical genres can also lead to the creation of scenes, e.g. hip-hop scene, punk scene etc. which enables people to act in a collective expression of "underground" or "alternative" identity, which enables them to distinguish themselves from the mainstream (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). Additionally, musical genres are also important for journalists and the music industry in general, as they are socially constructed organizing principles

which enable the producers and consumers to choose based on their preference and categorize accordingly to the shared similarities of the particular musical genre (Hitters & van de Kamp, 2010). Also, the concept of genre enables sociologists to better understand and investigate the contemporary cultural changes (DiMaggio, 1987).

2.3.1 Emo music

Since emo-rap is a newly emerging sub-genre, there is no academic research on it so far. Therefore, I will firstly discuss the two genres that it is based on: emo and rap. The first genre which will be discussed in order to provide some basis for the emo rap sub-genre is emo, as it makes for the more emotional side of emo-rap. Emo culture and music have been around since the 1980's (Bailey, 2005) and the definition of what it actually means is:

Emo, short for >>emotional music<<, is an evolving and complex youth subculture. So called Emo-kids listen to specific music characterized by feelings of psychical vulnerability and willingness to express heart-felt confessions about adolescence and its demands (Definis-Gojanovi, Gugi, & Sutlovi, 2009, p.173).

Adolescents are especially prone to vulnerability in means of suffering, disconnection and loneliness, experiencing it at a deep and painful level (Baker & Bor, 2008). Emo music represents two core ideas, a cathartic experience through honest outward release of painful emotions, combined with self-pity, hope and sense of grace, outpour of emotions in association to heart-break, or tragic events (Bailey, 2005; Baker & Bor, 2008); and a rejection of the hegemonic music industry, exchanging it for DIY (Do It Yourself) lifestyle by supporting and listening to unknown, non-mainstream bands (Bailey, 2005). The DIY culture in music dates back to emergence of anarcho-punk in late 1970's. The main idea behind the sub-genre was to provide artistic integrity in connection to social and political commentary and actions to current issues in the society, being against the mainstream system of the society. The actors of this sub-genre acted independently, accepting promotions by anyone who would provide them with a place to play (Gosling, 2004). At the same time, it was quite common that the music production was self-funded by the bands, or some would even make their own records (Bennett, 2018). In this sense, it is interesting to look at the aspect of independent music making and its roots, as the current study subjects are linked with the same path.

The image of emo-kids is rather different and stands out in its own unique way. Their clothing consists of wearing tartans, black – tight jeans, and scarves along with using dark eyeliner, and hairstyles of different sorts e.g. black and greasy with a fringe or long dark hair (Martin, 2006). The origin of Emo scene dates back to 1980s in Washington D.C., with the emergence of groups like Minor Threat or Rites of Spring who took inspiration from punk rock's ideas of rebellion, aversion towards authorities, and rejection of mainstream music and culture. What made this new scene

different was the combination of formerly mentioned aspects with a heart-felt introspective reflection of the musicians (Bailey, 2005).

Whereas the former present emo as a subculture, study by Phillipov (2010) looks at emo from a perspective of ‘tribes’ proposed by Bennett (1999). That is because even though the emo kids might seem committed to their cultural grouping they are more prone to processes of cooptation and incorporation (Phillipov, 2010). Most of them grow up eventually, shifting their nature and preferences as they develop their selves due to the idea that contemporary youth cultures are more fluid nowadays and connected to a particular lifestyle or scene

2.3.2. Rap/Hip-Hop

The second major genre contributing to the existence of the examined emo rap is rap/hip-hop, therefore the next part will illustrate the emergence, values and style of rap/hip-hop. Hip-hop has been evolving for more than four decades, becoming a cultural and artistic phenomenon influencing youngsters all around the world (Alridge & Stewart, 2005). The birth of hip-hop culture dates back to the 1970s, Bronx - New York, when the atmosphere was disrupted by postindustrial neglect, white flight, poverty and street gang wars among other problems. Youngsters with black heritage decided not to succumb to these negative forces of life, but to make something new and novel out of it. DJs started to make new beats by using preexisting technologies and old records, connecting it with MCs who developed rhymes which accompanied the beats with lyrics describing their everyday lives and future aspirations (Zanfagna, 2017). Hip-hop became popular due to its cut-ups, breaks, mixed samples and scratches which are not meant as the production of new text, just a new novel way of performing old text, in other words the making of meaning (Frith, 1996). Hip-hop is often criticized because it bases its presence in previously recorded music which leads to a critique of the whole genre (Clemmons, 2014). However, hip-hop’s nature does not only lay in the music. Hip-hop culture comprises of “four fundamental elements: Disc jockeying (DJing), break dancing, graffiti art, and rapping (emceeing)” (Alridge & Stewart, 2005, p. 190). Since hip-hop and rap is about the lyrics as well, I would oppose the previously mentioned critique as it might have some bases in previously recorded music, but the rappers provide for new lyrics to the music, often talking about a set of African American experiences. Sampling is also an important aspect to the genre of hip-hop. It is also called the sample based hip-hop, or “break-beat” industry created by a small group of unknown producers. It is closely connected to the nature of hip-hop itself, as it emerges from obscurity, confronts market forces and creates unique aesthetics (Peterson, 2014).

Krims (2000) expressed in order for it to be the “real” hip-hop its image has to be predominantly connected to African-American image. Hess (2005) explains that this might be a sort of protective mechanism of the African-American culture, presenting it as a black expressive culture in the world where the record industry is mainly controlled by white people. The issue of appropriation of hip-hop and black culture is also addressed in Kopano (2014):

Although the culture of black America is the foundation for much of American popular culture, black art forms are offered in the popular imagination to marginalize blacks and other nonwhites and to reaffirm white supremacy. Popular culture and the media that are used to disseminate its messages are arsenals of the hegemonic class (Kopano, 2014, p. 3).

2.3.3. Music in Digital World

Passion for music in connection with digital technologies has enabled young music enthusiasts to produce and distribute their own music. This is because the digital recording technology enables a more autonomous space for creating, producing and disseminating new music, eventually leading into a DIY music career (Bennett, 2018). In times when music industry was run by record labels, the choice of an independent music career was not as simple. Hracs (2012) summarized how the power of record labels has changed throughout the years. In 1950s to 1970s the music industry was rather diverse, being populated by dozens of record labels which varied in size, location scope and power. In 1980s and 1990s the larger companies started to purchase or merge with smaller ones, slowly making an alteration to the music industry. All was changed by 1999, when just the major record labels dominated the industry (in Hracs, 2012). Connolly and Krueger (2006) shine some light on the process of traditional music industry, explaining that it all begins with the musicians creating content which they then have to distribute to a manager for promotion either for a concert or to a recording company, which then helps them produce and market their content. Additionally, musicians have to contract with a publisher who licenses the music to be played in television, radio and other users (Connolly & Krueger, 2006).

Their dominance in the industry was, however, challenged with the launch of the first file-sharing Napster in 1999. Although Napster's existence was not long, being shut down in 2001, its newfound digital file sharing function had a major impact on the music industry. This seemed as an exit for the bands who received very little of their income in the traditional process involving managers, publishers and record companies, as in those times most of the money stayed with them (Connolly & Krueger, 2006).

The formerly provided situation of musical industry being pushed aside, the internet and free-file sharing have introduced a challenge to the traditional music industry. The internet gave young musicians an opportunity to produce and distribute their music through a new streaming service of SoundCloud. Soundcloud was initially launched in 2008 and it is a socio audio platform that allows users to create and share sounds across the web. Its novelty lies in the aspect that it is a safe, collaborative and customizable platform where individuals can upload and share audio, access listeners statistics, and receive comments and critique from the SoundCloud community (Henry, 2014). This can be described as the 'de-hierarchizing' impulse created by the postmodern consumeristic nature, where endemic features of social life like vertical classificational hierarchies no longer apply (Featherstone, 2007). In other words, it has become a market leader among audio-only

content creators, allowing them to post audio tracks in the form of original recordings, mashups, remixes; but also the formerly mentioned following of users, reposting content and other forms of engagement (Allington, Dueck, & Jordanous, 2015). This enables the musicians today to promote and distribute their home-produced content as a user-generated content for free (Hitters & den Drijver, 2017). As streaming grew on popularity, it also created a shift in music production and distribution. Its money-making essence lies in the amount a particular song has been streamed, or by the number of “listens.” This encourages the artists to emphasize the use of their products, and make them more popular (Hiller & Walter, 2017). SoundCloud differs from other streaming services like Spotify or Pandora in the sense that these content providers create a rather passive listening experience, while SoundCloud allows anybody to share anything they want, from music to random noises. It allows the users to upload their content for free under the rules that it is their own and it is unique (Mac, 2013).

In this sense it can be seen as a part of a DIY principle. The DIY principle was enabled by the postmodern style which provides for hybridity and intertextuality in art, in this regard by (re)creating the art through a process of recylation (Moore, 2004). The aim of DIY approach is to oppose the mainstream culture, to create an alternative form of expression, putting the greatest value to the authenticity and creativity of the work. Taking into consideration that the music must be ‘outwardly downplayed,’ meaning that it is constructed in a way that seems effortlessly or not at all strategically constructed, thus pure (Hibbett, 2005; Moore, 2004). Although the DIY culture dates back to beginnings of punk, this form of expression is even more dominant in today’s world of digital media and the internet. Internet plays a significant role for the distribution and promotion of the music, providing for freedom and autonomy with creative control (Hitters & den Drijver, 2017).

Describing the technical advancement of SoundCloud in this research is necessary because it has created the basis for many online communities and this aspect expands on the notion of traditional collective identity. Wellman and Gulia (1999) studied virtual communities and concluded that members belonging to such communities also feel an intrinsic connection towards one another, and a collective sense of disengagement from the nonmembers, just as in a real life community (in Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). SoundCloud promotes various and alternative genres, and their aim is to challenge mainstream content providers by taking a unique way to production, distribution and community development among subscribers (Maxwell, 2015). Understanding the streaming economy, opportunities SoundCloud and other streaming services provided to the young generation of musicians is an important factor to emo rap, and its musical identity. This also helps this research to understand the concept of musical identity of emo rap from the perspective of production and distribution values of this genre.

