

Behind the stage: the barriers to success for independent musicians of color

A qualitative research study in the Dutch music industry

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ABSTRACT

More and more musicians are choosing the independent route given the accessibility of digital tools. This thesis focuses on independent musicians of color and examines the barriers to success they may face due to race or ethnicity. The research questions guiding this study are, "What are the barriers to success for independent musicians of color?" and "How do independent artists of color overcome these barriers to success?" Interviews were conducted with a sample of 11 independent musicians of color located in the Netherlands, and thematic analysis was employed as the research method to identify and analyze recurring themes and patterns in their responses.

The study found that independent musicians of color face multiple perceived barriers that hinder their success. The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several important findings of barriers and methods for overcoming them. First, genre presented barriers for musicians of color in that it was often used as a means of discrimination. Hip hop was often used to categorize musicians of color while simultaneously receiving less credibility than other genres. Second, gatekeepers including record labels and playlist curators contributed to a glass ceiling for the musicians in this study. Independent musicians felt that there was a limit to their success due to lack of access and resources. Lastly, a lack of representation and stereotypes contributed to additional pressures that their white peers may not have to contend with.

To overcome these barriers, musicians made use of networks and marketing to international audiences. Networks were used by musicians to establish credibility and access to resources that are typically held by gatekeepers. The most significant contribution to theory of this research was the use of marketing to the US and UK for musicians making English music as a method of overcoming the barriers present in the Dutch music industry. Overall, the findings highlight the complex nature of the barriers faced by independent musicians of color in the Dutch music industry. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of independent musicians of color.

KEYWORDS: *Genre, race, hip-hop, gatekeepers, representation*

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1. Introduction

Participation in the creative industries can be defined as the process of creating ideas and items which contribute to culture and generate economic value (Jones et al., 2013). The role of entrepreneurs in the creative industries can vary but this study focuses specifically on the role of creative entrepreneurs in the music industry. More artists in the music industry are choosing the independent route in lieu of traditional record deals. Technology has evolved making home studios relatively inexpensive, and digital technology now allows artists to market, distribute, and engage with fans on their own (Hracs, 2016). These new technologies have effectively lowered many of the barriers to entry of independent music production (Hracs, 2016) however, some barriers in the music industry remain. Eiriz and Leite (2017) define the independent musician as a business model including all steps of the music business such as publishing, production, and marketing. Being solely responsible for every step of the music business process, independent musicians often look to outside resources. Access to these resources can prove to be a barrier.

Current creative industries research also points to racialized experiences as a source of inequality (Campbell, 2018). For instance, young people working in the creative industries often point to a lack of representation as a barrier to entry and success (Campbell, 2018). From this one can assume that as a creative industry, the music industry is also affected by inequalities related to race and ethnicity. Additionally, race and ethnicity can often prevent people of color from acquiring opportunities in all industries. For instance, Andriessen et al. (2012) finds that ethnic minorities are often discriminated against across the Dutch labor market. This study aims to see how this discrimination impacts creative entrepreneurs of color (i.e., independent musicians).

Applying an intersectional perspective, this research will examine how race and ethnicity affect the steps to success for independent artists. This thesis aims to focus on the barriers in the music industry for independent musicians of color. This research will be guided by the question: What are the perceived barriers to success for independent artists of color in the music industry? The sub question following this research question is: How do independent artists of color overcome these barriers to success? By providing insights as to how independent artists can overcome perceived barriers to success, this study will use theory to offer practical solutions for independent artists of color.

1.1 Relevance

Given the increasing popularity of independent musicians, it is important to know what barriers to success exist for people of color to create a more equitable music industry. Beyond the music industry, in the arts at large, independent artists of color may also have a different experience as creative entrepreneurs. The goal of this study is to contribute to the greater societal goals of creating a more equitable and fair music industry and creative industries overall. By addressing inequalities as well as methods for overcoming the barriers it contributes to better representation and can open opportunities for people of color in the music industry. Independent musicians also contribute to the overall creative economy as entrepreneurs therefore, this study is relevant to the growing creative economy in The Netherlands.

This research will also contribute to creative entrepreneurship theory. While there have been many academic studies about independent musicians as it has become a more popular choice, few academic studies have been done which focus on the independent musicians of color. Examining the experiences of independent musicians through the lens of race and ethnicity provides a new theoretical perspective to already existing research (e.g. Tessler & Flynn (2016), Walzer (2016), and Lee, (2015)). Similar research has been conducted on race in the music industry with a sociological perspective such as the study done by Jacobson (2015) on the perceptions of hip hop fans however, no studies have been located which are specific to independent musicians. This study will also be unique in that it combines sociological and entrepreneurial perspectives. Applying an intersectional perspective as defined by Crenshaw (2018), is also currently lacking in the research of creative industries as many studies focus on just one facet of identity such as race, gender, or sexuality but rarely address intersections of these identities (Mall, 2018) (Reyna et al., 2009).

1.2 Chapter Outline

The theoretical framework lays the foundational understanding of theory related to the research of independent musicians of color. Beginning with creative entrepreneurship, I will offer an overview of how creative entrepreneurs function in the current market including some of the difficulties and definitions of success. After providing a picture of the creative entrepreneur, I will expand on the nature of creative industries, in the context of the music industry in particular to provide an understanding of the uncertainty of the music industry.

Then, I will introduce possible sources of inequality within the creative industries including network theory as it relates to lack of access. Finally, I will discuss representation and intersectionality as they both relate to how the nature of one's identity can change their experience. For this thesis which focuses on independent musicians of color, representation and intersectionality add more nuance to the discussion of race related experiences.

Next, the methodological section will provide a detailed description of the sampling used and the reasoning for the selected qualitative method. Demographic information of the interviewees will also be included to offer additional context to the study. The thematic method of analysis will be justified as well as described in detail to ensure reliability of the research. The results section will include the relevant findings from the analysis alongside a theoretical based discussion.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Evolution of the Music Industry

While the music industry can be considered part of the larger creative industries, for creative entrepreneurs in this industry, namely independent musicians, the nature of work in this industry is not as clear as others may be. Despite performing many of the same activities, there is a dichotomy present in the music industry about whether these activities can be considered entrepreneurial (Haynes & Marshall, 2018).

The structure of the music industry has continuously evolved over time, changing the characteristics of work within this industry. According to Bockstedt et al. (2005), the "digital virtual value chain" (p.16) has placed more power in the hands of musicians to distribute their own music, thus lessening a need for traditional record labels. The current music industry now has few intermediaries between the musicians and the consumers (Bockstedt et al., 2005). This has significantly shaped the way consumers reach music as well as shaped how musicians get their music to consumers. Musicians in today's direct to consumer market must be evolving to keep up with marketing trends in the music industry (Murphy & Hume, 2023). Whereas in the past musicians were dependent upon brick-and-mortar retailers, manufacturers, and record labels to distribute their music (Bockstedt et al., 2005), now the landscape of the digital streaming service dominated music industry looks very different.

Online streaming services are now the most popular method of music consumption (Aly-Tovar et al., 2020). In the context of independent musicians, streaming services can offer a platform to be discovered, a means of increasing their live performance sales, or a

possible barrier in terms of revenue generated from music sales (Aly-Tovar et al., 2020). For instance, Spotify has been found to affect musicians' streams through the curation of playlists and algorithmic choices (Bonini & Gandini, 2019). The way streaming services impact a musician is dependent on their position within the industry but, digital music distribution is ultimately a defining factor of the current music industry (Eiriz & Leite, 2017). The digital landscape of the music industry has also changed the business models of musicians as they adapt to the technological changes in the industry (Eiriz & Leite, 2017). These changing business models can best be identified in the entrepreneurial tasks that independent musicians carry out to be successful.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Tasks

Entrepreneurship in the music industry has continuously evolved from what Tessler and Flynn (2016) describe as “DIY to D2F” (p.47), meaning from do-it-yourself to direct to fans. This evolution has created new challenges and opportunities for the independent musician including determining a target audience, choosing what music should be distributed on which platform, and measuring engagement (Tessler & Flynn, 2016). Creative entrepreneurs in the music industry are now handling many of the tasks that would have been managed by record labels at one time (Tessler & Flynn, 2016). Hracs (2016) argues that for musicians, creative entrepreneurship goes beyond recording and distributing music and now includes an increasing amount of time spent on aesthetic labor through perfecting their personal image, live performances, and creating a distinct visual style.

The digitalization of the music industry has coincided with the increased popularity of “promotional culture” (Klein et al., 2017, p.9). For independent musicians, many entrepreneurial tasks are now focused on marketing efforts including brand building, promotion, and partnerships (Klein et al., 2017). Some of these tasks include paying for placements on promotional playlists, developing social media marketing strategies, creating content for social media, and making use of crowdfunding services to increase revenue (Mühlbach & Arora, 2020). Everts et al. (2021) find that business and managerial tasks account for the most amount of time spent outside of creative tasks for musicians.

Given the number of roles and tasks independent musicians must fulfill to secure resources (Walzer, 2016), it can be inferred that there is a level of self-management involved in creative industries work, which in this case refers to music related activities. Gao et al. (2009) find that for many independent musicians, these many roles are often managed by

hiring external resources with the most common being “promotion, booking, and online distribution” (p. 116). While this is a common method for musicians to handle the large amount of tasks they are responsible for, this solution can also be flawed with a majority of musicians in Gao et al. 's (2009) study finding that they were not satisfied with the work completed by external business services. This may then point to the conclusion, that independent musicians prefer to manage these business tasks themselves given the availability of these services online at a lower price point (Gao et al., 2009).

2.3 Challenges for Independent Musicians

The diverse nature of creative entrepreneurial work in the music industry can prove a challenge for the independent musician as this work requires them to seek other resources and maintain a larger network to achieve success (Eiriz & Leite, 2017). Music production also provides its own unique challenges to the creative entrepreneur. As roles have become more blurred, the steps of production have also become increasingly blurred (Walzer, 2016). An independent musician may have to move between creative and entrepreneurial tasks during production to secure additional resources or collaborators (Walzer, 2016). Hennekam and Bennett (2016) find that in the self-management of creative work, “managing... multiple concurrent roles, managing unstable income, managing professional development, and managing identity” (p.35) are common struggles among creative workers.

