**Spotify ethical challenges**

**Sexism on Spotify**

My first thoughts after watching the Youtube clip about Martina McBride, makes me a bit amused of her anger towards an algorithm, but I realize sexism is a big problem in the world. Just like racism is, and they shouldn’t be taken for granted. It is small problems like these that leads to more sexism, that we should take care of.

In the video Martina wanted to make a new playlist called “Country Music”, with obviously country music songs. After making the playlist, the Spotify recommender system gave her 12 songs that she could add to her list. By her surprise she saw that not a single artist from the songs were a male, so she had to refresh the recommendations 12 times until she found one female. I thought this was simply cause of the lack of woman in the country music industry, so I decided to do some research on the topic.

According to an article on [NPR](https://www.npr.org/2019/04/05/710262673/country-music-excludes-women-especially-over-age-40-study-finds), only 16% of country music artists are female, thus I can see why the recommender took a while to recommend a female artist. Still 16% and one female artist in every 144 songs is a big difference, but 12 refreshes are quite a small sample still and variance could play a big role. After [Reuter](https://songdata.ca/2019/10/01/reflecting-on-spotifys-recommender-system/) performed this test again but with a larger sample, we can start to see the correlation between the percentages. After 430 songs they found that 13% were performed by a female or male-female artist which is much closer to the original 16%.

Another reason why this could be is that the men artists are simply better and more popular than the female artists in the country music category. If the Spotify recommender system only recommended two songs; One by a male and one by a female and 1 million people added the male artist and only 10 thousand people the female artist, I’m sure the recommender would not recommend the female more often that the male artist in the future (or the specific song).

I think in this case it has less to do with sexism and more to do with the specific music category and I think if we would choose another category, it could be the other way around.

**The Smirnoff Equalizer**

The Smirnoff Equalizer is a tool that will equalize the gender ratio of users’ listening experience. I think the idea behind the tool is good, but I’m not sure how it will work in practice. If the main point for a company is to make money, and the main point for Spotify is for the users to listen as much as possible, does trying to equalize the genders in this specific niche lead to this? I do not know. I like listening to hardstyle and usually there is a female singer there, and I think a female fits a lot better there than a man. Therefore, I don’t think the RS should try pushing in too many male singers into my recommendations if I keep rejecting them regularly.

In an article on the Baffler, they stated that on Spotify’s RapCaviar playlist, 8% of the artists where women while 92% men. The reason for this is simply that there is a bigger percentage of men in the rapping industry than woman, thus that also more better rappers are men. There also many good female rappers but a much smaller percentage than men. Sometimes I feel like some of these issues are made up just to find an issue. I just went and looked up the most popular Christmas songs and the top 3 were from a female artist. You can find statistics on everything but sometimes they don’t have to do anything with minorities, but of course sometimes they do and should be taken seriously.

**Strategic Recommendation Bias**

Strategic recommendation bias and user price-discrimination is something to be aware about. When subscribing to any type of service you must remember that the company is trying to maximize profits while at the same time trying to keep the consumer happy, but while also trying to keep the user unaware of the ways the company is mistreating the user. There are many examples of this in the real world, that goes unnoticed, but also examples that we know of but still do. A classic example is McDonalds and its burgers. We know they’re unhealthy and don’t look the same as in the pictures, but we still eat them. There are many examples of this that we know something shady is going on in the background but we simply don’t have enough time to care or we simply don’t care about it.

Another example is googles’ recommendation system. If me and my friend type the same text in the search engine it will give us different results based on our interests and previous actions. This often leads to problems with people that have very strong opinions on the political scale for example. A left winger who googles politics, will give her “good” opinions from her point of view, which will only strengthen her views even more and create more hatred towards the other end of the political spectrum. This creates more conflicts than often needed, but conflicts aren’t always that bad.

This bias is far worse for the artists than users on Spotify for example. An artist whose royalties are more expensive than another one’s, simply doesn’t benefit Spotify as much as the cheaper option. Unless of course we start taking math’s into consideration and doing formulas on supply and demand and see where the lines meet in the middle, like was calculated in the paper. This is the best practice for Spotify since they earn the most money this way, but the more expensive artists get less attention than they could’ve eventually earned to get. Many big problems in this world could be solved if people weren’t so greedy after big profits and money and would rather think about peoples’ best and not about themselves (all the time). That is also my suggestion but unfortunately people are greedy and realize too late in life that money wasn’t the most important thing after all. What I see more and more happening is big businessmen starting non-profit organizations after creating a few very profitable businesses first. This leads to giving back to the community which starts a positive cycle of giving back and people being happier and more friendly.