

Possible Technology Selves: Investigating Factors Contributing to Women's Absence from Technology Courses within Music and Communication Programs

Dr Helen English, Associate Professor Susan Kerrigan, Associate Professor Jon Drummond, Ms Melanie Coombes

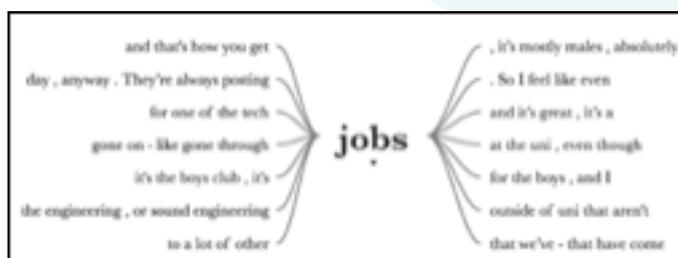
Project Summary

Women are under-represented in many areas of the Creative Industries, notably music production, cinematography and screen composition. Peak bodies APRA and Screen Australia are currently implementing strategies to address gender imbalance. However, the gendering of roles within Music and Media Production is evident earlier in the Higher Education domain. Our research investigated perceptions of gendered roles in Communications and Music degree programs, looking for factors that contribute to some students' reluctance to participate in particular courses and roles. The team was also interested in whether aspirations and imagined futures alter during the Tertiary Education journey, due to barriers to participation as well as opportunities.

Key Points

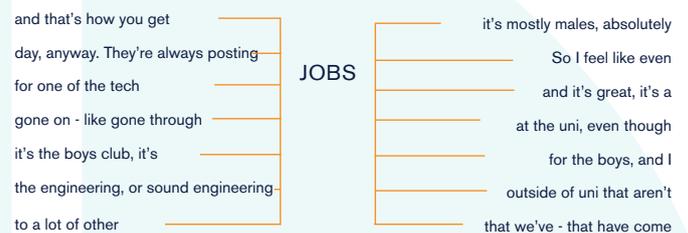
"In this world, women's voices are not given enough importance, though I don't just blame the film industry or critics for that. This is a problem that goes far beyond the cinema industry"
- Jane Campion 2018

The research points to a prefiguring of gendered inequities in the Creative Industries within tertiary courses. Female students are influenced by what they see and hear about possible careers and view certain careers (such as music production and cinematography) as beyond their reach. The research findings point to learning environments within School of Creative Industries courses that could do more in terms of challenging gender inequity and supporting female students. The data from the research was rich, presenting numerous avenues for analysis. We focused on the three recurring themes: gendered roles; aversion to risk-taking; and role models.



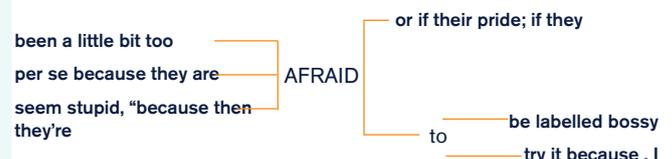
Gendered Roles

Female students felt excluded from some learning environments and career paths, perceiving them as boys' clubs. As research has shown, unequal gender relations are often internalised as a sense of shame or not belonging.



Aversion to risk-taking

Systematic gendered inequalities, i.e. inequality in practices, language and experiences, are often visible as a reluctance of female students to take risks in class. This manifests as holding back from asking questions, preferring to ask peers after class. This is often constructed through a deficit lens as individual lack of confidence or assertiveness. Female participants also expressed the view that a career in a technology-dependent arts field is too risky. They pointed to 'safe' careers that were gendered, such as teaching, as preferred options.



Role models

A lack of female role models as staff, in the industry, and in examples shown in class has a negative impact on female students' career path aspirations and perception of their own capabilities. Students spoke about the importance of having female tutors, female technical staff and examples of successful women in course materials. The employment of female tutors and revision of course materials to include more female examples in 2019 has already had a profound effect.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Lecturers and tutors should be prepared to challenge assumptions about who is suited to any role or career in the Creative Industries from the outset of each course and year. Lecture material and course resources need to be gender balanced, with a focus on providing positive examples of women in roles where they are underrepresented in the industries. Other strategies should be put in place, such as making sure students undertake all roles within courses and providing 'layperson' notes for students without prior experience.
- Creating a safe environment for learning should be the goal of every teacher. However, it calls for specific skills and sensitivity, coupled with awareness that staff may not be trained in. This therefore is a clear message from the research – the need for professional development and awareness of the experience of different groups within cohorts. It is important to be aware that students' reluctance to answer questions or pose them may stem from feelings of fear and shame that arise in contexts that are not sensitive to gendered differences. Other strategies therefore might be useful, such as creating safe spaces for special question time, as an add-on session to a course where women are otherwise disadvantaged.
- The report found that role models both in teaching materials and embodied as academic and technical staff were a key and crucial aspect to get right. Given the importance of role models for indicating what is possible, providing forms of and approaches to success that are gender sensitive, and providing inspiration, employing more female staff in areas that are male-dominated is a clear responsibility of the university. This applies to both academic and technical staff.
- Dissemination of this research and its findings about possible factors that impact on women's pathways and possible futures is important, including at senior executive and industry board levels. Gender needs to be at the core of any pedagogical discussions to make sure that courses are truly inclusive.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Our first step is to include more Creative Industries disciplines, such as Design in our research ambit. A second step is to involve more universities and industry partners to look at the issues beyond our university.
- A symposium is planned for 2020. We have a network of three universities currently with support from APRA (Australian Performing Rights Association) to grow the network.

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Contact

Dr Helen English

University of Newcastle

School of Creative Industries

helen.english@newcastle.edu.au