



YOUR FAVOURITE ARTIST'S FAVOURITE ARTIST

A look at gender expectations in the North
American music industry



Gender In The Music Industry

There are often double standards that artists face when making and performing their music. Feminine artists are expected to constantly one up themselves, creating new sounds and visuals with every new release. Masculine artists are often able to find a spot in the industry and stay there for the duration of their careers.



External Presentation

Feminine Performers

- Heavy makeup
- Cohesive style
- Extravagant outfits
- Revealing clothing

Masculine Performers

- Neutral palette/no makeup
- Toned down style
- Comfortable clothes
- Full body coverage



Behind The Scenes

On the Billboard Top 100 in 2025...

63% of songs are sung by men

81.1% of songwriters are men

94.1% of producing credits belong to men

(Mims, 2026)



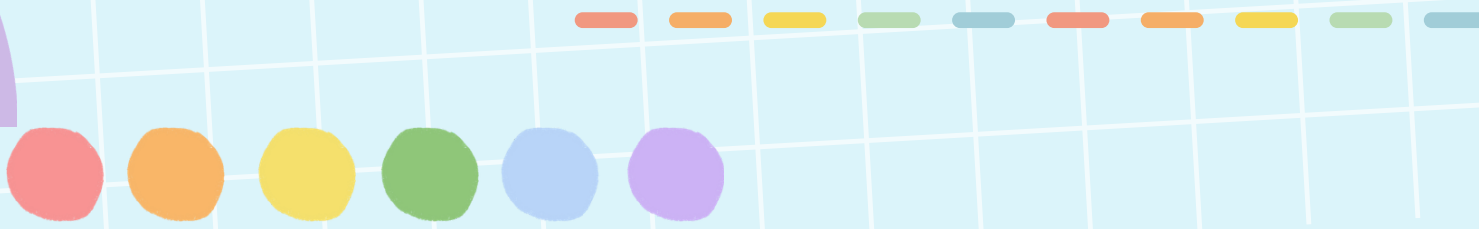
AWARDS

Historically, music awards like The Grammys favour men in their nominations, and winners.

- In 2026, women received 23% of the Grammy awards which is DOWN from the 37% they received in 2025.
- As of 2026, the highest amount of Grammy nominations women had ever received was 28% in 2025.
- In 51 years of Grammy Awards, no woman has EVER won producer of the year



Gender-Based Discrimination

- The music industry is built by men for men. This causes women and gender-non conforming musicians to leave the industry at higher and faster rates than their colleagues.
 - Most instruments in popular music are seen to be played better by men which means that other musicians are overlooked because of their gender identity.
 - In a musicians census from 2022, it was found that men made over \$2000 more than women which again, discourages women and diverse performers from starting music careers. (Musician's Union, 2024).
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MADONNA

Madonna is an icon in the music industry. With a career that spanned over multiple decades, she was, and still is a household name.

(Keep an eye out for traditionally masculine dance moves she is using in this video)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pehMBaHgPWE>

Her Experience

Madonna has done just about everything there is to do in popular music. She speaks about how she was inspired by David Bowie in the way that he broke masculine gender norms. Although she is extremely successful, it was still difficult being a woman in the industry.

"Thank you for acknowledging my ability to continue my career for 34 years in the face of blatant sexism and misogyny and constant bullying and relentless abuse."



Fighting Gender Expectations

- Madonna was known for pushing the limits of gender and sexuality in everything that she did. Was it without flaws? Of course not, but she made some major statements that helped women gain more recognition in the industry.

"What I would like to say to all women here today is this: Women have been so oppressed for so long they believe what men have to say about them. They believe they have to back a man to get the job done. And there are some very good men worth backing, but not because they're men—because they're worthy. As women, we have to start appreciating our own worth and each other's worth. Seek out strong women to befriend, to align yourself with, to learn from, to collaborate with, to be inspired by, to support, and be enlightened by."



Lil Nas X

Lil Nas X is a rapper who shot to stardom in 2019 for his hit, Old Town Road. He soon became an icon for breaking down gender expectations boundaries with his flashy costumes.

(Just like the Madonna video, keep a look out for stereotypically feminine dance moves!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfJicS3txO4>

His Experience

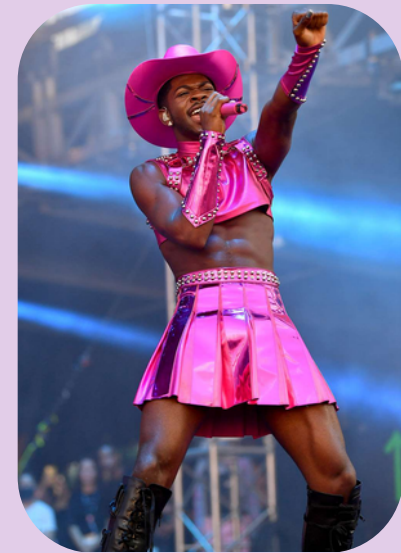
Lil Nas X came into the industry with a bang, winning the iHeart Radio Male Artist Of The Year award in 2022. His speech was about being delusional enough to follow your dreams and to be who you are!

"I wouldn't be where I am right now, in my life and my career, if I weren't delusional. Believing I could [...] become an international success within a year. It's delusional! Believing that I could come out of the closet in the height of my career ... to think that I could do that would be delusional! To think that I could do a song about a man lusting after another man in a world where it's still legal in many places to be prosecuted [...] for being who you are, for being gay ... it's delusional to think that that song could be the number one song in the world. It's OK to be delusional when you're chasing your dreams."



Fighting Gender Expectations

- Lil Nas X pushes boundaries in his costume choices during his performances!
- The music industry pushes masculine performers to stay in their lane, and to present masculinity at all times.
- By going on stage in a pink cowboy hat, crop top, and a skirt, Lil Nas X is making a statement about accepting yourself for who you are and letting your musical identity be whatever it wants to be!





YOUR TURN!

- CHOOSE AN ARTIST YOU CONNECT TO
 - MAKE A PRESENTATION THAT INCLUDES...
 - How long they have been in the music industry
 - What kind of music they make
 - How gender expectations would expect them to present themselves and/or act
 - How have gender expectations shaped their music
 - How have gender expectations shaped their physical performance choices
 - What do they do to conform to or break out from gender expectations
 - WRITE A REFLECTION ABOUT YOUR ARTIST AND YOUR OWN IDENTITY IN REGARDS TO THE MUSIC INDISTRY
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