

ALESSANDRA MICALIZZI - REBECCA PARACIANI*

WORDS BACKSTAGE. ITALIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Abstract

This article focuses on the Italian music industry from the perspective of gender. The Italian music industry can be considered a male-dominated workplace within which women while working, experience gender discrimination. This article intends to answer the following research questions: (i) how women working in the music industry are perceived and 'told' in their professional context and (ii) which representations, sedimented in the *male gaze*, continue to circulate in our culture. The empirical study is based on a qualitative secondary analysis of 75 narratives by female music workers focused on direct experiences. The results of this research confirm that the exclusion of women is motivated by the shared idea that they have biological predispositions for other activities and/or personal or professional limits.

Keywords

Gender study, narratives, music industry, women's discrimination, gendered workplace.

ISSN: 03928667 (print) 18277969 (digital)

DOI: 10.26350/001200_000188

Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

1. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the Italian music industry from the perspective of gender. In the Western world, women do not occupy prime positions in different sectors of the labour market, and this is a well-studied phenomenon¹. The world of music is not an exception: women are under-represented². Several researchers have outlined that women are under-represented within the music industry, feeling marginalized in the profession³. Apart from this under-representation, scholars show that the competence

* Alessandra Micalizzi, SAE Institute, Milano, a.micalizzi@sae.edu; Rebecca Paraciani, University of Bologna, rebecca.paraciani2@unibo.it. The authors wish to thank Sara Colantonio, Irene Tiberi, and Francesca Barone, co-founders of Equaly (www.equaly.it), for making a dialogue between the academic world and the music industry possible.

¹ I. Picardi, "La porta di cristallo: un nuovo indice per rilevare l'impatto di genere della riforma Gelmini sull'accesso alla professione accademica", *Quaderni di Sociologia*, 80 (2019): 87-111; M. Taparia, U. Lenka, "An integrated conceptual framework of the glass ceiling effect", *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 9, 3 (2022): 372-400.

² M. Leonard, "Girls at work. Gendered identities, sex, segregation, and employment experiences in the music industries", in *Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music*, edited by J. Warwick and A. Adrian, New York: Routledge, 2016, 37-55.

³ G. Jones, *Beauty imagined: A history of the global beauty industry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, 1-383; C.A.Q. Sears, "Paving their own way: Experiences of female high school band direc-

of many female musicians is not recognized: they are evaluated only as performers, even when they are songwriters, producers, and arrangers⁴. There are specific areas, such as that of music production, in which women represent only 3% of the national panorama⁵. This question concerns not only female artists⁶ within the sector but also female professionals: press officers, promoters, managers, photographers, video makers, sound technicians, sound engineers, lighting technicians, bookers, tour managers, and many other jobs ‘behind the scenes’. Women always occupy positions of lesser power or are employed, above all, in communication, an area where recognition for the success of a project is never exclusively theirs but is unanimous: it is the singer’s merit, of the label, of the promo office⁷. This trend is in line with what happens in the Italian labour market: female executives are only 18% of the total and, in any case, earn about 27% less than men who cover executive positions⁸. This gender gap increases when we consider the world of the creative industry, from which women have historically been kept away⁹.

These are the reasons why we focus on how female workers of the music industry are perceived and ‘told’ within their professional contexts and which representations of them continue to circulate and be part of our culture. Based on 75 narratives by female music workers, focused on direct experiences, we carried out a qualitative secondary analysis to answer the following research questions: (i) how women working within the music industry are perceived and ‘told’ in their professional context and (ii) which representations, sedimented in the audiovisual lens of the *male gaze*, continue to circulate in our culture.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section is an overview of the conditions of women in the Italian music industry, showing data from the analysis of the most important festivals, shows, and prizes related to music at the national level. This overview highlights that the music industry in Italy is a male-dominated sector. Within this scenario, the third section focuses on bias and social representations for a woman in music, highlighting stereotypes within the Italian music industry and their consequences from a gender-gap perspective. In the fourth section, we discuss data collection as well as the aims and methods of the analysis. The results are presented in the fifth section. The article ends with a discussion of the main findings.

tors”, PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010; M. Guerzoni, M. Nuccio, “Music consumption at the dawn of the music industry: the rise of a cultural fad”, *Journal of cultural economics*, 38 (2014): 145-171.

⁴ A. Micalizzi, *Women in creative industry. Il gender gap nell’industria musicale italiana*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2021, 1-160; M. Buscatto, *Women in jazz: Musicality, femininity, marginalization*, New York: Routledge, 2022, 1-174.

⁵ The results of the research conducted by Nuovoinaie and by Spotify were presented during the 2021 Milano Music Week.

⁶ When we use the term ‘artist’, we refer indiscriminately to singers, performers, songwriters, musicians, and producers of the music industry.

⁷ Micalizzi, *Women in creative industry. Il gender gap nell’industria musicale italiana*.

⁸ ISTAT, *Il mercato del lavoro. III trimestre 2022*, 2022, 1-40, Report available at: https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/12/Mercato-del-lavoro-III-trim_2022.pdf.

