



Exploring gender inequality in the music industry

An examination of barriers and opportunities for women
in audio

Mari Nyman

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ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
Degree Programme in Media and Arts
Music Production

NYMAN, MARI

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An Examination of Barriers and Opportunities for Women in Audio

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This thesis explored the persistent issue of gender inequality within the music industry, specifically investigating the challenges faced by women in roles such as audio engineers, producers, and positions that include leading. By examining the experiences and perspectives of professionals in both studio and live sound environments, the study aimed to provide insights of barriers that hinder women's entry and advancement in these career paths.

The research methodology consisted of a combination of a self-conducted survey exploring gender dynamics and opportunities within the music industry, as well as surveys conducted by other instances on related topics. By examining existing research data this study captured a comprehensive view of the varied experiences of gender inequality. This study included analyses of historical context, the influence of working environments, obstacles to career progression, and instances of harassment. To uphold sensitivity to the subject matter, the responses gathered from the self-conducted survey were excluded.

Key findings revealed prevalent assumptions regarding strength, appearance and knowledge, alongside the presence of challenging working environments and barriers in leadership roles. The male-dominated nature of the industry, fortified by established networks, presents challenges for women seeking entry to the industry. Deep-rooted traditions, attitudes, and prejudices served as deterrents to women pursuing careers in this field. The absence of role models significantly impacts career choices. Instances of discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse were also identified within the industry.

In conclusion this study not only highlighted the challenges faced by women in various audio-related roles but also proposed considerations for fostering a more inclusive and equitable industry. Acknowledging the issues is essential, motivating us to delve deeper and find more ways to make positive changes in the industry.

Key words: gender inequality, music industry, career barriers, workplace dynamics

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1 INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality continues to be an issue within the music industry, impacting various roles such as audio engineers, producers, songwriters, stagehands, and stage managers. This thesis aims to shed light on the challenges and experiences women face, specifically focusing on the barriers that women encounter when entering and pursuing careers in these roles.

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyse the gender inequality in those roles within the music industry. By examining the experiences and perspectives of professionals working in the studio and live sound environments, this research aims to provide a wider understanding of the challenges women face in these positions. This thesis further explores the experiences of women in leadership positions, recognizing that some roles include leading or managing responsibilities.

Research methods are a combination of a self-conducted survey, existing research data and surveys with professionals working in the music industry. Answers will provide insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of gender inequality within the industry. To achieve the research objective, surveys and data is gathered from men, women, and non-binary individuals to investigate the potential similarities or differences in their experiences.

The thesis examines the influence of recent history, the influence of the nature of working environment in the music industry, barriers faced by women when entering and pursuing careers in the industry, cases of misogyny and harassment, parenthood, and work-life balance.

2 WOMEN IN AUDIO

2.1 History of women in audio in Finland

The history of popular music in Finland is often told from the perspective of men in the industry, overshadowing the stories, experiences, and achievements of women as artists and musicians. It is suggested that the primary reason for this is deep-rooted structural conceptions. Discussions in music have traditionally focused on composers and arrangers, who were mostly men for a significant period. Many works have been written both about the history of Finnish popular music and its various genres. What they have in common is that women's participation in songwriting and production remains marginal. (Käpylä & Pääkkölä 2023, 15-16.)

According to Käpylä & Pääkkölä (2023) the timeline of women in popular music in Finland reveals three distinct golden eras. First, there was jazz and schlager music of the 1950s. Second, starting from 1995, rock music made by women, which for the first time was taken seriously in the mainstream. A significant change occurred from then on, as there started to be more women playing different instruments, different genres, and on different levels from grassroots bands to mainstream. The third golden era began in 2008, and it was the time music produced and written by women became more common. The first female artist who not only performed but also produced and wrote music emerged: Chisu. Making music became more accessible as the costs of music technology, software, and equipment decreased. (Käpylä & Pääkkölä 2023, 18-19.)

The fact that the background of women's popularity or interest has required well-known men in the industry, whose name has been considered a guarantee of quality, is also an issue. (Käpylä & Pääkkölä 2023, 17).

2.2 Media's impact on gender bias in recent history

In interviews with musicians, the line of questioning has differed based on the gender of the interviewee. Interviews with women has usually revolved around topics related to their appearance, personal lives, and family matters. In contrast, interviews with men have tended to center on their music and songwriting. The most glaring example of this is probably found in the joint interview of Kikka, Irwin Goodman, and Pasi Kaunisto conducted by Yle Sabatti (1990). In this interview, Kikka constantly faced belittling comments. The interview gives the impression that Kikka was a successful artist only because of her appearance. Also, her singing abilities were belittled. Interview was hosted by Tapani Ripatti and Anu Panula and the audience consisted of members of Tampere business school union. The audience were also able to ask questions. (Yle 1990.)

In the interview, Kikka was introduced with the words "Welcome Sabrina of Finland, Finland's Samantha Fox, a woman who has everything under the shoulders". Ripatti then commented he did not want to introduce Kikka like this or bring these topics up. Kikka responded by pointing out that it is precisely what he did. The first question directed to Kaunisto inquired about his upcoming music, while Irwin was asked about his tour. (Yle 1990.)

The following question concerned the media image of Kikka and Irwin. Ripatti explained that both have created characters, Irwin portrays a figure challenging state authority, while Kikka is ready but maybe only in the thoughts of adult men. Irwin responded joking about his own appearance, mentioning that he cannot take care of certain things like Kikka can with her looks. Ripatti then inquired whether Irwin implied that Kikka lacks intelligence, which Irwin promptly denied. Kaunisto's image, on the other hand was described as a good guy. (Yle 1990.)

An audience member raised a question about whether the artists considered a specific target audience for their music. Kaunisto responded by indicating that the record label producers made such decisions. Kikka stated that her music is intended to everyone. Irwin began to explain his songwriting collaboration with writer Vexi Salmi, with whom he has worked since childhood.

