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## Reflections on Teaching and Learning Feminism in Musicological Classrooms: An Autoethnographic Conversation

### Introduction

To make feminist classrooms the site of transformative learning experiences, we must constantly try new methods, new approaches ... We must be willing to restore the spirit of risk—to be fast, wild, to be able to take hold, turn around, transform (hooks, *Talking Back* 54).

Following bell hooks' call to try new methods and take new risks, we have come together as two colleagues to partake in an autoethnographic interview process about our experiences and understandings as feminist teachers and learners in musicological classrooms. We sit at a round table opposite one another, with a tape recorder and coffee cups between us. We feel nervous about the unknown nature of this experience, but comforted by our friendship and shared commitment to exploring this reflective process. For years we have eagerly discussed our ideas on feminism and musicology, and reflected on how we enact these beliefs in our research and pedagogy. However, at times we have felt like solitary voices waving a red flag. It is for this reason that we have decided to share our conversation, in the hope that we might spark a deeper exchange with other women in our field.

Although we have narrated this conversation in the here and now, it began three years ago, when we started teaching a course called MUSC2520 Women and Music at the University of Queensland (UQ). Since then we have eagerly discussed our pedagogical practice and its theoretical foundations, our relationship with feminist musicology and its discourses, and our personal agendas for redefining musicological classrooms. More recently, we decided to delve deeper into these issues through an autoethnographic interview process, inspired by the work of Carolyn Ellis and Leigh Berger (2002) on autoethnography and co-constructed narratives. Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and a plot" (xix). In this paper we weave together comments from this autoethnographic conversation in a type of "here and now" dialogue where each of our voices appear in double quotes. In doing so we are aware that we are playing around on the borders between fiction and fact, between past and present, subjectivity and objectivity, creativity and reality, and between comfort and discomfort as both readers and authors. Experimenting with narrative turns has been exciting yet we have

struggled at times to find the right voice and voices with which to speak. Ultimately, however, this co-authored narrative approach has allowed us to keep a sense of the aliveness of our ongoing conversation in place. By using this approach, we have also been able to “move away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer” towards “the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation” with our teaching and research (see Ellis and Bochner 434). It has also created a space for us to unashamedly wear our hearts on our sleeves as we openly question our practice as pedagogues and musicologists, reveal our uncertainties about our positions as third-wave feminists, and share our desires for a different type of pedagogy in musicology. As such, the methodological issues in constructing this conversation have been just as important as the theoretical content of the paper itself. By sharing our story in this way, we have aimed to not only self-reflexively critique our own positionalities (see Spry 710), but also encourage our readers to “embark on a collaborative journey” where they also examine their own individual experiences, relationships, beliefs, and roles as teachers and researchers (see Holman Jones 53).

In addition to our own reflective research, we asked our students to be part of these discussions through informal feedback, free-writes during class, a focus group interview, and end of semester independent survey of the course (run by the University's teaching evaluation unit) that allowed the students to offer anonymous feedback. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of Queensland for this project, and students gave consent for the materials from this research to be used in resulting publications. In the free-writes we asked them to reflect on specific topic areas, such as what they expected to learn from the course, their ideas about feminist musicology, their perceptions of their gender, bodies and race, as well as their reflections on the history of women in music. In the focus group and evaluation of the course, we asked them to reflect on the content and delivery of the course and critique the particular pedagogical methods we used. While the focus of this particular paper is on our own reflections and experiences teaching and learning feminism in musicological classrooms, we should acknowledge that our students' input definitely aided our understanding of the processes involved in this project. They reinforced the importance of seeing our classroom context as a vibrant and multi-dimensional space, with significant relational dynamics between all involved.

In this paper, we talk first about who we are as individuals, our personal relationships to feminism and musicology, and our relationship to each other as teachers, learners and colleagues. We then reflect back on our experiences as students in musicological classrooms, and think about how these experiences have shaped our own practices as pedagogues today. This then leads us to reflect on our relationship towards feminism. Our conversation then unfolds with two somewhat different viewpoints on our pedagogical practices. First, we critically gaze on what we originally imagined to be an embodied feminist pedagogy in our musicological classroom, and reflect on our failures and successes when attempting to adopt this approach. Secondly, our conversation moves in a somewhat

different direction as we explore the pedagogical possibilities of how feminism can offer more meaningful ways for us, and our students, to engage with music and musicology in the classroom. This paper gives a picture of the journey we have shared so far. It does not aim to give a conclusive account of the content we taught in the classroom, nor does it aim to offer any definitive 'blueprint' for feminist praxis, but rather captures some of the key issues we have faced and the understandings we have developed as learners in this process.

