

# Six Months of EqualPlay: An Update

DR. JADA E. WATSON,  @data\_jada

On 12 January 2020, CMT Vice President of Music and Talent Leslie Fram pledged 50/50 airplay for its video hours, signaling the beginning of the organization's EqualPlay campaign. Over the last 6 months, SongData has been tracking airplay through Mediabase's weekly reports, sharing a [2- and 4-month](#) updates on the SongData website. This report offers a 6-month update, evaluating representation at the mid-point of the first year of EqualPlay.

To say that the first 6 months have been tumultuous, would be an understatement. Two weeks following the EqualPlay launch, Nashville was devastated by a tornado that destroyed many homes, small businesses, music establishments and community organizations. Just as the city began to receive the support and supplies needed to rebuild, Nashville – like all cities around the world – was quarantined due to the fast-moving Covid-19 virus. Coronavirus has crippled the industry: new music scheduled for released was paused, tours and festivals were cancelled, and many people within the industry have lost their jobs. Predictions on when touring and festivals may be likely to resume range from late Fall 2021 to mid-2022 – and this future date often doesn't include international touring. Artists have suffered significantly during this time, to be sure, but many have found new and creative ways to engage with audiences through live stream concerts and interviews across all virtual platforms.

Amid this global pandemic, social justice has emerged as one of the most critical and important conversations as Black Lives Matter protests erupted across the USA, Canada and around the world in response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. As conversations about racism rippled through every facet of society, the music industry – especially country music – has come under increased public scrutiny. [Racism baked](#) into the country music industry can no longer be ignored. As much research has shown, the industry was created on a [musical color line](#) – one that sought to segregate music not by musical style, but by race and geography. The categories chosen, “hillbilly” and “race”, may no longer be used today (replaced with “country” and “soul” or “R&B”), but they have been reinforced throughout the history of the genre through the development of country radio, the [recording industry](#) and of the industry's [popularity charts](#), as well as the algorithms that underpin streaming services. It has also been perpetuated through continual discussion about “authenticity” that serves to create barriers for artists that are Black, Indigenous and Musicians of Color (BIMOC) who are put in a position of defending their place in the genre. This is also a genre that has had ties to the [KKK and George Wallace](#), and whose artists perform under racist names, have released racist songs or sold racially insensitive merchandise, perform at concerts with the confederate flag in full view, and remain silent when Black country artists – and fans – endure aggression after aggression while on stage, back stage, in meet and greet lines, and on social media. This is a conversation that has necessarily extended to other groups excluded from the industry's mainstream: namely, LGBTQ artists, who have found a home predominantly in Americana.

Nowhere is this discussion more pertinent than in the context of equity, diversity and inclusion on country radio. Evaluating representation through an intersectional lens brings to light the

dynamics of oppression and discrimination based on the overlapping identities or artists included – or excluded – from participation. This report aims to address representation through an intersectional lens in order to discuss how practices ingrained within the industry machine active serve to disadvantage women of color and LGBTQ artists, not just white women.

## Summary of Findings

Over the last 6 months, 4 songs by women have reached the #1 spot of the Country Airplay Charts (Mediabase), including Maren Morris' “The Bones” for two weeks in February, Gabby Barrett's “I Hope” and Ingrid Andress's “More Heart Than Mine” back-to-back in April, and Carly Pearce's “I Hope You're Happy Now” featuring Lee Brice in June. Combined, these 4 songs captured the top position for 5 of the first 28 weeks (17.9%) of the year. With “Bluebird” currently #3 on the chart, Miranda Lambert's song is in the running for the top position before the end of July. This would mean that there are double the #1 singles by women in the first 7 months of 2020 than in all of 2019. This is a significant improvement.

The results of this report echo the 2- and 4-month updates, highlighting positive movements, with caution for the future:

1. There has been an increase in spins from the 10.1% average in 2019, to a high of 17.6% in June and ending on 14.5% by mid-July. The largest increases occurred in the midday, evening and overnight periods, with little improvement in the morning and afternoon periods when audiences traditionally are most likely to tune-in.
2. There has been an increase in support (in form of spins) for current singles by female artists, but little-to-no improvement for reccurrents. While the #1 songs by Morris, Barrett, Andress and Pearce continue to receive airplay in recurrent status, there has been no attempt to fill the gap by re-introducing gold songs by women that audiences know and love (see the appendix for more on songs in recurrent status).
3. There had been an increase in the number of songs in the top 20 positions of the chart, but the bottom 30 positions had a significant deficit of songs by female artists. As a result of fewer songs by women entering the chart between March and June, there are just 2 songs by women in the Top 10, one at #13 and gap until #32, the chart is heading toward culturally unhealthy levels of representation.

What is perhaps most striking are the findings on diversity.<sup>1</sup> Despite foundational contributions made by Black musicians in the origins and development of the genre, they continue to be underrepresented on country radio. Between January and mid-July 2020, white artists received 91.3% of the format's airplay, with the bulk of the airplay for non-white artists distributed between two Black solo men and 1 multi-racial male ensemble: songs by Jimmie Allen, Kane Brown and Dan + Shay received 87.6% of the spins for songs by Black and multi-racial artists (which amounts to 7.5% overall). Only 5 of the 189 solo country artists (2.6%) are artists of color and just 1 of those 5 is a female artist. Despite releasing two of the most critically acclaimed songs of the year, Mickey Guyton, the industry's only Black female artist signed to a major label is completely absent from playlists.

This is particularly striking given that when she debuted “What Are you Gonna Tell Her?” at Country Radio Seminar in February 2020, several program directors indicated that they would play the song immediately if they had the track. Capitol Nashville Records released the song two weeks following the event, but audiences still aren’t hearing it. Even more disconcerting, Guyton’s music has been celebrated by fans and the broader entertainment industry but has received no support from her own format. The data continues to show that, while all artists of color are underrepresented, Black female artists are denied access to opportunities and resources.

LGBTQ artists are also absent from country format radio. Just two openly gay country artists received airplay in 2020 – Brandy Clark and Brandi Carlile with The Highwomen. Through 3 songs, they received a combined 388 spins over 19 weeks of airplay. Two non-country artists also received airplay, Lil Nas X and Sam Smith, who had just 2 and 1 week of airplay, respectively, with 1 song each. Like the results for artists of color, queer country artists are significantly disadvantaged within country music culture – and transgender artists are absent. As a result of their exclusion from mainstream participation, many LGBTQ artists and fans feel unwelcome and indeed unsafe in country music contexts. And while non-participation in the mainstream is an important statement and artistic strategy for building audiences and safe communities, LGBTQ artists should have the choice and freedom to participate in the mainstream. Participation should be based on musical aesthetic, and not one’s gender identity, sexual orientation or color of skin.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this report highlight the continued imbalance on country radio and the underrepresentation of women, as well as the exclusion of artists of color and and LGBTQ artists. While the results are not surprising, they are important to discuss in the context of the EqualPlay campaign and in the middle of a global pandemic: it is when the world is not looking that already marginalized groups are further marginalized.

There have been positive changes, to be sure, but for every accolade worth celebrating there is an issue to discuss. There has been a notable increase in spins for songs by female artists in 2020; in fact, some months have registered nearly double the spins than in 2019. However, there seems to be little concerted effort to do so in a manner that would push more songs by women into the weekly charts. Many have raised concern over the decreasing number of songs by women in the bottom positions of the chart and the impact this would have on the culture overall. As the handful of Top 20 songs by women have reached their peak and exited the chart, there have been fewer songs in the bottom 30 positions to replace them. At the 4-month EqualPlay mark, SongData cautioned that the airplay charts were on the verge of returning to summer 2019 numbers when women represented just 6% of the top positions of the chart. This remains a critical concern as Lambert’s “Bluebird” approaches the top of the chart.

### **Finding “balance”**

This report maps the evolving terrain of country music’s cultural space, addressing the ways in which the industry is grappling with a century-long practice of viewing white women as secondary to white men, and pushing all other artists to the margins of the genre – or to another genre entirely. Despite increases in spins, songs by white women are still played infrequently on radio, with the majority of airplay in the overnights. The absence of women of color and LGBTQ artists from weekly reports shows their continued exclusion from participation in the mainstream of the genre. Current practices within the industry ensure that success remains attached to the racial category of whiteness, so that people embodying this identity remain at the top.

If, by definition, “balance” means an even distribution or that different elements are equal in representation, then the results of this report, which show continued dominance of one group of artists, shows that balance is indeed a critical issue. This is at once an issue of fairness and opportunity, and the diversity and vitality and the long-term health of the genre. The more imbalanced a cultural space becomes, the more homogenous the overall composition of its artists and sound of its music.

Radio – even in the the current context of global pandemic – remains critical to the success and exposure of artists. Indeed, radio doesn’t “play” the hits, it “makes” the hits through the repetition of a song at high frequency throughout the 5 dayparts. It is this repetition that moves a song into this so-called “hit” status, and not the other way around. More critically, there is a direct relationship between the amount of times a song is spun each day and its ability to break into the weekly chart. This type of exposure is crucial to an artist’s career, especially news artists, because it is linked to opportunities and resources within the industry, including publishing deals, tours and festivals, award nominations, merchandising and so much more. Not only does the lack of exposure hurt *current* artists, but it also negatively impacts *future* artists because these cultural practices are repeated and recycled time and again. As a result, audiences have a false perception of who is *active* in the industry and about the *origins* of the genre when women and BIMOC are systematically eliminated from radio.

At the same time, labels need to work harder to make meaningful change within the industry. Not only do they need to promote more songs by their female artists so that program directors have more inventory to select when building playlists, but they also need to start building more diverse and inclusive rosters and organizations. Likewise, publishers need to encourage their artists to sign more women and BIMOC and *encourage* rather than *discourage* their songwriters from writing with and for them. Given that the orientation and identity of a character in a song can be modified to suit a singer, consider recording demos in a variety of voices so that artists can hear and see themselves in the songs being written. Yes, this will have an added cost, but it will go a long way to developing more material for a more diverse range of artists.

For too long, the industry has limited the opportunities and space available for women in the genre, allowing only a handful to succeed at once. As a result, women have become absent from main channels of dissemination – radio, streaming, tours, festivals, and invisible within charting cultures. Along with changes in representation, the genre will begin to change, too; music will sound less homogenous, it will become fresh and more innovative, and it will represent a wider segment of the population.

It is not enough to build capacity for current singles if there won’t also be a practice of retaining those songs as part of a stations catalogue once they exit the chart. While it seems as though there has been a shift to ensure that the most recent #1 songs maintain prominence in recurrent status, the lack of representation of female artists in recurrenents is suggestive of a culture that continues to devalue women’s and BIMOC’s stories and see them as second place to white male artists. Songs by women and BIMOC need to move into higher rotation slots on playlists so that they can be *heard* during the daytime hours when audiences are listening, so that they have the same opportunity for exposure and charting. The accomplishments of the first 6 months will be lost if radio does not make a concerted effort to make meaningful change.

---

[1] The term multi-racial is used for solo artists that identified as having multiple ethnic origins (like Kane Brown) and for ensembles with artists that are both white and non-white. This applies to Dan + Shay as Dan Smyers has Japanese heritage, Runaway June whose lead-singer Naomi Cooke is Native American and Gone West as member Justin Kawika Young is native Hawaiian.

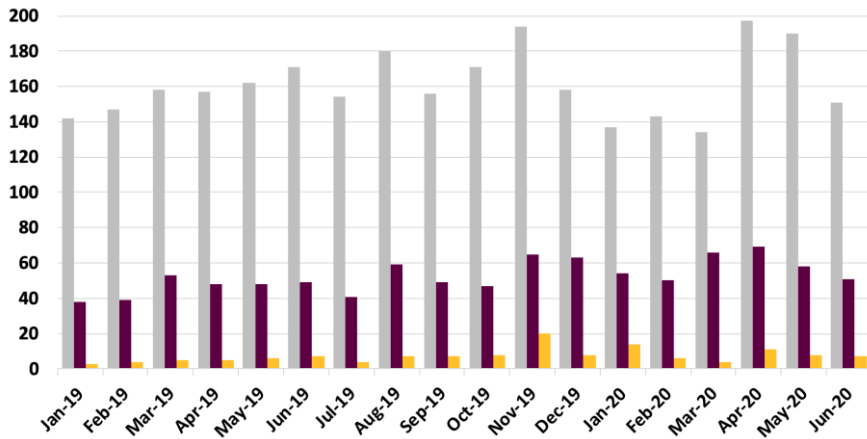
# Six Months of EqualPlay

## Country Airplay Reports & Charts (Mediabase)

DR. JADA E. WATSON, [@data\\_jada](#)

### FEMALE ARTISTS UNDERREPRESENTED ON WEEKLY REPORTS

Unique current songs on Country Airplay reports (Mediabase) from January 2019 to June 2020



TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTISTS **261**

Ratio of males to females **2:1**



Between January 2019 and June 2020, there has been marginal improvement in the percentage of unique current singles by female artists on country format radio as tabulated for Mediabase’s Country Airplay Reports. Until December 2019, 22.2% of the unique currents played each month were by women, increasing to 27.5% in the final month of the year. In the first 6 months of 2020, marked by the launch of CMT’s EqualPlay campaign, the percentage of unique songs by women increased – with a peak of 32.4% in March – from 38 songs in January 2019 rising to a peak of 69 in April 2020, before tumbling back to 45 by June 2020. Interestingly, the peak in unique current songs by female artists in April 2020 coincides with a surge of singles by male artists, which has the effect of burying the momentum made in the rise in unique number of songs. While that number has since declined for male artists, the impact has been damaging for female artists: this graph shows the decline in current songs by women, coinciding with chart-topping songs entering recurrent. The addition of more songs by male artist in this period limited the space for new singles by women and resulted in their declining representation on weekly playlists and on industry charts.

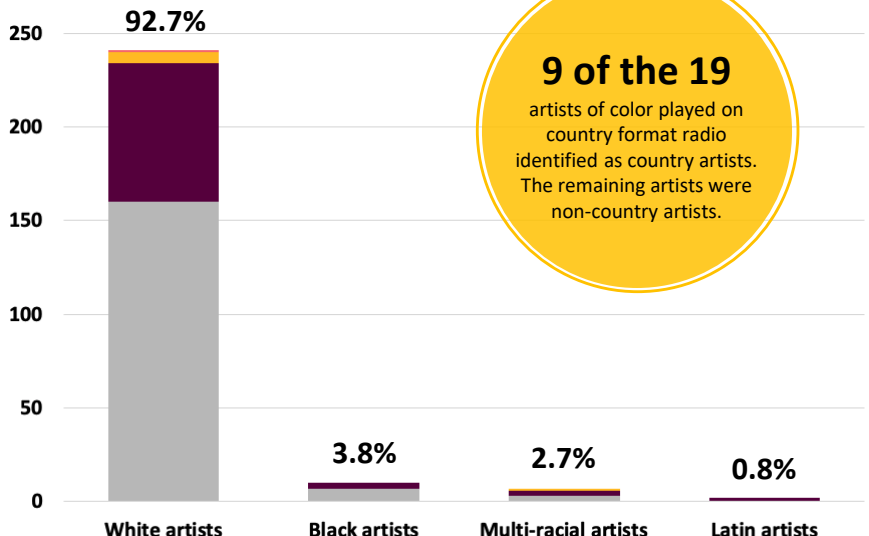
### VOICES PLAYED ON COUNTRY FORMAT RADIO IN 2020

More white artists most supported by country format radio

Songs by 260 unique artists received airplay on country format radio in the first six and a half months of 2020. This graph distributes the data by sex and race, showing that 92.7% of the artists were white, 3.8% were Black, 2.7% were Multi-racial solo artists or ensembles, and 0.8% were Latin artists.

LGBTQ artists are underrepresented here, with just 4 of the 260 artists (1.5%) identifying as gay or non-binary – none of whom having received significant airplay for their music. Their voices are thus not heard in the mix.

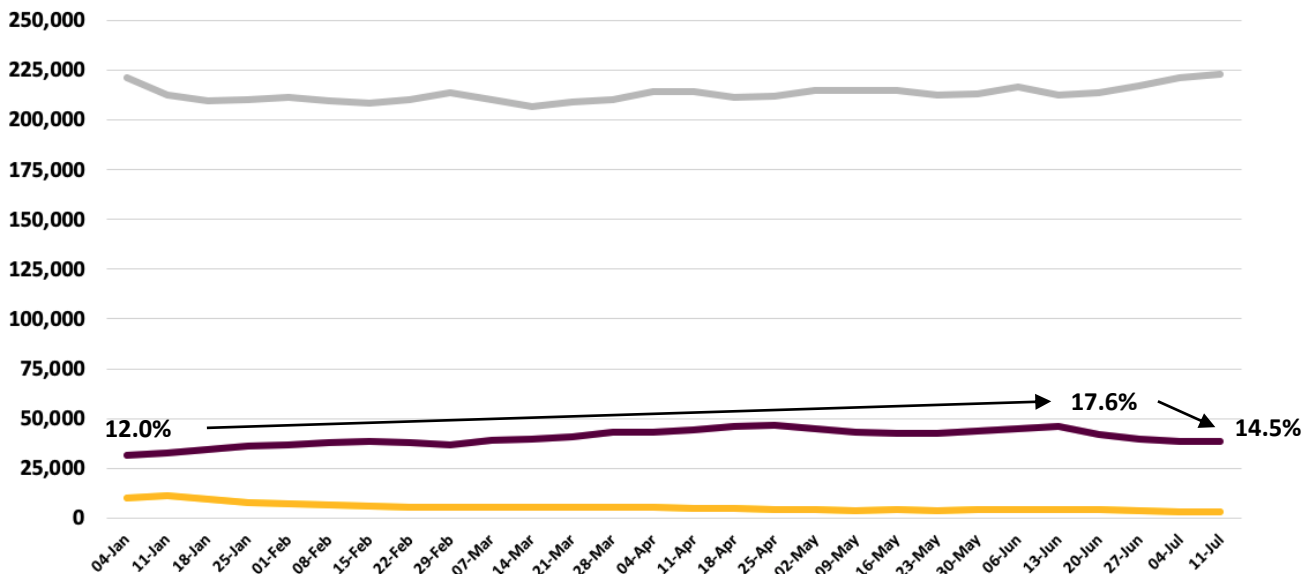
It’s important to note here that just 9 of the 19 artists of color (3.4%) identify as country music artists, with the remaining 10 emerging from other genres. While the 10 non-country artists received very limited airplay – the majority with just one week of airplay averaging 44 spins in that week, they had the same combined support as the genre’s one Black female artist.



**9 of the 19** artists of color played on country format radio identified as country artists. The remaining artists were non-country artists.

# INCREASE IN SPINS FOR SONGS BY WOMEN

Distribution of spins for songs by men, women and male-female ensembles in 2020 (to date)

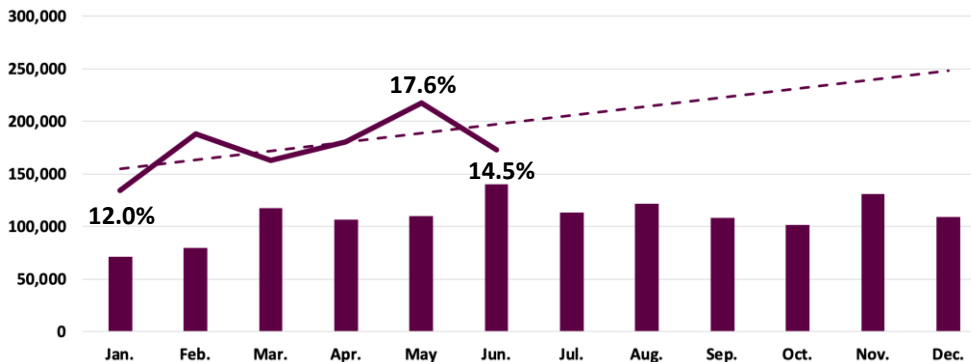


In 2019, female artists averaged 10.1% of the weekly airplay (increasing from 6.9% to 10.0% over the course of the year), with a 12-month average of 88.5% of the spins for songs by male artists. The first six months of 2020 have seen a marked improvement for female artists, increasing from 12.0% in January (before the launch of the EqualPlay campaign) to a high of 17.6% by 13 June 2020. In the four weeks following this peak, the percentage of spins for songs by female artists declined back to 14.5%. This drop in airplay can be attributed to a decline in the number of songs by women: as songs by female artists peaked and exited the chart, their songs were replaced with songs by men. While there has been an increase in spins for songs by women, to be sure, there has also been a notable decrease in spins for songs by male-female ensembles. This suggests that, not only has there been a small increase for songs by women, but that spins previously allotted for male-female ensembles may have been transferred to solo female and all-female groups. This is made clear by a 6-month average of 82.2% of the spins for male artists. Despite a period low of 80.5% the week of 25 April 2020, airplay has remained stable for male artists in 2020. While there is still much work to do to make meaningful change, one thing is certain, the ratio of spins for songs by men to women has improved, from an 8.8 to 1 ratio in 2019 to 5.3 to 1 so far in 2020. It is important to recognize that this is an average spins for for all songs (current/recurrent) across all stations.

Even more dire is the situation for women of color. Throughout this period, Black and multi-racial male artists consistently received airplay but because there are so few individual artists, they receive a combined average of 5.8% of the weekly spins across this period. Black and multi-racial female artists and ensembles, on the other hand, receive an average of 0.3% of the weekly spins. This figure includes Runaway June, whose lead singer has Native American roots. Removing the trio brings the average to 0.0% for Black women. Even with the spins for “What Are You Gonna Tell Her?” between February and April and “Black Like Me” in June and July, the amount of spins is so low that it registers as less than 0.01% in those months.

## IMPROVEMENT FROM 2019

Comparing spins for songs by women in 2020 against 2019

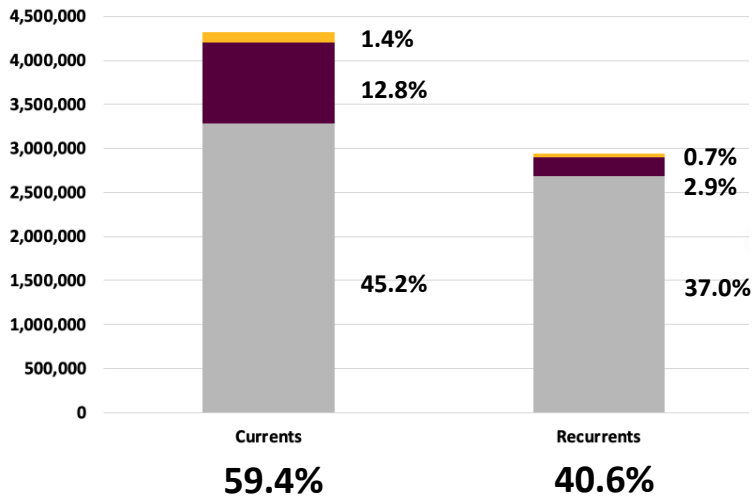


Graphing the total monthly spins for songs by female artists in 2019 (bars) against those in 2020 (line) offers greater perspective on changes in programming. Until June 2020, there was a positive trajectory in spins for songs by female artists (mapped in the trend line), a path that suggested commitment to increasing airplay for songs by women. In fact, January 2020 saw nearly double the spins (46.9% more) than the year before, with 57.6% more in February, 41% in April, and 49% in May.

The 17.6% drop in spins from May to June is a step in the wrong direction for EqualPlay, and an issue that was raised in the 2- and 4-month updates on the EqualPlay campaign. Over the last two months, as songs by women have entered the top of the chart, the bottom positions have seen fewer new songs by women. While 38 new songs by male artists entered the charts between January and 13 July, only 9 new songs by women entered the chart in 2020. In order to make meaningful change, songs by female artists need more support. This problem does not rest on the shoulders of radio alone: labels must help by sending more new music by their female artists to radio and consistently support them as they do the men on their rosters.

# INCREASED REPRESENTATION FOR CURRENT SINGLES

Percentage of spins for songs in current and recurrent status on Country Airplay reports (Mediabase) in 2020 (to date)

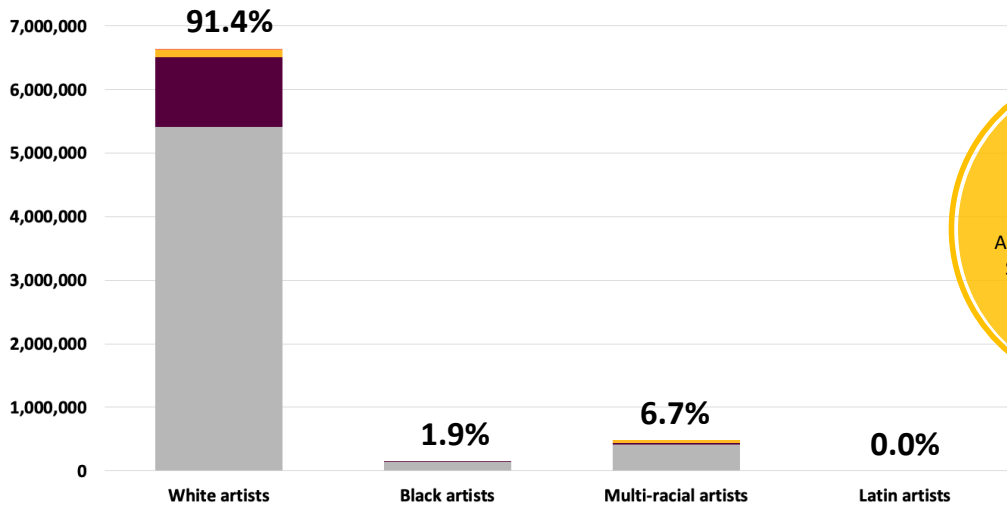


In 2019, women received 10.1% of the annual spins, with 8.4% for songs in current rotation and 1.6% for those in recurrent status. In the first 6 months of 2020, there has been a note-worthy change for female artists: a 5.6% increase in the spins for songs by women. However, 4.6% of the increase has been for songs in current status, with just 1.1% for songs in recurrent status. While it is critical to see more songs by women on the charts, representation amongst the songs in recurrent status is integral to improving representation and opportunities for women. Not only is it an easy way to make meaningful change for female artists, but it goes a long way to redefining the sound and culture of radio for listening audiences who want and need to hear a diversity of voices and perspectives.

The only current song by a gender non-binary artist to receive airplay in 2020 received just 1 week of spins, amounting to 0.01% of the airplay.

# VOICES UNHEARD ON COUNTRY FORMAT RADIO

Artists of color and LGBTQ artists are underrepresented in the mix



**8.6%**  
OF SPINS FOR COUNTRY ARTISTS WERE RECEIVED BY SONGS PERFORMED BY A BLACK OR MULTI-RACIAL ARTIST OR ENSEMBLE.

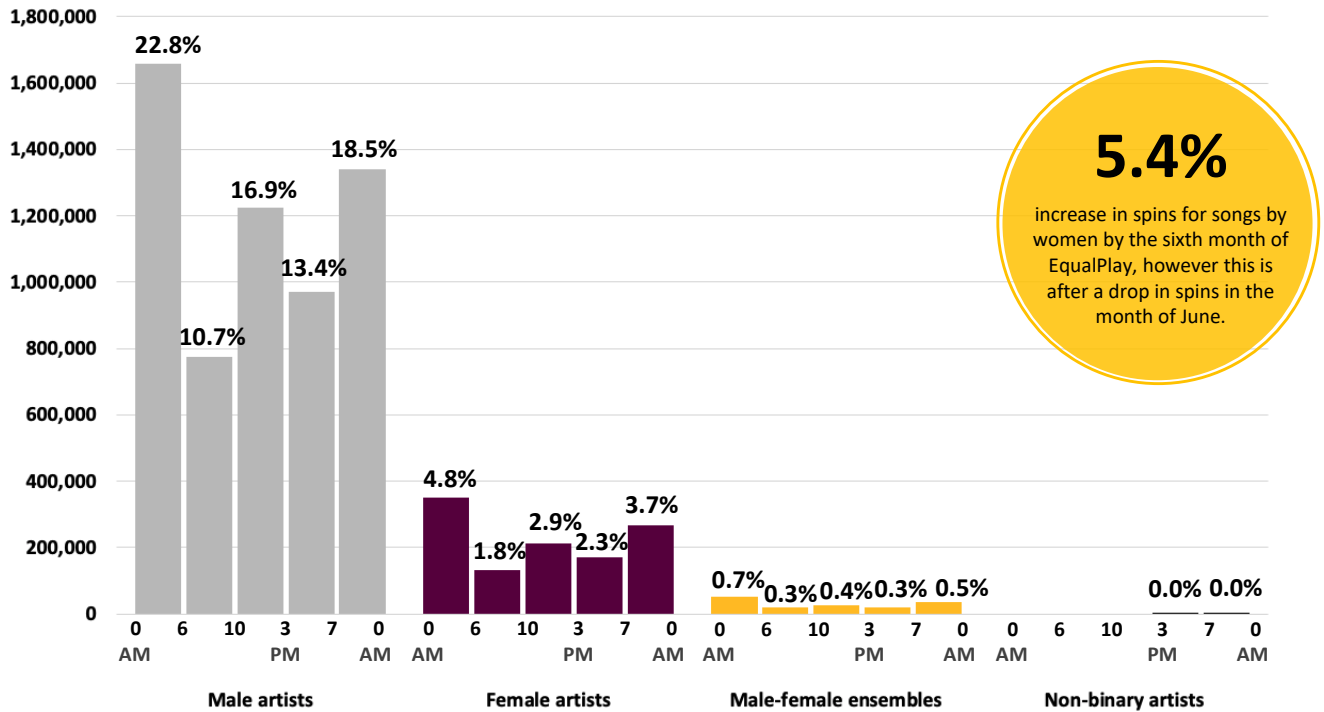
Tracking representation of artists of color by spins is of critical importance, because it affords greater perspective on how often voices of underrepresented artists are heard. Given the previous discussion on representation of the unique artists of color in 2020, it should not be surprising that graphing distribution by spins accorded to white, Black, Multi-racial and Latin artists looks strikingly similar. With just 9 country artists who are artists of color and 10 non-country artists (who received just one-week of airplay), their voices are not heard as much as white artists in the format.

The majority of both current and recurrent airplay (noted above) is for songs by white artists (74.5% for men, 15.3% for women, 1.6% for male-female ensembles). Given the small number of Black and multi-racial artists active in the format, their current songs receive just 4.3% of the airplay, while recurrences receive just 4.3% of the spins – nearly all of which was for male artists. While Runaway June has received support from the format in recent months, the genre’s only Black female artist has been nearly ignored by country format radio this year. Although country radio has played 3 of her songs in this 6-month period, they have received a combined total of 13 weeks of airplay and received the same total spins as non-country artists (under 300 combined cumulative spins). While many of the male artists of color have received complementary airplay to white country male artists (in terms of spins), Black female country artists are excluded from the format.

As pointed out earlier, just 1.5% of the artists whose songs have been played on country format radio identify as LGBTQ; combined, the spins for their 5 songs amount to less than 0.01% of the total spins to date. The majority of these spins went to The Highwomen’s “Crowded Table”, which impacted radio in June 2020. But the song has since dropped from a total of 47 spins on 13 June to 6 by 11 July.

# DAYTIME PROGRAMMING

Distribution of spins for songs by men, women and male-female ensembles across the 5 dayparts on Country Airplay reports (Mediabase)



**5.4%**  
increase in spins for songs by women by the sixth month of EqualPlay, however this is after a drop in spins in the month of June.

Even though there has been an increase in spins for songs by women, the increase has not occurred consistently throughout the five dayparts. The biggest increase occurred in the midday (1.5 percentage points), overnights (1.4 percentage points), and evenings (1.2 percentage points), with just 0.7 percentage points in the morning and 0.6 percentage points in the afternoon.

The changes that have already occurred in the first 6 months of the year mark a noted improvement from an 8.8 to 1 ratio of songs by men to those by women, to 5.3 to 1 ratio. While this is incredible improvement, for true change to occur for female artists, spins need to increase in the morning and afternoon as well to ensure that listening audiences benefit from actually *hearing* songs by women. This includes women of color and LGBTQ artists, who (as reported in earlier graphs) are absent from these reports. The EqualPlay campaign is not just about playing more songs by women, it's about building more equitable practices in programming that focuses on diversity and increased representation across all 5 dayparts. It's about ensuring that women, artists of color and LGBTQ have the opportunity for exposure and to expand their audience reach, and to begin reshaping an audience's experience.

## 24-HR CYCLE ON RADIO IN 2020

Number of songs by male artists, female artists, male-female ensembles and non-binary artists played throughout the day by July 2020

Daypart	Songs by male artists	Songs by female artists	Songs by male-female ensembles	Songs by Non-binary artists
AMD (6:00-10:00)	35	6	1	0
MID (10:00-3:00)	56	10	1	0
PMD (3:00-7:00)	44	8	1	0
EVE (7:00-12:00)	61	12	2	0
OVN (12:00-6:00)	75	16	2	0
<b>Total 24 hr cycle</b>	<b>271 (82.2%)</b>	<b>52 (15.6%)</b>	<b>7 (2.2%)</b>	<b>0 (0.0%)</b>

# REPRESENTATION ACROSS 2020 REPORTS

Number and percentage of unique songs by women, BIMOC and LGBTQ artists on Country Airplay reports (Mediabase) in 2020, to date

25.5% OVERALL



185/726 SONGS  
13 BIMOC  
4 LGBTQ

16.3% TOP 50



17/104 SONGS  
1 BIMOC  
0 LGBTQ

16.9% TOP 20



9/53 SONGS  
0 BIMOC  
0 LGBTQ

17.9% TOP 10



7/39 SONGS  
0 BIMOC  
0 LGBTQ

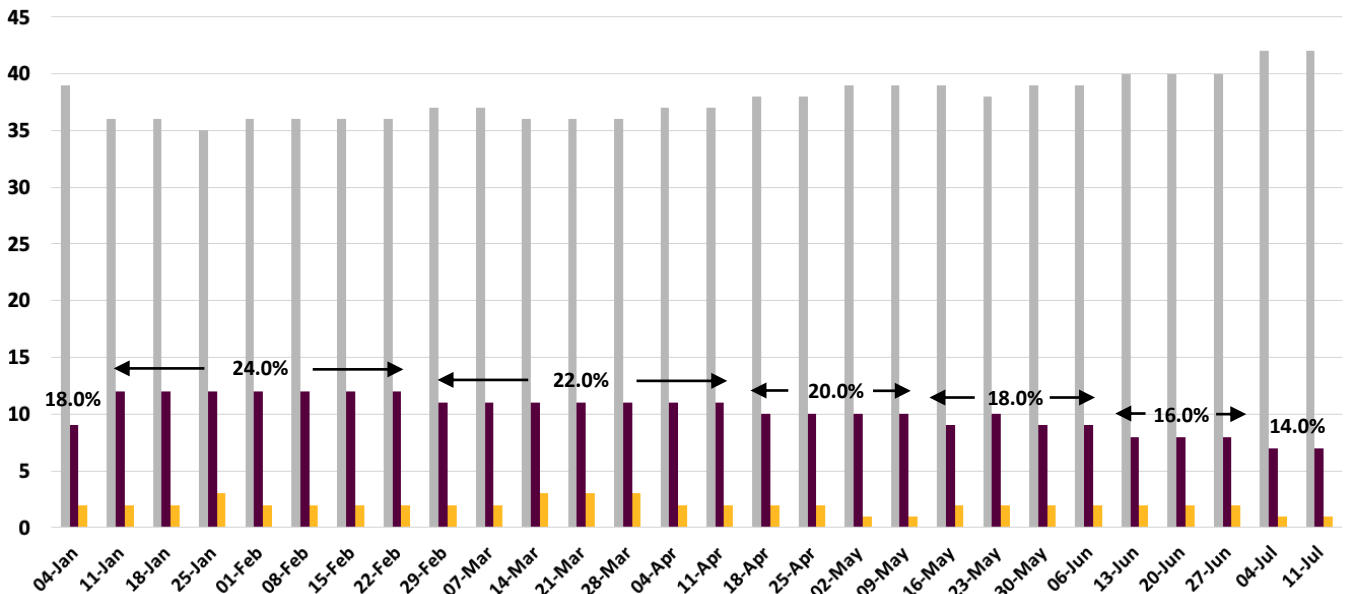
17.3% NO. 1



4/23 SONGS  
0 BIMOC  
0 LGBTQ

## DECLINING REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE ARTISTS ON WEEKLY CHARTS

Distribution of individual songs on the Weekly Country Airplay Charts (Mediabase) for first 6 months of 2020

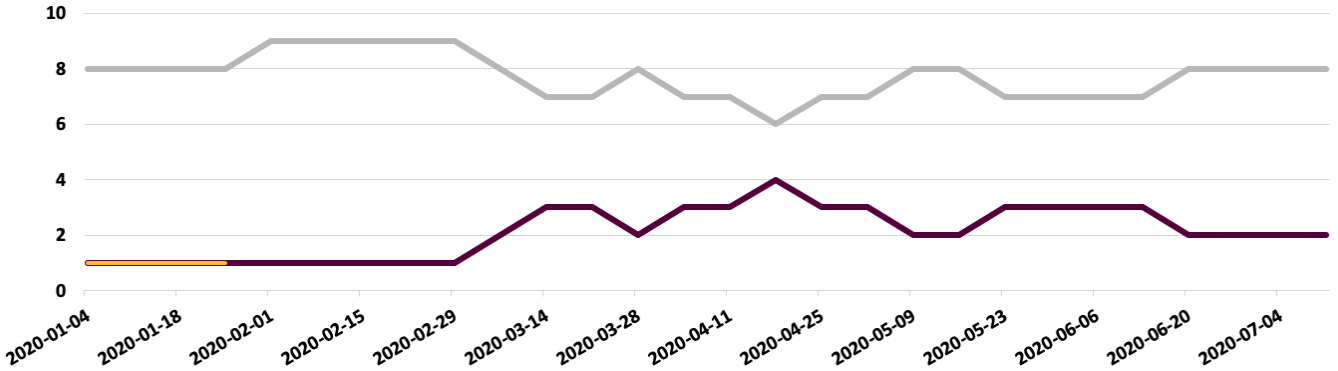


The year began with stronger representation of female artists on the 50-position Weekly Airplay Chart (Mediabase). Between 11 January and 22 February there was an average of 12 songs by women (24%) on the chart, with 5 songs (20%) a week in the Top 20. As the number of songs on the weekly Chart has declined over the 12 weeks following this period, the number of songs entering the Top 20 initially increased to a peak of 6 in the Top 20 the week ending 2 May 2020 and of 4 in the Top 10 the week ending 18 April 2020. As songs by women have peaked and exited the chart (entering recurrent status) there has been an overall decline in charting songs by women because fewer songs have entered the chart. Six of the 104 songs that have charted this year have been by men of color, with 3 for Kane Brown, 1 each for Jimmie Allen, Dan + Shay and Hootie & the Blowfish. Jimmie Allen, Kane Brown and Dan + Shay have had #1 songs in 2020, with Brown's "Homesick" and Dan + Shay's "10,000 Hours" registering 2-week runs.

While spins have increased overall for female artists, songs by women are not receiving adequate support to improve representation on the weekly 50-position chart. Focusing just on the charts, female artists received 21% of the weekly spins, with an average ratio of 3.5:1 over this period. While this is an improvement, to be sure, there needs to be greater support at radio and increased promotional support from their labels so that they enter, remain on and climb the chart. And despite significant fan support from Mickey Guyton as registered through streaming numbers, the singer-songwriter has yet to receive enough airplay to push her songs onto the chart. Runaway June is the only female-driven ensemble with an artist of color to chart this year, and Gone West is the only multi-racial male-female ensemble to chart.

# REPRESENTATION IN THE TOP 10

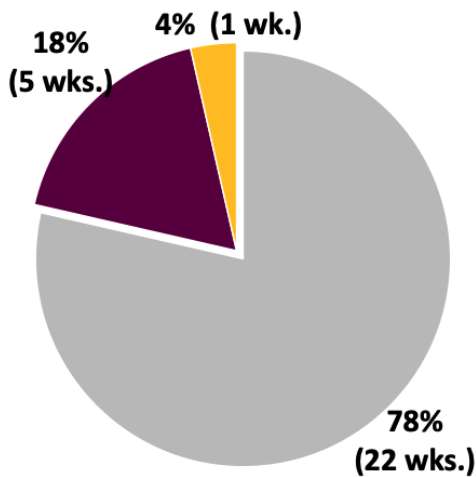
Distribution of songs in the Top 10 on Weekly Country Airplay Charts



One month following the formal launch of the EqualPlay campaign, there were suggestions of improvement on radio, as there were more songs by women entering the Top 20 and Top 10 positions on the Weekly Airplay Chart. For 3 months between 14 March and 13 June, Top 10 songs by women averaged 26.8% of the airplay for top songs. This is considerable improvement from the 8% at the start of the year and from 2019. The week of 25 April 2020 was particularly noteworthy, as 4 songs by women were in the Top 10, making up 40% of the top positions (and 32% of the spins) for the first time in more than 7 years. Despite these achievements, however, because just 9 songs by women have entered the chart in 2020 (against 38 new songs by male artists), leaving a considerable gap in the bottom positions of the chart. As stated earlier, as songs by women have peaked and exited the chart, there have been increasingly fewer songs by women behind them to take their place. By the end of the 6 months period following the announcement of EqualPlay, then, the number of songs by women in the Top 10 has declined and does not show sign of rebounding quickly. Once Miranda Lambert’s “Bluebird” and Maddie & Tae’s “Die From a Broken Heart” exit the chart, the only song by a female artist within reach of the Top 10 is Ashley McBryde’s “One Night Standards”, which was at #13 the week of 13 July 2020. The next closest song is Lauren Alain’s “Getting Good” at #32. The situation is thus becoming dire, once again, representation nears 2019 lows – and will surely be worse because of this considerable gap in songs by women on the chart.

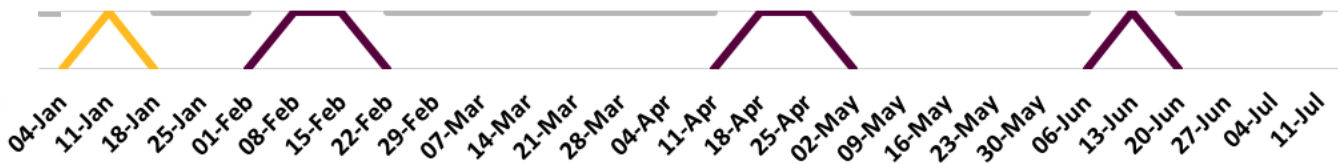
# IMPROVEMENT AT THE TOP OF THE CHART

Distribution of songs reaching the #1 position of the Weekly Country Airplay Charts



Over the last 6 months there has been significant improvement in the number of songs by women reaching the top position of the Weekly Airplay Chart (Mediabase). In the first 28 weeks of 2020, 23 songs peaked at #1, and 4 of those songs (17.4%) have been by women. Combined, these 4 songs maintained the top position for 5 weeks. With Miranda Lambert’s “Bluebird” poised to take the #1 spot before the month’s end, this would mean that there are double the #1 singles by women in the first 7 months of 2020 than in all of 2019. This is the highest number of #1 songs by female artists in a decade: in 2010, 7 songs by female artists reached the top of the chart.

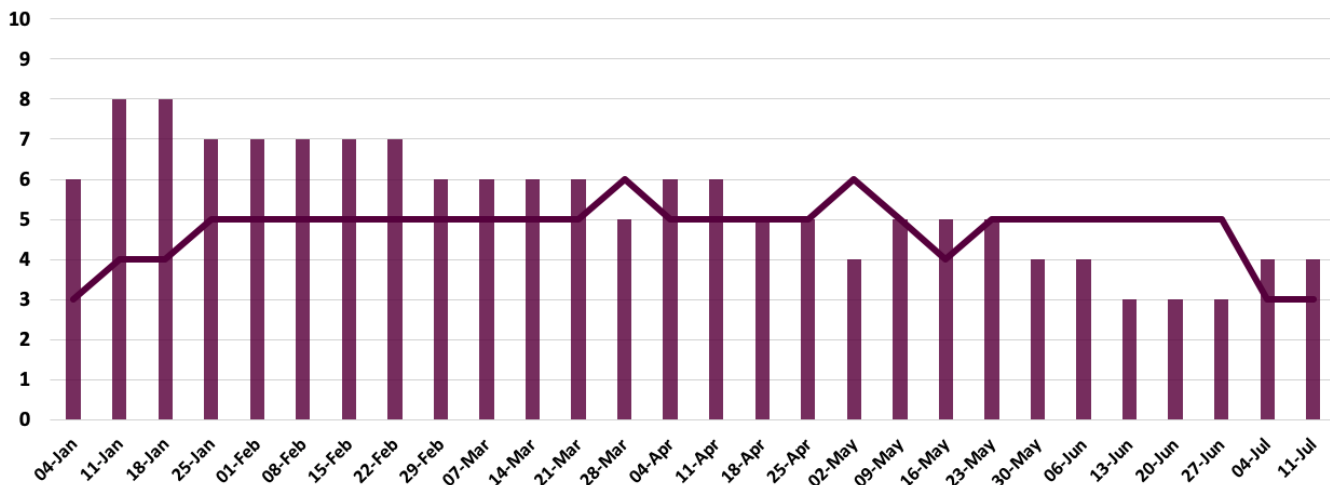
There have also been two #1 songs by men of color in the first half of the year. Jimmie Allen hit #1 the week of 29 February 2020 and Kane Brown’s “Homesick” spent back-to-back weeks at the top of the chart in March 2020. While there is much room for improvement with regard to racial diversity (notably, the inclusion of women of color), it is promising to see both artists embraced by country radio.





# RETURNING TO STATUS QUO...?

Distribution of songs by women in the Top 20 (lines) against those in the Bottom 30 (columns) on Weekly Country Airplay Charts



As SongData has continuously observed over the last few months, a lack of songs entering and moving through the bottom positions will eventually lead to a deficit of songs in the top positions and eventually a gap in representation overall. This graph shows that the Airplay Charts (Mediabase) are at risk of heading back in the direction of 2019 statistics with a drop from 8 songs in the bottom 30 in January down to 6 by March and sitting at an average of 5 between 18 April to 16 May. At the same time, the songs by female artists that have entered the Top 20 are starting to run their course on the chart: Maren Morris's, Gabby Barrett's and Ingrid Andress' songs have reached the top and gone recurrent, leaving 4 songs by women in the Top 20 and just 5 following behind in the bottom 30.

If new songs by female artists don't make it into the chart in the next few weeks, the charts will return to summer 2019 numbers with 10% of the charting songs by women.

## TOP MALES PROGRAMMED MORE THAN TOP FEMALES

Top 10 artists by sum of total accumulated spins in 2020 (to date), an asterisk (\*) denotes an artist of color  
Placement overall indicated in square brackets

TOP 10 MALE ARTISTS	TOTAL SPINS	TOP 10 FEMALE ARTISTS	TOTAL SPINS	TOP 10 MALE-FEMALE ENSEMBLES	TOTAL SPINS
[1] LUKE COMBS	442,945	[11] MAREN MORRIS	175,835	[29] LADY A	98,599
[2] THOMAS RHETT	281,428	[18] GABY BARRETT	143,730	[49] GONE WEST*	42,488
[3] MORGAN WALLEN	246,380	[20] CARLY PEARCE	140,361	[76] LITTLE BIG TOWN	11,645
[4] KANE BROWN*	237,468	[25] INGRID ANDRESS	120,590	[107] HALEY & MICHAELS	1,642
[5] LUKE BRYAN	234,532	[28] CARRIE UNDERWOOD	99,070	[116] THOMPSON SQUARE	1,200
[6] SAM HUNT	223,945	[35] MIRANDA LAMBERT	87,398	[132] SUGARLAND	524
[7] JASON ALDEAN	193,933	[38] MADDIE & TAE	78,950	[220] SMITHFIELD	50
[8] BLAKE SHELTON	189,986	[40] KELSEA BALLERINI	71,682	--	
[9] OLD DOMINION	185,701	[45] ASHLEY MCBRYDE	55,128	--	
[10] DAN + SHAY*	178,701	[57] LAUREN ALAINA	27,665	--	

## RECURRENT SONGS BY FEMALE ARTISTS

List of songs by female artists in recurrent status on Mediabase reports  
An asterisk (\*) marks songs that had been current in the 2020 calendar year

Gabby Barrett	"I Hope"* (2019)	49,126
Maren Morris	"The Bones"* (2019)	48,832
Bebe Rexha, ft. FGL	"Meant To Be" (2017)	19,351
Ingrid Andress	"More Hearts Than Mine"* (2019)	16,757
Carrie Underwood	"Southbound" (2019)	16,178
Kelsea Ballerini	"Miss Me More" (2018)	14,481
Maren Morris	"Girl" (2019)	8,895
Maren Morris	"Rich" (2016)	8,113
Runaway June	"Buy My Own Drinks" (2018)	7,073
Carly Pearce	"I Hope You're Happy Now"* (2019)	5,635
Carrie Underwood	"Cry Pretty" (2018)	3,547
Carrie Underwood	"Love Wins" (2018)	1,813
Kelsea Ballerini	"homecoming queen" (2019)	1,456
Trisha Yearwood	"Every Girl in This Town" (2019)	1,390
Caylee Hammack	"Family Tree" (2019)	1,228
Carrie Underwood	"Drinking Alone"* (2019)	956
Carly Pearce	"Hide the Wine" (2017)	876
Miranda Lambert	"It All Comes Out in the Wash" (2019)	808
Lindsay Ell	"I Don't Love You"* (2019)	628
Maddie & Tae	"Friends Don't" (2018)	627
Runaway June	"Head Over Heels" (2019)	458
Kacey Musgraves	"Rainbow" (2018)	332
Carly Pearce	"Closer To You" (2018)	376
Ashley McBride	"Girl Goin' Nowhere" (2017)	224
Lauren Alaina	"Doin' Fine" (2017)	71
Tenille Townes	"Somebody's Daughter" (2018)	65
Lauren Alaina	"Ladies in the 90s" (2018)	60
Lindsay Ell	"Criminal" (2016)	37
Ashley McBryde	"A Little Dive Bar in Dählonega" (2017)	19
Caroline Jones	"Chasin' Me"* (2019)	6

In the first 6 months of 2020, 30 songs by 18 women were in recurrent status, this includes songs that have recently exited the chart but are still in high rotation and those that are in gold catalogue status. This table lists all 30 songs, with their total spins to date. Their combined spins amounts 7.1% of all songs in recurrent status (of 2.9% overall).

Seven of the 30 songs were current singles in 2020, including 2 songs by a multi-racial ensemble. Otherwise, there are no songs by solo female artists of color included in recurrent status. While it is encouraging to see that songs by new artists Gabby Barrett and Ingrid Andress continue to receive airplay in recurrent status (showing that their songs have not immediately disappeared from playlists upon their chart exit), it is still disheartening to see so few songs by established artists on the list. The oldest song by a female artist was released in 2016 – just four years ago!

By contrast, there are 162 recurrent songs by 76 different male artists that received airplay between January and 11 July 2020. The oldest song amongst these recurrents dates to 2014. Thus not only are there more songs by more male artists in recurrent status, but program directors have a longer period from which they are drawing their male-led recurrents.

If program directors are going to limit the possible recurrent/gold songs by female artists to a period in which women were drastically underrepresented on radio and the chart (2016-2020), there are going to be fewer records for them to include on their playlists. Expanding this timeframe for recurrents by female artists to the same period as male artists (2014-2020) would enable program directors to improve representation on their stations' playlists. As [Brittany Thompson](#) has proven in her programming in Kingston, Ontario, one way to do this is by re-introducing songs that "never got a chance" their first time around. Many of these songs are by artists that are still very much active in the industry. With new music recently released by Maddie & Tae, Miranda Lambert and The Chicks – and new music on the way from Mickey Guyton and Cam – this is an opportunity to build familiarity with their voices and get their audiences excited for new music by women.