Managing professional development and managing identity are the most relevant to the social focus of this research which aims to examine how race interacts with these challenges in the music industry. The management of professional development in the creative industries often centers around practical skills needed to excel in creative work rather than internal motivations (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). Albinsson (2018) points out that musicians who do not receive formal educational business training may develop a different point of view of these skills as it develops out of necessity. Haynes and Marshall (2018) find that independent musicians often learn these skills reluctantly or out of necessity to their development in the creative industries. Everts et al. (2021) also finds a separation of tasks into two separate categories of music as art or art and business as necessity tied together and simply part of being a musician.

2.3.1 Gatekeepers

In addition to the challenges presented by managing the precarity of entrepreneurial work, there are also more systemic based barriers to success present in the music industry.

Despite being considered a more progressive alternative to traditional work, social inequalities are still present in the creative industries. The informal nature of social organization in the creative industries conceals the still present white male dominated network that minorities often can't access (Ruth Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). Lack of access via relationships remains a source of inequality in the creative industries due to recommendation-based recruitment practices in the creative industries (Ruth Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013).

These recommendation-based practices can be seen as a product of social networks which contribute to the inequalities present in labor markets which in this case refers to the music industry (Finneran & Kelly, 2003). Social networks often operate as referral sources for opportunities and for independent musicians that do not fall within a social network that has a high status in the referral hierarchy, this can leave them with little to no chances to reach those opportunities (Finneran & Kelly, 2003). While networks are not direct actors of discrimination, the exclusion of minority groups from powerful social networks does lead to further inequality within an industry (Finneran & Kelly, 2003).

In the music industry, gatekeepers such as record labels, platforms, and networks serve as intermediaries between musicians and success (Sanders et al., 2021). It can be argued that record labels continue to find new avenues to maintain their status as gatekeepers in the music industry (Mall, 2018). Moro-Visconti (2022) finds that record labels are able to retain power over resources through several business models including ownership and third-party relationships allowing them to remain an important gatekeeper in the music industry. The lack of access to gatekeepers as well as their resources via relationships can then create a glass ceiling effect. The glass ceiling concept is defined as a type of inequality that creates an invisible barrier that cannot be crossed to reach a higher level of success within a particular career or market despite accomplishments and qualifications (Cotter et al., 2001). In this study, the inequality is focused on race and ethnicity for independent musicians.

Denmead (2019) coined the term creative underclass to describe a similar phenomenon of less value being placed on the work of young, working class, minority communities. The creative underclass is defined by a lack of mobility in the creative industries (Denmead, 2019) which could be detrimental to a creative entrepreneur who is working towards a higher level of success. For independent musicians belonging to this creative underclass, gatekeepers which control access to resources in the creative industries can greatly impact the value assigned to their work by restricting access. According to Janssen and Verboord (2015), these gatekeepers can be understood as controlling the

exclusion or promotion of a work or artist. Gatekeepers are also a form of sponsor as identified by Geursen and Rentschler (2003). Therefore, gatekeepers are one of the actors which control the equality or inequality present in a cultural field (Janssen & Verboord, 2015).

2.3.2 Securing Resources

Securing resources is an additional challenge to achieving success in the music industry that can affect the independent musician in a number of ways. By applying a perspective that takes into account facets of identity to examine entrepreneurial activities, differences within a particular ethnic group such as class, gender, religion, and ability are acknowledged in interaction with their ability to secure resources (Romero & Valdez, 2016). This perspective is similar to that adopted by Denmead (2019) when describing the creative underclass. In the context of entrepreneurship, this informs the amount of capital one can acquire, be that social or monetary (Romero & Valdez, 2016). Intersectionality informs how systems of oppression in a social structure interact within the labor market, ultimately changing the experience of each individual entrepreneur (Romero & Valdez, 2016). Howard et al. (2021) applies this perspective to the changes music creators face as a result of COVID-19. The inequalities present for these musicians differ depending on the financial resources of the artist and risks they were able to take (Howard et al., 2021).

2.4 Networks

As creative entrepreneurs, independent musicians rely heavily on social and professional networks to access knowledge, opportunities, partnerships, and experience to advance their careers (Lee, 2015). Oukil, (2011) expresses that an active network can be vital to creative entrepreneurs' success, providing them alternative avenues to resources. The knowledge creative entrepreneurs share and gain through these networks is often known as social capital as they are resources that can be only accessed through the structure of the network (Lin, 2017). The extent to which social capital is shared in these creative industry networks varies by the structure, such as whether these networks are open or guarded by gatekeepers (Lee, 2015). Network identity dictates who is included and excluded from these networks and this identity is based on norms and values which set the tone for actions and behaviors of network members (Daskalaki, 2010). Independent artists can easily build relationships within these networks if they are aligned with the network identity, thus being

excluded from networks based on shared values is also a possibility and could be a barrier between artists and resources.

Networks provide necessary resources for independent musicians however, Cummins-Russell and Rantisi (2012) also point out that the culture and locale in which these networks form greatly influences the service they provide to artists. Digital networks built through social media and crowdfunding platforms have become increasingly popular in the music industry and allow independent musicians to gain resources, namely funding, through digital relationships (Martínez-Cañas et al., 2012). Given that digital networks offer independent musicians more control over risk (Martínez-Cañas et al., 2012), they may offer an alternative to the barriers of in person networks. However, digital networks come with their own risks to the independent musician including theft and inconsistent funding (Martínez-Cañas et al., 2012). Digital networks may offer an alternative to in person locally based networks, but it is unclear whether these networks help independent musicians overcome barriers or present a new set of barriers in the digital realm.

2.5 Defining Success

Provided the challenge of managing entrepreneurial tasks in the music industry, it is also important to understand the goals and motivations of creative entrepreneurship to define success in this context. According to the research done by Baláž et al. (2022), independence, freedom, creative control, and personal fulfillment were among the most important success goals of creative entrepreneurs. Similarly, in Campbell's 2018 interviews with young creative entrepreneurs, several respondents define their success in the creative industries using "non-economic rationales" (p.536). This offers a partial framework for defining success in creative entrepreneurship for the purposes of this thesis. The success goals of creative entrepreneurs themselves provide an insight into how the entrepreneurs define their success but it does not define success in the context of the larger creative industry. According to Purnomo (2019), for creative entrepreneurs, success is dependent on both artistic engagement through creative work and financial literacy. This suggests that while creative entrepreneurs define their success outside of the financial realm, financial goals are still imperative to success.

Beyond financial gain, other extrinsic factors may serve as motivation as well. In Campbell's (2018) qualitative study of young people working in the creative industries, respondents also point out race and gender both as a barrier to entry in the creative industries as well as a motivation to continue to pursue creative work. The relationship between

motivation and inequality in the creative industries is relevant to understanding how perceived barriers also inform a minority's view of success. Chen et al. (2017) also finds that for creative entrepreneurs, social recognition is both a common motivator and goal. For the independent musicians of color in this study, that recognition could refer to peers, fans, or other outside sources. Similar to social recognition, creative entrepreneurs prioritize achievements over financial success as well (Chen et al., 2017). Lena and Peterson (2008) point out that the expectations of others in the industry are necessary to the success of musicians.

Given that the work of independent musicians in the music industry can differ on a personal level, the personal motivations of independent musicians is helpful in understanding the nature of work in the music industry. According to Cnossen et al. (2019), many creatives view their entrepreneurial work as something done as necessity rather than skills that can help them achieve more success and instead see their success as a sole result of their creative work. This then suggests that independent musicians are not motivated to succeed as entrepreneurs and their work is focused on creativity as the avenue of success. Creative entrepreneurs being more intrinsically motivated than motivated by external reward (Cnossen et al., 2019) is vital to framing success and the work that leads to success for independent musicians in this study. Ryan and Deci (2000), establish with self-determination theory that a need for autonomy and control is a common facet of intrinsic motivation. Bilton et al. (2021) applies this self-determination theory to creative entrepreneurs finding that intrinsic motivations are strongly linked external motivations such as audience approval making both vital to understanding the goals of independent musicians.

2.6 Representation

Representation is a method of meaning making through images and language, commonly used in the context of media (Hall, 2020). Inequalities in the creative industries can lead to problems of representation. In a recent study of inequality in the British creative industries, Brook et al. (2018), reports an underrepresentation of the working class, women, and ethnic minorities compared to the representation of their upper class, male, white counterparts. According to Wang et al. (2021), many creative entrepreneurs in underserved communities found their success to be representative of their communities and therefore empowering. Additionally, Dennis (2016) finds that black social movements have been associated with music as early as slavery in the United States, offering possibly another

source of empowering representation. Despite the additional control granted to creative entrepreneurs over their careers, they still often rely on relationships and community for resources (Walzer, 2016), making representation an important factor of success.

For minority independent artists there is also a unique opportunity to represent themselves and their culture how they choose (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, representation can present a tool for overcoming barriers for creative entrepreneurs by acquiring resources from the community they perceive themselves to be representing or can be a barrier to access in larger institutions. Representation holds a lot of power over those that have limited control of the means of representation (Belfiore, 2018) in the music industry. According to Kidd (2016), a lack of representation within a particular industry can deprive people of color of messages showing how they fit within that context. Born & Hesmondhalgh (2000) also establish that for white musicians, the representation of other cultures in western music is an exertion of their power in society. This exertion of power then opens the door for the appropriation of cultures in popular music (Rodriquez, 2006).

2.6.1 Identity

The work of creative entrepreneurs in the music industry includes a wide range of activities as described earlier. These diverse roles can be an advantage for creative entrepreneurs as they are now in control of everything related to their messaging as a musician including performance, image, music production, and marketing (Eiriz & Leite, 2017). This allows independent musicians more control over their identity. The performance and crafting of this aesthetic labor extends into the personal life of independent musicians (Hracs, 2016), thus for creative entrepreneurs in the music industry the “distance between work-identity and self-identity” (Hracs, 2016, p.70) narrows. The blurred lines between personal and work have become an increasingly common theme of creative entrepreneurship (Jarvis & Pratt, 2006). This unstructured nature of creative entrepreneurship can be both an advantage and challenge for independent musicians. These precarities can be managed in a number of ways. For independent musicians, they can manage their identity by distancing themselves from entrepreneurial practices they take part in and negotiate their identities in terms of art and creativity rather than the work they perform within the creative industries (Haynes & Marshall, 2018).