Taking all of these aspects of musical identity into consideration, I believe that for now it is most important to focus on the idea that musical identity helps individuals express their ideas and beliefs, and it is particularly influenced by their previous experience in life, might it be family or school environment. Taking these ideas into consideration, the best fitting definition to illustrate

musical identity is the one by Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) who suggest that individuals develop their musical identities from early adolescence, and are seen as the aspects like personality style or social roles, self-image which contributes to the development of an individual's general self-identity (Hargreaves et al., 2002). This is closely connected to the theory about lifestyle, where these aspects which one chooses to encounter in everyday lives create a sense of the self and are a part of one's self-expression.

Overall, the theoretical background should provide a base for understanding the creation of musical identity among emo rappers. Firstly, the concept of identity was discussed as it is a complex issue ranging from ideas of stable identity which does not change throughout one's life, to the fluid concept which is influenced by the postmodern consumeristic society and enables the ever-shifting self-based on the personal preference. The instability of an identity then unraveled the debate between sub-cultures and neo-tribes. The subcultures are stable concept based on particular aspects that do not change, like the style of music, appearance or location. Contrarily, neo-tribes are perceived more from the perspective of fluidity. While the idea behind its creation stays the same there are frequent changes in style and aesthetics of the group. Also, they are not bound to one societal group or location. Later, the music and development of youth was discussed, proving that music is a substantial influence in the youth development. It often provides for an escape and source of self-expression in the adolescent life which is often accompanied by frustration and difficulties in finding an identity which would fit, often leading into more deviant forms of self-expression.

Next, the concept of a musical genre was explained, and the idea behind emo and hip-hop, by explaining the main characteristics of both genres. While both emerged in the 1970's the idea behind their creation differs. Emo is connected to raw self-expression of individualistic sensitivity, despair, heartbreak with a rather dark depressive aesthetics behind it. Regarding the musical production itself, it is more of an instrumental production of guitars and melodies accompanied by vocals. On the contrary, hip-hop and rap has emerged as an expression of societal issues in a more collective way, focusing on the oppression of minorities and inequality, and issues connected to gangs. The aesthetics behind this music production was characterized by making beats, mixing samples along with rapping their beliefs. The advancements of digital technologies provided a new wave of music making regarding production, distribution and dissemination. The role of musical industry and record labels has been challenged by streaming services like SoundCloud, enabling young musicians to produce new music in DIY fashion.

Since there is a gap in the literature about the musical identity of emo rap, and emo rap sub-genre in general, this theoretical background serves as a base to better understand this new sub-genre. It will further contribute to the existing literature about musical identities and development youth culture by studying this new sub-genre, especially because it is a contemporary youth sub-genre which emerged online.

3. Methodology

The following part will clarify the choice behind qualitative content analysis to answer the sub-question, and will eventually lead to the answer of the main research question. It will also explain the data collection, sampling, and will describe the steps of analysis in more depth. Eventually, the operationalization will be proposed along with the coding frame and main categories.

3.1. Research Method

In order to answer the main research question: “How musical identity is created through the emo rap sub-genre?,” this study is based on a qualitative approach using the thematic content analysis through which YouTube videos were analyzed and explored.

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because its aim is to define how people understand, experience, interpret and produce social world (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). This research is of an exploratory nature. Since emo rap can be described as a newly emerging field of interest, it is important that qualitative analysis is used because it provides maximum of explorative power (Boeije, 2010). Additionally, qualitative analysis provides for an open, descriptive and interpretive conception of the chosen data (Mayring, 2014). This is done through a systematic way of assigning chosen parts of the material into categories according to a coding frame (Schreier, 2012). The qualitative aspect of this research is helpful in establishing an understanding of particular meanings and interpretations of the emo rappers in connection to previously provided literature. Since this process is systematic, each YouTube video used for this study was analyzed according to the same sequence of steps, which will be later described in this chapter.

Thematic content analysis is especially useful for this kind of research because it is a flexible method which enabled me to extend from the previously provided theoretical background, eventually providing for a complex and rich array of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). when it comes to focusing on ideas or themes which are frequently repeated in the data. Thematic content analysis is carried out in three steps 1) preparation, 2) organization, and 3) reporting the results (Elo et al., 2014) and the next section will provide the process in more detail. The gathered themes from the analysis then served as a base for the results, answering the main questions.

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

The sampling carried out in this research was purposive and it has led to the choice to focus on interviews and podcasts with the artists that are the most known to the public eye or play a major role in creating the subgenre. Purposive sampling was relevant in this study because it allows for a sampling by deliberately choosing data from certain videos in order to select the content which will enable this research to meet the informational needs of the study (Morse, 1990). This means that only the cases that are relevant to answering the research question and sub questions were chosen based on

the previously stated theoretical framework. The purposive sampling is necessary because it enabled me to choose appropriate videos by which the musical identity could be established. This means that the videos have been chosen according to the topics these videos cover and discuss, which were closely connected emo rappers' musical careers, whether it was about the beginning of their musical career, views on the music they produce or general values they want to express to the world. This helped to better establish the existing patterns among the emo rappers, which eventually created the musical identity of emo rap. Since emo rap has not been academically researched before, this study focuses on multiple theoretical aspects which may contribute to the creation of musical identity like youth and rebellion, identity or musical genres. That is why I focused on these themes in the data which lead to answering the main questions.

The type of content that is used to gather data differs in style; however, all of it is sourced from YouTube. YouTube was chosen because it provides for convergence of the digital-self presentation in terms of interaction in particularly complex ways (Chen, 2016). To best understand what lies behind the creation of musical identity of emo rappers, videos in which these rappers are interviewed, short reflections of the genre and one personal vlog were explored. Interviews, podcasts and vlogs are a second-hand information source from the artists themselves. The short reflections, on the other hand, provide information about the artists in a sense of how they are perceived by the media, and how they interpret and illustrate their musical identity. I have decided to collect my data from already existing sources because they provide for a large variety of data from different artists within this subgenre. Additionally, since this data is already out in the public view it is a good source for interpretation on a deeper level (Schreier, 2012).

Interviews have been selected as a main source of information for several reasons. Firstly, if conducted correctly, they provide an intimate understanding of people and their social world (Hermanowicz, 2002). The choice to use interviews from YouTube for data collection was that they provide for a variety of information. The interviews are conducted by various interviewers; therefore, the questions differ and thus provide for a more complex data. They are relaxed but professional at the same time, being done in a setting of a 'natural habitat' for the artists either during a tour or in their own country. Most of them were conducted by interviewers who have a channel which specializes in interviewing artists, particularly rappers and therefore they already have the skills to interview artists from this branch and put more structure to the interviews. Since they are well structured and present a rich source of information, it was evaluated that these data would provide the most suitable way to analyze their lifestyle, musical identity, societal issues and the social values. At the same time, since I explore their appearance as well, the visual aspect of the video interviews contributes to answering the main questions. As was previously mentioned, two of the examined artists have passed away, but are still crucial to the construction of the musical identity of emo rap subgenre. Therefore, it is the only way to get information about them.

Initially, I investigated which of the rappers are associated with emo-rap. Then I have decided that the ones who are most publicly visible will be the target of the analysis, as they are seen as the protagonists in emo rap's current development, and the amount of content with them provided for a rich data collection. These are Yung Lean (Jonatan Leandroer Håstad) accompanied by Yung Sherman (unknown), his fellow musician in their group called Sad Boys, setting grounds for the sub-genre in the early stages; Lil Peep (Gustav Elijah Åhr) because his contribution to the genre and lifestyle has been given much attention by the media after his sudden death in November 2017; Nothing, Nowhere (Joe Mulherin) who is also frequently mentioned in connection to emo-rap ; Bones (Elmo Kennedy O'Connor) as he is often referred to as the creator of the sub-genre, also an influencer behind other's development in this sub-genre; XXXtentacion (Jahseh Dwayne Onfroy) who has also been given more attention after his death and who substantially contributed to this genre, being one of the most famous emo rappers in the scene; and Princess Nokia (Destiny Nicole Frasqueri) whose views provide a different perspective regarding the sub-genre as she is a woman. The reason why there is only one female representative in this study is because after doing some research it was established that she is the only female performer connected to this sub-genre, there are no other female artists performing under emo rap. Therefore, it was important to consider the ideas and perspectives of Princess Nokia, as she might have a different approach to the issues in question than the others. Apart from Yung Lean and Yung Sherman who come from Sweden, all the other artists come from and are based in The United States.

Apart from interviews, another valuable source for data were the podcasts. Podcasts are types of interviews. However, after analyzing them it seemed that they were less scripted and more based on a conversation with the interviewer. Whereas in the interviews the main goal is to just answer the given questions, in podcasts it is important to have some script with questions, but the overall outcome reminds more of a natural conversation. This results in the podcasts being visibly longer in duration than the interviews, thus providing for more amounts of data. This is effective when researching their identity, since I was able to see how they react, how they structure their thoughts and present their musical identity. The following table presents the YouTube videos chosen for the analysis in more detail.

