

Studying Diversity in the Music Industry

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Abstract

This paper reviews recent research initiatives that have been undertaken in the music industry to study issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and the organizations that sponsored the studies. It examines which genres are studied most, and identifies additional genres worthy of study. Further, it suggests potential areas of future study that can incorporate participation from students at colleges and universities.

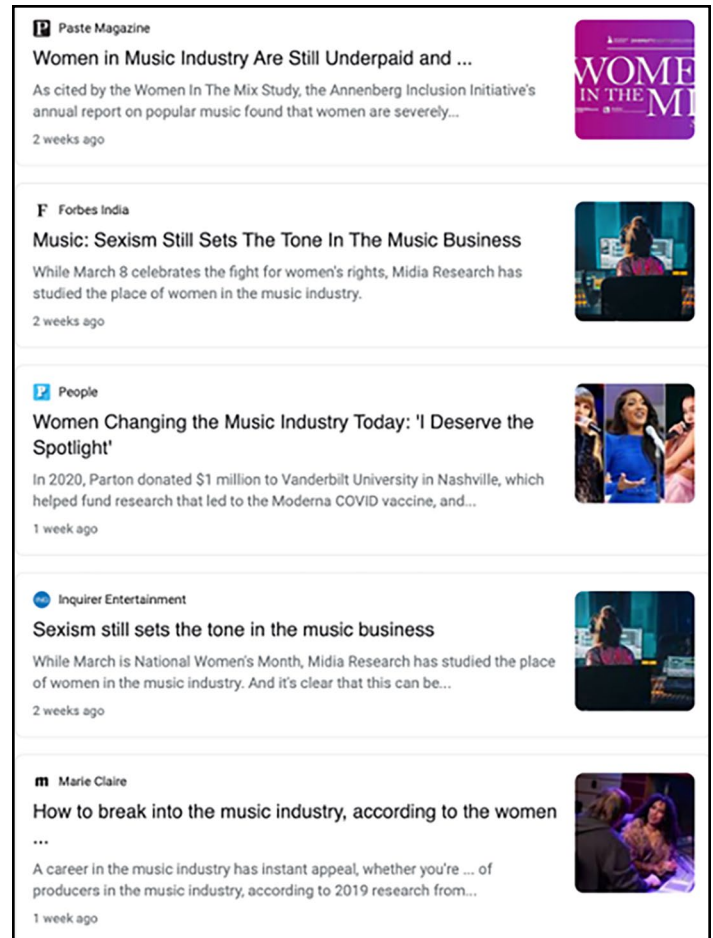
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Introduction

In recent years, many efforts have been made to study the state of diversity and cultural equity in the music industry. When a new study comes out, a press release is issued and a litany of music industry publications print similar articles based on it, announcing the latest statistic culled as the most significant takeaway from each study, usually lamenting a lack of progress in music industry reform. That statistic finds its way into conference panels, programming, conversations—and hopefully into changes made in the music industry. While many initiatives are underway separately, it is necessary to look at all of the research together to gain context on progress made and yet to be made.

Most publicized initiatives to date have been structured, descriptive studies that measure representation of various aspects of identity within different genres, constituencies, organizations, roles, and fields. The primary intention of these studies is to gather information about where the industry stands at the time of each study, to assess the field in order to set benchmarks industry professionals can strive to transcend through focused efforts on progress toward greater inclusion in the music industry.

In some cases, statistics unknown before have become



known. Myths have been debunked or reinforced. New knowledge has sparked initiatives to be launched, companies to reflect, corporations to advocate, and new organizations to launch—with hopes that positive incremental results will be seen in subsequent studies. Increasingly, studies have been followed up annually or have been launched to cover similar time periods using kindred methodologies to their predecessors, enabling researchers to compare their findings with others, at least directionally.

Some studies deduce theories about why the results might be what they are, and how the industry functions in ways that make them so. Some recommend changes to improve diversity and representation in the industry. Even with all the studies spotlighting needs for change, the industry

continues to wrestle with “what to do” and “are we doing enough” questions, until more is learned that paves the way forward.

Thankfully, dedicated professionals continue the work of studying the industry—and more stakeholders are drawn to participate in the work each day. While there is more awareness about diversity-related research in the music industry, and research is happening in more areas of the industry, if we are to truly learn from what these studies tell us over time, it is important to acknowledge that diversity research in the music industry is not new. It has been conducted for decades from vantage points across many academic and practical fields. It has evolved and expanded—in scope, depth, areas of focus, who is performing the research, style, and methodologies.

There has been a diversity of opinion about the definition of diversity itself, how to identify it, how to measure it, and what it means to audiences, artists, and the industry. There have been waves of research across decades and generations that reflected the cultural values and music industry realities that were common when the studies were conducted, and time periods the research covered.

Notable time frames when significant research was conducted (i.e., several researchers or organizations published reports and articles studying diversity in the music industry on related themes) were:

- 1976-1978: researchers focused on the *variety of music* reaching mainstream audiences, primarily reflecting pop music trends in the music industry from the 1940s-70s. While these studies were not about “diversity” as we define it today, this work proposed frameworks for reflection on how industry systems affect what music reaches consumers.
- 1991-1996: researchers re-examined the work of researchers from the 70-80s, primarily focusing on A&R operating practices of major labels and the role independent labels (or sub-labels owned by majors) were playing in the rise of new genres reaching mainstream audiences.
- 2008-2012: researchers focused extensively on gender presentation and gender representation as well as globalization of access to music through digital platform adoption.
- 2018 to date: while previous studies were primarily conducted by academics and journalists, recent research has been driven more by music business sector trade organizations, nonprofits, or industry organizations partnering with academics, based on a shared perception of a “diversity crisis.” Some studies have been prompted by specific events or through strategic initiatives on the part of many organiza-

tions, discussed in this paper. For example, prior to the event of George Floyd being killed by police in 2020, most research focused on gender disparity. After George Floyd’s passing and increased cultural reckoning around systemic racism, more studies have included race and ethnicity. Nonbinary gender identities and disability are still emerging topics in research being conducted today.

There is one exception to that timeline worth noting. An academic named Alan Wells published on many of these issues throughout his career—much earlier than the rest of the industry. While there are some reasons for pause in some of his findings, it is interesting to observe the timing of the topics he has covered. That in and of itself is probably a whole other presentation!

While most research regarding diversity in the music industry was historically focused on analysis of sales and radio airplay charts, contemporary research uses those data sources in addition to incorporating surveys, focus groups, interviews, community town hall perspective gathering events, and other information collected by music organization task forces and committees with inside industry access and knowledge.

Contemporary studies are designed to foster industry dialogue and stimulate ideas. As stated in a 2021 report by Spanish researchers Lorenzo Porcaro, Emilia Gómez and Carlos Castillo:

What generally is shared among academic communities, but also public and private institutions, is the importance of fostering diversity as a tool to enhance creativity but also productivity [69], to promote pluralism and equality [70], to make people aware of different viewpoints and facilitate the public debate [36].¹

Studies in recent years have increasingly focused not just on representation of diversity—but go further to measure indicators of inclusion, retention, advancement, promotion and actual equity.

What This Paper Is and Isn’t

This paper was written for the May 2022 MEIEA conference of music business professors²—a gathering of educators who have spent the last two years innovating ways to teach about the music industry during a global pandemic. It is intended for a reader who has a desire to know about research that has been done on this topic, but has been unable to keep up with conversations and initiatives underway with everything going on in the world and in their classroom.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the studies conducted within the last five years, and to consider the

mission-driven organizations committed to studying diversity in the music industry today. It is also the author's intention, by summarizing several studies in one paper, to draw attention to those studies and encourage colleagues in music industry higher education to respond if they detect that this paper is missing important studies, facts, points made, or if they would like to share opinions in response. One always hopes that in writing there will be dialogue, and in dialogue there will be learning that leads to improved ideas.

Some have been studying diversity in our industry for decades, and some are passionate newcomers to that research. It is not the author's intention to provide an exhaustive literature review of all studies on the subject, nor is it their intention to provide a thorough analysis of all major discoveries and points made in each study. While that would be a worthy endeavor, this paper is meant for music industry professionals, and academics who are educating present and future music industry practitioners, more than it is intended for researchers. (This is written with due respect and admiration to researchers, and with a promise of more writing to come on these topics that will be written with that audience in mind.) The author does not suggest that they are an authority on this subject—but rather that all of the humans who have dedicated hours, nights, and weekends to their studies are important voices to be listened to and shared with students seeking careers in music.

Finally, it is also important to remember that this paper focuses on organizations conducting research or those instrumental in the cultivation of research happening. It does not cover all research, and it does not at all scratch the surface of the vast number of incredible organizations and individuals advocating for change in the music industry every day. In some places in this paper, non-research organizations are mentioned to provide context for when research happened, how it happened, and how it might have led to more research being conducted. The author genuinely hopes no organization or individual will feel left out of this paper, but if one does, said author asks for understanding from the reader and invites dialogue, updates, edit requests, and suggestions with openness and humility.

Key Takeaways About Research: What is Different Now



1) The way the word “diversity” is used in the music industry has changed

That change is relatively recent and evolving. In some cases, we still experience ambiguity around what a person

means when they say the word “diversity.” We know they mean a lot of people or things that are different from each other, but it is often used as a code word. Studying music industry diversity thirty years ago was very different than it is today. While one might say that is a sign of progress, from a research perspective it is challenging. It means we are still in the benchmark setting stage with respect to measuring representation of women and non-binary gendered folks, LGBT+ folks, people of color, and living with disabilities. We are still documenting and establishing the state of our “diversity crisis” in the music industry, which is the first stage of research.

2) Academia’s relationship with the music industry has changed

This is a very good thing for music industry diversity research! At one time, research was conducted from afar, without participation of music industry professionals. In fact, in some cases industry had disdain for research that was done. Now, quite often research is coming *from* the industry, with academics invited to participate to provide an added layer of rigor/objectivity. This is partially happening because a lot more educators are active participants in the industry now, and have professional connections. While not true of all institutions, it is true in many places that academia has been more accepting of industry practitioners in the classroom—with current knowledge being a valuable asset. It is also happening because the industry has been made more transparent through invention of the internet. Mass adoption of social media and networking sites have made it easier to identify and contact leaders at all levels of organizations in the industry. In short, just as artists have become more directly accessible to fans, industry has become more directly accessible to researchers!

3) There is real momentum for change, across the industry, on a global scale

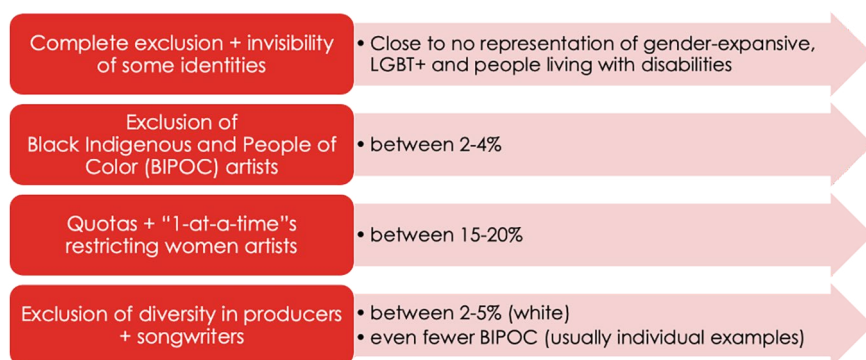
Research studies are not just coming from the United States. They are coming from Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Portugal, South Africa, Japan, and beyond. We’re seeing research start to be undertaken beyond the top of the industry pop charts on *Billboard*. While my paper speaks most about the research that has been done in country and electronic music, it is expected we will see more studies of other genres that will lead to deeper understanding of the music industry as a whole. In full disclosure, this summer I will share results of research I have been conducting about Americana music.

- *Benchmarks are being set.* More studies are being repeated or share methodology with others to compare results and detect progress (or lack thereof).
- *Stories are being told.* More studies are including qualitative data—stories and experiences from

directly inside the industry to explore what can be done to change systems of hierarchy and exclusion in place.

Highlights Across Studies

While it is impossible to compare studies directly given their differing methodologies, sources, and time periods, it is possible to characterize what has been learned across all of the studies at a high level based on the findings that are most consistent across all of them. Overall, all studies have continued to observe a consistent trend of exclusion with hopes new efforts will make a difference. There is complete exclusion of some identities. For example, studies are only starting to measure gender-expansive identities, and there is little representation of out LGBT+ artists and visibility of people living with disabilities. Across all studies, representation of people who are black, indigenous, and of color (representing other non-white races and ethnicities) ranged from 2-4% depending on the area of industry. Across all studies, representation of women (primarily white) seemed to be affected by spoken and unspoken quotas. Tokenism and the phrase “We have one already” came up again and again as a problem observed in studies—the notion that including one woman or person of color was inclusion enough. Naturally with that mentality prevailing in the industry, most studies found a range of 15-20% representation of women. Multiple studies looked specifically at the producer and songwriter roles, and identified between 2-5% representation—and even lower representation of BIPOC and other forms of diversity. Even though programs have been in effect for a few years to try to change this, the statistic continues to haunt the music industry. Corporations, small businesses, organizations, and sole proprietors must do more—and professors must do anything in their power to encourage and promote students who represent diversity who are aiming to pursue these careers.



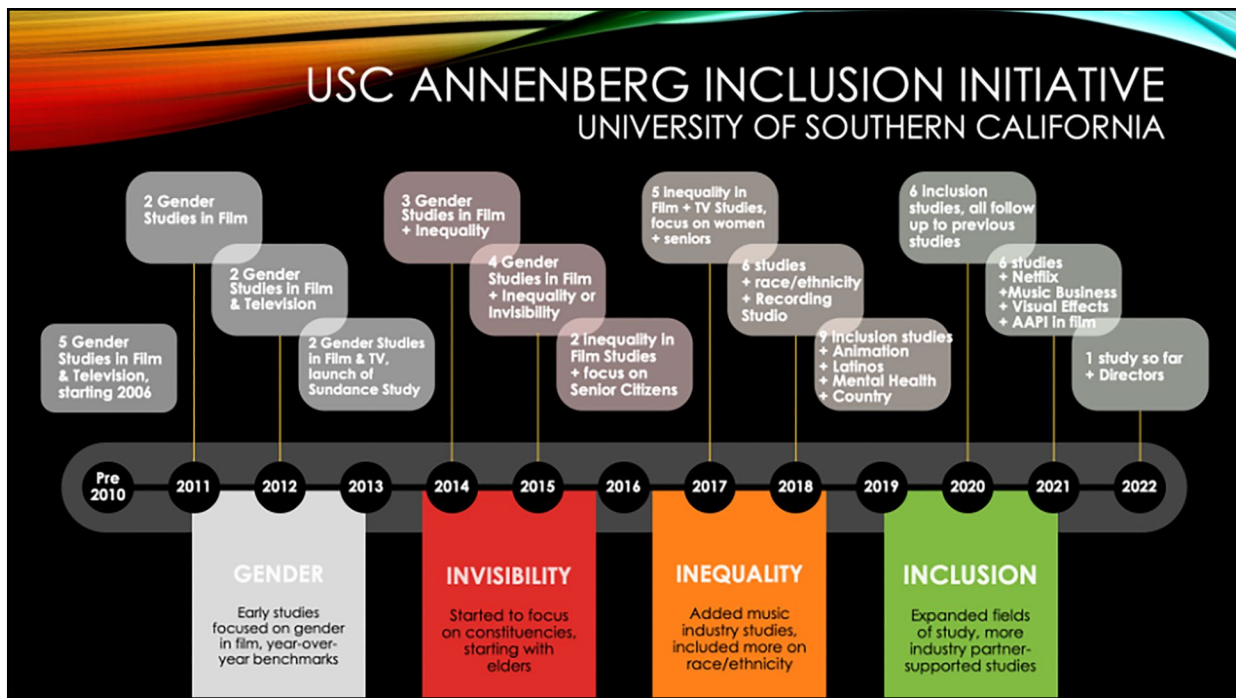
Some Organizations and People to Know About (In No particular Order)

USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

While the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California was founded in 1971, The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative at USC was founded by Dr. Stacy L Smith in Los Angeles in 2005.³ As her bio puts it, “She has authored more than 100 book chapters, articles and reports, along with 40 studies at AII on various aspects of entertainment, including annual studies examining inclusion in top-grossing films and popular music. In addition to being a prolific writer, Smith speaks routinely on issues of inequality in the media. Her TED Talk has been viewed more than 1.1 million times, and she has spoken at the United Nations, the White House, Sundance Film Festival, and the Toronto Film Festival. She has also testified before the U.S. Congress on inequality in the entertainment industry.”⁴

Annenberg’s most recent music report published in June 2021 “Inclusion in the Music Business: Gender & Race/Ethnicity Across Executives, Artists & Talent Teams” studies gender and race/ethnicity diversity among executives in the music industry. Just prior to that in March 2021, they released “Inclusion in the Recording Studio?” with funding from Spotify. These are not Annenberg’s first studies of the subject by any means. In fact, the recent release of “Inclusion in the Recording Studio?” is their fourth annual examination of the topic since they first broached it in January 2018. They have also released reports on Film, Animation, and other fields related to entertainment. While most reports center on the issue of gender representation, more recent reports also focus on race/ethnicity, LGBT, age, and people living with disability. A full list of studies from Annenberg can be found on their website.⁵ (See the References section for links to all studies mentioned in this paper.)

Given Annenberg’s long history recording statistics pertaining to diversity and representation in the music industry, and that in essence little progress has been recorded year over year, it is no surprise that their most recent studies incorporate observations and recommendations about measures they think will make a difference. One can only hope, if music industry organizations heed their recommendations, their future study results will exhibit more measurable progress.



Highlights From AAI's 2021 Reports

“Inclusion in the Recording Studio? Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters & Producers across 900 Popular Songs from 2012-2020”

by Stacy L. Smith, Katherine Pieper, Marc Choueiti, Karla Hernandez, and Kevin Yao, March 2021

Purpose: “To assess gender and race/ethnicity of artists, songwriters, and producers across the 900 most popular songs from 2012 to 2020” and across GRAMMY nominations 2013 to 2021.”

Findings: The study found that women are underrepresented across three roles focused on in the study: artists (21.6%), songwriters (12.6%), and producers (2.6%). Over time, representation of women has been consistently low, never greater than 28.1%, in 2016.

- *Artists:* In 2020, women were only 20.2% of artists represented—that is lower than six of the nine years studied, including the first five years at the beginning of the study (2012-2016). Women were most represented in pop music (32%) and least represented in hip-hop/rap (12.3%). Few women were in bands or duos, most were individual artists. On the other hand, representation of artists of color is on the rise. “46.7% of artists were people of color across 900 songs from 2012-2020.” It is interesting that “most underrepresented artists were solo performers (60.9%), with fewer in duos (29.4%) or bands (20.9%).” Perhaps there is a correlation to be studied

there, given that trend was observed in both women artists and artists of color.

- *Songwriters:* Exclusion of women songwriters has increased. 2020 was the worst year for women songwriters, with 65% of songs studied not having any featured women songwriters. “87.9% of the songs on the Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Charts in the last 9 years were either devoid of women songwriters or included just one woman.” Women songwriters appeared most often in dance/electronic (20.5%) or pop (18.7%) music, and were least represented in hip-hop/rap (6.3%), R&B (9.1%), country (10.6%), or alternative (11.1%) music.
- *Producers:* The most shared result of the study is that women make up 2% of producers in 2020, which is lower than observed in the overall sample (2.6%). The study showed no progress for women in production, and in fact showed the number of women declined in 2020 from 2019. Further, the study observed none of the women represented in the Billboard Hot 100 Year End Chart were there as a result of the Women in the Mix pledge. The researchers acknowledged that doesn’t mean pledgers did not work with women, but it does mean they did not work on their most popular songs with women. “The only woman of color credited as a producer in 2020 appeared on the charts as a result of a seasonal hit first released in 1994.”
- *GRAMMYS:* Between 2013 and 2021, only 13.4% of individuals nominated for a Grammy® Award were women, but recent progress has been steep. In

2021, women reached a high with 28.1% of nominations. “Women were most likely to be nominated for the Best New Artist award, followed by Song of the Year.” They are less likely to be nominated for Record of the Year or Album of the Year. Only one woman was nominated for Producer of the Year during the time frame of the study. (Note: When Linda Perry was nominated for Producer of the Year in 2019, it was the first time a woman had been nominated in fifteen years, since Lauren Christy of The Matrix production team was nominated.⁶) The study dipped into addressing intersectionality, observing that 61.5% of women nominated over the time period were white. “In all but one category, women of color were less likely than their white counterparts to be nominated for a Grammy® Award.”

Recommendations

The study’s concluding statement calls upon the music industry to “examine how its decision-making, practices, and beliefs perpetuate the underrepresentation of women artists, songwriters, and producers.” It makes the following points and recommendations:

- Women of color must be supported beyond the role of artist—that women of color must be included throughout industry roles.
- Improvement in GRAMMY nomination rates indicate the Recording Academy’s focus and steps taken appear to be making an impact for women, but more work needs to be done.
- “For artists starting work on new music, consider working with women in songwriting and producing roles.”
- The study identifies a few initiatives that should be supported: She Is The Music, Spotify’s EQL Residency, and Women’s Audio Mission

In the limitations section of the study, it is also noted that looking at genres other than the most popular ones from a mass audience perspective might reveal different results. While this study’s intention to research mass audience genres and categories is clear, studying all genres of music may lead to more insights about how inclusion can be fostered and achieved at the highest selling genres of music, too.

“Inclusion in the Music Business: Gender & Race/Ethnicity Across Executives, Artists & Talent Teams” by Stacy L. Smith, Carmen Lee, Marc Choueti, Katherine Pieper, Zoe Moore, Dana Dinh, and Artur Tofan, June 2021

Purpose: “To map the diversity of the U.S. music business across different positions of power.”

Findings: Overall, the study documented that “a lack of inclusion in the music industry is not the problem of one company or one sector.” The research suggests the diversity crisis in the music industry is system-wide and involves all of the industry. “Creating a more inclusive industry requires the insight, input, and effort of all.”

- At the CEO/President level, 86.1% of top executives were men, and 86.1% were white.
- At the nine major music companies, 100% of the top executives were white, only one was female.
- When they looked at executive boards by company type:
 - Music groups had “greatest share of underrepresented (26.3%) and Black executives (23.7%) on their executive boards.”
 - Radio and streaming companies were in the middle (underrepresented=17%, Black=2.1%, women=23.4%).
 - Live concert industry companies had the “lowest percentage of underrepresented executives (12.5%) and no Black executives, but the highest percentage of women in leadership roles (40.6%).”

Recommendations

AAI identified the necessity that music companies get beyond performatism. They suggest that recruitment without corporate culture change may only attract employees who represent diversity but they will be set up for failure. They pointed out the impossible challenge diversity candidates have, especially if they do not exhibit behaviors that are consistent with the prevailing dominant white, male culture. Example: “Managers...may discount the skills and talents of women because their behaviors do not align with historically masculine attributes.” Further, AAI considers other research conducted that suggests environments that are “high in social dominance orientation” are likely to hire in ways that perpetuate the status quo. This bears further unpacking.

The following bullets are recommendations quoted directly from the study report:

- Adopt objective and measurable criteria for evaluations
- Provide flexible pathways to leadership roles
- Fast track executives and use cluster hiring
- Reduce environmental cues that trigger stereotype threat
- Identify sector-specific strategies for unique challenges
- Ensure the pipeline of diverse representatives reaches talent

Annenberg Recommendation Highlights



Both AAI studies offered recommendations for the music industry calling upon the music industry to “examine how its decision-making, practices, and beliefs perpetuate under-representation” that music companies need to get beyond performatism. They suggest recruitment without corporate culture change may attract employees who represent diversity, but they will be set up for failure. They pointed out the impossible challenge diversity candidates and employees have, especially if they do not exhibit behaviors that are consistent with the prevailing white, male, dominant-focused culture.

Among limitations of their study, they noted that looking at genres other than the most popular from a mass audience perspective might reveal different results. They suggested perhaps the GRAMMYs showed improvement because that data included categories beyond mainstream music genres. It leads one to naturally question if studying mainstream music and mainstream genres represents a majority experience in the music industry overall.

Berklee College of Music and Women In Music

Berklee’s Institute for Creative Entrepreneurship has been involved in multiple studies over the past five years, in partnership with other organizations. In March 2019, Berklee and Women in Music jointly released “Women in the U.S. Music Industry: Obstacles and Opportunities,” which they described as “the first study in the U.S. exploring the socio-economic landscape of women in the American music industry.” They acknowledge their study was designed to build upon existing work done by Women In Music Canada in 2015, which used a survey to gather information about “demographics, employment, career challenges, and job satisfaction among women.” This survey was answered by approximately 2,000 U.S. women across the music industry.⁷

Highlights from “**Women in the U.S. Music Industry: Obstacles and Opportunities**” by Becky Prior, Erin Barra, and Sharon Kramer, March 2019

Purpose: “To examine the socioeconomic landscape of women working in the music industry across the United States.”

Findings: The report summarized three primary truths as follows (the following three bullets are direct quotes from the study report):

- Women experience a number of challenges in the workplace.
- Still, a majority of women report satisfaction with their work.
- Women shared strategies to overcome barriers and improve inclusion in the music industry.

In the first category, *challenges*, women cited issues pertaining to gender bias, racism, unfair compensation, work/life balance, and restrained career advancement.

- 84% reported being treated differently based on their gender.
 - The occupations that cited this most were Artist Development and Management, Music Media and Journalism, Music Production and Recording, and Performance.
- 68% said gender “affected their employment”—the occupations that cited this most were Music Production and Recording, Performance, and Music Media and Journalism.
- “Women of color were more likely to feel they should be further ahead in their careers” and “they were less likely to be satisfied with their primary occupation.”
- “Women of color were more likely to be in entry-level positions, while white women were more

likely to be in senior positions.”

- Over half work more than one job; 25% hold three or more jobs.
- Self-employed/freelancers reported different treatment and that gender affected their employment more than other employment types (note: 24% of those surveyed were self-employed).
- Women from higher income ranges were more likely to have children.
- 61% of women said their careers were a factor in their decision to have children.

In the second category, *satisfaction*, 72% of women said they were extremely or somewhat satisfied by their primary job. 77% of women felt comfortable in their work environment. 64% felt supported at work.

- Income does play a role in satisfaction—65% of women in lower income levels expressed satisfaction compared with 86% in higher income levels.
- Comfort: Women over 50 years of age were more likely to feel comfortable in the workplace (83%) than women ages 18-24 (73%). White women were more likely to feel comfortable (79%) compared with women of color (72%).
- Support: Women, ages 18-24, were more likely to feel supported at work (71%); women in their 40s were least likely to feel supported (59%). White women were more likely to feel supported at work (66%); compared with women of color (58%).

Recommendations

Regarding strategies to *overcome barriers* and *improve*



inclusion, half of the respondents offered recommendations. Those recommendations included:

- intentional focus on improving diversity and inclusion
- mentorship (92% of those who had mentorship said it helped their careers)
- internships (79% of those who had internships said it helped them)
- networking (54% said opportunities helped them)

However only 61% of respondents said they had been mentored, and only 54% of women said they had a music-related internship.

The Recording Academy

The Recording Academy was quick to share results of both the Annenberg and Berklee studies in 2018 and 2019. In the fall of 2021, in an effort to build on the work of these predecessors even further, they collaborated with Arizona State University and Berklee to circulate a survey “to study the roles and realities of women and gender-expansive people working in the American music industry.”⁸ The survey expanded on 2015 research by Women in Music Canada and 2018-2019 research by Berklee College of Music and Women in Music Global (see above). It “explores demographic characteristics, employment experiences, career challenges, job satisfaction, and pathways into the music industry for women and people with marginalized gender identities.” Results of the new “Women in the Mix Study” were released in March 2022⁹ and first reported in *Billboard*.¹⁰

Highlights from “**Women in the Mix**” by Erin Barra-Jean, Mako Fitts Ward, Lisa M. Anderson, and Alaysia M. Brown, March 2022

Purpose: “To study the roles and realities of women and gender-expansive people working in the American music industry.”

Findings: The study found that women and gender-expansive people in the music industry are facing multiple challenges including overwork, underpay, multiple jobs, discrimination, lack of mentorship, nepotism, gatekeeper culture, sexism, restricted career advancement, family planning, burnout, and “the competing demands of creative vision and generating revenue.”

The findings of this study were very similar to the study done a few years earlier, indicating slight shifts but no major changes in the industry. There were some differences in response to the new study—respondents to the new survey were more diverse. While 77% of the earlier survey identified as white, 59% of responses to this new study identified as white. Response rate by Black professionals was 10% higher than in 2019. This in and of itself might be an indicator of meaningful change.

The study acknowledges major changes in the world since the previous study, stating:

The simultaneous shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the cultural impacts of the death of George Floyd and several other unarmed Black people at the hands of law enforcement, and the sustained work of grassroots campaigns and movements such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too have shifted attention towards the systemic issues our country faces with both race and gender. In 2022,

we are living in a world and industry that is not the same as the one we last surveyed in 2018. In this iteration of the study, we added questions about work during the pandemic and worked to ensure more participation by women of color and gender-expansive people.”

This study is one of the first to acknowledge “gender expansive” identities including non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid, and agender people (3% of respondents).

- *Overworked, Underpaid:* 91% said music industry was their primary job, 57% have two or more jobs, 28% are working over fifty hours/week, 36% are making less than \$40,000/year. Respondents who own companies and are employees of companies reported higher earnings levels than self-employed/freelancers and those with multiple employment types.
- *Discrimination:* 77% felt they were treated differently because of their gender, 47% felt they should be further in their careers, 56% said gender had affected their employment in the industry—the occupations the citing this most were Music Creators and Performers (note: both of these statistics are slightly lower than the 84% and 68% in the previous Berklee/Women in Music study).
- *Satisfaction:* 78% felt satisfied with their jobs overall—those in Event and Tour Production and Management and Promotion were least likely to be satisfied (65%).

This study had similar findings to the previous study regarding comfort and support and solutions recommended by those surveyed.

- *Work/Life Balance:* Over 81% of women surveyed in the music industry said they did not have children. In comparison, according to the most recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on this metric in 2019, 44.8% of women aged 15-49 had never had a child (a percentage that is slightly increasing each time it is studied).¹¹ Women at all levels expressed emphatically that their career had an effect on the decision whether to have children.
- *Support:* The report identified “a level of skepticism among respondents when it comes to the effectiveness of programs across the industry that intend to uplift historically marginalized communities” given that 48% said programs/group initiatives in their workplace had no effect (12% said they had negative

impact and 15% were unsure).

- *Mentorship:* “Despite 93% of respondents reporting that mentoring has contributed to their career, only 67% of them have had a mentor.”

Recommendations

The study sets up a framework that action items should seek to address the following categories in order to effectively make change:

- Access to resources
- Access to opportunities
- Access to mentors
- Networking access and acumen
- Work/Life balance
- Intentional diversity and hiring efforts

The study’s recommendations strive to achieve more than one of each of the categories:

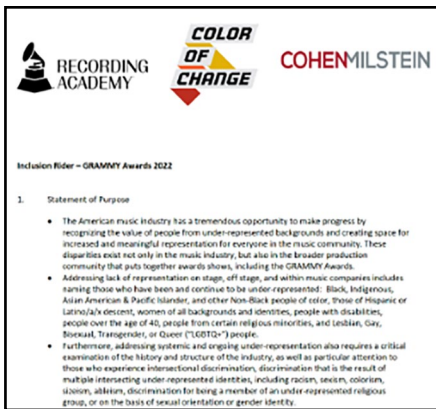
- More grant support
- More paid internships
- Recruitment pledges to get employers to commit to intentional diversity
- Mentorship initiatives
- Paid days off
- Support advocacy groups

The researchers did not suggest ways to measure effectiveness of the initiatives.

Strive for more...	By creating...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to resources • Access to opportunities • Access to mentors • Networking access and acumen • Work/Life balance • Intentional diversity and hiring efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More grant support • More paid internships • Recruitment pledges to get employers to commit to intentional diversity • Mentorship initiatives • Paid days off • Support for advocacy groups

While “Women in the Mix” is the Recording Academy’s most recent research, it is not the only work they have done regarding diversity. The Recording Academy also worked in partnership with Color of Change as part of a the #Change-Music Initiative, and Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll to study and then draft an Inclusion Rider for the 2022 GRAMMY Awards.¹²

The eight-page inclusion rider has nine main sections. It outlines the reasons the rider is necessary and speaks to dynamics of systemic prejudice that leads to underrepresentation in all facets of the music industry, and attests to the Recording Academy’s intentions to use the rider for all broadcasts. It introduces a notion that “On-Stage Positions” and “Off-Stage Positions” alike are equally in need of more diversity. And within on-stage positions pays particular attention to not just performers and hosts, but also announcers.



Highlights of the “GRAMMY Inclusion Rider” include:

Purpose: “Addressing lack of representation on stage, off stage, and within music companies.”

Findings and Recommendations: The eight-page inclusion rider has nine main sections:

1. *Statement of Purpose:* Outlines the reasons the rider is necessary and speaks to dynamics of systemic prejudice that leads to underrepresentation in all facets of the music industry, and attests to the Recording Academy’s intention to use the rider for all broadcasts.
2. *Definitions:* Clarifies terms including “underrepresented group(s).”
3. *Recruitment, Audition & Interview Objectives:* Explains process for Evaluation, Benchmarks, Recruiting Plan, On-Stage Positions (including Host, Presenters, Performers, and those in Background and Supporting Roles), Off-Stage Positions (including Development and Production, Design & Direction, Photography/Cinematography, Sound, Direction, Costumes, Stylists, Hair, Makeup), Accommodations, Gender-Neutral Facilities, Land Acknowledgment.
4. *Hiring Objectives:* Explains process for hiring, including a “No Quotas” clarification stating “Efforts to cast and hire qualified candidates from underrepresented backgrounds into On-Stage and Off-Stage Positions do not reflect quotas, but conscious efforts to overcome historical bias in the industry to move toward more equitable representation, while ensuring that all individuals cast and hired are qualified for their positions.”
5. *Confidentiality in Collection, Maintenance, and Use of Data:* Makes a point of keeping data confidential and anonymous, clarifies who will have access, while protecting the right to use the data for “research regarding diversity and inclusion in music and production.”

6. *Data Collection & Reporting:* States the importance of gathering data and information as a means to create “a culture of progress and accountability for advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.” In subsections, it explains that those hired should self-identify information collected, that U.S. Census designations for race, ethnicity and gender will be used, and who will be responsible for delivering a report. The data will include the number of people who auditioned, interviewed, or were considered for On-Stage and Off-Stage positions.
7. *Accountability or Compliance:* Suggests the means to hold the Recording Academy accountable includes a third-party company hired to analyze data and information gathered. It sets penalties of donation if the Recording Academy fails to satisfy the terms, including a list of potential organizations that could receive donations.
8. *Dispute Resolution:* Clarifies that the terms in contracts will govern conflicts.
9. *Expiration:* States that the rider is initially focused on the 2022 Grammy broadcasts.

One might ask how—after so many years of lagging behind—has the Recording Academy all of the sudden been equipped to mobilize on these initiatives? Some brief background on the Recording Academy’s efforts might be helpful to know. In March 2018, a task force was established by the Recording Academy to “examine issues of diversity and inclusion within the Academy and broader music community” and it began its work that May.¹³ The Recording Academy task force’s December 2019 report documents their work, and in the process cites research they relied on including reports from McKinsey entitled “Why Diversity Matters” (Jan 2015) and “Delivering Through Diversity” (Jan 2018),¹⁴ research from SourceMedia pertaining to sexual harassment in the workplace,¹⁵ and many other sources of inspiration.

The team at the Recording Academy appears to be well versed in research done about diversity, equity, and inclusion inside and outside of the music industry. In all publications the Recording Academy circulates pertaining to DEI work and research, regardless of who their partners are in each publication, they consistently dedicated real estate in their writings to cite data, studies, articles, and substantiating evidence for the concepts and decisions they are making. In this way, they encourage readers to trust the results they are sharing, but also provide resources to educate oneself further about the topics. One interesting assignment for college students could be to read a Recording Academy report and then to source and read one of the studies the Recording Academy refers to within their study. In this way,

the Recording Academy is leading by example and providing breadcrumbs of sorts to encourage the industry to take an active role in their own education pertaining to diversity and social justice.

MIDiA Research

Looking more at the independent music scene, in 2021 MIDiA (a U.K.-based research and market intelligence firm that reports on trends in music industry sales and consumption publicly, while serving clients privately as well) teamed up with digital distributors Tunecore and Believe on a study called “BE THE CHANGE: Women Making Music.” It is worth noting that Tunecore and Believe are both owned by Believe, and they both serve primarily independent artist and independent record labels, so one would expect this study to focus more on indie music trends than major label trends. The study primarily analyzed results of a survey circulated in February 2021 distributed online through “a variety of music industry associations, networks, and influencers working directly on issues faced by women creators.” They also conducted in depth interviews.¹⁶

Highlights of “**BE THE CHANGE: Women Making Music**” by Hannah Kahlert, Kriss Thakrar, and Srishti Das, March 2022

Purpose: “We asked a global community of female creators about their goals, challenges, experiences and inspirations. We wanted to build on and add to the excellent work already being done to better understand the uphill journey they face.”

Findings:

- This study digs deeper into cultural power dynamics and problems that arise from unbalanced power in the music industry. It explores perspectives primarily women respondents have about the music industry climate. While two thirds of respondents expressed a value that “success means being respected and recognized in their scene,” the likelihood of satisfaction and a sense of success is made less likely by the climate in which women are creating.
- 93% of women believe they “have to put up with far more difficulties and challenges than men.”
- 90% of respondents agreed that “The business treats female artists differently.”
- 81% of respondents agreed “It is harder for female artists to get recognition than male artists” and “almost two thirds of female creators identified sexual harassment or objectification as a key challenge, making it by far the most widely-cited problem.”
- “The majority of female creators feel excluded from composition and production.”

- “Many female creators, when asked what they thought has changed in recent years, agreed that transparency and discourse have improved—but many also hold the view that real, material change remains harder to pin down. Phrases such as ‘tokenism’ and ‘lip service’ are commonly used to describe some of the current changes in the industry.”
- A lack of female role models for independent creators was one of the challenges cited.
- The study points to a vicious cycle, “a spiral of perceived difference leading to lack of recognition, leading to lack of opportunity—spinning like a stuck record...”
- Multiple times, in different contexts, the report shares views of respondents who brought up being tokenized, and put in positions of competing with other women for a scarcity of opportunities—when organizations performatively “trying” to include women were only willing to include one or two women.
- The study drew a correlation between ageism and the circumstances female artists and workers face during common child-rearing and parenting years in their lives, suggesting that women are still presumed to be primary child caregivers.

Recommendations

- The study recommends more flexible work schedule arrangements for parents of all genders.
- The study suggests that some of the remote and virtual working options that became prevalent during the pandemic are positive for increasing women’s participation in the industry. (Unfortunately, some of the other studies in this paper do not show that pandemic virtual collaboration opportunities had that impact on the representation of women in songwriting, recording and production, statistically.)

Genre Specific Initiatives

Among the genres that have had studies specifically of their fields, country and electronic music are prominent—and their studies unpack more of the dynamics expressed in the MIDiA study. Sometimes significant events spark an increase in research activity. It helps to see these studies in context with when and why they may have happened.

For example, in 2018 at the 90th Academy Awards, Frances McDormand asked women to stand up and accept her Oscar with her during her acceptance speech. For most Americans, and for many in the entertainment industries, her speech was the first time they heard the words “inclusion rider.” Frances McDormand’s speech happened one month after Neil Portnow’s sexist “Step Up” comment at the GRAMMYS, six months after the *New York Times* broke

the news about Harvey Weinstein’s sexual harassment and assault, and less than six months after Alyssa Milano popularized the #MeToo hashtag on Twitter (though that movement started in 2006). The Recording Academy’s attention to diversity, equity and inclusion was in many ways sparked by that difficult moment in GRAMMY history. It’s no surprise that an inclusion rider would be among the first actions they took to remedy, repair, and strive to do better. Of course, research and the inclusion rider were only two of the many actions the Recording Academy took to further inclusion.

In country music, the “shot heard ’round the world” came in the form of public remarks from a radio consultant that tipped off a series of efforts to improve diversity in the genre.

Beverly Keel and Change The Conversation

Change the Conversation¹⁷ is not a research organization specifically, but it is important to acknowledge its role in the field due to its influence and the unique way it represents a coalition of leaders from multiple organizations active in the pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the music industry. Not only has Change the Conversation commissioned their own research, it has also greatly influenced organizations that have conducted research, and given them a forum to share knowledge and further dialogue and plans. Change The Conversation has been instrumental by unearthing questions from the country music industry community for researchers to pursue.

Change The Conversation was founded by three Nashville music industry leaders on the heels of controversial conversations about gender equity in country music:

- Beverly Keel - respected country music journalist and then Chair of Middle Tennessee State University’s Recording Industry program (now Dean of MTSU’s College of Media and Entertainment)
- Leslie Fram - Senior Vice President, Music Strategy and Talent, CMT Country Music Television
- Tracy Gershon - then head of A&R for multiple record labels within Concord Music Group (now a music industry consultant and leader of Brandi Carlile’s publishing company One Riot Music)

To summarize the climate from which Change The Conversation emerged, industry dialogue was sparked via a series of articles, panels, and events that transpired in 2014 and 2015. While a lot of discussion in the music industry is generally based on hearsay and common knowledge, in this time frame country radio went on the record about some strongly held beliefs that made it possible to study and verify what was fact and what was fiction. It happened something like this:

- November 8, 2014: Beverly Keel wrote an article in *The Tennessean* newspaper on the subject of women in country music deserving more radio airplay.¹⁸ Around this time, Keel, Fram, and Gershon started planning Change The Conversation, but public meetings had not started yet.
- November 10, 2014: *Country Aircheck* (a country music industry weekly publication) published an editorial panning Keel’s article, saying she was making “wildly unsupported assertions” and “failing to contribute something meaningful on the subject.”¹⁹ Though perhaps the most important sentence in the full-page article was this: “To be sure, the relative imbalance of male and female voices on the radio and in country music is a real phenomenon and worthy of serious discussion.” Of this article, Keel has said, “While I received numerous emails of support, especially from women, *Country Radio Aircheck*, an industry publication, wrote a full-page editorial slamming me, saying that there wasn’t a problem but now I was creating one, and that my column wasn’t worthy of my Columbia Journalism School education. Rather than being upset, I was thrilled and wrote them a thank-you email for continuing the conversation on the subject.”²⁰
- January 2015: Keel, Fram, and Gershon invited women music industry executives and creators to Keel’s house for an informal meeting to discuss ideas and ways to address disparity in country music. At that first meeting, nearly thirty women outlined a mission for Change The Conversation and set the group’s initial goals.
- February 27, 2015: At a Country Radio Seminar (CRS) session entitled “Unlocking The Secrets to Successful Music Scheduling,” consultant Keith Hill compared radio to a salad with women as tomatoes and men as lettuce. He suggested to boost ratings, women should be played infrequently for added color but not substance, never back-to-back, and he claimed “women want to hear males.” While this pattern of scheduling and attitude toward women was regularly experienced by women, no one in radio had gone so blatantly on the record about it, and this event sparked open dialogue and debate across the country industry. This would come to be known as #TomatoGate and #SaladGate in the music industry community.

“If you want to make ratings in country radio, take females out,” said Hill. “If you play more than 15 percent female on [country] radio, your rating will go down.” (Keith Hill)

In follow-up interviews over the next two months, Hill continued to stand by his recommendations—further expanding on his rationale for advising radio stations to proactively limit the number of women artists played on country radio.

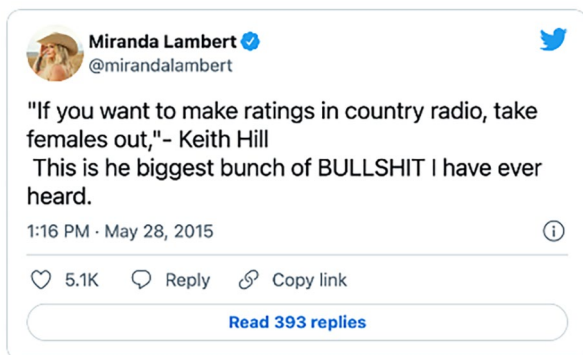
- March 2, 2015: The issue of *Country Aircheck* published after the Country Radio Seminar reported Hill's remarks factually as part of a recap of the conference's music scheduling session, but it did not point out the sexism and negative generalizations, or provide any alternative opinion on the subject.²¹
- April 2015: Change The Conversation held their second event at Black River Entertainment on Music Row. Featured speaker Dawn Delvo, from the Black River promotions team, talked about radio's role in breaking new artists.
- May 2015: *Country Aircheck* invited Keith Hill back to speak further on the subject in their May 26th issue.²² Beverly Keel conducted a follow-up interview with Hill, and reported on his perspective in a May 28th story in *The Tennessean*.²³ Another article by Keel entitled "Sexist 'tomato' barb launches food fight on Music Row" appeared in *USA Today* and *The Tennessean* on the same day.²⁴ A few days later, Change The Conversation's next meeting was held at Creative Artist Agency. Laura Hutfless gave a presentation comparing the rate of women being played on country radio (15%) with the number of endorsement deals for CAA's female country artists (50%)—proving that equity is possible. Artists including Sara Evans, Kacey Musgraves, Miranda Lambert, Jennifer Nettles, Martina McBride, and Vince Gill went on the record in media interviews and on social media to express objection to sexism in country music.²⁵

Women executive reactions were reported in *Country Aircheck's* June 1 issue—the tone of which, in retrospect, is fascinating to read. The coverage leads off by expressing



apparent surprise that Hill's remarks would be seen as offensive, punctuating the setup with the off-handed quip, "Go figure." In the same issue, the publication again checked in with Hill and published still more of his remarks.²⁶

- June 2015: At a June 30 event held at a Nashville restaurant and sponsored by City National Bank, two researchers presented studies analyzing the state of women in country music. Jay Frank, owner and CEO of DigMark, presented about women artists on country radio and a ten-year trend of decline in representation. He focused on Top 300 singles, and raised various topics for discussion, including the situation for female songwriters. New York-based political economist Devarati Ghosh presented research that dug deeper into the methodology of radio research and posed new questions about how assumptions enunciated in Hill's February remarks may have come to be accepted among radio stations as having merit. In her presentation, Ghosh identified that, "The problem isn't the number of solo women being introduced by country radio, but that their success rate has declined significantly. In fact, the number of women being introduced at country radio has remained consistent for twenty years."²⁷ Ghosh was a regular writer under the pen name Deb B on multiple blogs, websites, and Twitter, and was cited in *Entertainment Weekly*, *Pitchfork*, and *The Guardian*. Her research was reported in *Billboard*, *The Boot*, and other media.^{28 29}
- September 2015: Change The Conversation held an event at Ruby in Nashville sponsored by YouTube that featured Madeline Di Nonno, CEO of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, an organization at that time that had "amassed the largest body of research on gender prevalence in entertainment) and



Margaret Hart of YouTube. At the event, Di Nonno delivered the Institute's data pertaining to representation of women in film and television—not only the number of women and frequency with which they are hired, but also the nature of the roles they appear in, and how those roles change over the course of a woman's acting career.

Change the Conversation continued to hold meetings monthly with guest speakers to discuss, organize and change the plight of women in Country music.³⁰

Martina McBride held a gathering for female artists and their managers at her studio. Other speakers have included Ali Harnell, Lou Taylor, Ann Powers, Holly Gleason, Ann Crawford, Femke Weidema, Shani Ghandi, Alex Kline, Jewly Hight, Marissa Moss, Dorothy Carvello, Jeannie Sealy, and events took on multiple formats.

- September 2016: Devarati Ghosh died suddenly of a heart attack,³¹ a great loss to the community not only for her knowledge, but also for her commitment to data analysis in dialogue around change in the music industry. A graduate of Harvard and Stanford,³² her research knowledge and expertise was highly valued in the community. While groups continued to meet, it was a couple years before follow-up research was conducted that would further Ghosh's impeccable work.

Perhaps in part because the radio consultant claimed to be speaking from credible research he conducted, and in part because the immediate backlash to Keel raising the issue in *The Tennessean* was a call for substantiation, advocates for women in country music responded with data. In turn, that drew more players into the field of diversity research in country music specifically. From 2018-2020, several studies were published. Most analyzed country popularity charts and radio airplay reports as a means to understand representation within the industry, and to confirm or deny what the Keith Hill was saying. They posed questions including:

- Were women actually programmed at 15% or less?
- If so, how long had that been happening?
- How did that change materialize over time?
- What could be studied to further understand the trend observed by Ghosh and others?

Essentially, a series of researchers working separately were all trying to piece together a picture, grappling with what Hill had said about women in country radio. The following is a summary of some of that work.

Annenberg Country Charts Study

Turning their attention to country music for the first time in their research, Annenberg's "No Country for Female Artists: Artist & Songwriter Gender on Popular Country Charts from 2014 to 2018"³³ study looked at five hundred songs from the Year End Billboard Hot Country charts 2014 to 2018 including looking at artists and songwriters, and they reviewed ACM nominees in four categories. Annenberg used the same methodology applied in their other research to country music.

Purpose: "To provide a snapshot of how women are doing in country music as performers and songwriters." The study was sparked by a desire to confirm or deny a comment ACM host Reba McEntire made in a broadcast saying that representation of women was low but getting better.

Findings: Comparing results, they found that only 16% of artists in the chart were women. The average age of the top male solo artists was 42 years, while average age was 29 years for women. Only 15% of nominees for the top ACM categories were women. Only two women were nominated for Entertainer of the Year. Only 12% of songwriters nominated were women (two women).

Women were still underrepresented in the time period and the ratio of women in the chart did not appear to be getting better. Only 16% of artists were women. As can be expected, the top solo artists of both genders had multiple credits during the time period. However, top male artists had roughly twice as many credits than women—with 12 to 16 credits each, where top female artists had 6 to 9 each, and most top women only had 2 credits where men had at least 9. The researchers also observed a major age gap between the top men and women on the charts. Average age for men was 42—it was 29 for women, indicating a shorter career duration for female artists. None of the women in the top of the charts were over age 35. All but one of the men were over 40. Women were 15% of duos and 15% of bands across the time period. The number of women in bands did increase in the last year to 25% (up from 6% in 2017). 12% of songwriters were women across 200 songs. "Female artists were more likely to work with female songwriters than male songwriters." In the ACMs, only 15% of the nominees for Entertainer of the Year, Songwriter of the Year, Duo of the Year, and Group of the Year were women. Only two women were nominated for Entertainer of the Year in the time period—Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert. 12% of songwriters nominated were women. Only two women were nominated—Hillary Lindsey and Lori McKenna.

Recommendations

Annenberg recommended the following actions to the Country music industry:

- Labels assess their recruitment, signing, and promotion practices.
- Radio stations examine the perceptions of decision makers (programmers and management), study their playlists, and devise a plan to address biases.
- Artists, companies, and philanthropists support advocacy organizations working to improve access for women.
- Music platforms use their data to study what listeners want, and examine their playlists and algorithms so women are not “systematically disadvantaged.”
- Promoters, touring and live entertainment companies examine their role promoting female talent, and study their audiences to “dispel myths about who supports male and female country artists.”

Jada Watson and SongData

“The SongData Project explores the potential of using discographic and biographic data to learn more about how popular music genres form, develop, and evolve over time. We are developing approaches for using information about songs and artists to explore the connections between musicians and the broader socio-cultural and institutional frameworks that govern genres.”³⁴

Founder Jada Watson, of the University of Ottawa, began writing on topics of diversity with research pertaining to The Dixie Chicks in 2010 and studying diversity in country music radio charts following TomatoGate in 2015.³⁵ In addition to appearing in the journals *Popular Music* and *Popular Music and Society*, the most recent studies to come out of the SongData Project have been cited as a source in several mainstream music industry publication articles, and Watson has presented her research in various settings. While early research focused on gender in country music, recent reports expand to analyze representation on country format radio through an intersectional lens by evaluating gender and race/ethnicity. While SongData has coded data for LGBTQ+ and non-binary gender identities, few recordings from artists with those identities are detected in the data sets. In her most recent report, it stated “just one Black queer artist has had a song played on the format.”

SongData published a report that “advanced an intersectional framework to focus on radio programming in 2019, and demonstrated the cyclic relationship between radio programming, chart activity, streaming algorithms and nominations for CMA awards within the industry. This report leveraged data from both Mediabase and Billboard charts.” Every way SongData looked at it “women occupy signifi-

cantly less space than men in country music” and it has gotten worse in recent years. While the late 1990s were strong for women artists in country music, the overall trend has been a decline in visibility and commercial country radio success. 10% fewer women debuting and 27% fewer reaching #1. Whenever female artists have had a peak year, it has been followed by immediate drops of 20% or more.

SongData’s 2021 research expanded their study to look at race and ethnicity in country music, releasing a report entitled “Redlining in Country Music” in March of that year. The 2021 report paints a picture of minimal airplay for BIPOC artists—less than 4% in most recent years. Of the 2.5% of airplay BIPOC artists received in a 19-year period overall, 96% of that airplay was for men, suggesting “a racial hierarchy exists.” In 19 years, only 13 Black artists and 3 Black women appeared in the data set. When looking at spins by daypart, most airplay for BIPOC artists happened in evenings and overnights—which the researchers described as “redlining,” a reference to real estate practices that obstruct people of color from purchasing homes in neighborhoods dominated by white people.

In a period of three years, SongData, led by researcher Jada Watson, put out several reports—three in consultation with Woman of Music Action Network, one with CMT, and four independently—leveraging data from country format radio’s weekly and year-end reports as tracked by Mediabase. Highlights provided in this paper attempt to span all reports authored by Watson from 2018 to date, including reports released by SongData independently as well as those in partnership with multiple industry and advocacy organizations.

A brief chronology of those reports is as follows:

- October 2018/2019: “Gender on the Billboard Hot Country Songs Chart, 1996-2016”
- April 2019*: “Gender Representation on Country Format Radio: A Study of Published Reports from 2000-2018”
- August 2019*: “Gender Representation on *Billboard’s* Country Airplay Chart: A Study of Weekly Charts from January 2018 to July 2019”
- September 2019: “Gender Representation on Canadian Country Format Radio: A Study of Published Reports from 2005-2018”
- December 2019*: “Gender Representation on Country Format Radio: A Study of Spins Across Dayparts 2002-2018”
- Feb 2020^: “Inequality on Country Radio: 2019 in Review”
- March 2020: “Billboard’s ‘Hot Country Songs’ Chart and the Curation of Country Music Culture”
- March 2021: “Redlining in Country Music: Representation in the Country Music Industry 2000-2020”

* Report released in consultation with Women of Music Action Network.

^ Report released in partnership with CMT Equal Play.

Highlights of SongData's Studies

Findings: Every way SongData has looked at it, “women occupy significantly less space than men in country music” and it has gotten worse in recent years.

While the late 1990s were strong for women artists in country, the overall trend has been a decline in visibility and commercial country radio success—10% fewer women debuting and 27% fewer reaching #1 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs Chart. 71% of songs debuting from 1996 to 2016 were performed by males, with another 4% being from male-female ensembles. Reviewed over time, it was observed that every year female artists peaked (2005, 2008 and 2013) it was “followed by immediate drops of 20% or more.” Looking at the Top 10 of the chart, women artists decrease with only 20% of the songs and 22.5% of the artists. Reaching the #1 position on the chart has been less likely over time. 1998 was the only year when women had more #1 hits than men, and they came close in 1996 and 1999, but in 2000 there was a significant drop in women, from 2000 to 2012 men dominated the top position, and from 2013 onward there was yet another significant drop. Women all but disappeared from the #1 position from 2013-2016.

Women have dramatically decreased in spins, as reported in year-end Mediabase airplay reports, and are absent from the Top 10 in recent years. Top male artists had 3.3 million to 6 million spins, while the top female artists had 600,000 to 3.2 millions spins. Weekly reports show women consistently with approximately 25% airplay, and they are found decreasingly less in higher sections of the chart (24.5% of Top 100, 13.8% of Top 10, 11.1% of #1s). “Male artists are programmed more than women in every year of this study period by an average of 58.6%.” When they looked at day parts, women had a lower ratio of airplay during periods known to be the higher listening time frames (morning, mid-day and afternoon).

SongData's reports speak to the way women artists are “pitted against each other,” are “forced to compete” for adds and airplay, and are “reluctant to criticize the system for fear of backlash.” They document the impact of a 13-15% of a station playlist quota that appears to have been adopted at most country radio stations. They speak to the quota country radio programmers adopted as a “self-fulfilling prophecy” because lack of airplay leads to no hits, and then a perception that women have fewer hits leads to less airplay. The reports call for “a larger study of the genre's narrative space” to understand more of the unspoken rules

about their brand images, messages, and language used in songs. They also call for inquiry into decisions made by record labels and those who develop the strategies for “how songs and artists are marketed within the industry.”

SongData uniquely breaks out data for solo artists, duos, and groups, which has led to more understanding of the impact on chart performance of the way acts are coded for radio station quotas.

In 2021, SongData expanded their study to look at race and ethnicity in combination with gender identity and sexual orientation in country music. The reports paint a picture of minimal airplay for BIPOC artists, but tiny increases over three periods of time since 2000 (less than 4% in most recent years). Of the 2.5% of airplay BIPOC artists received in a 19-year period overall, 95.7% of that airplay was for BIPOC men, suggesting “a racial hierarchy exists.” Black women have not reached the Top 20 of the chart. In nineteen years, only 13 black artists and 3 black women appeared in the data set. When looking at spins by daypart, most airplay for BIPOC artists happened in evenings and overnights—which the researchers deemed “redlining,” a reference to real estate practices that obstruct people of color from purchasing homes in neighborhoods dominated by white people. The study further looked at representation on major labels, reporting less than 4% of rosters were BIPOC, similar to the rate of radio airplay. It also reported on nominations at major country music awards shows:

- ACM 2000-2019: 2.3% of artists and 2% of songwriters and producers were Black or biracial.
- CMA 2000-2020: 1.6% were Black solo artists, just two songwriters of color were nominated.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are direct quotes from SongData's December 2019 report that was written in consultation with Women of Music Action Network:

- *Radio:* Spin more women, more frequently.
- *Labels:* Sign and promote women with the same commitment, intensity, and resources as male artists.
- *Industry associations (CMA, ACM, CRS):* Set a standard for inclusion and representation throughout your mandate: update eligibility requirements for awards and honors to exclude ingrained bias and work with participating sponsors to develop diverse programming.
- *Promoters and Presenters:* Create and book diverse and inclusive tours, festivals, and experiences.
- *Management and Agencies:* Take the lead from Stacy L. Smith and her recommendations for the film industry: work with your artists to develop inclusion riders—demand diversity and inclusivity in the studio, on tour, and at festivals.³⁶

- *Male artists*: Play an active part in this discussion and with the inclusion rider! Demand that your female colleagues have equal opportunity on radio, tours, festivals, and more!
- *Audiences and Advocates*: Hold the above businesses accountable for their choices and offerings.
- *Businesses and Organizations* who promote their products and services via radio or who sponsor events can demand more diverse and inclusive programming.

Almost three years and several studies later, Watson today shares concerns about these recommendations: “While this list pointed to the parts of the country music industry that need reform, the recommendations are surface-level critiques of the industry, suggesting that simply adding more women will fix the problems. This ‘add and stir’ model fails to address the systemic issues that arise in an industry built on white supremacist and patriarchal values.”³⁷

With this comment, Watson not only models the ongoing self-assessment and reflection researchers must embrace as they learn more, but it also touches on a challenge that is present across all studies summarized in this paper. Each report venturing recommendations speak from both their findings and their own bias, given their identity and vantage point on the industry, the author of this paper included.

Note: For a solid grounding in early research about women in country music, there is a literature review of gender and country music culture in Jada Watson’s report published in *Popular Music and Society* in 2019. It also includes a brief history of country radio and a history of the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart and methodology, something absent from other studies reviewed here.

Leslie Fram and CMT

Country Music Television (CMT) has been a major player, facilitator, and megaphone for all of the research that happened in country music, and they invested in more of it. Prior to Tomatogate, CMT was already grappling with challenges women faced in country music. As early as 2013, with leadership from Senior Vice President Leslie Fram, CMT launched an initiative called CMT Next Women of Country, a program spotlighting female talent in country music each year.³⁸ Consistent with that work, in February 2020, CMT began a campaign called Equal Play—a program in which CMT pledged “Equal Play” to women in its music video programming blocks.³⁹ As part of that initiative, CMT launched a platform to promote research corresponding with the spirit of the pledge, including analysis about country radio by SongData and about *Billboard* charts by Annenberg (described above).⁴⁰ CMT also commissioned an audience survey from Coleman Insights (described below).

In follow up, at the time of the writing of this paper, CMT announced CMT Equal Access, “an artist and management training initiative designed to foster and support marginalized communities underrepresented in the genre, including Black, Native and Indigenous, Latino, LGBTQ+ and women.”⁴¹ Among other things, CMT has modeled a broadcast organization’s continued commitment to change—not only for their own company but for the broader country industry.

Coleman Insights “Equal Play Radio Research”

In the fall of 2019, researchers Jessica Lichtenfeld and Sam Milkman of Coleman Insights worked in partnership with CMT to pursue the question of what country listeners want to hear. Results of that study were released in February 2020.⁴²

Purpose: This study sought to confirm or deny the myth circulated by country music programmers that listeners did not want to hear female artists on the radio. It did this by surveying 1,000 radio listeners (age 25-54) who favored country radio.

Findings: Fans were aware that men got more airplay than women (72% of listeners say they hear more songs by men on country radio than songs by women). Fans wanted to hear more women on the radio (84% of listeners wanted equal play for female artists, 70% wanted there to be more female artists in country music). They also studied how respondents’ listening behavior might change if there were more or fewer women on the radio. The majority said they would listen the same, 28% said they would listen more, 11% said they would listen less.

Country music is not the only genre to dig deeper and research their specific communities.

female:pressure FACTS

An ongoing project in electronic music—the FACTS survey—has been published five times, first in 2013, then updated in 2015, 2017, 2020, and now in 2022.⁴³ The authors’ names are anonymous. They refer to themselves in the report and related documentation as the “female:pressure Trouble Makers.” They gather and analyze data from female:pressure members and festival organizers. They also refer to festival program listings as it arises in several places in their findings. It is clear in their conclusion they have also conducted surveys and interviews with certain constituencies to gain more insight on specific topics. Theirs is the only study I read that included a significant focus on, and methodology for, non-binary inclusion in their study, something it appears they added in the 2020 edition.

Purpose: Study gender of artists performing at electronic music festivals.

Findings: While many of the studies abstracted in this paper have found little progress for women in music, the FACTS 2022 study “reveals a rise in the proportion of female acts from 9.2% in 2012 to 26.9% in 2020-2021.” Still, the study notes that representation of women and non-binary acts in electronic music remains imbalanced, and more work needs to be done. The study looks at segments of data, and observed some useful trends:

- When the researchers looked at festival size based on the number of acts performing (example: Very Small = fewer than 20 acts, Small = 20-29 acts, Medium = 30-45 acts, Large = 46-90 acts, Very Large = more than 90 acts), they found there was more gender balance in smaller festivals than large ones. Male acts dominated the larger the festival lineups.
- When they looked at festival size based on attendance, they saw a similar trend. The larger the audience, the more male-dominated the lineup. (However, it should be noted in this analysis that most of the festivals were categorized as “unknown” audience size.)
- When they looked at festivals based on the gender composition of their artistic direction team, there appears to be direct correlation with all male teams programming performer lineups that were 54.5% male, all female teams programming lineups that were 57.4% female. For teams that were mixed gender or unknown, their lineups were 52.8% and 64.3% male respectively.
- Festivals that receive public funding were found to have a higher percentage of female artists than festivals that do not get public funding, or for those where funding was unknown. While it was not stated in the study, this might suggest that festival sponsors could help encourage progress if they make inclusion a stated priority to festivals they sponsor.
- While one would hope that festivals being presented online might have made inclusion more possible, the research results unfortunately did not show that. Whether an event was online or onsite seemed to have no bearing on gender representation, though hybrid events showed more balanced representation for unknown reasons.
- Looking at the top ten festivals with strong female representation, the country with the most festivals listed for 2010-2021 was Germany. Looking at the ten worst festivals in terms of female representation, the country with the most festivals was the United States.

The report for this study also takes care to compare their findings with other studies from across the world. If you would like to read through, you will find this on page 30 of their report. Some, but not all, of those studies are included in this paper.

Considerations

The report concludes with notes on “Additional Issues of Diversity,” which is incredibly insightful, and should be considered and applied in genres beyond electronic music. It is as if the researchers wanted to telegraph where they might go next in their studies, to gather more input from the community. They shared that they have consulted with artists of color to start to gather thoughts about how kindred research could be done regarding race/ethnicity. Many of the issues and dynamics they raise are noteworthy and should be considered by kindred researchers. Here are a few of many they outlined:

- Artists of color reported a “dependence on the goodwill of a relatively small number of gatekeepers in order to get booked.” I will add, for researchers, that goodwill (or lack thereof) may also play a role in our ability to obtain information.
- “The undervaluing and lack of acknowledgment of the work and contributions of women, artists of color, and gender minorities” is noted as a means by which white male dominance is maintained. I will add, for researchers, lack of credit or acknowledgment can also lead to lower statistics in our results than work that may be occurring in the marketplace.
- A gap in opportunities and ability to earn income is noted in the study. What is missing and not yet studied is the impact this has on artists’ ability to secure career-incubating business relationships with managers, business managers, agents, labels, publishers, etc.
- The study acknowledges a lack of knowledge about the state of inclusion with respect to artists and audience members living with disabilities.
- Concern was shared about the “white and Western framing of discussions about diversity and inclusion,” and the notion that, “Who researches might be as important as what is being researched.” The researchers ask us to walk our talk, and strive for inclusion in our own teams—acknowledging that research to date has been primarily driven by white people.
- Interviewees expressed a wish to be asked how they identify, rather than to be put in categories by researchers. I will add, it would be valuable if researchers were to gather that information from the

artists in a study to the extent possible, as a check and balance, to measure the accuracy of their work.

- One dynamic that was identified about tokenism is when artists are confused with someone else on the basis of appearance.
- Other issues raised for further study include slot hierarchy at festivals, visibility as a means of building credibility and leadership, ageism, and ableism.

Recommendations

The study presents distinct lists of “Points of Action” for festival organizers, artists, journalists, policy advocacy groups and politicians, and festival attendees:

- For example, for festival organizers: “members of majority groups should actively show solidarity with minorities in the field;” festivals should consider a DEI committee; book more acts that represent diversity; delegate curating power; ensure your decision-making team is diverse; be transparent and intentional, publicly share that diverse representation is a goal; support local underground scenes and listen to local experts; ensure safe working conditions; create a certification program across festivals; adopt a Code of Conduct that includes a pledge to strive for a safe space and a provision for enforcement if someone discriminates.

Side Note: Research and Anonymity

female:pressure FACTS is not the only music industry study to involve anonymous benefactors, researchers, or organizers. It raises a question of why people working in music industry diversity research would wish to remain anonymous, and the advantages and drawbacks of such decisions. Over the years, a lot has been written about anonymity in activism. While complete analysis of that topic is beyond the scope of this paper, there are some primary points that might be important to consider for anyone considering conducting music industry representation research work. It is important to keep these aspects in mind as researchers strive to collect clear, candid, direct, data to study, while also ensuring the integrity of the research process, the quality of data collected, and objectivity of analysis.

Benefits of Anonymity

Safety

In cases where one’s personal safety and/or career is at risk, it is understandable that someone would not want to put their name out there. When anonymous contributors conduct research about the music industry, their anonymity may be because those individuals have concern about their own jobs, livelihood, reputation, and networked connections. Some might worry for their personal safety.

Objectivity

Some people feel their research will be read with more objectivity if the reader is not distracted by who wrote it. Especially in an insular music industry, this element can work for and against a study. When someone with longstanding credibility is at the helm, knowing who it is can make a significant impact. In many cases, however, researchers are considered “outsiders” not actively working in the industry—whose careers may be immune to damage if their findings are unpopular with people in positions of power with decision-making leverage.

Focus

In an era where personal life and character attacks are often used in opposition, anonymity removes the risk that something about the researcher(s) will become a bigger story than the research itself.⁴⁴ Some advocates for anonymity say it ensures an activist stays focused on the collective good of successful work, and wards off the human temptation to seize a spotlight of attention for their own advancement, notoriety, and power.

Challenges of Anonymity

Accountability

When someone’s own name and reputation are not on the line, it is more difficult to hold them accountable or to substantiate their claims.

Accessibility

If people have questions about the research, they do not know who to contact or ask. If people have information to share that might further the study, they do not know who to tell.

Effort

Sometimes there is a worry that someone will not contribute as much or work as hard if their name is not on a project. Some suggest that personal gains are not always malevolent, but rather can be an incentive to do impeccable work, as long as the personal gain is aligned with the mission of the work.

Conflict

A “mob mentality” can ensue when personal responsibility is not present, and lead to more disharmony and aggression than when people work together as identified individual humans. People have a natural tendency to become defensive in situations when anonymity is involved.

Lack of Leadership

An additional consideration is the motivation and inspiration individual leaders provide. Many movements have visionaries known for having led them. If researchers are anonymous, they inhibit their own opportunity to lead. While they may find other ways to lead, it is important that

this facet be considered and the researcher’s decision be intentional.

Another concept to consider is unintentional anonymity that occurs in cases when studies are conducted by organizations in which a leader or senior manager in the corporation receives public recognition for their work on the study, but those who worked on elements of it are obscured and left off the list of authors, or absent when the research is presented. It usually appears to be an administrative or logistical issue—for example: there’s only room for so many names. Sometimes it is a protocol issue. When it comes to music industry nonprofit organizations, the Executive Director or President of the Board of Directors are the two individuals legally authorized to speak publicly on behalf of the organization. While that is a policy intended to ensure unity, it can also inadvertently obscure who actually did the work.

It is important that any academic working on research in partnership with corporations or music organizations have frank discussions about who is conducting, authoring, and funding the study. Further, if a person or organization wishes to remain anonymous, it is important that everyone involved understand why, respect whatever boundaries are created, and maintain that anonymity.

Community-Organized Awareness Initiatives

In addition to formal research, there are many advocacy initiatives underway that conduct active research analyzing facets of representation in the music industry. In her book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, Adrienne Maree Brown describes organizing for change like the murmuring of birds. She says that all birds move individually but together, and provide cues to others about taking turns, shifting direction, and making progress on the journey. The following are just a few examples that might inspire college students.

Some organizations are founded with goals of growing awareness:

Book More Women

Book more women started on Instagram as a way to graphically depict the way women are excluded from music festival bookings.⁴⁵

Black Opry

Home for Black artists and Black fans of country, blues, folk, and Americana music.

Black Opry is an organization creating awareness about just how many black artists are in roots music—a direct answer to promoters and music industry people who say they don’t know how to find diverse artists. “Black Opry is home for Black artists, fans and industry professionals working in country, Americana, blues, and folk music. Country and roots music have been made and loved by Black people since their inception. For just as long, we have been overlooked and disregarded in the genre. Black Opry is changing that.”⁴⁶

Database Initiatives

To further awareness, several databases have been created to help people find diverse talent and professionals in the industry. These databases are collecting valuable information worthy of study. The following two database examples span many music genres.

She is the Music



She is the Music is focused on “increasing the number of women working in music.” While they have not released research study results in a traditional sense, they are actively gathering critical research data in their She Is The Music database.⁴⁷



Diversify the Stage

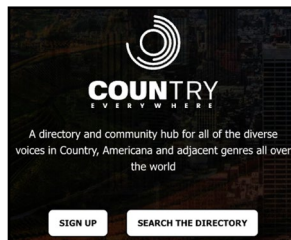
While DTS's work is focused primarily on organizing industry to pledge their intentions, and offering apprenticeship and mentorship programs focused on improving diversity in the music industry, particularly in tour-related roles, among their work is a DTS Workforce Survey & Research Project.⁴⁸

a network of industry professionals, working to establish more inclusive hiring practices and greater access to opportunities in live music, events, and touring industries for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities.

The following is an example of a database covering a specific genre/area of the music industry.

Country Everywhere

Community directory Country Everywhere's mission is to "foster the growth for all underrepresented and systematically excluded artists, industry folks and fans in Country, Americana and all adjacent genres."⁴⁹ They host, build, and maintain a database of artists with focus on three communities: Disabled, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+. The database can be searched for all of those communities or with focus on any one of them. It can also be searched by occupation (Artist/Band, Musician, or Songwriter) or by instrument. Artists, musicians, and songwriters in the database volunteer by adding themselves.



While these examples are not exhaustive databases, they are examples of what is possible if community members volunteer to be listed and database organizers ensure the quality of their data. Databases of these sorts have network effects—increasing in value when increased numbers of people participate. Over time, it will be seen if these databases continue and grow in their value as tools, or if they are replaced by other forms of networking stimulators.

Pledge Initiatives

Finally, several pledge initiatives are underway—through which music industry professionals and artists make pledges to hire people from underrepresented groups.

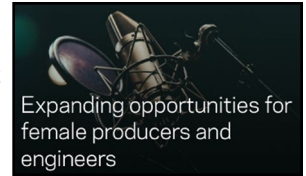
Keychange

Keychange⁵⁰ was founded by the U.K. performing rights organization PRS. Promoters take the Keychange Pledge to achieve gender balance in their programming and presenting work.

WE BRING UNDERREPRESENTED GENDERS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY TO THE MAIN STAGE

Women in the Mix

The Women in the Mix pledge was created by The Recording Academy⁵¹ in light of the first Annenberg report findings. The initiative focused on recruiting producers, artists, and other recording decision makers to pledge to consider women in engineering and production roles.



While the Keychange pledge reports significant impact in live music, the Annenberg study suggested the Women in the Mix pledge might not be having the same traction in the studio.

International Examples

While conducting research for this paper, I encountered studies about diversity in music from across the world. Significant ongoing work in particular is being done in England, Australia, Canada, and the United States. While it would be impossible to summarize all of the research out there, here are a few studies hot off the presses that are worthy of discussion among music industry educators for use in English-speaking classrooms.

There are many initiatives happening in the U.K. and Ireland. Here are a few:

UK Music

In 2015 UK Music established a diversity taskforce to "boost inclusion and diversity across the industry." Since 2016, UK Music has been conducting periodic "workforce diversity studies" focusing on measuring representation of gender and ethnicity across the British music scene. They have published reports in 2016, 2018, and 2020 in addition to their Equality and Diversity Charter, and a Ten-Point Plan.

Equality across the music industry

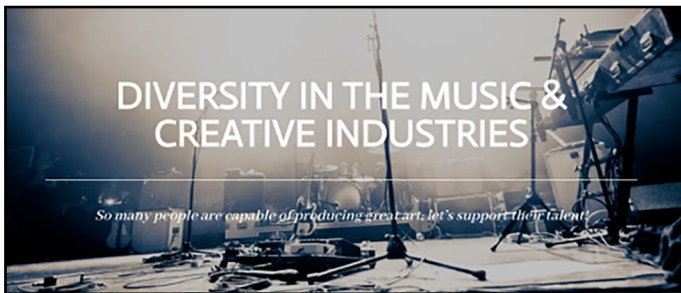
Diversity is not an option for music. It is a necessity. UK Music is committed to helping music companies diversify and adopt fair and inclusive employment practices.

Their most recent report in 2020 paints a picture of progress, with representation in several key categories increas-

ing, primarily among younger-aged professionals and at entry level.⁵²

- Black, Asian, and other ethnic minorities aged 16-24 increased to 30.6% (25.9% in 2018).
- Entry level Black, Asian, and other ethnic minorities increased to 34.6% (23.2% in 2018).
- Women increased to 49.6% (45.3% in 2016), though Women aged 45-64 decreased slightly.
- At senior executive levels, Black, Asian, and other ethnic minorities increased to 19.9% (17.9% in 2018), though the study notes that percentage still signifies one in five senior executives.

Vick Bain



U.K. music consultant Vick Bain has independently conducted a study called “Counting the Music Industry” which analyzes publishers and record labels, specifically with respect to gender disparity. Her study focused on measuring the gender gap of writers signed to publishing deals and artists signed to record labels, and it looked at pathways for girls and women into music and through the music industry ecosystem. She found that:

- “Just over 14% of writers currently signed to publishers are female.”
- “Just under 20% of acts signed to labels are female.”

Her report identifies barriers women must overcome to pursue and sustain careers in music, and makes recommendations for the industry as well as educational and governmental organizations.⁵³

Why Not Her? (Ireland and U.K.)

Vick Bain is also part of a collective of researchers and diversity activists called Why Not Her? led by Irish industry professional Linda Coogan Byrne, along with Winnie Amoaku and Margaret E Ward. Together, they work in a volunteer capacity to offer workshops, training, and mentorship programs. Since June 2020, a primary action they have taken is to compile a series of “Gender and Racial Disparity Data Reports.”⁵⁴



Attitude is Everything (U.K.)

Attitude is Everything is an organization focused on disability rights—and access to live music, both for audiences and for artists living with disabilities. They have published several reports on best practices and advice for presenters and industry, and are an excellent early resource if you would like to discuss disability rights in the classroom.⁵⁵



Two Major Canadian Studies Were Released During the Writing of This Report.

Canadian Independent Music Association (CIMA)

A major contribution of the CIMA and Breaking Down Racial Barriers study (which was internally reviewed in July 2021, but only just recently presented publicly in February 2022) is the notion that using the word “diversity” is a euphemism that is a way out for people who are uncomfortable referring to racism. It focuses specifically on anti-black racism, and contends that by lumping all intersectional issues together in research, we do none of the individual identities justice. This study was conducted differently from others reviewed in this paper. It was done entirely qualitatively, gathering its key learnings from a series of round-table discussions among Black artists and industry professionals.

Produced in conjunction with Breaking Down Racial Barriers (BDRB), the study “Anti-Black Racism in the Canadian Music Industry” received financial support from FACTOR, Radio Starmaker Fund, and The Government of Canada. In addition, CIMA and BDRB acknowledged contributions from ADVANCE, Canada’s Black Music Business Collective. The round-table discussion series on anti-Black racism was conducted over ten weeks from August to October 2020 and “featured first-hand testimonials and experiences of over 60 Black music industry professionals from across the country and provided a harrowing look into the systematic, systemic, institutional racism and oppression entrenched in all aspects of the music industry’s public and private sector ecosystem.”⁵⁶



Highlights of “Anti-Black Racism in the Canadian Music Industry” Findings

The report establishes some parameters, shares observations from testimonials, and recommends actions music professionals should take. Among the five central parameters, the first three are:

1. *“The Black Community is Not Homogenous.”*

The report acknowledges the many histories and pathways by which Black people have come to live in Canada, and reminds readers it is important to gather input from the Black community before any plans are started or executed regarding the needs of the Black community.

2. *“Black Issues Require Black Focused Solutions.”*

The report acknowledges the importance of all diversity initiatives, but identifies the reality that to make progress will require solutions that are focused on addressing anti-Black racism specifically, “based in the contributions which Black people have made, and continue to make to the music industry.”

3. *“Words Have Power.”*

The report addresses the frequency with which euphemisms are used to describe instances of anti-Black racism. It says “Labeling behaviors committed against Black people “prejudice,” “mistreatment,” or “discrimination” inadequately describes the scope and intensity of what is being experienced.” Further, it contends that the use of “BIPOC,” “POC,” “marginalized,” and other umbrella terms often used to gather or summarize multiple groups in one phrase not only dilutes the issue, but it allows “those uncomfortable with race to get out of saying the word Black.” The report emphasizes that Black is not a negative term, and identifies the notion of being “color-blind” or “not seeing race” as active erasure of culture.

Round-table participants expressed concerns in many areas including:

- Cultural appropriation
- Lack of diversity, inclusion, and equity on boards, committees, and key decision-making spaces
- Systemic exclusion from roles across and throughout the music and entertainment ecosystem
- Palatable Blackness, colorism, and shadism
- The impact of economic scarcity on Black community infrastructure building and development
- Systematic erasure of Black people and culture (lack of recognition, exclusion from spaces)
- Tokenism and “the parading of the Black employee”
- White fragility, white supremacy, white feminism

Please read the full report for the extensive list of concerns unearthed in the study. *Author note: it is difficult to summarize content that is meant to be read in the context of the full report, and all readers of this summary paper are encouraged to read all of the full reports cited, especially this one.*

The researchers found, from their conversations, that there is a high rate of Black people leaving the industry, or leaving Canada in order to pursue music industry careers.⁵⁷ The report identifies critical need for more research and data to quantify disparities in the industry, anti-racist policy making, media reform, and representation throughout the industry in thorough detail. Recommendations in the report center around the following areas of action:

- Individual work toward equity
- Creation of anti-black racism policies and training
- Collection, tracking, and public reporting of race-based data and key metrics
- Representation throughout the music industry ecosystem
- Black community partnerships, investment, and infrastructure support
- Pay equity, fair treatment and support
- Sharing of best practices

Canadian Live Music Association

The Canadian Live Music Association’s report was published in March 2022, during the writing of this paper, and is evidence of how frequently new information is available on the topic. The full report is a 102-page book, and all are encouraged to read it in full. It educates on topics from racism to tokenism to “the problem with genre classifications.”⁵⁸ It covers challenges immigrants and descendants of immigrants face in live music, emotional labor, gate-keeping, power dynamics in funding systems, imposter syndrome, adopted whiteness, imposed whiteness, ways privilege come to bear in live music, decolonization of funding, and other relevant topics in diversity, equity, and inclusion not always covered in music industry research reports to



date. The full report includes stories of specific communities, cultural practices, and events that have led to exclusion as examples to help the reader see, understand, and apply findings from the study in their own organizations.

The Canadian Live Music Association announced results of a study called “Closing The Gap: Impact & Representation of Indigenous, Black and People of Colour Live Music Workers in Canada,” conducted with financial support from FACTOR, Creative BC, Ontario Creates, and The Government of Canada—and supported by a long list of advocates, supporters, buddies, and friends (which suggests there may have been levels of sponsorship of the study in funding and stakeholder investment design). The study leveraged “40 in-depth interviews with IBPOC live music workers across Canada, spanning various roles, genres, levels of experience, and identities” and a national survey regarding economic, health, and mental health topics for live music workers in Canada.

Highlights of the Study

Purpose: “To provide evidence on the nature of inequalities experienced by IBPOC live music workers, and actionable policy recommendations that can in turn help to close the gap in representation and inequitable experiences in the live music community that vary along lines of race and ethnicity.”

Findings: The report establishes facts pertaining to inequities in the Canadian live music industry:

- “Gender diversity, sexual orientation diversity, and having disability is more common among IBPOC live music workers.”
- IBPOC are 25% of Canada’s population but only 16% of live music industry workers.
- On average, “IBPOC individuals in live music make \$11,700 less per year than white workers.” The study goes further to extrapolate “missing” GDP as a result of IBPOC exclusion, and projects if IBPOC representation in music matched the population, “there would be an additional 1,765 full time equivalents (FTEs)” jobs in the industry.

The report identifies sources of inequality in the industry:

- The study cites that IBPOC workers are “eight times more likely to be working a part-time job not related to the music industry” while “71% of white respondents report being able to work full-time in the music industry.”
- “IBPOC participants reported experiences of exclusion and tokenism with greater frequency than white participants” and cited tokenism as a “major barrier

to their sense of belonging in the live music community.”

- “The top four reported employment positions among white live music industry workers are gatekeeping positions: music venue owners, music promoters, live event producers, and music festival programmers.” “The unequal allocation of gatekeeping roles poses significant barriers for IBPOC workers, in terms of gaining access to audiences, and thus, revenue streams.”
- While Canada as a country is known for funding programs that support development of music artists locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, IBPOC respondents to the survey reported access to funding as a significant barrier. Some of the reasons respondents cited for challenges securing funding were rules about what events and expenses are considered eligible, language barriers, and lack of awareness of funding systems, rules, and policies. Diversity and overcoming racism was not considered when organizations developed their eligibility requirements, and it is not considered in the way funders do outreach each funding cycle.

Recommendations

The report’s authors identify opportunities they call “Sources of promise” for live music industry, government and funding bodies, and IBPOC workers. Kind readers are encouraged to read the report in full for all of the thoughtful suggestions made. Here is a selection as examples:

- *For live music industry (venue owners, promoters, agents, managers and festival organizers):* Increase representation of diversity in gatekeeper positions; disclose budgets showing aggregate pay to artists segmented by race/ethnicity and gender; also introduce similar transparency regarding staff pay; insist on inclusion/equity riders for festivals and concerts; feature artists from underrepresented groups in media promotion of festivals and concerts; mentorship programs for crew and tech staff; “offer performers financial compensation in lieu of complimentary alcohol.”
- *For government and funding bodies:* Include IBPOC representation on juries and in decision-making positions, especially when organizations are white-led; reform funding eligibility rules that exclude; insist on inclusion/equity riders for organizations that receive public funding; consult with IBPOC community members about issues related to genre “and explore strategies to add more flexibility within self-identification”; include advocacy groups like

National Indigenous Music Office or ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective in dialogue when developing policies; provide translation services; include audio and video in applications.

- “Adopt a ‘more than one’ rule” to reduce tokenism and the pressure on a person when they are the only representative of their community on staff, boards, and leader roles.
- *For IBPOC workers:* many suggestions pertained to transparency in grants—for example, reviewing applications that include you as a collaborator, other suggestions include normalizing transparency measures like asking white peers and colleagues to cross-reference performance rates, “asking if your pay is equal to others doing the same work,” requesting that “space and time be provided for traditional, spiritual, and/or cultural practices.”

At the end, the report includes a full page of “Calls-to-Action for Presenters” contributed by Alan Greyeyes (sākihiwē festival/Ogichidaa Arts), illustrating the importance of listening to voices of those who represent communities that have been historically excluded and marginalized. Among his six requests are two I will share here because they illustrate themes common with other research in this paper, and also point to areas of further potential study in music inside and outside Canada:

1. “We call on music award shows, music presenters, music promoters, and music conferences to use every stage they have to show Canadians that Indigenous people are just as special and talented as their loved ones.”
2. “We call on music presenters to submit offers to Indigenous artists that give them the ability to put their best foot forward. In Marek Tyler’s words, ‘you know that you have given enough when it starts to hurt a little.’ (A teaching given to him by his mom, Linda Young).”

Hack (by Triple J Radio, Australia)

Major Australian public radio station Triple J released reports compiled by Ange McCormack for the program Hack from 2018-2020.⁵⁹ Entitled “By The Numbers,” the reports focused



on Women in Australian Music. Like the electronic music study, McCormack’s most recent report showed progress. She used census data to gather that 29% of those who reported “music professional” as their job were women. One in five songwriters were women. Almost every festival stud-

ied showed improvement since their first report. In awards, women were still underrepresented. The percentages of board members and roles at indie labels improved, while artist managers held the same.

The Road Ahead

Even after compiling summaries of all of these studies, this paper only scratches the surface of issues that professionals who represent diversity face working in the music industry. Having synthesized as many studies and reports from recent years as possible, the biggest finding from each and every one of them was that there is more work to be done.

To follow up these studies, the music industry and researchers dedicated to studying it must:

- Go deeper to analyze genres and understand subcultures within the music industry to learn more from areas where equity has been more possible, how to foster inclusion, participation, and advancement.
- Foster cooperation between music industry and research professionals, and cooperate to ensure the quality of research methodologies, participants, and data sources.
- Strive for inclusive leadership of, and participation in, the process of research. While this paper did not study the identities of the people conducting research and publishing articles about diversity in the music industry, that is a worthy area of follow-up study for the sake of transparency about who is leading and conducting the research. (Acknowledgment: Should a reader wish to conduct that research, the author of this paper is a white, forty-something, LGBT+ cisgender woman who does not have a disability at the time of publication.)
- Incorporate new methods in the work of music research, gathering more qualitative stories to get beyond euphemisms and myths so industry professionals can face hard truths and make meaningful change.
- Further define metrics that are strong indicators and set benchmarks for accountability and progress—and—follow up to measure those metrics on an ongoing basis.
- Rethink music industry culture and the way decisions are made to foster environments where many types of people can shine light on our collective future.

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While detailed links to many sources are provided in the endnotes, here is a handy list of links to studies reviewed in this paper, including a few research-fostering organizations mentioned.

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CMT Country Music Television (Leslie Fram) – CMT Equal Play

<https://www.cmtequalplay.com>

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Diversify the Stage

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Female:pressure FACTS

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Keychange Pledge

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MIDiA Research/Tunecore/Believe – BE THE CHANGE: Women Making Music

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Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association (MEIEA)

<https://www.meiea.org/>

The Recording Academy – GRAMMY Inclusion Rider

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She is the Music

<https://sheisthemusic.org>

SongData (Jada Watson)

<https://songdata.ca>

UK Music

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USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

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Vick Bain – Counting The Music Industry

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Why Not Her?

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