

# THE PERSISTANT GLASS CEILING

## IN THE DANISH MUSIC INDUSTRY

A qualitative study on the barriers faced by female artists in the Danish music industry



## **Abstract**

Denmark has a rich, exuberant and exciting music life. However, also a musical landscape with shortcomings, as statistics of the past few years reveal that the Danish music industry is not one of gender parity. Accordingly, female artists constitute a minor percentage of the visible rosters, earn less in royalties, are played less on radio and are under-represented in the streaming charts.

The vantage point for this dissertation is to do a broad investigation of the selection practices among the most imperative gatekeepers within the Danish music industry and the associated biases that potentially influence their decision-making processes. This in order to examine if industry barriers prevent female artists from succeeding in the Danish music industry, and which possible initiatives that could change the prevailing structures and ultimately enhance the female artists' possibilities of a successful breakthrough and a sustainable career in music. The theoretical position of the dissertation is based on a toolbox compound from gatekeeping theory, decision making theory and gender bias concepts. The three branches of literature are combined with the aim to develop a theoretical model for analysis, embracing the unique field of this particular dissertation. Based on the social constructivist approach, the study's empirical data collection consists of a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews used to gain insight into the gatekeepers' selection practices as well as to female artists' experiences within the Danish music industry. The first part of the analysis presents an assessment of the music industry's most imperative gatekeepers and define the key dimensions of the relationships between them and the 'gated'. The objective here is to understand how the gates work by understanding the forces that help to determine the decisions of the gatekeepers. The second part of the analysis compare the evidence from the interviews with the female artists with the derived biases that asserted among the interviewed gatekeepers, in order to examine the impediments facing women in the music industry. Consequently, eight barriers that affect female artists' possibilities for a career in music has been identified. These findings imply that the barriers to a diverse representation stem from deep inherent understandings of norms and unconscious cognitive biases; inflexible business models; economical and commercial motives as well as Spotify's algorithms.

The discussion presents a range of actionable initiatives to change the prevailing structures and ultimately enhance the female artists' possibilities of a breakthrough and a sustainable career in music. These include three levels of concrete gender equality initiatives that will involve and impact all the addressed gatekeepers. With the proposed broad industry network effort, common targets and increased awareness it is argued that it is possible to change the present structures and unconscious biases of the industry and its executives, leading to a more vibrant and diverse music industry in the coming years.

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# 01 INTRODUCTION

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction and problem area

Gender inequality is a global challenge, addressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goal aiming at achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030 (Goals, 2019). Gender inequality in business is a hot and complex topic on the Danish media agenda, and often debated with a specific focus on the lack of women at the executive level in the companies. Focus on specific industries is less common, however, statistics from the past few years reveal that the Danish music industry is not one of gender parity either.

On Gramex' list of the ten most played Danish musicians on the radio in 2019, zero females were represented (Gramex, 2020). On Koda's list of the ten most profitable hits from 2019, one female artist's song was listed (KODA, 2019). And in 2019, only 13 percent of all royalties in the Danish music industry were paid out to female musicians (Ibid). Though the recognition of the issue begin to gain ground in the public, it is still not visible on the bottom line nor on the musical top-charts, and compared to 2015, numbers show either a deterioration or stagnation (Gramex; JazzDanmark; Dansk Musiker Forbund; Dansk Artist Forbund, Dansk Live, 2019).

During the last years there has been an increase in self-funded music careers where artists market and distribute their music independently through social media and streaming platforms at a low cost. However, the determination of a successful commercial breakthrough and a sustainable career in music still points to the important functions carried out by different intermediaries in the music industry including record labels, booking agencies, radio stations and streaming services, whose investment and promotion decisions have major impact on which artists succeed (Bain, 2019). This process, commonly referred to as 'gatekeeping' is essential for consumers and artists alike (Tonon, 2011).

However, critics raise concerns that female artists face biases in the support they receive from gatekeepers. Accordingly, a recent report examining gender equality in the U.K. music industry suggests that substantial investments by the global record industry (more than one third of their global revenues) mostly support male artists in arts, repertoire and marketing each year (Bain, 2019). Moreover, a charter by The Danish Arts Foundation highlighting the music industry's poor record on gender diversity state that "*there are indications that there may be barriers to exploiting the legislatively equal opportunities in Danish*

*music life. If you ask the actors in the music world, many of these barriers are invisible and unintentional. In music – like elsewhere – we have blind spots and make unconscious choices based on habits and biases that reproduce common stereotypes.” (Statens Kunstfond, 2017).*

Are the women in the music industry in 2020 not only facing competition and the demands of being a modern pop star, but also an (invisible and unintentional) inequality that still reverberates throughout the industry? Female artists are out there, yet they constitute a minor percentage of the visible rosters, they are earning less in royalties, are played less on radio and are under-represented in the streaming charts (Bain, 2019). This begs the questions: Why are they not signed and supported by the industry at anywhere near the same level as men? Are the female artists less capable or lacking talent? Or do they not get the same opportunities as their male colleagues? (Gibson, 2017).

Push-back on such questions often entails that truly talented individuals will prove themselves regardless of the circumstances, buying into the notion of the existence of a meritocracy which supposedly ensures the success of the most talented and hardworking people regardless of their identity (Strong & Cannizzo, 2017). However, such statements fail to take into account the systematic barriers that potentially prevent female artists from becoming involved in the music industry in the first place. Considering again the case of Danish female artists, the useful question may not be whether female artists are less capable or lacking in talent. Rather, we might ask if the Danish music industry does not recognize the value of the female artist. Are the female artists held back by gendered structures, embedded in both gatekeeper organizations and the Danish society at large? If so, their devaluation comprises a part of the puzzle behind gender inequality in the contemporary music market.

## 1.2. Research Question

The vantage point for this dissertation is to do a broad investigation of the selection practices among the most imperative gatekeepers within the Danish music industry and the associated biases that potentially influence their decision-making processes and eventually the female artists' access to the commercial music market. Accordingly, the research question is formulated as follows:

*What constitutes the industry barriers that prevent female artists from succeeding in the Danish music industry - and which possible initiatives could change the prevailing structures and ultimately enhance the female artists' possibilities of a successful breakthrough and a sustainable career in music?*

1. Which forces determine the gatekeepers' selection practices and what are the key dimensions of relationships between the multiple gatekeepers and the female artists?
2. How does cognitive biases affect the decision-making processes of the gatekeepers and possibly the female artists' chances of 'breaking through' and having a successful career in music?
3. Which industry players (or stakeholders) should initiate a change in the structures, eventually leading to an increased number of female artists – and how?

## 1.3. Delimitations

In the process of investigating and scoping the research field of this dissertation, the complexity, the many layers and possible explanations for the deficit of female artists in the music industry have continued to unfold. Accordingly, readers should note that this study does not purport to provide a definitive picture of all of the challenges facing female artists in music, neither does it aim to come forward with a clear-cut solution to close the gender gap. The realization of genuine diversity is a long process that requires real effort. There are no quick fixes. Neither is this an all-inclusive research. Accordingly, multiple opt-outs have been taken to ensure an effective and focused study taking into consideration the constraints and resources that are associated with a master's thesis.



This study concentrates around the contemporary commercial/popular music market. Commercial music is defined as music that is marketed directly to the general public by a medium. The idea of ‘pop’ is rather difficult to pin down in terms of genre, but for the current purposes, the term was applied to narrow down the area of commercial music that is aimed at a broadly mainstream, radio and chart-orientated market (Bain, 2019).

The concept of gatekeeping as applied to roles in the music industry can be used to describe the whole range of individuals between an artist and his or her potential audience (Astor, 2017). These gatekeepers include record companies, publishers, bookers, radio programmers, streaming platforms and DJ’s, journalists, media, promoters and individuals, professional or not, disseminating information online (Ibid). Notwithstanding, the four most powerful gatekeepers recognized in the contemporary commercial music market are the 1) major labels, 2) booking agencies, 3) radio programmers and 4) streaming platforms; namely the people who decide which artists to sign to the record labels, and who to book for the festivals, as well as what songs to playlist on the streaming services and in the radio (Tonon, 2011). Thus, these gatekeepers will be in focus and investigated for the purpose of this dissertation.

However, it is recognized that some of the barriers faced by female artists stem from factors prior to support decisions by gatekeepers. Female attendance and participation in musical activities can i.e. reflect stereotypical notions of what men and women can do and these starts manifesting themselves in early childhood (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Accordingly, there are indeed multiple actors besides the emphasized major gatekeepers, that influence girls and women to either take up – or give up musical activities throughout life, including parents, educational institutions, workplaces etc. Nonetheless, as established above, this study focusses solely on the four selected macro-level gatekeepers and their potential influence on the gender imbalance in the Danish music industry.

## 1.4. Case background

### The 80/20 gender distribution

A few decades ago, gender equality was not a major discussion point in the Danish music industry. However, in 2012, ‘Gender Balance in Popular Music’ a quantitative research report initiated by different Danish interest groups, shed light on the gender imbalance (Dansk Artist Forbund, Dansk Musiker Forbund, Danske sangskrivere & Komponister, & DPA., 2012). Accordingly, the report depicted Danish music life as a highly gender-divided and male-dominated field of practice comprised of approximately

80% men and 20% women. Since the 2012 report, there has not been any significant change towards a more equal music industry. In 2019, five Danish music organizations teamed up to collect fresh numbers and disclosed once again that the Danish music industry is not one of gender parity. Focus here was on the live branch, revealing that in terms of booking the share of female artists was 21-24%, illustrating a continual under-representation of female artists in the live music seven years later (Gramex; JazzDanmark; Dansk Musiker Forbund; Dansk Artist Forbund, Dansk Live, 2019). Accordingly, a study conducted by DR disclosed that almost all Danish festivals are far behind when it comes to gender equality in festival lineups. In 2019, female acts made up 7% on TinderBox, 10% on Skanderborg, 12% on North Side Festival and 27% on Roskilde Festival (DR, 2019).

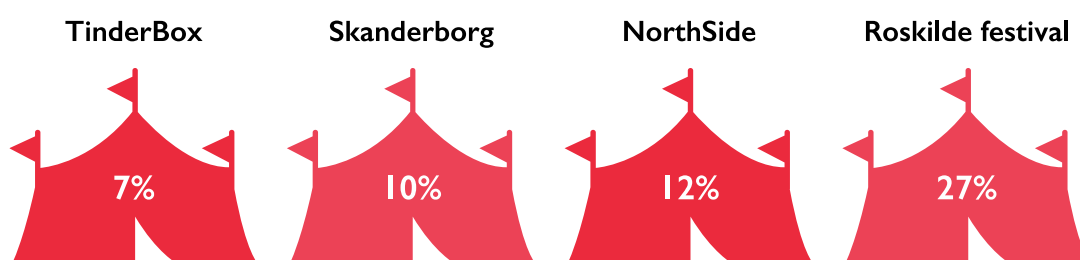


Figure 1.4.1. Percentage of female artists on Danish festival stages, 2019. Own illustration.

The pattern repeats itself within the industry’s executive class. In regard to distribution of gender among the Danish music industry gatekeepers, figures show that 90% are male (Gramex et. al., 2019). Accordingly, men continue to dominate decision-making roles in the organizations and powerful institutions including record companies, venues, festivals, the media, popular radio stations as well as the Danish Arts Foundation (with males receiving the majority of grants and financial aid) (Marstal, 2019). Accordingly, men dominate the functions that manage both record deals, festivals, playlists and media coverage, not only indicating a diversity problem in relation to the general labour market, but a probable challenge in regard to the music selection and dissemination performed by these intermediaries (Aguilar, Luis, Waldfogel, & Joel, 2018).



Figure 1.4.2. Gender divide in the Danish music industry’s executive class. Own illustration.

## Radio charts still dominated by male artists

Every year, the music organization Gramex counts the Danish musicians, -main artists and -songs played most on the radio the year before, resulting in three separate Top 10 charts. In 2019, these Top 10 charts revealed that just like in 2018 and 2017, there were no female artists represented (appendix 8). As a result, in 2019, the Danish Ministry of Culture requested an estimate of the proportion of female Danish musicians played on Danish National Broadcaster's (DR's) radio channels in the years of 2015-2019 (Kulturministeriet, Folketingets Kulturudvalg, 2019). The result revealed that female artists made up 18.3 percent of Danish artists played across all channels in 2019 versus 63.7% male artists. In the remaining 18% of the Danish songs played on the radio, men and women appear together (Ibid). As a consequence of the low representation of female artists, a low number of women are winning the music industry awards. At the Danish Music Awards in 2019, the women were vigorously overlooked. Accordingly, only seven female artists were among the nominees, whereas the number of male artists was more than four times higher (TV2, 2019) – compared to previous years that number is in fact proportionally higher. In 2017, five women were among the nominees, in 2016 there were only three (TV2, 2017).

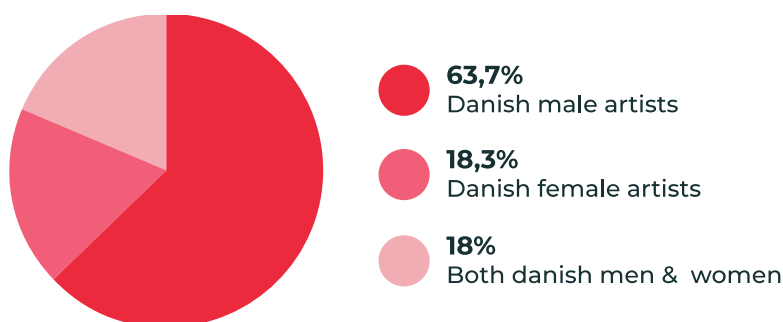


Figure 1.4.3. Danish artist gender share on DR's radio channels, 2015-2019. Own illustration.

## Radio and award show figures correspond streaming overweight

As streaming continues to shift music consumption, Spotify continues to play a major role in how music is consumed and discovered. However, also on the streaming service, female artists comprise an almost invisible share on Spotify's most popular artists. In 2019, the Danish Top-100 (most streamed songs in 2019 by Danish users) contained only nine female artists, and none of them were Danish. The remaining 91 songs were credited to male artists, and in this pool of males, 29 artists were Danish (IFPI Danmark & MI Service, 2020). Considering the listening patterns of Spotify's Danish users from 2017-2019, when listeners select their own music, 22.4% female artists are streamed, but when listeners use i.e. the

“Discover weekly” playlists, only 17.3% of female artists are streamed (Everynoise, 2020). Accordingly, Spotify’s algorithms are coded so that less than every fourth proposed stream on the service is created by a female artist (Mokoena, 2018). Due to the minor exposure of female artists, music by female artists ranks lower in the algorithms, causing fewer female artists to be suggested to the users (Aguiar, Luis, Waldfogel, & Joel, 2018).

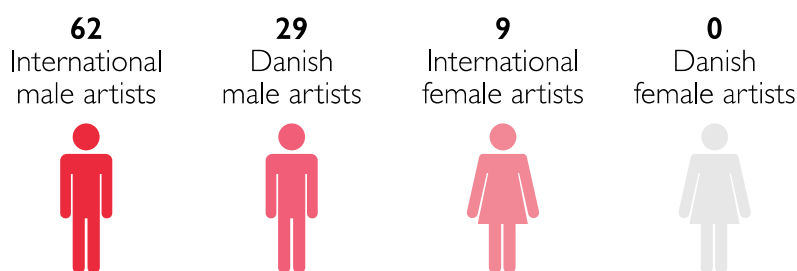


Figure 1.4.4. Gender share on Spotify’s Danish top-100, 2019. Own illustration.

### Change in attitudes under way?

Even though we are writing 2020, gender equality is far from a reality in the Danish music industry. However, the development of the debate in recent years has taken many steps in the right direction. The past few years have marked a turning point in representation in the entertainment industry. In the wake of 2016’s #OscarsSoWhite controversy and the 2017 #MeToo movement, there has been a general shift in awareness about the issues of representation at large as well as sexual harassment in the workplace (Europavox, 2019). In line, Danish female musicians who have been consciously silent, have started sharing their personal experiences about the barriers they face in their musical careers.

More than that, recent years have been marked by several initiatives that work to improve gender diversity in Danish music. Especially ‘Supply-side’ or opportunity enhancement strategies have been adopted to supplement equal opportunity efforts. These strategies, including mentoring, targeted development, and networking, have been developed to increase the supply of qualified women ready to start a career in music (Sojo, Wood, & Wheeler, 2016). As an example, ‘PigeBeat’ offer musical boot camps for girls and young women at the age of 13-20 years, aimed at getting young women to play in bands and to increase females’ interest in rhythmic music. In the same manner, the music camp ‘Pop Pilot’ invites girls at the age of 13-16 years to work on their musical skills as well as their confidence. Accordingly, the purpose is to ‘strengthen the teenage girls’ belief in their own creative and musical abilities at a time in life where crucial personal skills arise and mature’ (Rosa, 2020). Also, the large commercial player Spotify recently

enrolled their project ‘Spotify Equalizer’ which includes networking arrangements for up-coming female musicians (Spotify Equalizer, 2019).

‘Demand Side’ initiatives that create a demand for female artists to fill nominated roles has been less prevalent, however, a few players have initiated strategies to display female talent. As an example, the concert venue Forbrændingen decided to book their entire line-up for 2019 with only female artists (Forbrændingen, 2019). The well-known pop-artist Fallulah created a Spotify playlist named ‘HejSøster’ to showcase music by Danish female artists. This developed into a one-day festival in VEGA, celebrating female musicians and “sister solidarity” (Appendix 6). Last but not least, a mentionable concept is the concert-project ‘HUNSOLO’ which arranges solo concerts with a diverse selection of female artists to increase women’s visibility on stage (Appendix 4).

Accordingly, recognition of the issue is gaining ground, and though initiatives create a basis for optimism, evidence still points to a lack of action from by the major gatekeepers. As stated by Anna Lidell, the current chairman of the largest association of Composers and Songwriters in Denmark, DJBFA: *”It is the most powerful organizations: Radio, festivals and award shows, that call a halt to a full inclusion. We see many ill-considered things like lineups or radio playlists that primarily consist of male artists.”* (Steen, 2020).

## 1.5. Motivation

### Why gender equality matters

Gender inequality is a pressing global issue with huge ramifications not only for the lives and livelihoods of girls and women but, more generally, for human development, labor markets, productivity, GDP growth (McKinsey&Company, 2015). Accordingly, gender equality lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which asserts gender equality as both a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a prosperous and sustainable world: *“Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devalues all of us. It is not just a human rights’ issue; it is a tremendous waste of the world’s human potential. By denying women equal rights, we deny half the population a chance to live life at its fullest. Political, economic and social equality for women will benefit all the world’s citizens. Together we can eradicate prejudice and work for equal rights and respect for all”* (Goals, 2019).

Translated into the music industry, diversity can be a resource for a larger and more diverse offering of music to audiences and music consumers. Music enriches and develops us as human beings and diversity enriches and develops music. However, also macro economically, it is vital that the Danish music industry leverages all kinds of potential, in order to drive export growth forward. If half of the populations' creative resources are never unfolded or exploited – talent that could have created development and economic growth, not only for the individual, but in society at large, is wasted.

In recent years, we have seen MØ dominate pop charts all over the world and Lukas Graham's music pack stadiums and concert halls far abroad. Accordingly, the Danish music industry has proven itself on the international scene, creating a basis for new international ambitions and confidence in the ability of Danish musicians and Danish record companies to deliver the goods on a global market. This optimism must be exploited, however, there still remains a lot to discuss and understand, and large sections of the Danish music industry still possess vast, unexploited export potential that could potentially benefit from more diversity. Thus, in order to secure continual success and growth in the Danish music industry – also in terms of export, Denmark needs to make a critical assessment of attitudes and behavioural patterns towards gender equality and -inclusion. If the potential is to be fulfilled, and in order to have as diverse a musical life as possible, conditions must be strengthened.

Inequality in the music industry is a part of society's general gender equality debate and at the same time an important tool for communicating and expressing the very same discussion. Art and culture reflect society and act as an example for both the present and the future. Gender diversity in the musical landscape is therefore not a feminist preach or lecture, but about not reproducing structural inequality by conveying it in the art. The cultural industry has a strong social responsibility when it comes to the representation and negotiation of gender, as one of the foremost structuring forces in society (Tromsø, 2019).

## 1.6. Value of the study

Accordingly, there have been various music industry documents published over the past decade which have called for more work to be done in improving gender equality. However, most work in the Danish music industry has provided the over-arching statistical picture while there has been limited in-depth industry research into current thinking, barriers, attitudes or publicized programs to counter discrimination among the gatekeepers. Accordingly, the studies that do exist often take a quantitative, rather than qualitative approach, and more than that, discriminated characteristics are mostly grouped and discussed

together rather than separately. Moreover, very few studies, in fact, have to date investigated the behavioral patterns of music industry gatekeepers, despite their pivotal role in an artist's musical career and chances of success (Laband and Piette, 1994; Medoff, 2003; Brogaard et al., 2014; Colussi, 2017).

Therefore, the value of this thesis is to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the hidden inequitable/biased attitudes and practices performed by gatekeepers within the Danish music industry, that potentially prevent the female artists from 'breaking through' and having a sustainable career in music. Accordingly, the main objective is to go further in understanding the difficulties experienced by women in (and accessing) musical careers because of gatekeeper biases and stereotyping, in order to provide directions to potentially spur the music industry to take greater ownership of the challenges of the deficit of women across the industry.

“

*The point of departure for the critical perspective of the study is based on the argument that truisms are constructions that can be uncovered and replaced with other – possibly healthier – constructions”*

## METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS



## Chapter 2 – Methodological reflections

Drawing on inspiration from Saunders (2005) ‘research onion’, the following chapter will systematically review the methodological layers of the study design. To stay within the terminology of the framework, the outermost layer is concerned with the *research philosophy*, which will set the stage for the *research approach* and the *research strategy*. The next layers consider the *research choice* and the respective *research methods* including document analysis and semi-structured interviews. These layers are followed by a section that examines the specific *interpretation strategies* used to analyze the data of this thesis. Final layer includes reflections on *data quality issues* and *methodological limitations* as well as *validity* and *reliability* considerations. The model below illustrates the methodological approach of the thesis, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

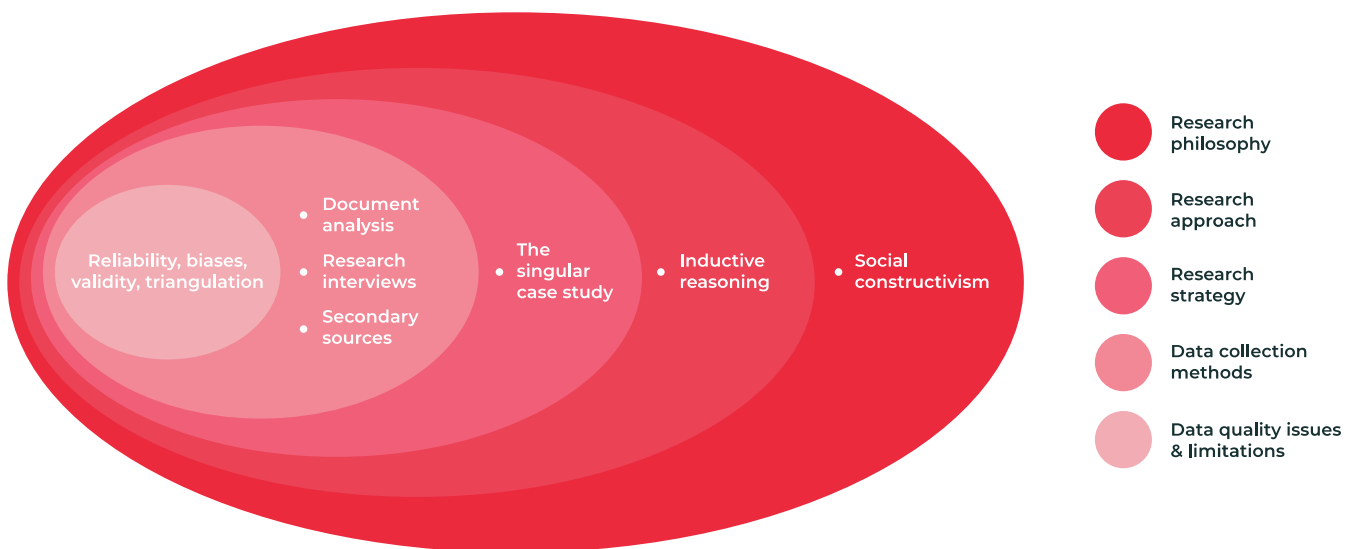


Figure 2. Research onion. Own illustration inspired by Saunders (2005).

### 2.1. Research philosophy, approach and strategy

This section is concerned with the first two of the onion’s layers: *Research philosophy* and *research approach*. The research philosophy adopted contains important assumptions about the way in which the world is viewed. These assumptions underpin the research approach chosen for this particular study.

### 2.1.1. Research philosophy - Social constructivism

When considering ontology, a typical distinction is made between objectivism and subjectivism. Accordingly, objectivism portrays the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence. In contrast, subjectivism holds that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Current thesis adopts a subjectivist view, primarily approached from a social constructionist perspective. From this philosophical standpoint, reality is in a constant state of revision as being *constructed* by social interactions creating partially shared meanings and realities (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Social constructivism therefore advocates that reality is constructed intersubjectively and the fundamental thought is “*we construct the world*” (Gergen & Gergen, 2005). Social constructivism thus breaks with the notion that a given phenomenon can be regarded as objectively or independently existing. Accordingly, our “reality” is created and reproduced by ourselves because our actions depend on interpretations, knowledge and meanings of it. In the long term, the perceptions of reality across people are transformed into temporary “truths” that are subsequently transformed into structural frameworks for human actions that appear in norms of everyday life (Pedersen, 2012).

This study contains a deconstruction of the above, as the ambition is to critically assess the prevailing social conditions (Collin, 2007). To stay within the terminology of the social constructivism, the objective is to ‘uncover and create new insights into the ways in which gatekeepers are active co-creators of what is perceived as truth or reality’ (Pedersen, 2012). The point of departure for the critical perspective of the study is based on the argument that truisms are constructions that can be uncovered and replaced with other – possibly healthier – constructions. This confirms the subjectivist view that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors, and that this is a continual process of social interaction within which these social phenomena can be revised (Ibid). In the following, the most relevant theoretical concepts from the social constructivism will be explained in relation to the study.

#### *Theoretical concepts of social constructivism*

Berger & Luckmann (1996) introduce three concepts to describe how social constructs create knowledge being 1) *externalization*, 2) *objectification* and 3) *internalization* (Ingemann, 2014). Externalization describes the process by which the construction and reproduction of society through habits, routines and interpretations becomes an everyday practice. This process becomes ‘fixed’ over time, thereby objectifying the constant negotiation and struggle of habits, routines and interpretations to objective and

indispensable facts, norms and institutions. Finally, internalization constitutes the process by which ideas are reproduced in society (ibid.).

Consequently, these processes are found relevant to the context of this thesis. Arguably, externalization happens when the music industry's gatekeepers make it an everyday practice to represent and push more male than female artists. If this practice is normalized into society, it is argued that the phenomenon of men being more popular in music is objectified. In the final phase, internalization, the conceptions of the underrepresented female artist are reproduced in the structures of the music industry and potentially in society.

Anchored in sociology, social constructivism seeks to clarify social orders using concepts such as culture, traditions, norms and logics (Ingemann J. H., 2014). As established above, human knowledge is developed, transferred and maintained in social situations, hence social constructivism further seeks to understand the processes by which individuals take their (subjective) reality for granted (ibid.). As stated by Morgan (1980), in order to reveal '*underlying patterns and order of the social world*' it is crucial to identify and understand the relationships between multiple realities of social actors (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Accordingly, for the purpose of this study, there will be multiple realities to be understood that all impact the overall activities and success of the female artist.

The gatekeepers planned to be examined in this thesis, will possibly all comprehend situations differently as result of their subjective world view, and in consequence this may affect their view on, and hereby practices related to female artists. In other words, music industry gatekeepers may interpret the value/talent of male versus female musicians differently as a result of their own view of the world. Their different interpretations are likely to affect their actions and the nature of their "gates". As a subjectivist researcher, my ambition is therefore to understand the different realities of the gatekeepers in order to understand their motives, actions and intentions in regard to the female artist. Moreover, since social groups create realities collectively and since these realities are formed in accordance with the interests and goals of the group, special attention is paid to the power that the gatekeepers gain and practice through their constructions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Accordingly, the theoretical model designed for the first part of the analysis is developed to elucidate processes, selection mechanisms and key dimensions of relationships among multiple gatekeepers in a dynamic perspective (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). This is further elaborated in chapter 3.

According to Muhr (2019), generalization based on gender is rooted in culture, traditions, and norms. This makes the contingent framework of social constructivism –with which its foundation of social conventions is changeable – particularly useful for the second part of the analysis where gendered structures and cognitive biases within the music industry are examined (Muhr, *Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer*, 2019). According to Muhr (2019), historical gender perceptions affect people's common sense and social worlds, and the way in which they understand each other. As humans create meaning relationally, behaviour will automatically be influenced by the stereotypical attitudes of others (Muhr, *Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer*, 2019). Thus, the reality gatekeepers construct jointly, that shape behaviour, is formed on the basis of social conventions that give rise to gender stereotypes. Thus, with gender stereotypes as a central element of equality, equality is not an objective science. It is therefore important to look at the constructions that set guidelines for men and women's opportunities – in this case in the music industry.

### *Hermeneutics as method for interpretation*

Within the paradigm of social constructivism, interpretation, or the so-called hermeneutic dimension is allowed since meaning must be understood; it cannot be measured or counted (Pedersen, 2012). Accordingly, the hermeneutic circle is central, where the process of interpretation takes place in a circular motion between the parts and the whole: The parts can only be understood if the whole is involved, and likewise the whole can only be understood by virtue of the parts (Højberg, 2004). Correspondingly, new data and insights that have appeared along the way have revised the direction of the study several times. Accordingly, the understanding of the study's research question has been tested and reconsidered through sub-analyses that have continuously provided a new and broader understanding to the scope of the problem, explanatory reasons and possible solutions (Ibid).

Within the hermeneutic tradition, the researcher is considered a part of the reality explored. Accordingly, I am included as a subject and it is through my interpretations, knowledge is gained. It is therefore important to be aware of own preconceptions, as they may influence the perception of the study. In order to ensure transparency and with the aim to strengthen the study's validity, the following will briefly describe my own interest and activities within in the Danish music industry: Alongside my studies, I write and produce music, both alone on my piano and in sessions with music producers. I have released two singles via Spotify, and I have had meetings with several major labels and booking agencies within the Danish music industry in this regard.

In the same way that my respondents are colored by their own social world and former experiences, my social world and experiences as a female musician with practical experiences from within the music industry will have (natural) consequences for my understanding of the topic under investigation. Accordingly, the comprehension acquired can never be objective, but rather it is driven by my subjective understandings and own experiences (Højberg, 2004).

### 2.1.2. Research approach – Inductive reasoning

The objective of the thesis is to explore a hitherto unexplored issue and add new theory to the existing, and as such, the nature of the relationship between theory and research in this study is inductive (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This study is based on qualitative data and has used a variety of methods to collect these data in order to establish different views of the phenomena under investigation (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008). Accordingly, as this study is particularly interested in understanding *why* females are underrepresented in the Danish music industry, it was deemed appropriate to undertake the research inductively rather than deductively. The thesis has its outset in a curiosity about gatekeepers' influence on female artists' access to the commercial music market. Thus, based on the empirical study, inference is drawn out of the findings, contributing with new theory to the existing field of research (Ibid).

### 2.1.3. Research strategy - The singular case study

The purpose of this section is to describe the research strategy of the dissertation: *The singular case study*, and the associated methodological reflections. Accordingly, Robson (2002) defines the case study as 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The purpose of this study is exploratory in nature. Accordingly, the exploratory study is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light' (Robson, 2002). Thus, for this thesis, the nature of the exploratory study is useful in order to deepen the understanding – and find into the nature of the problem of the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry.

As the literature review will demonstrate, the theoretical position of the dissertation is based on a broad toolbox compound from different theoretical branches, combining gatekeeping theory, decision making theory and gender bias concepts. The three branches of literature are combined with the aim to develop a theoretical analysis model that embraces the unique field of this particular dissertation. Accordingly, the

case study contributes with a focused and delimited framework, on which the study's theoretical understandings can be tested through a practical and real context (Yin, 2010). Accordingly, the single case study is relevant, as the scope of interest is to gain a rich understanding of the specific case, rather than a result or a theory that can apply to different cases. The single case has been selected because it provides an opportunity to undertake an empirical investigation of this particular contemporary phenomenon that few have considered before, within its real-life context.

## 2.2. Research choice and methods

In this section, the aim is to uncover the research choices of the thesis including data collection methods, data collection techniques and analysis procedures.

Following the philosophical underpinnings and the research design/strategy, the data collection techniques and data analysis procedures are predominantly qualitative. In the chapter on social constructivism, phenomena were described as 'changeable' with their meaning given through subjective understandings and attitudes. This premise is consistent with the qualitative tradition that focus on how concepts are assigned meaning (Ingemann J. H., 2014). In accordance this study therefore seeks different beliefs, attitudes and narratives that can help to account for different social realities of different social actors (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Accordingly, the qualitative method was found to be an effective way of inquiry to explore people's personal experiences within the music industry and to understand the meaning assigned to these experiences (Granot, 2012).

The dissertation will make use of qualitative data collection methods at several different levels. Combining more than one data collection technique with associated analysis techniques, yet restricted within the qualitative world view, makes the study a multi-method qualitative study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). First, a document analysis establishes a rich understanding of the relationship between management theory, gatekeeping theory, decision making concepts. Next, a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews will be used to gain insight into the gatekeepers' selection practices. Finally, a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with female artists will be used to gain an understanding of their experiences of being women within the Danish music industry. In addition to the collected empirical data, secondary data sources in the form of academic articles, journals and textbooks have been included. The following sections review the individual method choices of the thesis, and the reflections made in the data collection process.

### 2.2.1. Research choice - Document analysis

The document analysis is a methodological tool, generally used within social science. The typical ambition is to obtain new knowledge, support collected empirical data and/or conceive new paradoxes etc. (Lynggaard, 2015). Overall, the document analysis can be applied with two different objectives: *Knowledge-exploratory* and *knowledge-generating* (Ingemann, Kjeldsen, Nørup, & Rasmussen, 2018). Accordingly, the exploratory method is beneficial if a researcher wishes to exhaust a specific phenomenon on the basis of existing literature. This literature can further be used for generating knowledge if analysed and interpreted with the purpose to obtain new knowledge about the specific phenomena (Ibid). In this dissertation, the document analysis has been used for both purposes, as further elaborated in the following.

#### *The exploratory approach*

In the development of the study, a preliminary literature search was undertaken in order to develop a thorough understanding of, and insight into previous research relating to the gender imbalance in the Danish music industry. This involved going through reports and articles in academic and professional journals, as well as scanning the media for an overview of the current situation. Following a funnel approach, the preliminary literature search started out at a general level before narrowing down to drawing out key points and highlighting those areas where an up-to-date study could provide fresh insights. However, early in the media scan, it became clear that the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry is a heavily debated topic in the public, nonetheless, few academic studies have to date investigated the underlying industry structures or behavioral patterns of music industry gatekeepers as possible explanations to gender distortion, despite their pivotal role in an artist's musical career and chances of success. Moreover, none of the existing studies used theoretical stances that matched my interest area. Hence, I decided to seek inspiration from the business literature; academic research and exploratory out-takes to the self-same issue that exist in the general labor market, namely the deficit of female leaders at the top management level. As a part of the initial explorative process, I read the management book 'Managing Gender' by Sara Louise Muhr, to understand some of the barriers that females face in leadership careers due to gendered structures, stereotypes and biases (Muhr, 2009). Accordingly, the following provide a brief review of some of the business industry issues and mechanisms that inspired the academic scope and theoretical stance of my research.

### *Gender (in)equality and demand-side mechanisms*

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions and in areas that increasingly shape society (Ibid). In sports, female athletes experience that their achievements are valued lower than those of their male colleagues (Madsen, 2020) while only 2% of the art sold worldwide is created by women (Burns, 2019). In the general labor market, a gap in the wages earned by men and women remains, and recent reports from both the Danish Business Authority (2018) and the Danish institute for Human Rights (Larsen et al., 2018) show that more than 50% of the largest Danish companies do not have a single woman on their board of directors. This is true despite Danish women having overtaken men in educational attainment. Moreover, female students are rated better than their male counterparts and score higher on leadership competency tests (Muhr, Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer , 2019).

At this point, scholars turn to demand-side mechanisms, including processes of discrimination and bias, to explain the remaining gender gap. Studies have repeatedly shown that employers are more likely to discriminate against women in job applications and further indicate that women are judged differently from men by managers, co-workers, and consumers in regard to their competences, productivity, ability to innovate, and leadership style (Muhr, 2019). This is especially true in contexts that are traditionally male-dominant. The two most famous studies are, firstly, the so-called John-Jennifer study, where the same résumé is sent out to a large group of managers, who are asked to evaluate the candidate. The two résumés are identical, except that half of them have a male name on them, and the other half a female name. The résumé with the man's name (John) is systematically better rated, are offered a better starting salary and is offered more mentoring (Gaustad & Raknes, 2015). The other famous study is a blind test in which the American Symphony Orchestra, due to the lack of female musicians, tried to audition behind a blanket. The proportion of female musicians increased by 25 percent – simply because they could not see if it was men or women of choice (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). Before introducing blind audition and relying instead on a gut feeling, these women would not have been rated as qualified – or rather: they would not have been considered at all. Only when the judges were not able to see the instrumentalists, were they neutrally evaluated on their skills (Ibid).

In the context of the commercial music industry, 'demand-side' explanations of gender inequality point to the behavioral patterns of gatekeepers and tastemakers and to a potential preference among consumers for music by male artists. However, further academic in-dept research is needed to comprehend the full extent of the gatekeepers' impact. In the same way that business scholars question and investigate the



gender gap in the general labor market, I was inspired to investigate if authoritarian actors within the music industry undermine the value of the female musicians' work. On the basis of these reflections, it became relevant to search for theories that could help investigate gatekeeper selection procedures and the potential biases enacted in their practices.

### *The knowledge-generating approach*

Via a more structured subsequent document analysis, the gatekeeper phenomenon was discovered in a theoretical context. Documents were further revised and collected via the 'snowball method' as I had no previous academic experience with gatekeeping theory to rely on (Ingemann et. al, 2018). As a start, concentration was on the specific search word 'gatekeeping' with the aim of creating a thorough understanding of the existing theoretical landscape. Through this scan, it was possible to identify an array of relevant documents. Subsequently, via the same method I found the concept of decision-making processes and biases. All documents were read with regard to deriving overlapping themes and concepts, and associated reference-authors. With this strategy, it became possible to track the sources of the 'mother documents', and consequently search for new concepts and elaborations of relevant themes (Lynggaard, 2015). According to Lynggaard (2015), 'mother documents' can ascribe other documents and authors legitimacy, as they are recognized as pertinent literature of prominent researchers. On this basis, the documents found via the 'snowball method' are to a certain extent attributed with credibility.

The above process was used to knowledge-generate, as the phenomena were compared to the socio-cultural context for the purpose of deriving the processual relation (Ibid). The interplay between the explorative- and the knowledge generating method are thus pillars for this dissertation, as they help to draw new ways of understanding how the deficit of female artists in the music industry can be seen in the context of gatekeeper selection practices and decision-making concepts (Ibid).

### 2.2.2. Research choice - Research interviews

In the following sections, a review of the procedure in regard to the qualitative research interviews is presented. This includes the empirical approach, the choice of respondents and the interpretation procedures. The qualitative method design is organized in continuation of both social constructivism and the hermeneutic philosophy. Based on the social constructivist approach, the objective is to understand the informants' subjective perception of the research field. Accordingly, hermeneutics enables in-depth interpretation of the collected data. In accordance to this research method, this study has carried out twenty

semi-structured interviews in an attempt to gain an understanding of the world from the subjects' own perspectives; their experiences, practices and associated interpretations.

### *The semi-structured interviews*

Interviews may be highly formalized and structured, using standardized questions for each research participant or they may be informal and unstructured conversations. In between there are intermediate positions, such as the *semi-structured interview*. In an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews are effective to 'find out what is happening and to seek new insights' (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The uniformity of questioning is sacrificed in order to achieve richer development of information, coherence, depth and density of the material that each respondent provides. The obtained data can be used not only to reveal and understand the 'what' and the 'how' but also to place more emphasis on exploring the 'why'. Thus, the outcomes are of great value in the understanding of processes and enables a deeper understanding of behavior (Kvale, 2007).

Prior to the interviews, interview guides with a list of themes and questions were created (varying from interview to interview). Accordingly, formulating appropriate questions to explore areas of interest is critical to achieve success and lead a focused discussion on the issues relevant to the research topic (Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2007). However, because of the interpretive and exploratory nature of the study, the approach to interaction was 'non-directive' as the interviewees were given the opportunity to talk freely about events, behavior and beliefs in relation to the topic area. Elaboration, clarification, and completion probing was used to direct the interviews and to add depth to the data. Furthermore, questions that were not originally included in the guide were added whenever the participant said something interesting, allowing room to pursue topics of particular interest to the interviewee. When deemed relevant, the interviewees were encouraged to offer a more detailed account of the topic, by probing with background knowledge around the subject (Ibid). Hence, the strategy of 'probing' sometimes led the discussion into significant areas that had not previously been considered. Moreover, this afforded interviewees an opportunity to hear themselves 'thinking aloud' about things they may not have previously considered.

### *The selected respondents and data collection reflections*

This study has carried out twenty individual semi-structured interviews. All interview respondents have carefully been selected based on their supposed insights, experiences and practical knowledge from within the delimited area of the Danish music industry. The respondents have been divided into two groups: 1)

Gatekeepers and 2) Female artists. The respondents from within each group individually contribute with perspectives on the same issue, namely the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry. Accordingly, the gatekeeper representatives contribute with insights into the decision-making processes and selection practices performed within the gatekeeper organizations, while the female artists provide valuable information about their experiences and the barriers that they face/have faced in their musical careers.

All interviews have been conducted on a one-to-one basis. Preferably, qualitative research interviews are conducted by meeting the participant 'face to face', since 'face-to-face interaction is the fullest condition of participating in the mind of another human being' (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). However, due to the special condition of the Corona crisis, few interviews were conducted by telephone or electronically via Skype. The following figure presents the participants of the study.

#### *Gatekeeper representatives: collected and missed interview respondents*

As established, the most imperative gatekeepers within the Danish music industry are identified as record labels, booking agencies, radio and streaming. Hence, the data collection contains interviews with one or more informants from within each of these organizations.

#### *Female artists: collected and missed interview respondents*

In order to gain a rich understanding of the experiences and barriers faced by female artists, the interview representatives were carefully selected. In the search for representatives, several criteria were put forward: first, a criterion was for the women to have had a career and a certain commercial breakthrough that included dealing with certain gatekeepers. Consequently, smaller independent artists were sorted out. Following a funnel approach, I started out contacting the most visible and successful female artists today, including Jada, Clara and Medina. However, unfortunately none of these had time to participate.

Accordingly, I moved on to the next layer of female artists, also particularly visible in the Danish musical landscape. Here, I focused on artists signed to record labels and with practical experience within the live industry and the music industry at large. I managed to collect ten interviews with well-known Danish female artists, all songwriters and performers within different branches of the popular music field. All of the female artists are signed to commercial record labels; have released several albums; have had their songs played in the radio and some of them have played concerts and festivals around the world.

Accordingly, it is argued that all of these representatives have substantial knowledge and experiences that provide valuable insights for the purpose of this thesis.

### 2.2.3. Research choice - Secondary data sources

Finally, as a supplement to the document analysis and the qualitative research interviews, secondary data sources have been used. The application of existing empirical data, collected and analyzed by other researchers, allow for a deeper insight and richer understanding of areas outside this dissertation's scope and available recourses. This include i.e. large media analyses, organizational documents and academic articles. A benefit that comes with the secondary supplementary data sources is that they are typically based on larger samplings and conducted by professional researchers and authors. This contributes to a more representative picture of the problem area, that this dissertation attempts to examine. In addition, secondary sources have particularly been used in order to gain knowledge of the selection practices performed by Spotify and DR, since it was not possible to gain primary data from these gatekeepers.

## 2.3. Data analysis and interpretation strategies

This section provides a brief review of the data analysis process of the qualitative explorative case study, with focus on how to make sense of the whole (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The next section takes the reader through a more detailed description as to how meaning is deduced via *meaning condensation* and *meaning interpretation* (Ibid).

Following the hermeneutic approach, all the transcribed interviews were read carefully several times. The most relevant excerpts from each one was selected, commented on, and interpreted separately, and finally all the interviews were considered together to sum up the findings. Then each interview was coded by identifying persistent phases and concepts based on the participants' points of interest and overall impressions in order to enable identification and analysis of underlying patterns (ibid.). The highlighted texts were then put into categories and given names that were extracted from the data, based on the actual terms used by the interviewees. They are therefore meaningful and related to the collected data. These categories were then themed, i.e. the links that integrate or anchor the categories were determined in order to try to determine their relation and to see the "big picture", resulting in ten overarching conceptual themes extracted from the data as presented in the analysis. Careful attention was given not to make premature conclusions, or to try to force a piece of data to fit with other data. Accordingly, the data was processed several times in a circular process in order to avoid premature conclusions and the

understanding was continually revised during the analysis in view of the interpretation of the parts (Myers, 2009). The different respondents had sometimes confused, incomplete, cloudy, and contradictory views, and therefore the aim of the analysis was to try to make sense of the whole through the different parts, as explained: First making sense of each interviewee and then identify general themes and patterns (Ibid).

### 2.3.1. Analytical strategy - Focus on meaning

Accordingly, in order to achieve the most relevant and rich analysis of the qualitative interviews, the analytical strategy 'focus on meaning' have been used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This strategy allows to condense the collected empirical data and retrieve the most relevant information by expanding the original interview via a process of "*adding hermeneutical layers that enable the researcher to understand the meaning behind the language*" (Ibid). In order to deduce the meaning content in the obtained interviews, the two analytical approaches 'meaning condensation' and 'meaning interpretation' were used in a strategic combination (Ibid). Meaning condensation was relevant because it permits a "*shorter formulation of the meanings, expressed by the respondent*" (Ibid). Accordingly, this strategy allows to deduce and exhaust themes from long and complex sentences. This is especially beneficial when dealing with interview data where much of the meaning is found by the virtue of the whole, and as a result of the questions combined. Accordingly, meaning condensation make it possible to boil down central themes across multiple questions. In other words, this allows coding of participants' intent within the context (Ibid).

Meaning interpretation entails that the researcher "*go beyond what is explicitly said and develop structures and meaning relations that are not immediately apparent/visible from the text*" (Ibid). Kvale (2007) suggests three different levels of interpretations, which in a combination are found to be particularly useful for the interpretation of the collected interviews: 1) Interpretation of respondent's self-concept, 2) Critical common-sense making, 3) Theoretical context.

The purpose of the first level is to understand the meaning that the respondents attach to their own statements. Accordingly, the interpretation context for this level is the respondents' own self-conceptions and the world that they face. At the second level, the interpretation context moves beyond the explicit statements and permits a critical decoding of *how* some things are said, *who* says it and *what* is being said between the lines (Kvale, 2007). Accordingly, the combination of the first two levels of interpretation enables an understanding of the dynamics between the respondent's self-conception and the analytical deduction of their statements. I.e., in the interviews with the gatekeepers, a recurring discrepancy between

their explicit and implicit statements occurred. Consequently, via the interpretation strategies, it was possible to comprehend what was actually happening in practice in contrast to what they told me. The third and last level of interpretation deals with the theoretical stances of which the interviews are placed in the context of (Ibid). Hence, from a socio-constructivist perspective, the third level is central as it allows the researcher to invite the theory inside the respondents' statements in order to understand their experiences and practices in a broader context (Ibid).

## 2.4. Data quality issues and limitations

A number of data quality issues can be identified in relation to the use of document analysis and qualitative interviews, related to reliability, forms of bias, validity and generalizability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). In the following, these are discussed in turn.

### 2.4.1. Reliability

In relation to qualitative research, reliability is concerned with whether alternative researchers would reveal similar information: Are the research methods so well-defined, that others could in principle repeat the research and reach corresponding findings? (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, *Kvalitative metoder i organisations- og ledelsesstudier*, 2010). However, where reliability in quantitative studies reflect the research's direct reproducibility, this measure is typically a limitation in qualitative studies. In part, this is due to the individual researcher's thoughts and pre-understandings that form the methodological and theoretical 'opt in or opt out'; the interview data obtained and the associated interpretations.

A technique to secure the reliability of the qualitative results is via intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity imply that the researcher makes the reader a "*conscious and well-informed accompany*" via transparency and elaborative insights regarding the conditions that the results are developed under (Hovmand & Præstegaard, 2002). Accordingly, I have attempted to ensure transparency in relation to the methodological choices and reflections. This is both evident in the methodological chapter, but in the remaining chapters I have also indented to express clearly where points come from, and in what context they are meant to be understood, in order to hopefully avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Another response to the issue of reliability is that the findings derived are not intended to be repeatable since they reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation which may be subject to change (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The assumption behind this research is that the explored

circumstances are complex and dynamic. The value of using non-standardized interviews is thus derived from the flexibility used to explore the complexity of the topic. Therefore, an attempt to ensure that this qualitative, non-standardized research could be replicated by other researchers would not be realistic or feasible without undermining the strength of this particular type of research (Ibid).

#### 2.4.2. Biases

The concern about reliability in qualitative research interviews is also related to questions of bias, in terms of both interviewer and interviewees (Ibid). In order to reduce my bias as a researcher and hereby strengthen the reliability of the collected interviews, I have been carefully aware of not letting my pre-conception shape my understandings. Moreover, in order to reduce the scope of bias during the interviews and increase the reliability of the information obtained, the approach to questioning has been cautiously considered. As a guiding principle, all questions have been phrased clearly, so that the interviewee could understand them, and in a neutral tone of voice so that their responses were not pre-coloured. Furthermore, Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) point out that the use of open questions should help to avoid bias. Hence, open questions have shaped the interview guides, and have been followed up by appropriately worded probing questions, to explore the topic deeply and to produce a fuller account. However, questions that seek to lead the interviewee or which indicate bias on the interviewer's part have, as far as possible, been avoided (Ibid). Throughout the data analysis process, results from primary and secondary sources have been dealt with, with as much self-criticism and objectivity as possible.

Related to this is the interviewee or response bias. As pointed out by Easterby-Smith et al., participants may be sensitive to the unstructured exploration of certain themes, and/or they may choose not to reveal and discuss certain aspects of a topic, because this would lead to sensitive information that they do not wish, or are not empowered, to discuss (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The outcome of this may be that the interviewee provides a partial 'picture' of the situation that casts himself or herself in a 'socially desirable' role, or the organization for which they work in a positive fashion (Ibid). In order to facilitate the best possible information provision and exchange of knowledge, and in order to accommodate withheld information, Healey and Rawlinson (1994) suggest that *"it is usually best to leave sensitive questions until near the end of an interview because this allows a greater time for the participant to build up trust and confidence in the researchers"* (Ibid). Hence, the first part of the interviews has focused on building a level of trust, with less critical questions. Once this position of trust was reached, responses to potentially sensitive questions were pursued. Particular attention was paid to the wording of sensitive questions, in order to avoid any negative inferences related to, i.e. responsibility for discrimination, biases

or failure. Care taken over the exploration of sensitive questions has paved the way towards the compilation of a fuller and more reliable account (Ibid).

### 2.4.3. Validity

Traditionally, validity is concerned with the appropriateness in terms of providing answers to the research question, in other words “*if the researcher measures what is argued, to be measured*” (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2010). In this dissertation, the meaning of validity is further understood as the level of trustworthiness and credibility ascribed to the understandings of the research that form the study’s results. This accounts for the combination of the qualitative methods: the document analysis and the qualitative research interviews.

As with most methodological tools, the document analysis contains several reservations and pitfalls, that are important to take into account. Accordingly, as pointed out by Ingemann (2018) the collected documents are rarely developed for the same purpose as the study that they are subsequently involved in. However, by perceiving the collected document findings as ‘themes’ instead of ‘sources’, it is possible to address the above constraint (Ibid). This has been particularly relevant for this study, as it is recognized that the collected documents do not comprise a definitive and exhausted observation of the theoretical field. Hence, the document analysis has to a higher extend been used to establish an understanding of the phenomena, by contriving topics and themes that have had significant influence on the objective.

Another relevant validity dimension in relation to the qualitative research interviews concerns the actual interview situation. This is about whether the collected information is authentic, which is dependent on the respondents’ credibility in their statements – if they tell the truth (Ibid). However, in the process of handling and interpreting the qualitative interviews I have sought to increase the validity by using the analytical approach ‘focus on meaning’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Accordingly, this strategy can increase the validity of the respondent’s statements, as it allows me to understand the underlying rationales. Furthermore, this interpretation strategy allows me to invite the theory inside the respondent’s world views, in order to understand the broader context. Last but not least, in order to strengthen the validity, the qualitative interviews have been supported and supplemented by secondary empirical data sources.

The fact that I have not gained firsthand interviews with radio and Spotify has made it difficult to collect comprehensive and detailed information in regard to their respective selection practices. Accordingly, this



fact lowers the validity of the analysis of the two organizations. However, it can be argued that some of the statements from the representatives from external organizations in fact provide a more adequate picture of their practices, since external informants are not obligated to paint a 'socially desirable' picture of them. On the other side of the argument, the statements from the external representatives may reflect a 'abdication of responsibility' where i.e. record labels shirk their responsibility towards radio and Spotify, painting them as the 'bad guys'. Nonetheless, with the support from secondary sources and the use of 'meaning condensation and interpretation' it is argued that the collected interview data has been comprehensive in order to extract the needed information and answer the research question.

Finally, validity can refer to the question of whether the achieved findings are comprehensive and representative for what was intended to study (Harboe, 2001). It is argued that the choice of gatekeeper representatives as well as the selected female artists has proven to be relevant in terms of answering the research question. Hence, it is argued that the findings are representative for this particular group of respondents, in this particular part of the music industry and within the particular timeframe. In regard to the possible limitation implied by the missed gatekeeper interview, it is claimed that the overall aim with the gatekeeper interviews was to gain insight to the *networked* structures and interdependence among all the selected gatekeepers in order to draw an overall ecosystem. Hence, for the purpose of outlining the overall ecosystem of power and relationships, the collected interviews have proven to be adequate, even with the absence of representatives from the two gatekeeper organizations.

However, there is a critical concern surrounding the generalizability of the findings; namely if the respondents can act as representatives for the music industry at large. In this regard, Yin (2008) argues that case studies are in fact often criticized for not being generalizable for a broader population or societal trends. Accordingly, this study does not claim to be generalizable for another group of respondents, another selection of gatekeepers or a study conducted within another timeframe. On the other hand, it can be argued that the results have a high degree of validity, since the research's primary objective was to "*collect practical nuanced information and interpret this data in comparison to its context*", instead of collecting representative results that can be further generalized to large populations (Harboe, 2001). In other words, as this study is based on the social constructivist tradition, there is no epistemological need to infer from the sample to the population. Moreover, the information and insights obtained from the interviews do not represent any absolute truths about the social world (Ibid). Rather, the small number of interviews have allowed for a more in-depth understanding of each participant's knowledge and experiences within the field of interest. Last but not least, being able to relate this research to existing

theory, proves that the findings have a broader theoretical significance than the case that form the basis of the thesis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

#### 2.4.4. Triangulation

To strengthen the study, this thesis makes use of method triangulation, which Olsen (2003) defines as the use of different data forms or methods to analyse the same phenomenon. Accordingly, primary and secondary empirical data sources are combined to strengthen the study and thus increase its validity (Hede, 2007, p. 46). Combining more than one data collection technique with associated analysis techniques, however restricted within the qualitative world view, makes the study a multi-method qualitative study.

Accordingly, qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews have been used to gain a deep understanding of respondents' experiences, whereas reports and studies have helped to gain knowledge about the topic in broader terms. The collected literature has provided a comprehensive picture of the field of research under consideration and has to the same extent validated the contribution to the field. The combination of these two data collection methods contribute to a better sense-making of the whole, and a better chance of answering the research question. (Patton, 2002).

The method triangulation also includes the use of several respondents within the same category, which also contributes to the quality assurance (Olsen, 2003). Throughout the study, respondents have been divided into two categories: 1) The gatekeepers and 2) female artists, where several candidates from each category have been interviewed. By conducting several interviews with informants from the same category, it is possible to compare answers; and to reflect on whether they support or contradict each other, in order to strengthen the study, and provide a better opportunity to test the generalizability of the overall results (Patton, 2002).

With that being said, there are still ways in which the quality of the findings could have been further enhanced. One example is by the use of a combination of methods: namely if the findings had been supported by quantitative data. This combination would have made the results more generalizable and further helped to gain greater confidence in the findings.

“

*Gatekeepers filter the available products, ensuring that only a sample of the available ‘universe’ is ever brought to the attention of the general public” - Shoemaker, 2009*

# 03 LITERATURE REVIEW

## Chapter 3 – Literature review

In this chapter, a thorough literature review is presented in order to draw the theoretical basis of the thesis. The literature review is organized in three overall chapters: 1) Gatekeeping theory, 2) Decision making concepts and cognitive heuristics and 3) Bias, privileges and gender stereotyping. Finally, a last section 4) aims to explain how the theory in conjunction with the collected empirical data will be used to assess the problem area of the dissertation and respond to the research question.

### 3.1. Gatekeeping theory

The concept of gatekeeping was first coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947), whose theory of channels and gatekeepers was developed to explain the focal points of social changes in communities (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Lewin's gatekeeping theory has yielded numerous studies and models in several disciplines that have attempted to investigate the forces that determine, facilitate, or constrain the process of gatekeeping; that is, the decision whether to allow information to pass through the gate (Ibid). Shoemaker (1991) describes a gate as an 'in' or 'out' decision point and provide the following definition of gatekeeping: "*Simply put, gatekeeping is the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day*" (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, gatekeeping is a filtering process designed to reduce supply. As established by Bagdikian (1983), the information that gets through all gates becomes part of people's social reality, whereas information that stops at a gate generally does not (Shoemaker, 2009). He deems the latter to be one of the most important aspect of gatekeeping: that issues, events and objects that are *not* covered are absent from the worldviews of most audience members (Ibid).

The formative years of the development of gatekeeping theories happened predominantly in the communication and journalism fields, i.e., exploring newspaper editors as gatekeepers, and gatekeepers' influence on mass communication (Snider, 1967). However, in the late 1970s, the field of management began using the gatekeeper term and applied it to their own domain, denoting gatekeepers as intermediaries or "*key individuals who are both strongly connected to internal colleagues and strongly linked to external domains*" (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). According to Hirsch (1990), organizations act as cultural gatekeepers for the larger society and he argues that a gatekeeping-type function (he calls it preselection) is probably necessary for all industries: "*There are always more goods available for possible production and marketing than there are actually manufactured, promoted and consumed*" (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, some organizations use test marketing to decide which products to carry into

production, and the test results act as an ‘organizational gatekeeper’ (Ibid). However, for other organizations including the popular music industry, conventional market research procedures are generally unreliable, and preselection systems have been developed as a substitute. According to Shoemaker, such systems “*filter the available products, ensuring that only a sample of the available ‘universe’ is ever brought to the attention of the general public*” (Ibid).

Regardless of the industry, the preselection system has clearly differentiated roles and functions. As stated by Hirsch, the procedures within the artistic fields can be summed up as follows: “*The artist provides the creative material, which is identified by an agent who acts like a talent scout for the producer, who supplies the capital necessary to get the product under way. The promoter’s job is to create and manage anticipated demand, while the gatekeeper stands between the industry and its consumers, deciding which products will be recommended or publicized to the public, the ultimate consumer of the product*” (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, within the artistic fields, there are various options to who or what stands at the metaphorical gates. As stated by Hanke, professor in Art Management: “*Gatekeepers are guardians of professional integrity; decision makers who distribute public funds for arts and culture as well as reviewers, critics, bookers, librarians, artistic directors, etc. known as ‘taste judges’, stage makers, protectors of an important aesthetic and/or technical standard, and they dominate in various parts of the filtering processes of the cultural life.*” (Hanke, 2013). Accordingly, the concept of gatekeeping as applied to roles in the music industry is used to describe the whole range of individuals that are between an artist and the potential public.

### 3.1.1. Shoemaker’s gatekeeping theory

Pamela Shoemaker has developed a holistic gatekeeping theory, based on several pioneers’ theoretical insights. Examining both the individual and the organizational level, she provides the following definition of gatekeeping: “*Gates are decision points at which items may be stopped or moved from section to section or channel to channel. Gatekeepers are either the individuals or the sets of routine procedures that determine whether items pass through the gates.*” (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, gatekeepers determine both which units get into the channel and which pass from section to section, exercising their own preferences and/or acting as representatives to carry out a set of pre-established policies (Ibid). Shoemaker puts forward five analytical levels for the study of gatekeepers and gatekeeping processes being the individual level, routines and practices, the organization, the institution and the social system.

The individual level looks at the extent to which individuals are responsible for the gatekeeping selection, and consists of individuals' interpretations, decision making, personality and experiences (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). This level can also be seen in the context of the second, third and fourth, since gatekeepers often act on behalf of an organization's routines and practices. However, Shoemaker points out that individuals sometimes act based on their own rationales: *"They may exercise their own preferences and/or act as representatives to carry out a set of re-established policies"* (Shoemaker, 2009). The 'routine level' refers to these established policies, routines and practices. Apparently, routines are crucial in determining which items are moved through the channel and which are rejected, and the distinction between individual influences and routine influences on gatekeeping must be made in order to evaluate the extent of each separately (Ibid). Even when an individual appears to be a gatekeeper, it is essential to understand the extent to which the individual is merely carrying out a set of routine procedures. The 'organizational level' includes internal factors that vary by organization and at times by a group's decision-making patterns. The fourth, 'institutional level' is concerned with the exogenous characteristics of organizations and their representatives that affect the gatekeeping process i.e. market demand and forces, political alliances or external interest organizations that may influence the final selection decision. Finally, the 'social system level' explores the impact of larger trends such as ideology and culture, social interests and structures. Accordingly, at this level focus is on whether gatekeepers make decisions because they support the existing social structures or not (Ibid).

### 3.1.2. Consumers as gatekeepers

More elaborate theories point to the complications of the nature of the audience (Shoemaker, 2009). According to Napoli (2003), in some cases direct knowledge of the audience can be limited; therefore, gatekeepers rely on knowledge of the measured audience and the predicted audience (Napoli, 2003). Consequently, the predicted audience drives gatekeeping decisions, however, this process can be uncertain and drive status quo: *"The inability of organizations to confidently anticipate the audience size and composition of individual products compels these organizations to duplicate content that already has proven successful"* (Shoemaker, 2009).

Regardless of whether the audience is a market force, scholars disagree about whether audiences can directly affect gatekeeping decisions. Gieber argues that in news selection, there is no direct relationship to the wants of an audience. Gatekeeping decisions are instead influenced by socialization to the organization (Shoemaker, 2009). On the other side of the argument, Pool and Shulman (1959) show that reference group theory may explain how audiences affect gatekeepers: *"The messages sent are in part*

*determined by expectations of audience reactions. The audience, or at least those audiences about whom the gatekeeper thinks, thus play more than a passive role”* (Pool & Shulman, 1959). Finally, Shoemaker argues that in some fields, gatekeepers transmit messages or objects that give the audience exactly what it needs or wants, because ‘a mass medium survives only to the extent that it serves the audience’s needs’ (Shoemaker, 2009).

### 3.1.3. Gatekeeping in networks

As established, traditional communication literature on gatekeeping treats the process of gatekeeping predominantly as a selection mechanism, however, according to Banzilai-Nahon (2008), viewing it as such in context of networks merely constrains the meaning of the process of gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Thus, she examines the internal structure of a network, wherein the gatekeeping processes take place. In order to define the positions and roles that can identify the actors in the network, she has developed an expanded conceptual terminology (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Accordingly, these concepts are *gate*; *gatekeeper* (who performs gatekeeping); *the gated* (on whom gatekeeping is exercised); and *gatekeeping* (the means used to carry out the gatekeeping). Banzilai-Nahon's theory is developed with a focus on technology and information control, however, she argues that this should not be a constraint to the application of the theory in other research fields, since the theory generally provides insight into the social conditions surrounding selection processes. Below, Banzilai-Nahon's concepts will be reviewed and, although the word information appears, it can be replaced by i.e. art, culture or in fact music.

*Gatekeeping* is the active action executed as selection, omission or rejection. This action is performed by the *gatekeeper*, which Banzilai-Nahon defines from two dimensions; the authoritarian (such as the state, major institutions and organizations, etc.) and the functional (entities providing infrastructure systems). The term *gated* refers to the person on whom the gatekeeping is practiced, while the *gate* marks the turning point where information goes from being outside to being inside (Ibid). Accordingly, Banzilai-Nahon determines the nature of specific gates from different dimensions. In these dimensions she is particularly focused on technological development. Accordingly, the internet has had a great influence on the relationship between gatekeepers and the gates, as the gated have more opportunities to produce information themselves and bypass the traditional gatekeepers. However, other dimensions include the interpersonal relationship that may be characterized by the exercise of power or an unattainable and the alternatives for the gated – the question in this relation is if the gated can avoid some specific gatekeepers and choose others instead. The concept of *gatekeeping salience* is defined as the relationship established between gatekeepers and the gated, as well as gatekeepers in between (Ibid).

## 3.2. Decision-making concepts

Classical and behavioral decision-making models generally state that decision makers use ‘rational, analytical and dispassionate’ approaches, which include moral and ethical standards in the linear and deterministic decision-making processes (Shoemaker, 2009). However, as argued by McKenna and Martin-Smith (1991), decision making is not always a simple, certain process with clear phases. They acknowledge the complexity and chaos in non-linear and unpredictable situations and redefine decision making as ‘a dynamic cycle set in a complex and chaotic environment, influenced by the interactions between complex human beings’ (Ibid).

### 3.2.1. Cognitive heuristics

McKenna and Martin-Smith further present the concept of cognitive heuristics, sometimes called judgmental heuristics. They describe this as the ‘rules of thumb’ that people commonly use when making decisions. Accordingly, cognitive heuristics are generally and automatically applied without conscious consideration, related to what is called ‘common sense.’ (McKenna and Martin-Smith). These are deeply held beliefs about how the world works, perhaps hard-wired into the brain or the result of acculturation, or both (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Accordingly, a distinction is generally made between what is called ‘availability heuristics’ and ‘representativeness heuristics’. The availability heuristic makes more cognitively available messages (e.g., those that are more easily remembered) seem more frequent, thus potentially leading the gatekeeper to allow either more of them (‘this thing always works’) or fewer of them (‘this thing is overplayed’) to pass through the gates. The representativeness heuristic helps gatekeepers categorize information in a variety of ways but into at least two important categories: ‘information we generally use’ versus ‘information we do not’ (Shoemaker, 2009). In addition to cognitive heuristics, Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982) have identified four bias archetypes in people-related decision making: 1) ‘Pattern recognition bias’ leads people to recognize patterns where there are none, 2) ‘Social bias’ arises from the preference for harmony over conflict, 3) ‘Stability bias’ creates a tendency towards inertia in the presence of uncertainty and finally, 4) ‘Interest bias’ comes to the fore in the presence of conflicting incentives (Krieger, 2000).

Although neither McKenna and Martin-Smith nor Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky did study gatekeepers, it is assumed that the same cognitive processes and bias archetypes that humans generally go through also apply to gatekeeping. Thus, gatekeepers’ cognitive judgments and biases affect their decisions about whether to allow objects to pass through the gate.



Recapturing Shoemaker's theoretical framework, as gatekeeping decisions are made, the context of shared values comes into play (Shoemaker, 2009). Consequently, not only do gatekeepers make decisions based on their personal criteria (individual level of analysis) or on those routines of work that pervade their profession (routines level). They also make decisions based on an organizational mindset that is the result of organizational socialization (Ibid). Thinking in terms of cognitive heuristics, gatekeepers' judgments are formed not only by their personal experiences but also by their professional and organizational lives. Accordingly, in some cases, socialization may only be "skin deep" where the employee suppresses dissident values in order to keep their job or maybe to work behind the scenes to further a goal (Krieger, 2000).

### 3.2.2. Bias, privileges and gender stereotyping

All people experience and interpret the world through the biases and privileges that they experience throughout life. Bias is the filter through which one sees the world, and privileges are the benefits that certain individuals have, by virtue of which group they belong to, rather than who they are as a person or what competencies they have acquired (Muhr, 2019). Finally, gender bias arises when stereotypical perceptions of specifically men and women affect how they are assessed – both in private as well as in professional practices. Accordingly, gender bias reflects more generalizations than individual qualities, and in consequence their related prejudices may easily and somewhat subtly lead to discriminatory behaviours (Castaño, Fontanil, & García-Izquierdo, 2019).

As argued by Murh (2019), it can be difficult to understand how bias works without also looking at how it relates to privileges and privilege blindness. Historically, the term privilege has been used positively about a person's rights, merits and benefits. Recently, however, the concept has been used more and more to understand and explain structural inequality, that is, as a term for the fact that in society, certain benefits are systematically given to specific groups of people, whereby some people's privileges are associated with other people's disadvantages (Muhr, Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer , 2019).

Furthermore, a distinction is typically made between explicit and implicit bias. Explicit bias refers to conscious attitudes and beliefs that people have about i.e. a specific group or person, and they can therefore be measured by self-report, where a person expresses his or her view on something or someone (Devine 1989). The term implicit bias (also called unconscious bias) refers to bias that we are not aware

of and which operates outside of our own control. These biases happen automatically and subconsciously and are triggered by the brain's attempt to make quick decisions and judgments about people and situations based on our experiences, background and culture. The implicit bias thus means that we automatically – and immediately, before even being aware of it, form a positive or negative opinion about the people that we meet. Accordingly, implicit bias is far more difficult to identify than explicit bias, as implicit bias is not necessarily expressed in explicit opinions and attitudes. It is therefore also difficult to change, because even though you may be aware that it is wrong or that you do not want to react in a certain way, the brain has registered the bias, even before you become aware of it (Ibid).

### 3.2.3. Managing gender

In the book 'Ledelse af Køn' ('Managing Gender') on barriers and new strategies for managing gender, Sara Louise Muhr examines how gender inequality in business is expressed through gender stereotypes and the bias they cause. Muhr consider both explicit bias, that is, explicit attitudes about, for example, men and women, which we are convinced are true; and implicit bias, which goes into effect without our knowledge (and even possibly against our will), because our brains depend on predefined categories to make decisions; categories that are colored by historical and cultural gender stereotypes (Muhr, 2019). Accordingly, gender biases reflect more generalizations than individual qualities, and in consequence their related prejudices may easily and somewhat subtly lead to discriminatory behaviors, mainly by biasing human resources managerial decisions, and probably acting as a trigger for the glass ceiling effect, preventing females' promotion to higher ranking positions (Muhr, 2019).

One of the main outtakes from Muhr's book on leadership is that gender bias regarding how men's and women's competencies and results are assessed, combined with the privilege of being a man, leads to women being downgraded compared to men in a professional context, without it even being on a conscious basis. Moreover, Muhr (2019) points to two general explanations of the deficit of females in leadership. Accordingly, due to the social conception of Danish equality and our country's historical forefront in promoting gender equality, people tend to believe that females are rare in leadership because a) they do not have the right talent or competencies or b) they do not want to be leaders. And accordingly, these explanations affect how the genders are evaluated. The problem, according to Muhr, is that the notion that women lack competencies or do not want to be leaders causes top management to refrain from looking for them (Sherbin, 2018; Williams, 2015). So, a third – and more widely recognized – explanation to gender imbalance in the top management level is that the perception of being a leader is colored by strong gender stereotypes that make it difficult to judge people neutrally. They are instead judged

differently depending on gender. In other words, we are biased in our decisions and do not make rational recruitment or promotion decisions when judging male and female candidates.

### 3.3. Theoretical framework for analysis

As established, the theoretical position of the dissertation is based on a toolbox compound from different theoretical branches, including gatekeeping theory, decision making theory as well as gender bias concepts. For sub-analysis one, Barzil-Nahon & Shoemaker’s gatekeeping theories are used in combination to examine the highlighted gatekeepers and their associated selection practices. The interplay between the two theoretical frameworks is illustrated in the model below.

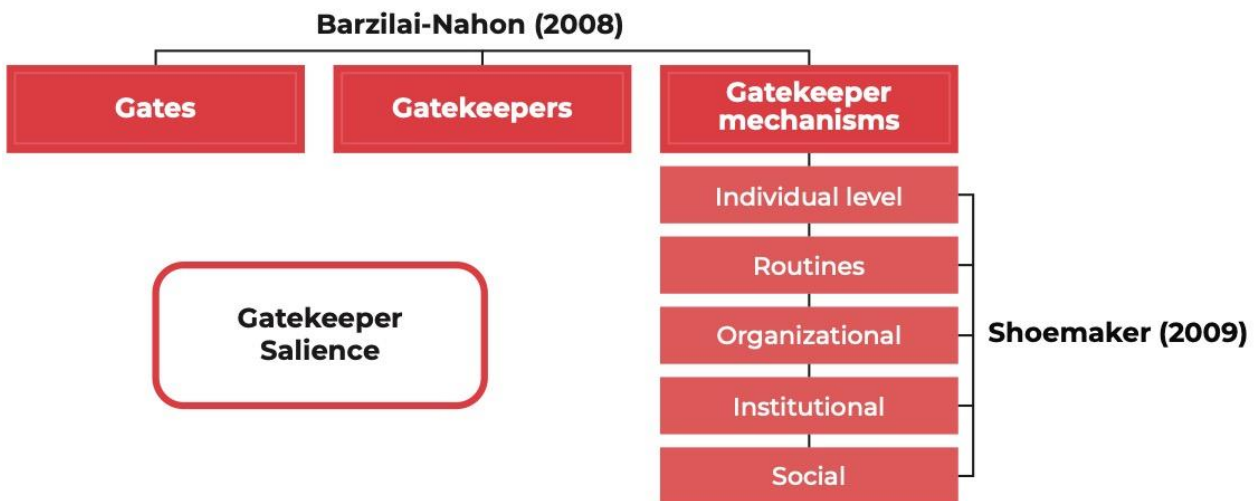


Figure 3.3.1. Theoretical model for analysis based Barzilai-Nahon & Shoemakers gatekeeping theories. Own illustration.

The purpose of sub-analysis one is to answer the first research question: *Which forces determine the gatekeepers’ selection practices and what are the key dimensions of relationships between the multiple gatekeepers and the female artists?* Accordingly, Barzil-Nahon’s theoretical concepts; gates, gatekeepers and gatekeeper mechanisms constitute the outer framework, used to examine the nature of the gates, the role of the gatekeepers and the gatekeeper’s selection mechanisms (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). The latter concept, gatekeeping mechanisms, is extended with Shoemaker’s five analytical levels for the study of gatekeepers and gatekeeping practices. This extension provides a basis for a deeper analysis and understanding of the forces that help determine the decisions of the gatekeepers. The analysis is summed up and discussed in relation to Barzil-Nahon’s concept of gatekeeper salience, highlighting key dimensions of relationships among the multiple gatekeepers and the ‘gated’ in a dynamic perspective.

Since the gatekeepers create realities collectively and since these realities are formed in accordance with the interests and goals of the network, special attention is paid to the power that the gatekeepers gain and practice through their constructions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Sub-analysis part two compares the evidence from the interviews with the female artists with the derived biases that assert among the interviewed gatekeepers, in order to examine the impediments facing women in the music industry. These are thematized and interpreted in association with Muhr's findings on gender management in leadership, and (furthermore with regard to) with the decision-making concepts and theories on cognitive biases as presented above. As such, the objective of sub-analysis part two is to answer the second research question: *How does cognitive biases affect the decision-making processes of the gatekeepers and possibly the female artists' chances of 'breaking through' and having a successful career in music?*

“

*Spotify is both a democratic platform, but it's also an evil data circle, because Spotify's algorithms are based on data, and data is perdefinition retrospective. And they measure a lot on what people liked yesterday, but they don't seem to be as good at measuring what will be good tomorrow”*

# 04 ANALYSIS

## Chapter 4 – Analysis

### 4.1. Sub-analysis part one – Gatekeeper selection practices

As established, the theoretical position of the dissertation is based on a toolbox compound from different theoretical branches, including gatekeeping theory, decision making theory as well as gender bias concepts. For sub-analysis one, Barzil-Nahon & Shoemaker's gatekeeping theories are used in combination to examine the highlighted gatekeepers and their associated selection practices.

The purpose of sub-analysis one is to answer the first research question: *Which forces determine the gatekeepers' selection practices and what are the key dimensions of relationships between the multiple gatekeepers and the female artists?* Focus is on the network structures and the interdependence between the selected gatekeepers and their respective selection practices. Accordingly, though gatekeeper findings are reported under separate headings in this chapter, it is recognized that these are interdependent, hence their interplay will be dealt with continuously.

#### 4.1.1. Record labels

##### *Gates*

In the pursuit of a musical career the first *gate* an artist typically meets is the gate to a record deal, or a recording contract, with a record label. At the most basic level, a record deal is a legally binding agreement between artist and label. Generally, the label invests in the production, distribution and marketing, and contractually agrees to pay the artist an agreed sum from the sales of the recordings – also known as the royalty rate (Spinnup, 2014).

The *gated* (on whom the gatekeeping is exercised) are dependent on a record label, as the label is where the artists receive professional and economic support and investment to nourish and support their careers, and to earn money. There has been a rise in DIY self-funded careers over the past twenty years, but according to the interview data, it is still far more widespread that a musician will be commercially successful when signed by a publisher or record label, than if they are not. As stated by a Danish female musician: *“The ones signed will have albums professionally recorded and released, go on tours organized for them, and have appropriate marketing including social media campaigns built around their personalities and music. Without any label support, chances are that a potential manager, booker or the media won't pick up on you”* (Appendix 5). Accordingly, record labels generally provide the full

machinery of producing, promoting, distributing and selling the music. Furthermore, a record deal can constitute a *passage point* to the next arms of the associated music industry, including finding a manager, a booker, being aired on radio and streaming.

### ***Gatekeepers***

The Danish music industry is dominated by the major record labels Sony, Universal and Warner, who control the market for recorded music in terms of both production and distribution. According to Barzilai-Nahon's conceptual terminology, the four majors constitute authoritarian gatekeepers (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). The A&R department of a record label is often perceived as the particular gatekeeper who performs the *gatekeeping*. A&R stands for 'Artists and Repertoire', and A&R departments have a powerful reputation since they have the all-important job of identifying, signing and nurturing the musical talent (Music Business Worldwide, 2016). Accordingly, the A&R executive is very often the personification or face of the label that a potential new artist will meet as the first gatekeeper in person. This meeting can be decisive for the talent, as the A&R rep has the ability to open or close the gate to that specific label. Their gatekeeping practices are identified as a process of selection, intermediation (management) and dissemination (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

### ***Gatekeeping mechanisms***

According to the interview data, A&R executives first and foremost exercise their gatekeeping practices based on their individual experiences, interpretations and 'gut-feeling': "*I need to get like... A pit in the stomach... Butterflies! Music that works is basically something that makes people feel. And I guess I am in some kind of position where I just have to believe that what gives me butterflies, gives everybody butterflies*" states an A&R respondent from one of the major labels (Appendix 2). A respondent from another record label presents another version of the same argument, when he explains his criteria for evaluating talent: "*Does it light a fire in me? Is it cool? Can I feel it? And most importantly, is there any stardust?*" (Appendix 1).

However, as proposed by Shoemaker, even when an individual appears to be a gatekeeper, it is essential to understand the extent to which the individual is also carrying out a set of routine procedures (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, a record label respondent describes that generally she has the power to select and reject talents, however, when working for a major label, the goal is commercial success and

profit: *“I feel like I have the entire responsibility and power to make my decisions. But of course, it is a factor that I work for a major label. We go for the big money.”* (Appendix 2).

In profit making organizations, the gatekeeping process is part of the overall process of maximizing revenue and profit. Thinking in terms of cognitive heuristics (Kahneman et al., 1982; Nisbett & Ross, 1980), gatekeepers’ judgements are formed by not only their personal experiences but also by their professional and organizational lives, and as an employee at a major label, the aforementioned respondent acts as a representative to carry out a set of pre- established policies and company goals. In line, a label respondent explains that when A&R executives discover and promote a particular artist, they are putting their own name in the line of fire. If the artist fails, an A&R executive’s job may be at stake: *“I can’t sign whatever I want. Or – I guess I can – but if the artist doesn’t perform well, I might not have a job.”* (Appendix 1).

Accordingly, not only does the A&R executives make decisions based on their personal criteria, but they also make decisions based on an organizational mindset (Shoemaker, 2009). Moreover, evidence point in the direction of Shoemaker’s third level of analysis, the institutional level, as major labels’ gatekeeping processes are heavily affected by market demand and forces (Ibid). Accordingly, the rise of online music services such as Spotify has put more power in the distribution of songs, and less in the production of physical albums, as Spotify has actively steered its listeners away from the album as a format and towards playlists (Aguilar, Luis, Waldfogel, & Joel, 2018). This technological development has transformed the music industry and changed its profit structure: *“Market share on streaming is alfa omega. In 2020, this is what drives revenue”* states an A&R from a major label (Appendix 1). In fact, another record label respondent describes it as a part of his artist selection procedure to ask himself if and where the music could potentially be playlisted: *“This is something we actually consider carefully in the process of signing an artist: ‘Okay, which Spotify playlists does it fit?’”* (Appendix 7).

As further explained by the record label respondent, the major label that he works for invests according to the genres that prove successful, especially on the streaming services: *“The label that I work for was actually a very pop-oriented label. Our shelves were filled with pop artists like Krebs, Falk, TV2 etc. and until very recently, the ‘new sound’ was mostly pursued by competing labels. But, as the streaming chart has proven to be more and more hip-hop oriented, we have invested heavily in rappers. Actually, we’ve both scouted new talents and stolen some from other labels. I think we’ve gone from having six rappers in our artist catalogue to around twenty”* (Appendix 1).



Another record label respondent supplements with a corresponding statement about the influence of the popular culture on the record label's investments: *"If we take a look at the popular culture, the dominating music genre right now is just men. And of course, we take that into consideration – what's working right now – and if the genre is male dominated, we work with more male artists"* (Appendix 2).

According to the above quotations, if the market demands a particular music genre such as hip-hop, then that is what it gets. Put another way, the record labels that provide hip-hop artists are rewarded financially, while those labels that do not supply these 'goods' receive fewer financial rewards (Alexander & Mahwah, 2004). To the extent that record labels respond by seeking to maximize profits, markets will dictate their investment in talents. This implies that the decision-making processes have less to do with individual gatekeepers' orientations than with the characteristics of the marketplace and its demands. Correspondingly, it is clear that the label respondents presented above consider the lack of female representation in their respective teams as merely a reflection of social and cultural trends, rather than an expression of their individual preferences. As proposed by Shoemaker, this implies that in their decision-making processes, they support existing social structures rather than make attempts to change them (Shoemaker, 2009). This is emphasized in the following quotation from an A&R from a record label: *"I really want to work with more female potential, but right now 'the genre' is just so hip-hop, and hip-hop is a man's world. End of story."* (Appendix 10).

#### 4.1.2. Booking/concert activities

##### **Gates**

Booking agencies and bookers constitute the *gate* to the artists' live activities. For the gated, concert activities are one of the greatest means to commercial success and revenue, making booking agencies imperative gatekeepers in the music industry's network: *"Concerts and gigs are the treasure chest of a musical career"* (Appendix 3).

##### **Gatekeepers**

The two leading booking agencies in Denmark are Live Nation and ICO concerts, with considerable sub agencies including Beatbox Booking, PDH Music, Skandinavian, 3rd Tsunami. The booking agents, also called bookers, are regarded as the particular *gatekeepers* who perform the gatekeeping practices within the live branch. Accordingly, the bookers do not actually put on shows, but act as intermediaries between the artists and the limited body of promoters of concert venues, festivals, clubs etc. (Hopewell & Hanlon,

2003). Hence, the gatekeeping process for the bookers is primarily a practice of selection and dissemination (Shoemaker, 2009).

### *Gatekeeping mechanisms*

According to the interview data, music bookers rarely scout or audition new talent nor work to ‘break’ an artist solely via live activities. Most artists represented by the booking agencies are signed at record labels, thus their activities are already guided by a label strategy and associated financial resources (Appendix 3). This indicates that record labels provide the ‘universe of artists’ and the booker then cherry-picks from this preselection (cf. Shoemaker’s proposal: *“some gatekeepers filter the available products, ensuring that only a sample of the available ‘universe’ is ever brought to the attention of the others”* (Shoemaker, 2009)).

However, before the booker can decide whether an artist should pass through their ‘live gate’, the gatekeeper must assess the artist, considering his/her individual characteristics and the environment in which the artist resides (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, as derived from an interview with a booking agent from one of the Denmark’s leading booking agencies, his gatekeeping function is dependent on his individual opinion and experience, however, he typically relies on external sources for input (Appendix 3).

As proposed by Shoemaker, a typical external source of gatekeeper routines is other gatekeepers (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, my respondent explains that besides record labels, he uses gatekeepers such as radio and streaming as a guiding principle to determine what to scout for: *“We, as a booking agency, represent artists that we think we can sell. And the festivals – our buyers – they want to buy what their audience wants to hear: Popular music. So – I look at the radio chart and the Spotify chart to find out what’s popular right now; what’s thriving; who’s going to sell tickets? (...) If they playlisted as many female artists as male, then we would have a sales argument for the festivals: ‘It’s equally popular!’ But until it actually is, we have to follow the market demand”* (Appendix 3).

The above quotation suggests that bookers are both consumers and distributors of artists. They “buy” artists and reject others in order to “sell” them later. Accordingly, bookers take into account what a potential live audience wants, in order to get the best “products” for sale. However, in general when gatekeepers operate with notions of what the audience wants, they do so not from direct or accurate knowledge of the audience’s interests but based on their socialization; what they themselves experience

to be in the interest of their audiences (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, the respondent relies on what he describes as ‘audience research’ in the form of radio and Spotify top-charts to measure artists’ relative success. Consequently, the respondent’s decision about what to let in the gate depends on the pre-selection of other gatekeepers, what they are doing and saying (Ibid). Arguably, the respondent feels compelled to validate his own sense of music (‘gut-feeling’), and decision-making processes by showing that others are interested in the same (Shoemaker, 2009).

#### 4.1.3. Radio/P3

##### *Gates*

The radio constitutes the *gate* to the broader public, and to a potential commercial hit. Accordingly, as stated by a female musician from my interview data: *“If the radio decides to playlist your song in A-rotation, people almost can’t avoid hearing it and eventually they will get the experience that it’s a hit. That’s how hits are created. They’re just played tons of times on the radio”* (Appendix 5). Accordingly, as stated by another female respondent, airplay on especially P3 has been a continuous success barometer in her musical career: *“I’ve been chosen as ‘The Unavoidable’ (Ugens Uundgåelige) by P3 a couple of times, and when this has happened, my career has been at its highest. It is just a major factor – to be supported and hyped by P3 and the media in general”* (Appendix 6).

Furthermore, the radio constitutes a *passage point* to TV- and award shows, as explained by a female musician: *“I really feel like the radio has a huge say in the Danish music market. For pop musicians there is ‘one place to be’, in order to succeed, and that’s P3. If P3 doesn’t support you; doesn’t showcase your music, it is almost impossible to actually make a living of your career. Because radio airplay is so closely connected with TV shows, which is connected to the amount of concert tickets that you can sell in the end.”* (Appendix 5).

Last but not least, radio airplay constitutes a (sometimes overlooked) mean to financial revenue: *“(…) more than the commercial output of getting played on the radio, airplay actually entails a monetary income that supports your entire music business. The radio is crucial for economic survival.”* (Appendix 5). One of my respondents underpins the above argument when she emphasizes the importance of getting played on the radio: *“People underestimate the economic value of getting played on the radio. As a musician, you are reliant on KODA payouts in order to for example create a cool live show or to be able to afford the right producer”* (Appendix 6).

## *Gatekeepers*

In Denmark, there is a distinction between the public service radio stations and the commercial radio stations. The commercial radio stations are private companies with complete authority to decide what to broadcast, including advertising. Public service radio, on the other hand, is funded by the state and by the license paid by the citizens. These radio stations with a public service obligation have a number of societal tasks. This applies for example to all Danish Broadcasting (subsequently referred to as DR) radio channels (The Ministry of Culture, 2019). According to Gallup, the license-financed radio channels on DR account for 75.3 percent of the total Danish radio consumption, and their largest channels, P3 and P4, together count more than 4 million listeners every week (August 2020). DR is thus a crucial gatekeeper – both by virtue of their broad listening surface and non-commercial starting point.

The following will focus on DR's popular radio station P3, as it is derived from the interview data to be the most influential radio channel for musical careers. P3 broadcasts popular music with the aim of reaching young audiences, and furthermore holds popular music activities such as the annual TV event and awards show 'P3 Guld' and 'KarriereKanonen' (an ongoing event nurturing upcoming popular artists/bands) (Krogh 2017). The radio programmers and music editors are regarded as the particular *gatekeepers* who perform the *gatekeeping*. Accordingly, for a song to be playlisted, it is either selected by the editorial team, consisting of radio hosts and music editors that meet up to evaluate the music sent to their inbox (Jensen, 2019). Alternatively, the song can be picked up directly by the radio host and air-played. These gatekeeping practices – performed both in groups and individually – are identified as processes of selection and dissemination (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

## *Gatekeeping mechanisms*

Corresponding Shoemaker's individual level of analysis, radio music choice is done mainly based on gut feeling by radio programmers. This entails hiring people who have a great deal of experience in the field of radio programming and allowing them to draw on past experiences in order to make the selection for the playlists. Accordingly, music programmers may choose individual songs to introduce to their audience, but in general their decisions are discussed at 'playlist meetings' held by proficient music representatives. As explained by executive music editor from P3, Mathias Buch Jensen in a public interview: *"The songs that appear on our playlist are discussed and selected in plenum at a weekly playlist meeting and meant to appeal to our audience in different ways. The playlist meetings consist of me – I am*

*the editorial music executive – one music representative and three or four radio hosts. It is also during this playlist meeting that we discuss and decide what song to choose as ‘Ugens Uundgæelige’; which will be the most played song the following week” (Jensen, 2019).*

Accordingly, the gatekeepers rely on well-established routines such as ‘playlist meetings’ to produce playlists believed to appeal to the audience. However, as argued by the theorist Gans (1979) and others (i.e., Schlesinger, 1987), gatekeepers have only an abstract, second-hand sense of what the audience wants from the radio media. Correspondingly, one of the record label respondents argues that to her knowledge, radio playlist decisions are made with very little knowledge of who are actually listening. In her opinion, radio decisions are made because of format rather than audience orientation: *“Radio programmers at P3 are tastemakers and -judges. They base their decisions on ideas like ‘this is cool, this fits our format’, and they can be completely indifferent with the data”* (Appendix 2). Accordingly, studies have found that radio programmers and playlist editors generally ignore or reject market research on audience taste or interest and instead rely on their own stylized versions of the audiences (Gans, 1979; Jacobs, 1996). This indicates that radio gatekeepers primarily base their decisions on Shoemaker’s individual – and organizational levels (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, it can be argued that they have less of a commercial approach, at least in regard to ‘serving the audience what it wants’.

This is further emphasized in Buch Jensen’s argumentation regarding the choice of ‘The Unavoidable’. He states: *“The measures for the choice of ‘The Unavoidable’ are indefinite. Maybe we choose a song because we think it reflects something new or surprising. Either because it is by an exciting artist, an interesting musical collaboration or because it contains a somewhat new sound that we believe contributes to expand everyone’s musical horizon. What these songs have in common, however, is that they are of high musical quality and reflect what we believe our audience would value”* (Jensen, 2019).

The above quotation indicates that the radio gatekeepers feel some kind of responsibility to “educate” their listeners. This corresponds to the fact that P3 is a non-commercial organization, thus there are no profit goals to reach as would be the case in a commercial radio. Accordingly, the gatekeeper function is dependent on radio programmers’ individual opinions, taste and interpretations. One specific criterion for getting played on P3, mentioned by Buch Jensen, is the gatekeepers’ definition of “musical quality” as an abstraction of what their audience would value. However, it is assumed that the radio gatekeeper’s abstraction is constructed within the organization, via playlist meetings and other interaction with their immediate circle of like-minded that generally act as reliable guiding for how the world is to be understood

(Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, radio programmers come to internalize these values through a process of socialization, thus standardized perceptions of ‘musical quality’ are determining what will pass through the gate (Ibid).

However, according to Buch Jensen from P3, deference to audience drives music selection in some ways, as ‘wishing wells’ sometimes determine which songs will make it past the gate. Accordingly, songs are voted on by listeners in a decision-making process that play a role in moving beyond only the conception of the mass audience (Shoemaker, 2009). Thus, in these instances the audience leads the decision of the program directors. Moreover, radio programmers take direction in what music to choose from sources such as record labels and their associated investments (Ibid). Mathias Buch states: *“We are constantly trying to challenge ourselves, go beyond and further in exploring i.e. how much generic pop we should play, how much female talent we should push etc.”* and further adds: *“(…) does this mean we’re not driven by what is signed and published by the record labels? No, of course we’re influenced by their investments”* (Rasmussen, 2019).

Last but not least, radio gatekeepers are reacting to an institutional landscape where political and governmental sources can manage parts of the music selection and dictate what gatekeepers should do. Public service radio stations have a variety of goals beyond economic motives that end up shaping media content and song selection. Accordingly, last year DR signed a new public service contract with the Ministry of Culture, comprising that P3 – amongst others – are now obligated to play at least 48 percent Danish music on their channels (Kulturministeriet, 2018). And according to Buch Jensen, this agreement entails that some songs are playlisted merely because they are Danish: *“Luckily, there are many good songs and artists to pick from, but on the other side of the argument, we risk ending up with a Danish apology for the international artist, that really have something to offer”* (Rasmussen, 2019). Accordingly, laws address the music selection directly, and create conditions that the radio programmers must adhere. However, there are to date no quotas determining the share of male/female music played across DR’s channels (Ibid).

#### 4.1.4. Streaming/Spotify

##### **Gates**

Spotify constitutes a medium where all artists can release their music to a global audience, at almost no cost. There are no actual gates to enter Spotify’s channels, release music and potentially build an audience

of streamers from around the world. This means that literally anybody with minimal craftsmanship and skills can produce a track and upload it to the streaming service, and artists added nearly 15 million songs to Spotify in 2019 (Bennett, 2019). Accordingly, around 40.000 songs are uploaded to Spotify every day (Ibid).

However, access to an increasingly large catalogue creates a daunting problem of product discovery. Thus, via playlists, Spotify filters the available songs, ensuring that only a sample of the available music is ever brought to the attention of the general public (Shoemaker, 2009). Consequently, millions of musical products are filtered out on its way to potential stardom, as these playlists have a huge say over what their users consume. If Spotify chooses to promote a song or album, they can easily draw millions of streams: *“The selection of which artists to playlist and who to exclude can be a ‘make or break’ decision for the artist, because it is such a career boost for those featured on the playlists”* states one of the female artists from my interview data (Appendix 5). Accordingly, playlists can play an important role in determining song and artist success, including the determination of which songs and artists are discovered in the first place. Consequently, in the streaming era, a new gatekeeper stands between record labels and listeners: the playlist editors.

### **Gatekeepers**

According to Barzilai-Nahon’s conceptual terminology, the streaming services constitute functional gatekeepers, providing access to infrastructure on different levels (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Spotify itself maintains both chart-based algorithmic and curated playlists, as well as playlists that are customized to each user. The algorithmic playlists – like the ‘Danish Top 50’ or the ‘Global Top 50’ – are based on streaming charts. However, when the platform promotes discovery via general playlists, such as ‘Today’s Top Hits’, they are curated using human discretion and are often used to promote songs and artists that are already widely known. As stated by one of my record label respondents: *“The most popular tracks on Spotify get featured in more playlists and become even more popular as a result... and this of course speaks to the basic echo-chamber-effect of the Spotify design. Songs placed on the platform’s most popular playlists inevitably end up in a greater number of user-generated and algorithmic playlists like Discover Weekly”* (Appendix 1). Other curated lists – like Spotify’s New Music Friday – are more specifically dedicated to the discovery of new songs and artists. The respondent points to the importance of especially this curated playlist: *“New Music Friday is one of the most essential windows to showcase new music, so it is extremely important that our artists get featured here when they release new music”* (Appendix 1).

Accordingly, new curators behind the streaming platforms decide what tracks to push on top of streaming lists so those would gain attention. The playlist editors constitute the particular gatekeepers performing the *gatekeeping* (Shoemaker, 2009). In the Danish Spotify department, the major Spotify playlists are managed by the Senior Editor, frequently referred to as ‘the most powerful man in the Danish music industry’ (Appendix 1, 2 & 5). Accordingly, the choice of which songs will be selected for the curated playlists rests in this one person’s hands. Hence, he has the power to potentially ‘make or break’ an artist, depending on who he selects to playlist, and who he disregards. Accordingly, his gatekeeping practices are identified as primarily a process of selection and dissemination (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

### *Gatekeeping mechanisms*

According to Shoemakers analytical levels, the Senior Editor is, cf. the individual level, responsible for the gatekeeping selection, which consists of his own interpretations, decision-making, personality and experiences (Shoemaker, 2009). However, it is recognized that the playlist editing is also based on Spotify’s technological routines and practices cf. the routine level (Ibid). Accordingly, listening patterns are studied by the playlist editors, who privilege songs with high completion rates and remove those with high skip rates: *“From meetings with Spotify, I’ve learned that this thing called skip-rate is a crucial metric that the editors take into consideration on how to move on songs.”* states a record label respondent from a commercial label (Appendix 2). This gatekeeping mechanism mirrors what Shoemaker identifies as ‘gate-watching’, where observation of the output gates of music publications helps to identify important material as it becomes available (Shoemaker, 2009).

Moreover, the ‘social system level’ has a huge impact on the streaming services, as larger trends such as popular culture, social interests and structures define Spotify’s playlists. Shoemaker argue that in some fields, gatekeepers transmit messages or objects that give the audience exactly what it needs or wants, because ‘a mass medium survives only to the extent that it serves the audience’s needs’ (Shoemaker, 2009). Correspondingly, Spotify relies on the public’s mass consumption in order to stay market leaders. Thus, they ‘treat’ their users in order to keep them at their platform: *“Spotify thrives on the mass consumption as performed by teenagers that listen to the same song over and over again. In society, right now, the trend is R&B and hip hop, hence, this is the trend on Spotify. Spotify must ‘treat’ its users in order to keep them on their platform, so of course their curate-decisions depend on what the mass wants”* (Appendix 2). Playlists are filled with R&B and hip-hop because Spotify is giving their audience what it wants in order to maximize audience shares (Allen, 2005). You may argue that from an artistic point of



view Spotify serves the audience ‘with more of the same,’ rather than focusing on developing the platform and audience via new genres and artists never heard of.

A record label respondent presents another version of the same argument, when he describes why Spotify’s playlists are dominated by male hip-hoppers: *“If you look at the ‘Danish top 50’ you will find that it is overcrowded by male hip-hoppers. So – whenever a new rapper, with somewhat the same sound as one of the others enters Spotify’s channels, chances are that the playlist editors will think ‘this is what our users normally stream; this is what the public likes, let’s feature him on the some of our major playlists’ (...) For Spotify it’s all about staying market leaders thus keeping as many listeners as possible and generating as many streams as possible. If they don’t playlist what their listeners want, they risk that they shift to another streaming service.”* (Appendix 1).

Spotify is generally understood to be driven by a profit motivation and a goal to maximize audience shares. Accordingly, Spotify uses their algorithmic market research to discover their individual users’ music preferences and show them more of the same. As pointed out by one of my respondents, Spotify’s strategy is overall based on former experiences, as algorithms repeat past practices: *“Spotify is both a democratic platform, but it’s also an evil data circle, because Spotify’s algorithms are based on data, and data is per definition retrospective. And they measure a lot on what people liked yesterday but they don’t seem to be as good at measuring what will be good tomorrow.”* (Appendix 1).

The above argumentation about Spotify resembles an argument presented in the book ‘Weapons of Math Destruction’ by the mathematician Cathy O’Neil, about the ways that algorithms uphold norms. As she states in the book: *“Algorithms don’t make things fair if you just blithely apply them – they repeat our past practices, our patterns. They automate the status quo. That would be great if we had a perfect world, but we don’t. Because we all have bias, it means they could be codifying sexism or any other kind of bigotry.”* (O’Neil, 2018). Accordingly, because there is more music produced by male artists on Spotify’s platform, the males have more data connected to their tracks, thus, they are recommended more to more listeners. This mechanism develops within the echo chambers which my respondents also point out: Spotify gives their users more of what they already have. As a commercial business, the streaming service does not want to challenge their listeners more than necessary. Rather, they work to secure that their listeners stay on their platform. According to O’Neil, this construction is not changeable without a disruption of the selection criteria coded within the algorithms. This again would require a conscious strategic decision from management (Ibid).

#### 4.1.5. Sub-conclusion

##### *The power of the gatekeepers*

In the commercial marketplace for music, gatekeepers still control the access to the musician's potential audience. Accordingly, despite the rise in DIY self-funded music careers where artists market and distribute their music through social media and via streaming platforms, access is not entirely open and uncontrolled. Social and interactive gatekeeper structures still develop and exist, meaning that for an artist to really break-through, they must still pass through different gates. As established via the analysis, record labels constitute the means to the full machinery of producing, promoting/market, distributing and selling the music. The booking agencies constitute the gate to the artist's live activities and the radio constitutes the medium to the broader public and a potential commercial hit. Last but not least, Spotify playlists can play an important role in determining the success of song and artist, including (the determination of) which songs and artists are discovered in the first place.

##### *Market forces shape gates*

The analysis provided a review of the individual forces that determine the decisions of the gatekeepers within the Danish music industry. As established, both record labels, booking agencies and the streaming services are commercially driven organizations with the aim to maximize profits and audience shares, thus oriented to the economic marketplace. Accordingly, market forces and demand heavily shape the nature of their individual gates (Alexander & Mahwah, 2004). When the market demands a particular music genre, then that is what it gets. In its simplest form, economic theory suggests that when the audience gets what it wants – it dictates content and becomes the gatekeeper (Shoemaker, 2009). However, this raises the question: Does the audience actually know what it wants, or does it rather want what it gets?

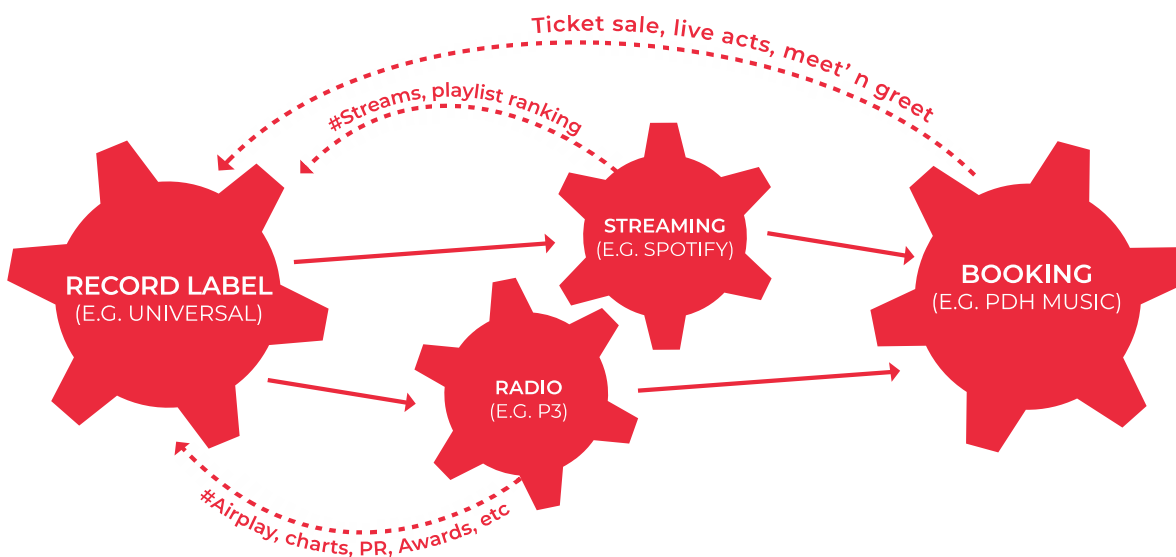
To the extent that gatekeepers respond by seeking to maximize profit, markets will dictate their investment in talents. This implies that the decision-making processes have less to do with individual gatekeepers' orientations than with the characteristics of the marketplace and its demands. Correspondingly, information on both record labels, booking and Spotify points to the fact that gatekeepers consider the lack of female representation in their respective teams as merely a reflection of structural, social and cultural trends, rather than an expression of individual preferences. As proposed by Shoemaker, this implies that in their decision-making processes, they all support (rather than disrupt) existing social

structures (Shoemaker, 2009). This further mirrors what Hirsch (1970) describes as a “dangerous goal” of gatekeepers within the creative sector; to pursue normative standards as a means to social leadership (Ibid). In his opinion, social leadership and marketplace competition for audience shares should lead to innovation, not uniformity (Ibid).

On the contrary, as demonstrated via the analysis, P3’s radio decisions rarely depend on audience orientation. Accordingly, studies have found that radio programmers and playlist editors generally ignore or reject market research on audience taste or interest and instead rely on their own stylized versions of the audiences (Gans, 1979; Jacobs, 1996). This indicates that radio gatekeepers primarily base their decisions on Shoemaker’s individual – and organizational levels (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, it can be argued that they have less of a commercial approach, at least in regard to ‘serving the audience what it wants’. Instead, radio programmers come to internalize standardized perceptions of ‘musical quality’ that in many cases determine what will pass through P3’s gate. Moreover, the public service radio has a variety of goals beyond economic motives that end up shaping media content and song selection.

### *Gatekeeper salience*

As proposed by Shoemaker, a typical external source of gatekeeper routines is other gatekeepers’ practices (Shoemaker, 2009). This orientation is very apparent in the interview data, as all gatekeepers depend on – and respond to each other’s choices and practices. Accordingly, the gates and their keepers are more networked than structured in sequence, thus a rejection from one gatekeeper lower the chances of reaching the next one. An ecosystem of influence among the gatekeepers, has been identified and visualized below.



*Figure 4.1.5. Gatekeeper ecosystem of influence. Own illustration.*

### *The vicious spiral*

As illustrated above, record labels are providers of the first ‘input’ – the artists, who further circulate in the ecosystem. Artists that pass through the gates of the record labels are managed by A&R’s and further picked up by radio and streaming providers who function as the primary disseminators to the public. The artists being subjects to substantial ‘commercial pushes’ and playlisting by radio and Spotify have the best possibilities of commercial success and popularity in the end. However, as derived from the analysis, this process takes place in a circular notion, where the output of radio and Spotify also function as input for the record labels’ further/future selection practices and investments in the current and new artists. This results in a ‘vicious spiral’: If Spotify does not support the entry of more female artists in order to move the music consumption forward and thus ensure gender equality in the music supply, the record labels are not going to sign more female artists due to the interdependency between the gatekeepers and their common goals. But, on the other hand if the record labels do not sign female talents and present them with their resources to the other gatekeepers, Spotify is not going to break them. The result is a status-quo music supply with a majority of male artists – especially within the hip-hop genre – hence new experiences and innovation with potential new markets and gains being less prevalent.

## **4.2. Sub-analysis part two – Cognitive biases and decision-making processes**

The following chapter compares the evidence from the interviews with the female artists with the derived biases that assert among the interviewed gatekeepers, in order to examine the impediments facing women in the music industry. Accordingly, eight barriers that affect the female artists’ possibilities for a successful breakthrough and a sustainable career in music have been identified. These are thematized and interpreted in association with gender equality professor Sara Louise Muhr’s findings on gender management in leadership, and furthermore with regard to the decision-making concepts and theories on cognitive biases as presented in the literature review.

### **4.2.1. Barrier 1: The perception that females lack talent and/or do not have the right mentality**

As described in the literature review, Muhr (2018) presents two general explanations of the deficit of females in leadership. Accordingly, due to the social conception of Danish equality and our country’s historical forefront in promoting gender equality, people tend to believe that females are rare in leadership

because a) they do not have the right talent or competencies or b) they do not want to be leaders. As derived from my interview data, the same basic idea applies to the uneven gender distribution in the Danish music industry. Accordingly, it is a barrier for the female musicians that they are ‘locked’ in the conception that they lack talent and/or do not have the right mentality. This conception might function as an unconscious stop block for the females, while at the same time it may influence the gatekeepers with decision-making power to appoint these females a record deal and a successful career in music.

### *‘Females are not talented’*

The first argument is that the female musicians do not have the necessary skills and/or the right experience. Accordingly, an A&R respondent from a major label states explicitly that she finds it difficult to scout female musicians: *“I must admit – it’s actually really difficult to find skilled female musicians. Especially some that are authentic and capable of actually writing”* (Appendix 2). Having encountered this perception, a Danish musician and pop-artist from my interview data expresses her frustration over constantly being annulled for her musical skills and expertise, despite the three albums she has both written and co-produced in her career: *“It’s like everybody believes that women can’t handle these roles. It is definitely a prejudice that I met throughout my career; that women are not as good musicians; women can’t produce; women can’t mix; women don’t care about technical stuff. So many nuances get lost because we write off women’s skills. It’s like women have to demonstrate clear evidence of what they are capable of before anyone will believe it. At least that’s my experience. That credit for what’s ‘behind’ my music has been taken away from me even though I have in fact written and co-produced everything I’ve ever released. But people don’t seem to really believe it”* (Appendix 6).

The above argumentation mirrors findings of a recent McKinsey report on women in the workplace. Accordingly, most commonly, women have to prove themselves more than men and have their judgement questioned in their area of expertise (McKinsey, 2018).

The supposed intrinsic masculinity of various musical practices, particularly those of ‘creating’ or composing music, is something that most of the female respondents have touched upon. Another version of the argument comes from one of my respondents, who is referring to a statement from the Icelandic music icon Björk: *“Björk once said, that no matter what, if she works with a man, people will always assume that he’s the master mind behind her productions and songs. And I just really relate to that. If a man joins me at stage, just playing a stupid triangle, he’ll get the credit for the entire show”* Appendix 7). With this quote, the respondent points to the fact that females are often ignored or overruled, implying that a female cannot create or perform a music product without a man.

Experiences of female pop artists vary and women in pop are of course not one singular entity. For example, one of my respondents explain that she has not directly experienced similar practices for herself. Nonetheless she recognizes the stories from her female colleagues: *“My friend Kirstine, who was a part of a popular band, she was always so disappointed after talking to journalists, because they just assumed that Tobias was the producer and creator behind the music, even though it was her”* (Appendix 4). Accordingly, another female respondent points to the Danish music critic from Ekstra Bladet, Thomas Treo, who in a review of the girl band Velvet Volume showed *”so little focus on their music and so much focus on their sex. And of course, he gave credit for the sound to Nick Foss, who was their male producer”* (Appendix 7).

### ***‘Females do not have the right mentality’***

The next argument is that females do not want to, or do not have the right mentality. One of my respondents, an A&R from a major label draw upon the stereotype that women are biologically more insecure than men when she states: *“Women are more insecure than men, tread carefully, wait longer to send their music and are less bossy when they step into a room. I guess it’s just in our nature. But it is definitely one of the reasons why we sign fewer female artists, and that less females breakthrough in general.”* (Appendix 2). A respondent from another major label is also certain that more male than females send music demos: *“It’s actually a rare thing, when girls and women send us demos. I have a feeling that they might be shy. But when they do, it’s actually pretty exciting – like – can this be something?”* (Appendix 1).

Accordingly, it is said that women, and girls, lack confidence in their skills and argued that this could be a reason why women are not succeeding in the music industry. However, the latter respondent expresses an underlying hope that the (few) women that do send in demos, actually show potential, implying that he wants to work with more female potential.

The perception that females do not want to or do not believe in themselves is not only a finding in my interviews, but also supported by several public interviews. As an example Mathias Buch Jensen from P3 expresses that the low representation of women as credited songwriters and popstars could be a reflection of women’s low interest in the ‘pop star dream’: *”We have some female starts that have had major success. Think about Mø and Medina. But I know – they’re rare. I guess it’s just not as recognized in the Danish culture for females to pursue a popstar dream as it is in i.e. Great Britain.”* (Politiken, 2018).

The above citations draw a picture of a discourse among gatekeepers that is repeated in public documents from media and journalists, resulting in a narrative that spreads and becomes a fundamental conception in society (Muhr, 2018). The discourse that females are not talented enough or do not have the right mentality sends a clear signal to the gatekeeper instances and onwards to society, that generally female musicians are not as valuable as their male colleagues. Accordingly, the discourse upholds an implicit bias that occurs when i.e. the record labels recruit and develop new talents. When women as a group are verbalized as humans that need help, it becomes difficult for female artists to be seen as complete artists, and at the same time it places the responsibility on the individual woman to disprove the ‘help discourse’ (Muhr, 2018).

With this said, it is important to emphasize that, naturally, there are females lacking skills and some that do not want to pursue a career in music, exactly as is the case for males. But this is not the issue. The issue is that these arguments are used to generalize about all females, thus as a general explanation to make up for the deficit of female musicians in the music industry. Hence, it constitutes a barrier for female musicians that they are locked in a conception that they are not good enough or do not have the right mentality to succeed. Besides being a potential unconscious stop block for females and for the gatekeepers, in between the lines it is also an abdication of responsibility and a justification for not recognizing the real issue.

#### 4.2.2. Barrier 2: ‘Female artists must be ‘superstars’ and over performers’

The tendency to overlook skilled females leads to another tendency that Muhr explains in her book about females in leadership: Women are often overqualified for a position or a job before they apply for it, while men come forward when they are only about to be ready. The general interpretation of this distortion is that females lack self-confidence (Muhr, 2018). But my female respondents do not explain this tendency with a lack of confidence (and the same is true for Muhr’s interview data). Instead, several of my respondents describe that they, as female musicians, have to be more skilled than their male counterparts in order to be noticed: *“The few female artists emphasized today are super-artists. As a woman, in order to be acknowledged on stage, you have to be supernatural. It’s okay for men be mediocre – they still get airplay and success. But the requirements to pass through the gates of the industry and society at large are simply higher for female artists.”* (Appendix 5).

One of my respondents; a female musician/pop-artist emerged in 2010, a few years after Mads Langer and while Lukas Graham was experiencing a major breakthrough. She explains: *“I was like: ‘Why are you (Mads Langer and Lukas Graham) able to be yourself and that’s fine? I felt like I constantly had to*

*work on my image and be a better performer. Often, girls are expected to be the full package a lot sooner than guys. I see boys go on stage in jeans and a T-shirt and look a bit scruffy and they're a bit awkward and people love it, but when you're a female act you're expected to be very polished very quickly. It can be daunting.*" (Appendix 6).

Accordingly, Mavis Bayton (1998), author of the book 'Women Performing Popular Music' writes: "*With female singers, traditionally, there has been a heavy emphasis on appearance, image and visual performance and often presenting a stereotypical feminine presentation of self*" (Bayton, 1998). In line, one of my female respondents further explains: "*In the post-Rihanna, post-Beyonce landscape, it seems impossible for labels to launch a new female artist without positioning them as potential style icons. That's how you make the money.*" (Appendix 6).

More than that, another respondent explains that female artists are expected to live up to certain social idealistic conceptions: "*It feels sometimes as though female pop artists are expected to live up to the "strong woman" archetype on social media. The music is never just enough.*" (Appendix 5). Correspondingly, one of the booking agents from my interview data refers to the rise of one of today's most popular Danish female stars, Jada, when he explains the importance of having 'something to say': "*Jada had her breakthrough because of her storytelling – the anti-idealistic woman archetype – and the media loved it. In fact, she was the cover of magazines on the basis of extremely few song releases. It's like she was a figurehead for another debate*" (Appendix 3).

Nonetheless, most of my record label respondents flatly rejects that they would look for something 'extra' in female acts, in comparison to their male counterparts. However, in one of the respondent's argumentation about conspiracy against women, it is stated that: "*If someone as unbelievable as Adele or Beyonce sent in an amazing demo, had a great manager and was a really great artist, everyone would be fighting to [sign them].*" (Appendix 2). Presumably, the respondent intended to indicate openness to female talent, but actually she shows how limited that opening is: the expectation of supernatural greatness and access to managerial support.

During the interview with another record label representative, the respondent became aware that there might be differences in what men and women are expected to bring to the table, when they knock on his record label door: "*Okay, I actually see it now... it is more difficult for girls. If a guy shows up with a cool attitude, he can almost get a record deal. But females are requested more. (...) Wow, we've signed so*



*much shit on the male front, where we've just been like: Let's give it a shot. And we rarely do the same with female talent. It's sad. But it's like we need to be surer.*" (Appendix 1). The above quotation reflects a process where the respondent realizes his own bias. Though he does not explicate the cause, one fact is clear: The requirements to pass through the gates of the record labels are higher for the female talent, than when a male talent is under consideration.

The female respondents agree that they are not noticed, unless they are better than their male counterparts: *"Regardless if we like it or not, we have to overperform in order to be acknowledged."* (Appendix 5).

An A&R from my interview data have noticed that female musicians are working hard for attention, however, in her opinion this is not helpful in order to succeed: *"Probably because it is so articulated, that it is more difficult for females (to break through), they try too hard. It's like they do things they don't want to, wear fancy clothes to get discovered and write songs about stuff they think will sell. (In the absence of a better formulation,) it's almost like some of the girls try to act and look more masculine and cool and I'm just like – this is not you? It's not authentic. It seems far-fetched"* (Appendix 2).

On the one hand, it makes sense that this A&R (responsible for finding, signing and developing talent) is scouting authentic talent. On the other hand, it is paradoxical to demand female talent comparable to global superstars like Adele and Beyonce, but at the same time question females making an extra effort. This argumentation indicates a narrow, socially acceptable room for maneuvering that female artists must balance within – in business literature terminology called 'walking the tight rope' (Muhr, 2019) 'Walking the tight rope' is a metaphor for what is often experienced by females in leadership as a thin line between femininity and masculinity. Are they too feminine, they are not taken seriously; are they too masculine, they will be seen as unnatural, bossy 'mini-men' (Ibid).

Translated to the music industry, female artists must fit into a stereotypical archetype of the female popstar (in business literature termed as 'fitting into the glass shoe'). But in a time where the commercial output to a great extent lies with male artists, and only with few female artists that furthermore have to overperform, there is not much room for a different shape of foot (to stay within the framework of the metaphor). Some women try to 'chop a heel and cut a toe', but are then regarded as unnatural or unauthentic artists. If they on the other hand are too feminine, they will become invisible and boring in the eyes of the gatekeepers.

#### 4.2.3. Barrier 3: 'Females bring lower commercial value'

Among the record label gatekeepers, the most used response/comeback to the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry is that 'women do not perform well on streaming' (Appendix 1 & 2). The backing for this argument is that right now the most dominant commercial music genre is hip-hop, which is heavily male dominated, pushing the female artists to the bottom of the hit-charts. A respondent from a major label states "*You might say the archetype of pop music is actually now shifting from pop stars to male hip-hop artists (...) The development of female stars is, therefore, somewhat being diverted away from R&B and rap*" (Appendix 1).

Gatekeepers in the interview data explicitly express that the popular genre is not beneficial for females. However, this is interpreted as a justification of their own lack of responsibility in regards to potentially biased or discriminating practices: "*If you look at the popular culture right now, the dominating genre is just men. And of course as A&Rs we look at this – what is going to work – and if the genre is dominated by men, of course we see more men in the charts*" (Appendix 2).

Though explicit bias is expressed deliberately and are views that people are often willing to defend and argue for, they are however to the same extend as implicit bias a result of norms, experiences and interpretations. It is therefore often worldviews that we believe to be true, and that we believe are backed up by valid proof. Because my respondent assumes that the popular trend is unchangeable, she has a greater risk of discriminating on that basis, and furthermore believe that it is legitimate. Though she formerly rejected potential discriminatory practices, she indicates later, that there are in fact higher requirements for female artists, because they 'per definition perform worse in the market' (Appendix 2). Even though this turns out to be true in general, this is not the main challenge or issue, it is rather the fact that the generalization itself stands in the way for my respondents view and evaluation of the individual (Muhr, 2018).

Because implicit bias is unconscious, the discriminatory behavior that it can cause is unintentional. Accordingly, it is possible to have a high explicit bias that supports women but still a high implicit bias against women. Even those aware of the fact that biases can occur show that they are still driven by implicit biases. This is visible in the following quotation: "*I don't think that there are more talented male than female artists. I really don't. Moreover, I have never thought of it as an issue in my job, whether it is a man or a woman that sits next to me at the table. If I come to think about it, it is when I am considering signing a female artist, then it sometimes hits me that women simply underperform in the market. So yeah,*

*I guess there is some kind of bias or what to call it – a gender specific way of thinking about candidates”* (Appendix 2).

The above quotation reflects a process where my respondent becomes aware of her own bias. She admits thinking differently about artists and explicates that there is a disparity in her evaluation of male and female talents, and that her deep-seated assumption that females ‘underperform in the market’ effects the signing process.

Especially one quotation from the interview data indicates that the predetermined conception that women underperform in the market actually entails lower budgets from the record labels and less push and support. As expressed in the following argumentation, at a personal level, my respondent might fancy a female artist, but he knows from the very start that she is not expected to provide as high of a return of investment via streaming. Thus, his director will give him a lower budget to work with: *“Often, when I am presented with a new female artist I am like: Wow, she’s cool, I get the right gut feeling and smell the potential stardust. But then, when going to my boss for budget discussions, I just don’t get a very big scope to work with. As an example, I just signed a girl who is super cool, but the verdict from above is just that she isn’t streaming potential. So that’s where we jump in and decide – well, then the budget just has to be a little smaller. Afterall, it is a business that has to thrive”* (Appendix 1).

If the female artist who my respondent refers to will be a success streaming-wise, it will not be investigated further. Nonetheless, the conclusion is clear: My respondent and his superiors at the major label, just like the other aforementioned respondents from other record labels – are influenced by gendered stereotypes that cause them to immediately assess male artists as having a higher commercial value than females. Accordingly, this entails that they consider it too risky to invest in female talents, to the same extend as they dare invest in male talents.

#### 4.2.4: Barrier 4: Lack of space and ‘the throne’

A returning/recurring theme among the female participants in the interview data is ‘space’, or rather lack of space. An often-used argument in this relation is what can be phrased ‘the throne’. According to this argument, there is a tendency in the music industry to glorify – and place one single female artist on a pedestal, declare her the queen and create a discourse that there is only room for her. In order for another female artist to succeed, she must ‘conquer’ the former queen and win over her throne: *“We can have only one interesting female artist at a time. And as soon as another becomes interesting; we throw the*

*first one under the buss. And is that actually what's about to happen right now? Jada's being replaced by Tessa? It is an awareness inside all of us, that there is not enough room for us all. And if another female artist is somewhat similar to whatever you're doing, you're fucked.*" (Appendix 6).

Another female artist supports the above argumentation with a personal experience of being rejected by bookers, and she is certain it was because of the lack of room for her sex: *"In 2015, when my career started to blossom, I was very hyped and so was Kwamie Liv. I was rejected several times for festival jobs that I was pitched to via my own bookers, because they had already made a deal with Kwamie. And then I was just like – but – we're completely different musicians and performers? Kwamie is super 'indie' in her genre, and I produce straight pop. I experienced that the only reason for my rejection was that they didn't want two women at the festival. Because our music is nowhere comparable."* (Appendix 5). Furthermore, my respondent explains that she was pitched in to the popular TV show 'Toppen af Poppen' the same year as Kwamie Liv. However, again, the show ended up having only one of the two singer/songwriters in the cast (Ibid).

The respondent also directly refers to the music industry's 'throne' and describes it as an unhealthy tendency, that all energy is centralized around one artist: *"In the 80s, there were so many females at the top at the same time. But the last ten years, we've seen a discourse that there's only room for one at a time. First there was MØ, and only MØ. Right now, it is Jada that gets all the attention and publicity, wins all awards etc. It is simply not productive for womens' possibilities to thrive – and survive – in the business (...) I honestly get really angry, because it is suppressing towards female artists that only one is 'right'."* (Appendix 5).

#### 4.2.5. Barrier 5: 'Rivalry rather than networks'

The lack of room drives competition among the female artists who distance themselves from each other, instead of networking and supporting each another: *"The industry plays us off against each other, because we're constantly reminded that there is not room enough for all of us. It creates a competitive mentality, because we all wish to be successful and be able to make a living from our music. But when you are told that it is only a handful of women, that can achieve it, there is not exactly breeding ground for putting the spotlight on another woman,"* states one of my respondents (Appendix 6).

In accordance, another female artist describes the music industry as a 'toxic environment', where women find it difficult to support each other, and instead perceive each other as competitors: *"If there is only room for one woman, you gotta make sure it's you. So instead of doing a collaboration with Soleima or*

*Ericha Jane, you become afraid that they will steal your chair. I've experienced a super toxic environment in regard to women supporting other women in my time in the music industry.*" (Appendix 5).

The competition between female artists stand in contrast to the mentality they experience among their male colleagues. One of the female artists from my interview data experiences that male musicians have a culture where they hang out in each other's studios, play on each other's tracks and invite each other on stage when they play concerts. Women, on the contrary, have a tendency of holding their music close to their chests until it is completely done: *"It is like we women sit on each our individual island – with each our music – and suck at letting each other in or using each other to get help (...) I see brotherhoods everywhere, but no sisterhood"* (Appendix 4). One of the record label respondents also points to the difference between men and women in their habits of supporting each other, and emphasizes that relations in the industry are of key importance: *"Women should encourage each other more. If you look at the biggest male stars in Denmark, they all collaborate and feed on each other's success. None of the biggest female artists do that. Men do it all the time. And they win because of it."* (Appendix 2).

#### 4.2.6. Barrier 6: Men as validators

Lack of sisterhood as stated above leads me further on to another important theme, evident from the interview data as well as in the public debate: The music industry's brotherhoods. A female musician describes to me that she became aware of the gender gap especially by looking at the industry's gatekeepers: *"When I started out, I wasn't very interested in this thing about gender or inequality. But my interest was awoken when I noticed the low share of female decision makers in the music industry, in the companies that determine whether the audience gets to hear the music or not"* (Appendix 4).

Accordingly, another female artist describes that when she looks around in the industry, specifically with the eye on gatekeepers, all she sees are men: *"I literally can't think of one single female record label boss. It's men that decide what's valuable enough to get played on the radio, it's men who book for the festivals and men sitting on the booking agencies"* (Appendix 6). In line, another female artist expresses a consideration that applies to great parts of the ecosystem of the Danish music industry, as well as in other arenas where men call the shots: *"It's like it has to get passed the male filters that have the power to decide if it is good enough. So men become some kind of validators on female art"* (Appendix 5). This resonates with a theme presented by Muhr in her book on gender management: female leaders are often dependent on male 'superiors' to pave the way and include them in practice (Muhr, 2019).

As stated in a recent Annenberg Initiative report, the lack of women in roles responsible for creative direction across visual and audio entertainment is ‘troubling’. Accordingly, this composition in the workforces may lead to a uniform expression of art, that does not reflect the entire population equally. More than that, the majority of men in decision-making positions can result in female artists being overlooked and ignored in favor of men. Accordingly, a recent McKinsey study argues that the so-called ‘affinity bias’ may compel men to prefer male candidates due to their perceived similarity to themselves (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

One of the female artists from my interview data questions this phenomena in a flow of thoughts: does the fact that the industry gatekeepers are men worsen her chances as a woman?: *”I have experienced that female musicians, myself included, encountered one locked door after another, and every time it was a man who turned the key. And at one point, when you have tried it so many times, you start to wonder if it has some kind of impact that it’s a man behind every door.”* (Appendix 4).

Likewise, another female artists explained to me that she has experienced rejection for something that in her opinion would have received plenty of airplay had it come from a man: *”I really got the urge to write a furious mail to Mathias Buch from P3, because he kept on rejecting and disregarding my music. Last year when I released an album, he thought that it sounded ‘too much like everything else’, so he wouldn’t playlist it. Then recently, when I released my new single, Mathias didn’t think that it was ‘contemporary’ enough. And then I’m just like – what do you want? And my management and label keep on reaching out to him like: We sell 2000 tickets in Copenhagen, why don’t you support this? I analyzed a male artist, that is very similar to me, and he gets plenty of airplay! I normally don’t feed that thought, but suddenly I was like: Really?! Is it because I am a woman? Or – would it at least be easier if I was a man? Or am I just a shitty musician?”* (Appendix 7).

The fact that this artist as a final remark rhetorically asks herself if the missing radio airplay is due to her being a ‘shitty musician’ (despite that she rationally knows that she has a huge fanbase globally) is a natural consequence of being rejected on the basis of biases. The mechanisms are generally invisible, thus it is difficult to point to a specific discriminatory practice: *”It is so difficult, because there is no concrete place that you can point to. People always want me to say ‘And then there was this white, old man with a cigar who refused to sign my record because I am a women. And I can’t give them that. It’s worse, because it is everywhere. Not just at the record labels, not just in the radio. It is everywhere, and you can’t really pinpoint what it consists of.”* (Appendix 7).

#### 4.2.7 Barrier 7: Still a Boy's Club

In relation to a potential affinity bias, some of the female artists notice what the business literature identifies as 'old boy's clubs' or an 'old boy's network' (Morgan, Quesenberry and Trauth 2004). One of my respondents states: *"I see brotherhoods everywhere. Chains of men that are friends: musicians, managers, bookers, label people that hang out at award parties and backstage at venues and festivals. And what I realized recently was – it is some kind of work-ecosystem – they provide each other with jobs and support each other's artists. (...) No, it is not only gendered, some of my male colleagues have the same experience of exclusion. But because it is primarily men that build relations and work-friendships with other men, it all just gets very masculine"* (Appendix 4).

Prof. Dr. Christa Brüstle, who is one of a few music professors with the explicit mandate to conduct gender research at a public university in Europe, points to the same significant gender power imbalances in the music business: 'Old-boy's networks persist and result in fewer career opportunities for women' as supported by recently documented gender-pay gaps in the music industry (Niethammer, 2019). Accordingly, men form 'informal social networks' where they share information in a less formal setting, learn to trust each other, and establish personal relationships. These networks breed a culture of hegemonic masculinity, and are an important, albeit tangential, facet of organizational life because such networks "reinforce gender inequalities in the organizational distribution of power" via the "tendency to form same-sex network relationships" (Zahidi & Ibarra, 2010).

#### 4.2.8. Barrier 8: The persistent glass ceiling

In order to explain and exemplify gender bias in the business literature, several researchers have defined an array of metaphors for the barriers faced by women in the labour market. The most famous hereof is the Glass Ceiling (Muhr, 2019). The glass ceiling is a metaphor for the barrier that many women meet when they have chosen a leadership career but reach a certain level where societal perceptions of their gender no longer match the perception of necessary leadership competencies. The metaphor illustrates the invisible line that seems to exist between middle management level and senior management level, and that particularly seems to limit women to the middle management level.

This invisible line has been touched upon by several of the interviewed female artists: *"I experience that as a female artist, you have dreadful conditions trying to break through and make a living from your music. It is okay that we are there, it is okay that we sing and create music, but it is difficult as a female*

*artist to do it at a level where you don't need to work on the side – and that's because of both radio decisions and label investments.”* (Appendix 5). Accordingly, this quotation describes a backlash that prevents female artists from climbing the hierarchical ladder, precisely in the same way as it is described in business literature. The respondent specifically points to two gatekeepers; radio and record labels that put a ‘cap’ on women’s possibilities. Likewise, another female artist from my interview data points to the glass ceiling as she experiences it: *”We need to put an end to a system where women in the music industry work under this famous glass ceiling. It's like there is a cap for what you are able to achieve as a female musician.”* (Appendix 6).

The glass ceiling is formulated as an argument against the common understanding that women do not have the will, the right abilities or the guts. Instead, the metaphor points to the gendered power structures, biases and stereotypes that stop women at the second highest level. Accordingly, the examples presented above, illustrate that female artists are either expected to be super-artists or told, that they ‘do not perform well on streaming’, thus putting a cap on females’ careers by creating a gender biased barrier. At the same time, the music industry (sometimes unconsciously) favours male artists at the top of the hit-charts and on the biggest stages. Of course, some women manage to break through the glass ceiling, but as illustrated via the many quotations brought forward above, these females have fought hard and faced bias many steps of the way. Not all have the energy to put up with this resistance in the long run, so it becomes easier to stay where you fit in or completely skip the fight: *”If women constantly hit their heads against the wall (read: the glass ceiling), feel like they are never recognized and have to work jobs beside the music, eventually they will drop out.”* (Appendix 6)

An important final remark is to emphasize that naturally, men also have to fight for a career in music, but the difference is, that they generally do not face resistance due to their gender; they are not held down by the glass ceiling. If gender biases and stereotypes are not tackled and put to an end by gatekeepers (i.e. via some of the mechanisms and initiatives defined in the discussion), it is up to every single female artist to break through the glass ceiling and individually prove that she is capable. If gatekeepers, on the other hand, work actively together and against the (concrete) construction of gender biases and stereotypes, it will eventually be possible for men and women to pursue and work on their musical career on equal terms (Muhr, 2019).



#### 4.2.9. Sub-conclusion

This analysis has compared the evidence from the interviews with the female artists with the derived biases that asserted among the interviewed gatekeepers, in order to examine the impediments facing women in the music industry. Accordingly, eight barriers that affect female artists' possibilities for a successful breakthrough and a sustainable career in music has been identified. These are summarized in the figure below.

**Barrier 1:** 'Females are lacking talent and/or do not have the right mentality'

**Barrier 2:** 'Female artists must be 'superstars' and overperformers'

**Barrier 3:** 'Females bring lower commercial value'

**Barrier 4:** Lack of space and 'the throne'

**Barrier 5:** Rivalry rather than networks

**Barrier 6:** Men as validators

**Barrier 7:** Still a Boy's Club

**Barrier 8:** The persistent glass ceiling

The above identified barriers have been thematized and interpreted in association with Muhr's findings on gender management in leadership, and furthermore with regard to the decision-making concepts and theories on cognitive biases as presented in the literature review. Accordingly, the findings imply that the barriers preventing a diverse gender representation do not stem from deliberate oppression, but instead from unconscious cognitive biases and deep inherent understandings of norms. On subtle as well as more clear levels, females experience a lack in several types of privileges. This is reflected in the interview representatives' descriptions of their lack of space; the fact that they have to be supernatural to be even noticed; that they hit their heads against the glass ceiling at a certain point in their careers and the fact that they are evaluated and validated solely by men. Status quo bias is warping gatekeeper selection practices, meaning that those in power are favoring people with whom they share certain attributes. Accordingly, female artists are evaluated from another point of departure than their male colleagues. They are not expected to have the right skills or the right mentality, whereas the male artists are generally understood to be capable. Hence, while men have to prove that they are good enough, women have to refute that they are not good enough.

“

*The only way to rectify is to take deliberate action. Since biases are integral parts of human nature, they can never truly be eradicated. We must therefore turn to changes in systems and practices to reduce their influence”*

# 05

**DISCUSSION**

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

In the following chapter, the findings from the analysis are incorporated in a discussion that contributes to answer the last sub-element of the research question. The first section will consider how the findings from the literature review and the analysis contribute to the understanding of the deficit of female artists in the context of gatekeeper selection practices. Accordingly, it is attempted to go beyond the collected findings and critically reflect over some of the themes and paradoxes they include. Subsequently, this chapter will discuss a range of actionable steps for the music industry, the government and the society at large to implement, in order to improve and ultimately close the gender gap in music. Finally, the last section contributes to highlight some of the implications that have occurred in the meeting of theory and practice and briefly review other perspectives than those detected in chapter 3, 4 and 5 that could have been relevant to include in order to study the imbalance in the most adequate way. Moreover, the last part of the discussion evaluates and discusses the dissertations' overall contribution in a broader academic and societal context.

### 5.1. Responsibility or lack of the same

The first part of the analysis presented an assessment of the music industry's most imperative gatekeepers and defined the key dimensions of the relationships between them and the 'gated'. The aim of this analysis was to understand how the gates work by understanding the forces that help to determine the decisions of the gatekeepers (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Accordingly, the expectation was to gain an understanding of the power dimensions between the gatekeepers and the gated, and perhaps be able to identify if one gatekeeper was more influential than the others; potentially holding the power to open up the entire network by executing their gatekeeping practices in a more gender inclusive manner.

In the analysis it became apparent that certain spillover effects are present in the gatekeepers' decision-making process: previous decisions by prior gatekeepers affect future decision makers reasoning and behavior as Shoemaker notes: "*today's individual gatekeeping decision may become tomorrow's selection norm*" (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, most of the addressed gatekeepers respond to each other in a circular notion, thus, it was possible to map an ecosystem of the music industry's most imperative gatekeepers. It was however not possible to pinpoint who holds first position in the networked ecosystem. Though record labels are providers of the initial 'input' into the ecosystem, record labels also depend on the output from i.e. radio and Spotify as input for their selection practices and investments in current and new artists. This results in a 'vicious spiral' as illustrated in chapter 4.

Based on the interview data, it appears that the prevalent position/attitude among the gatekeepers is that the lack of female artists is not their responsibility, but rather a simple question of supply and demand. The bookers point to the audiences buying the tickets. Radio stations pass on the responsibility to record labels that further pass it on to Spotify with the argument that they invest in the music that provides visible return on the streaming service. Finally, Spotify argues to be a democratic platform serving their users what they want. Accordingly, it can be submitted for discussion if it is in fact the music consumers, who must take charge and push forward to change the male artists' dominant role in the musical landscape. Further, it is relevant to ask if it is the listeners' consumption that have given men higher commercial value in the first place. The music industry is in many ways a democracy: If the listeners do not consume the music, priorities and investments must be reassessed which could potentially dilute the male dominance. But this begs the question: Do the listeners know what they want, or do they simply want what they get?

The female artists in the interview data express that they *could* sell more tickets if the festivals represented a wider range of artists. That they could generate more streams on Spotify if the streaming service supported them and not least that there would be more female artists thriving in the Danish music industry if the space for them was created and if the concept of the 'throne' was eliminated. This again points to the argument that the gatekeepers' investment and promotion decisions have major impact on which artists thrive, succeed, including the determination of which songs and artists are discovered by consumers in the first place.

However, according to the interview data, among the commercial gatekeepers there is a general perception that female representation brings lower commercial value and thus less profit. Accordingly, it is evident that you cannot blame the music labels that their main focus is earning a profit (as is the case for most companies). The music industry is huge, and so is the money in the industry. Accordingly, their strategy is based on their former experience; success and failures, and it becomes a safe ride that could be described as 'more of the same'. As such, the gatekeepers lean towards established and proven working models instead of embracing more innovative solutions that allow for more flexibility (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Besides the obvious ethical concerns, the business risks getting stagnant and overseeing a *blue ocean potential* in terms of a specific new genre or talent that could in fact expand their business. The mere fact that the music industry is part of the culture industry, could in itself be a special obligation to invest more in new areas, new artists, more female artists etc. Both as an obligation but also as a potentially missed business opportunity.

Diversity can be a resource for a larger and more varied offering of music to audiences and music consumers. However, on a macroeconomic level, it is also vital that the Danish music industry leverage all kinds of potential, in order to drive economic export growth forward. If half of the populations' creative resources are never unfolded or exploited – talent, that could have created development and economic growth, not only for the individual, but for society at large – is wasted (McKinsey&Company, 2015). If the potential is to be fulfilled, and in order to have as diverse a musical life as possible, conditions for female artists must be improved.

The arguments for correcting the gender imbalance in the music industry mirrors the arguments for diversity in other branches such as the general labor market. Supporting women's presence in the industry increases the market appeal, attracts more females to take part in the industry and supports women's rights to equal treatment, -participation and -representation (Sojo, Wood, & Wheeler, 2016). Nonetheless, there seems to be a tendency within the cultural sector – and especially in the music industry – to rebut the necessity of gender equality initiatives. Accordingly, gatekeepers point to 'talent' and 'quality' as something indefinable, unmeasurable and non-gender specific nor gender dependent.

However, as a counter to this argumentation, it is relevant to consider PhD in Musicology, Kathrine Wallewik's statement about talent, and the fact that it can never be an objective measure. She states in a public interview: *"Quality and/or talent is a context dependent concept. In the history of culture, it has been a quality mark that art was produced by male artists, whereas we have been critical towards female artists. Thus, historically most art has been created by men. The argument about quality vs. gender or more likely quality over gender is suppressing since it can always be argued that what there is most of is the best quality"* (Steen, Gaffa, 2020). In other words, Wallewik suggests that we must be critical towards the concept of quality or talent as not gender biased. Accordingly, it is privileged – and historically a male privilege – to perceive quality and art as something divine that cannot be touched. These concepts are socially constructed and thus socially changeable (Pedersen, 2012).

However, this leads us to perhaps the ultimate impediment as derived from chapter 4: Barriers to a diverse representation does not stem from deliberate oppression, they arise from unconscious biases. More than that, business models; economical and commercial motives as well as Spotify's algorithms support these biases, affecting female artists' access to the market. The only way to rectify this is to take deliberate action. As established in chapter 3, since biases are integral parts of human nature, they can never truly

be eradicated. We must therefore turn to changes in systems and practices to reduce their influence (Muhr, *Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer*, 2019).

## 5.2. Which actionable steps can be taken by the industry to correct the imbalance?

So far, this study has focused on the gatekeepers' selection practices and the biases enacted in these decision-making processes, affecting female artists' access to the Danish music industry. Now it is time to look at possible initiatives that can change the prevailing structures and ultimately enhance female artists' possibilities of a successful breakthrough and a sustainable career in music. As established in the introduction, there are no quick fixes. It is nonetheless my argument that based on the empirical findings; it is possible to propose several recommendations that can be introduced to create a meaningful shift in the representation of women in the music industry. These include three levels of concrete gender equality initiatives that will involve and impact all the addressed gatekeepers, as illustrated below.

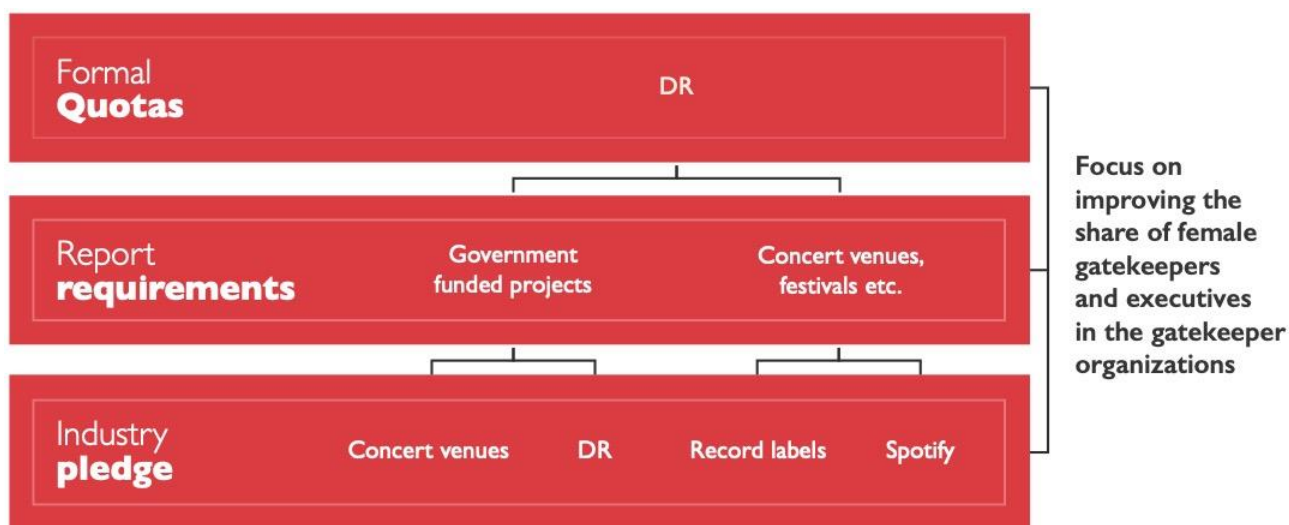


Figure 5.2. Three levels of equality initiatives aimed at the addressed gatekeepers. Own illustration.

### 5.2.1. Formal quotas for publicly funded media – DR

As established in chapter 4, DR differs from the other addressed gatekeepers due to their public service obligations. Accordingly, they are funded by the citizens, and act in an institutional landscape where political and governmental sources manage parts of their music selection practices. As noted, the Ministry

of Culture recently enrolled that P3 – amongst other channels – are now obliged to play at least 48 percent Danish music (Kulturministeriet, Kulturministeriet , 2018). However, only 8% of the Danish music air played on DR is by female artists (Kulturministeriet, Folketingets Kulturudvalg, 2019). Following this, it is evident that DR should also be obliged to ensure that the share of female artists on the channels reflects the population to a much greater extent. Therefore, following the overall 48% quota for Danish music on DR, it is proposed that the DR public service contract will be laid out to also include a gender quote.

The argument for quotas is that instead of working to change radio programmers' and music executives' attitudes and biases, in order to bring about different behavior, quotas force organizations to change their behavior at a much more fundamental and systemic level (Krook, 2008). A direct change in behavior, then, is argued to lead to a change in attitude much more efficiently than various attempts based on meritocratic values (Sacchet, 2008). The hope is that once women have reached a more equal representation on the radio, multiple ways of being a female artist will be more visible and the risk of marginalization and stereotyping should decrease compared to today (Muhr & Christensen, 2019).

It is recognized that within the music industry, quotas often generate negative responses and efforts are made to avoid them. Accordingly, it might seem less obvious how to work with formal quotas, as the objective of the music industry is to identify and nourish talent, without evaluating and comparing it based on objective merits like exam papers or résumés. However, though many perceive quotas as unfair, in practice, they can support an equal and identical evaluation of male and female talents, as they neutralize the benefits that men are systematically provided (Muhr, Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer , 2019). DR has the platform and opportunity (and obligation) to be a leader of this change. However, without a significant change in processes and ways of working the only thing to expect is more of the same.

### 5.2.2. Report requirements for venues and other governmentally funded organizations

As a next step towards a more diverse representation in the music industry, it is suggested that the Ministry of Culture should overall openly and directly support and encourage gender balance in the music industry. One mean of influencing the industry would be by to request that concert venues, festivals and other partly publicly funded organizations report gender breakdown in bookings/ticket sales as well as indications of gender diversity targets and strategies to increase female representation (Sojo, Wood, & Wheeler, 2016). Moreover, this could further entail making more funds available, from the industry and the public sector, rewarding targeted programs empowering underrepresented artists and industry professionals (Ibid).

It is acknowledged that company strategies developed in response to reporting requirements may need time to have significant impact. However, reporting requirements and targets will focus attention and accountability on outcomes while reporting could also result in indirect, longer-term effects by stimulating discussion and public debate about strategies for increasing the representation of females in the Danish music industry (Brierley-Hay & Elphick, 2019). In other words, the mere act of reporting on gender balance, drives attention to the problem itself, and with an increased awareness and acknowledgment, it is likely that change will come.

### 5.2.3. Industry pledge to ensure collective effort

In general, when discussing gender equality initiatives in the music industry focus is mainly on radio and festivals, as these are the most visible and traditional disseminators of music to the public (Svale, 2019). However, recapturing the analysis deducted in chapter 4, it is argued that a broader industry network effort will be required to make any impactful change. Only together and with a common awareness and effort will it be possible to change the present structures and unconscious biases of the industry and their executives.

Accordingly, the last recommendation is to leverage an ‘informal stick’ in the form of an industry charter or pledge for the different parties to commit to, including record labels, radio stations, streaming services and festivals. Gatekeepers committing to the pledge oblige to define a set of ‘good practices’ guidelines as measures that the organizations are expected to adopt and implement in full (Sojo, Wood, & Wheeler, 2016). The pledge should be incorporated into the strategy and planning of the different participants, ensuring implementation of the defined initiatives to increase the share of females in their specific line of business. The most important player, and potentially the initiator of this charter/pledge and reporting requirements is the Danish Ministry of Culture. The ministry will create a system of guidelines, commitments and rewards for the participating parties, and at the same time incentivize the achievement of the common objectives (Ibid).

While targets are the key indicators of change, they are only indicators, and the suggestion is that these will be achieved by using a range of tools detailed in the respective strategy – from creating an inclusive work environment, to encouraging more female talent to come forward, to prioritizing female talent management, and the use of special measures (Ibid). As an example, Spotify could decide to elevate and include a higher share of females on the humanly curated playlists and/or finetune the selection criteria



coded within the algorithms to elevate more female artists suggested to their users. Moreover, the record labels could initiate a strategy to attract more female talents as well as create a special funding to support the launch of new female artists. With the interdependency between Spotify and the record labels as established in chapter 4, common visions and goals would nourish a positive circle leading to the quest for female artist 'input' from the record labels to fill the requirements of (more) female music on Spotify. Vice versa, the record labels would have a stronger incentive to look for and sign talented female musicians, as they would see a stronger commercial demand or output from Spotify and other channels connected. The same interrelation is expected in radio channels and festivals, with a higher focus and ambition for a female share. More female artists pushed by these intermediaries would make the current female artists more visible, and thus create more role models for young girls wishing to start a career in music, as well as prove to the respective gatekeepers that female commercial success is possible.

As such, this set-up encourages the music industry to make a collective change once and for all, rather than creating progress in small sections of it. The targets would enable gatekeepers to think about all aspects of their organization, where they could make most progress now and what could be the next stage on the journey. Accordingly, an important premise is that it is not women who need to change; need help or motivation, but instead the system – organizations, processes and gatekeepers – that should be 'fixed' (Muhr, *Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer*, 2019). Only if the current gatekeepers are motivated and encouraged to change their own practices, they can help prevent that their organizations take coloured recruitment and/or evaluation decisions that potentially prevent female artists from developing and exploiting their full potential (Ibid). To achieve change, gatekeepers' evaluation (gut-instinct, intuition and experience) as well as their profit/audience maximizing goals must be supplemented by targets and strategies designed to reduce the effect of the biases that exist among the gatekeepers.

It is recognized that such a 'soft' and optional pledge is not a bulletproof way of securing progress. Organizations and individuals must acknowledge their unconscious biases and put active measures in place to ensure those biases do not come into play when signing, representing, booking or promoting. If companies continue to fail in taking these steps, a gender quotation system should then be applied, at least in a transitional stage (Brierley-Hay & Elphick, 2019). Quotas, like i.e. discrimination laws, aim to create a 'ripple effect through which progressive education is intended to change community attitudes' (Ibid). Thus, a potential quota system is proposed to lead the way, but hopefully it would subsequently be taken up by gatekeeper organizations themselves, becoming part of the normal selection and support practices over time.

Change is difficult, and the same apply to the incorporation of gender quotas, targets and strategies. First and foremost, quotas can be experienced as unfair for those ‘at the expense’ – those that benefitted from the existing (but not fair) order/system (Muhr, Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer , 2019). Moreover, some females display resistance towards quotas because they do not want to be selected to fill a quote but because of their talent. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the initiatives are only necessary because the point of departure is that the gatekeepers do not evaluate talent neutrally based on talent or skills. Accordingly, the argument for quotas in the organizations is *not* an argument for ‘reversed discrimination’ or a ‘free ride’ for women, as quotas are often alleged to be (Ibid). Rather, it is a necessity to neutralize the discriminatory practices that exist among the gatekeepers, in order to come as close to the meritocracy as possible so that women can compete on the same terms as men for the record label deals and investments, streams, radio airplay and concert jobs (Ibid).

#### 5.2.4. More female gatekeepers and executives in the gatekeeper organizations

The last critical focus area to correct the gender imbalance is to work towards more female representation in the executive and gatekeeper roles in the music industry. As established in chapter 4, the majority of men in decision-making positions can result in female artists being overlooked and ignored in favor of men, as the so-called ‘affinity bias’ may compel men to prefer male candidates due to their perceived similarity to themselves. Accordingly, the lack of women in the higher levels of the gatekeeper organizations is challenging, and this composition in the workforce may be one of the factors leading to a uniform expression of the music that does not reflect the entire population equally. Accordingly, it is recommended that the lack of female leaders in gatekeeper organizations is addressed, both in terms of recruitment, remuneration, career development and policies in a male dominated workforce. Moreover, it is suggested to create culture leadership educations, more targeted towards females (Lundberg, 2020).

### 5.3. Norm criticism

In order for the female artists to be truly integrated, supported and developed in the music industry, the above presented recommendations must be supported by long-term cultural development. Where the targets brought forward in the previous section aimed at changing behavior and practices via quotas, targets and strategies, the objective here is to propose how to change underlying views and attitudes that control behavior. Accordingly, this section presents the concept of norm criticism as an overall approach to cultural change (Muhr, Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer , 2019).

Norm criticism is a method for gaining a broader understanding of the perceived ‘normal’ in an organization – in this case the gatekeeper organizations – and then question this normalization. Accordingly, what gatekeepers perceive as ‘normal’ is a product of their culture and experiences, and even if there might have been reasons for this normalization, with time, these norms can be problematic. Hence, norm criticism suggests expanding the boundaries for the perceived normality, in order to make room for greater differences and more fluent understandings of the same. Only by challenging the gatekeeper’s stereotypes, biases, norms and normality’s and question their understandings, will they discover that what they have perceived as normal and as inherent (or natural) parts of their culture (‘that’s just how it is’) is not logical and rational, and may even affect females negatively (Ibid). In other words, this approach aims at challenging and expanding the boundaries of what is perceived as normal and natural. Accordingly, a norm critical culture within the gatekeeper organizations can potentially help to expand the music market (making more room for female talent) and break the glass ceiling that female artists currently face.

Accordingly, norms are not just viewed as patterns that comprise culture, but as producers of the culture (Ibid). This mirrors the philosophical basis of the thesis as presented in chapter 2. Accordingly, within the social constructivism, norms are perceived as performative, which means that they produce culture, while they are performed, and the more they are performed, the more normal they will be perceived (Collin, 2007). The way in which participants of a given culture perform normative gender practices reproduce and enhance norms, these norms remain invisible and unconscious unless they are contradicted or challenged. Consequently, when gatekeepers say that the remaining gender imbalance is a societal norm or that it is the popular culture that dictates what makes a commercial hit, they are only partly right. It is a societal norm because nobody has challenged it. All gatekeepers can actively begin to push the boundaries as to how gender is supported in their organization, and thereby set new boundaries and norms for gender representation and commercial value in the music industry.

This critical approach also sheds light on the people who currently benefit from the common and accepted norms, and the privileges it creates. This is important in order to undertake the aforementioned shift from the minority – away from the discussion about how to encourage more females to play instruments, or how to help females work on their skills – and instead discuss the underlying norms that produced the idea that women in general are not as skilled, not as brave and not as commercially valuable as men. Focus is then placed on the norms and the structures they create, and how they are enhanced via

gatekeeping practices and culture. An important final remark is that norm criticism is not solely about criticizing norms, but also about understanding them and acknowledge where they come from. Accordingly, it is not possible to simply change current norms with a set of ‘better’ norms. As established in chapter 3, all humans need stereotypes, categories and biases to be able to understand the world, in order to process information and make decisions. Accordingly, norm criticism suggests a practice where i.e. gatekeepers understand the norms that affect their culture, and hereby their selection practices and decisions. Next step is – via this recognition – for the gatekeepers to be able to spot when norms are appropriate, and when they should in fact be extended, changed, revised or even removed. In the end, this should imply a more elastic normativity. Accordingly, the goal is to create a norm critical culture among the gatekeepers, where it is the norm to question norms, and thus ‘bias check’ practices at a regular basis (Muhr, *Ledelse af køn: Hvordan kønsstereotyper former kvinders og mænds karrierer*, 2019).

#### 5.4. Theoretical reflections and the thesis in a context

This section contributes to highlight some of the implications that have occurred in the meeting of theory and practice and includes other perspectives than those detected in chapter 3, 4 & 5 that could have been relevant to look into. This will be followed by an evaluation of the dissertation’s overall contribution in a broader academic and societal context.

This study’s segregation of literature review and theoretical model for analysis has allowed me to distinguish between gatekeeping and decision-making processes in the theory, and a more practical understanding of how selection practices are performed by gatekeepers within the Danish music industry and how these practices influence female artists. On the basis of the literature review, it was possible to get a sense of how the phenomena could be combined in a theoretical framework for the purpose of a practical application. Hence, the dissertations’ analysis aimed at gaining a rich understanding of the deficit of female artists in relation to selection practices performed by gatekeepers, as well as how biases affect these practices, and consequently, the female artists’ chances of a successful breakthrough.

The theoretical model for analysis has contributed to deduce that the addressed gatekeepers’ decisions are circularly interrelated and interdependent in an input/output process. However, in the meeting with the empiric data, more possible influential actors were identified including the audience/consumers. Evidence from chapter 4 implies that big parts of the gatekeepers’ decision-making processes stem from (perceptions of) characteristics of the marketplace and its demands. As suggested by Shoemaker (2009),

when the audience gets what it wants – it dictates content and becomes the gatekeeper. However, though it was the theory that led me to this insight, it did not provide adequate tools to further investigate consumers as gatekeepers in a way that was meaningful. Accordingly, music consumers were excluded as independent gatekeepers from the gatekeeper analysis, though it could have been interesting to investigate their power, both in relation to the addressed gatekeepers and in relation to the female artists.

Nonetheless, the combination of the selected theory and the empirical data has contributed to deduce and establish a particular understanding of the deficit of the female artists in the Danish music industry as an effect of gatekeeper practices. This understanding is however comprehended and discussed in the light of the fact that the findings must be viewed in relation to the dissertation's delimitations as well as the theoretical, the empirical and the case study's limitations. Despite the fact that this study's findings should not be perceived as generalizable, they contribute with insights to the barriers faced by female artists in their meeting with the industry's gatekeepers. The insightful stories, experiences and beliefs that the informants have shared in the interviews have provided a solid overview of the set of problems that exist in relation to the imbalance in the Danish music industry in a gatekeeper context. Accordingly, this thesis contributes to the body of academic knowledge surrounding the hidden inequitable/biased attitudes and practices performed by gatekeepers within the Danish music industry.

A fundamental remark is that these barriers are complex, and that there are no easy solutions. With this in mind, this study does not claim to have found the quick fix. Instead, it attempts to provide a nuanced glance at the gatekeeper's impact on – and responsibility in regard to the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry. In this regard, I find it important to emphasize that it is my assessment that the imbalance does not stem from conscious oppression – or lack of willingness. Rather, the arguments that are unfolded in the study point to gendered structures and unconscious biases in the gatekeeper organizations as well as in the society at large, that in many ways disregard the female talent from succeeding in the music industry (Muhr, 2019).

Based on the empirical analysis it was however possible to propose a range of practical recommendations for the music industry, the government and the society at large to implement, improve and ultimately close the gender gap in music. These should be understood as directions to potentially spur the music industry (and not the female artists) to take greater ownership of the challenges of the deficit of women across the industry. It is however worth mentioning that these recommendations should not be seen as

definitive, as this would require deeper investigation of the political conditions associated with quotas and report requirements.

“

*Besides the obvious ethical concerns, organizations risk getting stagnant and oversee a blue ocean potential in terms of specific new genres or talent that could in fact expand their businesses”*

06  
**CONCLUSION**

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The motivation for this thesis was to gain an understanding of the deficit of female artists in the Danish music industry, in the light of gatekeeper selection practices. In the same way that business scholars question and investigate the gender gap in the general labour market via demand-side mechanisms, I was inspired to investigate if gatekeepers within the music industry undermine the value of the female artists, taking into account formal and informal biases and processes of discrimination. As established in the introduction, there have been various music industry documents published over the past decade, which have called for more initiatives to improve the gender imbalance in the Danish music industry. However, only limited in-depth industry research into the behavioural patterns of music industry gatekeepers has been conducted, despite their pivotal role in an artist's access to a musical career. Hence, the vantage point for this dissertation was to do a broad investigation of the selection practices among the most imperative gatekeepers within the Danish music industry, and the associated biases that potentially influence their decision-making processes, to understand if and how these influence female artists' access to the commercial music market.

On the basis of pertinent gatekeeping theory, the first part of the analysis presented an assessment of the music industry's most imperative gatekeepers and defined the key dimensions of the relationships between them and the 'gated'. The objective of this analysis was to understand how the gates work by understanding the forces that help to determine the decisions of the gatekeepers. From this analysis it was derived that gatekeeper structures still develop and exist, meaning that to get a real break-through, an artist must still pass through different gates. More than that, it was established that the addressed record labels, booking agencies and the streaming service are commercially driven organizations aiming to maximize profits and audience shares, thus oriented towards the economic marketplace. Accordingly, market forces and demand heavily shape the nature of their individual gates. In addition, among the gatekeepers there is a general perception that female representation brings lower commercial value and thus generate lower profit.

In the analysis it became apparent that certain spillover effects are present in the gatekeepers' decision-making process: Previous decisions by prior gatekeepers affect future decision makers' reasoning and behavior as Shoemaker notes: *"Today's individual gatekeeping decision may become tomorrow's selection norm"* (Shoemaker, 2009). Accordingly, the gates and their keepers are more networked than structured in sequence; the addressed gatekeepers respond to each other in a circular notion, thus, a



rejection from one gatekeeper lowers the chances of reaching the next one. The result is a status-quo music supply with a majority of male artists – especially within the hip-hop genre – hence new experiences and innovation with potential new markets and gains becoming less prevalent.

The second part of the analysis examined how cognitive biases affect the decision-making processes of the gatekeepers and possibly the female artists' chances of 'breaking through,' and having a successful career in music. This analysis compared the evidence from the interviews with the female artists with the derived biases that asserted among the interviewed gatekeepers, in order to examine the impediments facing women in the music industry. Accordingly, eight barriers that affect female artists' possibilities for a career in music were identified. On subtle as well as more evident levels, females experience a lack of several types of privileges. This being reflected in the interview representatives' descriptions of their lack of space; the fact that they have to be supernatural to be even noticed; that they hit their heads against the glass ceiling at a certain point in their careers, and the fact that they are evaluated and validated almost solely by men. Status quo bias is warping gatekeeper selection practices, meaning that those in power are favoring people with whom they share certain attributes. Accordingly, female artists are evaluated from another point of departure than their male colleagues. They are not expected to possess the right skills or the right mentality, whereas the male artists are generally perceived capable.

Accordingly, the findings from both of the analyses imply that the barriers to a diverse representation do not stem from deliberate oppression; they arise from deep inherent understandings of norms and unconscious cognitive biases. Business models; economical and commercial motives as well as Spotify's algorithms support these biases and represent barriers for the female artists' access to the market.

The discussion reflected critically over some of the themes and paradoxes the findings included. Besides the obvious ethical concerns, it was argued that the gatekeepers' organizations risk getting stagnant and oversee a blue ocean potential in terms of specific new genres or talent that could in fact expand their businesses. Accordingly, the discussion presented a range of actionable initiatives to change the prevailing structures and ultimately enhance the female artists' possibilities of a breakthrough and a sustainable career in music. These were organized in three levels including concrete gender equality initiatives involving and impacting all the addressed gatekeepers.

First proposal entailed that DR should be obliged to ensure that the share of Danish female artists on the channels reflects the population to a much greater extent. Therefore, following the overall 48% quota for

Danish music on DR, an equivalent female gender quote in the DR public service contract was proposed. As a next step, it was suggested that the Ministry of Culture should overall openly and directly support and encourage gender balance in the music industry by requesting that concert venues, festivals and other partly publicly funded organizations report gender breakdown in bookings/ticket sales as well as indications of gender diversity targets and strategies to increase female representation. The following recommendation was to leverage an ‘informal stick or carrot’ in the form of an industry charter or pledge for the different parties to commit to, including record labels, radio stations, streaming services and festivals. Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture should create a system of guidelines, commitments and rewards for the participating parties, and at the same time incentivize the achievement of the common objectives. The last critical focus area presented was working towards a higher female representation in the executive and gatekeeper roles in the music industry.

As established in the introduction, the realization of genuine diversity is a long process that requires real effort. There are no quick fixes. It is nonetheless my argument that with the proposed broad industry network effort, common targets and increased awareness it is possible to change the present structures and unconscious biases of the industry and its executives, leading to a more vibrant and diverse music industry in the coming years.

## 6.1. Critical reflections and further research

This study consists of an array of theoretical and empirical opt-outs initiated to ensure an effective and focused study, taking into consideration the constraints and resources that are associated with a master’s thesis. Accordingly, the findings must therefore be assessed with the delimitations of the dissertation, as well as the theoretical, the empirical and the case study’s limitations in mind. Accordingly, it is recognized that the findings could have turned out differently if other gatekeepers or female artists had been selected. Moreover, the specific combination of literature and theories within the field of gatekeeping and decision-making is per se a delimitation. These choices have impacted the theoretical analysis model shaping the empirical analysis. Last but not least, this study is based on a social constructivist worldview. It is acknowledged that a different philosophical stance could have contributed with alternative perspectives. However, despite the fact that this study’s findings should not be perceived as generalizable, they contribute with valuable insights to the barriers faced by female artists in their meeting with the industry’s gatekeepers. Moreover, based on the empirical findings; it was possible to recommend a range of initiatives

that can be introduced to create a meaningful shift in the representation of women in the Danish music industry.

As established, there are a number of possible explanations for the disproportionate representation of males in the popular music canon based on social structures, inherent norms and cognitive biases of the music industry and its executives. However, as implied by the gatekeeper findings, crucial parts of the gatekeepers' selection practices stem from perceptions of characteristics of the marketplace, the audiences and its demands. Accordingly, for further research, it would be interesting to investigate if the gatekeepers' perceptions of their consumers' preferences are actually consistent to reality. Hence, the research should examine whether the gender bias among gatekeepers reflects the music preferences of consumers. The individual's personal preferences would be of interest – the subjective attraction or pull.

There has been extensive research linking gender-of-listener to genre preference, but not considering gender-of-artist preference (Millar, 2018). In fact, no known study of music preferences has yet aimed to investigate whether all listeners favor an unequal ratio of male and female artists, or whether the ratio differs according to listener's gender (Ibid). Thus, a future study could also add this dimension by examining if there is a similar gender bias in the music preferences of the consumers, i.e. showcasing that more male artists would be featured on their favorite music lists, and furthermore if the potential gender bias is equally displayed across the genders.