N.	Artist	Video Type	Title	Conductor	Time	Year
1.	Nothing Nowhere	Podcast	Nothing, Nowhere. Interview - Masked Gorilla Podcast	Roger Gengo	1:14:09	2018
2.	Princess Nokia	Podcast	Princess Nokia You Feel Me? Podcast: Episode 15	Lee Shaner	31:14	2018
3.	Yung Lean & Yung Sherman	Interview	HipHop Message #21: YUNG LEAN x YUNG SHERMAN	The Message Magazine	14:08	2014
4.	Lil Peep	Interview	LIL PEEP x MONTREALITY ~ ☆ COLOR ☆	Sina Ghiassi	13:22	2017
5.	Lil Peep	Interview	Интервью LiL PEEP для «Fast Food Music» (LiL PEEP Interview)	Nasty Shake	12:04	2017
6.	Princess Nokia	Interview	Princess Nokia: "Everything Is Based On Intention"	Snobette	12:32	2016
7.	Bones	Reflection	What Is The SECRET To Bones Success?	Hello Yassine	11:06	2018
8.	Shawn Cee	Reflection	Emo Rap IS BAD?!	Shawn Cee	11:39	2018

Yung Lean and Yung Sherman are interviewed by The Message Magazine, an independent project interested in unique music, art and cosmopolitan ideas connected to social phenomena and critical views. Nothing, Nowhere is interviewed by Roger Gengo from Masked Gorilla, an underground rap blog, concert series and record label in Los Angeles focusing on emerging young

rappers. Lil Peep is talking to Sina Ghiassi from Montreality, which is a successful YouTube channel for interviews with hip hop stars (King-Abadi, 2017). Second interview with Lil Peep is conducted by 'Nasty Shake' in the name of Fast Food Music, a channel based in Russia, with the focus of current underground scene. Princess Nokia is in two videos, one being interviewed by Lois Sakany from Snobette, channel covering street-inspired fashion, style and hip-hop music. The other video is a podcast by Lee Shaner, for Skullcandy, an audio brand interested in original lifestyle. Bones' career in music is examined through the short reflection by Hello Yassine, an analysis video YouTube channel that finds interest in hip-hop/rap and internet culture. The current position of emo rap in the media is represented in a reflection by Shawn Cee, who focuses on music reviews and controversial musical styles. Anthony Fantano reviews emo rap in his channel for music reviewing, also focusing on hip hop and experimental music. These videos were transcribed into text and analyzed thereafter.

3.3. Operationalization

This study is both data and concept driven analysis, meaning that I started building the theoretical framework derived from previous research on identity, musical identity, youth development and rebellion, and musical aspects dealt with in this thesis. Sensitizing concepts are considered a beginning point of a qualitative analysis and they were used during the research because they indicate a direction for my analysis. It further enabled me to create guidelines and draw attention to specific features which became representative of the sub-genre (Bowen, 2006). I collected the data primarily by the representative emo rappers who are in the scene for the longest time and talked about their life based on the questions the given interviewer asked them, discussing a variety of topics ranging from their upbringing, mental health, musical production and societal and cultural influence among others. The theory about lifestyle, musical identity and debate about subcultures or neo-tribes helped me to focus on particular elements in the interviews. The inductive part derived from explaining and discovering new ideas and theories based on the data gathered from the YouTube videos, consisting of personal opinions about current societal values, how the youth evaluates what is happening in the world and how it affects their personal and musical identity.

In order to answer the sub question 'How is their lifestyle represented?' a theory by Veal (1993) was used as a base. It explains the construct of lifestyle as consistent moral and aesthetic principles in combination with similar characteristics like age, income, location or family situation. All of these characteristics provide for a sense of "one-ness" among the individuals in the sub-genre. First, I focused on the verbal expression to establish their lifestyles, how they talk about the way they live and their past experiences which made them into who they are today, about their substance abuse and their relationship towards drugs or how they spend their free time, meaning what kind of entertainment they prefer and what shapes and influences their identity. This will help with analyzing the characteristics that illustrate their lifestyle and gaining a better understanding about what exactly constructs it. Secondly, during the transcription of the text, not only will the focus go on the verbal

part, but also on the visual aspects, their appearance. Aesthetics of the emo rappers will provide characteristics of the lifestyle aspects connected to fashion trends and image these rappers set.

The second sub-question ‘Which societal issues are represented?’ was analyzed because emo-rap sub-genre is based on emo and hip-hop, where a critique towards the mainstream values and society in general is the core and drive of the two genres (Bailey, 2005; Peterson, 2014). Therefore, it is only logical to also explore if emo-rappers are concerned with similar concepts and how they perceive today’s society in a more contemporary setting than when emo and hip-hop first emerged, in the 1970’s. Firstly, I focused on the ideas and values of the emo rappers, and what they deem as currently urging societal issues and what are their perspectives on them. With this in mind, I also aimed to evaluate if they contribute to help in any of these situations or how they are trying to resolve them themselves. Secondly, I focused on the societal issues that are connected to the sub-genre from the perspective of media and the general public, to see how they are perceived by others in terms of societal issues.

Eventually, the two sub-questions provided a base for understanding the lifestyle emo rappers lead, in terms of activities and interests; their perception on societal issues and values; and their appearance. This led to a categorization of main themes associated with their musical identity. Looking at these aspects was important because musical identity, musical taste and preference also represent people’s views, values and attitudes (Hargreaves et al., 2002). Additionally, music is the metaphor for identity (Ruud, 1997). Therefore, to further explore the musical aspect of their identity I explored the musical influence as they were growing up, because the musical identity develops especially during adolescence (Gardikiotis & Baltzis, 2012). To explore their musical influence while growing up, I focused on the different musical genres and artists they mentioned, their relationship towards playing instruments and overall connection to music in the sense of what feeling and meaning it generates among these youngsters.

Regarding the reliability and validity of this research, the interpretation in a content analysis includes the risk of speculative nature of conclusions. Reliability in thematic content analysis is rather difficult because it is about interpretation by the researcher. Since I have done the research alone, there was no second researcher to look over the codes and see if the themes and topics fit. I also searched search for a wider array of data regardless of the time they were conducted. However, I did go through the process by Clarke and Braun (2006) which suggests to first familiarize with the data, do initial coding and search for themes based on the initial coding, then review the established themes and identify them and label them, and only after that write the results according to the main themes and interpret the information that I have gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The explanation of the research process behind this study provides an insight to the steps taken which supports the validity of this research, making it quite high because I could go deep into the analysis of the emo rappers.

3.4. Analysis

The main concept of a qualitative research when it comes to analysis is the process which consists of initially segmenting the data and then reassembling them into a more coherent set. That is done by looking at patterns, establishing the relationships between the various parts and eventually providing explanation for the observation (Boeije, 2010).

After evaluating which interviews and video content would be most suitable for the analysis, the transcription of the interviews was done. Only after that could the coding process begin. All the collected data was eventually coded and structured by using the program Atlas.ti. Firstly, an open coding was done which enabled me to explore the main topics, ideas and values discussed by the emcees in their own perspective. Next, the axial coding could take place where I looked at the similarities and differences in the answers the artists gave, combined some of the initial open codes into a more coherent set of data which was then further established into three main themes, each holding several sub-themes for an efficient description in the result section. In regard to the main research question, this provides a better sense of what shapes their musical identity, taking into account their past, mental health, current career in music and musical values and societal values.

Eventually, the coding provided for three main themes which were self-expression, musical production and concerns over today's society. With the self-expression theme the codes which came up often were about their personalities, may it be positive or negative traits which essentially create and represent their identity; personal beliefs which provided for understanding their societal thinking and the values they go by; social and cultural influence in terms of art, entertainment, philosophy; or codes commenting on their image where a frequent code was shifting image. In the musical production theme, I focused on the codes about musical influence where the codes provided for artists and bands which influenced the rappers in their musical production, which enabled me to see which genres they prefer to listen to and take inspiration from. Open codes can be found in the appendix.

4. Results:

The following section will provide an insight to the creation of musical identity of emo rap by unfolding the results found in the thematic analysis of interviews, podcasts and reflections with or about emo rappers on YouTube. The general concept of musical identity is closely connected to and influenced by the way people live, their background, entertainment or current environment. That is why the first section of findings mainly answer the sub-question of how is their lifestyle represented, followed by discussion about their musical production. Further, as the general sub-genre of emo rap is rapidly rising in popularity, it is often seen as the reflection of today's society. Therefore, the second sub-question guiding the analysis provided an answer to which societal issues are represented by emo rappers. The three main themes concerned with the construction of musical production of emo rappers are: self-expression, musical production and concerns over today's society.

4.1. Self-expression

I wanted to go beyond the general media portrayal of emo rappers and explored their lifestyle in terms of looking at three aspects of their self-expression and the way they live, leading to these three sub-themes: personality, societal and cultural influence, and image.

4.1.1. Personality

In general, the media portray emo rappers as depressed, anxious, heart-broken individuals with drug problems, dwelling in their own sadness and creating their music with the same aesthetics (Granovsky, 2018; Gursky, 2017; Petridis, 2018). Consequently, this makes these youngsters seem like a threat to their audience and raises some questions to the general development of youth nowadays. After analyzing the materials in the form of interviews and podcasts with these individuals, I have discovered that their personalities are much more complex than what the media set them out to be. While engaging in the conversations with the interviewers, all the emo rappers were rather upbeat, talkative and energetic while talking about their life. I will discuss their memories from the childhood which shaped their personalities into who they are now, as from the previous literature it is evident that the immediate environment plays a significant role in shaping one's identity (Bennett, 2005; Elliott, 2008; Mead, 1934).

Because school is such a big part of young people's lives, the majority of them had some sort of memories reminiscing to their education and the schools they attended. Predominantly, these memories were rather negative, with one theme repeating frequently: the feeling of being different from the others, in other words an 'outcast' of the society. Outcasts are often portrayed as deviants and rebellious individuals. *Princess Nokia* addresses this issue:

Yea, I just kinda always was different growing up. [...] I think very early on I was impressionable and just associated those types of alternative expressions as my expression and it was never about being a trouble maker or mischievous. It was about being misunderstood

and not caring and really having a good time with it. Yea I was kind of... a dark horse (Shaner, 2018).