Originating in black feminist theory, intersectionality provides a theoretical framework for understanding the way different facets of a person’s identity interact and can

compound discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). These different facets of identity can include race, gender, sexuality, and disability. For independent artists of color, intersectionality could point to vastly different experiences in the music industry. In DeCoste's (2017) study of an all-female brass band, intersectionality informs the women's experiences from assumptions made about their sexuality based on the instruments they play to racial assumptions based on what venues they play. For black women in particular, race and gender can present additional barriers in a given industry (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, Topaz et al. (2022), finds that black women are among the most underrepresented groups in the music industry. Mangani (2021) asserts that gender discrimination can affect the opportunities available for women to get into the industry including education, access, and the attitudes of their peers but for black women in the music industry there may be additional barriers.

The interaction of multiple forms of identity-based discrimination in the music industry can also affect expectations of independent artists in the music industry. For instance, in hip-hop, non-black fans have an expectation of damaging stereotypes of black men and women as hypersexualized or thugs (Jacobson, 2015). This suggests intersectionality not only informs inequalities artists may face in the securing of resources to create their music, but also the way that their music is perceived by audiences. Images of gender, sexuality, race, and class stereotypes may exist but can only be maintained if the audience identifies and understands the images as these stereotypes (Jacobson, 2015). Additionally, the stereotypes of women in music can have dangerous affects. Sexual harassment and violence against women in the music industry is common with little to no accountability for the perpetrators, leaving women feeling unsafe in their workspaces (McCarry et al., 2023). This can lead to a lack of representation of women in music as described by Topaz et al. (2022).

2.7 Stereotypes

Hayes et al. (2018) has established that stereotypes work using a form of othering, maintaining that people of color are outside of the norm in some way. Representation within the music industry can also other or stereotype artists based on several factors including race, gender, class, and genre. Genres categorize creators by specific roles and production work and as a result people working in the creative industries are also categorized by specific traits including race, gender, and class (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021). In the context of independent musicians, music genres can be a source of inequality for artists of color, if they do not

properly fit into what has been deemed an appropriate genre or attempt to cross genres that are outside of their category of work (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021). For instance, when examining music reviews, musicians are often compared along the boundaries of race within the Dutch music industry (Van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2015). This genre inequality may also interact with gatekeepers as they pick talent and products based upon potential profitability (Caves, 2006) and genre allows gatekeepers to place them within easily marketable categories (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021).

Neguț and Sârbescu (2014) explore the ways stereotypes are activated within the hip-hop and rock genres and find that audiences quickly pass biased judgements based on cues within the music or lyrics. Reyna et al. (2009) finds that the hip hop genre in particular is used as justification and reinforcer of societal attitudes towards black people. Therefore, the representation of a genre within the media and popular culture can impact the success of an independent artist creating within those genres. Music as a form of representation is often referred to as the study of ethnomusicology (Bohlman, 2005). According to Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000), ethnomusicology can be used to identify the ways in which specific groups are othered. For instance, the representation of non-western music as “world music” which combines all non-western music into one category is an effective example of othering representation (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000). As an independent artist, participating in the creation of music that has been represented as other can present a barrier to success.

2.8 Cultural Value

Other scholars find inequalities in the ways the products of creative work are consumed. Banks (2017), argues that inequalities in the creative industries also appear in the value assigned to cultural objects. Beyond barriers to entry, inequality exists in the way audiences and the creative industry at large make sense of cultural objects and thus assign value to them (Banks, 2017). Geursen and Rentschler (2003) define the value of creative works on whether it serves a purpose to an audience or it makes a contribution that can be preserved for future audiences. Based on this definition, it is ultimately up to the audience to determine the value of a cultural product. Therefore, if there are unbalanced power structures existing within an audience, one group may have more power over the value assigned to a cultural object or product. Institutionalized racism has been found to exist in Dutch society despite the lack of clear racial categories which could influence power structures present for musicians of color (Weiner, 2014). Geursen and Rentschler (2003) also identify sponsors of

the arts and government agencies as cultural value creators. Thus, any cultural biases that exist within the creative industries in the Netherlands are entangled with the value assigned to cultural products.

3. Methodology

3.1 Choosing Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research is the best fit method for gathering data that reflects participants' lived experiences and allowing the researcher to draw conclusions about social relationships (Boeije, 2009). This research followed a qualitative design because it explores musicians' personal experiences and looks for patterns in shared experiences as a way of understanding the relationship between the music industry and independent musicians of color. The topic is somewhat exploratory in nature given that there is currently a gap in academic literature on the subject of independent musicians of color. Therefore, qualitative research is well suited to identifying potential unknown barriers in the Dutch music industry and contributing to the current research on independent musicians (Flick, 2014). However, despite having some exploratory qualities, the research is still grounded in existing theory and the methodology is based upon systematic methods to ensure validity and credibility (Silverman, 2011).

3.2 Research Design

This research aims to achieve deep knowledge concerning multiple personal perspectives and emotions of a common group making in-depth interviewing the best method for data collection (Johnson, 2011). By using in depth interviews, the researcher can identify themes that may not exist in current literature. The interviews were semi-structured to maximize the meaning-making potential allowing the interviewer to guide the conversation and focus on the topics most relevant to the theoretical context (Brinkmann, 2020). This method of interviewing will allow the researcher to guide the conversation while still leaving room for interviewees to express themselves therefore building trust and deepening the knowledge being shared. The positionality of the researcher is also very important to interviews and the information that participants choose to share (Darwin Holmes, 2020). The topic of this research focuses on people of color as racial and ethnic minorities in the context of the Netherlands. The positionality of the researcher in this study as a person of color offers the opportunity to gain deeper insights in interviews that participants may not be willing to share in other contexts.

10 interviews were conducted with independent musicians of color, lasting an average of 50 minutes to provide enough time to build a rapport with the interviewees, gather information relevant to the research question, and follow up on additional meaning making leads. In addition, the majority of interviews were held in person because nonverbal knowledge could be better observed here such as body language and facial expressions (Brinkmann, 2020). Only 2 interviews were conducted via video call due to circumstances preventing an in-person meeting. The interviews were guided using prepared interview questions organized by main themes and follow up questions used to further build upon the interviewee's answers. This structure kept the interview related to the research subject while still allowing space for the interviewee to bring up ideas that were not in the interview guide (Kallio et al., 2016). Participants received informed consent forms ([Appendix C](#)) to look over which detailed the subject of the study.

3.3 Operationalization

The goal of the interviews was to measure perceived barriers to success for independent musicians of color. To measure these perceived barriers, an interview guide ([Appendix A](#)) was developed using the concepts of success, music industry characteristics, challenges, and representation, each of which being grounded in theory. These overarching concepts were used as the initial framework for building the interview questions. The sub-questions used to clarify and get deeper insights were based on more specific concepts of motivations, goals, entrepreneurial tasks, gatekeepers, networks, identity, and securing resources. The full interview guide can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The interview questions were introduced in order of surface level to most in-depth and personal questions to build trust with the interviewee (Johnson, 2011). Each interview began with general questions about how the interviewee began making music and transitioned into more detailed questions regarding their day-to-day tasks and how they perceive success. These questions were based on theory regarding the nature of creative entrepreneurial work such as that of Walzer (2016) which finds that independent musicians are often juggling a variety of entrepreneurial and creative tasks. The definition of success differs greatly among creative entrepreneurs (Baláž et al., 2022), so asking the interviewee how they interpret success and understanding their goals was vital to understanding what they perceive as barriers.

To measure perceived barriers to success for the independent musicians, the interview questions were based on theories related to how creative entrepreneurs seek out resources and opportunities. These included social capital gained through networks (Lin, 2017) and the role of gatekeepers as described by Janssen & Verboord (2015) and Ruth Eikhof & Warhurst (2013). The responses of the interviewees dictated which concept within perceived barriers that the interview most focused on. For instance, while the interview guide included several questions related to networks, if the interviewee did not have many related experiences, then the focus of the questions would be shifted to a more relevant concept based on their answers. Follow up questions regarding race were then asked to determine in which ways a musician's race interacted with their perceived barriers and challenges if at all.

Identity and representation theories were used as the framework for questions regarding race and ethnicity. Hracs (2016) finds that for independent musicians, self and work identity can be very closely tied, therefore this was used as a base for understanding to what extent an interviewee found race and ethnicity to be a part of their identity as musician. The flow of these questions typically ranged from personal identity perception to outward perception of the interviewee's identity such as stereotypes. The basis of the interview questions regarding stereotypes were based on the work of Alacovska & O'Brien (2021) which points to music genre as a reinforcer of societal stereotypes by race, gender, and class.

3.4 Sampling

This study aims to gain insights into the personal experiences of independent musicians of color and the ways in which they perceive barriers in the music industry. The participants in this study are independent musicians, identify as people of color, and located in the Netherlands. Given that the research is focused on the intersection of race and ethnicity for independent artists in the music industry, it is vital to the research that all participants meet all the qualifications. Sampling should account for the context of the study (Marshall, 1996), so participants were all located in the Netherlands to ensure that all the artists are located within the same social context.

This sampling criteria was defined based on the parameters of the research question. To determine if a potential participant met these criteria, the researcher reached out directly to the participant and after introducing the study and determining interest, asked if they identified as independent musicians and people of color. When available, Instagram was also used to determine participant eligibility prior to the researcher reaching out. On their

Instagram accounts, many of the participants refer to themselves as artists and musicians and their posts are often focused on music, including releases and shows. Participants received all relevant information about the nature of the study before agreeing to participate and prior to the start of the interview received a consent form, to be read and signed before proceeding with the interview.

A purposive sampling method was adopted to produce the most “information rich” (Schreier, 2018, p.88) interviews possible to answer the research question. The main goal of this research is to gain in depth meaning making information, therefore purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose participants based on criteria aligned with the research question to achieve the most meaning making potential in the interview process (Schreier, 2018). Snowball sampling was also used alongside purposive sampling in which interview participants were asked if they would like to recommend any independent musicians of color to participate in the study. The same criteria were used to choose from the referred artists. Snowball sampling was utilized because it allows the researcher easier access to people that share the same characteristics necessary for the study (Parker et al., 2020). By receiving a referral from musicians that have already participated this also assists in building trust with the referee (Parker et al., 2020).

