



“Just not that into it?": Gendered Barriers in the Indie and Dance Music Scene in Dublin.

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Abstract

This article explores the roles that women played in the Dublin Music scene over the years 2000-2017. Based on longitudinal ethnographic research, it describes the barriers that women face to performing opportunities in the indie and dance music scenes. I outline the motivating factors for women to become involved in music performance and contrast them with those of their male counterparts to see if there are fundamental differences in why and how either gender becomes involved. I posit that the prevailing messages that women receive are often discouraging to their sense of belonging to the music scene. Finally, I contend that rather than women gaining access to the positions that incur capital, they instead continue to find themselves in challenging and sexist situations and corralled into roles that offer them very little in terms of monetary or cultural reward, or they leave the music industry all together.

KEYWORDS: Female Musicians, DJs, Gender, Performance, Dublin

Women as performers in Dublin: An introduction

In the year 2000, the year that marks the commencement of my study, nightlife in Dublin was starting to change. Longer opening hours in pubs, live music venues and nightclubs resulting from the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2000, opened many possibilities for musicians across the city. Many pubs and nightclubs, in a bid to attract crowds in a competitive market, allowed musicians or promoters to take over rooms and entire venues and promote their own gigs, often in spaces that previously had not hosted music. What emerged was a lively and fluid indie rock and dance music scene that had previously been discreet and small but now was converging

and growing exponentially. In 2000 for the first time in Dublin a crossover club night called 'Screamadelica' opened in the Temple Bar Music Centre. It had an equal emphasis on dance music and indie rock, live acts and DJs and it formed a template for many clubnights that would emerge in Dublin over the following ten years.

This article explores the roles that women played as performers on the indie and dance music scene in Dublin. Through a multi-sited ethnography, which included in-depth interviews with performers who were active at some point over the period from 2000-2017, it describes the barriers that women faced to gain access to the scene. Tepper and Hargittai suggest, "[i]n theory, the digital revolution and the arrival of new technologies should democratise the discovery of new music and the capacity for individuals to become opinion leaders in culture" (2009: 230). I have found, however, that although women are regularly active consumers, they are rarely opinion leaders, and it is glaringly apparent that involvement in music remains a gendered experience. When female artists or groups do emerge and gain prominence, sexist stereotypes tend to appear, along with an overemphasis on the fact they are women rather than on their music.

I outline the motivating factors for women to become involved in performance and contrast them with the responses of their male counterparts to see if there are fundamental differences in why and how either gender become involved in music. I questioned if women in Irish society were afforded the same encouragement and opportunity to get involved in popular music as men, and found that this was not the case. I posit that through social interaction, the prevailing messages that women receive from parents, friends, partners, or other musicians, are discouraging to their sense of belonging to the music scene. Finally, I examine some of the contemporary strategies that women have developed to deal with some of the sexist attitudes they encounter. I contend that rather than women breaking into contemporary performance and gaining access to the positions that incur both economic and cultural capital, such as performer or promoter, they instead continue to find themselves corralled into roles that offer them very little in terms of monetary or cultural reward, or they leave the music industry all together.

The research presented here is part of a wider study of forty musicians and DJs and is based on twenty-two semi structured interviews (eleven men and ten women) each of two to three hours of duration, along with online and offline participant observation that included conversations with approximately 200 people (130 men and seventy women) at over forty events from a five-year period of 2008 to 2014. The field site has a physical manifestation in Dublin and a radius of 3.5 km extending on both sides of the river Liffey, but it also extends across three social networking sites and four Internet forums. When I identified the initial sample of musicians who were to be involved in my research in 2008, I was only able to identify one female who was still as actively involved in the scene as she had been ten years previously. This was in stark contrast with their male counterparts, the majority of whom were still active. When I returned to the field in 2010, and again in 2014, I was only able to identify two females on each occasion who had recently become involved as performers. I then contacted women who had previously been performers but who were no longer active, and these became the majority of my female respondents. Their lack of visibility led me to question whether women are absent or leave simply because, as one of my male respondents indicated to me, they are "just not that into it", or to consider whether there are other barriers to females' involvement, real or imagined.

