

Articles

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'I'm sorry, but it's true, you're bringin' on the heartache'

'I'm sorry, but it's true, you're bringin' on the heartache':

The antiquated methodology of Deena Weinstein

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The story of gendered issues in metal is a hot topic of analysis, and is often brought up when discussing heavy metal and its culture. The treatment and representation of women still remains a popular topic in metal studies, especially with the increased visibility and participation of women in academia. It is our opinion that the study of gender in metal remains an important topic, and continued study should be encouraged. It is for those reasons we would like to address the antiquated methodology and opinions of Deena

Weinstein in regard to gender in this article, in lieu of politely, and quietly, ignoring them. We believe that some of her claims are harmful to the current direction the metal music studies field is taking, and as feminist academic scholars, we implore the field to hold Weinstein to the same standards as any other academic. This article focuses on the problematic aspects of Weinstein discussing gender.

In 'Playing with gender in the key of metal', which is the first chapter of *Heavy Metal, Gender, and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, Weinstein's troublesome interpretation of gender is at the forefront of a volume, which, by any indication of the last sentence in her chapter, Weinstein deems as being unnecessary. Numerous aspects of analysis in this chapter are extremely dated. When describing how culture does not occur in a social vacuum, Weinstein writes:

Metal musicians, like all musicians, are embedded in a web of social relations that includes them, their fans and institutional mediators such as record labels, radio stations, TV programs and concert promoters, among the multitude of actors. Indeed, it is not possible to imagine any cultural form existing without a network of social interaction that sustains and embodies it.

(Weinstein 2016: 11)

What Weinstein fails to mention is the rise of official social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) which allow bands to engage directly with their fans, and on occasion, move towards collective action via textuality, which is very common in feminist spaces and the feminist movement. One excellent example of a cultural shift from hyper-masculine male to aware feminist occurred in March of 2016, when Baroness, an American heavy metal band from Savannah, Georgia, showed support for a female fan, Rosie, who reported being sexually harassed at one of their shows. Baroness linked to

Rosie's concert review, which described the assault, and denounced the assault as well as the 'gender-disparity' in heavy metal publically on Facebook, saying:

FACT: we have no tolerance for sexism, or any form of intolerant/insensitive behavior. In Baroness' real, functioning touring-world, we are witness to daily proof-by-example that gender exerts no weight on the scales of capability, strength or intelligence. Additionally, we are extremely sensitive to the gender-disparity that can exist, especially within the world of rock/metal music; and we are embarrassed and disturbed that Rosie (or anyone, for that matter) could have had such a terrible experience at one of our shows. (PLEASE NOTE: it is not any more or less important that this abuse occurred at a Baroness show, or even at a show at all.) IT SIMPLY SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.... We do not condone and we do not tolerate any form of sexual aggression or intolerance, nor will we ever. The man detailed in this article, whoever you are, if you read this post, stay the fuck away from Baroness and our audience. We don't need you at our show, we don't want you in our audience. – Baroness.

(DiVita 2016: n.pag.)

This move towards collective action through textuality (manufactured in the social media, as well as in the commentariat of the posts) is perhaps one of the most apparent aspects of feminist e-spaces (Daniels 2009: 129). Baronesses' denouncing of the sexual assault on a public Facebook post, as well as opening up to further conversations on heavy metal and gender, manifested as a 'collective organized for social change' (Daniels 2009: 129).

There are other numerous examples on both the negative and positive side of the spectrum regarding bands using social media, such as when GWAR fired their lone female member over Facebook (Cox 2015: n.pag.), or when Myrkur denounced the harassment she was receiving on social media on various social media platforms (Pasbani 2016: n.pag.).

The gendered harassment of Myrkur (particularly the rape threats hurled at her) via social media is another example of misogyny in the heavy metal music subculture, as well as gendered online harassment. Online communities and social media have enabled new forms of virulent sexism, ranging from gender-based insults, vicious language, to credible threats (Mantilla 2013: 564). Internet trolls can harass subjects for years, and are often drawn to women that vocally oppose misogyny (Mantilla 2013: 565). Many scholars believe that the underlying motive of Internet trolls that attack women or vocal feminists is to keep the online milieu as a male-dominated space (Mantilla 2013: 565).

