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# Gender minorities and persons with disabilities defining their perpetrators at music festivals

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## ABSTRACT

There are recent studies on sexual harassment at music festivals, particularly toward female attendees. However, studies on perpetrators of minority members are scarce. We wanted to discover the prevalence of inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities and persons with disabilities and give voice to their experiences, aiming to identify ways to improve inclusivity at music festivals. The research data comprised survey responses ( $n=16,681$ ) and nine in-depth interviews of minority members and their Personal Assistants. Statistical methods and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis were employed for the research. Both gender minorities and persons with disabilities faced more inappropriate behavior than other festival attendees, and these experiences increased if the person belonged to both minorities. The perpetrators were divided into four groups: those with positive attitudes but incorrect actions; those who were ignorant or did not care; those who had negative, prejudiced behavior, and those who were aggressive and expressed hate. Organizers should take various actions to increase inclusivity in their festivals: defining safer space policies; training, programming and recruitment; hiring a harassment contact team; improving the control of alcohol consumption, and introducing a sensory-friendly space.

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## Introduction

The goal of truly inclusive events is to enable diverse audiences to participate fully in an accessible, comfortable and enjoyable manner. (Finkel & Dashper, 2020, p. 485)

Generally, music festivals are described as events full of communality. It is said, for instance, that a shared musical taste enhances a sense of belonging among the audience (Rihova et al., 2019), and the feelings of a sense of community have positive effects on participants' well-being (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011). However, recent research on sexual harassment has revealed that 33% of female music festival participants have experienced

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sexual harassment in the UK (Bows et al., 2023). In Finland, 22% of males, 33% of females, and 64% of non-binary persons have faced inappropriate behavior at live music events (Kinnunen & Honkanen, 2024). Looking at these figures, the music festival experience is clearly not that positive for all the participants, and their inclusivity, as defined by Finkel and Dashper at the beginning of this section, is not fulfilled.

To enhance inclusion, it is important to know what kinds of persons violate it. What might be behind the perpetrators' actions, and how could those actions and attitudes be changed? Is the perpetrators' purpose, for example, to be empathetic, to show off to friends, or to insult a person who is vulnerable? Without this knowledge, it is difficult to tackle inappropriate behavior since the actions employed might not be suitable for the perpetrator types they are aimed at. This is the research gap on which we wanted to focus.

Research on inappropriate behavior at music festivals has concentrated on sexual harassment (for example, Baillie et al., 2022; Bows et al., 2023). In these studies, the focus has been mainly on female experiences since the number of female victims is considerable. However, the probability of facing inappropriate behavior is highest among non-binary persons (Kinnunen & Honkanen, 2024), but they have not been studied so much. Furthermore, Finkel and Dashper (2020) are critical that disability issues are reduced to issues of accessibility, and Calver et al. (2023) pay attention to the scarcity of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) research in the field of event studies. Both gender minorities and persons with disabilities have been very much overlooked in critical event studies.

Our research questions were:

- What kind of inappropriate behavior do gender minorities and persons with disabilities face at Finnish music festivals?
- How do gender minorities and persons with disabilities describe their perpetrators?

By answering these questions, we aimed to add knowledge on the prevalence and type of inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities and persons with disabilities. We also wanted to propose practical solutions to increase inclusion and make those excluded from surrounding society feel welcome in music festivals. This empirical research is part of critical event studies, scrutinizing power relations and inclusion in the music festival sector. The context of the study—Finland—adds EDI knowledge outside the dominant UK and Australian scope (Calver et al., 2023).

## Literature

We will first summarize research on inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities and persons with disabilities, both in society in general and at

music festivals where such research exists. Then, we will introduce previous studies on perpetrators of minority members and different attempts to increase inclusion for these minorities.

### ***Inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities***

Non-binary and transgender people face discrimination, harassment and violence in different—if not all—sectors of society. The main conclusion of the national US survey on transgender and gender non-conforming people ( $n=6,456$ ) was: “It is part of social and legal convention in the United States to discriminate against, ridicule, and abuse transgender and gender non-conforming people within foundational institutions such as the family, schools, the workplace and health care settings, every day” (Grant et al., 2011, p. 8). The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights received 6,579 responses from trans people in EU countries (EU FRA, 2014), and the results demonstrated that trans people experienced frequent intolerance, discrimination and other inappropriate behavior, causing fear and avoidance of particular locations or public transport. Every second trans person in the EU had faced violence within the previous 12 months, and 56% of them thought that it happened because they were trans. Consequently, they tended to hide their true gender identity, even from their family members. Similar to the US findings, trans people in the EU experienced inappropriate behavior at school, university, the workplace and in health care.

In Finland, gender minorities face unacceptable behavior throughout their lives, starting from childhood. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its recent periodic report of Finland, stated being “deeply concerned about persistent discrimination” (UN CRC, 2023, p. 4) and bullying against children who belong to a gender minority.

According to the School Health Promotion Study 2023, 5.2% of children and young people aged 10–20 years identified themselves as belonging to a gender minority (THL, 2023). Their proportion has increased by two per cent in four years. They have faced bullying at school, mental and physical violence by their parents or carers, physical threats, sexual harassment and sexual violence, much more than other children and young people (Jokela et al., 2020).

In 2022, the Finnish Ministry of Justice studied the effects of hate speech and harassment toward different minorities (Jauhola et al., 2022). The most common space where hate speech and harassment took place toward gender and sexual minorities was the internet, followed by public spaces. Many gender and sexual minority members hide their true identity because of fear, and the proportion of those who avoided specific spaces has increased from 2015 when the first study was conducted. Looking at

these concerning figures, it is important to study how prevalent such behavior is at music festivals that typically advertise themselves as inclusive spaces where harassment is not tolerated.

In earlier studies of inappropriate behavior at music festivals, the number of gender minority respondents has typically been so low that their experiences could not be examined separately. Thus, so far, there is hardly any information about their experiences of inappropriate behavior at music festivals (exceptions include Kinnunen & Honkanen, 2024).

### ***Inappropriate behavior toward persons with disabilities***

Yoon (2022) states that the history of perceptions of disability started with the medical model, where disability was seen as a “personal tragedy” (p. 188) requiring treatments or rehabilitation, followed by the human rights-focused social model that Shaw et al. (2012, p. 83) describes “as largely a social construction wherein disability is created not by the impairment but by the barriers created by society”. After that, an affirmative model of disability emerged, encouraging “individuals to assert a positive identity through their disability, and to see being impaired as determining their own lifestyles, culture, and identity” (Yoon, 2022, p. 189).

Already, 4-year-old Finnish children with disabilities face more bullying than others, and school children with disabilities experience threats of violence twice as often as other children (Luoma et al., 2022). 20–49-year-old adults with disabilities face twice as much violence as the rest of the population. The consequences of a lifetime experience of negative attitudes and behaviors might lead to those people avoiding public events and spaces, and not participating in society at the same level as people without disabilities.

Regarding the participation of persons with disabilities in music festivals, accessibility issues have been the nexus of research. For example, Castle et al. (2022) analyzed the experiences of visually impaired persons at live music events, and Alvarado (2022) studied accessibility at music festivals. They both concluded that venues and sites lack proper accessibility design to enable fluent (and safe) movement and navigation. Further shortcomings included an inadequate number of accessible toilets and their unsatisfactory cleanliness, the difficulty of booking a ticket for a Personal Assistant (PA), and the lack of staff support and disability training.

It is true that without accessibility, many persons with disabilities would not be able to participate at all; however, there is a need to scrutinize other inclusivity issues and influence their equal opportunities to participate in culture in general. More attention should be paid to staff attitudes and their knowledge of disabilities, audience behavior toward persons with disabilities, as well as the possibilities for persons with disabilities to

influence the contents and execution of cultural events as performers, organizers, workers, or volunteers (Finkel & Dashper, 2020).

### ***Attempts to enhance inclusion at festivals***

There have been some festivals that can be defined as separatist festivals since they did not accept cisgender males in their sites. The dominant aim has been to protect females—sometimes also transgender and intergender people—from harassment that cisgender males typically conduct. One such festival, Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in the US, eventually ended mainly due to controversies with the exclusion of transgender women in a lesbian feminist event, since trans women were considered not to have the same life-long experiences as “womyn-born-womyn” (Currans, 2020). Feminist festival organizers rejected the term “women” as it includes the term “man”—they preferred using the word “womyn”. “Womyn-born-womyn” referred to persons whose assigned sex at birth was female. The Statement Festival in Sweden was organized only once because the Discrimination Ombudsman found it guilty of gender discrimination (Snapes, 2018). These examples demonstrate that separatist festivals might end up being problematic in terms of equality.

The other aspect is organizing festivals aimed at a certain marginalized group and their allies—not as separatist festivals but as festivals open to everyone. In these festivals, the performers and organizers include members of different minorities. For instance, the InterACT Disability Arts Festival in New Zealand (Walters, 2023), or the Outsider Art Festival in Finland (outsiderart.fi), are festivals aimed at persons with disabilities. Gender minorities are present in various LGBTQI+ festivals (for instance, Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2008). These events offer marginalized groups empowering spaces where they can represent their identities without (so much) fear of discrimination or harassment.

When we think about mainstream music festivals, there are not necessarily as many allies among the audience as in festivals that are aimed specifically at the LGBTQI+ community or persons with disabilities. In mainstream music festivals, minorities face more inappropriate behavior than other members of the audience (Kinnunen & Honkanen, 2024). The festivals are tackling this problem in various ways, aiming to enhance inclusion for minorities. However, these actions often lack knowledge about the different types of perpetrators, how their behavior influences their victims, and why the perpetrators act as they do.

### ***Perpetrators***

There are some studies that handle perpetrators and the different ways they discriminate or harass minority members. Franklin (1998) studied

antigay aggression, which is quite similar to inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities. She stated that perpetrators acting in a group wish to show off and manifest their masculinity and heterosexuality to their peers by attacking people who do not conform with gender and sexuality norms.

Perpetrators of persons with disabilities have been studied by Olkin et al. (2019), Nario-Redmond et al. (2019) and EHRC (2011). Olkin et al. (2019) discovered various ableist microaggressions toward women. These were:

- denial of privacy by asking very personal questions
- assuming that persons with disabilities needed help even though they did not ask for it
- praising persons with disabilities for nearly everything in a patronized manner
- denying persons with disabilities the right to equality (for example, by being ignored)
- denying personal identity by disregarding other aspects of identity except having a disability
- downplaying the effects of a disability (for example, by assuming that a person with disabilities is taking advantage of the system).

Nario-Redmond et al. (2019) investigated benevolent, hostile, and ambivalent types of ableism (that they termed “disability prejudice”), concluding that the most common type of ableism is paternalistic prejudice, which is part of benevolent ableism. Furthermore, in the EHRC report (2011) about harassment that persons with disabilities face, there is a chapter about perpetrators.

Being disabled or having a health problem is the third most important reason for not participating in arts events (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sports, 2020). Due to this situation, and because many non-binary and trans people are afraid of public spaces (EU FRA, 2014; Jauhola et al., 2022), the reasons preventing minority group members attending cultural events must be made visible and tackled, if possible. We aimed to find out the prevalence of inappropriate behavior toward gender minorities and persons with disabilities and give voice to their experiences, aiming to identify ways to improve inclusivity at music festivals. It is essential to understand that there are different kinds of perpetrators, and they should be managed differently. Since this is an area where there has not been much research, we adopted a data-driven, theory-building approach.

### **Study 1: quantitative study**

Our research comprised two parts. In Study 1, we aimed to find out if gender minorities and persons with disabilities and/or a chronic illness

faced more inappropriate behavior than other music festival attendees, and who were the perpetrators. Additionally, we wanted to see if the intersection of the memberships of these two minorities affected the prevalence of inappropriate behavior. Quantitative data was collected using a web survey, and the data was analyzed using statistical analysis.

### **Survey and design**

The quantitative data comprised responses to the Finnish Festival Barometer 2022 that took place in October–November 2022. The Barometer is an audience web survey conducted every second year and administered by LiveFIN, the network and interest group of Finnish live music events. It contains various questions about music festivals: attendance frequency, important experience elements, musical taste, the meaning of music, etc. In 2022, a specific section about inappropriate behavior at Finnish music festivals within the previous five years was added.

The link to the questionnaire was distributed on social media (Facebook and/or Instagram) by 24 festivals, which provided prizes for respondents. These festivals offer various kinds of music, from pop, rock and hip-hop, to indie and jazz, and they had 1.1 M visits in 2022. The respondents were not told in advance that the questionnaire contained questions about inappropriate behavior or minority membership, and the survey was directed to festival goers in general, not to any specific minority group.

Altogether, 16,681 valid responses (with answers to both harassment and minority questions) were received. 26.6% of the respondents were male, 72.0% female, 0.7% other, and 0.7% did not want to express their gender. The mean and median ages were 33.98 and 32 years respectively.

The questions about inappropriate behavior were elaborated after evaluating two similar types of surveys about equality and discrimination, one that was aimed for music industry workers (Inklusiiv, 2022) and the other for users of Helsinki city services (City of Helsinki, 2021). Additionally, two experts helped formulate the questions (see Acknowledgements). We asked: “Which of the following have you experienced in music festivals in Finland within the last five years?”, with the following options. Respondents were asked to choose all the options that applied but also had the possibility not to answer this question:

- harassment because of gender
- harassment because of sexual orientation
- harassment because of ethnicity
- harassment because of disability, functional or mental capability
- harassment because of age

- harassment because of language
- harassment because of clothing or appearance
- sexual harassment
- physically threatening situations
- physical violence

Victims of inappropriate behavior were asked to define who the perpetrator was - again, by choosing from a list and asking to choose all the options that applied: audience member I know; audience member I do not know; performer at the festival; festival security person; festival customer service person; other festival employee.

Additionally, the respondents were asked if they belonged to any under-represented (that is, minority) group. The options were: ethnic or national; language; religious or ideological; gender minority; sexual minority; disabled; chronically ill, and other. 184 respondents identified themselves as members of a gender minority. Individuals with disabilities and/or chronically ill were analyzed as one group since many of those who are disabled are also chronically ill and vice versa. There were 157 people in this group. 22 respondents belonged to both minorities, meaning that they were disabled and/or chronically ill and belonged to a gender minority.

According to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (Kohonen et al., 2019, p. 20), an ethical review was not needed since all the participants were at least 15 years old; informed consent was given; participants' physical integrity was not interfered with; the participants were not exposed to exceptionally strong stimuli; the research did not cause mental harm that exceeded normal daily life; and, the research did not involve a safety risk. Before conducting the survey, the Research Integrity Adviser was contacted who confirmed that an ethical review was not needed. We included information about a mental health organization's helpline in the questionnaire. In severe cases, respondents were urged to report the incident to the police.

### **Data analysis**

The statistical analysis was conducted to ensure that there were statistically significant differences between the experiences of the two minority groups and participants who did not belong to these minorities (named "others"). The quantitative analysis included cross-tabulation with chi-square tests, or Fisher's exact test for  $2 \times 2$  tables (McDonald, 2014, pp. 77–83) and Monte Carlo simulation for  $3 \times 2$  tables (Mehta & Patel, 1983) if a cell had an expected count of less than 5.

**Results: type of inappropriate behavior; influence of intersectionality, and perpetrators**

Table 1 summarizes the experiences of inappropriate behavior. The first column group compares those who did not belong to a gender minority with gender minority members. The second column group compares non-disabled with persons with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. The percentages demonstrate the proportion of the corresponding respondent group experiencing a particular type of inappropriate behavior.

Gender minority members had experienced harassment because of gender ( $\chi^2 = 164.40, p < .001$ ) and sexual orientation ( $\chi^2 = 153.08, p < .001$ ) as well as sexual harassment ( $\chi^2 = 74.80, p < .001$ ), substantially more than others. Up to 40% of gender minorities reported harassment because of gender. In addition, more than other respondents, they had experienced harassment because of ethnicity ( $\chi^2 = 8.29, p = .004$ ), disability, functional or mental capability

**Table 1.** Types of inappropriate behavior by the two minorities and others.

Type of inappropriate behavior	Gender minority				Disabled and/or chronically ill			
	No <i>n</i> = 16,497	Yes <i>n</i> = 184	Chi-square	<i>p</i> -value	No <i>n</i> = 16,524	Yes <i>n</i> = 157	Chi-square or Fisher's exact test	<i>p</i> value
Harassment because of gender	10.6%	40.2%	164.40	<i>p</i> < .001	10.7%	31.2%	67.19	<i>p</i> < .001
Harassment because of sexual orientation	2.7%	17.9%	153.08	<i>p</i> < .001	2.8%	12.1%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Harassment because of ethnicity	1.6%	4.3%	8.29	<i>p</i> = .004	1.6%	4.5%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> = .016
Harassment because of disability, functional or mental capability	1.2%	4.3%	15.85	<i>p</i> < .001	1.0%	20.4%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Harassment because of age	3.7%	11.4%	30.04	<i>p</i> < .001	3.7%	10.8%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Harassment because of language	0.9%	4.3%	22.27	<i>p</i> < .001	0.9%	3.2%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> = .018
Harassment because of clothing or appearance	7.0%	20.7%	50.39	<i>p</i> < .001	7.0%	24.8%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Sexual harassment	15.7%	39.1%	74.80	<i>p</i> < .001	15.8%	29.9%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Physically threatening situation	12.6%	25.5%	27.33	<i>p</i> < .001	12.6%	24.2%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> < .001
Physical violence	3.1%	3.8%	0.29	<i>p</i> = .593	3.1%	7.0%	Fisher's Exact Test	<i>p</i> = .010

( $\chi^2=15.85$ ,  $p<.001$ ), age ( $\chi^2 = 30.04$ ,  $p<.001$ ), language ( $\chi^2 = 22.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and clothing or appearance ( $\chi^2 = 50.39$   $p<.001$ ). They also more frequently reported experiences of physically threatening situations ( $\chi^2 = 27.33$ ,  $p<.001$ )

Persons with disabilities and/or chronically ill had experienced harassment (Table 1) more often than others because of disability, functional or mental capability (Fisher's exact test  $p<.001$ ), as was to be expected. One in five had been subject to harassment for this reason. In addition, they had experienced all other forms of inappropriate behavior more often than others.

The statistical findings indicate that gender minorities and persons with disabilities and/or a chronic illness face harassment because of their specific minority position. That is, gender minorities face harassment because of their gender, and persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses experience harassment because of their disability or functional or mental capability. Moreover, they also experience other types of harassment more often than other people.

It has been argued that belonging to (any) multiple minorities will increase discrimination, meaning that "the effects of discrimination may increase proportionally" (Shaw et al., 2012, p. 83). We wanted to see if the same applies when gender minorities, persons with disabilities, and/or chronically ill attend music festivals.

In Table 2, the first column includes those who did not belong to the two minorities of the study, the second has those who belong to one minority only (either gender minority, or disabled and/or chronically ill),

**Table 2.** Prevalence of inappropriate behavior when belonging to none, one, or two minority groups.

Type of inappropriate behavior	NOT a member of a gender minority, NOT disabled and NOT chronically ill $n = 16,362$	Gender minority or disabled and/or chronically ill $n = 297$	Gender minority and disabled and/or chronically ill $n = 22$	Chi-square with Monte Carlo simulation [95% CI]	$p$ value
Harassment because of gender	10.5%	32.0%	63.6%	202.11 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Harassment because of sexual orientation	2.6%	10.8%	45.5%	214.22 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Harassment because of ethnicity	1.6%	3.7%	9.1%	15.36 [.004, .008]	$p = .006$
Harassment because of disability, functional or mental capability	1.0%	10.8%	18.2%	292.34 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Harassment because of age	3.6%	9.4%	22.7%	48.87 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Harassment because of language	0.9%	3.0%	9.1%	28.85 [<.001, .003]	$p < .002$
Harassment because of clothing or appearance	6.9%	17.8%	54.5%	125.80 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Sexual harassment	15.6%	30.6%	63.6%	86.73 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Physically threatening situation	12.5%	22.6%	40.9%	41.99 [<.001, <.001]	$p < .001$
Physical violence	3.1%	4.7%	9.1%	5.15 [.065, .078]	$p = .071$

and the third is for intersecting minority identities (that is, belonging to both minorities). The percentages refer to the proportion of the respondent group experiencing a particular type of inappropriate behavior. Indeed, if the survey respondent was disabled and/or chronically ill and belonged to a gender minority, experiences of harassment were even more common than for those who belonged to only one minority group or neither. Only experiences of physical violence were not more common than for others. Intersecting minorities are at higher risk of being subject to all other types of inappropriate behavior than others.

In cases of inappropriate behavior toward persons with disabilities and/or chronically ill, 86.7% reported at least one perpetrator being an unknown member of the audience. However, the share is smaller than in other groups (94.1%,  $\chi^2 = 8.55$ ,  $p = .003$ ). By contrast, persons with disabilities and/or chronically ill were more often subject to inappropriate behavior by festival security staff (25.6%, others 4.1%,  $\chi^2 = 94.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), customer service personnel (12.2%, others 1.9%,  $\chi^2 = 47.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ), known members of the audience (10.0%, others 4.3%, Fisher's exact test  $p = .016$ ), and other festival employees (3.3%, others 0.4%, Fisher's exact test  $p = .010$ ). Thus, a significant share of persons with disabilities and/or chronically ill had experienced inappropriate behavior where the perpetrator was a member of the festival staff.

Members of gender minorities were more often subject to inappropriate behavior by festival security staff (11.9%, others 4.3%, Fisher's exact test  $p < .001$ ) and other festival employees (3.7%, others 0.4%, Fisher's exact test  $p = .002$ ).

## **Study 2: qualitative study**

With Study 2, we aimed to illustrate and clarify the results of quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis—that is, we wanted to get a deeper understanding of the quantitative results by employing the qualitative part of the research. Qualitative data included in-depth interviews, and the analysis followed the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

### **Interview and design**

The Barometer included a question of whether the respondent wanted to take part in a research interview and, if they agreed, they provided their email address. Thirty persons who had experienced inappropriate behavior at Finnish music festivals and who identified themselves as belonging to a gender minority, being disabled, and/or having a chronic illness were contacted. Seven of them agreed to participate in a research interview, and with their Personal Assistants (PA), the total number of interviewees

was nine. The in-depth semi-structured interviews, altogether 7 h and 50 min, were recorded using audio and transcribed. Each interviewee had an option to get a free ticket to a festival as compensation for their time. The possibility of receiving compensation was disclosed only after the interview time was agreed.

The face-to-face interviews took place in March–April 2023. The interviewees with PAs were encouraged to invite them as well since they might offer additional insights into the incidents. The interviewees are summarized in Table 3. All except two belonged to more than one minority. Sarah, Winter, Momo, Maija and Hannah's PA are gender minority members. Sarah and Red Devil use a wheelchair because of their reduced mobility. Hannah is blind, Maija has ADHD and Snowflake ASD and ADHD. In addition, Winter, Momo, Maija, Hannah's PA and Snowflake belong to a sexual minority. Red Devil's PA Helmi is not a member of any minority group.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants gave their informed consent. They defined their own pseudonyms, gender definitions, minority descriptions, and gender pronouns in English since Finnish does not have gender pronouns. The draft version of this article was sent to them so that they could check that their opinions and experiences were represented accurately.

### Data analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for the qualitative data. IPA resembles thematic analysis but goes deeper into experiences

**Table 3.** Interviewees ( $n=9$ ).

Interview #	Pseudonym	Age	Gender Gender pronoun	Minority identities	Length of the interview (h:mm)
1	Sarah	19	Non-binary They/them	Gender minority Disabled because of an illness	1:08
2	Winter	29	Non-binary They/them	Gender minority Sexual minority	0:50
3	Momo	28	Gender queer She/her or they/them	Queer (demigirl) Pansexual/asexual	1:33
4	Red Devil	39	Female She/her	Person with reduced mobility Chronically ill	1:15
	Helmi (Red Devil's PA)	22	Female She/her	None	
5	Maija	28	Gender non-conforming She/her or they/them	Gender minority Sexual minority (lesbian) Non-neurotypical (ADHD)	1:25
6	Hannah	38	Female She/her	Blind	1:23
	Person (Hannah's PA)	37	Person They/them	Gender minority (gender fluid) Sexual minority	
7	Snowflake	27	Female She/her	Sexual minority (pansexual, sapiosexual) Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) Non-neurotypical (ADHD)	1:06

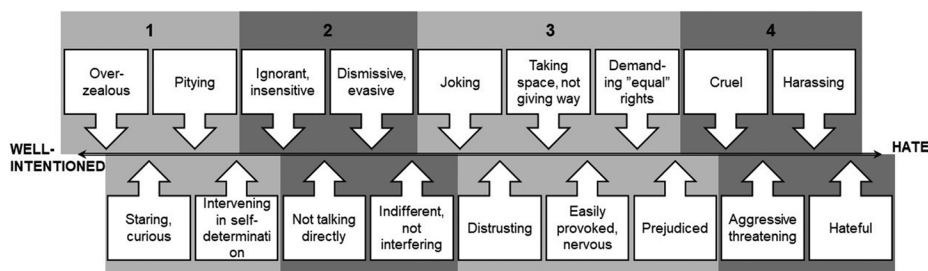
and emotions. The analysis process was adapted from Moss et al. (2020); it started by transcribing the recordings, re-reading the transcriptions, and marking the stories where perpetrators and their actions were described. Various rounds of re-reading were done to collect the emergent themes describing perpetrators and their emotions, not the emotions of the victim. Emergent themes were developed into universals by searching for similarities and generalities. Whenever a new emergent theme was discovered, the earlier transcriptions were gone through from the viewpoint of the new theme. The richness of the information was in focus, not the frequencies.

The number of interviews, nine, is not high, which is typical for IPA as the sample sizes are rarely more than ten (Geraldi Gauci, 2019) and Smith (2011, p. 10) describes this as follows: “The intensity of activity for each case means that IPA studies are usually conducted on relatively small sample sizes which are sufficient for the potential of IPA to be realized.” Furthermore, the interview data started to repeat the same themes even though the details varied. However, we did not aim for generalizability but a preliminary, theory-building framework based on participants’ subjective experiences. The focus was on the meaning-making of those individual experiences. Regarding the validity of the qualitative study, we refer to Yardley (2024) rather than to the definitions of Lincoln (1995) since Yardley’s conceptualization takes better into account the characteristics of interpretative phenomenology (see Moss, 2018, pp. 107–108 for justification).

### ***Results: perpetrators and their actions through the eyes of the victims***

The perpetrators identified by our interviewees ranged from unknown audience members, festival volunteers and their supervisors, to security staff and customer service personnel. The emergent themes are summarized in Figure 1. They are located on the continuum from well-intentioned actions to hate. On the left end, well-intentioned actions contain behavior intended to be empathetic but include factors perceived negatively by the minority members. On the right end, some actions comprise strong prejudices, aggression, and even hate toward these minorities.

When the emergent themes were generalized, and looking for similarities across the interviewees’ experiences, a data-driven theoretical framework of four perpetrator typologies was defined (Figure 1): (1) positive attitudes but incorrect actions; (2) ignorance and indifference; (3) negative and prejudiced behavior; (4) aggression and hatred. Each of them is analyzed next. We included a couple of longer citations, aiming to help readers immerse themselves in the research participants’ thoughts and experiences, which is the purpose of IPA.



**Figure 1.** Typologies of perpetrators' actions: emergent themes.

### *Positive attitudes but incorrect actions*

Some perpetrators might think of themselves as being empathetic and caring, but their actions range, in minority members' eyes, from over-zealous, staring, curious and pitying, to intervening in self-determination.

Red Devil has mobility issues but works a lot as a festival volunteer despite her wheelchair. Her PA Helmi gives an example of an overzealous attitude by festival attendees that is a bit too much: "Some people are overly enthusiastic, like 'I appreciate you so much for volunteering here! WOW!' Like 'you're doing such a great job!'" The commentators have good intentions and appreciate persons with disabilities who work as volunteers, but their output ends up being patronizing (Nario-Redmond et al., 2019; Olkin et al., 2019).

Hannah is blind and goes to festivals and gigs with her PA. They describe an example that was not from a music festival but could happen anywhere where organizers get (too) excited about meeting a person with disabilities at their event. In the following story, the organizer does not realize that they are violating the self-determination of persons with disabilities by deciding on their behalf where to go (helplessness in Olkin et al., 2019; unwanted help in Nario-Redmond et al., 2019).

Person: We were going to this Eurovision meet. This person was so excited when we went there, grabs Hannah's hand and started taking her, "come on, let's go over here" [...] I was holding her other hand, "hey, don't take her anywhere."

Hannah: And I was totally confused, what's going... then I think you said "maybe we'll come back in a while". And we never did (laughter). We just skipped that meet.

Person: It felt really intrusive [...] And people can do that out of foolishness or unintentionally. That person sure didn't mean any harm, but they were sort of careless in that situation.

Hannah: Yes. Or thoughtless...

Person: ...inconsiderate.

Sarah must use a wheelchair when their condition requires it. They have faced pity, leading to awkward situations when strangers ask Sarah's accompanying friends instead of directly asking Sarah why they are in a wheelchair. Furthermore, "they come and touch me, stroke my head" and say things like "oh you poor thing". This is an example of perceiving disability as misfortune, where the person with impairment is not an active agent but a victim who cannot communicate and deserves pity (Yoon, 2022). Nario-Redmond et al. (2019) defined pitying as part of benevolent ableism, and Olkin et al. (2019) as one type of microaggression called denial of privacy.

Pity or an overzealous attitude demonstrates that the commentators consider themselves more "lucky", more capable, and, at least unconsciously, having more power. The use of power is shown by touching the minority member and even grabbing a person's elbow without permission, as if permission would not be needed. However, since these people have good intentions and feel empathy, receiving more information might help them change their behavior so that their act would be perceived positively, as it was intended.

### *Ignorance and indifference*

People's ignorance and indifference might lead to inappropriate behavior since victims do not get help or are not treated with respect. People are ignorant or insensitive; they do not talk directly to persons with disabilities but to their PAs, and they are dismissive or evasive. They do not interfere if they see that minority members are facing inappropriate behavior or unfair treatment. These are all reflections the EHRC study illustrates as a "lack of genuine empathy" (EHRC, 2011, p. 89).

Hannah tells how customer service personnel do not talk to her but to the PA (see also Olkin et al., 2019). She believes that often, the reason is that, as a person who is blind, she cannot make eye contact. However, not talking to a person with disabilities directly does happen to many other persons with disabilities who have a PA, like those in a wheelchair. This kind of behavior is interpreted by persons with disabilities as if they were mentally disabled and unable to communicate, which is insulting; however, it is not usually the aim of the person talking to the PA. The situation might be a result of being confused and not knowing enough.

Misgendering happens often to non-binary and trans people (Jauhola et al., 2022). Winter, who is non-binary, understands that it is not necessarily intentional, but it does not feel good. They prefer to express themselves in a way that helps others to avoid misgendering,

Especially if it's a situation where it's more likely to meet strangers, then I may dress more masculine so it's easier for people to read me right. [...] For example, when I go to gigs, I usually bind<sup>1</sup>, because it makes me feel good. But it's partially also

because you hope people will read you right. And it leads to ... well, not exactly harassment or discrimination, but when people read you wrong, general misgendering. When people use some terms about you, like “lady” or something like that. That’s something that you get of course, although people don’t mean it, it just doesn’t occur to them that this person is non-binary. You get that all the time. And it’s just that dressing and things like that can make a difference so that people would misgender me less.

Ignorance and lack of knowledge of minority issues are problematic, particularly in the case of festival staff, since their misbehavior damages the reputation of the festival. Statistical analysis showed that both persons with disabilities and gender minorities face more inappropriate behavior by festival workers—particularly by security staff—than others. This is an area where training on inclusion and disabilities would help.

Regarding the members of the audience, more information should be given about suitable behavior, like not making presumptions about people based on their appearance. Advice about bystander intervention provided by the festival organizers might be a good way to make people more confident when interfering in a situation where other people are not treated with respect (Baillie et al., 2022). Bystander intervention might even increase the sense of community among the audience.

### *Negative and prejudiced behavior*

Prejudiced attitudes lead to people making inappropriate jokes, festival organizers not trusting volunteers with disabilities, and audience members taking people’s space or not giving way. Those people with prejudiced attitudes might be easily provoked and nervous in the presence of minority members. Other audience members might demand “equal” rights, like using accessible toilets. All in all, prejudices direct the perpetrators’ behavior toward minorities, which might reflect fear (EHRC, 2011, p. 89).

As a festival volunteer, Red Devil always informs the organizers beforehand that she has a wheelchair and comes with a PA. Still, she faces distrusting attitudes and disbelief, as if a person with disabilities would not know their limits and what they can do. This matches Olkin et al. (2019) definition of denial of personal identity where the person is defined by their disabilities, without acknowledging that they have capabilities and knowledge in many other areas.

Both Sarah and Red Devil stress that most people in wheelchairs are not paralyzed and that occasionally—depending on their current condition—they can stand or even walk a bit. This is important to avoid having muscle aches later. This, however, causes problems since some people accuse them of faking, as if they were not disabled enough; also, people envy them—not because of their condition but because of their “benefits” (see also EHRC, 2011, p. 92; Nario-Redmond et al., 2019; Olkin et al., 2019).

Sarah takes the risk of hurting herself by sometimes leaving her wheelchair or crutches at home to avoid unpleasant attention.

Sarah: Even though I would've needed a mobility aid, I've usually just gone there without it, just because that way I don't get people staring or yelling at me.

Researcher: Aren't you taking quite a big risk there that something might happen to you?

Sarah: Yep, for example if I've fallen down, the first aid people had to take me out and things like that. Of course that's a risk.

Researcher: So you take these risks so you can avoid the yelling?

Sarah: Yep. That's not how it should be (chuckles), but it has made me feel better when I don't have to listen to that.

When analyzing the actions that are ill-willed and, at times, based on deep-rooted prejudices, it is difficult to understand the perpetrators. It is probable that these attitudes will not change in the short term, and maybe never. It is important to make clear that this kind of behavior is not tolerated and that security personnel are trained to interfere in such actions. If festival personnel, even volunteer supervisors, have prejudiced attitudes and training does not change these attitudes, it might be best to move such persons to back-office positions, where they would not cause so much harm.

### *Aggression and hatred*

Cruelty, aggressive or threatening behavior, harassment and outright hate were recognized by our research participants. Winter emphasizes that they have not faced discrimination or other inappropriate behavior and that things are generally quite good in Finland. However, they describe how attitudes have become more hostile toward trans people, particularly during public discussion on the new Trans Act that made the trans community in Finland visible. As the debate proceeded, there were appalling comments, hatred, and threats of violence toward trans people and their supporters. Winter illustrated the point thus:

Somehow it's been rising, people are more aware that this transgender things exists, but it's also made those angry reactions rise more. In a way people maybe understand it more, but on the other hand, when things become visible, they may not become acceptable immediately. Earlier, people were not able to feel trans hate, because they didn't know (chuckles) these things exist. [...] 10 years ago you didn't have to listen to stuff like "non-binaries are crazy" same as now.

Red Devil tells how an unknown man offered to have sex with her, thinking that he was doing a favor to a person with disabilities who was unable to find a sex partner. The male even started pushing the wheelchair

toward the hotel, taking it for granted that a person with disabilities would gladly come with him. The incident might have ended in rape without PA Helmi. This is a demonstration of someone exercising power over a female with disabilities, showing double vulnerability due to intersecting identities.

Sarah, who is also non-binary, has experienced hatred and aggression that is directed toward non-binary and trans persons. The perpetrators are very hostile, aggressive and might end up being violent. Sarah's story reveals that perpetrators might act in a (drunken) group, which is threatening as group members probably try to show their power and make themselves admired in the eyes of their mates.

When I've been there with my friends who belong to a gender minority, people are yelling, all sorts of tranny comments and "kill the freaks" and stuff like that. So probably very drunken people, directly yelling at us.

Aggression, hatred, and violence represent problems in perpetrators' thinking, self-control and behavior. Festival organizers could control the audience's use of alcohol since drunk people tend to lose their self-control and act in a way they would not act in normal circumstances. The perpetrators' aim might be to seek acceptance from their peer group by harassing people who do not follow the norms (Franklin, 1998). They are not able to control their feelings, and they are not willing to try to understand their victims. They see marginalized people as possible objects where they can demonstrate their power and ease their insecurity and fear of differences. Probably, the current hate speech tendencies in social media (Jauhola et al., 2022) encourage perpetrators, as they might presume that it is widely approved to behave aggressively toward minorities, which is not true.

Festival organizers should act strongly in these situations. Their safer space policies should determine the consequences of such behavior, and the perpetrators should be punished accordingly. If talking severely to the perpetrator about tolerance and acceptable behavior is not enough, that person should be removed from the festival site and not allowed re-access. In some cases, the police should be involved in starting a criminal investigation.

## Conclusion

We aimed to scrutinize inappropriate behavior that gender minorities and persons with disabilities experience at music festivals. What is this type of behavior, and what is the influence of intersectionality? Furthermore, we wanted to study in more detail how these minorities perceive their perpetrators. The research data and analysis methods were quantitative

and qualitative. We used survey responses to the Finnish Festival Barometer ( $n=16,681$ ) and conducted nine interviews with minority members and their Personal Assistants.

The quantitative analysis revealed that both minorities faced more of nearly all kinds of inappropriate behavior than other festival attendees. Furthermore, these experiences increased if the person belonged to both minorities. The perpetrators of persons with disabilities and gender minorities were more often people working at the festival site. Up to 26% of the incidents with people who had disabilities, and 12% of the incidents with gender minorities, were caused by a security person.

On the qualitative side, a data-driven perpetrator framework was defined with four typologies (Figure 2): (1) those with positive attitudes but incorrect actions; (2) those who were ignorant or did not care; (3) those who had negative, prejudiced behavior; and (4), those who were aggressive and expressed hate. Our interviewees told us how they had changed the way they dressed or even quit using mobility aids to avoid unpleasant situations.

When the perpetrators had good intentions but not enough knowledge, they might have insulted a minority member, which was not the aim of the action. It seems possible that more information and training could transform the well-intentioned perpetrators into allies. Audience members should be given more information on how to behave and why, and festival staff and volunteers should be trained to face people with different needs. Even though inclusion is a common word used in safer space policies, it is not necessarily clear to all festival workers and participants what it means in practice and what each could do to nurture inclusion.

However, when perpetrators who have deep-rooted prejudices and whose aim is to insult, threaten or even physically hurt minority members, festival organizers face more significant responsibilities. These perpetrators are the people whose actions the safer space policies are designed to counter. The aim of the policies is to reduce these persons' bad behavior and, in the worst case, to have them removed from festivals where they do not belong.

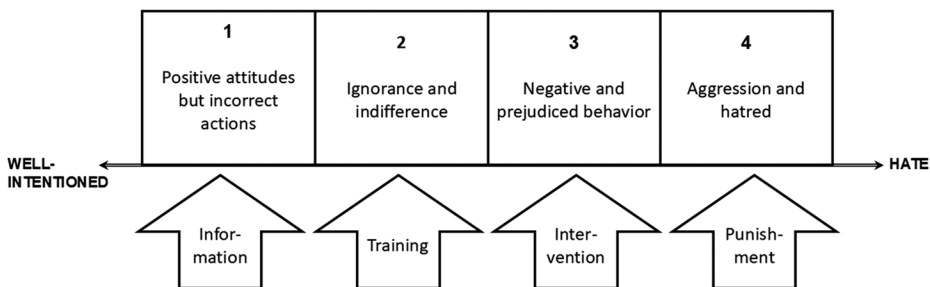


Figure 2. Actions needed for different types of perpetrator behavior.

Organizers should take care that both the audience and security personnel are aware of the approved code of conduct and the consequences for those who do not obey the rules. It is particularly important that security staff take inappropriate behavior seriously, interfere, and remove perpetrators from the festival when needed.

### ***Theoretical implications***

In the field of critical event research, there are recent studies on perpetrators of sexual harassment, particularly toward female music festival attendees (for example, Baillie et al., 2022; Bows et al., 2023). However, studies on perpetrators of minority members are scarce. The current study concentrated on gender minorities and persons with disabilities, aiming to find ways to make music festivals more inclusive. In their review of articles in event management journals about equality, diversity, and inclusion, Calver et al. (2023) express their concern that research is scarce and often only included in special issues of those journals, as though the focus could not be mainstream.

Our study adds knowledge on the position of minority members and their negative experiences at music festivals. The new theoretical framework (Figure 2) for developing inclusivity is one of the first steps in overcoming perpetrators' behaviors. We were able to go deeper into defining perpetrator types and corresponding corrective actions to reduce inappropriate behavior, thus giving means to handle the different behaviors that perpetrators exhibit. The theoretical framework is also helpful in teaching equality, diversity, and inclusion in event management education. The varying seriousness of inappropriate behavior is an essential finding, particularly because the need for different actions for different perpetrators has not been handled so far in event studies.

### ***Practical implications***

Safer space policies define the principles of inclusion, who is vulnerable, and who should be protected against prejudice, harassment and discrimination (Hill & Megson, 2020). The policy states what is permitted and what is not, plus the consequences to perpetrators. It should be visible everywhere, both in virtual and physical festival spaces.

Festival organizers, security personnel, customer service personnel, volunteer supervisors, and volunteers should be trained to enhance inclusion and treat minorities appropriately. Everyone who works at the festival site should be aware of how to act if they see inappropriate behavior or someone tells them about it. Furthermore, they should treat every attendee with respect and without presumptions.

If a festival wants to promote inclusivity, organizers should embed this approach in their programming. Performers who belong to a minority are important role models (Bossey, 2020; Finkel & Dashper, 2020). When recruiting personnel or volunteers, there should not be any discrimination against minorities. Supervisors' inclusive attitudes are important to reduce prejudice among volunteers.

Nowadays, many festivals have a harassment contact person. However, our interviewees stressed that one person is not enough at large festivals. It is advisable to consider having a harassment contact team that comprises trained harassment contact persons as well as security and first aid personnel. Often, festivals do not clearly express where these harassment contact persons can be found. Having a visible spot—marked as clearly as bars—helps people find them. However, there should also be other means of reporting incidents like apps, web forms and email.

In a festival environment, being intoxicated is tolerated and sometimes even a preferred state. Alcohol sales are an important source of income for festival organizers. However, the consumption of alcohol reduces control and might bring out prejudiced behavior. Being drunk is too often used—and accepted—as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. If security personnel belittle incidents conducted by intoxicated people, it leads to non-reporting of inappropriate behavior.

If the festival provided a sensory-friendly space to calm down without too many sensory stimuli, everyone would benefit. These kinds of calm spaces would be particularly important for people with autism spectrum disorder, those who are non-neurotypical, or those who have been victims of inappropriate behavior. There should also be the possibility of talking with trained personnel about possible incidents.

All in all, implementing various ways to increase inclusivity benefits everyone at a festival. Having an inclusive and caring environment improves the general atmosphere and makes people feel connected and more satisfied, which influences word-of-mouth and future intentions of participation.

### **Limitations**

The survey sample was self-selecting and biased toward female respondents. Thus, it is emphasized that when we talked about “other respondents”, it meant a female-dominant group. The minority members who participated in the research attended music festivals. In contrast, it would have also been important to reach those who did not attend, to find out their reasons for not doing so. Furthermore, there were no male interviewees. The results cannot be generalized since the survey and interview samplings used self-selecting convenience samples.

## Future research

This study revealed only part of the inappropriate behavior that certain minorities face at music festivals. The experiences of other minority groups must be scrutinized in more detail as well. Furthermore, the framework must be tested with larger samples.

Since safer space policies have been defined at mainstream music festivals only briefly, there should be evaluative research on these guidelines. Hill and Megson (2020) evaluated safer space policies of punk and DIY music venues, but a comprehensive review of music festivals' safer space policies is still missing. A longitudinal approach would be useful to determine if any corrective actions on the practices and policies were taken and why.

## Note

1. Binding means different ways to flatten one's chest.

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