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'Getting in' or 'moving on'? On internship experiences and representation in the popular music festival sector

Britt Swartjes [a] and Pauwke Berkers [b]

[a]ESHCC, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands; [b]Arts and Culture Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The cultural workforce has previously been described as pre-dominantly white, male and middle-class. Internships are often seen as a solution as they would function as a 'democratising path to launch careers'. Nevertheless, previous research has also suggested that there is no smooth path from an internship to paid work for anyone, and even less so for some than for others. Moving beyond previous research, which often neglects the production perspective on music festival organisation altogether or exclusively focuses on individuals 'getting into' the cultural and creative industries (CCI), we also include those who are 'moving on'. We question the (non)diverse composition of the popular music festival sector in Rotterdam, focusing on why and how people are excluded from working in it. Semi-structured interviews were collected in two phases: 1) workers who did an internship and moved into the sector ($n = 11$) and 2) former interns who left the music festival sector after their internship ($n = 13$). Findings indicate the force of the somatic norm of maleness and how related experiential differences affect sectoral demographic inequality. Moreover, internships are not an 'easy fix' for a non-diverse workforce because of how work is, experienced, organised and rewarded.

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Introduction

Most workers in the cultural and creative industries can be characterised as male, white and are mostly from upper and middle class backgrounds (Oakley and O'Brien 2016). As we will show, our findings regarding the popular music festival industry are similar. Diversity and inclusion have been put firmly on the agenda of the music festival industry. Yet, most efforts focus on diversifying audiences whereas changing the staff composition seems a more difficult, and possibly neglected, process (Berkers et al. 2018). Industry discourses and media framing often tend to focus on developments within festival line-ups (De Laat and Stuart 2023), overlooking the importance of representation backstage. Moreover, previous research on music festivals has largely bypassed the role of the festival organiser in diversity and inclusion questions (with some notable exceptions, including Laing and Mair 2015), thereby taking for granted the (non)diverse composition of the festival organisation profession and possible consequences of that composition for diversity and inclusion within festival spaces. While a lot of research has been done on work and education in CCI (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Oakley 2013), research on the music festival industry per se remains sparse. Even though data on workers in the live music industries is available, for example showing

CONTACT Britt Swartjes swartjes@eshcc.eur.nl ESHCC, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, Rotterdam 3062 PA, Netherlands

gender divisions of workers in pop music venues (VNPF 2022), similar data for the music festival industry at large remains absent. In this paper, we examine the cultural-normative structure of – and inequality within – the music festival sector as part of the live music industries, by exploring the perspectives of both those who get in as well as those who move on.

Earlier research has often tried to understand processes of in- and exclusion in varying professional fields by focusing on those who have, to some extent, gained an 'insider status' – meaning that they work in the industry in question (Bourabain 2020; Friedman 2021; Norman and Simpson 2022). Most research on inequalities for workers in the cultural sector similarly focuses on those individuals whose trajectories have led them into the sector (Siebert and Wilson 2013). We follow Puwar's (2004) reasoning and argue that to understand the music festival sector and its power structures, we need to include the perspectives of people who left the festival sector. In doing so, we consider that experiential differences of organisational cultures may have consequences for inequalities (Friedman 2021; Werner, Gadir, and De Boise 2020).

In the CCI, workers often acquire jobs through social networks, internships or voluntary work (Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015). Within industry and public policy discourse, internships are perceived to be a perfect base for 'experiential learning', providing young people with tacit knowledge that is thought to be unavailable in schools (Oakley 2013). Previous research has been done into the experiences, preferences and behaviours of interns as they transition from school to work in the cultural industries (see for example Frenette 2013; Skujina and Loots 2020). Yet, these studies do not acknowledge the experiences of those who move out of the sector after an internship. There are contrasting perceptions of the role of internships in providing equal access to a career in the CCI. On the one hand, as Frenette (2013, 391) stipulates, in everyday understandings of the role of internships in society they are often assumed to provide a 'democratising path to launch careers'. Public policy narratives echo the sentiment that the lack of diversity in the CCI 'could most effectively be tackled by experiential learning schemes' (Oakley 2013, 32). On the other hand, previous research has found that internships may reinforce existing exclusions as they are not easily accessible to all (Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015). Hence, including the experiences of those who left the sector is paramount in understanding processes of in- and exclusion.

We therefore explore who moves into the music festival sector in Rotterdam through an internship, who does not, and why. Drawing on qualitative interviews with interns in the Rotterdam-based music festival industry, the aim of the paper is two-fold. First, it provides a broader understanding of processes of inclusion and exclusion in the cultural industries by including the experiences of those who left. As we will show, including their perspective importantly adds to our knowledge about the subtlety of processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as how these may work differently for different people. In this respect, we observe three different positions with regard to staying in the sector: 1) interest, 2) ambivalence and 3) rejection. These positions are gendered: where 'interest' is a position upheld mostly by men, 'rejection' is a position rendered mostly by women. Reasons mentioned also differ between these categories: where people who were interested mainly leave because of competition and precarity, people who reject staying mainly do so because of organisational cultures. Second, as research into the festival organisation profession remains limited, we provide a sociological account of organisational cultures in the popular music festival industry. In doing so, we challenge the everyday belief in the democratising potential of internships.

Theory

Inequality and work in the CCI

Extensive research has focused on understanding why social inequalities in the CCI exist and persist (Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2021; Saha 2018), including 1) characteristics of work, to 2) somatic norms and discrimination and 3) professional characteristics and forms of capital. First, work in the cultural industries is generally described by long working hours (Brook,

O'Brien, and Taylor 2021), competition (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), flexibility and low pay (Ellmeier 2003), project-based work (Eikhof and Warhurst 2012) and precarious working conditions more generally (Bridgstock et al. 2015; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). These factors make the CCI more accessible for some than for others. Second, previous studies have pointed to the persistence of the somatic norm of maleness and hostility or outright discrimination towards people that fall outside of this norm (see Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2021). We expand on this research by exploring how the somatic norm present in the music festival industry affects what the industry looks like demographically (as also argued by Friedman 2021). Thirdly, getting a paid job in the CCI depends on economic and social capital (Skujina and Loots 2020), cultural capital (Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015), self-promotion and assertive personalities (Martin and Frenette 2017). All these factors are most often explored for workers who managed to get a paid job (Siebert and Wilson 2013). We argue that the outsider perspective is needed to broaden our understanding of work trajectories and inequality, as they are uniquely positioned to provide insights regarding what it takes to become an 'insider'.

Work trajectories and inequality

We focus on internships because the connection between internships and demographic inequalities in the CCI is highly debated. On the one hand, internships are perceived to have a democratising potential (Frenette 2013), as internships offer the opportunity to gain experience and 'can be an advantage when looking for paid work' (Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015, 600). On the other hand, as internships are often unpaid, earlier research has found that 'the opportunity to work for free was only available for those with the economic capital to do so' (Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015, 601). Moreover, most internships within the music industry are not followed by paid employment (Frenette 2013). Still, if internships and training trajectories are to have any 'democratising potential', we should understand both the perspectives of those whose trajectories led them into the sector as well as those whose trajectories did not.

But why do some people make it and others do not? Puwar (2004, 1) provides a detailed account of spaces that are dominated by a particular somatic norm and shows 'what happens when those bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so'. We build on Puwar's (2004) work by exploring the varying degrees to which people can be insiders and outsiders simultaneously. Including the perspectives of both relative insiders and outsiders to the festival industry could help us in furthering our understanding of 'the differentiated levels of inclusion that pertain in the space of institutions' (Puwar 2004, 119). Moreover, it helps us to further Puwar's (2004) work as we consider how experiential differences related to the somatic norm present within a field, may affect demographic inequalities in that field (Friedman 2021).

To understand how processes of inclusion and exclusion operate through this norm, sociologists have addressed the 'informal rules of behaviour that are rarely explicitly discussed or mentioned' (Puwar 2004, 109). Organisational cultures can be defined as 'the values norms and patterns of actions that characterise the social relationships within formal organisations' (Chan 2015). These rules are presumed to be shared by members of the organisation in question and new members must learn them to be considered part of the organisation's culture. Puwar (2004) for example described the masculine culture she observed in British parliament, which is not only there because of the vast number of men present but also because of more informal behaviour, such as social work activities (drinking, smoking cigars) and conversation topics. Many researchers followed Puwar (2004) and explored organisational cultures present in a variety of male-dominated fields, for instance including sports (Norman and Simpson 2022), civil services (Friedman 2021) and academia (Bourabain 2020). Previous research has found that 'best fit' was an important reason for employers to hire some people over others, meaning that prospective employees 'have to fit into the existing

culture of the workplace and get on well socially with team members' (Blackmore and Rahimi 2019, 439; Bourabain 2020).

Experiences of internships

These organisational cultures should be connected to how work, and in this case internships, is understood and structured. Frenette (2013, 372), in his study on internships in the music industry, describes internships as 'provisional labor', in that they are 'temporary, conditional, and ambiguous (what you make of it). Interns embody a flexible pool of labor for a host company, allowing for a range of formal and informal benefits for all parties concerned'. In essence, organisations benefit 'from an endlessly renewable source of free, educated labour' (Lee 2013, 206). These characteristics mean that interns can take on a variety of tasks depending on the intern's level of commitment, interest and ability. The intern thus has the responsibility to make as much out of the internship as they can or want to. Within industry discourses internships have been seen as an essential way to gain valuable work experience (Lee 2013; Oakley 2013). Nevertheless, as Lee (2013, 206) argues: 'we need to think critically about the nature of the "experience" being offered'.

Frenette (2013) also describes the characteristics of the intern role. First, interns usually have a low status within an organisation, performing a variety of tasks that are deemed 'simple'. The first characteristic is related to the second: perceived incompetence. This entails the assumption that most interns will be incompetent, which means that 'interns must seek to distinguish themselves as more than just the intern to potentially do higher level work' (Frenette 2013, 388). The intern is thus responsible for getting something out of the internship. Thirdly, internships are temporary in nature and are usually underpaid or even unpaid (Frenette 2013; Skujina and Loots 2020). The fact that interns usually get a limited range of tasks results both from the short-term nature of internships and their presumed incompetence. This characterisation of the intern role provides an important context to data collection and our findings, which we describe below.

Data and methods

Data collection was part of an extended qualitative study into music festival production and cultural diversity in Rotterdam. Rotterdam was selected as a case for two reasons: its profiling 1) as a festival city and 2) as a superdiverse city (Scholten, Crul, and van de Laar 2019). Festivals were selected based on several steps, ensuring a diversity of cases based on 1) pricing (paid or unpaid), 2) genres (multi or focused), 3) scale (large, medium or small, 4) maturity (number of editions) and 5) diversity goals (Cudny 2016; Paleo and Wijnberg 2006). This resulted in sixteen Rotterdam-based popular music festivals, including festivals that incorporate varying popular music genres, have a paid, unpaid or partially paid format, and range from one day festivals with 3,000 to 15,000 audience members, to multi-day festivals that attract around 150,000 visitors.

First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 festival organisers of festivals in Rotterdam on their work and organisation process before, during and after the festival (Swartjes and Berkers 2022). These interviews showed the classed, gendered and racialised nature of the festival industry. Most organisers were white, male and had completed higher education. Usually, organisers obtained their jobs through internships, voluntary work or their social network. We therefore use data from interviews with 11 festival organisers that did an internship or training trajectory and moved into the sector, as well as data from our interviews with interns that left the sector, as we will describe below. During the interview, we asked organisers questions about their background, previous jobs and internship experiences. Interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form before starting and were informed about the goal of the research project. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then coded in Atlas.ti leading us to the next step in data gathering.

In the second phase, we focused on former interns of music festivals within Rotterdam that moved out of the sector after their internship. The sampling was done in several steps. First, all previously interviewed festival organisers were contacted to provide names and contact information. Interestingly, many organisers mentioned that they did not know any people who moved out of the sector at all or entirely. However, subsequent snowball sampling suggests that there were interns who left the sector after their internship at these festivals. While organisers may not have been able to provide access to interns who left, simply because they did not know any, they may not have been willing to share contact details. Nevertheless, the first stage of sampling resulted in some interviewees, whom we also asked for new names, engaging in so-called snowball sampling. This resulted in too few new interviewees. Hence, in the second sampling stage, we shared brochures via Twitter and Linkedin and asked internship coordinators of relevant programs in Rotterdam (such as the Bachelor Arts and Culture Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Leisure and Event Management at Willem de Kooning) for names and contact information. This did not result in any new interviewees. In our third and final sampling stage, we searched for people who did an internship at a Rotterdam-based music festival on Linkedin and messaged them if they would be interested in taking part in the research. To find former interns on Linkedin, we combined search terms such as 'intern [company 1]' or 'intern [name festival 1]'. This resulted in 13 interviewees with interns who left the sector. Therefore, our analysis is based on interviews with a total of 24 participants.

In the first part of the interview with interns who left the sector, we asked some background questions, including age, race-ethnicity, gender and social class. After this, interviewees were prompted to discuss important events in their education, internship and work trajectory. This question then served as an introduction to other topics, including the choice for a festival internship, their internship experience, what it means to be a festival organiser, their decision to leave and their perception of diversity within and accessibility to the sector. Interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form before starting the interview and were informed about the goal of this research, including the focus on diversity. Even though this might lead them to answer questions in certain ways, the set-up of the interview steered interviewees away from these themes to only discuss them when relevant. Moreover, because of the sensitivity of the topic, especially for people who may have had to leave the sector because of being excluded in particular ways, we felt it was necessary to fully inform them about the research goals. Moreover, because of the sensitive topic we ensured anonymisation by using pseudonyms. Interviews with interns lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Afterwards interviews were coded in NVivo.

Almost all 24 interviewees were between 18 and 30 years old and completed higher education. For some this was not the case when starting the internship but they have almost all completed or were following higher education by the time of the interview. Almost all interviewees were white and 13 out of 24 interviewees identified as women. The gender composition of our sample is even more interesting when we think about the sample of 31 festival organisers (Swartjes and Berkers 2022) more broadly, where only 7 out of 31 organisers identified as women. Out of these 7 women 5 got their job either through an internship or a volunteering position.

Interns had taken on a variety of roles during their internships, including marketing and graphic design, (safety) production, programming and artist handling, usually getting or asking for more responsibility during their internship and being involved with the organisation for at least several months. Some interns who left took on similar roles and responsibilities, including marketing, production, video production, graphic design and programming, being involved with the organisation of the festival for several months. However, a few interns only stayed involved with the festival in and around the festival days and were mostly engaged in stage management or smaller tasks.

Findings

Somatic norm

The somatic norm within the festival organisation profession can overarchingly be described as young, male, white and middle-to upper-class. Although not many workers reflected on the diversity within their teams, some mentioned working in a 'young team'. At the same time, some interns who left mentioned not wanting to work in the industry long-term, clearly framing festival organisation as a young persons' job (as similarly argued for the popular music industry more broadly by Haynes and Nowak 2021). One of the interns for example mentioned: 'They [festival organisers] are stuck in a bit more youthful time in their lives' [Intern 12]. Where the norm related to the age of a typical festival organiser is often discussed without problematising it, the norm with regards to gender is questioned in more obvious ways. As one worker argued: 'It's of course a men's world, the festival world' [Worker 10]. Additionally, pertaining to social class, an intern added:

> everyone was kind of the same. [. . .] looks-wise [. . .] and yeah also the way in which they think. [. . .] it was sort of everyone completed HBO [Dutch higher education] [. . .] It's also difficult because the [. . .] bosses of [name organisation] would say 'yeah it doesn't matter if you did one study or if you completed university or whatever- if we think you're good then you're fine', but then one way or another a similar kind of person comes in. [Intern 13]

In terms of race-ethnicity almost all interns mentioned the industry to be pre-dominantly white. Nonetheless, one intern described the festival industry as fairly diverse in those terms, which may have been due to the particular festival she did her internship at and the homogeneity she observed in the industry she worked in at the time of the interview. Nevertheless, she mentioned:

> I think that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of gender in the festival industry. [. . .] at [name organisation] the general manager was a woman which is a big deal in itself but [. . .] as I said most organisers are men, but other than that the diversity is great. [Intern 12]

Thus, while there may be some differing perspectives with regard to race-ethnicity, most interviewees seem to at least agree that the somatic norm is young, middle- to higher class and male.

Questioning interns about their view on who the festival organiser is, they clearly described a case of vertical segregation which means that 'one sex – mostly men – occupy the best-paid and/or most prestigious professions ("male primacy")' (Berkers, Verboord, and Weij 2016 and similarly discussed by; Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2021). Not only did interns mostly focus on festival directors in their description of who the typical festival organiser is, they also described this festival organiser as mostly white and male, often referring to examples of festival directors they encountered during their internships. As one of the former interns for example argued:

> in my mind that's a man. And I'm very annoyed by that but if I keep the image of the festival organiser in my mind, generally speaking that's a man. [. . .] He's not very scrawny, a bit muscular, a bit more alternative- I hope at least otherwise it's a bit boring. He's wearing- I think he's wearing the same shoes I'm wearing. Like someone who appreciates a 'trendy sneaker', 'dressed down with a hip sneaker'. No suits, chill pants, and shirts with long sleeves with a crazy print on it you know [. . .] a beard. I think it would be a white Caucasian person. [Intern 11]

Hereafter, although with a certain amount of hesitation due to the stereotyping she was engaging in, she described how the festival director of another festival, which is focusing on the Caribbean community in the Netherlands, may actually be black. Nevertheless, one factor stays the same as she described this person as 'again a man!'. Corroborating this image of the festival organiser as male, another intern argued: 'well it's always a man [laughs]. I haven't actually met a female festival organiser ever' [Intern 12]. Nevertheless, she later mentioned the female general manager she worked with during her internship, again showing the pervasiveness of the somatic norm.

Where festival directors are often described as white men, some interns perceived diversity to be present mostly in other positions within the festival organisation team. As one intern stated: 'There's some women working there but often they're not [break] the owner' [intern 8]. Similarly, another intern argued that 'the big leadership roles are often white. And the people who are below that [. . .] that's

where I think oh! There I see diversity, but it's not the big leadership roles that I've seen' [Intern 13]. This could have consequences for the diversity within teams and the festival industry more broadly. Namely, even if festival teams themselves may have become more diverse at the lower levels, the top positions are still most often occupied by people that fit the somatic norm. This has consequences because, as several workers and interns described, the top positions in the festival industry in Rotterdam stay fairly similar over the years:

> In the cultural sector you see that the main characters are the same people for a long time. So, I think that for newcomers it's quite difficult- it costs a lot more time to get a place [Intern 3].

Consequently, the image of the festival organiser as a white man may be continuously reproduced. In the following sections we follow the trajectories of interns as they stay in or leave the sector. Who stays, who does not, and why?

On processes of in- and exclusion

Workers and interns discussed their move into or out of the sector and their internship experiences differently. Where workers discussed their trajectories as a smooth or even 'natural' process, even if their internship experiences may not have been 'easy' as they required hard work, interns often discussed the difficulties they experienced during their internship and, for a few, their attempts to move into the festival sector. Even though this may be a post-hoc rationalising narrative for workers, where they discuss their trajectories as smoother than they experienced them, the difference in how workers and interns narrated their experience is striking. Exemplifying how workers discuss their trajectories, one for example stated that 'then I did an internship here and then they asked if I wanted to stay and work here' [Worker 25]. Another recalled that 'in those two months that I did my internship there [. . .] [my work] pleased the organisation so much that they asked me to come back the next year to take on the entire production' [Worker 3]. This differs starkly with how most of the interns that moved out of the sector discussed their experiences. Here, we observed three different types of positions regarding staying: 1) interest, 2) ambivalence and 3) rejection. Our data show that only men in our sample of interns argued that they would want to move into the sector and tried to do so. The gender composition of the group that felt more ambivalent towards staying was roughly equally divided between men and women. The group that firmly rejected the notion of staying consisted of only women. These positions were thus highly gendered: since our sample is fairly homogenous based on other characteristics, such as social class and race-ethnicity, these did not seem to result in differential experiences for our sample. Below, we discuss these three groups while contrasting their experiences to those of interns that did become festival organisers.

Interest

Some interns who left noted that they had been interested in moving into the sector and applied to jobs (or even briefly worked) in the industry. They felt that their trajectory into the sector was halted by either 1) competition and/or 2) COVID-19. Factors that have been previously described to affect entry into the CCI, such as precarity and risk, as well as competition (Ellmeier 2003; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), thus similarly affect the trajectories of some interns as they move out of the sector. For example, one intern described that he never felt 'any hardship' in his trajectory, but the pandemic was 'the last straw. I've always wanted to look [. . .] further but I always thought it [festival organisation] was really fun' [Intern 2]. With regards to competition, one intern described his attempts to interview for a job at the festival he previously interned at, which remained unsuccessful:

> A week later he called me to tell me that [name, woman] got the job and I didn't. [. . .] that was a bit rough. Obviously. Because I was walking around there for such a long time- and [. . .] actually I am kind of the heir [laughs] why am I not getting this [position]? But I also really understood that yeah [name woman] just had more experience in that area- more to offer than I did- and also when I'm looking at it now she's really good- she's still in that position too [Intern 9]

In this quote, we read this intern's disappointment and surprise of not getting the job. Simultaneously, his use of the word 'heir' indicates a sense of entitlement to the position he interviewed for. To understand the gendered normative-cultural structure in the music festival industry and how it operates in extremely subtle, implicit ways, we need to first question why he felt this sense of entitlement to the position in the first place. This may have resulted from his long-term involvement in the organisation, but also because of the extent to which he felt that he 'fit in' (i.e. fulfilled the somatic norm). Throughout the interview, he often mentioned getting along well with other team members and sharing musical interests with them while at work, presenting an obvious fit with the existing organisational culture (Blackmore and Rahimi 2019). He already noticed the similarities when coming in for his internship interview: 'I went there in my band shirt and I also had two dudes in band shirts in front of me [laughs] that were a bit like me but older' [Intern 9]. While the remainder of the quote above could then on the one hand be read as merely a way to 'save face' after rejection, his use of the word 'heir' could also make us read it in a gendered way. In that sense, we should question why he felt the need to justify himself not getting the position at all, while simultaneously feeling rightful in his position to assess the woman that did get the job.

Ambivalence

A few of the interns who left presented a more ambivalent perspective. They did not firmly say 'yes' or 'no' to the festival industry and most framed their internship experience as generally positive. Some of these interns also mentioned that they felt they would 'fit' in the industry, with one intern for example stating 'the way I looked and the people I hung out with- I would maybe fit in there' [Intern 03]. Nevertheless, contrasting earlier research (Frenette 2013), we find that not all interns see an internship as a way to move into the industry. As one intern stated: 'I really like the festival world, but it was never where I wanted to end up or what I wanted to do as a job' [Intern 13]. Rather, an internship is seen as an opportunity to find out whether they like the job, or not. For some, this turns out not to be the case:

> It's a bit more loose and I just noticed that that wasn't my thing [. . .] I didn't see myself organise festivals my whole life. That pretty soon felt- I think maybe sometimes a bit repetitive. [. . .] I doubted if I would get the right gratification from that. On top of that the irregular hours I didn't like [Intern 8]

Other interns that shared the ambivalent position mentioned long hours, low pay and the general risk present in the industry when discussing their decision to leave. In the end, however, the major turning point for some of these interns seems to be in the passion they either feel or not feel for the job, as described by one intern:

> There's a lot of time and effort in that and there's a lot of people who do that with passion- but [. . .] you need to have a lot of passion to do that for years. And I wasn't convinced [I had that] [Intern 3]

Similar to findings from previous research, feeling 'passion' and drive for the job seems to provide a buffer to the precariousness present in the industry (Bridgstock et al. 2015; Guile 2006).

Rejection

About half of the interns who left scoffed, laughed and/or responded with a firm 'no' when asked if they would ever consider going back to the music festival industry. Comparing their responses to the experiences of workers, we explore two other factors that seem to contribute to some people

'making it' while others do not, including: 1) family culture and 2) expected individual characteristics. While the factors mentioned above, including for example passion and competition, may also matter to some of these interns, we highlight the above two factors as they seem to be uniquely positioned with interns that rejected the festival sector all-together. These two factors are often interrelated and seem to be affected by gender dynamics, as we will describe below.

First, related to the family culture present in the festival industry, our analysis shows that hierarchy and feelings of not belonging are affecting women more. Where workers that ended up in the sector, both women and men, describe their experience at a festival as a 'family' with a 'flat hierarchy', some interns that left paint a drastically different picture of the organisational culture. To illustrate, we will show the difference in which a worker and an intern described their internship experience at the same festival. The worker described his experience as:

> It was fun, really really fun. It's really a family, it's some kind of cult you get in and once you're in you're [.] never leaving. So that's a lot of fun, and everyone gets to be involved a lot, everyone has a say but at the same time it's a serious organisation [. . .] and everyone does it on the side, so yeah it's hard work but we have a very close team [. . .] that can work hard, be very fierce, but at the same time have a nice beer together afterwards. So yeah seldom [. . .] I've worked in such a relaxed yet effective environment [Worker 3]

Clearly, this worker had a positive experience of working in this festival team where he also felt a space to be involved, enjoy himself and work hard. One of the female interns who left drew a very different picture when discussing her experience at the same festival:

> you came into a group which was already some kind of family and you're an intern. So they know you're also leaving again. I think that that partially caused- if you're also not so confident like me that you feel a bit left out. That's something I dare to say I think ehm [. . .] the way in which I experienced it, it was a family and you're being welcomed and people are nice and such but there's less interaction with us. And maybe also because I didn't open up- that could be it. And I think that might be it [Intern 1]

Similar to Frenette's (2013) findings, she discusses her internship as a form of provisional labour that is temporary in nature, thereby affecting her sense of belonging to the festival team. At the same time, not necessarily displaying characteristics that belong to the somatic norm (i.e. confidence), meant that she did not feel part of the family. For her, these processes of exclusion also worked through taste. When asking her about meeting the festival director for the first time she said:

> I was looking up to him a little bit I think. [. . .] I remember that my clothing style really changed a lot that year [. . .] their clothing style I thought was amazing I wanted to be like that too- now I'm looking back at pictures and I think 'girl, you're so out of it' [Intern 1]

Although she did not necessarily describe her experience as bad during our conversation, she clearly described how she felt that she did not belong to this festival team, relating this to her own character traits as well as clothing style (taste).

The before-mentioned hierarchy is also reflected in who takes and gets responsibility during an internship. Many workers and interns mentioned the responsibility and pressure that comes with working during a festival: 'I think there's a lot of responsibility on everyone's shoulders' [Intern 1]. For some, this responsibility had a positive effect on their experience as an intern as well as their personal development. As one worker for example discussed when describing her first time working at a festival as an intern:

> I was very nervous- I used to be kind of- and still sometimes [. . .] a bit timid [. . .] and this is really a branche where you have to connect a lot and get to know people and- so it personally did me a lot of good [. . .] I let myself grow in that because of [name festival]. I got a lot of responsibility when I started working here [Worker 9]

While this responsibility can thus be experienced as a valuable learning experience and can offer recognition, it can also cause a lot of stress or can even be felt as a rejection when not given the same responsibility as other interns. A material expression of responsibility at festivals is the 'walkie-talkie'. When given one, one gets the power to communicate with other workers present. One intern discussed this in relation to her male friend that was also doing an internship at the same festival:

> he [my friend] all of a sudden got a walkie-talkie [. . .] and then I thought huh? Why does he get one and I don't? I had the idea that within team decoration I was working the hardest. That I thought 'hey!'. And then you also saw a bit of the culture you know in that, I think a sort of the 'friendship politics' because [. . .] if you can just chat with anyone- yeah then you're all right. And I thought that was a bit of a shame, because I thought 'oh I'm not getting a walkie talkie'. [Intern 10]

Previously describing how her male friend had gotten a role in the production team, doing the 'tough men work', she clearly accentuated the subtle ways in which gender roles can affect experiences of belonging during an internship.

Secondly, the organisational culture includes expected individual characteristics that affect who moves into the sector and who does not. As a festival organiser, one is expected to be confident, self-reliant and social. One must 'be resistant to stress. I think, you have to be kind of solution-oriented. [. . .] I think you have to be very confident in yourself. You should not be afraid to fall on your face with a party'. [Intern 8]. There is also an important social aspect to festival work. One intern for example discussed the 'goodwill factor' when discussing one of his female friends that also works in the festival sector:

> if you're easy to engage with [. . .]- and cheeky [. . .] you can do things way more quickly. She has a nice face and she can work really hard- she works very hard, not just can. [. . .] And she has a mouth on her so that's it too [Intern 2]

Not only does he refer to the social aspect of festival work here, he also refers to attractiveness as an important social divider.

But what happens if you do not possess these traits? Several interns mentioned that they experience difficulties when they describe themselves to have more 'timid' personalities. One intern for example stated: 'I'm a bit timid and that- in this world [. . .] that can't be' [Intern 6] Another one corroborated: 'you have to be a bit cheeky, yeah be able to do something unique or be named by the right people to get to the right places. Otherwise, you stay in a support role for a very long time' [Intern 3]. This means that the festival sector seems to privilege those with certain characteristics that supposedly 'fit' the job best. Interestingly, this clearly fits in the somatic norm in the festival industry, with the 'universal figure of leadership' (Puwar 2004, 9) being the authoritative, risk-taking, competitive man.

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we explored inequality in the music festival industry by studying the perspectives of both music festival interns that stayed and those who left. Our findings indicate a complex set of interrelated factors that contribute to some people making it while others do not, including many previously researched factors such as economic, social and cultural capital as well as typical characteristics of work in the music festival industry such as competition and risk (Ellmeier 2003; Randle, Forson, and Calveley 2015; Skujina and Loots 2020). At the same time, including these varying perspectives allowed us to observe the intricate processes through which inequality operates: namely, we show that inclusion works differently for different people, the same way exclusion does. Building on Puwar's (2004) work, we show the relevance of including the perspective of those who leave: both in understanding the implicit processes of in- and exclusion within these industries, as well as showing how levels of inclusion are differentiated. For instance, it seems that people who fit the somatic norm in certain ways, for example by being competitive and/or outgoing, are included into the music festival sector more easily, even if they do not fit the somatic norm in other ways.

We derive two main conclusions from this data. First, similar to other sectors in the cultural industries, the somatic norm in the music festival industry is young, male, white and middle/upper-class. Even though some deviation from this norm is possible in terms of race-ethnicity, and maybe even in terms of age and social class, the industry itself is unequivocally described as male-centred. Similar to what Orupabo (2018, 239) described for the male-dominated computing industry

'symbolic boundaries that define the "ideal worker" empower *all* categories of men and marginalize *all* categories of women'. The top positions are generally occupied by people who fulfil this norm. This is problematic as these top positions are also uniquely identified as reflecting the ideal-typical festival organiser. As these positions are relatively unchanging, the somatic norm is reproduced continuously, even if positions 'lower' in the hierarchy change.

Second, from our analysis it follows that we need to rethink what the function of internships is, especially in relation to questions of inequality. Positioning internships as having any 'democratising potential' entails a crucial misunderstanding of what the internship experience looks like, and in what normative structure these internships exist. Even if it may be relatively easier to get an internship (and more so for some than for others) than to immediately get a paid job, the internship experience, like any other work experience, can in itself be experienced as inclusionary or exclusionary. This all depends on who you ask. Feeling a fit depends on a variety of factors, such as personality traits and professional characteristics (social, outgoing, competitive etc.), which seem to be affected mostly by gender dynamics. This also means that developing a workforce that is open to people with backgrounds that do not follow the somatic norm, asks not merely for getting for example more people from lower class backgrounds, non-white racial-ethnic backgrounds, older people or women to do internships (similar to argumentation provided by Gardiner 2016; Guile 2006; Puwar 2004). Rather, it would ask for significantly altering the cultural-normative structure that exists within festival organisation entirely. Similar to what Gardiner (2016, 47) argues: 'what is required is a troubling of organisational structures [. . .] if the desired outcome is gender justice'. Similar to other industries (see Keogh and Abraham 2022 on the gaming industry), strategies for collective action are increasingly being developed. For instance, in recent years, Keychange has developed a global network of organisations within the music industry that aim to work on inequalities on different levels, including for instance altering recruitment strategies for workers and adapting language (Swartjes, Joshi, and Berkers 2023). Still, as people moving out of the sector after an internship seem to be fairly similar in background to those who stay, except for when we look at gender, one has to wonder the extent to which internships could actually have any democratising potential at all.

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Notes on contributors

Britt Swartjes is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Arts and Culture Studies at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam. Her research engages with sociological approaches to music in the city, focusing on how music festivals can be public spaces where people from diverse backgrounds meet.

Pauwke Berkers is Professor of Sociology of Popular Music in the Department of Arts and Culture Studies, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. He is an expert in the study of inequalities in arts and culture – particularly race/ethnicity and gender. He has published in leading journals in sociology and gender studies. Berkers has coordinated several national and international research projects.

ORCID

Britt Swartjes http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4693-0783
Pauwke Berkers http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8132-6007

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