The term 'dark horse' in an interesting way to look at this issue. In general, the 'dark horse' is associated with being the one who is, in the eyes of others, seen as the peculiar outsider, the unworthy who does not have what it takes to be successful. Yet, all of these youngsters were ambitious enough to pursue their goals, which can be deemed as successful. They were growing up with the belief that they do not belong, which was illustrated by *Yung Lean*: "It's like when you're growing up as a kid. Then you're in a school and you do something wrong and then someone tells you like "Hey, you're a fuckup!" Then you believe that you're a fuckup." (Yung Lean, 1, 2014). This example illustrates the formerly mentioned issue of 'normalization' where the institutions like school provide guidelines of what is deemed normal (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005) and anybody outside of that realm is seen as an outcast. This would mean that all the children have to follow certain rules, dress accordingly to the dress code or at least the given standard in the particular school, which these youngsters were not willing to abide. Since they were different and did not want to obey the rules of the traditional educational system, this sort of conformity led to the feelings of unfulfillment, which led to isolating themselves from the others.

The feeling of unfulfillment resulted in them eventually dropping out and fueled them into making music. Based on the data gathered by this research 3 out of 7 of these emo rappers are school drop outs, these being *Yung Lean*, *Yung Sherman* and *Bones*. Other sources explained that it was not just these three, but *Lil Peep* and *Xxxtentacion* also join the group (Fletcher, 2017; Mansfield, 2018). That is a concerning outcome for youth development, as they felt that the only way, they could achieve freedom from conformity and pursue their dreams within music was having to drop out. These youngsters proceeded with doing something they love and something they are good at, that is making music. This was noted by *Yung Sherman*:

I always got told that I was like bad at stuff at school. And I was. But like I started just like skipping classes and going home to make music, because I thought that was more worth it because like, yeah. I did something that I liked, and like, it went good. I could, feel and, like, see made something that was, like, good you know (The Message Magazine, 2014).

Being different from the others and being judged by the societal systems is not an easy path for a developing teenager. As a result, many of them developed feelings of depression, anxiety or self-harming tendencies. *Princess Nokia* and *Lil Peep* talk about harming themselves, although they did not talk about self-harm directly, she mentioned she used to wear thick leather bracelets to cover her scars, and he mentioned playing video games so that he would not hurt himself. From these two examples it is obvious that they did not want to be associated with self-harm and feelings of

depression and tried to cover it up and keep themselves busy to defeat the mental state. *Nothing, Nowhere* mentions anxiety rather thoroughly in the podcast. He could not pin down his feelings of anxiety to a particular cause, just knew that at some points of his life it was overtaking his existence:

I've had like really bad anxiety my whole life. [...] It would get so bad where like I'd have to be sent home from school or like I'd have to leave class and there was a special teacher aide with me. Because I'd have panic attacks in school. And uh as I went in a high school, you know, they started coming back pretty bad and like I remember having panic attacks and looking at my parents and disassociating and not even knowing who they were. Like not even recognizing my own room and so I got... it got really gnarly (Grenko, 2018).

However, although in media they are connected to suicide, although they talked about depression and anxiety not one of them mentioned having suicidal thoughts in the video, then again it can be seen as a sort of disassociation with their struggles in the public, because indeed the lyrics in their music talk a lot about dying. Thus, perhaps they let out these feelings of angst and self-destruction in their music, opposed to talking openly about them in the public, as a self-therapy. "Emo rap is hip hop's new sensitive wave" (Fantano, 2018). As was mentioned previously, there is a relationship between musical preference and a person's lifestyle choices (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996). Although this literature focuses more on the audiences, in this sense it is useful as it is common that these rappers listen to each-other's work, therefore they can be perceived as an audience of the sub-genre as well. Emo rappers see their musical career as a way of self-expression, finally being able to express their true feelings, emotions and values to other people openly. Therefore, even the darkest and scariest thoughts which they do not want to discuss and deal with, they filter through their music production.

Not only did the music production give them a more profound purpose in life, it also helped them with their emotional struggles like anxiety, depression or isolation, as it provided an outlet for them. Looking at the mental health of these youngsters, I found that mental disorders have become especially apparent in adolescence and present a risk factor to the wellbeing of particular individual (Kieling et al., 2011). According to the latest mental health statistics in the United States, the state of mental health among youth is worsening, rising from 5.9% in 2012 to 8.2% in 2015 ("The State of Mental Health in America 2018," 2018). This indicates that there must be a problem in the way young people live nowadays, whether it is the educational system or general lifestyle they lead.

The general approach to their personality was being very straightforward. For the purpose of analyzing their musical identity, it was also interesting to focus on the language and self-expression from the perspective of communication. Honestly and openly talking about issues is a trait that is quite dominant among these young individuals, being a part of their culture. It can be perceived in two scenarios, where one is being straightforward in expressing their issues concerning societal concerns

critically, which will be discussed later in the results. They especially do not shy away from vulgar language, but also very straightforward when expressing their emotions. The use of vulgar language seemed rather natural to them, not a “wannabe” rebel trait. I would argue they did not even realize using the curse words, it was incorporated and imbedded in their communication, with them using curse words so frequently it even lost its vulgar meaning, as it seemed as only a filler word without a meaning. In one video *Lil Peep* did ask in the beginning if he can curse throughout the interview after expressing himself vulgarly, therefore being aware that he uses them a lot, but it being such a natural communication trait for him that he cannot help. In general, they did use the expressions ‘fuck’ and ‘shit’ in high amount throughout the conversation, *Peep* using ‘fuck’ 18x in *Montreality* interview, *Nothing, Nowhere* 23x in *Masked Gorilla* interview and others quite frequently as well.

4.1.2. Social and Cultural Influences

Media and consumer channels have provided people with a simpler access to cultural resources, allowing them to creatively modify their identity regardless of their class, gender or race (Bennett, 2005). Although many of these youngsters are school drop outs, it is not surprising that they are interested in culture and art since they are artists themselves. They showed complex knowledge about a number of societal and cultural aspects, for example modern art, philosophy in the means of spirituality and existentialism, or afterlife, which eventually also shape these individuals’ identities.

Art in any shape of form provides great value and influence. While listening to the young rappers, they show appreciation for Japanese art, whether it is entertainment in the form of anime or Hentai, language or the culture. Anime is an animated form of entertainment with high degree of fantasy. Therefore, it can be argued that these young misunderstood individuals with introverted personalities saw it as an escape from reality (Reysen et al., 2016). Compared to American cartoons anime tends to be more complex in the story lines, more sophisticated in visual style and is more expressive when it comes to the treatment of sensitive topics, showing greater depth in terms of emotions and psychology (Napier, 2001). Their passion for anime is discussed by *Lil Peep* and *Princess Nokia* who both mentioned they grew up with watching anime, with *Peep* mentioning *Shiki*, *Death Note*, *Bleach*, *Hunter X Hunter* to name a few. The reason behind appreciating anime is because it is rather emotional and oftentimes sad, with *Peep* mentioning that *Shiki* ‘fucked him up emotionally.’ He expressed a positive attitude towards Japanese culture, praising their innovativeness and uniqueness:

They just know what they're doing they know what's attractive. They know what the fuck they're doing with everything - from horror movies to Hentai, you know the Japanese are just absolutely... you know I mean, they're just a step ahead of me (Montreality, 2017).

As a result, they created a positive attitude towards Japanese culture, where the concept of self-expression through art portrayed an escape and freedom. A growing number of adolescents in the Western world are becoming interested in anime. This can be connected to their aspiration of being unique and going against mainstream. It can be argued that the United States dictate what is trendy and play a major role in the entertainment industry. Anime is represented by its visible “otherness,” yet it is beginning to appeal to a wider range of fans among America, Europe and Canada because it avoids predictability and grasps the viewers by its engrossing stories (Napier, 2001). Therefore, these young rappers have turned to this more novel influence of Japan as a way of disobeying today’s trends set by Western powers, but rather turning to a culture which also has much to offer but is not so highly publicized in this regard. Alongside being interested in anime and manga these individuals show an interest in hobbies closely tied to Japanese entertainment like art, writing, music and video games (Chandler-Olcott, 2015). The young rappers often use the Japanese signs in their cover art and music videos, as well as they refer to Japanese characters from anime in their lyrics. For illustration of the influence Japanese culture has over this sub-genre, see picture 1 the album cover of Yung Lean with Japanese signs, and picture 2 with Lil Peep’s single cover with an illustration of a girl in anime style. Picture 2 especially represents the idea of DIY culture, where the artwork is in a form of a simple sketch done in pen and paper, or through a computer program. *Sad Boys* frequently use Japanese signs, for example their official Facebook page being named ‘SAD BOYS 悲しい’ – meaning sad boys in Japanese, and their merchandise having Japanese signs. ‘Superflat Manifesto,’ a Japanese contemporary art movement stemmed from the idea of a flat and shallow consumer culture (“Superflat Movement Overview,” n.d.), is mentioned in connection to *Sad Boys* and *Yung Lean*. This evokes that Yung Lean’s artistic vision transcends “temporal and geographic cultural distinctions” (“The Aesthetics of Supersadness,” 2015).



Picture 1 Cover of Yung Lean's Album (2013)



Picture 2 Cover of Lil Peep's and Horsehead's Single (2017)

Not only are emo rappers influenced by the Japanese art, but also the contemporary experimental artists. *Yung Lean* and *Yung Sherman* talk about two artists who made an influence in their art, *Andy Warhol* and *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. *Warhol* was a pioneer in pop art, therefore it is no surprise that these youngsters who pursue similar goal in sense of uniqueness and taking creativity as business (Alberge, 2019) would be inspired by such an extraordinary persona. *Jean-Michel Basquiat's* influence is even more relevant in connection to these youngsters, sharing many similarities in their development. *Basquiat* was also a school dropout at age 17, trying to pursue his non-conventional dreams of becoming an artist. His career was known as genre-wrecking bringing him international attention. Unfortunately, he battled depression and died very young of an unintended over-dose (Sawyer, 2017). In here we can see a similarity with the tragic end of *Lil Peep* and *XXXTentacion*, who also died very young, yet their music and aesthetics lives on, fueling many other artists in this scene. *Princess Nokia* went to school at a developmental art institution, where she was surrounded by diversity in terms of nationalities of her fellow students, music education and art education at the same time. This provided her with broader perspectives from various sources, same goes for *Nothing, Nowhere*.