Kikka was then asked about the man behind, under, or on top of her music or whether there is a woman she is doing “these things” with. Kikka clarified that she has a team, and no one is above or below her, or anywhere else for that matter; her team consists of songwriters. Irwin added that their situations are different because he co-writes with Vexi Salmi, while Kikka performs ready-made products. (Yle 1990.)

Kikka was asked a couple of times how she thinks her image lasts and there was also a question from the audience relating to her appearance, stating that Kikka would not be relevant when she is older. Ripatti also asked if Kikka had fears if her career continues in ten years and people say then “there is that slut again on stage”. These statements and questions suggest their opinion of Kikka’s success in music being only based on her looks. Ripatti continued to say that it is an issue to many if an artist is good-looking, because people think that the person is not intelligent. Kikka explained she had also started to write her own music but that is quickly put to side and not questioned further. This suggest the lack of interest and suggest Kikka was not taken seriously as a musician. (Yle 1990.)

They were all asked about the meaning and message of their songs. However, the descriptions were set differently. Irwin’s songs were described as quick reactions to political matter. Kaunisto’s songs had a theme of love for home and countryside. Kikka is described to have songs that are either in reality or subconsciously between the sheets. Kikka then explained that her songs which have theme of eroticism, is natural, and no one at that moment brings that topic up the same way in music. Nowadays the lyrics and messages of many songs relates to sex and the attitude and reactions in the interview reflects the time in the beginning of the 90s. (Yle 1990.)

Irwin is praised in the interview by Ripatti and Kaunisto, both of them stating he will be remembered as an important artist in Finnish popular music history because of the songs he writes. Irwin also highlighted that with his collaborator Vexi Salmi they always start from the scratch and belittles the scene of schlager music, that was translated to Finnish, because they are ready songs that are known to succeed.

Ripatti explained that Kikka's music, which he described as europop in a belittling way, is not taken seriously and does not meet Yle radio's demands for music. Ripatti described that Yle demands music that is politically involved, but not too involved. (Yle 1990.)

In the later part of the interview Panula defended Kikka, asking Ripatti why Kikka could not perform music that she liked and succeeded. Panula also asked Ripatti to be quiet and listen, because he constantly disrupted everyone. Ripatti answered that he was the one that can demand who should be quiet. When Ripatti ended the interview, he said they were going to speak further off the record. The interview was cut in a way that the TV audience could hear the first question which was related to Kikka's private life, whether she can have a boyfriend or not. Kikka answered affirmatively, and Ripatti asked if her boyfriend needed to make an appointment. Kikka said she did not understand the question and Panula agreed neither understanding the question. (Yle 1990.)

The interview may reflect the working environment in the music industry of that time, including considerations of who had access to the studio and who did not. It also highlights that female artists were not perceived as music creators or musicians but rather as products or performers, always with a man behind their success. This recent history still has an impact on the music industry today, even though there have been many changes for more equal and diverse environment. Hopefully the interview is an exaggerated example. Even though the interview mainly shows how female artists were treated, it may reveal how women in the music industry were sometimes underestimated and belittled. (Yle 1990.)

3 GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

3.1 Gender diversity in songwriters in Finland

Tutkimustoimisto vastakaiku Oy conducted a survey for Teosto of gender imbalance amongst songwriters in Finland. Teosto is a copyright society for composers, lyricists, arrangers, and music publishers in Finland. Teosto represents almost 40000 Finnish music creators. The statistics provided of songwriter's genders were sourced from the Teosto's customer database, which indicated women to make 21% of music creators in 2022. The survey involved 2055 respondents and interviews with 21 professionals. Tenhunen & Erola (2023) stated that within music enthusiasts and students the gender distribution is relatively even, but something appeared to change after that. Women tend to move into fields other than composition or songwriting, which are sources of royalties. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

When the respondents were asked if their gender had a negative impact, 47% of women reported facing difficulties in finding the right networks and partners to work with and advance their careers as songwriters. In contrast, only 3% of men expressed such concerns. Women have experienced discrimination in various ways including not being taken seriously, lack of respect, and being underestimated. Additionally, some respondents have faced comments on their appearances and even instances of sexual harassment. Also differences in payments have been noted. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Survey respondents were asked about the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in songwriting. The most common factors included the lack of role models and networks, feelings of isolation when entering the industry, irregular income, family responsibilities, attitudes and image of the industry, tendencies of self-criticism, male-dominated industry, prevailing attitudes, male-domination in decision-making in organisations, gender-based discrimination or harassment, music studies or the influence of teachers and a lack of knowledge in music technology. (Tenhula & Erola 2023.)

3.2 Gender diversity globally

In a 2022 study “Inclusion in the recording studio” conducted by USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative funded by Spotify, gender and race/ethnicity of artists, songwriters, and producers 1000 popular songs from 2012 to 2021 were examined through Billboard Hot 100 year-end-chart, Grammy nominees in related categories and Women in the Mix pledge. 4796 songwriters were credited across 10 years. The total balance of gender representation in songwriters was 87,3% men and 12,7% women. The number of producers were 2,8% women in total in the years 2012, 2015 and 2017-2021. (Hernandez, Smith, Pieper 2022.)

In a 2023 study “Be the change” conducted by Tunecore, Luminate and Believe, the opinions and experiences of over 1650 creators, industry professionals and executives from 109 countries were explored. The respondents consist of 34% solo artists / creators, 14% group artists / creators, 13% distribution, 13% live music, 11% independent record labels, 8% artist management and <7% other (such as marketing, branding, PR, music technology, social media, business services, major record label, publisher, etc.). (Tunecore 2023.)

