

# For the Love of Art: Work and Gender in the Jazz Scene

*Por amor al arte: trabajo y género en la escena profesional de jazz*

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## Key words

Gender

- Jazz
- Women
- Music
- Precariousness
- Artistic Work

## Palabras clave

Género

- Jazz
- Mujeres
- Música
- Precariedad
- Trabajo artístico

## Abstract

Sociology has traditionally analyzed the concept of work, although when we refer to artistic professions it has been done to a lesser extent. This article explores the relationship between that concept and the development of professional trajectories in jazz, through the results obtained in 42 in-depth interviews with women artists. The main findings reveal that the musical-artistic work is related to the idea of working without the need for adequate remuneration, but the masculinization of jazz is decisive. A difficult separation of the personal and professional spheres, the “bohemian and alternative lifestyle”, and the professional delegitimization directly affects women artists. From an uncommon international comparative perspective, this article concludes that professional experiences in the jazz scene are particularly difficult for women.

## Resumen

La teorización sobre el concepto de trabajo ocupa un espacio menor en la sociología cuando se hace referencia a las profesiones artísticas. Este artículo explora las relaciones entre ese concepto y el desarrollo de trayectorias profesionales en el jazz a través de los resultados obtenidos en cuarenta y dos entrevistas en profundidad con mujeres artistas. Los resultados muestran que el trabajo artístico-musical está directamente relacionado con la idea de trabajar «por amor al arte», pero es determinante que el jazz sea un campo profesional predominantemente masculinizado. Una difícil separación de las esferas personal y profesional, el «estilo de vida bohemio o alternativo» y la deslegitimación profesional afecta directamente a las artistas. Se concluye que la experiencia profesional en el jazz presenta mayores dificultades para las mujeres desde una perspectiva comparativa internacional inusualmente explorada.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sociology has long theorised about *work*, particularly in relation to industrial societies. This article examines *work* as a dynamic concept, continuously evolving amid the rapid changes of contemporary society. Discussions on its conceptualisation have largely focused on changes in labour processes and the role of remuneration, placing these factors at the core of its definition. However, these connections become especially complex when analysing artistic-musical work, particularly women's professional experiences within it. The general objective of this article is to propose a theoretical analytical framework that helps decipher the complex relationships between the concept of *work* and professional artistic-musical practices from a gender perspective. The specific objectives include analysing how women's professional experiences in jazz are shaped by the risk and uncertainty characterising the field's "bohemian or alternative" lifestyle. The article also explores how the blurred boundaries between different spheres of everyday life influence women artists' professional and personal trajectories.

The first section analyses the conceptualisation of work and its relationship to artistic-musical performance in general, and to professional practices in jazz in particular. The second section describes the methodological design and the fieldwork undertaken on the personal experiences of women who are currently professional jazz musicians in Spain and the United States. The third section outlines the key findings, highlighting how women's professional and personal experiences in the jazz world are related to precarious conditions and the new gender-focused meanings of artistic-musical work. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The concept of work and its relationship to musical-artistic work

The concept of *work* has been the object of sociological study since the origin of industrial societies, capitalism and Marxist theory. This has continued to the present day, when *work* and the sociology of work have become research paradigms in their own right. This section examines *work* as a dynamic concept, constantly evolving amid the rapid changes of contemporary societies. More importantly, it explores discussions on the transformation of labour processes and the role of remuneration, particularly in the context of artistic-musical work. The new forms of work that emerged in post-industrial, post-Fordist and globalised societies —marked by the dominance of the gig economy (Woodcock and Graham, 2019; Gandini, 2019), platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2018) and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019)— have flourished in a way that can account for a new relationship between labour and capital. A relationship that shows the flexible, precarious and exploitative labour practices typical of neoliberalism. While cultural industries have embodied similar practices since their origins (Jago, 2019; Hoedemaekers, 2017; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2012), the music industry is facing some recent challenges within the new modes of working in terms of *platformisation*, live music, streaming technologies and monitoring (Zhang and Negus, 2024; Azzellini, Gree and Umney, 2022; Gallego, 2022; Arditi, 2019). In order to reflect on these relationships, key concepts are analysed that enable an exploration of artistic-musical work in terms of gender.

The socio-cultural meanings and imaginaries represented in popular expressions such as doing something "for the

love of it” reflect that the “nature” of artistic-musical work is socially attributed. These imaginaries are constructed on the disconnection between the need for remuneration and the conduct of professional practices in the field of music or the arts. As is widely known, feminist theory has differentiated between *productive work*—activities related to the production of goods and services for remuneration in the form of salary—and *reproductive work*—activities performed by people in a living unit for the care of the members of that unit, their family, other people’s families or for themselves. These are decisive contributions because they show that there is a close and complementary link between *paid* and *unpaid* work in market economies, and that these forms of work are unequally distributed by gender (Giner, Lamo de Espinosa and Torres, 2006: 920; Tobío, 2005, 2012; Durán, 2000). The main characteristic of care activities is that they have traditionally been carried out by women and, in most cases, they are unpaid. The distinction between *work* and *employment* is fundamental here in order to consider the historical undervaluing of care work as “work done for love”, visibly distant from the concept of employment as a type of *paid work* (Durán, 2012). These ideas resonate with the discussion of artistic-musical work, often considered a workspace where individuals engage in work “for the love of art”, disregarding the fact that it is a field of employment. The conceptualisation of the spheres of everyday life —*productive, reproductive, personal* and *political*— (Casanovas and Gutiérrez, 2013) is considerably valuable to fully understand the contradictions involved in carrying out artistic work in the jazz scene.