⁹ P. McIntyre, “Creativity and cultural production: A study of contemporary Western popular music songwriting”, *Creativity Research Journal*, 20, 1 (2008): 40-52.

2. WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY: AN OVERVIEW

Historically, the relationship between women and music has been complex and anything but obvious. In fact, women either are interpreters of songs written by men or, if they study an instrument, do it to enrich the skills of wife, mother, and angel of the hearth¹⁰. It is well-known that the history of music has always handed down the names of male composers and performers¹¹. The women mentioned are generally singers, dancers, or ‘exceptional’ performers. Despite this, the (few) women who wrote music in the past still had their careers opposed by their families (as in the case of Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of the German composer Felix Mendelssohn) or did not have their music handed down (as in the case of Anna Maria Mozart, sister of the famous Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; to date, we do not know a single note of her music)¹².

Today the situation does not seem to have changed.

In the Italian music industry, the gender gap is extremely marked: for each track by a female artist in the singles chart, there are six by male artists, and for the albums chart, the ratio is 1 to 4.6. Women also seem to be less involved than men in musical collaborations: among the projects of male artists, only 15% of the titles feature a female voice (male + female), while 77% of the collaborations proposed by artists are with men. Based on a sample of 389,219 musical recordings, the number of female artists (also considering their interpretations) corresponds to 9.4% of the total; 90.6% of the artists are men¹³.

The space that women cover in music is small, even considering live music on television. If we focus on two important events broadcast on the national network: the Primo Maggio Concert¹⁴ and the Italian Song Festival (Sanremo Festival), the female presence occupies a residual space. In 2019, the scant presence of women at the Primo Maggio Concert was so evident that it attracted the attention of the press: in addition to the presenter, only 2 female artists (and not soloists) performed against 31 all-male projects. A similar gender disparity occurs annually during the Sanremo Festival. In the 2022 event, out of 25 proposals, only 6 saw female participation (in one case of two women together and in another of a man and a woman). In the last 25 years of the festival, there have never been more than 9 women in the competition (figure 1). Furthermore, in 2022, only 7 female authors in 79 were credited for their songs (the 8.8%).

¹⁰ M. Buscatto, “Feminisations of artistic work: Legal measures and female artists’ resources do matter”, *Todas as Artes*, 1, 1 (2018): 21-38.

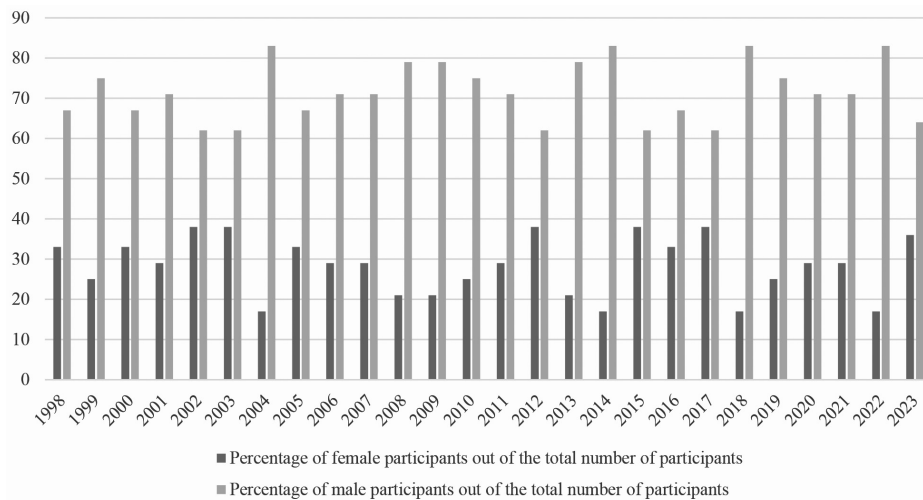
¹¹ P. Carrer, “Un repertorio di nomi femminili nel Fondo Nosedà 303 della Biblioteca del Conservatorio G. Verdi di Milano”, in *Da Napoli a Napoli: musica e musicologia senza confini: contributi sul patrimonio musicale italiano*, Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana, 2012, 303-317.

¹² S. Drinker, R.A. Solie, *Music and women: The Story of women in their relation to music*, New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1995, 1-327.

¹³ The data are part of the results of the research conducted by Nuovoinmaie and by Spotify that were presented during the 2021 Milano Music Week.

¹⁴ The Primo Maggio Concert is a music festival that, since 1990, has been organized annually on the occasion of Labor Day in the Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome, by the three Italian confederate unions.

