

Addressing the Gender Imbalance Nashville 2008 Summary Report

At the 2008 annual meeting held in Nashville, TN the Committee for the Status of Women presented a session entitled “Addressing the Gender Imbalance.” The percentage of women members within our Society is well below 50%; it remained stable around the 30% mark in 2001-06 and dropped to 27% in 2007. (In comparison, the percentages of women members of the AMS and the SEM in 2004 were 46% and 50%, respectively.) A similar imbalance exists in submissions and acceptances to the SMT’s journals.

Our session provided some statistics tracing these imbalances over the history of the Society, explored possible reasons for the imbalances, and suggested strategies for alleviating them. Following short presentations by four panelists, general discussion took place on ways in which the imbalances might be addressed. The following report summarizes the presentations before listing ideas presented by the panelists and audience for addressing the gender imbalance within the Society of Music Theory.

Presentations

Gender Representation in SMT

Brenda Ravenscroft presented the most recent statistics on gender representation in SMT membership, publication, and conference participation over the last five years. In addition, Ravenscroft polled members of the American Council of Learned Societies for strategies for tackling imbalances. Ravenscroft’s PowerPoint presentation is attached.

Results of gender statistics and SMT:

- With respect to overall membership, percentages of female members of SMT have decreased from 31% in 2001 to 27% in 2007. Meanwhile the total membership of SMT have increased from 700 to 1000.
- Women are overrepresented in the Society’s administrative structures, yet underrepresented on editorial boards of SMT journals.
- While women represent approximately 30% of the membership of SMT, fewer than one-third of the proposals submitted to the annual meeting are from women. Acceptance rates are comparable to those of men.
- Relative to female membership rates, women are underrepresented in both submissions to and publications in *MTS* and *MTO*. Acceptance rates for article submissions are significantly below those of men.

Challenges for SMT:

- *Raise* the membership rates of women by attracting more women to the Society.
- *Include* more women on editorial boards.
- *Encourage* women to submit paper proposals for annual meetings.
- *Encourage* women to submit journal articles for publication
- *Examine* reasons why journal acceptance rates for women are significantly lower than those for men.

Strategies learned from ACLS members:

- There must be an ongoing commitment to the achievement of gender balance from the Society's leadership.
- Women should be actively promoted as members of governing councils, presidents, and other influential committees (e.g. program and nominating committees).
- Explore means of including childcare at conferences.
- "Aggressively" recruit women at the graduate student level.

Gender Representation in Journal Articles

Robert Zierolf presented on "The Number and Nature of Journal Articles by Women in Music Theory." Zierolf researched the number of articles published by men and by women in four prominent music theory journals since they began publication. The journals are: *The Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Analysis* and the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*. The data was then combined to form graphs showing the severe differences in the number of publications by male authors and female authors. There was also a culmination graph of the last 30 years, depicting the total number of articles published by men and women in all four of the journals. The graphs displaying Zierolf's data are attached.

The data raises the question of why men publish more than women. Zierolf posited the following questions that need to be answered to fully be able to grasp the scope of the question:

- To what extent do women hold academic positions at institutions where publication is required from them?
- Are teaching loads/service requirements for women proportional to those of men?
- Is reading and writing a gendered activity?
- How do we currently define 'music theory', and how could this definition impact on the question of gender imbalance?

Zierolf provided the following recommendations:

- This study should be a catalyst for discussion and possibly more research.
 - What are the gender representation statistics for regional society journals, institution-based journals and other regular publications?
 - Is a change in our current publication style/format needed?
- Institutions should make sure the workload and service requirements are gender-neutral.
- Good mentoring is necessary.

Survey on Issues of Gender and the Field of Music Theory

Harald Krebs discussed the results of an on-line questionnaire addressing the issues of gender and the field of music theory. The questionnaire was distributed via appropriate list serves (SMT-announce and CSW-affiliates) in January 2008, and solicited

anonymous responses from graduate and undergraduate students as well as from faculty members. The number of responses was too small to be statistically significant.

Question 1: Are there reasons why females leave the field of music theory?

- The answers varied widely.
- Some answers were applicable to men as well as women. Such reasons included financial problems, limited job opportunities, loss of interest in the field.
- Answers applicable exclusively to women included discouragement at women's apparent disadvantage in the job market, familial issues arising from the decision to have children, and belittlement and harassment by male colleagues.

Questions 2 and 3: Are there issues particular to the field of music theory that may result in women leaving the field? Does your research fall within the broad remit of SMT? If not, does it affect your desire to participate in the Society?

- A number of respondents stated that they felt that SMT was not inclusive enough in terms of research areas. Research areas mentioned as being marginalized within the Society are feminist studies, popular music studies, cultural theory, and even early music analysis and theory.
- One respondent wondered if categorization of acceptable and unacceptable methodologies from SMT's point of view would reveal a reflection of gender within the two sets of methodologies.

Question 4: Are women encouraged and supported by music theory faculty members to submit conference proposals and journal articles and pursue a career in music theory?

- Three respondents stated that they had received encouragement; two stated that they did not. Four did not address the question, which implies they *did not* receive *active* encouragement.

Question 5: What changes can be made to encourage women to enter and remain in the field of music theory?

- Active encouragement and a supportive, caring attitude.
- It should be made clear to students that to be successful in the field, they do not have to become experts in every subdiscipline.
- Appoint women to editorial boards and as editor of *Spectrum* and/or *MTO*.

Question 6: What can the Committee for the Status of Women do to improve the gender imbalance?

- Suggestions included:
 - Travel stipends for young scholars to attend the national conference.
 - Have a conference guide program geared specifically towards women.
 - One respondent felt that grass-roots recruitment on individual college and university campuses was the only hope for increasing numbers and stated that we should advertise and advocate for our discipline more effectively.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Harassment is a problem that requires our continued attention.

- We should actively encourage female students to consider music theory as a field of study, and encourage current students to submit proposals and articles.
- SMT should provide travel stipends for unfunded women to attend SMT.
- Conference buddy program geared specifically towards women.
- Encourage broad-based mentoring programs.
- Engage in grass-roots advertising about music theory to explode preconceptions about music theory. Krebs specifically discussed giving a presentation to first-year students entitled “My Life in Theory” aimed at changing preconceptions about music theory as a boring and narrow field.
- Hold workshops geared towards women.
- Work to ensure that everyone understands that mastery of every aspect of the field is not necessary to succeed in music theory.
- Appoint women as editors of the Society’s journals “with regular periodicity.”

Music Theory Graduate Student Focus Group

Sharon Krebs presented the results of a focus group with eight female graduate students in music theory, held in February 2008. S. Krebs moderated the focus group; she is trained as a focus group facilitator. Activities during the focus group, developed by S. Krebs in consultation with the members of the CSW, aimed to discover why women are attracted to or deterred from the field of music theory, and how existing barriers to their recruitment and retention might be overcome. Human subject clearance, as required by federal law, was obtained, and every effort has been made to maintain confidentiality. Sharon Krebs’ PowerPoint presentation is attached.

Participants

- Participants included eight female graduate students in music theory (four at the master’s level, four at the Ph.D. level).
- Participants were from two different universities and from both the US and Canada.

Perception of music fields

The focus group began with two activities in which participants were asked to write down the first words and phrases that came to mind when they thought of the fields of music theory and musicology. They performed this exercise first as music theory graduate students, then a second time as if they were musicology graduate students¹.

- When responding as music theory graduate students, participants showed generally positive impressions of both disciplines.
- When responding as “musicologists,” participants showed a predominantly negative impression of music theory.

Barriers and Challenges

Participants were presented with three possible pools from which future female music theorists might be recruited: undergraduates, students at the Masters’ level, and students in other branches of music. Participants were divided into groups and asked to develop a list of barriers and challenges specific to one of these pools. It is noteworthy that

¹ Ideally, focus groups should have been held with both music theory and musicology graduate students. Since there was no funding for these focus groups, it was necessary to have the participants “pretend” to be musicologists.

participants stated that many of the barriers/challenges they identified were neither gender-specific nor specific to the field of music theory. For barriers and challenges specific to each group, readers are directed to the attached PowerPoint presentation.

Overall, the following music-theory-specific barriers were identified:

- Lack of knowledge about what the field of music theory is really like (both among undergraduates and students in other branches of music).
- A lack of female role models.
- Group dynamics in a “male-prominent” field (men more likely to interrupt in seminars, etc.).
- As already revealed in earlier activities, negative perceptions about music theorists and/or the field.

Recruitment Strategies

Participants were divided into three different groups and asked to come up with recruitment strategies for their assigned pool of potential music theorists. The suggested strategies included the following (again, strategies specific to each group are provided in the attached PowerPoint). Many of the suggestions were directed at increasing students’ awareness of the true nature of the field of music theory:

- Demonstrate the difference between undergraduate and graduate-level theory studies, by occasionally “going beyond the syllabus” in undergraduate teaching.
- Provide funding for undergraduates to attend regional or national theory conferences.
- Promote interdisciplinary events both to attract individuals in other branches of music and to make music theory appear less narrow.

The role-model challenge also generated some suggestions. For institutions with no female theory faculty, the following strategies were recommended:

- Invite female guest lecturers.
- Encourage female students to look at professional women in any field as role models.
- Work actively to retain women in any upper-level graduate program.

Other suggestions involved increasing program flexibility, creating a supportive environment, improving the atmosphere between faculty and students, and encouraging mentoring on every level.

Potential Next Steps

- Improve Music Theory’s image
- Foster academic interactions between theory and other branches of music.
- Develop recruitment tools that demonstrate how women can and do succeed in the field and that highlight the broad, interdisciplinary aspects of the field.

Post-Presentation Discussion Points

After the presentations we solicited audience members’ advice and ideas for strategies for facilitating the entry of women into the field and into the SMT, and for encouraging them to remain in both. Suggestions are listed below under subheadings.

1. Mentoring:

- Prominent female instructors, advisors, and professors are vitally important to keeping young women in the field.
 - Professors should be encouraged to include more work by women (composers, theorists) in their classes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, as a further method of demonstrating the worth of female work, and the possibility for women to continue in the field.
 - Professors and other mentors need to encourage their female students to submit papers to conferences and articles to journals.
 - It would be helpful to explore the extent to which gender bias and sexism may be embedded in the type of work considered acceptable to the Society (in language choices, modes of speech, style of social interaction in both conference and teaching environments, etc.) Sexism can be embedded in preferences for kinds of language, ways of saying things, mode of interaction in seminar courses (e.g. men might respond faster verbally than women).
 - There may be a confidence issue, where young women might not feel as confident submitting papers for conferences or publication as their male counterparts. (This comment was reinforced to a CSW member afterwards as well: women graduate students suggested that they felt their work had to be absolutely perfect before they could submit it anywhere, while their perception was that male colleagues presented less-polished work with total confidence.) Reinforcement of women's abilities through the points above should help alleviate this issue.
 - Perhaps as a component of a Ph.D., programs could require students to submit a paper for publication: even if it weren't accepted, they would at least have actively participated in the process with the support of their supervisor.
2. Affirmative Action—in general all ideas that fall in this group were hotly contested.
- SMT could look into a partly-blind submission process for conference presentations. The AMS has used a part-blind submission process in its national conferences, to increase the number of papers by senior scholars (who were apparently being rejected in blind reviews). 70% of the total slots would be filled by papers selected under a totally blind process. Non-blind review could balance out the remainder, depending on the aims of the program committee (more papers by women, more papers by minority ethnicities in SMT, more papers by senior or junior scholars, etc.). These papers might not be passing blind reviews because of existing biases in appropriate writing style and content (see Zierolf report, above).
 - Establish an award for women, such as best article by a female music theorist. In general, there was mixed reaction to this idea: fears of marginalization, of the award not being respected; of the subject area perhaps leaning towards more stereotypically “women’s” music theory and ignoring work done by women in more traditional subjects; wanting to compete with the whole pool of theorists and being judged worthy.

- Travel grants for young female scholars to the national meeting. It was mentioned that awarding travel grants could be construed as counterproductive to the mission of the CSW: that preferential treatment is not needed or could cause resentment, though encouragement in other forms is good. Someone proposed that a travel award from CSW be need-based, which could encourage adjunct faculty to attend.
3. Recruitment and Advertising
- Recruitment is inextricably tied to advertising.
 - The focus group showed a narrow preconception of what music theory entails. The Society and its members should work to alter such preconceptions.
 - It was suggested that the CSW create a Facebook group.
 - Individual professors should be aware of the role they can play by positively encouraging students early in their education (e.g. 2nd-year undergrad).
4. Fact Finding
- There was a real sense that hard data is desperately needed. Data should break down by gender, but also by rank (graduate/adjunct/visiting prof/assistant/associate/etc.); this should be communicated to the SMT executive board.
 - Find where the holes are in the leaky pipe—where in the process are we losing women: at the undergraduate, graduate or faculty level?
 - One suggestion was for a survey of the subjects on which women publish in order to see if there are preferences.
 - The possibility of running some sort of psychology study was raised regarding differences of writing style and perception: using a web-based survey, excerpts of writing are evaluated by participants (who would be music theorists) as being written by a man or a woman (thus addressing our existing biases), and also as being ‘weaker’ or ‘stronger’ pieces of writing.
5. Other
- Provide daycare at national meetings.
 - Some undergraduate and graduate students in the audience did not perceive a gender imbalance in the field. Others felt that graduate students tend not to see as much of a problem as those entering the job market or in junior faculty positions.

CSW Recommendations

Based on the information contained in this report, it is clear that a gender imbalance still exists within the Society. There is hope: positive steps worthy of celebration include the recent election of another female SMT president, and the first appointment of a woman to the editorship of one of SMT's flagship journals. But clearly, more work is required. We urge the Executive Board to make a public commitment to achieve the goal of a gender balance within the Society; develop clear steps that will be taken to achieve this balance; publicly set targets and deadlines to achieve gender balance; and deliver an annual progress report on the issue to the Society.

Some of the steps to achieving gender balance could include:

Executive Board Actions

- provide the CSW with membership data that will enable the CSW to identify at what point in their careers women most need support. The data should be broken down by gender, but also by rank; and there should be acknowledgement during the collection process that some respondents may be uncomfortable with choosing between male and female genders.
- help the CSW to find funding sources for vitally-needed further research into the gender imbalance. (One such body which supports data-collection projects is the American Academy (<http://www.amacad.org>.) Potential topics include expanding Zierolf's study of music theory journals; investigating the prevalence of specific writing and presentation styles and if such styles are linked to gender in any way; conducting broader surveys and focus groups to determine where women are most likely to leave the field; and examining why submission rates to journals are significantly lower for women than for men.
- explore ways to promote music theory as a vital and interesting career path, a welcoming environment both generally and specifically to women. This promotion should help to remove the negative stereotypes identified by focus group and survey participants. Options could include a DVD or other material for professors; encouraging professors to go beyond the syllabus and talk about their own research interests with undergrads, etc.
- provide travel stipends for underfunded women to attend SMT
- investigate the feasibility of a part-blind submission process for the national conference, in consultation with both the CSW and Diversity Committees
- include daycare services at conferences
- include more women on editorial boards of SMT's flagship journals (*MTS*, *MTO*) and encourage independent theory journals to increase female participation on their own boards, while acknowledging the disproportionate representation by women on standing committees within the SMT
- encourage regional societies to adopt similar techniques of inclusion for their own activities

Committee for the Status of Women Actions

- create a document for faculty with ideas on how to inspire female students (encouraging them to submit to conferences and journals; outlining possible issues that may be different for women than men, such as fewer female role models, sexual harassment, and confidence issues)
- create a document about sexual harassment, similar to those already created for the use of non-sexist language and legal interview questions
- explore the issue of gender bias, particularly unconscious and unintentional forms of bias that are likely at work in music theory. Using this research, develop an educational campaign (which could include documents for dissemination, special sessions at conferences, workshops, etc.) to help eliminate unconscious gender biases in music theory.

- in conjunction with the Executive Board, conduct further research into the gender imbalance (potential topics as listed in Executive Board recommendations)
- improve our promotion and information-dissemination: increase the use of the CSW-Affiliates list-serv; create a Facebook site; ensure that faculty know about the resources available to them and their students through the CSW website
- analyze the membership data provided by the Executive Board to identify at what point(s) in their careers women need support, and what kind(s) of support would be most helpful
- assist the Executive with encouraging regional societies to adopt techniques of gender inclusion for their own activities