Philosophy is a study about fundamental questions about human existence and experience, society, knowledge or values ("Philosophy," n.d.). When analyzing the thinking processes of the emo rappers, philosophical ideas were not uncommon for these youngsters, especially in regard to existence and self-development. From the interviews it was possible to observe that emo rappers have deep personal thoughts about what is happening in today's society, which will be discussed in the theme societal issues. For *Nothing, Nowhere* philosophy played a role in creating his pseudonym, where he was influenced by *Alan Watts* who talked about the concept of 'nothingness.' In his words, in order to appreciate something, there has to be nothing behind it so that the essence of the appreciated object shows. In this way, it is also connected with the mental state these youngsters have to overcome. If one feels like nothing, there will always be something to break that feeling of

nothingness and isolation. The spirituality is also closely interconnected with the concept of philosophy, as they often think about the afterlife and contemplate around these ideas.

Spirituality was seen as one aspect which played a big role in their development and thinking. Their statements referred to the belief that ‘spirit’ of one-self does not die and is actually transferred from person to person. The issue of one’s existence was mentioned by a number of these rappers, especially brought up by *Lil Peep* who was had deep thoughts about death and afterlife, and *Princess Nokia*, who believes:

I think that my spirit is very old, I got an old soul. So when I came back in this body, I had so much election and strength from all my past lives, that I just feel like a 25 thousand year old lady that’s got wit and wisdom and funniness put into 5’3’’ body (Shaner, 2018).

The belief in reincarnation can be again connected to the Japanese contemporary culture which stems from Buddhism, in this regard an article about reincarnation in contemporary Japan by Horie (2014) who believes that the previous life or past story in other words has an impact on the complexity of one’s present self and constructs ‘narrative of the reincarnating Self.’ The thought of the future scares them and they do not want to think about it or make any plans, as they do realize the downsides of the lifestyle they live and the uncertainties of life. None of these rappers showed any relationship towards more classical religions in the Western world like Christianity, on the contrary *Princess Nokia* mentioned her opposition towards Christianity per se, as it caused inquisitions in the past.

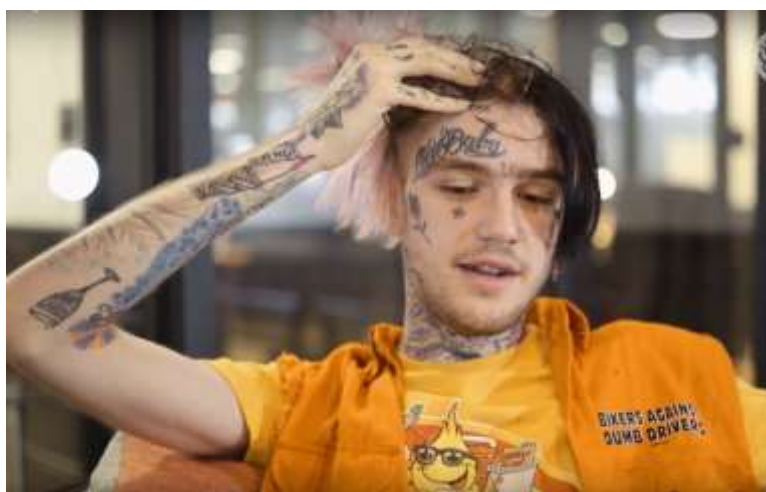
4.1.3. Image

Firstly, it is important to mention that based on these observations it is clear that some of them, *Princess Nokia*, *Lil Peep* tend to shift their appearance quite frequently and even address it in their interviews. *Lil Peep* was asked if he would like to ‘stick’ to one image and his response was: “Nah. I like... you know. I just like to change how I look constantly. I like change outfits like four times a day sometimes (Fast Food Music, 2017).” In the end of the interview by *Montreality*, *Sina Ghiassi* added that shortly after the video *Lil Peep* shaved his head. Just as was mentioned that they believe in self-development, it can also be seen as a refusal to look the same all the time, because when a person evolves, they change. That would mean that if their appearance does not change, the person is not changing or evolving either, because the way they look remains the same.

Tattoos have become a lifestyle feature to many artists in the music scene, and they are also present in the stylistics of emo rap as well. Whereas body tattoos are more commonly accepted nowadays, face tattoos still draw a lot of attention and spark controversy. Face tattoos have been called ‘job stoppers’ and that is because if one has this form of body art, the options for a proper employment are limited, as face tattoos are often connected to gangs, former inmates or deviants (Kurutz, 2018b;

Newell-Hanson, 2016). However, within the recent years they have been growing in popularity and have become a hallmark trade for SoundCloud/emo rappers (Tiffany, 2019). This stigmatized addition to their image can be seen as a way of building a transgressional character (Kurutz, 2018a), promoting a statement against mainstream societal and moral boundaries with the aspiration to break them. Additionally, it is believed to be a certain form of self-advertisement on social media, as it makes them stand out from the crowd (Tiffany, 2019). From the artists who were analyzed for this study, *Lil Peep* and *Xxxtentacion* have multiple face tattoos, presented in picture number 3 and picture 4. *Xxxtentacion*'s tattoo says 'numb' in red letters. He refuses any attachment to people, especially when talking about love, because of his previous experience of disappointment and abandonment, which forced him to create a sort of a protective bubble or barrier. This can be seen as going against the general conception of the societal values, where finding the 'significant other' is deemed normal, opting for a more individual hedonistic lifestyle where the self is the most important value to protect and preserve. *Lil Peep* stated in an interview for *Highsnobiety* that once he dropped out of school he began to tattoo his face, to make sure that he would never have a regular nine-to-five job behind a desk (Stone, 2017). *Peep*'s tattoo says 'crybaby' which is meant as a reflection of people's values in today's society, where they are often ungrateful and do not appreciate what they have. At the same time, it represents the inequality among people, where many societies suffer from famine, wars or natural catastrophes and do not have the luxury which Western cultures take for granted. He revealed the tattoo in the *Montreality* interview, saying:

I definitely think the planet is very sad and I think a lot of people are also very ungrateful, which is another big problem. Well that's why I got the crybaby tat on my face. I got a humungous tattoo, it says crybaby and shit to keep me grateful and remind me not to be a 'crybaby,' so I see it every time I look in there you know, to remind me I'm blessed (Montreality, 2017).



Picture 3 Screenshot of Lil Peep in the interview for *Montreality* (2018)



Picture 4 Screenshot of Xxxtentacion from his personal vlog (2018)

Just as the face tattoos, another common trait that these rappers are known for is covering their face with their hand, either on stage or on the promotional pictures or social media. This is connected to their mental health issues which were discussed previously, regarding the depression and anxiety alongside self-doubt, which is often low among individuals with these mental problems (Burwell & Shirk, 2006). Individuals who have lower self-esteem are usually extremely vulnerable to new challenges and uncertainty, using self-protecting strategies to isolate themselves from possible threats (Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2013). In this sense, both the face tattoos and hiding their faces may be seen as an inner battle with themselves and the fact that they are unhappy with who they are and do not feel good in their own skin. They alter themselves or completely hide themselves from the world, to show the person they want to be known as and not the ‘natural’ insecure side of them and proceed in their musical career and all that comes with it. Reflection on *Bones*’ career indicates: “Bones would come out in his signature clothing style; with a black hoodie and hiding his face with his hands (helloyassine, 2018).”

The idea of shifting styles and essentially identities is expressed in different ways. The new lifestyles of the post consumeristic world enable for de-centralization of an identity, meaning that people can engage in aesthetics play based on their current emotions (Featherstone, 2007). *Lil Peep* decided for a different expression of fluidity and self-process, by tattooing ‘wavy baby’ on the bottom of his fingers. From these examples of the idea of change, self-development and uniqueness, it might be argued that they constantly need to shift their personalities and identities in order to stay happy, because after some time they eventually get unfulfilled with who they are. Since they are on the verge of reaching adulthood, this can be connected to the theory of ‘moratorium’ discussed previously who connected the inability to find a particular personal identification, always searching and shifting of one’s identity (Kroger, 2006; Marcia, 1966). However, in this case it seems the frequent change fuels them and gives their lives meaning, contradicting the theory which proposes it would lead to anxiety.

The data did not provide for a strong evidence stating their clothing style, but emo rappers do create a particular aesthetics when it comes to their fashion choices. Although none of them dressed in the same exact style, all of them have individual styles of clothing, not going with the mainstream but trying to combine the new stylistics with the more retro ones, creating a rather niche style where a lot of times the clothes do not even fit together. This aesthetics is also interconnected with the way they create their music, as it is also based on older tunes, often recycled from other artists, and newer style.

Another image they are frequently connected to is the image of a rebel with drug problems. An alarming message went around the media in the early October 2018, when the U.S. Department of Justice proclaimed that emo rap is the cause of opioid crisis (Alston, 2018; Burks, 2018; King, 2018) to present a few sources. This is a rather bold statement, which was addressed by Shawn Cee (2018) who presented a strong opinion about this claim, which was put in a very sarcastic and irritated tone:

The United States justice system has found yet another way to take the blame off of themselves and decide to put it on the entertainment of the people for some... for some odd reason now. The death of the rapper Lil Peep has kind of sparked this discussion over whether or not emo rap is the cause for the increase in opioid addiction. A kid that wasn't even what barely 22 I think 21 or 22 years old (Shawn Cee, 2018).

