

**Creative Music Production Professional Project**

**Rebalancing the Stage: How Have Women in the Music Industry Experienced and  
Addressed Gender Imbalance**

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## Introduction

For my final year professional project, I wanted to research problems women have faced and continue to face working in the music industry. The music industry covers an extremely broad spectrum, with careers ranging from studio engineers to promoters to performing artists. Across all of these very different and unique roles, the same problem seems to be prominent. Women are not being afforded the same opportunities and chances that men are in their respective fields.

Women are constantly looked down upon, treated differently to their male counterparts, and discriminated against. The problem seems to exist at a high level, as well as in the moderate to middle sections, but not so much at entry level. The pool for musicians just starting out seems to be fairly balanced, as does the pool at the top of superstardom level, but somewhere in the middle there seems to be a huge problem and there are a lot less women existing successfully in this area.

For this project, I decided to interview women at different stages of success in their careers in the music industry to attempt to understand this problem further. I hope to learn why this problem exists, where it comes from, and how it can be erased. My project aims to research the claim that gender imbalance in the music industry is still prevalent and find out if there are reasons for this, or if simply being a woman is seen as lesser and becomes a disadvantage in the workforce within the music industry.

## Literature Review

'Future Learn' (i) published an article titled 'A Brief History of Gender in (equality)' discussing women's rights over the years. It is no secret that women have been treated differently to men across a number of different industries. A major example of the gender inequality women have faced is women's voting rights. Women were given the rights to vote so much later than men. While this seemed like a huge step in the right direction at the time, women seem to have been constantly discriminated against in many walks of life ever since.

Over the years, there have been several movements around the world that shed some light on the injustice towards women and the differences they are faced with. The MeToo movement is a perfect example of this, however upon constructing my research for this project, it seems not much has changed. To fully understand the struggles that women have faced in the past, I have researched some key moments in history that changed the way women have been treated.

An article titled 'A Brief History of Gender (in) Equality' from Future Learn (i) speaks about the suffrage and suffragette movements, which were the leading movements that would eventually result in women having the equal right to vote as men. The suffrage movement "aimed to achieve equality for women through peaceful and legal means by such as petitions", whereas the suffragettes used a much more physical and violent approach. They would "enter parliament, heckle members of parliament, damaged and chained themselves to property, faced abuse from the media and were physically assaulted by the police".

In a paper published by David Cotter, Joan Hermsen and Reeve Vanneman titled 'Gender Inequality at Work' (ii), they state that "women were much more likely to work outside the home by the end of the twentieth century than at any time since 1950". While the imbalance in the workplace is slowly changing and becoming more balanced, it is going to take a long time and a big shift in perspective to cause the much needed change. In 2000, nearly 75% of women worked outside the home and were employed and "were spread across nearly the entire spectrum of occupations". According to my reference, "the average woman earned 59c for every dollar a man earned in 1950, but in 2000 that figure had risen to 73c". While these are all improvements and steps toward gender equality, we are still nowhere close and women are still being treated differently to men in every walk of life and industry. "Even in 2000, men were more likely to have access to paid employment, to be employed in better jobs and to be better paid in said jobs". The author of this work examined "work outside the home, the kinds of jobs men and women do, and the relative pay they receive" and found that "this change has slowed and even reversed in the last decade of the century". While nearly nine out of ten men are in the workforce, only three out of four women are. "In addition, women and men continue to be highly concentrated in typically female and typically male roles, respectively". "The declines in gender inequality in the labor market evident since at least 1950 have essentially stalled". It is very clear to see that the inequality still very much exists in the workforce, with women only earning 73c to the dollar than men earn. (Note this paper is no longer available for download but was available at the time of uploading interim thesis)

Gender inequality still exists as a big issue in the entertainment industry. Veronica Weinstein discusses this in her paper titled 'A Women's World: Gender Discrimination in the Entertainment Industry' (iii). Individuals that are educated and trained in their respective fields deserve to work in the job that they are trained in, and the existing gender discrimination in the labour force in the past and currently has stopped that from happening. As of early 2018 when

the research for this work was conducted, “women only accounted for 31% of board directors at 3,000 large public companies. Now, Senate Bill 826 requires that there must be at least one woman for every four men”. When this research was conducted, Spotify had just become a publicly traded company and released data showing that “between 26 and 33 percent of women are on the board of directors and in various leadership positions”. The hope is that with Senate Bill 826, “these numbers will increase for Spotify and many other entertainment companies”.

Lisa Robinson from Vanity Fair (iv) discusses “why the music industry is still so hard on women”. She mentions how “almost every successful female musician has had a man initially help guide her career”. In many cases, “even with a male protector”, women were still treated unfairly in many ways, were faced with many more obstacles than their male counterparts and “didn't always think to ask for what they financially felt they deserved”.

