THE AUSTIN STORY

This analysis is a fork of Kate Rabinowitz's original analysis of tech meetups in DC. I came across this project after meeting her during a visit to Austin, and decided I wanted to repeat this analysis for Austin to hopefully encourage other cities to do it to. I encourage you to read more about her project.

BACKGROUND

I always thought of Austin as a 'not bad' place for women in technology, based on all the active women-specific groups in the area, the way people acknowledge the importance of diversity at meetups and at work, and the number of simply amazing women I have met in person through meetups. But in researching this project I found this report which has Austin well-below the national average on a number of diversity stats, including only 21% of tech jobs filled by women. This is well below the national average of 27%.

And while our meetup scene is hot and thriving -- among the top 10 by members in the US -- I've also discovered that the proportion of meetup speakers who are women, 16.3%, is even lower than that below-average proportion of tech jobs filled by women in Austin.

METHODOLOGY

For the analysis, I looked at the top 50 meetup groups in Austin and eliminated the ones without speaker events. These all had greater than 1500 members. I also omitted women-specific events which I will explain later. Amazingly, this still left me with 44 groups. I sorted the meetup group list by number of members and picked every third group as a sample. Then, I pulled the events for that group, returning 255 events.

I manually went through and notated whether or not these events were speaker events, and tallied the male, female, and non-binary speakers for each. I based this on triangulating with names, pronouns, and lots and lots of googling. I realize there are ways to automate this, but I wanted to have the highest quality vetted data to put out there.

FINDINGS

The Austin data revealed a disappointing disparity. Only eleven women spoke at single-speaker events in Austin. Out of 74. Startup Founder had more women than men at single-speaker events, but no women spoke at their multi-speaker events.

Multi-speaker events overall did feature more women, and technically at higher rates (17.1%, or 25 out of 146 speakers were women!) but 10 of this 25 came from the wordpress group where the same woman leads a regular workshop. I didn't go through and deduplicate all speakers, but in theory that would reduce this number to less than 10%.

Of the 255 speaking slots, only 14.5% were women. As Kate explains, "This lack of representation can have far-reaching effects. Marginalized groups miss out on opportunities to be presented as leaders or experts in their fields. They are less likely to feel welcome to such groups, missing out on valuable learning and networking opportunities. The result can be a feedback loop that works against diversity in the field."

These graphs do not include the data for non-binary people because they did not speak at any of the 114 events. But they are also a part of this community and deserve to be heard.

TAKEAWAYS

Although this data tells a strong story, we are not calling anyone sexist or intentionally exclusive of women. Kate goes on to say, "The speaker gap likely grows from ingrained networks and implicit bias. But as large, professional communities these meetups should consider it their responsibility to more accurately reflect, and champion, diversity in the industry."

And actually, many women in Austin tech have made homes for themselves in organizations like Women Who Code, PyLadies, ChickTech Austin, and others. These organizations are incredible at empowering women, and giving them the stage, but we want non-female specific groups to give women and non-binary people a stage too, and encourage them to work with these organizations to find and include women leaders.

At the very minimum, all meetups should include a Code of Conduct, as they are a very easy way to think about and show your meetup's commitment to diversity.

BE THE CHANGE

As I mentioned earlier, in an effort to bridge this speaker gap Kate created wespeaktoo.org. It hosts an open source list of area women and non-binary people interested in speaking at data and tech events. Please share and add yourself to the list. Women and non-binary people deserve a place on the stage.

ADD YOURSELF!

Technical notes: Data was collected through the Meetup API. Austin modifications were made by me, Alex Ford, and Dashiel Lopez Mendez. Original code was written by Kate and her group. Check out our resources page for most history.

Tell Your Friends

Share this with women and non-binary people in your life that you think are or would make great speakers.