Although in the media they are always connected to drug abuse, in the analyzed videos only two artists were openly talking about drugs, *Princess Nokia* and *Lil Peep*. Whereas it was clearly stated by Shawn Cee that the idea of blaming the whole opioid crisis on young rappers is rather ridiculous, the fact that *Lil Peep* openly promoted drugs not only in his music but also in his interview cannot be denied. He expressed a clear support of drug use, as he believes it is a practice to have a better mental health:

I think that everyone should do mushrooms in particular. Not necessarily acid, but I think everyone should do mushrooms at least two times a year. I think it's great for your mental health. It teaches you a lot of shit (Montreality, 2017).

As a regular drug user, he might perceive that for him and his problems drugs indeed are a way to escape the feelings of depression and anxiety, and therefore they in a way do help him, with his mental health. However, these personal opinions cannot be generalized to the whole public. Promoting drugs as a solution to mental health problems is not responsible, especially not in his position of an influencer and trend setter. Young people struggling with their mental health might be easily influenceable and try these drugs themselves whereas they would not think about it before they heard it has positive effects on him.

It was rather hard to collectively prove their relationship to drugs through the videos, as was mentioned before all of them were structured with different questions and not all the videos discussed the issue of drugs. Drugs and substance abuse is a rather sensitive topic to talk about, and since they are in the spotlight, the journalists and interviewers might have thought that it is best to put those controversial topics of substance abuse aside. Perhaps overall, it is not what makes these individuals unique as artists, and it is best to disassociate their talent from it. However, while observing the interview with *Yung Lean* and *Yung Sherman*, based on their body language and articulation towards the end it also seemed like they were under some influence. As an additional source I did find another interview with *Yung Lean*, which talked about his addiction to drugs which led into complete disassociation with himself, where he thought he was somebody completely different and had to be admitted to a rehabilitation center. According to him and *Yung Sherman*, this was caused by the freedom they felt in the USA while working in L.A, as it opened a completely new world in comparison to the socialistic nature of Sweden (Cooper, n.d.). In this sense, the drug use by all of these individuals can be seen as an escape from one's self and their problems that they encounter in their everyday lives. To a certain point, it fuels their music as well, as they frequently mention drugs in their lyrics, in connection to numbing their feelings and getting through the day.

4.2. Musical Production

Another important aspect to take into consideration when talking about the musical identity of emo rappers is the music itself. Therefore, the second theme that occurred frequently in the conversations about them is musical production, with three sub-themes: musical influence, DIY ethos and collectivity.

4.2.1. Musical Influence

In order to be able to understand their musical choices when it comes to their own production, it is first interesting to look at musical preference. All of the interviews and podcasts provided for variety of genres mentioned by the emo rappers. Firstly, emo lifestyle and music played a major role in the adolescence for *Lil Peep*, *Princess Nokia*, *Nothing*, *Nowhere* who remember being proper 'emo kids' with being dressed in all black, wearing crazy hairstyles and listening to bands like: *Blessthefall*, *Jimmy Eat World*, *Underoath*, *Brand New*. Additionally, there was also a heavy influence from the rap/hip-hop scene. Artists like *Lil Wayne*, *50 Cent*. From the newer wave of hip-hop these rappers mention listening to artists like *Waka Flocka Flame*, or more underground artists like *Future*, *Gucci*, *Atlanta*. Also, they mention other emo rappers being their influence as well, e.g. *Spooky Black* or even *Bones* who was at the time known under the name *Surrender Dorothy*. According to the provided information from the videos, *Bones* is in the scene for the longest time.

It is interesting to see that although hip-hop is dominantly connected to black culture, while emo is connected to the white culture (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005; Bailey, 2005; Zanfagna, 2017), in the

connection of emo-rap these two aspects merge, creating for a culturally diverse set of emo rappers. Adam Bradley, professor and a literary critic on popular culture addressed that emo rap, just as the traditional view of rap and emo separately, rejects the racial boundaries, calling it “defiantly multiracial” (Martinez, 2018). Although the definition of emo rap has not been defined per se, it can be defined as a combination between emo and alternative/underground rap. This means that the musicians mix and blur several genres into one, in this case emo and rap/hip hop, because they are acting against the traditional stereotypes of rap, avoiding the gangster clichés and additionally celebrate their independence by avoiding mainstream conventions (Lucas et al., 2011).

Surprisingly, these artists also find influence and pleasure in listening to more classical types of music. Young people are often not drawn to the more classical genres, being that it is too old fashioned and not popular enough, it is then interesting that these artists still find value in the more conservative genres of music. As was mentioned by Prior (2013) classical music was associated with older, educated middle class people. The fact that these individuals do listen to classical music, is another way of turning away from the mainstream perceptions and showing their difference from the youth, in a way showing their maturity. In the case of *Lil Peep*, he expressed in one of the interviews that he enjoyed classics by *Bach* or *Beethoven*. *Princess Nokia* also expressed her fondness for classical music, where she and family were a part of an orchestra while growing up, which lead to her admiration for violin music, remembering her brother’s influence :

Yea, he’s an accomplished violinist and he’s very influential in my life. Just because when we were kids, our life was so musically centered because of the amazing things he was doing with his violin programme. And my sister played piano and cello. I was more... creative and artsy (Shaner, 2018).

Yung Lean and *Nothing, Nowhere* have fond memories and appreciation for jazz and soul music, stating for example *Aretha Franklin*, *Nina Simone*, or a newer more alternative genre of jazz in connection to rap *Quest De La Soul* or *Guru*. An interesting array of genres was mentioned in one interview which in the end has an influence on their musical tastes and musical production, as *Yung Lean* expresses in his interview:

I listen to like a lot like you're *Aretha Franklin* like *Nina Simone*. Then bunch of like *David Bowie* and like I don't know like *Sabbath* or something like that. And then... yeah like some old-school Hip Hop, like 90s stuff and then... yeah you know, you pick stuff up and you just make your own music taste (The Message Magazine, 2014).

4.2.2. DIY Ethos:

The name for this sub-theme DIY ethos stems from the fact that all of these artists have built their careers on their own, starting with basic equipment like MacBook, road microphone and music editing programs like Presonus, Logic Pro X, Reason, or Ableton which they learned to use themselves. Starting with no followers, simply doing it for self-expression and passion for music, *Nothing Nowhere* remembers the initial start of his career where he had barely any followers, joking: “Maybe like 40... 40. It’s not a fanbase. There’s probably just like people I knew yeah. Like my sister” (Grenco, 2018).

Important word to mention here is the word ‘independence,’ which is the leading fuel of this sub-genre. As was mentioned previously, in the past when an artist wanted to ‘make it’ in the world they had to find a record label and sign themselves (Hracs, 2012). Similar to anarcho-punk in the late 1970’s whose main intention was to comment on the current societal problems (Gosling, 2004), emo rap’s musical identity also often refers to societal issues. The difference between these two sub-genres is the fact that the production shifted from creating music as a band in a garage in a more ‘analogue’ way, as would be the case for anarcho-punk; to the comfort of emo rappers’ own rooms behind their computers, making beats and sharing them among other fellow musicians who are interested in this genre.

Although music production has always been their passion, they never really thought they would make it this far. As was mentioned previously, the Internet has been a great tool for dissemination of music in the past decade, and it was not any different for the emo rappers. *Princess Nokia* acknowledged the fact that music was shifting to the Internet, and that if she wanted to be successful, she had to present herself online:

I took my last \$20 I had... um and spent it to do the video. I put the video out on my *Facebook* page to 2,000 friends, and the next day it was on *Noisey*, and *Vice*. I didn’t know anybody in the music industry, I didn’t know any journalist or writers (Snobette, 2016).

All of them started their promotion online, whether through social media or streaming services including *SoundCloud*, hence the name *SoundCloud rap*, *Myspace*, *Mediafire*, *Spotify* or *Pure Volume*. Emo rappers took the opportunity *SoundCloud* provides to their advantage by mixing the older, well known sounds of emo and rap, turning it into something novel. Through these sharing sites they were either connected with other emo rappers in pursue of their career, which will be discussed in the sub-theme collectivity, or they got noticed by already established artists either in or outside the scene, making a break into the world of mainstream. They are truly to be called ‘self-made’ because they started in their homes with and thanks to these advancements made it in their music career. Becoming an established creative professional is and has always been a challenge. Their aspirations were to be full-time musicians and that was possible thanks to these technologies.

The core value behind making music, according to these youngsters, is the uniqueness and experimental potential. This can be connected to the vast musical influence they had as children, and their belief that one should constantly develop themselves. Just as they frequently change their appearance, their music production seems to follow the same path. It seems that these individuals find it unfulfilling to tie themselves just to one particular genre. *Lil Peep*, *Princess Nokia*, *Nothing Nowhere*, and *Yung Lean* expressed their position by stating that they just create whatever they feel like in the moment. This also represents that their music is a form of self-expression and they base their music on the current feeling, or other influence that is the most overpowering at the moment. Emo rappers believe they are trendsetters and often regard their music style in connection to ‘waves.’ *Lil Peep* stood this ground by saying:

...job projects that are just me and no one else on them, so that you know I did it on my own, so I can't... Not to like hop on a wave, you know what I mean, try to ride a wave. I'm trying to make my own wave (Fast Food Music, 2017).

Princess Nokia also expressed her shifting styles and genres as an expression of free will and current longing after being asked if she shifts styles because she is not satisfied by being boxed into one style: “...not trying to break into different genres or demographics...it’s like whatever I feel like making I make” (Shaner, 2018).

Based on their beliefs, they are realistic and do not focus on the future, but are living in the moment, doing whatever makes them happy. Although they are proud about their musical achievements, they believe there is always room for improvement. The concept of fluid identity in relation to emo rap can be further evolved based on *Princess Nokia* and *Nothing, Nowhere*, when they said they even changed their artist names along their career because they felt like the older one did not fit their current style anymore. *Princess Nokia* went under the name *Wavy Spice*, which she remembers were times when she felt lost and confused about her identity, therefore once she grew and evolved, it is only understandable that she would not want to associate herself with somebody she was before who was confused and lost. *Nothing, Nowhere* previously went under the name *Never, Forever*. *Bones* also previously went by the name of *SurrenderDorothy*, *Th@ Kid* or *Oregon Trail* (Thomas-Hansard, 2017). Article about Yung Lean’s music production also mentions that he creates music under a different pseudonym, partly his actual name - *Jonatan Leandoer127* (Darville, 2019). The music *Yung Lean* produces under this pseudonym is strikingly different, providing a proof that these artists not only believe in fluidity in music, but also base their production upon this belief. It can be argued that instead of keeping it under the same name, they create another identity for the new expression. The variability of this sub-genre can also be understood in the reflection by Anthony Fantano, who when listing the emo rappers adds the phrase ‘at some moments people would say’ to each name: “Emo rap which include guys like I'm sure at some moments people would say Trippy

Red, at some moments I'm sure people would say Lil Uzi, I'm sure at some moments people would say XXXTentacion" (Fantano, 2018). This determines the possible confusion when addressing which artists fall under the sub-genre of emo rap.

4.2.3. Collectivity

Since this sub-genre is composed by number of rappers, it is logical to think of them in terms of collectivity. Support from one's environment is often a crucial aspect to one's success, and from the analysis it is evident that these musicians had it. *Nothing, Nowhere, Bones, Lil Peep, Yung Lean, Yung Sherman, and Princess Nokia*, express their gratitude for having supportive families as all of them had an impact on their music. Feeling like an outsider in the past, it must have been comforting for them to be a part of something they are passionate about. From a musical point of view especially *Yung Sherman* and *Princess Nokia* shared their memories from the past, where *Sherman's* mother was in an alternative popular punk band in Sweden, which had an impact on his passion for alternative music, and *Princess Nokia* who as stated previously mentioned her brother supporting her musical development as he was a successful musician himself. Although parents' support in their children is not an unusual sign, the fact that these lyrics are connected to self-destruction, drug abuse and negativity and they still get support is rather a unique phenomenon.

An interesting finding was the collectivity among the emo rappers themselves. A lot of them have mentioned that music making in this scene was a beginning of friendships among many of them. At first, they just connected through previously mentioned streaming services, especially SoundCloud where they would send beats to one another. Not only did this benefit their musical production, by being given an opinion from a fellow-musician, it also created for some strong bonds which lead into forming groups. *Yung Lean* – rapper/lyrics writer, *Yung Sherman* along with *Yung Gud* who are beat producers, composed a group called the *SadBoys*. That was because all of them were talented in a different sphere of musical production and also shared similar values and interests. Therefore, they joined forces to make their music even more unique and noticeable. *Lil Peep* also talks about the starting points in his musical career, where he met *Lil Tracy and Horse Head*, remembering they just clicked instantaneously because they had the same aspirations and ideas about music production. At this point *Peep* joined their group *GothBoiClique*, described as the collection of musical mercenaries, who joined their forces and found comfort, support and a common goal (Shaner, 2016) which encouraged them in their musical career. Even among these different groups, based on the opinions of the artists themselves, there does not seem to be any rivalry when it comes to music making. They seem like genuinely wanting to help each other grow as artists. Regardless of where they come from, after being discovered a majority of them moved to L.A. or at least went there for a while in order to make new records and release new music in collaboration with other artists, in record studios. This was noted by *Roger Grengo* (2018) in the podcast with *Nothing, Nowhere* for *Masked Gorilla*, where he mentioned that: "I think typically... people put their music on Soundcloud and then it starts getting

some traction and then they move to LA and then they're touring with some other like artists that's already in the scene" (Grenco, 2018).

Not only are these artists interconnected among each other, but they also show strong appreciation towards their fans, and thus promote another kind of collectivity. Since these artists do know first-hand how it feels to be excluded, feel different and emotionally unhappy, they are easily relatable to the youth who are experiencing the same feelings and it is believed that is the reason why the sub-genre has been rising in popularity so rapidly. *Xxxtentacion* expressed his gratitude for his fans in his personal vlog by saying: "The only people I've ever seen kinda suffice for me and offer me the support always is... is you guys, my people, you guys are my people and I felt very attached to" (*Xxxtentacion*, 2018).

4.3. Concerns over today's society

Emo rap sub-genre is seen as going against what is perceived as 'normal.' This next theme explains why they personally hold such negative attitudes towards today's society, and what they think about the current issues disrupting the society. To begin this theme, here is an exemplary statement about society by *Yung Lean*: "Fuck society" (*The Message Magazine*, 2014). Emo rappers acknowledged that people today are ungrateful and do not cherish what they have. Taking their position as artists and their musical identity as an advantage, they contribute to making the society a better place by taking part in various charities. "We just wanted to do something simple and effective and include, utilize my platform as Princess Nokia to get some of those resources" (Shaner, 2018). *Princess Nokia* mentioned creating a donation for Puerto Rico, 'ho te la gente,' after the devastating earthquake which struck in 2018 (Rosenfeld, 2018). *Nothing, Nowhere* contributes to protecting the environment, the Trust for Public Land, to which the interviewer commented: "I don't know any other rapper donating proceeds to public lands (Grenco, 2018)." *Xxxtentacion* mentioned his contribution to the people in need in his area, helping homeless shelters and orphanages by bringing them resources and toys they could play with, sharing his privilege with others, saying: "I'm gonna put my mind towards actually helping the world and the self (*Xxxtentacion*, 2018)." They believe taking action to their own hands is the best way to help the less fortunate. This is possible thanks to their earnings from music and taking into consideration their age it illustrates their maturity, concern over others and societal values. However, there are some problems with the society they have not been able to battle, but at least try to make awareness about them through their music and self-expression. Therefore, this theme was further divided into two sub-themes: aversion towards authorities, and categorization.

4.3.1. Aversion towards Authorities:

These youngsters share their opinions about many different issues in today's society, however, one that was rather dominant is the aversion towards authorities. Education is an important value for

each individual in pursuit of self-development, however, these youngsters never felt at place in school, and according to their explanation this was caused by the conformity and authority of teachers to pushing them against their will. Although authority features among teachers must be evident in order to gain some respect from their students and show their dominant position in the relationship between a student and a teacher, emo rappers never responded well towards these signs of power. On the contrary, it would seem that the obtrusive nature of pushing one's agenda on them had the exact opposite outcome as it was expected. They decided that school is not the place where they would see themselves grow as unique individuals, and dropped out. This decision may stem from the idea that educational systems are being created in a rather conforming way, meaning that the uniqueness of an individual is being challenged and to some extent even suppresses it. This can be seen as a form of marginalization, where all the individuals that are different from the 'normal' are left out and judged.

Police is another topic that had a negative connotation by two of these artists, *Princess Nokia* and *Lil Peep*. *Peep*'s message was subtler and not explaining his reason behind it, but towards the end when he was supposed to give his message to the youth his words were: "...and don't become a police officer" (Lil Peep, 2, 2017) After this he laughed, which showed a particular aversion towards police in general. *Princess Nokia*'s opinion on police was more complex, and she is the only one from the whole group of rappers who discussed the issue of racism, showing genuine concern about neighborhoods which are multiracial:

... unnecessary presence of police that are not for the safety of the black and brown man, but the safety of the white man. So then, therefore, it is backwards and therefore it is only trying to supply a safety to the people that have moved in. Whose actual safety is at a premium regardless. They have more of a chance of surviving through their day than anybody from the community (Snobette, 2016).

Police is the one pillar that secures and protects people. However, both of these individuals express their negative attitudes towards the police, presumably because they are not the 'normal' citizens abiding the rules of society. They believe in freedom, equality and genuine self-expression, which is often being restrained by the authorities. This topic is brought up by them because of the rising police brutality in the USA, where they are both from. This was also addressed by *Princess Nokia* in the interview, and *Lil Peep* rapped about it in his songs. *Princess Nokia* further addressed the issue of marginalizing minorities and silencing them. She believes it is important to explicitly address these issues, and that it is the only way to make a change, using her position of being an artist to spread the word (Hairston, 2016). It is interesting to look at the lyrics of these songs and take them into consideration of why these youngsters are against police, after all, as was previously mentioned they use their music to self-express their inner thoughts and feelings. In *Lil Peep*'s song '*Life is beautiful*' he discusses the continuous problem of police brutality in the USA, addressing how people

are often blamed for their own deaths (“Lil Peep’s ‘Life Is Beautiful,’” 2018). Instead of bringing safety to the towns, however, for the year 2017, 1147 people were killed by the police only in the USA, with only 13 of them being charged as a crime. The most striking fact is that most of these deaths started as suspected non-violent offence where no crime was reported, with most unarmed people being killed by the police were people of color (“2017 Police Violence Report,” 2018).

4.3.2. Categorization

Categorization of musical genres is important to ethnomusicological expertise as it is helpful when providing biographical details and historical background of music’s evolution in order to situate the music (Haynes, 2010). According to emo rappers, stereotyping, categorizing and labeling is a way of showing conformity in today’s world which leads to oppression of individuality, and they are strictly against it. They are going against the standardization of identity caused by the media, as was implied by De Been, Arora and Hildebrandt (2015). At the same time, stereotyping serves as a means of control. Not only does it create forms of prejudice and discrimination, it describes people’s beliefs based on the group they are a part of. It represents how people supposedly behave and what they allegedly like (Fiske, 1993). Therefore, this kind of categorization creates limitations for the people’s development outside of their alleged group membership. *Yung Lean* provides an interesting thought on stereotyping, expressing his idea that stereotyping is in the way of natural development because people are stuck in their own bubble and comfort zone, doing what they are being told, and thinking in the same way as others. He says that once you think more openly, regardless of any stereotypes that:

You feel above like... like if people believe in stereotypes, like “this person supposed to do this, this person looks like this, so he’s supposed to do this.” If you look past that then you know, then you’re definitely above everyone. You’re ahead of the curve (The Message Magazine, 2014).

These individuals do not want to be boxed into any kind of stereotype or label, no matter if it is their music, or other aspects of life. It can be argued that it is because of the consumeristic world today that everybody ends up being the same, or being perceived as the same, and everything needs a label to be identified by. They are not comfortable with fitting only one category, this is especially seen with their music styles which shift frequently. *Nothing, Nowhere* mentions he does not like to present himself in a particular genre:

“I mean like I said people can people... can call you whatever they want you know I mean and people have to call it something... it can’t just be like: “You make but... what kind of music do you make?” “Just makes music” (Grenco, 2018).

The idea of a genre or a sub-genre generates an initial presumption of what the music ‘should be’ like, and therefore these individuals do not like to be associated with a particular label of the music they make, because in the end boxing themselves within a particular label influences the creativity by giving restrictions and perceivable guidelines how they should produce their music. In general, they are very free and independent and never want to be conformed and manipulated by the labels, creating a ‘anti-industry’ approach (helloyassine, 2018). Labelling and categorizing is a general practice in the traditional music industry and record companies, and that is another reason why these rappers do not want to sign with any of the larger record labels. They either make a label with their producers, who are foremost their friends, or sign with independent record labels. As was mentioned before by Hracs (2012) music industry is very hierarchical and old-fashioned. Signing with a record label comes with obligations and restrictions provided by the record label, where the artists often lose the creative control over their product. Often times the record label even gets to choose their fashion style and the look of the artists (Williams, 2017). That is why emo rappers generally tend to stay away from record labels as it puts them in the danger of becoming conformed and being made into something somebody else wants, so that the artist can be easily categorized and labeled, in order to create a profit. *Nothing, Nowhere* remembers his first contact with record labels, stating:

... you know some of the stuff this stuff was sketchy. And I remember going into some meetings and just coming out of them like more confused than when I went in. [...] You could tell that they wanted something from me so they could like... They just wanted what they could get out of me... [...] It was weird like I just felt weird for a long time (Grenco, 2018).

5. Conclusion

It is time to conclude this research and answer the question “How is musical identity created through emo rap?” The thematic content analysis provided for a deeper insight into the identity of emo rappers overall, unravelling the complex set of characteristics that lie behind the devilish music and unique musical identity of emo rap.

Musical identity of emo rap is created by a set of influences, but it surely complies with the definition by Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) who present musical identity as an important statement to people’s values and attitudes. The core finding of this study presents the fluidity and constant shift of their identity, including a frequent change in styles, musical genres and appearance. These musicians experience the world from a unique place of self-awareness and their own body, as was suggested by Ruud (1997) and Snow (2001). Emo rappers believe that labelling and categorization is a way of conformity, creating limits for the people to develop freely based on what they want. By shifting their identity, they make a point against stereotypes and categorization, thus challenging the rigid lines of society. The sentiment behind their musical identity has its roots in the genres of emo and hip-hop. The emo genre is represented by the rappers’ views on the society, where their philosophy is to go against the mainstream and create a unique image when it comes to both their musical production and personal image. The self-expression is often emotional, with the common themes of loneliness, suffering or disconnection (Bailey, 2005; Baker & Bor, 2008). Similar to hip-hop and rap this is the essence of music production.

Emo rap and hip-hop are both based on sampling and producing unique beats which oppose the trends of general market (Peterson, 2014) and the. Their musical production is heavily influenced by the advancements of today’s technologies and digitization, as their musical career stems from sharing their work online on streaming platforms, primarily SoundCloud, hence the commonly used association of SoundCloud rap. Emo rappers evaluated the power of the Internet in the early 2010’s and started their careers as teenagers through music streaming services. This is where they uploaded their home-made beats made with simple equipment like MacBook, road mike and music editing software. These services provided for their collective identity as was implied by Melucci (1995). They have an ‘anti-industry’ approach, indicating the opposition towards traditional record labels and the hierarchical production of music under the leadership of the label. This is closely tied with the DIY concept of music production. When looking at the simplicity of their self-representation in terms of cover art or musical production itself, and taking into consideration the modest technologies they have, it can be described as being “outwardly downplayed,” (Hibbett, 2005; Moore, 2004). Not long after, they became the sensation of the Internet and music industry in general. Their idea behind this choice was simple, they wanted to be independent and free to create whatever they wanted without anybody controlling them as they do tend to have problems with authorities, and truly appreciate the creativity and authenticity behind the process. Emo rappers want to keep exploring their creativity,

which is evident in their music production as they always play whatever feels right in the moment. Additionally, it also shows through their appearance and style, resulting in several of them changing their pseudonyms throughout their careers, or having more of them based on the music they produce under it. Therefore, the theory of moratorium by Kroger (2006) and Marcia (1966) is not valid in this case, as the instability and frequent change of identity seem to fuel their musical identity as well as lifestyle.

Veal's (1993) principle of researching lifestyle proved that these rappers indeed share the same morals, aesthetic values, and are the same age, despite not sharing the same location. Growing up, they often felt like misunderstood outcasts, they isolated themselves and felt unfulfilled, causing the majority of them to drop out of schools. Connected to this is the state of their mental health, as the majority of them suffered and still suffer from depression or anxiety. These aspects fueled their music which serves as individualizing form (Frith, 1996), and helped them realize their identities as mentioned by Turino (1999). During these times, they found safety and comfort in art, music and entertainment. What also had an impact on the production of their artwork was that they enjoyed entertainment from Japanese culture, especially anime because of its complex storyline full of emotions and deeper meanings. This also had an impact on the production of their artwork. Not only can it be seen as a gateway from their struggles in real life, it also represents the opposition to the mainstream Western culture and elaborating on more novel and unique styles in a contemporary way. The appearance is also an important trait of lifestyle, which is distinct among these individuals. Although this study did not find a particular style trait these rappers would share regarding clothes, a feature seen as the trademark of emo rap are face tattoos. By having face tattoos, they are again breaking the boundaries of today's society, creating their own stylistics and not following general trends, but making new ones.

Regarding the concerns over today's society, these young artists have an evident issue with the terms under which the society functions. Three of the analyzed emo rappers mentioned charity work, which was an interesting finding given the fact that they are still very young. This finding illustrated their maturity and awareness for the societal issues. Some of these issues they cannot overcome themselves, but they at least create awareness by their music and by talking about it. For example, they have issues with authorities, that they were often punished by not following the school rules, or their visible disapproval of the police, which they tackle by shining some light on the contemporary debate of police brutality in the United States. Another concern the emo rappers had was the categorization and stereotyping in today's society, which creates limitations to the free expression of people, making the society blindly follow what is trendy, determining what they should or should not do and thus restricting their uniqueness and free willed self-expression.

Emo rap has not yet been studied in the academic sphere; thus, the current study is a contribution to the existing literature about musical identity and expands it by including the new sub-genre of emo rap. Focusing on the musicians rather than the audiences provided for a more authentic

understanding of the emo rap sub-genre as it gave the opportunity to gather the core information from the creators themselves, rather than an interpretation of the audience. As is evident in the theoretical background, most of the existing literature about musical identity was from the field of psychology. Therefore, this study contributes to the sociological theory of identity creation. At the same time, it shines some light on music production in contemporary society and adds to the existing literature about DIY production, which was previously primarily connected and based on the punk scene (Bennett, 2018; Gosling, 2004; Hitters & den Drijver, 2017). Regarding the concept of identity, theory by Bennett (1999), and Frith (1996) about changing identities and lifestyles was proven to be correct among these adolescents. In connection, Hodgkinson's (2009) theory about diversity of media and its impact on the youth development as well as identity development was also proven. Additionally, with the concepts of fluidity and diversity in the aesthetics and musical production make it that emo rap can be seen as a neo-tribe rather than a subculture, therefore adding to the literature about contemporary youth development in regard to music.

There are a few limitations to this study, especially from the perspective of data collection and foundation of common attributes. Although the interviews with the artists provided for a rich data sample, the questions differed per video. Each video had a different interviewer and all of them had their own preferred topics which they wanted to discuss with the artists. This became especially apparent when discussing drugs, because as was previously mentioned, these artists are frequently connected to accusations of self-medication on prescription pills and use of drugs in general. The initial thought was that the topic of drugs would be prominent in the interviews. However, in the provided interviews only two of the rappers discussed drugs, because others were simply not asked about the topic or did not have a chance to talk about it. Therefore, this study did not explore any patterns regarding drug abuse amongst these youngsters, although it cannot be denied based on the media coverage. Another limitation is that with most of the artists I only had one interview, video about the rapper, besides Lil Peep and Princess Nokia where I managed to analyze two interviews. This means that the data was only from one part of their life, when the particular interview was taken, and their attitudes might have shifted since then or they could have developed new concerns and beliefs as they are evolving as people and artists. Lastly, this research provided an insight into the lives of few artists, who are in the scene for the longest period of time. However, the emo rap scene consists of more artists than these, and the number is still growing due to the popularity of the sub-genre. Therefore, if I had analyzed more artists from this sub-genre the results might have been strengthened by similar attitudes and beliefs of those artists, or on the contrary might have provided some opposition to those which emo rappers presented.

This study provided the basic understanding of the musical identity of emo rap. However, since identity formation and development is such a complex issue, there is always more to discover. As this sub-genre sparks some controversy when it comes to youth development, it would be appropriate to carry out a future study, which would focus on the youth that listens to this sub-genre,

in order to establish if there are indeed any correlations between the behavior of the youth and the musical influence of this particular sub-genre, and if they feel it influences them in their emotions and decision making. At the same time, the influence of Japanese culture on emo rappers was prominent. It would be interesting to further explore the impact of Japanese culture on today's entertainment and develop the reasons behind the choice to see if it is something novel to these youngsters and this sub-genre, or if more artists and content creators reach out to these sources for inspiration.

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