Despite the fact that women can often be seen dominating charts with their album sales, the industry is still very backwards and many women in the industry today face the same problems their older counterparts did. Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson's infamous Superbowl performance in 2004 is a perfect example of the unfair treatment of women within the music industry. During the performance, Justin Timberlake mistakenly ripped a part of Janet Jackson's costume, exposing her on live television. As a result of this, Janet was essentially blacklisted from future performances for big events like the Grammys, whereas Justin was invited back to headline the Superbowl in 2018.

This treatment of women is extremely unfair and sexist. I am conducting research on the gender imbalance within the music industry in particular, which has been a huge problem for decades. ‘Gender Inequality in the Rock and Pop Music Industry: Breaking the Glass Ceiling’ (v) discusses this within the music industry in particular. Not only are women not given the same

opportunities as men to climb the corporate ladder within labels and companies, women have also been the subject of cruel jokes and objectification in music videos and the demeaning nature of lots of song lyrics. This in turn allows for the existence of inappropriate comments in the workplace. The term 'groupie' has also been discussed for decades across many different forms of entertainment, but especially music. This is a demeaning and objectifying title and is really only subject to women.

The music industry seems to be one of the worst industries when it comes to gender inequality. Bands and artists have the option to choose a man over a woman when hiring their crew, and jobs are often specified based on gender and age. A lot of the time, women are discriminated against because of lazy, outdated stereotypes and for no good or valid reason at all. It is particularly obvious the higher up the corporate ladder, with "only 4% of senior-level executive positions at major labels being women". The media is a very powerful and dangerous tool, that very much feeds into the inequality and imbalance and continues to paint women in a way that portrays them as lesser to their male counterparts., and this in turn causes some gender imbalance within its own industry of entertainment. Without the media, these stereotypes and perceptions would of course still exist but would be much less identifiable within mainstream culture.

Caroline Ann O'Sullivan (vi) discusses the gender barriers that exist within the indie and dance music scene in Dublin in 2018. In the year 2000, the Irish music scene was becoming more and more popular, especially among DJs and indie musicians.

The Intoxicating Liquor Act in 2000 meant pubs, clubs and venues could stay open much later than before. Pubs, clubs and venues began to allow musicians and promoters to use their rooms and venues to promote their own gigs in an attempt to gain customers in a competitive market. This marked the beginning of a very lively and fluid indie rock scene in Dublin. However, although women are regularly active consumers, it is still uncommon for women to be leaders. It is very apparent even to this day that involvement in the music scene, even in Ireland, is



surrounded by a harsh gender imbalance. Sexist stereotypes follow women that begin to make a career for themselves in the music industry. There also seems to be an overemphasis placed on the fact that they are women rather than the music itself. This is something that is currently and always has been unheard of for a male in a similar role.

The Sunday Times published an article in January 1999 (vii) titled 'Chicks with Decks Turn the Tables'. The article discussed a change in the DJ scene in Ireland, as several female DJs had been given residencies in some of the most popular venues of the time. The article questioned if the Irish club scene would ever recover from their arrival on the scene. As of today, this is simply not the case and there are no longer female DJs with residencies in the five most popular clubs in Ireland of today. It also has to be questioned if women and men are encouraged with the same energy as children when it comes to music. For many years, there has been a very common misconception that young girls do not identify themselves with becoming a musician or DJ as a career choice for them. This could have been due to the fact that in the 80's and 90's, a lack of women in the industry meant a lack of role models for young girls to aspire to. However, now, with the rising popularity of women in the music and DJ scene, this no longer seems to be the case.

In an article posted by RTE, their report looks at "how a musicians' gender can impact their career and experiences within the Irish music industry". In 2021, the author of the article, Ann-Marie Hanlon (vii), "surveyed over 500 male, female and non-binary musicians working in Ireland to investigate how a musicians' gender may impact their career and day-to-day experiences within the music industry". While "there are indications that positive change is occurring", the results of the survey showed that sexism and gender imbalance still very much

exists within the Irish music industry. Sexism in the forms of “unequal treatment due to gender bias, violence, harassment and objectification” were all reported in this survey.

As mentioned time and time again in this thesis, the harmful stereotypes that follow women in this industry that include “encountering assumptions in the form of expressions of surprise or doubt about their capabilities as musicians, their understanding of music technology and sound, and their identity as musicians” have a huge effect on the way women are viewed in the industry. “74% of women said that they had experienced doubts being expressed about their expertise as a performer sometimes or often. While 81% of men have never been mistaken as a groupie, 58% of women have”, an interesting statistic that solidifies Christine’s stance on stereotypes around groupies.

The UK Parliament published the ‘Misogyny in Music’ (ix) report in early 2024. The aim of the report was to discuss and shine a light on the problems that exist for women working in the industry. The UK Parliament recognizes the “lack of support, gender discrimination and sexual harassment and assault as well as the persistent issue of unequal pay in a sector dominated by self-employment and gendered power imbalances”. This report made a lot of the industry take a look at themselves and actually address the problem that has persisted, rather than being able to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist if it is not affecting them directly.

