

Authenticity as a Reputation Building Tool Used to Facilitate Success for Indie Artists

An Interview-based Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Modern indie musicians struggle to earn a livable income from their work; this issue is exacerbated by increasing inflation, dominance of streaming, rise of AI use in the music industries, and growing competition caused by low barriers of entry to access to music making. This thesis intends to find potential solutions to aid the career success of starting indie musicians by exploring the deliberate use of authenticity, hereby defined as “a truthful and sincere presentation of self to one’s audience in a way that is in accordance with one’s own and the audience’s values,” among successful indie musicians in aiding to build a reputable and successful career for themselves. This use of authenticity, if used deliberately, is theorised to have the potential to become a tool for success for starting indie artists. Accordingly, the research question posed asks: How can authenticity as a reputation building tool be used by indie music artists to foster career success? The approach taken was thematic analysis of interviews with successful indie music artists, with the data set being composed of two self-conducted interviews and 36 existing media interviews (i.e., magazine articles and video interviews) with 27 indie music artists of various degrees of success, measured by active listener base on Spotify. The coding process was done manually on paper, without the aid of softwares or artificial intelligence. The findings show that indie artists are not consciously curating authenticity or aiming for success. They create music out of a place of genuine self-expression and a love for music (production), without overly concerning themselves with others perceptions of them or their music. Therefore, the paradoxical answer for how indie artists can cultivate success via reputation building with authenticity is to not plan for success and just enjoy the craft without expectations. However, some suggestions for success-building have been provided. This thesis highlights on why ‘making it’ in the creative industries is often hard to achieve by deliberate planning or hard work.

KEYWORDS: *authenticity, indie artist, career success, music industries, reputation*

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1. Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

In April 2025, Lana Del Rey debuted her new song titled “57.5” on stage at the country music festival Stagecoach, held annually in California (Stagecoach Festival 2025; Emotion Big Life, 2025). The indie artist’s more than a decade-long music career has amassed her tens of millions of listeners on Spotify. It is this listener count she references in the chorus of her new song, where she sings “I got 57.5 million listeners on Spotify” (Emotion Big Life, 2025; Lana Del Rey – 57.5, n.d.; Lana Del Rey, n.d.). In the song, which is her proclamation of success, she reveals her ‘secret to success’ by singing “if you want the secret to success, I suggest showing up in a Ross¹ dress,” and later “if you want the secret to success, I suggest stop tryna hit it big time” (Emotion Big Life, 2025; Lana Del Rey – 57.5, n.d.). In other words, she is saying that a down-to-earth and uncorrupted-by-career-ambitions approach is what has worked for her. Furthermore, she suggests this authenticity to be the simple self-proclaimed secret to a successful career (one measured by and reflected in her Spotify statistics) and an overall high reputation as a music artist (Fetveit, 2015, p. 202). By stating in her self-referential lyrics that showing up consistently (even in a cheap dress) is what matters; she indicates that does not need flashy expensive outfits to impress audiences, because she knows her talent and music are where her value as an artist lies (Records, 2025).

All in all, Lana Del Rey’s lyrics are a sort of lyrical response to a recurring question regarding her ‘secret to success’ — a crucial question which is likely on the minds of many starting indie music artists, who struggle to turn their passion into a viable job or career, only further exacerbated by modern issues that plague many indie music artists and other creative workers alike (Berkers et al., 2023, p. 136; Hesmondhalgh, 2020, pp. 3596, 3598; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2009, p. 7; Kelman, 2025, p. 196; Li, 2025, p. 1).

The idea of authenticity, held in high regard in the (indie) music scene, can be a confusing concept, and must be first defined in order to be better understood and investigated with regards to indie music artists (Baym, 2019, p. 171). Within the context of this thesis, the working definition derived for authenticity is a truthful and sincere presentation of self to one’s audience in a way that is in accordance with one’s own and the audience’s values. The conceptual development process of deriving this working definition from literature is presented in Chapter 2 (see section 2.1).

1.2 Literature Gap

Prior literature on the importance of authenticity in the music industries has focused on its determining factor on success in the music industries, one that is often overlooked, as authenticity

¹ Ross is a discount retail store in the United States, known for its cheap clothing (Company History Ross Stores, 2023). The lyric is a likely reference to a dress she wore to the 2020 Grammys, whereby she infamously told reporters she got her dress last minute from the shopping mall (Hahn, 2020).

makes music “a product we can identify with, produce with conviction, consume with belief” (Askin & Mol, 2018, p. 28). Additionally, authenticity has been considered especially relevant for indie music artists as ‘authenticity’ (or ‘realness’) is a way of measuring and determining the reputation of a music artist — a common measure of ‘goodness’ in the indie music genre (Baym, 2019, p. 171). Considering its importance, authenticity can have determining power as it has financial consequences for the success of an artist. This is because an artist's authenticity, as defined earlier, affects how they are seen and evaluated by the audience, in other words determines their reputation to a considerable degree, and thereby influences the audience’s behavioral intentions towards the music artist and their work (Moulard et al., 2014, p. 586).

However, literature on indie music artists and authenticity rarely looks at the intersection of the two, with Portman-Smith & Harwood (2014), Strand (2013), and Dolan (2010) being some of the few existing pieces of academic literature exploring this intersection in a manner that can be considered comparable to the approach taken on the topic herein. More often, the study of authenticity has been applied to music artists in general or focuses on another genre of music artists, such as pop musicians. Additionally, there is a considerable lack of qualitative insight into artists’ own views on their own authenticity and its self-perceived impact on their success via its assumed impact on reputation. To the best of the author’s knowledge, there are, for example, no interview-based (or ones based on similar qualitative methods) qualitative studies with indie music artists on the matter of authenticity.

Notably, the existence of successful or mainstream indie music artists is paradoxical in its nature for several reasons. Firstly, the term indie denotes an independent way of music production, one that is, by definition, uncorrupted by record labels or other outsiders, yet there exist many successful indie artists that have been tied to major record labels and have whole teams working for them (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35, 51). Secondly, within the indie music scene, especially among the audience, achieving mainstream success is often frowned upon, as mainstream popularity is in direct opposition to the values of indie listeners (Strand, 2013, pp. 66-68). Hereby, this thesis aims to get better insight into this contradiction of the existence of very successful (arguably, even mainstream) indie artists.

In sum, this thesis aims to fill in the following research gaps and matters: (1) minimal academic insight on authenticity in indie artists, (2) general scarcity of literature on indie music artists, (3) lack of qualitative subjective insights into indie music artists’ own perceptions on the matter, and (4) understanding the contradictory nature of successful indie artists. The practical relevance of these literature gaps will become evident later in this introduction (please refer to section 1.5.3).

1.3 Research Question & Objectives

All things considered, the central research question this thesis aims to answer is as follows: How can authenticity as a reputation building tool be used by indie music artists to foster career success? Furthermore, the objective of this thesis is to investigate whether authenticity is, in the context of indie music artists' careers, deliberately curated, and whether this quality of seeming authentic is innate and natural, or rather something an artist needs to consciously and laboriously portray. Some questions considered are: Are there specific methods used to build authenticity? Is authenticity a priority to indie artists? Is an authentic reputation a conscious career-related goal?

The aim is to provide an answer to these questions via thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with successful indie music artists in order to provide an insight into the career-building world of indie music artists. The conclusive findings of this thesis aim to serve as pointers for up-and-coming indie artists looking to further their careers via reputation.

1.4 Key Concepts & Definitions

The definition of 'indie' when it comes to both the music and artists making music characteristic of the genre is a fuzzy area as it is highly contested as to who or what fits into the parameters of its vague definition (Brown, 2012, p. 520). On the one hand, 'indie' can refer to the genre of music originating from punk music or to the independent nature of music production, i.e., not being tied to a global music label and opting for the DIY (do-it-yourself) model of music production (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). The latter arose as a style of production due to (punk) artists seeing being tied to a record label as a restriction to express one's true artistic vision freely and also the culprit behind losing touch with one's audience (Bennett, 2018, p. 134). Therefore, the DIY artist relies on their self-efficacy and thus assumes full control of both their music production as well as strategizing its marketability (Hughes et al., 2016, pp. 24-26).

As noted earlier, indie music, however, goes beyond just the style of music production and has evolved into a well-established music genre of its own that nowadays constantly challenges mainstream music aesthetically (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35, 51). As mentioned, in the world of indie, (the appearance of) authenticity matters greatly and thus becomes a criterion of judgement (Baym, 2019, p. 171). Similarly, the connotation of the term 'indie' in music can also signal social differentiation and plays a key role in its marketing (Hibbett, 2005, p. 55).

Within the context of this thesis, indie music is defined first and foremost as the aesthetic musical genre characterised by distinct timbre, which is described according to Pons et al. (2017, p. 2745) as "the 'color' or the 'quality' of a sound" (Blake, 2012, p. 1, 11).

Taking into consideration the context given, the derived working definition in this thesis for an indie music artist simply defines them as a music artist whose music is aesthetically categorised to

fall under the umbrella of ‘indie’ by the general media, regardless of their production style. The term “umbrella of ‘indie’” has been used here to denote the somewhat problematic “motley collection of genres and styles” that make up the indie music genre, such as indie pop, indie folk, indie rock, *etc.* (Blake, 2012, p. 1). This choice of definition has been made considering the fact that many established indie artists do not employ the DIY model (any more) and instead are tied to a record label. Regardless, many are still considered indie artists as their music fits into the aesthetic umbrella genre of indie.

The other key concepts reflected in the research question, namely, reputation and career success, will be explored at length and defined in the theoretical framework chapter (see sections 2.2 and 2.3).

1.5 Relevance

1.5.1 Choice of Topic & Personal Relevance

As indicated at length, the focus in this thesis will be on indie music artists specifically, as opposed to music artists in general. The choice to focus on specifically indie music artists was made due to the author’s personal affinity for indie music, prior amateur knowledge of indie music artists, and a fascination to study a genre of artists who uniquely stand out in the music industries due to their alternative mode of music production. Additionally, the author had made personal observations in media regarding indie artists being held up to higher standards of authenticity than, for example, pop music artists — sparking an interest to study the intersecting world of authenticity and indie music artists.

In general, indie music is a genre that emerging adults alike (the author included) gravitate towards due to its perceived rawness, relatably human lyricism, and an authenticity that seems almost innately descriptive of the genre and its artists (Cateforis, 2019, p. 485; Dolan, 2010, p. 462).

1.5.2 Social & Practical Relevance

The art of succeeding in the modern music industries is no easy feat; it is a complex interplay that goes beyond the quality of the music itself. While some listeners practice the philosophy of separating the art from the artist, in this case the music from the music artists, it is often easier said than done. The modern music artist is more than just a name and face on an album cover – they are a human brand with a social media presence, a website, and often also a presence on several music streaming platforms (Porto et al., 2024, p. 345-346). Thus, in the modern information age, audiences are constantly exposed to the music artists they enjoy, their personalities and their practices in the media. This exposure inevitably shapes audience opinions of said artists, thus determining their success. In other words, artists are constantly under surveillance and thus how they

are perceived (online) matters, perhaps more than ever (Choi, 2016, pp. 484-485). Therefore, a music artist rightfully believes that their reputation affects their career success, and thus intentionally curates it for their benefit (Everts et al., 2022, p. 1). Therefore, it is important that artists learn to leverage the determining power of maintaining a reputable image. For example, research has found that indie music artists significantly benefit from having a social media presence, thus paying special attention to such aspects, like media presence, makes sense for artists looking to foster career success (Leenders et al., 2015, pp. 1812-1813).

Evidently, the issue of achieving career success via reputation building is a socially and practically relevant issue for music artists. It is especially relevant in the indie music sphere where the do-it-yourself approach to music production creates a low barrier of entry, leading to fierce competition between up-and-coming independent artists (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2009, p. 7; Hughes et al., 2016, foreword). This is why many of them are looking for new ways to “make it” in the music industries — to attract loyal audiences, to turn a hobby into a career, and to be admired and respected as an artist (Everts et al., 2022, p. 5; Hughes et al., 2016, pp. 24-26).

As stated, this thesis aims to introduce authenticity as a potential reputation building tool, demonstrating its value and nuances via investigating the success of prominent players in the indie music field. The author sees great practical value in providing insights on this novel low-cost and (potentially) high-reward tool that both new and also established indie artists could benefit from and integrate associated practices into their work with the hopes of it leveraging their career. It could aid starting indie artists both short and long term who usually do not have access to certain resources nor industry connections, like those that are more accessible to and thus utilised by non-independent artists in building up their careers (Hanorsian, et al., 2025). Therefore, (indie) artists are seeking out other ways of building up their reputation (Everts et al., 2022, p. 2).

Generally, the music industries’ labour market, like many creative industries, is hard to break into; this is due to the aforementioned fierce competition enabled by ease of technological access to music production (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2009, p. 7). Additionally, the (financial) rewards, in return, are often minimal and unreliable, with even successful indie music artists often earning considerably less than required by the national minimum wage and struggling to afford even basic necessities, such as health insurance (Berkers et al., 2023, p. 142; Cateforis, 2019, pp. 481-482). This further complicates the matter for already disadvantaged and precarious starting music artists who are trying to build up their careers, establish themselves, and stand out from the crowd (Everts et al., 2022, p. 2). On top of the usual matters, music artists of the 2020s also grapple with unique modern issues, such as struggling to afford pursuing music as a career during a cost of living crisis, prevalence of streaming (and its negative financial implications on the artist), concerns of marginalisation due to the rise of AI-use in the music industries, and a global pandemic inhibiting

their work (e.g. strict limits on live music events) (Berkers et al., 2023. p. 136; Hesmondhalgh, 2020, pp. 3596, 3598; Kelman, 2025, p. 196, Li, 2025, p. 1). All of the aforementioned issues have made it only harder to make a viable career out of music production in the modern music industries and contemporary society, emphasising the on-going need for academic insight on how success can be achieved in the modern music industries, hereby, specifically, in the indie music scene.

