

# Gender minorities at music festivals

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose was to examine the prevalence and type of inappropriate behaviour gender minorities face and how they perceive such behaviour. The study is framed within Gidley *et al.*'s social inclusion model, indicating areas where actions are needed to avoid social exclusion.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research data comprised over 12,000 responses to a web survey, which included 184 responses from gender minority members and four in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using statistical methods and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**Findings** – About 59% of gender minority members had experienced inappropriate behaviour, compared to 34% of female festival attendees. The most common form of inappropriate behaviour towards gender minorities was harassment because of gender, followed by sexual harassment, physically threatening situations and harassment because of appearance or clothing. Interviews were analysed against the theoretical framework of social inclusion, determining how the experiences influenced access, participation and empowerment.

**Practical implications** – Festivals must have unisex toilets. Safer space policies should be better communicated, more visible and more practical. Instead of having one harassment contact person, there should be a whole team. Training the festival personnel, particularly the security staff, is highly important. People are reluctant to report problems to the security personnel since those personnel might be part of the problem. There should be members of gender minorities among performers, workers, security staff and volunteers.

**Originality/value** – Studies on inappropriate behaviour at festivals have concentrated on female experiences of sexual harassment. Gender minorities have hardly been studied, even though they face more inappropriate behaviour than any other minority group. Furthermore, gender minorities are typically grouped with sexual minorities even though their experiences differ from one another. We applied Gidley *et al.*'s hierarchical model of social inclusion to gender minority members in the context of music festivals. In doing so, we added knowledge of attitudes and practices that reduce and endanger feelings of access, participation and empowerment.

**Keywords** Music festivals, Gender minorities, Harassment, Inclusivity, Social inclusion, Gender identity

**Paper type** Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

Festivals have been arenas for social marketing aiming to change people's behaviour. There has been considerable work in developing sustainable food consumption practices (Jutbring, 2018), social inclusion (Laing and Mair, 2015) and safer spaces (Barrière, 2021). Platt and Finkel (2020, p. 6) suggest that "festivals can take some steps in progressing positive social change". During the last decade, ever more music festivals have defined their safer space policies, aiming to nurture social inclusion at their events. One of the main themes in such

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policies is that discrimination, harassment and other types of bullying and threats are not tolerated and that all participants and their identities should be respected.

Gender minorities are often indirectly referred to in safer space policies where people are asked not to make assumptions about anyone based on their appearance. Nevertheless, gender minorities face various kinds of inappropriate behaviour at festivals, and it is a neglected research topic. In this study, we concentrate on gender minorities and their experiences of inappropriate behaviour at Finnish music festivals, and how these experiences influence the social inclusion of this minority.

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Whereas cisgender refers to people who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, gender minorities include non-binary, trans or intersex persons. For them, gender diversity can be biological or connected to the expression of gender or gender identity [1]. Non-binary means individuals who do not identify as male or female; also, terms like genderqueer, gender non-conforming, gender fluid or agender are used ([2]; Victoria, 2021). Trans refers to people whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth [2] [3]. Intersex means a person who is “born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male, or are a combination of female and male” [3].

In Finland, the number of children and young people who identify themselves as belonging to a gender minority has increased by two per cent between 2019 and 2023, being 5.2% in 2023 (THL, 2023). The visibility of trans people has increased as well. One of the reasons is the renewed gender recognition law that allows gender self-determination based on application, making it possible to get an identification document with the gender – only either male or female – with which one identifies. The discussions on the Trans Act have led to positive outcomes in the form of human rights (Castagnaro, 2023), but prejudice and hate speech towards trans people have multiplied as well. All this has led to resistance and denial of the existence of gender minorities by far-right conservatives, which was manifested in an initiative by some members of parliament to deny Seta (LGBTI Rights in Finland) representatives the possibility of visiting schools (Hautanen, 2024). Similar requests have been introduced in several municipal councils (for example, Tervonen, 2024). So far, these requests have been rejected. The overall position of gender minorities is not good since they face more harassment and threats of violence than the general population (Aparicio-García *et al.*, 2018; EU FRA, 2014; Grant *et al.*, 2011).

Large-scale surveys on gender and sexual minorities both in the USA (Grant *et al.*, 2011) and in the EU (EU FRA, 2014) have demonstrated that gender minorities face discrimination, abuse, harassment, intolerance and violence in the most fundamental areas of society: schools, universities, workplaces, health care, public transport – and inside their families. As a consequence, many non-binary and trans people avoid public spaces or hide their true identities. In some countries, trans people’s lives are in danger; for instance, Brazil and Mexico have the highest number of murders of trans people in the world (Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020, p. 171).

Aparicio-García *et al.* (2018) studied Spanish 14–25-year-olds and found out that non-binary young people faced more verbal and physical attacks than their cisgender counterparts. They also felt more isolated and were not supported by their families and friends as much as other young people (see also Factor and Rothblum, 2007). Similar findings were introduced by Fredriksen-Goldsen *et al.* (2014) in a US study on 50+ years old trans people. These transgender older adults experienced stigma and a lack of social support besides health problems, depression and disabilities. In a large student survey, Lipson *et al.* (2019) reported that gender minority students had over four times higher probability of a mental health problem like depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-injury or suicidality than their cisgender peers. All in all, interpersonal stigma – “being a victim of insults and violence” (Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020, p. 170) – is present in gender minorities’ daily lives.

In Finland, mental and physical violence against children who belong to a gender minority starts in their families and at school (Jokela *et al.*, 2020; UN CRC, 2023), and continues throughout their youth and adulthood (Jauhola *et al.*, 2022; Jokela *et al.*, 2020). They face hate

speech and harassment, particularly on the internet and in public spaces. One consequence of experiencing name-calling, yelling and threatening behaviour is that many gender minority members avoid or are afraid of public spaces. According to the EU LGBT survey, four per cent of Finnish trans people had faced a hate-motivated crime within the previous year (EU FRA, 2014, p. 56).

These kinds of experiences lead easily to social exclusion, which, in turn, negatively impacts well-being (Akyol Güner and Das Gecim, 2023). Social exclusion has been defined by Burchardt *et al.* (1999, p. 229) as wanting to participate in activities but being unable to do so for reasons beyond a person's control. Not participating because of being bullied or harassed – or due to the fear of it – is part of marginalisation and social exclusion in our society.

Calver *et al.* (2023) reviewed four major events management journals from 2011–2021 to find out how these journals handled equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). They revealed that EDI was a marginal theme, and almost half of the EDI articles were published on special issues, as if the theme was not important enough to be one of the core phenomena in event and festival studies. Furthermore, the contexts of the UK and Australia dominated these studies. So far, studies on inappropriate behaviour at festivals have concentrated predominantly on female experiences of sexual harassment (Bows *et al.*, 2023; Fileborn *et al.*, 2019). Gender minorities have hardly been studied as music festival attendees (Platt and Finkel, 2020), even though Kinnunen and Honkanen (2024) demonstrated that nearly two-thirds of them face inappropriate behaviour at live music venues and festivals, compared to 22% of males and 33% of females.

With this study, we aim to broaden the scope of EDI research to Finland, which has consistently ranked number one in the world for happiness and is, as one of the Nordic countries, high in equality and well-being. In ILGA-EUROPE's measure of respect for the human rights of LGBTI people, Finland is fifth in Europe, having an overall score of 70% ([www.ilga-europe.org/rainbow-europe](http://www.ilga-europe.org/rainbow-europe)). The results of the current study will contradict the perceptions of a happy, egalitarian country because gender minorities face prejudices, bullying, harassment and threats of violence at music festivals, making their experience worse than that of those who belong to a more powerful gender.

We aimed to add knowledge about the prevalence and type of inappropriate behaviour gender minorities face and how they perceive such behaviour. Our research questions were: “How prevalent is inappropriate behaviour towards gender minority attendees at music festivals?” and “How do gender minority attendees respond to inappropriate behaviour?”. We framed the experiences of gender minority members within Gidley *et al.*'s (2010) social inclusion model, indicating areas where actions are needed to avoid social exclusion. The context of the study is Finnish music festivals, whose annual number is around 600, with 3M visits annually (LiveFIN, 2024). We also aimed to find practical guidelines on how event organisers could increase inclusivity and reduce undesirable behaviour of the audience and festival security staff.

## 2. Literature

We will first introduce the theoretical concept of social inclusion and how its sub-areas have been handled in festival research. Then, experiences of other than cisgendered males are summarised, demonstrating how gendered violence jeopardises social inclusion. Finally, we introduce the theoretical framework of social inclusion at festivals, adapted from Gidley *et al.* (2010) and nuanced by examples from the festival context.

### 2.1 Social inclusion and festivals

Gidley *et al.* (2010) defined three degrees of social inclusion. The narrowest interpretation pertained to access, a broader interpretation was participation, and the widest was empowerment. Many festivals aim to promote social inclusion and this is often the

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government's emphasis (Laing and Mair, 2015). *Inter alia*, physical accessibility (Alvarado, 2022; Castle *et al.*, 2022), web accessibility (Dinis *et al.*, 2020) and economic accessibility (Davies *et al.*, 2023) of festivals have been studied. Participation in society is perhaps the most important aspect of social inclusion, encompassing consumption, production, political engagement and social interaction (Johnson *et al.*, 2011; Laing and Mair, 2015). In the event context, empowerment comprises, for instance, working for the event, having one's voice heard in decision-making, taking ownership of the event, and capacity development (Walters *et al.*, 2021).

Social inclusion at festivals, in the form of participation and empowerment (Gidley *et al.*, 2010), has been handled from the viewpoint of improving local communities' social connectedness and cohesion through community festivals (Jepson and Clarke, 2012; Ong *et al.*, 2021). Often, this is connected to the pride of place and community and cultural inclusion (Derrett, 2003; McGillivray *et al.*, 2024).

Festivals are considered sources of well-being (Kinnunen and Honkanen, 2021; Kitchen *et al.*, 2023), particularly social well-being (Keyes, 1998). Social dimensions of festivals (Rihova *et al.*, 2019) contributing to social inclusion (Laing and Mair, 2015) include known-group bonding (Wilks, 2011); socialising with strangers and making new friends (Wilks, 2011); a sense of belonging among people with the same taste and values – which create feelings of tribal community (Maffesoli, 1997) that extend the timeframe of the festival –; and, lastly, the temporary sense of community within the festival *communitas* (Turner, 2008).

Diversity in festival attendees, performers, workers and volunteers is an important part of social inclusion (Finkel and Dashper, 2020), both in terms of participation and empowerment (Gidley *et al.*, 2010). Performers offer role models, working or volunteering at festivals increases ownership, and seeing other people of the same minority makes one feel more welcome.

Yet, there are challenges in creating an inclusive festivalscape. Gidley *et al.* (2010) state that social inclusion pertains to various minority groups characterised by, for example, gender, sexual orientation, age, health and disabilities. Defining marginalised groups as out-groups (“others”) reduces feelings of safety and inclusion (Ong *et al.*, 2021).

## 2.2 Gendered violence vs. social inclusion at festivals

Liminality and *communitas* are frequently used to describe festivals. Liminality of festivals has been considered a factor that facilitates the emergence of *communitas*. People tend to behave differently at festivals than they do outside the festival gates. Typically, this means consumption of alcohol in search of a party feeling; however, being intoxicated reduces self-control and might bring up prejudiced attitudes and behaviour. Intoxication is also used as an excuse for harassment. Furthermore, although liminality is about leaving status, norms and rules at the festival gate, this does not apply to “gender hierarchies within the festival site” (Pielichaty, 2015, p. 246). Crowding, congestion, large festival and camping sites, and a low level of surveillance and low lighting, are typical for music festivals and make anonymity and quick escape easy for perpetrators (Bows *et al.*, 2023; Fileborn *et al.*, 2019). All in all, festivals are not “free from structural sexism, inequalities or gender power dynamics” and “persistence to characterise festival spaces as uncomplicated, value-free, utopic liminal/liminoid is highly problematic” (Platt and Finkel, 2020, p. 2).

Recent Western studies have demonstrated that (young) female festival participants face a considerable amount of gendered violence. In the UK, 30–33% of female respondents have faced sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour at festivals (Bows *et al.*, 2023; YouGov, 2018). The proportion rises when the focus is limited to younger females (YouGov, 2018). In the USA, *Our Music My Body* (2017) conducted a survey as a part of their campaign aiming to reduce sexual harassment, and their numbers were very high: up to 92% of female respondents were harassed at music events. In Australia, over 60% of survey respondents

thought that sexual harassment was frequent at music festivals (Fileborn *et al.*, 2019). It is common that these incidents are not reported at all (YouGov, 2018).

Sexual harassment interferes with the participation aspect of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010), leaving victims excluded from shared festival enjoyment, since incidents cause anger, shock and loss of trust, in some cases even long-term health problems and suicidal tendencies (Fileborn *et al.*, 2019, pp. 26–27). In most cases, the perpetrators are unknown male audience members. However, security staff and even police have taken advantage of female festival participants leading to non-reporting of incidents, since victims do not trust people they should report to (Aborisade, 2021; Fileborn *et al.*, 2019).

To avoid harassment, there is a long history of female attendees taking safety measures; for example, precautions like controlling the way they dress, being with friends all the time or avoiding spaces that might allow harassment (Bows *et al.*, 2023; Fileborn *et al.*, 2019). This kind of self-control restricts female festival participation, both in visible and invisible ways.

In festival studies, gender minorities are often grouped with sexual minorities under the acronym LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex) or similar. These studies have particularly emphasised the perceptions and experiences of identity building, self-expression and self-acceptance at LGBTQI+ festivals (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy, 2021; Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2008). Social inclusion is often manifested in these festivals in the form of participation and empowerment (Gidley *et al.*, 2010) since the atmosphere is full of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. However, the studies of sexual and gender minorities are scarcer when other than specific LGBTQI+ festivals are concerned; that is, studies on gender or sexual minority attendees as a part of a wider festival community are not that common – exceptions include Ong *et al.*'s (2021) study on community festivals, and Kinnunen and Honkanen's (2024) study on music festivals.

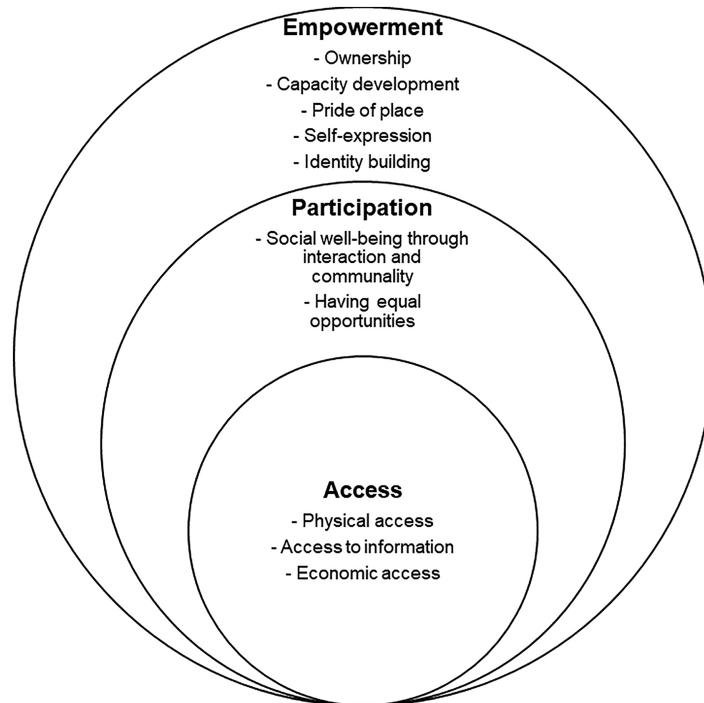
Organisers have tried to increase empowerment through counterspaces (Case and Hunter, 2012) or separatist festivals (Barrière, 2021, p. 65). For instance, a festival might have closed its gates to cisgender males, trying to create spaces “where members of marginalized groups can come together to heal from oppression” (McConnell *et al.*, 2016, p. 475–476). The purpose is to protect participants from harassment conducted by cisgender males. Nevertheless, it is emphasised that “even if cisgender men are excluded from the festival spaces, other power relationships will not suddenly disappear” (Barrière, 2021, p. 65). The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MichFest) in the USA, organised for the first time in 1976, was meant for females only, but it did not allow trans women in the festival, claiming that they did not have the same life-long experiences as womyn-born-as-womyn (Currans, 2020; McConnell *et al.*, 2016). Finally, the festival ended in 2015 because of this contradiction, as the festival itself was misusing its position of power by causing feelings of exclusion to a marginalised and vulnerable group, trans women.

Another example of a separatist festival was the Statement Festival in Sweden, which allowed only women, transgender and non-binary persons into the festival, having 5,000 visitors in 2018. Even though the participants and organisers were happy and satisfied with the outcome, the festival could not be organised in the same format again since the Discrimination Ombudsman found it guilty of discrimination (Snapes, 2018). These two cases demonstrate that separatist events are not a solution for harassment as they might introduce a different kind of oppression or inequality.

### 2.3 Theoretical framework

We have adapted Gidley *et al.*'s (2010) model of social inclusion to the festival context and use it as a theoretical framework for this study (Figure 1). The three degrees of social inclusion – access, participation, and empowerment – are from Gidley *et al.*, whereas the details are based on the literature review.

Access, the narrowest interpretation of social inclusion, is in the innermost sphere of the model. The main elements are physical access, access to information and economic access, all



**Source(s):** Adapted from Gidley *et al.* (2010)

**Figure 1.** Degrees of social inclusion in festivals

of which might prevent access to festivals. A broader interpretation is participation, where social inclusion is manifested in social interaction and equal opportunities. As the findings will demonstrate, social interaction will be the area where most actions violating social inclusion will occur. The widest interpretation of social inclusion is empowerment. Ownership and capacity development can be gained through working for the festival. Pride of place is connected to festivals organised in the place where the person lives – in these cases, the pride of the festival might develop into the pride of place. Self-expression and identity building can be gained as a performer or participant, but in both cases, the prerequisite is that the person feels safe in the environment. The model is nested; accessibility is fundamental for social inclusion, and participation is possible after accessibility is addressed. Furthermore, empowerment is achievable only once accessibility and participation are possible.

In this paper, we will scrutinise how inappropriate behaviour towards gender minority members compromises all three degrees of social inclusion.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research data

The research data comprise responses to the Finnish Festival Barometer 2022 and four in-depth interviews with gender minority members. The Barometer is a web survey that is conducted every second year. In 2022, it was distributed in October and November on Facebook and Instagram by 24 member festivals of LiveFIN, the network and interest group of Finnish live music events. The participating festivals offered lineups with pop, rock, jazz,

EDM, rap, etc., and they had 1.1 million visits in 2022. The respondents participated in the draw of festival tickets provided by the festivals that distributed the survey.

The questionnaire included various questions about festival attendance, such as musical taste, preferred experience elements, willingness to pay, intention for future participation, and so on. In 2022, a new section on inappropriate behaviour and minority membership was included, but it was not mandatory to respond to it. It was not indicated beforehand that the questionnaire contained such questions since we wanted to avoid any bias towards people who had experienced inappropriate behaviour. Those who did not respond to the questions about harassment or belonging to a minority were omitted from the analysis. Altogether, 16,681 valid responses were received. 26.6% of the respondents were male, 72.0% female, 0.7% other and 0.7% preferred not to state their gender. Their mean age was 33.98 years, and the median was 32 years. As the Literature section demonstrates, the groups that face most of the inappropriate behaviour that jeopardises social inclusion are females and gender minorities. For this reason, we have included only these groups in the statistical analysis since we specifically wanted to find out possible differences between these two groups that suffer the most from inappropriate behaviour and resulting social exclusion. Thus, we used 12,122 responses: 11,938 were females (not belonging to a gender minority) and 184 belonged to a gender minority.

Survey participants were also asked if they were willing to participate in a research interview, and if they agreed, they provided their email addresses. Since the quantitative analysis of the survey responses aimed to introduce a structural view of gender minorities' backgrounds and experiences, we wanted to capture richer data that would allow more holistic insights into feelings of inclusion and exclusion, or both. Consequently, we decided to conduct in-depth interviews. Seventeen gender minority members were contacted, and four agreed to participate (Table 1).

The interviews were held face-to-face in the interviewees' hometowns in March and April 2023. Interviews were semi-structured and included questions about interviewees' minority identities and their experiences of inappropriate behaviour. Their opinions were also asked about various practices that were recommended in earlier studies for handling inappropriate behaviour. The interviews were recorded audio (altogether 4 h 56 min) and transcribed. All the interviewees had intersecting minority identities, which is typical for gender minorities (see Statistical analysis). Besides belonging to a gender minority, two of them were also disabled or had a long-term illness, and three belonged to a sexual minority as well.

Gender minorities have been difficult to reach in festival studies (Bows *et al.*, 2023; Fileborn *et al.*, 2019) and even omitted from analysis (Marshall *et al.*, 2022). In our case, quite a few gender minority members responded to the structured web survey, but only a few were willing to be interviewed. The proportion of gender minorities among survey respondents was

**Table 1.** Interviewees ( $n = 4$ )

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Pronoun	Minority identities	Length of the interview
Sarah	19	Non-binary They/them	Gender minority Disabled because of an illness	1:08
Winter	29	Non-binary They/them	Gender minority Sexual minority	0:50
Momo	28	Gender queer She/her or they/them	Queer (demigirl) Pansexual/asexual	1:33
Maija	28	Gender non-conforming She/her or they/them	Gender minority Sexual minority (lesbian) Non-neurotypical (ADHD)	1:25

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

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big enough to make statistical comparisons. However, the small number of interviewees will be discussed further in the Analysis methods section.

### 3.2 Research ethics

An ethical review was not required because the following prerequisites were fulfilled (Kohonen *et al.*, 2019, pp. 19–22): participants were at least 15 years old; participation was voluntary and participants were given information about the research (informed consent); participants' physical integrity was not interfered with; participants were not exposed to strong stimuli; research was not causing mental harm exceeding everyday life, and it did not cause any threat to participants, researchers or their close ones. The Research Integrity Adviser was contacted who confirmed this situation. However, based on her advice, we included details of a mental health organisation's helpline in the questionnaire.

Neither of the authors belongs to a gender minority, which implies that it is necessary to pay special attention to ethical issues concerning research on this minority. We have aimed to neglect a cisnormative worldview through the following research decisions (see ethical recommendations on trans research defined by Marshall *et al.*, 2022): gender is treated as a non-binary issue and, to avoid misgendering, the interviewees self-determined their gender identities, gender pronouns, minority identities and pseudonyms (see Table 1).

We treated sexual and gender minority membership separately and did not combine them under the LGBTQI+ grouping. It is true – as the data of this study will confirm – that members of a gender minority often belong to a sexual minority as well. However, in the LGBTQI+ grouping, the experiences of sexual minorities dominate because their number is much higher than those of gender minorities, and the experiences of gender minorities are necessarily not the same as sexual minorities (Marshall *et al.*, 2022; Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020). Monterrubio *et al.* (2020) studied trans tourism and they argue that grouping gender minorities under an umbrella term that includes sexual minorities “ignores the complex differences between sexuality and gender” (p. 176); also, it ignores the implications for tourism (and other leisure) consumption and consequent experiences.

The interviews were conducted by the female author, and she explained at the beginning of each session that she needed the interviewees' help in interpreting and understanding their positions and experiences. This was done by asking them to explain from their own perspective all minority terms they used, and by showing empathy, sometimes frustration and even anger, when hearing about their experiences. The researcher intentionally did not try to be an “objective” and distant observer, but she took a position in favour of the interviewees. This hopefully made the participants feel safe to share their experiences, which were not questioned or belittled.

Additionally, member checking (Birt *et al.*, 2016) was employed, meaning that all the interviewees saw the draft of this article, and they were allowed to ask for changes if they felt that their identity or sayings were incorrectly expressed or interpreted.

### 3.3 Analysis methods

We used mixed methods to get a deeper insight into the research topic, minimise the weaknesses, and take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The mixed methods analysis was sequential: the quantitative part was conducted first, followed by the qualitative one. The principal rationale for using a mixed methods approach was complementarity; we aimed for “clarification of the results from one method with results from the other method” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22) – that is, we looked for explanations of the quantitative results from the qualitative part of the research.

Quantitative survey data were first analysed to determine the differences between gender minorities and females. After that, the experiences of inappropriate behaviour were examined

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and compared. Statistical methods included chi-square tests, *t*-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests.

The qualitative interview data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Moss *et al.*, 2020; Smith, 2019). Fundamentally, IPA is an enhanced version of thematic analysis, aiming to make sense of research participants' personal experiences. This analysis is done in a process involving a double hermeneutic (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 51): "The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world". In our case, the experiences were those of inappropriate behaviour – harassment and discrimination – or a fear of them. It is essential to make sense of the significance of these experiences and what they mean to individuals' identities (Smith, 2019). Our qualitative sample size is small since we had only four interviewees; however, IPA is typically conducted on small sample sizes. In addition, gender minorities have been hard to reach in festival studies, particularly when the context has been other than LGBTQI+ festivals. Within festival harassment studies, non-binary gender has been present in surveys (not in interviews); but even so, their number has been considerably low: seven in Bows *et al.* (2023) and two in Fileborn *et al.* (2019). Nevertheless, we did not aim for generalisations but rather for richness and depth of information (Moss *et al.*, 2020) about gender minorities' experiences of inappropriate behaviour at Finnish music festivals.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Statistical analysis

Since in previous festival studies there have been so few gender minority participants, little is known about their general characteristics. We summarise here the most important differences between gender minority attendees and females. These groups are mutually exclusive, meaning that individuals who identified themselves both as females and as members of a gender minority were included in the gender minority group only. Thus, the group "females" does not contain any gender minority members.

47.8% of gender minority members identify their gender as "other", 13.0% as male, 36.4% as female and 2.7% did not want to answer the gender question. This implies that nearly half of the gender minority members identify as males or females. Those belonging to gender minorities are younger (mean = 28 years) than female respondents (mean 34 years,  $t = -6.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Even though most of the gender minority members (just like other attendees as well) live in cities, they (41%) are more likely to live in the Helsinki region (females 26%,  $\chi^2 = 48.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Only 23.4% of gender minority respondents belonged to this one minority, meaning most had intersecting minority identities. As many as 68.5% also belonged to a sexual minority, and 12.0% were disabled or had a long-term illness, or both. However, our sample size was not big enough to allow statistical analysis of intersectionality.

Gender minorities (59.2%) face much more inappropriate behaviour at music festivals than females (33.6%,  $\chi^2 = 53.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). They are more frequently victims of various forms of harassment. Harassment because of both sexual orientation and gender is more likely for gender minorities than for females, which is clearly demonstrated by the chi-square values in Table 2. Furthermore, gender minorities often also experience sexual harassment, physically threatening situations and harassment due to their clothing, appearance or age.

There is a difference where the harassment is experienced (Table 3). Even though the most common places for inappropriate behaviour for all respondents are those places from which one can watch the show, crowded areas and bars, gender minorities (38.3%) experience harassment in toilet facilities more frequently than females (15.4%;  $\chi^2 = 40.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Festival camping areas can also be more dangerous for gender minorities (14.0%) than for females (6.0%;  $\chi^2 = 11.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Respondents were also asked how important are the values represented by the festival for the success of the festival experience (1 = not at all important, 7 = very important). They are

**Table 2.** Types of inappropriate behaviour faced by members of a gender minority and females ( $n = 12,122$ )

Type of inappropriate behaviour	Gender minority ( $n = 184$ )	Females ( $n = 11,938$ )	Chi-Square
Harassment because of sexual orientation	17.9%	2.6%	155.66*
Harassment because of gender	40.2%	13.1%	114.79*
Harassment because of clothing or appearance	20.7%	7.6%	42.96*
Sexual harassment	39.1%	19.7%	42.76*
Physically threatening situation	25.5%	12.0%	31.11*
Harassment because of age	11.4%	4.0%	25.52*

**Note(s):** \* $p < 0.001$

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

**Table 3.** Common places or situations for inappropriate behaviour ( $n = 3,986$ )

Place or situation	Gender minority ( $n = 107$ )	Females ( $n = 3,879$ )	Chi-Square
In the toilet area of the festival	38.3%	15.4%	40.71*
In the festival camping area	14.0%	6.0%	11.46*
During transport arranged by the festival	3.7%	1.5%	3.56
In the licensing area of the festival	45.8%	40.0%	1.44
When watching the show	73.8%	69.1%	1.08
In a crowded or congested area, or both, at the festival	49.5%	47.2%	0.23

**Note(s):** \* $p < 0.001$

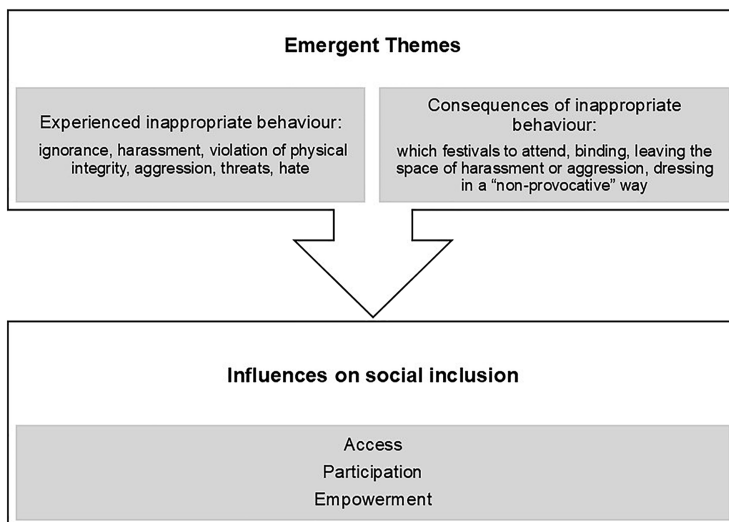
**Source(s):** Authors' own work

more important to the members of gender minorities (mean = 5.9) than females (mean = 5.4,  $U = 825,116.00$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### 4.2 Qualitative analysis

Our IPA process comprised various phases. The most important part was the interview itself, in which the researcher's role was to help the participants self-reflect on the happenings and their consequences. The transcripts of the interviews were then read through several times, identifying excerpts involving inappropriate behaviour. This data-driven phase resulted in two main themes: how the participants interpreted inappropriate behaviour and how they tried to protect themselves against it. The types of inappropriate behaviour, from the minor to the extreme, were related to ignorance, harassment, violation of physical integrity, aggression, threats and hate. All of these create feelings of otherness and not being a member of the festival community, reducing social inclusion. To minimise potential threats, our interviewees employed different kinds of safety measures: choosing which festival to attend in order to avoid unwanted incidents; binding [4] to avoid misgendering; leaving the space of harassment or aggression, and dressing in a way that would not "provoke" others. At the final stage of IPA, the themes were analysed against the theoretical framework of social inclusion (Figure 2) based on [Gidley et al. \(2010\)](#), studying how the experiences influenced access, participation and empowerment. The representation of the qualitative findings follows these degrees of social inclusion.

**4.2.1 Access.** Access is often perceived as a barrier for persons with disabilities. However, there is one particular type of access form that is important for gender minorities, and that is



Source(s): Authors' own work

**Figure 2.** Themes development

gender-neutral (unisex) toilets. The statistical analysis demonstrated that gender minorities experience inappropriate behaviour more often than other attendees at the festival toilet area. Unisex toilets are important for gender minorities to avoid others judging, staring and commenting about presumed gender identity when one has to choose between binary-gendered toilets. However, some non-minority members might find problems in this arrangement, as the following incident demonstrates:

Momo talks about a case at a festival where there are unisex toilets. Whereas Momo felt comfortable with the practice, the female festival attendees in line blamed the shared toilets for the queues. Indirectly, they blamed gender minorities even though the reason for the queues was that so many people wanted to go to the toilet at the same time, probably during a break in the programme. There were urinals available for those who wanted to pee standing up, and there were no males in the queue for unisex toilets.

That [unisex toilet] queue was full of frustrated female-assigned people. I remember they were like [imitating a woman] "what's the point really, now everybody's queuing for the same toilet and it's a mile long queue" (snicker). And I was thinking, "well, there's not a single male-assigned person in this queue" (snicker).

In Gidley *et al.*'s model, access is the narrowest interpretation of social inclusion and a core sphere and prerequisite for broader benefits. Even though here females were complaining about longer queues, from a social inclusivity point of view that issue is minor, compared to gender minorities' safety and the possibility for them to be less anxious about visiting toilets.

**4.2.2 Participation.** The most frequent violation of the participation aspect of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010) was related to people and their prejudices. The way other members treated gender minorities of the audience and security staff reduced their possibilities to feel an equal part of the festival community. For Maija, these attitudes (or the possibility of them) influenced their decision to participate. They state that "it's really the reputation of the festival that counts for more than the rules [for safer spaces]", and they choose the festivals to attend according to their reputation and values. This confirms the statistical finding that gender minorities respect festival values more than others. Choosing a festival that aligns with one's values presumably reduces incidents and increases the possibility of feeling social inclusion.

Sarah is “passing as a woman”, which eliminates harassment and aggression because of their non-binary gender. In contrast, visible gender manifestations of friends belonging to a gender minority might cause problems for everyone in the group. Sarah knows people “belonging to a minority, who have been beaten at festivals. People tear their clothes, tear their tapes off [5] and stuff like that.” Violation of physical integrity, even physical violence, is an extreme way of excluding marginalised people as perpetrators eventually try to prevent their representation and participation.

Furthermore, Sarah tells how “people are yelling, all sorts of tranny comments and ‘kill the freaks’ and stuff like that”. These are “probably very drunken people”, implying that a group of perpetrators act together. One of the usual actions at the time of aggression is to leave the space, allowing themselves distance from harassers, and so avoid escalating the incident. Thus, the less powerful group has to give way or even escape, diminishing the possibility of participating fully. Sarah has chosen this approach,

If you feel even a bit like the yelling and stuff might escalate, then I’m usually like, well, OK, let’s get out of here. [ . . . ] When they [perpetrators] are under the influence of alcohol, you often feel it’s better just to leave, so it won’t escalate and get violent or physical.

Winter argues that gender minorities are in a worse position compared to sexual minorities,

This general atmosphere in the trans law discussion, really many people are like, “yea, yea, gays are ok but these transgender people, they’re crazy”. I personally feel I would better dare to say something myself if the discrimination is based on sexuality rather than gender.

Winter explains further that they would not report incidents related to a gender minority membership to the security staff since they might not take it seriously, or might think that your gender does not exist and that, consequently, you are crazy. Security personnel’s sometimes discriminating and belittling attitude does not encourage the inclusion of gender minorities as equal members of the audience.

Participation is a broader interpretation of social inclusion than access (Gidley *et al.*, 2010). Social interactions and equal rights are at the core of participation, and in these examples, other people are questioning gender minorities’ rights to participate fully and on equal terms in festivals. When these aspects are violated, the broadest interpretation of social inclusion, empowerment, cannot be fulfilled either.

**4.2.3 Empowerment.** The broadest degree of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010), empowerment, might be hindered by misgendering or fear of dressing “provocatively”. Misgendering due to lack of knowledge or ignorance is something gender minorities face daily. Winter takes measures to help others avoid accidental misgendering, but binding also makes them feel good through the representation of their true identity,

When I go to gigs, I usually bind, because it makes me feel good. But it’s partially also because you hope people will read you right . . . it leads to something that’s kind of . . . 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 like all the time. And it’s just that dressing and things like that can make a difference so that people would misgender me less. Of course, that’s what I’m aiming at.

Momo argues that it is necessary to adapt to the societal situation where non-males have to dress in a way that does not “provoke” males to act inappropriately,

Really often it’s the male gender doing that [the harassment]. And that’s why we all have to adapt to that [ . . . ] Well, how it affects my whole life is I wouldn’t want to adapt, but I don’t want to actually provoke anything. [ . . . ] Although I’m sweating like hell (chuckles) and I’d like to wear, say, a swimsuit [at a festival], but at the same time I think I would be exposing myself so that everybody else would think ‘oh, that top is held up only by that tiny ribbon which is so easy to open’ or ‘that’s bare skin

right there. Maybe that means it's OK to touch that person' etc. So even though I know it's wrong, if a person comes along who thinks like that, I've minimised it in advance by how I dress.

This preventive action reduces the possibility for minority members to express their identity through dressing. The above cases reflect the freedom to express one's identity within the empowerment aspect of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010). Self-expression and identity-building are essential parts of empowerment, and they are possible only in a safe environment. Whereas people should be free to express themselves at music festivals, gender minorities face even stronger pressure to suppress their self-expression than females.

## 5. Discussion

The background questions of the survey gave valuable information about gender minorities at music festivals. Interestingly, only about half of the gender minority members defined their gender as "other". This means that about half of them identified as male or female. This is an indication of the diversity of this minority. Minority members were also younger than female festival participants. The younger generation is indeed more aware of gender diversity, since the number of children and young people identifying as a gender minority member is increasing (THL, 2023).

Regarding the place of residence, gender minorities lived mostly in cities, but they differed from females in that more of them lived in the Helsinki region. The residents of the capital area are more diverse than the rest of the population and it is an environment where people are used to different minorities.

Gender minorities put more importance on festival values than females. Even though these values were not detailed (like ecological values, EDI-values, etc.), it can be assumed that due to the prevalence of discrimination and harassment that this minority experiences in various parts of society (Jauhola *et al.*, 2022; Jokela *et al.*, 2020), they might consider equality and non-harassment important at festivals in which they participate.

When considering the degrees of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010) – access, participation and empowerment – it is obvious that social inclusion does not operate in an environment that permits discrimination and harassment against gender minorities. Moreover, inappropriate behaviour leads to frustration, caution and even fear.

Gender-neutral toilets are becoming more and more common in Finnish music festivals. Yet, as Momo's story proves, prejudices and misinterpretations regarding unisex toilets still exist. When considering that accessibility is the prerequisite for broader degrees of social inclusion, gender-neutral toilets might be one of the most important issues for gender minorities. During a long day everyone must visit a toilet, and it is important that a basic need can be fulfilled without the fear of being judged about one's presumed gender identity.

The biggest challenges are with the participation aspect of social inclusion. Having the possibility to participate in festivals on equal terms with others, without being belittled, bullied and harassed, will nurture social inclusion, but this is not the current reality. As nearly 60% of gender minorities face inappropriate behaviour at music festivals from other festival goers or from festival personnel, the situation has implications for their future intentions unless festival organisers take action.

Finally, the broadest degree of social inclusion, empowerment, is not fulfilled at the same level as in LGBTQI+ festivals. Unless lots of work is done in general music festivals by spreading information and acting against inappropriate behaviour towards gender minorities, there is a threat that those who do not conform to conservative social norms will be pushed away.

Evaluating festival experiences with Gidley *et al.*'s model of social inclusion is useful as it reveals shortcomings and their consequences that organisers should address. Furthermore, exploring the significance of each degree of social inclusion in an expanding manner (access → participation → empowerment) helps focus the actions needed.

When analysing the prevalence and type of inappropriate behaviour that gender minorities face, it is important to note that concerns about personal safety cause “elevated levels of anxiety or bodily stress” (Hoover *et al.*, 2022, p. 205), which reduces well-being. In addition, it is believed that security personnel belittle the incidents and might have a negative attitude towards gender minorities, which leads to non-reporting.

The protective actions are typically reported by women or required from women, related both to the night-time economy (Gunby *et al.*, 2020; Hill and Megson, 2020) and festivals (Fileborn *et al.*, 2019; Williams and Murray, 2022). Often, victim-blaming emerges if women fail to fulfil these “rules” and get harassed or sexually abused. According to our findings, it is obvious that gender minorities also apply these “rules” to avoid problems. Partly, the protective work makes the minority member feel good (like binding), yet some of the safety measures demonstrate (potential) harassers’ power, even as much as how to dress and where to be.

Winter argues that gender minorities are in a worse position compared to sexual minorities, concurring with Monterrubio *et al.* (2020). This notice reaffirms that gender and sexual minorities should not be treated as a homogenous group (Marshall *et al.*, 2022; Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020). Pathologisation by defining trans experience as a mental illness has been part of medical history (Marshall *et al.*, 2022), as if the cisnormative definition of sex and gender would be the only right one.

Sarah describes how a group of drunken guys harassed them. Sarah’s observation aligns with Franklin’s (1998) definition of peer dynamics in the context of antigay aggression. Peer group dynamics include the “desire to feel closer to friends, to live up to friends’ expectations, and to prove both toughness and heterosexuality to friends” (Franklin, 1998, p. 12). In this case, the members of the drunken group want to prove their masculinity to their peers when they feel that gender minorities violate the cisnormative rules and might even cause a threat to their masculinity.

However, it is emphasised that both Maija and Winter stress that they do not see all males as a threat to them,

I’m no queer feminist angry about men [...] When it’s about creating [safer] space for women and queers or women and non-binary people, it comes with the assumption that men in that space somehow seek to harm. I think it just sounds really stressful for any man, like people assume right away you are seeking to harm. (Maija)

I don’t feel heterosexual men, like as a monolith, would be a problem for me or my safety. I think just as often it’s heterosexual women crossing the line and stuff. (Winter).

These quotes demonstrate that the threat to social inclusion is not males *per se*, but rather prejudiced and discriminating attitudes. Maija also points out that minority communities are not free of inappropriate behaviour either, meaning that power relations and related actions are present in the marginalised communities too,

Maybe a bigger problem comes from the cultural pockets that we have everywhere in the Western countries where men have a hegemony of their own. And not all of them are cis. That masculine hegemony is sometimes repeated even in lesbian communities. There are many historical examples of [lesbian] communities where they repeat these real awful patriarchal, kind of masculine habits. But of course, these groups are short-lived and small, marginal. If people want to dismantle gender-based violence, well, that (laughter) is quite complicated.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

The current work belongs to critical events studies and contributes to the EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) section of these studies. Due to the relatively large survey sample, we were able to add knowledge on gender minorities’ characteristics and their experiences of inappropriate behaviour. Quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated in various ways how

exclusion is present at Finnish music festivals, even though it is probable that perpetrators are few in number. Yet, the small number of violators of the inclusive code of conduct causes far-reaching effects, as victims might stop participating in the festival in question or stop festival attendance altogether.

Social inclusion studies on festivals have concentrated on community festivals, predominantly on locals and their feelings of participation and empowerment (Jepson and Clarke, 2012; Ong *et al.*, 2021). In LGBTQI+ studies, social inclusion is handled mainly in reference to specific LGBTQI+ festivals – not as separatist festivals, but festivals that are open to everyone. This study opens the discussion on gender minorities' social inclusion at mainstream music festivals that do not necessarily contain so many LGBTQI+ allies in their audience. Thus, these festivals reflect the attitudes, opinions and behaviours of the general public and society.

We applied Gidley *et al.*'s model of social inclusion to gender minority members in the context of music festivals. In doing so, we added knowledge of attitudes and practices that reduce and endanger feelings of access, participation and empowerment. Investigating gender minorities' experiences with Gidley *et al.*'s model helps to understand the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. Implementing single preventive actions might help to mitigate specific issues, but it is essential to address all three degrees of social inclusion. Without accessibility, there is no possibility to participate fully, and without participation, empowerment is out of reach. Overall, most preventive actions are needed in the participation aspect by reducing the audience's and security staff's inappropriate behaviour towards gender minorities.

Gender minorities were handled separately from sexual minorities, which is important as gender and sexuality are different concepts (Marshall *et al.*, 2022; Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020). Gender minorities are more exposed to social gaze as they sometimes are more visible, and this brings out prejudices concerning divergence from cisnormativity (Monterrubio *et al.*, 2020).

### 5.2 Practical implications

Festival organisers' values, norms, and corresponding policies and practices are important facilitators of inclusion. By demonstrating in concrete actions that they take inclusivity seriously, festival organisers improve the atmosphere and reputation of their festival.

First, regarding access, one of the simplest and most powerful things is to have gender-neutral (unisex) toilets to avoid inappropriate behaviour towards gender minorities at festival toilet areas.

To enhance participation, there are various actions that help both festival staff and the audience understand what inclusivity means and their role in the process. Safer space policies are nowadays well-known and widely implemented. Still, these policies should be better communicated, more visible at the festival site, and more practical since not everyone is familiar with inclusivity vocabulary. The violators of safer space practices must be removed from the festival site if needed since this might be the only way to make potential perpetrators aware that there are consequences for their behaviour. A good practice is to advise other attendees to interfere and report to the festival personnel if they recognise inappropriate behaviour. Safer space policies should encourage everyone, including audience members, to take part in creating an inclusive festival space. This would also indicate to minorities that the majority of the festival audience is on their side.

The current practice of having a harassment contact person at a festival is not enough – there should be a whole team (including security staff) that is made more visible on the site. Several interviewees were aware that the festival they visited had a harassment contact person, but no one knew where to find them.

Training the festival personnel, particularly the security staff, on minority issues is highly important. People are reluctant to report problems to security personnel since they are often considered part of the problem and behave inappropriately towards marginalised groups.

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Besides staff training, the issue of non-reporting should be tackled with various anonymous reporting options, and also after the event.

Finally, in the empowerment sphere, it is essential to have performers, workers, security staff and volunteers who belong to a gender minority. For instance, having security persons of a gender minority would make them more approachable and reduce the fear of reporting incidents. Festival volunteers build the festival and its atmosphere, and working for the festival is the kind of empowerment that improves inclusivity considerably. Another important aspect is to have gender minority members as performers, thus manifesting festival values and creating role models for marginalised people (Finkel and Dashper, 2020).

### 5.3 Limitations of the study

The survey participants had to define their gender by selecting one option from “male”, “female”, “other”, and “do not want to answer”. Marshall *et al.* (2022) point out that this approach is problematic as the categories are “not mutually exclusive for many people” (p. 193). We agree on this point and admit that our gender question did not allow us to do an analysis based on it. Instead, we adhered to the gender minority identity, regardless of the respondent’s gender. Gender minorities have various gender identities. For example, trans women can identify themselves as female, trans, and/or other. The experience might vary, and respondents may feel these categories do not suit them. Some of the gender minority members preferred not to choose between the given three categories and chose the option “do not want to answer”.

Our sample size was not big enough to conduct a quantitative analysis based on the intersectionality present in most gender minority members’ lives. This limitation should be addressed in future studies since it is imperative to gain more knowledge about intersectionality that concerns gender minorities.

### 5.4 Future research

There is a need to continue research on gender minorities at festivals. The sample size of this minority must be increased to allow more comprehensive statistical analysis, and the gender minority identity should be more detailed, aiming to identify differences between trans women, trans men, gender fluid and non-binary people, among others.

Gender questions, other than mutually exclusive ones, must be tested. The experience of gender is multifaceted and complex, and it cannot be simplified to a triple categorisation of male, female or other.

We did not collect data on the positive effects of festival attendance. Future research on gender minorities should compare the positive feelings gained through mainstream festival attendance compared to attending LGBTQI+ events, since it is important to understand the differences between these two types. The mainstream festivals often are reflections of surrounding society, whereas sexual and gender minority festivals more explicitly gather LGBTQI+ allies together.

## 6. Conclusion

Our aim was to study gender minorities’ experiences of inappropriate behaviour at Finnish music festivals in the context of social inclusion (Gidley *et al.*, 2010). The research data included responses to a web survey and interviews. In the statistical analysis, the perceptions of females and gender minority members were compared. We chose to compare gender minorities to females (and not to all the other attendees) since earlier studies have demonstrated that females are a common target for inappropriate behaviour at festivals, and that such behaviour towards males is much rarer. Thus, we scrutinised the differences in gender-based harassment between females and gender minorities. The quantitative analysis

revealed that gender minorities face much more inappropriate behaviour than females. Furthermore, the places for harassment differ.

To get a deeper view into the gender minorities' perceptions of inappropriate behaviour, a theoretical framework of social inclusion was employed, and evaluated using qualitative data. Thus, the qualitative part complemented the quantitative data and analysis to provide a richer and more detailed description of how social inclusion is violated at music festivals.

Interviewees talked about ignorance, harassment, violation of physical integrity, aggression, threats and hate they had faced. This restricted their actions and appearance because they wanted to avoid confrontations or "provoking" other people. Inappropriate behaviour caused stress, over-alertness and elevated cautiousness. If an incident occurred, it ruined the whole evening and the happy and joyful festival atmosphere vanished. The current situation at Finnish music festivals does not nurture social inclusion, and it causes harm to gender minorities' well-being.

Given that Gidley *et al.*'s social inclusion framework is nested, the innermost spheres of the model, access and participation, should get more attention to make the outer sphere, empowerment, possible. In the access sphere, providing unisex toilets is essential to make gender minorities feel more at ease and to reduce harassment in the toilet facilities because of gender. However, most of the problems reside clearly in the participation sphere. The prejudiced attitudes and behaviour make it difficult for gender minorities to be part of the festival community. Only after this problem is fixed, will it be possible to enjoy the broadest degree of social inclusion, empowerment, like other participants already do.

Laing and Mair (2015, p. 255) state that "social inclusion might be an outcome of festival involvement and attendance". By participating in a mainstream music festival, gender minorities undoubtedly aim to achieve the positive outcomes of festival attendance, have fun and feel included in the festival community. However, the inappropriate behaviour described in this study and its consequences – feelings of being excluded and violated – lead in the opposite direction. Festival organisers have the power to interfere and change the course, as Ong *et al.* (2021, p. 2055) say: "Event organisers set the tone for hierarchy-attenuation and inclusivity".

## Notes

1. [oikeusministerio.fi/sateenkaarisanasto](https://oikeusministerio.fi/sateenkaarisanasto) [Ministry of Justice: Rainbow Glossary].
2. [cdc.gov/healthyouth/terminology/sexual-and-gender-identity-terms.htm](https://cdc.gov/healthyouth/terminology/sexual-and-gender-identity-terms.htm)
3. [oulgbtq.org/trans-and-intersex-glossary](https://oulgbtq.org/trans-and-intersex-glossary)
4. Binding refers to using different means to flatten one's chest.
5. Tapes are used for binding the chest.

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