

***Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches.* Florian Heesch and Niall Scott (Eds).** Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series, Routledge. 282 pp., ISBN: 9781472424792, h/bk: £110.

Gender, Metal, and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music. Rosemary Lucy Hill. Pop Music, Culture, and Identity: Palgrave Macmillan. 184 pp., ISBN: 979-1-137-55440-6, h/bk: £52.99.

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Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality, was published by Routledge in 2016. The second work also debuted in 2016, and is entitled *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music*. This piece will review both works individually, before relating them to each other, as well as comparing and contrasting their contributions to the field.

Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality is a collection of interdisciplinary essays that tackle issues of gender and sexuality in heavy metal music and heavy metal music culture. In this volume, scholars from various backgrounds and disciplines discuss and debate the state of queerness, identity, masculinity, femininity in heavy metal music, a music scene and subculture that can (mistakenly) be treated as an intrinsically masculine space. On the whole, the text reveals that the world of heavy metal is not solely a masculine hegemony, instead, it is a place where gender play is inherently important (particularly when it comes to the theatricality of heavy metal) and is arguably how metal sustains its mass appeal.

The first chapter of *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality*, 'Playing with gender in the key of metal' warranted an entire article of its own. Succinctly, I found it confusing that a book on gender in heavy metal would start with one that claims that 'at least for many younger women in the middle-class West, gender is no longer as salient an issue as it had been through much of the twentieth century' (Weinstein, 2016, p. 22). I discuss this chapter in more detail elsewhere (DiGioia and Helfrich, *Metal Music Studies*, forthcoming).

The rest of the volume seems to align with the belief that gender is still very much an issue, even to young women in the middle-class West. A stand out chapter in this volume is 'Never say die!: Ozzy Osbourne as a male role model'. In this chapter, Dietmar Elflein discusses how Ozzy Osbourne is a male role model that is contrary to the disciplined and well-trained hegemonic masculinity ideal. Using video, Elflein compares and contrasts Osbourne's performance style to other British frontmen of the late 60's and early 70's, specifically Deep Purple's Ian Gillan and Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant. When likened to those artists, Osbourne's performance is not one of a confident, cool frontman- instead, when performing Sabbath's 'Paranoid', Osbourne appears not powerful, conscious of his body, and arguably asexual. When Elflein expands his viewing to Osbourne performing 'War Pigs', and again, does not find an artistic display made famous by David Lee Roth or Pete Townshend: instead, Osbourne claps out of synch with the music, and runs around like a maniac looking for others to join the party. Elflein summarizes by stating that to the audience, Ozzy Osbourne is 'one of us', while Page and Gillan are larger than life rock stars. Elflein expands on this, explaining that the clownish element of Osbourne's persona has allowed him to reject certain hegemonic elements of the white male habitus. Elflein argues that Osbourne's public persona allows male heavy metal fans the possibilities of being weak, shy, unconfident, and self-conscious of their bodies, as long as they devote themselves to something and are funny (Elflein, 2016, p. 83).

Keith Kahn-Harris provides another interesting chapter in the work, entitled ‘‘Coming Out’: Realizing the possibilities of metal’. In this chapter, Kahn-Harris discusses the ‘metal identity triad’, which consists of being white, masculine, and heterosexual. Kahn-Harris argues that these are coded signifiers of power within the heavy metal music scene, and of these three, the whiteness third of the triad is the one that is most regularly challenged. Kahn-Harris uses the coming out of Rob Halford as a case study, claiming that his maleness and whiteness anchored him in the two thirds of the metal triad, and that he had proved himself as metal first and then came out after his reputation was irreproachable. Kahn-Harris concludes his chapter by stating that the universalist essentialism of metal provides the tools for its own subversion, and metal’s white, masculine heteronormativity is a gateway to its own undoing (Kahn-Harris, 2016, p. 121).

Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone’s chapter, entitled ‘Metal, masculinity and the queer subject’, has an auto-ethnographic element to it, which I appreciated. Clifford-Napoleone opens the chapter by saying she isn’t sure when she ‘became’ a metalhead, just as she is not sure when she ‘became’ a lesbian, stating that they were always a part of her life and that she had ‘never experienced any incongruity between those two parts’ of her identity’ (Clifford-Napoleone, 2016, p. 39). Clifford-Napoleone describes her feelings of being shocked when her future wife expressed that she was nervous and borderline fearful when attending a Ministry club show with her, which caused Clifford-Napoleone to explore why she was certain that she and her partner were safe among the fans that outsiders consider dangerous and homophobic, and how she came to identify heavy metal with queerness (Clifford-Napoleone, 2016, p. 39). This chapter is the first in a long phase project undertaken by Clifford-Napoleone to ‘queer heavy metal’, and I look forward to her results and her further work, as I agree with her statement: ‘...heavy metal is not, and has never been, all about the straight boys’ (Clifford-Napoleone, 2016, p. 49).