To ensure a credible sample, gender was considered as the experiences of a feminine presenting person may differ from that of a masculine presenting person in the music industry as they do in society generally (Crenshaw, 1989). The aim of the sample was to achieve an equal number of women and men. All the participants considered themselves independent except for interviewee 11. This participant was signed to a label at the time of the interview but was still responsible for many of the tasks of an independent musician. The sample demographics can be seen in the table below.

Name	Gender	Age	Genre
Interviewee 1	Man	27	Electronic
Interviewee 2	Man	30	Hip Hop, Pop
Interviewee 3	Man	24	Latin, Pop
Interviewee 4	Man	23	R&B
Interviewee 5	Woman	27	Alternative R&B
Interviewee 6	Woman	33	Electronic, Hip Hop
Interviewee 7	Woman	28	Neo Soul, R&B

Interviewee 8	Man	23	Hip Hop
Interviewee 9	Woman	35	World Music
Interviewee 10	Man	24	Alternative, R&B
Interviewee 11	Woman	32	Latin, Urban

Table 1. Participant Demographics

3.5 Analysis

To prepare the interview data for analysis, each interview was transcribed using MacWhisper, an AI software which also transcribes cues such as laughing. After the AI transcription, I adjusted any mistakes. The goal of the transcriptions was to keep as much of the original spoken and nonverbal meaning from the interviewee intact (Roulston, 2013). The qualitative data in this study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is flexible and best fit for identifying and analyzing patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was also chosen to reduce the data down to the most relevant, meaningful information to the research question through coding (Roulston, 2013).

Open, axial, and selective coding were used to perform the thematic analysis of the data. Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software was used at every step of the coding process to organize and refine the data according to themes. This kept track of where in the transcripts coded data appeared to not lose context while proceeding with the coding process. First, each transcript was read over to get familiarized with the content and look for any initial patterns or themes that can become part of the coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase of code building uses open coding to assign themes to specific pieces of the data without yet applying a hierarchy or order to the codes (Boeije, 2009). To qualify the data as belonging to a specific code, the corresponding passages from the transcripts were reread before being refined in the axial coding phase.

The axial coding phase refined the codes further by comparing them, combined where needed, and developing a hierarchy (Boeije, 2009). In the selective coding phase, the coding scheme was then compared to the theoretical framework of the study to determine how the data can be used to answer the research question. The analysis used both an inductive and deductive approach to coding by initially identifying patterns directly from the data and then also applying the codes to theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final coding tree can be viewed in [Appendix B](#).

3.6 Reliability and Validity

A qualitative research study can be considered reliable in the ways that it is trustworthy, truthful, and plausible (Tracy, 2010). A number of steps were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of this research including making sure the interview questions were clearly understood by the interviewees, accurately transcribing the data, and using a systematic coding scheme in the analysis (Silverman, 2011). The interview guide was also used to increase validity by making sure that each interview gathered data relevant to answering the research question and based on theory. Transparency of the research process by clearly outlining every step of the methodology also contributed to the reliability and validity of the research (Tracy, 2010).

4. Results

This chapter addresses the findings of the interviews conducted with independent musicians of color. The interviews were analyzed using thematic coding and described below in theoretical context. To answer the research question, “What are the perceived barriers to success for independent artists of color in the music industry?” barriers will be discussed first. Next, the chapter will discuss findings related to the sub research question, “How do independent artists of color overcome these barriers to success?”

4.1 Motivations and Goals

To lay a groundwork for a deeper understanding of the experiences of independent musicians of color, it is important to first understand their motivations and goals as independent musicians. This established context for what the musicians in this study perceive as barriers to their success. The primary motivations found were freedom and control with the goals of financial stability and reaching a larger audience.

4.1.1 Control

Control presents itself in the analysis in the ways that artists dictate decisions about their careers, images, and music. For some, this control is a necessity to their work. “Some artists are like, okay, I can’t manage this, so I leave this to the label, or I leave this to some other people, but I’m not like that. I need to control my own things” (Interviewee 2). Even when working with a team and delegating tasks, musicians find that being independent allows them control over every aspect related to their music. “I just want to write the things and tell

people what I like. So, I do oversee everything” (Interviewee 7). Being able to maintain control at every level appeared as a motivator for musicians to continue their path as an independent artist as well as a goal for them in the future if signing with a music label. Cnossen et al. (2019) has previously found that independent musicians are intrinsically motivated and control in some form provides them this intrinsic reward, however the findings of this study present an additional factor to the need for control which is race. For independent musicians of color, control can serve as a method of resisting the standards of a white dominated music industry. For instance, Interviewee 5 states, “there are certain type of standards or things that you have to do in order to even make music not to make it like as in success wise but to make music you know what I mean? They create like a whole barrier even to be in the creative process.” Similar to Baláž et al. (2022), the results of this study suggest that this motivation may be associated more with outside factors for musicians of color than simply an intrinsic motivator.

Control then grants the musicians interviewed a sense of freedom in their work. A sense of freedom was one of the main motivations identified in the data analysis process. This freedom manifests in a number of ways such as freedom to work on their own schedule and in the manner that works best for them. According to one interviewee, “For me personally, I like to be creative and do whatever I feel like in a moment's notice and that I'm able to do as an independent artist way more than under a label” (Interviewee 6). Maintaining freedom in their process is a motivation for many of the musicians to remain independent from a label. “I'm free to do everything that I want. So, I decide what I want to do...it's really nice to be independent artist in this time” (Interviewee 2). This desire for freedom is not unique to independent musicians of color and is common theme in literature on independent musicians. This aligns with Ryan and Deci (2000) which find that this perceived freedom in working comes from a need for autonomy in more intrinsically motivated individuals. However, despite the generalizability of freedom in creative entrepreneurial work, this study does find additional ways in which a desire for creative freedom is specific to independent musicians of color, namely when it came to music style and genre.

Maintaining freedom to choose the opportunities that best suit the artist and to make nonmainstream or “commercial” styles of music recurs throughout the interviews. Genre freedom is also a large motivator for musicians of color to remain independent as it provides them the space to create music that they would like rather than what is most marketable. One artist describes gaining this freedom as success in her career and a motivation to continue. “So, I have to make more commercial music to even make it? ... I walked away from it all

and I think that was a success for me” (Interviewee 5). Creating music that is outside of the expectations of marketability recurs throughout the interviews most often in relation to genre. Many artists describe feeling placed into genre boxes based on their race. For example, Interviewee 2 describes being billed as rapper despite not considering himself to make rap music. “When they booked me for a show and they like promote it and they like put like rapper...I automatically send an email to them, you need to delete that because I'm an artist, I sing, and I rap but I'm not a rapper...you don't need to like categorize me or put me in a box.” Therefore, for independent musicians of color, freedom as a motivator also refers to making music without race-based expectations of genre.

4.1.2 Success Goals

Defining success for the independent musicians of color interviewed, further develops the context for what is considered a barrier to reaching those success goals. The definitions of success found in this study can be applied to all independent musicians. It was found that when describing success, the participants of the study did not perceive race or ethnicity to be a factor in their success goals.

The main personal definitions of success described by the interviewees were financial stability and the ability to reach a larger audience. For some this financial security was the main criteria for success. “Success is for me when I get a lot of money so I can take care of people and also be happy” (Interviewee 2). For others, the financial gain that comes with success is simply a means to meet other goals such as creating resources for other independent artists and being able to access collaborators and wider audiences. “I don’t see a world where people who don’t make money off of music get the reach to where I would like” (Interviewee 10). The desire for financial security as a prerequisite goal to the independent musician’s other criteria for success rather than a final goal has been previously established in other studies. Similarly, Chen et al. (2017) finds that creative entrepreneurs often prioritize achievements over financial success. These results build upon this established research by defining what independent musicians perceive as achievements. Gaining a larger audience and the ability to perform for these audiences is a prime example of the success defining achievements that come as a result of financial stability.

“I want to touch millions of people. I want to stand at the Ziggo Dome or the Garden in New York. Like that's definitely one of the highest accomplishments I can get as performance wise.” (Interviewee 9). Performing for large crowds as a marker of success

aligns with current theory such as Chen et al.'s (2017) findings that for creative entrepreneurs, social recognition such as the recognition gained from performing for a large audience, is a common goal. One musician describes performing as the main method of generating more fans and expanding her audience, therefore making performing vital to success. "Well, the thing I enjoy most or one of the things is really like performing...that's when I connect to people the quickest as well...That's like how I convert watchers into fans the quickest. So that's my main thing. So, if I could just have like, I don't know, tours. It doesn't even have to be headlining." (Interviewee 6). For this musician, performing is a mechanism by which they can increase their fan base thus possibly increasing their sales, other performance opportunities, and financial success. This result refines existing self-determination theory by providing examples of the established interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for musicians (Bilton et al., 2021). While the enjoyment of performance may serve as an internal motivator, success seems to come from the extrinsic rewards of that performance.

4.2 Limits to Success

Through the analysis of the interviews with 11 independent musicians of color, significant barriers were identified that limit the levels of success for these musicians. The primary barriers limiting success were identified as the influence of music industry gatekeepers, music genre, and a glass ceiling for musicians of color specific to the context of The Netherlands. The influence of music industry gatekeepers and music genre interact with and contribute in some cases to the glass ceiling described by interview participants, so these will be discussed first to lay some foundation for understanding the glass ceiling for independent musicians of color in The Netherlands.

4.2.1 Industry Gatekeepers

Lacking access to the resources of a record label is a barrier presented by several participants. "I think that labels, they aren't really as much in control, but they do have a lot of resources" (Interviewee 1). For this participant, record labels do directly exert control over his career, but he still perceives them as gatekeepers of resources. This aligns with current research on the influence of record labels in the music industry such as that of Moro-Visconti (2022), which finds that record labels retain power over resources for musicians. While many participants were weary to define record label gatekeeping as something stopping them in

their careers, some did see signing to a label as an easier pathway to success. “Looking at opportunities you’d be like oh I really want to be signed to a label because they’ll push me to the next level” (Interviewee 4). While independent musicians have more access to resources than in the past, these findings align with Mall (2018) suggesting record labels continually maintain their status as gatekeepers in the music industry. These results add the perspective of independent musicians themselves to existing research on the power of record labels in the context of the current music industry.

The control of record labels over resources and opportunities presents a barrier for independent musicians however, for independent musicians of color, this problem seems to be exacerbated. This participant described experiences with white gatekeepers within the industry dictating her image and brand without her input: “That’s what happens when old white men run labels and they’re trying to tell you what the looks should be, what the sound should be. To which again, I’m very happy that I’m independent” (Interviewee 6). For some musicians of color, the control exerted by record goes beyond resources and directly impacts their creative work.

