

## Music support for gender equality campaigns

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### Abstract:

Can music be a force for gender equality? With the development of time, people's attention to gender equality has gradually increased, and many efforts have been made to change the various kinds of discrimination that have existed for a long time. What role does music play in these efforts? This thesis explores the role of music in promoting gender equality, gives examples of musicians and musical works that have had a significant impact on gender equality, and analyses how these examples have challenged and changed gender stereotypes. Through case studies and literature analysis, the paper also explores the role of music education in fostering gender equality awareness, analysing in-depth the various parts of the music industry from a number of perspectives, including creation, performance, advocacy and education. It is found that music not only reflects social change, but also positively contributes to the process of gender equality. These findings are intended to inform future research and practice and to promote the further development of the potential of music as a tool for social change.

**Keywords:** Music, gender equality, gender stereotypes

The global movement for gender equality has drawn widespread attention to the social problems faced by women. Research indicates that nearly one-third (29 percent) of women around the world have experienced some type of sexual violence in their lives. [1] However, the truth is that it is not only sexual violence but also varying degrees of gender discrimination. According to a paper on professional women published in 2019, for every 100 men promoted and hired as managers, only 72 women are promoted and hired. [2] In the workplace, women are paid less, are less likely to be promoted and have difficulty in becoming leaders, and have difficulty in breaking down this barrier despite their outstanding abilities and knowledge. In the media and in the cultural sphere, the dissemination of news and commentaries on current affairs in some media also show sexism and violence against women, and such gender stereotypes not only affect women's self-identity and image in society, but also exacerbate gender discrimination and prejudice, and these discriminatory and unequal treatments impede women's talents and self-expression.

In the face of these pervasive gender inequalities, the field of music is at the forefront of change. In early music history, music was once the exclusive preserve of men. [3] However, little attention has been paid to the outstanding contributions made by female musicians to the development of music, and their presence has been ignored. It was not until after the 20th century, with the awakening of gender awareness, that female musicians began to have more opportunities to showcase their talents in public. The

importance of gender equality has been recognised in this field. More and more female musicians are bravely coming forward to express their voices and opinions through music. Their musical works not only show their creativity and talent, but also speak out for gender equality and become a catalyst for social change. Through their music, one can feel the protest against sexism and the desire for equality, a voice that is inspiring more people to join the cause of gender equality.

Not only the creators of the music, but the music itself has an important role to play in the gender equality movement, which is reflected in its impact on individuals and society. "People listen to music to achieve self-awareness, social relatedness, arousal, and mood regulation. We propose calling these the Big Three of music listening." [4] It is precisely because of these three functions of music that music has become one of the mainstream forms of entertainment and plays an important role in the promotion of the gender equality movement. Firstly, as a social and cultural activity, music provides the public with a platform for cultural sharing and communication, which promotes the spread of gender equality awareness and strengthens people's understanding and acceptance of gender equality awareness. Secondly, through its unique way of expressing emotions, music helps people to regulate their moods, draw confidence from music, and expand their ideologies, thus inspiring and providing psychological support for the gender equality movement. In addition, music conveys the value of gender equality through a variety of performance designs and forms, which in turn provokes people to think

about sexism and gender stereotypes and, in turn, inspires a series of actions to achieve gender equality on a deeper level. In previous studies on the economic, political, and cultural impact of music on society as a whole, Farnush Ghadery stated in his study that music has a deep influence on socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts. [5] Especially for some countries in the south of the planet, art is seen as a form of social activity, bringing people closer together and exchanging ideas through music and other means. In their lives, we can detect the powerful force that music represents.

However, to maximise the impact of music on changing people's attitudes, we must delve deeper into the role of music education. Music education is an integral part of the gender equality movement. It is not just a process of imparting musical skills but also an important way of shaping and promoting social values. Through music education, people can not only learn musical skills but also develop a sense of gender equality, break down gender stereotypes, and encourage women to participate in music creation and performance. Music education is not only a tool for nurturing musical talents but also an important force in promoting the movement for gender equality.

Based on what has been said above, this paper will explore the support and contribution of musicians, musical works, and music education to the gender equality movement. There are several main aspects, including analysing the contributions made by musicians in the gender equality movement, the portrayal of gender roles and the expression of gender equality ideas in music-related works (songs, musicals, musical films and documentaries, etc.), how music can serve as a medium for social change, and how music education can assist in the development of an equal concept of gender and the development of gender awareness in children. The aim is to delve into the importance of the field of music in promoting gender equality and to provide references and lessons for future research and practice.

Taylor Swift is a high-profile example of a supporter of the gender equality movement in music. As a popular pop singer, she has consistently communicated her support for and call for gender equality through her music and social media activism. In her music, Taylor Swift often expresses strong attitudes towards women's strength, autonomy, and equality, such as in her song 'The Man,' in which she directly addresses society's double standards for women and men and calls for the equal treatment of women and men. Her work has not only been a musical success but has also raised awareness of gender equality issues in society, winning numerous MTV Video Music Awards, including 'Video of the Year' and 'Best Female Video', among others. Video of the Year' and "Best Female Vid-

eo". In addition to her music, Taylor Swift is an active supporter of the gender equality movement through her social media activities and public statements. She often shares her views on gender discrimination and injustice on social media, supports women's rights movements, and calls for society to treat women with more fairness and respect. She has also provided practical support for the cause of gender equality through donations and participation in women's organisations. RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) had written on Twitter: "Your generous donation this week during #SAAPM ensures that survivors and their loved ones get the help they need and deserve."

Annie Lennox's contributions to feminism have also been significant. She often expresses her concern for gender equality and women's rights through platforms such as music, speeches, and social media. The exploration of women's autonomy, rights, and dignity is often reflected in her music; for example, the lyrics 'Standing on their own two feet and ringing on their own bells' in Eurythmics' song 'Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves' emphasise women's independence and strength. In addition, many of her solo musical endeavours include songs that explore the topic of gender equality and women's rights, such as her single 'No More, I Love You's', which calls for more attention and respect for women's real needs and feelings. " Lennox's work has shown women in pop that it is possible to avoid the cute, sexy female pop singer image. Her work has opened up a space in which alternate and less (or differently) sexualized images of women are possible, and it continues to create a space in popular music that does not rely on youth or prettiness. Lennox's work certainly serves as a model of what is possible for women who are dissatisfied with gender stereotypes, particularly those stereotypes that are still very much a part of the popular music industry even in the twenty-first century. [6]"

The efforts of these outstanding female musicians have shown more people the power possessed by women. They have not only conveyed their support and appeal for gender equality but also set an example for women, and their advocacy has not only led to great achievements in music but also triggered profound thoughts and discussions on gender equality and women's rights in society.

Analysing musical works is also one of the keys to examining the music field's support for the gender equality movement. In recent years, more musical works have explored the diversity of gender roles and advocated the idea of gender equality. Together, these musical works convey reflections on gender identity and gender equality through different forms of artistic performance, calling on people to transcend the traditional limitations of gender roles and pursue opportunities for self-identity and free develop-

ment.

Firstly, as one of the most widely spread forms of music, songs are bound to attract more attention to their every move, and many of them have contributed immensely to the cause of gender equality. Haydar's song 'Wrap My Hijab' delves into the topic of autonomy and identity in Islamic culture from a woman's point of view. Through her lyrics and melody, she emphasises a woman's right to choose whether or not to wear the hijab and expresses pride in her self-identity and religious beliefs. The song has attracted a lot of attention on social media, with female commenters in particular making up the majority of the comments, highlighting the resonance of the song and the depth of discussion it has generated among them. One of these commenters noted, 'She's pushing me to adjust how I think about Muslim women.' These kinds of affirming comments stimulate discussion about women's rights and religious freedom. 'Wrap My Hijab' has also become a symbol of women's rights and religious freedom, providing society with a platform for reflection and discussion and helping to promote understanding and respect for individual beliefs and cultural expressions. "Mona Haydar disrupts both Western imaginaries of what it means to be a Muslim woman as well as the patriarchal structures within her own Muslim community." [7]

Secondly, we turn our attention to musical theatre, which, as a comprehensive performing art form, often explores and presents themes of gender role diversity and gender equality. Through the combination of stagecraft, characterization, acting, script, and lyrics, the relationships and emotional changes between characters are presented, making it easier for the audience to engage with and feel the emotion and tension of the story, which in turn provokes deeper thought. Therefore, the use of musical theatre to show the connection between music and gender struggle can provide a good practical direction for 'music in support of the gender equality movement'. *Six: The Musical* is a musical written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss whose story focuses on the six wives of Henry VIII. Each queen has their own story and perspective in the show as they express their emotions, desires, and ambitions through music and dance. We will focus primarily on the parts of this musical that exemplify gender resistance.

In *Six: The Musical*, historically neglected female characters are reimagined as figures with independent voices and unique stories. This reinterpretation reflects a re-examination and re-imagining of women's roles in history, emphasising their importance and value as individuals. Each queen wears a stunningly studded contemporary outfit with accents in a colour that represents her: Catherine of Aragon, who was born into royalty and refused to give up her crown, dons gold; Anne Boleyn, known for 'Greens-

leeves', wears green; and Catherine Parr, the peacemaker and the only queen to have published a book, is dressed in blue, a colour that symbolises wisdom and tranquility. [8] These different costumes create a unique image of each queen, and in the play, each queen has her own song in which they express their dissatisfaction with the prejudice and suppression of women in history. Their songs emphasise women's quest for power, freedom, and autonomy, as well as their resistance to being ignored and marginalised. For example, Jane Seymour's character has the line, 'I'm sorry, I'm too busy opening a school in my name.' This line highlights Jane Seymour's pride in her accomplishments as a woman and demonstrates her quest for self-fulfilment and independence in society. Apart from the lyrics, we can also feel the emotions conveyed by the characters through their stage movements, their powerful dances, and their ironic lines, which are a sign of their defiance against their unjust fate. There are also references to the solidarity and mutual support between the women, as they respect the choices and decisions they make for each other. The strength of the women and their struggle against injustice in this musical touches the audience's emotions and makes people understand and think more about the topic of gender. Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian* wrote, "It may be cloaked in silliness, but *Six* makes some serious points about female victimhood and survival." [9] On top of that, in a review of the Chicago production, Chris Jones said *Six* has an audience that is ready for it, in part because it gets to a complex historical paradox and treats it with verve, the memories of women in history being tied to the life of a man. [10] *Six* has received positive reviews from critics and audiences alike, demonstrating its serious perspective on female persecution and survival and its highly acclaimed treatment of historical paradoxes. The musical is not just entertainment but also a profound reflection on history and gender concepts, making an important contribution to the advancement of the cause of gender equality. In the next subsection we will discuss music as a medium for social change, showing how political and social messages can be transmitted through the lyrics, melodies, and performance styles of music, provoking public opinion and influencing people's actions.

In the 1960s, the United States witnessed the outbreak of many civil rights movements, the emergence of which was rooted in the long-standing systems of racial discrimination and segregation. Since the days of slavery, racial discrimination has existed in the southern part of the United States, and African Americans have been treated unfairly and excluded. Although slavery was abolished in the mid-nineteenth century, discrimination and segregation against African Americans remained severe. Against this backdrop, the desire for equality among African Ameri-

cans grew, and the rise of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks provided leadership and direction to the movement. Together, these factors contributed to the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, which became a major force for social change in the country. And music played a key role in these civil rights movements. For example, at the 1963 March on Washington, millions of demonstrators led by Martin Luther King Jr. sang 'We Shall Overcome,' making it one of the key pieces of music for that historic event. The song's lyrics and melody inspired countless participants in the civil rights movement and became part of what propelled the movement to success. This was in addition to songs such as "This Little Light of Mine," which emphasised unity, freedom, and equality and inspired popular morale. In fact, research has shown that music plays a crucial role in the formative stages of social movements. [11] Next, we will specifically analyse how 'We Shall Overcome' contributed to the process of social change.

The lyrics "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome someday." from "We Shall Overcome" showcase a state of optimism and encourage people to face difficulties with unwavering determination. The line "We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand someday." also expresses the sentiment of unity. At the same time, We Shall Overcome has a simple and clear melody that is easy to remember and sing, and because of its slow and lyrical performance, it has a powerful emotional impact that touches the heart of the listener. These characteristics and its lyrics have made it an important song in protests and demonstrations, conveying a message of solidarity and resistance and inspiring others to action through the powerful way it is sung and performed.

The powerful impact of "We Shall Overcome" makes it clear that music has the potential to spark social change and that it can be one of the driving forces behind the movement for gender equality.

The last thing we will explore is music education. Music education refers to the educational process of developing students' musical skills, aesthetic emotions, creativity, and musical literacy through music learning and practice. Music education not only plays an important role in school education but also has a wide range of applications and influences at all levels of society. In our daily encounters with music, we can find that music becomes gendered in many ways: through lyrics and librettos, through the gestural or narrative quality of formal musical structures, and through gendered conventions associated with certain instruments, styles, audiences, or performance venues. When we create, perform, or listen to music, we are par-

ticipating in the construction and perpetuation of gender through its symbolic associations. In doing so, we simultaneously use music to help us build our own gender identity. [12] Extending this to music education, we can identify gender stereotypes that may be hidden in music education. For example, most teachers and students believe that girls are more talented at singing and that they prefer gentle and calm classical music. This bias may affect students' self-perception and development, limiting their choices of music learning and participation in music activities to gender roles. Gender stereotypes may also affect the content and methods of teaching in music education. Certain music education curricula may be more oriented towards traditional gender role orientations at the expense of gender-equitable and inclusive educational concepts.

This is a limitation and a direction in which we can work. We can provide equal learning opportunities and resources in the music learning process and encourage students to cross the boundaries of traditional gender roles, thus reducing the constraints of gender stereotyping. For music textbooks, choosing materials that include musicians and singers of different genders and showcasing their achievements and contributions in the field of music can help children realise that gender should not be a limiting factor in their individual talents. In addition, music education should focus on developing students' critical thinking and awareness. Students are encouraged to think about and analyse the gender stereotypes that exist in music and to actively participate in actions to change them. By discussing and reflecting on gender equality and inclusiveness, students can develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of gender issues and establish the value of gender equality.

## Conclusion

The field of music has always endeavoured to promote gender equality, entertaining audiences while stimulating their thoughts on gender issues and calling for social change. Through the power of art, people are able to gain a deeper understanding of the pain and injustice caused by gender discrimination and inspire a desire for change. In addition to the songs and musicals I have mentioned above, music films and music-related documentaries also provide a rich source of material and perspectives for exploring gender roles and gender equality, and through real-life cases and witness accounts, they reveal the existence of gender prejudices in society as well as the efforts and achievements made in combating these prejudices. Examples include 'Miss Americana' (music documentary), 'The Punk Singer' (music documentary), and 'The Queen of the Night' (music film). These kinds of works

can also serve as an extension of the power of music to promote gender equality and may be a direction that can be explored in future research into the derivative power of music.

From songs to musicals, from musical films to documentaries, as well as the promotion of music education and the contributions of musicians, all forms of voices in the field of music are calling for social attention and action on gender equality. Music is not only entertainment but also a medium for social reflection and inspiration, playing an irreplaceable role in promoting the advancement of the cause of gender equality. In the future, we look forward to more elements of music becoming a source of strength for the gender equality movement and continuing to push society in the direction of greater equality and inclusiveness.

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