### **Positioning Ourselves**

Liz looks at Brydie, waiting to see who will start this part of the conversation. Brydie smiles reassuringly at Liz, encouraging her to begin, "In the context of teaching and learning I see myself performing many different identities—as an ethnomusicologist I speak often from my position as a white woman married to an Aboriginal man and mother to our Aboriginal children, and as an educator I wear my performers clothes and talk about my experiences learning and dancing alongside Aboriginal women in a variety of public ceremonial contexts. In these contexts my white skin gives to me certain kinds of powers and privileges, which I am only just beginning to understand (see Mackinlay, 2005a; 2005b; 2003). It is my subjectivity as a woman which closely links these spheres of activity and feminism is a praxis which I sought refuge in to enable me to engage with rather than ignore the complexities of race, gender and power in my personal, social and musical worlds."

Brydie waits for Liz to finish, before she says, "I also see myself performing various identities in the context of teaching and learning. I find myself constantly embodying my multiple, and ever-shifting, positions of young married woman, feminist musicologist, teacher, and musician, whether I'm on the podium conducting, in the classroom teaching, or undertaking research and writing about women conductors (see Bartleet 2006; 2005; 2004; 2003; 2002). Although I have largely been trained in the Western art music tradition, my experiences of growing up in two different cultures—South Africa and Australia—have made me constantly question the values and assumptions associated with my Western training, and in turn, how I approach my own teaching and learning today."

As for our relationship, we first met over seven years ago when Brydie began her doctoral research in musicology and wanted to work with a supervisor whom she could openly talk with about the "woman question" in conducting and musicology. Although Brydie has now finished her studies, we still see ourselves sharing a journey together in our teaching and learning of Women and Music. Indeed, the idea of sharing an ongoing journey resonates with much feminist literature that speaks about bringing women's voices together to discuss issues that are particular to them, and creating a community or collective journey that can resist dominant structures that might try to marginalise them (hooks, *Yearning* 149). The idea of bringing voices together, rather than relying on a single individual, certainly underpinned how we approached the teaching of

Women and Music. We felt compelled to bring together not only our voices, but also those of our students and guest lecturers in order to explore a greater diversity of possibilities for engaging with feminism in musicological classrooms.

### **Our Experiences in Musicological Classrooms**

An essential aspect of understanding ourselves as feminist educators in musicological classrooms has been to reflect back on our own experiences as students in musicology—what did our musicological classrooms look like? What did we learn? How did we learn the things we did? Why do we feel a deep need to do things differently and radically change the way we teach musicology? Although we both come from different musical backgrounds, we also shared many similar experiences. We both had experienced a deafening silence when it came to women and music throughout our tertiary education. Liz recalls, “Although I had many wonderful female tutors and lecturers, from a curriculum perspective women were completely invisible to me—there were no ‘skirts’ in musicology, all my performance pieces were by men, and we analysed works by the great male composers in music theory. It was only when I began studying ethnomusicology in my second year that space was given for discussions about women, gender and music.”

Brydie is not surprised to hear this—it is a story that so many students share with us—and she thinks out loud, “It sounds like yours was much ‘worse’ than mine. I at least experienced one gesture toward including women’s voices in a musicology class. A feminist musicologist gave a guest lecture on three women composers she was studying for her Masters thesis, and although it was a rather tokenistic gesture, it still exposed me to a number of gendered issues I had never thought of before. At least I heard these voices, albeit briefly; you heard none.” Liz continues, “It gets worse. For the most part I remember my musicology classes as a very passive learning experience— I was just a cup being filled up with information about music and music making by men across time periods. Musicology as I experienced it felt very distanced and removed from a sense of aliveness and performativity, it was an inactive process of gazing at composer’s lives and their works without any real engagement from me.” Brydie nods her head and says, “Your descriptions certainly ring true with my experiences as well. We used to sit in our musicology classes for two hours, dead still. Our legs would go cold from the inactivity under our chairs and our hands used to ache afterwards from writing so much.”

For both of us then, the musicology classroom existed as something to which we could not relate—male, passive and disembodied. We saw ourselves, as hooks describes, inhabiting a real institution “where very little seems to be changed, where there are very few changes in the curriculum, almost no paradigm shifts, and where knowledge and information continue to be presented in the conventionally accepted manner” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 143). We both felt strongly that

we did not want to replicate this teaching and learning style in our own praxis. We did not want, as Luce Irigaray laments, to continue to “speak the same language to each other” and “reproduce the same story” nor to “begin the same stories all over again...Same arguments, same quarrels, same scenes. Same attractions and separations. Same difficulties, the impossibility of reaching each other. Same...same...Always the same” (69). Thus, we wanted to at least provide our students in Women and Music with something that was so lacking in our own education—a female presence. UQ was similar to the institutions where we studied for our undergraduate degrees, with a curriculum that featured an obvious absence of womanly voices, both literally and figuratively. For us personally, we were also painfully aware of the absence of a pedagogical space to share our own ideas, experiences and understandings as women in music. We feared that if we did not act on these desires, we too would become tired and as Irigaray cautions, “keep our desires secret, unrealized. Asleep again, dissatisfied, we will be turned over to the words of men – who have claimed to ‘know’ for a long time” (76).

