

Addressing Underrepresentation of Women in Performing Arts Technology



Faculty Communities for Inclusive Teaching, 2017

Sile O'Modhrain and Michael Gurevich

Project Overview

- The Women's Audio Mission estimates that behind the scenes, only 5% of the people creating, producing and recording the sound and music we listen to are women.
- In the Department of Performing Arts Technology, the challenge of including the voices and perspectives of women is exacerbated by the fact that we have a predominantly male faculty teaching a student body that is overwhelmingly male, in a male-dominated discipline.
- To help understand and develop strategies to improve inclusive teaching in this environment, we held a day-long event with Terri Winston, founder and director of Women's Audio Mission.
- Ms. Winston participated in a faculty retreat around inclusive teaching, met with undergraduate and graduate students who are women, and gave a public lecture.
- Students from local schools were invited to the lecture, and given tours and demos by current PAT students.

Participants

Faculty from the Department of Performing Arts Technology, School of Music, Theatre & Dance:



Sile O'Modhrain, Associate Professor



Michael Gurevich, Associate Professor and Chair



Christopher Burns, Lecturer



Jason Corey, Associate Professor
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research



Jeremy Edwards, Lecturer



John Granzow, Assistant Professor



Andrew Kirshner, Associate Professor



Stephen Rush, Professor

Key Insights / New Questions

- There is a prevailing impression that Music Technology is a field for men. It is reinforced by pervasive imagery of male engineers and producers, but also by the fact that most of the media that women consume is produced by men from a male perspective.
- By training women to be engineers and producers, WAM aims not only to reverse the imbalance, but to change the very nature of the media we consume by injecting it with more diverse perspectives.
- Girls develop this impression at a young age; those who do persist often experience stereotype threat.
- This is why it is particularly important to consider diversity in how we present and represent ourselves in media. Although we can't change the composition of our student body overnight, we CAN change our image, making it more explicitly welcoming to women.
- It is also especially important to include the work and voices of women in our curricula.
- Ms. Winston in part attributed her affinity for the field to having a parent who didn't reinforce gender stereotypes about girls' interests and aptitudes.
- Our students have reported that they frequently experience such stereotypes. We must be extra vigilant not to play into those in the classroom.
- WAM has worked with thousands of girls and women, but Ms. Winston emphasized the power of individual and personal contacts and connections.
- WAM started out because of leadership that explicitly encouraged it. We are fortunate to have such leadership in SMTD and U-M; we should take advantage of it.
- WAM aspires to reach women and girls from underserved communities.
- Women who are successful in the field are generally proactive and generous when it comes to assisting younger women getting started. We should leverage their willingness to contribute, especially given the gender composition of our faculty.
- The biggest question that emerged was: How we can address diversity in our student population more broadly, beyond only gender?
- Consideration of diversity in our curricula, and in how the department presents itself is important; but socioeconomic diversity is especially problematic due to the relatively high cost/access barrier to entry into our field.

Artifacts



Resources



WOMEN'S AUDIO MISSION
CHANGING THE FACE OF SOUND

<https://www.womensaudiomission.org/>



<http://www.soundgirls.org/>

Born, G., & Devine, K. (2015). Music Technology, Gender, and Class: Digitization, Educational and Social Change in Britain. *Twentieth-Century Music*, 12(2), 135-172.

Farrugia, R. (2012). Beyond the Dance Floor: Female DJ's Technology, and Electronic Dance Music Culture. Chicago: Intellect.

Rodgers, T. (2010). Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Next Steps

- Overall, we need to actively counter the prevailing impression that this is a field for men.
- Review our admissions criteria and application portfolio requirements in an effort to be more inclusive.
- Engage more proactively in community engagement and outreach. Create more on-campus programming for middle- and high-school students.
- Produce public-facing imagery — pedagogical, promotional, and outreach materials — that feature women and students of color. Have students lead these efforts.
- Summer camp targeting girls interested in music & technology, with low barrier to entry.
- Videoconference calls with women who are professionals in the field, for students and camp participants.
- Encourage and support students to have meet-ups or informal gatherings for those who are underrepresented.
- Use our Seminar series to foster conversations about gender and diversity.
- Introduce courses with an explicit focus on diversity. "Electronic Music and Social Justice" to launch in Winter 2018.