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Chapter 1: Gendered violence at international festivals: An interdisciplinary perspective

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Abstract

This introductory chapter argues that liminality as conceived by van Gennep (1960) and, subsequently, Turner (1969, 1979, 1982) within the festival literature has been under-theorised and, as a result, has limited event scholars' abilities to be critical of festival spaces, especially when it comes to gendered power dynamics and structural inequalities. There is an assumption that power is dispersed or even absent under 'communitas'. However, we argue there is often a neglect to understand how hegemonic cultural structures and social controls still govern these experiential settings. We also argue that festivals are too quickly seen as spaces of rupture when they are more likely to reinforce the status quo. This chapter frames the discussion around the increase in reported sexual assaults and gendered violence at festivals to argue that a persistence to characterise them as uncomplicated, value-free, utopic liminal/liminoid is highly problematic. It then presents the interdisciplinary chapters in this volume focusing on gendered violence at international festivals, and concludes with a 'call to arms' to change contemporary praxis in festival environs.

Introduction

The idea for this book first started out as a chapter for Lamond's & Moss' (forthcoming) volume exploring liminality in critical event studies. As we developed our chapter, we realised the topic of the liminal/liminoid was so much more problematic than we initially anticipated once the focus shifted to non-dominant, non-privileged groups and cultures. How could ingrained inequalities, un/conscious bias, and motivations for symbolic as well as physical violence just float away when people enter festival spaces? And, then, like an overcoat, would these prejudices be put on again as they walked out of these so-called liminal environments? Although festivals are often marketed as 'transformational', this mainly centres on the experiential design and programming content rather than the interactions between participants and attendees. It is too big of an ask for festivals alone to dismantle societal power structures; in fact, more often than not, they reinforce them. As Finkel et al. (2018, 1) state, "Special events are microcosms of society. Because they are temporary and usually bound by geographic space, they can be considered reflections of or responses to societal norms at the time they take place."

We thought other scholars must have realised this too, and, thus, we wanted to find out what interdisciplinary work was being conducted on a global scale. Our book chapter grew into an edited book; it is the first in the Routledge Critical Event Studies Research Series. As co-editors of the series, Finkel & McGillivray state, "In adopting a critical stance, we take our starting point the idea that events intervene in social structures and, in so doing, they expose the diverse contested discourses and frames of reference being articulated by the actors and institutions involved." Given this, we specifically wanted to focus on gender — not necessarily broader equality & diversity narratives, which can often entangle many disparate

communities together without going into depth about distinctive key issues or how these may interrelate. Certainly, we do recognise that all useful discussions surrounding gender are intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989), and, as such, the ways in which age, class, nationality, ethnicity, and so forth intersect with gender is of particular relevance to advancing research in this area. Thus, we wanted to concentrate on how intersectional gendered relations play out in festival spaces and the sometimes violent outcomes as a result of these interactions. Although many current conversations of gendered violence are viewed as a binary with most discussions highlighting men's violence towards women, we would like to state that we accept gender as a spectrum and an identity culturally developed and performed aligned with Butler's (1999) theorisations. We also acknowledge that much more investigation is needed regarding those with trans and non-binary gender identities in experiential environments, and there is significant scope there for future research.

Although more work is being published at the intersections of gender studies and critical event studies (e.g. Coyle & Platt, 2018; Crichton & Finkel, 2019; Dashper, 2013, 2018; Finkel & Dashper, 2020; Platt & Finkel, 2018; Pavlidis, 2012; Walters, 2018), it is still under-explored, emerging, and considered rather niche, often side-lined to its own segregated conference streams and special issues instead of embraced as an integral theme threaded through mainstream scholarship (Dashper & Finkel, 2020). Despite a growing body of work regarding human trafficking and sex work around mega sporting events (e.g. Finkel & Finkel, 2015; Matheson & Finkel, 2013; De Lisio et al., 2019), it is still rare for the unfavourable, less salubrious actions of human behaviour to be researched within festival frameworks, with very few publications concentrating on sexual assault, rape, and other incidences of violence. Therefore, we seek to make a contribution by amplifying more realistic festival narratives to inform conceptualisations and practices in an effort to address pervasive gendered injustice issues.

Thus, the emphasis for this volume centres on patriarchy, performativity, and praxis in an effort to contest the widely-held notion that festivals are temporal spaces free from structural sexism, inequalities, or gender power dynamics. Instead, we argue that they are spaces where these are enhanced and enacted more freely, using the experiential environment as an excuse or as an opportunity to victim-blame and shame. Whilst it has been argued that the liminal/liminoid space, due to the so-argued temporary suspension of societal norms, allows women's bodies and voices to be asserted in a way that is not usually deemed acceptable in everyday public spaces (e.g. Riches, 2011), there is often a neglect to understand how hegemonic social and cultural structures and controls still govern these spaces. This book illustrates this argument with discussions around the increase in reported sexual assaults at international festivals to argue that a persistence to characterise festival spaces as uncomplicated, value-free, utopic liminal/liminoid is highly problematic.

The problem with the liminal-norm: Festivals and gendered violence

We argue that liminality as conceived by van Gennep (1960) and, subsequently, Turner (1969, 1979, 1982) within the festival literature has been under-theorised and, as a result, has limited event scholars' abilities to be critical of festival spaces. Whilst it has been identified that the liminal space of the festival can be dangerous and risky (e.g. Jaimangal-Jones et al, 2010), there is little work that questions issues of gender power relations within festival frameworks. Without wanting to spill further ink on explaining what liminality is, we want to point out briefly some key aspects of Turner's work that have been acknowledged by festival scholars which are integral to our analysis. In festival studies, the work of Falassi (1987) is often cited in relation to his take on the ritual process drawn from van Gennep, whereby the festival space is seen as "a time out of time". Within the festival space, in this liminoidal period, *communitas* occurs; i.e. festival goers come together with the same purpose and become a "communion of equal individuals" (Turner, 1969, 96). Turner's

characterisation of structure and anti-structure has been appealing to those studying festival spaces, particular with an emphasis of transgression, freedom, and creative expression. Yet, there is an assumption that power is dispersed or even absent under such 'communitas'. Boissevain (2016), however, notes that festivals evolve within the changing nature of society and, therefore, are not immune to power relations external to the events themselves. Within festival studies specifically, there is an emerging critique; most relevant here is Pielichaty's (2015) work in relation to the negotiation of gender in festival experiences. In her analysis, she found that despite the so-called liminoid spaces of festivals, gender roles were normative and reinforced. This volume expands on her important work to examine what the consequences of this might be.

The lack of critique in festival studies of the limen and communitas, we contend, has occurred as festival scholars have fallen under the spell of the 'liminal-norm' (McKenzie, 2004), a theory from performance studies that suggests that the subversive potential of performance has become the status-quo, with a privileging of liminality leading to conceptualisations of the term becoming chronic and normative. In a critique of the concept of liminality in performance studies, Crosby (2009, 5) suggests that the concept of the liminal, "produces a blindness for, or at least impatience with, institutions and cultural performances associated with reproduction and structure rather than resistance or subversion." Therefore, there is the accusation that by employing the concept as an analytical tool, we can be in danger of being too ready to seek subversion and not address the structures within which hegemonic society functions. McKenzie (2004) considers the symbiotic relationship between liminality and performance and suggests that liminality as a theoretical conceptualisation is essential to understand performance as a transgressive force. Indeed, McKenzie (2004) further points out that Turner even accepted that liminal rituals had normalising functions on society, and the outcome of ritual is often 'reabsorption' into society. "Public liminality can never be tranquilly regarded as a safety valve, mere catharsis, 'letting off steam'. Rather, it is communitas weighing structure, sometimes finding it wanting, and proposing in however extravagant a form new paradigms and models which invert or subvert the old" (Turner, 1979, 474). McKenzie (2004) goes on to argue that liminality was 're-cited' and 'de-contextualised' throughout the 1960s and 70s in performance theory with the rarer moments of rupture in ritual being centralised. Whilst problematic, what McKenzie (2004) is suggesting is the notion of liminality cannot be abandoned altogether; however, there is a need to acknowledge its 'own alterity' in order to unravel the reification of its theorisation.

Thus, the ways in which festival spaces have been perpetually conceptualised in this regard motivated us, as editors of this volume, to call for international perspectives on how gendered violence is enacted across different festival environs.

Chapter Outline

Recently, there have been more and more media reports surrounding increased sexual assaults at cultural and, specifically, music festivals. However, there has been a paucity of sustained scholarly work in this area. This collection attempts to highlight international, interdisciplinary research in an effort to progress thinking about gendered festival experiences and emphasise the symbolic and physical violence often associated with them. The chapters draw from a range of sociology, geography, criminology, law, cultural studies, and other social sciences and humanities literatures and methodologies along with gender studies and critical event studies. This book is in no way conclusive or all-encompassing, as there is scope for much more research into this area; however, it is, in some ways, a spark for an ongoing conversation about gendered violence (both epistemic and physical) at festivals and the implications this has for the ways we celebrate — and live — together. The vision for this book, then, is to feature contributions from critical events and interdisciplinary

scholars specifically focused on all kinds of gendered violence at festivals from around the world. Each chapter interweaves cross-disciplinary theories, international policies, and includes practical case study example/s to illustrate key points. Unfortunately, almost all continents are represented in these chapters, which illustrates what a pervasive and universal issue this is, and provides further evidence of the need for such gendered inequalities to be more competently addressed — inside and outside — of the festival setting.

The book begins by exploring the manifold dimensions of the infamous *La Manda* or “wolfpack” gang rape case in Spain. Silvestre, Royo, & Linares analyse the responses of feminist activist movements to this horrific sexual assault. The chapter presents political and social feminist interventions against gendered violence and sexual aggressions that occur in the popular festivals of the Basque Country in northern Spain. Festival lived experiences are contrasted with institutionalised measures to demonstrate the increasing internalisation of empowering feminist discourses in younger generations of women. Following this, Morero Beltran & Camps Calvet also focus their chapter on the “wolfpack” gang rape case by demonstrating how the event came to mark a turning point in the country’s responses to sexual violence in general and, more specifically, to sexual attacks perpetrated in public space during celebratory events. They argue that a “patriarchal logic” dominates the uses of public space, and *fiestas* function not merely as leisure activities, but mainly as practices that represent the current social order, legitimise violence against women, reinforce sexist hierarchical values, and reproduce rape culture.

The next two chapters focus attention on African case study examples, where similar themes emerge relating to how broader societal inequalities are magnified in cultural festival spaces and how this results in a continuous cycle of gendered violence. Aborisade’s research explores sexual aggression against women by men in cultural festival spaces in southern Nigeria. The extent of gendered harassment and attacks are indicative of broader social heteronormative ordering in Nigerian society and illustrate the safety issues women must deal with on a regular basis. Thereafter, Mlotshwa examines the gendered epistemic violence and colonialism of the content, programming schedules, and location of shows at an arts festival in Zimbabwe, and how the festival, perhaps unintentionally, contributes to the symbolic degradation of women and persistence of colonialism of gender.

Following, we turn the spotlight on music festivals. Fileborn, Wadds, & Tomsen investigate gendered practices which lead to sexual violence in an Australian context. They explore the potential of ‘assemblage thinking’ in understanding how individual incidents of sexual violence unfold in music festival settings. Also, from a criminologist perspective, Bows, King, & Measham analyse gendered safety at UK music festivals. Along with studying the occurrence and nature of crime, they also examine perceptions, concerns, and experiences of different types of gendered harassment and violence at UK music festivals. Most of these chapters are examined from consumers’ perspectives, and Jones flips this by researching producers’ perspectives with an analysis of workplace gender-based violence at UK music festivals. It is important to understand that it is not just audiences who are affected by gendered violence at festivals; the experiences of festival employees are often neglected and require further attention and intervention to create safer and more respectful working environments for festival staff by untangling the gendered power dynamics of music festival organisational structures. Additionally, the experiences of performers is not an issue covered in depth in this book, but it should in no way be discounted, and further research from performers’ perspectives would be very welcome and necessary for providing more evidence, experiences, lessons learned, and best practices to shape our understanding of gendered violence at festivals and, thus, provide better practical solutions.

Next, Grabher explores the micro, meso, and macro infrastructural inequalities of a women’s festival as part of a wider City of Culture series of events in Hull, UK. With attention to

structural discrimination in so-called equality-themed events, she probes the fragility of the notion of equality. Vegh Weis & Montenegro, then, interrogate the social, economic, and cultural contexts of festivals in Argentina through the actions of feminist activists, who are drawing attention to the sexual violence and blatant sexism of the festival scenes there. Such resistance is not only catalysing changes in Argentine festival landscapes, but also calling into question societally-accepted notions of inequitable gendered behaviour and attitudes.

The book concludes with a case study example of a heritage sporting festival, demonstrating that it is not just cultural and music festivals where gendered violence is an issue; rather, it is an issue in all kinds of festivals when they are reflections of societal values and biases. Felt & Bakardjieva base their research at the Calgary Stampede in Canada, where they found that an often-uncritical view of a celebration of Western heritage has led to a culture normalising sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence during the festivities. A grassroots social movement has responded to this in an effort to raise awareness and make the festival safer. The chapter explores how grassroots civic mobilisations can influence festival culture and practices pertaining to gender politics and put gender-based violence on the agenda for the festival's organisers.

Future Directions for Research and Practice

As is evident throughout this volume, there is momentum building by feminist activist movements to take action against symbolic and physical violence in festival spaces throughout the world. Internationally, harassment and sexual attacks are no longer becoming considered something women “just have to put up with” and “a risk they have to take” to enjoy celebratory spaces. It is not acceptable, and although more encompassing change to eradicate structural inequalities in global cultures will be slower to happen, it is within our power to change how gendered interactions occur at festivals. Festivals are not naturally misogynistic entities. And although they are mainly currently *reflections* of society, festivals do have the potential to be constructed as *responses* to society to make statements about social needs and social anxieties (Warren, 1993). As Finkel & Dashper (2020) argue, “Events can provide forums to advance alternative social arrangements and to work as a force for society's transformation.” Although they cannot be a panacea for societal woes, festivals can take some steps in progressing positive social change. Therefore, what we can conclude from the chapters in this book, which represent a snapshot of what is happening again and again in festival after festival, is more must be done by events managers, local authorities and police, community groups, and socio-cultural institutions to change the physical and cultural infrastructure enabling gendered violence in experiential landscapes. There can no longer be a prioritisation of the economic over the social when making decisions about festival design, programming, location, security, alcohol provision, and so forth without consideration of the implications for gendered violence. Festivals must be co-created with approaches which take into account dominant power frameworks — until the unjust hierarchies of mainstream society are dismantled. Audiences, workers, performers, all stakeholders involved in festival industries have to be afforded the same opportunities to enjoy safe, nonviolent, and, then, quite possibly, transformative festival experiences.

Therefore, much more research into gender interactions in festival spaces is needed, including, as mentioned above, trans and non-binary experiences as well as diverse viewpoints from various festival stakeholders. Joined up thinking among interdisciplinary researchers, including shared approaches and cross-subject collaborations, have the potential to provide multi-perspective narratives, which are helpful in developing in-depth critical analyses of the complex dynamics in festival settings. As Finkel & Dashper (2020) argue, “Critical event research has the potential to inform current theoretical developments and wider sector practices, and, ultimately, change the dominant heteronormative patriarchal

paradigm of the experiential landscape.” We hope that this book instigates wider academic, policy, management, and organisational debates about these issues in this context.

What we have assembled here are narratives of dis/empowerment with a view to enacting positive social change. We consider this to be a dawning of evolving conversation among scholars and practitioners, where festivals are not continuously framed in unrealistic, outmoded, patriarchal conceptualisations of *communitas*, and decisions can be made to construct these celebratory spaces in ways that acknowledge and amend existing gender inequalities. As Audre Lorde (1984) so aptly said, “And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.”

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