CHAPTER 5

The Status of Relationships

Q: What's the worst thing about this job in your experience?
A: There are two things. Knowing your value and also the effect it can have on partners… It is like having another partner. There's a third person in your relationship.

—Producer/Performer, M, Hip-hop, Manchester [4]

This chapter will explore how concepts of emotional labour, coupled with the convergence and distortions of private and public space brought about by social media, have served to amplify the impacts of having musical ambition. The centralising of responsibility on the musical subject that so embodies the ideal of the creative entrepreneur has profound implications. By using the musicians that we interviewed as an exemplar of this model of creative labour, it is possible to see how these transformations shape internal and external life. These tensions present specific challenges to all social relations, however the patterns that become visible once we turn to the field of family and close personal relationships are particularly revealing. This chapter will propose that musical ambition increases the tensions between musicians and those closest to them (their friends, partners and family) and extends out into musical communities as the fragmentation it creates increases the level of competition. In doing so, this increases the impact of existing inequalities, distorting and amplifying positions of privilege and disadvantage.

Our findings here concerning the impact of musical ambition on human relationships should be understood as intersecting with and revealing a hidden side of the previous chapters. Music making is deeply intertwined with personal relationships, so understanding the nature and impact of these relationships sheds new light on how we might better understand the nature of

musical work ('the status of work'), and how musicians understand the ways in which this work acquires validation and meaning ('the status of value'). This chapter explores the nature of musicians' relationships with friends and family, with professionals and other musicians who come to be seen as like family, and ultimately their relationship with music making itself. We interrogate what might constitute healthy or damaging relationships in these terms, exploring a key dialectic between support on the one hand and dependence on the other. In so doing, we reveal how social relationships often *are* economic relationships which are continually both worked on and sometimes shattered, and the profound impact this has on the lives of musicians and those closest to them.

Although many of the challenges identified here are not unique to musicians alone, what is revealed is the way in which the special characteristics of this kind of digitalised creative labour come to occupy and preoccupy the minds, lives, time and spaces of those undertaking this work in what we argue is a particularly problematic fashion. One of the issues for those trying to carve out a career in music is how to resolve the conflict between the vision of a successful future, advertised and encouraged by multimedia sources and the very different reality of their own experiences. Here again the fantasy of participation conflated with the myth of meritocracy that is so central to a musical ambition has a visibly polarising and insidious impact on the already disadvantaged, as can be seen in the recent data on women in music (Bain, 2019, for example). Indeed, revealing a hidden side of the 'status of work' and the 'status of value' as we seek to do here by looking at personal relationships, demands a gendered approach, not least given the historically gendered assumption that one's work life and home life ought to be cleanly divided. As we explore how personal and economic relationships have blurred together, we ask how this process has impacted female musicians in particular, given the way masculine/heteronormative ideas about who should be the 'breadwinner' and the centrality of the nuclear family have historically operated. Also, on a more practical level, our female interviewees, simply tended to speak about their relationships in distinct ways. Given the tendency for women, historically, to shoulder the burden of emotional and reproductive labour this was perhaps not surprising, but explains why we have grouped the women's responses together in this chapter on relationships.

The final section of this chapter will explore some of the particular challenges facing women working in the UK music industries. As we suggest, while the emphasis on the economic value of music for the individual serves to obscure the social value of musical work as well as underplaying the significance of musical activity in social relations and social reproduction, this has very specific implications for sexual and gender politics. What we want to do in the third section of this chapter is emphasise the psychic and affective dimension of this on female musicians to better interrogate the particularly high levels of anxiety and depression reported by female respondents to our earlier survey.

5.1 Personal Relationships

The link between music and personal relationships is a powerful one. People fall in love to particular songs and come to define life's precious moments through what they define as 'our song' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013a). When people get married, often two of the key questions asked are 'Which song should I walk down the aisle to?' and 'Which song will be for our first dance?' Music is powerful. Music matters. At the same time however, the strain of being a musician can have a destabilising effect on personal relationships and family life. Antisocial working hours and time spent away recording, promoting a release or touring can make maintaining relationships and family life difficult for musicians. A female DJ we interviewed, who has been playing all over the world for over twenty years, suggested that her musical career has effectively taken precedence over her desire for a relationship: 'It has made it pretty impossible… to meet someone… I had to make a choice between my job, my work life and my family, and I chose work over my family' (DJ, F, Dance, Manchester [8]). In this first section of the chapter we will examine how musical work impacts on the family lives of artists, and secondly how the dissolving of the work/leisure distinction which digital labour has brought about is felt particularly acutely by musicians. We end the section by suggesting that reducing music to its economic value can lead to viewing it as akin to financial speculation, a kind of risk management where gambling is at the centre.

5.1.1 Family, Guilt and Sustainability

Several of our interviewees spoke of the tension of having to rely on the kindness, understanding and support of others, but they spoke of this as if it was more than one should expect, or that it came only at a price. One musician told us: 'Even now with my girlfriend supporting me, most of my money goes on other stuff. The annoying thing is like, "Oh, let's go out for a meal". Nah, I can't afford it. "OK, let's go on holiday"… Every fucking year we go on holiday and she ends up like paying for it and then I end up paying her back. It just adds to the stress' (Producer, M, Dubstep, London [18]). In this respect, this interviewee felt that 'the status of work' leads to problems in 'the status of relationships' on a simple financial level – an accounting level if you like. However, at times this analysis went further. Later in the same interview, this producer told us: 'I don't want to be broke all the time… I don't want to be this person who is scrounging off his girlfriend.' Here the interviewee is expressing how his sense of self, his position as a man, is destabilised by feeling like he has to rely on his girlfriend to pay if they are going to do things together. With that comes frustration and anxiety about how he is seen by others, and what impact that may have on the future of his relationship. His musical career at this point does not allow him to feel it is enough to be who he is and to allow himself to be supported by his partner. He was clearly struggling with this.

This particular excerpt reveals dependency and interconnectedness felt by musicians, and is an example of how the 'music' part of their work may be understood by themselves and their loved ones as something of an indulgence – a luxury not afforded to everyone, above and beyond that which one might be expected to support. This also highlights the evaluation matrices of social hierarchies of work that come to be based on economics rather than need, where the social value is marginalised. Some of our interviewees spoke of feeling like their music was something intruding on their relationships. As a jazz musician told us: 'The stress of being away from home… And when you're really, really busy you hardly see the family, that's when marital problems start. I've had terrible experiences of stuff happening while I'm away from home… A lot of trying to get home as soon as possible… latest flights out, earliest flights back' (Musician, M, Jazz, Birmingham [5]). This leads them to question the very nature of their most deeply intimate relationships which can become defined by guilt. Many of the music makers we spoke to reported feeling that they were a burden and were struggling to find a sense of self-worth. For those in relationships this was primarily with their partners, but sometimes regarding their parents too. Although all of those interviewed expressed their gratitude at having this support, they also spoke of the guilt they felt and how often this led to them feeling inadequate and worthless.

At the same time however, there was a very real sense among our interviewees that they simply would not have been able to reach their current position without the encouragement, support and care of their loved ones and their wider support network. Such feelings are well founded. Research conducted in the Netherlands by Zwaan and colleagues (2009: 60) found 'a significant and strong positive correlation for social support with career success, indicating that in order to be successful it is important to receive support from important others, such as family members, partner and peers.' This raises interesting and challenging questions vis-à-vis inequality. As explored in 'the status of value', artistic success correlates closely with existing social advantage further eroding the myth of meritocracy that is so embedded within creative industries' – and specifically the music industry's – discourses and values. This paradox between being told that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in music, and the reality that success depends on social privilege and networked relationships of power, has specific impacts on the psychological wellbeing of an individual and his or her relationships as they struggle to reconcile this reality in their own lives. Here then we can see how 'the status of value' intersects with 'the status of relationships'. That is, the successes (and failures) of musicians are not isolated incidents of genius rising to the top; they are embedded not only in the commercial world of the music industries and industry infrastructure, but in the association of family, friends and their social worlds.

That families are the biggest indirect patrons of the arts should come as no surprise; a musical career, particularly in classical music, needs significant

investment from expensive instruments to private tuition. There is a distinct link between one's social class and the cultural environment and musical education one might receive, from church music to folk traditions to classical music. Yet despite some of our interviewees being born into musical families, many of them spoke of how they experienced their dependence on their families in terms of burden and often guilt. What appears too, is that the attempt to forge a musical career in a professional arena without adequate additional income made our interviewees vulnerable to these negative feelings. Rather than accepting the situation as being part of a wider social pattern, they continued to individualise their predicament and refer to themselves in terms of inadequacy and failure.

Financial support, such as from parents or partners, is increasingly necessitated in an environment of decreasing investment in wider arts infrastructure occurring alongside the collapse of indirect support that had previously supported the democratisation of art practices. The idea that artists should rely solely on market forces for support is, historically speaking, relatively new, as well as being neither sustainable nor accurate. Historically, artists in Europe have, by and large, required some kind of patronage, most notably from the crown, the Church or the state (Blanning, 2008). More recently this financial support might have come from a combination of collaborating institutions; a mixture of income solutions for artists that included public donations or monies paid for the sale of tickets or works or performances, money thrown in a bucket in a church hall or crowdfunding via services such as Patreon. Indirect support of cultural production has always favoured the more privileged, from access to education onwards. However, the reliance on support of this kind coupled with the introduction of student fees, has raised significant questions regarding access to and opportunities within the creative industries. McRobbie (1999, 2016), Banks (2017) and others have written specifically about the role of public policy in post-war Britain acting as indirect state support for music, from music lessons and free instrument loans in schools to the role of arts schools and in higher education. Unemployment benefit that included housing benefit – or 'the dole' as it was once called – provided a more conducive environment for many aspiring musicians (O'Rorke, 1998) and Cloonan (2002, 2003) has written about the New Deal for Musicians (NDfM) scheme that operated under New Labour. Historically, rents were much less expensive in London and other urban centres when considered relative to income, and there was a developed squatting scene allowing artists to live cheaply and work on their art (Gornostaeva and Campbell, 2012). These were outside of the formal parameters of funding for the arts. With the shift away from the creative industries since the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010 in the UK and the Conservative-led governments from 2015, the policies of austerity and increasing cuts to arts funding has meant a move to hubs, partnership funding, and what has been called third leg income. This has also been seen at the more

commercial end of the music industries, where previously direct arts funding was rarely seen (see Newsinger, 2014 for more on this). It is in this environment our interviewees find themselves – even as they continue to internalise their predicament.

5.1.2 The Role of London

All of these changes have meant that musical aspirations often need direct family support. The questions then are: how does your family feel about your musical aspirations, and can they, or do they want to, support you? The advantage of being in London, or not, was a key issue raised by many of our interviewees. For many, London was just too expensive on every level, and yet the necessity of living there, for some, defined and dictated their deepest relationships.

Geographical location and access to the music industries' power players remains an issue for artists and music professionals working outside the capital. Several commented on the difficulty of building relationships with music people in London, citing the cost of visiting or moving to London as a real obstacle, and that even when they did make the move, it was often (as per other work-seekers moving to the capital), an exhausting, draining and even scary place. One interviewee said, 'I went there because I wanted to do music and I just felt like I had to work every hour of the day just in order to afford to be there and that then meant that I wasn't really having time to meet other creative people which was the one thing that I wanted to do. And it felt a bit murky' (Musician, F, Folk, Cardiff [21]).

Even if musicians could forge their key professional relationships online, they felt that it was important to meet these people physically, to spend time with them in order to develop a relationship, even just to get their attention. As a DJ told us, 'I need to be able to do my job: I needed to be able to earn some money. And I wanted to do what I wanted to do for me. And I needed to be in the capital to do it because I also felt and realised that if I was in the capital I would get more work' (DJ, F, Dance, Manchester [8]). Even though Manchester has a strong media position now with Media City, BBC Radio and a large student population supporting a vibrant live scene, as well as its own strong musical identity, it was still noticeable from our interviewees that London was seen as central to developing a musical career. London is the hub of the UK music industries, with the main offices of the three major music companies headquartered here, as well as many recording and publishing companies. The royalty collection societies are now all based together in the regenerated Kings Cross area including the Performing Rights Society, Mechanical-Copyright Protection Society and Phonographic Performance Limited and all their new derivative offshoots. In addition, London is the home of the Musicians' Union, the Music Managers Forum, the Featured Artists Coalition and most of the big recording studios, influential management companies and international

live agents. In recent years this central hub has shrunk and been moving from its old West London base first towards East London and now settling in and around St. Pancras and Kings Cross.

London was perceived by many of the interviewees as another part of their career struggle, even though there are important regional orchestras and local radio and online stations. For the younger, emerging contemporary popular artists across all genres, it is clear that their local music scenes and venues – both of which are now hugely threatened in the wake of the impact of Covid-19 – still play a very important part in their career development. However, in order to improve their chances of getting signed or attracting sponsors or investment, London is still seen as pivotal and it is hard to argue to the contrary. Moving to London often meant having to leave behind friends and family to enter a world of work which, as many of our interviewees recalled, was precarious, uncertain, and even dangerous. This presented particular challenges for one interviewee from Manchester who introduced an interesting class distinction to her analysis: 'I know London to Manchester isn't that far, but when you're a northern girl, and it is a northern thing, it is far. It's far mentally and it's 200 miles far. You're not at home anymore. And that whole working class thing about moving away from your family and becoming something other, and doing something else, brought with it a whole heap of stress because I was moving away from my family, being a big traitor and going "Down South"' (DJ, F, Dance, Manchester [8]). Those who were able to avoid having to live in London made this a point of pride. For example, one musician told us, 'I've been doing it since 1986… surviving kind of outside the record industry, "that east London-centric thing", living in Manchester. And that's what I've been doing' (Producer/Performer, M, Hip-hop, Manchester [4]).

5.1.3 Touring and Family Life

The impact of a music career on family life was particularly evident when it comes to life on tour. Playing live and touring – an essential part of any musician's life and where they will earn their money, albeit an income stream which at the time of writing is, for many, entirely destroyed by the impact of Covid-19 (Hudak, 2020) – creates unique stresses and strains on relationships. The nature of touring is particularly difficult for those who are trying to maintain a relationship or any semblance of family life. One of our interviewees talked movingly about the possibility of one of her parents dying while they were still on tour and the fear of not being able to get back to see them alive one last time; knowing her father was sick but also realising how important the tour was to her career and livelihood:

> Literally the week before my Dad passed away, I was on tour in Australia
> and before I went on the tour… I was unable to make up my mind about

leaving my Dad who had just been in and out of hospital... I really struggled with the idea that I would have to be so far away when I wanted to be with my family. At the same time there was a [recording] deal on the table and I was supposed to get my head on that and think about the deal… You are constantly thinking ahead… I went away on tour and I was not on my best at all on that gig. It was more like I was not present… We flew to Melbourne for two gigs there and then flew to Sydney and did two nights there at the Sydney Opera House and then flew back home. I remember on the flight home, I was coming home to so much uncertainty.

—Musician, F, Jazz/Soul, London [3]

These difficult decisions cropped up frequently among our interviewees for whom extended periods away from home and loved ones put significant strain on all concerned. As a singer from Cardiff told us: 'I know people who spend a long time away from home and away from their partners and [feel] guilty about it… not feeling that they're doing enough somehow' (Musician, F, Folk, Cardiff [21]). Once again, we can see here how personal relationships can come to be defined by feelings of guilt, inadequacy and sacrifice, and all the clear self-esteem issues which come along with this. However, this occurs alongside a very real sense in which musicians feel that they love the work they are doing, problematising notions of (self)exploitation as explored in 'the status of work'. Indeed, work by Kenny, Driscoll and Ackermann (2012) on classical orchestral musicians suggested that touring artists regularly suffer from loneliness, sexual frustration, loss of a support network and frequently experience relationship breakdowns. The specific challenges of live music and its impact on mental wellbeing are being tackled as we write this, with LiveNation recently announcing that it is funding the writing of a *Touring and Mental Health Manual* – certainly a much-needed contribution in a sector which, as suggested, at the time of writing is facing unprecedented challenges.

5.1.4 The Work/Leisure Distinction

For many of the musicians we spoke to there appeared to be no time for rest and there was a collapse of the work/leisure distinction. By this we mean, there is often an inability to separate work time from leisure time and, given the nature of the work being undertaken, their relationship to it and how it is perceived, this has specific implications for domestic relationships. One interviewee explained that, 'I work pretty much all the time. I have just recently taken a little step back because I came probably as close to a breakdown as I think I've ever been in September. But just before that… I didn't have any days off that I could remember, for years. And felt really guilty if I thought about having time off' (Musician, F, Indie/Theatre, Belfast [6]). There is a multiplication of guilt here – guilt about the impact this has on the musician's family added to guilt about

even thinking of stopping. Public and private spaces dissolve as time away from work or the creation of quiet intimate space evaporates in the 'always on, always available' world of creative labour. It is interesting to note how in recent years, bigger artists are able to take 'time out', such as Ed Sheeran announcing in 2019 that he would be taking eighteen months off touring (Reilly, 2019b). For new and emerging artists there are no such opportunities, for 'fear of missing out'.

One of the most evocative and powerful ways this was described by an interviewee was when a producer from Manchester told us that music – or rather his music career – was in effect a third person in his relationship with his partner. We began this chapter with his words. He went on to explain:

> There is a third person because making music takes so many hours, beyond normal working hours, it doesn't do nine to five. Having that inspiration in the morning, jumping up 'I've got to put this down!' or having to leave a conversation because you've just heard something and you need to go and capture it. So it's that constant creation thing. It's almost like there is a third person in the relationship. And if you've got a loving partner they let it manifest because they know it's part of you and it keeps you alive for your wellbeing. As I said, to not let it out is toxic. It's like having a cyst.
>
> —Performer/Producer, M, Hip-hop, Manchester [4]

Outside the family, decoupling music from its social value serves to increase the fragmentation and isolation music makers experience, as the endless cycle of musical work invades all quarters of the musicians' lives, leaving no space, and no time, both physically and psychologically, for family and relationships to flourish. In this sense, the logic of competitive individualism comes to pervade all aspects of not only professional life, but also private life, as the musicians we spoke to, unconsciously or not, spoke about all relationships as being in competition with each other; competition for time and space. The majority had experienced difficulties in this area and often spoke about the loss of relationships and families in terms of sacrifice: it was a constant battle to prioritise their work or their relationships. As suggested, the drive to succeed (whatever that is), and to progress (likewise), means there is a pressure on musicians, whether set by themselves or others, to meet a set of preconceived expectations and a pressure to 'deliver', all in the context of ambiguous and blurred definitions, which all leads to feelings of burnout and exhaustion. As one music manager told us: 'You are under pressure from all angles… It's so erratic on a daily basis… Everything is a drama because of the pace this industry moves at… It's a constant state of pressure… It's inhumane… This job is completely extreme' (Manager, M, Pop/Various, London [29]). Not only is the work itself exhausting, but this is compounded by the knowledge that it is causing suffering for those closest to them.

One interviewee put it simply: 'There isn't much time to have a life' (Song-writer, F, Reggae/Soul, Manchester [9]). This sense in which an environment of perpetual work pervades, interrupts and even destroys our deepest bonds of interpersonal connectivity has recently been examined in the context of work on the gig economy, where notions of 'working yourself to death' (Tolento, 2017) are not just observed but applauded. However, what further makes the matter so problematic for musical workers is the very nature of subjective, artis-tic creative production, whereby there is always doubt, always another opinion to hear, and where everything – every idea, every concept, every opinion – is contestable; what Dean (2013) calls the reflexive loop. Here we see again the way 'the status of relationships' intersects with 'the status of value'. In this con-text, the idea of quality of life and quality of relationships is being subsumed by the occupation. For those we interviewed, musical work is not just an occupa-tion: musicians are *occupied*, inescapably so. Indeed, as with the term 'stream-ing' with its connotations of continuity, ubiquity and incessancy, so too is the language of occupation interesting. The question of whether these occupations qualify as 'work' has become increasingly contested – as has all creative labour in the digital sphere where regular work for regular wages becomes ever rarer and an employment contract has become a prize to be won (Dean, 2010). It is within this setting that we observe the collapsing inwards of the distinction between work and leisure wherein musical occupations are defined by being entirely occupied and preoccupied.

What is at the heart of this interpersonal destabilisation? What is the context in which the very processes of sociality are being interfered with for these musi-cians? We might understand this as a combination of five factors that charac-terise a musical career:

1. Destabilising financial precarity.
2. The difficulty in defining what 'work' is.
3. Entrepreneurial competitive individualism being highly invested in the hope that 'one big hit' (Neff et al., 2005; McRobbie, 2007) might pay off the debt.
4. The precarity of musical experience based on a fantasy of participation that includes the idea that everyone has an equal chance of winning.
5. High exit costs and a reluctance to stop making music.

It is worth briefly exploring the idea of exit costs or barriers to exit. When thinking of the marketplace, musicians are familiar with the idea of barriers to entry, now commonly understood to be very low i.e. the idea that the financial investments required to become a musician are lower now than they ever have been. This is at least one of the factors used commonly to explain the high level of competition and oversupply amongst musicians. Exit costs however refer to the costs – fiscal or otherwise – of *leaving* the marketplace. For some firms, exit

costs are low: they simply pack up and leave, albeit with a heavy heart. Contrastingly, other firms might have grown over the years with enormous financial and emotional investment, alongside high capital investments in fixed costs which one cannot easily walk away from. In chapter three when we discussed the concepts of success and failure, we explored the idea that musicians feel they must keep producing because it 'is' them: they are entangled with this identity. Walking away is hard, life-changing and time consuming: where would you go, and who would you be? Exit costs for musicians, we would argue, are high. We saw this earlier in a powerful section from an interviewee in which she described not making music as akin to being in mourning. Music is not something you let go of easily because it defines you; it is the life you have led and are profoundly attached to.

However, if one is symbolically and practically self-actualising via a process of entrepreneurship rooted in self-belief whereby one is both never working and always working (given an inability to define what work is), against an economic backdrop whereby transubstantiating acquired symbolic and cultural capital into financial return is incredibly hard, yet simultaneously acknowledging that great success might be 'just around the corner' and where the emotional cost of stopping is enormous, the question for musicians becomes; *when do you stop?* This is an incessant occupation as explained by German artist and filmmaker Hito Steyerl (2011) who illustrates how in this hyper-realm of streaming image, text and audio everything is flattened out – time, space, history and politics – and the artist is compelled to continuously produce. Just as the decline of symbolic efficiency also flattens out historical narratives and distorts the sense of time, the huge volume of competing voices creates the fantasy of participation that Dean identifies in which meanings become lost as they fragment and multiply. This fantasy of participation works in combination with the distortion of possibilities created by discourses of meritocracy and diversity that lies at the heart of much of techno-positivism.

5.1.5 Music as a Gambling Addiction

The forging of a career driven by musical ambition plays into the reconfiguring of humans as capital (McRobbie, 2018), and with it modes of risk management that have much in common with gambling. Imagining musical ambition as essentially a series of random opportunities fuelled by luck allows one to see the pursuit of a musical career as analogous to that of a gambling addiction, with the tantalising possibility that your next move – your next bet – might be 'the one'. The musicians and music industry guest speakers that come to speak to our students every week – just like our interviewees – always talk of luck. 'It's a gamble' they say, or 'You've got to take risks'. This is the language of any risk business where choosing, and then investing or betting, is central to the model

of production. The economics of releasing records is disguised in these terms. They are understood to be predicated on luck because the failure rate is so high, and so it must be luck, rather than the system itself, at work. The idea of luck as the operative element of a musical career works to conceal structural inequalities; it neatly deals with the more uncomfortable possibilities of cultural power, network connections and privilege, and it allows agency to be mobilised as a key component to the initial imperatives to believe in yourself, and your work, and to work hard.

Cultural industry scholarship which is interested in music and music marketing at the institutional level of major companies well understands the nature of this 'product' (Caves, 2000; Krueger, 2019). This scholarship, like music discourse in the recorded music industry, continues to focus on the economics of the recording industry that is, in many respects, defined by the omnipresent risk of failure (Jones 2012: 35) and an inability to control what is going to be commercially successful given that the appeal of musical products can never be entirely predicted, and given the way it seeks to tap into that which Hennion (1983: 160) called the 'socio-sentimental' ephemeral 'infra-linguistic categories'. More succinctly he noted: 'The notion of a gamble is a fundamental one' (1983: 190). Indeed, this remains true today in the age of big data and audience insights which in the very recent past came to be considered akin to digital white knights on quantitative horseback arriving to solve the subjective qualitative riddle of music development and music marketing. Today, few A&Rs, managers, radio pluggers or DJs would suggest that data can tell them the whole picture when it comes to music in a way that perhaps they imagined it might, but many are still working towards this techno-solution.

The discussion at hand here regarding the potentially damaging impact that musical work has on the closest personal relationships musicians have, chimes with commonly understood definitions of addiction that suggest all addictive behaviours which damage individuals also impact negatively on the lives of their families and close friends. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) suggests that a gambling addiction might be diagnosed if four out of the following nine characteristics are observed within the previous year. If one replaces the word 'gamble' or 'gambling' with 'make music' or 'making music', the parallels for factors 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are particularly striking:

1. Need to gamble with increasing amount of money to achieve the desired excitement
2. **Restless or irritable when trying to cut down or stop gambling**
3. Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back on or stop gambling
4. **Frequent thoughts about gambling (such as reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next gambling venture, thinking of ways to get money to gamble)**
5. **Often gambling when feeling distressed**

6. **After losing money gambling, often returning to get even (referred to as 'chasing' one's losses)**
7. Lying to conceal gambling activity
8. **Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job or educational/career opportunity because of gambling**
9. **Relying on others to help with money problems caused by gambling**

There is a great deal of research that suggests the most difficult point for addicts lies in rebuilding their lives away from old habits and old associates because, in 'rehabilitation speak', friends can never be other addicts (Eitan et al., 2017). Addiction in this narrative is always understood as a cycle that needs to be broken involving lives that need rebuilding. According to this formulation, the responsibility lies with the addict, and is characterised as individual rather than a social issue.

The tenacious commitment to musical ambition, and the profound emotional toll it can take, is encapsulated in this excerpt below from an interviewee from East London. She told us about the challenges she and her band faced when a record company offered them a recording contract but changed their minds at the last minute, and the impact this subsequently had both on them and their career infrastructure. Her words powerfully communicate ideas of determination, embodiment of labour, exhaustion, exploitation, pressure on relationships, and more. What is particularly striking however, is how this excerpt ends with her saying 'but we kept going…':

> We had an infrastructure; we had a manager, a lawyer and… we were approached by a few other labels… There was also massive pressure from our manager to sign a deal. She kept saying 'you've got to sign a deal and bring some money'… It was difficult because there were a lot of voices and maybe we were… somewhat naive not knowing who to trust or to trust our own instincts… The deal completely fell through and the record company withdrew their offer very suddenly. I remember feeling like I was relieved, feeling I was just not ready, but as a band we all felt differently. It had a massive impact on us…. [Another band member] had invested a lot of his own money and I think for him though it was more than the money – he had put so much of himself in the album… I remember we met in this cafe the day the deal fell through and he was like really trying to save the deal but I was like 'it's cool. It's done. It's not happening'. He really struggled with it, and he still does in a way because it was very real for him. Essentially we lost a band member at that point because we could not afford to keep him on board. He had kids and a family… – it really impacted on [him]. It was like a door shutting. [He] is really open with us and he had to go and have counselling for a year after that.

> So we all burnt out basically…. We did not get 'the deal', but we had our basic infrastructure. So it was like: 'It's cool, we have to keep going'. We always had a plan A, plan B and plan C. Then [someone] came along and said, 'I would like to put the record out'… In the middle of all this our lawyer had a nervous breakdown and just went off the radar… Our whole infrastructure started to fall apart. Our manager, once the deal fell through, she was like 'I can't manage you anymore', so our infrastructure just slowly dissipated, pretty much all at once. We lost our deal, we lost our lawyer, we lost our manager and we lost one band member. But we kept going…
>
> —Musician, F, Jazz/Soul, London [3]

One of the things that defines addiction is the difficulty of giving up the thing one is addicted to. Even when one accepts that what is happening here is hurting you, the unsayable – the unspeakable and unaskable – question is: why don't you give it up? The unsayable is: I will give it up. As we have seen, for many of the musicians we spoke to this was too painful to consider, and besides, there might always be another opportunity or another song; 'the one' that would change everything. Indeed, to continue the language of gambling, to play again you have to spend again. The accumulation of debt is interesting in this context as musicians continue to invest. This debt is not only financial (as with the musician quoted earlier who struggled with holiday debt with his partner) but also a psychological state of knowing that you have invested so much of your time – so much of your life – that you cannot give up and you have to keep going. The investment each person makes to his or her musical career is beyond a simple economic reckoning. With each event that passes, and with each attempt, and each new relationship, the debt increases and the possibility of it being written off moves further out of reach.

Our findings challenge the idea that music making is simply 'good'. It is clear that the experience of having musical ambition is paradoxical and complex; it is not only defined by exhaustion, pain and heartache, but often simultaneously joy, meaning and fulfilment too. This is exemplified when we return to the interview with the musician from East London who lost her father shortly after she returned from a tour. She went on to say:

> As soon as my Dad passed away, I guess I felt like I needed to prove something. Like, I did not want to let it go. I felt like if I just let everything collapse, I was literally going to lose my mind, so I just felt like I had to keep going. I think that is what charged us to get the record out – we just had to keep going. It was like; my Dad died, but this all had to be worth something. We had to keep going. *It was life affirming*. But once the record was out I needed to stop; I had to stop. I needed to process all of this, all of what had happened. I could not make any more music.
>
> —Musician, F, Jazz/Soul, London [3]

There is then, in pursuing a musical career as with gambling, an ambiguity to addiction. Indeed, the comparison we have made herein has been made in a slightly different guise by Gomart and Hennion (1999) when they compared music making to drug taking, suggesting that 'the drug user, like the music lover, is a competent amateur who puts his equilibrium at risk in the name of a non-communicable experience. He or she takes risks, exercises judgement (including moral judgements) and makes choices' (1999: 222). This environment of 'consensual self-abandonment' (1999: 221) they categorise as being rooted in 'passion'. One of our interviewees also used the language of drug taking when she told us: 'Songs for me have always been an escape from reality and the real world… To sit at a piano and write a song… it's like my drug in a way' (Singer/Songwriter, F, Pop, London [2]). Another said of songwriting, 'it takes me out of my head' (Songwriter, F, Pop, London [12]). As with drug taking, these practices have the potential to be both damaging and enriching; it is not a simple either/or. The question for musicians is how can they limit the former and amplify the latter? After all, unlike gambling or drinking, it is not the actual addiction to playing and creating music per se that is so damaging, but the gamble of trying to turn this into a sustainable career.

The challenge for musicians, as with other addictions perhaps, is to distinguish what they think is helping them from what is actually hurting them. When does the fun of playing in the casino with your friends turn into a problem when all your bank accounts are empty? When does the camaraderie of taking drugs change and you lose everything you care about? This can be true for musicians too. A particularly helpful lens through which to consider this analogy is that of 'cruel optimism' developed in the work of Berlant (2006, 2011). Her work examines the contradiction that the things we love and desire, or even that which we *think* we love and desire, are often the root causes of suffering and the things which prevent us from flourishing. People often, her work suggests, 'stay tethered to bad lives and unrealizable ideals that exhaust and defeat them' (Zembylas and Keet, 2019: 83). What is particularly enlightening in this analysis is her elucidation of how this occurs on a very day-to-day level i.e. that people become exhausted and defeated by these attachments without even really noticing it, thereby highlighting 'the ordinariness of suffering' (Berlant, 2006: 23). This seems particularly apt in the lives of many of our interviewees.

5.2 Professional Relationships

It is not just in their private lives that these musicians say they experience emotionally destabilising relationships, but in their professional lives too. It is interesting when turning from the musicians' family to their professional life – from friends to colleagues – to begin with the person with whom many have one of their closest relationships: their manager. This relationship is

particularly interesting given that managers can entirely blur this friend/colleague relationship as they are often friends first (Baskerville and Baskerville, 2018). This can be a highly positive force, a bond that a singular vision can encapsulate along with a special closeness, a sense of honesty and a way of 'keeping it real'. Extending McRobbie's (2016) idea of romantic attachment to one's work, the musician-manager relationship can represent another kind of 'romance' with all of the attendant complications. However, just as in romantic relationships, the power dynamic can become confusing and confused, and changes over time. One of our interviewees summarised it thus: 'Having a manager who I'm employing in a way but is technically sort of in charge of me; basically, calling the shots to some degree … The dynamic is that he knows more about the industry and he is the one liaising with all the other people and I'm just hearing it filtered back through him, so he's got this sort of overarching control and I'm just sort of subservient to that to some extent' (Singer/songwriter, M, Folk, London [24]).

Again, this manager/artist relationship is not only complicated by the friend/colleague dynamic, but also by the fact that the power relations between the two can be extremely unbalanced. As the songwriter above suggests, who truly employs who is open to debate, even down to the concept of meaningful employment and the idea of work. But this can be further complicated in an environment where older, more powerful, music industry professionals – managers, but also label executives, agents and others – are often working with much younger musicians and the potential for abuses of power this presents. As one of our interviewees told us, 'I think this is why they love young artists, because there's a level of manipulation and control that they love. And that's why most female artists over 25, no one's bothered. Like 'Oh no, no, you're just a bit too old'. What? No: that's because you can't tell me what you want… me to do. You don't have that power and control' (Musician, F, R&B, London [22]).

The relaxed and informal working culture in the music sector is what many find attractive about it. It is great when things are going well and everybody wants to be your friend, but there are also the amplified feelings of rejection and depression if or when it comes to an end. Later in the same interview, the musician above said, 'All of the people who I thought were like family, you know, as well as the people who were supposed to be working for me, it's just a façade. Like the moment… you're not up to their standards of what they feel is brilliant and acceptable then they just let you go and it's just coming to the realisation that, oh yeah they weren't my friends, they're just people who try to make money off me singing. So it's that realisation of being around people for however many years and realising that this industry has no friends, there's no such thing. A lot of that pain as well, of letting go of actual people I thought… loved me and I loved them' (Musician, F, R&B, London [22]). This was an extremely difficult moment in our interviews and one that resonated with us long after it was over. To hear this musician tell us about how her world fell apart and everything she had worked for and her personal networks that she relied on

seemed to disappear before her eyes. This was repeated by other interviewees too. For example, a producer told us, 'It's mad because these people will fucking really be like, "Oh yeah, you're my best mate, blah blah blah." And they'll really manipulate you into this shit. Then, afterwards, they'll just be like, "nah, it's fine"' (Producer, M, Dubstep, London [18]). There were also concerns raised about the blurring of relationship boundaries, and the inability to distinguish friends from colleagues (a theme echoed in the work of Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b: 13). Many of the interviewees spoke of their hurt and frustration: 'You feel worthless. You are one musician amongst many. You don't matter' (Producer/songwriter, M, Pop, London [19]). The question then emerges: who you can trust when you are in competition with everybody? Two extracts below summarise this idea:

> I think [that social media world] draws you in and you feel compelled to keep doing it and the comparison side to it, where you are looking at other people and seeing how they are doing all the time and popping up and they are doing great or having success and it makes you feel like – oh, I am happy for them of course, but then 'why didn't I think of that or do it?'… It is just this horrible comparison thing all the time. And it is a very conflicting feeling because you do not want to be like that, but you can't help it. You feel ashamed, but I think it is very strange. But if I get out of that vortex I can feel much happier for other people if I hear they are doing well. It is very weird.
>
> —Musician, F, Classical, London [11]

> It's not nice and I don't like it, but I can't help it… I was just booked on this festival for next year in Amsterdam and I'm sort of – or on the poster at least – I was like top… It's two days and I was kind of 'top of the bill' on one day and this other artist – another UK female singer songwriter – was one below me. I remember mentioning to the guy who booked it: 'Oh, I'm above her, great'. You know, as a kind of like, good, because she was sort of a fairly big name and I was happy that I was above her because she's bigger than me… There is a sense of competitiveness and it's the politics of it as well.
>
> —Singer/songwriter, M, Folk, London [24]

As the process of atomisation continues, many of the musicians we interviewed are engaged in the processes of endless self-promotion that communicative capitalism demands, and indeed, this is a central skill in the curriculum of music and arts education across the globe. This manipulation of relationships is embedded within the structures of the music industries whereby, as Lazzarato (1997: 137) notes, there is 'first and foremost a "social relationship"… Only if it succeeds in this production does its activity have an economic value'. This is what we might understand as stickiness. This endless quest for stickiness,

achieved socially, is what defines musical production. The decline of symbolic efficiency means that, as suggested, in the quest for musical 'success' (whatever this is) in an environment of abundance, well-known signifiers are sought in order to consolidate power and act as recognition triggers to audiences swamped in content. It is in this context that we see the proliferation of musical collaboration as a way of increasing a musician's competitive edge in the marketplace; piggybacking on the success of others with greater symbolic recognition as a distinguishing mechanism (Musgrave, 2017). But by doing this, what should represent friends working together for fulfilment and sharing creative ideas, is captured and reconstituted as competitive practice. This was perhaps most explicitly communicated to us by a DJ who told us:

> I know quite a lot of female DJs and we'll all say, oh yeah, we all get on, and isn't it marvellous, and blah blah blah. And we do get on. I'm not saying that we don't. But we are fiercely competitive, and we do seriously want to do better than our best friends. And there's just no way round that.
>
> —DJ, F, Dance, Manchester [8]

Other musicians spoke of this competitiveness taking place in a slightly more subtle way, but nonetheless acting as a source of deep anxiety. Another songwriter told us: 'Collaborations with people can be such a strange experience because you're thrown together with someone you don't know, necessarily, and it can completely destroy your confidence. Having to perform in front of someone that you've not met… you know, people judging each other's talent. Obviously songwriting's very personal' (Singer/songwriter, F, Pop, London [2]). Here again, as with relationships with friends which become subsumed by competitiveness, so too do social and creative practices of songwriting, which are reconceptualised as a competition for 'cuts' (being included on an album) or status within the profession. Within this matrix of relations musicians can feel pressure and expectations, and struggle if this does not work out. For example, one artist we spoke to, who had become very ill, said: 'A lot of people were relying on me. I was the main music maker. I was basically the producer, the beat maker. So, when I got ill the whole project fell apart…. I just felt like I let a lot of people down… because obviously there were high hopes for us' (Producer/Rapper, M, Hip-hop/ Spoken Word, Manchester [27]). Professional relationships are of course a form social capital for musicians. However, this requirement to cultivate and nurture – and ultimately not harm – the social relationships upon which your career is built further blurs the friend/colleague distinction:

> It's not a nice thing and it's not a nice reality but it is a reality for me. You've just got to try and keep – even as a purely self-serving, career-helping thing – just to be friends with everyone. Even if you hate their

music just say that you fucking love it and say that you love them, you love everything about [it]. 'Yeah we should definitely jam', you know … It's like five minutes of discomfort and you don't know how much they could end up helping you when they're fucking massive the next day.

—Singer/songwriter, M, London [24]

This quote perfectly conveys how career progression in music is reliant on a form of informal, network sociality (Wittel, 2001) – a necessity of socialising in a way that appears informal (what Bourdieu (1984: 317) described in the field of cultural production as being an 'interest in disinterestedness'), but which in fact is highly networked, professionalised, status-dependent and reliant on a capacity to engage, with all the challenges for access this necessarily entails. For many this can be extremely challenging. As one interviewee told us: 'I'm not a very sociable person. I love being at home. And it's a very sociable job… Most business is done on the golf course, big business. It's like a lot of the [music] business at clubs is hanging about afterwards, after the gig, and talking to people and going up to the bar' (Musician, M, Jazz, Birmingham [5]). The idea that digital methods of communication and the subsequent democratisation of musical production and proliferation of creative abundance – a theme which underpins so much of what we are examining here – would open access to the music industry in a form of utopian participatory emancipation was clearly naive. Instead, access to the music industries is still closed and reliant on social networks and cultural power, albeit in new forms. Indeed, the fact that this is the case is what drives many applicants to apply to MAs in Music Business Management such as ours. We sometimes joke with students that our course is a form of institutionalised gatekeeping where we are trying to critically interrogate the music industries and examine ideas of openness, inclusivity, diversity and mobility rather than reinforce the myths we are concerned they hear and believe.

What is revealed by our interviewees is that economic relationships *are* social relationships, and experienced as emotionally intense. It becomes clear that these relationships are not just social networks, in the sense of connections existing between individuals at a very instrumental level: they are thickly fleshed-out emotional/affective/psychological bonds that are being made, worked at and broken. This is, in essence, a 'relational work' perspective (see Zelizer, 2005). Once again then, in the context of musicians' relationships, we see the all-pervading impact of precarity on a creative career – and thus the need to extend our understanding of the term in this context – driven by Dean's concepts of the fantasy of participation and the techno-positivist encouraging of 'taking part'; the decline in symbolic efficiency and its requirement for 'latching on' to prominent signifiers; and the reflexive loop which traps musicians in subjective production. Not only is precarity financial in terms of economic survival, or experiential in terms of the unpredictability of the music industry, but also psycho-social whereby musicians' very human relationships with each

other are rendered fragile. The logic of competitive individualism comes to pervade all social relations experienced by musicians. Precarity, and the anxiety and depression this can produce, then comes to define all elements of a musical career: financial, productive, experiential and interpersonal.

5.3 Women and Their Relationships

As we suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the idea of studying relational work in an environment where personal and economic relationships dissolve inwards on each other necessitates a focus on gender. Empirically too, our female interviewees had specific concerns in this area of relationships which we felt it appropriate to address in a dedicated section. In addition, our survey findings showed both levels of self-reported anxiety and depression were higher among our female respondents than men, with anxiety demonstrating a particularly large differential: 77.8% of female respondents self-identified as having suffered from panic attacks and/or high levels of anxiety compared to 65.7% of males. Self-reported depression was marginally higher for women too (69.6% compared to 67.5%), as was the categorisation of 'Other mental health difficulties' (22% for women compared to 15.1% for men). In this third section, we want to interrogate some of the potential reasons behind numbers such as these.

Research continues to show that a professional career in music presents particular challenges and difficulties for women (Conor, Gill and Taylor, 2015), and yet there is no shortage of women seeking a musical career. One example of this can be seen in the creation of 'The F List' by former CEO of the Ivors Academy Vick Bain; a list of thousands of UK based female[9] musicians and songwriters developed in response to the under-representation of women on music festival line-ups (Savage, 2020). In fact, in certain music genres – specifically in classical music – there is an abundance of women violinists, for example, competing against each other on a global scale. In this process, women are pitted against each other both in terms of their playing, but importantly and significantly in terms of their attractiveness and ability to convey emotion. In this space, ideas of race and ethnicity are mobilised against the competing women (Leppanen, 2014). According to the Association of British Orchestras (2014), the profile of youth orchestra musicians is split 62%:38% female to male, and yet simultaneously according to Scharff (2015a: 14), in 2014 'women only made up 1.4% of conductors and 2.9% of artistic/musical directors'.

The toll of being a women making music is reported by diverse groups of women such as DiscWomen, Siren or Shesaidso, a view supported by equally diverse allies from celebrities and global superstars such as Beyoncé and Annie Lennox, government bodies, drinks companies such as Red Bull and Smirnoff Vodka, to organisations such as the Performing Rights Societies, UK Keychange, and Rebalance with their initiatives in live music. The process of building

a career as a women does appear to be extremely challenging on multiple levels from issues of equality of opportunity and access, to gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Savage, 2019), as well as the persistent issues of equal pay in an area dominated by self-employment (Armstrong, 2013).

5.3.1 Sexual Abuse and Misogyny

We heard from women we interviewed about how their working lives impacted their emotional wellbeing in a number of ways, many of which were shocking. In the first instance, a number of the female musicians we spoke to suggested that some of their 'professional' relationships were, at times, abusive. One interviewee disclosed a shocking history of sexual abuse experienced as a musician when she was travelling abroad:

> Certainly for me, in terms of anxiety, it's the risk element, because I'm so used to travelling to work and going somewhere on my own. I'm a fairly strong person but you just don't know how people are going to be once you get there, and everything is based on trust. You trust that people will be as decent to you as you are to other people. And in general, people are; people really are, nice and decent and honest and caring and open. But there's always one … and unfortunately over twenty-eight years I've found this happen five times … One time is too many. Five times is, 'Are you absolutely crazy?' … I've thrown away diaries and diaries and diaries worth of stuff where I'm questioning who I am, why I do what I do. Why am I going into this environment, which for women is so unsafe? And it is. It really is … This kind of thing doesn't regularly happen, but it has happened. And in psychological terms, that has been very, very damaging, and has taken quite a lot of work to get over and through, and a lot of talking. I don't think that ever happens for male DJs. I don't think that really happens for men in the music industry, but it is a risk for any woman in the music industry. It really is.
>
> —DJ, F, Dance, Manchester [8]

Here we can see the intersections between 'the status of work' i.e. the working conditions of, in this instance, DJing late at night and within a non-formalised workplace environment of a nightclub, intersecting with 'the status of relationships' as the trust this female DJ had placed in those around her was broken. Indeed, these concerns have been echoed in the media over recent years with growing accounts about sexual abuse in music environments from female fans at gigs (de Gallier, 2015) to recording studios (Thump, 2016), or abuses of power in the operatic world (Mentzer, 2017). These issues are being taken seriously in the wider media, particularly the issues of sexual harassment and violence towards women attending live music events. A recent report by the

Musicians' Union (2019) on sexual harassment in the workplace found that in a poll of 725 musicians, 50% of women said they had experienced sexual harassment and 85% of the victims did not report the incidences. In response, charities such as Safe Gigs for Women, that are run on a voluntary basis to highlight the need to safeguard women and draw attention to sexual harassment at gigs, have been supported by live music promoters and many celebrities and bands. In line with our own findings, other women-led pressure groups have reported that this is not just a problem for women attending live events but also for women performers and DJs across genres. *DJ Magazine* ran an article in 2018 highlighting the problem within dance music in which five women from different areas of the industry told their stories, all of which are extremely harrowing (*DJ Mag,* 2 February 2018).

   It was clear from some of our interviews that abuses of power, from bullying to actual sexual abuse, were a feature of some of the womens' working lives. This manifests itself a number of ways, but one was how women felt they were seen by others – largely men. For example, one interviewee told us: 'I work with a lot of men who are musicians and sometimes I get very paranoid about that and them thinking that I'm stupid. I've had technicians asking if I'm on my period. I've had people call me a silly little girl – a bitch – just because I've asked for soundcheck …. And I do always wonder if I was a guy, in my position, they wouldn't blink an eyelid: they'd just do it' (Musician, F, Indie/Musical theatre, Belfast [6]). We can see here that 'the status of work' is not neutral for women, given that it intersects with 'the status of relationships' in a very gendered way. We can see this playing out in a number of other ways too, notably given the role of gender in issues of the 'precariatisation of labour', which Federici (2006) has argued has underplayed the impact on women and fails to sufficiently recognise the different levels of inequality for women of all races and classes. In our interviews, privilege played an important part in precarious labour conditions. For the less privileged, and for those with parenting or caring responsibilities, the positives for this mobile, unattached work appear to be far more limited. For example, an opera singer put it like this: 'If you were going to have a baby you could just have one and then keep working, because the lifestyle, the way the work works, is that you can just have time off if you need time off, or not. But for a woman you actually have to time it because if your career's starting to go really well, do you want to then risk that by stepping back for a bit?' (Singer, F, Opera, London [23]).

   One of our interviewees spoke of having to be measured monthly by her record company and management so that she remained a size eight in order to fit into sample sizes of clothes. These disclosures were alarming. She told us: 'They [the management company] had a personal trainer to make sure I wasn't overweight and stayed the sample size, which was size eight… Like I know every inch of my arms, my waist. They measured every other week. I had meetings with [name redacted] and he'd be like "I'm not sure how focused you are. I'm not sure how serious you are. The girl said you couldn't get into

your clothes'"(Musician, F, R&B, London [22]). The idea that the bodies of female artists are policed in this way, and that women artists have to be 'produced' is part of the systemic sexism which pervades this sector of the music industry.

5.3.2 Self-Perception

Another key relationship the female music makers we interviewed had is the relationship they have with themselves and how they see themselves. For the women we spoke to, their reflexivity appeared to address their insecurities in such a way as they named them; they spoke of their age, their bodies, and their looks. Although the men we spoke to also revealed insecurities, it was interesting to note the subtle but clear differences; the omissions, the not-naming. For example, one interviewee spoke of her struggles with an eating disorder and of starving herself before auditions: 'When they asked me to go and rehearse with them, I didn't eat for a week…. That's the first thing I think of when I get on stage: why is that fat girl on stage?' (Musician, F, Indie/Musical theatre, Belfast [6]). She went on to tell us: 'The way you know you feel like you're meant to look as a musician has always been very difficult for me because I've been told I'm too fat and I've been told I'm not pretty enough many times which is really hard' (Musician, F, Indie/Musical theatre, Belfast [6]). This, and the earlier example above of the musician being measured, are examples of how women working in the music industries are not only judged by their work but also by their bodies. How women look and the cost of making them look like this has recently been used to justify signing fewer women artists: they are more expensive to maintain (Jones, 2020).

Even though our interviewees were aware that distortions and misrepresentations of reality were 'the game' – this is what it is about, this is what you have to do – it was still a site of anxiety and was often extremely upsetting. The stresses and pressures are not unlike those seen in other creative industries such as acting and fashion where this phenomenon has been much explored (Swami and Szmigielska, 2013; Record and Austin, 2016). A classical musician we spoke to told us that she went for an audition at a conservatoire in Paris when she was twenty years old, and 'already from the beginning some members of the panel just made me aware that I was basically really old to do music… I was just very lucky, but I shouldn't count on doing music in my life because I was already too old' (Musician, F, Classical, Birmingham [17]). Age did not seem to come up in interviews with men in the same way it did with women. Our interviews really only scratched the surface of women's experiences of music making. Recently there has been an explosion of interest in gender inequality across the music industry, and now the data is available to demonstrate the problem in numbers (Bain, 2019). This is an issue that impacts every area of the music industries from streaming numbers, to the cost of breaking female artists, to live music and beyond.

5.3.3 Women Online

Not only is 'the status of work' gendered in important ways as we have discussed, so too is 'the status of value'. That is to say, women have a different status of relationship with the online world, and it impacts on them in distinct ways. An artist we spoke to told us that, 'writing and then putting [music] out in a public domain and waiting for some kind of feedback… can make you really vulnerable… There is a kind of direct mainline into criticism' (Musician, F, Folk, Cardiff [21]). Certainly this is true of the men we spoke to as well, but it is important to make sense of comments such as the one above to offer some thoughts as to their potential relationship to significantly higher levels of self-reported anxiety from the female respondents to our survey.

There is evidence that women experience abuse and harassment online in different ways to men. For example, Hess (2014) suggests that there is a sense in which 'women aren't welcome on the internet', reflected in much higher levels of online harassment. The Angus Reid Institute (2016) reported that women are 'twice as likely as men to say they've been stalked or sexually harassed' and 'significantly more likely to self-censor' online (2016: 6, 9). Whilst this was not necessarily common amongst our female interviewees, one did tell us that she had received death threats online (Songwriter, F, Pop, London [12]). There have been two recent high-profile cases of racist and sexist online abuse targeted at the recording artist FKA Twigs because of who she was dating (Gorton, 2015), and directed against the lead singer of the band Chvrches – Lauren Mayberry – because of what she was wearing in a video (BBC, 2015). Duggan (2014: 5) suggests that: 'those whose lives are especially entwined with the internet report experiencing higher rates of harassment online. This includes those who have more information available about them online, those who promote themselves online for their job, and those who work in the digital technology industry.' For female musicians, this is what they are told to do, and there seems to be little or no protection for them.

For many of the women we spoke to, the idea of being in a public-facing job was central to their anxiety. For example, one interviewee told us: 'I don't find the internet helpful. It gives me anxiety in quite a lot of ways and I think that it does for a lot of people. And I think especially if you're a performing artist, you know, this whole *visual side of the music* can cause you immense anxiety' (Singer/songwriter, F, Pop, London [2]). How musicians present themselves online was a central characteristic of 'the status of value', and for female musicians this takes on an additional element as their physical appearance becomes central to their source of anxiety. They also know it is considered extremely important by the industry and they are being judged differently to men. They are conscious of the double standards: 'Everybody wants visuals and it's all to do with how people look, or how we're perceived to look… So many people listen with their eyes now' (Musician, F, Pop/R&B, Manchester [28]). Finally, not

only are incidents of abuse and harassment quantitatively higher for women but they are experienced qualitatively differently too, and likely to be felt much more deeply and painfully (Fox et al., 2015).

How can we make sense of this within changes to the wider digital economy? Terranova (2000) stated that at its inception the internet was an overwhelmingly male environment and in order to expand successfully it needed to develop ways to attract women into it. The internet would need a healthy mass population and that meant it urgently needed to bring women in, becoming more socially representative and more democratic. More women users were necessary if it was to become a successful marketplace. Facebook was the first social media platform to do that successfully. Twitter, on the other hand, is still very male dominated – according to Kemp (2019) Twitter's userbase is 66% male and 24% female. According to the same report, Instagram is the only platform where women outnumber men, albeit only by 2%, representing 52% of the userbase. As Dean (2005) points out, rather than necessarily producing active social commons as they are represented as doing, new media technologies actually produce new forms of unpaid labour that are contributing to further social fragmentation in a contrary and paradoxical fashion, that plays out in ways that increase division across gender, racial and political lines. This is the fantasy of participation, and within the music field, where social media platforms are also workspaces, these contradictions are especially difficult for musicians to psychologically reconcile.

As Dean (2010) has argued, the fetishising of technology that is so characteristic of personalised media has produced the fantasies of abundance and participation enabling everyone to become unconscious but active producers of data as part of their daily routine of living, with every click they make. Our research suggests that for the reflexive musical subject, being incited to self-promote, create more, and be on social media and present at all times, can be a site of heightened tension and anxiety. This has been reflected in other research findings amongst female classical musicians, for example, in their struggles with what has been called 'the gendered dynamics of self-promotion' (Scharff, 2015b). All of the strategies being employed by women-led groups utilise the language of democratic participation as they seek to empower women to bring about or accelerate change within the music industries. Yet, in doing so, they can turn the problem back onto the women themselves. There are a variety of public relations and marketing campaigns that simultaneously bring attention back onto the organisations and the brands that support them as part of the continual cycle of network building that social media sites and digital media demand. All of these new women-led exercises compete for support from sponsors such as drink companies, from music industries stakeholders, and from public industries bodies alike. However, in doing so they are once again in danger of stimulating competition rather than co-operation. There is a chain of feedback forms, targets to be met and outcomes to measure; after all, the new

media world runs on big data, and gender equality debates have proven media appeal. The question becomes: how can these differing interest groups work to improve gender equality in the music sector? While these struggles play out publicly and the outrage they can produce continues to drive numbers – and numbers drive data and promote participation – what the data reveals is that the numbers are moving extremely slowly in terms of equality of opportunity and access for women.

5.4 Conclusions: Drive and Being 'Occupied' by Your Occupation

The argument in this third and final empirical chapter has focused on the relational work that takes place in the absence of stable employment and pay: the intimate entanglement of transactional and social relationships, as family and friends are also patrons/colleagues/employers/contractors, so that personal relationships *are* economic ones and vice versa. Our particular focus here has been on the conflict between the need to instrumentalise some relationships, while neglecting or sacrificing others in the pursuit of income and/or future success, where the semantics of exploitation are particularly pertinent. This third status mediates the other two statuses in many respects. While commercial relationships may create new forms of social relations, these can often feel (and maybe are) superficial and conditional. These relationships are experienced under conditions and logics of micro-competition. Although these relationships can be supportive, encouraging and desired they can also be abusive, cruel and hard to escape. There is then a dialectic of individualised flexibility. By this we mean that our findings reveal that a reliance on others can be coded in both positive and negative terms. Relationships can be support structures (such as a stable home life or supportive family background), which by some are seen as a privilege. However, where this is viewed as dependence on others, it might be seen as failure. The music industries' emphasis on independence disavows the complexity and community of musical production, and with it the relational work involved.

It would seem that the primary relationship musical subjects have *is with the music itself*. This connection with music is relational in the sense that is it both personal/private and public. As one interviewee told us: 'I developed such a close relationship to music… music does become a friend' (Musician, M, Pop/Soul, London [1]). This kind of uneasy coexistence – of loving something so much which at times doesn't love you, and which at times gives you so much love and joy and fulfilment but which sometimes you hate – was encapsulated in the words of one of our interviewees:

> If I could think of another job I would do it, and if I could go back and tell my sixteen-year-old self not to do it, I would. I'd tell myself not to do

it… But, I wouldn't listen to myself. I know I wouldn't listen to myself. I'd still do it anyway because I love it. But I hate it.

—Singer, F, Opera, London [23]

All other relationships, even the one they have with themselves, are subsumed so that self-care becomes out of reach. Everything and everyone is competing for the attention required, necessitated by, and given to the relationship the musical subject believes they must have with the music object. However, simultaneously, a musician's embodied relationship to music is systematically under attack by all of the complex features we have uncovered in these three chapters:

(1) the ambiguous status of work;
(2) techno-positivism's fantasy of participation and its impact on the efficacy of communication alongside the reinforcement of existing power structures whilst simultaneously espousing an entrepreneurial culture which places the responsibility for success on the individual while obfuscating the power relations of the wider music and technology industries, and;
(3) the subsuming impact of music on relationships.

By extension, *you*, the musician, are under the influence of all of these competing interests all the time. Musicians today are always alert, always on guard – under siege (Steyerl, 2011). Under these conditions, music as an occupation completely captures and controls the digital musical subject, impacting their relationships in the ways seen in this chapter.

In music, not only does the winner take all, but the idea of becoming the winner is ever present: musicians are only ever three minutes of magic away from their life being changed, and the myth of luck and its randomness cements this idea. However, hyper-competition does not produce lots of winners; the categorical imperative of a competition produces a tiny number of winners – and lots and lots of losers. As Lazzarato (2017: 7) suggests, 'If trade implies equality, then competition implies inequality'. Abundance only serves to increase competitiveness for music producers, and in this atmosphere the intensity of the competition plays out on the bodies and in the minds of musicians and music producers. As a reflexive workforce, musicians are able to articulate how the turbulence of the competing interests plays out in their lives and impacts their sense of wellbeing. They recognise the illusions, the smoke and mirrors; they clearly enjoy and are driven by the moments of intensity and pleasure musical practices give them, but they struggle internally and externally with the pressure they perceive as coming from their work environment – the music industries – and the impact this has on their relationships with those closest to them. The musicians we spoke to shared a very real sense of personal responsibility and talked about degrees of coping. They were clearly aware that even

their friendships were impacted by competitiveness. Some acknowledged the discomforting sense of hoping for support from other musicians – from other friends – and the disappointment when that does not materialise; the piggy-backing or collaboration that has become such an important part of musical career development and validation. The musicians then doubt whether these friendships are real, feeding the doubt and the reflexive loop which keeps the treadmill spinning. However, at the same time, there is real, deep and mean-ingful joy in the sociality of music, particularly emphasised by interviewees when they spoke of playing live together or writing a great song, and how this was a way of recharging their love for music – of keeping them alive. We have all experienced this: that moment we are out dancing and listening to music together and the power it has to move us, physically and emotionally, to raise our spirits. Musicians then have their energies rebuilt by experiencing music making, only to have it drained again in the daily struggle to maintain their careers and their position within the music industry. This is what they mean when they say they love music, but it is the music industry that is hurting them.