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## **Solo, Multitrack, Mute? Producing and Performing (Gender) in a Popular Music Classroom**

By

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### **Abstract**

*This study applies secondary analysis to amplify the voices, perspectives, and experiences of young women in a high school songwriting and technology course along with related research to address the production and performance of music and gendered identities and implications for popular music pedagogy. While each participant had idiosyncratic experiences and perspectives, several common themes emerged in relation to gender. Each young woman participant negotiated and had varied perspectives on collaborating, compromising, and accommodating for others on the final project. Participants identified and discussed issues of control in relation to technology and intersections between gender in the music course and society, however, had differing perspectives on these issues with implications for curriculum and pedagogy. Informed by findings, analysis, and related scholarship I propose four foci with potential for future research and praxis: broadening beyond gendered norms, goals of popular music programs, uncomfortable conversations, and popular music programs as springboards and hubs.*

**Keywords:** curriculum, gender, music education, pedagogy, popular music, production, technology

A growing body of music education research focusing on popular music and related engagement is exciting and helpful for advancing praxis. Given that the development of research and practice related to popular music is at a somewhat early stage in U.S. K-12 and higher education settings, music educators might be proactive in addressing issues of gender to avoid how music education has historically marginalized the voices and perspectives of women. By learning from and building upon a strong foundation of music education research that addresses gender issues, music educators might advance an inclusive approach to addressing popular music in K-12 music programs. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of how gender issues might impact and inform music teaching and learning, particularly in the context of programs that incorporate popular music and related engagement. This study draws upon young women's voices, perspectives, and experiences as well as related research to address the production and performance of music and gendered identities (Abramo, 2011; Butler, 1990; Farrugia & Swiss, 2008; Lamb, 1993; McCarthy, 1999; McClary, 1991). By addressing gender explicitly, this study might inform how music educators approach the integration of popular music in schools.

### **Gender, Popular Music, and Music Education**

Popular music and its practices are rife with gendered codes and norms (Bayton, 1997; Leonard, 2007). Leonard (2007) demonstrated how historical perspectives of rock music marginalize women, naturalizing it as a male domain. Women are often further marginalized from popular music practice by being held to higher expectations than their male peers and face difficulty accessing informal male-focused networks and friendship groups that contribute to learning how to perform and produce popular music (Bayton, 1997; Carson, Lewis, & Shaw, 2004; Farrugia, 2010). Such inequities extend into aspects of technology, live sound, and production.

Leonard (2007) argued that recording and production studios are culturally constructed as male contexts and, if not outright hostile to women, frame their engagement within a particular gendered context. Sandstrom (2000) linked the male dominated field of mix engineering to issues of power and the unwillingness of many male mix engineers to share power with women. Others argue that women often feel uncomfortable with or unprepared for production processes (Farrugia & Swiss, 2008; Olson as cited in Massey, 2009). Sandstrom (2000), however, argued that some women seek out related information and educational opportunities. Given the paucity of school music programs that provide students opportunities to work with popular music, technology, live sound, and production, music education may be complicit in these inequities.

While research demonstrates how young people's engagement in rock bands or other types of popular music ensembles contributes to their identity construction (Abramo, 2011; Bennett, 2000; Cohen, 2001; Davis, 2005; Fornas, 1990; Fornas, Lindberg, & Sernhede, 1995; McGillen & McMillan, 2005), few studies focus on intersections between gender, identity, and students' engagement with popular music in school contexts. Abramo's (2011) research of gender and popular music practices in a high school music program identified differences in the ways male and female participants communicated and created popular music. He argued that these differences often led to tension in mixed gender groups. Abramo suggested that music pedagogy, particularly in terms of instrumental music education, aligns more closely with the boys' preferred rehearsal strategies than the girls'.

The integration of music technology may also occur within male gendered norms. Several researchers have found that young women disliked or felt alienated by music technology (Armstrong, 2001; Caputo, 1993-1994; Comber, Hargreaves, & Colley, 1993; Pegley, 2006), though Comber, Hargreaves, and Colley (1993) suggested that after working through their discomfort, female students approach technology with similar enthusiasm as their male peers.

Additional research is necessary to address students' experiences engaging with both popular music practices and technology in relation to gender.

Given the history and ongoing process of marginalizing or excluding women, girls, their perspectives, and accounts of gendered experience from music education (Green, 1997, 2002; Jorgensen, 2003; Lamb, 1993; McCarthy, 1999; Morton, 1994; O'Neill, 1997; O'Toole, 1994) along with heteronormative discourses that impact students' and teachers' school music experience (Bergonzi, 2009; Gould, 2007, 2009, 2010), educators ought to avoid perpetuating unjust gendered and heterosexual norms in popular music classrooms. McCarthy (1999) suggested that "studies of classroom discourse are valuable in pointing toward the gender ideologies that underlie pedagogy and form the gendered meanings that inhere in classroom practice" (p. 121). This study considers such discourse in the context of a high school songwriting and production class to inform development of comprehensive and inclusive popular music pedagogies that account for young people's nuanced and gendered experiences.