On the one hand, there is a complex relationship between artistic-musical work, *productive work* and the *personal sphere*—which encompasses activities related

to personal and intellectual development in one’s social life, such as leisure, hobbies, and sports—. Artistic-musical work brings together a set of professional activities that cannot be easily associated with the production of goods in a capitalist economy, making its consideration as *paid work* more difficult. This is due to the fact that some of its most significant activities, such as musical performances, composition, band leadership or concerts, take place in a leisure-oriented space-time which, moreover, typically occurs at night-time. In contrast, notions of work have been traditionally associated with set, daytime schedules that are far removed from the leisure spaces reserved for activities in the *personal sphere*. If the theoretical framework of new modes of work is applied, artistic-musical work can be understood from its inception as a form of *playbour* (Kücklich, 2005), given that it is perceived as a leisure activity or an extension of play. But also as a form of *gamification-from-below* (Woodcock and Johnson, 2018), where artistic-musical work represents a subversion of activities that are considered “serious” in everyday life.

On the other hand, there are two main issues to be considered. The first pertains to the high *expressive value* (Menger, 2016) of artistic-musical work. This refers to the value of self-realisation inherent in performing a creative act typically found in professions with a strong sense of vocation. Such professions are often linked to more uncertain working conditions and tend to exhibit greater inequalities in terms of salary or remuneration, a higher risk of failure, diverse professional practices and underemployment. This does not prevent people from continuing to be involved in creative occupations, because they are also highly attractive insofar as they can lead to high levels of prestige, professional recognition and personal sat-

isfaction (Baudelot and Gollac, 2003). The second issue relates to how artistic-musical work has been integrated into the *gig economy*, defined as an economy sustained by new forms of precarious employment where multiple short-term jobs occur in quick succession, or which entails specific freelance jobs born out of the economic crisis of 2008 (Woodcock and Graham, 2019). The challenges posed by being involved in *gig work* as part of platform capitalism lie in the difficulty in finding *the point of production* (Gandini, 2019) and in having these jobs perceived as *paid work*. This becomes even more complex when analysing the gig economy in relation to artistic-musical work, where the *point of production* occurs at various interconnected locations that extend beyond digital platforms. For instance, live music venues, educational institutions, private residences, streets and rehearsal spaces are all common sites for this type of production.

Similarly, understanding artistic activity as a need for individual expression, and not as the exercise of collective musical practices that are transmitted from generation to generation, also limits its development and social recognition. All these factors give rise to challenges in having professional activities in the jazz world recognised as *productive work*, which increase the likelihood of it developing within the *informal economy*<sup>1</sup> and restricting improvements in working conditions for these workers. Moreover, generally speaking, artistic-musical activities only

enjoy high social recognition when they are accompanied by popularity or widespread public appreciation. Notions such as talent and meritocracy are adduced to explain the acquisition of public and social recognition, which often renders gender-based structural inequalities invisible. As some authors have argued:

The social ascription to unpaid work across genders, generations and social classes is asymmetrical and unequal, which has repercussions for gaining entry to the most valued and prestigious resources of power (Giner, Lamo de Espinosa and Torres, 2006: 919).

In this regard, it should be considered that, like all labour markets, the artistic-musical sector also involves gender inequalities (Buscatto, 2022; Bull and Scharff, 2021; Gill, 2014). Women's career trajectories face challenges that are not only different from those of men, but also vary across the life cycle, an issue comprehensively addressed by *gendered life course* theories (Moen, 2011).

Moreover, earlier ways of navigating work and family obligations by women (still assumed to be the family care providers) have deleterious consequences for them. For example, taking time to raise their young children by scaling back work hours or moving out of the labor force for a time, or moving to follow husbands' careers mean that women in encore adulthood (and older) have less savings, are less apt to have pensions, and have lower social security benefits than men (Mortimer and Moen, 2016: 119).

Therefore, the expectations and challenges of women artists cannot be deemed to be the same throughout their careers; each age period presents opportunities and constraints determined by the social structure. Furthermore, life experiences construct different subjectivities for women within post-Fordist regimes of labour (Weeks, 2007) which rely on the assumption that people's time must always be available for work, or that the "risks" of

<sup>1</sup> The term *informality* refers to the set of "productive activities, incomes, jobs or other concepts that materialise outside the institutional mechanisms of regulation of economic and social systems" (Ruesga, 2021: 95-96). They are employment relationships "in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits such as advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc". (ILO, 2012 in Ruesga, 2021: 102).

artistic work must be borne by individuals (Gill, 2014). These are all issues that require further analysis in the field of the artistic-music and jazz professions.

### Particularities of jazz as a field of study

Job insecurity and intermittency are characteristics of artistic jobs (Menger, 2011), which in the case of jazz result from being situated within the so-called gig economy (Jago, 2019). The choice of this term is far from incidental. It reflects a form of employment characteristic of the jazz scene, where “gigs” may be either regular or sporadic, are typically associated with an undefined remuneration and generally do not operate under a contract. This *informality* is not attributable to the artists’ low educational level or lack of musical skill; rather, it forms part of the underlying logic that has shaped career trajectories in jazz since its inception. A romanticised “bohemian or alternative lifestyle”, coupled with the association with risk as an aesthetic-musical value in jazz —where improvisation is celebrated as the most significant marker of identity— has helped cement this logic.

However, the process of institutionalising jazz has been understood as the incorporation of its musical teachings into educational institutions and socio-cultural validation in academic contexts, a development that began in the United States in the late 1940s (Pinheiro, 2023). This has enabled artists to gain access to more formal working environments. Nonetheless, this process is still ongoing in many countries, such as Spain, where inequalities also persist, including those between regions (Muñoz-García, 2022).

Historically, risk and improvisation are nouns closely related to jazz practice, traditionally linked to a lifestyle that required musicians to be artistic migrants who travelled across the United States and other

countries, facing difficult working conditions. Improvisation was not only a stylistic and structural tool of the newly emerging genre; it became a dogma of life, a key resource for survival in professional jazz scenes. Moreover, at its inception, the links with an “alternative” lifestyle could be construed negatively and be related to the fact that jazz was a cultural product of the African-American population in a context of racism and racial segregation (McAndrew and Widdop, 2021: 691). However, as the twentieth century progressed, jazz became a part of middle-class consumption and lifestyle practices; it gradually began to be linked to a “bohemian lifestyle” associated with artists and writers. In this setting, the “alternative lifestyle” was no longer directly related to the working conditions or racial discrimination of the time and gained symbolic value, becoming a life choice. An identity symbol which, to a large extent, determined the social distinction of artists. In fact, the process of artistification involved staking a claim to the word *jazz* in order to take distance from the popular culture embodied by the dance music from which this genre had originally emerged (Becker, 2009). Jazz therefore evolved as a musical genre, broadening its compositional and performative horizons, and making its forms of production and consumption more complex, while also continually becoming signified within a broader artistic conception.

This article uses the phrase “bohemian or alternative lifestyle” to mean that related to engaging in artistic, social and cultural practices that rejected a bourgeois lifestyle, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in the nerve centres of urban and cultural life in Europe. But what specific features define a “bohemian or alternative lifestyle”? Artistic production has historically been characterised by its link to bohemian life, understood as:

A taste for nocturnality, rejection of the conventional and bourgeois, exaltation of the individual and their freedom, and a search for authenticity through rebelliousness, both in personal life and in artistic production (Reverter, 2008: 214).

Professional jazz musical practices are distinguished by their nocturnal settings, their vocal stance against racial discrimination and their celebration of individual freedom—manifested largely through improvisation and upheld as a necessity to engage in free artistic expression in performances and compositions.

Moreover, jazz was not only a disruptive genre in terms of the traditional musical canon of the time, but it also challenged social norms in the United States and, ultimately, the legitimacy of a social model in itself. As jazz was re-signified as an art form, it became a place of transgression and subversion of social norms; a professionalised space that could also question the heteropatriarchal system—although this has not been a primary purpose explored by historiography and the musical canon—. In twentieth-century Spain, jazz had little stability as a profession, largely resulting from the political situation (Iglesias, 2017; Alonso, 2013). Nevertheless, leisure and entertainment spaces became places of transgression of traditional gender norms where women could be recognised for their musical skills (Muñoz-García and Tobío-Soler, 2023).

In order to understand the specificities of jazz as a professional space, it seems necessary to reflect not only on risk as a characteristic of postmodern and fragmented societies (Beck, 2002), but also on uncertainty as a cultural value of our times (Pugh, 2015). The work of professional jazz musicians has demanded—and still demands—leading a risky lifestyle and strong individual and collective resilience. Furthermore, contemporary societies and the neo-liberal economic system are building a social model that increasingly emphasises the

value of individual creativity and the individualisation of risk. This has an impact on new forms and processes of work, but does not necessarily involve that people easily adapt to, or understand the impact of, such transformations on their daily lives (Beck, 2000: 85-86).

It is also interesting to examine the relationship between *neo-bohemia* and artistic production in contemporary societies within a new social model. In this model, educational attainment no longer protects individuals from socio-economic vulnerability, and engaging in *urban bohemia* is not merely an aesthetic choice but a necessary adaptation to new socio-labour realities (Lloyd, 2010: 240-243). This accelerates the pace at which work is conceptualised as a field of study, highlighting its dynamism. More importantly, it directly influences professional practices across various occupations. Even in the most routine jobs, individual creativity is increasingly essential for navigating the high levels of uncertainty and risk that define contemporary society (Lloyd, 2010; Pugh, 2015). That said, flexibility and uncertainty are inherent to artistic-musical professions. In jazz, in particular, these qualities are not only fundamental but also embedded in its aesthetic and cultural values, where embracing uncertainty is celebrated as a virtue.

Building on these ideas requires exploring how female jazz artists navigate and manage risk and uncertainty in their daily lives from a gender perspective. This requires examining the *expressive value* of artistic-musical professions and having a broader understanding of *remuneration* that extends beyond the economic sphere. These specific conditions place jazz professionals at a significant disadvantage, not only in terms of stability and income but also in relation to labour and social rights tied to participation in the formal economy. In this context, structural gender inequalities

permeate both personal and professional experiences, often shaping or limiting women’s participation in jazz scenes.

Based on this theoretical analysis, the article explores possible answers to the following questions: does the prevalence of a “bohemian or alternative lifestyle” hinder the development of female artists’ professional jazz practices? Does the approach to managing risk and uncertainty inherent to the field have a particularly strong impact on the career paths of women in jazz? In this context, what does it mean for women in the jazz scene to pursue work in which *expressive value* is predominant? How do career trajectories in jazz affect the blurring or overlapping of boundaries between different spheres of everyday life?

METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this article are based on forty-two in-depth interviews with women who are currently professional jazz musicians. A qualitative methodology was employed to analyse the development of professional and personal trajectories in a traditionally male-dominated field, focusing on two study contexts. Spain does not have a deeply-rooted tradition of jazz as a music genre, in contrast to the well-established research trajectory in the United

States of America. A qualitative methodology allows the daily musical-professional practices of artists to be studied from the time they first came into contact with the world of music. This methodology also makes it possible to analyse their difficulties and opportunities in the world of jazz from a biographical, narrative and intersectional perspective. Therefore, the choice of a qualitative approach falls within the “context of discovery rather than verification” (Ambert *et al.*, 1995: 880), generating understanding and in-depth knowledge about particular phenomena in order to transfer the findings to other similar contexts regarding a little-explored subject in Spain. Comparing career paths across two different socio-cultural contexts is an innovative and rarely explored approach.

Three segmentation variables were considered in the choice of the interviewees’ profile: *musical speciality*, *age* and *place of work*. The women interviewed were singers, instrumentalists, or both singers and instrumentalists who also worked as band leaders or composers. Their age groups were: women aged 35 and under, and women aged over 35. Although all the artists interviewed currently work or have worked in different cities in the two countries under study, and at the time of the study most of them pursued their careers in Madrid, Barcelona, New York and Kansas City (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Interviews conducted by segmentation variables

Age	≤35 years old	18
	>35 years old	24
Music speciality	Singers	10
	Instrumentalists	21
	Singers and instrumentalists	11
Place of work	Spain	21
	United States	21
Total interviews conducted		42

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The interviews were mainly conducted in person; however, some were carried out remotely, primarily via video conferencing. In some rare instances, telephone interviews were performed due to participants' work constraints or travel limitations imposed by the COVID-19 crisis, which prevented the researcher from travelling to the locations where the artists were. Choosing a non-face-to-face interview model enabled the exploration of certain aspects of methodological reflexivity inherent in qualitative research. Firstly, the preparatory phase required careful consideration of the challenges posed by interaction without the benefit of observing body language. Participants were encouraged to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences, perceptions and opinions. Notes were taken in the field notebook and transcriptions were produced, which included silences, tone and any other features that helped interpret the interviews. Secondly, while video conferences were prioritised to replicate a face-to-face interview setting as closely as possible, some participants chose to disable the visual component. This decision facilitated discussions on particularly sensitive topics, as it enhanced the interviewees' perception of anonymity. As a result, the recording process felt less intrusive and fostered a greater sense of trust. Additionally, remote interviewing was a feasible interview process to study career paths which were subject to uncertainty (just as jazz is). Changes to the date or time of the interviews were common, since unplanned "gigs" or spending time with family were part and parcel of the artists' lives. In addition, the new online methods helped the complex and time-consuming fieldwork, which was carried out in two countries and seven different cities. The sample was selected to achieve a socio-structural representation of women jazz musi-

cians while considering accessibility criteria. Potential participants were mainly approached through: 1) interpersonal contacts; and 2) institutional contacts obtained through local conservatoires and music schools, as well as various third sector organisations. Chain referral or snowball sampling was also used for key informant search processes in small, hard-to-reach population groups.

A qualitative content analysis was carried out based on the full transcription of the interviews, where the text was the unit of record. The content analysis used a category-based deductive-abductive approach that involved identifying and coding the most relevant fragments of the interviews, and then establishing categories of analysis that related to the identified codes. This kind of approach entails a continuous dialogue between explanatory theories and research findings, where decisions regarding analysis and interpretation are open-ended and emanate from the different theoretical frameworks employed. The ATLAS.ti 22 software was used to conduct a systematic and rigorous qualitative analysis, incorporating both *a priori* codes based on the theoretical and explanatory framework and inductively generated codes. This software offers seven types of relations between codes — "contradicts", "is cause of", "is a", "is part of", "is property of", "is associated with", "results in" —, which were used to form structural networks and identify the main dimensions of analysis. The information analysed in the results of this article corresponded to three of the dimensions: *job insecurity and uncertainty*, *work-life balance* and *employment and nocturnal life*. Based on this, relationships were established between codes not predetermined by the software that arose from the needs of the ongoing analytical process.



## RESULTS<sup>2</sup>

### Precariousness and uncertainty as structural issues: working for the love of art is merely surviving

The qualitative data showed that precariousness, temporariness and multi-activity were shared characteristics in the career paths of female jazz musicians. The combination of these three features was the main challenge for these artists, as it hindered their opportunities to focus on compositional work, engage in a single professional activity to support themselves financially and be leaders. In general, the women interviewed described an existence based on precariousness and uncertainty within the gig economy, where engaging in sporadic activities with wages that may or may not have been previously established was a constant challenge.

Es un riesgo, es difícil, no va a estar bien remunerado... nunca y nunca vas a estar tranquilo, que vas a estar todo el rato teniendo que... ¿sabes? O sea, es difícil.

[It's a risk, it's difficult, it won't be well paid... you can never ever be relaxed, you're constantly having to... you know? Basically, it is difficult] (E4, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, Madrid).

A veces la gente puede sobrevivir de hacer gigs ¿sabes? Pero la gran mayoría no.

[Sometimes people can survive by doing gigs, you know? But the vast majority can't] (E23, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

Gigs come and go. You don't always get gigs, and you don't know how much they are going to pay you (E15, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, Spain).

<sup>2</sup> In order to maintain the full transcription of the in-depth interviews, this section presents the verbatim text units selected for the analysis in the original language in which the interviews were conducted. A decision that meets the reliability and validity criteria for qualitative research (Kvale, 1996).

Female artists in both countries were in a very vulnerable position in the gig economy, where *informality* prevailed and musical speciality also determined career opportunities. Working conditions meant that female artists were particularly unprotected in the face of maternity, retirement, unemployment and illness (Muñoz-García, 2022), although the experiences involving precariousness and uncertainty were more strongly emphasised in the discourses of the interviewees as they grew older.

Pero claro, ahí yo lo que pienso es yo no tengo cotizado prácticamente nada porque yo no tengo una seguridad económica para un futuro. Entonces, bueno, pienso voy ahí y ya está, dame mi dinerico, no rallarme.

[But of course, I think that I have contributed practically nothing to social security because I have no economic security for the future. So, I think I just go and do it and that's it, give me my bit of cash, not getting too worked up about it] (E10, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, peripheral city, Spain).

I'm just leader because it's the only option [...] in the jazz world, in improvised music very few times singers are asked to be collaborators inside musicians you know. So, in order for you to survive and to perform, you actually have to be a leader (E31, singer, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

However, the institutionalisation of jazz is widespread across and integrated within American universities, and gives female artists greater access to personal and employment stability that private classes or other types of teaching do not allow. This allowed the participants, regardless of their recognition in the jazz world or their musical speciality, to support themselves financially by defying the precarious existence that the scene offers them, especially in New York City.

I'm teaching a class at this important institution right now [...]. Most of the people I know teach. Everybody that I know. Yeah, even X, for example, Y or Z. [She mentions very important names]. They all have really secured teaching jobs in in-

stitutions (E31, singer, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

The place that there is money in America for jazz is academia. [...] and they're getting paid a lot of money to teach jazz [...]. These jazz programs scratching up a little bit in the United States are bringing special guest to play, and they can pay them a real feast, so I'm starting to do those types of gigs that pay a lot more than a club (E22, instrumentalist, under thirty-five years old, NYC).

In this professional context, the social security system in the United States leaves artists unprotected and in a vulnerable socio-economic situation. The lack of public service coverage means that jazz musicians are unprotected when they are ill or when they retire, which leads them to engage in non-music related jobs. In addition, the cost of rent and the level of purchasing power required in a city like New York put women artists in a very delicate position in the absence of job opportunities.

Los gigs, en general, pagan poco porque hay mucha gente que está dispuesta a tocar gratis. [...] Todo es que todo es privado y si necesitas health insurance que necesitas ¡claro! para el niño como si tienes un niño son como otras seiscientos al mes y si necesitas la escuela, pues seguramente sean como dos mil al mes ¿sabes? Entonces, claro, como músico... pues eso imagínate. Pero bueno la gente lo hace, la gente tiene hijos y la gente... sobrevive.

[Gigs, in general, don't pay a lot because there are so many people who are willing to play for free. [...] Everything, it's just that everything is private and if you need health insurance (which you do, of course!) for your child—if you have a child—it's like another six hundred a month and if you need school, it's probably like two thousand a month, you know? So, of course, as a musician... well, imagine that. But, you know, people do it, people have children and people... survive] (E23, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

I have corporate jobs. I don't worry about health insurance or... I got a roof over my head... So, it was never... and sometimes people like, oh, that

person... they have such drive and determination and they're so tenacious with their... they moved to New York, and they lived out of their car, they lived on the street, and they struggled and was homeless and did all that and you know, until they made it (E40, singer, over thirty-five years old, KC).

This business is so crazy. There's nothing guaranteed, there's no security. If I break my leg tomorrow, I've got no income for months. This happened before [...]. Oh, it was tough! There's no sick leave or it's not like that's one thing 9 to 5 to have that security (E35, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

In both countries, the verb *survive* was used repeatedly to convey the considerable difficulties they faced, where working "for the love of art" was a constant possibility. Generally speaking, women artists experienced socio-economic vulnerability throughout their careers and assumed that they had to take responsibility for their risk-taking. This was unavoidable for cultural workers, who embody the labour subjectivities of our time (Gill, 2014). Persisting in professional endeavours despite adversity is characteristic of the artistic-musical professions, where expressive value is crucial to understanding the acceptance of uncertainty and precariousness.

Moreover, gender and power dynamics in the jazz world shape a professional practice for women that is marked by discrimination and inequality. Female jazz musicians experience strong professional delegitimation due to their gender, which hinders their access to and establishment in the field. Sexism, stereotypes and gender prejudices linked to music speciality operate by having their professional practice questioned. Female instrumentalists, band leaders and composers encounter significant obstacles, as they work within traditionally male-dominated professional practices where men benefit from greater social recognition.

Al principio intentaba... bueno, pues hacer esto ¿no? Demostrarles, ¡ey, tío, yo estoy aquí!, ¡puedo hacer lo mismo que tú, o sea qué me estás diciendo! Y después...ya fue como tío, yo no te tengo que demostrar nada. Estoy aquí estoy con el mismo derecho que tú de estar aquí, [...] Le tengo que demostrar a este y después de demostrarle que lo puedo hacer ¿qué?, ¿me va a tratar mejor? No. [...] El problema es tener que pensarlo [...] tienes que eh... estar así para que ellos... entiendan que tú estás en el mismo nivel.

[At the beginning I was trying to... well, I was trying to do this, right? Show them, hey, man, I'm here, I can do the same that you can do, so what are you saying!? And then... it was like, man, I don't have to prove anything to you. I'm here and I have the same right to be here as you, [...] I have to prove to him and after I prove to him that I can do it, what, is he going to treat me better? No. [...] The problem is having to think about this [...] you have to er... be like this so that they... understand that you are on the same level] (E1, singer and instrumentalist, under thirty-five years old, Barcelona).

Being aware that things are still rough for women. So, don't make it easy for others to judge you because you're a woman. I think every female musician that I know they work super hard and they're at the point sometimes they're perfectionists because anything can be appointed to [...] just be like a good professional and make people respect you for your work and not by how you look, or how nice you are (E31, singer, over thirty-five, NYC).

### **Blurred boundaries between personal, professional and family life**

The experiences of female jazz musicians showed that it is often difficult to differentiate between the *professional sphere* and the *personal sphere* (Gutiérrez and Cánovas, 2013). The time spent in education, dedication to study, rehearsals, professional multi-activity, and the development of leadership projects and compositions make artistic-musical work a profession that re-

quires constant attention. The relationships between time spent on professional development and personal identity mean that it is difficult to establish a clear division between the *personal sphere* and the *professional sphere*, where artistic-musical work demands exclusive or almost exclusive attention.

The personal and the professional life is all one thing. I can't say there's anything separate, and how many people wanna do that? Not many. People wanna live their work at work. That doesn't work in this business, cause is your life thinking about, occupied with it, how are you gonna make...? [...] It's a full-time business (E25, singer, over thirty-five years old, KC).

I am X, and I am a musician, and, like, there is no separation, you know. Like, this is who I am. This is what I was meant to do. This is the only thing that I want to do is the only thing that I see myself doing. I mean, that's not really true, because I could do many other things. But the fact that I'm a musician just makes so much sense with who I am and my ideas and how I see the world and how I wanna live my life (E15, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, Spain).

The fact that artistic-musical work is vocational and the primary expression of these artists' identity, which occupied the whole of their *personal sphere*, was a key factor that hindered their social recognition as part of the *productive sphere*. This emphasises the perception of artistic work in jazz as *playbour* (Kücklich, 2005) when professional activities are understood as part of the leisure time of its workers.

Furthermore, the complex social perception of artistic-musical work, combined with the insecurity women face in a male-dominated environment, shapes career choices within this field according to generational life courses. In Spain, women over thirty-five often attain leadership positions later in their careers, after years of professional instability, insecurity and self-doubt. This delay is also influenced by the absence of family, social and institutional support, re-

inforcing the notion of art as a challenging or even unattainable profession. However, younger generations are increasingly taking on leadership roles at an earlier stage, viewing leadership as a professional goal from the outset of their careers.

Me costó muchos años, concretamente empecé a cantar, pues eso, con este grupo a los veintidós, pero hasta los treinta y dos no grabé un disco de jazz. Antes grabé de todo, grabé muchas cosas de pachanga, de muchos tipos, colaboraciones mil, pero hasta que yo no me vi capaz de decir bueno, esto es lo que me gusta pasaron unos años de aprendizaje.

[It took me many years, I actually started singing with this band when I was twenty-two; but it wasn't until I was thirty-two that I recorded a jazz album. Before, I'd recorded all types of things, I'd recorded a lot of basic party music, of many kinds, (did) a thousand collaborations, but it took a few years of learning before I was able to say, ok, this is what I like] (E16, singer, over thirty-five years old, Barcelona).

Durante varios años de estar tocando en proyectos de otros, pues cada vez vas cogiendo más soltura y más solidez instrumentalmente y lo que pasa es que... a ver yo lo que es el tema de la composición no me salía... [...] pero me parece como que la composición también hay que tener como una dosis de confianza mayor, por lo menos yo lo sentí así ¿no? Y, bueno, pues conforme fui cada vez siendo más profesional y teniendo más confianza necesitaba ponerme al frente de un de un proyecto y ser yo la jefa.

[After playing in other people's projects for several years, you become more and more at ease and more solid instrumentally and what happens is that... you see, what happened was I wasn't able to do composition... [...] but it seems to me that in composition you also have to have more confidence, at least I felt that way, you know? So, as I became more and more professional and more confident, I needed to lead a project and be the boss] (E17, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, peripheral city).

The overlap between the *personal* and *productive* spheres is not the only blurred

boundary. The fact that artistic-musical work is so demanding, coupled with the caregiving role traditionally assigned to women, makes it particularly difficult for female jazz musicians to balance family, personal and professional life. The challenges grow as the time spent on care increases, determining their positions on and experiences of motherhood.

Hay un factor muy grande, que es el factor maternidad. Es un factor... telita, tela porque claro todo esto te afecta cuando son un montón de horas y pues yo a lo mejor... imagínate, pues el año que viene quiero tener un niño ¿no? Y yo veo a mis compis, mujeres, instrumentistas que es una historia. Entonces bueno, pues eso frena un poquito también.

[There is a very big factor, which is the factor of motherhood. This factor... it's a really tricky one because, of course, all this affects you when you work lots of hours and then maybe... imagine, next year I want to have a child? I see my colleagues, women instrumentalists, and it's tough. So, that slows things down a bit too] (E2, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, Madrid).

It's hard to travel and tour for women as they have kids, but it was hard for women to go to work every day because they have kids.[...] when this is the music that you love, you have to find the support and a lot of that responsibility falls on women to find [...] musicians traveling often... often the woman is more... what do I say? Taking on that burden of finding (E33, instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

I've forgot children [...]. Sometimes it's a sacrifice you have to make, in my opinion, so people don't make that sacrifice that, somehow, they make it work it's very... I never could figure out how to do (E25, singer, over thirty-five years old, KC).

The interviewees' experiences showed how traditional gender and caregiving roles can affect their creative and artistic process; although these processes are also conditioned by the need to have close family support or to have sufficient economic resources. In this context, fear of

motherhood was reflected in most of the participants' accounts, especially among women over thirty, who were at a key moment in their lives when they had to make a decision about this issue or who had recently experienced motherhood. Discourses about the choice not to have children were also commonly found, particularly in interviewees from the United States. In general, all the women interviewed clearly prioritised their professional careers in a highly vocational professional field that demands an almost exclusive commitment when engaging in jazz "for the love of art", as they described it.

### **Bohemian or alternative lifestyle from the perspective of otherness**

Historically, the "bohemian or alternative lifestyle" that jazz represents as a working space has made women's access difficult, and even today it still complicates their careers. The taste for nocturnal scenes, the rejection of convention and the exaltation of the individual's freedom (Reverter, 2008) have traditionally been denied to women. The way they (and their bodies) have been sexualised in public spaces, both in the past and at present, has shaped a professional practice constrained by negative social perceptions and normative constructs within nightlife leisure and entertainment settings. This explains why women who historically transgressed traditional gender roles were accused of being morally dubious (Sánchez, 2019), which had far-reaching consequences. By questioning their ability to engage in "a bohemian or alternative lifestyle", they were restricted in their participation in the *productive sphere* and in their opportunities to pursue professional practices that could represent a form of *gamification-from-below* (Woodcock and Johnson, 2018); in other words, the ability to subvert the activities that are considered

"serious" in everyday life. The artists' experiences in the contemporary scene place them at a perpetual crossroads between "making a place for themselves in the night without being seen as a bitch" and "earning the respect" of their peers without being too edgy, while simultaneously not being too light-hearted, to avoid having their professionalism called into question.

You have to carve your space to be a woman in the night, you know, demanding respect without being seen as a bitch or like not being angry. You don't wanna be angry. [...] I wanna be happy and then I don't wanna be seen as: "oh she is a lot of fun, but we need someone who could do the job" (E27, singer and instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, NYC).

These artists' work —except for teaching— took place mainly at night, when they were also more likely to be sexually harassed and abused. Their experiences also revealed difficulties in reconciling imaginaries of motherhood with bohemian life:

Vida nocturna, vida bohemia, es mucho más difícil conjugar eso también, sí porque es como bueno, si nos planteamos tener un hijo, ¿dónde vas a estar?, ¿qué vas a hacer?, ¿cuánto te vas a responsabilizar? O sea, es que claro son preguntas que yo... Eso, te las haces.

[Nightlife and a bohemian lifestyle are much harder to balance as well. Yes, because it's like, if we consider having a child—where are you going to be?, what are you going to do?, how much responsibility will you take on? I mean, of course they are questions that I... That, you ask yourself] (E9, singer and instrumentalist, over thirty-five years old, Madrid).

Sí que a veces pasan cosas raras ¿no? de... bueno, de eso de, pues eso o básicamente o comentarios o fuera de lugar o... yo qué sé, o pequeños acosos, digo pequeños o algún comentario en plan despectivo. [...] Um... no sé, sí que han pasado cosas. A mí también y a otras chicas también.

[Yes, sometimes strange things do happen, you know? Like... well, stuff like, basically com-

ments that are out of place or... I don't know, or small forms of harassment, I mean small, or some derogatory comments. [...] Um... I don't know, yes, things have happened. To me too and to other girls too] (E11, instrumentalist, under 35, Barcelona).

Feminist historiography in jazz has played a decisive role in making visible the leading role of women in all musical specialities. Nevertheless, even today the scene's imaginaries revolve around male improvisers and instrumentalists who dominate the music-aesthetic meanings of jazz and its lifestyle. As these women experience strong professional delegitimation and inevitably experience complex professional and personal circumstances, in constant flux between rejection and acceptance, they find it difficult to express themselves authentically and enjoy personal freedom in the jazz world.

## CONCLUSIONS

The professional experiences analysed show that women in the jazz world face enormous difficulties as workers in the music-artistic sector, which are partly related to gender issues. Precarious and uncertain conditions are the main obstacles they encounter within the gig economy, where *informality* prevails. However, it cannot be ignored that such conditions occur in a predominantly male-dominated professional field. In both Spain and the United States, the verb *survive* was used recurrently to express the great challenges they are confronted with, where working "for the love of art" is an ever-present possibility. The institutionalisation of jazz offers more stable opportunities for female artists in the United States who experience ongoing socio-economic vulnerability. This was most prominently featured in the testimonies of women artists aged thirty-five and over from both countries. The *expressive value* of the artis-

tic-musical professions is an essential part in understanding their acceptance of uncertainty, where risk-taking is inherent in the working subjectivities of this professional field. Furthermore, professional delegitimation is more prominent in the discourse of female instrumentalists, composers and leaders, demonstrating that there are differentiated professional practices depending on the musical speciality in the scene. However, this does not mean that singers do not face difficulties of their own.

These artists' lifestyle is characterised by the problematic separation of the *personal* and *professional spheres*, which promotes the perception of jazz as *playbour* and hinders it from being considered *paid work*. Jazz is described as a clearly vocational field of work where the boundaries between the personal and the professional are blurred, and artistic identity constitutes the greatest expression of the artists' selfhood. Moreover, the role of caregivers traditionally assigned to women continues to be a handicap in any field or discipline. However, this article shows that jazz possesses specific characteristics. Their time commitment to professional development demands almost exclusive attention throughout their careers, where imaginaries of motherhood are not compatible with a bohemian life. In addition, being a composer or a band leader poses greater obstacles for women over the age of thirty-five, when the difficulties of balancing professional and personal life increase and the time to be spent in their professional lives is multiplied. It is therefore common to find discourses that fluctuate between fear and opting out of motherhood.

Finally, the "bohemian or alternative lifestyle" that jazz represents is far removed from both traditional gender roles and the masculine imaginary that places the male, American, instrumentalist and creator at the core of its professional practices. The night is portrayed as the primary setting for

professional jazz activities, and it has been predominantly conceived as a male and heteropatriarchal leisure space. This determines female performers' options in terms of access to and stability in the jazz world, where they are also more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Ultimately, the relationship between artistic-musical work and the traditional concept of work hinders the development of professional careers for women in jazz, for whom working "for the love of art" carries more hostile embodied meanings and experiences than for their male counterparts.

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