1.5.3 Academic Relevance

In addition to aiming to fill in the previously mentioned literature gaps, this thesis aims to build on the work of Everts et al. (2022) (“Milestones in music: Reputations in the career building of musicians in the changing Dutch music industry”) by proposing authenticity as a unique or previously unconsidered reputation building tool for (indie) artists.

1.6 Reading Guide

The remainder of the thesis is divided into four major chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two provides a theoretical overview by investigating relationships between key concepts of authenticity, career success, and reputation, informed by the most recent academic ideas and findings. Following, in chapter three, the methodological approach taken to study indie music artists’ views on matters of authenticity and beyond is explained and justified. In this chapter, the reader can expect to get acquainted with the qualitative research design involving in-depth interviews, the sample of indie music artists studied, data collection (i.e., interview procedure), and, lastly, the thematic data analysis process involving explanations of the various stages of coding. Additionally, ethical considerations are mentioned at the end of chapter three. In chapter four, the findings and results of the thematic analysis of interviews will be presented in thematic order. Namely, the findings have been organised into subchapters following the main themes, illustrated with notable quotes, and discussed at-length. Lastly, chapter five provides a conclusion that seeks to provide an overview of the thesis and provide a satisfying answer to the research question and other objectives. All in all, the reader can expect an academic inquiry into the world of authenticity and its role in the career success of indie music artists, done so via a comprehensive literature review and an analysis of interviews with successful indie music artists.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Authenticity

2.1.1. Defining Authenticity

To begin defining and conceptualising the elusive idea of authenticity, in the music industries and beyond, dictionaries offer a concise and clear starting definition on which to build upon.

Britannica equates the quality of being authentic with something “real or genuine, not copied or false” and something that is “true and accurate” (“Authentic,” n.d.). Similarly, the Cambridge dictionary simply defines authenticity as “the quality of being real or true” (“Authenticity,” n.d.).

These definitions, however noticeably, lack a point of comparison, and therefore questions, such as, “True or accurate to what?”, begin to surface. This lack of objectivity begins to shed light on why literature has rendered the concept of ‘authenticity’ difficult to precisely define (Newman & Smith, 2016, p. 609).

Authenticity has highly varying definitions depending on the context in which it is defined (Van Leeuwen, 2001, pp. 392-393). In a literature review on authenticity, Newman and Smith (2016, p. 610-611) find that by some definitions, authenticity seeks to validate whether or not something or someone lives up to what or who they claim to be, and thus assigns value based on that verified accordance; in that sense, authenticity is said to be about validity (Van Leeuwen, 2001, pp. 396). These definitions match well with the definition used by Peterson (2005, p. 1086, 1091) who has defined authenticity as “a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others”. Hereby, he suggests that authenticity is created via interaction between fans and artists. These definitions also resemble that of Dutton’s idea of expressive authenticity which he defines as “true expression of an individual’s or a society’s values and beliefs” (Dutton, 2003, p. 259; Newman & Smith, 2016, p. 611). Dutton admits that expressive authenticity is highly subjective, and the same can be said of iconic authenticity, wherein the audience’s expectation is *de facto* subjective, meaning different audiences and even different audience members might have differing expectations and values, and by extension different criterions or definitions for authenticity. Put in a larger context, expressive authenticity falls within the category of ‘value authenticity’, labelled so by Newman and Smith (2016, p. 613), this type of authenticity is concerned with the intentions of moral agents — whether or not their motivations are intrinsic, driven by passion for the task, rather than (financial) reward; and whether one’s actions are in alignment with a particular culture. This type of authenticity is often attributed to companies and persons, deeming it a potential match to also be extended onto indie music artists. While this type of authenticity is also deemed subjective, it can be argued that the context or framework of comparison (e.g. the indie music culture) in which it operates is actually rather objective, meaning cultures have

set frameworks and rules that fall outside the subjective scope of the validator (Newman and Smith, 2016, p. 613).

Taking all of the aforementioned into consideration, a working definition of authenticity for this thesis is one that takes into consideration the key nuances and commonalities of various definitions provided and their applicability onto indie music artists. Therefore, the working definition of authenticity is “a truthful and sincere presentation of self to one’s audience in a way that is in accordance with one’s own and the audience’s values”. This definition was decided best suitable as it includes the role of the audience and its determining value upon an artist, while also taking into consideration the artist’s own value judgement; hereby, striking a balance between perceived authenticity by outsiders (i.e., the audience) and the intended or self-perceived authenticity by the artist (i.e., the self).

2.1.2 The Psychology of Authenticity

While the previous approach to authenticity was somewhat philosophical in nature, there is also plenty to be said on authenticity in psychological literature. One of the most notable and cited works on authenticity in psychology comes from Wood et al. (2008), who set out to measure authenticity and composed a 12-point scale to (quantitatively) measure authenticity. Their findings validate the legitimacy of a tripartite definition of authenticity whereby it is defined as the congruency between a person’s inward experience, their recognition of inner states, and their outwardly expressed actions (Wood et al., 2008, pp. 386, 389). Their 12-point authenticity scale, based on the aforementioned tripartite definition, was divided up into three subscales, which were made up by the relationships between the aforementioned three levels in the tripartite definition of authenticity. While an in-depth explanation of said subscales is beyond the scope of this literature review, it is notable that all of them (self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence) were positively correlated with happiness; in other words, authenticity was linked to subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and self-esteem (Wood et al., 2008, pp. 389, 395-396).

Supporting their findings, a meta-analysis by Sutton (2019, pp. 2, 11-12) looked at the correlation between authenticity and well-being, and found that authenticity to be a key to not only well-being and high self-esteem, but also a buffer against stress. In summary, psychological research indicates that acting in accordance with one’s own internal world (i.e., being authentic) feels good.

2.1.3 Authenticity in (Indie) Music

As explored in the introduction, authenticity is nearly synonymous with the concept of indie music itself. Baym (2019) talks about music genres, such as indie, holding authenticity as a value in

such high regard that it becomes a measure of judgement for the music artists navigating that subculture. To explain why this is, she gives us historical context, explaining that since the industrialisation of music, the audience has wanted to see the relatable humanity of (indie) music artists in an attempt to feel connected to them; hereby, authenticity serves to help build parasocial bonds between the (indie) music artist and their audience (Baym, 2019, p. 171). She continues by explaining that while artists' authenticity has been used to market them and their work, music artists are also often portrayed as idealised characters. Hereby, a new kind of authenticity arises, wherein an authentic musician is seen as someone who can convincingly strike a balance between realism and idealism; "an 'authentic' musician is one who credibly conforms 'to an idealized representation of reality,' qualified to speak as a legitimate member of a subculture" states Baym (2019, p. 172). She concludes that authenticity is not as much "an objective quality" of something, but rather the expression of a shared value system, a sentiment also shared by Strand (2013, p. 74) who inherently finds authenticity value-laden (Baym, 2019, p. 172). This idea is reflected in the working definition of authenticity within this thesis which emphasises the notion of accordance with values.

The goal of indie music in general is to challenge and stand in direct opposition to mainstream music, which explains the disdain indie music artists and listeners have for anything considered 'mainstream' (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35, 51; Strand, 2013, pp. 66-68). This shared value can, hereby, define authenticity — anything considered mainstream is seen as inauthentic in this subculture, anything considered non-mainstream, on the other hand, is seen by definition as authentic in the indie scene. It follows that if an indie music artist does something that can be considered mainstream, such as producing music for commercial utility, they are deemed inauthentic for acting out of accordance with the shared value system (Strand, 2013, p. 66).

To further explore this, Strand (2013, pp. 66, 74) lists spontaneity, autonomy, a love for music production, and uniqueness as being what contributes to authenticity in indie music artists, calling it "an inspirational form of worth", wherein he considers autonomy to be the most crucial factor. Namely, he points out that the authentic value in many indie music artists lies in their deliberate choice to remain autonomous, in other words, to *not* sign with a major label and thus benefit from a boost in their revenue and fame (Strand, 2013, p. 66). He argues that this contrast between the inspirational and the commercial is at the root of all forms of authenticity and its expressions in the genre. This idea will come up again when talking about career success and authenticity in section 2.3.2.

2.2 Reputation

2.2.1 Defining Reputation in Music

The concept of reputation often goes explicitly undefined in music literature, likely, because of the term's commonality and high familiarity to English speakers, its meaning is assumed to be known to the reader. However, despite the term's assumed implicitly, it is useful to conceptualise it here to assure a common understanding of this key concept. Therefore, focus has to be turned onto psychological literature to help conceptualise it in the context of music. In social psychology, reputation has been defined as "a set of collective beliefs, perceptions, or evaluative judgments about someone among members within a community" (Wu et al., 2016, p. 351). An adjusted version of definition will serve as the working definition of reputation in this thesis; it follows that reputation, in the context of indie music artists, is a set of collective beliefs and opinions about an artist among their audience members. Importantly, 'community' has been replaced with 'audience', while other outside parties, such as the media, have been left out as they do not meet the qualities of 'community' in this context. Audience members (i.e., an artist's fans and listeners) are a more fit replacement for the term.

The value of reputation is recognised in social psychology, where it has been found to provide prosocial benefits as a good reputation promises allyship and cooperation (Wu et al., 2016, p. 350). More relevantly, the value of reputation has been also recognised in music literature, where music artists are seen to be actors in a so-called 'status market'. Here, reputation aids musicians' career success by warranting help and opportunities from others within the industry and acts as a marketing catalyst (Everts et al., 2022, p. 1-2).

2.2.2 Reputation and Authenticity

Borrowing from business literature, the work of Sisson and Bowen (2017, pp. 289-290) investigates the role of authenticity in reputation management of large corporations and brands, draws upon a Kantian approach to establish a connection between authenticity and reputation. They argue that authenticity and reputation are closely related with authenticity fostering a strong reputation, in this case the ethical and authentic actions of a company establish a positive reputation in the eyes of the public. Hereby, they define authenticity by its key tenets: ethical behaviour, transparency, credibility, and integrity (Sisson & Bowen, 2017, pp. 289-290). While their work is centered on corporations, the same logic and principles of reputation cultivation could be applied to musical artists as they can be likened to human brands (Porto et al., 2024, p. 345-346).

2.3 Career Success

2.3.1 Defining (Career) Success

Prior literature has defined success for musicians as the ability to make a viable career and a living from producing and performing music (Smith, 2013, p. 31). As for successful indie music artists, Brown (2012, p. 520) has also noted they are often uncritically grouped together despite their heterogeneity, for example, some of them are tied to a major record label, while others practise independent production. His notion suggests that the term “successful indie music artists” may be a confusing and overly general concept, an idea to be considered when talking about the validity of this thesis (see Methods chapter).

Within the context of this thesis, career success of indie music artists is defined by their popularity among audiences, measured by the size of an indie music artist’s listener base. This conceptualisation has been elaborated on and justified in the ‘Measuring Success’ subchapter under the Methods chapter (section 3.3.1).

2.3.2 Career Success & Authenticity

When it comes to the relationship between authenticity and career success, a notable dilemma modern music artists are forced to face is the struggle to balance their bohemian identity and the entrepreneurial nature of their careers, the latter being a necessary requirement for a successful (viable) career in the modern music industries (Schediwy et al., 2018, pp. 174-175; Smith, 2013, p. 31). Bourdieu (1983, p. 321) also talks in length about this constant struggle between the heteronomous principle (the entrepreneurial side of art production) and the autonomous principle (the artistic side of the work) that many artists, such as music artists in this case, face. He goes on to add that, artists who tend to lean on the autonomous (artistic, bohemian) side of the spectrum see the more entrepreneurially-minded (heteronomous) artists as adversaries and call into question their authenticity as artists (Bourdieu, 1983, pp. 322-323). This issue can be especially relevant for indie artists, who consider authenticity, as a key value in the subculture, detrimental to their success in the industry (Baym, 2019, p. 171).

However, the work of Schediwy et al. (2018, pp. 190-192), in which they study this dilemma between bohemian and career identities in young musicians, finds that contrary to some ideas suggested in literature, young musicians are actually able to balance and even combine the two in a synergic manner. This suggests that authenticity and career success do not necessarily always act as a dichotomy for music artists. However, this matter may be more complicated for indie music artists due to high standards of authenticity in the indie music subculture (Baym, 2019, p. 171-172). While they might also be able to balance their entrepreneurial and bohemian natures, as suggested by Schediwy et al. (2018), their entrepreneurial mindset and overall (entrepreneurial) career success

may be deemed to clash with the subculture's values of authenticity (Strand, 2013, pp. 66-68, 74). To further prove the point, Baym (2019, p. 172) explicitly states: "As a general rule, the further musicians are from commercial pressures, the more authentic they are seen to be." Music artists themselves share this belief by admitting that not only they have some disdain for entrepreneurial and managerial tasks, but, more importantly, they fear their commercial approach will make their work inauthentic (Everts & Haynes, 2021, p. 742).

