

IS THERE STILL A GENDER IMBALANCE IN ART AND DESIGN CURRICULA?

The majority of undergraduates studying Art & Design courses are female, however the majority of professionals in the creative industry are male. This research explores if educational practice influences this conversion rate.

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Purpose
RA small scale action research project, conducted to satisfy the taught PCET programmes learning outcomes. The scope is limited to one cycle of action research, examining an issue of practice.

INTRODUCTION

There are more female undergraduates than male in Art & Design course. This has been a consistent pattern for many years (Tatlow, 2023). By contrast the percentage of men working in higher institutional roles within the industry are significantly larger than females. This is echoed in the material that we teach. For example, male artists have more coverage in the curriculum than females and non-binary people. This report is one cycle of action research where I will analyse my own practice in this area.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do my teaching materials and learning activities contribute to this gender imbalance?
2. If so, how can I improve my practice?

METHODOLOGY

I have gathered data on student genders from the last five years working on the Cert HE Art & Design Foundation course. No identifiable or identifying data was gathered.

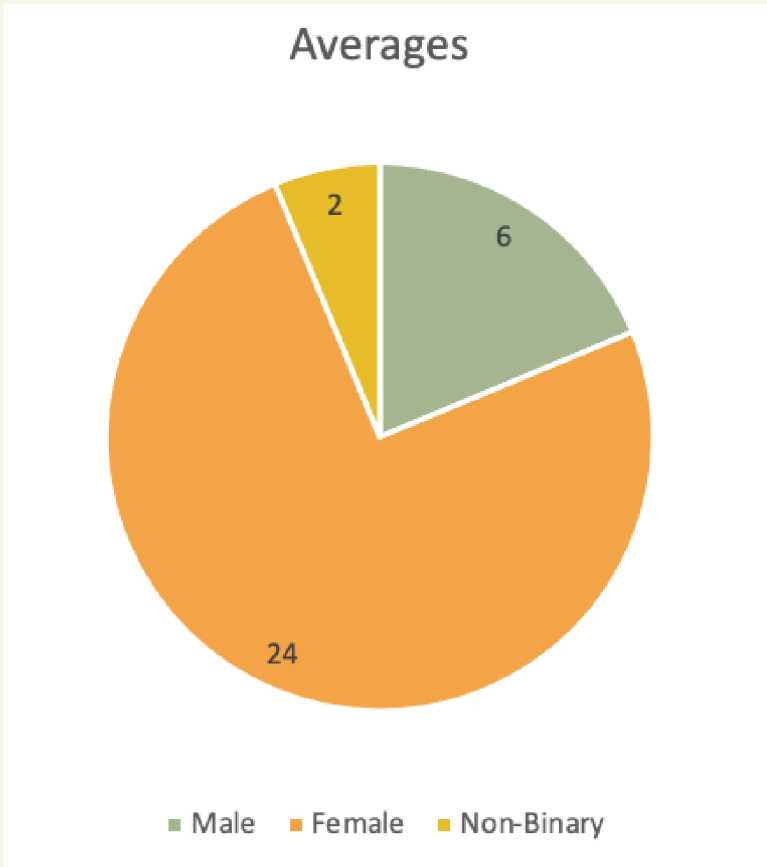
I went through my teaching material and grouped the artists covered by gender.

I then analysed these for solutions.

RESULTS

The average gender breakdowns over the last five years was 24 female, 6 male and 2 non-binary.

My teaching material was twice as likely to include male artists than female or non-binary.



ANALYSIS

Unconscious thought patterns can influence current situations. This results in unconscious bias (Devine et al., 2012). As humans we consciously and unconsciously keep encounters and experiences in our brains, which can later influence our automatic responses (Dee & Gershenson 2017).

Unconscious bias is particularly important for teachers to challenge, due to their job roles and responsibilities at the forefront of society as facilitators of student development. They have a duty to promote diversity and inclusivity, both as a duty of care and in accordance with the Equality Act (2010). If teachers do not challenge their own unconscious biases, this could have an impact on their perception and choices towards students, particularly of marginalised characteristics (Ashmore et al., 2019; Dee & Gershenson, 2017).

ACTION PLAN

- Rewriting teaching material to have gender parity.
- Work with colleagues within the department to do the same across all modules.
- Attending CPD sessions and training on unconscious bias
- Use small groups and critiques to create safe spaces for students to challenge the status quo.
- Conduct the next cycle of research incorporating intersectionality.

CONCLUSION

In my own practice, I believed I was using an even balance of genders within my teaching material, but through looking at the data here discovered I was not because of unconscious bias. This is an area in which my curriculum needs to be unfiltered. I have produced an action plan to challenge this and make my practice more inclusive.

Related literature

Ashmore, L., Avis, J., Dalton, J., Hadwen, D., Lavender, K., Noel, P., Rennie, S., Salter, E., Swindells, D., Terry, R., & Thomas, P. (2019). Equality and Diversity. In J. Avis, R. Fisher, & R. Thompson (Eds.), Teaching in lifelong learning: a guide to theory and practice (3rd ed., pp. 57–78). Open University Press.

Dee, T., & Gershenson, S. (2017). Unconscious Bias in the Classroom: Evidence and Opportunities. Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis.

Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. L. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48(6). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003>

Equality Act. (2010). Equality Act 2010. UK Public General Acts. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Tatlow, S. (2023). Exploring issues in categorisation of higher music education courses through FOI surveys of gender demographics in UK higher education institutions. British Journal of Music Education, 40(2). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051722000249>