'Are you at the correct concert?'

The mental weighing of gender and race-ethnicity in rock music reception

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Abstract

In this article, I combine insights from cognitive and cultural sociology to assess how gender and ethno-racial inequality is maintained through processes of everyday association grounded in shared mental schemes. Rock music – a form of cultural production and reception dominated by white men – is an interesting case study to dissect this process because its connotations of symbolic whiteness and masculinity have remained relatively invisible or 'unmarked'. Based on 27 interviews with rock scene participants in the Netherlands and the United States, I examine how actors invested in rock music culture become cognitively socialised in optical communities in which shared mental schemes provide frameworks to assess scene participants' legitimate membership. In this process, some aspects are given more mental weight than others, resulting in the maintenance of inequality. The analysis demonstrates that women and/or people of colour entering the scene are delegitimised based on an assortment of marked attributes, which are given varying amounts of mental weight. Generally, gender is attended to more often and quicker than race-ethnicity, but it is race-ethnicity that is given more mental weight in the legitimation of a participant's presence.

Keywords: gender, intersectionality, whiteness, popular music, cognitive sociology, mental weighing

Introduction

When Pinar visits rock concerts, she is typically confronted with the same routine of events:

> You walk towards the venue and it's always like 'Are you at the correct concert?' But then when you talk with [these] people it turns into 'Oh man, I really didn't know what to think of you, but you are in fact really cool!'

The reason for these recurring initial misunderstandings is that Pinar is a woman of Turkish-Dutch descent, and wears a headscarf on the basis of her Muslim convictions. As rock music production, culture, and spaces are both numerically and symbolically dominated by white men (Schaap, 2015; Hamilton, 2016), her arrival is scrutinised because she becomes socially 'marked' in three ways: as a woman, as an ethno-racial 'other', and as a Muslim. This markedness is the consequence of the context that Pinar aims to enter and, despite her own optimistic approach towards it, functions as a social mechanism to (at least initially) delegitimate her presence there. How can it be that she encounters a similar routine of events every time she enters a space that she considers her 'second home'?

In this article, I adopt a culturalist cognitive sociological approach (Brekhus, 2007) to examine how gender and ethno-racial inequality is both maintained and contested through processes of everyday association grounded in shared mental schemes (Zerubavel, 1997). Rock music is a remarkable case study to examine this process because it is dominated by white men while its connotations of symbolic whiteness and masculinity have remained relatively invisible or 'unmarked'. This stands in opposition to 'marked' genres such as soul and hip-hop, which are often perceived to directly relate to (in particular) issues of race-ethnicity (Rose, 1994; Clay, 2003; Harrison, 2008). Based on 27 interviews with rock scene participants in the Netherlands and the United States, I examine how actors invested in rock music culture become cognitively socialised in 'optical communities' (Zerubavel, 1997), in which shared mental schemes provide frameworks to assess scene participants' legitimate membership. In this process, some aspects are given more 'mental weight' (Mullaney, 1999; Danna-Lynch, 2010) than others, resulting in the maintenance of inequality. For example, is Pinar's initial exclusion primarily based on her femininity, her ethnicity, or her religious affiliation? As our perceptions and understandings of social life are, to a large extent, determined by the social and cultural milieus we are involved in (Brekhus, 2007), this

cognitive sociological perspective allows me to advance our insights into the – often unintended – everyday maintenance of gender and ethno-racial inequality.

Rock music and white masculinity

Popular music is an important source of identity formation (Fiske, 1998). Music genres – 'systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music' (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 698) – can be fundamental in anchoring an identity. Although 'fuzzy' and continually in flux (Van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2018), genres prescribe conventions relating to the musical rules (for example, what it should sound like, the kind of instruments used) and behavioural conventions (for example, whether audience members dance or remain seated), but also artists' and audiences' expected ethno-racial and gender make up (Roy & Dowd, 2010). Because of this, music genres can reflect social groups or co-constitute these groups, particularly on the basis of gender or race-ethnicity (Roy, 2004). While musical and behavioural rules are often quite explicitly foregrounded in a genre's conventions (its breaching typically leads to overt social sanctions; imagine starting a mosh pit at an opera), these latter social conventions regarding who can participate and who cannot, are more implicitly maintained – particularly in physical and online music scenes (Bennett & Peterson, 2004) This is particularly the case in genres where whites and men dominate, as these remain unmarked vis-à-vis the white, male norm in most Western societies (Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

