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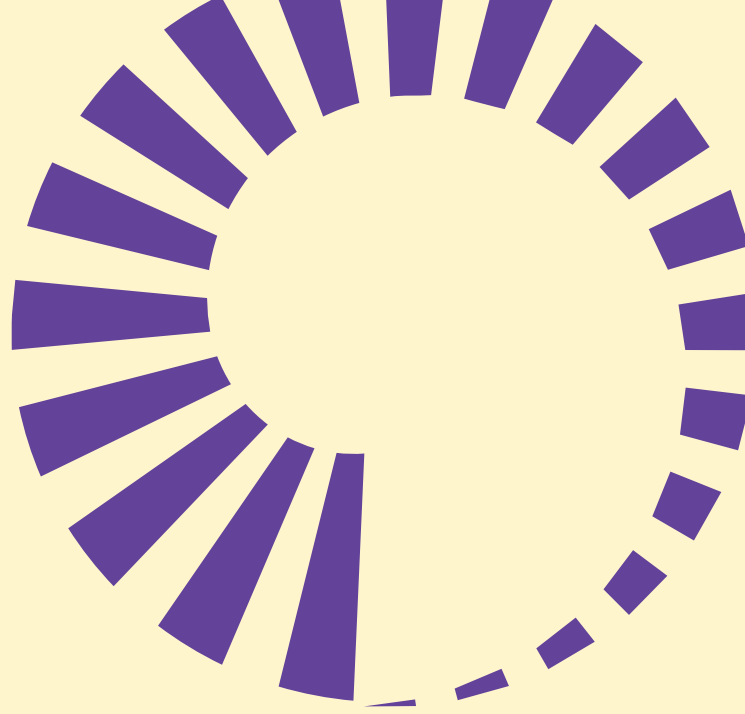
Story  
at Scale

**EXPANDING VISIONS OF  
GENDER IN POPULAR CULTURE**  
A CULTURAL AUDIT

by Erin Potts

 *listen while you read*

We've created a Spotify [playlist](#) that accompanies this report.



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## Author's Preface

It is clear that we are in a moment of massive cultural upheaval around gender. Stereotypical gender performances dominate television, film, and music. Our culture is overwhelmed with limited visions of gender that create distressing and unsafe conditions for those who do not conform to dominant cultural norms—from sexual harassment and assault to the rise in murders of Black transgender women.

But this is also a positive moment.

New visions of gender and gender justice can be seen in the #MeToo movement, in the many new gender expressions in popular culture explored in this report, and in the increased number of people who are creating change in industries and across society, despite not conforming to narrow cultural stereotypes of who can be a “leader” in politics, business, or media.

This moment—in both its good and bad aspects—is indicative of a society in the process of rewriting its narratives and norms. Through cultural and narrative research and strategies, the gender justice movement can play an even larger role in expanding these narratives and creating new norms.

As a start, Story at Scale commissioned this audit to look at *positive mainstream cultural trends that expand our notions of gender*. But **culture is a fast-moving phenomenon**. Many of the examples that I use to highlight the new cultural visions of gender in this report were dated as soon as I finished typing them. Cultural audits are never comprehensive and all-knowing: they are snapshots of a moment and should be read as such. **There are also alternative, DIY, and local trends bubbling up**—such as **pleasure activism**—that will soon challenge, and ultimately vanquish, dominant narratives and norms. This constant flux is the opportunity that we, as people who want to make both short-term political change and **long-lasting cultural change**, will have to leverage.

As a cultural strategist, my job for the past twenty-five years has been to observe popular culture, looking for opportunities for social change. However, culture is vast—it is impossible for one person to see, much less understand, even a narrow slice of it. I am particularly grateful to **Dr. Courtney Morris**, an African American gender justice professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who contributed to the “Fuck Respectability!” section and to our understanding of popular “bad girl” music, as well as Jeff Chang, Ebony Ava Harper, Jee Kim, Alex Lee, Jess McIntosh, Favianna Rodriguez, Tracey Sturdivant, other members of the Story at Scale Research Advisory Council, and the many others who spent countless hours in conversation with me and with one another and who lent their eyes, ears, and perspectives to help deepen and broaden this report.

Toward justice,

Erin

**Erin Potts** (she/her) is a pioneer of several innovative social change strategies and research techniques, a producer of award-winning cultural events and products, and an organizer of unusual—but potent—groups of changemakers. Over her twenty-five-year career, Erin has been a leader in the emerging field of cultural and narrative strategies and has developed revenue strategies that have earned tens of millions of dollars for social justice. You can learn more about Erin's work at [Jumpslide.com](https://www.jumpslide.com).

## Introduction

Cultural audits provide movements and campaigns with a deeper and more emotionally resonant understanding of their audiences than traditional research practices do on their own. While they do not seek to be comprehensive representations of everything everywhere, they do help to orient campaigns' communications strategies to the cultural lives of their audiences, getting to the heart of the audiences' hopes, fears, and joys as expressed in the culture they consume and participate in.

This cultural audit investigates and distills the changing cultural concepts of gender to assist campaigns in developing effective communications and engagement strategies to advance gender justice<sup>1</sup> that are audience-centered, story-driven, and emotionally resonant. Because culture has the power to both disrupt and uphold gender stereotypes—sometimes in the same moment—and because gender is literally everywhere all the time, a cultural audit of gender is a massive undertaking. Researchers often narrow the scope of cultural audits with rigorously defined audiences, but Story at Scale seeks to understand the gender narratives of everyone living in the United States: what new gender stories are people listening to and watching through popular culture, and how are these creating new opportunities and challenges for gender justice? To make this undertaking manageable (and, we believe, more strategic), we decided to focus on positive or joyful cultural trends and examples of resistance to oppressive gender norms that are popular across Story at Scale's multiple audiences and pilot states (California, Georgia, and Michigan).



*listen while you read*

We've created a 51-minute **playlist** that accompanies this report. There is also a "Read, Watch, and Listen List" in **Appendix B**.

*One more note before we begin: it is important to recognize that this cultural audit is focused on gender. It is not about sexual orientation, though lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people appear as important culturemakers and influencers throughout the document.*

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<sup>1</sup> Gender justice is a framework used to bring about the fair and equitable treatment of people of all genders, with the goal of achieving dignity for all. It serves all those directly impacted by gender-based oppression, including transgender and cisgender women, genderqueer and non-binary people, and transgender men. True gender justice is intersectional and incorporates the needs and perspectives of those working towards racial justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ liberation, and disability justice, among other struggles, recognizing that each of these is required in order for people of all genders to experience full dignity, equality, and liberation.

Even with this defined scope, the amount of information was overwhelming. To create a useful tool, we also filtered this audit for scale and tactical opportunity. Thus, this report highlights only some of the trends relating to gender—the mainstream stereotype-defying trends that touch all of our audiences. Our analysis focuses on television, film, music, books, fashion, beauty, sports, and sex, but our research went far beyond these boundaries. We did data analysis using tools including Google Trends, Audiense, and Spotify. We also conducted expert interviews, literature reviews, and content analysis. All told, we reviewed, watched, and analyzed approximately 120 television shows, films, videos, and comedy skits, 200 books and articles, and 225 songs, including the top songs in all of the cities in our three pilot states and on the Billboard charts (including Billboard’s Hot 100, Pop, R&B/Hip-Hop, Country, and Christian/Gospel charts). (See [Appendix A](#) for more details about our methodology.)

*This report concludes with strategic organizing recommendations for how activists and others can use this information to promote gender equity, particularly, **a call to connect narratives—such as those about parenthood and caregiving, resilience, and men’s wellness—to collective action and to coordinate with cultural leaders around gender equity.** A lengthy set of appendices contains methodological details, a top *Read, Watch, and Listen* list, a review of new tropes, and more detailed state profiles.*

## Highlights

We start by examining the many joyful trends that reject traditional gender norms and help to create new, expansive definitions of what gender roles, norms, and portrayals can be. Many of these are becoming increasingly common and mainstream, touching the lives of our audiences:

- Popular female musicians of color are rejecting “respectability politics” and are using their sexuality to empower themselves while establishing new rules around gender performance.
- Elite female athletes are championing bodily and emotional autonomy, and unlike other examples given throughout this report, are doing it collectively.
- Gender blending and fluidity are more pervasive and welcomed in popular culture than ever before.
- Historically gendered cultural spaces—like music, fashion, and beauty—are beginning to be successfully reorganized to disrupt the status quo.

We also take a broader look at how the mainstream culture is selectively celebrating women and “pop feminism” in television and film, music, and even brands.

We then explore narratives and themes that are challenges now but present opportunities for continued activism to push our culture forward:

- Portraying parenthood and caregiving as genderless, rather than as primarily women’s work.
- Moving from individual stories of overcoming and redemption to larger narratives about collective action for systemic and social change.
- Changing the conversation about sexuality, with insights about how our audiences understand it and tips on how health and wellness are an entry point.

Finally, because laws protecting abortion, contraception, and other personal spheres of behavior are based in the contested right to privacy,<sup>2</sup> we look at changing concepts of privacy in our cultural lives.

In our analysis of cultural consumption and affinity in three pilot states—California, Georgia, and Michigan—we find some important similarities leading to key opportunities to create new stories on gender:

- They are all cultural production states, responsible for much of the world’s popular music, television, and films.
- They all consume similar cultural content, with common narrative themes about gender (e.g., dysfunctional families, strong female characters, male characters with hidden identities), particularly in the case of television.
- They value both helping others and independence. They like to “set their own goals and ways to achieve them.”<sup>3</sup>
- The majority of people in these states think that knowing what’s right or wrong “depends on the situation” more than it is dictated by common sense or religion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David A. J. Richards, “Sexual Autonomy and the Constitutional Right to Privacy: A Case Study in Human Rights and the Unwritten Constitution,” 30 *Hastings L.J.* 957 (1979), accessed January 22, 2020, [https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings\\_law\\_journal/vol30/iss4/2](https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_law_journal/vol30/iss4/2). See also Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” *Harvard Law Review* 4, no. 5 (Dec. 15, 1890): 193–220.

<sup>3</sup> Primary data pulled from Audiense Insights reports commissioned by Story at Scale on each state. These reports and related data are archived at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1naAUxfpSI3bqbkX95sArn0HWXaCrLib>.

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, Religious Landscape Report (online interactive report), Pew Research Center web site, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>.

## From the Margins to the Mainstream: The Bright Spots

In conducting this audit, we saw stories, narratives, and identities over and over again that reinforce existing gender norms.

But we also saw bright spots where people are rejecting limiting “rules” about gender roles and identities and forging new models of representation. Frequently, these reimagined gender roles and performances originate with people and groups outside of the dominant white narrative—including women of color; independent artists; queer, transgender, and/or non-binary people; and men operating outside the traditional definition of masculinity. We explore several of these in the section below.

We also see some of these gender rewrites moving beyond the margins, gaining attention, traction, and then acceptance, with mainstream culture adopting the trend (in many cases without attribution or acknowledgement). This section ends with a short examination of how some of these new norms are starting to appear in mainstream culture and in commerce as “pop feminism.”

