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# Music Gender Metadata Manifesto

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## Music Gender Metadata

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*+ information at [GenderMusicTech.org](http://GenderMusicTech.org).*

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# Introduction to the Manifesto

In the digital music industry, metadata is fundamental for artists' distribution, visibility, and promotion. Metadata is structured information that describes and categorizes music, including details such as the artist's name, song title, genre, release date, intellectual property rights, and other key data. These datasets enable digital platforms, streaming services, and rights management organizations to organize, recommend, and monetize music.

However, metadata is not neutral. As highlighted by D'Ignazio and Klein, the collection and management of data can perpetuate structural biases and reinforce inequalities. That's why, beyond its technical applications, metadata is also a powerful cultural and economic tool that determines who gets discovered, who receives promotion, and who gets compensated in the music industry. Without well-structured and equitable metadata, artists can become invisible and excluded from mainstream music streaming channels.

Gender metadata is key to ensuring fair representation in digital spaces. It cannot be limited to binary categories (male/female); instead, it must include disaggregated data that reflects the diversity of gender identities, including sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and other intersectional dimensions.

## The Role of Metadata in AI-Based Recommendation Systems

Digital platforms rely on AI algorithms for music recommendations, and these directly depend on metadata. Studies such as *Exploring Artist Gender Bias in Music Recommendation* (Shakespeare, Porcaro, Gómez, Castillo), *Break the Loop: Gender Imbalance in Music Recommenders* (Ferraro, Serra, Bauer), and *The Impact of Algorithmically Driven Recommendation Systems on Music Consumption and Production* (CDEI, UK Government) have shown that these systems amplify existing biases. Without a fair metadata structure, AI systems exclude non-male artists from recommendations, drastically reducing their visibility and monetization opportunities.

## **A Call for Infrastructural Change in Gender Metadata Governance**

This manifesto advocates for an infrastructural change in the design and governance of gender metadata to ensure a fair, inclusive, and representative music industry. Digital platforms and recommendation services must integrate gender metadata ethically, transparently, and securely without compromising the privacy and safety of artists. The management of this data must be guided by principles of data justice and intersectional representation. This is why we are launching this manifesto. Metadata is not neutral—it reflects human decisions shaped by social, cultural, political, and economic biases. It is time to transform the way metadata is designed and governed to build a more just and inclusive digital future for all artists.

***This manifesto is inspired by other manifestos and principles such as Embedded Metadata Manifesto, Feminist Data Manifest-No and Design Justice Principles***

# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE 1: METADATA IS NOT NEUTRAL

Metadata is the language that digital systems use to classify and organize information. Music metadata consists of structured information that describes key aspects of a musical work and its sound recording, such as the title, artist, musical genre, or release year. Each track can contain dozens of metadata fields. Metadata standards reflect the human decisions that shape them: which data is included, which categories are used, and how the information is described. Metadata design is not just a technical aspect; it is deeply rooted in social realities. Metadata embodies human choices, including biases and cultural values. Every choice in its design has a direct impact on the visibility and accessibility of the data it represents.

Metadata can either reinforce or challenge invisible power structures. Recognizing that metadata is not neutral is the first step toward developing more representative, transparent, and ethical metadata systems. We acknowledge the inherent biases in metadata and urgently call for new practices in the creation and standardization of metadata so that they better represent the complexity and richness of our societies, including gender metadata. We believe in diverse and comprehensive metadata structures as a means to eliminate barriers to representation in digital systems.

# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE 2: INTERSECTIONALITY IS ESSENTIAL IN METADATA

Traditional metadata categories often reflect dominant social norms and power structures, regularly failing to capture or represent the full range of identities in digital systems. Intersectional metadata challenges these structures, questioning and expanding categories to reflect race, gender, and other overlapping identities inclusively.

Women and gender-diverse artists, especially those from racialized communities, often face unique challenges in gaining recognition, navigating industry bias, and accessing opportunities. It is also essential to emphasize that gender is complex, fluid, and extends beyond a simple binary framework. Traditional data systems often classify gender as either "male" or "female," ignoring the diversity of gender identities that exist. This binary approach not only limits the visibility of trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals but also reinforces outdated norms and perpetuates exclusionary practices in digital spaces.