### **Our Relationship towards Feminism**

Another crucial aspect of understanding ourselves as feminist educators in musicological classrooms has been to also reflect on what feminism means to us as musicologists, what kind of feminism it is and why feminism at all. Brydie decides to begin this part of the conversation, “I wear the label of feminist quite openly and proudly. It is such a strong part of my sense of self and pervades so many aspects of my private and public life. If you asked me to define feminism, I could talk about equality and egalitarianism or I could engage in a lengthy discussion about how all the different historical trends in feminism, and their key thinkers, have positioned, politicised and articulated particular women’s experiences over the years. But for me personally, feminism is a process of viewing, living and engaging with the world that validates and celebrates women, and their multiple subjectivities. It is an on-going and ever-shifting process that is cultural, contextual and multi-dimensional. So, my own feminist identity is very particular to me, and my life experiences. Liz, how would you describe feminism and your feminist identity?”

Liz looks across at Brydie, unsure of how to respond. So much of what Brydie has said resonates with her own feelings about her place in sisterhood—feminism is indeed about living and breathing the personal and political as women. Her thoughts immediately turn to the words of Virginia Woolf and Liz explains, “Feminism gives me a safe place—a ‘room of my own’ to ask as Virginia did ‘what are these ceremonies and why do we participate in them?’ This question strikes a chord with me for so many reasons. At one level it links in very tightly with my desires as a researcher in ethnomusicology—at its most basic to understand the musical behaviours, identities, powers and desires of women. Each time I fold another nappy, hold my baby to my breast, read another bedtime story and make another sandwich for my husband’s lunch, I wonder at another level about the daily ritual, which is motherhood. Standing in

front of the mirror in a clothes shop, agonising over whether my 'bum looks big in this' I am confronted with my yearning and my participation in the female beauty myth. Without feminism in my life I fear I would fall hopelessly and helplessly into an a-theoretical, a-political and a-critical world and surrender myself unknowingly to the masked and unveiled structures of patriarchy."

In our conversations about expanding the possibilities of feminism in musicology, we felt it was important to come to an understanding of what kinds of feminism we were aiming to enact in the classroom, and the significance of such feminisms in personal, political and pedagogical terms. During these discussions we found ourselves repeatedly questioning, positioning and requestioning ourselves, and our ideas on feminism, in relation to our feminist second-wave "mothers." We found ourselves at times almost paralysed by huge fears that we would be revealed by them to be hopelessly and horribly lacking in terms of our theoretical readings, articulations and locations. We were encouraged continually however by the words of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (xxiii) who reminded us that we needed to begin where we experienced the "slew of inequities" in our lives and that if we were to wait until we were "perfect and free of conflicts" then we would never achieve anything. We were also convinced by hooks' assertion that our vision for a musicological classroom of tomorrow needs to emerge from the concrete circumstances of our experiences right now (hooks, *Teaching Community* 12).

While those in the second-wave generation have very clearly articulated what feminism is and the role that it can play in redefining women's musical experiences (Citron, 1993; Solie, 1993; McClary, 1991), we felt the need to re-define it in our own third-wave musicological and pedagogical context in recognition of our differing generational experiences, subjectivities and desires. The theory and material generated by second-wave feminists provided the backbone of our curriculum; however, we also sought new ways to deliver it, which were relevant to our understandings and our students' experiences. Liz explains, "We used what our feminist mothers gave to us, in terms of the source material. We didn't need to re-write all of that because they have done such a good job of providing us with that information—of rewriting women in music through "her-story". What we did was instead to try and put in place a more distinct way of handing over that information, which aligned itself with what we perceived to be closer to a feminist way of engaging with students."

### **Our Women and Music Classroom**

Given our feminist commitments to transforming musicological classrooms, when developing Women and Music we aimed to create a course that not only taught students about women in music, but also actively engaged them in a learning process that was politically and pedagogically feminist based (see Appendix 1 for the topics covered). The

course aimed to deconstruct the ways in which gender and musical identities intersect, intertwine and inform each other within specific contexts and drew upon feminist, postmodern and poststructural readings of gender, power and identity as they relate to music. Aligning itself with feminist pedagogy, the assessment for this course aimed to give the students an embodied learning experience by integrating theoretical concepts with academic writing, fieldwork, tutorials, and a performance. Many different types of teaching and learning “texts” were combined in this approach in order to give the students a range of tools that encouraged them to come to their own understandings about women, gender and music.

