

Men, masculinity, music and emotions, by Sam De Boise, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, viii+243 pp., UK £65 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-137-43608-5.

By Rosemary Lucy Hill

In *Men, Masculinity, Music and Emotions*, Sam De Boise has produced a convincing critique of dualistic thinking that attaches emotions to female bodies and rationality to male bodies. Drawing on survey data with men and women and life histories of men, he argues for the need to go beyond ideas of men's 'getting in touch with their emotions' and to deconstruct what counts as emotions in order to bring down the two sex binary. This book is a useful contribution to the growing body of work on musical engagement, in which there has so far been a gap in considering men's gendered experiences and the workings of masculinity. It also makes a valuable contribution to gender studies, as it furthers arguments about the problematics of understanding emotions and rationality as separate.

De Boise begins by surveying work on masculinities and the relationship between music and emotions. He argues that typically emotions are attributed to women and non-White middle class straight men, and that colonial patriarchal power has come from asserting the superior reasoning abilities of white middle class men. When men seek to counter patriarchy by show themselves as more emotional, it reinforces the gender binary by retaining the attachment of emotions to femininity. This is De Boise's central point and his aim for the book is to show how emotions need to be reconceptualised.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of some of the major trends in thinking about emotions and sexual difference. De Boise argues that emotions are not biologically 'hardwired', as some biologists and neuroscientists have claimed, but rather they are socially learned and culturally experienced and displayed. Drawing on the work of Fine, Fausto-Sterling and others, he shows how the prejudices of scientists looking to understand sexual difference have had a significant impact on their interpretations of their data. This chapter engages with relevant feminist literature and is driven by its critique of Descartes. One thing lacking here is reference to theories of affect, but De Boise deals with this later in the book.

In chapter 2 De Boise turns his attention to men, masculinity and emotions. He considers critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) literature around how the concept of rationality has been attributed to some groups of men – white colonialists - thereby justifying their privilege. He also discusses the literature which considers men's suppression of emotions as damaging. He argues that what is missing from this debate is 'how masculinities actually shape emotions for men' (p. 68). De Boise's point is that constructions of masculinity have a role in how men talk about and experience emotions. He argues that describing men's display of emotions as marking a breakthrough in gender relations (because it shows men being 'in touch' with their emotions) retains a binary split in which emotions are still equated with femininity. This is problematic, he argues, because it neglects to understand 'how emotions have been defined through a colonial, framework' (p. 68). For De Boise, understanding how men talk about emotions is what is important.

Exploring the relationship between gender and mass-market theories of musical experience, in chapter 3 De Boise discusses the higher proportion of men as music purchasers and breaks sales down by genre. De Boise asks how music, which is supposedly so intrinsically bound up with emotion, has come to be dominated by men, who are supposedly less emotional? To answer this question he discusses some philosophical traditions (Plato and Castiglione) in thinking about music and men, particularly with regard to enjoyment of music or being emotionally moved by music. He also discusses Descartes' and other theorists' ideas about music and melancholy, noting that the debate is contradictory and complex.

De Boise then engages with ideas of absolute music and the work of Susan McClary, Lucy Green and others. He notes the relationship between formal music education and classical music and how this has shaped discourses around music and emotion. He moves forward to discuss the context of the mass market, particularly the work of Adorno, and takes into account big shifts in technological approaches to listening to music. He is careful to take acknowledge the industry and capitalist aspects of this. He draws on psychological perspective such as those of Juslin and Sloboda, critiquing them for their too individualistic approach and for not taking into account the ways in which emotions that are socially developed and in which understandings of music are socially learned.

In chapter 4, De Boise considers how the men in his study described their emotions elicited by music. He argues that men use language that connects music to physiological effects so emotions are not described as 'emotions', but as involuntary responses: 'In seeing the feeling that music evokes in this particular way, emotional responses to music can be portrayed as involuntary reactions which happen *to* the body' (p. 99). This, he maintains, is a way in which men distance themselves from being perceived as emotional because they cannot be held responsible for involuntary reactions. He moves on to state that in the questionnaire results there was very little difference in terms of gender. The most significant variance was in age: over the life course men's listening practices and emotional responses to music (specifically around aggression) changed.