### Women Who Say “Fuck Respectability!”

Cultural critics and academics refer to “respectability politics” as the strict policing of members of one’s own marginalized community in terms of their conformity with social norms that is undertaken with the assumption that the respectability afforded by this policing will grant them full participation in society (think of [Bill Cosby’s morality-infused “pound cake” speech](#)).<sup>5</sup> Contemporary female hip-hop artists are loudly rejecting respectability politics in both their musical content and visual aesthetic practices. Again, this is not a new thing—[Betty Davis](#), Miles Davis’s ex-wife, who supposedly was the subject of the song “Bitches Brew,” is a great example from the 70s. Today this irreverence for social norms is renewed and brought to scale by pop artists as different and sometimes controversial as [Lizzo](#), [Azealia Banks](#), [Nicki Minaj](#), Megan Thee Stallion (who started the “hot girl summer” meme), and others.

Within this trend is a particular sub-genre of former strippers, now rappers, who are also moms.<sup>6</sup> The most famous, and perhaps most controversial, of these women is [Cardi B](#). Many view this trend as working-class women celebrating their freedom, power, and sexuality and leading a different kind of feminist movement. As one feminist writer discusses the phenomenon, “It represents women as hard-working in an industry where they are regularly subjected to abuse and objectification. Cardi had to strip in order to stay afloat in a world where women are seen as objects rather than people... This feminist movement represents talented women from low-income backgrounds and how they rise and overcome the adversity they face.”<sup>7</sup> In her video for “Money,” Cardi B asserts power in every frame, whether she is playing piano, dancing on a stripper pole, or breastfeeding her baby while wearing an opulent gown.

Earlier this year, Cardi B responded to criticism that female rappers who used to strip are always rapping about their sexual parts. “There’s a lot of female rappers that be rapping they ass off and don’t be talking about they pussy and don’t be talking about getting down and dirty, and y’all don’t be supporting them,” she said in an Instagram video. “Y’all don’t be supporting them and they be mad dope. These bloggers don’t support them, they don’t give them the recognition. So don’t blame that shit on us when y’all not the ones that’s supporting them.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more on respectability politics, see [this piece by Ta-Nehisi Coates about Bill Cosby](#) (Ta-Nehisi Coates, “This Is How We Lost to the White Man,” *The Atlantic*, May 2008) or [this article about the rise of respectability politics in the Obama era](#) (Fredrick C. Harris, “The Rise of Respectability Politics,” *Dissent*, Winter 2014).

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note for this project that stripper-rappers are very popular in Atlanta.

<sup>7</sup> Ariana Memishi, “Stripper Turned Rapper. The Feminist Movement,” *The Femme Oasis*, July 17, 2018, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.thefemmeoasis.com/music/stripper-turned-rapper-the-feminist-movement/000002am>.

<sup>8</sup> Joshua Espinoza, “Cardi B Responds to Jermaine Dupri’s ‘Strippers Rapping’ Comments,” *Complex*, July 11, 2019, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.complex.com/music/2019/07/cardi-b-responds-jermaine-dupri-stripper-rapper-comment>.

► watch: Cardi B's video for "Money"<sup>9</sup>



## ABOUT CARDI B:<sup>10</sup>

She is a devout Catholic Latina from the Bronx who won Best Rap Album in 2019 — the first time a woman has ever won it. (Her **instagram bio** says “I HAVE A GRAMMYWINNINGVAGINA.”) She is married to Offset from **Migos**, one of the most popular Atlanta hip hop groups, with whom she recently had a child. She

has 45 million followers on Instagram, her preferred social media platform, and she is very outspoken on it, talking about everything from **Trump** to gun reform to her **lactose intolerance**. She also consistently shows up at the top of the charts globally, as well as in the pilot states. And, according to **Audiense**, an audience research tool, she is an influencer for people who think that abortion is a woman's right.

<sup>9</sup> Warning: There is brief nudity and lots of sexual content in this video.

<sup>10</sup> Cardi B (iamcardib), Press, Instagram photograph, posted May, 30, 2019, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/ByGIKQIAT72/>.



## Elite female athletes<sup>11</sup>

From **Caster Semenya** to **Serena Williams** to **Megan Rapinoe**, elite female athletes are making sports a space in which to rewrite narratives on bodily and emotional autonomy. Unlike other cultural verticals mentioned, many of these athletes are doing this important work to combat gender violence, inequity, and stereotypes in coordination with other athletes. Together, the women of the USA Gymnastics Team<sup>12</sup> took on more than a decade of sexual assault. Together, women soccer players in the World Cup demanded self-representation and autonomy, **using stand-out hair and makeup on the field to change notions about how female athletes should present themselves** and leveraging their collective voices in advocating for equal pay off the field. Finally, many Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) players have spoken out on recent state abortion bans using common language that is starkly about autonomy and what women should be allowed to do with their bodies.<sup>13</sup> These elite female athletes understand, perhaps better than most, that gender equity is a team sport.

But athletes aren't stopping with just bodily autonomy. They are also taking on the double standard around showing emotions during competition, allowing men to do it as part of their competitive nature, but penalizing women who do it as well. Two great examples are Serena Williams being penalized for **being upset at a call** in the 2018 US Open tennis championship and the 2019 US Women's National Soccer Team being criticized for **showing "too much emotion"** in their opening match against Thailand. The policing and criticism of female athletes' emotions is so prevalent that Nike created an important ad campaign about it earlier this year.



## Challenging Gender Norms and the Gender Binary

There have always been gender rebels in society. We would not have Janelle Monáe if not for Prince nor Lady Gaga without Grace Jones. But what is new is how transgender and/or non-binary artists and trendsetters are no longer rare figures achieving occasional success; they are a constant and growing group. Whether performers are men, women, or non-binary, the lives and work of these artists and trendsetters are contributing to the rewriting of all of our society's scripts for gender identity and expression.

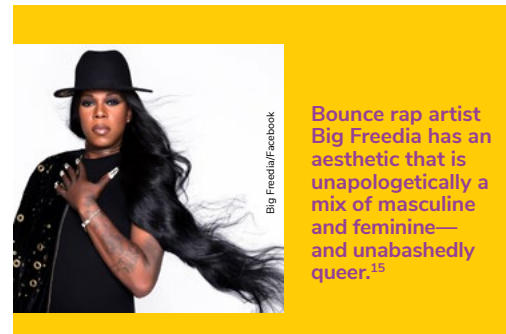
<sup>11</sup> While more and more male athletes are using their public platforms to engage in social justice issues, this section is specifically about the work that female athletes are doing on bodily and emotional autonomy.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to recognize the names of the team of women who took on their assaulters: Jeanette Antolin, Kennedy Baker, Alyssa Baumann, Simone Biles, Jamie Dantzscher, Gabby Douglas, Amanda Jetter, Bailie Key, Madison Kocian, Mattie Larson, Ashton Locklear, McKayla Maroney, Maggie Nichols, Aly Raisman, Kyla Ross, Tasha Schwikert, Sabrina Vega, Morgan White, and Jordyn Wieber.

<sup>13</sup> The WNBA also **partnered** with Planned Parenthood and other women's and girls' empowerment organizations last season.

<sup>14</sup> Nike, Dream Crazier, YouTube video, 0:01:30, February 24, 2019, <https://sneakernews.com/2019/02/24/nike-dream-crazier-ad-oscars-2019/>.

Big Freedia, the New Orleans bounce rap artist who also had her own **reality television show** on the Fuse television network, is a great example of someone who has attained a high level of artistic and commercial success while playing with gender and creating an aesthetic that is unapologetically a mix of masculine and feminine—and unabashedly queer. Elsewhere, **Asia Kate Dillon** has garnered acclaim for their portrayal of the first non-binary main character in a television show (**Taylor** on *Billions*). **Alok Vaid-Menon**, a South Asian media maven, and **Tyler Ford**, a multicultural writer and activist, have each gained notoriety specifically because of their outspoken advocacy on behalf of people who are transgender, non-binary, and/or gender nonconforming.



Bounce rap artist Big Freedia has an aesthetic that is unapologetically a mix of masculine and feminine—and unabashedly queer.<sup>15</sup>

Fashion is another space where we see some norm-defying behavior accepted and celebrated, even as the industry broadly continues to uphold many traditional gender norms. (Think of the phrase “who wears the pants?” and how that is really an inquiry into who holds the power.) But a shift is afoot. Established clothing brands from Gucci to Zara have recently launched “unisex” lines, and there are dozens of independent, gender-neutral clothing brands, such as **the Phluid Project**, **Radimo**, and **Agender**. These shifts are also reflected in some of the structures of the fashion industry: in February

2018, a unisex/non-binary category was introduced for New York Fashion Week. Similarly, there is a rise in the number of transgender and/or non-binary models we see—at least ones who don’t stray too far from the traditional beauty norms of thin, white, and cisgender-presenting.<sup>16</sup> In the Fall 2018 Fashion Weeks across the globe, there were sixty-four models who openly identify as transgender and/or non-binary.<sup>17 18</sup>



Gender-blending fashions were evident at 2019 red carpet events and award shows like the Oscars.<sup>19</sup>

Artists like **Jaden Smith** and **Young Thug** have modeled women’s clothes for brands like Calvin Klein and Louis Vuiton. We are further seeing a rise in musicians of color challenging gender norms through fashion. From Lil Nas X’s **signature glam cowboy suits** to Bad Bunny’s **painted nails** to A\$AP Rocky’s **babushka**, these musicians are making “hip-hop more femme.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, gender-blending fashions were all the rage on the red carpet, from the Oscars to the Met Gala, as illustrated by the outfits of professional football player **Odell Beckham Jr**, Elsie Fisher, and Billy Porter this year.

<sup>15</sup> Big Freedia, profile photo, Facebook, posted February 27, 2018, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/bigfreedia/photos/a.147558541950751/181451805254783/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Saltzman, “The Fall 2018 Runways Saw Increases in Racial Diversity and Transgender Inclusivity,” *Fashionista*, March 22, 2018, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://fashionista.com/2018/03/fall-2018-runway-model-diversity>.

<sup>17</sup> Sara Radin, “These Gender-Neutral Labels to Watch Provide Inclusive Communities through Clothes,” *Fashionista*, May 24, 2018, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://fashionista.com/2018/05/unisex-non-binary-gender-neutral-clothing-brands-2018>.

<sup>18</sup> Chiomi Nnadi, “This Was the Decade That Hip-Hop Style Got Femme,” *Vogue*, July 18, 2019, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.vogue.com/article/young-thug-jeffrey-lil-uzi-vert-kanye-west-lil-nas-x-hip-hop-style>.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP, Billy Porter Arrives at the Oscars on Sunday, Feb. 24, 2019, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles (photograph), in Sandra Barrera, “Oscars 2019: Velvet Was the Plush New Trend for Men on the Red Carpet,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, February 24, 2019, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.dailynews.com/2019/02/24/oscars-2019-velvet-was-the-plush-new-trend-for-men-on-the-red-carpet/>; Josh Haner/*The New York Times*, Elsie Fisher, the star of “Eighth Grade” (photograph), in “Oscars Red Carpet 2019: Stars Arriving at the 91st Academy Awards,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2019, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2019/02/24/fashion/oscars-red-carpet-2019/s-josh-oscars-2019-582-elsie-fisher.html>.