Upon investigating this problem evidence of the existence of non-disclosure agreements around sexual assault and harassment was brought to light. The simple existence of this report in the media has forced the industry to take a step back and finally attempt to fix the problem from the root. This is very interesting, and seems to highlight a very important way forward for this industry. Without blame, there is no need to take accountability. When a report of this nature is

published on such a wide scale, accountability is forced upon the perpetrators, and the problems discussed must be solved.

For this project, I have chosen to interview some women who actively work in the Irish music industry. Harvard Business Review published an article that mentions effective interviewing strategies. To ensure I am adequately prepared for my interviews, planning before the interviews must take place. It is very important to have the questions thought about in advance, and to make sure the questions can flow nicely and leave enough room for the interviewee to answer openly rather than asking closed yes or no questions. Being friendly but also professional is a very important factor in an interview. This will help make sure the interviewee can trust you and will feel comfortable answering your questions.

## Methodology

By conducting and reviewing the research stated in the previous chapter, it is very evident that there is a gender imbalance across almost every walk of life, but in the music scene in particular. This project will focus on the Irish music industry specifically. To ensure all bases are covered, research will continue to be conducted regarding the obvious gender imbalance in the music industry throughout the interview process of this project.

Ideally, interviews with women that work in different areas of the music industry and at different levels of success in their careers would be the main source of research for this project. By asking all interviewees the same questions, common problems will be highlighted. As a result of this, solutions may be drawn from the experiences of these women, along with their opinions on what could help to solve the problems in the industry.

Four separate interviews will be conducted, with four separate women all working at different levels and stages in their career in the Irish music industry. Upon completing the interviews, common codes will be highlighted across all interviews. These codes will then point to themes that emerge throughout the interviews. This will make analysing the interviews and finding results efficient and easy to understand.

The first interview I will conduct will be with Shauna Watson, programmer of We've Only Just Begun festival held in Whelan's. The results of this interview will give a very insightful look into the music industry and its treatment of women in comparison to their male counterparts. Shauna runs this festival which boasts an all-female line up every year, as well as displaying a website boasting a directory of all-female recording artists, DJs, musicians and industry professionals. As someone who has not only recognized that there is a problem within the music industry regarding gender, but has also actively made an attempt to change that, Shauna will be able to give a very useful insight into these struggles.

Shauna has worked her way up to where she is now, by reaching out to the people in the music industry to work any small jobs she could find. She has worked across a range of different roles in the music industry, including working in BIMM as an events assistant, booking and promoting for the Ruby sessions, working as a production manager for Whelan's, and working as the label and management coordinator for Rubyworks. Shauna's experience across all these different jobs means her insight will be very useful to this project.

Moving into a slightly different realm of the Irish music industry, I will conduct an interview with Karima Dillon. Karima is currently a lecturer and works with composition for film. Karima also spent five years of her professional career playing across multiple different bands, including all-female bands. Karima's experience in the film industry as well as working as a touring musician will provide a good insight into the gender imbalance that exists in the industry today and over the last few years. The fact that Karima was involved in an all-female band will also give an interesting perspective on the issues that arise when existing as a woman working in the Irish music industry.

My third interview will be conducted with Dr. Sarah Cleary and this interview provides insight for a different perspective. Sarah has worked in live events, as well as the film industry, both of which are extremely male dominated fields. Sarah also lectures and has spent time working with DBS and Sound Training College. Sarah's experiences throughout her career in multiple different sectors will be an extremely useful insight into the problems that exist regarding gender imbalance and sexism in the Irish music industry. Sarah has dealt with many different people and characters over the years when working in this industry, and has encountered many of the problems that will be discussed in this project.

Finally, an interview will be conducted with a female musician that is currently attempting to break into the music scene here in Ireland. For this project, the interviewee was Leah Moran. Leah is a young singer/songwriter that has been busking since 2020 and more recently has been performing as an opening act, as well as playing her own headline shows in Whelan's. Leah's experience will be very useful as a musician that is trying to make a name in the industry and is in the beginning stages of doing so. As mentioned in the introduction chapter above, the problem seems to exist at a higher level as well as at a moderate level in the middle, which will be covered by the interviews mentioned above. The problem doesn't seem to exist as heavily in women just starting out in the industry, and an interview with a female musician that is just starting to break away from that entry level and into that middle ground will be very useful and could give great insight into the struggles women face.

## Thematic Analysis

Upon completing these four interviews, it became apparent quite quickly that all four of these women have experienced the problems discussed in this thesis. These include gender imbalance and discrimination, as well as a lack of support in a professional and personal sense when in work. To fully understand these experiences, thematic analysis will be performed across all four interviews. When reading the interviews and analyzing them, common codes became very obvious. These codes then pointed towards themes that were prevalent across each interview.