The historical involvement of women in music in Dublin

In her work on the music scene in Liverpool, Cohen noted that it “comprises predominantly male groups, cliques or networks shaped by social norms and conventions through which they establish and maintain relationships with other men” (Cohen 1997: 20). Leonard, documenting the history of popular music in the same city, recognised that women had not been as publically present as music makers, and therefore written accounts and archive holdings tend to reflect a gender imbalance in terms of representation. She noted that Liverpool does not buck the national and international trend of male dominated music scenes (2010: 106-107). My research asserts that Dublin is no different. The Sunday Times, in an article by Mick Heaney in January 1999 entitled “Chicks with Decks turn the Tables” (Heaney 1999), heralded a “fragrant wind of change blowing through club lands DJ mixing booths”. Heaney noted the arrival on the scene of several female DJs who had residencies in some of the most popular venues of the day. The article questioned if the Irish club scene would ever recover from their arrival. It profiled five female DJs who were all well-known names in Dublin at the time. Unfortunately, eighteen years later this prophecy has not transpired, there are simply not five female DJs who hold high-profile weekend residencies in Dublin. The popular perception from 2010 onwards, as evidenced by the lack of journalist commentary, as well as the views of some of my respondents, is that women have always held a peripheral position on the music scene in Dublin. When you examine the post-millennial scene in detail, particularly in the context of the indie music scene, you find that this is not the case. A number of those who started playing music in the early part of the 21st Century, male and female, framed accounts of how they got involved in the music scene in Dublin with references to nights run by female promoters and DJs. One DJ in particular, Dandelion, who DJed at and ran a number of clubs from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s and held a weekly residency in the RíR6 nightclub for nine years, was a common denominator in many of my respondents’ first memories of being part of the scene. DJ Dandelion often DJed with a female partner Mivian.

Orla, who was the lead singer and guitarist in several different rock bands from 1998, but who retired from music when she was returning to study in 2012, recalled the nights run by Dandelion as the place to be seen:

Everyone used to drink in Bruxelles, especially on a Saturday and on a Sunday night. Dandelion and Mivian used to DJ on a Sunday night downstairs. People used to just go and you’d be there. And there was a period of time where Dandelion was DJing up in the Mean Fiddler at ‘Way to Go Go’, a club night, and everyone used to go to that as well and there was various bits of night and things that were going on. That’s how I got in to it really. (Orla Interview, April 2009)

Pioneers such as Dandelion and Mivian, as well as other high-profile DJs such as Aoife Nic Canna, who was extremely popular in the dance music scene from 1998 to 2007, paved the way for other female DJ acts to follow. While women had been on the margins for quite some time, there is general consensus from a number of my respondents, female and male, the club flyers and now defunct music forums that the four-year period from 2003 to 2007 appeared to be ground breaking time for female performers in the city. Established acts such as Dandelion continued to be ever present promoting and DJing at numerous club nights around the city including the infamous Monday night club Strictly Handbag in RíR6. Aoife Nic

Canna also played R1R6 every Friday night and Mivian played weekly at Velure, the late-night club that opened in the Gaiety Theatre every Saturday. New female DJ's encouraged by one another started to emerge with an exciting regularity, establishing themselves as regular fixtures in various pubs and clubs. This was a period of time when the Internet and social media were becoming popular, and shifts in technology meant that access to music was becoming easier than ever before. Many cite this change in technology alongside the new medium for promotion as a real conduit for access to the possibility of DJing.

