

Singing a woman's life:

How singing lessons transformed the lives of nine women

Ann Patteson

Queen's University

The disturbing film *The Burning Times* (Armstrong, Pettigrew, Johansson & Read; 1990), about the persecution of women during the Inquisition, closes with the image of modern day women enacting an ancient tradition of dancing and singing in a circle under the full moon. They hold high above their heads a circular net of ropes that intertwine, weaving together to make a web. It is a powerful image that speaks to me of many things. That net held high is, for me, a twofold symbol of how women experience the world, one strand of a woman's experience intertwining with other strands to create the fabric of her life, many separate lives weaving together to create a web of community. The image of the circle of women and the net they hold is celebratory, certainly, but it also speaks of how much of what is important in a woman's life still takes place in the shadowy margins of our culture, rather than in the full light of day.

Perhaps this image has had such a powerful effect on me because it reflects what I am learning in the research I am conducting into eight women's experiences of taking singing lessons. I have been a teacher of singing for the past fifteen years. Many of the women I have taught have told me that the effects of the singing lessons have reached far beyond the weekly session we spend together and beyond the growth of their singing voices, having what they have described as transformative effects on their whole lives. They have told me that they do, indeed, feel that important parts of who they are and what they have known as true have been forced into the shadows, neither accepted nor honoured by others nor, often, by themselves. The singing lessons have taught them that there are kindred spirits in those shadows and that through singing much of the darkness may be dispelled.

The aim of my research was, originally, to understand how, for eight women, ranging in age from thirty-three to fifty-five years, taking singing lessons has transformed how they feel about themselves and how they live their lives. I chose as my focus the wider experience of the singing lessons, rather than the specific activity of singing, because my study participants told me that what happened between them and me in the pedagogical setting of the lessons was essential to their processes of change.

Deborah Britzman (1993), in her article *Beyond Innocent Readings: Educational Ethnography in Crisis*, reminds us that researchers "intervene in and rearrange the lives of those they study" (p. 14) and that the researchers themselves are changed by their research. My study participants have told me that they have certainly been changed by both

the process of taking singing lessons and by thinking about the effects the lessons have had on their lives. Through my relationships with these eight women, first as a teacher and now as a researcher and friend, I too have been changed. The embrace of my research, therefore, has widened to include my own experiences. In particular, what I have learned from these women has prompted me to turn a critical eye on music education and musical practice in our culture. This paper, then, is about the transformation of the lives of nine women, eight of whom were singing students and the ninth who was their teacher.

I have been told of transformations that have taken place in the lives of men because of music-making. However, men's experiences of the world are differently constellated politically, economically, and psychologically from those of most women in our culture. I suspect, therefore, that at the heart of transformations for men there are probably different issues from those that women face. Although I consider exploration of men's transformations through singing to be important, my commitment at this time is to exploring the experiences of women.

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1998), in *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins*, lament the habitual dismissal of women's stories as a focus for research and a legitimate source of knowledge. Magda Lewis (1993), in *Without a Word: Teaching Beyond Women's Silence*, says that women "have been denied the status of meaning makers: we have been excluded from the stories we are told, as well as from those we are encouraged to tell to and of ourselves" (p.70). My research, by concentrating on the experiences of women, is a contribution to the redressing of an imbalance in what we know of human experience.

Most of the theories about human development in the Western world have been based primarily on male experience and have valorized detachment, autonomy and objectivity as the markers of maturity (Fisher & Silber, 1998; Gilligan, 1993). Jean Baker Miller (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1979), Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule (1986), and Carol Gilligan (1993) have found in their research that women are more likely than men to view their lives in terms of connections between experiences and between people. Gilligan (1993), in her study of the moral development of women faced with the decision of whether or not to have an abortion, found that the women she studied were not comfortable with abstractions or absolute rules. Each of her study participants preferred to anchor her decision-making in the realities of her everyday life: she was acutely aware of her responsibilities to others and of how her decisions would have a ripple effect, spreading out through her life and the lives of those with whom she was in relationship. Moral decision for these women were, therefore, based, not on an objective, universal rules, but on subjective experience.

Miller (1976), Chodorow (1979), Belenky et al. (1986), and Gilligan (1993) cite biology as the major cause of the differences between what male and female experience in our culture. Such a stance ignores the role of education, in the broadest sense of the word, in the creation of gender and gender roles, and ignores how access or lack of access to power influences how one lives in the world (Brookes, 1992). However, in their work these researchers have, with diligence and compassion, attempted to challenge the fact that women's desires to base their lives and actions in knowledge derived from the subjective

experience has been interpreted as a failure to reach maturity and has meant that much of what women report as meaningful experience has been devalued and/or ignored. Gilligan (1993) has described this discounting of female experience in our culture as a loss of voice.

My research began as an enquiry into transformative aspects of the development of the physical voice in the singing lesson setting, but it became clear to me early on that the metaphorical dimension of the word "voice", as used by Gilligan (1993) and myriad others, was integral to the experience of my study participants. Belenky et al. (1986), in their study of the cognitive development of women, found that the metaphor of voice reverberated throughout the stories of their one hundred and thirty-five study participants: the women in their study equated the process of cognitive development, with its accompanying gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy, with a movement from a position of silence to one of gaining a voice. Moon Joyce (1993), in her study involving seven facilitators of women's singing, found that her study participants spoke of voice as representing "women's power to be seen and heard in order to survive" (p.120).

Imbedded in all metaphors are the shared characteristics of the two things being compared. The metaphor of voice is effective in describing a woman's ability to express and, therefore, affect her own life because the use of the physical voice involves a decision and a commitment to create utterance, an assertion of presence, and a demand, a request, and/or a need to be heard. These are all aspects of communicating about one's needs and experiences in the world.

Gilligan, in her introduction to the 1993 edition of *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, talks of how the work of Karen Linklater (1976), singing teacher and author of *Freeing the Natural Singing Voice*, has made her sensitive to how the various meanings of "voice" infuse one another. She says that we can actually hear in the singing voice "the difference between a voice that is an open channel - connected physically with the breath and sound, psychologically with feelings and thoughts, and culturally with a rich resource of language - and a voice that is impeded or blocked" (xvi). All of my study participants have told me that the metaphorical and the physical aspects of voice overlapped in their experiences of the singing lessons: what happened in their lessons connected to physical, psychological and cultural issues in their lives. For all of them, discovering how to use their singing voices was tied to being more visible, powerful, and accountable in the world.

Fiona, one of my study participants, indicated an awareness of both the metaphorical and physical aspects of discovering the low notes in her singing range:

It felt resonant, and I use that term resonant an awful lot to describe feeling . . . It felt like learning how to get the resonance in my body. Somehow it started to unlock some feeling and some power, and I wasn't sure how comfortable I was with the power, because I've tried to make myself smaller than I am in a lot of ways in my life. That journey was pretty powerful in terms of registering the discovery of strong notes and strong presence.

Another study participant, Sarah, told me that voice has become her "path" and her "passion." She is a writer of Haiku poetry and struggles with the fact that most Haiku

masters are male. Is there room, she wonders, for her more "emotional" voice within the simple juxtaposition of images and space that exist in Haiku?

I've just been incredibly interested in voice in a lot of its different mediums, and what it means. But most particularly, I guess, because for me it's still a searching for discovery of my own voice and allowing it expression. So, as much as I'm fascinated with the concept of voice, either spoken or written, I think it is also intertwined in a lot of ways with my search for allowing my authentic voice to come out.

Brenda, another study participant, also tied the voice to the larger issues of presence in the world:

I think that owning your voice is a way of owning more of who you are so that you can "present." I think it also allows you to be more present, as well, because you have more of yourself . . . Unless you get really comfortable and familiar and learn to trust your voice, which really, I think, comes from trusting your own basic nature, I think you sort of diminish yourself and edit yourself more heavily . . . I think that often that lack of trust shows up as a weak voice. Or a voice that is halted or constricted or stuttering . . . Being able to present [yourself]: it's not just your voice: you're presenting your ideas, you're presenting yourself and being able to have that loud enough so that other people can hear you.

What is clear from the words of these women is that they made the connection between discovering how to sing better and overcoming silence that had been both imposed by others and also self-imposed through a process of self-editing. In the literature about women's experience, there is debate about the origins of silence in women's lives and the nature of women's emergence from it. Belenky et al. (1986) developed a five-tiered model of female cognition, tracing the developmental path from "silence" where a woman experiences herself as "mindless and voiceless and subject to the whim of external authority" (p.15) through to a position of cognitive maturity, where a woman plays a dynamic role in the construction of her own knowledge and has confidence in her abilities to influence and shape her own experiences. Magda Lewis, in her article *The Challenge of Feminist Pedagogy* (1989), speaks of what I, too, have found disturbing in the work of Belenky et al. (1986). Lewis points out that, throughout their work, Belenky et al "inadvertently slip into the language of women's deficiency and thereby fail to address the deeply complex way in which women's constraints and possibilities are constructed" (p.120). Rather than depicting the "silent" women as underdeveloped, it would prove more useful and just to examine the forces in their lives that have eroded self-confidence and limited possibilities. It would be more accurate to say that these women have been "silenced."

My study participants were all able to identify silencing forces in their lives. Three of the women told me that the secrecy and shame surrounding the experiences of childhood sexual abuse had robbed them of their sense of self-worth and of the feeling that the world was a safe place for them. Another, Kathy, traced the beginnings of a depression that had immobilized her since the age of thirteen to the pressures her parents had put on her. They were acutely concerned with creating the appearance of a perfect, professional

family and felt it necessary to control and shape Kathy to fit their idea of what a girl should be: seen, but not heard. Janet talked of "round-shouldered" women in her family who bore the weighty burden of membership in a church that, while it benefited from their labours, treated women as inferior and flawed human beings. Janet, herself, sensed early the enormity of her sin of having been born female rather than male. Patricia, a childhood television star, had lost a pivotal film audition to a prettier child who could sing better than she, and thus felt the withdrawal of the love of her family that had built its life around her career. Fiona spoke of an awareness that, as the child of narcissistic parents, she did not count in their lives, and of the fact that in adulthood, following the death of her husband, there was little room for expressions of grief in her life as she cared for a new born baby and a toddler. Karen told me that being the youngest of seven siblings meant that she was habitually assigned and accepted the role of inarticulate "baby" of the family.

My study participants all felt that, in the face of unwelcoming circumstances, silence was, for them, both imposed and chosen. As children and later as adults, they were well aware that they could lose their precarious positions in family and society were they to be too forceful in asserting what they viewed as the truth about their lives. As Janet, the woman brought up in an oppressive church, put it,

I think we carry it within ourselves, like the fear of all the women who were burned at the stake . . . Now it's women fearing losing their jobs, women fearing losing their children, which is probably correct. If women open up too much now, and speak their truth, and are heard too much, they are likely to lose a lot . . . I mean, it depends on what culture you want to talk about too, because it's different from one culture to another, but it's there. Big time there.

Lewis (1993) in *Without a Word: Teaching Beyond Women's Silence*, suggests that choosing silence may not only be wise in many circumstances for reasons of safety, but, in the face of rules of discourse that habitually ignore women's experiences, silence may be seen as an act of political dissent. Sarah, the Haiku poet, spoke of another kind of silence, a "holding" silence that allows knowledge to take root so that when the occasion arises where one must speak from one's experience, "you cannot be shaken from what you know." Most of these women indicated that the silencing forces in their lives were so powerful that they often found themselves in a state of inner turmoil, torn between their own perceptions and what they were told was "true." Yet, despite the risks and struggles involved in breaking imposed or chosen silences, all of my study participants felt that they had grown to the realization that "silence does not make social inequality more liveable for not being spoken" and that "to speak our histories is the only safety net against obliteration" (Lewis, 1993, p. 189). One study participant expressed the tension between the benefits and losses involved in remaining silent:

Well, the more visible you are, the more clear a target you are as well. I think that when our mothers tried to encourage us to be small and demure and all those things, to some extent there was a desire to protect us. "Don't stand out; don't say too much because when you do you're more of a target." So, there's a risk. There's always a risk in being more visible. On the other hand, when you're not

visible, I think you lose a lot of the richness of life as well. It has to be a balance you're comfortable with.

Although all of the women in this study were aware of how they had been silenced and how they themselves had gravitated toward silence in a world that was, in many ways, unwelcoming, all of them indicated a concern for both men and women in our culture and a much wider concern for the survival of all the peoples of the world and for our global habitat. They felt that it was incumbent upon women to share their knowledge about the lives they led. As Janet said, women must learn to "move their voices up out of their hearts, and out into their throats and communicate it [their knowledge] and put it out there powerfully" in order for the earth to be healed.

Each of the women in this study, when she first came for singing lessons, had already realized that there was a connection between the physical and metaphorical senses of "voice." Each articulated her belief that the development of her singing voice was the important next step in overcoming silence and reclaiming power in her life. As a matter of fact, as the course of their singing lessons unfolded, some of these students urged me to conduct this study into how the lessons were, indeed, connected with the changes they were experiencing in their lives. Here are some of the transformations that they attributed to having taken singing lessons:

- Brenda developed the self-confidence to speak out against discriminatory working conditions and sexual predation on the job. She also experienced a dramatic increase in self-confidence that led to accepting invitations to speak at professional conferences and to becoming a college teacher.
- Brenda, Sarah, and Evelyn were able to begin or to continue the process of recovery from the effects of childhood sexual abuse.
- Kathy said that the singing lessons provided her with an experience of joy and feelings of renewed hope in the midst of clinical depression.
- Fiona found an ability to grieve the death of her husband more thoroughly.
- Patricia, the woman who had lost that crucial audition to a little girl who could sing better than she could, regained the confidence to accept a role in a musical and to overcome a long-held sense of failure.
- Karen was able to begin to discard the role of baby in a large family of siblings and to overcome her fear of rejection by her male colleagues should she express herself too forcefully at work.

Of course, an important question I faced in my study was what it was about the singing lessons that allowed these women to overcome silence in its physical, psychological and cultural manifestations, to discover a voice. I would like to explore this question by sharing part of one woman's story with you (in italicized text below). It is the story of how she found a voice to express and share one of the most secret and complex experiences of her life, one for which our culture has few words. It is also the story of how one of my students took me beyond the realm of the familiar, challenging a set of beliefs I held about my role and life as a musician.

One woman's lament

As we sat face to face on the vibrant intertwining reds, blues and golds of the oriental rug in Brenda's study, I knew that what was about to unfold would not easily fit anyone's definition of a singing lesson. This was the anniversary of the death of Brenda's father, and she had asked me to come into this quiet space, a beautifully renovated garage full of light, colour, and calm, to help her to find a way to use her voice to express the emotions she was feeling. I felt a trembling anxiety within me. This was uncharted territory for me and for her, an experiment that called upon courage from both of us.

Brenda had been a singing student of mine for several months. When she first came for lessons she told me that she was painfully shy about her singing voice, not sure that she could sing at all, but she expressed a conviction that learning how to use her voice was an important step in her life's journey. Initially, we worked on exercises that encouraged her to open her body to allow her to breathe deeply, experimented with how to let the breath carry the sound out of her body as she supported it with strong abdominal muscles, found vocal resonance and slowly built up her confidence. For the first few weeks of our lessons together, Brenda insisted that I sing all the vocal exercises with her. She made sure that my voice was the louder of the two. I could barely hear her. Then, one day, Brenda announced that she was ready to have me be quiet. From that point onward, she progressed in vocal prowess and confidence in leaps and bounds, arriving at this point of having enough technique, confidence, and sense of safety to sing a lament for a lost father.

Brenda's relationship with her father had existed in the midst of the confusion of love and betrayal that often characterizes an incestuous relationship. He had been the perpetrator of what Brenda called a "primal" crime, and he had been the father she had loved. Brenda said that she didn't have the words to express the many faces of her grief, yet she still wanted and needed to "voice" it and to have it heard.

Brenda's plan was to have me tone a single note while she joined in and let her voice take her to whatever notes and sounds that it would. She would not use words, just sung sound. It was essential that I keep the toned note going throughout her vocalization, Brenda said, because she needed the support that my voice expressed and because the nakedness of her own voice and emotions would be too much for her to bear.

We both shut our eyes so that Brenda wouldn't feel that I was watching her and so that she could stay focussed on her own experience. I took a deep breath and began to sing a single tone to the sound of "ahh." Her voice joined mine, at first tentatively, as if she were standing with one toe dipped into a deep and shadowy lake, not sure that she really wanted to jump in. But gradually her voice gained conviction and propulsion. It dipped and dove as it sang sounds of tenderness, love, passion, anger, struggle, and unspeakable emotion that reached beyond the power of any opera I had ever witnessed. After forty-five minutes, our voices began to lose momentum and stopped at precisely the same moment as we both sensed that, for now, the song was over and that we were back on the shores of the familiar.

Brenda was able to tell me later that there had been three elements of the singing lessons that had brought her from a place where she had no confidence in her voice to the

point where she was able to use singing to express the complexities of her losses. These elements were the reconnection with bodily awareness that the development of singing technique allowed her, the singing of music that was a direct expression of her own experience, and, finally, the nature of the pedagogical relationship that existed between the two of us. All of the other participants in my research also identified these as the pivotal factors in their recovery of voice, in all its physical and metaphorical dimensions. I would like to briefly explore each of these factors.

Disconnecting from bodily experience is one way of dissociating from painful experiences or feelings that may not be acceptable to the self or others. Linklater (1976) has stated that few humans arrive at adulthood without having developed muscular armouring as a response to the stress and demands of life. A student of singing must take off that armour and develop a heightened sensitivity to her body: she must learn to relax and engage muscles at will, "open" the body so that it may reverberate with sound, breathe deeply, learn how to form clear vowels and consonants, and be sensitive to the sensations that accompany singing in various parts of the vocal range. Thus, the very process of learning to sing well necessitates an increased sensitivity to bodily experience.

The reasons my study participants cited for a disconnection from bodily experience were varied. Three of my eight study participants told me that sexual abuse had caused them to disconnect from the memories held in their bodies. Fiona said that she could not let herself feel deeply and "sing from her body" because that would bring up the grief that she had suppressed since the death of her husband. Kathy, the woman who had suffered from years of depression, described the feeling that she carried a black hole around inside of her and that she was afraid of falling into it if she really felt the depth of her embodied despair. Each woman recognized that dissociation from bodily experience meant that she was experiencing a constricted range of emotions, and each said that singing was the means by which she was able to reintegrate bodily experience and feelings in her life. As Sarah, our poet, said, "Yes, it is about removing the armour. We can do it one piece at a time, or something can come along and crack it all open." For some it was slow, careful going; for others it was more dramatic.

Each woman said that the removing of armour was possible because singing involved an experience of powerful energy moving through the body as sound was created. When connected to that energy, each woman felt strong enough to at least begin to face even her most tormented feelings.

Not all of my study participants had experienced a single traumatic event or series of events that had caused a disconnection from body, but all had experienced the trauma of living in a society that treats women's bodies as objects. For example, when the prevailing beauty ideal is one of extreme thinness that can only be obtained through the denial of hunger, women are encouraged to dissociate from bodily needs, to treat their own bodies as recalcitrant rebels in the pursuit of bodily perfection. For all of my study participants, singing offered them an experience of living from within the body. They began to reclaim the role of subjective physical experience in meaning-making and to acknowledge, some for the first time since childhood, that there was wisdom in what their bodies told them.

My study participants told me that another important factor in their transformations

was the elimination of the disjunction between what these women thought and the words that came out of their mouths. In their work on the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and the Development of Girls, Carol Gilligan, Lyn Browne, and Annie Rogers (Gilligan, 1993) observed that at adolescence girls began to enact "a dissociative split between mind, body, thoughts and feelings" accompanied by the use of the voice to "cover rather than convey one's inner world" (xxi). Brenda and the other women in this study said that such a dissociation of words from experience existed for them, but that for most of them it was a process that started, not at adolescence, but very early in life. As Fiona said, "I knew I was on my own by the age of two. I always knew what I wanted to say, but no one would listen." In the face of such dismissal, Fiona, like all of my study participants, said that she learned to say what was expected even when it conflicted with what she knew was true for her.

In my teaching, I take into account the fact that such a dissociative split between what a woman feels and what she feels free to express is a common feature of female experience in our culture. I make it clear to my students that they are free to tell me, if they wish, about their lives and that we will together find a repertoire that fits both their vocal abilities and their deep concerns. Thus we, in some sense at least, eliminate the dissociation of voice from experience. For example, Sarah decided that she wanted to sing only lullabies for a while because she felt that they would help her learn to love her five-year-old self who had suffered sexual abuse. Kathy wanted to sing short chants about hope that she could repeat again and again when her depression threatened to overwhelm her. When Brenda was faced with the fact that there were no words to express her lament, she felt comfortable telling me that she wanted to use only vowel sounds.

All of the women in the study said that they appreciated the fact that their life experiences were honoured and accommodated in the singing lessons. Janet expressed this in terms of contrast with her other educational and church experiences where she was told what to do and think. She likened our lessons to a circle of two where she and I both remained empowered, each in turn affecting and supporting the empowerment of others we meet in our lives as the circle expands. She contrasted this with the image of a wheel where there is control by one person at the centre.

Each study participant told me that as important as my willingness to share the power in the lesson situation was the fact that I appeared non-judgmental. Each expressed appreciation that, while I guided her mastery of technique, I refrained from giving any impression that her voice or her attempts at singing were inadequate. On the contrary, I spent much time encouraging each woman to give up ideas about what a good singer sounds like, instead concentrating on accepting her own voice as unique and beautiful. Each woman said that my witnessing and assurance of the beauty of what each woman had to express, and of the voice with which she expressed it, were important parts of the learning process. Each said she felt celebrated, rather than denigrated and that that was a welcome change from many of her previous learning experiences.

Sarah told me of one lesson where she was singing Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath my Wings" (a song she eventually saw as a tribute to her courageous, abused five-year-old self) and heard a beautiful, clear voice somewhere in the room. She looked over to see if I

was singing. I was not. She realized, with amazement, that she was hearing her own voice. This was a pivotal experience for Sarah, one that she said could not have occurred had I not constantly refused to entertain her assertions that she did not have a "good" voice. In explaining what my support had meant to her, she referred to a passage she had read in which Kathleen Norris (1998) spoke of her discovery that she was a woman of faith because someone else saw her that way: Sarah said, "I first began to think that I might have a beautiful voice because you heard one in me." The women in my study also spoke of their appreciation of the fact that I was willing to share my experiences and vulnerabilities and that I, too, appeared to be on a journey of discovery. All of them said that it was through women supporting women in their journeying that they felt we would be able to change the world. Our shared experiments in voice sometimes took us to tears, and often to laughter, but always to a sense of community.

I realize that not all singing teachers teach or want to teach the way I do, but I find it significant that, for eight of my students, the way we approached singing in their lessons meant that they were able to begin to recover voice in all senses of the word. Some might say that we were doing together was a kind of therapy and not singing lessons at all. To that I would respond as Mary Rose O'Reilley (1993) wrote in *The Peaceable Classroom* when a similar comment was made about her classroom practice: "... good teaching involves reweaving the spirit. Bad teaching, by contrast, is soul murder" (p.47). Whether we call it reweaving the soul or reweaving the fabric of a life, for my study participants, what happened in their lessons changed them profoundly.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, I too had the web of my life rewoven by working with these women. Witnessing their courage in finding their voices helped me to overcome debilitating stage fright and spurred me on to a recent return to public solo performance after a hiatus of ten years. Because of what I have learned from the women in this study, I now approach performance with a new appreciation of what it often takes for a woman to stand in front of others, open her mouth, and let her voice flow forth. I have also been able to reconfigure my relationship with my audience. I no longer sense so strongly an objective standard of perfect vocal performance hanging over my head like the sword of Damocles. I now realize that when I sing to an audience, I am singing them the gift of my life and being as a woman. They, in return, give me the gifts of listening and of hearing my voice.

The women in this study have also taught me to question how we teach and live music in our culture. Although my own teaching of singing had already begun to diverge from how I was trained as a singer, I left Brenda's lamenting session in a turmoil of thought and emotion. I had been deeply touched by what had happened, but I knew that it was not what normally takes place in a singing lesson. I even said a little prayer of thanks that none of my own singing teachers had witnessed this foray into strange sound and experimentation. But trampling on the heels of these thoughts came another: I had just devalued what had been for both of us a profound experience- and all because it did not fit what I discerned to be the prevailing notions of what a singing lesson should be, what singing is, and what singing is used for in our culture. How deeply the urge to deny and silence was embedded my own psyche!

The exploration of the questions raised for me about music education and practice in our culture as a result of my interactions with Brenda and the other women I teach is material for another paper or many papers. I find that many of these same issues are being addressed by other writers in much recent critical analysis of the field of music. Still, I would like to share just a few of the questions that I have been asking myself.

If women value community and connection, does our system of music education and performance provide a welcoming space for them? Much of what we do in music is based on a model of competition, individuality and scarcity, engendering a kind of paranoid guarding of our own territory lest someone "more talented" usurp our place.

If women find the support of other women helpful in musical pursuits and life in general, what happens to our female musicians as they progress through our educational system and encounter fewer and fewer female teachers and mentors?

Where is the music that expresses the complexities of the lives of women? As a singer, I am all too often aware that I must choose from a repertoire that casts me as either the villain or the victim in romantic love. Most of the "art" songs about women's lives that have been granted canonical status have been written by men. Are we providing enough practical and emotional support to enable women to create and present their music to the world? And are we making enough effort to uncover the music women have certainly created throughout history?

In our desire to produce fine singers and choral performances, do we too often overlook the importance of the process of music-making? Do we dare risk presenting a less polished product if it means providing a more life-enhancing experience for singers?

In our pursuit of product, do we bar women and men who have not had formal training and/or can't read music from our music-making activities? Are we open to learning from other cultures new ways of using music in our lives? Are we, in our classrooms, in our private teaching and, indeed, in our own lives, encouraging the development of a critical consciousness that leads to challenging exclusionary and hierarchical practices, so that the voices that emerge out of varied experiences of gender, class, and race may be heard? Are we prepared to listen to those voices?

I would like to close this paper with the description of an event that echoes the image I began with, that of the women dancing and singing beneath the moon. It is also an account of women gathering one evening to sing, but this time in a well-lit hall full of people. A choir composed entirely of women, only two of whom could actually read music, led by a woman, gave a concert in a small community north of my hometown of Kingston, Ontario. The songs they sang described women's lives in politics, work, family, and friendship and had all been composed by women, some from local Ontario towns and others from countries far away. One song, by Black American composer Rachel Bagby, consisted of only five words: "I am a full woman." As the women performed Bagby's chant, pictures were projected on a screen depicting each choir member in turn in the midst of the complex and varied activities of her life with family and friends, at work and at play.

This concert was a testament to the fact that many women have been on the same path. We are gradually overcoming the privatization of women's lives, that living on the

dark side of the “public-private dichotomy” (Miller, 1991, p.5) that has typified women’s experiences in music and in our culture at large. We are overcoming the silence, and we are singing our belief that we have much to give and teach the world and ourselves as we celebrate our lives with our voices.

Reference list

- Armstrong, M., Pettigrew, M., & Johansson, S. (Producers), & Read, D. (Director). (1990). *The burning times* [Film]. National Film Board of Canada, Studio D.
- Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. & Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: the development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brookes, A. (1992). *Feminist pedagogy: an autobiographical approach*. Halifax: Fernwood.
- Britzman, D. (1993). Beyond innocent readings: Educational ethnography in crisis. In W. Pink & G. Noblitt (Eds.), *The futures of the sociology of education*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fisher, J. & Silber E. (1998). *Analysing the different voice: Feminist psychological theory and literary texts*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Joyce, M. (1993). *Singing for our lives; Women creating home through singing*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Kirby, K. & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins*. Toronto: Garamond.
- Lewis, M. (1989). The challenge of feminist pedagogy. *Queen's Quarterly* (96)(1):117-130.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *Without a word: Teaching beyond women's silence*. New York: Routledge.
- Linklater, K. (1976). *Freeing the natural singing voice*. New York: Drama.
- Miller, J. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Miller, N. (1991). *Getting personal: Feminist occasions and other biographical acts*. New York: Routledge.
- Norris, K. (1998). *Amazing grace: A vocabulary of faith*. New York: Penguin.
- O'Reilly, M. (1993). *The peaceable kingdom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
-