For instance, racialized women may face both racial and gender-based discrimination, affecting their visibility, representation, and discoverability within the industry. Intersectionality provides a framework to understand how overlapping social identities influence artists' opportunities, visibility, and access to resources.

We call for the creation of intersectional metadata to prevent the reinforcement of stereotypes and the erasure of diverse identities in how music is classified and recommended. Making intersectionality a requirement in metadata is essential to recognizing and addressing the varied identities that shape our societies.

# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE 3: AI NEEDS GENDER METADATA

Artificial Intelligence is deeply influenced by the metadata it is trained on. AI systems mirror and often amplify the biases present in their training data. Without accurate, nuanced, and diverse gender metadata, AI systems will continue to perpetuate historical biases, affecting representation, visibility, and economic and cultural participation on digital music platforms. Gender metadata, however, can prevent the invisibilization that AI systems currently generate.

The call to include gender metadata goes beyond technical improvements—it is a demand to design ethical and transparent systems that recognize human diversity. Research on algorithmic fairness and representative metadata practices shows that gender metadata should be a mandatory requirement for AI-driven music recommendation systems that seek to be fair and equitable, countering historical biases and preventing the amplification of existing inequalities.

Today, in the era of automated systems and AI, this debate must be central to the music industry. Metadata was not originally created to be used and manipulated by AI systems, yet today, it has become one of the essential elements powering these technologies. If this issue is not addressed urgently, the music industry will be responsible for failing to prevent bias and exclusion, as the absence of gender metadata is currently leading us toward a digital world where a significant portion of artists is rendered invisible.

# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## **PRINCIPLE 4: GENDER METADATA MUST BE MANAGED SECURELY**

To foster fair and inclusive representation, gender metadata must be carefully designed to reflect the full diversity of gender identities while being managed under the highest standards of security and privacy. Gender, as a sensitive and personal attribute, requires rigorous handling. Mismanagement of this data can lead to severe privacy violations and even put individuals at risk, especially in regions where non-binary and gender-diverse identities are stigmatized or criminalized. It is crucial to ensure that gender metadata is only collected when it serves a meaningful purpose, such as improving visibility and representation.

Unfortunately, today there is no guarantee that gender metadata is handled with the necessary privacy protections, particularly given the increasing threats of digital surveillance, discrimination, and political backlashes against gender-diverse communities. This manifesto makes it clear that any technical proposal to include gender metadata in industry standards must prioritize safety, privacy, and ethical use, ensuring that data collection does not put individuals at risk.



# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## **PRINCIPLE 5: CROWDSOURCED SYSTEMS REQUIRE OPEN DEBATES**

Nearly two decades ago, in 2006, the music industry established metadata standards to define processes and manage music metadata architectures. These standards ensured interoperability and common formatting, allowing different industry stakeholders—from digital distributors to streaming platforms—to efficiently input and extract metadata. This progress has positioned the music industry ahead of other sectors in adopting effective metadata standards.

However, despite some efforts to include gender metadata in standard metadata architectures, the industry has failed to demonstrate a strong commitment to adopting this categorization. At Digitalfems, we firmly believe that the discussion about how gender metadata should be included is of the utmost importance and urgency. We call on all industry stakeholders to engage seriously with this demand.

Music plays a fundamental role in the cultural sector—not only as an artistic expression and form of entertainment but also as a powerful force in shaping identity, reflecting values, and sharing collective stories and emotions. Music represents a space for human creativity and freedom, capable of bringing people together and fostering a sense of belonging. It has the potential to shape and transform social values and attitudes.

# MUSIC GENDER METADATA MANIFESTO PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE 5: CROWDSOURCED SYSTEMS REQUIRE OPEN DEBATES

For this reason, we envision a digital music industry that takes responsibility for technological governance, ensuring a more just and inclusive ecosystem—a digital future where women and gender-diverse people have visibility and recognition rather than being relegated to invisibility.

We advocate for a model that prioritizes diversity, representation, and equal opportunities, driving metadata systems that reflect the richness of human experiences and guarantee a fair distribution of the cultural and economic value of music

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