Rock music has its roots in the black, working-class United States South. In the 1950s, a sequence of events (see Peterson, 1990) allowed for rock 'n' roll music to reach mainstream white audiences despite attempts from major music labels to keep the rebellious music at bay (Bertrand, 2000). In a society segregated along ethno-racial lines, it was deemed impossible to sell black music to white audiences – breaching the 'colour line' (Miller, 2010). At the point that there was no stopping this new phenomenon that captivated teenagers, white rock musicians such as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley had the racial advantage over black originators of the genre and hence were preferred by music labels. This 'whitewashing' of rock 'n' roll music (Taylor, 1997) has been consequential for rock music's enduring whiteness, as considerations of the salience of race-ethnicity and rock 'n' roll's bi-racial roots have largely been relegated to the universe of the undiscussed (Hamilton,

2016). Ever since, the prevailing view has been that 'no one – not black au-
diences, not white audiences, and not black musicians – had an interest
in black rock' (Mahon, 2004, p. 6). In the Netherlands, a similar process of
whitewashing took place as initial rock 'n' roll artists were of Indonesian-
Dutch descent, which were only reluctantly embraced by mainstream me-
dia, the industry, and audiences (Mutsaers, 1990). As recently as 2015, pop-
ular Dutch rapper Fresku addressed this ongoing relationship in his critical
song 'Zo doe je dat', in which he suggests that musicians need to be white
and 'do something with rock music' to get airplay.

Moreover, notwithstanding the participation of women of colour such
as Big Mama Thornton and Rosetta Tharpe in the 1950s, rock 'n' roll and
later rock music has been decidedly male dominated as well (Bielby, 2003;
Bannister, 2006). Women in general are under-represented in both the
production and reception of rock music and its many subgenres (Frith &
McRobbie, 1990; Cohen, 1997; Leonard, 2007; Vasan, 2011). Symbolically,
masculine celebration of sexuality, rebellion, and homosocial solidarity was
hardwired in rock 'n' roll discourse (Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Davies, 2001;
Schippers, 2002), which has been maintained as a masculine set of prac-
tices ever since despite instances of explicit female resistance against this
discourse (for example, 'Riot Grrrl' in the 1990s; see Marcus, 2010; Strong,
2011). Both in the production, distribution, and consumption of the genre,
this taken-for-granted masculine ideal is upheld in everyday interactions
(Ridgeway, 2011). Moreover, femininity is routinely related to pop music and
a light-hearted, non-serious pop music sensibility versus male rebellion
(Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Berkers & Schaap, 2018). Because of this, rock mu-
sic scenes are typically not only so-called 'white spaces' (Anderson, 2015;
McDowell, 2017), but white and male spaces in which dominant – albeit
implicit – authentication practices pertaining whiteness and masculinity
are rarely acknowledged (Hamilton, 2016).

A cognitive sociology of ethno-racial and gender inequality

Key in the maintenance of stratification on the basis of (amongst oth-
ers) gender and race-ethnicity, is that many of its fundamental mecha-
nisms are rooted in processes of cognitive association and categorisation
(Brekhus, Brunsma, Platts, & Dua, 2010). This is particularly the case in
realms such as music reception, which many people experience as triv-
ial compared to 'the real business of race' (Pitcher, 2014). In sociology,
Bourdieusian approaches have been very fruitful in underscoring the

importance of social categorisation for aesthetic evaluation (cf. Prior, 2013). Yet, such studies have shed relatively little light on the cognitive processes underlying these ties. The culturalists cognitive sociological perspective advanced by Zerubavel (1997; for a review see Brekhus, 2007) 'studies the sociomental conventions by which we perceive, attend to, and disattend to features of social reality, classify and categorise the world, create meaning, construct identity, remember events and comprehend time' (Brekhus, 2007, p. 448). As such, it allows for an analysis of exactly the implicit practices that are consequential for the authentication of rock music participants.

Drawing from this framework, the rock music genre and the rules or conventions it prescribes in its discourse and culture (Fabbri, 1982; Frith, 1996) can be understood as being formative of a rock music's 'optical community' (Zerubavel, 1997). Optical communities offer a 'way of seeing' – a shared mental scheme – that is unique to that group, as it prescribes which aspects are attended to or rendered invisible. For example, someone socialised in the optical community of gender studies 'sees' many instances of female objectification in advertising, whereas someone socialised in the optical community of advertisers merely sees the added value of gendering a product. People can belong to multiple optical communities at the same time; it is their standpoint – derived from standpoint theory (Smith, 1987; Collins, 1990) – that determines the aspects (dis)attended to in specific contexts (Brekhus, 2007).

Depending on the context and standpoint, actors 'mentally weigh' (Mullaney, 1999; Danna-Lynch, 2010) the attributes that they attend to, to assess their importance in determining someone's (or an object's) 'fit' with the conventions prescribed in the shared mental scheme of the optical community. In other words, 'a given audience for any act engages in weight management in order to maintain an image of identity consistent with their desired view of the person(s) in question' (Mullaney, 1999, p. 278). Using contextual cues and indicators, individuals 'focus on (i.e. give weight to) those factors that are in line with the desired role performance' (Danna-Lynch, 2010, p. 165). Broadly speaking, this process can have either of two consequences. On the one hand, someone is perceived to mismatch the mental scheme, meaning that (s)he is out of place or, seen from the other side, the behaviour is classified as uncharacteristic of that person. On the other hand, it could also lead to the widening or amending of the mental scheme, to include the aspects previously excluded. As will be demonstrated in the analysis, this duality is essential in both the maintenance and deconstruction of the whiteness and masculinity of rock music reception.

Data and methods

For this article, 27 interviews were conducted with rock scene participants in the Netherlands (Rotterdam) and the United States (Atlanta). These cities are comparable in population (respectively 638,000 and 475,000, excluding Atlanta Metro) and are both distinctly diverse, multi-ethnic metropoles. Although a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that the rock scenes in both cities are very similar with respect to their size (relatively small) and ethno-racial/gender make up (dominated by white men, but not exclusively). Moreover, I found very little variation regarding Dutch versus American interpretation of rock music culture; as a distinctly American cultural product, its culture and symbols have 'travelled' to the semi-periphery of the Netherlands. A core difference is how Dutch people discuss issues of race-ethnicity compared to the American counterparts, but my data indicate that they do 'see' in largely similar ways.[1]

Interviews took place in 2015-2016 (Netherlands) and 2016 (United States). I approached potential respondents at or after various concerts and festivals, varying in subgenres (for example, indie-rock, punk-rock, heavy metal), making sure that respondents were diverse in both background characteristics and taste for rock music variations. Respondents have various educational backgrounds, ranging from high school education (nine) to vocational/professional education (eleven), to a bachelor's or master's degree from university (seven). The mean age is 28.9, ranging between 18 and 38 (see Table 1). Since the primary goal of this research project was to explore the maintenance of whiteness and masculinity, the majority of respondents (ten) identify as white men. Nine respondents identify as white women, three as women of colour, and five as non-white men.

Each interview started with a sorting task based on the photo-elicitation technique visual Q methodology (Watts & Stenner, 2012) in which respondents were asked to sort 40 images of rock music artists on a scale of -5 to 5 (Schaap & Berkers, 2018). Q methodology offers respondents the opportunity to freely position themselves towards a stimulus (by measure of a scored evaluation) and argue why they make certain sorting choices. This allowed for a discussion of diversity with individuals who are typically reluctant to discuss such matters without incentive. A semi-structed topic list was utilised to guide the interview, focusing on respondent's involvement in and ideas on rock music culture. Importantly, interviewees were not pushed to discuss the topic of race-ethnicity or gender: apart from the potential probing in the photo-elicitation task, respondents could introduce or ignore