3.3 Insights from female producers from Finland

In an interview conducted by Ylex (2022) five female producers and songwriters shared their insights and perspectives about the music industry. Producers were asked why and how they started to produce. The reasons were not wanting to be dependent on male producers and aspiration for greater control in the artistic process and form their creative visions into concrete outcomes. Eme’s dream was to be an artist who writes her own material, and then got a music production software Logic through a friend and started experimenting and got accepted to study music production to further develop her skills. Nelma U answered she grew up in an environment where her friends and little brother produced, and realized she would be able to do that as well. (Ylex 2022.)

Interviewees were asked to share their perspectives on whether there exist outdated ideas or misconceptions regarding to the role of a producer, that might act as a barrier for those interested in starting a career in music production. They pointed out that the image of a music producer has often been clouded by vague and somewhat mystifying conceptions. Many people tend to view a producer as a technical wizard, creating sounds by adjusting mystic knobs behind a big console. However, the interviewees saw producer primarily as a creator. Noraturi further explained that a producer is an integral part of the songwriting process, and not a separate person to take care of the technical side of things. This signifies a shift in the producer's role, and many believe that this transformation is a positive development for the music industry. (Ylex 2022.)

The participants were asked about their views on the rarity of female producers in Finland and whether there are measures that can be taken to alleviate this rarity. They responded by pointing out that girls often are not encouraged to explore technology-related interests from a young age, which can lead to not believing one's own abilities. They emphasized the importance of improving the representation of women in production and promoting technology-related education for girls and women in schools and universities. (Ylex 2022.)

They also highlighted the historical role of male domination within the music industry, which has created a perception that women have less credibility as producers and songwriters. To address this issue, they suggested that the responsibility belongs to people in charge and those who are holding producer and songwriter positions. Producers, for instance, should actively encourage women artist and songwriters in their circles to engage in production and offer assistance as needed. Additionally, they expressed a need for encouragement from record labels and management companies. The participants suggested that having more collaborations among women in the industry could serve as a powerful action to support and empower each other in overcoming barriers. (Ylex 2022.)

The final question posed to the respondents was about their perspectives on the potential impact of increased diversity in the music industry representation on overall equality. In response, the participants stated that greater diversity could help address the wage gap issue. They noted that if more women became music producers, they would receive producer salaries. This change would affect the current situation where women, often working as songwriters, would earn more. Furthermore, the respondents said that more diversity would bring more diverse stories and perspectives in music. The participants also emphasized the importance of having more role models for aspiring producers, highlighting that they themselves lacked such role models when they were starting to produce music. The presence of diverse and successful figures within the industry can inspire and guide future generations, contributing to a more inclusive and vibrant music community. (Ylex 2022.)

4 NATURE OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The industry is divided into many sectors, but this thesis focuses mainly on live production, event production, music production and songwriting. All these environments have a unique working environment, and it is important to study how this imbalance in gender representation affect and if there are differences depending on the environment. Music industry has long been associated with creativity and innovation and has a nature that is driven by passion and dedication required to succeed. It also carries the weight of stereotypes and gender biases that affect opportunities available to women. (Lanzendorfer 2017.) In the survey I conducted, I managed to get various insights and experiences of gender dynamics in the music industry.

4.1 Gender diversity and career paths in the music industry

Paths in the music industry open through various ways, via education, performing at independent gigs, self-investment in equipment and skills development, as well as volunteer work and internship at venues. Majority of the respondents in the survey I conducted work in the live field, while some work both in live and studio.

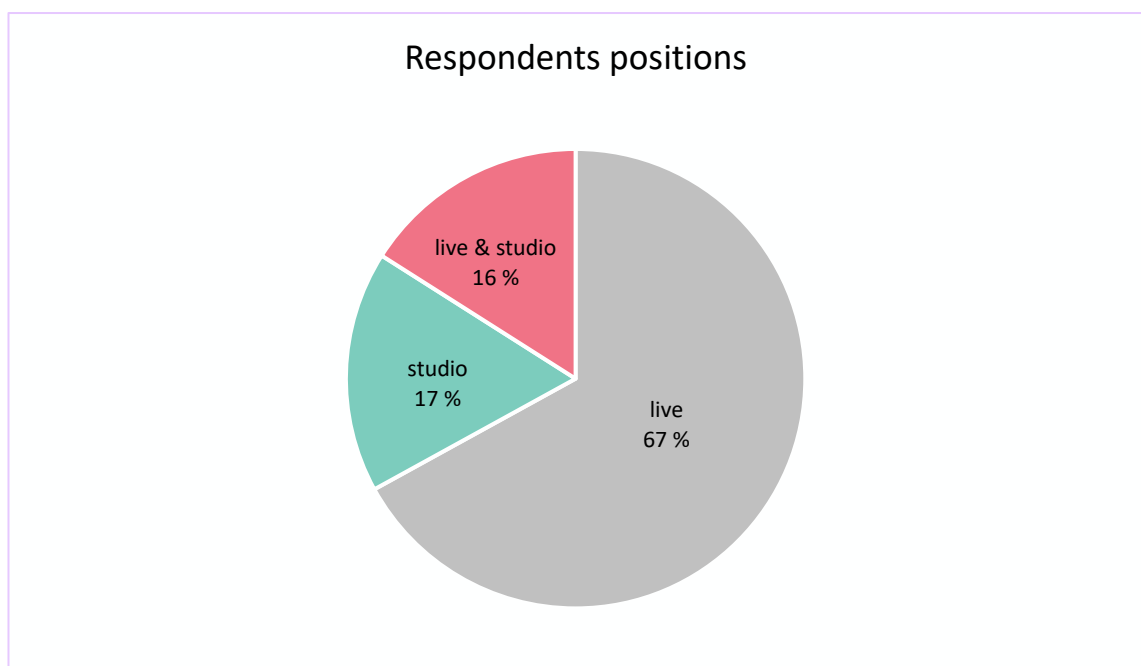


FIGURE1. Respondents' positions in the music field

Almost all of the respondents stated that the gender imbalance is significant in the industry, with their estimations suggesting that women and non-binary individuals ranging from 1% to 5% of the total workforce. (Appendix 1.)