Our class consisted of approximately 20 students from the Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Arts degrees. Although the class was mainly comprised of females, we did have one male student both times we ran the course. While our students’ musical interests were wildly varied, their passion and commitment to learning more about Women and Music was unwavering. A number of them were classical music vocalists and instrumentalists and took an interest in studying and performing the music of Western art music composers, such as Hildegard von Bingen and Miriam Hyde. Others were guitar players and singers in local rock and hip-hop bands and were interested in exploring social and cultural critiques of women in popular music, and found the work of Lucy Green useful in this respect. Some of them were not musicians themselves, but avid followers of particular musical sub-cultures and were keen to investigate gendered issues within their favourite songs, bands and venues. Such a diverse student body meant that classes were always very interactive and conversations stretched across a wide range of different musical contexts.

Keeping in mind hooks’ idea that “teaching is a performative act” (*Teaching to Transgress* 11), we aimed to open up dynamic spaces where we could explore the reciprocal bond between lived experience and theory with this diverse body of students. We aimed to look at women’s music and musical experiences from a broad and holistic perspective, instead of merely focusing on music history books that treat music in an isolated archival manner. Rather than simply reiterating values and norms associated with traditional Western canons, by merely inserting women into them, we engaged our students in a pedagogical process that critiqued what, how and why we teach and learn about music. This influenced our students to connect with a process of deep learning that encouraged them to critically reflect on their own music interests and interactions, as well as their experiences in the learning process. To do this, we always integrated class discussions, debates, or group work exercises that allowed the students to explore these key issues for themselves. In this way, as Patti Lather describes, “our action” became “our knowing” (xv).

### **Imagining Ourselves as Embodied Educators**

In our early discussions about the course, we thought that embodiment

was our primary tool for enacting our feminist beliefs in our classroom. At the time, we believed the term “embodiment” in education to mean positioning the body as an epistemological site. We thought that this positioning would enable us as educators to draw attention to the fact that the experience of living is mediated through the body (Gustafson 250), and that “embodied learning” is a powerful pedagogical tool, which can produce different kinds of knowledges and ways of being in the world (St Pierre and Pillow 1).

In our classes, we drew on the work of corporeal feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Judith Butler (1993), to highlight the significance of our bodies in the classroom, and attempted to break out of the limitations of Cartesian dualisms in our critique of women and music. We deconstructed how binary oppositions have worked in musical discourses, and sought to encourage our students to see that bodies are not singular beings but rather fluid and differential constructs with overlapping identities (Weiss 1). Using the ideas of Henrietta Moore (1994) we also examined how bodily difference is viewed as a relational concept and always experienced relationally in terms of political discrimination, inequalities of power and forms of domination. At times these theoretical discussions became somewhat heavy and text based, so we introduced different pedagogical tools, such as problem-based learning packages to examine how these theoretical ideas on embodiment are played out in the music of bands and artists, such as The Spice Girls, Madonna, Marilyn Manson and K.D. Lang. From these exercises the students came to realise how the body is crucial to understanding a woman’s psychical and social existence, and how it is interwoven with societal, political, cultural, and geographical systems of meaning, signification, and representation (Grosz 17-18, 23).

We kept in mind hooks’ words, “Once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we’re automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 136-137). We desperately wanted to disrupt the notion that we were omnipotent, all-knowing minds by acknowledging our bodies and the layers of meanings ascribed to them (see hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 138). Whether we were examining the history of women and music or critiquing the ways in which women’s bodies are objectified in current popular music discourses, we wanted to show our students that embodiment is a powerful tool for deconstructing the way power has been traditionally constructed in the classroom (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 139). As we soon came to realise, there is a big difference between wanting to do something and the transference of that desire into practise. We tried to embody these ideals by “performing” and “modelling” them in our pedagogical practice and approach – we did not hide ourselves behind a lectern, we sat side by side students, we shared our personal and professional selves through the recalling and recreating of memories and experiences relevant to women and music, and always made attempts to draw students into an open and discursive space by listening to and valuing their thoughts and opinions. As we write this now, we can’t help but ask, “How is this embodied

pedagogy? How is this approach feminist? Are we living a dream or imagining a reality?"

In order to encourage our students to think through these issues and reflect on how they perceived, framed and understood their bodies, we continually asked them for feedback and reflections on themselves as embodied beings in our classroom. We hoped that these responses would reveal students' receptiveness and willingness to consider their bodies as sites of location for knowledge. Using the process of "free-writing" as our primary research tool, we were interested to find out how students perceived, framed and understood their body. Some students "texted" their bodies by describing their physical make up, and others extended their descriptions by shifting their gaze from their bodies as passive physical objects to their bodies as moving, acting, feeling and thinking subjects. Some students positioned themselves as particular types of social actors with particular types of capital in relation to their body. Others viewed their bodies differently, not dislocated from a sense of self but rather interlinked and dialogic. Some wrote of the duality they perceive between their external body and their internal mind, perceiving the body at one level to be a reflection of their physicality and at another a reflection of their emotions, feelings and thoughts, the two working dialogically together. Some described their bodies as a locale for contestation between their growing feminist consciousness and their desire to become the body beautiful society expects of them. Such self-aware ideas alerted us to the power relations at play, whereby women's bodies are what qualify them for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility.