2.3.3 *Career Success & Reputation*

When it comes to reputation and career success, Zwaan et al. (2009, p. 260) find that social support, such as a supportive fan base (a marker of reputation among a social group), has been found to be positively associated with career success in pop musicians. On the other hand, they did not find a significant direct correlation between authenticity and career success. However, they also posit that earlier findings suggest that authenticity is a trait commonly perceived by industry professionals in successful music artists, alluding to some contradicting findings that call for further research (Zwaan et al., 2009, p. 261).

While indie artists do not necessarily see their reputation as a source of potential risk, they are aware that their reputation encompasses both their personal image as well as their musical abilities. Additionally, they already have some innate and basic knowledge on basic practices to manage their reputation (Portman-Smith & Harwood, 2014, p. 500).

Lastly, as mentioned in the introduction of this proposal, the idea for this thesis topic was inspired by the work Everts et al. (2022), who discuss the idea of milestones, to build one's reputation and thus (indirectly) foster career success, and their deliberate use by music artists, especially in the beginning stages of their career. Such milestone markers include, for example, releasing an album, performing at a local pub, and getting radio air time.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The approach taken in this thesis in order to answer the research question is qualitative in nature because it is most suitable to answer the chosen research question as this topic requires an in-depth subjective understanding that can only be extracted from the study participants (in this case indie music artists) themselves. In order to answer the research question, (in-depth) interviews with successful indie music artists were conducted and analysed.

Interviews, as a qualitative method, are known to provide nuanced and deep understanding of niche topics, and are suitable for researchers looking to understand the people involved in specific

positions, both of which is applicable in the context of the chosen thesis topic (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 154). Furthermore, Brinkmann argues in his book *Qualitative Interviewing* (2013, p. 4), that the most objective measure for studying personal experiences and thoughts is through the use of qualitative interviews, as they are the best tool available to study the latter. Hereby, in order to get an objective idea of the subjective ideas, opinions, and feelings of indie music artists on the matters of their authenticity, reputation, and career success, interviews are considered a valid qualitative tool to be used.

The primary focus was on conducting hour-long interviews with indie artists of varying levels of considerable mainstream success. Drawing on the experiences and knowledge of the supervisor and literature when it comes to the music industries, it should be taken into consideration that many successful artists cannot be reached directly, they (or their managers) have busy schedules, or might be unwilling to respond for various reasons (e.g. concerns of privacy) (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 122). Thus, a high rejection-rate to interviews is to be expected.

However, despite the danger of a high rejection rate, interviews are considered a valuable source of knowledge on the topic and thus attempting to conduct as many interviews as possible will be pursued regardless of the rejection-potential. Therefore, in order to fill the gaps of knowledge that might occur due to not being able to conduct as many interviews as ideally needed, they will be supplemented by written interviews and existing interviews with prominent indie artists found online (both audiovisual and written interviews, found on e.g. Youtube, online magazines, *etc*) which will be analyzed via thematic analysis.

The choice to use media articles as a supplement to interviews also allows for methodological triangulation, whereby combining several methodological sources, such interviews with media materials, allows for a richer picture of the research topic. The use of several different methodological sources allows for corroboration of information, hereby, claims made by indie music artists, and for fulfillment of gaps in knowledge (Natow, 2019; pp. 160-161). The correct use of methodological triangulation also increases the reliability of findings (Natow, 2019; pp. 162).

Lastly, thematic analysis was chosen as the method of data analysis as the goal is to identify and interpret common or recurring themes reflected in interviews regarding the research question and conceptual framework (Cassell et al., 2018, pp. 219-220). In other words, the research sets out to explore how artists speak of themes of authenticity, reputation, and career success, and how these themes interact with one another. As thematic analysis often deals with identifying patterns in participant perceptions, it is the most suitable form of data analysis for interpreting interviews where music artists' own views are of interest with regards to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 297).

3.2 Sample

The thesis draws upon interviews with 27 indie music artists, of whom two were interviewed online by the author, and the rest were studied via thematic analysis of existing media interviews published online. Participants were selected via purposive sampling, in order to fulfill specific characteristic criteria relevant for the research purposes of the thesis, herein studying the niche group of successful indie music artists (Bullard, 2024, para. 1). The participants were selected because, as indicated in the working definition of indie music artists, they were labelled as indie artists by various online articles and mainstream sources, and because of their success in the indie music scene. The latter was measured by active monthly listener-base on Spotify, a success metric commonly used in music literature (Kang et al., 2022, p. 1). Additionally, wherever possible, the author's personal knowledge of the artists and their work was considered, and personally better-known artists were chosen for the most part. This enabled the author to go into the interviews with some prior knowledge and context, and have a knowledgeable approach to the interviews.

The artists were contacted in April 2025, primarily via email addresses obtained through industry connections (e.g. via the supervisor), via their general public contact information or forms available online (e.g. their website), or via their managers or management agency where possible. The sampling of artists included artists from various countries, mainly Europe and North America, and from varying levels of mainstream success (see 'Measuring Success'). Both successful interviews were also conducted in April 2025.

Admittedly, getting prominent indie artists to agree to a research interview was challenging. Therefore, in order to gather insights from the most prominent and successful artists in the modern indie music sphere, the aforementioned existing media interviews were studied to fill in that data gap.

3.3 Conceptualisation & Measurement

3.3.1 Measuring Success

In the context of this thesis, success is conceptualized as the number of monthly listeners on Spotify. As success is a rather subjective concept, quantifying it with a numerical measure allows a more objective approach. Spotify was chosen as it is the most widely used music streaming platform with 678 million users from 180 countries (About Spotify, n.d.). As the monthly listener count is publicly displayed on the page of every music artist on the platform, it allows for an accessible measure which puts all the artists on a level playing ground, in other words the same relative measurement is applied to all artists on the platform (Kang et al., 2022, p. 3). Additionally, this measure shows their active listener base, it reflects a more accurate measure than, for example, the amount of total streams on the artist's songs as the latter could be attributed to phenomena such as

so-called ‘one time wonders’. The measure is also always up to date as it automatically adjusts according to platform usage, meaning an artist’s monthly listener amount fluctuates month-to-month to adjust to real time streams on the platform. In other words, this measure reflects an artist’s success in real time and is thus an accessible source that quantifies an artist’s current success in relation to other artists on the platform.

Another reason for choosing Spotify to measure success is due to its reflection of the modern music industries. While the platform has plenty of critique towards it in the modern day it is still a pivotal key player in the modern music world (Hesmondhalgh, 2020, p. 3604). Previous scales measuring success of music artists, such as that of Fisher et al. (2010, p. 328) reflect contemporary norms of their times that are no longer applicable in the mid-2020s, such as the use of CD sales as a measure of success on their scale (e.g. an item such as “How many copies of all your combined CDs did your group sell in the past year?”). However, inspired by their items such as “Our group has developed an international reputation” it was decided to use a major global streaming platform, such as Spotify.

Admittedly, this is not a perfect operationalisation of success as there are many systematic flaws with this approach. For example, despite Spotify’s widestream use lots of people don’t use Spotify, hence they do not count towards monthly listener statistics for their favourite artists. Additionally, the concept of success is a wide and ambiguous one at best, and it encompasses way more than the number of streams on one streaming platform.

The indie artists were categorised into three categories: smaller indie artists, very successful indie artists, and indie superstars (see Table 1). Artists of differing levels of success were chosen in order to increase the heterogeneity to the sample, thereby enabling varied insights from both smaller, yet still successful, artists as well as indie superstars. Their experiences in the field may vary due to their differing levels of success and its implications (e.g. bigger artists are more likely to be tied to record labels, or have more concerns regarding their reputation and success). The aforementioned categorisation was done by dividing them up by monthly listener count on Spotify. Please find a full table with every artist and their monthly listener count in Appendix A.

Table 1

Categorisation of the sample of indie artists by monthly listener count on Spotify

Category	Criteria	Artists
Smaller indie artists	100 thousand to 1 million	Puuluup, Sad Night Dynamite, Nikki Lane

Very successful indie artists	1 to 10 million	Mt. Joy, The Last Dinner Party, Declan McKenna, Amber Run, Bleachers, Father John Misty, Faye Webster, LP, Remi Wolf, Wallows
Indie superstars	> 10 million	TV Girl, Fitz and the Tantrums, Lord Huron, Hozier, Tame Impala, Bon Iver, Clairo, girl in red, Lana Del Rey, Mac DeMarco, Mitski, Phoebe Bridgers, SYML, The Lumineers

Note. Data retrieved June 2025.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 *Self-conducted Interviews*

In order to secure interviews with selected indie artists of varying levels of success and fame, traditional approaches, such as sending merely an email, had to be reconsidered. Therefore, artists were reached via various channels: primarily via their (manager's or agency's) public email address, via their Instagram accounts (or that of their managers, band members, colleagues), or via their websites' contact submission forms. In total, approximately 115 messages (emails, social media messages, *etc*) were sent out to 68 different artists over the span of seven weeks (from beginning of April 2025 to end of May 2025). Some artists were contacted repeatedly, in order to aim to increase the likelihood of a response. As a result, ten artists (or their managers) responded, of whom five declined the interview, usually due to a busy recording/touring schedule or because of unspecified reasons. Five artists agreed to be interviewed, and these positive responses led to two successful interviews, of which one was a short and written one, and the other one a full-length hour-long interview as originally intended.

The various versions of the message templates can be found in the appendix. The primary format only offered the possibility of an hour-long interview, the latter format also included the possibility of a shorter written interview consisting of just five key questions (see Appendix B for both formats). This was inspired by the response of one artist who said they would gladly answer some questions but they only have time for five written questions. Keeping this time constraint caused by artists' busy schedules in mind, and also taking into account the (thus far) low success rate with getting people to agree to a full-length interview, the alternative of five written questions was included. Additionally, a shorter format of the message was adapted for the character limit of Instagram messages, where the regular (email) format would have been too long.

All steps of the data collection process were conducted by the author herself; this included gathering the contact information of artists, writing the interview invites, sending them out, coming up with the interview questions, and conducting the interviews. Some steps were reviewed or aided

by the supervisor to a reasonable extent (e.g. proofreading the interview invites and questions, providing industry connections to reach out to artists, giving tips on how to best organise and conduct interviews with music artists).

As mentioned, the interview questions were put together by the author based on a holistic knowledge of the literature on the topic, with keeping in mind the research question and the investigated connections between the variables of this research. This was done as there was no existing scale to measure the set of three variables in interview format (or otherwise): success, authenticity, reputation, with authenticity being the central concept of interest. When it came to condensing the list of interview questions down to just five key questions, it was assured that the questions best capture the central idea behind the research question and do not stray away from it. In other words, there was no room for additional (sub)questions that were not strictly tied to the research question. Both sets of interview questions: those for the full hour-length one and the shortened version with five written questions can be found in the appendices.

All in all, while a low success rate was to be expected, it was considerably lower than anticipated, causing a considerable lack of data to work with. Therefore, the back-up option of conducting data analysis on existing media interviews had to be utilized.

3.4.2 Existing Media Interviews

In order to fill in the gaps of data left by the low response rate to interview invites, existing interviews with indie artists found online (both audiovisual and written interviews) were gathered for data analysis. The sample remained mostly the same as for the intended self-conducted interviews, meaning the same artists who were reached out for interviews but with whom no successful interview took place, made up the sample, with a few small exceptions. This resulted in looking into online interviews conducted with 66 indie artists, of whom 25 had relevant interviews published online that could be used for the data analysis.

The process for searching for interviews entailed googling the format: “(artist name) interview” and going through the first two pages of Google search results in order to obtain the most relevant search results. Within each written interview that was found the stem keyword “authentic” (which is included in the words “inauthentic” and “authenticity”) was looked for using the page search function ‘Ctrl + F’. This process uses the logic of Boolean operators, which use an asterisk attached at the end of a stem word to find any and all keywords derived from the stem. While this strict Boolean function was not utilised in this case, according to this logic “authentic” was acting as the stem for keywords that include it (such as the aforementioned “inauthentic” and “authenticity”) enabling finding any references to the concept of (in)authenticity (LibGuides: Advanced Library Search Strategies: Boolean Searching, n.d.). Looking for the keyword(s) enabled to quickly and

efficiently identify which interviews had any relation to the central research variable of authenticity by seeing if the concept was mentioned by either the interviewer(s) or the artist interviewed. If the interview included the keyword(s) (in relevant context), that interview was considered a relevant fit to be included in data analysis. While using keyword search may not be a perfectly reliable method of determining which interviews touch upon relevant themes (in this case, authenticity), it does considerably ease the data collection process by making it more efficient allowing more time instead to be used for data analysis. Additionally, it is hard to predict at this stage of research which interviews may or may not contain relevant information, as coding is yet to take place, however this approach helps to eliminate interviews that likely do not touch upon the relevant theme(s) early on (Boeije, 2010, p. 96).

In total, 40 media interviews were gathered, of which 36 made the cut to be included in the final data analysis. Four interviews had to be discarded after open coding as these interviews ended up not containing any relevant passages that could be coded. Of the 36 interviews that were eligible for data analysis, 34 were written interviews (from online various magazines and websites) and two were audiovisual recorded interviews found on YouTube. All interviews were published between 2008 and 2024. For some artists, there was more than one suitable interview referring to, in some capacity, to the concept of authenticity.