## De-gendering other historically gendered spaces: Music and beauty

Like the fashion world, the music industry both strictly enforces traditional narratives and hosts some of the most intriguing and celebratory resistance to oppressive gender norms.

Music is certainly a male-dominated industry; only 22.4 percent of all performers across the 600 most popular songs from 2012 to 2017 were female. Moreover, 2017 experienced a six-year low, with women comprising just 16.8 percent of popular artists on the top singles charts.<sup>20</sup> With some exceptions (such as those discussed above), most of the top female artists express themselves in ways that align with mainstream notions of femininity.

Against this backdrop, we find emerging artists like Princess Nokia, a twenty-seven-year-old New York rapper of Puerto Rican descent. She is one of a growing group of female artists of color who are pushing gender boundaries by simultaneously disrupting what “proper” femininity looks like and the idea that physicality is something that belongs exclusively to men. This is evident in her music, in her videos, and in her performances, which she describes as very physical and masculine: “It’s spitting into the air. It’s punching the air. It’s kicking. It’s not stopping. It’s banging your head. It isn’t feminine. Ain’t no heels, ain’t no choreography.”<sup>21</sup> Princess Nokia challenges her audience’s concepts of gender further by inviting the women to come to the front—a role reversal from a typical hip-hop show where women stand in the back while the men dance aggressively in front of the stage.

▶ watch: Princess Nokia's video for "Tomboy"



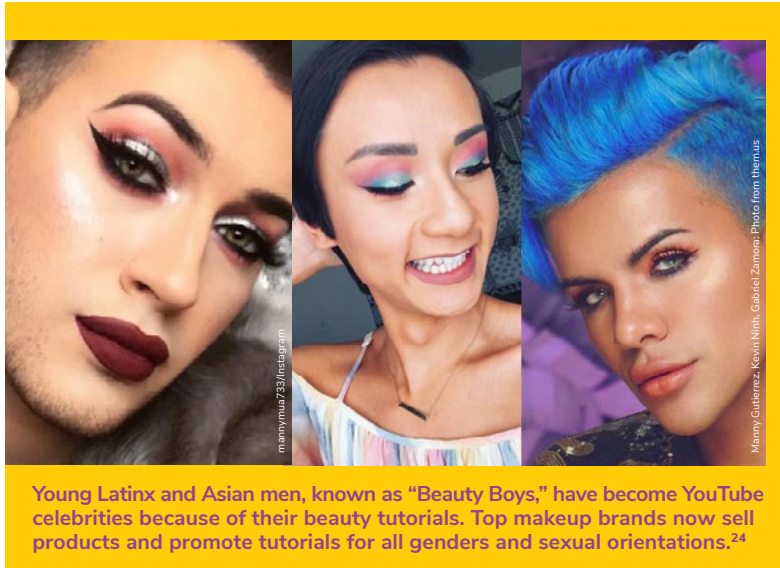
New York rapper Princess Nokia is one of a growing group of female artists of color who are pushing gender boundaries and the idea of what “proper” femininity looks like.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper, “Inclusion in the Recording Studio? Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters & Producers across 600 Popular Songs from 2012–2017,” Annenberg Inclusivity Initiative, January 2018, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/inclusion-in-the-recording-studio.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Schnipper, “Princess Nokia on Remaking Rap for a Queer, Feminist New York,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 2019, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/05/30/magazine/princess-nokia-new-york.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Princess Nokia (photograph) in Jaylene Lopez, “Princess Nokia channels NY upbringing in ‘1992 Deluxe,’” *Amherst Wire*, October 4, 2017, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://amherstwire.com/21266/entertainment/princess-nokia-channels-ny-upbringing-in-1992-deluxe/>.

Similarly, there has been a radical transformation in the beauty industry that is opening the space beyond the white female consumer base it has traditionally catered to. In the past decade, user-generated YouTube beauty tutorials have exploded from 2 billion annual views to 169 billion views.<sup>23</sup> The most widely viewed beauty channel is by Yuya, a Spanish-speaking 26-year-old beauty blogger with over 23 million subscribers. Many other beauty bloggers on the rise are young Latinx and Asian men, often referred to as “**beauty boys**,” who are now YouTube celebrities because of the success of their beauty tutorials. In 2017, **Manny Gutierrez**, became a **Maybelline Ambassador**, the first of these beauty boys to land an endorsement deal with a traditional makeup company.



Young Latinx and Asian men, known as “Beauty Boys,” have become YouTube celebrities because of their beauty tutorials. Top makeup brands now sell products and promote tutorials for all genders and sexual orientations.<sup>24</sup>

The fascination with male beauty and makeup goes beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer folks. Top makeup brands like Glossier, Milk Makeup, Fenty Beauty, and **Haus Laboratories**, **Lady Gaga’s** new makeup company, celebrate, sell products and give **tutorials** for all genders and sexual orientations on how to apply makeup. A new “manly” men’s makeup company called **Warpaint** launched in May 2019 and is getting **a quick-witted lesson on gender** and **race** via social media. But all of these examples illustrate that men’s desire to look better is on the rise. Interestingly, the men’s beauty trend is also coupled with men’s desire to feel and perform better. This has led the wellness industry to also turn its attention towards men. Companies like **Him** and **Goop Men** are just some of those filling this need with everything from men’s **mental wellness podcasts** to **apps** to **retreats**.

The men’s beauty trend, coupled with men’s desire to feel and perform better, has led the wellness industry to turn its attention towards men.<sup>25</sup>

### Mainstream positive portrayals and “pop feminism”

Even as women of all races and classes are feeling more politically and socially attacked and oppressed, mainstream culture seems to be embracing and celebrating the power of women, particularly white women. In the last four years we’ve seen not just a revival of heroines in television and film, but those very movies being huge box office hits. As examples, we see **Wonder Woman** (2017) and **Captain Marvel** (2019) in the superhero genre. Rey and Princess Leia (now General Organa) in **The Force Awakens** (2015) and **The Last Jedi** (2017) and Jin in **Rogue One** (2016) are the female

<sup>23</sup> Statista, “Annual Beauty-Related Content Views on YouTube from 2009 to 2018” (chart), Statista web site, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/294655/youtube-monthly-beauty-content-views/>.

<sup>24</sup> Manny Gutierrez, Kevin Ninh, Gabriel Zamora (photograph) in Michael Waters, “How Instagram’s Beauty Boys Are Changing Our Ideas About Gender,” *them.*, February 28, 2018, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.them.us/story/instagrams-beauty-boys-are-changing-our-ideas-about-gender>; mannymua733/Instagram, Manny Gutierrez (photograph), in Erin Reimel, “Manny Gutierrez Is the First Man to Star in a Maybelline Campaign, and It’s a Huge Deal,” *Glamour*, January 4, 2017, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.glamour.com/story/manny-gutierrez-maybelline-campaign>.

<sup>25</sup> Goop, Inc., “The Goopfellas Podcast,” Goop web site, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://goop.com/goopfellas-podcast/>.

heroes we never had in the original Star Wars movie releases. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) illustrates the diversity of feminine powers in the battle towards collective liberation, and *Incredibles 2* (2018) shows us that “reversed” gender roles could be normal—maybe. (While this progress should be lauded broadly, it’s notable that none of these are women heroes of color, which offers us an opportunity to advocate for even more inclusive representation on the big screen.)

A similar trend of portraying strong, complicated female characters is also happening in television. Some of the most watched television shows in our pilot states highlighted this trend: *Game of Thrones*, *Empire*, and *Jane the Virgin*, just to name a few. In fact, there are two new character tropes that we are seeing that embody this trend and defy traditional gender norms: the “Damsel Not in Distress” and “The New Matriarch.” (For more on television tropes, see [Appendix C](#).) This rise and diversity of female heroes, and especially heroines of color, is vital because social science has found that in order to accept new types of leaders, we must first see them as heroes.<sup>26</sup>

In the realm of music, some of the most popular female artists—many of whom are referenced above—are disrupting gender stereotypes. Perhaps thanks to the more in-your-face activism of others, mainstream pop artists like Taylor Swift or the Haschak Sisters are singing about “pop feminism.” In fact, in a recent review of Billboard’s Top 100 Artists, we found that every female artist in the first quartile of the list has created music with feminist themes and has been involved in gender equity activism.<sup>27</sup> There has also been a rise in the number of songs about gender equity in country music, where women are systemically and notoriously underrepresented. (See examples in [Appendix B](#): “Read, Watch and Listen.”)



Even suburban mall brands are selling—and selling out of—apparel and housewares with feminist slogans and labels.<sup>29</sup>

In the brand space, leaning into gender justice issues and explicitly pro-women ad campaigns are now seen as safe and are increasingly common. There has been an explosion of female-first companies like *Lola*, *Thinx*, and *Third Love*. These companies aren’t just making products for and by women but are also taking a stand and engaging their customers in activism around gender justice, as with a recent [full-page ad seven female-run brands took out in the New York Times](#) affirming abortion rights and urging corporate America to take action.<sup>28</sup> Pro-women ad campaigns, like Always’s *#LikeAGirl*, Dove’s *Real Beauty*, Audi’s *#DriveProgress*, Wrangler’s *#MoreThanABum*, and Pantene’s *Sorry, not Sorry* campaigns, bring the strength of women into our living rooms. And when it comes to wearing our politics on our sleeves, even suburban mall brands like Urban Outfitters and Forever 21 (which are bad actors on other issues like [body](#), [labor](#), and [intellectual property](#)) are selling—and selling out of—apparel and housewares with slogans like “*The Future is Female*” or the simple declaration “*Feminist*.” (Who doesn’t want a pair of “Feminist” socks?!)

<sup>26</sup> Sophon Shadraconis, “Leaders and Heroes: Modern Day Archetypes,” *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research* from Claremont Graduate University 3, no. 1 (2013): Article 15, accessed January 24, 2020, <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/lux/vol3/iss1/15>.

<sup>27</sup> “Top 100 Artists Chart,” *Billboard*, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/charts/artist-100>. The list included Madonna, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, Halsey, Lizzo, Cardi B, and Pink.

<sup>28</sup> Lauren Valenti, “These 7 Female-Founded Brands Ran a Full-Page New York Times Ad Taking On the Abortion Bans,” *Vogue*, May 22, 2019, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://www.vogue.com/article/abortion-bans-female-sexual-wellness-reproductive-rights-new-york-times-open-letter>.

<sup>29</sup> Forever 21, “Feminist Crew Socks” (online catalog photograph), product code: 2000339681, Forever 21 web site, accessed February 3, 2020, [https://www.forever21.com/us/shop/catalog/product/f21/sale\\_acc-legwear/2000339681](https://www.forever21.com/us/shop/catalog/product/f21/sale_acc-legwear/2000339681).

### Backlash and violence

It is important to note that even as we see growing mainstream acceptance of gender activism and the rewriting of some norms around gender identity and expression, that acceptance is not enjoyed equally. For decades, mainstream culture presented very limited representations of transgender and/or non-binary people, and those representations were almost exclusively of white transgender women. Thankfully, that has changed in recent years, with increased mainstream awareness and visibility of transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, thanks to phenomena like [the Emmy Award-winning television series \*Pose\*](#), as well as the leadership of [Laverne Cox](#), [Indya Moore](#), [Janet Mock](#), [Angelica Ross](#), and others.

Unfortunately, alongside that visibility is an unprecedented [epidemic of violence and murder](#) against transgender women of color, particularly Black transgender women. In the last seven years, there has been an average of at least [twenty-two murders per year](#)—driven, in part, by the intersecting issues of racism, sexism, and transphobia, which frequently lie at the heart of such violence.

We must continue to call attention to this needless violence. As we do so, we must also highlight the mistreatment of transgender and/or non-binary people in the fashion, film, and television industries—industries which have historically appropriated and adopted the ideas and culture of transgender and/or non-binary people while simultaneously denying them acclaim or credit and pushing them out of the spotlight.

## Opportunities for Continued Activism

In the above examples, we see expanded definitions of gender in cultural representations. However, in this audit, we also found areas that continue to promote rigid depictions of traditional gender norms and expressions. In this section we focus on several of these opportunity areas: parenthood, caregiving, resilience, sex, and sexuality. Where possible, we offer up ways to promote alternate narratives that challenge or rewrite these gender norms and/or advocate for systemic change.

### Parenthood and Caregiving

When we look at television, film, and social media, “mom” is one of the most common identities for women, and it seems to span political and religious affiliations. Indeed, in our social media analysis, we see “mom” as a common way that women in each of our pilot states describe themselves, whether they are religious and conservative or members of the “Resistance” and pro-choice.<sup>30</sup>

We find that mothers are portrayed differently in television versus film. In film, moms are often support roles and may be cast as “bad”—or even presented as dead—to elicit the audience’s emotional response to the main character. On television we see more nuanced portrayals of moms, but they are often depicted as the moral compass of the family in shows like *Jane the Virgin* and *The Simpsons*.<sup>31</sup> Portrayals of dads are radically different and highly problematic.<sup>32</sup> In both television and film, they are portrayed as:

- Clumsy, oblivious, or idiots (think Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons*, Phil Dunphy in *Modern Family*)
- Babysitters while moms do important things (think of *The Incredibles 2*)
- Evil, like Lucious Lyons in *Empire* and Tywin Lannister in *Game of Thrones*



<sup>30</sup> According to Audiense data, moms on social media tend to be younger, less educated, and more likely to be both single and progressive than those who identify as dads across social media (Audiense Insights, *Audience Intelligence Report: Moms*, June 29, 2019, archived by Story at Scale at [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1kmy57vNKHrKeipWkz3K\\_rbakECncAcwt](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1kmy57vNKHrKeipWkz3K_rbakECncAcwt)). Facebook Insights shows, however, that women who identify as moms are twice as likely to be conservative as liberal. Similarly, across social media, we also see dads as an important, albeit smaller, identity for men (Audiense Insights, *Audience Intelligence Report: Dads*, June 29, 2019, archived by Story at Scale at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ehTBibh60gj7Bkc4GpZ9FuUCgAmRLuH1/view>). Social media dads are more likely to be older, educated, wealthy, religious, and politically conservative. On Facebook specifically, dads are similarly twice as likely to be conservatives than liberals (data from Facebook Audience Insights searches, 2019, archived by Story at Scale at [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1RtoZZcLB5RtuyhWiOl\\_8hwJvbOfr-F27&sa=D&ust=158067187427000&usg=AFQjCNHo9q8LamL13jwgeSWo-m\\_drUImQA](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1RtoZZcLB5RtuyhWiOl_8hwJvbOfr-F27&sa=D&ust=158067187427000&usg=AFQjCNHo9q8LamL13jwgeSWo-m_drUImQA)).

<sup>31</sup> Erin Wright, “Film Historian Talks Motherhood in Pop Culture.” WABE web site, May 11, 2018, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://www.wabe.org/motherhood-in-classic-and-contemporary-pop-culture/>.

<sup>32</sup> Fox Broadcasting Company, still image from “Every Man’s Dream,” *The Simpsons* animated series, season 27, episode 1, in Michael Cavna, “Marge and Homer Simpson to Separate (Thanks, Lena Dunham),” *The Star*, June 10, 2015, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/television/2015/06/10/marge-and-homer-simpson-to-separate-thanks-lena-dunham.html>.

<sup>33</sup> The importance of revising the portrayals of dads is supported by academic research which indicates that identifying as a father helps men express non-traditional masculine traits like sensitivity. Unlike moms/women—where the two roles are seen as one—“dads” are seen as more distinct and positive than “men” in general. See Piercarlo Valdesolo, “How Fathers Can Change What It Means to Be a Man,” *Scientific American*, June 12, 2018, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-fathers-can-change-what-it-means-to-be-a-man/>.

These highly gendered portrayals of moms and dads are unnecessary and are happening in a time when popular beliefs about child-rearing have put increased pressure on parents. As an article in *The New York Times* describes, “Intensive parenting has gained popularity in England and Australia, but it has distinctly American roots—reflecting **a view of child-rearing** as an individual, not societal, task. It’s about ‘pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.’”<sup>35</sup>

Parenthood, and caregiving more generally,<sup>36</sup> are often portrayed as individual acts of sacrifice and love. Seeing them as gendered and individualistic distracts from the systems that could make caregiving easier in America, such as parental and family leave, high-quality public education and health care, safe neighborhoods, and more. Our movement would be well served if we push for and promote representations that show parenting as genderless and as a collective versus individual responsibility.

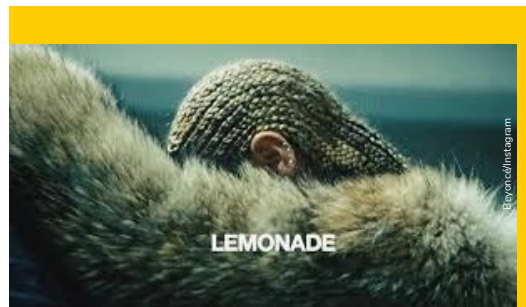
### Resilience Narratives

Resilience is a biological term that has been adopted into self-help and self-care culture. It is defined as an elasticity and ability to bounce back from difficulties. Resilience narratives tell us we just need to show more individual toughness or “grit” to overcome what we are experiencing. A great example of this resilience narrative can be found in Beyoncé’s song “Freedom” on her album *Lemonade*. In addition to the lyrics being all about resilience, at the end she includes an audio clip of her grandmother saying, “I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade.”<sup>37</sup> This act of making lemonade is at the heart of resilience narratives.

While often a good thing, messages of resilience can also be troubling. People whose struggles are the result of racism, sexism, or poverty cannot, through sheer will alone, overcome systems of oppression. These resilience narratives romanticize injustice without investigating its causes—for example, **celebrating Home Depot employees who helped parents build a medically-necessary walker for their son that they worried may not be covered by insurance** instead of demanding a better health care system that prioritizes care over profits. Academics in the United Kingdom have studied how resilience



Moms are often depicted as the moral compass of the family in shows like *Jane the Virgin*.<sup>34</sup>



One great example of a resilience narrative can be found in Beyoncé’s song “Freedom” on her album *Lemonade*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The CW, still photograph from the television series *Jane the Virgin*, in Rianne Houghton, “Jane the Virgin Creator Explains Why That Big Reveal Was Left until the Very End,” *DigitalSpy*, January 8, 2019, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/ustv/a28576117/jane-the-virgin-narrator-reveal-series-finale-wait/>.

<sup>35</sup> Claire C. Miller, “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 25, 2018, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/upshot/the-relentlessness-of-modern-parenting.html>.

<sup>36</sup> We include caretaking here in addition to parenting both because the two are perceived as being similar and because child-free adults might still find themselves in caretaking roles. That said, data on how many people are caregivers is difficult to find. A 2015 report estimates the prevalence of caregiving at 16.6 percent, or 34.8 million Americans (National Alliance for Caregiving [NAC] and the AARP Public Policy Institute, *Caregiving in the U.S. 2015*, NAC and AARP research report, June 2015, accessed January 26, 2020, [https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015\\_CaregivingintheUS\\_Final-Report-June-4\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015_CaregivingintheUS_Final-Report-June-4_WEB.pdf)).

<sup>37</sup> Beyoncé, et al., “Freedom,” *Lemonade* (New York: Parkwood Entertainment, Columbia, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Beyoncé. *Lemonade* album cover (Instagram photograph), April 23, 2016 (Beyoncé. *Lemonade*, Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia, 2016), accessed February 3, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BEkLWj7vw7R/?hl=en>



has been peddled to and received by white, middle-class women to damaging effects.<sup>39</sup> Through the wellness apps on their phones, **the magazines** that they read, **the leadership advice** and **calls to “lean in”** that they get in the workplace, and, of course, the music they listen to, they are told to “work harder,” “toughen up” and “pull themselves up by their bra straps.” They are even told that resilience is **a key component to aging well**. But as the British research shows, because they are middle class and white, these women have social safety nets that enable them to weather tough times and that are not available to working-class or poor women or women of color. Because the narrative of resilience is so individually focused, these middle-class white women think they succeed on their own. Similarly, they think those who do not succeed are not strong or resilient enough.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, they do not see the systems that brought them their own misfortunes nor the systems that allowed them to rise again—and, therefore, they cannot see the misfortunes of others as systemic either.

Rewriting resilience narratives may offer us an opportunity to move from individual stories of overcoming and redemption to collective action for systemic and social change. Several recent examples show a path towards this. The first is, of course, the #MeToo movement. Another is the work of African American moms like Lucy McBath, Sybrina Fulton, Lezley McSpadden, and others who are part of **Mothers of the Movement**. After losing their children to violence, these women are using their resilience stories for collective action—for example, by organizing for gun and police reforms and running for office. We can also see this in Black Lives Matter Co-founder Patrisse Cullors’s reframing of “self-care” to “collective care” or “community care.” Cullors says, “We should be developing spaces and places that are thinking about how we care for the group versus asking the individual to take care of themselves.”<sup>41</sup> Finally, the 2018 referendum overturning the abortion ban in Ireland was **won in part because of personal storytelling** that was connected to an opportunity for systemic change.



## Sex and Sexuality

Changing conversations about sex and sexuality also offer significant opportunities for furthering gender justice work, particularly given the prevalence of sex and sexuality in popular culture. Lyrical analysis of the most popular songs over the past forty years shows a dramatic increase in the content pertaining to sex.<sup>42</sup> Today, almost all popular music references sex, and many of these sexual lyrics are highly explicit. All of this is to say that sex is getting talked about at great length and in great detail in our culture—and in many ways that are unrealistic, demeaning, and/or focused on male pleasure.

<sup>39</sup> Rosaline Gill and Shani Orgad, “The Amazing Bounce-Backable Woman: Resilience and the Psychological Turn in Neoliberalism,” *Sociological Research Online* 23, no. 2, (2018): 477–496. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1360780418769673>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Alanna Vagianos, “Patrisse Cullors on the ‘Legacy of Queer Black Women’ This Pride Month,” *Huffington Post*, June 11, 2018, accessed January 24, 2020, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/patrisse-cullors-on-the-legacy-of-queer-black-women-this-pride-month\\_n\\_5b1939afe4b0734a993b9eb3](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/patrisse-cullors-on-the-legacy-of-queer-black-women-this-pride-month_n_5b1939afe4b0734a993b9eb3).

<sup>42</sup> Peter G. Christenson, et al., “What has America Been Singing About? Trends in Themes in the U.S. Top-40 Songs: 1960–2010,” *Psychology of Music* 47, no. 2 (January 23, 2018): 194–212, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0305735617748205>.

<sup>43</sup> Lighthouse, *Keep Calm and Let’s Talk about Sex* (graphic image) in Lighthouse, “World of Sex Series: Talking About Sex,” Lighthouse web site, September 30, 2016, accessed February 3, 2020, [http://lighthouse-sf.org/2016/09/30/world-of-sex-series-talking-about-sex/keep-calm-and-lets-talk-about-sex\\_resized/](http://lighthouse-sf.org/2016/09/30/world-of-sex-series-talking-about-sex/keep-calm-and-lets-talk-about-sex_resized/).

It is commonly known that viewers of online porn are predominantly male. In 2018, men represented approximately 70 percent of the total number of visitors to Pornhub.<sup>44</sup> Pornhub is the largest of the online porn sites,<sup>45</sup> receiving 1.1 billion visits monthly, making it the sixth most popular web site in the United States (this means that this one porn site has more traffic than social media sites like Twitter and Instagram, or even Netflix).<sup>46</sup> According to Pornhub's own data, the most-searched-for terms are directly or indirectly related to identities that are embattled and oppressed in our society today. These terms include references to sexual orientation (e.g., "lesbian" or "gay") ethnicities (e.g., "ebony," "African" and "spicy Latina") body types (e.g., "BBBW"), and unmarried mothers (e.g., "single MILF").

With porn and the consumption of sex being so popular—coupled with the sometimes problematic terms many are using to search for such material—there's a clear opportunity for our movement to think about how to rewrite sex narratives that are sex-positive, liberating, and joyful.

The other major provider of sexual content is romance and erotic literature. Books in these categories are a massive industry—they represent more than \$1 billion in sales, and romance novels are the second-best-selling genre of books overall!<sup>47</sup>

The vast majority of authors in the romance genre are women, and the genre's readership is also 91 percent female. Nielsen data reveals that romance book buyers are more likely to be from the South and Midwest regions of the United States and tend to be retired and to identify as Christian.<sup>48</sup>

One of the top writers in this genre is an African American woman who writes under the name of Zane. She first became a *New York Times* bestseller in 2001 and is still topping the charts almost two decades later. Her audience includes Black women of all ages—in fact she is the favorite author for all African Americans according to Facebook Insights.<sup>50</sup> As one critic described Zane's work, "Her female protagonists are predominantly squeaky-clean and middle-class, med students and bank tellers and account supervisors. But they also know how, in Zane parlance, to get their freak on."<sup>51</sup>

Cultural critics, sexuality experts, and academics think there are a number of reasons for the popularity of these books, the most inconspicuous and compelling of which for our work is that these stories are often



<sup>44</sup> Pornhub, "2018 Year in Review," Pornhub Insights, December 11, 2018, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review#gender>.

<sup>45</sup> While Pornhub is the top destination for online porn, several communities use other platforms, such as [Tumblr](#), to find content that they enjoy.

<sup>46</sup> SimilarWeb, "Top Websites Ranking," SimilarWeb web site, December 1, 2019, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-states>.

<sup>47</sup> K. S. C., "Book-Publishing's Naughty Secret" *The Economist*, May 26, 2016, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2016/05/26/book-publishings-naughty-secret>.

<sup>48</sup> The Nielsen Company, "Literary Liaisons: Who's Reading Romance Books?" Nielsen web site, August 10, 2015, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2015/literary-liaisons-whos-reading-romance-books/>.

<sup>49</sup> Atria Paperback, *Afterburn: A Novel* (image), cover of Zane, *Afterburn: A Novel*, New York: Atria Paperback/Simon & Schuster, first Atria Paperback edition, October 2005, accessed on the Amazon web site, February 3, 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/Afterburn-Novel-Zane/dp/0743470982>.

<sup>50</sup> Facebook, Audience Insights search results (screenshot image), 2019, archived by Story at Scale, <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://drive.google.com/open?id%3D1BZWzcZCvMMizMpJA7A2hft3RjIMp8L3r&sa=D&ust=1580671874271000&usq=AFQjCNHd8UyLWU-XOaIQPCBnY0hB5Baa4w>.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Moser, "Zane, the Queen of Erotica, Has a Secret," *Washingtonian*, June 21, 2015, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.washingtonian.com/2015/06/21/how-zane-the-queen-of-erotica-became-marylands-top-tax-deadbeat/>.

about women who “have it all.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, while women might not say it in a survey, their buying habits and cultural affinity show that fulfilling sex lives are part of what they mean when they talk about “having it all.”

In 2016, the sex toy industry was estimated to be a \$15 billion global business. It is expected to grow to \$50 billion over the next five years.<sup>53</sup> Conservative states regulate it: In 1998, Alabama began to criminalize the sale of sex toys, and in Texas, there is still a law on the books prohibiting people from having more than six dildos in their possession (despite a federal court having ruled this unconstitutional a decade ago). At the same time, sex toys have started to become more accepted as their appearance in popular books and in television shows and films like *Sex in the City* and *50 Shades of Grey* becomes more common. Many in the industry believe this normalization stems in part from research and marketing about the positive health aspects of certain devices, like kegel balls, and the benefits of orgasm for women’s health.

Similarly, sexual health and wellness is a main concern and an entry point in men’s wellness and health. Companies like **Roman** and **Hims** have focused primarily on erectile dysfunction treatments because of the massive market for these products.<sup>54</sup> Many of the online men’s wellness companies advertise that men can talk with a doctor about their sexual wellness virtually, a plus for talking about such sensitive topics. The ability to shop and get prescriptions anonymously online has no doubt encouraged the entire sexual product and wellness industry. But market watchers also note that the association of sexual wellness with physical health and healthy relationships has weakened the association of sexual products with the less socially accepted (albeit massively popular) world of pornography.<sup>55</sup>

Since sex and sexuality are a huge part of the cultural conversation, we recommend that our movements participate in it to promote the narratives that lead towards gender justice.

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<sup>52</sup> Justine A. Constanza, “Why Do Modern Women Love Romance Novels? Call It The ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ Syndrome,” *International Business Times*, June 30, 2012, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.ibtimes.com/why-do-modern-women-love-romance-novels-call-it-fifty-shades-grey-syndrome-720842>.

<sup>53</sup> Janet Burns, “How The ‘Niche’ Sex Toy Market Grew Into An Unstoppable \$15B Industry,” *Forbes*, July 15, 2016, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janetwburns/2016/07/15/adult-expo-founders-talk-15b-sex-toy-industry-after-20-years-in-the-fray/#26f04e9b5bb9>.

<sup>54</sup> In 2017, the erectile dysfunction industry sold \$4.82 billion globally. It is expected to almost double by 2024, according to a Zion Market Research Report, “Global Erectile Dysfunction Drugs Market Will Reach USD 7.10 Billion by 2024,” Intrado, October 5, 2018, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/10/05/1617442/0/en/Global-Erectile-Dysfunction-Drugs-Market-Will-Reach-USD-7-10-Billion-by-2024-Zion-Market-Research.html>.

<sup>55</sup> “U.S. Sexual Wellness Market Worth \$8.8 Billion By 2025,” Grand View Research report, December 2017, <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/press-release/us-sexual-wellness-market-analysis>.

## Privacy and Consent

Privacy is the basis for abortion laws and has come up several times during this research process, whether overtly, as in the above section on sex, or implicitly around notions of individuality in parenting, caretaking, and resilience. Abortion laws, including the historic *Roe v. Wade* decision, are based on the legal concept of autonomy—that is, freedom from government interference in the realm of personal decision-making. Female athletes have talked about this right of bodily autonomy in many of their actions—from their comments against anti-abortion laws sweeping the nation to their public fights, in some cases, to be free from their abusers and to hold them accountable for their behavior.

More prevalent in the cultural representation of privacy are stories of surveillance and our inner lives being made public. Loss of privacy at a societal level is often portrayed in movies (*Minority Report*, *V for Vendetta*, *Batman: the Dark Knight*, *Hunger Games*) and television (*Westwing*, *Black Mirror*, *Parks and Recreation*). Reality television as a genre is almost defined as a “baring it all,” where we see all of the details of participants’ private lives. Interestingly, reality television is generally viewed more by conservatives who are vocal on social media about abortion, according to Audiense.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, reality television viewing may have been a defining factor in who voted for Trump in the 2016 election.<sup>57</sup> It also showed up repeatedly in our state cultural affinity profiles.

Social media has the biggest influence on our concept of individual privacy—both in terms of inadvertently giving over our private data to companies and in terms of voluntarily posting the intimate moments of our lives, an activity that is incentivized by receiving “likes,” which activate the same reward centers in the brain activated by eating chocolate or winning money.<sup>58</sup> Even the way that culture is distributed is a privacy concern. (Remember when U2’s album was pushed to every iTunes account without consent?) Furthermore, mobile phones that **track** and **listen to us**, the automatic **geotagging** in photos that gives away a user’s location, smart home devices like **Alexa that collect data**, and even web tracking and cookies all point to eroding privacy in our digital and cultural lives.

Finally, as mentioned above, privacy plays an important role in the sex and wellness space. From web sites that allow users to order drugs and products privately to fitness companies that put spin bikes and other equipment in the privacy of your own home to “**quantified self**” devices like Fitbits and Apple watches that track activity, the health and wellness sector relies on privacy to exist. The key to all of this is that users decide when and with whom to share their private information. This is often referred to as differential privacy or digital consent.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Data from [Audiense Insights reports](#) commissioned by Story at Scale on each state, archived at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1naAUxpfSI3bqbkbX95sArn0HWXaCrLib>.

<sup>57</sup> Josh Katz, “‘Duck Dynasty’ vs. ‘Modern Family’: 50 Maps of the U.S. Cultural Divide,” *The New York Times*, Dec 27, 2016, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/26/upshot/duck-dynasty-vs-modern-family-television-maps.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Lauren E. Sherman, et al. “The Power of the Like in Adolescence: Effects of Peer Influence on Neural and Behavioral Responses to Social Media,” *Psychological Science* 27, no. 7 (May 31, 2016): 1027–1035, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797616645673>.

<sup>59</sup> For more on this topic, see the [Kantara Initiative web site](#) and this detailed whitepaper on digital consent: *Mobile Ecosystem Forum, Understanding Digital Consent: A Comprehensive Guide to Digital Consent in the Personal Data Economy*, Kantara Initiative website, 2017, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://kantarainitiative.org/confluence/download/attachments/101811330/MEF-whitepaper-understanding-digital-consent.pdf?api=v2>.

## Cultural Consumption and Affinity in California, Georgia, and Michigan

The state cultural profiles below were compiled using multiple primary sources, including Audiense and Facebook Insights. We've tried to collect identical information about the states in order to compare and contrast cultural affinity and consumption. We list the similarities below, but have placed the complete profiles for each state (and the United States overall) in [Appendix D](#), including demographic, religious, cultural interest, influencers, and psychographics.

### Commonalities in cultural affinity and consumption in all three states:

- All three states have robust agricultural and creative industries. Creative industries are a unique category because all three states currently host or formerly hosted tax-incentive programs for film production. They all also have large music communities that are both locally and internationally successful. Important to this work is that all three states have state-wide creative industry networks that can help in cultural organizing and production around our story platform.<sup>60</sup>
- Hip-hop is very popular in all three states, but the most popular artists in each state are based in that state. Lyrical analysis of the most popular songs reveals that there is a lot of gender-stereotypical language being consumed in these states.
- In all three states, users searched for the term “lesbian” in their porn more than any other term (the majority of users in the United States also searched for this term).
- All are majority Christian (as is the entire United States).
- While television consumption differs in these states, there are similar narrative themes across the most popular shows in these states, and indeed the entire United States, that feed traditional or nontraditional gender performance. To summarize, these are:
  - **Dysfunctional families:** Families are the original sitcom material, and all of these depictions disrupt and/or reinforce traditional gender norms within the context of families. Examples include: *Family Guy*, *The Simpsons*, *Game of Thrones*, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, *Modern Family*, and *Real Housewives*.
  - **Strong and complex female characters:** As mentioned, expanded archetypes and tropes are emerging for women, some of which can be seen in highly watched shows in these states, including *Game of Thrones*, *Empire*, *Jane the Virgin*, *Family Guy*, *The Simpsons*, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, and *Love & Hip Hop*.
  - **Male characters with hidden identities:** Hidden identities and mask-wearing are common character devices used to highlight the difficulties of living up to familial, social, and gender norms. The most popular shows in these states featured several examples of male characters with hidden identities, including *Luke Cage*, *Dexter*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Power*.

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<sup>60</sup> More about the creative industries in these states can be found at <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-location/states>.

The Audiense tool includes psychographic summaries for each audience and audience segment it identifies. For California and Georgia, they are identical: “They consider both helping others and independence to guide a large part of what they do. They think it is important to take care of the people around them. And they like to set their own goals to decide how to best achieve them.”<sup>61</sup> And for Michigan: “They consider both taking pleasure in life and achieving success to guide a large part of what they do. They are highly motivated to enjoy life to its fullest. And they seek out opportunities to improve themselves and demonstrate that they are a capable person.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the [Pew Religious Landscape Study](#) found that the majority of people in our three states thought that right or wrong was not dictated by common sense or religion but rather “depended on the situation.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Audiense, *Audience Intelligence Report: Georgia*, June 8, 2019, archived and distributed by Story at Scale at <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://drive.google.com/open?id%3D1IAIf0qDiyOatB1Tfvx6S0mSFwYa3kyBG&sa=D&ust=1580671874342000&usg=AFQjCNFwBwzpuEEFAelKB0GlaWKzDXIVPQ>, Audiense, *Audience Intelligence Report: California*, June 8, 2019, archived and distributed by Story at Scale at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V8R3fAtq134O1UmSv1pW3JsEUh8rsImb/view>.

<sup>62</sup> Audiense, *Audience Intelligence Report: Michigan*, June 4, 2019, archived and distributed by Story at Scale at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14kmK6EuudrphkEjZg2ktFH87mYUd2q7S/view>.

<sup>63</sup> Pew Research Center, “2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study,” interactive tool, Pew Research Center website, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

## Recommendations: Cultural Strategy and Organizing



Art didn't invent oppressive gender roles, racial stereotyping or rape culture, but it reflects, polishes and sells them back to us every moment of our waking lives ... We make art, and it simultaneously makes us.

Lindy West,  
“We Got Rid of Some Bad Men.  
Now Let's Get Rid of Bad Movies,”  
in *The New York Times*

The following is a short list of some of the most obvious cultural strategies and organizing that emerged in our research. Because understanding and activating culture is critical to advancing gender equity and gender justice, a specific plan should be developed in the future. This should include investing in cultural strategy infrastructure, including hiring cultural strategists as consultants<sup>64</sup> and cultural organizers as staff in gender justice organizations, as well as funding culture work in gender justice organizations and funding gender justice work in arts/culture organizations. We also recommend the following:

- ❑ Investment in constant, high-level monitoring of culture to identify trends that can help our movements accelerate gender justice. This should include better understanding of **fandoms** within the cultural arenas discussed in this report, as well as developing **better tools for understanding audiences**.
- ❑ This research makes clear the need for organizing creatives around gender justice. First, we can present information to culture creators about culture's role in upholding and disrupting gender inequity. Then we can ask creatives to help rewrite narratives, particularly on themes found in the research, such as parenthood, caregiving, resilience, sex, wellness, and more. This can start by educating and inspiring creatives through:

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<sup>64</sup> Cultural strategy, as an emerging field, currently relies heavily on a cadre of independent cultural strategists who have decades of experience and work with many institutions across movements to help design and implement specific cultural organizing campaigns, as well as to build capacity and infrastructure.

- ❑ TV writers' room workshops with [Hollywood, Health & Society](#) and [Storyline Partners](#)
- ❑ Workshops for actors and others with [Harness](#)
- ❑ Connecting musicians with [Revolutions Per Minute](#),<sup>65</sup> [Women Want More](#), or other groups in the music industry
- ❑ Connecting a variety of artists with the [Center for Cultural Power](#)
- ❑ Connecting comedians with [Yes, And...Laughter Lab](#)<sup>66</sup>

A network can then be organized around rapid response moments with the organizations above and [The League](#). Additional guides, like [TRANSform Hollywood](#), a guidebook created by [5050by2020](#) and [GLAAD](#), can be established for other aspects of gender justice.

- ❑ Whoever creates the culture determines the culture. It is commonly known that there are low numbers of women, transgender, and/or non-binary artists creating the culture that we consume. Investing in these artists (especially artists of color) to shape culture will help bring new stories to the masses that reflect and advance gender equity and gender expansiveness. The organizations mentioned above, which have large networks of artists, are great places to make this happen. Also, these organizations may need to be funded to engage further with arts funders and groups (like [Grantmakers in the Arts](#)) that typically are not making these investments, but could.
- ❑ Creatives who work in our pilot states are another group that can be better organized around gender-equity issues. For example, some creatives took action when Georgia passed a 2019 law banning abortion after six weeks of pregnancy: [Disney announced it was considering pulling production from the state](#), and [Ariana Grande donated the proceeds from her Atlanta show to Planned Parenthood](#) to protest the new law.
- ❑ Another strategy is to explore health, beauty, and wellness as an entry point and organizing forum. As people, especially men, look for tools to help them look, feel, and perform better, there are opportunities for gender-equity narratives to be embedded within discussions and materials on these topics.
- ❑ By partnering with influencer-dads and parent-, family-, and kid-oriented organizations and companies, like [Forward Together](#), [Family Story](#), [Fatherly](#), [Parents Together](#), and others, we can distribute new stories about parenthood and caregiving. These groups can also work to increase visibility of liberal and progressive parents on social media as a way to model genderless parenting and caregiving roles.
  - ❑ Examples of influencer-dads who have a huge reach, identify as parents, and engage on issues we care about include: [John Legend](#) (changing tables in every men's room), [Alexis Ohanian](#) (paternity leave), and Dwyane Wade ([gay pride, his history of caretaking](#)).

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<sup>65</sup> Author's note: I co-founded RPM and sit on its board. Based on my extensive experience organizing musicians, I think that the time is right to launch a comprehensive gender campaign within the music industry to change institutional issues like pay and representation, as well as to encourage new gender narratives.

<sup>66</sup> According to Audiense data (data source: Audiense Insights, Humor Influencers [excel file], 2019, archived by Story at Scale at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V2MQhybydUacZxZeNFu0mX\\_spu\\_fS-Fr/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V2MQhybydUacZxZeNFu0mX_spu_fS-Fr/view)), people who identify as very conservative and very liberal are more likely to enjoy humor than the national average. These groups share other important cultural similarities, including a preference for news over cultural products and channels — in fact, these groups look culturally isolated compared to other demographics in the United States. The assumption is that the content of the in-group tension that is the basis of humor is different for each group, but organizing comedians and creating new, audience-specific comedy projects on gender might be avenues for reaching these disparate and culturally isolated groups.





## Appendix A: Methodology

The practice of cultural strategy springs from the notion that politics is where some of the people are some of the time, but culture is where most of the people are most of the time.<sup>67</sup> Cultural audits—a key component to smart cultural strategy—provide movements and campaigns with a deeper and more emotionally resonant understanding of their audience than traditional research practices do on their own. Cultural audits help orient campaigns' communications strategies to the cultural lives of their audience, getting to the heart of the audience's hopes and fears (and joys) as expressed in the culture they consume and make. They also can help campaigns discover pathways that truly inspire and can unite otherwise disparate groups. Because a cultural audit attempts to look at a very broad subject through the lens of culture, narrative, and story, **it is not a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and should be a part of a campaign or organization's analysis and not the whole.**

Cultural audits follow a **methodology** that is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research and cultural and narrative analysis. Cultural audits follow three phases of work:

1. Data collection through surveys, content scans, existing studies, and interviews
2. Analysis of this data to identify themes and trends
3. Delivery of the cultural audit in a summary document (like this document)

For this audit, our content scan focused on (but was not limited to) television, film, music, comedy, books, slang, fashion, beauty, sports, porn, and sex. Because of the scope of research and audiences, We looked mostly at mainstream and not emerging or underground cultural outputs. We also pulled in researchers and experts on gender, pop culture, music, and other areas, including hiring **Dr. Courtney Morris**, an African American gender justice professor at the University of California, Berkeley, to help understand popular “bad girl” music. We interviewed **Dr. Josh Kun**, the Director of the School of Communication and the Popular Music Project at the University of Southern California, a MacArthur Fellow, and an expert in Latin music, and **Adriel Luis**, a curator at the Smithsonian's Asian Pacific American Center. Narrative and character expert **Michael Ahn** looked at tropes and character analysis to help identify patterns in portrayals that might be opportunities to advance gender equity. Finally, many members of the Story at Scale Research Advisory Council reviewed and made suggestions and additions to an early version of this document.

We also reviewed, watched, and/or analyzed approximately 120 television shows, films, videos, and comedy skits, 200 books and articles, and 225 songs, including the top songs in all of the cities in our three pilot states and on the Billboard charts (including the Hot 100, Pop Songs, R&B/Hip-Hop, Country, and Christian/Gospel charts). We conducted both close and distant readings,<sup>68</sup> including lyrical analysis, of these pieces of content. Finally, we reviewed many academic, polling, and research papers and articles by cultural critics related to gender and culture. The complete list of the content and references for this research is available upon request.

Finally, we used **Spotify Musical Cities**, **Google Trends**, and **Facebook Insights**, as well as a paid audience research tool called **Audiense**, to go deeper on cultural consumption, state cultural profiles, and audience identity. Audiense allowed us to view audiences based on affinity, states, keywords, and other data. We used the tool to review data on topics including: Michigan, Georgia, California, #MeToo, #Girlpower, mom, dad, #KAG, feminist, #CaptainMarvel, and #AbortionIsAWomansRight. We also followed indicators of defining traits or interest amongst these audiences, such as country music, parenting, school, sex, humor, health, and fitness. All of these reports are available upon request.

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<sup>67</sup> The Culture Group. *Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy*, 2014, <http://revolutionsperminute.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Waves-The-Culture-Group.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> For more on close and distant reading techniques and definitions, please see <https://www.informatik.uni-leipzig.de/~stjaenicke/Survey.pdf>.

## Appendix B: Read, Watch and Listen

These are just a few of the best articles, studies, and cultural content used in the development of this report.

### Read

- On resilience:
  - Rosaline Gill and Shani Orgad, “The Amazing Bounce-Backable Woman: Resilience and the Psychological Turn in Neoliberalism,” *Sociological Research Online* 23, no. 2 (2018): 477–496, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1360780418769673>.
- On the impact of culture on elections:
  - Josh Katz, “‘Duck Dynasty’ vs. ‘Modern Family’: 50 Maps of the U.S. Cultural Divide,” *The New York Times*, Dec 27, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/26/upshot/duck-dynasty-vs-modern-family-television-maps.html>.
- On women in sports:
  - Allison McCann, “World Cup Players Say Muscles and Makeup Mix Just Fine, Thanks.” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/style/world-cup-women-hair-gender.html#click=https://t.co/g3YfSSUvAP>.
- On parenting:
  - Claire C. Miller, “The Relentlessness Of Modern Parenting,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/upshot/the-relentlessness-of-modern-parenting.html?login=email&auth=login-email>.
- On men’s wellness:
  - Alex Moshakis, “Evolution of Man: The Rise and Rise of the Male Wellness Sector,” *The Guardian*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2019/mar/17/evolution-of-man-the-rise-and-rise-of-the-male-wellness-sector>.

### Watch

- Recent cultural moments
  - Issa Rae “Entrepreneur of the Year” award [acceptance speech](#)
  - Billy Porter’s [interview with Stephen Colbert](#)
- Music videos
  - [Cardi B - “Money”](#)
  - [Princess Nokia - “Tomboy”](#)
  - Lizzo [“Like a Girl” performance](#) in Atlanta
  - Taylor Swift’s [“You Need to Calm Down,”](#) with a call to action for LGBTQ+ rights
  - Maddie and Tae’s comedic [“Girl in A Country Song”](#)
  - Tim McGraw and Faith Hill’s duet [“Speak to a Girl”](#)
  - Beyoncé’s “Freedom” as part of an [ad for International Day of the Girl](#)
- Commercials
  - Nike [“Dream Crazy”](#) ad
  - Always’s [#LikeAGirl](#) campaign
  - Dove’s [“Real Beauty”](#) campaign
  - Audi’s [#DriveProgress](#) campaign
  - Pantene’s [“Sorry, Not Sorry”](#) campaign
  - Budweiser’s [#OneLastDance](#) ad (Dwayne Wade retirement)

### Listen

- We created a [fifty-one-minute playlist](#) that accompanies this report, which you’re encouraged to listen to.

## Appendix C: Tropes

**TVTropes.org** defines a trope as “a storytelling device or convention, a shortcut for describing situations the storyteller can reasonably assume the audience will recognize.” Tropes are often culturally specific archetypes, and there are many examples of tropes that promote gender stereotypes, such as the “Damsel in Distress.” But there are also a number of emerging ones that defy these stereotypes. Below we look at four in detail. That is followed by a broader review of new tropes by Michael Ahn for Story at Scale. Even more gendered and non-gendered tropes can be found [on the Stereotrope website](#).

The “**Damsel Not in Distress**” or “**Woman of Action**” is a younger woman who takes charge and makes change on her own, against all odds. She is admired for her strength and shatters perceptions of the role of women as submissive, meek, etc. These leaders must win and succeed to be admired. Real and fictitious “Women of Action” include Brie Larson as Captain Marvel, the US Women’s National Soccer Team, Wonder Woman, the character Hermione Granger, Serena Williams, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. This trope is nicely represented in [a scene from \*Star Wars: The Force Awakens\*](#) where Finn keeps trying to “save” Rey, who ultimately and repeatedly saves them both.

The “**Caregiver**” or “**Matriarch**” is a long-standing female trope that has taken a few turns in pop culture recently. Traditionally, these are older women who lead with wisdom and experience. Today, that wisdom and experience is often gained independent of the men in their lives (and sometimes at the expense of the bad decisions that these men have made). As a result of this independence, she may be intimidating to others and not necessarily liked. She often has to make the hard decisions and say things that people do not like to hear. Even with their independence from men, they are often seen as part of tradition and “the establishment.” Real and fictitious “Matriarchs” include General Organa (a.k.a. Princess Leia in later *Star Wars* films), Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*, and Michelle Obama.



Artists like Lil Nas X are rewriting the narrative around the idea of the cowboy and reflect “the Yeehaw agenda,” which is rooted in the history of black and hispanic cowboys and has been erased from our history.<sup>69</sup>

The **New Cowboys** are LGBTQ+, women, and transgender and/or non-binary characters and people who are adopting the styles and symbolism of the American cowboy—adopting, in effect, the freedom of cowboys while rewriting the narrative around the idea that cowboys are only white cisgender men. These characters can be seen in movies like [Brokeback Mountain](#) (2005) and in the meteoric rise of Atlanta artist [Lil Nas X](#) and his trap country hit “Old Town Road.” These also reflect black cowboy culture, called “[the Yeehaw agenda](#),” that is rooted in the history of black and hispanic cowboys, which has been erased from our history. Some of the work of the anti-respectability female artists, like Azealia Banks’ song “[Liquorice](#),” and of Evan James Benally Atwood, a queer Native American artist [who uses the term “cowthem” instead of “cowboy” to describe his self-portraits](#), also speak to this. As Mitski, a musician

whose latest album is called “Be the Cowboy” [explains](#), as an Asian woman who feels like she has to apologize “for existing,” she was attracted to the myth of the American cowboy. “I was so attracted to that idea of freedom and arrogance and not having to apologize.” She goes on to describe, “The idea of the cowboy is so American because the idea of a man riding into town, wrecking shit, and and then walking out like he is the hero is just so [American].”

<sup>69</sup> Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP, Lil Nas X (photograph), 2019, in Bonnie Stiernberg, “Lil Nas X Discusses Backlash to His Coming Out: ‘They’re Just Looking for That Reaction,’” *Billboard*, July 5, 2019, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8518822/lil-nas-x-discusses-backlash-to-his-coming-out-theyre-just-looking-for-that>.

The **“Self-Proclaimed “Woke” Guy**” is a man who champions marginalized communities, but from a privileged, and usually uninformed, point of view. They think they are allies in their words and actions, but often their support reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. A new social media phenomenon, called the “Wife Guys,” further highlights this trope. One article described a Wife Guy as “a particular type of notorious man whom [sic] builds his identity, or viral fame at least, around something his wife has done, or is.”<sup>70</sup> There are many types of “Wife Guys.” The most famous is **“Curvy Wife Guy”** (he likes his wife’s body and even made a music video about her called “Chubby Sexy”). But there is also “Elf Wife Guy,” “Don’t Email My Wife Guy,” “Cliff Wife Guy,” “Choreplay Wife Guy,” and “Lentil Wife Guy.”



The Self-Proclaimed “Woke” Guy is a man who champions the causes of women and marginalized communities from a privileged point of view and whose support may actually reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.<sup>71</sup>

### Other New Tropes

The following is a description of new tropes that reinforce traditional or nontraditional gender roles in current popular culture. It was created by Michael Ahn, a narrative expert.

TROPE	DEFINITION	AGENTS	CHANGE OPPORTUNITY	POTENTIAL BACKLASH
The Friendly Guide	Someone who bridges two cultures, and can safely introduce one culture to another because they conform to societal and gender norms in some important way.	Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Oprah, Ellen DeGeneres	Makes change appear benign and reasonable. Acts as the “friendly face” of change.	Indirect approach dilutes messaging. Fans may feel activism and pop culture should remain separate.
The Corporate Sponsor	Not an individual but an entity that advocates for “pro-social” issues.	Gillette, Nike, Google	Association of products with lifestyle. Corporate messaging implies growing acceptance, due to larger audience and potential for profit.	Elitism, boycotts, perceived cynicism to make a profit.

<sup>70</sup> Georgia Aspinall, “Who Is Wife Guy And Why Is Everyone Going On About Him?,” *Grazia Daily*, June 12, 2019, <https://grazia-daily.co.uk/life/in-the-news/wife-guy/>.

<sup>71</sup> Northern Sun, “I’m with Her Statue of Liberty Sticker” (online catalog photograph), product code: SKU 6742, Northern Sun web site, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.northersun.com/l%27m-With-Her-Statue-Of-Liberty-Sticker-%286742%29.html>.

TROPE	DEFINITION	AGENTS	CHANGE OPPORTUNITY	POTENTIAL BACKLASH
The Damsel Not in Distress/Woman of Action	Women who take charge and make change on their own, against all odds, and who are admired for their strength	Brie Larson as Captain Marvel, the US Women's National Soccer Team, Wonder Woman, Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter books, Ellen Ripley in <i>Alien</i> , Princess Leia in the <i>Star Wars</i> films, Serena Williams, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	Direct confrontation is galvanizing. Leaders like this are very charismatic. It shatters perceptions of the role of women as submissive, meek, etc.	May polarize those who are threatened by strong women. These leaders must win/succeed to be admired.
The Tender Male	The man who is confident enough to be tender.	Characters in <i>I Love You Man</i> , the <a href="#">Obama/Biden meme</a> , characters in Seth Rogen Films, Beto O'Rourke, Keanu Reeves	They make being gentle and open cool.	Their sensitivity is often humorous and delivered with some embarrassment.
The Caregiver/Matriarch	Women who lead with wisdom and experience and make hard decisions but may not necessarily be liked. If not for her, everyone around her would be lost. A leader of people. Accepted by society.	Miranda Priestly in <i>The Devil Wears Prada</i> , Michelle Obama, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, Elizabeth Warren	They are veterans of past movements and can speak from experience. They are wise.	They can be viewed as part of the system of oppression, and therefore unwilling or unable to create major change.
The Self-Proclaimed "Woke" Guy	A man who champions women and LGBTQ+ issues but does so from the cisgender male point of view.	This group of men, who claim to be allies but then do awful things, can be seen in this video by <a href="#">Saturday Night Live</a> .	Speaks to straight men in language and tones that they can relate to. Change is framed as logical and benefitting straight men.	They can appear pandering or that they missed the point of the message.
The "New Cowboys"	Artists who use the stereotypes of the American cowboy to blend messaging.	Lil Nas X, The Cowgirls of Color, Firefly	A playful way to blend cultures and points of view by appropriating a culture mainstay of white American masculinity, thereby accentuating evolving race and gender roles.	Opens debate on categorization of what is "genuine," which may deflect from the actual narrative.

## Appendix D: State Cultural Profiles

Below is a bulleted summary of the cultural profiles of our three pilot states—California, Georgia, and Michigan—followed by some comparable data for the United States as a whole. Most of this information is drawn from primary sources as cited. The “Interests” sections draw heavily upon data from Audiense,<sup>72</sup> and where possible, this has been corroborated by external data. For additional information about these audiences, including demographics, please see the [Audience Research report](#).

### California

#### Interests

- **Top Interests:** Movies and television, society, sports, music, education. Not much deviation from the general US audience in terms of ANY interest. Californians are slightly less interested in sports and education.
- **Top social media bio words:** “love,” “life,” “music.”<sup>73</sup>
- **Popular music:** Brenton Wood (R&B; four different songs in five cities across the state); Ambjaay (hip-hop/rap; four songs all in the Los Angeles area); Shoreline Mafia (Los Angeles-based hip-hop; four songs in four urban cities)
  - Only pilot state where electronic and Spanish music shows up (all in Spanish, concentrated around Los Angeles).
  - **Lyrical Analysis:** Extensive use of derogatory terms for women. Only thirty-eight out of the 139 most popular songs (27%), did not use the word “bitch” in a derogatory manner.
- **Popular television shows:** *Silicon Valley*, *Jane the Virgin* are popular statewide.
  - Bakersfield: *Adventure Time*, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, *Ridiculousness*
  - Los Angeles: *Family Guy*, *Modern Family*, *The Simpsons*
  - Sacramento: *The Daily Show*, *Tosh.0*, *Modern Family*
  - San Francisco: *Game of Thrones*, *The Daily Show*
  - Santa Ana: *Family Guy*, *Modern Family*, *The Simpsons*
- Audiense reports that Spanish-language networks are more popular in California than any other place in the United States.
- **Most searched porn terms:** “lesbian,” “hentai”<sup>74</sup>

#### Psychographics from Audiense

- **Personality:** They are expressive, explosive, and particular. They are authority-challenging: they prefer to challenge authority and traditional values to help bring about positive changes. They are hedonistic: they feel their desires strongly and are easily tempted by them. And they are philosophical: they are open to and intrigued by new ideas and love to explore them.
- **Needs:** Their choices are driven by a desire for stability.
- **Values:** They consider both helping others and independence to guide a large part of what they do. They think it is important to take care of the people around them. And they like to set their own goals and to decide how to best achieve them.

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<sup>72</sup> Audiense Insights reports commissioned by Story at Scale on each state are archived at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1naAUxpfSI3bqbkbX95sArn0HWXaCrLib>.

<sup>73</sup> Audiense, “Audiense Bios (spreadsheets)” June 2019, digital copy archived by Story at Scale at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NCDKLEOrzGJKL3GG5Ky7qc7gHe-UgSn5xpxvXbSKBrw/edit#gid=1708621921>.

<sup>74</sup> Lauren Vitto, “Welp, Here Is Your State’s Most Popular Search Term on Pornhub, Mashable, January 16, 2018, <https://mashable.com/2018/01/16/pornhub-data-2017-us-state-searches/>.

## Michigan

### Interests

- **Top interests:** Society, movies and television, education, sports, music
  - Compared to the US general population, Michiganders are significantly more interested in “society” (however the term “society in this context is not clearly defined). They are also slightly more interest in movies, schools and education, and music than the general US population.
- **Top social media bio terms:** “love,” “life,” “Michigan,” “mom/mother,” “music”<sup>75</sup>
  - All of these are significantly more commonly used in Michigan than in the United States as a whole
- **Popular music:** Michigan really loves hip-hop, especially home-grown artists.
  - **Most popular artists:** Sada Baby (hip-hop; eight songs);<sup>76</sup> FMB DZ (hip-hop; seven songs); Tee Grizzley (hip-hop; five songs). While all three of these artists are from Detroit, only Tee Grizzley is extremely popular outside of the Midwest.
  - **Most popular song:** “2k17” by Sada Baby.
  - **Lyrical analysis:** Extensive use of derogatory terms for women. Only five out of forty-six (11%) didn’t use the term “bitch” in a derogatory manner. Most songs that didn’t use the term “bitch” in a derogatory manner are from Ann Arbor. Jackson and Grand Rapids also had one song each.
- **Popular television shows:** *Orange Is the New Black*, *Dexter* are popular statewide.
  - Detroit: *Dexter*, *Empire*, *106 & Park*, *Empire*
  - East Lansing: *The Big Bang Theory*, *The Daily Show*, *Tosh.0*
  - Grand Rapids: *Family Guy*, *Modern Family*, *Tosh.0*
- **Most searched porn terms:** “lesbian,” “milf,” “orgy”<sup>77</sup>
- **Buying mindset:** They are more influenced by friends and family in deciding what to purchase.

### Psychographics from Audiense

- **Personality:** They are explosive, expressive, and analytical. They are hedonistic: they feel their desires strongly and are easily tempted by them. They are sociable: they enjoy being in the company of others. And they are modest: they are uncomfortable being the center of attention.
- **Needs:** Their choices are driven by a desire for revelry.
- **Values:** They consider both helping others and independence to guide a large part of what they do. They think it is important to take care of the people around them. And they like to set their own goals and to decide how to best achieve them.

## Georgia

### Interests

- **Top interests:** Society, movies and television, music, sports, education. Other notes: significantly more interest in “society,” astrology, and telecommuting as a career than the general US population. They also have slightly more interest in hip-hop and slightly less interest in pets than the general US population.

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<sup>75</sup> Audiense, “Audiense Bios,” accessed in June 2019, digital copy archived by Story at Scale at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NCDKLEOrzGJKL3GG5Ky7qc7gHe-UgSn5xpxvXbSKBrw/edit#gid=1708621921>.

<sup>76</sup> Note: I did a cultural audit in 2017 that also showed the popularity of Sada Baby in the state. He is from Detroit, so his popularity as a local artist makes sense.

<sup>77</sup> Lauren Vitto, “Welp, Here Is Your State’s Most Popular Search Term on Pornhub,” Mashable, January 16, 2018, <https://mashable.com/2018/01/16/pornhub-data-2017-us-state-searches/>.

- **Top social media bio words:** “love,” “life,” “music,” “mom/mother”
  - This is the only pilot state where the term “god” showed up in social media bios at all.
- **Popular music:** Georgia has more diverse musical interests than our other states, but really loves hip-hop, especially home-grown artists. The main difference between Michigan and Georgia in terms of hip-hop is that hip-hop artists from Atlanta are more popular across the country than are artists from Detroit.
  - **Most popular music artists:** Skooly (Atlanta-based hip-hop; seven out of the thirty most popular songs); Lil Gotit (Atlanta-based hip-hop; six songs), Young Nudy (Atlanta-based hip-hop; four songs). Though all three of these artists are from Atlanta, all are also extremely popular outside of Georgia.
  - Georgia had the largest number of popular songs in the country and gospel genres of the pilot states.
  - **Lyrical analysis:** This is the only state where “god” is referenced frequently, though only one reference to the deity. Georgia also had the fewest references to the word “bitch” in popular song lyrics; in fact, half of the most popular songs across the state don’t reference it.
  - **Most popular song (popular in every city):** “Lil Boy Shit” by Skooly.
- **Popular television shows:** *Luke Cage*, *Love & Hip Hop*, *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Scandal*, *Power*, *Empire*
  - BET is the most important network in Georgia, with *BET Music* ranking even higher than the general BET network.
- **Most searched porn terms:** “lesbian,” “black girl, white guy”<sup>78</sup>
- **Buying mindset:** People in these states are most influenced by online ads, brands, and social media in deciding what to purchase.

### Psychographics from Audiense

- **Personality:** They are active, analytical and excitable. They are cheerful: they are joyful and share that joy with the world. They are sociable: they enjoy being in the company of others. And they are hedonistic: they feel their desires strongly and are easily tempted by them.
- **Needs:** Their choices are driven by a desire for stability.
- **Values:** They consider both helping others and independence to guide a large part of what they do. They think it is important to take care of the people around them. And they like to set their own goals and to decide how to best achieve them.

## United States

### Psychographics from Audiense

- **Personality:** They are explosive, excitable, and analytical. They are hedonistic: they feel their desires strongly and are easily tempted by them. They are modest: they are uncomfortable being the center of attention. And they are sociable: they enjoy being in the company of others.
- **Needs:** Their choices are driven by a desire for revelry.
- **Values:** They consider both helping others and independence to guide a large part of what they do. They think it is important to take care of the people around them. And they like to set their own goals and to decide how to best achieve them.

<sup>78</sup> Lauren Vitto, “Welp, Here Is Your State’s Most Popular Search Term on Pornhub,” Mashable, January 16, 2018, <https://mashable.com/2018/01/16/pornhub-data-2017-us-state-searches/>.





# Acknowledgements & Key Terms

Please see [storyatscale.org/about](https://storyatscale.org/about) for a complete list of all the contributors to Story at Scale: our research team members, advisory council members, partners, co-creators, and funders.

**We acknowledge and appreciate you all!**

## About Story at Scale

Story at Scale ([storyatscale.org](https://storyatscale.org)) is a research project to help artists, campaigners, and organizers advance gender justice across issues from workplace equity to reproductive justice to sex- and gender-based violence to LGBTQ+ rights. We combined data science with narrative and cultural theory, practice, and strategy. Our conclusion: tell stories that are connected in celebrating the joys of living in a gender-just world where everyone belongs.

Story at Scale is funded by The Culture Change Fund.

## About The Culture Change Fund

Housed at the Women's Foundation of California, The Culture Change Fund is a collaborative fund focused on using culture to advance and transform gender justice by changing how the public thinks about wide-ranging issues, including economic security, income inequality, violence against women, sexual assault, maternal health, abortion, contraception, and broader reproductive justice and gender justice issues, among others. Learn more at [womensfoundca.org/culture-change-fund](https://womensfoundca.org/culture-change-fund).

## Key Terms

**Gender justice** is a framework used to bring about the fair and equitable treatment of people of all genders, with the goal of achieving dignity for all. It serves all those directly impacted by gender-based oppression, including transgender and cisgender women, genderqueer and non-binary people, and transgender men. True gender justice is intersectional and incorporates the needs and perspectives of those working towards racial justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ liberation, and disability justice, among other struggles, recognizing that each of these is required in order for people of all genders to experience full dignity, equality, and liberation.

**Intersectionality**, a term first used in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a mode of analysis that examines discrimination experienced by people who face multiple lines of identity-based exclusion. Intersectional gender justice examines the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination that people face, based not just on gender but on race, class, sexual orientation, and a number of other axes. As such, as we work toward gender justice, we do so through the lens of multiple, simultaneous identities—for instance, as a poor, cisgender woman or an Asian, transgender man—not gender identity alone.

**Cultural Strategy** is a field of practice that centers artists, storytellers, media makers, and cultural influencers as agents of social change. Over the long term, cultural strategy cracks open, reimagines and rewrites fiercely-held narratives, transforming the shared spaces and norms that make up culture. In near-term campaigns, it helps to shape opinions, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to electoral, legislative, and policy wins. (source: Jeff Chang, Liz Manne, Erin Potts, [A Conversation About Cultural Strategy](#))

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