4.2 Live sound technicians and event crews

Building shows at festivals or venues requires a lot of different professionals and each role contributes to creating memorable and seamless live experiences for audiences. Behind the scenes there are many roles such as live sound engineers, FOH and MON mixing engineers, lighting designers, rigging technicians, stage managers, stagehands, pyrotechnicians, video technicians / operators and a production manager. There are other specialists and roles in addition to these. (UK Music n.d.)

There is also a separate band crew that tours with the band from venue to venue and consists of driver, FOH and MON mixing engineers, lighting technician, video/screen technician, stage technicians and/or guitar-, bass-, drum technicians (also called backline technicians) and a tour manager. While smaller productions may not require all these roles, larger productions typically have all of them. (UK Music n.d.)

Technical crew prepares the equipment before tour aiming to make everyone's work more convenient. In the festivals the change times are usually short, load ins and outs need to be quick. Tour might have a tight schedule as well; the crew and the equipment needs to move to the next gig and location. (UK Music n.d.)

4.2.1 Gender stereotypes in strength expectations

One part of working in almost all these roles consists of lifting heavy objects. Often there are techniques available to make lifting heavy objects easier, so you do not necessarily have to be a top athlete; having a decent level of physical fitness is generally enough. (Larsson 2019.)

Kim Watson is a sound engineer who has been on the road from 2008 onwards. She has been on tour with Blondie, Emeli Sandé and the Subways among others. Watson says that in the early days, the equipment was a lot heavier, but nowadays there is a lot less of it and it is less heavy. (Larsson 2019.)

Beth O'Leary, a live sound technician and engineer, at the moment working as a monitor engineer for Kylie Minogue, says in the interview that there is no innate reason why women don't hack it in tour. It usually involves heavy lifting, but this day and age of risk assessments and manual handling training, that is becoming more manageable too. (Larsson 2019.)

In the survey I conducted, respondents noted that women are often underestimated in roles requiring physical labour, such as festival construction and setting up the gear. Some stated that some people turn to men more easily when they need help with lifting heavy objects that requires strength. Even if they are the same size as a man in the same position. In situations where physical tasks were involved, some respondents needed to prove their physical capabilities. Sometimes there is a nature in the working environment that others test someone's capabilities via humour as in phrases such as "show me how strong you are by lifting this object". (Appendix 1.)

The assumption of women not being able to perform well in physically demanding roles is a mistaken belief. In the article by Institute of entrepreneurship development it is stated that the assumption holds back many qualified women from applying for those roles. These traditional perspectives that stem from society and old-fashioned thinking in this matter has led many women to question their own abilities and potential. (Institute of entrepreneurship development 2020.)

4.2.2 Who's girlfriend are you?

The world of entertainment and events often involves a wide range of roles besides technical positions and stage management. Misconceptions about who occupies which role persists. One of the questions in the survey I conducted, respondents were asked whether others had ever mistakenly assumed they held a different role in the venue rather than the one they actually hold. Several respondents answered yes, and notably, some participants reported experiencing the assumption that they were someone's girlfriend or singer of the band on multiple occasions. (Appendix 1.)

Respondents also commonly reported being mistakenly assumed to have a different role at the venue. For example, a stage manager asked a respondent to clean a dressing room, even though they had just discussed technical matters as a role of technician. Respondents mentioned they were often assumed to be singers or production assistants, highlighting the tendency to associate certain roles with gender. While gender norms did influence these misconceptions, respondents noted that such assumptions could happen to anyone in the industry. However, women seemed to face them more frequently. Respondents expressed frustration with these misconceptions but also recognized the importance of challenging stereotypes and educating others about the diversity of roles in the industry. (Appendix 1.)

Kim Watson says in the article by The Guardian (2019) it has helped to learn how to manage a PA system on her own, without the help of a crew, because she has been assumed to be a colleague's girlfriend, or just somebody she was hanging out with. She has been pushed out of the way for a guy to jump on the desk. Previously, as a young woman she has experienced a lot of that. But even with such impressive career she has encountered situations where her professional identity was overshadowed by those assumptions. (Larsson 2019.)

Nadine Shah, one of the artists in a book *a Seat at the Table* (2019) mentioned she has on multiple occasions been asked whether she is a band member's girlfriend, even though the venue has had posters of her face all over the place. (Raphael 2019).

In the 90s there was a significant rock band called Thee Ultra Bimbos but they have been overshadowed when compared male bands of the time. The band was referred to as “the girlfriend band” in the media, stating that the women playing in the band were only there because they have been watching rehearsals of their boyfriends, all of whom played in a different band. (Käpylä & Pääkkölä 2023, 189.) These experiences shed light and highlight the challenges that women in these roles face. These assumptions may leave women feeling excluded from the team and not equal.

4.2.3 Stereotypes based on looks or appearance

When I asked individuals in the survey if they believe there are any specific stereotypes affecting opportunities available to women in the music industry and if they could share any personal experiences or instances where they encountered such stereotypes influencing their career advancement, one theme came up from the responses: the stereotype of a sound engineer as an older and reserved person. Young women in these roles may not match the expected image, leading to unexpected interactions with clients. (Appendix 1.)

Women sometimes feel pressure to adopt more masculine appearance to be taken seriously in their roles. This includes avoiding looking pretty or girly. Some respondents shared experiences from over a decade ago, such as female colleague being signed to cleaning duties during an internship while others gained working experience. Some respondents had faced sexual harassment and inappropriate comments at work. (Appendix 1.)

Tiffany Hendren states in the Atlantic (2017) article that women need to work harder than men in the industry. That statement has also been amplified with her female colleagues. Hendren works as an instructor at Sound Camp, a program designed to empower girls in mastering live music technology, and she also works as a monitoring engineer. Hendren has encountered a situation that has hindered her working opportunities: some band members’ wives did not feel comfortable with her being on the tour bus with their husbands. (Lanzendorfer 2017.)