Table 1   Respondent sociodemographic characteristics (n = 27)

Name[2]	Location	Gender[3]	Race/ethnicity[4]	Age
Abbigail	Atlanta	F	Bi-ethnic, white / Asian-American	24
Alexis	Atlanta	F	White / American	28
Alfred	Rotterdam	M	White / Dutch	36
Arnout	Rotterdam	M	White / Dutch	37
Berna	Rotterdam	F	Turkish-Dutch	20
Chuck	Atlanta	M	White / American	31
Claas	Rotterdam	M	White / Dutch	29
Cliff	Atlanta	M	Hispanic-American	36
Daisy	Rotterdam	F	White / Dutch	35
Dennis	Atlanta	M	Bi-racial / African-American	26
Dwayne	Atlanta	M	White / American	27
Dwight	Atlanta	M	White / American	32
Erin	Atlanta	F	Bi-ethnic/white / Hispanic-American	23
Estelle	Atlanta	F	White / American	36
Iris	Rotterdam	F	White / Dutch	32
Jeffrey	Atlanta	M	Hispanic-American	22
Jennifer	Atlanta	F	Bi-racial, white / African-American	27
Jeremiah	Atlanta	M	African-American	37
Johan	Rotterdam	M	White / Dutch	33
Kamille	Atlanta	F	White / American	20
Kendrick	Atlanta	M	African-American	21
Marc	Rotterdam	M	Bi-ethnic, white / Indonesian-Dutch	24
Nadine	Rotterdam	F	White / Dutch	26
Naresh	Rotterdam	M	Indian-Dutch	35
Pinar	Rotterdam	F	Turkish-Dutch	18
Sven	Rotterdam	M	White / Dutch	38
Winston	Atlanta	M	White / American	29

these elements at will. Respondents read and signed a consent form before the interview and verified afterwards whether they still agreed. The average length of interviews is 63 minutes, with the shortest lasting 35 minutes and the longest lasting 105 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). This allowed for a continual cross-comparing of the different subjectivities and discourses presented to me by the respondents.

Results

Many respondents overtly attend to the perceived necessity of masculinity in rock music culture by marking femininity as incompatible with it. For most respondents – men in particular – gender is quickly and easily

attended to and is treated as a 'natural' trait that provides a basis to assign a person's legitimate presence at a rock concert. For example, white Dutch man Sven states that 'I think that women – maybe very much generalising here – prefer to look attractive, maybe even sexy. And that's not something you can always reach wearing jeans and a *Slayer*-shirt'. Conversely, ethno-racial elements are less often explicitly attended to – sometimes clearly reluctantly – and most respondents are unwilling to draw conclusions based on these associations. In other words, while women's participation is seen and overtly discredited as something that does not fit rock music culture, non-whiteness is ignored – at least verbally. This does not mean that the same mental weight is assigned to these categories. In fact, the interviews demonstrate that white women's participation is perceived as more common than participation of (wo)men of colour, making race-ethnicity a more entrenched basis of exclusion.

In many interviews with men it became clear that women are explicitly seen as not fitting with rock music culture, despite being welcomed at a discursive level. White Dutch man Johan explains the absence of women in the local rock scene by employing gendered role expectations: 'Many women don't like rock. Especially the, well, not exactly "louder", but when it gets a bit more "dirty", then you do generally see more men. And women you see at the more swinging stuff, so to say'. Sven also explains that women are typically only interested in the 'softer' sides of the genre: 'Just the music, the atmosphere, the festivals, the cosiness [gezelligheid] and, just, cool music that makes you dance, so to speak, or makes your head move'. Not wanting to be associated with 'male' behaviours such as 'the destructive part, so the alcohol and the drugs [...] the fights'. He adds: 'Men are inherently self-destructive. So, they'll just drink, smoke, and do drugs, challenge other men'. The displaying of sufficient subcultural capital is important in the process of mentally weighing the legitimacy of a woman's presence. For instance, by wearing specific band T-shirts displaying 'the right' bands. But, even then, gender weighs down heavily on being seen as legitimate. As Sven argued earlier: 'I think that women maybe, generally speaking, prefer to look attractive, maybe even sexy. And that's not something you can always pull-off wearing jeans and a *Slayer* t-shirt. Although it *is* possible of course'.