By failing to mention social media at all, Weinstein missed a prime opportunity to support her thesis about culture not occurring in a social vacuum, as well as to expand on how metal artists ‘play with gender’ in the heavy metal music scene, as some choose to abandon hyper-masculine traits, and instead, embrace feminist values. The fact that female heavy metal artists are targeted by misogynists via social media was completely disregarded as well.

Weinstein’s analysis of women fronting power-metal bands (describing them as ‘icons for the female gaze’ (Weinstein 2016: 20) also presents several substantial fallacies:

The international success of Finland’s Nightwish with former singer Tarja Turunen gave momentum to such mixed-gender metal. With strong and unusually classically trained soprano or mezzo soprano voices, these attractive, elegantly attired women were far removed from any prior metal tradition. The popularity of women fronting metal bands has extended to the annual festival Metal Female Voices Fest held in Belgium annually.

(Weinstein 2016: 21)

While Weinstein aptly describes other women being gleefully excited at the site of other women 'owning it' onstage, via a direct quote from Christine Cargo, vocalist for band Level-C (Weinstein 2016: 21), Weinstein neglects to analyse the fact that conversations in relation to female fronted bands, such as Nightwish, are still often about the writers (like Nightwish's Tuomas Holopainen). Weinstein even disregards the revolving door of female singers that Nightwish employs, who seem to be kicked out of the band with little to no warning, and who own no rights to the music that they sing. The women singing in Nightwish are not band members; at best, arguably, they are guest artists.

Women who create, and participate in metal, are overwhelmingly pushed to positions of being vocalists, as that has always been the position of women in rock and roll (Helfrich 2017: n.pag.). As of late, a few more instrumentalists have arrived in heavy metal (like Netta Skog, an accordion player who has shared the stage with Ensiferum and Children of Bodom, or Liz Buckingham, guitar player in Electric Wizard), but their numbers remain low. This idea of women being pushed into traditional positions of vocalist, or instruments such as keyboards, highlights the need to discuss gendered socialization, which is an opportunity Weinstein failed to seize. Women as instrumentalists is an important topic in feminist scholarship, as well as more broadly in rock scholarship, demonstrated by scholars such as Bayton (1997), Vasan (2010), Coates (1997) and Hill (2016). Gendered socialization in music manifests itself in the encouragement of men towards highly technical skill, and women towards more feminine activities (Bayton 1997: 45). Whether or not the electric guitar should be considered inherently masculine is arguable, but it is obvious in the number of active women as

guitarists in metal bands that there is something to this idea of women not being encouraged to take up instruments, which are not considered feminine.

The final page of the book chapter contains Weinstein's most harmful statements.

Weinstein writes:

With the explosion of women on the metal scene, anything goes for women's self-representation, from the angelic to the demonically aggressive.

(Weinstein 2016: 22)

Sonia Vasan's excellent work counters the belief that 'anything goes for women's self-representation'. Vasan's Ph.D. dissertation focused on women's participation in death metal. Her participant observations highlight the tight rope that women must walk in their expression to be taken seriously, even as fans. The highly gendered nature of the scene is even perpetuated by women, with one female noting:

"By dressing up like one of the guys, I was treated like one of the guys." She expressed disdain for the suggestive attire of "band whores": "If you dress like a slut, you're gonna get treated like a slut".

(Vasan 2010: 16)

This division of female fans into *true fans* and *band whores* is a troubling indication of the way women are viewed/view themselves within local fan scenes. Instead of building each other up and encouraging each other to have an 'anything goes' attitude to self-expression, women's dress and actions as fans are instead heavily policed.

As mentioned previously, heavy metal music artist Myrkur has received thousands of rape (a gendered threat of violence) threats on all of her various social media pages (Pasbani 2016). In her article for the Houston Press, 'Metal's Problem With Women is Not Going Anywhere Soon', Kristy Love writes:

For many years, metal's message to women has been one of assignment: you can be a groupie, but not a fan or serious musician. It has failed to support women in any capacity besides as live props — objects, not subjects...And while there's nothing wrong with women in bikinis, there is something wrong if that's the only role metal will allow them to play. Keep in mind, this is 2015.

(Love 2015: n.pag.)