In chapter 5 De Boise turns his attention to expressions of distaste. That is, how his participants described music they did not like. For many of his (white) male participants this was rap music, which they perceived as violent and aggressive and characterised by misogyny. De Boise points out that because this was the *genre* his participants disliked, their descriptions were generalised as they were actually fairly unfamiliar with the genre. They were therefore drawing on general impressions about the music and mainstream discourses about the genre rather than their own *informed* impressions. There is, De Boise argues, a racialised aspect of this discourse: perceptions of rap have been shaped by racism. Racist beliefs about black men as more emotional and more closely associated with particular kinds of the emotions - violence and aggression - have a long history and are fundamental to his participants' distaste. This section is particularly good and De Boise uses it to move forward thinking about how emotions are mobilised in ways which are dependent upon sociocultural

context. In the final section he discusses perceptions of pop music as manufactured. The majority of the men surveyed disliked pop music because they perceived to be emotionally inauthentic. De Boise argues that this denial of authenticity to feminised pop music is a way of maintaining the inequality between men and women. He argues therefore that any idea that men are approaching emotions differently or are becoming more comfortable in talking about emotions is a simplistic understanding of changes in gender relations. He says this is evidence that emotions are still being used to maintain gender inequality.

I found this chapter very compelling, with a minor caveat that the section on race is much longer than the section on gender. The result is that this important argument about the gendering of pop is somewhat rushed and leaves questions: for example why is labelling pop music emotion as inauthentic a way to deny women real emotions in order to preserve inequality, but rap is not argued to be inauthentic in order to further a project of racism; indeed rap is viewed as more emotionally authentic and this is what is used to degrade it. This contradiction leaves his argument about the denial of authenticity to emotions as a tool to maintain gender inequality in question.

In the penultimate chapter De Boise turns his attention to affect theory. He begins by discussing various theoretical positions on affect and finally concludes that ‘it is fruitless to enforce a distinction between emotions and affect because the two cannot be separated’ (p. 152). The chapter then discusses the life histories of his participants and examines how music is a learned affective relationship: we learn from our parents and friends how to be affected by music, and this changes over time. De Boise argues that using affect to think about men, music and masculinity is helpful to avoid dualistic thinking because it considers motivations as ‘neither fully conscious nor unconscious’ (p. 175). I am not entirely convinced that affect theory can do all of this and still tell us something about musical engagement. In fact this chapter did not tell me that much about musical engagement. The case studies could have been explored in more depth and more interesting things could have been said about them: quotes are treated at face value without the previous chapter’s attention to the discourses that influence why his participants say what they do.

Finally De Boise concludes by reasserting his critiques of Cartesian notions of rationality, arguing that there is no fundamental link between femininity and emotions to the exclusion of masculinity; ideals of rationality are produced in a racist and sexist context – we must think intersectionally to understand this; emotions and associated physical responses are crucial parts of rational thinking; some emotions are regarded as more emotional than others – and this retains a binary understanding of more/less emotional people; our understandings of emotions are forged in sexist/racist contexts and so raced/sexed judgements about emotions inform discussion; emotions are judged by their perceived values so that some are ‘positive’ and others ‘negative’; there are no ‘predetermined’ (p. 182) responses to music because emotions are not hardwired: emotions and musical responses are socially learned.

Overall this book makes a great contribution to work on emotions in gender and masculinities studies. In some ways it is a shame that music is treated as a case study to understand emotions better, rather than music being a central category of investigation. I would have liked to gain a better sense of the depths and complexities of music's power for his participants. For other popular music scholars, the strongest chapter is most likely to be that on distaste, which explores the racist and sexist discourses that inform our distastes. This builds on work by critical race theorists and feminists working on popular music and develops the author's argument about the influence of the social in shaping our emotions and our understanding of our emotions. Ultimately this is an enjoyable book with a strong grasp of the philosophical discussions of music and emotions alongside some perceptive analysis of data and written with an engaging feminist tone.

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