Other participants describe a feeling of white peers within the music industry having more power or access to these gatekept resources. For instance, interviewee 9 states, “I’m always more comfortable working with other black artists. And that’s definitely my go-to, but I definitely also still work with white artists because sometimes you also need a white man like in the corner to pull a little string.” There is an understanding from this statement that white artists have access to more resources through connections or simply just receiving more credibility for being white in the music industry. For the participants of this study, working with white musicians allows them access to resources that are typically held by record labels, radio stations, and other gatekeepers in the music industry. Correspondingly, Eikhof & Warhurst (2013), find that the unstable nature of work in the creative industries can make creatives, which in this context refers to independent musicians, dependent on gatekeeper resources and peers that have access to those resources. This study adds additional context to the use of peer of resources by defining it as a necessity for independent musicians of color to reach the same resources as their white peers.

In the age of streaming, many of the musicians interviewed also emphasized the importance of streaming services and particularly streaming services’ playlists. Getting placed on these playlists was an important step in gaining a larger audience for these artists. “Just to talk about being playlisted on Spotify is a hard thing because if you are playlisted on Spotify your track can go through the roof, right? And I knew this guy that had worked with

Spotify...but he's white and I just knew if I want my music to pop off, I'm gonna have to work with you" (Interviewee 5). Spotify playlists in this instance, are an example of the resources held by white gatekeepers within the Dutch music industry. Spotify has been identified as possibly having a great effect on an artist's streams (Bonini & Gandini, 2019) thus the results of this study suggest that Spotify itself is a gatekeeper for independent musicians of color. If being playlisted on Spotify is vital to success for independent musicians of color but their white peers have more access to avenues that get them playlisted, then this serves as a significant barrier. Interviewee 5 also points out the way that playlist categorization can present a barrier as a musician of color. "You will always be in like the urban playlist. I hate that...word but you'll be on the urban side." In this way, placement on a popular playlist is a barrier but also the types of playlists that independent musicians of color are being added to. If a song is added to a playlist based on the musician's race rather than their genre, this can mean their music is being exposed to listeners that are not relevant giving the illusion of access to a larger audience.

4.2.2 Genre

As described above in terms of playlists, many independent musicians described finding themselves put in certain categories based on music genre whether they consider themselves to make that music genre or not. "Urban" and "Hip Hop" are mentioned as the genre categories by which musicians of color encountered barriers. For instance, this participant finds that they are often placed in the hip hop or rap genre based on race rather than the music they make. "It's really irritating because I am a singer, but they automatically put me in the category like a rapper. And here in the Netherlands, it's really like, difficult to be... a black male rapper or artist, to be shown like an artist instead of a rapper. They always always do that." (Interviewee 2). The results contribute to previous studies which have shown that music genre is often used to quickly make associations with a particular race or ethnicity and can even impact behaviors towards that racial group (LaMarre et al., 2012). The additional layer to this concept described by participants is the way in which hip-hop and rap is also looked down upon while simultaneously being used as a categorization of musicians of color.

While this musician describes the frustration from being placed in a genre that he doesn't feel represents him, others find that while they do participate in the hip hop genre, it is not taken as seriously as others. "You do get kinda more weird looked at when you say I'm a

hip hop artist, rap artist. I haven't been taken serious sometimes, 'cause I was like, oh, I'm a hip hop artist, or I wanna be a rapper, 'cause they would already have this image of me" (Interviewee 9). This presents a unique challenge for independent musicians of color who struggle to be recognized as anything other than hip hop artists but also are not taken seriously as hip hop or rap artists. These results build upon, Reyna et al.'s (2009) study which finds that the hip hop genre is used as a reinforcer of attitudes towards black people, thus the classification of genre based on race adds more to this argument. Another artist finds a similar experience within the world music genre as well, "It's kind of like even a bit diminished in terms of level, the way...many people can see it" (Interviewee 8). Similarly, LaMarre et al., (2012) posits that genre serves as a proxy for maintaining attitudes about a group of people associated with that genre however, world music is vast genre making it difficult to decipher a single group of people this genre may be associated with within the Dutch cultural context. Therefore, some genres such as world music simply stand in place as a form of othering.

Genre also limits independent musicians of color in the ways that it creates boundaries for artists who do not wish to be defined by genre. Musicians in the study describe the genre perceptions from others in the industry as well as marketing expectations. "People who work with labels or something or like really in the industry...they'd be like, "Oh, you sound like him." And then in the industry they'll say like, "Oh, you're an R&B artist." And you're kind of half mainstream pop, half underground type music." (Interviewee 4). While some musicians in this study dislike being placed into a genre, others acknowledged the necessity of genre for marketing purposes. For instance, Interviewee 10 points out the difficulties of attempting to market without genre: "It's super difficult marketing wise. It's difficult to know what your audience is gonna be. It's, yeah, it's different because it's new and that genre doesn't exist. It's not popular because it's, yeah, it's a new thing. So, I imagine it's gonna be quite difficult." This is aligned with current research including Lena and Peterson (2008) which suggests industry expectations are vital to a musician's success. These results show that independent musicians are aware of this, and genre does still inform their work.

Given the necessity of genre in some ways, the hesitancy to embrace a particular genre lied in race for some participants. For instance, interviewee 4 describes the genre assumptions that they've experienced regarding race: "they'll say, yeah, it's like black people music, or it's like hip-hop for black people, or you know what I'm saying? Like you got a white people hip-hop, like Eminem." For independent musicians of color, genre can create a

seemingly inescapable situation of being associated with race and therefore being associated with stereotypes and biased beliefs.

4.2.3 Glass Ceiling in The Netherlands

The effects of these genre associated assumptions appear as the glass ceiling created for independent musicians of color in The Netherlands. Industry gatekeepers discussed above also contribute to creating and upholding what can best be referred to as a glass ceiling of success for independent musicians of color in The Netherlands. While success is still possible, participants express what they perceive to be a limit to the levels of success a musician of color can achieve.

For example, “I think there's like a stigma still going on, like a person of color cannot like reach the highest level of musicians, like the legends. People still talk more, I feel like, about white legends than musicians in history” (Interviewee 4). Another participant describes the markers for higher level success that musicians of color struggle to reach in The Netherlands, such as radio. “It's still being very white dominated. Also within like the top 40 and whatever gets played on big radio stations and big ... playlists. Yeah, it's time for that to be over a long time ago” (Interviewee 5). This suggests that there is a level of racial categorization present in what is deemed popular music. Accordingly, it is known that artists tend to be compared in racial categories (Van Venrooij & Schmutz, 2015) but, the comparison of musicians by race does not account for the lack of musicians of color on the top charts and at a higher status within the Dutch music industry. These results then suggests that racial categorization within the music industry offers an avenue by which racism or discrimination can affect the success outcomes of musicians of color.

This musician describes her difficulty in breaking that perceived glass ceiling: “Dutch people tend to like only go with what they know so if they don't know you, if you don't particularly look or sound like them, it's like you're gonna have a hard time breaking through that. Once you're broken through then you're good, then they're with you, but I do tend to notice a difference in the level of support you tend to get based on complexion” (Interviewee 6). This statement suggests that the barriers for independent musicians of color may not be overt but that over time they are noticeable in the careers of these musicians. There is also an implication that once a musician of color has reached a certain threshold, these barriers cease to be a problem, but it is not clear from these interviews where the musicians perceive this threshold to be.

Interviewee 11 states, “I think in the Netherlands there's a huge line in between the white folks and the black folks. Still, you don't get the same opportunities as the white folks.” This builds on current theories of institutionalized racism such as that of Weiner (2014) by establishing ways in which this impacts people of color in the music industry. For this participant, it is as simple as not receiving the same opportunities based on race. The glass ceiling present for the independent musicians of color in this study, prevents them from reaching a status where race no longer impacts their careers thus forcing them to work around constant barriers to reach a desired level of success.

4.3 Representation

In this study, representation looks at the way meanings ascribed to people of color in the music industry affects their success. This participant describes his struggles with feeling as though they need to be representative of a larger group but also true to himself: “I feel like it's my duty, but at the same time...music is bigger than me, right? Sometimes I want to do it, but I need to be in the moment, the space, and time to actually do that right... I do feel like I need to represent but, it's difficult for me to represent something that I'm not of course...so I guess by being myself I'm already representing myself” (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 10 also describes the lack of representation for themselves in the music industry, “I just try to be the representation that I didn't have when I was younger...I think it's really important for children because otherwise you get a bunch of people that are like lost in the sauce, I think, and feel like they have to conform for no good reason.” These experiences with representation contribute to current research which suggests a lack of representation can prohibit people of color from understanding their place in a certain context like the music industry (Kidd, 2016). It also adds a feeling of responsibility for musicians of color to then be the representation they may have lacked.

Interviewee 1 also describes this lack of representation for himself in the early days of his musical career specific to the electronic music genre. “I think looking back, I don't know how many years, I would say, let's say 10 years, 15 years ago, I didn't really see that many role models, like some people of color that were into the electronic music...I didn't really see those role models”. For independent musicians of color, this can be discouraging to not know what a career within the music industry or a specific genre within the music industry looks like. The representation discussed in these interviews was focused specifically on race and ethnicity. While it was not clear from these interviews how much of an impact the pressure of

representation has on the success of these independent musicians of color but, it is important to note that reckoning with their cultural identities in the music industry is a concern that their white peers may not have. These results provide additional context to the viewpoint of musicians of color in terms of the representations of other cultures as other in western music as described by Born & Hesmondhalgh (2000).

For others, the pressures of representation take on a political aspect in regard to audience perception. “I felt like, okay, you should be an activist now. And if I do or don't take a stand, they're going to perceive that in the same way. And that...will trickle into what I make and how they perceive what I make. So, I do think that my identity and what I stand for as a person impacts my career” (Interviewee 7). These results suggest the link between black social movements such as black lives matter, which this musician references here, and music as described by Dennis, (2016) creates an expectation of advocacy for musicians of color, namely black musicians. In this way, representations of race impact the audience perception and expectations of a musician of color. Representation exerts additional pressure on independent musicians of color through personal feelings of responsibility as well as outside expectations of behavior which may present barriers for them when navigating the music industry.

4.3.1 Stereotypes

Stereotypes based on race and ethnicity occur throughout the interviews in the experiences of musicians of color. “The dude told me... *“couldn't he figure out that you were a singer due to your hair and your color? ...It's actually due to your hair, like you had an afro...Couldn't he see that you're a singer?”* And I, yeah, that's one of the reasons why I don't hang out with this dude anymore. And I was like shocked that he would say something like that.” (Interviewee 8). This musician finds herself stereotyped as an entertainer simply based on her hair and skin tone. This aligns with Hayes et al. (2018) which establishes the mechanism by which stereotypes work however, it does not account for the way that specific stereotypes form. In this case, the stereotype being employed associated an afro and darker skin tone with musicians. This was an interesting discovery based on the fact that independent musicians of color in this study find that their looks present a barrier as musicians. Therefore, there could be additional layers to this stereotype such as the way these musicians are expected to perform and the music they make.

Other interviewees describe a similar stereotype based on an expectation of particular skills, interests, and talents because of their race and ethnicity. “Oh, that's why you make music because you're Moluccan. Oh, okay. That's like a stereotype that comes with being where I come from.” (Interviewee 5). This example of stereotyping also may have additional components such as genre expectations or not being taken as seriously as white musicians. For musicians of Moluccan descent and possibly other musicians of color making music may be perceived as part of their nature rather than a career that generates income. Interviewee 6 also describes a racial expectation that impacts her career. “You won't get the same attention as a black girl. Because then it's like, “*Oh, duh, black girl rapping*” ...we can't compete on that level when it comes to that, unfortunately because we won't get as much attention.” Similar to the work of Born & Hesmondhalgh (2000), these findings suggest stereotypes easily open doors for white artists within the same space to gain additional attention using appropriation. Thus, the appropriation of hip hop by white musicians does not lead to the same barriers for them as it does for black artists due to stereotyping.

4.3.2 Intersectionality

To provide an intersectional perspective to this study, participants were asked about other parts of their identity which they felt contributed to the barriers they face as independent musicians of color. For many, gender was an important factor and black women shared the ways that gender and racial barriers interact in their careers. “Well, first and foremost, I think everyone knows that this is a male-dominated industry. So, it was very disappointing to never see another female. And if I saw another female, they were like doing administration or like super silly jobs, but never within studio sessions. At least when I was starting out...So that was quite disappointing.” (Interviewee 5). These results support similar findings of underrepresentation of black women such as that of Topaz et al. (2022). This underrepresentation of black women can then discourage female independent musicians of color if they feel that they are alone in the music industry. “As a woman, I think it's really hard, but I'm a strong woman” (Interviewee 11). The lack of women in the music industry also opens the door for gender discrimination which for the female musicians in this study is compounded with racial discrimination. This aligns with Crenshaw (1989) which describes the interaction between racial and gender discrimination.

Similar to the findings of Mangani (2021), once black women have gained access equivalent to that of their male peers, they must still contend with the barriers based in race.

In addition to the lack of representation of women in the music industry, participants also shared stories of misogyny and harassment on part of their male peers in music. “He told me like one day like *when your career goes that good, you should get a boob job and stuff like that because like this you're not getting that far*” (Interviewee 11). For interviewee 8, these occurrences were demoralizing. “It made me feel like, when is this going to end? ... I managed to get out of some situations and others I didn't. But the reaction was always the same, like, hmm, interesting. When is this going to change? I used to think that it would change the moment that I would say something about it but even if I say something about it, it's still gonna happen to someone else.” These findings are similar to that of McCarry et al., (2023) which suggests violence against women in their careers is common with little accountability. In the context of this study, this can create barriers for black women in their careers as independent musicians as they must prioritize their safety when considering business opportunities and collaborations in a way their male peers do not.

4.4 Managing Entrepreneurial Tasks

As independent musicians, the participants of this study are responsible for handling entrepreneurial tasks in addition to making music. While not everyone interviewed identified themselves as an entrepreneur, all agreed on the necessity of some business tasks including marketing, managing finances, and securing opportunities. For example, interviewee 1 states, “I'm mostly focused on the business side of things so the things that independent artists should do when they're not having a team. So, working on the marketing, on content, on finding new artists to work with and everything besides that.”

Many of the musicians interviewed described the difficulties of managing entrepreneurial tasks on their own without the support of a team. For interviewee 11, she believes this is a barrier to reaching the next level of success: “I think that's because I'm independent or doing things myself. Because if you like have a good team behind you that basically does everything for you then you get to a place you would never go when you're doing it all by yourself. So, I think for me now that's the only thing that's yeah not holding me back but that's the reason that I'm not that big already.” While these results further confirm the managing of multiple tasks in addition to creative work as a common difficulty for creative entrepreneurs (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016), it was not directly clear from the results of these interviews if race impacted the managing of these tasks. One possible way race might be of note is in the securing of business partners or collaborators. “No one in my corner

right now does marketing so I'm really doing everything myself” (Interviewee 9). This participant points out a lack of help with marketing which is just one of the many business tasks independent musicians must manage as found by Klein et al. (2017). Business collaborators are possibly part of the resources, independent musicians of color perceive their white peers to have more access to.

4.4.1 Balancing Music and Business

Working without a team means that many of the musicians responsible for managing entrepreneurial tasks alongside creative work. There is often a struggle to balance these tasks without compromising their creative work. “It would be really great to outsource a lot of the business aspects to make sure that you can stay creative. I think that's a challenge a lot of independent artists have, balancing that.” (Interviewee 1). These results are aligned with Everts et al. (2021) finding that outside of creative work, musicians spend the most amount of time on business tasks. For independent musicians of color, no difference was found in the balancing of entrepreneurial tasks, however in the access to business resources that could provide more balance, race-based barriers were found. Interviewee 3 sees these tasks as now part of his daily life but still suggests there is some tradeoff to being creative or business minded: “I see a lot of artists that they lack in that sense, but of course they're also the ones that are very creative. Right? So, for me it's in the, in the balancing it because right now I'm a solo business. But sometimes I wonder like, okay, am I focusing too much on the business now? ...I've learned how to manage it into my daily life, you can say, and for me, it's not work anymore. It's just, it's just my life.”

Interviewee 8 finds that attempting to balance creative and business work can keep a musician from reaching higher levels of creativity: “The moment that you get to work with people that understand your vision or share your vision or want to work hard for it as well, it's way better than if you do it by yourself. Because the management part, the administration part is gonna keep you there, it's gonna keep you off and it won't give you the possibility to be more creative and be the type of artist that you actually want to be.” In conversations of balancing work, musicians seemed to fall into two separate categories similar to those found by Everts et al. (2021). For instance, Interviewee 3 viewed business tasks as part of his daily life and therefore necessity to the music. Overall, balancing of music and business tasks remains difficult for independent musicians but for those of color the inequality may lie in what business resources and knowledge they can secure to help them balance these tasks.

4.4.2 Business Knowledge and Resources

Acquiring business knowledge and resources can be a barrier to musicians who are solely responsible for all tasks related to their success. Education provides one method of acquiring business knowledge and resources as well as credibility when reaching out to potential collaborators or resource holders. Interviewee 7 describes the lack of business-related knowledge found in her music education: “I was a bit disappointed at the lack of guidance I got when it comes to the music industry. Because they did teach me how to get better at what I do, like singing, the production, the songwriting. But after I finished school, there was this big world of possibilities. And I didn't really know where to start. And they expect you to kind of get in there and do your thing. But the music industry is totally different from if you study music itself.” In this way the lack of music business education was a barrier for this musician when starting her career. This corresponds with Albinsson’s (2018) findings that musicians who do not receive formal business education may have a different business perspective. Interviewee 3 describes wanting more formal business education from the perspective of a musician who did not attend school for music. “Maybe they have a secret sauce that I don't know about. Or maybe they focus more on the finance side of things. How do I tackle that?” For both independent musicians of color that received a formal education and those that did not, there is a lack of business present that these musicians must then learn on their own.

Finding business resources and ways to learn about the music business then becomes an additional responsibility for the independent musicians. For the participants of this study, the music business knowledge seems to be acquired with the goal of not being taken advantage of but there is a divide in the knowledge and resources available to musicians of color outside of formal education. Interviewee 6 states “the whole business of a label I think is based on exploiting artists. They will exploit you and I don't think skin color has anything to do with that. But I think that certain networks are in place...some knowledge is available to certain people and other people.” These results show that a lack of access to these business-oriented resources based on race can present a large barrier for independent musicians of color adding to current academic theory that entrepreneurial work is vital to success (Albinsson, 2018).

For other musicians in the study, business knowledge is not something they desire to learn but would rather outsource. “I hated the business aspect of music, and I was never really

good at business like that but now I'm trying to get more into it but I'm really more focused on creating the art in business. I think once I get a team, I really need someone to, you know, help me with that, because that's like something I can't really do alone, 'cause that's like not my lane. I'm like, I'm not a businessman” (Interviewee 9). Going about acquiring business resources by building a team also presents the same barriers as musicians who want to handle business tasks themselves, in that exclusion from networks can also prevent them from finding people with the business skillset to manage these tasks.

4.5 Methods of Overcoming Barriers

This study sought to find what perceived barriers there are for independent musicians of color but also what methods these musicians use to overcome those barriers. The main methods of overcoming barriers described in the interviews were making use of networks, using a team, outsourcing work where possible, and marketing to a specific audience.

4.5.1 Networks

Networks were used by the independent musicians in this study in a number of ways to overcome the barriers in their careers including locating opportunities, collaborators, professionals such as photographers, and organizations that provide resources according to their needs. Without a label, musicians rely on networks to get things done. “So, there's this music conference in Amsterdam. It's like a big musician's conference where people who have experience or people who work at major labels...they kind of get together and give panel discussions, master classes, you can pitch demos, all kinds of things. So, you start talking to each other, follow each other on socials and kind of keep in touch and that was a way for me to kind of find people that work in the industry and that might be able to help me doing what I do” (Interviewee 7).

