

Gender Differences in the Popular Music Compositions of High School Students

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple case study aimed at investigating how gender influenced songs composed by students using popular music processes. High school students simultaneously composed and rehearsed original songs in groups and then were interviewed to understand their perspectives. Student artifacts and audio recordings of rehearsals and interviews were openly coded for emerging themes of gender. The boys' and girls' compositions differed with regard to lyrics, as well as the forms and timbres used. Because students did not work in a cultural vacuum, when they borrowed musical styles from their "outside" musical worlds, they also borrowed the social rules that shaped those styles, and gender was one of these. Educators should begin to look at students' compositions not solely as products of musical knowledge, but as products of cultural knowledge expressed musically, as well as transform popular music pedagogy research and practice by teaching how popular music influences and is influenced by society.

In recent years, researchers have suggested that popular music processes—learning by ear, peer learning, and repertoire-based, as opposed to exercise-based, learning—can contribute positively to formal music instruction (Allsup, 2003; Green, 2002, 2008; Rodriguez, 2004). In a separate area of research, educators have taken an interest in creativity and student compositions (Campbell, 1998; Hickey, 1997; Webster, 1990). Absent from this research, however, is an investigation of the characteristics of the compositions created by students using popular music processes. What are the topics of the lyrics and how do students write about them? What types of forms, structures, and tonalities do students use to create their compositions? What roles do students' gendered identities play in their compositional choices?

Focusing on process, researchers of popular music pedagogy defined popular music production as a communal activity where students simultaneously compose and rehearse in small groups (Allsup, 2003; Green, 2002). In this process, musicians conversed by playing musical material called "licks" rather than communicating through verbal dialogue. There was

some evidence, however, that this was a process preferred by males, and females had a propensity for longer episodes of verbal dialogue (Abramo, 2009). This mirrored research on children's play, which suggested that boys chose nonlinguistic ways to communicate while girls spent most of their playtime engaged in verbal communication (Benenson, Del Bianco, Philippoussis, & Apostoleris, 1997; Maccoby, 1998; Messner, 1997; Pollack, 2000).

Green (2008) used the communal popular music process to make a distinction between, and educate about, what she called, the "inter-sonic" and "delineated" meanings of music. The inter-sonic meanings were the so-called "real" meanings of the work, derived from the elements of music, like rhythm, pitch, form, and timbre. The delineated meanings were those cultural meanings arbitrarily assigned to the inter-sonic meanings. She argued that using these processes in the classroom, and applying them to a variety of music, helped students begin to understand the difference between inter-sonic and delineated meanings and became better consumers and producers of music.

Contrary to this, some musicologists have suggested that the inter-sonic and delineated meanings were not as separate as they appear, and that musicians used the elements in political ways (Cook, & Tsou, 1994; McClary, 1991; Moisala & Diamond, 2000; Rycenga, 2006). McClary (1991), for instance, argued that notions of gender had an influence on form and key relations. She contended that Western musics, both popular and classical, created tonal constructions that, with its use of primary and secondary key centers, created gender-bias binaries. A primary key center was considered masculine and the secondary key was feminine, and in order for a piece to be complete tonally, the protagonist, "masculine" key must subjugate and annihilate the antagonistic, "feminine" key (McClary, 1991, pp. 155-156). McClary argued that some female popular musicians, like Madonna, thwarted this expectation and created forms where the keys resolve more equally.

McClary (1991) and similar analyses (Cook, & Tsou, 1994; Moisala & Diamond, 2000; Rycenga, 2006) provided a framework to examine music sociologically. Rather than the formalist view that the

