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What Boys and Girls Learn Through Song: A Content Analysis of Gender Traits and Sex Bias in Two Choral Classroom Textbooks

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Abstract

In an effort to further the understanding of gender traits or sexual bias that high school-aged choral music students might be exposed to in their curricular materials, two choral textbooks *Choral Connections Beginning Level 1 Treble Voices* and *Choral Connections Beginning Level 1 Tenor-Bass Voices* published by Glencoe MacGraw-Hill in 1999 were analyzed using a modified Bem Sex Role Inventory Model. The results found that significantly more songs were about men than were about women. The songs selected for the treble voices were more androgynous, while the secular music presented to the boys was significantly more masculine in the traits: assertive, masculine/heterosexual, adventurous, and self-reliant. Gender stereotypes were also found in the volumes. Lastly, women and minority groups were presented less often than were males and the white majority.

Introduction

Since the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex against students and any employee of a school receiving federal financial assistance, school districts have become increasingly aware of the need for gender equity in K-12 classrooms. Though Title IX did not directly address instructional materials, some states, like Washington, have since adopted laws which require elimination of sex bias in classroom textbooks (WAC 392-190-055 of the Washington State Equal Education Opportunity Statutes). A major problem is that school districts do not have the financial resources to order special texts from publishing corporations; they simply have to choose what appears to be the most gender equitable text in print. Sadly, what typically is purchased for instructional materials are filled with numerous examples of covert bias and symbolic, or stereotypical, representations of males and females. When children read and sing from these materials social values and attitudes are transmitted. Boys and girls can quickly learn to believe misrepresentations of what it means to be masculine and feminine in American society (Sadker and Sadker 1982, 1994).

An Overview of Gender Content Analysis in Educational Research

Within the larger field of education, a small number of researchers have examined types of sex bias in classroom reading materials through content analysis. An early investigation by Fraser and Walker (1972) studied four first- and second-grade basal reading series published between 1962 and 1970. They found that there were more male characters than female characters represented in stories and that males had limited gender roles. Notable was that within some stories there were male characters who “actively avoided being associated with a girl-type activity (p. 747).” In a larger study, Britton and Lumpkin (1977) analyzed more than 16,000 reading selections in 49 textbook series published between the years 1958-1976. Their findings were similar to those of Fraser and Walker in that major male characters greatly outnumbered female characters. In addition, they found that there were few ethnic minorities represented, and that males had greater career roles than females. Lastly, they reported that there had been a non-significant change in examples of sexual bias between texts that were printed before and

following the announcement of gender equity publication guidelines by major textbook publishing houses between the years 1972-1976.

During the 1980s and early 1990s research in sexual bias continued, though it was not financially supported through grants nor was it politically encouraged by the Reagan-Bush administration (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Scott (1981), using a modified classification scheme of Britton and Lumpkin, analyzed two publishers' 1979 basal reading series for grades 1st-6th. She found that the majority of the story characters exhibited traditional gender traits and that 76% of these characters were males. Having observed that American publishers and school districts were not conforming to the spirit of Title IX, Sadker and Sadker published their Sex equity handbook for schools (1982). In it, they noted six forms of sexual bias in curricular materials: invisibility of women or minorities, stereotyping of traditional roles or group attributes, imbalance or selectivity of an issue, unrealistic portrayals of our history and our contemporary life, fragmentation or isolation of issues related to women and minorities from the main body of the text, and linguistic bias such as masculine terms and pronouns and other sexist language. In their follow-up book on sex bias in schools, entitled *Failing at Fairness* (1994), the Sadkers found that most publishers had forgotten about their equity guidelines of the 1970s. Furthermore, the researchers found that some revised editions of university literature texts were surprisingly less gender fair than the former, pre-Title IX, editions (p. 175).

By the late 1990s attention was once again focused on concerns of gender traits in elementary reading materials. Witt (1996) analyzed sixteen basal readers from six publishers to determine gender traits of the main characters of the stories. Using a measurement based on the Sandra Bem Sex-Role Inventory (1974), which labeled a total of sixty masculine, feminine, and gender neutral characteristics, Witt found that male characters in all six publishers' readers were more masculine than feminine while five out of six of the same publishers' female characters were androgynous. This finding was contrary to Bem's belief that boys and girls should have an equal distribution of masculine and feminine traits (1972). Seeing that boys were perhaps more likely than girls to be the target of gender stereotyping in texts, Evans and Davis (2000) conducted a content analysis of 97 fiction stories found in 1st, 3rd, and 5th grade literature textbooks published by Macmillan McGraw Hill and Silver Burdett Ginn. Using a modified Bem inventory of eight masculine and eight feminine gender traits, they found that males were often stereotypically portrayed in the stories and that in the older, 3rd and 5th grade readers, males were shown as aggressive, argumentative, competitive, and less emotionally expressive than were females (p. 265).

Gender Content Analysis in Music Education

Few music educators have focused their research on gender issues and fewer still have analyzed sex bias in printed materials, such as textbooks (Trollinger 1993/1994). In fact, music education research that examined sex bias first appeared in the 1990s, two decades after the passage of Title IX. For her University of Minnesota PhD dissertation, Julia Koza (1990) located, indexed, described, and analyzed music related nonfiction articles in the *Godey's Lady's Book* published between the years 1830-1898. She found that there were sex stereotypes written about music

education that still existed in contemporary American society, such as the idea that music was a feminine subject. Koza (1992, 1994a) furthered her research in gender issues by analyzing 3,500 illustrations in nine sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teacher's editions of music textbooks. She reported that no published work had approached the 50% equity mark in musical illustrations. Rather, 68.9% of music related figures were male and 89% of all musician portraits were male. Furthermore, many of the illustrations reinforced music-related sex biased stereotypes.

McWilliams (2003), like Koza, conducted research on a music periodical in an effort to address questions of gender equity. Examining picture content on the covers, articles, and advertisements for twenty-four issues from August 2000 through July 2002 in the *Instrumentalist* magazine, McWilliams reported that in 368 images 91% of the subjects pictured were male. Images of female instrumental directors were also found to be rare, which was contrary to the reality of the number of women within the field.

Koza (1993/1994) argued against the notion that gender research was a fad, and she encouraged more involvement in sex-biased music research in higher education. During the same time, she (1993/1994, 1994b) analyzed 32 choral method books, articles, editions, and reports on choral methods materials published between the years 1982-1992 for use at the tertiary level. Koza found that the repertoire was dominated by the majority white, male culture. Also, she reported that some of the lyrics were gendered, sexist, and misogynistic. Finally, she found that these choral method materials assumed heterosexual orientation as a component of masculinity and failed to address the reality that some males might be fearful of joining school choirs due to a stigma of being labeled "gay."

Another content analysis of sex bias in college music textbooks was conducted by Humphreys (1997). He analyzed two well-regarded music education history texts: *History of Public School Music in the United States* (Birge, 1937) and *A History of American Music Education* (Mark & Gary, 1992) for representations of sex, geographical location/region of the country, and time period. His findings revealed that women in both texts were mentioned less than 32% of the time, even though they had historically been the majority of American music teachers. Perhaps most upsetting was that the newer volume, by Mark and Gary, had nearly 10% fewer remarks about women in music education than did Birge's text. This finding further supported the Sadker's (1994) claim that gender equity had not been realized at any level of American education during the 1990s.

Humphreys and Stauffer (2000) investigated editorial board appointments of the *Journal of Research in Music Education* (JRME) from 1953 to 1992. The results of their research found that male appointees outnumbered females 86% to 14%. However, women had more articles published in the journal from 1973 to 1992, during a time when the number of women serving on the editorial board for the JRME increased. Humphreys and Stauffer noted, however, that women had to "overachieve" to earn recognition within the field.

While research has begun to reveal inequalities in a variety of music education materials, to date there has been no published research on content analysis of gender traits or sex bias in high school choral music textbooks. Students who read and sing lyrics are repeatedly exposed to

written and aural messages about what it means to be masculine and feminine. Similarly, normalized social values have largely gone unchallenged by music educators (Koza, 1993/1994; Russell, 1997; Sapon-Shevin, 1999). Given the current laws which demand sexual equality in education and given the recent attention to multiculturalism and diversity within classrooms, it seems that the need to closely examine what American children are reading and singing is of great importance to music teachers.

Method

In an attempt to examine what types of gender traits or sexual bias entering high school choral students might be exposed to in their curricular materials, two teachers' choral textbooks were selected: Choral Connections Beginning Level 1 Treble Voices and Choral Connections Beginning Level 1 Tenor-Bass Voices published by Glencoe MacGraw-Hill in 1999. These two texts offered separate performance editions for girls and boys of the same age and musical ability. This allowed a unique opportunity to study what types of information boys were presented in their songs in comparison to what girls learned in their text published by the same press.

Using a modified Bem Sex Role Inventory Model with definitions utilized in a gender study by Evans and Davies (2000), a total of 20 masculine and feminine traits were selected for this study (Table 1). All songs in both texts (N=53) were analyzed for occurrences of these traits as exhibited by the main character(s) in the lyrics. Multiple occurrences of the same trait in the same song were not counted more than one time. The songs were coded as either sacred (n=24) or secular (n=29). Furthermore, the lyrics were analyzed for the number of male main characters in comparison to female main characters represented in the songs. Any noticeable occurrences of linguistic bias and stereotypes found in the songs were recorded. Lastly, the texts were examined for invisibility of women and minorities within the texts. 10% of the songs were randomly selected and were coded by an independent researcher. Inter-rater reliability was found to be $r=.90$.

Table 1. Definitions of Personality Traits Used in the Choral Connections Series

<u>Personality Traits</u>	Definition
<i>Masculine Traits</i>	
Adventurous	Actively exploring the environment, real or Imagined
Aggressive	Actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; hostile
Ambitious	Eager to achieve something. Seeks material possessions or career success
Argumentative	Belligerent: verbally disagreeable with another person
Assertive	Taking charge of a situation, making plans and issuing instructions
Competitive	Challenging to win over another physically or intellectually

Decisive	Quick to consider options/situations and make up mind
Masculine	Is heterosexual in feelings toward females
Risk-taker	Willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal
Self-reliant	Can accomplish tasks or handle situations alone with confidence
<i>Feminine Traits</i>	
Affectionate	Openly expressing warm feelings: hugging, touching
Emotionally Expressive	Allowing feelings to show, including temper tantrums, crying, or laughing
Feminine	Is heterosexual in feelings toward males
Impetuous	Quick to act without thinking of the consequences
Nurturing	Actively caring and aiding another's development, be it physically or emotionally – especially towards children
Panicky	Reacting to a situation with hysteria: crying, shouting
Passive	Following another's lead and being active in a situation
Shy	Readily frightened, bashfully reserved
Tender	Handling someone with gentle sensitivity and consideration
Understanding	Being able to see and comprehend a situation from another person's perspective; showing empathy. Singing in a foreign language applies to this trait

Results

Fifty-three songs were analyzed for masculine and feminine gender traits of the lyric's main characters (N=55). Of these characters twenty-one were male, four were female, and thirty were sexually unidentifiable. Significantly more of the songs were about men than were about women. The content analysis of the gender traits of these characters found that in the Treble edition there was a non-significant difference between the number of masculine and feminine traits in either the sacred or secular songs. While the Tenor-Bass sacred songs were evenly masculine and feminine, the secular songs were significantly more masculine than feminine in gender role traits (Table 2). Furthermore, the traits were analyzed for frequency in the Treble edition and the Tenor-Bass edition (Table 3). The results show that the leading masculine traits were assertive, masculine (male heterosexuality), adventurous, and self-reliant. The feminine traits were affectionate, nurturing, tender, and understanding.

Table 2. Treble edition Tenor-Bass edition Masculine Feminine Masculine Feminine

	Treble Edition		Tenor-Bass Edition	
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine

Sacred	16 (55.17%)	13 (44.83%)	12 (50%)	12 (50%)
Secular	12 (40%)	18 (60%)	37 (69.81%)	16 (30,19%)
Total	27 (46.55%)	31 (53.45%)	49 (69.64%)	28 (36.36%)

Table 3. Masculine Traits Treble Edition Tenor-Bass edition Total

Masculine Traits	Treble Edition	Tenor-Bass edition	Total
Assertive	13	12	25
Masculine	3	10	13
Adventurous	5	7	12
Self-reliant	0	8	8
Risk-taker	2	4	6
Ambitious	0	5	5
Aggressive	2	1	3
Competitive	0	2	2
Decisive	2	0	2
Argumentative	0	0	0
Feminine Traits			
Affectionate	5	8	13
Nurturing	6	5	11
Tender	6	5	11
Understanding	6	4	10
Passive	2	3	5
Emotional	3	1	4
Feminine	2	1	3
Panicky	0	1	1
Shy	1	0	1
Impetuous	0	0	0

The songs were analyzed for linguistic bias and for stereotypical references. Overwhelmingly, terms of endearment were used for female characters such as “little sweetheart,” “honey lamb,” “gentle dame,” and “dainty nymphs.” No such terms were found directed towards males. Other forms of stereotypes labeled all women as being “pretty,” “beautiful,” “faithful,” and “fair.” Examples of linguistic bias repeatedly named women “lady,” “lass,” “lassie,” “maid,” “maiden,” and “muse.” Labels for men were “lad” and “master.” Furthermore, male characters in the songs

often had stereotypical careers such as “band leader,” “cowboy,” “farmer,” “king,” “sailor,” and “shepherd.” Women, however, were not portrayed in the songs as having careers away from those associated with domestic work, including “mother,” “seamstress,” and “servant.” Not surprisingly, all references to a divine male “God,” “Lord,” and “King” appeared more than any other biased term.

Finally, the two choral editions were analyzed for the presence of women and minority groups located in the “Making Historical Connections” portions of the texts, which were designed to introduce basic music history knowledge to high school singers. There were a total of 113 references to names of artists, musicians, and writers from the Renaissance through the late twentieth century. Of these, male (n=95) significantly outnumbered females (n=18). Most surprising was that there was mention of only two women composers, Clara Schumann and Linda Spevacek, while there was mention of 43 male composers. Likewise, all listening selections (n=20) were compositions written by white males. Ethnic groups were given significantly less attention than were Euro-Americans with a total of 12 multicultural songs: African-American (n=3), French-Canadian (n=1), German (n=2), Greek (n=1), Italian (n=1), Mexican (n=1), Sephardic Jewish (n=1), Spanish (n=1) and “World” (n=1). Notable omissions were from Scandinavia, Russia, Asia, the South Pacific, Australia, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East. While some of these societies might not have strong choral traditions, they certainly have a wealth of folk-song repertoire that could be addressed in the choral editions. Lastly, eight of the multicultural songs were found in the Treble edition of Choral Connections while only four were presented in the Tenor-Bass edition.

Discussion

The results of this study support previous educational research findings that male characters dominate female characters in K-12 texts. This invisibility of women in curricular materials perpetuates the belief that men are more important in society than are women either in fictional or non-fictional form. The presence of such blatant omission of women from modern textbooks is in violation with the publisher’s own gender-equity statements, is a violation of some states regulations for gender-equitable curricular materials, and is contrary to the spirit of Title IX. The sad truth is that girls are not receiving fair treatment in American education, even in academic areas where they tend to be in the majority, such as in the visual and performing arts.

Girls are exposed to stereotypes and linguistic bias in the choir texts. While boys can be portrayed as having careers in songs, girls are seen as domestic workers and mothers. Furthermore, girls are labeled with terms of endearment while boys are not. Such terms as “sweet,” “pretty,” and “fair” reinforce beliefs that girls are only valuable for their appearance and for exhibiting a non-aggressive personality. Choir teachers should remind their students that many of these terms were historically used in folk-song literature, but that these students should not be bound to these gender traits in modern society.

Boys are also subjected to unfair bias in these songs. The results of this study show that secular songs intended for males are significantly more masculine in gender traits. Such sexual bias

socializes men to believe, unfairly, that they must not exhibit any feminine trait. This idea, however, is contrary to the psychological argument that it is normal for boys and girls to exhibit an equal number of feminine and masculine characteristics in their personality (Bem, 1974; Stimpson, 1974). When high school males read and sing out of these texts they learn that they must be assertive, non-emotional (contrary to the philosophical principles of expressive music making) and that they must be heterosexual.

The findings of this content analysis support previous research that suggests that minorities are underrepresented in curricular materials. The American public school system is as diverse as it has ever been in its history, yet school textbooks are not meeting the needs of the growing non-majority populations. It is hoped that teachers who use this textbook – and others like it – will supplement their choral curriculum with a variety of multicultural music.

Choir teachers need to be aware of issues regarding gender and sex bias in the growing number of classroom textbooks that are being published. Too often teachers fail to recognize the hidden messages that they are transmitting to their pupils on a daily basis (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). The fact that four out of the five authors who wrote this Choral Connections series were women serves as a clear reminder that gender inequalities and stereotypes can be easily and unknowingly perpetuated by either sex. Future research is needed to examine all current school choir textbooks for gender issues. In addition, publishers should be made aware of their responsibility to make their textbooks more equitable for both sexes and for our diverse, multicultural classrooms.

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