Love continues to mention more valid points: bands with women in them are nearly never headliners, 'women can't win' because they either too 'slutty' or '(allegedly) not sexy enough' and what coverage female musicians do get often focuses on 'sideshow, gimmicky crap' (Love 2015: n.pag.).

Neill Jameson, journalist for *Decibel* magazine, wrote an article for the website entitled 'Low Culture: Neill Jameson on Maybe Not Treating Women Like Sperm Receptacles' (Jameson 2015: n.pag.). While the title of the article is somewhat crude, it manages to highlight a concept that *should* be fairly obvious: treating women as people. Jameson goes on to argue that women face challenges at shows, such as being groped, being deemed as unauthentic fans, or shamed for their sexuality, challenges that men do not face. The importance of this particular article should be somewhat obvious: a male, a fellow fan, is also pointing out that he has noticed this behaviour and considers it unacceptable. He further supports what has been claimed all along: that metal has a gender problem. He challenges the notion that women can express themselves how they want by highlighting the double standards that exist within the scene, as well as the constant struggle that women face in the metal scene to be taken seriously (Jameson 2015: n.pag.).

Jameson explains that this is not something that only takes place in individual discussions, but it is also valid in regard to female journalists and musicians. If music journalists, fans and other academics alike recognize the obstacles in representing oneself as a woman in the heavy metal music scene, why does not Weinstein? This datum effectively counters Weinstein's words – the heavy metal scene is certainly not an 'anything goes' type of environment for the women who are attempting to represent themselves within it.

The final page of Weinstein's chapter continues to go downhill, ending with sentiments like this:

Postfeminism shows a strong cultural indication 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 ... As postfeminism replaces feminism in women's gender culture, some pressure is taken off men, who are in the process of adjusting to the new balance of power rather than feeling constrained to fight it.

(Weinstein 2016: 22)

What Weinstein says about gender, and women in heavy metal, is at the very least, troubling, and at the very worst, outright misogynistic and offensive. To claim that gender is 'no longer as salient an issue as it had been through much of the twentieth century' is quite frankly, ludicrous. As recently as October of 2016, supporters of United States Presidential Candidate Donald Trump got the hashtag #RepealTheNineteenth to trend on Twitter (Friedman 2016: n.pag.). Trump supporters utilized this hashtag in response to Nate Silver's recent findings that Donald Trump would win the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States if only men voted; the 'Nineteenth' referenced in the hashtag is the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which

gave American women the right to vote (Friedman 2016: n.pag.). US Presidential Candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton stated that the culture of sexism in the United States is so rampant. She purposefully neglected to emphasize her history of fighting for women's rights when campaigning for President in 2016. Clinton did not think that 'there would be that receptive an audience' (2017), elaborating that:

...sexism and misogyny are endemic in our society... you see it online, as women express an opinion and then are totally deluged. You see it in Silicon Valley, you see it in the media, you see it in a lot of places where women's advancement has gone very far, much further than it certainly seemed at the time when I was coming of age...

(Clinton 2017: n.pag.)^[1]

Women in Poland successfully defended their basic healthcare right to an abortion by protesting and striking, although the ruling party leader in Poland vowed that his politicians would 'return to the drawing board' in their efforts to tighten the country's anti-abortion laws (Walker 2016: n.pag.). If misogynist behaviour like this is occurring in October of 2016, how is gender 'no longer as salient an issue'?

Weinstein's assertion that the pressure is taken off of men is also troubling. By taking the pressure off of men it arguably presumes that men are not important in changing the culture, but rather it is their feelings we must protect. What this sentiment is missing is the notion that men must also hold each other accountable; taking the pressure off them is not going to lead to that. Jameson's article was meant as a call to action to *men*. It was a way of putting pressure on men to actively try and make metal a more honest place and deal with the problems that it does so clearly have. This poor treatment of women impacts men as well in that it continues to promote a hyper-masculinity that creates unattainable standards for men within the scene. Taking the pressure off of men

essentially means that we are taking the onus off of men to treat women with basic common decency and to treat them as people.

Furthermore, Weinstein can be read as saying that because women are more involved in metal, research into women in metal is no longer as necessary as it once was. The problem with this claim is two-fold: first, it represents an outdated, and essentially, white feminism. In her article, 'For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion', Jess Butler states:

Notably, most of the academic literature on postfeminism examines cultural representations featuring women who are young, hetero-sexual, middle-class, and white. Those scholars who have critically examined the racialized character of these representations conclude, almost uniformly, that postfeminism works to exclude women of color and reproduce racial inequality by reinstating (Western) whiteness as a dominant cultural norm.