The markedness of femininity in rock music scene participation is consequential for women's role expectations regarding their involvement. Typically, three different roles are attributed to female scene participants, sometimes simultaneously. First, women are seen as the

girlfriend of a male scene participant (cf. Downes, 2012; Farrugia, 2012). This association consigns most authenticity to the male partner, who is expected to have invited his female partner to 'his' scene. Having been romantically involved with a prominent male local scene member for a while, white American woman Alexis has endured many of such experiences. She explains that 'I was never seen as a person. [...] Not that it's reducing women to sexual objects – that is a thing. But it's like, that they can't see why a woman would be there *outside* of for who she dates'. The querying of someone's authentic presence in a rock music space is tiring for many female respondents, as they continually have to authenticate their presence to others. Similarly, white American woman Kamille explains that, in her experience:

> It's almost unbelievable [to others] that you came by yourself and you're not looking to hook up with someone. And especially if you get into, like, the mosh pit and stuff like that. I've had several instances. [...] Someone's breathing down my neck, someone, like, touching my body and, like, thinking it's okay. They would not touch a man like that!

While women in their local scenes are authenticated over time by male members, new or passing male participants often subject them to similar processes of social scrutiny.

Second, women, especially young women, are expected to act as 'groupies' – fans with a romantic or sexual interest in band members (cf. Hill, 2016). In doing so, their reasons for participation are posited in the realm of pop music fandom rather than a genuine interest in the music. This not only has consequences for the attribution of authentic membership, but also for how women are expected to act when encountering potential (sex) partners in the rock scene. Displaying romantic or sexual interest is subjected to the 'one-time rule' of identity attribution (Mullaney, 1999): if a woman is perceived to indulge in such behaviour only once, she becomes socially marked as a groupie or slut – even if she abstains from doing so at later points in time. White American woman Estelle is annoyed by these 'double-standards', as she calls them:

> I hate the term groupie. I understand why it exists and I think for some girls it's actually very accurate, you know? And I feel that they *are* there for the wrong reasons. But at the same time, it's just sex. Like, if people wanna have sex with each other, why does the girl get the stigma and the guy doesn't? Like... that aggravates me.

Third, many women in rock scenes act in (voluntary, un(der)paid) support roles such as floor managers, box-office operators, photographers, and merchandise salespeople. Core roles such as bookers, venue managers, sound/light technicians, and band members are typically perceived to be male-driven. As such, when women take up organisational roles in their scenes, these roles are often limited to support roles. Moreover, when they take up core roles, they are typically treated with suspicion or are downright denied the legitimacy of these core roles. For example, Kamille, who, after many years of voluntary jobs at a local venue managed to acquire a paid position there, feels that she is not seen as having legitimately obtained this job:

> If I was a man, then they were like 'Oh, congrats dude, that's an awesome job!' No, always a question: 'How did *you* get that?' […] Like, 'What did you *do* to get that?' […] I worked my ass off, for no money, you know. Until I got hired. And I continue to work my ass off.

It is important to note that this optical socialisation, in which masculinity remains an unmarked norm, is not exclusively imparted by men: male and female respondents routinely draw from the very same associations, and female respondents often note that they sometimes feel excluded by other women in particular (cf. Clawson, 1999; Vasan, 2011). For example, while white Dutch woman Nadine has been a regular concertgoer for years and has often felt to be part of a minority, she evaluates women in bands negatively: 'Girls aren't really rock. We're too sweet for that'. Similarly, while white/Asian-American woman Abbigail shares anecdotes about how the legitimacy of her participation as a woman of Asian descent was questioned by white, male scene members, she is dismissive of many other younger women entering the scene: 'Girls like guys with instruments, you know? […] Also, they're young and I think they're boy-crazy, so it makes sense to me. They're in that stage in life (…) It's girls in puberty'.