Other chapters of note in the volume include Niall Scott’s ‘The monstrous male and myths of masculinity in heavy metal’, in which Scott embraces the identity of masculinity in heavy metal culture as monstrous, while rebuffing an outdated perspective that may look at heavy metal culture and argue that it is a prime example of masculinity in crisis (Scott, 2016, p. 121), and Andy R. Brown’s ‘‘Girls like metal, too!’: Female reader’s engagement with the masculinist culture of the tabloid metal magazine’. Brown’s work focuses on how although the editorial framing of female musicians as glamour shots similar to lad’s mags, as well as the accompanying questions to titillate male readers undermines the idea that female musicians are treated equally, and, in some cases, also provides a forum of sorts for the discussion of gender conflict and reflection on their experiences of female musicians in a male dominated genre (Brown, 2016, p. 179). There are also several interesting contributions about metal globally, including ‘Heavy, death and doom metal in Brazil: A study on the creation and maintenance of stylistic boundaries within heavy metal bands’ by Hugo Ribeiro, as well as ‘Brutal masculinity in Osaka’s extreme metal scene’ by Rosemary Overell.

Several chapters appeared to have gender hurriedly rushed in as an afterthought, such as ‘Living history: the guitar virtuosos and composer Steve Vai’ by Michael Custodis, and ‘Placing gender: Alice Cooper’s motor city move’ by Sarah Gerk. Both of these works seemed to focus on primarily the virtuosity aspect of metal, as well as the localized identity of metal, with a few sentences inserted here and there to fit the gendered nature of the volume. Although these chapters are not on gender specifically, they both contribute to metal music studies successfully when discussing either virtuosity or localized identities.

In comparison, *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music*, by Rosemary Lucy Hill, solely focuses on gender, is an examination of the dichotomy many female fans face between being a woman and being a fan of heavy metal or rock music. The media portrayal of women being groupies (and therefore ‘unauthentic fans’) and the prominent assumption that heavy metal music is masculine contributes to that dichotomy, and makes being a music fan intrinsically shaped by gender. In *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music*, Rosemary Lucy Hill broaches the subjects of masculinity, sexism, groupies, and male dominance in heavy metal music, by interviewing women fans in the United Kingdom.

Rosemary Lucy Hill challenges assumptions of heavy metal music as being ‘inherently masculine’ by deeming that the music is not masculine within itself- instead, it is ascribed as being so by the media, as well as patriarchal cultural factors. Hill also asserts that musical pleasure is more erudite and complex than the simple enjoyments of aggression, violence, and virtuosity (Hill, 2016, p. 167). The book consists of Hill interviewing women fans in the United Kingdom, and interpreting those findings.

Hill lays extensive groundwork in the introductory chapter of her book, indicating that she clearly knows the subject and the existing literature on gender, women, and heavy metal. Hill acknowledges that the term ‘gender’ is never truly neutral, as ‘gender’ is often used on questionnaires to divide the respondents, and to group them distinctly (Hill, 2016, p. 7). Hill draws on Delphy explains that in her book, ‘gender’ refers to the socially constructed distinction between the groups ‘women’ and ‘men’, and focuses on gender as a concept, and the idea of the divide itself (Hill, 2016, p. 7). Hill also delineates the genres of hard rock and metal music in the book by emphasizing bands who feature in *Kerrang!* magazine (Hill, 2016, p. 11), which is an unorthodox, but arguably very effective, way to wade through the classification of bands as metal or not. How women adapt their affection of bands dependent on the groups of friends they were around was another finding of Hill’s that piques the interest, Aime, on respondent, described how she minimized her affection for My Chemical Romance when in the company of newer friends who liked Avenged Sevenfold, a ‘heavier band’ (Hill, 2016, p. 12).

Hill’s second chapter focuses on hard rock and metal as an imaginary community, and focuses on how much of the earlier academic work and research in the field of metal music studies has been focused upon a model of male fans, and has been emphasized on fan behavior in public spaces, such as concerts, festivals, clubs, and gigs (Hill, 2016, p. 40). Hill argues that the research in metal music studies ignores the fact that the majority of the most crucial of music fans’ behaviors- listening to the music- occurs in private- whether it be in home, with headphones, or in the car, and building on McRobbie and Garber’s argument, therefore disregards other kinds of fannish activities that center around the home (Hill, 2016, p. 40). Essentially, in her book, Hill uses the concept of the imaginary community to understand women’s symbolic ‘place’ within hard rock and metal.

The third chapter focuses on the media and the imaginary community of heavy metal music; Hill opens the chapter with acknowledging how rock fits into a tradition of freeing men from the societal constraints of caring and responsibility, while not straightforwardly offering women the same independence (Hill, 2016, p. 47). Hill uses this chapter to explore the gendered nature of heavy metal music reviews (where masculinity is an asset) as well as women’s reading (and participation, via the letters pages) of metal music magazines, such as *Kerrang!*. Hill’s conclusions in the chapter are that women are always outside and need to

fight for their place in metal, while men are making hard rock and metal for each other 'almost as if it is the natural order of things' (Hill, 2016, p. 77). The line in the chapter that sears into the reader's memory is this: 'In this way, the male experience of hard rock and metal is assumed by *Kerrang!* to be the normal experience; women are there to enhance the male experience, not to share in it' (Hill, 2016, p. 77).

'Women Fans and the Myth of the Groupie' tackles a powerful form of sexism in an incredibly persuasive myth: the metal/hard rock group. Hill describes this myth as being 'a gendered division that serves to ensure that the high-status role of musician is reserved for men and provides those men with women to bolster their egos and cater for their heterosexual desires (Hill, 2016, p. 83). Hill tackles the sexism of this myth, as well as the inherent heteronormativity and slut shaming behind it. Hill concludes the chapter by saying the groupie myth is a detriment to free expression of music fandom for women, because sometimes women are attracted to musicians (which does not correlate to wanting to be intimate with them). Additionally, Hill points out that because women are disaffected within heavy metal music scenes, the group myth is seemingly embedded within the scene, and 'avoiding the denigration of groupies is vital to preserve their reputations and self-esteem' (Hill, 2016, p. 102). Have we, as a society, and in an allegedly 'rebellious' subgenre such as heavy metal music, moved beyond Mary Wollstonecraft's belief that women are perceived to be nothing but silver rattles, to entertain men? Based on Hill's analysis, perhaps not.

Hill's recommendations for the metal music scene at the end of the book include (but are not limited to) metal moving away from its reification of masculinity and link with authenticity, accepting masculinity as performance, the acceptance of female musicians, increased inclusivity, and representation of women fans focusing less on their relationship with men (Hill, 2016, p. 168). All of these recommendations are valid: as Hill points out earlier in the book, while metal is allegedly a rebellious sub-genre, the metal music scene certainly does not consistently rebel against gender norms: now is the time for artists to heed Hill's call, and to do so.

Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality and *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music* have stark similarities and differences. Hill and the authors of chapters within *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* often cite the same sources, or are the sources themselves. Hill and many of the authors draw from the same existing academic material found within heavy metal music studies. While *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* contains chapters within it that will certainly pique the reader's interest, some of the essays included range from the downright perplexing (in the case of Weinstein's chapter) to the evidently hurried attempt to add gender to a chapter in order for it to be included to the volume. However, this is common in all volumes: some chapters are stronger, whereas others are weaker. Weaker chapters aside, *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* required reading for metal music studies scholars, and sections can potentially be read by those outside of academia as well. In comparison, Hill's work is solely on gender in heavy metal- whether it be how the scene, the fans, or the media construct gender. One instance where within *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* and *Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music* overlap is the use of *Kerrang!* in the context of analysis. Both Hill and Brown discuss the gendered aspect of *Kerrang!*, and have similar, though different, findings. While Andy Brown claims that the use of female musicians (particularly lead singers) on the front cover of *Kerrang!* are band signifiers, with the accompanying text on the magazine cover more often than not being conducive to some type of controversy (Brown, 2016, p.

169), while also mentioning that in his sample size, female letter writers to *Kerrang!* are the overwhelming majority. Hill goes more in depth within her analysis of the letters section of *Kerrang!* in her work, stating that the dominant message of *Kerrang!*'s letters pages is of an imaginary community in which women are designated as 'heterosexual bandmates rather than taken seriously as fans' (Hill, 2016, p. 75). Hill ends her discussion of *Kerrang!*'s letters section by stating that although it could be argued that the presence of women on *Kerrang!*'s letters pages is indicative of a greater presence of women in metal, the photographs and the single-gendered portrayal of musicians undermine this reading as women's roles are so limited, with no change in the agenda (Hill, 2016, p. 77).

While *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* contains the occasional questionable contribution to gender studies in heavy metal music, Hill's work is a metaphorical tsunami in the new wave of feminist metal studies. Hill's contribution to the field is significant here, as she challenges the orthodoxy surrounding metal as being deemed 'masculine', and encourages that definition to be re-defined, as the music itself is not masculine, but is gendered as such by the media and patriarchal culture (at least in the West). Rosemary Lucy Hill's work can provide a good foundation to building new theories and contributions on gender and heavy metal music, and should not be overlooked.

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