Another musician describes networking as an alternative to having a formal team. “I want my team and I want it to be strong. And that's the thing, ...when I was networking, I found everything. I found very interesting people until this day still network” (Interviewee 3). These findings that networks can provide an avenue for independent musicians of color to work around gatekeepers are aligned with Oukil, (2011) which suggests networks can be vital to creative entrepreneurs' success. Interviewee 9 sees the city of Rotterdam as a network itself. “I'll say the city and overall, if you hit up both the mics, jam sessions, and then you already can get a pretty good network...I feel like Rotterdam is definitely a big, big beneficial

network for independent artists to be at.” In this way, these networks seem to function as places to find opportunities and resources. This participant describes Rotterdam as a useful network for independent artists generally however, given the barriers described above for musicians of color, these Rotterdam based networks may be more of help compared to white independent musicians who may have access to these resources without the use of these networks.

Others found access to gatekeepers such as record labels through organization and school networks. “At that school, they have a study where people study like music management industry. And because she really likes my music, she hit up the A&R Warner 'cause she has connections with Sony Warner...So that's one thing that school really helps with is networking and they just have connections up there that other places don't really have” (Interviewee 9). For Interviewee 8, an organization provided access through offering financial support and credibility. “They gave me financial support for this. And they told me that I had to use that money like only...within musical goals. So, for me, it was easy just to use that money for my album and for my album release, which is what I did. And then, in the meantime, they gave me not only this opportunity to be the music ambassador for a whole year where I could also represent Rotterdam at some events, you know, and it also gave me the exposure and a certain respect that I have till today.” For these musicians network credibility allowed them to navigate spaces with more respect as Interviewee 8 states. For independent musicians of color, particularly those in the hip hop genre who struggle to be taken as seriously, this credibility can be vital in navigating the music industry.

4.5.2 Marketing to International Audiences

As defined in the motivations section of these results, many of the musicians interviewed defined success as control over their careers and financial stability. Given that the end goal for many of the artists was to be successful with their audience, choosing the audience to market themselves to can be a method of overcoming the barriers present in the mainstream Dutch music industry. Interviewee 4 states, “I used to do it in Holland and then all over, but now I'm just focused on America, Canada and the UK. Because it's like English language is strong in those countries and I don't want to be attached to the Netherlands in any way. Yeah, because I know my target audience is not here but like in America like somewhere else.” Similarly, Murphy & Hume (2023) find that independent musicians are constantly adapting to market music in the evolving music industry. The surprising finds of

this study indicate that musicians of color have no problem moving beyond their current market to other countries to avoid the barriers of one particular market. By marketing to an audience outside of The Netherlands, musicians may feel they have more control over their marketing environment not subject to the barriers of the Dutch music industry.

Interviewee 1 also established networks internationally, “In the first years I was really working in an international type of scope. My music is, I would say, considered international. I don't make Dutch music.” Interviewee 5 describes the resistance of record labels to market English music but ultimately found an audience elsewhere. “Making English songs and not Dutch songs is also a big thing over here because they're like, uh, nah, this won't work, there's no market for you out here. There's no market for English singing stars or whatever you want to be. There's no place for you...we got playlisted in the UK and in France. We got played on BBC radio. So, I was like, “*Oh, I know my gut feeling was right.*” So, no, I never considered Holland as my main audience.” Using English music to market outside the scope of The Netherlands offers a different perspective on the ways that independent musicians of color cope with barriers than what is currently available in related literature.

According to these results, English music may constitute a niche audience in The Netherlands but, by choosing to market themselves to the US and UK these musicians effectively create a much a larger mainstream audience. This somewhat contradicts the findings of Murphy & Hume (2023) which examine the ways that marketing to a niche audience can allow musicians to work within a smaller market. Some of the musicians interviewed did still desire a niche audience but defined that target audience by genre or style rather than language. For instance, Interviewee 7 states “I'd much rather create a community instead of being a big pop star that's not that's not me.” Largely, the choice to market to a larger audience to avoid the barriers present in the Dutch music industry is an interesting discovery of this research.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine what the perceived barriers to success are for independent musicians of color as well as what methods they use for overcoming these barriers. The research question guiding this study was: “What are the perceived barriers to success for independent artists of color in the music industry?” And the sub question “How do independent artists of color overcome these barriers to success?” The basis of the research includes theory and ideas related to race and ethnicity, creative entrepreneurship, and the

music industry. To measure barriers to success, the motivations, and goals of the independent musicians of color was also observed to build a working definition of success for the purposes of this research. Given that barriers measured in this analysis were subjective to the views of the interviewed musicians, it was important to understand their contexts. Through the qualitative analysis, it was found that there are several barriers that the musicians perceive on the basis of race, gender, and entrepreneurship.

5.1 Main Findings

The main barriers discovered for these musicians are genre-based discrimination, a glass ceiling enforced with stereotypes, and less access to resources than their white counterparts in the music industry. Genre was a perceived barrier for many artists in that it was often used as a placeholder for race or forms of othering (LaMarre et al., 2012). For example, many respondents discussed the use of the words urban and an association with hip hop and rap to refer to black musicians. Ultimately what could best be described as a catch-22 was discovered which pinned musicians of color into the urban genre category while simultaneously, discriminating against that genre. For independent musicians of color there is a struggle to be perceived as more than a rapper or urban artist despite the genre of music they make. Many of the musicians interviewed also perceived hip hop to be looked down upon and taken less seriously in the context of the Dutch music industry. Thus, the association of independent musicians of color with a genre that is avenue of discrimination was a massive barrier to success. There were no direct methods of overcoming the genre barriers found in this study, however genre can be understood as one of the methods by which a glass ceiling is maintained (Reyna et al., 2009). Therefore, the methods by which the musicians overcome the barriers attributed to a glass ceiling can be applied to genre as well.

A perceived glass ceiling was found to be a prominent barrier for the musicians interviewed as many believed musicians of color could not break through a certain level of success in The Netherlands while remaining independent. Record labels and platforms such as Spotify that generate playlists, were named as the main gatekeepers acting in this glass ceiling. Both were perceived to have control over means to success such as connections to collaborators, money, marketing resources, and a large audience (Janssen & Verboord, 2015). To navigate this glass ceiling, musicians relied on networks to gain access to the resources held by gatekeepers. There was also a common perception that white independent musicians have more access to resources in the music industry including business resources and gatekeeper connections than independent musicians of color. Many of the musicians

interviewed also described working with white people in the music industry out of necessity to gain access to the resources they could not otherwise such as Spotify playlists, radios, and record label resources. The participants of the study that did have previous record label experience also felt that as musicians of color there were different expectations of them based on their race.

The most unexpected outcome of this research was the method by which many musicians opted to overcome the barriers to success in the Netherlands. For some English music making musicians, their perceived glass ceiling was specific to the Dutch music industry, therefore marketing to other markets provided a means of getting around the glass ceiling. These musicians then chose to market their music to audiences outside of the Netherlands, namely the US and UK. Given that many of the musicians interviewed view their music as international, their target audience is also international. For these participants, the barriers present for them in the Dutch music industry have made them more inclined to focus their efforts elsewhere. While the US and UK markets have their own barriers, it was interesting to learn that for independent musicians based in the Netherlands, these markets were perceived to be more accessible to them.

Examining the experiences of independent musicians through the lens of race and ethnicity provides a new theoretical perspective to already existing research. The main theories used for this study were creative entrepreneurship, network, representation, and nature of the music industry. Creative entrepreneurship was used to build a framework for the entrepreneurial side of being an independent musician. Tessler & Flynn (2016) and Walzer (2016), provided a basis for the entrepreneurial tasks that independent musicians must manage as well as the nature of the music industry. This study contributed additional context to this theory in the way that the lack of access to business resources for independent musicians of color can make the managing of entrepreneurial tasks more difficult.

Network theory was applied as both a possible source of barriers for independent musicians of color and a method for overcoming barriers such as gatekeepers (Lee, 2015). The study found that networks are mainly used as a method of overcoming barriers rather than presenting a barrier itself for independent musicians of color. This aligns with current theory as well as providing practical examples of the ways that networks are used such as to find opportunities, collaborators, and resources.

Representation and stereotypes were used to build the context for understanding the ways that race, genre, and gender can impact people of color in the creative industries based on the work of Alacovska & O'Brien (2021) and Jacobson, (2015) for example. Campbell

(2018) also offered a strong framework for understanding some of the ways barriers can manifest in creative work. The main academic contribution to this theory came from the finding of the way that the urban genre is used to create and enforce barriers for independent musicians of color. The main theories used in the theoretical framework for this study proved suitable and relevant to the analysis conducted.

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews was selected as the method of research and analysis to gather data reflecting the participants personal experiences and opinions (Boeije, 2009). Semi structured in depth interviewing, allowed for exploratory meaning making as well as the incorporation of current theory using an interview guide. This allowed the researcher to guide the conversation in a way that was most relevant to the study while allowing participants to share opinions that may not have been included in the initial framework of the study.

5.2 Implications

Ultimately the results of this study can offer independent musicians of color tips on how to strategize and navigate the Dutch music industry. For musicians, making use of networks can be a vital step in ensuring long term opportunities. In addition, to opportunities networks can offer necessary tools for managing the entrepreneurial tasks that come with being an independent musician. Being aware of genre implications and stereotypes can also help musicians combat the discrimination they may receive as a result. For instance, a focus on methods of marketing outside of traditional channels may offer the musician more control over these genre associations. A lack of representation can also be used to gain footing within a particular context for some musicians, as some of the musicians in this study found opportunity based on representation.

For gatekeepers such as record labels and other large music platforms like streaming services there are also future implications of these findings. Creating a more inclusive team within these organizations is one way to combat discrimination from the inside. Given the use of marketing to audience outside of the Netherlands, independent musicians of color feel that there are too many barriers presently to reach their audience in the Dutch context. Record labels and platforms can alleviate that by assisting musicians in reaching their target audiences in the Netherlands. Collaborations with smaller community networks may also contribute to a more inclusive music industry.

5.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the sample. The sample of independent musicians were mostly based in Rotterdam meaning many of them may utilize the same networks and the generalizability of their experiences to the whole of the Dutch music industry may not be accurate. The selection of participants in the sample also heavily relied on the personal bias of the researcher to select people of color for the interviews and required the interviewees to self-identify. Given the requirements of the sample, there were less systemic methods applied in choosing the sample. The socio-economic backgrounds of the participants could have also provided additional contexts. The analysis method of thematic analysis is also subject to the possibility of researcher subjectivity however, this was mitigated with transparency and systematic coding.