  While gender is explicitly attended to, most (white) respondents initially deny the relevance of race-ethnicity in the attribution of legitimate presence. To illustrate, Johan is very deliberate in explaining that he does not pay attention to race-ethnicity in any way: 'No, that's something I don't pay attention to at all. No, no, it really isn't of any interest to me'. He does feel that the rock scene, also the one in Rotterdam, is very white. Although he thinks that 'Rotterdam is more diverse than other cities', the local rock

scene 'isn't as diverse as I thought it would be' when he moved to the city a couple of years ago. Explaining the absence, he says:

> Look, rock 'n' roll, that's just really white music. You don't see many coloured people [kleurlingen] there.[5] I would like it if there would be more, so to say. I think that they maybe hold themselves back, or something. But you do notice that, when there's a different musical style, if there'd be a show of it, yeah, then you do see them. That it's almost fifty-fifty.

While he understands that this would not happen in his native small-town community, he did 'expect that the scenes would be more entangled with each other and that there would be more ethnicities, more difference within them. That you also would just have "rock negros" [rocknegers], kind of.[6] Not disrespectful, but... [...] I mean that in a positive way'.

   Unlike gender, the mental weighing of ethno-racial traits is often submerged in supposedly non-racial associations. This comes to the fore in a particular interaction with white Dutch woman Daisy. After asking how she would evaluate the hypothetical situation that she would be surrounded by black people at a rock concert, she responds by arguing that that would be odd but that it would not matter, 'as long as people feel it'. However, in arguing how she would recognise this feeling being present, she immediately jumps to the commercial adaptation of the 'rock appearance':

> Yes, how do I know this? Because you also see these days that the appearance aspects that I define as rock, that H&M has that in their clothing line now. And they promote it as a style. [...] But that isn't rock. So, it's more... yeah, it's more like a feeling.

Interestingly, in this line of argumentation – which started out discussing race-ethnicity – the topic was replaced by commercialism and not being able to assess legitimate presence anymore. Questions of race-ethnicity are evaded or replaced by other topics that might feel to be implicitly related (as many contemporary non-white pop musicians were adopting the 'rock look' at the time this research took place). Likewise, for Sven, the conversation also initially moves to the displaying of subcultural capital rather than an individual's ethno-racial traits:

> There were moments that I just was at a white [blanke] rock show and that a dark person joined who also wasn't dressed like the rest. Then you, yeah, kind of have the idea that that person is misplaced there. But that's just crazy of course.

But, it does help him in evaluating whether the person is in fact misplaced or not: 'on the other hand, if this person, this dark person [donker persoon] would be dressed in more, like, a rock-outfit then – I don't know – it wouldn't be as odd'.

As a young woman of Turkish-Dutch descent, Berna has experienced being at the receiving end of the mental querying that Sven described. Reminiscing one particular experience, Berna explains that there was a moment at a concert when:

> I saw everyone around me – I was the only person there wearing a headscarf – looking at me like 'What is *she* doing here?' And I felt also... You're so close together [at shows], but I could really do [makes a wide gesture] with my arms. No one was *next* to me. (...) Then after they saw me singing along, then they all came up to me and we started talking and it got close again.

She continues discussing another concert, where:

> Two women came up to us [Berna and her friend] and said 'We saw you, we thought you were at the wrong place. But then you went completely crazy [losgingen] and started singing along and then we thought, oh, you do belong here, but I haven't seen you around before, why is that?' And I think: 'Why wouldn't that be possible?'

In both scenarios, it becomes clear that the conflation of Berna's non-whiteness and her Muslim affiliation are a prime cause for scepticism by her co-concertgoers – and her femininity less so (as is exemplified by the fact that she is scrutinised by women in the second anecdote). Similar stories are shared by black American man Kendrick, who explains that 'I get little microaggressions when I first meet someone' due to his blackness. 'Like, even if I go to a punk show and, like, "Yeah, I listen to this and this band". "Oh? *You* do?"' Although he attributes such scrutiny to whiteness in general – 'that's just stuff that, like, as a black person, you just kinda get accustomed to' – he adds that he cannot address it easily with the people asking him such questions: 'No! I don't bring it up. You just create more trouble than it's even worth'. Jerimiah does not feel excluded because of his blackness, but does pick up on being judged on the basis of it: 'I've never felt unwelcome. I mean, it's a natural instinct that somebody is being hateful towards you for that reason [racism]. That you picked up on it. And I mean, that can happen anywhere'.

