



White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities And 1980s Indie Guitar Rock (Ashgate Popular and Folk Music) (Ashgate Popular and Folk Music)

Matthew Bannister

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To what extent do indie masculinities challenge the historical construction of rock music as patriarchal? This key question is addressed by Matthew Bannister, involving an in-depth examination of indie guitar rock in the 1980s as the culturally and historically specific production of white men. Through textual analysis of musical and critical discourses, Bannister provides the first book-length study of masculinity and ethnicity within the context of indie guitar music within US, UK and New Zealand 'scenes'. Bannister argues that past theorisations of (rock) masculinities have tended to set up varieties of working-class deviance and physical machismo as 'straw men', oversimplifying masculinities as 'men behaving badly'. Such approaches disavow the ways that masculine power is articulated in culture not only through representation but also intellectual and theoretical discourse. By re-situating indie in a historical/cultural context of art rock, he shows how masculine power can be rearticulated through high, avant-garde, bohemian culture and aesthetic theory: canonism, negation (Adorno), passivity, voyeurism and camp (Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground), and primitivism and infantilism (Lester Bangs, Simon Reynolds). In a related vein, he also assesses the impact of Freud on cultural theory, arguing that reversing binary conceptions of gender by associating masculinities with an essentialised passive femininity perpetuates patriarchal dualism. Drawing on his own experience as an indie musician, Bannister surveys a range of indie artists, including The Smiths, The Jesus and Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine and The Go-Betweens; from the US, R.E.M., The Replacements, Dinosaur Jr, Husker Du, Nirvana and hardcore; and from NZ, Flying Nun acts, including The Chills, The Clean, the Verlaines, Chris Knox, Bailter Space, and The Bats, demonstrating broad continuities between these apparently disparate scenes, in terms of gender, aesthetic theory and approaches to popular musical history. The result is a book which raises some important questions about how gender is studied in popular culture and the degree to which alternative cultures can critique dominant representations of gender.

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