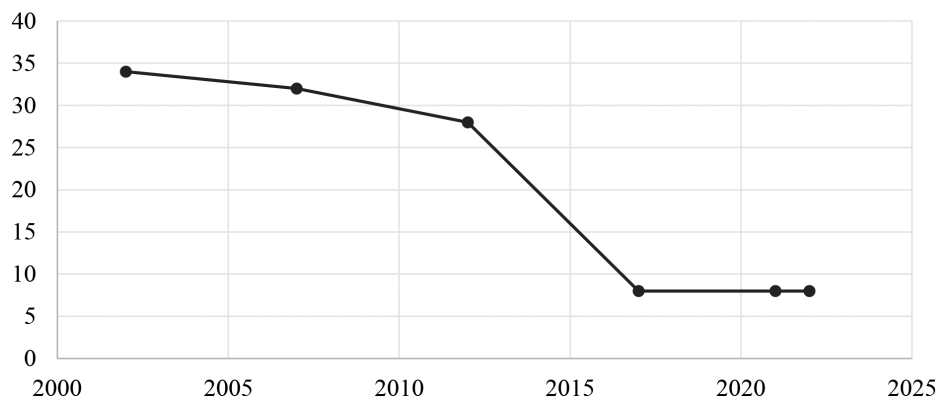
Figure 1 - Female and male participation at the annual Italian Song Festival from 1998 to 2022 (% values)



Source: www.rai.t, authors' elaboration.

Only 6 of the 73 Sanremo Festivals were conducted by women (1961, 1978, 1986, 2001, 2004, and 2010), and in no case was the artistic direction of the festival assigned to them. Since 1994, however, all the men who have conducted the festival have also been its artistic directors. Figure 2 shows the percentage of female artists within the Italian Top 50 charts in the last 20 years (2002–2022) with an interval of 5 years.

Figure 2 - Female artists in the Italian Top 50 charts for the years 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2021, and 2022 (% values)



Source: www.fimi.it, authors' elaboration.

This overview shows that the music industry in Italy is a male-dominated sector, within which women are few and, most often, performers of music written by men. Women who manage to establish themselves as authors, composers, or producers are still under-represented¹⁵. In the next section, we focus on the biases and social representations of the (few) women who work in a male-dominated sector, such as the music industry in Italy.

3. WOMEN IN MUSIC STRUGGLING WITH BIAS AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATION

Music is part of the wider world of the cultural industry, and it is responsible for the construction, spreading, and sedimentation of socio-cultural representations. At the same time, as we have seen in the previous section, music is a business, a sector of the labour market, partially de-structured and regulated by specific logic¹⁶. These two characteristics are strictly interwoven since contents and models that circulate in culture and come from the music intervene and interfere with the self-representations of the public and of people who want access to the music labour market¹⁷. Media artifacts – such as songs, video clips, and so on – can be considered cultural objects¹⁸: in such a way, they are the main sources of our imaginaries since there is almost a coincidence between the sociocultural artifacts and the media ones¹⁹. As part of our culture²⁰, the music industry, expressed by its multimedia contents as well as by its actors, contributes to the circulation and co-construction of social meanings²¹. Indeed, we can consider the ones related to gender as part of them: meanings and symbols about gender are shared and reinforced within the music industry²².

Previous studies linked with women's representation in the music industry confirm that the gender models that circulate in the music industry have some redundant characteristics that stress on physical aspects²³. More specifically, a recent study on the Italian music industry shows that in regard to the perception of women and men involved in the sector, the most dominant model is the one called the 'window-singer' by the interviewees²⁴. This perception is also shared by international female artists, as evidenced from

¹⁵ R. Paraciani, "No country for women. Women working in the Italian Music Industry", *Italian Sociological Review*, 13, 2 (2023): 243-262.

¹⁶ P. Wikström, *The music industry: Music in the cloud*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020, 1-224.

¹⁷ M. Buonanno, F. Faccioli, eds., *Genere e media: non solo i immagini. Soggetti, politiche, rappresentazioni*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2020, 1-222.

¹⁸ W. Griswold, *Cultures and societies in a changing world*, London: Sage, 2012, 1-216.

¹⁹ A.L. Tota, ed., *Genere e media: verso un immaginario sostenibile*, Roma: Meltemi, 2008: 1-259.

²⁰ Reach literature in social anthropological studies outlined the strict relation between culture and music as well as the reasons why we can consider the latter one of the most ancestral forms of the culture. For a more in-depth dissection of the topic, see Clayton, Herbert, and Middletown's publication (2003), in which music is analyzed within the frame of the cultural studies.

²¹ I. Pitti, "Being women in a male preserve: An ethnography of female football ultras", *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28, 3 (2019): 318-329.

²² G. Born, K. Devine, "Music technology, gender, and class: Digitization, educational and social change in Britain", *Twentieth-Century Music*, 12, 2 (2015): 135-172.

²³ C. Wallis, "Performing gender: A content analysis of gender display in music videos", *Sex Roles*, 64 (2011): 160-172.

²⁴ The term 'window' is used to translate the Italian word *vetrina*: the metaphor stresses the idea that the physical components are more important than the voice for the evaluation of a female artistic project more than for a male one.

the Women in Music Report 2022²⁵, in which the women explicitly declare that age and physical appearance are crucial for career development. These studies are perfectly in line with those carried out in other working sectors that confirm a general attitude to perpetuate the vision of women as actors with a special attention to external qualities as part of the overall evaluation of their performing, technical, or professional skills²⁶. More recently, music studies have included the concept of the *male gaze*, borrowed from cinema studies, which translates into the act of depicting the female universe, in the visual arts and literature, from a male, heterosexual perspective, which leads to a representation of women as sexual objects capable of satisfying this perspective. In classical Hollywood cinema, the female character is represented as an object rather than a subject, materializing man's unconscious²⁷. In this way, the male gaze limits the possibilities for the female spectator imagining herself as a woman with an agency, on the one hand, and escaping identifying herself as a passive object, on the other²⁸.

