

## Improving Gender Imbalance

Improving Gender Imbalance:  
Male Recruitment at the Speaking Center  
Casey Mann, Undergraduate  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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### Abstract

This paper explores the gender inequity prevalent at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Speaking Center. Included is consideration of potential barriers to gender inclusion based in gender role theory. The author's discusses the importance of cross-gender relations as a form of intercultural communication to fulfill the UNCG Speaking Center mission. Closing is a brief analysis of the current recruitment practices with recommendations for improved recruitment schemes and further positivist study to assess and evaluate gender disparity in greater depth.

*Key Words:* Speaking Center, Gender Gaps, Gender Role Theory, Intercultural Communication, Recruitment, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

## Improving Gender Imbalance

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Upon entering CST 390, a class dedicated to training Speaking Center consultants, the discrepancy was evident. Including the female professor, there were eight women and just one man. Upon review of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Speaking Center website (2010), I discovered that of the forty-six or so employees of the Speaking Center, only nine are male. On any given day in the Speaking Center, one feels fortunate if we are able to have two males in the office at the same time. When approaching the situation in the Speaking Center, one must first consider student demographics of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. According to the Faculty Convocation and General Faculty Meeting for 2009, by gender, 69% of UNCG students are female; 31% are male (Perrin, 2009, p.7). Even when considering this fact and that the occupation of teaching is a female-dominated profession, the 15% male employment rate is disturbingly low at the UNCG Speaking Center. However, consultants are not teachers; they are peer advisors and role models. This fact makes the deficiency all the more concerning. The lack of male consultants detracts from the overall diversity of the center while limiting the ability to create and demonstrate effective intercultural communication. In addition, I believe that without being able to provide critique from varying perspectives of diverse audiences, we are unable to fulfill our mission. For these reasons, a review and reflection on the recruitment process for new consultants is necessary in order to encourage a greater membership rate by male students.

### The Value of Male Role Models

One merely needs to look at the statistics of gender gaps in achievement for education to understand that there are systemic issues at work. “[School-age] girls now outperform boys in every academic subject, including the traditionally male-dominated subjects of math and

## Improving Gender Imbalance

science” (Cole, 1997, in Wiens, 2005, p. 12). This “gender gap in achievement is particularly pronounced in language-based subjects” (Carrington & McPhee, 2008, pp.109-110). This dilemma is also evident when looking at students in college institutions. The Department of Education (2004) concluded that by 2011, the graduating classes of American universities would be 60% female (Weins, 2005). As the achievement gap continues to widen, studies have looked to apply gender role theory to measure, interpret and sometimes alleviate the disparity. “Gender role theory is grounded in the supposition that individuals socially identified as males and females tend to occupy different ascribed roles within social structures and tend to be judged against divergent expectations for how they ought to behave” (Shimanoff, 2009). Gender role analyses in the field of education have several foci, including works out of the paradigm of feminist studies focusing on the significance of hetero-masculine dominance and the number and role of male teachers.

In discussing gender theory within the context of education, one must first consider the phrase “the ‘feminization’ of education.” Some scholars view this term to mean “the continuing under-representation of men in the teaching profession” (Carrington & McPhee, 2008, p.1). For example, Carrington and McPhee (2008) did a study into the feelings of educators and students in schools in the United Kingdom on the numbers of male teachers and the potential strengths and pitfalls. The authors found that both male and female participants felt rectifying the gender imbalances would ultimately be beneficial both in terms of “an antidote to prevailing gender stereotypes,” and also to provide “much-needed male ‘role models’” while maintaining “discipline in schools” (Carrington & McPhee, 2008, pp.111-112).

Others view feminization not only from the context of numbers, but as a societal view on the feminization of education via social constructs of gender identity. Some view the “concerns

## Improving Gender Imbalance

about feminization and its potential to *contaminate* men's and boys' masculinity—and to raise questions about their sexuality” (Martino, 2008, original emphasis, p. 190) as an historical action based on perspectives of hetero-masculine dominance and “as part of a broader cultural project of re-masculinization” (Martino, 2008, p. 190). These perspectives assert that the call for increasing the number of men in education is a call to perpetuate the hetero-masculine notion and gender normalization. These perceptions are based in historical reflections of education as “women's work” where teaching was “constituted as an extension of the domestic duties deemed appropriate for women” (Martino, 2008, p. 195). These assertions result in the view of men in education being traditionally viewed as effeminate. This hegemonic view of education as “women's work” is evidenced in a recent interaction in the UNCG Speaking Center. Recently, I began asking about recruitment of male consultants. This started a discussion amongst several consultants regarding what they had seen and experienced. One consultant spoke of a conversation she had with a male friend about considering coming to work at the Speaking Center, and his response was, “Work at the Speaking Center? That's girl's work.”

Theories equating the call for encouraging men into the profession of teaching tend to focus on the need for strong masculine models to break a cycle of so-called feminization of education. These approaches are limiting. By placing policy of encouragement in the guise of maintaining the dominant hetero-masculine hegemony, the criticism is both encouraging the maintaining of education as a female domain and perpetuating the perception of men in education as “sissified” or “effeminate.” I am not advocating male role models defined commonly as “synonymous with being a ‘real man’ who is able to ensure that boys' masculinity remains intact or is appropriately cultivated” (Martino, 2008, p.193), or put simply, males helping to build and inspire males to be strong men. This view is limited and somewhat

### Improving Gender Imbalance

demonstrative of the influence of the hegemonic society within which we live common within gender theory. Though it is necessary to understand the significance of hetero-male hegemony in society, some works border on advocating exclusion which encourages further separation. One must break down all gender role barriers, not just the ones who are not the hegemon.

Though the context of hegemony must be considered, when contemplating the potential goods of positive role models, one must consider also a positivist approach. Research has demonstrated that those in minority groups, such as women, are more likely to assign positive self-image when compared to the same identification group, whereas the hegemonic group, in this case men, assigned positive self-image regardless of the identification group (Lockwood, 2006). One caveat to this research, however, is that it was performed in a career area that is more heavily dominated by men – the professional world of glass-ceilings. If one were to juxtapose this analysis to the circumstances of the UNCG Speaking Center, male consultants, as the minority group, could conceivably be more likely to assign a positive self-image when compared to their identification group.

### Intercultural Communication

Though it is important to consider research into the benefit of gender specific engagement, I think the greater opportunity derives not simply from providing same-sex consultations for our male clients, but to allow engagement across gender lines. Being able to provide an assessment from those of the opposite gender provides female clients the opportunity to reach a different audience. I believe its importance is based more from the perspective of diversity. The more voices and perspectives that students are exposed to lends the potential to gain broader perspectives themselves.

## Improving Gender Imbalance

The Speaking Center has excelled in maintaining demographic numbers similar to those of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro when considering ethnicity (K. Cuny, personal communication, April 16, 2010). For that reason, I concur with Uchida (1997) who proposed a “culture building approach to intercultural communication” (p. 17) in the context of mixed gender communication. Uchida describes intercultural communication as one where participants “create a ‘third culture’ through negotiating and integrating aspects of their respective cultures and constructing mutually shared meanings (Broome, 1991; Casmir, 1993; Camir & Asuncion-Lande, 1989; Starosta, 1989; Starosta & Olorunnisola, 1995)” (Uchida, p. 17). I believe this approach is most beneficial as a perspective for considering the potential of building a more gender diverse community at the UNCG Speaking Center. The Speaking Center can build a culture through intercultural communication with those of differing ethnicities and of different gender. This is constructed through “negotiating ways of doing gender, identifying similarities, and discovering or creating new ways of doing gender” (Uchida, 1997, p. 18).

## Recruitment

After considering what potential factors may be contributing to this dilemma of gender imbalance at the UNCG’s Speaking Center, I decided to evaluate the root: recruitment. I believe that a significant reassessment of our recruiting tools and procedures may illuminate issues underlying the lower male participation rate. In terms of recruitment methods, I am familiar with only a few options. The most accessible recruitment tool is the placement of a singular statement on the bottom of the backside of consultation forms. I see several problems with this as a recruitment tool specifically when pertaining to recruitment of male consultants.

The first area of concern is based in the fact that these are forms used in consultations with clients. Consistently, clients have signed up for a consultation for one of two reasons.

## Improving Gender Imbalance

Either they are required by their professor to attend or they are over-achievers looking to cement their exemplar grades. In reference to faculty referrals, the clients lack the desire to engage more than to perform in order to receive class credit for attending. In consideration of over-achievers, statistics viewed earlier noted the growing gap of women outperforming men (Weins, 2005). Ultimately, when recruiting from consultations, one can choose from either those disinterested in the process, or over-achievers who tend to be women. This discrepancy helps to perpetuate the female-dominated culture of the UNCG Speaking Center.

Secondly, when assessing consultations as a recruitment tool, the potentiality for bias must also be considered. In other words, perhaps there is a perpetuation of the female-dominated staff because this same staff is suggesting more females to be considered for the consultant recruitment process. By leaving recruitment up to the consultants in a casual manner, it leaves the potentiality for bias. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) state “social cognitions that underlie stereotypes often operate implicitly and even unconsciously” (in Morgan, 2008, p.84). This claim means that even when someone doesn’t believe they hold a negative attitude toward a group, the individual has implicit attitudes that can “affect the way we behave and communicate with others” (Morgan, 2008, p. 84). Upon review of the Consultant Recruitment List (Jarrett, 2010), the percentage of potential male recruits was 37.3% (22 males out of 59 applicants). This ratio is more demonstrative of the demographic make-up of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Perrin, 2009). This fact would lead one to believe that the Speaking Center is indeed attempting to improve their ratios. However, this list is not exhaustive as it does not include possible recruits suggested by faculty. I have been told I should expect that list to be female heavy as well (K. Cuny, personal communication, April 16, 2010). This also leads one to believe that societal factors discussed earlier play a discernable role.



## Improving Gender Imbalance

Another form of recruitment is inclusion in the “orientation speech.” Though a viable option for recruitment, I believe we need to go further to reach out to potential consultant applicants. For example, I was not recruited to the Speaking Center nor had I witnessed an orientation speech prior to my attendance in CST 390. At the start, this may sound like egocentric reasoning; however, I feel it’s best to start with personal experience and radiate out from there. I happen to have the fortune of knowing someone in the Bryan Business School at UNCG outside of academia who suggested the Speaking Center based on knowledge of my experience. Though the suggestion led to my work here, I fail to see it as true “recruitment.” Once again though, I must note that the person who “directed” me was indeed of my same gender. One suggestion to improve the effectiveness of the orientation speech would be to encourage more faculty members to host a UNCG Speaking Center orientation. In addition, to encourage male participation, these speeches should be performed by male staff members of various ethnicities and orientations to allow for a diverse interest.

The final recruitment tool is the one with which I am least familiar: that of the consultation recruitment form/brochure. The reason why I am least familiar with it is because until recently, I had not seen one. In reviewing the media, I found it to be a bit unassuming as it was created with basic elements of a common word processing program. I believe a redesign including black and white photos of consultants, both male and female, would increase its viability. In addition to assessing its effectiveness, I think the fact that it was difficult to locate one speaks volumes. Prior to several weeks ago, the only version I had seen was a photocopy stapled to a board outside the satellite office of the UNCG Speaking Center located in the McIver Building. During my journey to learn how to apply to the speaking center, the photocopy was what I used to find information on how to voice my interest in the center. Whereas I am highly

## Improving Gender Imbalance

motivated and had the good fortune to run into Hema Yarragunta, the Assistant Director of the Speaking Center during my quest, the average student would not be so inclined.

In order to produce a true positivist study into the disparity in gender at the UNCG Speaking Center, one would need to incorporate greater investigative means. The small sample of data and resources discussed here merely scratch the surface of understanding. A more thorough study could include all forms of recruitment for the Speaking Center employing tactics similar to a marketing study. Included in this study would need to be the gender of the person recommending the recruit. In addition, one would need to have follow-up interviews with potential recruits. This process would include those who did not respond to recruitment emails to discern their reasoning for disinterest. Perhaps through an analysis such as this, the UNCG Speaking Center can improve their demographics as reflective of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro community not just in ethnicity, but also in gender.

## References

Carrington, B. & McPhee, A. (2008). Boys' 'underachievement' and the feminization of teaching.

*Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34(2), 109-120. doi:10.1080/02607470801979558.

This is a study on the feminization of education and the participants' perceptions of importance and benefits of gender inclusivity measures in education. The view of the participants is that gender inclusion is important to rectify achievement gaps. In addition, the male teachers voiced the desire to have more male teachers for communication and exchange of ideas. Both gendered participants noted the importance of increasing "male role models" to enable connection to the male student population. In addition, the female teachers believed that an increase in male teachers would improve discipline in the school.

Cuny, K. (2010, April 17). Personal Communication.

Kim Cuny is the Director of the Speaking Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Jarrett, A. (2010, April 16). *Committee Recruitment List 2010-2011*.

This is a listing of all names of possible recruits to University of North Carolina – Greensboro's Speaking Center. The list was compiled through review of consultation forms for client sessions. Included on the hand written list was the professor of each recruit. The list was provided via personal communication with Abby Jarrett, Chair of the Speaking Center's "Consultant Recruitment Committee."

## Improving Gender Imbalance

Lockwood, P. (2006). "Someone like me can be successful": Do college students need same gender role models? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30(1), 36-46. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00260.x.

This is a study regarding the significance of gender matching in relation to role models for college students. The focus was predominantly on the effect of gender for female students considering careers in the professional arena. A comparison to the effect of gender on male students was also considered.

Martino, W. (2008). Male teachers as role models: Addressing issues of masculinity, pedagogy and the re-masculinization of schooling. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 38(2), 189-223. doi:10.1111/j.1467-873X.2007.00405.x.

This is a critical analysis of the current cultural assertion to encourage male inclusion in education as a reflection of the dominant hetero-male hegemony. The author describes the fear of emasculation and believes that the demand for an increase in male educators is a desire to maintain the hegemonic view of a "real man" as heteronormative. Martino bases his assertions through the perspective of history.

Morgan, M. (2008). Explicit Versus Implicit Stereotypes: "What Biases Do I Really Hold?". *Communication Teacher*, 22(3), 84-88. doi:10.1080/17404620802154683.

This is a teacher resource for lesson plan creation. The purpose of the lesson is to allow students to discover not only the explicit stereotypes to which they ascribe, but to realize the implicit stereotypes that arise without us knowing. The activity utilizes the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

## Improving Gender Imbalance

Perrin, D.H. (2009, September 16). *Faculty Convocation and General Faculty Meeting*.

(PowerPoint Presentation).

This is a PowerPoint presentation provided by Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for University of North Carolina – Greensboro that was presented in 2009. Included in the presentation were statistics on enrollment growth and demographics.

Shimanoff, Susan B. (2009). Gender role theory. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*.

Retrieved April 16, 2010, from

[http://www.sage-reference.com/communicationtheory/Article\\_n161.html](http://www.sage-reference.com/communicationtheory/Article_n161.html)

This entry is from a resource guide with a general description of Gender Role Theory based in the research of Margaret Mead and Alice Eagly. Provided are general tenets of the theory including identification of gender roles and gender specific expectations of behaviors. Included is the application of Gender Role Theory to Communication Research such as conformity, gender stereotypes and sociopolitical attitudes.

Uchida, A. (1997). Bringing the "culture" back in: A culture building approach to gender and communication. *Women & Language*, 20(2), 15-24. Retrieved from Communication & Mass Media Complete database.

This is an attempt by the author to challenge the intercultural context of gender from a "two culture" perspective. The author asserts that a better perspective would be to view differing genders through the guise of construction of community through intercultural communication. Through the perspective

## Improving Gender Imbalance

culture building, “gender can become a starting point for the negotiation to create shared meanings” (p. 18).

University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (2010). *Staff Biographies*. Retrieved April 10, 2010 from The UNCG Speaking Center website: <http://speakingcenter.uncg.edu/>)

This is the website for the Speaking Center at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In particular, the pages studied were those with staff biographies. The staff included the director, assistant director, graduate students, and consultants. The staff biographies are update each semester.

Wiens, K. (2005). The new gender gap: What went wrong? (pp. 11-27). *Journal of Education*. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

This is a study to review the widening gender gap of achievement based on gender. It includes analysis of statistical data and the studies performed on school-age boys reflections on education. The author seeks to define potential reasons for this discrepancy including both biological differences and effects of environment. The author considers the result affect of feminism on the learning experience of boys.