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# “Maybe it’s ... skin colour?” How race-ethnicity and gender function in consumers’ formation of classification styles of cultural content

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## ABSTRACT

Race-ethnicity and gender, while rarely *explicitly* considered for cultural consumption choices, are characteristics that can function *implicitly* in the classification of cultural content like films, literature or music. Embedded in classification styles – recurrent classificatory patterns in the habitual ways people choose, weigh and combine classifications at their disposal – such attributes are important for consumption practices. Based on visual Q methodology and 27 interviews with American and Dutch rock music consumers, we examine how consumers attend to, weigh and lump classifications, and to what extent gender and race-ethnicity drive classification processes in rock music – a genre historically dominated by white men. We identify four classification styles that consumers employ, in which race-ethnicity and gender function as classificatory tools. The analysis reveals that the implicit classification of “good” rock music as white and male, even though this is rejected discursively, is key in keeping whiteness and masculinity in place.

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## Introduction

Avid music consumers often have surprisingly little difficulty in classifying artists, even in the absence of sonic cues. When we asked rock music consumers to evaluate Judas Priestess – an all-women, ethno-racially mixed group – based on only a picture, they responded as follows:

I think this could be a soul-lady who was in some kind of a metal-period. (Sven)

I have to think of Rihanna. Especially with these big pop artists now. Yeah, they can just take up a new image for every album. (Nadine)

These respondents indirectly draw on gender and race-ethnicity to locate the band in a broader system of meaning.<sup>1</sup> Sven does not see a rock artist, but a black “soul-lady” temporarily acting as a metal

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<sup>1</sup>Although “race” and “ethnicity” are distinct concepts and subject to considerable discussion in the United States (e.g. Wimmer 2015; Winant 2015), they are often used interchangeably in everyday discourse (for a comprehensive discussion, see Cornell and Hartmann 2006, 15–40). Generally, “race” is socially constructed as “a system for classifying people who are believed to share common descent, based on perceived innate physical similarities” (Morning et al. 2013, 265). “Ethnicity”, meanwhile, is typically established on perceived cultural similarities, namely as members of a similar ethnic group in which racial elements can – but not necessarily do – play a role. In the Netherlands, references regarding race are typically shunned and replaced by ethnic, cultural or national associations (Essed and Trienekens 2008; Weiner 2016). Having researched both national contexts,

musician. Nadine compares the band to pop star Rihanna, even though they seem to have little in common, apart from both being black women. Moreover, none of these rock consumers classify the group unambiguously as “rock,” but instead attribute it to other genres.

These classificatory practices help us to understand how the consumption of cultural content such as music, films or literature is informed by notions regarding: race-ethnicity (e.g. Crockett 2008; Lamont and Molnár 2001; Pitcher 2014); gender (e.g. Bell, Haas, and Sells 1995; Sandlin and Maudlin 2012); or both (e.g. Hunter 2011). Previous research has mostly focused on cultural genres that are *explicitly* marked as “black.” For example, scholars have identified strong, explicit links between blackness and hip-hop (Clay 2003; Rose 1994). However, *implicit* social differentiation based on race-ethnicity and gender also takes place in cultural genres where such categories are “unmarked” (Brekhus 2015), and their salience is generally disregarded (e.g. Hughey 2014; Lacroix 2004; Pitcher 2014). Rock music is one of the most ubiquitous music genres, yet its connotations of whiteness and masculinity often remain unaddressed (Schaap 2015). This study therefore examines how race-ethnicity and gender function in the classification of rock music, a genre in which such attributes are generally regarded as irrelevant (Hamilton 2016). Using in-depth interviews based on visual Q methodology with American and Dutch rock music consumers ( $n = 27$ ), we focus on specific “classification styles” that consumers employ, namely more or less stable patterns in the habitual ways people choose, weigh and combine classifications at their disposal (Patterson 2014).

This study makes two key contributions to research on cultural consumption. First, it combines insights from cultural and cognitive sociology to understand: which categories of constituted cultural knowledge people activate when confronted with consumption choices; and how they do this (Patterson 2014). Cultural content is habitually evaluated based on previous experience, through which relatively stable categories of culture are formed and become rooted in cognition (DiMaggio 1987; Douglas and Isherwood 1979). A consequence of the functioning of these categories is that people tend to evaluate the world as it *should be* to them rather than how it actually *is*. As such, a cognitive perspective: sheds new light on how inequalities are reproduced or contested in the habitual or routine elements of cultural consumption; and helps to uncover the classificatory processes that often remain concealed in consumption studies (Holt 1995; Warde 2015). Second, previous research has convincingly demonstrated how music media, industries and producers maintain a racial status-quo (Bannister 2006; Roy 2004), but has shed relatively little light on the relationship between culture and social classifications in everyday consumption practices. In particular, the “whiteness” of cultural consumption has received relatively little attention in consumer research (Burton 2009). This article aims to address this issue by demonstrating how expectations and assumptions regarding a genre are shaped by ethno-racial and gender associations, despite rarely being propagated explicitly. Moreover, as these associations interact with each other, we adopt a multidimensional, intersectional approach (Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015) which takes into account how race-ethnicity and gender can intersect in how consumers form classification styles based on cultural content, as evidenced in the opening quotes.

## Classification styles in consumption practices

The sociology of cultural consumption has recently witnessed a shift from studying *what* culture people consume to *how* they consume it (Jarness 2015; Peters, van Eijck, and Michael 2018). The way people consume cultural products will arguably tell us more about their cultural knowledge than their actual preferences (Peters, van Eijck, and Michael 2018, 59). Scholars are therefore urged to focus more on habitual consumption practices, namely basic conceptual units that are

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Essed (1996) suggests using the term “racial-ethnic” instead, variations of which we employ throughout this article. In the discussion of the results, we give prominence to the conceptualisations used by the respondents themselves.

used to describe consumer behaviour (Holt 1995; Warde 2015). However, most research “has focused almost exclusively on describing how meanings are structured and on interpreting the meanings particular to certain groups or consumption categories, paying little heed to the classificatory processes involved” (Holt 1995, 2). Moreover, previous work has strongly focused on social class in explaining consumption practices, even though classifications based on race-ethnicity and gender may well be stronger and more stable over time (Levitt 2005). To explore this, we therefore examine how classification styles are constructed in action and what role race-ethnicity and gender play in these styles.

We turn to cognitive sociology (Brekhus 2015; Cerulo 2010) to disentangle how individuals both implicitly and explicitly attend to race-ethnicity and gender in classificatory practices. Loosely based on the concept of group styles (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003), we conceptualise classification styles as recurrent patterns of classification based on shared beliefs on what signifies “good” cultural content. In consumption practices, the confrontation with cultural products raises two fundamental questions, with the first of these involving sense-making: “What kind of thing is it?” (Glynn and Navis 2013, 1125). Encountering something new results in knowledge activation, i.e. a “cognitive process involved in the retrieval and use of cultural knowledge” (Patterson 2014, 19), by which it is located within an existing meaning structure. Second, classifying asks a moral question: “Is it any good?” This addresses the “worth” of an object or practice in relation to the genre to which it has been assigned (Lamont 1992).

To understand this process, we focus on three dimensions of classification styles: *attending to*, *mental weighing* and *lumping/splitting*. First, in order to use particular classifications, people need to recognise or see particular categories (and not others). A classification style emits “innate pattern-recognition abilities” (Bourdieu 1977, 88), or, simply put, the “things that go without saying” that are essential to make sense of the interactions, symbols and cultural products that we encounter in everyday life (Patterson 2014). Degrees of attention and inattention are socially organised and shared by participants who are socialised in the same style (Zerubavel 1997). Although individuals might actively choose to see things differently, this requires more cognitive effort. This social organisation of (in)attention helps us to unpack which categories consumers (choose to) see or ignore, particularly regarding race-ethnicity and gender; for example, do black consumers attend to whiteness whereas their white counterparts ignore this?

Second, we theorise that individuals within a classification style see social reality through a similar lens. Nevertheless, the process of mentally weighing attention causes intersectional intragroup variation (Mullaney 1999); mental weighing “operates as a means through which social actors sort and sift through various cues and indicators” (Danna-Lynch 2010, 169), assigning more importance to certain indicators over others. To illustrate this, while hip-hop artist Eminem’s whiteness and his working-class background were both attended to by media and music consumers, his skin colour generally received substantially more mental weight in debates concerning his legitimacy as a rapper (Rodman 2006). So to what extent do rock music consumers attribute more mental weight to, for example, masculinity over whiteness?

Third, a style informs its practitioners on the extent to which objects, persons or symbols should be grouped together or seen as separate (Zerubavel 1997). When actors lump elements together, similarities between them are given more weight than differences. Differences are inflated when splitting potentially similar elements from each other. Once individuals form categories, between-category differences are magnified and within-category differences minimised (Brekhus 2015). Some social aspects are more easily lumped together than others, particularly when they are perceived to be “natural” or are felt to have biological origins, like race and gender. This is the fundamental cognitive basis for gender and ethno-racial essentialism: the notion that certain gender or ethno-racial groups inherently possess (or lack) certain traits or skills (Gelman 2003). An illustration of this is the way that female musicians are often lumped together based on their femininity – amplifying between-category differences – whereas their male counterparts

are split from each other and are seen as unique individuals (Berkers and Schaap 2018). So, to what extent are lumping and splitting practices – based on race-ethnicity and/or gender – patterned in classification styles? We focus on a music genre that is dominated both numerically and symbolically by white men to assess the construction of classification styles (Bannister 2006; Mahon 2004; Schaap 2015).

## Genre, race-ethnicity and gender

Cultural sociologists have defined music genres as “fuzzy” yet bounded configurations based on perceived similarities (Van Venrooij and Schmutz 2018). Genres “bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music” (Lena 2012, 6). They are also fundamental in the formation of consumer (sub)cultures (Ulusoy and Firat 2018). While cultural tastes have become increasingly fluid (Savage 2006), music genres have remained relatively durable. They afford certain classifications based on orientations, expectations and conventions, but restrain others (Frith 1996). The unambiguous commercialism of a genre like K-pop (Korean pop), for example, raises expectations towards – among other things – high-end productions, accessible content and a dedicated celebrity culture (Lie 2012). In contrast, the anti-commercialism of punk (at least initially) embraced expectations of lo-fi creations, political activism and an egalitarian culture (Berkers 2012). Of all potential attributes, ideas about race-ethnicity and gender can become particularly entrenched in genre conventions (Roy and Dowd 2010).

First, music genres tend to (partially) reflect ethno-racial groups and are often constructed based on these groups, making ethno-racial boundaries important in music production and consumption (Shank 2001). So, genres like hip-hop, soul or reggaetón are forms of cultural expression dominated by people of colour (Clay 2003; Rose 1994), while genres like country, heavy metal and rock are mainly produced and consumed by whites (Schaap 2015). Despite being heralded as one of the first racially “mixed” music genres (Bertrand 2000), rock music was whitewashed in the 1950s due to the “Elvis effect” (Taylor 1997). At the time, record labels were reluctant to sell “black” music to white audiences (Peterson 1990). This resulted in a musical colour line (Miller 2010) and a lasting white cultural dominance in rock music (Mahon 2004). Ever since, it has been claimed that “the history of rock discourse is marked by a profound aversion towards discussions of race, and attempts to reckon the music’s racial exclusivity have often been met with hostility” (Hamilton 2016, 12). This has made the undiscussed “whiteness” of rock music production and consumption pervasive. Although often unnoticed by whites (Withers 2017), the hegemonic whiteness of a cultural good like rock music can assist in sustaining the racial status-quo in which whiteness is experienced as a non-racial trait, disguised by supposed “colour-blind” (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Doane 2017) ways of categorising social reality.

Second, rock music has always been male-dominated (Bielby 2003), as it was constructed as a form of male rebellion against female domestication (Frith and McRobbie 1990). While pop artists “celebrate and embrace rituals of heterosexual love, romance and commitment” (Schipper 2002, 24), rock artists are “the men who take to the streets, take risks, live dangerously and, most of all, swagger untrammelled by responsibility, sexual and otherwise” (Frith and McRobbie 1990, 374). This rock masculinity is a particular set of practices that is not “naturally” masculine; it is actively maintained as such (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 844) by field actors such as music media, industries and producers (Leonard 2007). As these social interactions are repeated over time, the particular quality content of masculinity and femininity becomes taken-for-granted (institutionalised) and hegemonic, and may provide a barely questioned rationale for gender inequality (Ridgeway 2011). Nevertheless, we know little about to what extent and under which conditions race-ethnicity, gender, and intersections between the two, play a role in the actual classification processes of rock music consumers.

## Data and methods

### *Visual Q methodology*

We employed visual Q methodology to uncover classification styles (McKeown and Thomas 2013; Watts and Stenner 2012). This is a powerful, inductive tool with which to study audience reception (Davis and Michelle 2011), and is valuable when it comes to observing, reflecting on and comparing classification processes in action (Kuipers 2015). In visual Q methodology, respondents sort a deck of pre-selected images: the Q-set. This deck – known as a *concourse* – typically comprises 30–60 images that are illustrative of a framework of diverging ideas on a topic or product. Importantly, this sample is theoretically driven and is not necessarily representative of a larger population; the respondents' sorting logic and interpretations are what matters. Using a sorting question, respondents sort the images on a bell-curved grid that ranges from negative (–5) to positive (+5) and fits the entire Q-set. The sorting procedure is valuable, because it helps when it comes to accurately observing classification processes while, at the same time, opening up a conversation on a potentially sensitive topic such as race-ethnicity or gender. During sorting and subsequent interviews, respondents reflect on their sorting motivations, providing discursive data on how they relate to their specific sorts. Furthermore, principal component analyses of the sorts allow researchers to compare different sorts between respondents and to identify shared sorting rationales – individuals who have sorted the Q-set in similar ways.

We composed a theoretically informed visual Q-set for this paper consisting of 40 images of rock musicians without further information about the artists. We defined rock music as the “broad range of styles that have evolved out of rock ‘n’ roll” (Shuker 2002, 263), including classic rock, indie rock, punk rock, new wave, hard rock and heavy metal. While items used in Q methodology are polysemic by definition and warrant diverse interpretations (Kuipers 2015), five theoretically informed criteria were used to compose the set. First, ten images were selected for each group of theoretical interest (white male, white female, non-white male, non-white female). Second, artists were selected on the basis of important periods and (related) subgenres (from 1950s rock “n” roll to contemporary rock). Third, artist groups were matched based on their level of general renown, making sure, for example, that for each well-known (or obscure) white artist, an equally well-known (or obscure) non-white artist was in the deck. However, the overrepresentation of white male artists in the rock canon complicated this (Schaap 2015). We controlled for potential skewness by asking our respondents which artists they recognised (see below). Fourth, all the images portray artists playing instruments or singing in a live setting to control for visual presentation; as such, they are similar in composition (front-stage) and did not depict audience members. Fifth, the images were desaturated and cropped to the same size to subdue possible effects of colour and lighting. As a result, the Q-set offered a *concourse* that opened up the possibility of various sorting rationales and many potential discussion topics informed by the respondents' choices.<sup>2</sup> All the respondents were presented with this *concourse* of all 40 (shuffled and randomly stacked) images.

The sorting occurred in three-steps. The respondents first familiarised themselves with the Q-set and, when ready, pre-sorted the images into three piles (negative, neutral, positive) based on the sorting question: “How ‘rock’ do you rate this artist?” This initial sort helped the respondents to further acquaint themselves with the images and make preliminary decisions. Second, the respondents placed the images on the sorting grid using the same question. After approving the sort, the respondents flipped the images of artists that they did not recognise. This third step helped us to understand to what extent familiarity with an artist affected the sorting process and prompted further interview questions. The respondents were generally able to identify a diverse array of between 20% and 40% of the artists in the deck. None of the respondents sorted solely based on *who* they saw (familiarity), instead explaining that they did so based on *what* they saw.

<sup>2</sup>All the data on the *concourse*, including the individual sorts of each respondent, are available upon request. The images were used through the fair use of copyrighted material for scientific purposes and so cannot be reproduced here.



### ***In-depth interviews***

Each sorting procedure was followed by an in-depth interview, which helped us to understand what the respondents had paid attention to when sorting, i.e. what made some artists more or less “rock” than others. The interviews were conducted by the first author, who identifies as a white, cis-gender male. This was valuable in terms of circumventing the potential “empathy barrier” with white and/or male respondents (Hochschild 2016, 5–8), who might have been more hesitant to share ideas about race-ethnicity or gender with non-white or female interviewers. Non-white and/or female respondents were generally very interested in the research project and seemed unhindered when it came to sharing their ideas.

The themes discussed in the interviews were constructed bottom-up, without initial interviewer probing. Each interview started by asking about the aspects to which the respondents paid attention to while sorting. Categorisations earmarked as important to a respondent were subsequently discussed at length. This strategy helped to uncover which classifications were used by the respondents (attending to, lumping/splitting) and the sequence of paying attention to them (mental weighing). The interviews were audio recorded (including the sorting process) and transcribed verbatim thereafter. The interview data were analysed using a grounded theory approach. In this iterative process, the data were coded in three linked steps – open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Charmaz 2006; Goulding 2002) – with the goal being to first abstract central themes in the data. Second, latent patterns were identified by comparing these central themes. Third, these were compared to the underlying classification styles found in the principal component analyses of the Q sorts. In this final, relatively deductive, stage (Holton 2008), we tested to what extent these central themes were grounded in the four classification styles.

### ***Sample***

All the respondents are regular concert-goers in the local rock scenes of Rotterdam (Netherlands,  $n = 12$ ) and Atlanta (United States,  $n = 15$ ), respectively (see Table 1). These cities are interesting cases for the study of race-ethnicity, as they are considered to be markedly diverse. Rotterdam is home to approximately 638,000 citizens, about 38 per cent of whom are of “non-Western descent” (Gemeente Rotterdam 2018). Atlanta, Georgia, meanwhile, was central in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and is a so-called “minority-majority” city that houses around 475,000 citizens, with more than 50 percent of them identifying as African-American (United States Census Bureau 2016). Both cities are home to small, yet lively, rock scenes that spread out over multiple small to mid-size bars and venues.

Rock scene participants were recruited at concerts by the first author during fieldwork that took place between June 2015 and February 2016 (Rotterdam) and April–August 2016 (Atlanta). We used a maximum-variation sampling strategy (Flick 2006, 130–131) to achieve a high level of diversity within a relatively stable group of people frequenting the same social spaces in – or pertaining to – their city (concert venues and bars, but also online spaces such as scene-specific Facebook groups). The sample consists of 15 white and 12 non-white respondents. We purposely oversampled white/male respondents, as this is the demographic of primary interest to us and because this group is over-represented in rock music consumption. Eleven respondents identify as female and 16 as male. The respondents had various educational backgrounds, ranging from a high school education (nine) to vocational/professional training (11) or a bachelor or master’s degree from a university (seven). The mean age is 28.9, with a range between 18 and 38 years. The respondents read and signed a consent form before their interview and verified thereafter whether they still agreed to be included in the research. Most of the respondents remained in touch (digitally) after the interviews took place. The average length of the interviews was 63 minutes, with the shortest lasting 35 minutes and the longest 105.

**Table 1.** Respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and style fit ( $n = 27$ ).

Name <sup>a</sup>	Location	Gender	Race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	Age	Style
Abbigail	Atlanta	F	Bi-ethnic, white/Asian-American	24	4
Alexis	Atlanta	F	White/American	28	1
Alfred	Rotterdam	M	White/Dutch	36	3
Arnout	Rotterdam	M	White /Dutch	37	confounded
Berna	Rotterdam	F	Turkish-Dutch	20	4
Chuck	Atlanta	M	White/American	31	confounded
Claas	Rotterdam	M	White/Dutch	29	unique sort
Cliff	Atlanta	M	Hispanic-American	36	2
Daisy	Rotterdam	F	White/Dutch	35	2
Dennis	Atlanta	M	Bi-racial, white/African-American	26	confounded
Dwayne	Atlanta	M	White/American	27	confounded
Dwight	Atlanta	M	White/American	32	1
Erin	Atlanta	F	Bi-ethnic, White/Hispanic-American	23	unique sort
Estelle	Atlanta	F	White/American	36	2
Iris	Rotterdam	F	White/Dutch	32	2
Jeffrey	Atlanta	M	Hispanic-American	22	2
Jennifer	Atlanta	F	Bi-racial, white/African-American	27	1
Jeremiah	Atlanta	M	African-American	37	2
Johan	Rotterdam	M	White/Dutch	33	3
Kamille	Atlanta	F	White/American	20	2
Kendrick	Atlanta	M	African-American	21	1
Marc	Rotterdam	M	Bi-ethnic, white/Indonesian-Dutch	24	1
Nadine	Rotterdam	F	White/Dutch	26	4
Naresh	Rotterdam	M	Indian-Dutch	35	3
Pinar	Rotterdam	F	Turkish-Dutch	18	4
Sven	Rotterdam	M	White/Dutch	38	confounded
Winston	Atlanta	M	White/American	29	3

<sup>a</sup>To ensure anonymity, all names are pseudonyms.

<sup>b</sup>Self-identified by respondents.

## Results

The 27 Q-sorts were analysed using *PQMethod* (Schmolck and Atkinson 2014). Four distinct styles were identified through a principal component analysis (Table 2). The respondents' sorts that correlate above 0.41 within a style are regarded as "significant," implying that they are meaningful to the style.<sup>3</sup> None of the styles correlate with each other, i.e. they suggest unique sorting rationales. Nineteen respondents scored significantly in only one of the styles, six scored on multiple styles (confounding), and two did not sort in accordance with any of the styles (unique sorts). We will discuss the four distinct classification styles – *doing diversity*, *keeping hegemony*, *guarding masculinity* and *learning conventions* – below.

### Classification style 1: *doing diversity*

The rock consumers within this classification style are all deliberately attentive to – and attribute mental weight to – gender and race-ethnicity (diversity) as opposed to ignoring these categorisations. They first tend to discuss artists through a feminist lens, seeing unequal opportunities for women in rock. Second, they employ a colour-cognisant perspective, critiquing the – in their eyes – white cultural appropriation of a black form of cultural expression. Importantly, these rock consumers explicitly mark rock music's masculinity and whiteness. Of these respondents, three identify as men and two as women. One respondent identifies as an African-American man, one as a mixed white/African-American woman and one as a bi-ethnic Dutch-Indonesian man. The other respondents identify as white.

<sup>3</sup>Please note that statistical generalisation is not possible with (and is not the purpose of) Q methodology (Watts and Stenner 2012). "Significance" here refers to the factor, not the population. The calculation is as follows:  $p < 0.01 = 2.58 * (1/\sqrt{N})$ , where N is the amount of items in the Q-set. This means that  $p < 0.01 = 0.4079 \pm 0.41$ .



**Table 2.** Artists in the Q-set and ideal-typical sorts for each style.<sup>a</sup>

Artist	Race-ethnicity	Gender	Style 1 <i>Doing diversity</i>	Style 2 <i>Keeping hegemony</i>	Style 3 <i>Guarding masculinity</i>	Style 4 <i>Learning conventions</i>
Elvis Presley	White	M	−0.06	1.45	1.90	−0.69
Led Zeppelin	White	M	−0.18	1.38	1.64	−0.81
Joy Division	White	M	1.01	1.11	−0.42	−0.66
Jack White	White	M	−1.18	0.86	−0.98	0.57
Editors	White	M	−1.78	−0.03	−0.83	0.76
Mudhoney	White	M	1.32	1.81	0.27	0.66
Judas Priest	White	M	−1.19	−0.34	1.85	0.37
Whitechapel	White	M	−1.16	1.41	0.71	1.96
Black Flag	White	M	1.12	2.31	0.85	2.26
Primus	White	M	−1.60	−0.43	−1.34	−1.89
Wanda Jackson	White	F	0.74	−1.14	−1.07	−1.71
Janis Joplin	White	F	−0.50	−0.95	0.89	−0.97
The Slits	White	F	1.15	0.18	−0.19	−0.32
PJ Harvey	White	F	0.50	−0.06	−0.54	−0.43
Haim	White	F	−0.35	−0.98	0.09	0.70
Hole	White	F	1.24	−0.71	0.71	−0.18
Girlschool	White	F	−0.27	−1.32	1.78	0.53
Arch Enemy	White	F	−1.57	−1.11	1.37	1.68
Bikini Kill	White	F	1.63	1.11	0.10	−0.00
Luscious Jackson	White	F	−0.01	−1.02	−1.24	−1.14
Chuck Berry	Non-white	M	1.06	1.14	−0.25	−0.86
Jimi Hendrix	Non-white	M	0.68	0.64	1.36	−0.82
Prince	Non-white	M	0.30	0.34	0.92	0.52
Lenny Kravitz	Non-white	M	−1.87	−0.68	0.24	0.40
Bloc Party	Non-white	M	−1.08	0.03	−1.14	0.76
Alice in Chains	Non-white	M	−0.85	0.00	−0.70	0.36
Death Angel	Non-white	M	−0.49	0.06	1.35	0.97
God Forbid	Non-white	M	0.34	0.25	−0.05	0.74
Bad Brains	Non-white	M	0.80	0.92	−0.59	0.19
Living Colour	Non-white	M	−0.11	0.49	−1.00	−0.21
Big Mama Thornton	Non-white	F	1.56	−0.43	−1.02	−0.61
Os Mutantes	Non-white	F	−1.38	−1.45	−0.37	−1.87
New Bloods	Non-white	F	0.96	0.21	−1.55	−0.46
Tamar Kali	Non-white	F	−0.16	−0.98	−1.00	0.28
History of Apple Pie	Non-white	F	0.51	−0.71	−0.49	−1.21
Skunk Anansie	Non-white	F	−0.52	−0.74	−0.27	0.45
Judas Priestess	Non-white	F	−0.09	0.46	0.33	0.89
Straight Line Stitch	Non-white	F	−0.40	0.13	0.52	1.46
X-Ray Spex	Non-white	F	1.14	−1.63	−0.55	−1.01
Boris	Non-white	F	0.73	−1.60	−1.28	−0.66

<sup>a</sup>Z-scores above 1 are highlighted, indicating the images that were most often classified as positive (black, grey background) or negative (white, dark grey background) within the style. Lower z-scores (light grey) indicate sorting ambiguity within the style.

This classification style is characterised by attending to the (white) history of rock music and actively choosing to “do” things differently. So, the respondents have a preference for African-American rock “n” roll musicians such as Chuck Berry and Big Mama Thornton over white musicians like Elvis Presley and Wanda Jackson. They weigh artists using two ways of lumping and splitting. First, they classify white artists as “less” rock. As Jennifer states: “Elvis I kind of put there [negative position] because I don’t think he stands on his own merits. Like, all of his music is stolen.” Similarly, Kendrick explains that he ranked Elvis low because “He pretty much had the precedence of white artists just stealing black artists’ music and then making money off of it. And they didn’t even write the songs.” However, this judgement does not befall other artists in the Q-set such as Janis Joplin, Chuck Berry, Big Mama Thornton and Jimi Hendrix, all of whom are known to have had cover songs as key material. In other words, only white and male artists are lumped together along such lines. Alexis explains that these matters considerably motivate her preferences:

Black people have been pioneers in that and in a lot of ways that narrative was stolen from them, when it became more commercially viable. When you're looking at like, historically and also who is doing it best, someone who is doing it, like, most innovatively, it's gonna be like ... It's gonna be black women. That's who it's gonna be.

So, these respondents lump together the whiteness of rock music (race-ethnicity), a lack of artistry (not writing own material) and commercial opportunism (Bourdieu 1993; Powers 2012).

Second, the respondents classify non-white artists as “more” rock. Dwight employs the narrative that people of colour have been edged out of the rock canon. To him, this gives them a rebellious edge that actually fits well with what rock music should be about. “Say, for instance, like Bad Brains or even Hendrix or Prince, like, it's almost more of a bold statement. Like, that I can be this type of musician even though that's not what audiences would necessarily picture.” Arguing that non-whites are in fact inherently more capable of rock music – lumping together artistry with race-ethnicity – he continues: “that's kind of the essence of rock ‘n’ roll. It's that it's, like, ‘pow!’ It's out there; it's in your face like a ‘fuck you’ kind of thing.” Similarly, for Alexis, rock music is fuelled by rebellion and

all those feelings [aggression, anger] come from a place of experiencing, you know, like, being disenfranchised. And feeling like you don't have another space to express those things or they cannot be heard. (...) And that to me is much more powerful and interesting.

However, non-whiteness does not automatically result in positive classifications, as not all non-white artists fit within the rock-as-rebellion element of this classification style. This act of mental weighing becomes particularly apparent in Dwight's evaluation of Lenny Kravitz. He does want to give him

credit for being like a, you know, an African-American rock musician. But he's just, there's just so much cheese, it's too cheesy. (...) I kinda feel bad putting him in that low a little bit, but I just like, I think it's ... From my personal taste.

Similarly, Alexis shouts out: “Oh, it's just so cheesy! (...) It's the showmanship versus the sincerity.” So, within this style, political considerations, which are pitted against commercialism and the rock canon, assist in lumping artists together and are given more mental weight.

A preference for a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to music production and reception relates to a feminist and colour-cognisant way of sorting artists. This is the logical result of the belief that large-scale institutional developments, such as the whitewashing of rock music by the music industry, the music press and record companies, as well as sexist practices at music venues, call for a different approach towards inclusive music participation. Dwayne explains that DIY spaces have “always been, like, a place for weirdos and people that feel marginalised and can't get a show at a larger venue.” Importantly, according to him, these “DIY safe spaces are not about making money so much.” Alluding to this same motivation, Alexis states “I can't go to shows at whatever bar anymore? Fine, then I'll make my own public space. And that's kind of what it is.” Moving away from institutionalised spaces of cultural production is part and parcel of resisting rock's whiteness and masculinity. It is experienced as being difficult to challenge whiteness and masculinity within a space that is dominated by white men (Harries 2014). This preference for DIY spaces is intrinsically tied to the feminist and anti-racist ideologies that people within this style uphold.

### ***Classification style 2: keeping hegemony***

In this style, the respondents tend to sort favourably towards white, male artists while arguing that gender and race-ethnicity do not matter in their sorting practices; instead, commercialism and canonisation are explicit sorting rationales. The respondents discursively give more mental weight to gender than to race-ethnicity, although this is at odds with their sorting behaviour. Despite the supposed lack of attention paid to race-ethnicity, the ideal-typical sort reveals that female and non-white musicians are lumped together as “less rock” than most white, male artists. This group is equally divided

on the basis of gender, with three male and three female respondents. One of the respondents identifies as an African-American man, whereas two other men explain that they have bi-cultural (Hispanic) roots. All the women identify as white.

First, an artist's historical importance is attended to, and this is strongly related to being included in the rock canon. This is also the case if the respondents only assess this factor based on what an artist looks like rather than familiarity. Elvis Presley has a key position in this sorting rationale, embodying what rock music should look like to these rock consumers. Jeffrey, for example, positions Elvis highest, because "that's just Elvis though. He's just a legend. So it's kinda hard to not include him here." For Kamille, Elvis is, by-and-large, the most important figure in rock music:

I feel like Elvis especially, like he was the first person to kind of add, like, a lot of guitar, a lot of beats, a lot of movement to his music. So for that time he was revolutionary and a total stepping-stone for all of these people [points to artists]. So that's why I put him up there.

Daisy reasons in a similar way, although she does also include Chuck Berry in her list of important founding fathers: "The old legends, the history, those that are at the foundation. So all the way to the right [positive side] I have Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley."

Second, the respondents in this style have a preference for large-scale, bombastic rock. "Big productions," as Cliff notes multiple times, or, as Jerimiah states: "Big stages." This typically aligns with the classic vision of what rock should be. In Daisy's words: "Light show, loud guitars, much leather, much metal, long hair, much visible chest hair, tattoos and an air-fan on the stage, so that you can see hair waving around." This is at odds with the preference for DIY productions and anti-commercialism found in the first style. Moreover, while a preference for DIY productions is discursively linked to carving out a space for people of colour and/or women, a preference for corporate rock is not explicitly lumped together with white masculinity by these respondents, even though their sorting demonstrates otherwise.

Third, and related, this classification style exemplifies the colour-blind narrative of rock music's whiteness. When probed, the respondents uphold a positive attitude towards ethno-racial diversity in rock music, yet they generally feel that it should never be an explicit focus and thus part of a classification style. As Cliff states: "It's really nothing to do with ... [pause] what colour or anything like that. It's like, if you're good, you're good. You know?" Jeffrey agrees with this: "As long as the music itself is good, it really doesn't matter. Everything else will just come along with it." Similarly, Estelle states that "race wasn't really a factor" when sorting. Moreover, even though Kamille explicitly mentions that race-ethnicity and gender do matter, she often reinforces her supposedly colour-blind position that "I've never seen the blur, you know? I see it all as the same. I don't see it as one or the other, you know?" Despite these well-intentioned, often reluctantly conferred claims, which demonstrate that colour is in fact *seen*, the mental weight attributed to these aspects has consequences for how ethno-racial diversity is evaluated when classifying rock. When this discourse is contrasted with its ideal-typical sort, it becomes clear how race-ethnicity does matter when classifying an artist's fit with rock music's conventions.

### ***Classification style 3: guarding masculinity***

This classification style represents a male-centred variation on the second style, with much more mental weight attributed to masculinity. While respondents within the "keeping hegemony" style pay lip service to notions of gender-inclusivity, here a preference for male musicians is both clearly reflected in the ideal-typical sort and the discourse employed. Notions on masculinity and femininity are treated as, respectively, signifying "more" and "less" rock. Race-ethnicity is treated in colour-blind ways that are similar to those used in the second style. One respondent is of Indian descent, the other three identify as white, and all of them identify as male.

Again, Elvis Presley reflects ideal-typical rock. For Johan, this means sorting “classic” male artists positively, because “those are the men that are *really* rock ‘n’ roll, that have meant something for rock ‘n’ roll” [emphasis by Johan]. Similarly, Naresh states, after realising that he was sorting women negatively: “No, that’s not what I find cool in rock music.” This masculine ideal is not only about an artist’s sex. Female artists perceived as “masculine,” such as Girlschool and Arch Enemy, are also sorted positively. Alfred, for instance, is specifically attentive to “the physical, which is what displays a sense of freedom. That’s what I find very important in rock. That you let things go and go wild. That you lose yourself while doing so.” He argues that this freedom is masculine, because:

You have to be able to show yourself. And in general, I think that men open up more easily or are less afraid to do so. I often have the idea that women are more insecure to really reveal themselves. (...) It’s something wild and it has something to do with yelling, drinking a lot.

Winston, likewise, does not feel that this is exclusive to men. Related to Alfred’s ideas, he argues that: “I think it’s ‘cause it [rock music] wants to be, like, an extreme polarity of society. And that just happens to be [so that] the vessel for that expression is this bare-chested ‘pounding on your chest’ kind-of-thing.” Nevertheless, he adds that “for me it’s, like ... a woman could express that too.” In saying this, Winston shows that it is not necessarily the maleness that is used as an indicator of “good” rock within this classification style, but rather masculinity, which is seen as necessary, but not unattainable, for women.

On the negative end of the ideal-typical sort, we find musicians who seem to signify a more feminine – and thus “softer” – variation of rock that these respondents feel is inappropriate. As Naresh states when looking at the images he sorted negatively: “I see a couple of really cute ladies that are standing there with a guitar and singing, and that’s just something I have no affinity with at all. It makes me think of the *Eurovision Song Festival*.” He adds that he does like certain female musicians, but attributes this to the fact that they are “a little bit more boyish.”

#### **Classification style 4: learning conventions**

This classification style differs from the other three in terms of the lack of value attributed to the history of rock music or its canon (Frith 1996). These respondents, therefore, attend to other aspects, such as age, perceived attractiveness and contemporary apparel. Nevertheless, the respondents who score significantly on this style reason in similar ways to the “keeping hegemony” style: race-ethnicity does not – and should not – matter when classifying rock. Paradoxically, despite their own gender (all the respondents in this style identify as women), they reason along similar lines to the “guarding masculinity” style, indicating a preference for male artists. This group is ethnically diverse, with two Dutch-Turkish women, one American-Asian woman and one white woman.

The rock conventions found to be important in the first three classification styles are not very significant to these respondents, resulting in markedly atypical sorts. Moreover, the respondents in this style all recognised only five or fewer of the musicians in the Q-set. This can be explained by this group’s young mean age (22.3) – their ideas on rock music are developing and they regard classic rock artists as “old men-rock” (in Pinar’s words). The rock consumers within this style give more mental weight to a non-canonised, contemporary, relatively “open” view of rock, yet still make use of the implicit whiteness and masculinity of conventional rock music.

Interestingly, for these respondents, female presence in rock music is seen through the lens of masculinity and femininity, as in the third classification style. Pinar uses classic gender roles to explain the absence of women in rock music:

I think that for a woman in general, like as a general image of a woman, I think the rock ‘n’ roll tour life is just much heavier. Because you just, yeah, in general women are just more emotional. And they get attached to their house and they don’t want to be away that long and they’re just, yeah ... Drinking and partying is just more, in the general image, more in the direction of men.

Equating masculinity with the rock “n” roll lifestyle, Pinar employs a common style that reinforces stereotypical ideas about male and female role expectations (Berkers and Eeckelaer 2014). Similarly, using Janis Joplin as an example, Abigail argues that men retaining this lifestyle are “true to themselves,” whereas Joplin was “not really this person.”

As in styles two and three, there seems to be a refusal among the respondents to discuss race-ethnicity in explicit terms. Struggles about determining genre categorisations bring this to light, for instance when discussing the African-American vocalist Poly Styrene of punk outfit X-Ray Spex:

- Pinar: With this image, I simply unconsciously get more of an R&B sense, you know? Because she looks so happy, mainly.
- Interviewer: Yes, okay. So why is that? Because of the expression?
- Pinar: Yes, predominantly due to her expression. Really, I think this is more like a jazz R&B thing, you know?

As is part and parcel of colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2003), it is impossible to conclude that Pinar bases her classifications on the ethno-racial make-up of Poly Styrene. Nevertheless, when considering the many similar examples in the interviews and the absence of such classifications for white artists, it is reasonable to infer that blackness functions as a proxy to split these artists from rock and lump them into “black” music genres. In the interview with Berna, this became apparent after she was asked why she considered Living Colour’s Corey Glover to be a rapper: “It’s probably rock. But then it’s really, yeah, I still think it’s rap. I think maybe it’s ... [whispering] skin colour?” The fact that this ethno-racial classification is thought to merit a hushed articulation underlines the relative unease that these rock consumers experience when explicitly employing the classificatory tools that usually remain undeclared. Indeed, Berna reflects on this by stating that she “feels like such a judgmental person right now,” while maintaining that “no, it [Living Colour] just doesn’t fit.”

## Conclusion and discussion

This paper addresses how rock music consumers construct classification styles and the roles that race-ethnicity, gender and intersections between these attributes play in this process. Employing visual Q methodology, our analyses revealed four distinct classification styles that rock consumers employ. Classification styles are recurrent patterns of classification based on shared explicit and/or implicit beliefs that underlie consumption practices. Due to the often implicit nature of the ethno-racial and gendered properties that define classification styles, understanding how these function helps to uncover the relatively concealed elements underlying consumption practices. By focusing on rock music – a genre that is both numerically and symbolically dominated by white men – we aimed to analyse the roles of race-ethnicity and gender in a genre in which they are generally not perceived to be relevant.

The first classification style, “doing diversity,” is fuelled by pro-inclusive discourse that is seen as distinctly oppositional to commercialism. The individuals employing this style actively pay attention to gender and ethno-racial differences, assign mental weight to these attributes, and equate “more rock” with diversity and marginalised social backgrounds (and “less rock” with white masculinity). Importantly, “more rock” means a combination of gender and/or ethno-racial diversity and a do-it-yourself mentality of inclusivity to circumvent institutional boundaries. Although our focus was on race-ethnicity and gender, social class was occasionally used to classify artists. For example, Lenny Kravitz, whose parents were a well-known actress and a television producer, is perceived to lack the authenticity of other seemingly less socio-economically privileged artists. In the second classification style, “keeping hegemony,” the respondents maintain a discourse of inclusivity (“rock is for everyone”), but female and non-white musicians are classified as “less rock” than their male counterparts. Although gender is more openly used to classify than race-ethnicity, the respondents argue that they are essentially gender- and colour-blind when classifying artists, which is not reflected in the actual

sorting. Instead, more mental weight is assigned to commercialisation and canonisation, which are (at least discursively) split from gender and race-ethnicity. The third classification style, “guarding masculinity,” follows a similar logic, although masculinity is openly attended to as a factor that is important for “good rock.” The respondents note the importance of stereotypically masculine aspects: roughness, loudness and a rebellious attitude. Again, race-ethnicity is ignored or treated in a colour-blind fashion, resulting in lower scores for non-white artists. Lastly, the fourth classification style encapsulates those new to rock music and its genre rules, those “learning conventions.” These young respondents rarely pay attention to historical and institutional factors (canonisation), instead giving mental weight to, what to them, are new and contemporary artists. Rather than re-assessing the whiteness and masculinity of the rock canon, however, these individuals maintain the gender- and colour-blind logic found in styles two and three.

This paper makes two key theoretical and empirical contributions. First, in contrast to earlier literature, we show how stratification along gender and ethno-racial lines is maintained in actual music consumption practices. Our analysis demonstrates that gender and race-ethnicity matter in the classification of rock music, even (or particularly) when the salience of race-ethnicity and/or gender is rejected discursively. As discussions of diversity tend to revolve around socially marked cultural genres such as hip-hop, turning the focus towards considerably white and male cultural products increases our understanding of how, through classification processes, the consumption of “unmarked” cultural genres can (albeit unintentionally) facilitate cultural dominance (Brekhus 2015). The relative incoherence between the ideal-typical sorts and the discursive data from the interviews found in the latter three classification styles can be explained by the continued functioning of a colour-blind racial ideology that retains the ethno-racial status-quo in both the Netherlands (Essed and Hoving 2015) and the United States (Doane 2017). This is despite discursive differences regarding the discussion of race-ethnicity that vary between contexts. Indeed, it is particularly Pinar’s whispered “maybe it’s ... skin colour” – reluctantly uttered after a longwinded thought process – which exemplifies how most respondents deal with ethno-racial difference. As such, it demonstrates the paradox of race-ethnicity as a classificatory tool. On the one hand, the ideal-typical sorts for each classification style show that ethno-racial associations matter in the classification of rock music. On the other hand, however, the analysis of the interview data demonstrates that the respondents are – with the exception of the colour-cognisant individuals who are “doing diversity” – reluctant to address these matters verbally.

While our article has deepened our understanding of how ethno-racial associations function in the consumption of rock music in particular, we would like to set an empirical and theoretical agenda to examine further how other consumption fields are habitually imbued with these implicit exclusionary mechanisms. So, do similar classification styles underlie the implicitly racialised and/or gendered consumption practices of films (e.g. Benshoff and Griffin 2011), cars (e.g. Sheller 2004), food (e.g. Chen 2012; Williams-Forson 2008) or other types of content from the cultural creative sphere in general (see, Giesler 2008)? While classification styles might vary in their specific foci depending on the context in which they function, it is reasonable to assume that overarching versions that are very similar to “doing diversity” and “keeping hegemony” can be found among consumers of television series and films. Seeing recent movements towards addressing the perceived whiteness of films (particularly regarding the process of cultural consecration, for example at the annual Academy Awards in the United States), consumers of these and other cultural goods might more actively monitor the attributes they use when classifying cultural content, because the sudden widespread marking of ethno-racial and/or gender diversity is significant in terms of the attention consumers pay to these factors. In cultural fields that are not (yet) under such societal scrutiny, variations of the latter three styles identified in this paper may be found to be dominant. This could be the case for many fields of cultural consumption, such as visual arts (e.g. Blackwood and Purcell 2014) or literature (e.g. Chong 2011), but also for sports such as golf (e.g. Long and Hylton 2002) or leisure activities like camping (e.g. Philipp 1995). In all such instances, rather than assessing the potentially gendered and/or ethno-racial connotations



of cultural content, the theoretical and empirical focus of researchers should be directed specifically towards how consumers attend to, mentally weigh and lump/split such attributes. This will enable them to disentangle both the explicit and implicit roles that these attributes can play in consumption practices and the consequences for social inequality. By putting how consumers form classificatory styles at the forefront of the analysis, researchers can also better understand the multiple dimensions of social diversity that underpin consumption practices (Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015), without necessarily making the analysis “cumbersome at every stage” (340). In fact, analyses of social diversity in consumption practices can only gain in theoretical detail, while fostering a concrete empirical understanding of practices of inclusion and exclusion through consumption.

Second, our paper drew from recent advances in cognitive sociology to improve the empirical assessment of the habitual aspects of consumer practices, which can be noticeably automatic and implicit (Warde 2014). While psychological perspectives tend to focus on resources that are specific to the individual (Zerubavel 1997), the cognitive sociological perspective is uniquely positioned to take into account how cultural resources, rooted in cognition, are activated when confronted with (new) cultural content. The methodology we employed – visual Q Methodology – aided in assessing actual sorting practices (at least partly automated cognition) and how people reason about their sorting choices (in most cases, deliberate cognition). Q methodology offers unique possibilities for researchers to explore consumers’ various viewpoints on and interpretations of the same (cultural) products, while also enabling an inductive, standardised comparison of these viewpoints as classification styles. As such, we were able to extract four distinct classification styles, which would have remained inaccessible if conventional methodologies were used. These habitual styles contain racialised, gendered and intersecting properties that consumers implicitly and explicitly employ when evaluating or selecting cultural products. Hence, this approach allowed for an empirical understanding of how and why selection practices can be disconnected from discursive practices. Further studies could assess the cognitive “depth” of these classification styles, potentially by employing cognition-based methodologies drawn from social psychology (see, e.g. Lamont et al. 2017; Schaap, van der Waal, and de Koster 2019).

The found disconnection between selection and discursive practices has an important implication. People continually use cultural knowledge as a resource to make (consumption) decisions, which often occurs at a pre-reflexive, implicit or “non-declarative” level (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Lizardo 2017). While now a widely accepted idea in our understanding of consumer manipulation (e.g. by means of “nudging,” see Wilkinson 2013), similar cognitive underpinnings are clearly crucial in the maintenance of social inequalities. The, at first sight, rather puzzling paradox that consumers may display egalitarian and inclusive beliefs while at the same time “keeping hegemony” through their choices, can actually be understood by theoretically and empirically distinguishing between these different cognitive processes. Importantly, this not only helps us understand how ethno-racial and gender boundaries are – often unintentionally – maintained in the consumption of all kinds of (cultural) products through classification styles, but also how they are consequential for other kinds of life-choices such as education, jobs, friends and spouses. So is it skin colour? It probably is.

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