musical elements are completely abstract and apolitical, it is possible to conceive of the elements as a product of social phenomena. Musicians' choices, therefore, are influenced by so-called "extra-musical" influences like gendered politics. But McClary's analyses have received criticism. Richards (1998), for example, found little use in generalized binaries in music but instead thought of music as a phenomenon "which is remade with divergent meanings in its inscription within particular discourses" (p. 172). This means that music does not essentially embody these gendered meanings but that they are inscribed onto the music through the use of analytical lenses like the ones employed by McClary. DeNora (2000) wrote that the actual composition contributed little to the meaning of a performance: "Music takes its meanings from many things apart from its intertextual relationship with other musical works ... equally important to the matter of music social's 'effects' is the question of how musical materials relate to extra-musical matters" (p. 61). Dibben (2002) wrote that DeNora (2000) and others' critique of McClary did "not dismiss the analyses provided by musicologists as irrelevant to gender, but to recognize that they are readings made from a particular subject position, with political purposes in mind" (p. 130). Thus, viewing the elements of music as political allowed the investigation of students' compositions as influenced by gender. But from McClary (1991), Richards (1998), DeNora (2000), and Dibben (2002), it must be acknowledged that these analyses were themselves situated within a particular "political" act. This was not a political act that claimed *the* truth of these compositions, but was, instead, an interpretation that rendered a *kind* of truth that brought meaning to the practices and processes that created that work. This framework, adopted for this study, allowed the question: how, if at all, did boys' and girls' lyrics and elements of music differ in their original compositions? In other words, did this view of the elements reveal differences in the boys' and girls' music and lyrics?

Methodology

To study this question, a qualitative multiple case study (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2003) was created to collect students' compositions as well as their perceptions of their work. Seventeen students (ages 15-18) formed five mixed-gendered and single-gendered rock bands to compose songs collectively using popular music processes. This included the self-named "Joey and the Pussycats" (4 females), the Princes of Zanzibar (2 females), the groups that I have named here the "Boy Group" (4 boys), the "Ska Group" (3 females, 1 male) and the "Mixed Group" (2 females, 2 males). The participants simultaneously composed and

rehearsed their compositions in groups from October 2007 to February 2008 and performed the songs on a concert. The rehearsal/compositional sessions were conducted after school, were not associated with any official classes at the school, lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours, and were fifteen in total. Individual interviews were conducted in March 2008 to understand their perspectives on their compositions and their composing processes.

All data collection took place in a public high school in the Northeast of the United States that the participants attended. The school was located in an ethnically-diverse, small city with a population of 26,067. The population was 56.8% White, non-Hispanic, 25.1%; Hispanic, 15.1%; Black; and 9.3% other races, and this general population was reflected in the population of the high school. The city thrived during the beginning and middle of the twentieth century when a railroad-based economy provided factory jobs, but as the economy shifted at the end of the century the factories closed and the unemployment rate grew. The high school in this city has many of the problems that affect urban schools in the United States; the school has been identified by the state as "A School In Need of Improvement" because it has not made quotas in the number of students passing standardized tests, and in 2007 the graduation rate was 54%, the lowest in the county. Despite this, the school offered several courses in music, including two concert bands, five choruses, music theory, and a guitar class.

Data were obtained by collecting student-created artifacts and creating audio recordings. The researcher-created audiotapes were the only recordings made and the students did not make their own recordings, although students frequently referenced the tapes to listen to their progress or to retrieve ideas from previous rehearsals. All of the physical artifacts collected were created by the participants, which included their notation of lyrics and music. Notation was broadly construed to mean any way of symbolically representing their compositions, and therefore included non-standard musical notation. Because participants composed by ear without the aid of standard notation, recordings of the rehearsal/compositional sessions and the final compositions as performed on the concert were made to document the process as well as the sonic qualities of the final compositions. Audio recordings of the final interviews were also made to document their reflections. In these interviews, students were asked to comment on recordings of their compositions and rehearsals and to explain their compositional processes. Sometimes this included the use of audio recordings as prompts for dialogues or researcher-generated questions. These interviews were "unstructured"

(Fontana & Frey, 2005), meaning they did not follow a set protocol or question set. Instead, it allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions, to mold the discussion to each individual participant, and to move in unanticipated directions.

These artifacts and transcriptions were openly coded (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998) for emerging themes related to gender, meaning that the lyrics were analyzed for what topics participants wrote about, how they wrote them, and their relation to gender without the use of preexisting categories. When themes of gender were identified in the lyrics, the non-lyrical aspects of that song were also analyzed to see if gender could be interpreted in the song. All protocols received IRB approval including the use of pseudonyms. Of the songs produced, two songs—*Dot, Dot, Dot*, by the all-female “Joey and the Pussycats,” and *Jam #12*, by the all male group—are presented here because they most clearly show issues of gender through music. The recordings of these songs are available for listening. “Joey and the Pussycats” consisted of Eleanor on guitar and voice, Rigby on bass guitar, Laverne on guitar and singing, and Shirley on drums. The participants choose these pseudonyms. Besides Shirley who was not enrolled in any music classes, all participants in this group were enrolled in both band and chorus and were active in the school musical theater productions. The “Boy Group” consisted of Fred on guitar, Rob on bass, Armando on vocals, and Tim on drums. Like the girls, all of the members except one, Fred, were enrolled in music classes at the high school. Although the processes the students used—including playing by ear and peer learning—were observed, a detailed description is beyond the scope of this paper. If readers are interested in an in-depth discussion of these students’ processes, they may consult my dissertation (Abramo, 2009).

Findings

Composing Femininity: Dot, Dot, Dot

From the beginning of the formation of “Joey and the Pussycats” Rigby had ideas for the lyrics and music for a composition, that she titled *Dot, Dot, Dot*, that she wanted to write with the band. How the girls used the lyrics, tempo, arrangement, and form to create binaries in the music and then thwarted those binaries provided insights into gender in popular music. Rigby’s lyrics were ostensibly about a heterosexual relationship written from a personal perspective. Rigby composed the words for the song before the study began, and brought them to the second rehearsal:

Verse 1

Oh Baby don’t bother ‘cause I don’t want to know
And Honey you are crazy if you think I’ll let you go

I just heard “Sweetie you’re not...”
A-a-a-nything can come after the dot dot dot

Chorus

Flipped the mattress but the sheets weren’t changed
Feels like something’s different but it’s still all the same
You think that I’m dramatic but I blow you away
They saw that we won’t make it when we’re really ok.
We might be kind of pointless but you sure mean a lot
But when I’m in your arms you know that I’m all you got.

Verse 2

And Baby don’t bother ‘cause you’re making a fuss
And Honey you’re crazy if you think it’s about trust
I just heard “Sweetie you’re not...”
A-a-a-nything can come after the dot dot dot

Chorus

Chorsey breaky thing (*sic*)
Keep it Keep it only to find that when your
Secrets Secrets sound just like mine, you’ll see the
Regret Regret in the whole time to show I
Mean it Mean it that we’ll be fine (email from Rigby,
November 23, 2007).

Click for audio of *Dot, Dot, Dot*: 

During one of the rehearsals, Rigby took time to make sure the other members of the band understood her intent:

Laverne: Anything can come after the “dot, dot, dot.”

Rigby: You’re not pretty, you’re not funny...

Eleanor: Sweetie you’re not, “insert word here.”

Laverne: (The narrator of the song) doesn’t want to hear it ‘cause anything can come after (it)... Sweetie you’re not “dot, dot, dot.” Anything can come after the “dot, dot, dot” (AR, November 5, 2007).

The girls’ explanation can be summarized like this: The narrator of the song is on the phone with her boyfriend. They have a fight, and in the middle of this fight the boyfriend says “Sweetie you’re not ...” and the phone cuts out. Nervousness ensues because the girl does not know what words follow the ellipse. His words could be anything, “Sweetie you’re not what I’m looking for,” sweetie “you’re not pretty,” “there could be a lot of adjectives that could go there.” Therefore, “Anything can come after the dot, dot, dot.”

The uncertainty of the meaning of the boyfriend’s comments created anxiety. In her interview, Rigby described the lyrics as “scary:”

The “oh baby don’t bother cause I don’t want to know,” is like, “I don’t know why you want to leave right now, I don’t know why you hate me, I don’t know why you think there’s something wrong.” Because I don’t want to know ‘cause it’s kind of scary (AR, March 3, 2008).

The “scariness” of Rigby’s lyrics were based on the fear of losing her romantic partner because of a lack on her part, and the song took on the perspective of the “nervousness” or “scariness” of a breakup of a relationship.

While the verses were tense because of this ambiguity, the chorus’ lyrics were a change in quality. I also asked Rigby to explain how and why she composed the words of the chorus:

“I flipped the mattress and the sheets weren’t changed” [has] a symbolic meaning, because there’s no change. But I guess basically the whole song has that relative meaning. Like, “I flipped the mattress but the sheets weren’t changed,” like “I changed something but really there wasn’t any [change].” “It feels like something’s different but it’s still all the same.” Get it? (AR, March 3, 2008).

The lyrics of the chorus changed the tone and questioned the feelings of the verse. The nervousness and scariness of change precipitated by a breakup or fight was balanced with a view that although it felt like the relationship has changed, everything has, in fact, remained the same. Therefore, the song created a dualism between “that which is felt” in the scariness of the verse, and “that which is in reality” in the mattress metaphor of the chorus. In other words, although it *feels* like something is different in the relationship, in “*reality*” all is still the same. To further this dualism, the lyrics of the chorus, in contrast to the verse, seemed more optimistic and confident. “You think that I’m dramatic but I’ll blow you away.” In the lyrics, a tension was created between the verse and chorus. The fear and doubt of the impending breakup in the verse was pitted against the chorus, where uncertainty of whether the perception of this situation was accurate and a more confident view of the relationship was presented.

The non-lyrical aspects of the song accompanied this binary in the lyrics. The tension caused by the alternative views in the lyrics of the verse and chorus was echoed by the tempo of the song. The girls, at first, had a difficult time reconciling the tempi of the verse and the chorus, wanting to play the chorus faster than the verse. Finally, they solved this problem by playing the chorus in a double-time feel.

The double-time feel of the chorus, while conforming to the same tempo, created a contrast between the verse and chorus and the feel of the lyrics of those sections.

Both Eleanor and Laverne sang on the song, and where they sang separately and together further exaggerated this tension in the arrangement of the vocals. In the verse Eleanor and Laverne traded phrases; Eleanor sang the first phrase: “Oh baby don’t bother/‘cause I don’t want to know,” and Laverne answered it by singing the second phrase, “And Honey you are crazy/if you think I’ll let you go.” They then sang in harmony of thirds for the third phrase, “I just heard ‘sweetie you’re not’/A-a-anything can come after.” Finally, they completed this phrase by alternating “dot, dot, dot;” Eleanor sang the first and third “dot” and Laverne sang the second “dot.” In contrast to the separate singing in the verse, in the chorus, Eleanor and Laverne sang simultaneously by sometimes singing in unison and other times in thirds. The result was a contrast and a binary in the vocal arrangement between the verse and the chorus; the singers who remained separate in the verse, came together in the chorus.

The song concluded with a Final section, which Rigby called the “Chorsey breaky thing.” This section extended the theme of coming together and complicated the binary between the verse and chorus. After proceeding through the verse and chorus twice, in the Final section the instruments dropped out and Eleanor sang a new melody to the words “keep it, keep it only to find, (etc.),” accompanied by handclaps by the entire band. From this point on, the piece built as other parts were layered on top of one another. Laverne was the second to enter, singing the melody and words of the chorus, followed the bass, acoustic guitar—playing the chords of the chorus—and finally the drums—playing the double-time feel of the chorus. The result was that after the girls layered all the instruments, the new material of the Final section and the chorus were simultaneously performed.

To foreshadow this layering and coming together of the material, Rigby, who played bass in the band, included one final integrative detail. During the seventh rehearsal, she came up with the idea of to make Eleanor’s vocal part in the Final section the bass part of the chorus as a way to anticipate the Final section. She sat in rehearsal and tried to transcribe Eleanor’s vocal part on the bass and after several minutes, she was able to play it. She suspected that this might work as a bass line in the chorus because at the end of the song the chorus and the Final section were combined. After she tried the new bass line with the chorus she concluded that she liked the result and made it a permanent part of the composition. Table 1 summarized how the girls used some of the elements of music to create a tightly-

constructed, integrative composition that has a series of tensions built into it. The result of these unique aspects of this composition is that the girls created binaries in the composition, but then resolved these binaries in unconventional ways. In traditional song form the chorus is dominated by the verse. The song must end with chorus material and this concluding final material “get’s the last word” so to speak (McClary, 1991; Rycegna, 2006). Rigby and the other girls took great steps to minimize or eliminate this so-called “domination and subordination.” They introduced the final section, which was new material, at the end and combined it with the chorus. The abruptness of this introduction of this new section was minimized because the vocal part was foreshadowed in the bass

line during the chorus. From this perspective, the form of the piece was not hierarchical but integrative. The chorus did not subordinate the other material but they harmoniously coexisted. The combination of the chorus and final section helped ameliorate the hierarchical nature of form. But this theme of coming together was not exclusive to the form. As noted before, Eleanor and Laverne traded phrases in the verse only to sing in harmony during the chorus. At the end of the composition this theme of coming together was extended to the whole ensemble. Little by little—starting with voice, then adding the bass, guitar, and finally, drums to the ensemble—the theme of coming together was reemphasized and extended to include all players in the ensemble.

Table1
Form, Tempi and Arrangement of Dot, Dot, Dot

Form:	Introduction	Verse	Chorus	Verse	Chorus	Final section Chorus
Tempo:	Regular-time feel	Regular-time feel	Double-time feel	Regular-time feel	Double-time feel	Double-time feel
Vocal Arrangement:		Traded Phrases	Sang in unison and Harmony	Traded Phrases	Sang in unison and Harmony	Sang different Vocal parts polyphonically
Instrumental Arrangement:			Vocal Melody of the Final section used as the bassline		Vocal Melody of the Final section used as the bassline	Layering of the different parts
						Vocals
						Bass
						Guitar
						Drums

Composing Masculinity: Jam #12

In contrast to Joey and the Pussycats—with their song about relationships, and its coming together of musical material—the boys, with their composition *Jam #12*, wrote about governmental politics and kept a rigid form. The boys—Fred on guitar, Armando on vocals, Rob on bass, and Tim on drums—decided to write a song collectively and over the course of several

rehearsals, the composition grew to four minutes in length incorporating several different formal sections based on heavily distorted guitar licks and a virtuosic guitar solo.

Contrary to the girls, the instrumental music of *Jam #12* came first, followed by the lyrics. Rob, who wrote the verses, and Armando, who wrote the choruses, focused their lyrics on their perceived lack of

fairness in the 2008 presidential primary campaigns and debates.

Verse 1

Presidential race 2008,
Civilized culture and still the world is filled with hate.
Corporate sellouts, always promising change,
How much does it cost to buy a candidate?

Chorus

This can't go on any longer
It's our nation make it stronger.
The heart is as black as the money is green
Fighting wars for profit fueled by greed.

Verse 2

Major news stations, always they decide,
Who's in the spotlight and who's forced to hide.
The truest Americans, the honest candidates,
They ain't even allowed in the televised debates
(Combination of transcribed hand-written lyrics by Rob and Armando, February 13, 2008)

Click for audio of *Jam #12*: 

Verse 1 generically established a critical stance to the campaigns, and then shifted to a more pointed critique of corporate involvement in the funding of these campaigns. Verse 2 then criticized what they saw as the news media's biased coverage of candidates and lack of access to the debates. The chorus' lyrics were a shift in tone, calling for people to "make our country stronger." Like *Dot, Dot, Dot*, these lyrics have a dualism created by the verse and chorus. The verse was an airing of grievances against the election process—the role of money and corporations in campaigns, and the media's bias and influence over the exposure of the candidates. This was juxtaposed with the call to action of the chorus: "This is our nation, make it stronger." This dualism was then somewhat compromised by the following lines, "The heart is as black as the money is green/Fighting wars for profit fueled by greed," which sounded like continued grievances.

Both Rob and Armando wrote the lyrics from a distant perspective. By removing the subject, Rob wrote verses that were incomplete sentences: "Major news stations, always they decide." In this context, the patching of these fragmented phrases allowed Rob to create distance between himself and the text he created. The result was lyrics that circumvent the personal and felt experiences of the presidential race, and instead focused on global, grand explanations of that phenomenon. Armando, although using a subject, also circumvented the personal. Instead of writing "this is our nation, make it stronger," which called for collective revolution, he could have elected for the

more personal "it's my nation, I'll make it stronger." This contrasted *Dot, Dot, Dot*, where Rigby's lyrics conveyed a personal experience, which was written in the first person throughout the song where "us," referring to a dyad of a romantic relationship, and "I" served as the subject of many of the lines.

The non-lyrical aspects of the *Jam #12* also held some similarities and differences with *Dot, Dot, Dot*. Where the girls chose to use standard tuning for the guitars and bass in *Dot, Dot, Dot*, in *Jam #12*, the boys elected to use a lower tuning, known as the "drop D," to create a heavier sound. The key of the song, D minor, was urged on by this tuning; it allowed power-chords deep in the register of the guitar to be played with one finger. In addition, the tonic D5 chord (just the pitches D-A-D) could be played with open strings, again allowing for a full and heavy sound. To add to this heaviness, the boys also used distortion throughout the entire composition.

Like *Dot, Dot, Dot*, *Jam #12* called for two vocalists. In this case, Rob rapped the verses, and Armando sang the choruses. However, unlike *Dot, Dot, Dot*, these vocalists never performed simultaneously and the part could easily be performed by one vocalist. The part was divided up because it was decided that it would be easier for Rob—who wrote the rap lyrics—to rap the verses rather than teach it to Armando.

Compared to *Dot, Dot, Dot*'s unconventional formal structure, *Jam #12*'s form was more traditional in construction. Unlike the coming together of *Dot, Dot, Dot*, which integrated different parts of the song and made an effort at fluidity between the sections, *Jam #12*'s form was rigid, hierarchical, and compartmentalized. Table 2 shows the form of *Jam #12*. The form of this song was more conservative than the girls' composition. There was no coming together of instrumentation, no blurring of formal sections, no compromise of the hierarchical nature of form. Conversely, there was an *emphasis* on the hierarchical nature of form; the chorus, the formal section with the most heroic lyrics of the song, prevailed in the end.

Perhaps the most hierarchical aspect of this form was the use of the bridge-like section called the *breakdown*. The "breakdown" in heavy metal was a commonly used section in the middle of the composition where the tempo immediately slows down and gradually speeds back up to the original tempo while the guitarist plays a solo. While rehearsing, I asked the participants to explain breakdowns:

Armando: We'll *the breakdown is like the most rebellious part of the song*, it keeps going and going until it breaks out. That's when you're building up, where you're getting to the point of your song ... When you're

going to a breakdown you're building up and you're getting stronger and it just explodes to the point.

Fred: Yeah, breakdowns, especially for us, [the band I'm in outside of school], that's the point where we go nuts. Like our guitars are in the air. It just like, "Arr!" Well except of me I'm like "oh God!" (gesturing that he is playing fast). 'Cause both of our breakdowns have guitar solos. It kind of sucks 'cause I can't go crazy (AR, December 6, 2007).

By analyzing the participants' perspectives, it could be argued that the breakdown was a formal section that aided in a masculine display. According to Fred, the guitarist could show virtuosity through the guitar solo

while other members could "go nuts" by gesticulating violently and running around the stage. In addition, the musicians took control of the music through manipulation of the tempo. They seized the music, taking it from its unruly, fast tempo and forced it into its slower, heavier tempo. This stood as a musical metaphor for them to take control of their environment, and act like a heroic musician who took charge of his musical environment through manipulation, coercion, and submission of the tempo. So as in the lyrics, where there was a call for people to take the fate of the nation into their own hands and to "take charge," the musicians did this musically; they "take charge of the tempo," forcing it where they wanted it to go. This stood in stark contrast to the girls' assiduous work to make the verse and chorus conform to the same tempo by using a double-time feel.

Table 2
Form of Jam #12

Form	"Introduction" Lick	Verse	Chorus	Verse	Chorus	Breakdown	"Introduction" Lick	Chorus
	A	B	C	B	C	D	A	C
Singing	No Singing	(Rap)	(sung)	(Rap)	(sung)	guitar solo	No Singing	(sung)
Tempo	A tempo					Slower tempo that accelerates	A tempo	

If this section was a male display, then it was no surprise that Armando explained the breakdown as "the most rebellious part of the song." The breakdown, the formal section where the musicians "control the music"—where Fred displayed virtuosic technique through a solo and the band forced the tempo into different configurations—was referred to in terms of "rebellion." And the notion of rebellion as grand, overtly subversive, and utopian was masculinist in conception compared to Rigby's more modest lyrics that use the flipping of her bed mattress as a metaphor for gaining control over her environment. It should also not be a surprise that Armando described it in almost male orgasmic terms: "when you're going to a breakdown you're building up and you're getting stronger and it just explodes to the point."

Discussion

A comparison of *Dot, Dot, Dot* and *Jam #12* in Table 3 suggests that these two compositions hold similarities and differences. Why did the differences exist? Why did the boys choose to compose a heavily distorted song about grand revolution? Why did the girls prefer a milder song about relationships? The girls' *Dot, Dot, Dot*—with its integrated form, lyrics about personal relationships, standard tuning, clean timbres, and consistent tempo—can be seen as a musical composition that affirmed a certain type of femininity and also embodied the girls' "feminine" collaborative process. Conversely, *Jam #12* by the boys—with its rigid hierarchical form, unfettered sense of self and rebellion in the lyrics, drop D tuning, distortion, and manipulation of tempo—projected a form of masculinity.

Table 3
Comparison of *Dot, Dot, Dot* and *Jam #12*

	<i>Dot, Dot, Dot</i>	<i>Jam #12</i>
Lyrics	Local concerns, relationships.	Global concerns, politics
Tonality	C Major, diatonic	D Minor, diatonic
Form	Verse/chorus with individual sections that come together in the end	Verse/chorus, with breakdown, no mixing of sections
Arrangement	Two singers that trade phrases but come together for the chorus and overlap in the final section	Singer and rapper, never sing together
Timbre	Clean	Distorted
Guitar Tuning	Standard	Drop D
Tempi	Consistent	Slowed down and sped up in the "breakdown"
Guitar solo	No	Yes

Rigby wrote songs about an imagined, fictive relationship and breakup. These were not “real” experiences lived by Rigby, but created experiences she *thought* were part of romantic relationships and popular music vocabulary. Rigby’s gender became evident in the song because she used the pop song as her mode of expression. Pop songs, rigidly about heterosexual love, have certain clichés and idiomatic gestures that Rigby used to write her lyrics. If she wrote in a more abstract form or genre, such as a flute sonata, or used compositional techniques like an ostinato—pedagogical strategies used in more traditional instruction—would she be urged as strongly to write about the heterosexual relationship? The answer would probably be no because those forms were not *expected* to be about straight love as strongly as the pop song was. As a result, *Dot, Dot, Dot* was a love song interpreted and

understood as foundationally heterosexual. Rigby used the assumptions of audiences that this love song was heterosexual as a way to create a self-affirming sexual and gendered identity.

These influences saturated *Dot, Dot, Dot*, and delved deeper than the lyrics. Because the ostensibly abstract elements of music, such as form, harmony, and arrangement were influenced by gendered and sexual politics (McClary, 1991; Rycenga, 2006), the musical elements the girls used in the song also enacted notions of gender. *Dot, Dot, Dot*’s theme of “coming together,” for example, played out through the unusual combination of different formal sections at the end of the composition as well as through the layering of the different vocal and instrumental parts. The use of these techniques stood as a musical metaphor for the girls’ propensity for collaboration. As Laverne described it in an interview, “we ... were all collaboratively getting better together,” and unlike the other bands, “we wanted to be a band because we’re best friends not because we were good at the instruments” (AR, March 10, 2008). As they felt that they socially came together through rehearsing and composing with one another, their music has the quality of coming together as well. This echoed the processes used in popular music creation by girls (Abramo, 2009), and how girls played with each other (Benenson, Del Bianco, Philippoussis, & Apostoleris, 1997; Maccoby, 1998; Messner, 1997; Pollack, 2000).

Conversely, the boys’ song *Jam #12* displayed masculinity through lyrics and the elements of music. The boys wrote lyrics that described the 2008 presidential primaries as a grand conspiracy that involved corporations and biased news media by asking “how much does it cost to buy a candidate?” In comparison to *Dot, Dot, Dot*, which was written from a personal standpoint and frequently used the subject “I,” *Jam #12* portrayed a somewhat detached rendering of these lyrics by using sentence fragments that avoided the use of a subject. Unlike the girls, whose lyrics presented a more circumscribed notion of what it meant to act in their environment, the boys used a universalized sense of what it meant to be autonomous. For them, their ability to act was uncompromised and uncompromising, and they conformed to ideals of the “take charge,” unbridled, macho male.

But the elements of music, as well, had a masculine meaning. The guitars were tuned lower and were distorted in timbre, and the song was in a hierarchical, climax-based form where the dominant introduction section was the most important formal section and dominated the subordinate secondary

sections of the verse and chorus (McClary, 1991; Rycenga, 2006). The boys added a “breakdown,” to their song—a formal section where a virtuosic guitar solo is performed, and they slowed the tempo down only to gradually accelerate back to the original tempo and the climax of the composition. The boys described the breakdown as “the most rebellious part of the song” where you “go nuts.” In this section the boys exerted a type of musical masculinity by displaying technique through the solo, taking aggressive charge of the tempo and forcing it where they want it to go, and reinforcing a hierarchical, climax-based form (Cook, & Tsou, 1994; McClary, 1991; Moisala & Diamond, 2000; Rycenga, 2006). It was a place, as Armando said, you were “building up and you’re getting stronger and it just explodes to the point” (AR, December 6, 2007). The breakdown served as a musical metaphor for masculine conception of “rebellion.”

Although not generalizable in the quantitative sense, the girls’ and boys’ compositions suggested that students did not work in a cultural vacuum, and when they borrowed the processes from the “outside” musical world they also borrowed the social rules that shaped those processes. This moved beyond the use of language and embedded itself in the elements or the so-called “inter-sonic” (Green, 2008) meanings of the music. But, it might also be argued that the participants in this study simply copied the styles of music that they like. This was indeed true, but the question remained, why did they prefer this music, and why did they decide to use it in the classroom? The participants were drawn to the music they like for several reasons. They were drawn to the elements of music, but they also used it to create specific identities (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002). The boys wrote *Jam #12* from a perspective that purported an idealized notion of masculinity while the girls composed *Dot, Dot, Dot* to present her idea of a romantic relationship. Their musical compositions were not merely the abstract composition of sound, but were also imbued with personal experiences and cultural contexts. These experiences and cultural contexts, perhaps, more fully permeated the compositional process than when

educators ask them to compose in “non-popular” or “classical” idioms.

Educators, then, should begin to look at their students’ compositions not merely as products of *musical* knowledge, but as products of *cultural* knowledge expressed musically. In addition to being avenues of personal expression, they also convey the institutions and rules of society. This has implications for pedagogy. Students do not make compositional choices simply by what “sounds good” divorced from other considerations. To the contrary, what sounds good and what students try to express in music in a popular music setting is linked to social influences like gender. When students compose in the popular music classroom teachers should take this into consideration. It provides educators another tool to understand why students make certain musical decisions, but it also requires them to think about and reevaluate the aims of popular music pedagogy. While it is valuable for students to learn about the elements of music, popular music also provides opportunities to learn how the elements of music express ideas that are “larger” than music, and how the musical world links to the “outside” world. This aspect of popular music provides many avenues for the expansion of popular music pedagogy research and practice. Educating not only to *do* the popular music process, but to actively reflect on the *how* and *why* these processes come to be, and why students, as active musicians in the popular music process, make the decisions they do.

Such a shift would take popular music as a serious object of study and shift it away from a using it as a gateway to the inter-sonic aspects of music. In popular music, as some musicologists suggest (Cook, & Tsou, 1994; McClary, 1991; Moisala & Diamond, 2000; Rycenga, 2006), the delineated meanings are as central to “the meaning” of a work as the inter-sonic meanings derived from the elements. Embracing *both* the intersonic and delineated meanings as the *real* meanings of the music, bringing them to the fore as subjects of musical understanding, and making it a central focus of education are important steps in the evolution of popular music pedagogy.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

中文摘要

高中生創作流行歌曲的性別差異

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本文採用了質的研究方法來探究學生的性別對歌曲創作的影響。高中生們分組創作並排練了歌曲，然後接受了採訪，討論創作時的想法。本人分析了學生的作品、排練錄音和採訪以發現關於性別的主題。結果發現男孩和女孩所創作的歌曲有所不同，分別表現在歌詞、所用的曲式和音色。由於學生們不是生活在真空裏，當他們模仿一些音樂風格來創作歌曲時，也會把形成這些音樂風格的社會因素，比如說性別，帶入到創作中去。教師們在看這些音樂作品時，不能把作品只看作是音樂知識的產物，而應該看作是文化的音樂化

表達。老師們還應該讓學生們明白流行音樂是怎樣影響社會，反之又被社會所影響，并把這些觀念貫穿到音樂研究與實踐中去。