While female respondents of all ethnicities frequently share examples of their presence being evaluated, these instances are often relatively overt and can hence be identified and called out. Non-white respondents share similar anecdotes, yet, for them, this felt exclusion is clearly of a more covert nature. As respondents only reluctantly discuss the mental weighing of race-ethnicity, yet discuss gender with relative ease, it becomes clear that exclusion on the basis of race-ethnicity is firmly entrenched in rock music's mental scheme and difficult to address. In other words, while both attributes to the assessing of an individual's legitimate presence, race-ethnicity is granted more mental weight than gender, which is consequential but in a notably more adaptable and addressable way. This is exemplified by Erin, who identifies as a bi-ethnic American woman. Erin is actively engaged in issues of gender equality in her local rock music community, but still feels she cannot address issues of race-ethnicity – while expecting of others to identify with her feminist ideals:

> I think I'm just, because I am a female who has a girlfriend and has a lot of gay friends and just the fact that I'm a female, I focus more on *that*. [...] I'm very aware. And I'm very sympathetic. And I'd love to be more of an activist than I am currently. I just... I don't speak too much on racial issues because I don't want to be told that I'm doing it wrong, that I'm ignorant, that I don't understand. So, until I can fully understand – which will never happen – I'm a white female American, I can't take a stand you know? I mean, you know, why is this white girl talking? Why does she care?

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, I sought to address the everyday maintenance of gender and ethno-racial inequality by assessing how individuals mentally weigh attributes relating to gender and race-ethnicity in the evaluation of legitimate rock music scene participation. The rock music genre is dominated by white men, both numerically and symbolically (Mahon, 2004; Schaap, 2015). This is consequential for rock music's conventions – sonic, visual, and social – which determine how rock scene participations are 'optically' socialised (Zerubavel, 1997). While gender is explicitly attended to and given mental weight as a reason to delegitimise women's presence in rock music spaces, race-ethnicity is discursively ignored yet given substantial mental weight in the evaluation of people of colour – as respondents' accounts attest to.

The interview data demonstrate that gender and race-ethnicity are both causes for the experience of social exclusion, yet in distinctly different ways. Importantly, due to the more overt treatment of femininity as a 'natural' reason for women's perceived lack of legitimacy to 'rock', its overtness makes it easier to address and indicate in everyday interaction. Indeed, in the Netherlands, media have started addressing the relative lack of women at the Netherlands' many (rock) music festivals (Kain, 2017; Derks, 2018), while the dominance of whiteness remains largely undiscussed.

Despite offering only a limited empirical account of the shared mental processes underlying everyday inequality in rock music reception, this article has demonstrated that social properties pertaining to stratification can work in different and – at times – conflicting ways. This is also a reason why it is challenging to include such attributes intersectionally in the sociological analysis of stratification. Focusing on a limited yet remarkable case study such as rock music reception makes such an analysis feasible. This underlines the importance of popular music as a revenue for the further scrutiny of social inequalities, which could also include elements such as class, sexuality, and religion.

Notes

1. Whereas it is more common to discuss racial matters in the United States (for example, using the terms 'white' and 'black'), in the Netherlands this terminology is shunned and replaced by ethnic, cultural, or national associations (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Weiner, 2014).
2. Names are pseudonyms.
3. As identified by respondents themselves.
4. As identified by respondents themselves.
5. The Dutch term 'kleurlingen' is best translated to 'coloured people' and is considered anachronistic/inappropriate by many in the Netherlands.
6. The Dutch term 'neger' is best translated to 'negro' and is – despite its continued usage – considered offensive by many Dutch people.

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