

A New Approach to Examining Gendered Involvement in Music

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Abstract

The establishment of a new framework for reclaiming the voice of boys and men in research and discourse music education has become a necessity. This paper deconstructs the postfeminist perspective and presents *critical genderist thinking and action* as a way of approaching gender research (Adler and Harrison 2004). In so doing, the impact of feminist theory on music education research as it relates to the subordination and exclusion of males is discussed. The relationship of schooling and music education from this *critical genderist* perspective are examined, in order to illuminate structures and practices that contribute to a gendered social hierarchy, which in turn negatively effect the participation of both males and females in music.

Journey to the Past

In order to make sense of the world, categorisation through binaries takes place: war and peace, large and small, black and white, young and old, tall and short, male and female. While it is acknowledged that in reality there are an infinite number of shades of grey between black and white, of sizes between large and small, of ages between young and old, that idea that male and female are completely different is perpetuated. Masculinity and femininity are also viewed as opposites in a binary structure. Any attempt to define masculinity or femininity as single entities proves to be difficult. In studies about males, recent thought has centred on the notion of the existence of a multiplicity of masculinities (Tolson, 1997; Brod, 1987; Kaufman, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Jefferson, 1994; Connell, 1995). Connell's use of the term "hegemonic masculinity" implies the existence of a variety of masculinities and a hierarchical ordering of them, in which one form overrides almost all others by social and psychological processes. In postmodernism, there is however a recognition that a continuum of gender exists and that all individuals, whether gendered male or female through still sex-related categories, experience and exhibit aspects of both masculinity and femininity.

A range of approaches, reactions, and responses to feminism has been put forward in recent years. Lingard and Douglas (1999) summarize some of these and define them as men's rights, profeminism, masculinity therapy, and conservatism. The first of these,

men's rights, takes a liberal humanist perspective and uses some elements of biological essentialism. It concerns itself with protecting male rights and denies that public structures give men power. As with men's rights, profeminism has its origins in the men's liberation movement of the 1970s. It works towards a gender-just society through a personal and political definition of masculinity. Masculinity, in the view of the profeminists, is a two-edged sword: it brings both power and powerlessness. Masculinity Therapy shuns the politicism of profeminism and is, to a certain extent, atheoretical. It promotes the concept that therapy is the main prescription for righting male ills: glorification of the tribal ritual, returning to the bush, finding self and male bonding. Conservatism has links to the religious right and supports a return to patriarchy, where men and women have clearly defined social roles. It is explicitly antifeminist. Of all the types of masculinity politics, the greatest tension is usually between the mythopoeists (who support masculinity therapy and men's rights views) and the profeminists.

In embracing feminist methodologies to form his theoretical framework, Pease (2000) studied profeminist men and their experiences with a view to giving a voice to their ideas, thereby helping to subvert dominant masculinities. Pease's work established a postmodern model which, while based in profeminism, points to a position beyond feminism. In postfeminist thought, a gender-just society is sought. Postfeminist men support the claims of women for social, political, and economic equity. They also express similar concerns for men and boys. It is on this point that profeminists and postfeminists disagree. The postfeminist claims that the feminists and profeminists lack an understanding of the disproportionate ways in which males suffer, are disempowered and are at risk of abuse and neglect. There is a danger that male affirming voices can be seen as misogynist and repressed by feminists because they challenge feminist doctrines. Kipnis (1995), Benjamin (1995) and Horrocks (1995) claim that a critique of feminism needs to be viewed as more than chauvinism or antifeminist and, while not denying the privilege experienced by men, emphasizes the need to view oppression and victimisation in ways that are not ideologically rigid. They further maintain that men are both the subjects and the objects of oppression. Based on research of Clatterbaugh (1997), Kimmel and Messner (1995), Pease (2000), Benjamin (1995) and Kipnis (1995) it is therefore argued that there is a need to address the status of men who are disempowered and marginalized. A postfeminist view is seen as being able to embrace this throughout, while accepting that other viewpoints have contributed and continue to contribute to the field of study.

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A word about patriarchy in relation to postfeminism: in some feminist writing, patriarchy signifies the power all men have over women. Not all men achieve power: a person's masculinity, according to Buchbinder (1998, p. 43) may even be defined by whether he has a place within patriarchy. Patriarchy, therefore, affects men as much as women. Men are oppressed and isolated by the models to which they are expected to conform. Men struggle to prove themselves to be men and the penalties for failing to do so are considerable. They are teased, isolated, and forced into constant competition in drinking, sport, womanising, and risk-taking behaviours. Masculine identities often expect men to curtail their lifestyles in order to conform. This can include the choices men have made with regard to music. Gender studies have not always recognized the damage done to men under patriarchy. Unlike other forms of masculinity politics, postfeminism recognizes this and seeks to address it, without denying the damage done to women by patriarchy.

I'm all Alone

When Gould (2003), Chair of Gender Research in Music Education (GRIME), reflected that gender research can help us envision "an educational system in which we can all flourish" while suggesting that "worrying about the lack of men and boys who sing in our choirs—even as we privilege them" is a waste of time, the agenda became overt and the lack of understanding and tolerance of the male perspective institutionalised. In reflecting on this Harrison, (2005) remarked:

Current thinking in relation to gender and music appears to be almost entirely focussed on and driven by a feminist perspective. There is no denying the contribution of feminist thought to awareness-raising of gender issues, nor is there any denial of the need for girls to be encouraged to engage in music of all styles and for the music of women to receive higher status in the musical canon (p. 123).

One of the most widely recognized sources on feminism, feminist research, and gender research, is the Lamb, Dolloff, and Howe chapter in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (2002). A critical analysis undertaken by Adler and Harrison (2004) reveals that the content and structure of Lamb, Dolloff, and Howe (2002) demonstrate the subordinate place of gender studies to feminist studies, and the

resulting invisibility of male gender studies within gender studies. The term "feminist," attached to words such as "theory," "studies," and "education," dominates the chapter, while the term "gender" takes a decidedly secondary place. Adler and Harrison (2004) further assert that feminist studies and gender studies have, as their central focus, the interests of girls and women.

Technically, gender studies should include any studies of gender, including studies of femininity, masculinity and male gender issues; but in practice, male gender studies remain outside of gender studies because they do not focus on the experiences of girls and women (p. 274).

The use of the term "masculinity studies" is as isolating as studies in femininity and still fails to acknowledge the fluid nature of gender. A postmodern view recognizes that a continuum of gender exists, and that all individuals experience and exhibit aspects of both masculinity and femininity.

So the nomenclature and practice of feminist studies, gender, and masculinity studies all fail to recognize the need for equitable understandings. Furthermore, they leave no place for the study of male-centred issues—whether they are concerned with male participation, male-based research, male responses to feminism, femininity in males, and so on. Koza (1994) spoke of the disregard for feminism as a legitimate movement in these terms:

When marginalized groups are brought to the table, they may not understand the rules or they may think the rules are irrelevant; they may want to change the rules that do not serve them well. They may ignore table talk and instead bring up subjects that are not to be discussed in polite company. They may say things that people don't want to hear, upsetting and disturbing things, and sometimes they have no manners at all (p. 61).

A similar statement could be justified in examining males' involvement in music. Discussion of any male gender issues in their own right has become politically incorrect. While feminists continue to prioritize the needs of girls in education and making invisible the needs of boys, there is also a lack of recognition for girls' successes in

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music and education. The idea of girls as victims and as passive recipients of mistreatment by males in music, education, and in life is perpetuated.

Are feminist studies, gender studies, and male-gender studies separate subjects worthy of their own brands of critical thinking? Because both feminist studies and male gender studies examine issues of gender in context, they follow the same type of critical thinking in which procrastination takes charge.

Bring on Tomorrow

A broader, postfeminist construct is required for examining issues of gender in music and general education. The term *critical genderist thinking and action* describes the process of examining issues of gender across the entire gender spectrum. It allows for the examination of the experiences of individuals or groups while still valuing and understanding that those experiences do not negate the experiences of other individuals or groups. In addition, it illuminates the interconnectedness of differing experiences. The adoption of this principle as the central procedural tool of GRIME would facilitate interaction and cooperation among gender researchers of both genders. A significant aspect of the construct is that of *action*. An excellent philosophical framework means nothing if there is a continual delay until solutions are considered. A framework that involves critical thinking in gender studies that is neutral, and allows a process of relearning, recritiquing, and reevaluating needs to be enacted in experiences of music for males and females.

We Can Never Go Back To Before

This way of examining gender respects the gains of the past, but moves forward to the future. This is a new way of thinking and acting. It is time to put aside these differences and to claim Gender Research in Music Education for what it is: a research agenda representing a broader view than the current *leading* thinkers are advocating. The word "gender" needs to be reclaimed to represent a study of the involvement and roles of women and men in music. *Critical genderist thinking and action* can reclaim the gender agenda for the benefit of males and females without discarding the gains of feminism, at the same time adopting a viewpoint that reflects on and challenges the pure study of males and females, maleness and femaleness, masculinity and femininity, and other so-called binaries.

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Author's Note

The author would also like to acknowledge the composers of the songs used to subtitle this paper:

- Flaherty, S and Aherns, L: "Journey to the Past" from *Anastasia*
- Flaherty, S and Aherns, L: "Back to Before" from *Ragtime*
- Idle, E. and Du Prez, J: "I'm all alone" from *Spamalot*
- Margoshes, S and Levy, J: "Bring on Tomorrow" from *Fame, The musical*