A large number of club nights had live indie music playing before a dance DJ, or in some of the larger venues, a band in one room and a DJ playing a different genre of music in the other room. When you look at the billing for these nights, it seems women had finally made a breakthrough. You were likely to see a female DJ on the bill of acts playing, and in some cases headlining, in a number of clubs on both a Friday and a Saturday night. It was not only female DJs who were gaining prominence. There were a number of female-fronted bands playing regularly at these club nights, and also a number of popular bands had at least one, if not more, female member(s). In 2006, there were four well-known female DJ duos, all with weekly residencies in Dublin: Chicks on Decks in Whelan's, The Leather Girls in The Hub, Love Action in Carnival Bar, and The Clap in Eamonn Dorans. Pogo, the Saturday nightclub night run by promoters Bodytonic, which was at that time located in the large Pod Complex on Harcourt St, had four regular female DJs on its rota of acts. Bands such as Stagger Lee, the Blonde Majority and Talulah Does the Hula all had female lead singers and a majority of female members. These bands headlined both Pogo (Saturday) and Radiator in the Hub (Friday) on numerous occasions from 2006 to 2008. Many other bands had women in various roles within their ranks. Fight like Apes, Sweet Jane and Dark Room Notes all had female lead singers, The Mighty Stef had three women in the band (two singers and a violinist), Neosupervital had a female bassist and keyboard player, and Band On An Island had a female violinist.

Farrugia proposes that the "[g]ender imbalances in EDM are slowly dissipating as the number of female DJs and producers continues to grow" (2012:145). I question that proposition in relation to Dublin, as it has become evident that the number of women in prominent and visible positions that hold real subcultural capital (Thornton 2004) is diminishing. A large number of the women who were involved in the scene from 2000 to 2013 no longer perform in any shape or form. None of the DJ duos listed above still play together, and very few of the bands that are popular and play regularly on the scene have female members. Of the female fronted bands that were popular in 2008, only the members of Fight like Apes and Talulah Does the Hula are still involved in music. This is in stark contrast with my male respondents who are continuing to perform. All of the bands that had female members moved to all-male line-ups with The Mighty Stef and Neosupervital continuing to perform under the same name, and members of Sweet Jane and Band On An Island becoming Buffalo Sunn and Knoxville Morning respectively. During my fieldwork, I tried to determine why this was the case. In the next section of this article, I outline the personal stories of the women involved to explore the challenges they faced trying to gain access to this space, and what it was that caused them to leave.

Entering the scene

In 1989, Mavis Bayton stated that "young girls do not see rock musician (or DJ) as a role they can aspire to" (Bayton, 1989: 239), yet that seemed to no longer be the case for many women in Dublin in the early 2000s. The rise in popularity of alternative music featuring strong female musicians meant that young women finally did have someone to look up to. In her examination of the early career histories of male and female musicians, Clawson found that

despite the male-dominated character of rock music, some women respondents developed ambitions to perform, which were sometimes inspired by media figures, both female and male. Yet these aspirations were frequently stalled. Teenage girls seemed to have a harder time translating their desire to become rock musicians into the practical experience that was readily available to boys. (Clawson 1999: 102)

This rings true for a number of my female respondents. While many might have aspired to becoming musicians, the road to succeeding, for many, seemed very distant indeed. The way to get a gig or be in a band at the turn of the millennium was through a process of working your way up. You first had to put in time as a fan and get your face seen at gigs, before then being asked to prove you had expert knowledge, for example, by giving somebody a CD, or getting a warm-up gig.

So, we got in on a bottom-rung, and a couple of opportunities arose that we were able to get more regular work with the bigger shows, which took us about a year-and-a-half from getting shit warm-ups to getting slightly less shit warm ups. (Arthur Interview, March 2008)

While the road to becoming a musician or performer was a varied one for the women in my study, there are many common characteristics in their narratives. The average age they became involved was similar to other women and was different from their male counterparts; the average age at which my respondents identified themselves as a performer was sixteen for the male respondents of my study, while for females it was twenty-three. I use the term 'identified themselves' as often the first time they saw themselves as a DJ or a musician did not coincide with their actual first live gig. Often it is the age that they first jammed with a band or played at a house party with friends as opposed to actually performing in a venue to a live invited audience. The average age that men performed their first 'proper' gig was nineteen, and for women, twenty-four. This suggests that women need to be older to have built up the self-confidence required to perform in public. My findings are in line with Clawson's who also found that the women in her study were on average six years older than their male counterparts at the age at which they joined their first band (1999:105).

For the women in my study who had played in bands and entered the music scene prior to 2007, the primary access route was via their boyfriends. None of the men I interviewed had the same experience. Orla described how she joined her first band at the age of twenty-one in 1998 as:

I was really into singing and wanted to try and get a band going and managed to get a band going with someone I was going out with at the time. (Orla Interview, February 2008)

Amy, a DJ, guitarist and singer, currently plays with an all-female band that released their first album in January 2014 to critical acclaim. She was also the keyboardist and singer with a very successful band from 2003 until 2008, and she describes her experience of joining her first band in 2003:

I was a very late starter. I didn't join my first band until I was twenty-four or twenty-five. I was going out with a guy who was playing music with two of his friends and he'd written some songs and was like "We need a girl to sing some parts" and I was like "Yeah, okay, I'll do that".
(Amy Interview, June 2011)

This finding is in contrast to Clawson, who found that "personal access to musicians as boyfriends did not seem to operate as a resource for band participation; not one of the women interviewed reported being recruited into a band by a boyfriend" (1999:107). Other respondents, nevertheless, found inspiration from other women. Laura, a member of a successful DJ duo from 2003 to 2007, and a bassist in a number of different bands from 2006 to 2017, discussed going to London and being inspired by the scene there:

So, we went over to this festival (in London) and had a good time and saw a load of DJs. It was kind of around the time that the Queens of Noize were so big and we went and saw them in Camden and were really drunk and said "We need to do that. We need to start DJing in Dublin" and we became much closer friends within the space of a weekend. So, by the time we came back the following weekend and went into (names a bar) and (the owner) was there very drunk and we said "We are the best DJs from New York" ...like we both had DJed in New York but not in any clubs or anything but said "Ah we are huge in New York give us a gig" and he did and the following Friday we were in there and every second Friday for a couple of years. (Laura Interview, September 2013)

Laura found that the actual process of obtaining a gig was surprisingly not that difficult. The women, emboldened by their trip to London, had the confidence to go and ask for a gig. Telling a white lie, and talking themselves up in the process, they managed to procure a DJ slot, which developed into a residency. This suggests that perhaps one of the primary barriers to entry for women is one that is self-imposed due to a lack of confidence and the normalised belief that women simply are not DJs. Those who plucked up the courage to ask were often given the opportunity.

Technology and gatekeeping

When finding a place in the industry, women had to develop strategies to negotiate gendered discourses and gatekeeping practices in relation to technology. While some women in my study talked about aspiring to be in a band, others turned to DJing, and discovered closed networks and an ongoing technical mystique constructed around the art of DJing that often shifts the goal posts and continues to shut women out. Many theorists such as Gavanas and Reitsamer (2013), Farrugia (2012) and Hutton (2006) recognise that female DJs can often be precluded from the cliques and networks that will allow them the opportunity to become key players within the scene. Many of the women who got involved in the scene in Dublin faced difficulties accessing the technical information required to become a

DJ. Once they acquired this information, they then encountered the constant challenge of being seen as both authentic and technically proficient. Gavanoas and Reitsamer contend that one key gatekeeping practice in electronic dance music scenes is the relationship between technology and masculinity, which negatively affects women who wish to become musicians, DJs and/or music producers (Gavanoas and Reitsamer 2016: 5).

One of the greatest barriers to access for female DJs was access to vinyl. Record shops were spaces that many women felt extremely uncomfortable in. They were small and full of men who were cliquish and unwelcoming. Fullington found that male shop owners and staff might try to assert their masculinity by devaluing music that, from their viewpoint, stereotypically appeals to women and gays (2003: 298). In her research on record shops in the 1980s, Mavis Bayton (1989: 349) found that men can also feel uncomfortable in these settings, but the fact that both shop assistants and customers are usually male means that record shops remain a male domain. As Farrugia noted, "[c]ollecting itself can become part of the gatekeeping process that can dissuade women from becoming DJs" (2012:29). Many of the women I interviewed reported feeling more comfortable visiting record shops abroad, which indicated to me that they see other cities as more progressive than Dublin in their attitudes towards women. Anonymity allowed them the freedom to ask questions and not feel undermined, and it also signified the self-doubt that they felt about trying to access male dominated realms in the city. This became less of a problem as they got older and gained more experience. However, many cited record shops as being just as unwelcoming in 2017 as they were in 2000.

