Gender and the *Billboard* Top 40 Charts between 1958 and 2023

A look at more recent and statistical data on the Gender Bias in the music industry

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**Background**

*Billboard* Magazine has been classified as the gold standard for reporting on news and events in the music industry. In 1958, *Billboard* created a Hot 100 charts which listed the top 100 songs for the week. Over the course of the decades, the Hot 100 has gained popularity to see who tops the charts at #1.

If the charts are characterized, it would be easiest and statistically supported to say it is dominated by male artists. But is this always true? Is there inherent bias in the representation of artists in the charts? If so, is there a reason? The purpose of this study was to look at the weekly Hot 100 to see what, if any, gender bias may exist.

**Results**

The Average Gender of the Artists Each Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Methods**

This study allows the claim that male artists continue to dominate the world of popular music and that there is still gender inequality within the music industry (Wells). When looking at the ratio of female artists to male artists, it revealed that the difference between the two is higher than the hypothesis. However, research also allows for the claim that the influence of the female audience may partially contribute to the popularity of gender in the music industry.

**Discussion**

These findings indicate that male hits exceed female hits and are overly dominating the music charts between 1958 and 2023. The popularity of the male artists shifts between artists over the handful of decades depending on the popular genres at the time, like in the 1960s and 1970s when Rock N’ Roll was popular unlike the early 2000’s when boy bands found huge success. The findings can be separated out into the larger finds that:

- Male artists had consistent extreme highs and almost never dipped below half of the music charts, in comparison to female artists;
- Male artist’s worst years were always extremely close to female artists best years;
- When male artists are more popular, the artists typically surpass the frequency of female artists greatly; and
- Between 1958 and 1989, the music industry was much more densely populated with male artists, so much so, that the average total is significantly different from that of a smaller period.

After analyzing the trends in the data, a separate hypothesis was then questioned. Although the males dominate the music charts, what is driving that domination?

**Methodology**

- The *Billboard* weekly Hot 100 charts from 1958-2023 were used.
- The coding source, Python, was used to compile a code that pulls the data off *Billboard*’s API to Excel. Each song was categorized by the gender at birth of the performer(s).

**GENDER CLASSIFICATIONS**

- F – Female Artist
- M – Male Artist
- MG – All-male group
- FG – All female group
- XG – Mixed gender group
- MSG – Male solo group (group of solo artists who generally do not record together)
- FSG – Female solo group (group of solo artists who generally do not record together)

The data was then consolidated into three categories: male, female, and mixed.

**Conclusion**

Around 1991, the Riot Grrrl Movement, a movement that empowered women’s ownership of one’s sexuality, influenced a significant flux of woman artists into the music industry (Starr).

In 1998, the movement died out and the female representation in the charts was extremely lessened. During this time, boy bands picked up popularity.

After researching the relationship and characteristics of boy bands, it was found that:

- Females (often called “teenyboppers”) influence the popularity of boy bands.
- The popularity of boy bands is directly related to not only their music but their conventional attractiveness that feeds the love of these groups to women and girls (Lyons).
- Most boy bands were created specifically for the so-called “female gaze” (Bailey).

In the 2000’s, there is a correlation of increase in female artist(s) when the said female artist(s) released a new album, where albums typically get most of their traction from their fanbases made up primarily of females (Serra).

Since the 90s, the dominance of either gender and trends seen in the music industry can be explained at least partly by the female audience.