We also asked them to think about the links between their bodies and music by asking them to reflect on Pierre Bourdieu's phrase "music is a bodily thing" (105). Some of the students emphasized the cognitive features of music: "Music engages the body and the brain at the same time" (free-write response) "You can't make music without your body ... you need to use some part of your body ... you need to use your mind but it is ultimately connected to your body (free-write response)." Others drew attention to the ability of music and the body to arouse strong feelings and emotions: "It's about 'feeling' the music in your body ... It's also about the music affecting you on an emotional level, a level that is deeper than anything words can express" (free-write response). "You feel it [music] in your body. You make it with your body at times aided by 'tools'. It has the impossible-to-define power to 'move' people physically and emotionally, suggesting the interconnectedness of these feelings" (free-write response). There is no doubt that the student's responses to our questions are interesting. However, we also have doubts about what these free-writes can actually tell us about the way students responded and engaged with the ideas and processes of embodiment we attempted to enact. The responses in some ways could be seen as naive and reflect in turn the naiveté of what we were trying to do.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges, we also used an end of semester class concert of women's music as one of the most obviously

embodied aspects of the course goals, content and assessment tasks; most notably because it required our students to personally, politically and publicly enact and perform the issues we'd been discussing in class. One of the main aims of this concert was also to recover the lost and often excluded voices of women in music by figuratively and musically "sounding silences." The students and lecturers formed a choir that performed works by Faye White, Judy Small, Eleanor Daley, Bessie Jones, Maya Jupiter, as well as lullabies and a traditional Aboriginal song. Brydie conducted the choir for a number of the works, and her personal approach to this traditionally male-defined role provided yet another avenue for us to critique the gendered and embodied nature of music and conducting with the students. Individual students also performed works by Barbara Strozzi, Hildegard von Bingen, Miriam Hyde, and Sarah Hopkins. Students were assessed on their participation, involvement and initiative in the performance. As the repertoire was largely vocal, it enabled each student, regardless of their perceptions of their own musical talents and abilities, to come to voice in this process. The students were expected to come along to extra rehearsals each week, outside class time, to practice. The students were also required to complete a research project of approximately two thousand words and explore an issue raised by the class performance relating to women, gender and music. This assessment piece thus provided students with an opportunity to relate their practice to theory and then through involvement in the performance continue the cycle of theory into practice. Afterwards they told us: "Most of the other theory courses, which I guess you could probably call this one, you don't get to do any prac whatsoever ... But this one was really cool because you could get up and have a sing and it was really fun" (focus group response). "The performance, I really enjoyed that 'cause everyone seemed to have a lot of fun that day, and we'd been working so hard and although half the class had never done such a thing, they all felt proud" (focus group response).

Reflecting back on what we did, Liz says, "Now when we look at the questions we asked our students and the responses they gave us, we can see the naiveté and shallowness of our approach—it was never going to be as easy as simply adding our bodies to the class and using the word embodiment freely and loosely in our classroom talk." Brydie sheepishly tells Liz that she is having trouble reconciling what we aimed to do with embodied pedagogy and what actually happened in the classroom: "I know in all honesty that while we actively deconstructed disembodied learning with our students on a theoretical level, we did so whilst they were sitting in chairs, dead still. I cringe at the thought." Liz too feels the shame of this deception they have enacted creep over her. Brydie concedes, "I know we did ask them for lots of feedback and our class was very interactive; however, in all honesty we did not use our bodies as learning and teaching tools much at all. Although when we performed our concert of women's music, we did come closer to acting out this embodied agenda." As she remembers this occasion Brydie breaths a sigh of relief—comforted temporarily that at least in that moment we did actively use our bodies to make a statement about women and music.

Our thoughts and discussion move on to critique the way we ran the course for a second time, two years later. Brydie remembers making a concerted effort to try and enact an embodied pedagogy by staging a workshop on embodied learning. She explains, "We did away with chairs and note pads and the hierarchical set-up of a classroom and sat in a circle on the floor. I sat in the circle alongside the students, and the placement of our bodies served to disrupt some of the 'usual' power relations of the classroom. The students brought along items that could help tell a story about what they had learnt about themselves and music through the course." Brydie pauses for a moment, caught up in the memory of the workshop and what it meant for her teaching and learning practice. She admits, "It still wasn't a sufficiently embodied approach again! I suppose we were talking about our own experiences and our own understandings of those experiences, and our bodies did come into it. By moving out of our 'usual' chairs the students seemed to feel freer to use their bodies in the telling of their stories. Their bodily gestures and mannerisms became important elements in their narratives and the knowledge they were collectively sharing. The ways in which they responded to each other's stories were also communicated through their bodies, whether they were excitedly bobbing up and down or rolling back into a curled up position hugging their knees in response to something someone had said. I presume that in this process they did come to realise issues of agency, and that their body is a political and social entity that is inscribed with all sorts of meanings. But none of this was made explicit enough. So how did they come to such understandings?" Liz interjects, "It wasn't necessarily through an actively embodied approach, was it?" "No," Brydie acknowledges.

As Liz watches her friend's crestfallen face, slowly but surely a smile spreads across her own as awareness dawns on her that by sharing our vulnerabilities and strengths as pedagogues, we had come to a place of understanding where we had cause for hope. Liz speaks again, "I think you're right about us not using an embodied approach—when you're teaching and learning in a musicological classroom it always has the potential to be embodied because as phenomena music is essentially a bodily thing. I think we were actually trying to do something quite different—something which aimed to engage with emotion and experience in talk about, with and through women and music." As we come to this new understanding, we begin to realise that what we were attempting to create in our classroom was what hooks describes as a "location of possibility" (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 207), a place for critical and transformative engagement with feminism and musicology.

### **Enacting a Pedagogy of Possibility in Musicology**

To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality (hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* 110).

Like many others before us, we have looked to the work of bell hooks to understand the complications and confusions of our classroom and the

difficulties of thinking between and among them (Heywood and Drake, 1997). We acknowledge that there is a growing body of literature in feminist pedagogy which has both historical and contemporary relevancy and circles in, out and around the discussion we are presenting here (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992, 1997; Lather, 1991; Luke, 1996; Luke and Gore, 1992; Mayberry and Rose, 1999). However, for both of us, hooks consistently provides a feminist and pedagogical place to ground and consider where we are, a sense of where we are going, and a model of inspiration for what kinds of performative moves we are going to make next. In all of hooks' writing on liberatory and transformative education, she often reminds us of the strength and hope to be found in the idea of "possibility." She writes, "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility" (*Teaching to Transgress* 207). For hooks, the possibility lies in closing the gap between theory and practice, opening up spaces to think critically, acknowledging and engaging in emotion and experience, and thereby awakening our hearts and minds personally and politically. Her words are inspiring and yet daunting—how do we actually put into practice this kind of "wise and loving politic" (hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* 103) in our pedagogy? What might this kind of pedagogy look, feel and act like in a feminist musicological classroom?

First and foremost, we ensured that our students were aware right from the beginning the pedagogical, political and personal agendas of our course (hooks, *Talking Back* 49-54) —as suggested by Ruth Behar (480), we wore our hearts unashamedly on our sleeves and in doing so we wanted them to understand the reciprocal bond between lived experience and theory. For our course to be empowering for women in terms of content, ideology and praxis, we felt that we needed to be transgressive. We used the "f-word" freely and without fear, wanting to create a space where our students could feel safe to explore, question and assert their own feminist understandings, desires, and identities. We spoke with feeling, emotion and passion about the history of women and music—we worked constantly to assert the understanding that women have been involved in music making everywhere, at all times and in all places; and, that women's ways of making music are valid, important and should be valued. Music, we told our students, is a vehicle for us to understand who we are individually and collectively as women, and we sought to expose and explore the social, cultural and musical worlds where women still suffer from diverse and degrading forms of patriarchal oppression.

Perhaps the most challenging and confronting aspects of the course for us all as teachers and learners were the reflective moments when we stepped "back in order to better close in" (Freire 241) on what we now understood about women and music. For us it meant that we needed to be prepared at every stage to let students know what we were thinking, why were thinking it and how that thinking made us feel. In this way we encouraged our students to be part of this process by relating what they were learning to their own personal identities and experiences. This was obviously valued by our students, as one commented, "the strengths of

the teaching team are their ideas about teachers also being students, and their acceptance of our thoughts and opinions" (course evaluation response). Others commented that our approach, "makes students feel like people – we can discuss something without feeling like it's right/wrong or like we're being judged (course evaluation response)" Liz recalls, "We shared many things about our own personal selves and experiences that I would perhaps have kept to myself in other contexts." Brydie interjects, "We surely did! There were many moments when I shed my mask of 'know-it-all-teacher' and openly confessed things I would never have shared with students in other contexts." As she recalls a student saying, "Brydie is not afraid to give personal insights/thoughts/experiences which I think greatly improves the learning experience" (course evaluation response).

Letting her mind wander back to our first class, Liz goes on to say, "I can remember when we first talked to our students about feminist theory—the very thought seemed to drain the colour from their faces and we both knew in that moment that we simply had to link our discussion of theory with our lived experience if it were to mean anything to them." Brydie remembers this moment of realisation vividly, "Yes, from that moment on, whenever we shared a story and brought the theory to life with our own experiences, you could see the students sitting up in their chairs and engaging animatedly with us. The significance of us sharing our own personal stories was not lost on them. They realised that what we were doing was not 'normal' practice within academia; many of their other lecturers would not dare to do what we did." As a student observed, "The course was very openly structured – there was ample opportunity to take and explore detailed areas when we wanted to. We were continually asked to evaluate our own interpretations and personal responses and thus were able to take so much more out of the subject than just text-book knowledge" (course evaluation response).

Liz continues, "I shared with the students how feminist theory has provided me with tools to understand what it is that I do as a woman in relation to music. My subjectivities as white woman, academic, wife to an Aboriginal man and mother to our sons place me in contexts where I perform Indigenous musics in both an experiential and representational sense. Neither are necessarily always comfortable and I can remember talking quite openly about the personal anguish that questions and criticisms about speaking rights and performing rites as a white woman in black spaces can bring. The words of hooks, Moore, Behar, Holman-Jones and others have provided a place for me to go to ask those questions, engage in that critique and then do it all over again." Brydie stops for a moment to take in all that Liz has said, "I think having a space to go to, where we can be nourished ourselves, is so important. I don't think this works as a solo journey."

It was important for us to let our students know that as teachers we were not, as Kirsten Lanier (9) asserts, "bodiless, spiritless, and without passion" and that we were prepared and involved as teachers to place emphasis on experience and feelings not just as a subject of knowledge,

but as part of the very process of educational exchange and community. We wanted to avoid the kind of musicological classroom we had experienced where we were not asked, "what do you think?" Placing ourselves into the picture of our critique was a deliberate strategy to use our power as teachers to let students know that we also valued them in that space, we wanted to listen to their experiences (no matter how insignificant they thought them to be), we wanted them to ask questions (even if they asked the same ones over and over), and we wanted to hear their voices (we didn't care how loud and strong they became). Brydie turns to Liz and says; "I think we were quite successful with this." Feeling the need to justify what she has just said, Brydie pulls out a sheet from underneath her folder and reads it aloud to Liz: "The teacher is both a teacher and student and the students are also teachers in the way that each individual's life experiences [are] different, and hence each individual has a different perspective/opinion of issues that is valid. I didn't realise until this late date in the [Women and Music] course this is what Brydie has been doing with us in our lectures. She provides us with the theory side of things...and then asks for our thoughts and feelings on the issue/s she has put to us as a class, and each person is encouraged to speak and respond to one another resulting in a classroom conversation (free-write response)." Brydie looks up at Liz after reading the student's words and says, "This makes me think of hooks' words when she says, 'to allow your students, or yourself, to talk about experience; sharing personal narratives yet linking that knowledge with academic information really enhances our capacity to know' (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 148)." In our classroom, sharing lives and sharing selves worked to create a place of safety—a teaching and learning community grounded in acknowledgement, care, responsibility and knowledge (hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* 104)—where all of us could trust our thoughts, experiences and voice them when we asked "what do you think and feel?"

## Conclusions

We have now reached what should be the conclusion to this paper and yet we are not ready to end our conversation. From our explorations of embodied learning to pedagogies of possibility, there are many questions left to ask, equally as many uncertainties and confusions to enter in dialogue with, and still more feelings and experiences to share on our journey of understanding feminism in musicological classrooms. Sensing the conversation is nearing an end, Brydie reveals, "In light of all that we've been discussing I'm still haunted by hooks cautionary observation that 'many feminist professors, for example, begin their careers working to institutionalize more radical pedagogical practices, but when students did not appear to 'respect their authority', they felt these practices were faulty, unreliable, and returned to traditional practices' (*Teaching to Transgress* 143-144). While we did not encounter any such problems with our students, given that it was a small elective course, will we encounter difficulties trying to gain a sense of 'authority' (although that word seems to contradict our goals in this process) within the fields of musicology and feminist pedagogy? We're making ourselves vulnerable and open to

criticism with not only what we are saying, but also how we are saying it. I wonder whether our colleagues will dismiss our ideas and experiences. While I can't see us being driven back to 'traditional practices,' like hooks cautions, I wonder whether we'll be left isolated and silenced by our colleagues instead. Where will that leave us and what will we do?" Brydie stops and takes a deep breath to consider the ramifications of what she has just said. She knows that this somewhat 'classic' feminist perspective of vulnerability offers an alternative to the certainties and omniscient gaze of the archetypal male academic. While it also evokes the postmodern positions of self-doubt, self-reflexivity, lack of closure and playfulness, she's concerned that it might be seen as too 'feminine' by defenders of the empiricist faith. She further questions, "Do you have that fear Liz?"

Liz can relate to the anguish she hears in Brydie's voice and quotes hooks in reply: "There's one way you can look at this: it's like having a sickness in your body that gets more and more fierce as it is passing onto wellness. We don't have to view that period of intense sickness as an invitation to despair, but as a sign of potential transformation" (*Outlaw Culture* 120). She explains, "I am not sure whether the conversation we have had here about feminism, musicology and pedagogy is 'good enough' and just thinking that it might not be flutters the wings of the butterflies in my stomach. What I do know, however, is that enacting a pedagogy of possibility in our classroom has meant making a commitment to our belief in feminist politics and that musicology can be taught, learnt and lived differently. We cannot wait for others to do it for us—the moment is here and the moment is now. We will make mistakes along the way, we will encounter opposition and all kinds of personal, professional, pedagogical and political obstacles but we have to keep moving forward—learning and relearning, making and remaking."

Liz's comment lingers in the air as we sit quietly for a moment. We look at one another: exhausted, yet elated at what we have just experienced. Liz breaks the silence, "Okay, do you want to press stop on the tape recorder?" As Brydie turns to press the stop button she notices the unopened bag of pastries she bought that morning sitting on her desk, "We were so busy talking we forgot to eat the pastries!" Liz looks down at her pregnant belly and laughs, "You have them. I don't think my stomach can stretch any further!" As we clean up the coffee cups and say our good-byes, we know the conversation that we have just had is far from over.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **MUSC2520 Women and Music – Lecture Topics**

#### Lecture 1

##### **Sounding silences: images and ideas from women in music**

This introductory lecture will show a number of provoking sounds, images and ideas from women in the field to introduce some of the issues that will be explored during the course.

#### Lecture 2

##### **Early modern era: did women have a renaissance in music?**

This lecture examines the political and social changes in different parts of Europe, which facilitated or hindered the ability of women to take part in particular music making.

#### Lecture 3

##### **Questioning the Western classical music canon**

This lecture aims to reflect on the feminist theoretical perspectives, which have informed the previous week's discussions. We will look at how the work of Susan McClary, Sally Macarthur, and Marcia Citron has begun to debunk the musical canon.

#### Lecture 4

##### **Is there a feminine essence in music?**

This lecture explores the notion of feminine qualities in Western composition. By examining Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II* we will broach the question of whether women's music actually does sound different.

#### Lecture 5

##### **Bodies I: understanding bodies of music and musical bodies as inscriptive surfaces**

This lecture will explore theories of the body and the performance of "gender." We will examine how "womanly" bodies have been received by the music profession and discuss how such reactions have influenced the performance of women musicians and conductors during rehearsal and on stage.

#### Lecture 6

## **Bodies II: Representation, music and the body**

This lecture takes a deeper look into images, marketing and media portrayal of Women and Music. These representations will be deconstructed to illustrate what is being represented and who is doing the representing. We will explore how these ideologies and discourses conform or challenge the musicological canon.

### Lecture 7

#### **Positioning women in the contemporary music scene**

This lecture explores issues relating to contemporary women performers in Western culture. With examples from popular music genres, such as country music, the lecture will examine the significant role that women have played in these areas.

### Lecture 8

#### **Sex and sexuality in music**

This lecture will delve into theories of sex and sexuality and will explore how the “new” gay and lesbian musicology has re-searched and deconstructed our musical history and proposed new theories of music.

### Lecture 9

#### **Women, gender and music in the racial imagination**

The “woman question” is a focus of scholarship in feminist musicology. Add race and a disciplinary shift occurs to ethnomusicology. Using Ethnomusicological theory in gender and music, and examples from Indigenous Australia, the aim of this lecture is to position music in terms of the racial and gender subjectivities of performers and performances.

### Lecture 10

#### **Workshop performance of women’s music**

In this lecture we move beyond books and text and turn to our bodies to explore the issues that we have covered so far. We will sing excerpts of women’s music and discuss their significance in terms of gendered performance.

### Lecture 11

#### **Playing out “Women and Music”**

This week’s lecture wraps up the issues of the course through a dynamic and interactive role-play. Major theoretical themes will be revisited with reference back to the weekly lectures and practical examples.

#### **Dr Elizabeth Mackinlay**

Liz Mackinlay is a Senior Lecturer in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland where she teaches Indigenous Studies, Anthropology and Ethnomusicology. She completed her PhD in Ethnomusicology in 1998 and a PhD in Education in 2003. She is undertaking research on Indigenous Australian women's performance, performance pedagogy and embodied learning, motherhood and music, and issues of ethics and representation in research practice more broadly. Liz is presently a member of the National Committee of the Musicological

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**Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet**

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