We can see that this sexualized gaze²⁹ and the consequent objectivation of the representation of women permeates all media productions, including those in music³⁰. The extended look at all media implies that this perspective (the *male gaze*) concerns not only visual representation but also its spill-over into narratives and other multimodal contents. In this sense, we can lend the label 'male gaze' to identify a perspective, a way of looking at women, that could be crystallized not only in the gaze but also in the language. More specifically, the discriminations are linked with the underestimation of personal characteristics and professional skills³¹. The first group includes body judgement, ageism, and the attribution of specific psychological attitudes. The second one refers to the lack of recognition of technical expertise and creative talent to women who work in the music industry. Indeed, the prejudices on personal characteristics become the alibi to justify the limits in technical and professional skills, as the studies proposed below can confirm.

Body judgement is the concretization of the process of objectification that has dealt with women's (attempt to) access (to) power places, including the cultural industry³². In the specific context of the music business, a qualitative study focused on the Italian labour market confirmed the existence of widespread phenomena of sexualization and objectification which disturb the lives of women, hinder their creativity, and limit their careers. MIDIA carried out a survey among 400 professional women all over the world.

²⁵ H. Kahlert, S. Das, T. Cirisano, *Be the change. Women In Music 2022*. Report available at: <https://mediaresearch.com/reports/be-the-change-women-in-music-2022>.

²⁶ B. Poggio, "Women and men in scientific careers: New scenarios, old asymmetries", *Polis*, 31, 1 (2017): 5-16; C. Volpato, *Psicosociologia del maschilismo*, Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2022, 1-216.

²⁷ R. Sassatelli, "Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, gaze and technology in film culture", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28, 5 (2011): 123-143.

²⁸ K. Oliver, "The male gaze is more relevant, and more dangerous, than ever", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 15, 4 (2017): 451-455.

²⁹ R. Gill, "Media, empowerment and the 'sexualization of culture' debates", *Sex Roles*, 66 (2012): 736-745.

³⁰ M.D. Vavrus, *Postfeminist news: Political women in media culture*, New York: Suny Press, 2002, 1-225; T. Krijnen, S. Van Bauwel, *Gender and media: Representing, producing, consuming*, London: Routledge, 2021, 1-250.

³¹ B.M.T. Olave, "Underestimating the gender gap? An exploratory two-step cluster analysis of STEM labor segmentation and its impact on women", *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, 25, 1 (2019).

³² V. Cann, S. Madrid, K. Ratele, A. Tarrant, M.R. Ward, R. Connell, "The Men and the Boys, Twenty Years On: Revisiting Raewyn Connell's Pivotal Text", *Boyhood Studies*, 13, 2 (2020): 1-8; R.R. Valtorta, A. Sacino, C. Baldissarri, C. Volpato, "L'eterno femminile. Stereotipi di genere e sessualizzazione nella pubblicità televisiva", *Psicologia sociale*, 11, 2 (2016): 159-188.

The results show how 64% of the interviewees claim to feel discriminated against for sexual reasons: they were victims of sexual harassment and objectivation³³.

The male lens, in the sense we have described above, also affects the perception and consequent recognition of specific psychological attitudes to women at work, even in the music industry. They are considered more emotionally fragile and oriented to collaborative tasks, with special attention to the relational aspects than the goals of a specific job³⁴. Recent studies focused on the music industry confirm this trend and highlight the touch point between the prejudices on personal attitudes and consequent ones on professional skills³⁵.

All these prejudices affect self-esteem and have as a direct consequence, among others, the reduction of the number of women who start or attempt careers in the music business. This is more evident in technical positions, where the gap between men and women starts at school. Hopkins and Norrie³⁶ highlight how female students in audio production must maintain a higher goal-oriented mindset than their colleagues to complete their academic paths because they feel subject to discrimination.

Even a recent study among music labels shows how, despite a numerical parity between female and male employees, women are not as represented as men at the top of the career ladder³⁷: different roles and/or different powers. Women who have been able to break the glass ceiling³⁸, are constantly involved in situations of ‘mansplaining’ or are forced to continuously demonstrate their abilities³⁹.

Talent deserves a separate mention. It is a qualitative characteristic that is difficult to define uniquely. In the specific case of the music industry, it intercepts the idea of an innate gift: something that is part of one’s personal identity, that is independent of training, and that is not an acquired ability.

Using the lack of talent as a motivation to exclude women from the mainstream scene is a way to solve the debate and justify the low percentage of female-led projects as a ‘natural’ fact, as well as, it is one of the elements that activate the self-hyper-criticism of female artists who have interiorized this stereotype.

4. METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE SECONDARY ANALYSIS

According to a narrative perspective⁴⁰, the stories that circulate in a specific culture affect not only the ability to interact with the external (social) world but also the way in

³³ H. Kahlert, S. Das, T. Cirisano, *Be the change. Women In Music 2022*. Report available at: <https://mediaresearch.com/reports/be-the-change-women-in-music-2022>.