The experiences of my respondents in terms of collecting vinyl were gendered in other ways. Of the many shared experiences that women reported through the course of this research, not one related a story of two women going record shopping together. For them, it was not a pleasurable or noteworthy event. Instead it was a case of gaining access to the music they wanted to play by whatever means necessary. This is remarkably different from their male counterparts who saw the regular gathering and networking in the record shop and record shopping as an integral part of their development and identity as a musician or a DJ. By contrast, the majority of my female respondents identified a close male friend or family member who provided them with the access to, and confidence in their subcultural capital, thereby affording them access to the scene. Access to an older sibling's or a parent's vinyl collection meant that females were able to circumvent the need to access the male-dominated site of the record shop, and also to overcome the cost of establishing a substantial record collection. It is no coincidence then that many women who emerged as DJs in the early 2000s became synonymous with playing retro rather than contemporary music.

How it happened was my parents owned a lot of vinyl so I grew up around a lot of music.... And then, when I was about 20, I decided that maybe I should give it a go at DJing, ya know, just having loads of records, buying records...And so I just put a mix tape together and sent it into Dice Bar and then landed my first gig. So that's how it all started out. I hold my parents majorly responsible for me going into the music industry, for sure. (Eileen Interview, June 2013)

It is likely that many men also started their record collections through hand-me-downs. However, not one of them cited that experience in their interviews with me.

There was a significant decline in the mid-2000s of DJs playing vinyl records, and the move to new formats – particularly CDs or MP3s – had positive implications that may not necessarily be immediately evident. Firstly, when DJs play MP3s on a burnt CD, a USB key or a laptop, they are almost always accessing their music digitally, thereby moving the site of access to the latest music away from the male-dominated realm of the record shop. Many female respondents who had become DJs reported that had it not been for the availability of music online, they would not have been able to build up their music collections, and certainly would not have felt they had a sufficient collection for performance. For many, the combination of suddenly having access to every song you wanted to play, by either buying the CD or downloading the song, was a revelation and certainly the starting point for building confidence in the ability to play a DJ set. As Gavanas and Reitsamer argue, the demise of the record store and the rise of internet-based shopping meant that “female DJs are no longer gendered as customers and do not need to interact with potentially problematic male gate-keepers to access crucial professional information and DJing Tools” (2013:57). My respondents no longer felt shackled by a limited vinyl collection that had evolved more from visits to charity shops than from visits to record shops in the city.

Record stores were not the only places where the women in this study reported encountering discouraging attitudes. According to Hutton, one of the reasons why women are not attracted to DJing is because of poor attitudes towards them held by established male DJs (2006: 61). I have found this to be the case amongst Dublin-based DJs. Many women cited numerous examples of the difficulties they faced while performing that were related to their perceived lack of technical proficiency. They found that their male peers did not take them seriously, and, as a result, they felt consistently undermined. Female DJs also felt under constant scrutiny as to the technical proficiency of their mixing, and that their genuine interest in music was constantly under question. Over the sustained period of time in the field, it became evident to me that one of the most profound differences between male and female DJs is their attitude to the importance of mixing and the mix. Almost all female DJs prioritise an extensive knowledge of music over the ability to deliver a successful mix. For men, however, the technical ability to mix takes precedence. It has become somewhat of a flash point where men's dismissive attitudes have become normalised, as men just assume that females simply do not possess the innate technical ability required to mix. Ann recalls an early experience playing for a promoter:

I think Ryan (the promoter) was actually surprised that I could actually DJ. You know they kind of go whatever because you are a girl and I was actually mixing and he was like “oh you are mixing well done!” (Ann Interview, April 2010)

Eileen also discussed her ability to mix when starting out:

To be honest, when I started out, I wasn't so concerned about mixing because I was playing Soul and all that kinda stuff. You don't really get that worried with that kind of music. In the last few years generally, I get good things said. I still don't think my technical ability is in any way amazing. Obviously, it's not as good as some DJs. But (...) (Eileen Interview, June 2013)

She also cannot understand what she perceives to be a local male obsession with mixing:

Men never stop going on about it. Even if they can't mix! You've more to prove, as a girl...You've much more to prove, and you've got to be...You've more to prove. You get a lot of guys who are crap and are like "I'm deadly", and have that attitude. That always amazes me. The interesting thing is, in the last two years or so, I've played with a lot of bigger names, international names and it's funny, because they say to me "Eileen, mixing is the least important thing about DJing". Big acts say that. The selection of music is so much more important. I've seen so many DJs who are technically brilliant [but] what they play is shite. (Eileen Interview, June 2013)

The valuing of different elements of DJing in ways that are gendered is one way that men acting as gatekeepers can continue to marginalise women. This approach is also used with more recently emerging technologies. From 2010 onwards there has been a shift by some DJs towards using expensive DJ software such as Ableton Live or Serato, prompting a debate amongst many, predominantly male, DJs and musicians about the validity of using such technologies, particularly around the authenticity of DJs using software. What is interesting, however, is that you are much more likely to find male DJs using these types of technologies. Only one of my female respondents reported using Serato, with many others expressing that they found it difficult enough to be taken seriously without being seen to be using "helper software".

While negative comments and reviews are something that every musician and DJ will have to deal with at some stage during their career, being physically interfered with while performing appears to be a uniquely gendered experience. For female DJs, the number one issue that they face when DJing is that men will come up and start interfering with their equipment. Men in my study often face other men coming up and making comments on their DJing, but none of my male respondents (DJs or musicians) reported ever having an experience where somebody intentionally physically interfered with the equipment they were using. A number of them had experienced males and females falling into equipment while drunk; my female respondents, however, experience men interfering with equipment on a regular basis. Many women cite issues with men "messing with the mixer" or telling them they are doing it wrong.

While these experiences can be annoying at best, and intimidating at worst, there are usually security staff employed at every venue. This gives performers the confidence that someone who becomes too much of a problem can be removed. When the comments or interference comes from another DJ or other member of staff from the venue, such as the sound technician, it can be somewhat harder to deal with. Mary relayed her experiences:

We sometimes got sexism from idiot promoters, bar managers and the like who thought we didn't know how to plug in a mixer!

She goes on to cite a specific example:

The guys who run (a popular bar in Dublin City), a bar I quite liked playing in, seem to dislike girls. Or maybe they dislike me. I feel like they never acknowledge me, never say hello, but fall all over (her husband) when we go. It's very strange, but it made it hard to say yes to play nights there. (Mary Interview, September 2013)

She is the person who DJed in their bar and although she was not dealing directly with them, but rather through a promoter, the fact that they rarely acknowledged her existence meant that she found it difficult to continue to play there.

Appearance

For many women, time spent with their performing partners, making music, rehearsing, planning what to play and what to wear, which may take place days and even weeks before the gig, became just as important as the gig itself. This was part of the "desire for comradeship" (Garrett 1984:401) or fun factor that motivated many women to start and continue in music. Trying on outfits and practicing makeup and hairstyles were also important for the women. They were very conscious of not only looking their best but also wearing clothes that would be comfortable to DJ or perform in. As Mary outlined:

We both trawled through our record and CD collections separately and brought what we felt like bringing, then we'd often get ready together, coordinate outfits, have a couple of beers! (Mary Interview September 2013)

Many of the women involved in my study felt that getting ready together, dressing up and looking their best, was empowering for them and prepared them for the difficulties they might face on the night ahead. They also recognised the contradiction and worried about playing into the stereotype of not taking the music seriously or just being seen as merely decoration for the club. For a number of men, one of the attractions of being in a band or performing was to attract female attention. Women, however, seemed to have to spend their time trying to avoid male attention. As Laura outlined:

Also like hitting on you when you are DJing and in your head you are "like really?" And that's when you wish it was a job because you could say "I'm not here to look at". But then I suppose you were there to look at. (Laura Interview, September 2013)

I asked her if she felt she was only there to look at.

A little bit yeah... No in saying that, you wouldn't have lasted very long if your music was shit. (Laura Interview, September 2013)

Sexist attitudes did not only affect DJs; female musicians also felt there was an undue focus on their technical proficiency and their looks. They reported that their ability to play their instruments was questioned consistently, and the focus on the fact that they were women and the "negotiation of their appearance and desirability" (Gadir 2016:5) was unavoidable. Scharff found that there is an established link "between sexy self-presentation, self-selling and women being degraded to sex objects" (2015:108). Many of the respondents found this to be the case, and they often had to deal with both media coverage that focused solely on their appearance and sexist comments on social media. For example, on day two of the Hard Working Class Heroes festival showcase in 2010, a prominent all female band received a review that opened with the lines:

The first noticeable thing about Talulah Does the Hulah was, well, their legs. Fronted by four talented stunners, each Talulah had donned their own version of the mini for the occasion. (Entertainment.ie 2010)

This caused one of the band members to respond on her Facebook account "Fed up with clothes-obsessed reviews. God forbid putting on dresses and suits. Maybe if we wear potato sacks they'll write about the music?" (Facebook Status 11th Oct 2010).

When I spoke to the band members about the review, mentioning their responses on social media, they indicated that these were not isolated events. Paula responded:

We've gotten reviews which talked about our mini-skirts and stuff like that. We don't care if you don't like our music. We don't care if you think we're shit, but at least like write that. Don't write about the way we look, because they wouldn't do that if it was dudes. You wouldn't say, "Wow, they're wearing really tight jeans". (Paula Interview, August 2011)

Particularly disappointing for her was the fact that it is not only men who have given her band reviews of this nature, but also women.

We've gotten them (reviews) from women too, which is disappointing. I can understand how a man can just stand there like, "Ah look at them all fancy like", but a woman should know. Girls dress up whether they're playing a gig or whatever they're doing. (Paula Interview, August 2011)

While reviews and online comments are difficult for women to tolerate, they often feel very conflicted about whether or not they should respond or if they should just try to ignore it. Often they do not want to draw attention to it, but they can also feel under a lot of pressure by the constant focus on their appearance and the negativity, so much so that they often feel like giving up. The contrast between the negative emotions caused by such reviews, and the enjoyment women derive from the social activity of dressing nicely, is also hard to negotiate.

Sustaining involvement

Both genders reported that their love of music, and the desire to perform, is what motivated them to get involved. However, in contrast with the male performers, none of the women I encountered over the course of my research were currently working as full-time musicians, and very few of them even discussed musical performance as a full-time aspiration. Those women who were in bands almost never put on their own headline shows and, as a result, there was uniformly a cost involved in being in a band rather than a monetary gain.

We all work, so we have enough money to pay for rehearsals and save up a bit of money here and there for recording and everything. (Orla Interview, February 2008)

The sexist attitudes, and the practices of shutting women out, often spilled over to the wider social circle where women were traditionally cast in the role of fan, and have also, for many years, supported their male friends and partners in their musical careers. When they make the switch and become performers, they often

find that they, similarly to the classical musicians studied by Scharff (2015), lack the confidence to engage in the same level of self-promotion as their male counterparts. Even when they make an attempt to promote themselves and their act, my respondents have found that they cannot always rely on their peers to support them in their endeavours by coming to see them play. Not having the support of friends can be very stressful, particularly if it is your responsibility to attract a crowd. One of my respondents readily admitted that they won't take gigs where they have that responsibility for that very reason.

It is not only their peer group, however, that can be problematic. Often partners and family pressures can interfere with their musical careers and aspirations. Eileen – the only woman who aspires to work full time in the music industry – recognises that it has had a significant effect on her personal life. She felt she could only sustain the level of DJing that she does being single:

It definitely affects your life in that way. Without a doubt. It affects your relationships. Like, I've gone out with guys and they're like "I never see you, and I don't really wanna go and meet you at three in the morning after your gig. And I don't really wanna stand by the decks, watching you play all night". And you can understand because I don't think I'd want to be that girl. (Eileen Interview, June 2013)

Laura, who is married and has recently given birth to her first child, voiced her concern about maybe having to leave the band that she was a founding member of and principal songwriter. She maintained her position in the band throughout her pregnancy much to the surprise of her fellow band mates who were expecting her to leave the group shortly after she announced she was pregnant. She had organised a replacement while she was on maternity leave, but that hasn't worked out and she has been feeling under pressure from her band-mates to re-join.

Another female who played in bands throughout the 2000s has already given up their dream of being in a band as a result of having a child and being married to a prominent musician. She posed a very interesting question at one of his gigs:

I sometimes ask myself when did I become the sensible one? Like we both met because we were in bands, rock n rollers you know? Except now I'm the one putting on the crappy clothes and going to the crappy job to support our family and he's the one living the dream. I don't suppose I would change things, but it is just difficult you know? (Maria, personal conversation at Whelan's, July 2012)

Taylor notes that "creative working, as unbounded immersion and personalized, emotional labour, demands the masculine selfishness of the conventional creative artist and this conflicts with long-established gendered positionings of women as other-oriented, attending to the needs of others and heeding their preferences" (2011:267-268). Many of the women in my study had no option but to leave the music industry once the needs of others became a priority in their lives.

Career aspirations can also affect how women choose to be involved in music making. While a majority of my male respondents, including those who were involved for over ten years, expressed an ongoing desire at some point to work full time within the music industry, only one female expressed the same desire. There are in my opinion many reasons for this. One is that most of the women who were successful as performers had also achieved a high level of tertiary education, usually in a field related to the creative industries. Six of my female respondents

have a postgraduate degree in a media, communications or technology-related discipline. This is unusual, but it would suggest that women who identify themselves as creative from an early age will perhaps aspire to, and are often encouraged by parents and teachers to choose studying it at university, while young men who identify themselves as creative in a similar fashion will join a band or will buy a set of decks. This would also suggest that education is an important confidence-builder for women who are interested in succeeding as a performer in Dublin. The educational attainment of the female respondents is in stark comparison to their male counterparts. Only one of the men in the wider study (Arthur, a DJ and band manager) has a postgraduate degree. None of my female respondents had ever survived on unemployment benefit, or on support from a partner, while trying to nurture a burgeoning music career. This implies that the women have priorities other than music as their career or as their primary source of income, and that those other priorities at some stage have to take precedence.

Conclusion

In this article, I attempted to shed some light on the circumstances women who may wish to gain access to the industry endure. I outlined the historical barriers that women faced to gain access to the music scenes such as confidence, access to insider knowledge and paths to entry. I recognise that although many of these practices, such as vinyl collection, have been superseded, women still face difficulties gaining access. I contend therefore that it is often not the actual technical or physical barrier that is the obstacle, it is in fact often the traditional male practice of shutting females out, whether intentionally or not, that continues to be problematic. While historically it has been difficult for women to gain access to male-dominated spaces, a number of female role models, particularly in the early stage of my study, were identified as the encouragement and inspiration that young women needed towards building the confidence to start a music career. Several female-led initiatives have emerged in recent years with the aim of empowering young women by training them in the use of music technology. Future research into the impact of these initiatives would be both pertinent and necessary. In speaking with performers who were no longer involved with music, their stories all had a similar narrative. They enjoyed it while it lasted, but they had “gotten lonely”, “fed up” or their “career or other life had taken over”. Male musicians do not report a similar trajectory. The limited number of contemporary female role models on the scene, however, is very worrying in terms of the future prospects of emerging female artists. Research with the few female artists who have debuted since 2015 questioning their role models and their access routes would also be valuable. What is indeed clear from my research is that being a female musician and DJ in Dublin remains extremely challenging, and that there are very few women in prominent and decision-making roles in the music industry in Ireland. That situation, instead of improving over the course of my study, as might be expected, has actually deteriorated.

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