(Butler 2013: 47)

The term 'postfeminism' reeks of privilege and heteronormativity. As academic feminists, we find this term to be ridiculous, as we will be 'post-feminists' in the 'post-patriarchy'.

Secondly, the assertion Weinstein essentially makes with regard to post-feminism is the claim that because women are involved, sexism must be dead. This is tantamount to claiming that because the United States has had a black President, racism is dead, which is clearly untrue (Bacon 2015: 1). Instead, what the increased visibility in women has done is similar to what Barack Obama has done as President: bring these issues to the forefront and make them more visible, which is an important step in moving forward in resolving these systematic injustices.

To continue with this argument, just because there are women involved in metal it does not follow that sexism in the scene, or society, is no longer an issue of concern. As has been pointed out above, female musicians, fans and journalists still struggle to be taken seriously as legitimate in their positions. While some have managed to be successful and widely respected (Angela Gossow, formerly Arch Enemy, Doro Pesch or Girlschool), the problem of sexism and gender inequality still persists. The success of these women is merely a crack in the façade of sexism. Women can participate in metal, and in every other aspect of life such as voting, but that does not mean that the values promoted by feminism are no longer needed.

Comparatively, the ‘myth of being “post-racial”’ (Bacon 2015: 1) is as big of a myth as being ‘post-feminist’. Much like the election of Barack Obama did not erase systemic racism in the United States, Angela Gossow fronting Arch Enemy did not eliminate misogyny in the heavy metal music scene.

The criticisms provided here are not meant to completely diminish the work of Weinstein, but rather draw attention to the antiquated nature of her methodology regarding gender analysis in the particular book chapter in question. Weinstein has created a significant oeuvre, which is important to the foundation of metal studies. As with all fields of study, there are certain works, which are important simply for the fact that they were there at the beginning and started a conversation. With this in mind, we should begin to treat Weinstein’s works in a similar manner to how many are now treating Angela McRobbie and Simon Frith’s writings on rock music and sexuality, as important, but flawed.

Metal music studies is a unique field of academia, due to the fact that at its creation, topics that had to be inserted into other fields at later dates (particularly issues of race, gender and sexuality) were a part of metal music studies at its inception. By not accepting pre-established essentialist notions of masculine coding, and outdated views of gender issues, while further investing in breaking some of those tropes with innovative research, metal studies has the opportunity to avoid gender inequality and overall lack of research on the subject. This would set metal studies apart from other more traditional fields, which have struggled to rectify the lack of representation of female scholars, as well as lack of consideration of feminist and gender studies (and popular culture studies) as serious pursuits. Deena Weinstein has provided metal studies with a solid base to continue on, while also creating an opportunity for current academics to shape the field into a modern study of all things metal.

Continued study of gender in heavy metal is necessary as the impact of patriarchy is omnipresent in the world. Deena Weinstein's problematic and antiquated methods of analysing and interpreting gender do no service to today's metal music studies field. As feminist heavy metal music academics, we request that our colleagues hold Weinstein's work on gender to the same standards that they expect of others within our field. There are many other scholars of gender in the heavy metal academic scene that are producing excellent, ground-breaking work: Laina Dawes, Rosemary Lucy Hill, Gabby Riches, Jamie E. Patterson, Jasmine Shadrack, Jenna Kummer, Oliva Lucas, Emily Harris and Charlotte Naylor-Davis are among them.² It is time to turn to them, and other scholars like them, for considerations on how gender is constructed in the heavy metal scene and subcultures. Deena Weinstein is rightly to be recognized as a founding mother of

studying heavy metal music in academia, but when it comes to academic scholarship on gender in heavy metal music, Deena Weinstein is only bringing on the heartache.

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1. It is important to note here that during the 2016 US Presidential Election, Clinton won women by twelve points overall, but lost the votes of white women overall and struggled to win women without a college education (Malone 2016: n.pag.).

2. The late Sonia Vasan also contributed greatly to the field, may her memory always be a blessing.

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