Additionally, these existing media interviews were clumped together with the two self-conducted interviews for the data analysis process, in order to streamline and standardise the process (i.e., apply the same codes) as there was no legitimate reason to conduct a separate data analysis on the two categories/types of interviews as their sample and themes remained one and the same, as did the nature of data (interviews). Therefore, the final data set is made up of 38 interviews (including 34 interview articles, 2 video interviews, 2 self-conducted interviews).

Altogether, the interviews that made up the final data set were conducted with the following 27 indie artists: Amber Run, Bleachers, Bon Iver (2 interviews), Clairo, Declan McKenna (4 interviews), Father John Misty (2 interviews), Faye Webster, Fitz and the Tantrums (2 interviews), girl in red, Hozier (2 interviews), Lana Del Rey (4 interviews), Lord Huron (2 interviews), LP, Mac DeMarco, Mitski, Mt. Joy, Nikki Lane, Phoebe Bridgers, Puuluup, Remi Wolf, Sad Night Dynamite (2 interviews), SYML, Tame Impala, TV Girl, The Last Dinner Party, The Lumineers, Wallows.

3.4.3 Data Preparation

For the self-conducted interviews, the spoken interview was transcribed verbatim using Estonian speech-to-text AI transcription software ‘Tekstiks’ (Olev & Alumäe, 2022). The AI generated transcript was then manually reviewed and corrected where needed by the author. It must be noted that the interview took place in Estonian, the common native language of both the artist and

the author. However, later coding and further data analysis was done in English for convenience. As required, the original (Estonian) transcript includes a summary in English.

Later on, all the transcripts and interview articles were printed out and the coding was done by paper and pen in order to help the researcher better approach the manual coding process by having a visual overview of the data she is working with (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). Manual software-free coding was chosen because it helps for the researcher to have high familiarity with her data, by reading through all the materials herself to get a thorough grasp. This organic approach to coding and the researcher's high involvement in the coding process is often characteristic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 297).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process was done by following the guidance of the book “Analysis in Qualitative Research” by Hennie Boeije (Boeije, 2010). For the full coding frame please refer to Appendix C.

3.5.1 Open Coding

The data analysis started by first reading through the transcripts of self-conducted interviews. This choice was made because self-conducted interviews followed a relevant set of questions based on the literature, therefore they served as a basis to establish primary codes to be used later for the open coding process of media interviews. In this phase, the research question and prior literature were also heavily referenced and used as a starting point for the coding process.

After having coded self-conducted interviews, open coding of media interviews followed. While a preliminary coding frame had been established, this stage of coding relied heavily on ‘in vivo’ coding, meaning codes were derived from the terminology used in quotes by the indie music artists in their interviews (Boeije, 2010, p. 101). This flexible approach is reflective of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 297). In this stage, careful mind was paid to code only (bits of) quotes by music artists, and not code things said by the interviewer or any background information on the artist provided in the article (usually in the form of a contextual introduction to the interview). This was done in order to prevent (unintentionally) conflating artists’ own perceptions with perceptions of journalists and interviewers. All 40 interviews were read through, relevant parts highlighted, and codes assigned. Over the course of the open coding process, the same codes started appearing repeatedly and towards the end no new codes came up, meaning saturation had been reached.

3.5.2 Axial Coding

The axial coding process involved meaning-making of the coded data. Following the recommended steps of Boeije (2010, pp. 108-109), the codes were checked in reference to the data to see if they managed to accurately reflect the themes underlying the quotes. Then, similar and synonymous codes were reviewed in order to merge overlapping or repetitive codes. Wherever needed, a new name that more accurately reflected the themes in the data was assigned to the newly created (merged) code(s). Data assigned the same codes was contrasted and compared to see whether there were any significant deviations and/or similarities, in order to determine whether or not it was fair to assign the same code to them. With the help of the thesis framework, the codes were divided accordingly into three main codes: authenticity, reputation, and career success. Additionally, the category of indie music was added as a relevant code that was not directly reflected in the framework. In this stage, codes that only reflected one to two data fragments were determined to be one-off cases and removed for the sake of focusing on the most representative themes that came up repeatedly.

3.5.3 Selective Coding

Lastly, selective coding was implemented. Here, the codes were organised into a hierarchical order in the form of a code tree (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Please note that the figures reflect one big code tree that had to be divided up for the sake of formatting as the whole code tree was too spacious to fit onto one page.

Careful mind was paid to assigning subcodes under relevant main codes and deciding which main codes were most suitable for certain subcodes as some could be classified under several. For example, the subcode “Authenticity & the audience” could have been also classified under the main code ‘Reputation’ as audience perception is a key part of forming a reputation (see Figure 3) (Boon et al., 2019, pp. 295-296). However, since the subcodes reflected themes of authenticity heavily, it made more sense to assign it under the main code “Authenticity” instead.

Following this logic, borrowing from a grounded theory approach which is adjacent to thematic analysis, the main code authenticity tends to act like a core category in this research (Boeije, 2010, pp. 115-116). This becomes evident when it is seen to encompass the most subcodes, and, hence, was divided up from the rest of the code tree when the tree needed to be split for illustrative and technical purposes as mentioned earlier. To further demonstrated this, themes of authenticity are also apparent in subcodes that fall under other main codes, such as the subcode “Inauthentic” falling ultimately under the main code “(Career) success”, and the subcode “De facto authenticity” falling ultimately under the main code “Indie music” (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Code tree for central category: Authenticity

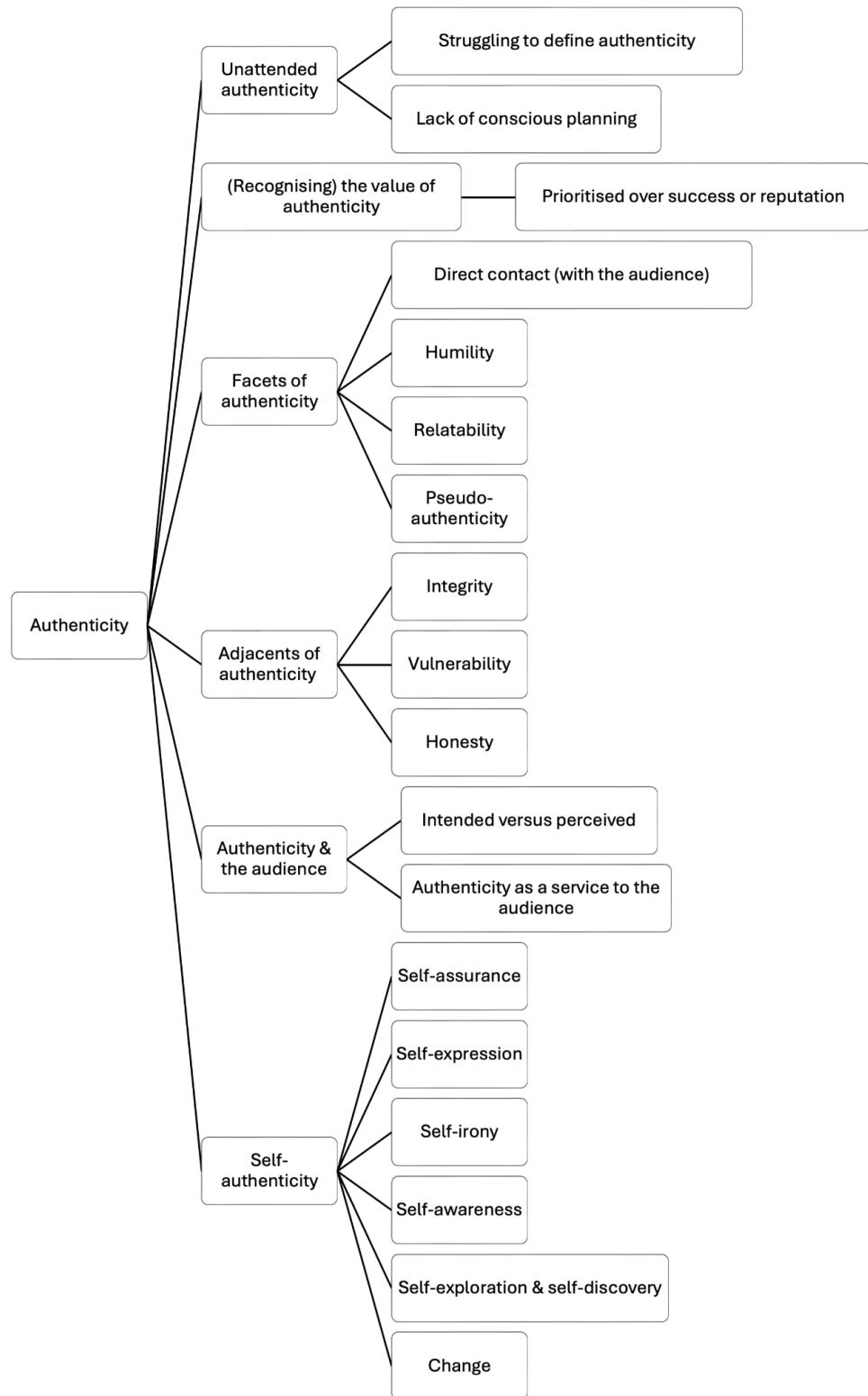
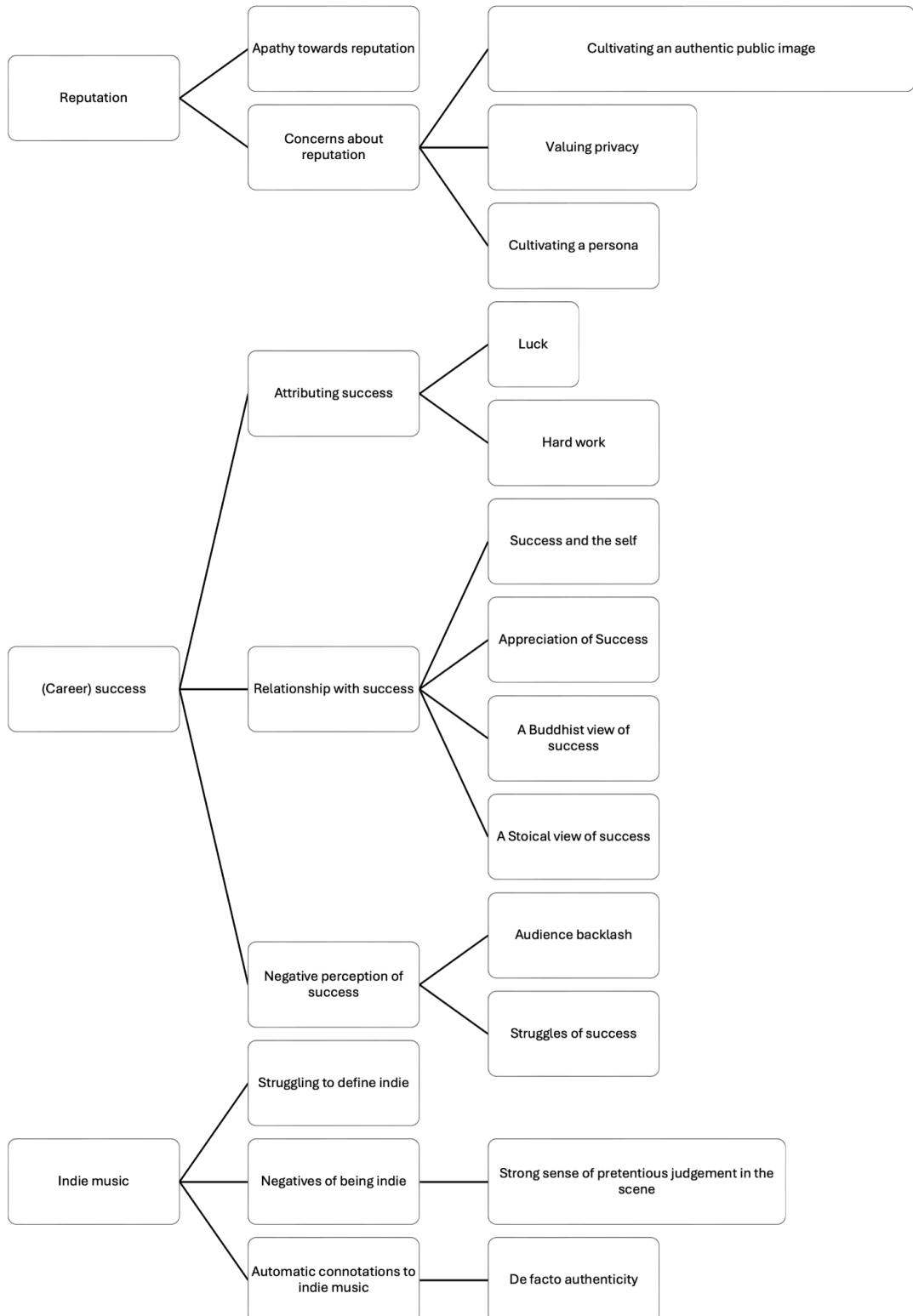


Figure 3

Code tree for other main codes: Reputation, (Career) Success, and Indie Music



3.6 Limitations

While methodological triangulation can increase a method's validity it can also serve as a notable limitation in this case, where the use of various sources to study the same phenomena can complicate the interpretation of results due to natural variances in methods. It must also be noted that the two methods do not carry equal weight in the results because they were not used to an equal extent (two self-conducted interviews versus 34 media articles and 2 video interviews).

Additionally, the use of existing media interviews proved tricky at times as many interviews were not on topics relevant to the key concepts being studied, therefore, the author had to carefully look for the few mentions of relevant concepts and the context in which things were said. This lack of control that came with using pre-existing media and interpreting the results of that in combination with self-conducted interviews (of various kinds) proved difficult at times. This approach's possible negative impact on the quality of research outcomes has to be considered and the results and conclusions thereby approached with such caution in mind.

A common issue of validity — interviewer bias, has to be mentioned. Interviewer bias, herein the interviewer's position as a fan or audience member and thus having emotionally-loaded knowledge of the artist being interviewed can impact the validity of the interview results (Salazar, 1990; pp. 568-569). As for the sample, the work of Brown (2012, p. 520), suggests that the sample of this thesis could have proved to be too heterogeneous due to considerable variability within successful indie artists.

The time limit of this research being constricted to a matter of months proved to be an issue as there were only a number of weeks during which the author could conduct interviews with the artists and likely contributed to a low rate of self-conducted interviews. Additionally, the (obvious) lack of funding in this case, was also a likely contributor to the latter. In other words, getting famous artists to agree to do a free interview proved to be near impossible.

Lastly, due to the author's heavy background in quantitative research and limited familiarity with qualitative research, certain elements of the study's approach may have been more quantitative in nature than intended or required. However, this tendency was aimed to be avoided to the best of the author's abilities.

3.7 Rigour & Credibility

To assess the rigour and credibility of this thesis, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness are considered as they are relevant for qualitative research; these criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). Credibility hereby is the degree to which this thesis work accurately portrays reality (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). The credibility of this thesis is validated by the fact that it used true insights from real indie music

artists, and instead of analysing media opinions about the artists (such as what interviewers had to say about the artists in their introductory articles), rather relied solely on the artists' own words verbatim. In other words, the true source was considered as the only data worthy of analysis. Credibility was also improved by the use of methodological triangulation as several data sources (self-conducted interview, both verbal and written, as well as media interviews, in the form of articles and videos) were considered for analysis (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). As for transferability, utmost detail was given about each piece of interview (article), all methods and steps of data analysis have been described at length, transcripts and copies articles have been uploaded with this work, and there are several tables in appendices detailing each artist interviewed or studied (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27) (please refer to tables A1 and A2 in Appendix A). The dependability of this thesis has been increased by the inclusion of reflexive self-analysis in several sections of this thesis whereby the author addresses personal biases, values, and passions and their potential impact on the thesis-writing process (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27) (please refer to sections 1.5.1 and 3.6). Lastly, confirmability was strived for by setting aside personal beliefs and opinions when interpreting the data and by staying as close to the original data as possible, such as trying to understand what an artist was really saying in an interview, not what the author expected or hoped for them to say (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 28).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

There are no considerable ethical issues with this research that the author is aware of. While some interviewees are hesitant to agree for an interview due to privacy reasons they are assured that the utmost care is taken when handling their data and privacy. Additionally, participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary. The artists had the right to refuse to take part in the interview, as there was no form of persuasion nor coercion.

All interview participants were informed about the nature of the research and their consent was recorded in either written (email) and verbal format (recorded with the interview). Additionally, they were offered to remain anonymous and their wish for anonymity is respected when applicable. The interview data (recordings, transcripts, email communications, *etc.*) were stored securely on Apple and Google cloud service platforms, only accessible to the author via self-authentication by password.

With the use of existing interviews there were no ethical concerns as the data set was composed of publicly available interviews.

4. Results

The results of the thematic analysis of the interviews (both self-conducted and media interviews) are presented together, structured thematically, and illustrated with quotes. The key themes were that of authenticity, reputation, career success, and indie music. Hereby, it is relevant to mention the research question once more: How can authenticity as a reputation building tool be used by indie music artists to foster career success?

4.1 Indie Music

Indie music is the overarching theme and context in which all results are interpreted as the sample composed of indie music artists, meaning their responses, and accordingly, the common themes established are only applicable in the indie music scene or within the context of an indie music artist's career. For this reason, this theme will be explored first as it sets the context for all other themes to follow.

4.1.1 Struggling to Define Indie

Wherever the definition of the indie genre was brought up directly — mainly in self-conducted interviews where this was directly asked — artists struggled to clearly define the genre due to its ambiguity and, thus, expressed their struggle to rightfully position themselves in it. This is not surprising since the same sentiment regarding the tricky definitions of indie is evident in literature as established earlier in the thesis (please refer to Chapter 2 ‘Theoretical Framework’). For example, Marko Veisson, one half of the Estonian indie-folk music duo Puuluup, said the following in response to being labelled ‘an indie duo’ by the media,

I don't know whether we are often called indie musicians. So, I think that this indie definition has several ways of interpreting it. ... But if we talk about indie as a type of non-mainstream pop [music] which maybe also ... I don't even know how to define it then, because like we have record labels. (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025)²

His words echo a clear confusion around the definition of the genre, which was evident in many of his responses but was also echoed in other indie artists. Hereby, it is crucial to note that Marko Veisson is also in academia himself, researching and teaching sociology and cultural anthropology, and his academic mindset was often reflected in his answers when he was aiming to accurately

² All quotes by Puuluup have been translated from Estonian by the author.

operationalise concepts such as indie music and authenticity when asked about them (*Marko Veisson*, n.d.). This academic bias must be considered when interpreting his responses.

4.1.2 Negatives of Being Indie

Despite many artists expressing content with their musical careers, they also criticised their genre and vocalised struggles that uniquely come along with being in the indie scene. For some indie artists, like Father John Misty, they felt a strong sense of pretentious judgement in the scene, usually by others in the scene; this is best illustrated by what he had to say in his in an interview for the magazine *Pitchfork*,

Someone in the indie world is more likely to be accused by other indie people of being over-thinking, calculated psychos, when this whole fucking world of pop music has been [calculated]. It's all this bourgeois bullshit. It's neo-Orientalism. (Mapes, 2017, para. 34)

He goes on to say that many indie people, as he refers to them — likely meaning other indie artists, think they are special and exempt from criticism, calling it 'soft bigotry'. Father John Misty's words well capture an anecdotal sentiment common regarding the pretentiousness and judgment of the indie scene yet one that is rarely explicitly stated or studied in academic literature. It also alludes to a potentially negative view of conscious and deliberate planning when it comes to indie artists, a theme that will be discussed more at length under the theme of authenticity.

4.1.3 Automatic Connotations to Indie Music

Lastly, automatic connotations to indie music were prevalent throughout interviews, more specifically the ideas of *de facto* authenticity and *de facto* good reputation. Here, '*de facto*' denotes the automatic connotation that just because something is indie it is by default deemed authentic or by default worthy of a good reputation. It is a connotation that came up in interviews, yet is not something that the genre is strictly defined by in literature. However, this could be considered the effects of an affinity bias, as indie artists associate their own genre of choice with positive traits such as authenticity and good reputation. Regardless of the reason, big indie artists such as *TV Girl* refer to their own work as authentic merely because of its independent (i.e., indie) nature,

I'll say this, we are a true independent band, so for better or worse, every creative expression of the band is authentic in that it came from me directly without the influence of record labels, managers, pr teams [sic], etc. (B. Petering of *TV Girl*, personal communication, April 20, 2025)

He emphasises the lack of middle-man or the lack of outside influence as a contributor to authenticity in his work. Later in the interview he adds that their de facto good reputation is because independent bands like his are more likeable and easier for audiences “to root for” (B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025).

4.2 Authenticity

4.2.1 *Unattended Authenticity*

One of the objectives of this thesis was to investigate whether authenticity is deliberately curated or a naturally occurring by-product of indie musicians’ work and self-expression. As the heading suggests, there is a surprising sense of authenticity being unattended, something that is not paid mind to or something artists do not concern themselves with. One artist explained, when asked what being authentic as an indie artist means to him, the following,

I don't really know. I don't really think about it. Indie rock is still showbiz. Dressing up and playing pretend is part of the job. And I don't think music that authentically reflects the artist as a person is any more compelling than the opposite. (B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025)

Evidently, he sees indie rock, a genre that is considered by many (including himself) as a showbusiness, where acting is part of the job, and authenticity is not even a second thought — it is not even thought about. Admittedly, there is some contradiction in his own responses. However, this could be explained to an extent by the idea that he might consider ‘indie rock’ and independent music (production) as separate categories.

In his response, he then gives the examples of how the most acclaimed songwriters (Lana Del Rey and Father John Misty, in his opinion) of both past and present tend to play characters that “obscure their authentic selves” (B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025).

Overall, his response echoes a sense of indifference or lack of mind paid to issues of defining or consciously curating concepts such as authenticity. Evidently, it is not something artists concern themselves overly with, which alludes to a lack of conscious effort towards coming off as authentic.

4.2.2 *(Recognising) The Value of Authenticity*

Despite authenticity being often not a deliberate quality to be intentionally curated, its value is, however, often recognised. So much so, that it seems to be prioritised over success or reputation.

Authenticity also seems to carry both personal value and value to the audience on a deeper level, as echoed by Mitski,

I knew that I didn't want to make music that was putting up walls against the listener. At the time I felt I needed to in order to protect myself, but that's not why I make music. At the end of the day, the music that touches me and has saved me is the stuff that goes right to my heart and feels personal, authentic and true." (as quoted in Tsjeng, 2022, para. 10)

4.2.3 Facets of Authenticity

As Brad Petering of TV Girl indicated earlier, direct contact with the audience (i.e., lack of a middle man) is a contributor to authenticity. Direct contact can be, therefore, considered one facet of authenticity. In the course of thematic analysis, other such facets were also discovered: humility, relatability, and pseudo-authenticity.

When talking about direct contact with the audience, it can mean more than just the lack of middle-men (in the form of managers, record labels, PR teams, *etc.*), for example it can also be reflected in the sense of seeing oneself as equal to one's audience and engaging with them face-to-face. One artist said: "That's the thing I love most, talking to the fans. It's great to be on an equal footing with people." (D. McKenna, as quoted in Fabien, 2024, para. 22). In a similar vein, this sort of humility, relatability, and connection has also been expressed by another indie artist,

I think, when I'm performing, I'm really into it being an experience we're all having. If you're digging it, if you're here to see the show and you like the music, then I want it to be an inclusive process, not a pedestal, idol-worshipping, bullshit kind of thing. (LP, as quoted in McCartney, 2014, para. 12)

It is evident that artists like McKenna and LP want to feel equal to their audience and connect with them, either via on-or-off stage, via conversation or during performance.

As another facet of authenticity, Marko Veisson of Puuluup talks about what he coined 'pseudo-authenticity', describing it as a type of fake lore one makes up to seem more authentic. In his band's example, they made up a dance for their Eurovision performance, and when asked about the dance on the radio, they falsely claimed it to be an old viking dance from the island of Vormsi, called the Veisson dance. While it was intended as a tongue-in-cheek response to the radio host's question, the dance and its newly invented lore took on a life of its own. While the concept of pseudo-authenticity is not commonly used nor referenced in music industries literature, it is however an established concept repeatedly referenced in literature regarding, for example, tourism (Walby, 2025), linguistics (Fiedler, 2019), leadership (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Hinojosa et al., 2014;

Novicevic et al., 2005), and performance art (Gusman, 2020).

However, some artists, such as Father John Misty, speak of pseudo-authenticity in a different light, stating: “There’s something innately false about performance, I wanted to be authentically bogus rather than bogusly authentic” (Father John Misty, as quoted in Paumgarten, 2017, para. 2). Evidently, it also speaks of how he holds authenticity in such high regard that it becomes a value judgement, and something that is prioritised over reputation. This idea of authenticity as value-laden has been discussed in indie music literature (please refer to section 2.1.3).

4.2.4 Adjacents of Authenticity

While facets of authenticity refer to features that compose the overall feeling of authenticity, adjacents of authenticity refers to concepts that are similar to yet distinct from authenticity. Therefore these themes do not necessarily fall under the authenticity umbrella, but are also crucial not to ignore when talking about authenticity in indie artists.

When talking about authenticity in interviews, the concept of integrity came up repeatedly, and it clearly seems to be a core value of many indie artists. Similarly, the idea of vulnerability was often expressed, like done so here by Lana Del Rey,

It was 100 percent authentic. it’s just that where I was at the time was malleable in my own life — easy to, like, acquiesce. I kept rereading the idea of somebody who was feigning vulnerability, perhaps what they saw was what was vulnerable. (as quoted in Cooper Jones, 2023, para. 18)

Honesty was another authenticity-adjacent value that artists said they strive for in their work, expressed by the indie superstar Hozier as,

All I can do as an artist is to be honest about how I witness things, how I experience the world. I’ve always strived for that. The danger is that it’s a vulnerable thing to be honest at times, it can come with pressure and be tricky. (Hozier, as quoted in Westwater, 2023, para. 17)

4.2.5 Authenticity & The Audience

Undoubtedly, the audience plays a crucial role in indie artists careers, and directly relates to their expressions of authenticity. In the examined interview articles, authenticity is often alluded to as a service to the audience; such as it serving a role in helping the audience deal with their issues better by hearing it honestly expressed in the indie artists’ own work, often via their lyrics or through their public battles with issues such as mental health or losing a loved one. One indie band member shares: “I hope that by sharing [my own dealings with depression and suicide] one other person

might be able to see a little bit of themselves in that story and that they are not totally alone in those feelings." (J. Keogh of Amber Run, as quoted in Olson, 2023, para. 4).

From the interviews it seems that a clear distinction is made when it comes to authenticity, namely, the artist's own intended authenticity versus the perceived authenticity (usually by the audience and media). What an artist may intend as coming off authentic, may be received inaccurately and thus perceived as inauthentic, such as has been the case for the indie-pop star Lana Del Rey in her career repeatedly,

Of course [I see myself as authentic]. I'm always being myself. They [emphasis added] don't know what authentic is. If you think of all the music that came out until 2013, it was super straight and shiny. If that's authentic to you, this is going to look like the opposite. (as quoted in Frank, 2024, para. 29)

Hereby, indie artists are seen to define authenticity by their own terms, which can end up backfiring on them, yet that proves their self-assurance.

4.2.6 Self-authenticity

In literature, the 'ideal of authenticity' has been described as the strive for being true to oneself, with minimal to no conformity to outside influence, but rather prioritising one's own individuality and feelings (Newman & Smith, 2016, p. 612). This literary meaning is also applicable to the idea of self-authenticity, expressed by many indie artists in their interviews. Six subthemes can be derived from this overarching theme of 'self' (and self-authenticity, more specifically): self-assurance, self-expression, self-irony, self-awareness, self-exploration/self-discovery, and change.

Self-assurance as mentioned earlier when speaking of Lana Del Rey's intended versus perceived authenticity, put simply is indie artists expressing pride, confidence, and belief in themselves. Similarly, to how Del Rey defined her own authenticity, the same can be said of her opinion of herself,

I'm proud of the way I've put parts of my story into songs in ways that only I understand. In terms of my gauge of what's good, it's really just what I think. I have an internal framework that is the only thing I measure it by. My own opinion is really important to me. It starts and stops there. (as quoted in Frank, 2024, para. 95)

Some artists even expressed apathy towards outside feedback, a sense of indifference towards criticism and others' opinions was prominent, as seen in the words of Father John Misty: "I made a decision as a child that I would never let anyone tell me that I was invalid or inauthentic, or that my

experiences were" (Mapes, 2017, para. 11). His claim is supported by literature findings indicating that children as young as four can be concerned with their self-authenticity (Sedikides & Schlegel, 2024, p. 12). The same theme of self-assurance was expressed by another indie artist,

Sometimes you put too much pressure on yourself by second-guessing what others think - maybe that was part of this album's ethos and why that authenticity theme is featured across the album in different ways. You have to trust yourself, know who you are and to be yourself. (Declan McKenna as quotes in Way, 2024, para. 14)

In stark contrast to the unattended authenticity mentioned with regards to a lack of concern or planning when it comes to coming off as authentic, this self-assurance is, evidently, paid mind to and consciously decided. Hereby, it can be said that indie artists are highly self-aware and in tune with themselves. This gradual garnering of self-knowledge, and subsequently, self-confidence has also spilled into expressions of vulnerability and honesty in artists music, as expressed by one famous indie music artist as: "[All my albums have] gradually gotten more and more personal because I've gradually gotten more confident to say what I want to say and say what I'm feeling." (Tame Impala, as quoted in Interscope Records, 2020, 14:43). "Doing what feels right" seems to be the summative ethos of indie musicians, and this is supported by literature such as Sutton (2019, pp. 2, 11, 12) that suggests authenticity feels good. This could explain indie artists' tendency to almost 'automatically' be authentic. They may not be aware of it, but it just feels right to act in ways that are true to oneself.

Tame Impala was not the only artist to indicate the value of music being a vessel for self-expression. Similarly to Lana Del Rey is proud that she "put parts of her story into songs in ways that only she understands", the indie duo Sad Night Dynamite admitted that,

Most of the time [our songs are] versions of ourselves. I think all of us have different characters within us. Most of the time you don't even realise you're writing about yourself. Then six months later you realise. (as quoted in Rezai-Mah, 2024, para. 14)

Part of being acutely self-aware and at the same time confident in oneself is being able to poke fun at yourself. In a few interviews this sense of self-irony was evident, especially with Father John Misty who stated: "I don't have any experience to draw from other than my music career, because if you take away my music from me, all you have left is a mustache and a bad attitude." (as quoted in Mapes, 2017, para. 39).

Lastly, under the theme of self-authenticity, unsurprisingly (coming from self-aware indie artists), themes of self-discovery and change also emerged. When talking about self-discovery and self-knowing, Declan McKenna said,

At first you probably think too much before you speak, trying to act up to a role to appear cool or appear like this or that. Being an authentic human being is something that I've had to learn. (D. McKenna, as quoted in Curran, 2024, para. 18)

While authenticity in one's career is not paid conscious mind to, it seems that authenticity of self in terms of personal development is something that has to be learned and acknowledged to oneself. Regarding experiencing change, Faye Webster said,

I really don't relate to that record anymore. Just like in an artist sense, I feel like everyone grows and changes. I think as I've grown I've realized who I wanted to be and what I wanted to write about and what was meaningful to me. (as quoted in Olson, 2021, para. 16)

Both McKenna and Webster's words echo the wish of indie music artists to remain authentic to the human experience and portray it honestly, even its less perfect sides, such as learning to get to know oneself and changing.

4.3 Reputation

4.3.1 Apathy Towards Reputation

Similarly to how authenticity was approached with apathy and indifference, the same can be said of reputation. Indie music artists, in general, possess an indifference to outside opinions, likely because of their aforementioned self-knowing and confidence. As a result, their reputation is not a concern for most of them and reputation-management is not on their minds. This is illustrated by a quote from Phoebe Bridgers when she was asked about her reputation: "I don't really think about perception of me [sic] at all, I don't think of myself as a character, even if some people think I am." (as quoted in Bennett, 2020, para. 17).

4.3.2 Concerns About Reputation

To directly contradict the apathy towards reputation shared by many indie music artists, there are however some unique concerns that come with one's reputation. Notably, one artist, in stark contrast to other less concerned indie artists, shared his overall concerns for his band's reputation and integrity, stating: "I actually toss and turn at night quite often worrying about this topic, how this reputation may change by taking one step or another or what the fans will think or what anyone will think," (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025, p. 9). Evidently, reputation and integrity greatly matter to and concern him. He also goes on to say that he and his band, along with their manager, try to approach the matters in a planned and calculated manner as much as possible, despite differences in band members' approaches to media and PR related matters, admitting that he is more calculated and careful than his more spontaneous band mate.

Other indie music artists relate their reputation in the scene to their authentic public image, and how it matters to them more than success: “It’s not that we don’t want to have success at the highest levels; I think it’s just that we want people to realize that making honest music,” (M. Quinn of Mt. Joy, as quoted in Mosk, 2023, para. 22).

A common concern that comes with reputation and fame is the worries for privacy, as many indie artists, evidently do not yearn for fame or mainstream success, they also do not intend to live a lifestyle in the public eye and therefore highly value their privacy. Phoebe Bridgers speaks on the matter. “Artists have a responsibility to themselves to be their authentic selves publicly, but there are also things that should stay private. … Some things are sacred,” (P. Bridgers, as quoted in Bennett, 2020, para. 21).

Another struggle is to maintain a good reputation among one’s audience and beyond, which for many also involves cultivating a likeable persona to match the audience’s expectations of them. As expressed by one indie music artist: “Part of my job is to be a character or to be everybody’s friend, and that’s not possible.” (McKenna, as quoted in Fabien, 2024, para. 22)

4.4 Career Success

4.4.1 Attributing Success

Indie music artists tend to attribute their success to one of two things: luck and hard work, or a mixture of both. Many artists, like TV Girl, state that they have just gotten incredibly lucky in this regard: “But I really don’t think [our authentic reputation] contributed to our success. We really just got lucky and/or made music that resonated with people for whatever reason,” (B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025). Meanwhile others admit the success to be the result of years or decades-long consistent work that often goes unnoticed in the modern era. One interviewed indie musician explained the reality of this,

But what I do know is that the fucking Internet makes everything seem like it takes two seconds. But it still takes a long time to find yourself. Just because someone saw something on the Internet in two seconds, saw someone’s time-lapse, doesn’t mean it happened that way. It’s fucking hard. (LP, as quoted in McCartney, 2014, para. 65)

4.4.2 Relationship with success

Indie music artists have varying relationships with success, most notably they conceptualise and approach success differently. Success and its relation to the self was note with many artists demonstrated their awareness of their career success by acknowledging it in interviews, such as

When the single came out and the views were climbing and everyone was getting more and

more followers, we were able to sit together and be like okay, we're not going to change, we're still the same. The five of us are friends, and we have our feet on the ground. (The Last Dinner Party, as quoted in Landrum, 2023, para. 9)

Hereby, members of The Last Dinner Party, as a response to their success also made a decision to stay their authentic selves irrespective of their newfound popularity. Others go as far as to not identify with the success and shrug it off when brought up in interviews.

In a similarly humble manner, even indie superstars such as Hozier also outwardly express gratitude for their success: “They’re buying tickets to come to the shows. That’s amazing, it’s really, it’s yeah … And I feel really fortunate, I feel incredibly blessed,” (Hozier, as quoted in Lewis Howes, 2024, 18:51).

Indie music artists' views on success have been categorised to fit into two philosophical schools of thought: Buddhism and Stoicism. Hereby, a Buddhist view of success echoes the Buddhist philosophy which sees desiring more (fame, fortune, *etc.*) as the cause of suffering, and the modern economic-minded and goal-oriented world perpetuates this issue (Loy, 2014, p. 47). Applied in this context, indie music artists who see longing for success as pointless and as a source of unhappiness and therefore aim to stay indifferent towards success have been labelled to have a Buddhist view of success. One such indie music artist who fits into both schools of thought is the American solo artist SYML, who expressed his Buddhist approach as,

If I’d limited myself to just dream, I think I would’ve been too focused on that and missed all the good stuff. … But I haven’t god [sic] a dream to play in a specific venue, with this many people and become famous or something. (B. Fennell of SYML, as quoted in Cernat, 2021, para. 54)

Secondly, indie music artists can also possess a Stoical view of success. One key tenet of modern Stoicism echoes the sentiment that life is inevitably full of suffering and there is not much one can do to control for that, the only control lies in one’s response to the outside factors (Guerin, 2022, p. 138). Following this tenet, indie music artists expressed seeing music as a job like any other, one that comes with its own struggles, and that it helps to just accept the sense of lack of control in matters of career success. Once more, SYML illustrates this Stoic approach well by stating

Once you put [your music] out into the world, it doesn’t matter what people think because that’s what you have to do as an artist: just fully let go once it’s out, move on and find out what’s next for you creatively. (B. Fennell of SYML, as quoted in Cernat, 2021, para. 7)

4.4.3 Success as a Negative

Lastly, indie artists despite their seeming indifference to many aspects of their careers, also described the negative sides of success, such as audience backlash and general struggles that come with success. Audience backlash was not a common theme, yet notable regardless, especially in how it uniquely relates to the indie music scene. One case of mainstream success (in this case going to represent one's country in Eurovision) being met with audience criticism has been described as the following,

When we started we were definitely more indie, like in terms of the quality, that we were lesser known, and then people wanted to come see us, especially those who don't want to listen to music that everyone knows. And some of those fans disappeared once we got very popular. (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025, pp. 4-5)

Indie music artists, such as Mitski also struggle psychologically with the idea of being a successful and well-known music artist: "You have to accept that in the eyes of the world, you're not a person, you're a consumer product. That's just really difficult for my brain to accept," (Mitski, as quoted in Tsjeng, 2022, para. 16)

5. Conclusion

This thesis investigated the role of authenticity in the reputation of indie music artists and its impact on their career success. The focus of this research was on indie music artists specifically, due to the high importance of authenticity in the indie music subculture (Baym, 2019, p. 171-172). Therefore, the suitable methodological approach taken was conducting interviews with indie artists, and to supplement those, also gather media interviews (articles and videos) with indie music artists. All data was analysed together via thematic analysis.

The central research question of the thesis asks: "How can authenticity as a reputation building tool be used by indie music artists to foster career success?". The findings indicate that indie music artists do not consciously attend to their authenticity, thereby, it is not seen as a reputation management tool, but rather a natural by-product of the types of people indie music artists are naturally. Indie artists are well in touch with themselves as people and therefore possess a great degree of self-awareness and self-confidence that is independent of outside validation or lack thereof. This also helps them to stay authentic to themselves and to their audiences. While they do hold authenticity in high-regard, prioritise it over success and reputation, and recognise its value in their genre, they do not effortfully attend to it and, thus, lack any specific authenticity-building methods. Additionally, indie music artists are not looking to foster career success, as most are indifferent to both their reputation and success. All studied indie artists deny cultivating success consciously and

attribute it rather to pure luck and the result of consistent music production and performance. Indie music artists do not express any career-related goals, their main focus is on being their authentic selves and making music for the enjoyment of themselves and their audiences. Their genuine intent and lack of success-seeking is evident to the audience who perceives this as authentic, the most important value in the modern indie music scene. However, it must be noted that intended and perceived authenticity do not always align. All in all there is almost an overarching apathy regarding one's success and reputation when it comes to indie artists, however their love for music as a means of self-expression remains strong.

