

Review

Pauwke Berkers and Julian Schaap. 2018. *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production*. London: Emerald Books. ISBN 978-1-78714-675-4 (pbk). 176 pp.

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Pauwke Berkers' and Julian Schaap's monograph *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production* is, in many ways, a response to a question that has been asked in Metal Music Studies since the field's inception—why are women routinely underrepresented in the spaces, practices and cultures of heavy metal music? This is a question that has underscored the earliest work in scholarly studies of metal. Deena Weinstein's foundational work from 1991 argues that metal is more than just demographically male-dominated; it is culturally masculinist, in that heavy metal subculture 'highly esteems masculinity' (2000 [1991]: 104). Robert Walser tried to negotiate this masculinism in *Running with the Devil* in 1993, where crucially he argues that metal is, as much as anything else, a performative arena of gendered behaviour—but nonetheless ultimately reinforces a notion that women are secondary participants in metal, only becoming a more pronounced presence with romantic themes and frontmen following metal's commercial popularity in the 1980s (1993: 13). Women's engagement with metal and the seemingly 'default' masculinism of the scene has thus represented troubled terrain for Metal Music Studies for several decades.

An immediate, and too easy, criticism which could be made of *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production* is that this is a book on gender representation—specifically that of women—which is written by two male academics. This is a factor that needs to be acknowledged; nonetheless my feeling is that this is too facile a tack to follow. Moreover, I would assert that much of the past and contemporary research which seeks to understand the root causes of gendered marginalization in metal has fallen to women within Metal Music Studies, configuring the task of addressing and remediating inequality as distinctly feminine labour, rather than a collaborative effort which acknowledges how privilege within both metal scenes and the academy can tacitly and explicitly manifest in lived experience and scholarly research. Excellent work has been done in this area, and beyond Weinstein's

and Walser's foundational texts, women's marginalization has been further dealt with by numerous scholars in varying ways. Recent work by Gabby Riches (2015) and Rosemary Hill (2016) has asserted the need to move away from masculinist essentialism in discussions of metal, and to consider the myriad ways in which women experience and articulate their own positionality within metal scenes, cultures and practices. However, much scholarly work continues to reify a cause-and-effect model which asserts that women are under-represented in metal because metal is simply male-dominated and masculinist, rather than further engaging with the structural causes of such hegemonic masculinity and its materializations in heavy metal.

In response to this longer legacy of metal and masculinism, *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production* offers a sociological scaffolding which positions practices of gender (learning gender, doing gender, and evaluating gender, within three interwoven matrices), society at large, gender representation in pop music, and metal music. The result of this, for Berkers and Schaap, is the development of a framework which sees metallic experiences of gender as never isolated just to particular metal scenes or cultures, but rather situated within the flows and relationships between 'doing' gender within wider social contexts, and how this can inform the evaluations of gender which emerge in metal scenes. In the book, this framework intersects with four key dimensions: longitudinal trends and cross-national differences, subgenres within metal, roles in instrumentation, and degrees of recognition.

This first point, on how cross-national differences construct metallic experiences of gender, is a significant step in undoing much of the homogenizing work which substitutes Western experiences of metal and gender for *all* experiences of metal and gender. Berkers and Schaap nonetheless find in their data that there is no country where female metal musicians outnumber men, and that women represent more than 10 per cent of metal musicians in only ten countries. Of particular interest for the regional implications for *Perfect Beat* is how low the percentage of female metal musicians is in Oceania—women represent only 2 per cent of musicians in this geographic region. The emphasis on cross-national differences thus leads to the acknowledgement that whilst masculinity and femininity do not mean the same things, in all times, in all places—and indeed sometimes the binary itself is insufficient to capture the diversity of lived experiences of gender—patriarchy is one of, if not the, primary frameworks through which metal continues to be experienced and understood.

Berkers and Schaap, in the final chapter, point to how the severe underrepresentation of women as metal musicians in turn produces what they refer to as 'a double-edged sword', where women are simultaneously marginalized, yet also hypervisibilized. As the authors contend, such hypervisibility often unfolds in

problematic, tokenistic and objectifying ways—from *Revolver's* 'Hottest Chicks' special, to an anecdote about Girlschool being turned down for a festival booking because the line-up already had a 'girl band'. Berkers and Schaap nonetheless give much space to the agentic ways in which women have pushed back against the notion that 'gender is a genre': for example, articulating how women have challenged the lexicon of 'female-fronted metal' by responding with the terminology of 'male-backed metal' in its place, reconfiguring the normative gendered dimensions of metal's structuring discourses.

The numbers are stark, and quite overwhelming, in *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production*—the book's main finding is that, on average, women make up only 3 per cent of the total global metal music production. Berkers and Schaap identify this figure through a robust methodological approach which spans online and offline contexts, quantitative and qualitative data, and engagement across multiple geographic regions. What is most significant, moreover, is the unpacking of the structural and nuanced issues which contribute to this incredibly low figure. As Berkers and Schaap point out themselves, there is much more room to develop in future a critical—and indeed crucial—discussion of gender inequality which also takes into further account the intersections of race, ethnicity and sexuality which are interwoven with the lived experiences of metal musicians, producers and fans. Research addressing gender inequality beyond metal musicians ('Production', in the title of the book, largely refers to those who produce metal in their capacity as performers), which can examine the gendered dimensions of the sound engineers, crews, management, labels and studios that provide the infrastructural conditions for metal, is also a critically under-researched area. *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production*, by placing a clear number on the extent of the underrepresentation of women in metal, is nonetheless an important social and cultural contribution to the field, and one that precipitates the necessary intersectionalist interventions which are still to be made in Metal Music Studies as a field.

References

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