

Study sheds light on continued challenges facing women in music industry

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The annual report from the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative reveals that little has changed for women in music and explores why that might be the case.

2018 saw an outcry from artists, executives and other [music](#) industry professionals over the lack of [women](#) in music. Has 2019 brought change? A new report provides an update on the status of women

making popular songs, and the barriers facing female songwriters and producers.

The report, titled "Inclusion in the Recording Studio?" is the second annual report from Professor Stacy L. Smith and the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative to investigate the music industry. The study examines gender and race/ethnicity of artists and content creators across 700 popular songs on the Billboard Hot 100 year-end charts from 2012 to 2018. The report also evaluates gender for seven years of Grammy nominations for Record of the Year, Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Producer of the Year, and Best New Artist. Finally, the investigation examines the barriers facing female songwriters and producers through a set of qualitative interviews.

Across all seven years examined, 21.7 percent of artists were female. After hitting a six-year low in 2017, little change was observed in the percentage of women working as artists in 2018—17 percent of artists in 2018 were women. From 2012 to 2018, women were most likely to appear on the charts as individual performers rather than in duos or in bands.

In contrast to the findings on female performers, artists from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups represented half of 2019's artists. Over time, people of color represent 44 percent of the over 1,400 artists included in the study.

"Once again this year we see a lack of female voices in popular music," Professor Smith said. "However, one positive finding is that of the female performers in 2018, 73 percent were women of color. This seven-year high point reveals that the music industry is including women of color in ways that other forms of entertainment are not."

Female songwriters and producers are vastly outnumbered. Across seven

years, 12.3 percent of songwriters of the songs were female. Of those women, 43.3 percent were women of color. The researchers also examined how many songs were completely missing a female writer—more than half (57 percent) of the 633 songs examined did not credit one woman as a songwriter.

Turning to producers, the percentage of women working in this role remained stagnant in 2018, and only 2 percent of producers across 400 songs were female. For producers, this translates into a gender ratio of 47 males to every one female. Only four women of color have worked as a producer on the 400 songs analyzed.

"Women are shut out of two crucial creative roles in the music industry," Professor Smith said. "It was critical to understand what factors contribute to the lack of women songwriters and producers in order to open up more opportunities and create sustainable change."

Through interviews with 75 female songwriters and producers, the study explores the lived experiences of women in music. More than 40 percent stated that their work or skills were dismissed or discounted by colleagues, and 39 percent said that stereotyping and sexualization were impediments to their careers. Finally, more than one-third said that the industry was male-dominated—a belief borne out by the numbers in the quantitative report. Women also cited instances in which they had been doubted or questioned and illuminated how the [recording studio](#) is a site for objectification and place where personal safety is a concern.

"What the experiences of women reveal is that the biggest barrier they face is the way the [music industry](#) thinks about women," Professor Smith said. "The perception of women is highly stereotypical, sexualized and without skill. Until those core beliefs are altered, women will continue to face a roadblock as they navigate their careers."

The report also updates last year's analysis of seven years of Grammy nominations in five categories. Roughly 10 percent of all nominees in these categories were female. For the first time in the seven-year sample, one woman has been nominated for Producer of the Year. Women were most likely to be nominated for Song of the Year or Best New Artist. Fewer than 10 percent of nominees for Record or Album of the Year were female. More than a third (37 percent) of the female Grammy nominees in the past seven years were women from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.

In addition to noting the barriers facing women in music, the study also offers solutions and highlights the work of different organizations to improve the numbers for women. For women creators, the work of [She Is The Music](#), an organization dedicated to amplifying women's voices is highlighted. She Is The Music runs songwriting camps and offers mentorship opportunities. For producers and engineers, Spotify's EQL Studio Residency program, an opportunity that provides mentorship and work experience in three recording studios, is another way to improve the numbers. With the pipeline in mind, the report cites the need to highlight role models in music. The [For The Record Collective](#) is a call to action for inclusion that will feature a first-of-its-kind collection of EPs, docuseries and live events with music produced, written and engineered by women.

The report is the latest from the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, and can be found online [here](#).

More information: The report is available online: [assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/a ... ding-studio-2019.pdf](https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/a...ding-studio-2019.pdf)

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