³⁴ A.H. Eagly, S.J. Karau, “Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders”, *Psychological Review*, 109, 3 (2002): 573-598.

³⁵ R.H. Gálvez, V. Tiffenberg, E. Altszyler, “Half a century of stereotyping associations between gender and intellectual ability in films”, *Sex Roles*, 81 (2019): 643-654; Micalizzi, *Women in creative industry. Il gender gap nell’industria musicale italiana*, 1-160.

³⁶ L. Hopkins, A. Norrie, eds., *Women on the Edge in Early Modern Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 1-249.

³⁷ D. Lup, “Something to celebrate (or not): The differing impact of promotion to manager on the job satisfaction of women and men”, *Work, Employment and Society*, 32, 2 (2018): 407-425.

³⁸ D. Purcell, K.R. MacArthur, S. Samblanet, “Gender and the glass ceiling at work”, *Sociology Compass*, 4, 9 (2010): 705-717.

³⁹ U. Lutzky, R. Lawson, “Gender politics and discourses of #mansplaining, #manspreading, and #manterruption on Twitter”, *Social Media+ Society*, 5, 3 (2019): 1-12.

⁴⁰ D.P. McAdams, “Studying lives in time: A narrative approach”, *Advances in Life Course Research*, 10 (2005): 237-258; A. Cavarero, *Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*, London: Routledge, 2014, 1-184.

which a person perceives himself/herself. In other words, we are the precipitate of the common stories we have been entering into contact with during our lives, and they can shape our possible selves⁴¹.

This exploratory study is based on the qualitative secondary analysis of the empirical documentation produced during a survey promoted by Equaly (<https://www.equaly.it>) on gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace, consisting of 97 questionnaires collected online, edited by one of the authors of this paper. A total of 97 female music workers took part in the research, 91.7% aged between 25 and 44 years. Around 26.8% of the sample was made up of artists, while the remaining 73.2% were women who worked behind the scenes: backstage or in the management field. In addition, 91.7% of them worked with men (in 53.6% of cases only with men).

The last part of the questionnaire includes the following optional open question: ‘Can you report one or more sentences that were addressed to you in the workplace that you perceived as offensive, discriminatory, or violent towards you?’ The paper focuses on the answers to this question. In this way, 75 narratives were collected by female workers in the sector.

The secondary analysis of the 75 narratives was guided by a different research goal from the ones for which they were collected⁴² to grasp how women working within the music industry are perceived and ‘told’ in their professional context as well as to study the representations that emerge from the analysis. While the survey covered gender-based violence and harassment in the music workplace, reading the answers to the open questions showed the importance of the content and analysis of each story, making ad hoc work important and determining (i) how women working within the music industry are perceived and ‘told’ in their professional context and (ii) which representations, sedimented in the male gaze, continue to circulate in our culture.

The limits of the qualitative secondary analysis consist in attributing meanings that are not in line with the intentions of the interviewee⁴³. In our case, this bias was easily overcome both due to the high number of narratives collected and because the frame within which they were collected concerned the same topic as the article: discrimination in the world of the music industry. The data collected were analysed by content through the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software to allow the researchers to import and code textual data, creating ties within non-numerical and non-structured data as well as identifying recurring themes within the narratives⁴⁴. Applying a framework approach⁴⁵, labels based on the literature were formulated, with a priori concepts derived from the aims of the research. We constructed a grid of analysis based on Schank’s model about narratives⁴⁶. According to the author, a story has four constitutive elements: the topic, the purpose, the action plan, and the final result. Considering our purpose, we chose to select only two of Schank’s drivers and added a third one about the characteristics of the

⁴¹ H. Markus, P. Nurius, “Possible selves”, *American Psychologist*, 41, 9 (1986): 954.

⁴² J. Heaton, “Secondary analysis of qualitative data: An overview”, *Historical Social Research*, 33, 3 (2008): 33-45; D. Leonardi, R. Paraciani, D. Raspanti, “A strategy is necessary. The policy-client conflict within different relational asymmetries: A comparison at the street-level”, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 41, 13/14 (2021): 81-95.

⁴³ Leonardi, Paraciani, Raspanti, “A strategy is necessary. The policy-client conflict within different relational asymmetries: a comparison at the street-level”: 1-95.

⁴⁴ A. Bryman, *Social research methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2016, 1-735.

⁴⁵ E. Welsh, “Dealing with Data: Using NVivo in the Qualitative Data Analysis Process”, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3, 2 (2002): 1-9.

⁴⁶ R.C. Schank, *Tell me a story: Narrative and intelligence*, Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1995, 1-232.

tone of voice. In fact, since we are faced with fragments of narratives, the perspective, the point of view, is expressed by the choices of words and their syntax (the way in which the sentence is organized). For this reason, from our perspective, the tone of voice becomes evidence of what we have defined previously as the male gaze.

We classified the narratives according to the following labels:

1. *The object* or the focus of the story. We identified three categories: *personal competencies*, *professional skills*, and *physical appearance*.
2. *The purpose* of the sentence. We distinguished narratives that stress how to be included in the music industry or in the business, narratives that highlight reasons for exclusion, and narratives that simply describe the ‘way’ to relate to the (male) professional partner (*inclusion/exclusion*).
3. *The male gaze*. This label refers to the tone of a voice emerging from the narratives that could be *affirmative* when the male gaze stresses a quality, or *negative* when the narrative is a way to criticize a personal, physical, or professional aspect⁴⁷.

The output of this analysis was also cross-referenced to study the possible connections among them as well as the inclusion or exclusion of female workers in or from the music industry. Direct quotations from the narratives are used to integrate the analysis and to enrich the data presentation with qualitative and in-depth details. The next section presents the principal findings of the analysis.

5. PRINCIPAL FINDINGS: A MODEL FOR INTERPRETING GENDER NARRATIVES

This paragraph shows the results from the secondary analysis of the 75 narratives collected. The first notable outcome concerns the fact that being a woman is considered a limit in most cases: in 39 narratives out of 75, in fact, it constitutes a barrier to access into the music industry. In a similar way, the feminine gender represents a reason to be excluded from the situation in 35 narratives. The discourse analysis shows that the female gender seems to be inseparable from a value judgment. This happens especially when the narrative has to do with the body of the female worker. A total of 34 narratives out of 75 focus on their body; physical characteristics are the only issue of the narrative in 23 cases, while in 11 cases, it is one of the focuses of the narrative.

When the body is at the center of the narrative, it is in 18 stories (53%) on inclusion within the sector.

*He works with you only because he wants to fu** you.*

Narrative 50

*If you want him to listen to you, you have to make him sm*** it.*

Narrative 63

⁴⁷ As better shown in the analysis, the choice of the label ‘male gaze’ is coherent as far as even the sentences with a positive tone of voice keep women in a complementary position of subordination.

You are more beautiful live than in your music video.

Narrative 4

On the contrary, in 13 narratives that focus on the body but derive exclusion from the sector, the fact that the female worker does not allow it is criticized, almost as if she does not respect an unwritten rule.

You have to make our friendship more sparkling if you want me to do something for you.

Narrative 2

Another item that, together with the body, is at the center of most of the narratives concerns the technical skills of the female workers. In fact, 27 narratives focus on this kind of skill, considered in 77.8% of the cases with a negative meaning.

I would prefer to speak to [name of a man] for technical reasons.

Narrative 17

You'll never be able to be a sound engineer. Women are weaker than men.

Narrative 43

Is all the equipment yours? But do you know how to mount it yourself?

Narrative 13

The sentences reported show that being a woman means not having technical skills, in line with other research⁴⁸. Despite this, an evidence that we did not expect is the following: the narratives that focus on the personal skills of female workers (19) are positive only in 2 cases and negative in 14. Despite the trend described fuelling the existence of gender stereotypes and gender segmentation within a work sector, for which the majority of women working in atypical sectors will do similar jobs, actually, at the 'narrative' level, these (presumed) personal characteristics should be viewed positively, making female workers suitable for certain jobs within the atypical workplace. This occurs, however, only in two cases; in other cases, the characteristics associated with being a woman are a reason for exclusion from the sector.

Your mood is unstable, and this is reflected in your work.

Narrative 44

Leave [her] alone. She has her period 365 days a year.

Narrative 24

⁴⁸ A. Reinking, B. Martin, "Strategies, research, and examples for elementary teachers to integrate STEM", *K-12 STEM Education*, 4, 4 (2018): 413-419; J. Denner, S. Bean, L.L. Werner, "Girls Creating Games: Challenging Existing Assumptions about Game Content", in *DiGRA Conference*, June 2005, 1-9; N. Hoque, B.L. Boulier, "Hi-Tech Sexism? Evidence from Bangladesh", *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 20, 3 (2020): 1-17.

Women have no artistic imagination. They just emulate what has already been created by male musicians.

Narrative 3

You are too sensitive to do this job.

Narrative 5

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the focus of the narrative and its meaning.

Table 1 - *Focus and meaning of the narratives (absolute value)*

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Meaning</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	
Body	7	15	7	29
Personal characteristics	2	14	3	19
Technical skills	2	21	4	27
Total	11	50	14	75

Based on the previous description, we used our analytical drivers (object, purpose, and male gaze) to construct multiple women's images emerging from the male narratives. According to the narrative perspective⁴⁹, the stories represent the minimal unit of meaning exchange in the organizational contexts as well⁵⁰. More specifically, the narratives that circulate in the working contexts are particularly effective to understand the 'culture' inside the organization: among other functions, they help to express a sense of belonging, narrate the careers, and to legitimize the occupation of specific roles as well as to exercise control.

The narratives collected are commonly described in the music business context and frequently in front of other people. For this reason, we presume they affect the recipients' self-perception and self-esteem as well as the process of socialization and legitimation of women's presence in specific organizational positions. Furthermore, they are responsible for the gender segregation common in the music business for specific sectors. If we consider the object of the narratives, we can see that our sample is homogeneously distributed among the three categories: the body as well as the personal and professional characteristics. What differs is the purpose of the narration (inclusion/exclusion). More specifically, our analysis shows how the body represents the most important mediator – in its aesthetic characteristics – to legitimate the process of inclusion in professional roles that remain strictly anchored to cultural stereotypes according to women who can occupy better positions in the career ladder only if (or thanks to the fact that) they are pretty or 'available'.

Professional and even personal characteristics are the main object of narratives

⁴⁹ L. Richardson, "Narrative and sociology", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19, 1 (1990): 116-135.

⁵⁰ A. Bruni, S. Gherardi, B. Poggio, *Gender and entrepreneurship: An ethnographic approach*, London: Routledge, 2004, 1-240.

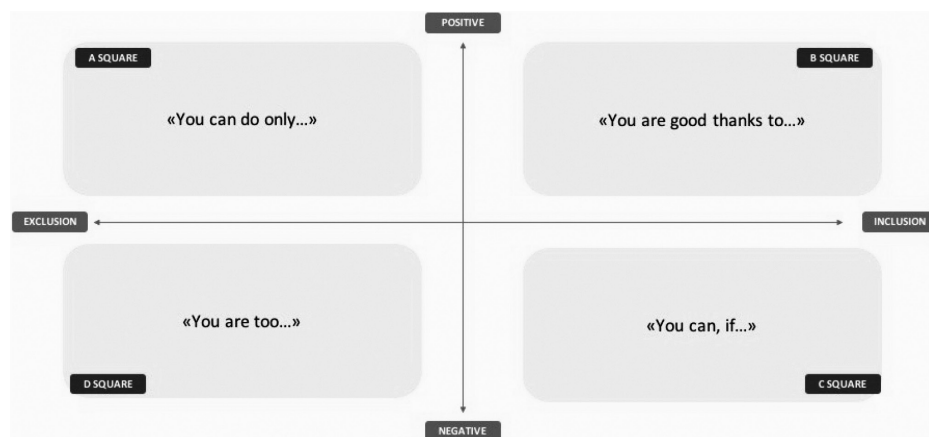
marking the reasons of exclusion that could deal with a specific role or, more generically, professional correspondence:

*Since you are the receptionist, can I speak to your (male) boss?
[The protagonist of the narrative was the head of the company.]*
Narrative 64

Consequently, the male gaze crystallized in the narratives gathered is polarized as well. When the statements are focused on personal or professional qualities, they are used to mark a lack of them and used with a negative construction of the line (negative male gaze): their general purpose is to justify the exclusion. On the contrary, when the statements present an affirmative male gaze, they tend to be focused on the body, and they are used to mark physical appearance as the only reason for the professional role assigned. Some examples can clarify this polarization.

In fact, we crossed two of the drivers – the purpose and the male gaze – of our analytic schema, and we identified four different squares. Each square contains a specific narrative plot with a focus on a gendered representation of women in the music world. Moreover, to simplify the reading of the model, we chose a prototypical incipit of the sentence that, according to our analysis, well synthesizes the core message of the narratives.

Figure 3 - Narrative representations model



The first square (A) includes narratives in which a positive tone of voice is used to mark a quality or skill that is not coherent with the object of the conversation, and the same quality (even if positive) is marked to justify an exclusion from other professional roles. To stress this meaning, we chose the incipit ‘You can do only...’ because our analysis showed that men tend to express the exclusion restricting the area of skills reserved for women.

*Did you know that in the music industry, a woman can only aspire to be a secretary?
[The president of the company where I was hired said this during the interview.]*
Narrative 75

You are a woman. You can't be at the same level as a man that plays the same instrument.

Narrative 22

Women have different neurological conformation and do not perceive low-pitched sounds.

Narrative 26

The lines imply that women can do other things with discreet success, but the difference in level can be taken for granted, like apriorism. The B square is the most popular as it encloses the highest number of examples: in this case, the narratives are strictly focused on the body's qualities or side characteristics that become the *passé-partout* to justify success or progression in the career ladder. Physical appearances are stressed as the positive key points of their professional path. The use of the incipit 'You're good thanks to...' aims to outline this aspect.

They listen to you just because you are beautiful.

Narrative 9

Finally, we have a female DJ – young and beautiful!

Narrative 12

In the bottom part of the model, we can find the most polarized narratives – the ones that are explicit, vulgar, and disparaging. The C square includes statements that depict women as made up of flesh and bones. Here, the process of objectification is more evident. Women's physical characteristics are often considered tools for the legitimization of their presence in the music industry. The body and its characteristics assume a negative sense: citing physical attributes is not a way to mark a quality but to stress the lack of other skills. The body is what counts and what can be used as a bargaining chip. This is why we chose the incipit 'You can if...', which implies a sexual deal. Physical characteristics become the *conditio sine qua non* through which women can stay in specific organizational positions.

*[Female] singers are good only because they have bo**s.*

Narrative 21

*Once, I had to interview a male artist. He arrived and pointed out, 'OK, I'm ready. Now I fu** you.*

Narrative 27

Zero brain but outstanding – this is our choice.

Narrative 31

*If you want that they listen to you, [you] should sn*** it [referring to the genitals] to them.*

Narrative 63

Lastly, we have the D square, where the male gaze is always focused on characteristics considered 'too female' or gendered, which then affects professional performances. The

incipit we chose is ‘You are too...’ to mark the excess of a given quality that becomes, in this way, negative. In this case, the body is not frequently mentioned; rather, the stories reported by our interviewees seem to focus on a natural emotional attitude and the lack of specific skills that represent the main reasons for exclusion.

You’re overreacting.
Narrative 7

You’re too sensitive.
Narrative 5

*What do you want to understand? You don’t understand sh**. Your experiences are worthless. (My manager; male, was around 65 at the time.)*
Narrative 33

She has the problem of the children.
Narrative 44

We created four labels to identify the main socio-narrative representations sedimented in men’s minds and expressed by statements pronounced in at-work situations. The first one is titled ‘the right woman in the wrong (job) place’. We can collocate this representation in the A square since the main point of the narration is to stress other qualities that are incoherent with the job or the tasks required by the (male) interlocutor.

The representation of the ‘pretty woman’ is clearly linked to the stress on the body’s characteristics and, in general, with external appearances. In our model, it could be inserted in both the B and C squares. The main difference is the tone used to stress the physical attribute: the narratives in which the body becomes the object of desire or verbal harassment support a ‘pretty woman’ representation in the C square.

We used the ‘fragile woman’ label to identify the socio-narrative representations that emerged from the statements in which emotions, generally negative ones, are stressed as negative qualities of female colleagues. It is part of the D square together with the ‘indomitable shrew’ label, in which the emotional characteristics prevail as well. The shrew is aggressive, unable to control her rage and her emotions. She is a problem, and for this reason, she needs to be ejected.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we proposed a qualitative secondary analysis of 75 narratives shared by women who work in the music industry with different roles and positions. Our analysis confirms the main evidence of a previous study about the practices of access in the music industry. According to the author, in this specific labour market, the exclusion is motivated by, on one hand, natural attitudes for other activities (vocation) and, on the other hand, by a motivated ouster from the music business caused by real personal or professional limits. At the same time, the inclusion is not characterized by a peer-to-peer recognition of skills and knowledge; rather, it is based on explicit forms of ‘exclusivity’ that justify the presence of women only in specific job positions, with stereotyped career roles and opportunities, positions where the body is the mediator of the relation.

Moreover, the narratives reassert the persistence of women’s social representations

anchored to a traditional form of storytelling that portrays women as fragile, emotional, and less capable of addressing technical issues. At the same time, the body remains the first mediator of relations with male superiors, colleagues, or clients: even when the physical characteristics are appreciated or highlighted with sensitiveness, they are considered the reason – sometimes the only one, other times the main one – by which the women can be ‘included’ in the music business.

Using an interpretative model, we scaffolded the fragments with two drivers taken from Schank’s model about narratives⁵¹: the object of the narration and the purpose. We added a third element, the male gaze, that coincides with the tone of voice used to appeal to women (positive/negative). Looking at the main socio-narrative representations across the board, we can highlight some common points. First of all, in the music industry, considered as a labour market and via an organizational context, *objectification* is a common practice to weaken the value of female colleagues or protectionists regardless of the sectors or the working positions. As of today, evaluation of the female body – even if it belongs to an over-skilled profile – is part (sometimes the main part) of the overall professional evaluation. The underestimation of technical skills is the direct consequence in several cases: many of the statements shared by our interviewees are focused on highlighting the lack of soft and hard skills, often justifying it as the absence of a natural attitude towards art, sciences, and creativity. This is perfectly in line with the main results of previous studies in other working contexts carried out in the past several decades. It also confirms the persistence of the model of interpretation of the female presence in the labour market that continues to be crystallized and perpetrated all over the Western world and over the years.

These narratives are not simply thoughts. They are part of collective and social discourses inside a specific organizational system: the music industry. In fact, the vocabulary used and the words selected to speak to female colleagues reflect strong prejudices. They are the matrix of a form of discrimination that is almost totally normalized within the music industry, even including forms of violence. The male symbolic order dominates thanks to this language.

In the previous section, we mentioned that the narratives that circulate within an organizational context have several functions, among which is organizational sense-making. It deals with not only the socio-cultural representation but also the identity of women who work in the music business since the self is the result of a negotiation between internal and external narratives. This means that it is important to act against these shared forms of representation so as to introduce a change of trends at a socio-cultural level.

One possibility is offered by the narrative perspective. From this point of view, the recipients play an important role in the so-called process of positioning⁵². In the specific case of our object of study, women can have an active responsibility in distancing themselves from the main socio-narrative representations shared by men. Bearing witness, sharing them, collaborating on studies and research on this topic, and contributing to spreading the initiative of sensibilization are all actions to stop the reiteration of the stereotypes. However, networking and creating new narratives are the strongest initiatives we can collaborate on and execute.

⁵¹ R.C. Schank, *Tell me a story: Narrative and intelligence*, Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1995: 1-232.

⁵² B. Davies, R. Harré, “Positioning: The discursive production of selves”, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 2, 1 (1990): 43-63.