5 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

5.1 Leadership and gender norms

Leading is a skill needed in many fields that this study relates to: working as a producer and working as a stage manager, working as a technician for instance in an occasion when working as a light technician of a band setting up gear and leading a crew of stagehands to help with setting up the equipment. On that note, it is essential to examine leadership characteristics both men and women have.

In the music industry, women face a significant leadership paradox, particularly in producer roles. The occurring stereotype is that when people vision the role of a producer, they automatically think of a male figure. The existing perception is that leadership and managerial roles are typically associated with males. (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark, Case, Villanueva 2019.)

5.2 Behavior characteristics of women in leadership roles

Gender stereotypes often influence our perceptions of leadership qualities. Certain traits commonly associated with femininity, like warmth, supportiveness, or kindness, are not usually considered as defining characteristics of successful leaders. On the contrary, qualities often associated with masculinity, such as ambition, dominance, and self-confidence, are associated with effective leadership. These associations may lead to two main consequences. Firstly, women may find it challenging to be considered for leadership roles because they are perceived as lacking these stereotypical leadership qualities. Secondly, women who do reach leadership positions may face negative consequences like discrimination or backlash if they start to absorb those masculine leadership traits. (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark, Case, Villanueva 2019.)

Women sometimes absorb masculine characteristics in leading roles. One of them is lowering voice in male-dominated fields or environments. This occurs both intentionally and unintentionally. "Because our current model of leadership prizes conformity, the quickest route to success is often shaping yourself to fit that model" (Mahdawi 2021, 18). Mahdawi has an example of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher who used a professional speech coach to intentionally lower voice by 60Hz. Adult women tend to speak in a range from 165-255Hz. Another similar case was Jessica Procini, a Philadelphia-based lifestyle coach who signed up for vocal training to make herself sound more authoritative after people were starting to question her work or credibility in comments such as "how old are you?" or "how long have you been in the business". (Johanson, 2015.)

5.3 Barriers in leadership

Lack of female leaders as role models and different styles of leadership might lead to women not wanting to aim for these positions but it also might have a negative impact on the working environment. Having worked as an event producer leading a group of people, mostly older men, has its own challenges. Occasionally, it even requires the intervention of another individual, often an older man, to explain the same instructions for tasks to move forward. Newer generations tend to be more open-minded and less likely to judge individuals based on the same characteristics. This comes from the experience of working as a stage manager leading groups of same-aged or younger stagehands. To some extent, I have found it easier to establish authority. However, men may have an advantage in this regard due to the existing model of a leader.

In the survey I conducted, several respondents noted that as team leaders, they sometimes face difficulties in gaining authority, particularly when working with older men. A recurring theme was the perceived lack of respect for female leaders. However, some stated that the challenges they encountered was more about individual attitudes towards authority, rather than gender related. (Appendix 1.)

In the survey I conducted I also asked if the respondents observed any distinctions in the leadership style or the experience of following instructions when led by a female leader in comparison to a male leader, and if there are, have those distinctions affected their work. Respondents mentioned that male leaders often get their point across with fewer repetitions. This suggests a potential difference in communication dynamics. Some noted that they perceived female leaders as more sensitive and considerate of their team members. Some indicated that female leaders create safer and more inclusive environment. Female leaders are more likely to create attentiveness and consideration, which leads to a sense of safety and trust. (Appendix 1.)

Many respondents said they evaluate leaders based on their skills, expertise, and leadership qualities rather than their gender. Male leaders were perceived by some respondents as being more straightforward or direct in their communication, which could sometimes come across as aggressive. Many emphasized that leadership style is determined by individual differences, rather than being gender related. They acknowledged that there are both effective and challenging leaders of all genders. Encouraging and diverse leadership styles and environments that value the strengths of each leader, regardless of gender, can contribute to a more inclusive and innovative music industry. (Appendix 1.)

At the core of this problem is the idea that men might be more resistant to the influence of women, compared to women resisting the influence of men. In a USC Annenberg study (2019) women were asked a question about whether their leadership or ideas had met resistance from their colleagues. 92% of women responded affirmatively. (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark, Case, Villanueva 2019.)

5.4 Traits of a good leader

As Mahdawi (2021) explains about self-doubt and impostor syndrome which might be a factor why women are less likely to apply for these positions. The traditional thinking around confidence is the more you have it, the better. Women have been told to take up space, speak up and act like men. (Mahdawi 2021, 100.)

Effective leaders have qualities such as being calm, easily approachable, good with people and providing clear instructions. Over-confidence, especially when it is ego-driven or fear-based, does not typically result in effective leadership. When it comes to making decisions, good leader listens and co-operates with others to decide and is open to feedback to improve. They have authority but do not necessarily consider themselves superior to others. They emphasize the importance of not tolerating any form of discrimination and encourage reporting such incidents to the company to take needed action.

All these qualities are also equivalent and valid in a role of a music producer. A producer Noraturi described similar traits required for producers in an Ylex (2022) interview. The characteristics include being empathetic, to have strong listening skills, the ability to collaboratively define what they are aiming for in a song, flexibility, and the ability to put one's ego aside. It is important to acknowledge that these are not tied to traditional masculine or feminine traits. Furthermore, effective leadership and success should not be tied to gender-specific behaviours or characteristics.

Robyn Ely, a business professor in Harvard has done research, where there are some cases that male-dominated environments might lead to women hindering other women's success. When there appear to be few opportunities for women, women begin to view their gender as a barrier; they avoid joining forces, and sometimes turn on one another. (Khazan, 2017.) A similarity was found in the results of USC Annenberg study (2019) where some respondents reported women being competitive with each other. (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark, Case, Villanueva 2019.)

In Khazan's article, much of the referenced research indicates that in male-dominated fields, women often emphasize that they are not like other women, but rather "one of the boys". The studies were done from different fields such as professors, lawyers, and police officers. Laurie Rudman, a social psychologist at Rutgers University has researched why women cannot get away with behaving like men do. (Khazan, 2017.) Some women considered less hireable than men even though they were acting the same way.

A similarity in answers were reported in the results of USC Annenberg study (2019) were some participants stated male-dominated industry to be one of the barriers for women entering and pursuing careers in the music industry. (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Clark, Case, Villanueva 2019.)

6 CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN AUDIO

The self-conducted survey had open-ended questions related to gender dynamics, challenges in the music industry, collaboration, working relationships, and networking. Its primary objective was to gather insights and perspectives from professionals working in Finland. Respondents held diverse occupations, including roles in live technology, producers, songwriters, and recording engineers. (Appendix 1.)

To reach a wide audience, the survey was distributed through platforms such as “Teknikoille töitä” group on Facebook, which has 3389 members and through my personal networks. When posting, I emphasized that questions are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all respondents, regardless of gender and my aim is to gather diverse responses and experiences from different perspectives. The survey was open for responses during the time 19.9.-31.10.2023. In consideration of the sensitivity of the subject, I assured respondents of anonymity to encourage honest response, which is why I could not include their answers in the appendices. (Appendix 1.)

In the survey I conducted I asked if there are any barriers that women face when entering or pursuing careers in the music industry. While some respondents noted positive changes, many outlined significant challenges that women continue to encounter. A recurring theme in the survey responses was the perception that women are not seen on the same level as men with similar backgrounds and education. Higher-ups often underestimate or undervalue their skills. Stereotypes particularly in technical roles were considered as barriers. Some believed that there is an underlying idea that men are considered more logically capable. This can lead women having to prove themselves continually. (Appendix 1.)

Many respondents recounted experiences of misogynistic language from colleagues. Established networks in the industry were mentioned as male-dominated and the presence of problematic attitudes within these networks makes it challenging for women to establish connections and access opportunities, even if the exclusion would not always be conscious. Lack of respect and inclusion occurred in a way that women are not taken seriously. (Appendix 1.)

Several participants noted that men often offer help, assuming women are not professionals or could not complete the tasks. This can undermine women's competence. Young women may suffer from impostor syndrome, fearing they are not capable of certain roles, where men end up even with lot less experience or professional skill. (Appendix 1.)

Respondents noted that women of equal skill and strength are often overlooked on gigs. People tend to seek advice from men, even when women possess more knowledge or expertise. Bias was also observed when physical tasks were involved, men were more often asked for assistance in those instances. Sexual harassment and general misogynistic attitudes were reported. Some respondents described an environment where demeaning comments were tolerated under the guise of workplace humour. (Appendix 1.)

6.1 Male-dominated industry

Music industry is perceived masculine containing deep-rooted prejudices, discrimination, and undervaluation of women. In Teosto's survey respondents highlighted issues such as men usually holding gatekeeper roles and decision-making positions. They suggested that this results in bias toward men in job applications, with men often favouring male candidates over women. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Women have faced undervaluation, with their music being described as "too cute and sensitive" or "too artistic and complicated". Many have shared an experience that their music is automatically assumed to be created by a man. Many have experienced discrimination and harassment, and some women have faced comments on their appearances and lack of respect as in they have not been taken seriously. Furthermore, many have noted that discrimination is sometimes accepted as normal behaviour, and speaking up is seen as being a difficult person. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Also, men bring up the traditions, attitudes and prejudices that prevails in the music industry, emphasizing the masculinity and culture that can discourage women and non-binary individuals from entering the field. Some men acknowledge the need for shift in industry attitudes, particularly concerning respect and visibility for women. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

The industry is considered demanding with intense competition. Many share experiences of having to continually prove themselves better to men to earn equal credibility and respect. Many recognize the tendency of self-criticism towards their own work, often resulting in setting exceptionally high standards, and the fear of failure stops many from pursuing their dreams in music. That is considered as one of the greatest barriers to succeed in a music career. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Recording Academy launched a pledge “Women in the mix” in 2019. In November 2021, 476 individuals had committed to work with a women producer or engineer on a song. The study by USC Annenberg Inclusion initiative found out that from 25 committed to the pledge, only 4 were credited for working with a female producer. The study also focused on examining the engineer(s), and only 5 of the pledge takers worked with a woman engineer on a song included in the Billboard Hot 100 year-end-chart. The findings suggests that the Women in the mix pledge might not have had a significant impact on the representation of women producers and engineers on some of the industry’s most popular songs. Although the pledge might not facilitate women’s participation in less popular tracks, it appears that women are still struggling to reach top positions in the industry as producers and engineers. (Hernandez, Smith, Pieper 2022.)

6.2 Education and upbringing

Upbringing and early childhood experiences are perceived to have a significant influence. Girls are often encouraged to be careful and safe, while boys are urged to be bold and take risks. These attitudes in upbringing continue to have a great impact still to this day, but there is a notable difference between the youngest group of respondents under the age of 35 and those over 50. Among the youngest group, a higher number of individuals reported having experienced similar upbringing patterns regardless of gender. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

All age groups emphasized the significant role of education and teachers, even from early stages of learning. Respondents point out teachers' attitudes may not be intentional or conscious. This can become evident in music classes where girls have been directed usually to sing while boys have been directed to play guitar or drums. Girls have been taught to play exactly as the score is and to avoid mistakes. This has left little room for creativity and improvisation, potentially discouraging girls from pursuing songwriting. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Many respondents perceive that girls are not encouraged in a same way than boys. Girls tend to focus on succeeding in tasks assigned by teachers, while boys want to succeed in things they personally choose. They suggest that teachers should encourage to creativity and experimentation. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

6.3 Lack of role models

Feelings of isolation when entering the industry may arise from the networks between men that had started to form in the early stages of their music career, when playing in bands. It is more unusual for girls to form bands that it is for boys. Usually, the band background creates a network that later on is beneficial for pursuing a career in music. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Networks are considered significantly important amongst all respondents. Many experience that networks consist of small circle of people and are difficult to access. Additionally, these networks are often seen as strongly centred around Helsinki. Lack of networks is a common experience of all genders. However, 77% of women consider the lack of networks as a barrier, while 57% of men share this view. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Lack of role models has affected strongly on career choices, with many not considering the possibility of turning their songwriting hobby into a profession. Lack of role models is perceived also to have an influence on why there are so few women as producers. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

The music industry often employs gender-specific prefixes, such as “girl” or “woman” when referring to musicians, music genres, artists, or producers. For example, terms like “women’s rock”, “female guitarist”, “female producer” are commonly encountered. Similar prefixes such as “man” or “boy” are not used, as many aspects of the music profession are traditionally perceived as male-dominated activities. For instance, if there is always a male drummer in a band seen in media, it creates an image, that all drummers are male. This unfairly labels and groups people together regardless of their skills or the musical genre, maintaining a perception in which women are considered a rarity in music. Also, in the 2020s, it is worth considering whether a strict binary gender classification still serves any purpose. (Käpylä & Pääkkölä 2023, 17.)

6.4 Family responsibilities and irregular income

Especially among respondents over 50 years old, women’s roles in family were emphasized. Respondents over 50 years old stated that women have a greater role in parenting responsibilities and therefore can deter from pursuing a career in music. Respondents experienced that plans to start a family needed to be considered more than in many other fields. Maternity leaves were experienced difficult when pursuing or advancing careers. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

In Tunecore survey, it was found that the parents in the music industry often needed to adjust their working styles and hours to meet their family responsibilities. Nearly one-third of parents expressed challenges in maintaining a work-life balance within the industry. An equal number of respondents reported experiencing feelings of guilt when they had to prioritise work over family or personal commitments. Also, financial issues were reported. The survey revealed that 30% of all parents, including 1-in-4 women who are parents, struggled to afford their basic living expenses. Nearly 40% of parents have added financial burden of childcare, which is necessary to continue their careers. (Tunecore 2023.)

Irregular income and the uncertain job opportunities were perceived as significant factors. Many stated that only a few can make a living purely through music, and it is necessary to work in other jobs and fields in addition. As a result, many women find themselves pursuing alternative careers or industries. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

6.5 Assumptions of lack of knowledge in music creation

Many respondents in the later stages of careers point to a lack of knowledge in music theory as a complicating factor in career development. It is also stated that songwriters need to have skills to create one's own demos and women as a producer is even more distant thought. Women have faced comments such as "wow, have you done this by yourself?". (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

Héloïse Letissier, known as Christine and the Queens, explained in a book *Seat at the table* (2019) that there were multiple occasions where people expressed disbelief that she had written and produced her songs. She explained about the meaning of role models. She knew many strong women when she was growing up, yet she felt lack of diverse representations of womanhood. Letissier compared it to being a black woman growing up and only seeing films with blonde girls all the time or growing up as a lesbian and being surrounded by heteronormative movies. People are always looking for characters they can relate to, and not finding them can make them feel isolated. (Raphael 2019, 38.)

Alison Moyet had a story where she had worked with men of lesser professional status that cannot handle the disparity. In occasion, a collaborator criticised her vibrato and deleted all her takes at the end of the session where she had gone and the next day, he said it was a shame he had wiped them, they have been good takes. That experience impacted her confidence for a while. (Raphael 2019, 84.)

Like Letissier, Moyet has experiences where she has not been recognised as a songwriter and says there has always been assumptions that a man has wrote the songs. She also recently had an interview where the first question was “how important is the producer on an Alison Moyet record?”. She things though that this is not gender-related and probably male singer-songwriters face this question as well, and explains it comes from maybe how records used to be made. (Raphael 2019, 85.)

6.6 Sexual harassment and abuse

In a Tunecore (2023) study, it was observed that industry professionals in male-dominated spaces such as music technology, engineering and social media were more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. 34% of all industry professionals and creators had either personally experienced or witnessed someone else experience sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace. Roughly half of women and non-binary individuals had experienced such incidents or witnessed them happening to others. (Tunecore 2023.)

Respondents were asked what happened after sexual harassment or abuse at workplace, respondents reported a range of experiences. 31% mentioned that their claims were ignored or dismissed, 71% was told to keep quiet about it, 13% was able to report it to an authority. Sexual harassment and abuse in the music industry is a significant problem. Industry lacks a response to this issue. Tunecore research revealed that the sexual harassment and abuse are underreported with only 13% of victims felt comfortable reporting these incidents to an authority. (Tunecore 2023.)

Alison Moyet mentioned a couple of instances of discrimination and sexual harassment she has encountered in her career. A manager of a band asked to have a meeting with her. Moyet was 18 at the time, and his proposal was a big deal. She arrived at his office and said he would rather take the meeting on a flat he had next door. He then suggested to have a session on his sunbed. Moyet declined and the manager then asked: "well, what do you want?". Moyet replied: "I want to sing" and he said: "Go away and think about it then". (Raphael 2019, 84)

6.7 Recognizing the issues

Many respondents, especially men aged 35-49 and over 50-year-olds emphasize that everyone has equal opportunities to pursue career as a music creator in Finland. The research question is considered odd. Only a few respondents of women and non-binary experienced that purely knowledge and skill determine success and that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.) According to male respondents, one reason for the underrepresentation of women among songwriters is that women are interested in other things more and may not desire to enter the field or become music creators. It is also compared to a typical female-dominated fields that do not attract as many male participants. (Tenhunen & Erola 2023.)