5.4 Avenues for Further Research

A main contribution to theory made by this thesis is the use of hip hop as a categorization of musicians of color as well as a method of excluding musicians of color from networks, resources, and credibility. Further research into this topic could provide insight into how this exclusion is enacted. For instance, examining how gatekeepers function in this context could offer a basis for removing these barriers and creating a more inclusive music industry. Additionally, the role of Spotify playlists as gatekeepers came about in the interviews. The Spotify algorithm has a big effect on independent musicians, and it would be interesting to find out the ways in which Spotify playlists differ for musicians of color with further research.

Marketing to international audiences as a method of coping with barriers to success is another key takeaway from this research. Given the use of marketing to the US and UK to avoid the barriers present in the Dutch music industry, further research on the implications of this would add more context to these results. For instance, if more musicians are focused internationally, this could affect the outcomes for the Dutch creative industries as a whole. This information could also be useful from a managerial perspective to determine what changes could be made in the Netherlands to encourage independent musicians of color. This research would be relevant to policy changes as well, to encourage the continued growth of the creative industries.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Definition of Success/Motivations

- What inspired you to become an independent musician and what motivates you to continue as an independent musician?
- How do you balance the creative aspect of making music with the business side of being an independent musician?
- How do you manage the uncertainty of being an independent musician?
- How do you define success as an independent musician?
- In your experience, what are some of the most important qualities or skills that successful independent musicians possess?

Securing Resources

- What resources do you go to find specific information about music production or the music industry?
- Can you discuss any strategies or approaches you have used to find resources?
- What role does networking and building relationships play in your success as an independent musician and how do you go about cultivating these connections?

Opportunities

- How do you go about identifying opportunities in the music industry, and what strategies do you use to capitalize on these opportunities?
- Can you describe any collaborations or partnerships that have helped you find opportunities or tools?
- In what ways do you believe race affects your opportunities in the music industry?
- In what ways do you believe technology has affected the opportunities available to you?

Networks

- Have you found that social media and online platforms have helped you to build networks and connect with other musicians of color?
- Have you found that there are specific communities that have been particularly supportive for musicians of color?

Personal Perception

- How has your personal experience as a musician of color shaped your perspective on inequalities within the music industry?
- Can you discuss any instances where your identity has influenced your experience as an independent artist?
- How do you feel your race or ethnicity contributes to the uncertainty of being an independent musician?
- How have you navigated challenges related to representation and identity within your music career?
- How do you see the intersection of race, gender, or sexuality in the music industry and how does that affect you?

Outside Perception

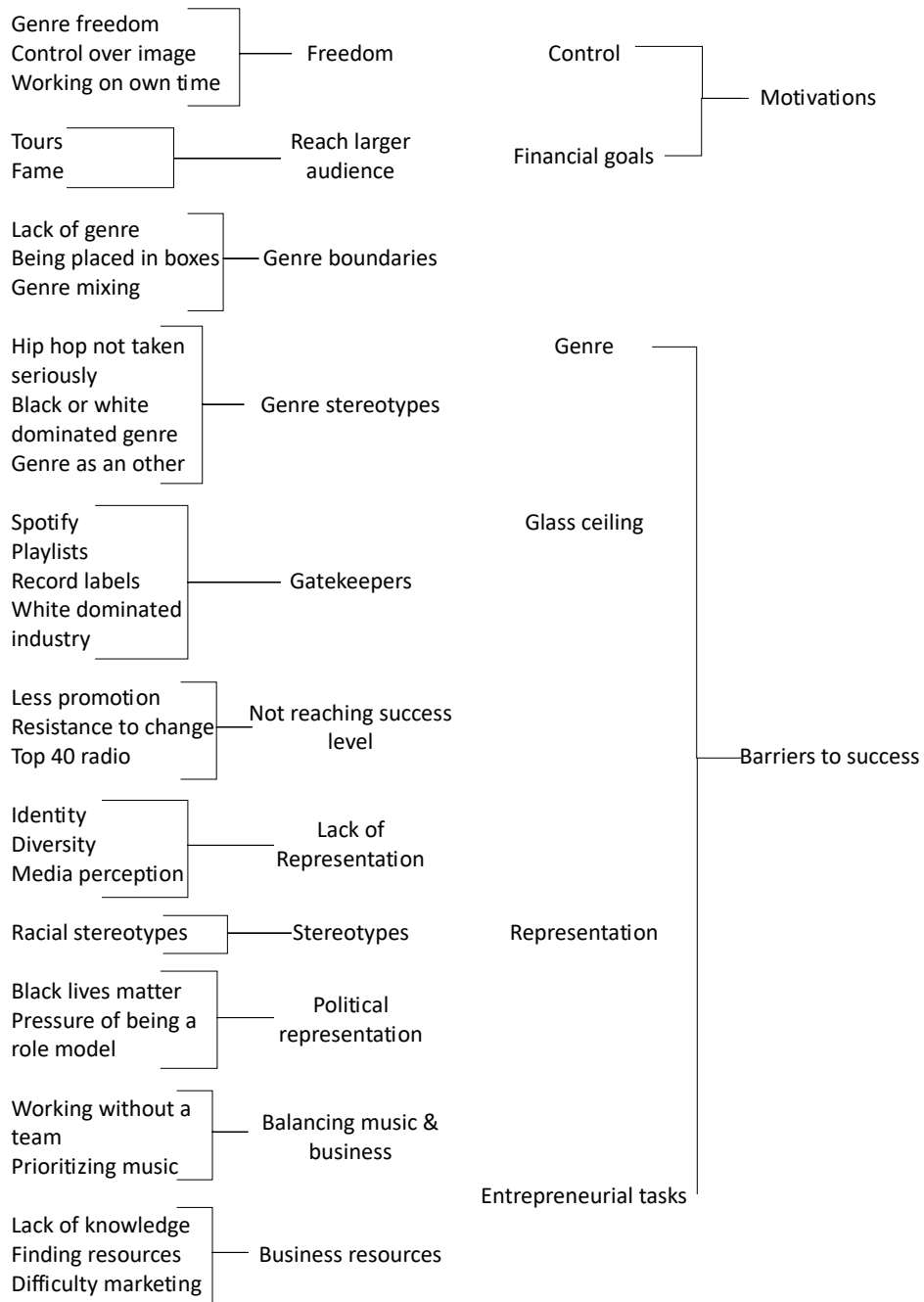
- How do you believe gatekeepers such as large record labels have affected your career?
- Which genre of music do you make?
 - How do you feel (blank genre of music) is perceived by others?

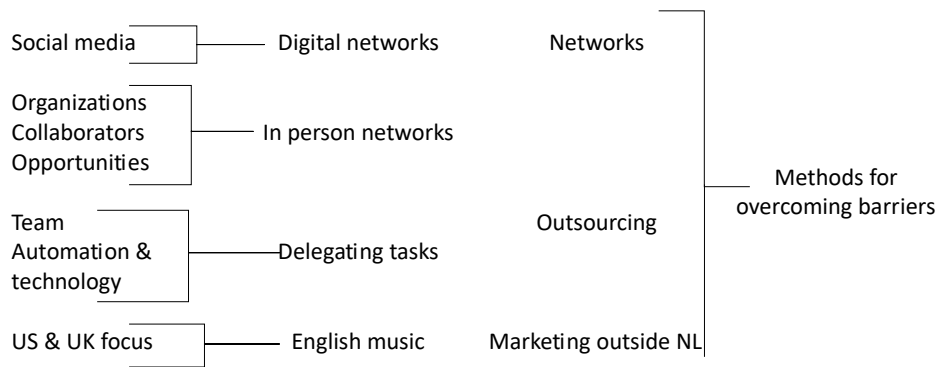
- Can you speak to any instances where a lack of representation in the music industry has affected your own experiences as an artist? – depending on the conversation this question may be changed to representation of (insert race, or genre)
- If any, can you speak to the impact of any stereotypes and biases you've experienced as an independent musician?
- Can you describe a time when assumptions made about your identity impacted the way you were treated as an independent musician?

Music Industry

- In your opinion, what role do independent musicians of color play in the broader music industry?
- Have you seen any changes regarding representation in the music industry and if so, how?
- How do you think the music industry can better represent audiences of color?
- What advice would you give to aspiring independent musicians of color who are looking to find opportunities?

Appendix B: Coding Tree





Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Information and consent form

Experiences of Independent Musicians of Color

Introduction

Hello, I am Sydney Brakie and I am conducting research for my master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am conducting research on the experiences of independent musicians of color in The Netherlands. I am conducting this research independently: there is no financial contribution to this study.

I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

What is the research about?

This research is about the experiences of independent musicians of color in The Netherlands including how they find opportunities, network, and any possible barriers to success.

What can you expect?

An interview:

This research will consist of one interview and will last approximately 1 hour. I will make an audio recording of the conversation.

Many of these questions will be about personal experience. If you do not want to answer a question during the interview, you are not required to do so.

You decide whether to participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

During the interview, personal questions will be asked about potentially upsetting events you may have experienced regarding race. These may trigger unpleasant memories and emotions.

What data will I ask you to provide?

I will ask you to provide a full name and phone number or email address so that I can be in contact with you. This data will not be used in the study.

During the interview, the following personal data will be collected from you: Age, gender, occupation, cultural background, ethnic background, opinions/ feelings about the music industry, and audio recordings.

Who can see your data?

- I store all your data securely.
- Only persons involved in the research can see the data. Only I have access to your data such as your name, phone number, and email address.
- Recordings are transcribed. Your name is replaced with a number/made-up name.
- Data such as your name, phone number, and email address will be stored separately from the transcription.
- The thesis including the results of the study will be published publicly in Erasmus's thesis repository. The results will be accessible by anyone.

- I may use your specific answers in the thesis. If your answer can be traced to you, I will ask your permission first.

Do you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please contact me.

Name: Sydney Brakie

Phone number: +31 6 48 45 86 20

Email: 661648sb@student.eur.nl

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Declaration of Consent

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered. I know that I am allowed to stop at any time.

By signing this form, I

1. consent to participate in this research.
2. consent to the use of my personal data;
3. confirm that I am at least 18 years old.
4. understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time; and
5. understand that my data will be anonymised for publication, educational purposes, and further research.

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.

Required for research participation,

Data

I consent to the researcher's collection, use and retention of the following data:
Ethnicity, race, personal opinions

Audio recording

I consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Name of participant:

Participant's signature:

Date: