

Let the Boys Sing and Speak: Masculinities and Boys' Stories of Singing in School

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This paper includes narrative material that has been adapted from: *What It's All About*, a one-act play; *Yo, Fag!*, a poem, and *The Practice*, a mixed-perspective narrative; taken from Chapter Five of the doctoral dissertation: Adler, A. (2002), *A case study of boys' experiences of singing in school*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.

Prologue: Excerpts from *The Practice*

Monday, lunchtime, the last paper airplane nose-dives as the music teacher enters the music room. Twenty-six 12 and 13 year-old students scurry to their seats, 4 boys conspicuous in their clumsy flailing for chairs. The rehearsal begins...

"Just give them a drum to bang on or something," says the Principal. The new teacher, puzzled, replies, "For the entire year?" "Or just have them listen to music," continues the Principal. "But isn't this supposed to be VOCAL music?" questions the new teacher. The Principal replies aggressively, "There's no point in trying to get them to SING – they won't sing at this age," while she thinks to herself,

"And I don't need the hassle."

Between pieces, the music teacher takes attendance.

"Where are George and Brent?"

"Out on the field, sir, playing football," answers Lauren-from-the-altos.

"They were catching flack from the other boys in grade 8. George dropped choir, and Brent will only come to choir if George does."

"Thank you, Lauren-from-the-altos," the music teacher somberly replies.

Every absence hurts. And George has the baritone solo in their anchor piece.

At that moment, a gang of lads runs past the open window and yells

"Choir queers!"

In the yard, a boy stands quietly,
staring at the music room window,
waiting ...

A dozen boys chase a football across a muddy field. How they know who is on whose team is anyone's guess – they are all covered in mud; so is the ball – little soldiers tearing up the field of honour. A gaggle of screaming groupies cheers from the sidelines. George pauses as an anthem rings across the field. "They're singing my song," George thinks to himself. "That's MY song."

A sudden whack on the back of the head from a flying football knocks George out of his reverie and into the mud, face first.

The referee blows time out as Brent helps George to his feet.

"What're you DOING?" Brent asks.

How do individuals' values determine institutional value systems?

What is the issue here, the missing boys and ensuing choir imbalance, or the boys' decision-making and forces behind it?

Who is in the position of power and control? Who put them there?

Why are certain activities so closely connected to the establishment and defense of personal/social masculinity?

"It looked like you were sleeping or something."

"I was listening to the choir," replies George.

"They were singing ... my song."

"Well, you can't lose focus like that during the game. It's dangerous," replies Brent. "And ditch that long face as well. YOU'RE the one who wanted to ditch choir. And besides, we haven't got time for both, anyway."

The whistle sounds...

The drums beat...

It's time to play the game.

On whose whistle do YOU run, my boy?

To whose drum do YOU march?

In the yard,

A boy stands quietly staring

At the music room window,

Waiting ...

The bell sounds –

He's missed his chance.

His voice recedes

Silently to its own

Tumultuous depths

As he walks,

invisible, to class.

Why don't some students have time for both sports and the arts?

Whose game is it, really?

In what ways are some boys "invisible" in school?

Introduction

A consistent problem facing many of today's vocal/choral educators is that of the disproportion of girls to boys in high school vocal programs and choral ensembles (Swanson, 1984);(Castelli, 1986); (Adcock, 1987); (Dunaway, 1987); (Phillips, 1988). The problem as expressed in the literature is solely the ensemble imbalance created by the absence of boys. This view is flawed, because it devalues the participation of girls in music programs, and because it sets as a goal the equalization of gender numbers in music programs rather than the understanding of the processes behind the disproportion. The missing males issue is a symptom of a much greater problem – that of gender discrimination against males, which has been under-researched in music education (Koza, 1994). This discrimination occurs through inequities in schooling that limit boys' personal growth, development of identity and self-esteem, life and career choices. Castelli (1984) concludes that part of the problem might be a "lack of shared concerns" (p. 127) surrounding participation in singing between students, teachers, and administration. Dunaway (1987) proposes that successful programs were likely to have a higher percentage of boys participating than were average programs; the difference in recruitment success lay in understanding their personal, social, and physical needs.

Social Constructionism (Bem, 1974); (Helgeson, 1994); (Lipkin, 1995); (McLaren, 1995) is the process by which individuals construct their identities within their lived socio-cultural contexts, mediated and influenced by dominant discourses and mechanisms of control, which are further mediated by institutions such as schooling and the media. *Gender* is a commodity that is used within the social world of schooling to establish and control an individual's social power. For boys, while masculinity is established and defended by the individual, femininity is ascribed by others (Mac an Ghail, 1994, citing Arnot, 1984). Schools have been implicated in creating and maintaining structures and policies that create and maintain hierarchies of gender and social valuation. In so doing, they participate in what

has been called a "sexual apartheid" (McLaren, 1995). Activities in school are evaluated for their *identity capital* (Coté, 1990); (Evans, 1993)—their potential to increase an individual's social standing, power, and self-esteem. Conversely, activities which are perceived as potentially damaging to an individual's social standing, power, or self-esteem present potential *identity liability* (Adler, 2002) and are avoided.

In my exploration of the literature in music and general education, I identified four consistent problems that I believe have contributed to the failure of the profession to address the issue of boys' reluctance to sing:

- I. A focus on physiology and the voice change has ignored the psychosocial elements of boys' school lives.
- II. Second, research from a critical feminist perspective has been invaluable in uncovering the gendered power inequities experienced by girls, but has largely ignored the gender issues experienced by males in music education.
- III. Traditional choral texts have presented solutions to boys' reluctance to sing; based on the masculinization of singing, these "solutions" may have exacerbated the problem.
- IV. The existing research in this area has focused on boys' reluctance to sing, while ignoring the successes of boys who have persisted in singing.

The purpose of this study was to explore the location and meaning of singing within the personal/social universes of young adolescent males, to illuminate the factors that influence their decision-making with regards to singing. The principal question for this study was: How do boys experience singing in school? This question was explored via a set of specific sub-questions:

- 1) What decisions do boys make regarding singing?
- 2) How are the decisions boys make connected to their identities and the meanings they attach to singing?
- 3) What psychological, sociological, cultural, or physical factors are evident in this decision-making process?

This investigation was undertaken at Valleyfield Senior Public School, a multi-ethnic, primarily working-class school in the suburbs of Toronto. As the researcher, I was also the music teacher to all the students in grades 7 and 8 at this school. In the first part of this study, I observed the interactions of students in my music classes and ensembles; I made observations in a journal, which were used later as data for analysis. Sixteen boys and two girls from grades 7 and 8 were invited to participate in individual and group interviews. Data was examined through multiple lenses: teaching experience, the literature in music and general education, and a critical genderist¹ perspective, and was further analyzed through the process of narrative composition.

In arts-based inquiry, the researcher weaves case study data into stories which feature the researcher's voice (Borg, 1996). Research stories are then more credible, and are able to achieve value negation in the reader (Barone, 1995a, 1995b). The researcher uses theoretical lenses to correct mistrust (Barone, 1995a), and interpretive text may be used to explain meaning (Barone, 1997). (Rofes, 1995) discusses his use of narrative writing to place his expository text in the context of the kinds of experiences that he had. He used the sounds and structures of language to reinforce meaning, and characters such as "The Bully" who represented not only themselves, but also the moral codes and processes that they enforce (p. 79). Composite narrative fictions, the amalgamation of the experiences of several participants, streamline the presentation of data while facilitating subject-anonymity (O'Connor, 1995) and providing validity to the participants' individual narratives.

What it's all about

Cast:

The "Jocks of Singing," Ron, Rik, and Senthon, wear clean, oversized sporty clothes. The "Sensitive Boys," Ranjan and Mark, dress casually. "Neutral Boy" Paul dresses in an eclectic mix of sporty and casual, and sits with the Sensitive Boys. "Non-Singer" Tom dresses casually and sits slightly to the side. The "Offstage Voice" should sound tough, aggressive, and resistant.

(Seven boys sit in a semi-circle, with pens and paper, and a group assignment they've just been given.)

Ron: 'How do boys experience singing?' What kind of an assignment is that?

Tom: The writing kind.

Rik: The thinking kind, you dumb ass.

Ron: But I don't KNOW how I experience singing, I just... sing.

Mark: Everybody knows how they experience singing. It's just putting it into words that's the hard part.

Rik: But what if I'm not good at that?

Paul: Then you've got a problem.

Ranjan: The question is, how are we to solve this problem?

Ron: Which problem?

Tom: The writing problem, dufus!

Mark: And there's another problem.

Senthon: What?

Mark: The fact that the way I experience singing might be different from the way you guys experience it, because I'm different from all of you.

Do we encourage empathy in our male students?

Rik: (laughing) You sure are.

Ron: Hey, drop it, dip-wad!

Ranjan: What I think Mark means is, since we are all different people, our views of things – our perspectives – are different.

What purpose does name-calling serve in the social hierarchy?

Mark: Ya, so the problem is, how do we write a single assignment about how boys – all boys – experience singing, when every body might experience it differently?

Ron: Maybe we could like make a list, like of all the things we share in common about singing?

Tom: Ok, but what about the differences?

Rik: Well, maybe we could make like a ginormous ven-diagram like in language class.

Senthon: You're just trying to suck up!

Why is "sucking up" criticized?

Rik: No, really, 'cause it's cool and stuff, and you get to like use markers and everything.

Ranjan: How about we all write our ideas down on paper. Then when we've all got something, we come together to combine them and see what's the same and what's different?

All: Ok.

(The boys spread out across the stage to work privately.)

Ron: How do I experience singing? I don't know. I know what I LIKE about singing. It's culture. I used to do dancing in my culture; my mother encouraged me, to get involved in the culture and activities and dancing and singing. But then

Do fathers and mothers support different components of students' lives?

that conflicted with other things, so I had to stop. Now in school we have choir, and we get to experience different types of music and different cultures and basically understanding the way of life in other places, not just our own.

And I also like being part of a group, and working together towards a goal – it's like we're a sports team, and the concert is our big game. And if we all work together during the practices, then we do really well. And everybody wants to be part of that group too – those who didn't join early enough feel left out, not part of something. And so then they make fun of us, except they can't any more because there's too many of us and we stick together and support each other.

In what ways do we try to make music like sports? What effect might this have on the participants?

Tom: *Singing is a nightmare. Or no, I guess it's a day-mare, since I never have to sing at night. I'm too busy anyway, after school, doing teams and stuff – all out of school, mind you. At school, everybody knows you. And the more they know you, the more chance that, if you screw up, they'll say something; so I do as much stuff as I can outside of school. In school, I try to keep from getting noticed; it's like, "Don't look at me," especially in class. The only thing scarier than a teacher asking you for an answer is singing. 'Cause what if I screwed up? I don't know the answer, 'cause it hasn't happened yet, but who knows, right? I guess if it's a really BIG group singing, then you kind of get lost in the crowd, and so you can sing and it's kind of fun, because nobody can pick just you out. I could never sing a solo, though; if I had a solo, I'd be so nervous I wouldn't be able to sing – the rhythm wouldn't come out... I'd probably just talk the words. The whole flow would be... blocked.*

If it hasn't happened yet, why does he anticipate criticism?

What lies ahead in Tom's life, career, and relationships?

How are rap music and stage fright related?

Rik: *Singing is something I do, something I CHOOSE for myself. An opportunity to express myself. At least, when we're in Boys' Choir, it's a different environment – all guys, closer. Not like with girls, 'cause you don't want to make a mistake in front of them, have them think less of you, get embarrassed. You want to keep the same reputation you've built. But nobody cares what the other guys think, 'cause you can make a mistake in front of them and they forget the next day. When I'm on the playground, I mostly play basketball with my friends, but you have to be a certain way there. Home way, playground way, class way, and then choir way. I used to be the same way on the playground and in choir, but then because people were being more free to me in Boys' Choir, and so I just started speaking my mind to them. It's a more free environment, where I can be open, closed; I can be just sitting there listening, or I can speak out, whatever...*

Why might boys need a "safe zone" to express themselves?

How are reputation, identity, and school experience connected?

What is the role of informal sports in interpersonal relations between boys?

How long can Rik successfully negotiate multiple worlds? Which identity will he choose as an adult?

Senthan: *Singing is a chance to show people what you can do, what you've been working towards, like your parents and stuff. And it's a chance to be a leader, by being the best at something, and I think I'm pretty good at singing; I probably wouldn't sing, otherwise, 'cause then people could like criticize me and stuff. And singing is fun too, and we get to learn about ourselves, about our changing voices and stuff. I liked it, especially after my voice changed, and I could sing quite low, but really really high too, up*

Why is leadership important?

Why do some boys have to be "good" to sing?

into some "whistle register" that was way higher than the girls. Now I like being a baritone, and I can do falsetto too, and I hope I can keep all of it, 'cause then I'd be like better than everybody because of my huge range.

Why is being better than everybody important?

Paul: I've been singing since elementary school, so I'm pretty used to it by now. I remember in grade 6, though, I was the only guy with a changed voice, and I never knew what notes to sing or anything, and the teacher couldn't help I guess because she's got a high voice. So I tried to blend in as best I could, mostly was quiet though.

Who is responsible for musical task failure or success?

My family is really happy that I'm singing, because it's something I enjoy and that I'm committed to. It's a longer term commitment than sports, though, and you don't get anywhere near the kinds of attention from the school that you get when you're on a sports team. I do sports too, but I'm not that good at them, and it's difficult when you don't want to be the one letting the other players down by being the weakest link. I guess the other players sometimes could tell that you suck, but it's mostly you yourself that tells you "you suck," because YOU know how you played. I feel that I'm good at singing, though, at least better than some of my classmates, and it's something I feel I can be successful at. And I get to be a leader when I go back to class by helping them, leading by example. And you get to meet a lot of different people, in different grades, especially. It helps if some people you know – even one person, is in the choir with you though; makes you more comfortable.

How are short- and long-term goals connected to success in school, and to persistence in music?

What would happen if schools gave equal recognition to music and sports?

Mark: Singing is something I can be good at – I totally suck at sports, but they're way to competitive anyway. It's no fun when it's that competitive. I'm good at the arts. The arts helps me to express myself; it's like a kind of therapy – it frees everything, and helps me deal with my problems. I think singing helps me move towards the issues. But that's THIS year; LAST year I didn't join choir because I was really insecure about myself, and people all thought of me as something weird, and I think singing would have just provoked the problem. I think grade 7 was the worst year of my life. This year I have friends who support me, so it's better. The choir is like a family; if somebody screws up, it's ok; we don't mind, it doesn't matter. Some people still tease me for singing, and call me gay; but when I sing, I feel more confident. When I sing, it's like I change, and this new person comes out of me. I think I've evolved over the past year, and in the end, all that really matters is what I think about myself.

How does task success relate to overall educational success?

What happens if we make sports non-competitive, or the arts competitive?

What kind of a learner was Mark in grade 7?

Who is this "new" person? How can we help Mark to carry it into his life outside of choir?

Ranjan: I grew up singing in my culture, as part of my religion. My father taught me in our musical prayers, encouraged me, coached me on the music feel, because he really likes music. That played a big part of me getting involved in music activities. There are two different groups in choir. We all of course enjoy singing, but we differ in how we know each other, and in how we feel about the music. I would say that the one group thinks of singing as an ACTIVITY, while my group "FEELS" more about the music, sees singing as more of a CONCEPT – of something... DIVINE.

How do we honour our students' diverse musical needs and values?

What would happen if we directed the music curriculum to only one of these groups' values?

Singing has power; it's always the same no matter how I'm feeling, it always gets me going. It's just part of me. And in this school community, when we sing we sing as a group, and you feel the unity as we sing; it brings us together as a school. And while singing or not singing may not make so much of a difference in how others treat you, it makes an impact in how YOU feel about things.

Where does musical community begin and end?

It's sometimes difficult – when I talk or sing it's like hearing a tape of my own voice which is shaky, uneven. That might affect my self-confidence. I sort of get self-conscious about what I sound like. And because I'm in the middle of tenor and baritone, I hit awkward notes once in a while, and that's embarrassing sometimes. I want to be a tenor, because it's just more of me and myself inside.

How are voice, voice-type, vocal ability, self-esteem, and identity connected?

(The boys, seeing that they've all finished, reassemble to discuss their findings.)

Ranjan: *So, did everybody get something down about how we each experience singing?*

All: *Yes.*

Ranjan: *Ok, who wants to start first?*

Silence.

Senthan: *I dunno. It's like this is MY stuff, and I don't really want to share some of it.*

Ron: *Well, how about the common stuff that we all have?*

Paul: *I was thinking about those marks guys – you know, the ones who just come to choir for the marks.*

Rik: *Ya. It's like they're only there to talk to their friends, and they wreck everything.*

Ranjan: *We certainly don't get as much done with them there. Why do they even bother coming?*

Ron: *I think they see all of us in it, having fun and stuff, and they don't want to feel left out.*

Paul: *But then why don't they sing when they're here? They just end up looking stupid when we perform, and make us all look bad.*

Mark: *They're so immature!*

Tom: *Hey!*

Should boys share their "stuff"? What would it take to make "sharing" a more natural event?

How do reward systems affect students' perceptions and valuations of school activities?

(Time freezes. Tom speaks to the audience)

Tom: *You see what I mean? Everybody's always judging everybody else. So NOW anybody who doesn't feel comfortable SHARING their voice is IMMATURE! I give up!*

(Normal time resumes)

Ron: *It would be better for everybody if they just quit.*

Senthan: *Ya, like Rik did!*

Rik: *Hey! I didn't quit.*

Ron: *Well then how come you didn't join again at the*

beginning of grade 8?
 Rik: *That's only my business, Ron.*

(Time freezes. Rik speaks his thoughts to the boys)

Rik: The truth is I was still a soprano and all you guys were tenors and baritones, and I couldn't sit with you anymore. I didn't even MIND singing soprano, it's just that it was like you were all growing up and becoming men, and I wasn't. Well, actually, I WAS (hands in pockets), but not anywhere anybody could SEE, so they didn't know I was even in puberty. And I didn't want to be like younger and everything. 'Cause then you guys would be the leaders, and I... would be just some immature little kid like a grade 6 or something.

What is the role of labelling in the formation of musical identity?

How do we make it acceptable for boys to sing soprano?

How are physical maturity and social power connected?

(Normal time resumes)

Paul: What about the guys who don't join at all?
Tom: Uh, I think I have to...
Paul: You know, those tough guys with the attitudes and the low pants.
Tom: Phew!
Senthan: They're all morons! They'll never achieve anything; All they want to do is play basketball and fight, and they never do any work.
Rik: Ya, and they always give teachers a hard time and spoil class.
Ranjan: I think they're afraid.
Ron: Afraid of not being able to do stuff good.
Senthan: Or afraid of showing what they can do isn't as good as they want people to think.
Mark: Or afraid of showing who they are.
Ron: And that's why they always diss' us up for singing and stuff.
Mark: And call us gay.

How are behaviour and dress connected to identity and social power?

Where does resistance to learning come from, lead to?

What is the danger in "sharing" or "showing" one's authentic self or voice? How does this relate to singing?

(Laughter and giggling at Mark's comment. Time freezes. Poem "Yo, Fag!" is read from offstage.)

Yo, Fag!
He think he so smart, singin' an' all that stuff.
Singin' little angel boy don't know nothin'!
I'm all that, sit here talkin' class so so chill.
I could sing if I wan' to. Jus' don't wan'to. Don' wan' get no disrespect!
Yo, Queerboy!
Look at him, sittin' there all good and everything.
Always tryin', always cryin'
When me an' my posse get in his face.
When you like cry we're stronger an' better than you.
Yo, Homo!
Why you wan'na kiss ass like that?
Talkin' to teacher, doin' your work,
Always hand up in class. Where that gonna get you?

Why does singing invite "disrespect" for some boys?

Why do some boys rely on bullying and name-calling to build their self- and social-esteem?

Why do some boys perceive engagement in learning as impossible for them?

You got de marks, got de perks. How hard for me too?

Yo, Fairy!

Walkin' through the halls all swish swish

With your fairy friends t' choir again?

Not playin' basketball and tough like us outside.

Why not walk manly man low-pants like me?

Yo, Fruit!

How much you wanna go in da school?

What if we crowds you like, see?

Follow you 'round the school yard 'til you give up ?

Come out with us, BE us, be ME. Raise yourself to cool.

Why do boys label choir as "gay" ?

How do boys' choices in early adolescence determine their life and career paths?

Are there different levels of gender exclusion or inclusion?

(Mark then speaks his thoughts to the other boys)

Mark: Seriously, you guys have NO idea what it's like. For the rest of you, it's easy. (Gesturing to Jocks of Singing) You've got a girlfriend, and you're good at sports, and all three of you are in the big popular clique, so it's more ok for you to sing. And even when you do catch flack for singing, it doesn't really mean anything. (Gesturing to Sensitive Boys) And you guys are really content with yourselves, with your abilities and your looks and your friends, and with how people see you – that's all ok to you. So it's easier for you guys to bounce the comments off. You don't know what it's like without all those defenses – every shot hurts, and it really adds up. Try singing when you don't like yourself!

What does Mark need to succeed? Whose responsibility is that?

(Normal time resumes)

Rik: But that name calling and stuff, it doesn't happen as often as it used to.

Paul: Ya. It's like it's getting to be ok to sing here, or something.

Ron: And I don't get so frustrated by it. Never really did. You have to take it as it comes...

Rik: Maybe since we've been doing more concerts, we're getting more respect.

Senthan: I don't know how, they still always criticize us in the halls after we perform. It's like we perform worse for our peers than for our parents or something.

Ranjan: It's not that we actually PERFORM worse; it's that our performance is worse in our PEERS' perceptions. They THINK we suck, so we suck.

Paul: But why do they think we suck? We're pretty good, or at least that's what our parents say.

Mark: Because we don't sound like pop singers, like the Backstreet Boys...

Jocks: Gay!!

Mark: Or N'Sync...

Jocks: Gay!!!

Mark: You guys are so rude! You don't even think about how what you say might affect other people!

Paul: Ya. You just blurt out the first thing that comes to your head, and you never give anybody else space to think.

How do we make singing socially acceptable for boys? Is this a transformation of singing, or of our values and approaches?

Why will peers criticize even a "good" choir performance?

Why is "pop" music perceived as gay, despite its focus on heterosexual love? How does this relate to boys' avoidance of singing?

- Rik:** Well, if all you GEEKS would stop hiding and speak up, share an opinion once in a while...
- Ron:** Ya, take a leadership role...
- Ranjan:** It doesn't always have to be about leadership. It's about working together.
- Tom:** Ya, if you Jocks would just listen for a change...
- Ron:** And what's the matter with being a Jock?
- Senthan:** Ya. Why can't Jocks be in choir too?
- Rik:** Jocks of Singing!
- Jocks:** Ya, Jocks of Singing!!

(As the Jocks of Singing laugh and talk (silently) among themselves, the Sensitive Boys commiserate)

- Ranjan:** Well, I don't know about you, but I have NO desire to be a "Jock of Singing."
- Paul:** It's so rude. And sometimes when they get loud like that in all our classes, we can't even get a word in edgewise. Neither can the girls.
- Mark:** Ya. And I don't even bother saying anything anymore, 'cause I just draw attention to myself and invite all sorts of comments.
- Ranjan:** Well anyway, we should get on with this, because our time is running out. Paul, you say something.
- Paul:** Me? Why me?
- Ranjan:** Because you're kind of a Jock, but not really. Sort of like - a semi-jock...
- Paul:** Well what do I say?
- Mark:** What were we talking about before? Oh ya! Professional singers!
- Paul:** Uh... uh... uh... Hey guys, what about Rap?
- Jocks:** What?
- Paul:** What about Rap? Is that "gay" too?
- Jocks:** (Oh, well of course not, that's ok, fine, etc...)
- Mark:** Just like I thought, hypocritical.
- Paul:** Mark's right, though - we don't sound professional. Our sound isn't refined. Hey, compared to that high school group that performed here, we probably do suck.
- Ranjan:** But we can't sound like that now; we can only sound like WE sound, now, and so we have to appreciate what we've achieved; that we understand the concepts; and that we enjoy the singing.
- Rik:** Ya. Musical success is just knowing that you have enjoyed learning and performing, and just knowing that music is an enjoyable thing in life.
- Paul:** Just doing your best and performing is a success, because of the courage it takes.
- Ron:** But no one can reach their best, because you can always do something better. So there's no perfect song or anything.
- Mark:** It's being proud of what you do - from the inside - and not being afraid to show it to the public, no matter what they say.
- Tom:** Performing in front of a crowd and doing good, and when it's all over, everybody's happy.

Is there a masculine hierarchy of participation in the classroom?

Who else might this "over-participation" affect?

Why does Paul aspire to the "Jock" identity?

At what point do we choose our identities?

While we are still choosing, who are we?

Why is Hip-Hop acceptable in masculine popular culture?

How does the cult of perfection influence our activity choices and expectations?

How do we change a learning community's musical values?

Senthan: *Ya. After the applause, you feel really good because you've made other people feel good.*
 Ranjan: *Whatever the reason, once you get musical success, you want it... ALWAYS.*
 All: *Ya! (etc...)*
 Ron: *So what are we going to write for this assignment?*

How do we facilitate musical success?

(Freeze. Fade to black. They speak in darkness.)

Ron: *How I experience*
 Rik: *singing in school*
 Mark: *depends on -*
 Tom: *Where I am,*
 Rik: *Where I'm from,*
 Ranjan: *What I've experienced and*
 Ron: *What I'm willing to try,*
 Paul: *What I'm good at,*
 Senthan: *What I enjoy,*
 Tom: *What I fear,*
 Mark: *Who I know and*
 Paul: *Who I'm with,*
 Senthan: *Who I respect,*
 Paul: *What I value,*
 Ron: *What I know and*
 Ranjan: *What I want to learn,*
 Mark: *How I feel,*
 Rik: *What I need*
 Tom: *Who I am*
 Senthan: *in the moment and*
 Ranjan: *Who I see myself becoming.*

The end.

Discussion

Boys perceive singing as being composed of two separate but concurrent acts: the *bodily-aesthetic act* by which they engage with the music, and in which they use their bodies to produce singing sound; and the *psycho-social act* in which they engage with each other in music making, as well as in the experience of being singers within the social environment of school.

Cultural background and home environment tended to be downplayed by most of the participants, even where there was evidence of significant interaction with their decision-making. Musical fathers were particularly strong role models, although mothers were cited as being more actively supportive of the boys' participation in the arts. Voice type and stage of vocal development are correlated with maturity, heterosexuality and social power, and are therefore also significant in boys' decision-making. Recognition and support from girls is important, although this was cited as being rare at best; even more important was the avoidance of losing face in the presence of girls as the result of musical task failure in comparison to societal aesthetic expectations. Recognition from teachers was similarly rare; the boys remarked on how this differed significantly from teachers' frequent recognition of their successes in sports. Boys who construct their identities through dialectic processes rather than by identification and imitation are more likely to view singing as an appropriate for them. Musical success in publicly visible activities in elementary school; the ability to

make long-term commitments with delayed rewards; and the ability to be self-motivating and rewarding, were key to boys' persistence in singing in middle school.

An examination of the data revealed a *typology of identities*, which was marked by a *hierarchy of masculinities* and differing approaches to interaction with peers, schooling, and singing. The only group to self-label, *The Jocks of Singing* is the most socially popular and the most broadly successful of all the participants. They identified public leadership through the demonstration of success in their chosen activities as the prime defining characteristic of their "jock" identity. They are characterized by a strong heterosexual masculinity, which they establish through success in formal and informal school sports, and which facilitates their participation in the arts. A contributing feature to this group's success is their construction of *multiple identities* to facilitate their functioning in multiple and differing social contexts, as well as their participation in a wide gender-valued spectrum of school activities. Members of this group value choir for its utility as an activity at which they can succeed, develop self-esteem, and positive public visibility.

The Sensitive Boys are the most academically and artistically successful of all the participants. They are characterized by their dedication to academics; by their poor performance in and rejection of the competitive and elitist nature of formal and informal school sports activities; and by their typically *androgynous self-concepts* that facilitate their participation in gender-incongruent school activities. This group values choir as an *experience*, as a *mode of personal expression*, and as an *extension of their own musical identities*.

As a sub-group of *The Sensitive Boys*, *The Social Isolates* are similarly characterized by success in academics and the arts, but are rejected by many of their peers on the basis of their perceived homosexuality. Consequently, these students develop processes of internal self-esteem maintenance and motivation to facilitate their positive functioning in school. In addition to the values that the rest of the *Sensitive Boys* placed on singing, this group values choir as a venue in which they can feel accepted and involved as part of their peer group.

The Neutral Boys are characterized by transitional or ongoing construction of their identities in grade seven. Regardless of their actual abilities or traits, almost all of these boys aspired to the *Jocks of Singing* identity. Their valuing of singing included shared aspects with both *The Jocks of Singing* and *The Sensitive Boys*.

The Non-Singers are characterized by moderately successful academic studentship, and by purposefully unsuccessful incorporation into the social world of schooling. They described an internally constructed fear of criticism or harassment as the result of self-perceived potential for failure in school activities. In response to this fear, they develop avoidance strategies to avoid being noticed by teachers or peers in class; they also avoid extra-curricular activities of any kind within school. The *Non-Singers* are hesitant to sing in class, in response to their comparisons of their own imagined poor performance, to their perceptions of public aesthetic expectations of successful choral performance; they would never sing in choir because of the wide public exposure it presents. They may eventually allow themselves to openly enjoy singing in class once they come to perceive their class context as a socially safe environment in which to take such risks.

The participants described two additional identity groups that included students from outside of the participant group: *The Partial Engagers* are not a distinct identity group in their own right, but their singing peers criticize them for their unsuccessful participation, limited commitment, and poor behaviour in singing activities. More specifically, *The Jocks of Singing* criticized them for failing to contribute to the "team effort," while *The Sensitive Boys* criticized them for failing to engage the music or connect musically with their peers. Their participation in choir was usually to earn bonus marks in music, or to be able to "hang" with their singing friends, but they rarely persisted in choir for more than a few rehearsals.

Participants described *The Bad-Asses* as the most masculine, but also the most dangerous group in the school. This group includes students from all ethnicities at Valleyfield, who share several common characteristics: low socio-economic status, lack of parental supervision and involvement in the educational process, and an apprenticeship into

gang involvement with older siblings or mixed-age peer groups. Regardless of ethnicity, the Bad-Asses are characterized by modes of dress, gesture, and speech that emulate media-celebrated images of the African American "gangsta" sub-culture. The Bad-Asses typically reject the formal learning aspects of schooling, choosing instead to secure self-esteem and social status through success in informal sports on the playground, and to ratify their identities through acts of intimidation and violence towards their peers and teachers. They use homophobic slurs and violence to persecute the singing boys; as a way to publicly reinforce their violent form of heterosexual masculinity; and in order to rationalize their non-participation in positively valued school activities.

Homophobia emerged as a significant gatekeeper of boys' participation in singing and other activities at Valleyfield. Boys use it to socially lower others, and to socially reinforce their own heterosexuality. It is administered on the schoolyard and in the classroom; and – unlike the sexual harassment of girls or racial harassment – it is not regularly subject to interference or punishment by teachers or administrators. In the face of this harassment, boys develop different strategies to maintain their participation in singing. The Sensitive Boys are often the victims of homophobic harassment apart from their participation in singing, as the result of being perceived as less masculine; in the absence of social- or peer-esteem, they develop processes of *internal self-esteem maintenance*. The Jocks of Singing reinforce their heterosexual masculinity through success in formal and informal sports, and then use *multiple identities* to distance the aspects of themselves with which they participate in arts activities from those with which they interact on the schoolyard. They also use their valuing of singing for its social utility to rationalize their participation in choir while avoiding homophobic harassment.

The creation of a *Boys' Choir* at Valleyfield proved to be highly successful in recruiting and maintaining boys' participation in singing. The Boys' Choir provided a venue in which the boys' unique developmental needs could be addressed, and an environment free from the social and behavioural pressures which can accompany a mixed choir. Some of the participants perceived the Boys' Choir as a sanctuary where they could participate free of social limitations and controls: where The Jocks of Singing could shed their constructed context-specific identities; and where The Social Isolates could emerge from their shields of purposeful overachievement, to interact with their peers and with the music as their most authentic selves, free from peer criticism and homophobic harassment. Once the place of singing was elevated at Valleyfield through a succession of successful performance projects and recordings, the boys found that they experienced homophobic harassment less frequently, and with less intensity.

Conclusion

If boys choose away from singing because they perceive it to be an inappropriate activity for them, then there must also be a number of other activities and experiences which they deny themselves, in response to the same gender-based psycho-social influences. By denying themselves the full range of activities that could be available to them, boys are deprived of potential growth experiences that contribute to the construction of identity and self-esteem, and are therefore limited in their life and career possibilities. By creating learning environments that are compatible with the boys' motivations for and valuations of learning; environments in which boys feel that they can achieve task success; and environments free from social hierarchy and marginalization; we can support boys to engage and succeed in the broadest possible range of educational activities.

School policy makers need to understand schooling environments and students' attitudes towards curriculum (Colley, 1994) in order to change school policies that promote limited visibility and a social hierarchy, and which create anxiety in all students around their activity choices (Evans & Eder, 1993). Schools should examine the activities they provide, how students' participation in those activities is facilitated, and how those activities are honoured (Rofes, 1995). Schools must also evaluate their policies and practices with regards

to the addressing of homophobia (Griffin, 1995), the mistreatment of subordinated students, and the creation of social isolates.

Music educators should understand the psychosocial processes at work in students' personal, educational, and musical development in order to develop compatible curricula and pedagogies. If our goal is to support as many boys as possible to continue to sing through adolescence, and if we understand what it means for adolescent boys to sing, then we can: advocate on a psycho-social/developmental front to maintain music in the schools; work to make our schools places where students' participation in the arts is supported and nurtured; and work to make our classes, activities, curricula, and pedagogies compatible with our students' needs, in order to give them the best music education experience possible.

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Endnote

1. I have coined the term "critical *genderist* theory" to refer to a perspective in which issues of inequity, power, control, value, and discrimination are examined critically as they occur *within* as well as *between* gender(s). I intend for this term to replace as well as contrast the term "critical *feminist* theory," which is commonly used by gender researchers, in an effort to focus (or *re-focus*) on the gender issues of males, and in order to remind us that gender is multi-sided, and that males – as well as females – experience issues of gender (Harrison, 2001).

For Thee We Sing: The Historical Implications of Marian Anderson's 1939 Easter Concert

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This lecture recital is an opportunity for me to celebrate one of my idols, the classical singer Marian Anderson. Many of you know her as the first African American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera. Some of you may connect her name to Eleanor Roosevelt and the Daughters of the American Revolution, or D.A.R. Perhaps a few of you even know some of the details of the incident in 1939 which brought these names together. However, I imagine that very few of you have ever considered Marian Anderson's 1939 Easter concert one of the rare moments in which classical singing greatly impacted American society as a whole. What other classical singers have caused millions around the world to re-evaluate American patriotism and our sense of humanity? I don't know of any. For this reason, I appear before you today to fill in some of the gaps which may be missing for you in the story of Marian Anderson and the famous concert she gave in 1939.

Along the way, I'll introduce you to a website sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania where the Marian Anderson collection is located. I hope that you will eventually visit the Marian Anderson collection and meet the incredible curators who catalogued and care for the hundreds of boxes of material there. You'll find several treasures at the website—interesting photos, audio clips and video clips. Browse on your own and enjoy!

Marian Anderson was born in Philadelphia February 17, 1897, the eldest of three daughters. She was raised in a poor, racially mixed neighbourhood and religion played an important role in her upbringing. At age six, she was enrolled in the Union Baptist Church choir and by age eight her singing had captured people's attention in both church and school. Marian Anderson began singing whatever and wherever she could. She eventually saw the need for voice lessons to further her artistry, but found that lack of money and racial attitudes were obstacles. Religion helped her overcome both. Her church collected money for her lessons and her faith allowed her to be strong when facing racial prejudice (Dizikes, 1993, pp. 492-493). For example, when Anderson tried to enroll in a local music school as a teenager, she was bypassed and then told, "We don't take coloured" (Anderson, 1956, p. 38).

Eventually, Anderson's involvement with music turned into a career, but not a particularly lucrative one. As so many other classical singers had done and would do, Anderson travelled to Europe to further her career. Unlike other American singers, however, Anderson achieved her greatest success in Scandinavia. There, people were curious about her skin colour, but she did not encounter the prejudices to which she had become accustomed at home. Marian Anderson was well received and her concerts were numerous. During the 1933-34 concert season she gave 112 concerts—an unheard of number for most classical singers of the day (Dizikes, 1993). Anderson also met several famous musicians during her time in Europe—for example, composer Roger Quilter, pianist Kostî Vehanen (who became her accompanist), and Scandinavian composers Kilpinen and Sibelius. After singing for Sibelius, who had invited her for coffee, he declared, "My roof is too low for you," and he called to his wife, "Not coffee, but champagne!" (Anderson, 1956, p. 149). Apparently, the famous impresario, Sol Hurok, had a similar reaction to Anderson's voice, and he approached her about becoming her manager after attending a concert she gave in Paris. Anderson agreed to sign with Hurok and he remained her manager throughout her career. One of the things that made Hurok invaluable to his artists in general, and Marian Anderson, in particular, was that he was willing to take risks and build for the future. It did not bother him that Anderson's tours in America lost money during their first year or two together. What was most important was that he had brought Marian Anderson home. In her autobiography, Anderson writes: