

The Social Implications of Student Gendering and Music Technology in the Classroom

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The age of technology has produced wonderful things: life-saving medical procedures, trips to the moon, and fuel-efficient vehicles. With the rapidly changing technological society, citizens should not only understand how to use technology, but perhaps even more importantly, the social and ecological impacts of technology (Thaler & Zorn, 2010). The concept that technology equals progress, specifically in the music education classroom, is now commonplace (Pegley, 2006). However, for as much good can be derived from technology, it can also be socially detrimental when not understood and utilized properly. Studies have been conducted regarding music education and gendered technology use, but many of these discussions are devoid of the social implications of the students, specifically adolescents (Armstrong, 2008, p. 376). This discussion will examine the social implications of adolescent student gendering and music technology in the music education classroom, in order to help teachers and our society at large better understand any social implications, be prepared for issues that may arise, and advocate for students who may be subjected to gendering while utilizing music technology in the classroom.

Most research on the topic of gendering and music technology has focused on the positives and negatives of implementing music technology into the classroom, of which there are many arguments for both sides. Positive arguments to implement music technology in the classroom include future career options and higher salaries (Brynin, 2006), streamlining processes to reach a larger number of students (Pegley, 2006), and utilizing Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools for promoting and supporting the development of specific skills and knowledge (Armstrong, 2008). The problems with implementing music technology include diverse issues, such as cutting back specific programs like formal music,

theatre, art, or physical education to make room for technology classes, or, while streamlining practice regimes, the development of specific skills are removed, such as finger weight distribution on the piano or proper embouchure on a trumpet, or the processes of struggling through a particular skill so that it becomes the student's new normal (Pegley, 2006). However, perhaps the most important issue with technology implementation in the classroom is that of student gendering and the social implications that may occur.

For the purpose of this discussion, clear distinctions will be made between the terms sex, sexuality, and gender (Abeles, Haflei, & Sears, 2010). Sex is referring to the biological male and female anatomy, sexuality is to be defined as the preference for a sexual partner, and gender is to be used in terms of the "societal expectations associated with being male or female" (Abeles et al., 2010, p. 358). Given these definitions, technology is agreed upon to be a gendered subject (Thaler & Zorn, 2010). It can be argued that if music technology in the classroom influences gender differences, then music technology may influence the social implications of student gendering. Examining male and female student approaches to various aspects of technology derives the supporting evidence. Male adolescent students are more naturally attracted to the use of technology, because it becomes a safe relationship with no threat of rejection or human intimacy, while most female adolescent students are diabolically opposed to relationships with things and desire human interaction instead (Pegley, 2006). Male students are "viewed with a natural affinity towards technology," whereas female students seem to dislike or even fear it (Bray, 2007, p. 38). Male students are drawn to colorful gadgets, disassembling and reassembling objects, and experimenting with new equipment, regardless of time involved, making them ideal candidates for technology (Hinkle-Turner, 2003). Meanwhile, female students prefer to know the purpose behind the technology, learn small skills, repeat said skills until

mastered, and then learn additional skills that build upon one another (De Palma, 2001).

Teachers often find themselves reacting to technological or societal problems instead of strategically anticipating issues, and so the natural implications of utilizing technology in the classroom so that student-gendering issues may be avoided must be taken seriously (Bauer, Reese, & McAllister, 2003).

Since music technology in the classroom influences gender differences, social implications of said gendering must be examined. Social implications are greatly varied and diverse, for as “science and technology studies (STS) have shown, technology is not predetermined but is related to selections, preferences and choices made by human actors, not mechanical or digital systems,” meaning, society and technology are not mutually exclusive; they are a social construct (Armstrong, 2008, p. 376). Caution should especially be exercised when dealing with adolescents, because derogatory labeling and behavior incongruent with accepted gender roles can lead to speculation about sexual orientation, which does nothing but exacerbate confusion to an adolescent trying to establish their identity (Abeles et al., 2014). Social implications include the construction of identity, the fear of failure regarding a new piece of technology or skill set, or the perceived reactions of one’s classmates regarding specific socially accepted gender behavior (Thaler & Zorn, 2010). Technology naturally feeds into a male student’s desire to dominate machines or be recognized as an expert or simply be needed (Armstrong, 2008). On the other side, technology naturally fights against a female student’s desires to affirm her femininity through the alliance of music and her natural body, either through her voice or an external instrument (Armstrong 2008). It is culturally expected that a female student be nurturing and relational, while the male student who likes technology may be stereotypically labeled a “computer geek,” a lifestyle that any female student would naturally

avoid at all costs (Hinkle-Turner, 2003). Regardless of whether these social constructs are valid or not is irrelevant; “their significance is that they exist and must be dealt with before progress will be made in female recruitment in technological fields” (Hinkle-Turner, 2003, p. 43).

Ironically, if students do manage to fight through stereotypes, they are often subjected to social constructs, which are even more damaging. Women who become successful in largely male dominated areas are “less liked and more personally derogated than successful men in the same area,” while men who are successfully in female dominated areas are less effective and offered lower respect than women in the same area (Abeles et al., 2014, p. 356). Given the arguments, music technology in the classroom does influence the social implications of student gendering and is an issue that must be seriously considered by all educators.

It has been argued that music technology in the classroom influences both adolescent student gendering and its social implications. Though there are several organizations that provide technology training for music teachers, such as the Technology Institute for Music Educators (TIME) and the Music Educators National Conference: National Association for Music Education (NAfME), current technology training does not address the important societal effects of student gendering (Bauer, Reese, & McAllister, 2003). This information is vital for teachers to be able to effectively understand the social implications of student gendering, to be proactive and strategically prepared for issues that will arise, and to be able to advocate for gendered students while utilizing music technology in the classroom.

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