

BE THE CHANGE – Women in music 2022

Executive summary

The last two years of pandemic-driven disruption in the music industry may just have created a window of opportunity for real change in the fight for gender equality. The next generation of women music creators and executives have begun to make room for themselves, laying the groundwork for the industry of tomorrow – not simply fighting an uphill battle against the industry of yesterday. However, the journey to equality for all remains a long one. Challenges still abound, and while some progress has been made, it is still far from enough.

This is demonstrated through insights from the 2022 edition of the BE THE CHANGE: Women In Music study. This year we broadened the scope of our study, collating the views of 1,003 respondents globally including 631 women, of whom 486 were creators (those who write songs, record, perform etc.) and 223 executives (some were both). Alongside the survey we also conducted in-depth 1:1 conversations with independent artists from around the world, including India, Nigeria, Thailand, France, Mexico, the UK, Lebanon, and Armenia.

Overall, a sobering picture emerges of little change in the challenges women face since our inaugural study in 2021. The majority of women creators said that sexual harassment / objectification, sexualization, and ageism have stayed the same over the past year, while criticism and abuse on social media have gotten worse. Many of the biggest challenges for women creators stem from the music industry's long standing focus on their appearance, with over two-thirds of them witnessing the pressure to look good frequently.

Most women in music still struggle with confidence issues — an invisible challenge that we explore in-depth this year. Two-thirds of women executives and 52% of women creators feel imposter syndrome when compared to or collaborating with men, and 69% of women (both creators and executives) feel inadequate or doubt their abilities in general.

However some small, hopeful improvements have emerged. Visibility of women in the music industry at live events and conferences are among the few challenges perceived as improving by women creators (40%). Another 36% saw improvement of diversity in executive roles or positions of power. There are also bright spots when it comes to confidence: half of women feel more confident when presenting ideas to other women and/or other non-male gender identities, highlighting the need to diversify the music industry workforce.

However, 38% of women in music frequently witness tokenism, which warns that some of this may be an appearance of diversity rather than true recognition of hard work and talent. When accounting for gender nuances, other non-male minority creators were more likely to experience tokenism than women creators. An astounding 93% of all non-male minority creators experienced unconscious bias: 73% 'frequently' (compared with 58% of women creators alone). Meanwhile, 41% strongly agreed that live performances are often venues for sexism and harassment, compared to 23% of women overall. It is clear that in many instances, they face the same issues as women to an even worse degree.

When men were asked about what they have done to help women in the industry, the majority indicated that they have listened consciously, encouraged women to be part of the music business, and actively involved women in projects. However, there is a shortfall between intent and action. Only 16% say that they hired women as part of more gender-diverse teams, and 16% created safe spaces for women, while 17% specifically recognized care-giving imbalances. Just over one quarter of men called out specific instances of gender bias or inequality.

Call to action

Despite the slow pace of change and the myriad of ongoing challenges, there is a real sense of women proactively carving out opportunities for themselves. Key to this are gradually shifting industry attitudes, along with better, more widely-available resources for women in the industry. However, these early, green shoots of optimism and improvement must be cultivated by the industry. Doing so requires giving women what they want and need: focused resources, diversity, and representation at every level across the industry. On top of the list is a zero-tolerance approach to the sexism and harassment that can – and do – drive women away from music.

With creators and executives on different sides of the industry, collaboration is critical: one side cannot thrive without the other. To this end, men must play a critical role in fostering participation for women, their right to respect, and further contributions to the industry all across the chain – from creators through to the highest executive level. There are actions that every part of the industry can take. There are small steps that can also be taken as a music consumer, for example, prioritizing diversity-balanced playlists and sharing them with friends. Taking the initiative to attend festivals and concert houses that have committed to diversity, and encouraging friends and communities to do the same.

Harassment

Despite being the challenge with the highest level of mainstream awareness, it remains one of the top challenges that women continue to face. In addition, the transition of music creation and management to digital-first spaces has given rise to harassment on social media.

Perception gap

The perception gap is largely characterized by the issues that men are less likely to perceive at all: parental expectations and unconscious biases, like considering sound engineering to be a male role, for example.

Value gap

The value gap is characterized by challenges like the pay gap, the observed issue of men being rewarded more for doing the same jobs, and age discrimination – as with the number of women afraid that the industry will no longer value them as they age.

Confidence gap

Lack of confidence is one of the most subtle issues that women face: that of battling themselves for respect, as well as the industry.

Call to action for companies

Countering harassment

- Instigate zero-tolerance policies and back this up with HR departments empowered with intervention, sensitivity training and preventative education
- Put measures in place for creators (who do not have access to HR departments) as well as executives (who do), to report negative behavior and feel confident that action will be taken
- Record labels and publishers can make a difference by extending the same HR-like resources to their artists as to their employees

Countering the perception gap

- Foster internal discourse by inviting speakers, holding events, and engaging relevant organizations (DEI training)
- Review and adjust practices of hiring, signing, and promotion, to broaden diversity across gender identities and racial backgrounds. This may include hiring goals, adjusting required qualifications to account for differing backgrounds and education, or even instituting 'blind' auditions / interviews to ameliorate unconscious bias

Countering the value gap

- Institute policies of equal pay for equal work across all gender identities and racial backgrounds
- Conduct outreach to prospective candidates – meet them in an environment in which they are most comfortable, rather than a potentially intimidating setting
- Utilize 'blind' hiring / promoting practices with employees, or 'first listen' techniques with artists to ensure that the industry is rewarding effort, quality of work and talent, while avoiding bias altogether

Countering the confidence gap

- Seek the support and guidance of organizations and networks that specialize in confidence issues and train executives in how to approach women and gender minorities without bias
- Ensure a strong roster of diverse gender-identifying role models in your organization – allowing more junior artists and executives alike to develop ambitions and envision themselves as going the distance

Call to action for men

Countering harassment

- ❑ Institute zero tolerance, call out bad and negative behavior. Create an environment where there is no fear of recrimination for speaking out
- ❑ De-normalize objectification, for example, during marketing campaigns or productions
- ❑ Get involved in online spaces and encourage positive discussions, while condemning negative comments or reporting them
- ❑ Ensure zero tolerance applies to everyone. No exceptions, no matter how important a perpetrator may be. Act particularly decisively when men with power and influence attempt to bully women victims into silence

Countering the perception gap

- ❑ Work with women to understand what they need to build pathways to success and proactively include or hire women in teams. Accept that your view of how well your organization and / or you are set up for women's success may fall short of reality
- ❑ Reach out to women and support what they are working on. Bolster their projects. Make introductions to expand their networks
- ❑ Encourage and advocate for women in typically male dominated sectors, i.e., tech, engineering, DJing, etc.
- ❑ Read up and understand why minorities face barriers in the music industry and get to know the music business from their perspective. Become aware of internalized, unconscious biases. Equality is quality, and better representation equals better music

- ❑ Find like-minded peers across the industry to collaborate with to support diversity. Offer expertise or provide mentoring to organizations that support under-represented groups (i.e., Keychange, Women In Music, She Is The Music, SheSaid.So, etc.)

Countering the value gap

- ❑ Support and recognize hard work and talent where it is due. Look to correct tokenistic activity and behaviors, and challenge 'the way things are'
- ❑ Identify high-potential women and support their training in order to help them continue to progress in their career
- ❑ Continually ensure women get every merit-based opportunity for promotion as male peers. Understand that pay gaps are about the roles women are in just as much as how their pay measures against peers

Countering the confidence gap

- ❑ Proactively identify where communication is lacking. Often issues of communication, and the feeling of 'not being listened to / understood', is what drives lower confidence to begin with
- ❑ Ask 'what can I do here to change the way things are?'. Be fair and supportive. Encourage women individually, but be more vocal about diversity in general
- ❑ Be aware that you may be part of the problem – think about how your approach, support, and tone can be improved

Call to action for women executives and creators

Countering harassment

- Call out or bring to light any harassment through HR or support groups. Continue to support one another and join relevant organizations
- Introduce relevant resources and groups to music companies and organizations, to help them instigate change

Countering the perception gap

- Build a support system that will link like-minded peers for networking, access to resources, and opportunities. Keychange, HyperTribe, Color of Change, SheSaid.So, She Is The Music and Women In Music are all organizations that are actively working to bridge the gap for under-represented groups in the music industry. Join one or more of them
- Encourage other women to do the same. Support each other through networking and sharing resources and success stories

Countering the value gap

- Use a top-down approach, with higher executives supporting women in more junior positions, and with all executives supporting creators
- Higher profile creators should consult with executives on how and where change is best suited to their company or institution, and support and extend networks and opportunities for more junior creators

Countering the confidence gap

- Support other women who have long been pushed by the industry into competing with each other for token places, rather than for overall recognition
- Women executives and creators should work together through sharing resources, bringing each other into conferences and other events, and collaborating on projects to create more opportunities and support for each other
- Take the time to assess strengths and weaknesses. When women know themselves, they can better advocate for themselves
- Don't second guess – women should not hesitate to apply for that job or submit the application for that showcase. Women should remember that they belong in this industry and should own their space!