### **Method**

This study addresses the research question: What are female students' experiences with and perspectives in a high school songwriting and technology course? To address issues of gender explicitly, I applied a process of secondary analysis to reframe data and findings from my dissertation (Tobias, 2010), a case study investigating how students engaged with and what they learned in a US Southwestern high school songwriting and technology course (STC). The STC, taught by Ron Witwill, consisted of demonstrations and projects focusing on creating, recording, and producing songs with an emphasis on related skills and techniques. In the original study, observations, interviews, and multimedia recordings throughout the STC's penultimate and final project generated data. The final project consisted of students creating, performing, recording, and producing original popular music, which they shared with each other in a final presentation.

Data were analyzed recursively throughout the original study to identify emerging themes that addressed the following research questions 1) In what ways are students engaging with music in the STC? 2) What are students learning through their engagement in the STC? 3) How do students reflect on their work and participation both during class and outside of the immediate STC context? 4) How does the music teacher describe and reflect upon students' engagement and learning in the STC? 5) In what ways do students' musical engagement in the STC intersect with their musical engagement outside of school? While female students' voices were included among the participants and several findings regarding gender related to the aforementioned original research questions, related discussion and analysis were beyond the scope of the dissertation.

In a two-paragraph section titled "Issues of gender" I articulated:

While this study did not focus on issues of gender, the implications of mixed and single gender groups and power dynamics were not insignificant or irrelevant. Considerations of participants' processes and decisions were not, for instance, framed in terms of gender in this study. This may have elided dynamics at play throughout the STC particularly in terms of production issues. When one can literally have her or his voice distorted, muted, or even deleted, issues of power and gender have tremendous implications in the ways students engage and enact polysemous identities. The application of a post-structuralist feminist lens to students' engagement with and creation of popular music (Abramo, 2009) was beyond the scope of this document. This analytical approach, however, is important to recognize, interpret, and better understand the discourses at play in environments such as the STC and make them what Abramo (2009) refers to as a "discourse-aware" classroom (p. 323).

The perspectives of Liz, Alice, Sara, and Esmerelda pertaining to the STC, gendered societal norms, and the exclusionary nature of the music industry, challenge music educators in determining how to address contemporary societal norms and biases as they intersect with students' experiences in their classrooms. Developing a deeper understanding of these issues might assist music educators to acknowledge and address gendered discourses present in the intersection of students' musical engagement in and out of music classes. Incorporating post-structuralist feminist and related frameworks in the context of students' creation of popular music (Abramo, 2009) might be used to reinterpret data and findings and provide deeper analyses of gendered discourses at play when students record, produce, and mix music. (Tobias, 2010, p. 544-545)

In this article I seek to amplify the experiences and perspectives of female students whose voices are sometimes lost in the mix or muted in research involving popular music in music education.

Secondary analysis is "the use of an existing data set to find answers to a research question that differs from the question asked in the original or primary study" (Hinds, Vogel, Clarke-

Steffen, 1997, p. 408). Secondary analysis often refers to a process in which researchers analyze data generated by other researchers. Databases typically archive such data. However, secondary analysis can also involve a researcher re-analyzing data she or he generated in a study to address emergent concepts or themes that the primary analysis did not address or to investigate additional questions to those explored in the original study (Heaton, 2008; Hinds, Vogel, Clarke-Steffen, 1997; Thorne, 1994). Heaton (2008) explained that one approach to secondary analysis is to engage in supplementary analysis, “a more in-depth analysis of an emergent issue or aspect of the data that was not addressed or was only partially addressed in the primary study” (p. 39).

Given that the original study partially addressed issues of gender, this article re-situates data and findings by providing a more focused and in-depth analysis of gender issues through supplementary analysis. This process required mobilizing related literature and conceptual frameworks addressing issues of gender that were not included in the dissertation. In addition to re-examining and re-situating findings, I re-analyzed transcripts of video data, researcher memos, field notes, and in-depth reports of participants’ daily involvement in the STC throughout the duration of the original study with a focus on issues of gender.

I first discuss several idiosyncratic experiences and perspectives of four female participants in the STC: Liz, who worked with a male student named Marcus for the final project, and Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice all of whom worked independently. I then discuss themes that emerged from both the original study and through supplementary analysis when focusing on issues of gender. I end with implications and suggestions for addressing gender explicitly in the context of popular music pedagogy and curricula.

## Findings and Discussion: Idiosyncratic Experiences

### Liz (and Marcus)

**Compromise in the songwriting process.** Describing her work with Marcus, Liz expressed that collaborating requires accepting others' musical ideas even when they were not necessarily part of one's own musical vision. As she reflected:

I hadn't written with other people other than my band before that so it was definitely an interesting experience. I'm not used to writing with other people because from when I was 12 to 16 I had written everything myself. So that was a big change. . . . Because [other people] have different ideas than you and trying to get people to accept that you want to make it your song, like it's whatever. I usually start with the lyrics and so I'm like this is my story and then they want to contribute to that. Then you're like ehhhhhhhhhh. But you have to be accepting of what other people think. Getting other views is definitely a good idea because you can't come up with everything obviously.

Marcus and Liz understood that making accommodations, compromising, and being open to others' ideas were important aspects of creating music with others. They described these moments of give and take as balancing their own musical vision and that of their collaborator's. Marcus and Liz saw the benefits of collaborating outweighing compromises and accommodations to create something not necessarily possible working on their own.

**EQ'ing the voice.** While a significant amount of time was spent creating music with voice and guitar away from a computer, Marcus and Liz's production process with Pro Tools<sup>1</sup> played a critical role in shaping the final version of their song *Here*. Dissatisfied with the sound of Liz's recorded vocals, they decided to mix and EQ<sup>2</sup> the voice during the recording process. Liz explained, "I like to put the EQ on after so that we can sound as natural as possible and then at the end we can fix all of those little things that sound weird."

Liz touched on how technology and processing can change the "natural" sound of one's voice. Marcus and Liz EQ'd Liz's voice to adjust the frequencies that they felt sounded too deep for the song. As Liz described:

The tone sounded too deepish so we put an EQ on it. There was one called female vox and one that was male vox and it turned out that the male vox actually worked better. I think because for some reason my mic was picking up the bass too much and I'm more

bassier. So we put that on it and that helped and made it sound more clear I guess, instead of muddy.

Marcus's use of Pro Tools to filter out the lower frequencies of Liz's voice and apply plugin presets drew upon technical knowledge and aural preferences. Issues of gendered social norms related to vocal characteristics were also likely at play. As Marcus articulated, "The preset I chose for her in the beginning was female because she is a female so her voice is more treble, but you can hear it's really low." Rather than simply applying the preset with a name that seemingly best fit the situation, in this case one labeled "female," Marcus applied varied vocal treatments before choosing the best sounding solution. Though he took the lead in deciding on the best strategy for EQ'ing Liz's voice, the process was collaborative in nature. As Marcus explained, "It was kind of like she's listening, I'm listening. I said it and she was like 'OK, how does it sound.' I'll play it back and she's like 'yeah, that sounds good' and so we do it." Together, Marcus and Liz reached consensus as to the best sounding equalization and mix, which included using a preset called "solidify male vocals."

### **Esmerelda (The Thunder)**

**A Metal drummer as a singer songwriter.** Esmerelda regularly asserted that she was a drummer, not a guitarist or singer. Statements such as "I'm way better at drums" and "I hate the guitar," were typical of her discourse with me and her peers throughout the study. As she explained:

The drummers that I listen to are 250 beats per minute sixteenth notes on their feet and on their hands. They're not even moving and it's unbelievable to me how athletic these people are, running on the treadmills every day. That's why I have to weightlift, you know. It's so much more athleticism and technique.

Verbally, Esmerelda projected a persona of a tough and athletic Metal drummer. However, the musical discourse she embodied during the project, through her acoustic guitar, vocals, and sound of her song *Rage and Love*, inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*, fit into a singer songwriter genre.

While the contrast between her metal drumming and singer songwriting might raise questions about Esmerelda's construction and presentation of self and musical preferences, her lack of access to musicians with whom she could form a Metal band during her section of the STC must contextualize it. Asserting her desire to play in a band, Esmerelda explained that her foray into an Acoustic Singer Songwriter genre was due to the circumstances of her class not having other students who could play Metal music rather than a desire to explore this musical genre. Additionally, she wanted to succeed in the final project.

**Positioning oneself in reference to others.** Esmerelda compared her situation of expanding beyond playing in a Metal band to Mark, Bert, and Jebidiah a group of young men who played Metal, in a different STC period. Highlighting a rivalry between herself and Bert the band's drummer she insisted, "I don't think he can even compare to how I am by myself. Give him a guitar and make him play!"

The following episode which occurred one day after school exemplified Esmerelda's performance and production of a particular gendered identity in relation to that of Bert's. As several students packed their instruments and equipment Esmerelda informed me that Bert had left cymbals on a drum set in the other room. As I mentioned this to Bert, Esmerelda interjected "yeah the little pussy bell of yours." While Esmerelda could have said, "yeah your splash cymbal" she deliberately and publicly chose a charged phrase shot through with gendered and sexualized meaning. Within the gendered matrix and heterosexual hegemony that operate in schools and society (Butler, 1990, 1993; Gould, 2007), Esmerelda simultaneously positioned herself and her rival Bert in antithesis to normative social and musical scripts. In this context through feminizing both Bert and his cymbal, Esmerelda explicitly communicated that it was she who was the "real" metal drummer.

## Sara

**Learning and requesting assistance.** Sara worked alone for the first time during the final project having decided to stop working with a peer who seemed perpetually confused during a prior project. Working independently, Sara treated the final project as an opportunity to learn aspects of the software and hardware that she did not understand. Sara explained:

I find that if I work alone it would force me to really learn how to use this stuff and to know what kind of cable I need. Because I've been relying on [my former partner] really heavily for that kind of thing. Now I definitely feel like I know how to use Pro Tools [and all that stuff] more.

Sara was not averse to working with others for STC projects, as she explained, "I actually would also like to have the opportunity to work in a group but I don't have really close relationships in my class with people." That Sara was one of a few freshmen in the class and did not enroll until halfway through the year may have exacerbated the situation. Sara requested assistance from peers when she felt she could not move forward due to technological issues but sought Ron's assistance only once in the project when her MIDI<sup>3</sup> keyboard would not work.

**Adjusting expectations and emotional attachments.** Sara tried to be pragmatic about what she could accomplish on her own for the final project but had high hopes for her music. This was partly due to having a sonic ideal in mind that she wished to attain by the project's completion. Reflecting on challenges she faced during the project and the need to adjust her expectations she commented:

I think for me it was almost the emotional attachment that I had to the song. I mean, how I wanted it to be perfect. The truth of the matter is I'm not that great of a musician. Like, I don't play piano. So, when I'm expecting my piano part to be perfect, that's just not going to happen. So, I think having realistic expectations for me was really difficult. Also, the vocals. I feel like vocals are really a personal thing. . . I feel like it really reflects on me if I miss a note or my voice wavers or something. So, I think I'm more picky about vocals. I dealt with that the last time by recording once and being done. Then I just moved it around and listened to it and was just like that's how it's going to be. So, I think that that was one of the most difficult things for me.

Sara's coming to terms with what she could accomplish for the final project due to the time frame and her abilities was difficult given her desire to realize her music. This might explain her

attitude at the end of the project, when she expressed that she was done with the song and “emotionally uninvolved,” though not completely satisfied with the final outcome.

### **Alice**

**Being in control.** Alice’s insistence on having control over every aspect of the creative process was infused across her STC work. This resulted in Alice realizing her artistic vision without compromise, but forced her to perform multiple roles without the assistance of another set of hands or ears. When working on her project, Alice was completely focused on creating her music. With her headphones on and the computer in front of her, Alice was in a way shut off from her surroundings. Other than helping people around her, she worked independently and did not look to others for advice or feedback. Alice engaged in a largely internalized process mediated through her use of the computer, Pro Tools, and the MIDI keyboard controller.

**“Branching out from my usual style.”** The opportunity to pursue her musical vision without having to compromise for others allowed Alice to explore an aesthetic direction, new to her creative process. She described this as “branching out from my usual style.” The final project extended the trajectory of Alice’s songwriting experiences and deviated from the Industrial-influenced songs she created earlier in the year. Discussing her final project Alice expounded:

I’m not always a fan of the typical verse chorus verse chorus bridge chorus structure. For the last [project], I did an epic long ostentatious pair of solo bridge things instead of keeping it perfectly structured. My final, is almost completely piano based, which I normally don’t do. I just put a few sparse electronic things and some drums, it’s not as thick and heavy and complex as most of [my music].

Working solo allowed Alice to concentrate on developing as a musician, drawing upon her personal life experiences, and exploring a musical realm with potential to inform her future work.

### **Findings and Discussion: Common Themes**

Having outlined some of Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice’s idiosyncratic experiences, I now discuss issues of technology, control, and intersections of the STC and society in relation to participants’ performance and production of music and gender.

## **Collaboration, Accommodation, Trust, and Issues of Control**

Each young woman participant had to consider her willingness to collaborate, compromise, and accommodate for others on the final project. While Liz worked closely with Marcus, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice decided against collaborating and expressed varying levels of willingness to accommodate for others. Issues of control, negotiation, trust, and the degree of connection to their own music were common themes across their experiences and decisions, however nuanced differences also factored in their engagement. Participants had a high degree of autonomy and control over their work. This included Liz, who had to compromise with Marcus. This was a critical element of their process and might be seen in contrast to the experience of young women who often feel silenced and ignored when working in groups, particularly mixed gender groups as seen in the research of Abramo (2011).

The ability to choose whether to work with others and with whom was critical to the participants' autonomy. The rationales for working alone included participants wanting full control and responsibility over their music, not wanting to compromise their aesthetic visions or working styles, to more general issues of trust. Kaschub (1999) found similar reasoning among several sixth grade students wishing to compose alone. As Esmerelda explained, "It was more of the fact that it's really hard for me to trust people [Sara nodded and laughed]. Not like really, really trust them but I can't be dependent on them." Esmerelda and Sara expressed the tension between their desire to play in bands and decision to work independently in this interview excerpt:

Esmerelda - It's like you know we're doing acoustic-y kind of stuff but it's like we want to play with bands. So this is kind of like we're doing it for our own self fulfillment but you know (looks at Sara) I don't mean to speak for you, you know to get this project done.

Sara - Yeah, I don't have the skills too [to play in a band].

Esmerelda - You know we don't want to depend on other people. We have trust issues [smiles and she and Sara laugh].

Sara - Yeah.

Alice also raised the issue of trust in terms of knowing she could rely on technology but not necessarily on her peers, as she explained:

I'm a little more comfortable with [performing with a recording] just because even though technology isn't terribly reliable I can fix that if I need to and I don't have to worry about my band members doing what they need to be doing. 'Oh, can I trust that. . . they know how to do that or this? Are they going to remember their part?'

Diamond (2005) posited that the issue of trust may be gendered concerning women artists and producers in choosing with whom they work. Diamond suggested that for women, choosing collaborators "is as significant as the more tangible techniques of production" (p. 125). While trust was a factor in Alice's decision to work alone, her core rationale seemed related to issues of sonic control. That engagement in the STC afforded these young women control over their musical decisions, however, is significant and may have contributed to their enjoyment of the course. While they never used terms such as empowerment, their experiences seem to echo McGillen's (2004) finding that female students felt a sense of empowerment when they had the ability to control aspects of their music and engagement in a performance context.

### **Using Technology and Issues of Control**

All four young women demonstrated interest in using technology to forward their music. While educators ought to heed Caputo's (1993-1994) warning that technology can emphasize control over creativity and "make invisible the differences among the students that we teach" (p. 88), the STC's openness to student process resulted in participants using technology in varied ways that balanced control with creativity. Maintaining control over their musical and technological processes was key to young women having control over their selves and bodies, particularly given the masculinist context surrounding computer use (Armstrong, 2001). Music educators might consider how certain technologies and processes may privilege ways of knowing or being in the world that draw upon dominant perspectives or experiences of men.

Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice had control over their processes to varying degrees and used technology in diverse ways to create, record, and produce their music and one might say

themselves. Liz, who had the most experience with technology relied on Pro Tools as a critical aspect of creating her music during the recording and mixing phase. Her work with Marcus made this a somewhat smooth process. Esmerelda, while often frustrated by the technology, used it to improve her recorded parts and viewed being knowledgeable about technology for recording, producing, and live sound as critical for her future in the music industry. Sara, approached learning and using the technology as a challenge and appreciated the opportunity to use the available resources in the STC. Alice relied on the technology to create her music throughout the entire process appreciating how it afforded her control and the ability to experiment with sound.

Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice's autonomy may have factored in the contrast between their experiences with those of participants in prior studies who had negative reactions to music technology (Armstrong, 2001; Caputo, 1993-1994; Pegley, 2006). While sometimes immersed in and frustrated with the technology, they were present in the process. This is critical given the ways that repetitive use of technology over time may contribute to how one comes to know and understand oneself or the world, which might include developing gendered identities. Music educators might consider students' experiences in such processes holistically; their musical engagement may contribute to their development or formulation as people, including how they experience or understand gendered norms. As Butler (1993) argued, their bodies matter.

Butler's (1993) project to reformulate the materiality of body provided music educators with a complex yet potentially fruitful way to better understand the roles that technology and musical engagement play in young women's construction of gendered identities. Gould (2007) suggested that music educators consider how performative acts related to music and music education contribute to subject formation and musician-ness (p. 208). The following two themes of five outlined by Butler (1993) offered points for consideration when developing appropriate pedagogy and curriculum that take gender and embodiment into account:

- (1) the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamics of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects and

- (2) the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains. (p. 2)

Music software, hardware, instruments, and equipment carry with them and exist within regulatory norms, power structures, and discourses that shape students' music, musicking, and classroom experience. How might this factor in students' embodied experiences with popular music and technology in music programs? While music educators ought to trouble unreflective applications of technology in music programs, Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice demonstrated varied ways of engaging with software, hardware, and recording equipment that call for nuanced perspectives that avoid essentializing music technology and its integration in music classrooms. For instance, the STC focused primarily on the use of Pro Tools, an industry-standard digital audio workstation that offers particular affordances and constraints. The class environment prepared students for potential futures in the music industry by disciplining them in and through the use of this specific software and the ways it mediates musical engagement (Gould, 2007; O'Toole, 1994).

Liz, Esmerelda and Alice, expressed that using Pro Tools along with live sound and recording equipment helped them develop the ability to have control of their music and a degree of independence not necessarily available to musicians reliant on sound engineers, should they enter the music industry (Leonard, 2007). As Sandstrom (2000) argued "knowledge of the technology allows women the opportunity to participate where they would normally be excluded" (p. 301). However, just as the normative codes and power structures in place throughout society contribute to gender performativity so too might the use of music software, hardware, and equipment. Whether controlling the sound and balance of one's voice in the mix or having it controlled or balanced by a peer, students' use of technology in music programs may impact their musical, social, and personal understanding and development. Thus, music educators might consider how bodies matter (Butler, 1993) in school-based popular music courses that involve technology and how specific technology might contribute to how bodies matter.

## **Intersection of Gender in School, the STC, and Society.**

Participants consistently referred to their STC experiences as mirroring “the real world,” a phrase Ron Witwill often used when speaking with his students. An unintended parallel to the real world of the music industry was the small number of young women enrolled in both STC periods. Liz felt that the course enrollment did not reflect the number of young women in the school who wrote songs or were interested in doing so. She saw this as both a reflection of society and a result of the STC’s focus on equipment and techniques as opposed to songwriting, a perspective highlighted in literature focusing on music education and technology (Armstrong, 2001; Caputo, 1993-1994). Liz explained the disproportionate representation of young women in the STC as follows:

Women aren’t in the industry very much and there aren’t a lot of girls in this class either, which I think there should totally be. . . I’m sure there are girls here [in school] that write songs and they just aren’t in the Songwriting class because that’s not what girls are supposed to do.

Liz also described the curriculum and environment of the course as gendered:

I think Mr. Wittwill kind of portrays it as a guy’s class. I’m not saying that he does it on purpose but subconsciously. . . there’s kind of a connection between guys and what they got going on and there’s a connection in this class that feels like a big family sort of thing and girls might not feel welcome into that because it’s mostly guys.

Liz’s description of a big family of mostly guys with girls potentially feeling unwelcome echoes the feelings of many women in the music industry (Bayton, 1997; Farrugia, 2010; Leonard, 2007). Liz’s potential solution involved the addition of a songwriting course separate from technology due to what she perceived as gendered differences between songwriting and production, as she expressed:

Having it being just a songwriting class, that might draw them in more because it’s more artistic versus the technical part. Guys feel more like hands on, like they’re doing something, you know, technical. More guyish-like. Songwriting is more artistic and more girly I guess. . . I know a lot of girl songwriters here that aren’t in Songwriting class and I don’t know why they don’t really get into it. Just ‘cause they’re more girly I guess. I don’t know how you could appeal to that. That’s the problem with the music industry, it doesn’t appeal to the girly girls. And if they are girly girls they end up like Britney Spears.

Liz saw a gendered dichotomy between songwriting as girly and production and live sound as guy-ish. The STC as it was constructed, focused primarily on technical production aspects of the creative process. Ron's decision to not address aesthetic aspects of songwriting in order to provide students autonomy in their music was, from Liz's perspective, alienating a segment of the school population. The STC, according to Liz, thus replicated the music industry.

Liz in particular used gendered dichotomies to position herself differently than the young men in the class. For instance Liz reflected normative tropes in her perception that girls "feel more" and "jump right in to writing songs because they do poetry and artsy stuff" whereas guys just like to joke around. Alice, Sara, and Esmerelda did not share Liz's binary perspective of artistic/female and technical/male, however. The notion of girly-girls who do "poetry and artsy stuff" was a construction that Esmerelda continuously worked against through projecting an identity as a Metal drummer. Sara, Esmerelda, and Alice all agreed that the imbalanced representation of women in the STC was merely reflective of society. Esmerelda asserted, "there's no need for more girls. I don't know if [the STC] would benefit from more girls." Sara compared the STC to choir and said, "choir attracts girls and this is like guys cause it's cool to play guitar and bass and it's not for girls as much." Sara drew upon gendered discourses (Abramo, 2011; Farrugia & Swiss, 2008) to describe aspects of the music program articulating, "I think that this is a program that attracts guys because it's. . . about bands and writing music and that's what guys are more into. Girls are like, 'I want to join choir and sing and wear pretty dresses.'"

Making the point that the lack of girls in the course was a reflection of society rather than an exclusionary aspect of the STC, Sara explained:

I think that's a reflection of how our culture is towards more contemporary music. If you look at really popular bands not very many have a woman as their front of the poppy stuff. . . . I think that's a reflection of our culture more than it is a reflection of this program and I think if you try to get more girls into it, it would almost compromise the program.

Esmerelda and Alice concurred with this perspective. As Esmerelda asserted, “it’s just how it is. . . Us being in the class. We don’t care.” Alice, Esmerelda, and Liz all planned to continue with their music professionally and both Liz and Esmerelda acknowledged that gender factored into their thinking about future music industry careers. Liz felt compelled to excel in the industry since she perceived a lack of women represented in popular music and Esmerelda recognized she would be one of few women drummers in an even smaller community of Metal music.

Though Liz, Esmerelda, Sarah, and Alice embodied experiences as producers, performers, and songwriters in the STC, they positioned themselves as outliers to society and employed discourse that reified the notion of the music industry as a man’s world. Furthermore, they articulated resistance to changing the educational context that mirrored the industry. As young women questioning changes that could potentially make the program more inclusive of other young women, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice present a paradox for music educators. All four participants exemplify the need for music educators to approach developing curriculum and pedagogy with a nuanced understanding of young women’s diverse perspectives.

### **Implications: Toward Inclusive and Equitable Popular Music Pedagogies**

Informed by the experiences and perspectives of this study’s participants and related literature, I suggest the following four foci with potential for future research and praxis: broadening beyond gendered norms, goals of popular music programs, uncomfortable conversations, and popular music programs as springboards and hubs.

#### **Broadening Beyond Gendered Norms**

Ron Wittwill’s observation that the STC was open to all students since they were free to write, create, and express themselves as they wish reflected his genuine belief that the class was not gendered. However, this common perspective does not account for the gendered and heterosexual hegemonic or social norms present in society (Butler, 1993) and at work in popular

music performing and studio work (Bradby, 1993; Leonard, 2007; Sandstrom, 2000). Gendered norms related to popular music in music education are further perpetuated by the overwhelming focus of music education research, dialogue, curriculum, resources, and pedagogies on the experiences of young and older-than-young White men.

Broadening such discourse requires more than solely adding women's voices and experiences to existing curriculum and structures, a method sometimes referred to as an add-and-stir approach (Caputo, 1993-1994; Morton, 1994). As Bilger (2011) wrote in reference to a women in rock and roll exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, "We know women rock, tell us something new." However in the STC, Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice saw themselves as outliers to what was otherwise something that guys do. As Sara asserted, "it's just the way it is."

This is a failure of music education. Music educators might consider how curricula may deny young people knowledge of a rich living history and current landscape of women in all aspects of the music industry. As Morton (1994) suggested adding women, their music, and practices to curricula must be accompanied by critical analyses of the systems that perpetuate their exclusion and gendered norms. Music educators and their students might engage in such critical analysis. For example, after taking the first step of critically analyzing "history of rock" courses and popular music resources marketed to music educators, teachers might work along with their students conducting the same analyses in classroom contexts. Feigenbaum (2005) described how feminist critics work toward "re-constructing the rock review" and highlight misogynistic journalistic conventions "in order to expose and attack them" (p. 53). Why not include young women and men in such work? Curriculum ought to integrate investigating coverage of women artists in media texts and power analyses of the music industry.

### **Goals of Popular Music Programs**

Curricular priorities and goals can potentially marginalize or exclude particular ways of knowing and being (Citron, 1993; Lamb, 1993). The STC's curriculum, primarily focused on

helping students develop the skills needed to enter music industry careers focused on technology, recording and production techniques, and live sound overshadowing or excluding more expressive aspects of songwriting and the creative process. Armstrong's (2001) finding that girls felt strongly about a connection between their music, "their own experiences and identities," and self-expression (p. 40) seems connected to Liz's desire for a songwriting class that addressed these issues. Students rarely discussed, at least formally, issues of creative process, expression, meaning, or the interaction of these aspects of their engagement. Popular music classrooms that focus on technology, skills, and techniques may thus mute dialogue addressing gendered meanings and identities.

By addressing both intersonic (sound-focused) and delineated (social-cultural-focused) meanings of students' and popular artists' music (Green, 2002, 2005) music educators might foster an environment where students can develop multiple ways of understanding music along with their own preferences and perspectives. In this way decisions such as how one processes another's voice or balances a mix can be framed in ways that encourage students' nuanced thinking about the intersections between technical skills, aesthetic preferences, social and musical meanings. Music educators might help students think through situations such as Marcus and Liz's vocal recording and production process while considering how digital technologies represent and mediate our understanding of female voices and bodies (Bradby, 1993; Butler, 1990, 1993).

Raising and connecting such issues to students' music, allows educators and students to consider how musical decisions, sound, and technology make bodies legible and illegible or how bodies and gender matter through performing and producing music (Butler, 1993; Gould, 2007). This requires music educators to think broadly about music theory, analysis, and history. It is also an area where educators, musicologists, music theorists, and others might find potential for productive interdisciplinary work (Abramo, 2010; Tobias & Barrett, 2010). Liz's comments

about emphasis of technology and techniques over songwriting might encourage music educators to consider what is missing from courses that focus on particular aspects of musical engagement. While in some cases it may be appropriate to have separate technology- and songwriting-focused classes, music educators might consider hybrid and comprehensive approaches to developing curricular structures that allow for a mix of musical engagement and inquiry.

### **Uncomfortable Conversations**

Addressing gendered performance and production of music in a popular music-focused class raises the possibility that music educators and/or students might engage in and facilitate uncomfortable conversations. Issues of privacy and gendered space (Björck, 2013) further complicate the consideration of such conversations. In the STC, Alice kept the meaning of her music private and was hesitant to share her lyrics. While Esmerelda was willing to discuss *Rage and Love* with me and how her music reflected and expressed the meaning she made from *Romeo and Juliet* and curiosity of related topics; it is unclear how she might have addressed such a discussion with her teacher or peers, whether one on one, in a small group, or as a class.

Björck (2013) discussed the importance of “a room of one’s own” or “space in which one can *avoid* being seen and heard” to be able to focus on the music in some women’s popular music making (p. 24). Removing oneself from the public sphere in this way avoids being cast under an objectifying or othering gaze (p. 23-24). This could be critical in the popular music classroom, particularly if discussion of one’s music is seen as unwanted analysis that puts the student and her music under a teacher’s or peer’s gaze. However, Liz’s desire for a songwriting class suggests that some students would welcome music education that acknowledges and addresses issues of music and personal expression.

What aspects of human experience can and should be included or allowed in a popular music classroom? Should the contemporary music educator address issues of love, fear, rage, sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender in students’ music and musicking? How might one

facilitate such dialogue? How do we address students' music that reifies gendered norms or casts young women or men as sexual objects? How might music educators address students' musical expression of sexuality, desire (Gould, 2009), or other topics that are typically considered off limits?

Abramo (2010) suggested that music classrooms might look to how language arts classes explore novels addressing controversial issues for guidance. Kaschub's (2009) research of a high school music class that included the creation of original music to express issues of social justice ranging from animal rights to child abuse, offered the potential of students keeping journals and exploring their expressive potential as creators. Whether made explicit or not, students and teachers often know the boundaries and their locations in terms of what should or can be expressed through students' music and discourse. Popular music pedagogues ought to reflect on the tensions inherent in these boundaries, how they move or dissolve, protect and constrain, and the ramifications of their reinforcement or crossing. Additional research is needed within music education as to if, when, and how music educators might address the visceral, how bodies matter, and topics that are typically taboo in student's original music, as little concrete guidance exists for everyday practice.

### **Popular Music Programs as Springboards and Hubs**

Bayton (1997), in discussing the importance of informal friendship groups within which rock music-making occurs explained that "teenage women are not often welcomed in male music-making cliques and thus do not generally get the insider information and tips which are routinely traded within them" (p. 40). Carson, Lewis, and Shaw (2004) also pointed to the importance that women performers had on other women musicians' lives. Music educators could help their students transcend isolation by treating classrooms as hubs and springboards for students to gain awareness of and connect with others beyond their immediate environment. This may mean providing access to media that highlight women's voices and perspectives such as

*Tom Tom* magazine, which celebrates women percussionists, or social networks that can connect young women with peers and mentors across the world (Farrugia, 2004).

While none of the participants explicitly discussed the desire to connect with others or resources related to gender in popular music, it is possible that some might have appreciated or gained from such information. Given Esmerelda's and Liz's desire to be a part of the music industry and acknowledgement of the role that gender might play in that process, they might have benefitted from speaking with women in the music industry or learning from their perspectives. Similarly, Liz, Esmerelda, Sara, and Alice's perspective that they were outliers to what was otherwise something that guys do might have changed if they had opportunities to connect with larger communities of women involved with popular music and production.

Even music educators who do not address issues of gender directly with their students can nurture environments where students have opportunities to engage with gender-related issues and meaning making on their own or with their peers. Music teachers might also point their students to national organizations such as Musicians for Equal Opportunities for Women (MEOW, n.d.) or Women in Music (n.d.) and local organizations such as Women's Audio Mission (n.d.) or Chicks with Picks (n.d.). Similarly, music educators might support female students' interests by providing information regarding where they might flourish and form communities outside of the male gaze (Björck, 2013) sometimes unavailable in their school environments such as Girls Rock Camps (Girls Rock Camps Alliance, n.d.). Music educators also ought to be cognizant that some young women may not be interested or comfortable with women-focused environments. Alice's, Sarah's, and Esmerelda's concern that a more gender-balanced space might compromise the STC complicate how music educators might support young women interested in engaging with popular music. Additional dialogue and research are needed to help music educators make informed decisions related to these issues.

## **Conclusion**

In this study the STC served as a microcosm of society and a place where participants produced and performed their music, perspectives, and understanding of what it means to be a musician. The STC also provided a place for students to negotiate and enact gendered identities mediated through their engagement with popular music and related practices. For popular music pedagogy and curricula to evolve, music educators ought to develop the awareness and pedagogy to recognize and in some cases address gender performativity and its relation to musicking in their classrooms. Doing so without essentializing or constraining the meanings that young people make through their musical engagement is no easy task. At a minimum it means observing the discourses at play and considering what content and whose voices we solo and mute in our programs (Lamb, 1993; McCarthy, 1999). With that knowledge music educators can develop popular music programs and pedagogies that balance and equalize our classrooms while working toward a more equitable mix of musical engagement for our students and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Pro Tools: A software program referred to as a digital audio workstation (DAW) that allows for music to be created, recorded, edited, and mixed. It can record MIDI and digital audio, both represented visually. MIDI information can also be represented in standard notation if desired.

<sup>2</sup> EQ: To equalize audio, which in the context of the STC, meant to adjust the frequency spectrum through a graphic user interface in Pro Tools.

<sup>3</sup> MIDI Keyboard Controller: A musical instrument digital interface (MIDI) device that uses the metaphor of a piano keyboard but sends digital information to a computer to communicate information such as pitch, duration, velocity, and other assigned values that can then be translated into sound.