The most relevant academic research and literature that made up the backbone of this thesis process were that of Everts et al. (2022) ("Milestones in music: Reputations in the career building of musicians in the changing Dutch music industry"), Baym's book *Playing to the Crowd* (2019), Strand (2013) ("Authenticity as a form of worth"), and the various (co-)publications of Hesmondhalgh (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Hesmondhalgh, 2020; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2009).

The basis for the thesis topic was built on Everts et al. (2022) idea of reputation building tools and techniques for starting music artists. This work provided a great starting point into developing a specific inquiry of research by introducing the role of reputation in career success and also used the same methodological approach as was done in this thesis — interviewing musicians. Similarly, in hindsight, their findings similarly suggest that music artists are in the industry due to their passion for their work. As a basis, the work of Everts et al. (2022) proved useful, however, through this research it became evident that reputation building tools do not hold much relevance in the indie music scene, and thus are not applicable to indie music artists in the same manner as reputation building tools may be for music artists of other genres.

Nancy Baym's book *Playing to the Crowd* (2019) provided some of the most valuable insights on the crucial and determining role of authenticity in indie music; it helped lay the foundation for the whole thesis by highlighting the complex interplay of the two key themes. It introduced the notion of authenticity as a value measurement in the genre, a framework upon which findings of other authenticity literature could be explored. One such work that complemented and further explored the idea of authenticity as a value measurement in indie music, was that of Strand (2013). It highlighted the contradictory nature of mainstream success in indie music, and demonstrated which values indie music audiences hold with regards to what they deem (in)authentic. Strand's (2013) work provided a valuable and rare academic insight into indie music audiences.

The various works of Hesmondhalgh, such as Hesmondhalgh (1999), Hesmondhalgh (2020), Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2009), contributed to a better understanding of the workings of music industries. Hesmondhalgh (1999) was the source for many indie-related concepts and definitions utilised in this thesis and thereby greatly contributed to creating a working definition of what

contributes to an indie music artist. It also served as the main source of information on the lesser studied indie music industry in general, both its artistic side as well as its more political side.

Hesmondhalgh (2020) had a less impactful role, serving to understand the issues musicians face in the modern music industries with regards to streaming platforms. Similarly, Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2009) helped to highlight the specific difficulties faced by creative workers and thus contributed to an explanation of the practical and social value of this thesis.

For its methodology, this thesis used in-depth interviews (both self-conducted and pre-existing media interviews) in combination with thematic analysis, enabling a rich subjective understanding of the research sample of successful indie music artists. Despite some limitations and potential issues with its validity, overall, this triangulated method proved useful and was decidedly the best approach taken to qualitatively study this topic, given the circumstances (e.g. struggling to get in contact with famous indie musicians).

As mentioned, the use of triangulation proved to be a limitation due to the severely unequal contribution of various data sources, which also complicated the data analysis process. Interviewer bias, the heterogeneity of the sample, time and budget constraints, and the author's quantitative background all proved to be considerable limitations.

It is, hereby, important to note that while this thesis set out to serve as a guide for young and starting indie music artists, it was unable to do so in a manner expected initially when going into the research. The findings proved problematic for two main reasons: 1) indie music artists do not have any reputation building tools or techniques which could be passed on to starting artists, and 2) indie music artists do not seek to build their success or curate their reputation. This has two implications: 1) this thesis is unable to provide any sort of practical roadmap for success as intended, and 2) there is a lack of audience who would care for such tips to begin with, hereby rendering the practical usefulness of this research pointless. Admittedly, the wrong premise of assuming indie artists are seeking success in the same way as other music artists was taken in this thesis from the start; however, this blindspot was not evident when setting the objectives for this thesis, and only became apparent through its findings. Despite these pitfalls, the value of this thesis is still prevalent, however, it lies more so in its academic and scientific contribution, by providing a valuable insight regarding the lack of care indie music artists have for curating authenticity, reputation, or building career success. Additionally, the author aims to still deliver a sort of advisory paragraph based on the findings below in order to fulfill the objective of the thesis, even if it is not done in the initially intended way.

The somewhat paradoxical advice for any starting indie artists seeking success in the industry would be to pursue this career for the love of (making and sharing) music. Additionally, success may be reliant on luck which is not something that can be controlled for, hereby, consistent

hard work, while not a guarantee, is the way towards success. It helps to get to know oneself and to be in tune with one's inner world as this may help foster natural authenticity. Similarly, one can cultivate a deep sense of unshakeable self-confidence by getting to know oneself better and aiming to live, act, work in accordance with one's own values. In the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's new song, if you want the secret to success, stop trying to hit it big time!

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Appendix A

Table A1

Monthly listener count on Spotify by artist. Data retrieved June 2025.

Artist	Monthly listener count on Spotify
Amber Run	3.4 million
Bleachers	9.2 million
Bon Iver	16.4 million
Clairo	18.8 million
Declan McKenna	9.2 million
Father John Misty	9.5 million
Faye Webster	8.2 million
Fitz and the Tantrums	11.8 million
girl in red	13.2 million
Hozier	48.1 million
Lana Del Rey	59.7 million
Lord Huron	30.4 million
LP	7.8 million
Mac DeMarco	20.4 million
Mitski	22.7 million
Mt. Joy	6.6. million
Nikki Lane	374.9 thousand
Phoebe Bridgers	11.5 million

Puuluup	207.8 thousand
Remi Wolf	4.1 million
Sad Night Dynamite	227.7 thousand
SYML	13.1 million
Tame Impala	28.7 million
The Last Dinner Party	2.6 million
The Lumineers	21.3 million
Wallows	8.8 million

Table A2

An overview of the interview articles and video-interviews analysed (excludes self-conducted interviews).

Interview Article Headline	Publication Name	Publication Type	Date of Publication	Artist(s) Interviewed	Link to Interview Article
““Brutal Honesty Can Be Somewhat Comical:” An Interview With Faye Webster”	Passion of the Weiss	(Online) magazine	September 9, 2021	Faye Webster	https://www.passionweiss.com/2021/09/09/faye-webster-i-know-im-funny-haha-album-interview/
“Mitski: Stop the World”	Crack Magazine	(Online) magazine	January 5, 2022	Mitski	https://crackmagazine.net/article/profiles/mitski-new-album-laurel-hell-interview/

“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: A Conversation With Lana Del Rey”	Medium	Online publishing platform	January 30, 2024	Lana Del Rey	https://medium.com/@alexgfrank/life-liberty-and-the-pursuit-of-happiness-a-conversation-with-lana-del-rey-99b53f03f9ae
“Hozier on being authentic, Ireland and speaking out for queer youth: 'All I can do is be honest'”	Big Issue	Street newspaper	December 9, 2023	Hozier	https://www.bigissue.com/culture/music/hozier-unreal-unearth-tour-ireland-honesty-lgbtq-interview/
“One To Watch: Sad Night Dynamite on Finding Their Creative ‘Sweet Spot’ During Lockdown”	Billboard	(Online) magazine	March 18, 2021	Sad Night Dynamite	https://www.billboard.com/music/rock/one-to-watch-sad-night-dynamite-debut-mixtape-interview-9542394/
“Interview: The ebb and flow of Wallows.”	Coup de Main	(Online) magazine	August 31, 2022	Wallows	https://www.coupde mainmagazine.com/wallows/18778
“Lana Del Rey hits back at critics who say	The Guardian	Daily newspaper	May 21, 2020	Lana Del Rey	https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/may/21/lana-del-rey-hits-back-at-critics-who-say

she 'glamorises abuse”					ey-hits-back-at-critics-who-say-she-glamorises-abuse
“INTERVIEW: The Lumineers”	Post To Write	Music blog	April 12, 2013	The Lumineers	https://posttowire.com/2013/04/12/interview-the-lumineers/
“Fitz, Leader Of Pop Band Fitz And The Tantrums, Talks About Their New Album, Let Yourself Free, Their Hit “HandClap,” And Writing Their Songs”	SongWriterUniverse	(Online) magazine	December 12, 2022	Fitz and The Tantrums	https://www.songwriteruniverse.com/fitz-and-the-tantrums-handclap-songs-2022/
““The beauty of this album is not thinking too deeply” – DECLAN MCKENNA on the inspirations & process behind new album”	Buzz Magazine	(Online) magazine	February 8, 2024	Declan McKenna	https://www.buzzmag.co.uk/declan-mckenna-what-happened-to-the-beach-making-of-album-interview/
“Mind Reading: Amber Run Frontman Joe	Forbes	(Online) magazine	April 3, 2023	(Joe Keogh of) Amber Run	https://www.forbes.com/sites/cathyolson/2023/04/03/mind-reading-amber-run-f

Keogh Gets Candid About His 'Very Lonely Time'"					rontman-joe-keogh-gets-candid-about-his-very-lonely-time/
"Here Is the Scandalous Father John Misty Interview You've Been Waiting For"	Pitchfork	(Online) magazine	March 16, 2017	Father John Misty	https://pitchfork.com/features/interview/10041-here-is-the-scandalous-father-john-misty-interview-youve-been-waiting-for/
"Father John Misty's Quest to Explain Himself"	The New Yorker	(Online) magazine	June 19, 2017	Father John Misty	https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/26/father-john-mistys-quest-to-explain-himself
"Bon Iver: 'There are people who are into being famous. And I don't like that'"	The Guardian	Daily newspaper	September 24, 2016	(Justin Vernon of) Bon Iver	https://www.theguardian.com/global/2016/sep/24/bon-iver-justin-vernon-22-million-interview
"The Eyes Have It: An Interview with LP"	Medium	Online publishing platform	September 4, 2014	LP	https://medium.com/@theKELword/the-eyes-have-it-an-interview-with-lp-c6ac60ddbe1f
"INTERVIEW with Brian Fennell	Oana Cernat	Music blog	March 24, 2024	SYML	https://oanacernat.com/interview-syml/

(SYML): “Until we die, music will hopefully continually change for all of us””					
“Interview: Ben Schneider from ‘Lord Huron’”	AAA Backstage	Music blog	February 23, 2016	(Ben Schneider of) Lord Huron	https://aabackstage.com/interview-ben-schneider-lord-huron/
“Lana Del Rey: She Does It for the Girls”	Rolling Stone	(Online) magazine	March 9, 2023	Lana Del Rey	https://au.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/lana-del-rey-interview-45714/
“Lana Del Rey Leads With Her Heart”	Harper’s Bazaar	(Online) magazine	November 21, 2023	Lana Del Rey	https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/art-books-music/a45862475/lana-del-rey-interview-2023/
“Isolation Songs: An Interview with Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon”	Pop Matters	(Online) magazine	February 18, 2008	(Justin Vernon of) Bon Iver	https://www.popmatters.com/isolation-songs-an-interview-with-bon-ivers-justin-vernon-2496176382.html
“Ten Year Town: Nikki Lane”	Holler	(Online) magazine	December 12, 2022	Nikki Lane	https://holler.country/feature/ten-year-town-nikki-lane/
“Phoebe Bridgers on Best Fit	The Line of Best Fit	(Online) magazine	May 27, 2020	Phoebe Bridgers	https://www.thelineofbestfit.com/featur

identity, internal worlds and her new record “Punisher”					es/interviews/phoebe-bridgers-identity-internal-worlds-punisher-interview
“Mac DeMarco: “I like to respect the way that recordings come to be””	MusicTech	Music blog	August 31, 2023	Mac DeMarco	https://musictech.com/features/interviews/mac-demarco-five-easy-hot-dogs-on-e-wayne-g-studio/
““That Song Genuinely Gets Me Off”: Clairo, in Conversation With Remi Wolf”	Interview Magazine	(Online) magazine	July 25, 2024	Clairo, Remi Wolf	https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/clairo-in-conversation-with-remi-wolf
“Jack Antonoff on Bleachers' newest album”	npr	Public broadcasting organization	March 17, 2024	(Jack Antonoff of Bleachers)	https://www.npr.org/2024/03/17/1239078700/jack-antonoff-on-bleachers-newest-album
“Declan McKenna: 'I've never claimed to be the voice of my generation”	The i Paper	National newspaper	February 9, 2024	Declan McKenna	https://inews.co.uk/culture/music/declan-mckenna-interview-2894563?srsltid=AfmBOorHn1WN41XUOiWCdcW22-Dn5rOXfK1RGfCqckn4G2C-0o1VT3Hk

“Norway’s most candid pop star Girl in Red: ‘One journalist asked me what meds I’m on’”	Independent	Online newspaper	April 13, 2024	Girl In Red	https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/girl-in-red-im-back-interview-b2527651.html
“Interview – Declan McKenna talks about his latest album and the relationship with fans”	Soundofbrit	Independent online media outlet	December 28, 2024	Declan McKenna	https://soundofbrit.fr/2024/12/28/interview-declan-mckenna-talks-about-his-latest-album-and-the-relationship-with-fans/
“Interview: Declan McKenna on the Need for Authenticity in Music and His New Album ‘What Happened to the Beach?’”	Atwood Magazine	(Online) magazine	April 5, 2024	Declan McKenna	https://atwoodmagazine.com/dmwb-declan-mckenna-what-happened-to-the-beach-album-interview-music-feature-2024/
“Interview: Lord Huron Dive into Time’s Blur on Their “Indefinably Nostalgic” 4th Album ‘Long Lost’”	Atwood Magazine	(Online) magazine	May 25, 2021	(Ben Schneider of) Lord Huron	https://atwoodmagazine.com/lhll-lord-huron-interview-long-lost-album-music-2021/

“INTERVIEW: Fitz and the Tantrums return to Boston, owe it to the fans”	The Daily Free Press	Student newspaper	November 13, 2016	Fitz and The Tantrums	https://dailyfreepress.com/11/13/21/123328/
“Sad Night Dynamite — Absurdity in the Big City”	Metal Magazine	(Online) magazine	(exact date not given) 2024	Sad Night Dynamite	https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/sad-night-dynamite
“Beating the ‘Industry Plant’ Allegations: An Interview with The Last Dinner Party”	Polyester	Online publication	(exact date not given) 2024	The Last Dinner Party	https://www.polyesterzine.com/features/the-last-dinner-party-interview
“The Hot Honey Sauce of Bands: An Interview with Mt. Joy’s Matt Quinn on Irreverence, Inside Jokes, & Their 3rd LP, ‘Orange Blood’”	Atwood Magazine	(Online) magazine	October 4, 2022	(Matt Quinn of) Mt. Joy	https://atwoodmagazine.com/mjob-mt-joy-interview-orange-blood-matt-quinn-music-2022/#google_vignette
“Hozier Opens Up: “I Was At War With Myself” - How	Lewis Howes	Youtube channel	April 1, 2024	Hozier	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mrt25oQwW4

To HEAL & UNBLOCK Your Creativity”					
“Tame Impala - Zane Lowe and Apple Music 'The Slow Rush' Interview”	Interscope Records	Youtube channel	February 14, 2020	Tame Impala	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr28pGJZ3nY

Appendix B

Interview Guides

Interview Guide 1: Full Set of Questions

General Questions

- Do you consider yourself an indie artist? What is your relationship with being labelled an indie artist?
 - What do you enjoy most about being an indie artist?
 - What would you say is your relationship like with your audience?

Authenticity

- What does being authentic as a music artist mean to you?
 - Provide my definition of authenticity (from literature): In academic literature authenticity has been defined as “a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others”, something is created via interaction between fans and artists, the key tenets of authenticity are: ethical behaviour, transparency, credibility, and integrity
 - Do you agree with this definition?
 - Would you say authenticity is a priority for you as an indie artist? Why or why not? (Brief)

Curation/Intention

- To what extent do you consciously curate authenticity?
 - Do you consciously curate authenticity in your work and public image?
 - Is it a strategic choice/conscious decision, an intuitive expression, a thought-through strategy or a mix of both?
 - Do you curate your personality and behaviour for your audience/career? Why or why not?

Methods

- In what ways do you foster authenticity in your work and the way you present yourself?
 - Which methods seem to have worked best?
 - Which methods surprisingly have backfired? (i.e., you were aiming to be authentic and it was not received well)

Reflection/discussion

- Do you believe that authenticity has helped shape your reputation or contributed to your success as a music artist?
- What music industry norms do you disagree with or go against, e.g. norms/rules or even your own managers?

Final question

- Is there anything else you wanted to add that we did not discuss?

Interview Guide 2: Shortened Set of Interview Questions

- 1) What does being authentic as an indie artist mean to you?
- 2) Would you say authenticity is a priority for you as an indie artist? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you consciously and intentionally try to cultivate an authentic image or does authenticity come naturally to you? Or is it a mix of both?
- 4) In which ways do you foster or express authenticity in your work and the way you present yourself?
- 5) Do you believe that authenticity has helped shape your reputation or contributed to your success as an indie artist?

Appendix C

Table C1

Coding frame to demonstrate the data analysis procedure.

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Illustrative quote
Authenticity	Unattended authenticity	<i>Struggling to define authenticity</i>	<p>“I don't really know [what being authentic means to me]. I don't really think about it. Indie rock is still showbiz. Dressing up and playing pretend is part of the job. And I don't think music that authentically reflects the artist as a person is any more compelling than the opposite. ... ” (B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025)</p>
		<i>Lack of conscious planning</i>	<p>“The thing is, I don't think we are doing what we do very consciously, like not in a negative way, but we aren't planning a lot of it ... So we aren't sitting here like: 'Okay, how can we make ourselves come across as authentic and do these things?' It just kind of happens. So you asking that, or posing that question, I'm like: I didn't even really ever think about that.” (C. Preston of Wallows, as quoted in Graves, 2022, para. 46)</p>
	(Recognising) the value of authenticity		<p>“I knew that I didn't want to make music that was putting up walls against the listener. At the time I felt I needed to in order to protect myself, but that's not why I make music. At the end of the day, the music that touches me and has saved me is the stuff that goes right to my heart and feels personal, authentic and true.” (Mitski, as quoted in Tsjeng, 2022, para. 10)</p>
	Facets of authenticity	<i>Direct contact with the</i>	<p>“That's the thing I love most, talking to the fans. It's great to be on an equal footing with</p>

		<p><i>audience</i></p>	<p>people.” (D. McKenna, as quoted in Fabien, 2024, para. 22)</p>
		<p><i>Humility</i></p>	<p>“I think, when I’m performing, I’m really into it being an experience we’re all having. If you’re digging it, if you’re here to see the show and you like the music, then I want it to be an inclusive process, not a pedestal, idol-worshipping, bullshit kind of thing.” (LP, as quoted in McCartney, 2014, para. 12)</p>
		<p><i>Relatability</i></p>	<p>“Anything in general that makes somebody relate more or makes somebody relatable, that’s the goal. To be heard, or for somebody to feel more understood. That’s what I generally like to get out of my music.” (F. Webster, as quoted in Olson, 2021, para. 63)</p>
		<p><i>Pseudo-authenticity</i></p>	<p>“There’s something innately false about performance, I wanted to be authentically bogus rather than bogusly authentic.” (Father John Misty, as quoted in Paumgarten, 2017, para. 2)</p>
<p>Adjacents of authenticity</p>	<p><i>Integrity</i></p>		<p>“A very important term for me is what in English is called ‘integrity’ … which means that you are not all over the place but rather consistently whole. … And I have said no to many interviews for magazines … where it seems to me that I would not want to give an interview about what I eat.” (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025, p. 8)</p>
		<p><i>Vulnerability</i></p>	<p>“It was 100 percent authentic. it’s just that where I was at the time was malleable in my</p>

			own life — easy to, like, acquiesce. I kept rereading the idea of somebody who was feigning vulnerability, perhaps what they saw was what was vulnerable.” (Lana Del Rey, as quoted in Cooper Jones, 2023, para. 18)
		<i>Honesty</i>	“All I can do as an artist is to be honest about how I witness things, how I experience the world. I’ve always strived for that. The danger is that it’s a vulnerable thing to be honest at times, it can come with pressure and be tricky.” (Hozier, as quoted in Westwater, 2023, para. 17)
Authenticity & the audience		<i>Intended versus perceived</i>	“Of course [I see myself as authentic]. I’m always being myself. <i>They</i> [emphasis added] don’t know what authentic is. If you think of all the music that came out until 2013, it was super straight and shiny. If that’s authentic to you, this is going to look like the opposite.” (Lana Del Rey, as quoted in Frank, 2024, para. 29)
		<i>Authenticity as a service to the audience</i>	“I hope that by sharing [my own dealings with depression and suicide] one other person might be able to see a little bit of themselves in that story and that they are not totally alone in those feelings.” (J. Keogh of Amber Run, as quoted in Olson, 2023, para. 4)
Self-authenticity		<i>Self-assurance</i>	“I’m proud of the way I’ve put parts of my story into songs in ways that only I understand. In terms of my gauge of what’s good, it’s really just what I think. I have an internal framework that is the only thing I measure it by. My own opinion is really important to me. It starts and

			stops there.” (Lana Del Rey, as quoted in Frank, 2024, para. 95)
		<i>Self-expression</i>	“Most of the time [our songs are] versions of ourselves. I think all of us have different characters within us. Most of the time you don’t even realise you’re writing about yourself. Then 6 months later you realise.” (Sad Night Dynamite, as quoted in Rezai-Mah, 2024, para. 14)
		<i>Self-irony</i>	“I don’t have any experience to draw from other than my music career, because if you take away my music from me, all you have left is a mustache and a bad attitude.” (Father John Misty, as quoted in Mapes, 2017, para. 39)
		<i>Self-awareness</i>	“[All my albums have] gradually gotten more and more personal because I’ve gradually gotten more confident to say what I want to say and say what I’m feeling.” (Tame Impala, as quoted in Interscope Records, 2020, 14:43)
		<i>Self-exploration & self-discovery</i>	“At first you probably think too much before you speak, trying to act up to a role to appear cool or appear like this or that. Being an authentic human being is something that I’ve had to learn.” (D. McKenna, as quoted in Curran, 2024, para. 18)
		<i>Change</i>	“I really don’t relate to that record anymore. Just like in an artist sense, I feel like everyone grows and changes. I think as I’ve grown I’ve realized who I wanted to be and what I wanted to write about and what was meaningful to me.” (Faye Webster, as quoted in Olson, 2021,

			para. 16)
Reputation	Apathy towards reputation		“I don’t really think about perception of me [sic] at all, I don’t think of myself as a character, even if some people think I am.” (P. Bridgers, as quoted in Bennett, 2020, para. 17)
	Concerns about reputation	<i>Cultivating an authentic public image</i>	“It’s not that we don’t want to have success at the highest levels; I think it’s just that we want people to realize that making honest music.” (M. Quinn of Mt. Joy, as quoted in Mosk, 2023, para. 22)
		<i>Cultivating a persona</i>	“Part of my job is to be a character or to be everybody’s friend, and that’s not possible.” (McKenna, as quoted in Fabien, 2024, para. 22)
		<i>Valuing privacy</i>	“Artists have a responsibility to themselves to be their authentic selves publicly, but there are also things that should stay private. … Some things are sacred.” (P. Bridgers, as quoted in Bennett, 2020, para. 21)
(Career) success	Attributing success	<i>Luck</i>	“I think we’re lucky that our music seems to bring people to the party for the most part without having to have radio charting success necessarily.” (M. Quinn of Mt. Joy, as quoted in Mosk, 2023, para. 21)
		<i>Hard work</i>	“But what I do know is that the fucking Internet makes everything seem like it takes two seconds. But it still takes a long time to find yourself. Just because someone saw something on the Internet in two seconds, saw someone’s time-lapse, doesn’t mean it happened that way. It’s fucking hard.” (LP, as

		quoted in McCartney, 2014, para. 65)
Relationship with success	<i>Success and the self</i>	“When the single came out and the views were climbing and everyone was getting more and more followers, we were able to sit together and be like okay, we’re not going to change, we’re still the same. The five of us are friends, and we have our feet on the ground.” (The Last Dinner Party, as quoted in Landrum, 2023, para. 9)
	<i>Appreciation of success</i>	“They’re buying tickets to come to the shows. That’s amazing, it’s really, it’s yeah … And I feel really fortunate, I feel incredibly blessed.” (Hozier, as quoted in Lewis Howes, 2024, 18:51)
	<i>A Buddhist view of success</i>	“If I’d limited myself to just dream, I think I would’ve been too focused on that and missed all the good stuff. … But I haven’t god [sic] a dream to play in a specific venue, with this many people and become famous or something.” (B. Fennell of SYML, as quoted in Cernat, 2021, para. 54)
	<i>A Stoical view of success</i>	“I haven’t actually heard any negative feedback, I think it’s more like once you put it out into the world, it doesn’t matter what people think because that’s what you have to do as an artist: just fully let go once it’s out, move on and find out what’s next for you creatively.” (B. Fennell of SYML, as quoted in Cernat, 2021, para. 7)
Success as a negative	<i>Audience backlash</i>	“When we started we were definitely more indie, like in terms of the quality, that we were

			lesser known, and then people wanted to come see us, especially those who don't want to listen to music that everyone knows. And some of those fans disappeared once we got very popular." (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025, pp. 4-5)
		<i>Struggles of success</i>	"You have to accept that in the eyes of the world, you're not a person, you're a consumer product. That's just really difficult for my brain to accept." (Mitski, as quoted in Tsjeng, 2022, para. 16)
Indie music	Struggling to define indie		"I don't know whether we are often called indie musicians. So, I think that this indie definition has several ways of interpreting it. ... But if we talk about indie as a type of non-mainstream pop [music] which maybe also...I don't even know how to define it then, because like we have record labels." (M. Veisson of Puuluup, personal communication, April 29, 2025, p. 1)
	Negatives of being indie	<i>Strong sense of pretentious judgement in the scene</i>	"Someone in the indie world is more likely to be accused by other indie people of being over-thinking, calculated psychos, when this whole fucking world of pop music has been [calculated]. It's all this bourgeois bullshit. It's neo-Orientalism." (Father John Misty, as quoted in Mapes, 2017, para. 34)
	Automatic connotations to indie music	<i>De facto authenticity</i>	"I'll say this, we are a true independent band, so for better or worse, every creative expression of the band is authentic in that it came from me directly without the influence of record labels, managers, pr teams [sic], etc."

			(B. Petering of TV Girl, personal communication, April 20, 2025)
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