

Deconstructing Hypersexuality in Rammstein's "Bück Dich" as an Analysis of Intentional Design

Shock rock. A creation designed by heavy metal bands to rebel against the 1990's panic to protect the morality of the youth. The 90s are a time of new ideas, and with the speed of technology increasing daily, parents and lawmakers look to protect the children. In 1996, The Simpson's character Helen Lovejoy aptly said, "Will someone please think of the children?". This satirization embodies the emotions felt when things change so quickly.

After the Berlin Wall fell, a group of intrepid East Germans grouped to form a group called Rammstein in 1994. Achieving popularity in the newly unified Germany, their unique take on industrial metal and brutal core take on a harshness that will eventually take the United States by storm. Rammstein's uniqueness comes from their entertainment value and their construction of stage production inspired by KISS.

Utilizing pyrotechnics, elaborate costumery, and elements of spectacle, Rammstein found a niche to break into the elusive American market. While Rammstein is a German band, they are a truly American product.

To understand Rammstein's identity as an American product, we must go back to their first days of touring in the United States and their influences. Growing up in East Germany, the band members had little access to western radio stations and relied on bootlegged tapes from East Berlin, where the western stations reached. These stations would play the big shock rock bands like KISS and Alice Cooper, helping shape the band's early sounds. Even their name is influenced by the American airbase Ramstein after an air show disaster in 1988 that led to 70 fatalities and hundreds of injuries, becoming the worst air show disaster of the time.

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) officially denounced western music, and the state controlled all official channels for music production. Brauer's work, "Clashes of Emotion: Punk Music, Youth Subculture, and Authority in the GDR (1978-1983)", points us toward the government's stance on moral corruption with capitalist musical influences. "The government's attempts to control these "strange" and "dangerous" musical styles were virtually identical to measures taken in earlier decades, when young musicians were labeled as "antisocial rowdies" and persecuted on the pretext of publicly performing forbidden music. These strange musical styles were often described as unhealthy, noisy, aggressive, savage, and tantalizing; they were considered products of a capitalist entertainment industry and symbols of a morally decadent Western culture. The harsh state reaction to independent youth culture focused particularly on music that many believed inculcated degenerate "Western" values and corrupted the young people who listened to it."¹ Brauer's statement here grounds us to the idea that the band's early influences were considered taboo and thus enticing, creating a desire to experience more.

Another issue arrives as we investigate how the band creates its sonic and visual identity. In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, Christoph Schnieder alludes to the catharsis of playing the music of Rammstein. "If you are always with the same boys over such a long period of time, it's like a therapy for life. You have to learn to be part of a crew and get along with all the other people - and also to give in sometimes."² With this idea of Rammstein's music being a cathartic act, it teases another question out of

¹ Juliane Brauer, "Clashes of Emotions: Punk Music, Youth Subculture, and Authority in the GDR (1978-1983)," 2022, 19.

² "Rammstein: Deswegen Ist Die Band Immer Noch Zusammen," Rolling Stone, June 29, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.de/deshalb-sind-rammstein-immer-noch-zusammen-2000149/>

us. How can their music be a simple performative act espousing the influences of previous shock rockers and many punk rock bands that made it sonically through the Iron Curtain?

The effects of the Cold War on the German Democratic Republic creates a unique situation for political and ideological subversion from the capitalist West. The distilled music that reaches the GDR creates a unique microcosm of musical ideas ranging from the synthesizer leads of Disco to the voices of dissent with punk and the pop vocal styles of groups like The Cure. This eclectic mix of musical styles creates an odd but pleasing sound that Rammstein fuses with the thought that anything is possible once free of the shackles of a state-controlled media industry. This idea of freedom in the West becomes the basis for our investigation.

Metal in the 1980s and early 1990s was a massive dick-swinging fest that epitomized the emergence of the New Wave of American Heavy Metal. Embracing punk rock's tempo, angst, and escapism allows metal bands to show that they are the most virile of the male gender. I intend to examine Rammstein's 1999 "Bück Dich" performance in Massachusetts with their subsequent arrest for simulated sodomy on stage. In this examination, I will investigate why this particular performance caused issues for the band when they toured with Korn on the 1997 Family Values Tour and their 1998 Shenschutz Tour. Looking at the band's arrest for simulated sodomy on stage, I aim to investigate the band's long-standing stance that they are not "shock rock" and use hypersexualism and hypermasculinity in their performances to create a unique show experience.

As we look at the performance, we will look at the costumery, the staging, and the song structure to identify the elements of hypermasculinity and hypersexualism. Utilizing bootlegged footage from fans at the 1998 Centrum Center show, we can view and apply these themes to understand the context.³ Keyboardist, Flake, is topless, wearing loose silver pants performing the intro on a flaming keyboard. Matching Flake is the group's vocalist, Till Lindemann, standing on a box towering above the audience, giving a superimposing visual. As the rest of the band comes into view, they are all wearing similar outfits with straight edge lines in silver.

Henry Spiller expands on Judith Butler's work about gender performativity. "In contrast to performativity, which is usually invisible, performance invites the active gaze of an audience. This gaze can be a two-edged sword for a would-be man: inviting the gaze can be (1) a means to assert masculine power over the audience through charisma and demonstrations of skill, or (2) a submissive act in which the performer's actions provoke the audience to dominate and objectify him, thus dis empowering, even emasculating him."⁴ This dichotomy is essential in understanding the costumery chosen for every performance. The costumery is selected as a specific thought process to tell the story of the music. It is also determined to enhance the already outrageous stage spectacle further. Thus, we can see that the band's costumery was chosen to assert their power over concertgoers. By asserting their dominance through clothing, this becomes a point of hypermasculinity. As this is a performance, it becomes an acceptable frame to question their costume choices as ironic.⁵

³ Rammstein - [LIVE] Worcester, Worcester's Centrum Centre, USA, 1998.09.23 [VIDEO BOOTLEG] [V1], 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCvPShOJmTg>.

⁴ Henry Spiller, "Introduction: Music, Movement, and Masculinities," *The World of Music* 3, no. 2 (2014): 5–13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24318173>.

⁵ Spiller.

The headbanging becomes a pulsating and relentless pounding as we continue looking at the performance. Pushing nearly 150 beats per minute, "Bück Dich" is a mosh pit's wet dream in that it carries massive driving energy regardless of the shock value coming in the chorus. The introductory lyrics roll in with "I command you to bend over / Turn your face away from me / I don't care about your face / Bend over!". With such a strong introduction, we see how these elements combine to emphasize sexuality. The drums and guitars become more distorted and begin to pulsate, leading into the refrain. As Lindemann repeatedly screams, "BEND DOWN!" Flake approaches the main box on all fours, now dressed in BDSM gear, with Lindemann leading by a leash. Lindemann pulls out a prosthetic phallus and begins simulating penetration. As the end of the chorus nears, Lindemann's masculine character drives away the submissive Flake and sends him back to the keyboards. This act has Lindemann and Flake perpetuating the very essence of Spiller's work. Lindemann fulfills position one of asserting dominance and, thus, masculine power. Flake supports the second position by becoming disempowered and letting the audience emasculate his identity in this performance.⁶

As the song reaches the end, Lindemann's prosthetic phallus begins "ejaculating," a mixture of liquor spraying Flake, himself, and the closest audience members. This sexual act, while performed between two men, is not read as homosexual as it is being shown as a performance act, thus reinforcing its hypermasculine nature. This act on stage leads to the arrest of Lindemann and Flake following the show for lewd and lascivious behavior⁷.

⁶ Spiller.

⁷ "Rammstein's Act Lands Two Members In Jail," MTV, accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.mtv.com/news/11dz28/rammsteins-act-lands-two-members-in-jail>.

As we have now looked at the performance, we will look at other tours in Worcester, Massachusetts, around the same time as Rammstein's Sehnsucht Tour and arrest. In 1998, Korn created the Family Values Tour to show the Nu Metal scene. The first year that the tour ran, Rammstein was invited to join, and they played the Centrum Stadium (now known as the DCU Center) in Worcester. Rammstein performed "Bück dich" as a part of their setlist for this tour. So if Rammstein had performed this song before on tour, why was this particular performance so egregious? Is it because the Palladium Theatre is for all ages? Unfortunately, there is no solid answer.

Worcester, Massachusetts, is also home to the New England Metal and Hardcore Festival (started in 1999) and the Rock and Shock Horror Convention (began in 2004). Both of these events occurred at the Worcester Centrum Center. With both events focusing on similar pageantry elements and topical content, did Rammstein pave the way for these events? Tipper Gore's "Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society" can shed some light on the issues of morality raised against this performance.

Written in the late 1980s as a response to the increased sexuality/violence portrayed in media, Gore sought to try and reclaim the "innocence of youth." I use this term as a colloquial response to the last statement in the introduction: "More than anything else, I want this book to be a call to arms for American parents. I want to offer them the very hope that we can reassert some control over the cultural environment in which our children are raised."⁸ Gore later says, "These groups wouldn't be allowed to get away with such vulgarity if the promoters and the city or county councils who have jurisdiction over concert facilities got together and required them to clean up their acts."⁹

⁸ Gore.

⁹ Gore.

As we investigate deeper into 90's culture, we need to look at other issues of moral panic across the United States to answer if the arrest only occurred due to police officers believing in Gore's Parents Music Resource Center viewpoints. Several months before Rammstein's arrest, President Bill Clinton was caught in a scandal and said, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." The United States military had "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policies to prevent queer-identifying people from entering the service. Marilyn Manson is "arrested for exposing himself on stage and criticized for his occasional indulgence in self-mutilation."¹⁰

All these events occurred in the wake of a supposed decline in morality sweeping the nation. We can then look to Rafalovich to understand the "crisis in masculinity" as a moral problem to solve in America.¹¹ They arose from the normalized social behaviors in the lyrical content of metal music. This panic is not limited to just one genre as others, such as hip-hop, have run into similar issues of purported moral decline. The non-initiated "interpret the phenomena of heavy metal exclusively on the basis of symbolism accompanying the music, whether in the form of images, signs, texts, or behavior."¹²

In the Rammstein in Amerika documentary, Moby begins talking about America's decency laws and tells us, "if police don't like an artist then they choose to apply the decency law." While this is speculation, one cannot help but question the truth behind this statement. The idea that laws can be applied willfully is furthered by controversial

¹⁰ Robert Wright, "'I'd Sell You Suicide': Pop Music and Moral Panic in the Age of Marilyn Manson," *Popular Music* 19, no. 3 (2000): 365–85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/853642>.

¹¹ Adam Rafalovich, "Broken and Becoming God-Sized: Contemporary Metal Music and Masculine Individualism," *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 1 (February 2006): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2006.29.1.19>.

¹² Bettina Roccor, "Heavy Metal: Forces of Unification and Fragmentation within a Musical Subculture," *The World of Music* 42, no. 1 (2000): 83–94, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41699315>.

laws such as the "Stop and Frisk," which assumes guilt on the offending party. Digging deeper into Moby's statement, this comment lays the groundwork for analyzing the potential effects of constructed masculine identities of the Columbine school shooters. Leading to the 1999 Columbine School Shooting as Rammstein and other metal bands were associated with being an influence on Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's attack on their high school. Dave Cullen's book on Columbine paints a unique story of how Harris and Klebold's classmates portray them as queer after the attack. Evan's "Faggots, Fame and Firepower" tells us that these two "seemed somewhat desperately to strive for a masculine ideal rooted in an aggressive expression of violence, heterosexuality, and misogyny"¹³. These concepts are further exacerbated by Cullen's analysis of the Basement Tapes (tapes by Harris and Klebold to explain their actions). "Eric introduced most of the ideas; Dylan riffed along. They insulted the usual inferiors: blacks, Latinos, gays, and women"¹⁴.

After the attack, Rammstein and other groups received negative attention. MTV News Staff days after reported the following: "Rammstein has also received negative attention, as members of the so-called 'Trenchcoat Mafia,' the clique the gunmen were purported to belong to, reportedly listen to the metal band's music. On Friday, the band expressed its condolences through a statement, which insisted the members 'have no lyrical content or political beliefs that could have possibly influenced such behavior.'"¹⁵

¹³ Richard T. Evans, "'Faggots, Fame and Firepower': Teenage Masculinity, School Shootings, and the Pursuit of Fame," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 46, no. 1 (April 2016): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2014.018>.

¹⁴ Cullen, *Columbine*.

¹⁵ "KMFDM And Rammstein Speak Out About Columbine," MTV, accessed November 30, 2022, <https://www.mtv.com/news/kejw25/kmfdm-and-rammstein-speak-out-about-columbine>.

The statement continued, "Members of Rammstein have children of their own, in whom they continually strive to instill healthy and non-violent values."¹⁶

To understand music's correlation to immorality, we must decipher heavy metal's cultural impact and the communities it creates. This stark contrast pushes the idea that heavy metal negatively influences the communities. There is an exception to specific subgenres of metal that are wholly based on negative associations with Neo-Nazism and racial hate music. "White power music remains wildly unpopular. In fact, it is hard to imagine a more maligned and marginalized form of expressive culture, whether measured by market share, public outrage and condemnation, or reaction from other musicians, as evidenced by songs like 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' by the Dead Kennedys."¹⁷ Before we go too far off the rails, we look at metal's power chords, how the perfectly timed hits apply to creating a sense of community in "Buck Dich," and what this means to fight against the perception of immorality.

"The power chord is an inclusive musical reference for both punk and heavy metal music."¹⁸ Looking into this idea that metal is inclusive bites against the past portrayals and exemplifies Rammstein's stance against being shock rock. By creating a community to share their unique musical stylings, Rammstein can create rules in which audience members police their actions. Donze's ethnographic work, "Heterosexuality is Totally Metal," points us to the local Los Angeles music scene to help correlate this sense of identity within the community. "The aspect of community that Mark identified with was a

¹⁶ "KMFDM And Rammstein Speak Out About Columbine."

¹⁷ C. Richard King, "Listening to Bad Music: White Power and (Un)Popular Culture," in *Unpopular Culture*, ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 187–206, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv157bjk.13>.

¹⁸ Patti Lynne Donze, "Heterosexuality Is Totally Metal: Ritualized Community and Separation at a Local Music Club," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22, no. 3 (2010): 259–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-1598.2010.01241.x>.

shared sense of embodied feeling, of being physically moved by the music. Andy described it as sharing your art with others. In both instances, they are in an empowered position, but also, they are giving the audience what they want. The audience becomes empowered—physically energized—and this is the essence of community through music."¹⁹

We have looked to understand the social issues surrounding Rammstein's arrest. By examining Rammstein's 1999 "Bück Dich" performance in Worcester, we can see the events leading to their subsequent arrest for simulated sodomy on stage. In this examination, we have sought to understand why this particular performance caused issues for the band and questioned the band's stance on this performance aspect. Looking at Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, we see how their performative acts are a commercialized product. Butler states, "gender proves to be performative- that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed."²⁰ While Butler's statement is specific to gender, this can also be applied to sexual identity performance. Rammstein specifically states that simulated sodomy was designed this way because they wanted to see the fans' reactions to something so outrageous.²¹ This statement contradicts their statement about not being a shock rock band as they deliberately seek a specific response. It is also important to note that this contradiction may be a statement of an afterthought. If Lindemann did speak this as an afterthought, does this still keep Rammstein from being a shock rock band to protect the innocence of the

¹⁹ Donze.

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²¹ "Hannes Rossacher."

youth? It is necessary to look into the dichotomy of the Puritanical roots of the United States and how it is also the porn capital of the world.²²

Worcester, Massachusetts, is roughly sixty miles away from Salem. It is also close to the many Puritanical settlements dating back to the country's founding. Because of the religious influence on the original colonizers, it creates a profoundly ingrained structure of moral decency. Other areas around the country, such as Los Angeles and "the West," allow for a broader acceptance of the issue of indecency and immorality. Because of this, it can be posited that this specific performance could have resulted in this outcome. With Lindemann and Flake's arrest, the two had to constantly return to Worcester to face criminal proceedings. Because of this, anytime the band enters the United States, Lindemann and Flake face questioning by the TSA. This constant questioning of motive and deeming the band criminals, compounded with the aftermath of 9/11, led to the band not returning to tour the United States after their 2001 Mutter Tour.

We have investigated how metal music is often considered to represent hypermasculinity. Metal embraces the tempo, angst, and escapism of punk rock and allows metal bands to show that they are the most virile of the male gender. By examining Rammstein's 1999 "Bück Dich" performance, we understand why Lindemann and Flake were arrested and charged with lewd and lascivious behavior for simulated sodomy on stage. In this examination, we have also sought to understand the cultural influences that led to Rammstein being viewed as a negative influence.

By critiquing their long-standing stance on not being a shock rock band, we have come to understand their viewpoint and questioned the statement's validity. It is through the frame of time and place that I have sought to tear apart Rammstein's hypersexualism

²² "Hannes Rossacher."

and masculinity to show that their performance is just that, a performance. Utilizing Butler's framework of gender performativity, we have sought to understand how the onstage identity is constructed and used to challenge traditional gender and sexuality normativity.

Rammstein's early influences in the German Democratic Republic led the members to create an idealized view of the West and the United States. Because of shock rock bands like KISS and Alice Cooper, the band's first shows in the United States take on these performative acts to create a unique show experience with Lindemann walking on stage with his arms engulfed in flames. Eventually, as the band gains prominence, they begin to understand that America is just a law filled with red tape and regulations stifling their shows to the point where some shows become a disappointment for their enamored fans, who have to expect outrageous antics. After Flake and Lindemann's arrest, they learned the hard way "that America is not so free" and that they "thought you could do what you wanted here."²³ In the land of the free and the home of the brave, Rammstein became the antithesis of law and order, creating a unique show setting the stage for future bands to continue to push these boundaries.

²³ "Hannes Rossacher."

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