The music industry needs genuine gender equality and diversity at all levels of organizations. Opportunities for women and non-binary have been limited to entry-level and non-management positions, with creative and strategic roles showing the lowest gender equality. A significant percentage of people (58%) believe that not everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in the music industry. Lack of promotions and inclusion in important conversations are issues faced by women in the industry. (Tunecore 2023, 20)

7 DISCUSSION

The challenges women face in achieving career sustainability and success in the industry seems less related to their own training and skills and more about the stereotypes surrounding their abilities and the challenging environments they often face. From the survey I conducted and extensive review of interviews, articles and books detailing women's diverse experiences, similar experiences and challenges that might hinder women's career advancement and opportunities were found. These issues have a significant influence on women across different roles spanning from producers, songwriters to technical and stage management positions within the live industry.

Women often encounter doubts regarding their abilities, competence, and expertise, which leads to having to prove themselves to colleagues. Being ignored or not taken seriously represents a pervasive issue. When women's creative contributions are questioned or unrecognized, it impacts their motivation to progress in their careers.

Due to music industry long being male-dominated as well as lack of role models have a big influence on women's career progress. The working culture has formed to be more suitable for men, making it challenging for women to integrate into such environments. Even though the studio environment has evolved from its hierarchical structure in the 1990s, pursuing a career has historically demanded conformity to behaviours associated with male-dominated industries, potentially still influencing the current work atmosphere. The image of a producer is usually thought as a male figure, and women are seen as rarity in production roles. However, the role of a producer has changed, and producer is typically now seen more as an integral part of songwriting process rather than a separate person taking care of the technical side of record production. This is considered to be a positive development. (Gullichsen, 2019.)

Discrimination and harassment occur, and it is sometimes disguised as workplace humour. When a woman speaks up or report such incidents, she may be labelled as difficult, and it can even have an impact on her working opportunities.

In education and upbringing societal norms often steers boys toward technical pursuits and risk-taking behaviours, while girls are encouraged to prioritize safety and avoiding mistakes.

Women's physical capabilities are undervalued in working environments where the job entails physical strength. Persistent stereotypes linked to appearance and assumptions continue to exist, leading to instances of bias and discrimination. When a woman's creative contributions are doubted or not recognized, it can negatively affect their will to develop in their careers.

Nature of the music industry entails long and unpredictable hours as well as irregular income. Traditionally women have had greater responsibility in parenting, but nowadays these issues affect both men and women who are planning parenthood or already have family. Issues related to women leaders was also examined and found out there to be additional challenges due to leadership and managerial roles typically being associated with males.

Finding clear solutions to solve inequality in the industry is difficult. However, there are steps that can move the industry towards achieving greater equality. Recognizing the specific challenges faced by women and non-binary individuals is important. Employers can take measures to foster a culture where reporting problems is encouraged. Some companies have instituted reporting mechanisms, creating forms to report incidents and actively encourage employees to report even minor instances of discrimination and harassment. This approach sets a low threshold for reporting. Establishing safe environments is another action. G Livelab is a live music venue and has two venues in Helsinki and Tampere. G Livelab has conducted safe space rules which states the importance of addressing discrimination. (G Livelab, n.d.)

Panel discussions in music industry events where women are involved can also be beneficial. While there have been panels featuring only female speakers, having mixed-gender panels might be more beneficial. The reason behind this is that audiences attending such events are likely already interested in topics related to women in music. Having mixed panels could offer a broader perspective and engagement. (Gullichsen, 2019.)

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APPENDICES

1 (2)

Appendix 1. Gender dynamics and opportunities in the music industry survey

Gender dynamics and opportunities in the music industry SURVEY**Background info**

1. Female / Male / other
2. Age
3. Profession / Role
4. Student: yes/no
5. Education:
6. Working experience: 0-1 year 1-5 years 5-10years 10years or more
7. Could you briefly explain how did you end up in the music industry and what you do?

Gender dynamics and challenges in the music industry

8. How would you describe the gender balance within your specific role in the music industry?
9. In your experience, are there some barriers that women face when entering or pursuing their careers in the music industry? If so, please describe
10. In your opinion, does one need to make different life choices or sacrifices in order to work in the music industry?
11. Do you believe there are any specific stereotypes that affect opportunities available to women in the music industry? Could you share any personal experiences or instances where you have encountered stereotypes that you believe have directly influenced your opportunities or career advancement?
12. Does your job include leading or management responsibilities? If so, have you faced any difficulties in those roles?
13. Do you observe any distinctions in the leadership style or the experience of following instructions when led by a female leader in comparison to a male leader?
14. Have you needed to demonstrate your skills or expertise by explaining or showcasing your knowledge to others? (e.g, needing to show you are capable) If so, could you provide examples?
15. Have people ever mistakenly assumed that you occupy a different role in the venue rather than the one you actually hold?
16. Have you witnessed or experienced any instances of gender bias or discrimination within the industry? If so, could you provide examples?
17. What factors or reasons, if any, have slowed down or deterred individuals from applying to education programs in music technology / music production / live sound education?

Collaboration / working relationships

18. Do you have a preference for collaborating with professionals (e.g., producers, songwriters) of the same gender as you?

19. If you prefer to work with professionals of the same gender, what are the primary reasons for this preference?

You can write with your own words and/or use one of these: comfort and familiarity, shared experiences and perspectives, creative synergy

20. Have you had experiences where collaborating with professionals of the same gender has resulted in a more successful or enjoyable project?

21. Have you ever encountered any challenges or barriers related to your gender preference for collaboration? If so, please describe

22. How would you describe your overall relationships with colleagues in the music industry?

23. Have you noticed any differences in your relationships with colleagues based on whether they are the same gender as you or a different gender?

24. Do you think that the gender composition of a team or collaboration group can influence how you interact with your colleagues or how they interact with you?

Networking

25. In what way have you networked in your career and do you think it's important in this industry?

26. Have you noticed any differences in networking opportunities for women compared to men?

27. Have you or your company made efforts to improve women's opportunities in the workplace? Any examples?

Many thanks for replying this survey!

Feel free to give feedback: