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# **‘Mothering the artist’**

*Women artist managers crafting an occupational identity in the Flemish music industry*

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on Joan Acker’s notion of the ideal worker (1990) and Karen Ashcraft’s notion of the ‘glass slipper’ (2013), this paper investigates the organising practices that gender the occupation of artist manager and the music industry, and how women artist managers construct an identity in an occupation that is tailored on a male ideal manager, made to fit a man’s shoe. Empirically, we draw on thirteen semi-structured interviews with nine women artist managers, two women former artist managers, and two women former students of Music Management. In line with existing literature, our findings show that the Flemish music industry is organised around practices that reflect hegemonic masculinity, and that women managers mimic many of these practices to fit the ideal manager, and, although they see the gender inequality, they do not challenge it. At the same time, they construct an occupational identity by reframing stereotypical feminine competences as indispensable for being a good manager. By making a business case for these competences, they, however, paradoxically also reproduce those same notions of gender that they aim to overcome.

**Keywords:** female artist managers, music industry, glass slipper, creative industries, the ideal worker

## **Introduction**

Over the last two decades, a sizeable literature has emerged that debunks the myth of the ‘cool and egalitarian’ cultural and creative industries by unveiling the persisting, pervasive gender inequality amidst them (Gill, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

Inequality has been documented in its multifarious manifestations (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Gill, 2002). For instance, some studies have shown horizontal and vertical segregation along gender lines in the creative industries, with women concentrated in support jobs such as PR, marketing, and styling, leaving higher creative and management functions almost exclusively to men (Banks & Milestone, 2011; Dotiwala, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Other studies have rather unveiled the numerous barriers women encounter in these sectors (Henry, 2009), including the gendered stereotypes, the sexism, and the sexual harassment aggravated by endemically precarious working conditions (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017; Jones & Pringle, 2015), the exclusion from male-dominated networks, which are particularly salient due to the high levels of informality (Gill, 2002; Wing-Fai, Gill, & Randle, 2015), and the (gendered) challenges of combining work and life (Gill, 2014) in these 'bulimic' sectors (Pratt, 2000), where evening and night work is ubiquitous (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Gill, 2002, 2014; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015).

This study builds on these rich insights in the specific mechanisms of gender inequality in the creative and cultural industries and reconnects this scholarship to that of work, occupations, and organisations. Taking the specific case of the music industry, we investigate how women music managers – a profession that has historically been dominated by men (Steward & Garratt, 1984) – experience and engage with the gendered social construction of their profession and the ideal music manager inhabiting it. Theoretically, we combine Joan Acker's (1990) concept of the 'ideal worker' for a specific job, which is commonly referenced in the literature on the creative industries, with Karen Ashcraft's (2013) less used concept of the 'glass slipper'. Acker's (1990) theory of inequality regimes posits that policies, practices, and discourses structure organisations around a specific ideal worker image that unobtrusively structurally favours men over women. Such theory is germane to Ashcraft's (2013) theory of the glass slipper, which, however, conceptualises the process through which occupations are themselves gendered by highlighting how occupations are socially constructed by referring to the characteristics associated with a specific social group and how members belonging to this group come then to be seen as the natural 'owners' of an occupation. In this way, the occupation comes to be socially constructed to fit only individuals with a certain profile, similar to how the glass slipper is made to fit only Cinderella. Taking the perspective of women music workers, our analysis is structured along two research questions: 1) What practices produce the job of artist manager as a job fitted to a hegemonically masculine ideal worker? 2) And how do women

music managers construct their own occupational identity in relation to such hegemonic masculine ideal? To address these questions, we empirically draw on the case of women artist managers working in the Flemish music industry.

## The gendered nature of the music industry

Similar to other contemporary creative sectors, the music industry is characterised by ubiquitous gender inequalities as well (e.g. McCormack, 2018; UK Music, 2017). The extensive scholarship on this topic can by and large be classified in three major types. A first type of studies investigates the representation of women in music, showing how many images of women are stereotyped and sexualised (e.g. Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2007; Cooper, 1985; Davies, 2001; Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Reddington, 2007). A second type of literature focuses specifically on the inequality between men and women performers, unveiling how female performers are more often found in sexist situations with less monetary rewards (e.g. Clawson, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2018; Whiteley, 2000). Third, some studies deal with gendered careers, and, more specifically, unequal work conditions, gendered barriers, and work segregation along gender (Leonard, 2016; Vanhaverbeke, 2015). Prior to the 1980s, and the strong increase in women's higher education, the few women workers in the music industry were almost exclusively in subordinate, supportive positions. For instance, the rock world's privileging of 'rebellious machismo' entailed the exclusion of women, whose 'civilizing influence' stood in the way of performers' natural behaviour (Kearney, 2017). Many women chose not to work in an environment that was seen as sexually aggressive or to work in administrative jobs at a safe distance from it (Cohen, 1991; Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Kearney, 2017; Parsons, 1988). Women who achieved success were often involved in less popular genres, such as early punk, where they were not seen as a threat to men (Kearney, 2017).

While, in the 1980s, the music industry was still mostly male, Steward and Garratt (1984) point to a growing percentage of women working as artist managers in the US back then. They describe the role of manager in the music business in broad terms, as 'to "mother" the band, to organise their day-to-day life, to negotiate work and contracts. A manager's primary function is to take care of business and finances' (Steward & Garratt, 1984). The growth of women working in the music industry has, however, been mostly visible in public relations, marketing, and other support positions

and much less in Artist & Repertoire, creative and higher management, and executive positions (Cohen, 1991; Negus, 1993; for broader cultural work, see Banks & Milestone, 2011). National studies indicate that women today remain underrepresented in the music industry, with 45.3 per cent of music workers in the UK (UK Music, 2017), 29 per cent in Australia (McCormack, 2018), and 30 per cent in the US and Canada (Women in Music, 2017). Disparities have been explained by referring to the common association of men with creativity (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Nixon, 2003; Scharff, 2015) and gender stereotypes of women as being more ‘caring’, ‘supporting’, and ‘following’, and men as being more ‘reflexive’ and ‘assertive’ (Anker, 2001; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Informality and ‘clubby’, men-dominated contexts, where sexualised interactions are common (as #MeToo has recently shown) (Gill, 2002; McRobbie, 2004; Willekens, Siongers, & Lievens, 2018), together with the frequent use of sexist jargon (Cohen, 1997) and insider jokes, create a hostile culture for women. Finally, some studies have pointed to the barrier constituted by the gendered division of labour in the private sphere. The flexibility and long working hours expected from music workers make it hard for them to care for a family and manage a household, disadvantaging women who are still more often taking on domestic tasks (Gill, 2014; Massey, 1994).

## The gendered nature of occupations

Studies of gender in paid work and organisations have, amongst others, investigated the relation between the social construction of gender – the behaviours, attitudes, and attributes that society considers acceptable for the categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987) – and of specific work identities. The empirical focus has often been on women in jobs that have historically been dominated by men, as the misalignment between their gender and their occupation renders more easily observable how these women ‘do’ or ‘undo’ gender and perform gender identities (e.g. Kelan, 2010; Morash & Haarr, 2012; Pruitt, 2018).

In this tradition of research, Acker was one of the first scholars to contest the allegedly gender-neutral nature of organisations and organising (1990; see also Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998; Calás and Smircich, 1996; Cavendish, 1982; Cockburn, 1983, 1991; Gherardi, 1995) and to further theorise the ‘ideal worker’ as a gendered norm that has the effect of gendering organisations. In her analysis, the emphasis is on a job as an abstract

category that is ideally filled by a 'disembodied worker' who has no other obligations and who lives only for the job (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) holds that, although a disembodied worker does not exist, male workers come closest to it, as much unpaid care work is carried out by women, allowing most men to be 'unencumbered' and to centre their life around a full-time job. Furthermore, high-status jobs tend to be socially constructed by referring to traits that have historically been associated with men, providing these latter a structural advantage over women. Hence, the 'ideal worker' for white-collar, high-status, and well-paid jobs reflects hegemonic masculinity, with stereotypically masculine organisational roles, characteristics, and practices (Acker, 2006, 2009). At the same time, the ideal worker for subordinate, low-wage, and no benefits, often part-time jobs with no promotion opportunities is often a woman (of colour), to the extent that women are seen by employers as more compliant than men and unable to fully commit to the job, as they juggle paid and unpaid work (Acker, 2006, 2012; Wooten & Branch, 2012).

Ashcraft's (2013) metaphor of the glass slipper is germane to Acker's notion of the 'ideal worker', as both point to the importance of social construction to theorise processes of gender inequality in work contexts. Yet, whereas Acker's focus is on organisational practices enforcing the ideal worker, such as, for instance, recruitment and evaluation practices, Ashcraft rather looks at the social construction of specific occupations. She uses the metaphor of Cinderella's glass slipper to argue that occupations are constructed to fit certain social identities and characteristics, or 'collective identities', as a shoe made to fit a certain type of foot (see also Cockburn, 1983, 1991). As a glass slipper comes to be the blueprint to select the 'right' princess, jobs come to be used to select specific types of individuals. This selection is based on arbitrary characteristics that often have little to do with the work itself. People who do not possess these traits, or not belong to the expected category, will structurally encounter difficulties to fit a job that, despite its apparent neutrality, was never made for them (Ashcraft, 2013). Ashcraft (2013) thus stresses that not only do the workers' social identities need to be fitting the occupation, but occupations also derive their identity from the social identities of those who have historically been associated to them.

The historical, socially constructed nature of organisations and occupational identities entails that, although change is, in principle, possible, it is not easy, as jobs become largely institutionalised and taken for granted and thus appear to 'naturally' fit certain people, obscuring the structural inequality they produce. Most prestigious occupations fit with hegemonic

masculinity, or the masculinities that predominate and are privileged within a social context (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). Being a man is necessary yet not sufficient to belong to these dominant masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is linked to other characteristics such as whiteness, heterosexism, egocentrism, et cetera (Collinson & Hearn, 2005; Connell, 1998), and is sustained by policing men and discrediting women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Despite different nuances, both Ashcraft's (2013) and Acker's (1990, 2006) theories explain inequalities by unveiling the relationship between social identities and seemingly neutral and therefore taken-for-granted structural processes, everyday practices, and professional identities. Little research has coupled scholarship on creative labour to that of work and organisations. Miller (2016) is one of the first to do this by drawing directly on Acker's concept of the ideal worker and theoretically pointing out that the ideal-typical artist is implicitly masculinised. Combining both theoretical approaches, we empirically investigate how gender structures both the profession of artist manager and female artist managers' experiences and identity in the Flemish music industry.

## Methodology

Similar to other national music industries, the Flemish one is also characterised by an underrepresentation of women, who constitute only 33.4 per cent of behind the scene music workers (Vanhaverbeke, 2015). The Flemish music industry is small and not as commercially competitive as the UK or US industry. For instance, in the pop-rock-alternative scene, many management agencies are subsidised by the government (Afschrift, 2010). Our empirical study is based on a total of thirteen semi-structured interviews with women artist managers (nine), former artist managers (two), and graduates from the Music Management bachelor at the PXL school in Hasselt, yet who never worked as artist managers (two). Fifteen potential respondents identified through the Music Managers Federation in Flanders or via websites of the management bureaus were contacted. Of them, nine agreed to be interviewed. Via snowball sampling, contact details of two former managers were obtained who agreed to participate in the study. Finally, two alumnae of the bachelor's degree in Music Management offered by the PXL Hogeschool in Hasselt were interviewed about their education, their search for a job, and their first and current work experience.

The mean age of the interviewed women artist managers was 38 years. They had between one and 20 years of experience as artist managers. Two women started late in their careers and worked in another sector before entering the music industry; however, most of the interviewees had always worked in the music or cultural sector. The PXL alumnae were younger, with a mean age of 26.5. Only one of them was working in the music industry at the moment of contact. All women were white and of Belgian nationality, reflecting an ethnically more homogeneous cultural sector compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries (cf. Zaroni, Thoelen, & Ybema, 2017).

All interviews were conducted by the first author, a white female researcher of Belgian nationality and born in Flanders, but (somewhat) younger than most interviewees. They took place in Dutch, and were guided by a questionnaire of open questions concerning: 1) the respondents' job, the music industry, and their positioning within the field (e.g. What are your day-to-day tasks as a manager? How did you get to this job? How would you describe the Flemish music sector?), 2) their experiences as artist managers (e.g. Are there things that bother you/have difficulties with in the music industry? What are the conditions to do your job well?), 3) how they experience working in a male-dominated sector (e.g. How do you experience being a woman in this industry?), and 4) how they see the future (e.g. What is your opinion on the future for women in music?). The interviews took place in a location that was most convenient for the interviewees (their home, office, or in a café), lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, were tape-recorded with respondents' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. For privacy reasons, the names of the managers used in this paper are pseudonyms. We coded the transcripts first along three concepts in our theoretical approach – gendering practices, the ideal worker, and occupational identity – distinguished in each between fragments describing the music industry and fragments constructing the respondent herself, and identified key themes within each.

## The music industry as a man's world

In their conversations with us, women artist managers consistently showed a strong awareness of men's dominance in the music industry. At the same time, they surprisingly seldom problematised such dominance. For instance, although the term 'macho' was often used to describe the



atmosphere in this milieu, working with and being around men was regularly presented in positive terms:

It is indeed a man's world, but I get along fine with men, so it was okay... Yes, sometimes it did annoy me, but this is true for many industries, that there are more men than women. (Katrien)

Several other respondents, like Katrien, relativised male dominance in the music industry by constructing it as a widespread phenomenon in other sectors and in society at large. One respondent, Helena, told us how she was taken by surprise by being in the minority as a woman in the music sector, as the vast majority of students in the master's programme she had attended were women:

Everywhere I came, there were mostly women. Then I started working, certainly with (the artist), I was the only girl. On tour, there was a female backing-singer who went with us. So, I very often went in the tour bus and it was really twelve men and two women. And that was really new for me. I didn't know that. I was always used to having it the other way around.

Even on the few occasions in which interviewees referred to the vertical segregation of women and men, they refrained from judging it:

... you have the organisers, these are predominantly men, these are the positions of power, the most comfortable positions. They often have an assistant, production manager, these are women, they do all the work. Then you have the musicians, these are also predominantly men, occasionally there is a female singer. There are women in music, but well, they are still a small minority. (Michelle)

Although Michelle points to the concentration of men in 'comfortable' positions of power and of women in more supportive positions – where 'all the work' is done – her narrative remains descriptive and does not problematise the unequal division of labour.

Interviewees further often explained the underrepresentation of women in the music industry as resulting from the male networks based on friendship and informal contacts. Also, in these cases, they presented such exclusionary mechanism in neutral language, as 'how things are' due to the history of the industry:

The musicians are basically all men still and the people around them are also mainly friends of the musicians and these are often also men. So, I think that it's kind of an organic thing or so, from which the whole music industry has evolved. (Naomi)

Respondents consistently emphasised that a manager's network is of utmost importance to get artists the contracts they want, the best concert deals they need, et cetera, and that, in the music industry, networking means hanging out at the bar late after a concert with men, drinking beer in a café, and so on. Many of the interviewees stressed that they did not mind doing this, as it is an important part of their job, yet they also acknowledged that this is a very masculine way of networking. These professional practices assume and, in turn, require a music manager to be totally committed to his or her job, to be always available, including late into the night. The women we spoke to enact this behaviour, mimicking men, because it is necessary to do business:

... Because I want to get to know them personally, that's how this world works. If you drink some beers with them, you create a different bond. They get to know you better, what you stand for, then the contact goes smoother in the future. (Gina)

Yet at the same time, many also felt that this social practice is tailored to men's preferences, and does not completely 'fit' women:

... all these guys drinking beer at the bar and you have to want to be part of that. That's the way of networking. You have to want to do that of course. Whatever way you spin it, hanging at the bar drinking beer, all fun and so, I kind of like that too, but I just want to say it is something that men in particular seem to like very much. (Katrien)

If you want to succeed in the music industry, then you have to be able to say: I'm going to the bar, I am going to hang at the bar, and I'm going to talk bullshit in the middle of all those men and you have to be a little tough, have a little 'butch' in you to do that, because without network you are nowhere, and those dull girly girls – they are really not waiting for them. 'Just act normal'. (Ellen)

For both respondents, networking by drinking at the bar during the night is necessary to do the job: as a woman manager, one needs to want to do it and, importantly, to know how to. Women need to avoid enacting too much

femininity – ‘girly girls’ – and be rather ‘tough’, as a ‘butch’, or ‘act normal’, that is, act along male norms.

While the participating in these clearly ‘masculine’ modalities of networking was largely presented as core to the profession of artist manager, respondents pointed to how it was hard to combine with family life and, in particular, raising children. Barbara, a former manager, told us:

It is an industry where they network a lot. ... that is all nice and fun, you can be everywhere, until you start a family. Because it is expected that after every concert you hang at the bar for several more hours and talk to everyone. There they make the deals and arrangements.

The difficult combination of the job of artist manager and a family was presented by all respondents as the main reason for the underrepresentation of women in this job and other key positions in the music industry. The conflict between having children and a career as manager became very explicit in specific situations, such as the recruitment of a good artist manager. Helena was asked the question if she was going to have children any time soon by a band:

I literally was asked the question by a group if I was going to start having babies before they wanted to work with me. ‘Are you going to start having children?’ And that was clearly with the idea that you will not be able to do your job. [...] I have very young half-brothers, my parents got divorced. And what they [her bosses] said was: ‘Ah, you have young half-brothers, so you don’t have to start with babies’. And this person just says it. You have others that think it, but don’t say it. I know the moment I would tell my artists (that I want to have babies), that they won’t like it.

Admitting a wish to have children can cost Helena her job, as it are artists who choose their manager, even if not everybody is as explicit on this topic.

Yet, the problem is not solely one of how women are perceived and discriminated by men. Some point to how being self-employed – also typical of the music industry, and the creative industries more generally – leaves them with little social security protection compared to women who work as employees. Even women in supportive roles working as employees, who are legally entitled to take parental leave, for instance in the form of working four days a week, are denied it by the agency. Anna told us about how she has to always be available, even when on holiday:

Sometimes it is really hard because I am alone [self-employed]. You don't have anyone to leave the work to, so if there is a problem you have to fix it. It doesn't matter if you are on holiday ... you have to fix it. You can't just say the artist is not coming because of a problem.

Being absent and unreachable for longer periods of time is not an option. This indicates that the (male-dominated) music industry faithfully sticks to its (male) unencumbered ideal worker.

As a whole, the women managers we interviewed expressed a clear understanding about how key practices in the music industry, and the profession of artist manager more specifically, were both based on a male ideal worker and, in turn, favoured men over women. At the same time, while they acknowledged hegemonic masculinity, their narratives lacked explicit reference to inequality, and do not advance any individual or collective claim for more equality or fairness. The will of (male) artists and (male) 'bosses' remains largely unchallenged, likely because they are in gatekeeping positions that can make or break a manager's career. Gendered practices remain largely taken for granted, as they are constructed as historically defining of the profession and the industry, with which these women want to professionally identify, rather than 'manufactured', as a shoe would be.

### **Not fitting and the remaking of the (male) shoe of the ideal manager**

Respondents elaborated at length on how, as women, they did not fit the shoe of the artist manager. These narratives often turned around the impossibility to keep doing this job once they had children. Only two of the interviewees who were still working in the music industry had children. One had had a baby six months prior to the interview and was still considering if she should continue working as a manager, and the other had only started in music when her children were already teenagers. The two respondents who had quit their jobs as managers both had small children, and, for both, this was one of the main reasons to quit the job. Barbara's narrative is telling:

You come home from a concert at two, three in the morning and at five your baby wakes up. It was just so debilitating. I remember at a certain moment I had to go to New York for a meeting, my baby was 4-5 months old. I was still breastfeeding so I was like: no, I can't do that, sorry. And that is all really hard and there is little understanding for things like that. They don't mean it in a

bad way, but I was the only one with children. That was a whole different world and I found that really hard... There was no one else in the same situation. I couldn't talk about it to anyone.

Barbara felt very alone in her situation and, elsewhere in the interview, she mentions that she even struggled with health problems because of the difficult work-life combination. Although her male colleagues seemed to fit this ideal better than her, further in the interview she calls the music industry a family- and human-unfriendly industry, emphasising that both women and men suffer from this. Many men seem to be oblivious of this difficult combination, nevertheless many music workers have broken relationships and little private time.

Tellingly, in our sample, only Barbara and Katrien, the two former managers, see these practices as a structural problem of the music industry, where efforts should be invested for change. The other respondents rather relate the problem to being a woman and the 'natural' consequences of motherhood. In this way, gender roles are reproduced and their choice of not having children is presented as an individual one. For example, one respondent consciously chose not to have children because she works long days every day and she would not be able to devote the time she would like either to the kid or to her management agency:

Honestly, I really live for my agency and my life is my agency, but I couldn't live with the idea of not being able to enjoy my child and spending a lot of time raising it. (Gina)

Yet, women artist managers' narratives did not solely reproduce the ideal manager; they also challenged such representation and the hegemonic masculinity underpinning it. For instance, women proactively constructed themselves in opposition to male managers, described as having factual, 'library' knowledge over music (e.g. knowing who was the drummer of a band at a concert in 1981), as opposed to dealing with music more with 'feeling' and intuition:

And men and their music: men are like walking libraries. I handle music a whole different way. I know a lot about music, but that is more on an emotional level or so. But that is also who I am... But that is such a man-thing. Like music-thing, man-thing. And it also has to do with that, I think. (Katrien)

Other interviewees rather challenge the importance of such music knowledge tout court in their job. This knowledge would be used by men to show

off. This is in line with Michelle's construction of men as wanting to be in the spotlight mentioned above. The opposition with men as attracting attention and women as not wanting attention in turn implicitly constructs men as ideal artists (on the podium, where all the attention goes) and women as ideal artist managers (in the background, for which there is no attention).

Women managers also proactively discursively reconstruct the job of music manager in a way that emphasises the competences commonly associated with women. Consider the following quotes, which remake a quite different shoe of the job of artist manager:

I think the job I am doing is very well suited to women. I might be talking in clichés, but that psychological aspect is very important, and I think that we are just a little better at that. ... I am not saying that no man has psychological insights, but it is very important in the job. (Helena)

... we work with artists, whether they are a painter or sculptor or an author or a singer or actor. These are people with a lot of insecurities, they find it really difficult to decide. Euphoria, peaks, lows, doubts ... I can imagine that a woman who does her job well is a God's gift. (Gina)

The first quote emphasises psychological insights in this profession, aligning it with stereotypical femininity. Along the same lines, the second tellingly elevates the caring competences necessary to deal with artists' unstable personalities 'a God's gift'.

Michelle even more explicitly associates these competences with traditional gender roles women fulfil in the private sphere – as dedicated, self-sacrificing wives and mothers – or in the work sphere – as secretaries – and whose success is measured through the success of those whom they care for:

As manager, when all goes well, that is normal, because that is the way it is supposed to go, and no one praises you. You have to be able to read the thank you's between the lines... that makes this job is probably longer done by women, 'working in function of'... You always have the secretary, she works in function of her boss. The mother in function of her children. The wife in function of her husband... A manager in function of his artists.

Paradoxically, while motherhood is seen as largely incompatible with a job as an artist manager, the latter is literally presented here as the mothering of artists: being in the background and supporting others, without expecting or getting much credit for it. Other respondents also frequently

represent the work as a manager through motherhood. For instance, two managers referred to educating their artists like one educates one's children. They must be taught that their manager has other important things in life beside them and that they cannot call her 24/7, whenever they feel like it. This construction conversely opposes the ideal of the manager as always available, which was discussed earlier.

The importance of care in constructing a viable occupational identity as women managers is confirmed, on the contrary, by the insecurity and shame Helena experienced in the beginning of her career, when she was afraid she would not be taken seriously due to her young age:

I have felt ashamed for my age for a long time, that I almost didn't dare to say what age I was. Had I been a boy, I might have this less... it just shows that you are female and young. Why would we take her seriously? I didn't lie about my age, but I always avoided answering.

Although respondents aptly re-constructed the occupation of artist manager by using characteristics associated with women, making it more fitting to women and themselves, this does not always challenge existing gendered norms about it. For instance, some distance themselves from the 'typical manager'; Katrien says she was more dynamic and Barbara states:

... the job as manager is looked at very classically, like the one that does hard business. But I have never seen it that way. That was not the kind of management we did. We did it differently, in a different way.

Emphasising their own difference from the masculine ideal manager, while it might preserve these subjects' own sense of a gender identity, it also paradoxically reproduces the male ideal worker, relegating alternative constructions centred around feminine competences to the margins, and containing their potential to remake the shoe.

## Discussion

Drawing on Acker's (1990, 2006) notion of the ideal worker and Ashcraft's (2013) notion of the glass slipper, this paper investigated the organising practices that gender the occupation of artist manager and the music industry more broadly, and how women artist managers construct an identity in an occupation that is tailored on a male ideal manager, made to fit a

man's shoe. Our analysis shows how the music industry is undeniably not only numerically dominated by men but also organised around a specific form of hegemonic masculinity (Gill, 2014; Hennekam & Bennett, 2017; Miller, 2016): to use Ashcraft's words, 'the construction of a prototypical practitioner yields the nature of work' (2013, p. 37).

Largely in line with existing international research, we find that the Flemish music industry relies on practices of informal networking, long and late hours after concerts hanging at the bar (Franks, 1999; Gill, 2002, 2014), resting on and in turn reproducing a hegemonically masculine ideal manager, who devotes all his time to his job (Acker, 1990; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). The structural difficulty to combine this job with the care for one's family – often disproportionally still carried out by women – is seen by our respondents as the main obstacle for women to be a 'good' manager (Gill, 2014). Although women managers themselves enact hegemonic masculinity to fit this male shoe, they cannot always pass in this disguise. Still, our analysis indicates that, while structural gender inequality is named, it is often not openly denounced, but rather constructed as an unavoidable reality that the individual cannot challenge (cf. Lewis, Simpson, & Benschop, 2018).

At the same time, in constructing their occupational identity as artist managers, our respondents also proactively and creatively redefine the job by contesting the importance of competences commonly associated with men – e.g. such as library knowledge of music – and repositioning competences traditionally associated with women – such as caring, supportiveness, mothering, and organisational skills – at the core of the occupation of artist manager. Filling stereotypically feminine competences with positive meanings and value within the occupation allows them to reconstruct an occupational identity away from hegemonic masculinity, while it also at once reproduces stereotypical understandings of gender (cf. Pruitt, 2018; Wang, Whitson, Anicich, Kray, & Galinsky, 2017). For instance, our respondents take distance from stereotypical 'girly girls', who do not 'fit' the masculinist music industry. At the same time, some managers describe themselves as different from this 'typical manager', which paradoxically reproduces the male ideal. So, in this context, we could not observe any 'degendering' (Lorber, 2000), 'forgetting gender' (Kelan, 2010), or 'undoing gender' through multiplicity (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Kelan, 2010), but rather an attempt to construct oneself as possessing core competences to do the job, building a business case for women artist managers.

Our study also presents various important limitations. Solely based on women artist managers' perspectives, our analysis might itself reproduce an



overly monolithic understanding of practices reproducing hegemonic masculinity within this industry. As one of our respondents, Barbara, indicated, these gendering practices are family- and human-unfriendly, and therefore have a disproportionate exclusionary effect on women due to their still more prominent role in the household and, more specifically, childrearing (Glorieux & Van Tienoven, 2016). At the same time, they are arguably also exclusionary of men who take up these roles. To the extent that men's roles within families are changing, more and more men might increasingly struggle to embody the unencumbered ideal manager on which the whole sector is predicated (Humberd, Ladge, & Harrington, 2014). Future research on the music industry in Flanders and elsewhere might want to direct attention to this group of men, in order to gain a better understanding of how hegemonic masculinity also affects them, in terms of their practices, careers, and identity, and to envision alternative forms of organising that are less gendered and more equal.

Also, we should observe that, while our interviewees mentioned some sexist jokes, none spoke to us about sexual harassment or being disadvantaged when it came to their income compared to male colleagues. This is perhaps surprising, in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, which has shown that cultural and creative industries are especially prone to sexual misbehaviour, because access to work is often through informal networks and connections. A recent study in Flanders has indeed shown that half of the women working in Flanders' music industry (50.6 %) has experienced inappropriate behaviour during the past year (Willekens, Siongers, & Lievens, 2018). However, at the time of the interviews (2015), this topic might have been too sensitive to discuss in the interview setting, as it remained largely unspoken in public. This points to the key importance of the public debate for respondents to feel legitimated to bring up specific experiences of power and inequalities and to find a language to express them. In this sense, replicating this study with the same sample in the near future might be a productive strategy to generate important insights into the role of such a debate in shaping understandings of the job, the sector, and one's identity.

Finally, while our study tangentially touched upon the intersection between gender roles and age and life phase, it left other social identities largely outside the scope of the analysis. While this partially reflects the rather homogeneous Flemish music sector and cultural and creative industries as a whole (cf. Zanoni et al., 2017), it is likely that our study itself downplays the sector's diversity and the simultaneous and combined role of gender, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, amongst others, in the music industry

and in shaping artist managers' occupational identity. Future research is warranted that, drawing on larger samples, allows to gain insight on the intersectional dynamics that unequally structure the Flemish music industry.

## Note

1. These industries are usually defined by referring to the definition by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' and 'include[ing] advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio' (DCMS, 2001, p. 5).

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