### GENDER IMBALANCE – SOCIETAL AND PERSONAL

The first theme to be discussed is Gender Imbalance in a societal and professional sense. There is no question that a very clear gender imbalance has existed in the Irish music industry for decades. To fully understand this, the theme of gender imbalance has been split into two separate smaller themes. Firstly, gender imbalance in a societal and personal sense. Upon completing the interviews, it became clear that the existence of a lot of the gender imbalance and discrimination within the Irish music industry, occurs because of the way people, predominantly males, have learned to think through society's views on women. A form of 'backwards thinking' still exists in many different industries around the world, but it is extremely prevalent in the Irish Music Industry. Many people accept the 'backwards' thought process of men being better at their jobs than women, or more capable, as the way it is. It's the way it always has been, so why would it change now? This is an extremely harmful way of thinking. There are many very damaging stereotypes that exist in this industry, and these can extremely affect a woman's career. Also the lack of support around childcare makes it very difficult for women with families to progress at the same rate as their male counterparts. There is a huge

pressure to be able to return from maternity leave and not have missed a beat and be able to pick up exactly where you left off, which is simply unrealistic. The expectation for women to stay at home and mind the children makes it very difficult for them to be able to attend late night networking events, which the music industry is built on. It is very difficult to build and further your career without attending these events.

Women are often expected to take on this role over men, and it is seen as more socially acceptable for men to be able to attend these late night events and in turn then further their own career. In Shauna's interview this theme became apparent quite quickly.

Shauna spoke about the blatant gender imbalance in the industry. While it may not be the case of being actively discriminated against because of gender, a huge gender imbalance exists and that alone can be very disheartening and discouraging. The music industry has been male dominated for a long time, and only in recent times has it become less acceptable to allow sexism or discrimination. Men have been dominating higher positions within the industry for years, and only recently has a shift started to appear. More and more women are starting careers in the music industry and slowly working their way up the corporate ladder. This chain of events is slowly making its way up the ladder and more women are filling these higher up positions than ever before. Trying to understand why there is a shortage of women even at the bottom of the ladder is the most important factor in all of this research.

It has always been a fact that less women and even young girls take part in musical activities, even as minimal as learning an instrument. Growing up as a girl that started music at a young age, it's always been more popular amongst boys than girls. More representation definitely helps, young girls seeing female musicians doing well can be much more encouraging than just seeing men playing guitar or drums or fronting bands. Shauna also mentioned that the very existence of gender discrimination in the industry can be a deterrent and can very much put women off pursuing a career in the industry. Knowing you will be the only woman in the room



can be very frustrating, and instantly forces you to stand out in the crowd. This is sometimes a catalyst for unfair treatment, or the passing of inappropriate remarks.

Shauna discussed the gender imbalance and discrimination that she has witnessed and experienced and gave her thought process as to why it exists. Her main point was that it is simply down to people's values and principles, and the way they think. However, the way people think is heavily influenced by society and how, in this case, women, are viewed. Shauna thinks this is a large part of the problem. This 'backwards' way of thinking is extremely outdated, yet it is still prevalent across all sectors of the music industry. Something like this is generational and can take years or decades to change. There is a slow change happening, which Shauna discusses, but it will take a very long time to change the narrative on how people think, especially when this way of thinking was traditionally the norm and socially acceptable until very recent times.

Shauna also mentioned the stress that mothers are put under at the hands of the music industry. The music industry is one that is changing every single day, and it can be hard to keep up with. A lot of women taking maternity leave feel a huge pressure to be able to pick back up exactly where they left off after six, or eight months or more. This plays a huge factor in women's decisions to start a family as it can feel like they have to choose between their job and their family. Of course, it's not just a woman that exists in a family, but unfortunately it is very standard to expect the woman to take on all the parental duties. In this line of work, this can leave a woman at an extreme disadvantage to her male counterparts when it comes to progressing in her career. Networking and attending events is a huge part of many jobs within the music industry and participating in this can be extremely difficult and sometimes impossible for women with children at home.

Gender imbalance in a societal and personal realm was also discussed by Karima in her interview. Karima talked about the gender imbalance that exists in live sound, and the assumptions and stereotypes that come with working as a woman in a male dominated field. Karima performed in many bands throughout her career, one being Montauk Hotel. This was an all-female band. Despite the respective band members understanding the technical side of the live sound industry, and Karima herself studying live sound in Creative Music Production, male sound engineers would often assume the girls had no education in the area, and therefore had no idea what they were doing. Because careers in live sound have been predominantly male and it is seen as a 'traditionally male driven' career, these harmful stereotypes exist. These stereotypes can seriously damage a band or artists, as the way you are treated in the workplace has a massive impact on your emotional wellbeing. The existence of these stereotypes is a totally unprofessional way to act in a workplace.

Like Shauna, Karima puts this way of thinking down to people being 'old-fashioned'. People are used to seeing these industries be dominated by males, and therefore it has become normalized. Karima mentioned that in twenty years of playing shows around Ireland with different bands, she only encountered two or three sound engineers. While Karima acknowledged that these statistics are slowly changing, and more women are taking on these roles in the last few years, it is still very heavily dominated by males. Karima also discussed the difference between men and women and how they behave in society. Society can tend to teach women to be quiet, laid back, and not 'too-forward' to avoid the risk of being called 'high maintenance' or 'highly strung'. These are misogynistic terms used to describe strong, independent, powerful women.

While it is also slowly changing and improving, this way of thinking is still very much normalized in today's society and can cause women to be less outgoing and less willing to put themselves forward for opportunities than men. Karima recalls a songwriting lecture she attended where the lecturer asked for someone in the class to put one of their own songs forward to be critiqued. Despite the class attendees being mainly female, the only person to put themselves forward was a male. This could very much be caused by the way society teaches men and women to think differently, and these again are very harmful stereotypes that can and do impact women's careers daily.

As a woman working in the industry that also has a child and a family, Karima gave a great insight into the problems that occur around childcare and the lack of support for women in the music industry. Similar to what Shauna talked about, Karima discussed the immense pressure to be able to pick up in your career exactly where you left it. Karima also discussed the hours of work that are typical of the music industry, and they simply do not align with having a child. It seems in an industry like this, you must choose between your career and your family. It is near impossible to succeed at both. Childcare does exist but then the decision has to be made around whether a parent wants to leave their child in care for eight hours a day just so they progress in their own career. Unfortunately, in the music industry, like Shauna said, networking and attending events is the most important factor when wanting to further your career, and this simply cannot be done to the same extent once a woman has a child to care for. Karima said this is the reason there aren't as many women in their thirties and forties that are established in the industry, and this is another huge cause for a gender imbalance at the slightly higher level of careers.

Sarah also found this gender imbalance in a societal and personal sense to be a huge problem in the industries she's worked in. Sarah also talked about the imbalance that exists in 'traditional' roles. Traditionally, jobs in sound engineering crew, local crew, tour management and security are still to this day dominated by males. This is because these are all very physically demanding jobs and societally, women will never be looked at on the same par as men when it comes to physical strength. But as Sarah said 'guess what? Girls can lift too'.

It has become slightly more acceptable for women to exist in these roles, but these roles have always been predominantly men and will be for a very long time. This is simply down to the stereotype that men are always going to be stronger than women, and all women are too small and fragile to perform such physical tasks. This simply isn't true and it all just depends on the person, but society has allowed these stereotypes to exist and to thrive and this causes a huge gender imbalance.

The music industry also attracts as Sarah said, 'bombastic', characters. Again, women are treated with very misogynistic language when it comes to being competitive, powerful and strong, whereas a man displaying these traits are seen as leaders and innovators. This is once again caused by societal stereotypes and beliefs, and can really harm a woman's career, causing her to step back and be more laid back and less upfront about her beliefs. From working in the film industry and being so heavily involved, Sarah has noticed the existence of these problems, and claims that sexism and misogyny are culturally built into the film industry. When asked about if being a woman has hindered her career at all, Sarah said she feels she would have been spoken to differently and treated differently if she was a man. This is an extremely harmful way for an industry to be portrayed, but unfortunately, because of the way society is and has been for so long, it is much more normal for women to be treated very differently to men.

Sarah also put a heavy emphasis on childcare. Like Karima, Sarah is a woman working in the music and film industry with a child. 'Traditionally, childcare is something women have to either do, or B sort out'. This extra responsibility being placed solely on the woman's shoulders rather than the mans, comes from the traditional societal belief that women should take on the majority of the childcare duties in the home, when realistically, it should be very equal. She mentions the point again of mothers not being able to work late or attend important networking events, because the majority of the responsibility is placed on the woman. Sarah and Karima both said that women are afraid to get pregnant in case they lose their jobs as it is too difficult to pick up where you left off. More support for women with childcare would be a huge factor in helping women move forward in their career.

Leah discusses the stereotypes that exist in her line of work. As a female busker, being on the street alone with lots of expensive equipment is simply safer as a man than as a woman. She talked about how the girls would often have to bring friends or parents with them, 'just in case', whereas the boys wouldn't really have this issue. This isn't solely a music industry problem as it is a societal problem. But in this line of work, societal issues can bleed into it and this can be the stem of some of these problems. When Leah started performing in venues, these societal issues and pre-misconceptions persisted. Leah talks about being dismissed, and not even looked at as a musician. 'What are you here for?' Leah says most of the time male crew working in these venues don't even assume she is there to play the gig.

This comes from society viewing women as less and not viewing women as the 'ideal' candidates for performing artists. By playing gigs around Ireland, Leah has noticed patterns that exist that contribute to the gender imbalance in the music industry today. As the other interviewees mentioned, the stereotype that women have no education in the music industry and have no idea what they are doing is extremely prevalent. Leah has experienced this first hand, when coming into contact with male sound engineers in venues, Leah says there are often times these men assume Leah knows less than her male counterparts, when this is usually not the case.

These stereotypes can very easily set young aspiring female musicians like Leah back in their career, and can stop them from progressing. Many people still have the mindset that men are more capable than women, Leah states that this sexism exists due to the enablement of society towards men's misogynist behavior.

### **GENDER IMBALANCE IN A PROFESSIONAL SETTING**

There is a very blatant gender imbalance that exists across many industries, this is especially prevalent in the music industry as was confirmed in all 4 of the interviews conducted. This imbalance can be very disheartening and discouraging for women attempting to carve out a career in the industry. Even though blatant sexism hasn't been extremely obvious for all of the interviewees, simply existing as the only female in a room full of males is intimidating enough to discourage progression.

Shauna has worked across many different areas in the music industry and has noticed a gender imbalance in most of these areas. While Shauna believes that things are beginning to improve slightly and there are a few more women beginning to filter through to upper executive positions, up until very recently these posts were male dominated. Shauna often found herself being the only female in the room and experienced an abundance of inappropriate remarks made to that fact which led to her being uncomfortable and less productive in this environment. Shauna has worked in live sound and discovered that this was the setting for the most prevalent gender imbalance. Often she would work from 3pm to 2am and she would still be the only female in the group. Shauna believes in the 80's, 90's and early 2000's it was much more difficult for women to exist in the music industry. However, Shauna has said that what is acceptable to do and say has changed drastically. This comes from a slight change in society in recent times and the beliefs and standards that come with these changes.

When asked what advice Shauna would give to women wanting to work in the industry she discussed the intimidation that exists around reporting inappropriate behavior. Shauna states that being able to stand up for yourself and not being afraid to speak out is really important in this industry. This is a small change that is currently occurring that will improve women's experiences in the music industry going forward.

When Leah began busking 4 years ago there were a lot more men than women taking up this profession. This imbalance still exists today and while there is no explicit sexist reason for this imbalance, the lack of encouragement for young women in music can play a huge role towards the cause of this gender imbalance. As previously mentioned male musicians are encouraged to take up an instrument at a very young age, where this encouragement would not be as strong for young women. Even though this imbalance exists Leah has felt that hasn't impacted her career in busking as there is no power imbalance, just a gender imbalance.

Traditionally the music industry has predominantly been male dominated and although again this is currently changing the imbalance is still very obvious and prevalent. Leah discusses Irish Male Musicians that are currently achieving success in their careers for example, Bands & Artists like Amble, Kingfisher & Darren Kiley. These are all selling out the Olympia and playing world tours. However, there seems to be no equivalent female counterparts achieving this success in the Irish music industry currently. This is not due to a lack of female artists and the imbalance doesn't seem to make much sense in this situation. It appears that there are patterns that support males climbing the ladder and gaining success at a quicker rate than women. In Leah's experience as a musician, who is currently supporting bigger acts, Leah has found not enough emphasis is placed in ensuring there is gender equality across tours and crews alike.

Male musicians like aforementioned are choosing their own support acts. Through no foul play these musicians choose their friends to support them on tour or work in their crew. This then causes a chain of men supporting men accidentally which in turn makes it more difficult for women to get their chance in the industry.

Karima discussed the gender imbalance that exists in the areas of the industry she has worked in. Karima has played in various bands, and in twenty years has only encountered female sound engineers two or three times. This is a blatant example of the gender imbalance that exists in the music industry.

There are still more males than females on the music production courses she teaches, although this has slightly improved in more recent years, the imbalance still very much exists. This imbalance can be very discouraging for aspiring females within this industry. It has been proven time and time again that representation is extremely important, and this is no exception. Young girls being able to see successful women working in the music industry can be a huge motivator. More women in higher positions can drastically change the imbalance lower down the ladder, as young females can see where their career can go.

Sarah has experience across many areas and has experienced different levels of gender imbalance in a professional setting. On a crew level, the industry is very male dominated, as these tend to be the more 'traditionally male' roles, such as sound engineering crew, local crew, tour management and security as discussed previously. Sarah also spoke a lot about the film industry, and how it is extremely male driven. Sarah has felt a sense of fear throughout her career in the film industry more than anywhere else she has worked. This is a fear of losing her job, or having her career intercepted as a result of her speaking up about things that are



inappropriate in the workplace. This unfortunately comes from men having power over women, and too many men being in power, much like they are in the film industry.

Most of the higher up positions are held by males, and when their own societal beliefs about women come into play, this can be a very dangerous place to be male dominated. Misogynistic language has been used a lot and appears to be the norm in Sarah's experience in the film industry. This comes from the huge power imbalance that is a result of males being in an authoritative position over women. Sarah believes things seem to be moving in the right direction, however the existence of social media and powerful male figures that preach these harmful stereotypes about women, there is a great fear that things may only get worse.

#### WAYS FORWARD/POSITIVE ACTIONS

In all four interviews, the question 'What do you think could be changed to make a difference, if any?' was asked. After discussing all of these problems and issues with the interviewees, it felt important to ask the people who have experienced these problems what could be done to help them and others in similar positions. Existing as a woman is very difficult in an industry like this, as has been reiterated repeatedly across the interviews. To summarize, more of a conscious effort needs to be made to balance the scale and give women the same opportunities as men. The way things are currently is simply unacceptable and must be changed.

Karima discussed different funding and bursaries available for women in the music industry. In recent times, more of a conscious effort has been made to include women and offer them more opportunities that they may have missed out on in the past. This can really be encouraging to women working in the industry and can help to further their career. Seeing women in roles that were previously male dominated will make a huge difference and change for good. Younger women that are beginning their career in the music industry can be very discouraged to see a

predominantly male field in front of them. The simple existence of women in these roles can be enough to encourage more woman to start their careers, as it becomes more normalized. Karima also discussed mentors, and how women will be more likely to mentor other women. This is because these women in the mentor positions may have already struggled to get to where they are as a woman in the industry, and they may want to cut out that hassle for someone that is in the same position they were in ten years ago or so. The more women in higher roles and mentoring positions there are, the better as this means more chances for younger women be mentored and progress in their career.

In Sarah's interview, critical thinking was mentioned. The way adults think is often a result of the beliefs and values they were taught or picked up on as a child. This means that as adults, teaching children critical thinking skills and societal beliefs that line up with a fair and balanced society is extremely important and could be a huge step forward. The existence of social media has become a huge problem as mentioned previously, and children are being exposed to views and opinions that can fuel the aforementioned 'backwards thinking' and in turn gender imbalance in an industry like this.

Making a conscious effort to include women and offer them equal opportunities to men seems to be the way forward. When asked what could help Leah and young women in her position to progress in their career, Leah discussed the issue around support slots for gigs in Ireland. As discussed previously, the majority of Irish musicians that are playing headline shows and world tours currently are male. The reason for this was discussed earlier, and the solution is actually very simple. Instead of these male acts harmlessly just inviting their friends, who tend to be male, to support them or work with them on tour, a conscious effort should be made to ensure a woman is also offered this opportunity. Simply ensuring there is a male and a female on the bill for a show can make a huge difference and give women a boost and the support they need to reach the audience they desire. It shouldn't be unrealistic to expect crews and tours to be made of equal amounts of males and females.

There is a gender imbalance that exists currently in this sector, but this can be changed very quickly and quite easily by people in charge of hiring and booking support slots, thinking critically and ensuring the bill is balanced. Just because the gender imbalance exists and has done for so long, does not mean it has to be accepted as standard.

Shauna was a great candidate to interview, as she has actively made changes to the industry. Shauna runs a festival called 'We've Only Just Begun' which takes place in Whelan's in Dublin every August. This festival was created with the idea of balancing out the stage, and Shauna and her crew have been very successful. The festival showcases women and gender-expansive artists on the line up. They also run a directory, which is a free database of Irish women and gender-expansive musicians or industry professionals in Ireland. Shauna's work is a perfect example of what can be done to change the industry and solve the problems discussed in this thesis. For example, as mentioned in Leah's interview, making a conscious effort to have a gender balanced crew can make a huge difference in changing the narrative around gender imbalance in the Irish music industry. Shauna's database makes this extremely easy and negates the excuse that there aren't as many women to choose from, or it's hard to find women to work in these roles.

Shauna also discussed mentorship, similarly to Karima, as well as the different projects and initiatives that are currently in place in an attempt to encourage more women to begin their careers in the music industry. Another point Shauna made about ways to move forward is the existence of HR in the workplace. Being able to report inappropriate behavior in the workplace is extremely important, and wasn't always a thing. Before, it was looked down upon to complain or call out anything as a woman, no matter how inappropriate. This is entirely misogynistic and caused a lot of trauma for women working in these male dominated fields.

Having a clearly outlined process to report sexual harassment or assault in the workplace, and the existence of the correct infrastructure for women to be able to report things that happen makes a massively positive difference. Another great resource that can massively change the views of people is literature and studies.

Shauna mentioned the Misogyny in Music report which was published in 2024. Shauna believes that reports and studies with evidence can be a great catalyst for conversations and change in the industry across all organizations. It can force people to understand women's perspectives and have those uncomfortable conversations that before were ignored as it wasn't an issue that directly affected those in power. It is very easy to shy away from these topics if it isn't something that directly affects you personally, and that is what has gone on for so long and has caused this problem to grow and spiral out of control. Calling people out directly and forcing them to look at their own actions and the consequences can really make an impact and be a cause for change.

## DISCUSSION

Before conducting these interviews and researching the blatant gender imbalance in the music industry, it seemed like the problem was unfixable, that it was the way things worked and that it would never really change. Upon conducting research and interviews with women that exist and work and thrive in the Irish music industry and its counterparts, it's very obvious that there is a clear solution. It truly seems to boil down to the fact that people in positions of power simply are not making the effort required to ensure a gender balanced industry exists. It absolutely can be done, but it will come from a place of want and will. As mentioned in the interviews and as discussed in the thematic analysis of said interviews, an effort must be made to eradicate the gender imbalance that exists within the music industry. Slowly, things are changing regarding the way society views women in the workplace. In recent years, it has become less acceptable to be 'overtly sexist in an office environment'.

Women that have been working in the music industry since the 1980s will have had a much more difficult time working in the music industry in comparison to now. Sexist comments and women being offered less opportunities than men were very standard back then, but this is slowly changing. As Karima mentioned in her interview, women seem to be less likely to put themselves forward for opportunities than their male counterparts. This lines up with what was said in the Vanity Fair article about women not asking for what they realistically financially deserve. This comes from the way the society we live in has allowed women to be portrayed as worth less than men, thus causing them to have less self belief in their own worth. Often, this means women are not being treated fairly or paid fairly, and also have less opportunities available to them.

Sarah discussed men having too much power in the industry being a huge part of the problem. This is evident every single day in the music industry. A very important and shocking example of this is the incident that occurred between Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake at the Superbowl performance. Janet Jackson's career took a huge hit due to this, and although the incident was caused by Justin Timberlake, his career continued to soar. This is exactly the kind of power imbalance that exists in the industry that Sarah discussed in her interview.

Multiple times across all interviews, the idea of representation was mentioned. The fact is, there is not enough female representation in the music industry, whether that be in corporate settings, live settings or crew. The existence of women higher up in these roles is such a simple solution that can very easily be done, and this is something that will encourage other women to strive for these positions, in turn creating a more balanced industry and workforce. This is also mentioned in Caroline Ann O'Sullivan's discussion of The Sunday Times article 'Chicks With Decks Turn The Tables', where it is stated that the possible reason for a lack of women in the indie and DJ scene now is due to the lack of women in the scene in the 90's that could pave the way for younger artists now.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the sexism and gender imbalance that exists in the Irish music industry, along with many other industries globally, is unacceptable and extremely outdated. The many problems mentioned across my research and interviews are easily fixed. While the industry is slowly changing and moving in a more positive direction in regards to gender imbalance and sexism, it still has a long way to go. This imbalance will not go away on its own. It requires people in power to make executive decisions around the existence of women in the industry. The solutions are very simple, for example, ensuring touring crews and support slots for established musicians are equally accessible to male and female artists. This has never been easier as people like Shauna Watson have created directories such as on her 'We've Only Just Begun' website that contain contact details for female and gender expansive musicians, sound engineers and industry professionals. This in turn can help solve the issue of the underrepresentation of women in the industry.

If more women are given opportunities to work in the smaller roles, they can then progress into higher roles, and work as mentors for young women wanting to work in the industry. Karima talked about several different initiatives and programmes that are catered towards getting women involved in the industry. This is a simple solution that could definitely make a huge difference to the gender imbalance and could be a really positive way forward. A huge problem that came up multiple times across different interviews was childcare. There is simply not enough support for women with families. The music industry is ever changing and there is too much pressure on women to be able to return from maternity leave without missing a beat. The fear of losing your place in the industry has put many women off having families. This is totally unfair, in no case should anyone have to choose between their job and having a family. There must be an effort made to ensure both can be achieved. The most difficult problem to solve will be the 'backwards thinking' that still exists in today's society.

As Sarah said, this will only change when parents start teaching their kids differently from a young age. Not allowing the stereotype that boys are better than girls in any right to exist in young minds can make a huge difference in the way they will treat each other as adults. The access to social media at such a young age has also set society back years, and is a huge problem. Not allowing children unsupervised access to the internet could almost solve this problem entirely, as there will be no one to influence them or tell them how to think whether it be right or wrong.

While these are all big problems at the minute, I truly believe that with the correct effort made from the correct people, they can be solved quite easily. My hope for this thesis is to have highlighted the issues and solutions that exist for women working in the Irish music industry, and in turn the issues can be fixed.



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## APPENDIX ONE : INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Introduce Yourself
2. Where did you get your start in the music industry?
3. Have you experienced sexism / gender imbalance at any stage of your career? Give examples if comfortable to do so
4. Do you experience more or less sexism / gender imbalance in your role now?
5. Do you think there is a reason for it / have you noticed any patterns? Anywhere / situations where it is particularly prevalent?
6. Would you say it has impacted your career? Do you think you would have progressed quicker in a male position?
7. Anything you have noticed that has changed / improved in recent times?
8. Any advice for young women wanting to work in the industry?
9. What do you think could be changed that could make a difference, in anything?