

MY BODY, MY INSTRUMENT: HOW BODY IMAGE INFLUENCES VOCAL
PERFORMANCE IN COLLEGIATE WOMEN SINGERS

by

Kirsten Shippert Brown

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Randall Everett Allsup, Sponsor
Professor Jeanne Goffi-Fynn

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

Date: May 19, 2021

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Teachers College, Columbia University

2021

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the influence of body image on classical vocal performance in collegiate women singers. Those trained in classical singing are familiar with the phrase, “your body is your instrument.” A focus on the physical body is apparent in the vocal pedagogical literature, as is attention to singers’ mental and emotional states. But the intersection of emotions and the body—how one thinks and feels about their body, or body image—is largely absent from the vocal pedagogical literature. As voice teachers continue to necessarily address their students’ instruments (bodies), the field has not adequately considered how each singer’s relationship with their instrument (their body) might affect them, as singers and as people.

This initial foray sought answers to just two of the myriad unanswered questions surrounding this topic: Does a singer’s body image influence her singing? If so, when and how? It employed a feminist methodological framework that would provide for consciousness-raising as both a method and aim of the study. Four collegiate women singers served as co-researchers, and data collection took place in three parts: a focus group, audio diaries, and interviews. The focus group was specifically geared towards consciousness-raising in order to provide co-researchers with the awareness necessary for examining their body image. Co-researchers then recorded semi-structured audio diaries for one month after practice sessions, voice lessons, and performances. One-on-one interviews concluded data collection and provided a situation of co-analysis wherein the researcher and co-researcher could deeply examine data from the focus group and diaries.

The major discovery of this research is a pervasive sense of separation between a woman singer’s “everyday body” and her singer’s body. Self-objectification served as a

barrier to a conscious recognition of embodied experience and effectively split the singer in two. The various states of the relationship between these two seemingly separate entities resulted in specific outcomes for singing, including restriction, unawareness, inconsistency, and focus. The discussion concludes with a consideration of how a positive body image may encourage effective and artistic vocal performance and how voice teachers might help foster a positive experience of one's body.

© Kirsten Shippert Brown 2021

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my sponsor, Dr. Randall Allsup: Thank you for pushing me—as a writer, researcher, and teacher—in ways I never anticipated. I am so grateful for the communities you created and the opportunities you gave me to engage in this process of becoming.

To my second reader, Dr. Jeanne Goffi-Fynn: You inspired me to test the limitations I gave myself. Working with you gave me a broader lens and made me more capable as a singer and teacher, thank you.

To my voice teacher and mentor, Dr. Christopher Arneson: Your support, guidance, and friendship mean the world to me. I would surely be a lesser singer, teacher, and human if not for your incredible investment in me as a student, and your kindness and care for me as a person.

To Robert, Lindsey, and Elliott: Your wisdom as voice teachers, talent as musicians, insight as researchers, and kind words as friends have been indispensable in writing this work and in my time at TC. And Lindsey, thank you for telling me to go see *Ellen West!*

To my friends and family (you know who you are): Your support and encouragement have made this work possible. Thank you for listening to my ramblings and for distracting me from them. You kept me sane.

To my husband, Dan: Thank you for your joy, steadfastness, wit, ingenuity, generosity, strength, and love. I could write a whole other dissertation about how awesome you are, but for now, I'll just say, I love you.

K. S. B.

Table of Contents

Chapter I INTRODUCTION	1
Personal Narrative	4
Background.....	7
Problem Statement.....	9
A Note about Gender.....	9
Research Questions	12
Theoretical Framework: Feminisms	13
Feminisms and Body Image	13
Feminisms and Singing	16
Participants Co-Researchers	17
Research Methodology Overview	18
Chapter II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
Body Image	20
Concept Definitions.....	21
Feminism(s).....	23
Risks	30
Body Image, Identities, and Intersectionality.....	32
Singers, Singing, and Bodies.....	36
Identity and Industry.....	36
Intersections: Singing and Body Image.....	40
1. Perceptual	40
2. Cognitive	41
3. Affective	42
4. Behavioral.....	43
Conclusion	45
Chapter III METHODOLOGY	47
Feminist Methodology.....	48
Pilot Study	50
Research Design	51
Recruitment	51
Procedures	55
Part 1: Focus group.....	55
Part 2: Diary study.....	57

Part 3: Interviews.....	59
Sites	60
Materials	62
Data Analysis.....	63
Reflexivity and Ethics	64
Chapter IV WOMANHOOD.....	70
Dana.....	71
Karina	79
Aksha.....	85
Marissa	91
Why am I a girl?	99
Chapter V EMBODIMENT	101
Relational States of Body and Instrument	106
Experiences of Embodiment.....	109
Relational State 1: Body without Instrument	110
Relational State 2: Body and/with Instrument.....	115
Relational State 3: Body vs. Instrument	119
Relational State 4: Disembodied Voice.....	123
Relational State 5: Instrument without Body	127
Relational State 6: ?.....	129
Drawing Imaginary Lines.....	132
Chapter VI SINGING.....	134
“Content” and “Virtuosity”	135
Negative Experiences of Embodiment and Singing.....	137
Restriction: The Cost of “Body without Instrument”	137
Inconsistency: The Consequence of “Body and/with Instrument”.....	142
Coping: The Response to “Body vs. Instrument”	146
Unawareness: The Side-Effect of “Disembodied Voice”.....	148
Positive Experiences of Embodiment and Singing	152
Focus: The Yield of “Instrument without Body”	152
Art: The Fruit of a Positive Body Image?	154
Who’s to blame?.....	157
Chapter VII CONCLUSION	161
Feminism(s).....	164

Voice Teachers and Voice Teaching	169
Woman, Singer, Teacher	176
Further Research.....	179
Revisiting Ellen West	181
Final Thoughts.....	184
REFERENCES	188
Appendix A Informed Consent Form.....	204
Appendix B Focus Group Protocol	209
The Body Image Evaluation Test	211
The Body Image Thoughts Test	212
The Body Image Distress Test	213
The Appearance Importance Test.....	215
The Body Image Coping Test.....	216
The Body Image Quality of Life Test	218
Appendix C Diary Study Protocol.....	220
Appendix D Interview Protocols	222

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1	Relational States of Body and Instrument in Conversational Terms 110

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1	
The Wall of My Apartment That I Turned Into a Low-Tech Whiteboard/Art Installation	109

—How her soul, uncompromising,
 insatiable,
 must have loved eating the flesh from her bones,

*revealing this extraordinarily
 mercurial; fragile; masterly creature ...*

—But irresistibly, nothing
 stopped there; the huge voice

*also began to change: at first, it simply diminished
 in volume, in size,
 then the top notes became
 shrill, unreliable—at last,
 usually not there at all ...*

—No one knows why. Perhaps her mind,
 ravenous, still insatiable, sensed

that to struggle with the shreds of a voice

*must make her artistry subtler, more refined,
 more capable of expressing humiliation,
 rage, betrayal ...*

—Perhaps the opposite. Perhaps her spirit
 loathed the unending struggle

to embody itself, to manifest itself, on a stage whose

*mechanics, and suffocating customs,
 seemed expressly designed to annihilate spirit ...*

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

I first encountered these words not on paper or spoken, but sung. I was in a black box theater in Brooklyn, spending the afternoon watching Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Ellen West*. The libretto for this one act opera is Frank Bidart’s poem by the same name. Bidart was inspired by psychologist’s notes from the 1930s about a patient, given the pseudonym Ellen West, who suffered from what we would now call anorexia. She was

one of the first patients ever treated through existential analysis, and Bidart's poem, written mostly in the first person, reflects the profundity of questions and dysfunction one might expect in someone treated through that means. That Sunday afternoon, soprano Jennifer Zetlan brought her to life.

Listening to a soprano sing about Callas, about a singing career, about the voice, about art made through the body, the irony was palpable. As was the irony created by my personal situation: a soprano (me) listening to another soprano sing about her body, as I took the afternoon off from this research about singing, singers, and body image. In this section of the poem, Bidart, through his character Ellen, wrestles with all the unspoken tensions of singing and bodies: publicity and career success, weight and vocal health, artistic expression and physical form, the self and the audience. As I listened, I wondered if I even needed to write this dissertation. It seemed like Frank, Ricky, and Jennifer had already uncovered, dissected, and expressed this issue with more grace and nuance than I could possibly muster.

But I pressed on—partially because my advisor would not accept someone else's poem as my dissertation. But mostly because Frank, Ricky, and Jennifer said things that lurked in the back of my mind, but never seemed to make it out of anyone's mouth. My research was inspired by a conversation I'd had much earlier with a fellow singer and voice teacher about his struggle to get a female student to adopt the "noble posture" required for classical singing.¹ I assumed my suggestion, that a discomfort with her body

¹ If you're unfamiliar with this expression, or with the postural requirements of classical singing in general, try this exercise. Stand with your feet aligned under your hip joints, with flexible knees, and with a gently tucked in pelvis. Now imagine there are two strings lifting you up towards the ceiling: one attached to your sternum, the other to your head. Allow your shoulders to fall back and down and let your hands rest at your sides. If you look in the mirror, you might notice why we often call this posture "noble": this way of

might be the source of the problem, would come as no surprise. But we shared in a state of shock: his at my suggestion, mine at his reaction. It seemed so obvious to me that a young woman might not instinctively stand with her chest high, arms at her side, stable and proud before anyone who cared to look at her. I began to seriously consider what it means to sing in a woman's body, and how my experiences in my own body had come to define my singing.

Personal Narrative

Have you ever heard the phrase “land tuna”? I heard it so often as a child that I was in my teens before I realized that this idiom was actually two separate words referencing a large fish, and not just a composite set of syllables commonly used to denigrate women who take up too much space. I was in my 20's before I realized how very not-funny this joke is—how it allows the joker to see that woman as less than human. I also grew up around women with an extreme desire for thinness, perhaps due in part to the omnipresent threat of phrases like “land tuna.” I remember family members’ “diets” that consisted of replacing all their meals with a glass of V8, and packs of cigarettes justified as appetite suppressants. I was often advised, by multiple sources, to take up these kinds of habits whenever I outgrew a pair of jeans or wanted the attention

standing portrays a reserved pride, a cordial dignity, or perhaps arrogance. Certainly there is an aesthetic value to this stance that matches the general aesthetic of classical singing, but there are also physiological reasons for this postural prescription. For example, take a deep breath, without raising your shoulders, and notice what moves when you breathe. You might feel expansion in your ribcage, back, or abdomen. As I will describe in later chapters, it is this movement, this expansion, that is the basis for breath support, which is the technique that allows the singer to produce the legato line and unified tone that defines the classical genre of singing. If you're a person with larger breasts, you might also notice a little bit of extra tension in your midback as you continue to hold this position. Finally, notice how open you feel standing in this position. Do you feel visible? Do you feel comfortable? Do you feel exposed?

of boys. Thankfully, I've always loved food, and I found neither fashion nor romance worthy of sacrificing a second slice of pepperoni pizza.

I started singing classically in middle school, right around the time I started to feel pressure to look like a perfect woman rather than a joyful child. I developed habits, as all singers do, that I've spent many years trying to break. I've never been able to sing with my hands at my side, at least not as a soloist for extended periods of time. Regardless of how many times teachers, coaches, or directors say, "Put your hands down," they wander back up into their expressionless pose, just in front of my stomach. I don't notice my hands moving, they act on their own. It wasn't until a voice teacher asked why I was "hiding myself" that I realized how uncomfortably exposed I felt when nothing was guarding my midsection.

Another bad habit that many singers struggle to fix: posture. My chest is always slightly slumped. My teachers assumed this was a symptom of being a tall girl, unwilling to own her height (even though I'm only 5'8"). Again, no amount of correction sticks. I've been told over and over again in so many different ways: "find a noble posture," "stand like you're a queen," "imagine a string lifting you up from your sternum," "sing with your arms behind your back," "feel like your chest is full of helium," the list goes on and on. The prompt that made me most uncomfortable was "tits on a platter," because it is wholly accurate—that's what it feels like to be a girl with larger breasts standing like a singer is supposed to stand: like you are serving up the vulnerable parts of your body for your audience to consume. To be fair, that's what the best singing feels like: like you are presenting your whole self, in all its vulnerability, for the sake of connecting with

someone. The best singers are fearless; they put themselves out there, tits and all, unafraid of the judgment that will inevitably follow.

And then there's breathing. I remember the first time I decided to hold my stomach in so I'd look skinnier. I was walking to a friend's house—I don't remember exactly how old I was, but I was still in the period of life when one walks to their friend's house in the summer for unspecified "play" in the backyard. Cars drove past me, and I got the sense that I was being looked at, and I had the explicit thought that pulling my stomach in would satisfy my suddenly desperate need to look skinny for these random strangers. I remember, too, the day in high school anatomy class when I re-learned that one's midsection should expand when they inhale, and the months of conscious practice that came after to breathe "normally." Later in life, I studied with a teacher who came from the German school of singing and advocated for a "belly-in" breathing strategy. In this technique, the singer never releases their abdominal muscles and instead relies on expansion in the ribcage and back. When she taught me to do this she said, "See? You sound better, and you look better, too." From that day on, I wondered every time I sang for her if she thought I looked fat.

Throughout my training, I've heard over and over again "Your body is your instrument." Usually, this saying serves as an admonishment about my vocal health: a stern reminder to get more sleep, or avoid loud parties, or drink more water and less coffee. What if this had been a reminder to love and appreciate my body? What if my teachers had pushed me to acknowledge that the thing I most love to do is made possible, made beautiful, by this body? What if I had been able to accept that it is because I have *this* body that I have *this* voice? Could I have left my hands at my sides? Could I have

stood proudly? Could I have breathed more deeply? Could I have been vulnerable? Could I have been fearless?

Background

Teachers of singing have long recognized the impact that mental and emotional states have on the voice (Günter, 1992; Shelton, 1997; Walker & Commander, 2017). As Horst Günter writes, “the voice reflects all the problems and emotions a person has in his private life” (1992, p. 6). In recent years, pedagogues have paid more and more attention to how we prepare our singers psychologically, as evidenced by the growing body of literature discussing performance anxiety, singer identity, and emotional well-being (Arneson, 2010; O’Bryan, 2015; Walker & Commander, 2017). The field has also seen a shift towards body awareness, as pedagogues profess the benefits of the Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Body Mapping, and yoga for singers (Grant, 2014; Hemsley, 1998; Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017; Moliterno, 2008). But in the vast body of literature on vocal pedagogy, discussions of body image, a singer’s feelings about her body, are scarce, peripheral, or most often, simply absent.

This absence is made more conspicuous by the presence of body image in our modern American culture. Whether it's due to the influence of social media, third (or fourth) wave feminism(s), or the body positivity movement, the concept of body image, both positive and negative, seems to be all around us. Ads for soap, razors, clothing, lingerie, and makeup suddenly show models of all sizes; TV shows feature fat women in substantive roles; Lizzo just won three Grammys (Brown, 2018; Recording Academy, 2020; Viera, 2018). And yet, a recent survey of American adults found that 49% of women are somewhat-to-extremely dissatisfied with their weight (Frederick, Garcia,

Gesselman, Mark, Hatfield, & Bohrnstedt, 2020). Some informal surveys estimate that over 95% of women have negative thoughts about their bodies on a daily basis (CBS News, 2011; Garner 2017). 58% of college-aged women feel pressure to maintain a certain weight (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014). Negative body image is significantly linked with depression, low self-esteem, low overall well-being, and eating disorders (Gattario, 2019). The pervasiveness and seriousness of this concept is reflected in its own international, peer-reviewed journal—*Body Image*—which has been published quarterly since 2004.

Research on body image in collegiate women abounds—partially because undergraduate courses form a large pool of willing research participants, but also because one’s body image is immensely consequential during college. Body image can play a major role in the undergraduate experience, as newly independent college students re/form their eating and exercise habits and, more importantly, their identity and sense of self (Rubinsky, Hosek & Hudak, 2019; Thompson & Zaitchik, 2012). For women who developed disordered eating behaviors during adolescence, this behavior increases during the freshman year of college (Delinsky & Wilson, 2008). These changes to physical and mental health during college may persist throughout one’s lifetime (Nelson, Story, Larson, Neumark-Sztainer & Lytle, 2008).

Much research has also focused on body image in female athletes and dancers — two groups for whom careers are dependent upon both the function and appearance of their bodies (Dantas, Alonso, Sánchez-Miguel, & del Río Sánchez, 2018; Muscat & Long, 2008; Pollatou, Bakali, Theodorakis & Goudas, 2010). Classical singers are similarly positioned, I believe, especially as the opera industry becomes more and more

appearance oriented (Lowe, 2014; Moussaoui, 2018). Research has shown that dancers' body image and performance suffer when they dance in front of mirrors; perhaps singers experience the same negative effects in front of the mirrors in practice rooms and voice studios (Raddell, Adame & Cole, 2002; Radell, Adame & Cole 2004). Student athletes may experience a greater appreciation for the functionality of their bodies; might the same be true for singers as they use their bodies for art, rather than sport (Soulliard, Kauffman, Fitterman-Harris, Perry & Ross, 2019)? But beyond the experiences of other groups, singers have a deep connection to the uniqueness of our instruments—it is so often through voice type and quality that we find identity (O'Bryan, 2015). How does that relationship translate to our feelings about our bodies? How might our singing be different if we celebrated our bodies as the source of our vocal traits and talent?

Problem Statement

As teachers of singing, we continually acknowledge the influence that mental and emotional states have on our singers' ability to perform. We also recognize that a singer's body is her instrument and therefore emphasize awareness of one's body and one's health. But the intersection of these two ideas, how one perceives, thinks, and feels about their body, has been largely overlooked in the vocal pedagogical literature. Therefore, I aimed to examine how body image affects classical vocal performance in collegiate women singers.

A Note about Gender

If you have a body, you have a body image. For decades, body image was thought of as a women's issue, but in academia this bias has started to shift (Bailey, Gammage &

van Ingen, 2017). Men experience body image concerns regularly; one survey estimates that nearly one fifth of American men are somewhat-to-extremely dissatisfied with at least one aspect of their bodies (Frederick, Garcia, Gesselman, Mark, Hatfield, & Bohrnstedt, 2020). But, by the same survey, over one fourth of American women felt dissatisfied with at least one part of their body. Women experience body image concerns and eating disorders at much higher rates than men, and their anxieties about their bodies are different. Where women aim to be smaller and thinner, men often seek to be larger and more muscular (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Women also experience more and different societal pressures on their appearance (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1984). Body dissatisfaction may also pose more and different health risks for women than for men (Bornioli, Lewis-Smith, Smith, Slater & Bray, 2019).

Unfortunately, the research described in the previous paragraph is limited by its implicit acceptance of the gender binary. The gender binary, or the conception that gender is limited to the categories of male and female or masculine and feminine, permeates the vast majority of sociological research (Johnson & Repta, 2012). Research across multiple fields, from neuroscience to psychology, has demonstrated that the gender binary is a deeply flawed conception that arises from our malleable culture, rather than the actualities of our biological makeup (Hyde, Bigler, Joel, Tate & van Anders, 2019). But still this idea persists, and although it is untrue, it still holds power. The way that Ibram X. Kendi describes the construct of race is remarkably analogous:

We are what we see ourselves as, whether what we see exists or not. We are what people see us as, whether what they see exists or not. What people see in themselves and others has meaning and manifests itself in ideas and actions and policies, even if what they are seeing is an illusion. Race is a mirage that we do well to see, while never forgetting it is a mirage... (Kendi, 2019, p. 37)

Research built on the gender binary does not fully reflect what is, but it does provide an accurate picture of the mirage. Understanding that mirage helps us think about the ways in which it exercises and maintains power. Therefore, while my research aims to operate under and promote an inclusive perception of the gender spectrum, the gender binary must be acknowledged not because it is real, but because it holds real power.

Recently more research has been done to examine body image in transgender and non-binary people. This research suggests that many transgender individuals experience gender dissociation in relation to their dissatisfaction with body size: “body size or shape was a problem specifically because of the way it influenced gender expression” (McGuire, Doty, Catalpa & Ola, 2016, p.102). They may focus on different body parts and prize different physical characteristics based on how those characteristics are associated with their desired gender expression. Research on body image for people who identify as nonbinary is still very limited, but it seems clear that nonbinary and binary transgender people’s experience of their gender has a direct relation to how they experience and are satisfied, or dissatisfied, with their bodies (Jones, Pierre Bouman, Haycraft & Arcelus, 2019, p. 271).

Everyone has a body image, and everyone’s body image is at least partially influenced by societal pressures, norms, and stigmas, most of which are related to gender. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how body image may impact vocal performance, and to limit the scope of this study, I have chosen to focus solely on singers who identify or are identified as women. Participation in this research was open to cis women (assigned female at birth and identifying as binary manifest women), trans women (assigned male at birth and identifying as women), or AFAB nonbinary people

(assigned female at birth, identifying as neither men nor women), as long as they have experience with classical singing while being viewed, either by themselves or by others, as women. My goal through this focus is not to reinforce the gender binary, but to acknowledge and unpack the expectations for our bodies that often come through this bifurcated lens of gender.

Research Questions

The dearth of research connecting singing and body image leaves many questions unanswered. I started by noticing the eerie similarity between the ways in which women are restricted by a negative body image and the set of skills necessary for effective and artistic classical singing. From the literature, and from my own experience, a negative body image and its consequences seem uniquely antithetical to classical singing technique and training. However, I recognized that a positive body image, wherein one appreciates their body for its abilities and uniqueness, might apply to a singer's voice and allow her physical freedom, confidence, and artistic expression. Therefore, I sought answers to these questions:

1. Does a singer's body image influence her singing?
2. If so, when and how?

This intentionally broad inquiry was a first step into this important topic and will hopefully open the door to future research that could provide narrower conclusions, solutions, or suggestions. But in this initial foray, my goal was to explore any and all connections, provide awareness, and spark reflection.

Theoretical Framework: Feminisms

Feminisms and Body Image

This study employed a feminist lens through which to examine the issue of body image and singing. As previously stated, body image concerns are more prevalent, and often more serious, in women than in men. Feminist theorists posit that this gender disparity can be explained by the social role that women inhabit, rather than any innate biological differences (Smolak & Murnen, 2007). By contrast, proponents of a biological approach, as employed in evolutionary psychology, suggests that humanity's biological drive to reproduce and the differences in male and female reproductive roles is the driving force behind broader behavioral differences between men and women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Singh, 1993). Smolak and Murnen (2007) explain how this approach to gender differences is often applied to examinations of beauty standards:

A woman's reproductive fitness is equated with her fertility and her ability to mother while a man's is signaled by his potential to provide material resources. Hence, a woman should look for indications that a man has a high status while a man should seek evidence that a woman will be fecund. The best indicators of the latter are body cues, aspects of women's body's shape that has come to be equated with physical attractiveness. (p. 237)

This explanation would suggest that any differences between beauty standards and by extension body image between men and women are natural and implicitly unalterable. A biological perspective on these differences ignores any and all socio-cultural factors and is inherently antagonistic to feminists' aim to bring about gender equality.

Eagly's Social Roles Theory (1987) stands in opposition to theories based solely in evolutionary psychology; her work explains that "the social behaviors that differ between the sexes are embedded in social roles—in gender roles as well as in many other

roles pertaining to work and family life” (p. 9). While these social roles may have originated from physical differences, social conditions have reinforced these ideas, to the point that they exist even in spaces where physical differences have minimal significance (Smolak & Murnen, 2007). Social Roles Theory (SRT) represents a structural approach to examining sex differences in that it emphasizes the influence of social positions within groups (such as business organizations or families) on behavior. The Tripartite Model of Body Dissatisfaction relies on this structural perspective and identifies the media, peers, and parents as the primary determinants of one’s beauty ideal (Thompson et al., 1999, as cited in Smolak & Murnen, 2007).

The current American beauty ideal for women is obsessed with thinness, and associates it with inherent goodness, and fatness with inherent deficiencies of character (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). The thin, angular form that has become synonymous with beauty is antithetical to the ‘normal’ adult female figure (Smolak & Murnen, 2007). Men are also subject to an appearance ideal, but the muscular form prescribed for men, while for many is impossible to fully achieve, does not run opposite to their natural form: “Puberty moves boys towards the male ideal but takes girls away from the female ideal” (Smolak & Murnen, 2007, p. 244-245). Furthermore, our culture teaches that one’s physical form is infinitely malleable, leading women to further reject their natural state of being and attempt extreme, dangerous methods of altering their bodies. For so many women, their culture and their physiology are at war, and judging by the prevalence of body image concerns, “culture appears to be winning” (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999, p. 87).

According to the Tripartite Model of Body Dissatisfaction, pressure from the media, peers, and parents will only lead to body dissatisfaction if one has internalized the beauty ideal they promote (Smolak & Murnen, 2007). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) refer to this internalization as self-objectification. Their Objectification Theory posits that women's bodies are often treated as objects for male consumption within Western society, and that women are therefore valued more for their appearance than for their person (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Deviating from this prescribed social role has myriad consequences for a woman's livelihood and safety (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Wolf, 1991). Self-objectification occurs as women attempt to anticipate and mitigate those consequences by turning the male gaze on themselves. Women's internalization of beauty ideals is directly related to their social role, and the differences in the social roles of men and women are therefore a likely cause of women's heightened body image concerns.

Despite the social origins of these issues, "popular feminism," as defined by Sarah Banet-Weiser, lays the locus of control for them at the feet of individual women. Banet-Weiser (2018) characterizes popular feminism as a dilution of feminist principles that is made more palatable to corporate interests and neoliberal sensibilities by stripping away feminism's traditional focus on the responsibilities of structural forces and instead focusing on the capacities of individuals to change or transform. In the context of body image and self-esteem, popular feminism "positions individual *capacity* to believe in oneself as the resolution to low self-esteem, rather than look to structural sexism, which provides the context for low self-esteem in the first place" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1611). Put simply, the implicit message is often "if you don't love your body, that's because you

aren't confident enough" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1590). A woman's body image is both the problem and the solution, and it has become something to be judged in and of itself.

Feminisms and Singing

Feminist perspectives are remarkably present within the body of academic literature on body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Smolak & Murnen, 2007; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Feminist perspectives are less visible, however, within the vocal pedagogy literature, despite numerous feminist musicological probes of the Western operatic canon (Smart, 2000). Gender differences are ever present in classical singing. Operatic roles are almost always gender specific, and even many art songs are traditionally relegated to a specific gender (Fontaine, 2013; Sjoerdsma, 2008). But beyond gender associations with repertoire, which could arguably be challenged, voice teachers must contend with physiological differences between the sexes as they train their singers. Estrogen and testosterone have profound effects on the vocal mechanism, which necessitates a different approach to training male and female singers, at least in some areas of vocal technique (Doscher, 1994; McCoy, 2012; McKinney, 2005; Miller, 2013).² Because of these biological differences, a socio-cultural model cannot completely account for differences in classical singing pedagogy between men and women. However, as Eagly's (1987) SRT articulates, conditions wherein biological differences between the sexes are apparent give rise to social structures that reinforce

² Pedagogy for the transgender voice has become an increasingly present topic in vocal pedagogical journals and conferences. Discussions about transgender singers include ways to choose and adapt repertoire as well as how a teacher must adapt their technical pedagogy to suit the needs of transgender singers. The profound effects estrogen and testosterone have on the voice are documented in studies of transitioning singers who are undergoing hormone therapy (Manternach, Chipman, Rainero & Stave, 2017; Sims, 2017).

gender divisions and hierarchies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the classical singing world is rife with gender inequality and therefore research in this field that employs a feminist lens will likely prove fruitful (Frey, 2017).

Participants Co-Researchers

Participants in this study were four collegiate women majoring in music with classical voice as their primary instrument. They had each completed a minimum of three years of private vocal study. Women were defined as anyone who self-identified as a woman (Golombisky, 2017). Singers majoring in musical theater were excluded, not because their body image is unimportant, but because the literature suggests that the specific demands of the operatic industry may have a large impact on the aspiring classical singer's body image. If so, the differing pressures of the musical theater industry may lead to differences in body image and its effects for women entering those fields. The technical differences between classical and musical theater vocal pedagogy would further complicate any comparison between singers in these fields. Much of this study relied on the participants' reflections and reactions, and therefore they needed at least a basic awareness of vocal technique and their own instrument; therefore, singers who completed less than one year of private vocal study were excluded from recruitment.

Throughout this research, I relied on my participants to do more than just participate. In our focus group they inspired our conversations with their openness; in their audio diaries, they observed and reported their experiences; in our interviews, we analyzed their discoveries together. I therefore chose to call them co-researchers to recognize the magnitude of their contribution to this work and to give them license to actively explore, rather than passively participate, in this research experience. Whether or

not they fit the traditional definition of that title is a fair question, but I chose their title in keeping with the magnitude of their effort and to honor their contributions, rather than to satisfy broader associations with somewhat nebulous research terminology (Smith, 1994). In Chapter 3, I'll explain how this title is in keeping with the feminist methodology I chose to employ. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, you'll see the ways in which my co-researchers' curiosity, dedication, and courage made this research possible and meaningful.

Research Methodology Overview

This study employed a feminist methodological framework. Feminist methodologies often center on examining women's lives and experiences, but their usefulness here goes far beyond a focus on gender. Feminist methodologies are inherently interdisciplinary, and therefore support the use of multiple and different methods of data collection. This framework also requires that the researcher utilize, not neutralize, her personal perspective as a woman to bring her work "into sharper focus" (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 73). Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this project, feminist methodologies prescribe consciousness-raising both as part of a research method and as a gateway to personal and social transformation (Cook & Fonow, 1986; Mies, 1993). Examining the effects of body image on vocal performance requires participants to be conscious of their body image in potentially new and deeper ways; choosing a research methodology that supported this necessary shift was a primary concern in constructing this research.

Data collection was a three-part process, housed within this feminist methodological framework. It began with a focus group designed to raise co-researchers' consciousness about body image by inviting them to view their own experiences in a

social, rather than personal, context. Part 2 was a diary study, conducted over one month, that allowed co-researchers to reflect over time and in varied singing settings (i.e., practicing, lessons, and performances). Data collection concluded with individual interviews with each co-researcher so that she and I could analyze her experiences together and generate deep and potentially meaningful insights that enriched this research and hopefully benefitted each co-researcher in her future singing.

which body image affects not just my own life, but the lives of other women in general and those of the four specific women with whom I researched.

Concept Definitions

Body image can be simply defined as “a person’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about [their¹] body” (Grogan, 2016, p. 4). Body image is a multidimensional concept that is commonly divided into four areas: perceptual, cognitive (or attitudinal), affective, and behavioral (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Gardner & Brown, 2011; National Eating Disorders Collaboration). Perceptual body image is generally assessed by comparing one’s estimation of one’s body size with their actual measurements (Grogan, 2016). People experiencing body image disturbance often perceive their body to be larger than it actually is (Gardner & Brown, 2011; Phillips, 2009). The cognitive dimension of body image relates to how one thinks about the function and appearance of their body. This dimension is often assessed by measuring the importance one places on their appearance, or by evaluating one’s beliefs about their body (Grogan, 2016). Affective body image describes the way one feels about their body and is often assessed through measures of body satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2016). The behavioral dimension of body image refers to one’s behavior towards their body based on their body image. These behaviors can include avoidance, social isolation, or habitual body-monitoring (Grogan, 2016).

The study of body image as a biopsychosocial concept began with Paul Schilder’s *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1935). For the rest of the 20th century,

¹ Throughout this dissertation, “their” will be used as a singular, third person pronoun.

research focused mainly on negative manifestations of this concept (Grogan, 2016; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Negative body image can be defined as “a person’s negative thoughts or feelings about [their] body” (Grogan, 2016, p. 4). A great deal of research has linked negative body image with eating disorders, depression, sexual dysfunction, and low self-esteem (Cash, 2008; Cash & Smolak, 2011). One large study of college students found that 46% of participants, both male and female, experienced negative body image (Williams, Cash, & Santos, 2004).

Recent research has redefined the concept of positive body image as distinct from negative body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). People who exhibit a positive body image display attitudes and experience effects that are distinct from those of people with low levels of negative body image. Although the concept is still being explored, researchers have proposed the following definition of positive body image: “An overarching love and respect for the body that allows individuals to (a) appreciate the unique beauty of their body and the functions that it performs for them; (b) accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images; (c) feel beautiful, comfortable, confident, and happy with their body, which is often reflected as an outer radiance, or a “glow;” (d) emphasize their body’s assets rather than dwell on their imperfections; and (f) interpret incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed” (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010, p. 112)

Feminism(s)

Body image concerns can affect anyone, but research has consistently shown that they are more prevalent in women than in men (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984). In one study of n=277 college students, researchers found that women were significantly more likely to experience body image dissatisfaction (Muth & Cash, 1997). In another study of over 400 college students, women were again found to be much more likely to have a negative body image, and only for female participants was body image strongly correlated with self-esteem (Lowery, Kurpius, Befort, Blanks, Sollenberger, Nicpon & Huser; 2005). These differences between men and women likely stem from differences in societal ideals about femininity and masculinity (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Feminist literature provides essential perspectives for understanding the societal context in which women learn to relate to their bodies.

In 1984, Judith Rodin, Lisa Silberstein, and Ruth Striegel-Moore coined a new phrase to describe body image in the general female population: normative discontent. Citing research that demonstrated that a healthy woman's attitude towards fat and weight gain are nearly indistinguishable from those of a woman with an eating disorder, they asserted that the body image concerns associated with eating disorders plagued the psyches of most Western women to some degree. Eating disorders, rather than being individual pathologies, are more accurately characterized as extreme versions of normative behavior. To explain this state of widespread weight anxiety, they turned to societal causes and cultural attitudes, and examined women's experiences of their bodies in contrast with men's experiences. Their analysis led them to a self-evident conclusion:

that society places much of a woman's value in her appearance, while a man's appearance is less consequential. Since society deems a woman's value is determined by her beauty, so is her career advancement, her social potential, and her access to resources. Women "pursue thinness like a career" (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, p. 269) because in so many ways their livelihoods depend on the way their bodies are perceived by others.

Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) goes a step further. Her passionate manifesto reconciles seemingly contradictory trends of the latter half of the 20th century: as women became more liberated, eating disorders among young women became more prevalent. In Wolf's view, the ideology that dictates a woman's value as a direct consequence of her beauty—or, as Wolf calls it, the beauty myth—is not passively accepted by a society slow to change, but rather actively enacted and sustained by the patriarchal, capitalist power structure that benefits from women undervaluing their labor, their bodies, and their selves. The closer women get to power, and the less restrained they are by older and more direct vehicles of oppression, the more a need for outer beauty is forced upon them. The struggle to perfect one's body drains a woman of her income, her time, and even her self-efficacy and self-worth.

I was recently reminded of the incredible amount of resources I have put into conforming to feminine standards of beauty on an early morning trip to Target with my husband. Our newly remodeled Target has a giant section, full of fancy displays and giant glossy ads, devoted to women's beauty products, while the men's section of shampoos and body washes is still confined to just two normal aisles more towards the back of the store. This disparity is normal, so much so that it didn't occur to me; rather, it was my

husband who said, “they really do want you to spend all your money looking pretty, don’t they?” And its not just my money, it’s my time and energy too. How to do your makeup isn’t innate knowledge coded into our DNA—it’s a skill we put our time and energy into learning. It’s a specialized knowledge base that takes work to gain and to maintain. The way some people memorize baseball statistics or practice their three-pointers, I know what shade of foundation I wear down to the number, what colors of eyeshadow I look good in, how to match my lipstick to my outfit, and how to use an eyelash curler (although to be honest, I’m still not very adept with those). And that’s just makeup! There’s so much more to know about dieting, exercise, fashion, skincare. Some women explore these things like a hobby, for their own personal enjoyment, to follow their own passions. But for me and so many others, we hold on to (and try to keep up with) all of this extra knowledge just to be baseline acceptable in the eyes of our colleagues, superiors, partners, and even friends.

The eternal home-improvement project (as one of my co-researchers will refer to it in Chapter 7) that is a woman’s struggle to be beautiful enough was the perfect counterweight to the legions of women seeking power thanks to the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s.² Even as second wave feminism surged, the weight of Miss

² Wolf’s writing has been criticized within academia as conspiratorial thinking that strips both men and women of individual agency, and lays blame at the feet of a nameless conglomeration of men and corporations (Knight, 1997). While I agree with Lynne Segal’s assertion that “women’s subordination is not a result of a conscious conspiracy by men” (1987, p.165, as cited in Knight, 1997), ignoring the structural forces that Wolf identifies comes dangerously close to what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) identifies as the neo-liberal tendency to answer the injuries of sexism with the individual woman’s capacity for self-improvement, rather than addressing structural sexism, or the men (and women, and non-binary people) who cause said injury. The purpose of including Wolf’s work here is not to propagate the image of a secret cabal of sexist men, but rather to draw the audience’s attention to the structural forces at play and the ways in which women’s subjugation is incentivized. It is my personal view that individual actions over centuries created our culture, and that individual actions exist both as a result of personal agency and within that historical context. While any individual cannot be held responsible for the whole of that culture, they are

Americas, playboy bunnies, and fashion models all dropped precipitously during the 1960's, 70's, and 80's. Wolf refers to this shift as the “One Stone³ Solution” (Wolf, p. 3156), wherein society's image of the ideal female body was systematically manipulated to reflect a skinnier figure than is natural for most women. In Wolf's words: “By simply dropping the official weight one stone below most women's natural level, and redefining a woman's womanly shape as by definition ‘too fat,’ a wave of self-hatred swept over First World women, a reactionary psychology was perfected, and a major industry was born. It suavely countered the historical groundswell of female success with a mass conviction of female failure, a failure defined as implicit in womanhood itself” (Wolf, p. 3165).

Wolf's above quote suggests that, although enacted by the patriarchy, women have internalized the constraints of the beauty myth. Fredrickson and Roberts' Objectification theory (1997) further explores that internalization. Sexual objectification is defined as being valued predominantly as a body or collection of body parts for others' consumption, and women are constantly at risk of being objectified. This objectification occurs via the male gaze: “Through the male gaze, the female body becomes territory, a valuable resource to be acquired” (Ponterotto, 2016). The concept of the male gaze originated in film critiques and referred to the way in which women's bodies were presented in media—almost exclusively as objects of sexual desire (Sassatelli, 2011). But the male gaze is not just an on-screen phenomenon; women experience visual objectification by men in their daily interpersonal reactions. Research demonstrates that

responsible for the actions they take that propagate that culture, keeping in mind that the sum of these actions will define culture for future generations.

³ “Stone” refers to the British measurement, which equates to around 14 pounds.

anticipating being looked at by a man can prompt a woman to self-objectify more so than anticipating a woman's gaze (Calogero, 2004).

Self-objectification occurs when women adopt an observer's perspective on their bodies (the male gaze) to the point that they habitually view themselves through that lens. Fredrickson and Roberts echo Rodin, Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, and Wolf in highlighting the ways in which a woman's prosperity and physical safety are determined by outside perceptions of her beauty. They assert that women turn this lens on themselves in an attempt to gain control over their circumstances, to anticipate and prepare for the sexism they will face. Body image concerns are therefore a learned adaptation, a logical consequence of a culture that places disproportionate value on a woman's appearance.

Today, in the midst of third-wave feminism, it might seem like things have changed.⁴ Modern feminism is a multi-vocal movement that lacks an epicenter, but all its disparate corners seem to agree on the importance of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Evans, 2015; Snyder, 2008).⁵ Many feminist scholars and activists now prefer to refer to feminism in the plural, as feminisms, to more fully represent the breadth and diversity contained within this movement. From this focus on intersectionality rose a willingness to highlight non-traditional female bodies. Fat feminism has become a subgroup that focuses on the ways in which fat women experience discrimination in ways that are unique from the experiences of women in general or fat men (Morris, 2019; Saguy, 2011). The Body Positivity Movement sprung up on blogs and social media

⁴ Some say we are now in the fourth wave of feminism, others eschew the wave metaphor entirely (Evans, 2016, Grady, 2018).

⁵ This focus is not entirely new - certain activists like bell hooks have been champions of intersectionality for decades - but intersectionality's prominent place within the current movement is a defining feature of this new wave of feminism (hooks, 2000; Snyder, 2008).

websites in the mid-aughts and began as a way to publish photos of figures one would not normally see in the media (Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John & Slater, 2019; Sastre, 2014).

These websites answered bell hooks' earlier criticism of feminist intervention into beauty culture: "to critique sexist images without offering alternatives is an incomplete intervention" (hooks, 2000, p. 35). Alternatives seem to abound now: Ashely Graham was on the cover of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue, Lizzo took home three Grammys, and large fashion brands are featuring models of all different sizes, skin colors, and genders (Dalessandro, 2015; Recording Academy, 2020; Sports Illustrated, n.d.).

It's not nothing; at least for me, seeing women in swimsuit ads that look like me really helps. I feel so much more comfortable shopping when the models in the pictures aren't all unattainably thin. I feel welcomed, valued in those spaces. I find myself shopping almost exclusively in those stores (or more accurately, on those sites), not because of a conscious boycott, but more so because of the unconscious message I receive from those brands that they want women like me to wear their clothes, use their makeup, be seen with their products. Unfortunately, that positive message does not always spring from sheer corporate benevolence; it has been turned by many into a superficial way to differentiate their brand and increase profits. The activism of the Body Positivity Movement has been largely hijacked by corporations, whose attempts at challenging the hegemonic beauty ideal are ultimately "diluted by [their] contradictory imperative to promote self-acceptance and at the same time increase sales by promoting women's consumption of products that encourage conformity to feminine beauty ideology" (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 962; Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Luck, 2016).

Although some company leaders attempt to disrupt this ideology, the inherent structures of the fashion, beauty, and advertising industries present significant barriers (Craddock, Ramsey, Spotswood, Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2019).

This body-positive façade may be masking an escalation of the body image problem facing women. A 2019 review of over 100 studies of eating disorders found that eating disorders have become more prevalent in the US adult population, increasing from 3.5% for the 2000–2006 period to 7.8% for the 2013–2018 period (Galmiche, Déchelotte, Lambert, & Tivolacci, 2019). In one large survey of Western women (n=9667) conducted in 2015, 89% of respondents experienced weight-based body dissatisfaction (Swami, Tran, Stieger, & Voracek, 2015).

Social media may also present a greater threat to a woman's body image than traditional media (Hogue & Mills, 2019). Facebook usage has been consistently linked to greater body image dissatisfaction and eating disorder risk (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015; Eckler, Kalyango & Paasch, 2017). Instagram is particularly problematic; greater Instagram use is associated with more frequent self-objectification and greater body image dissatisfaction in young women (Fardouly, Willburger & Vartanian, 2018). These trends may be attributable to the sheer number of images of the “ideal” female body with which we are now constantly surrounded; online harassment, in the form of body shaming through comments sections and direct messages, may also play a part (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The same tools that gave rise to the body positivity movement have also allowed misogyny to take root in internet communities.⁶ Within this context of “popular

⁶ The internet has accelerated and anonymized more traditional forms of harassment, like cat-calling or threats of violence, through emails, instant messages, and comments sections. The internet has also given rise to novel forms of misogyny, like revenge porn. Forums like 4Chan and Reddit provide spaces for

misogyny” (Banet-Weiser, 2018), online body shaming is meant to humiliate, and that humiliation serves dual purposes. First, women’s embarrassment serves as a balm to the bruised egos of these men: “the capacity of women to ‘love their body’ apparently injures men’s sense of self-esteem (because in the body positivity discourse, women don’t need men to affirm their bodies), and shaming is seen as the conduit to restoring masculine capacity” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1441). Second, online shaming and humiliation encourages women to remove themselves from online discourse, thereby disrupting the feminist community (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf describes beauty as a kind of currency that is subject to inflation: as women become more powerful, so does the myth (1991).

Risks

The adoption of a negative body image can contribute to poor mental health. Depression is experienced broadly by both women and men, but women are twice as likely to become depressed in their lifetime (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that this gender gap can be explained by objectification theory: habitual body monitoring, shame, and anxiety, as a result of repeated sexual objectification, put women more at risk of experiencing depression. Multiple studies show that depression is positively correlated with negative body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Holsen, Kraft & Røysamb, 2001; Noles, Cash & Winstead, 1985; Şanlıer, Türközü & Toka, 2016). Sexual dysfunction in women has also been repeatedly linked to negative body image (Andersen & LeGrand, 1991; Faith & Schare, 1993; Wiederman, 2000).

misogynists to virtually congregate and organize. 70% of online harassment is committed against women, a disproportionate amount of which is against women of color (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental illness wherein a person is preoccupied with a slight or imagined physical defect, to the point that it causes significant distress and/or social or occupational impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). “People with BDD have a problem with body image—with how they view their physical appearance—not with how they actually look” (Phillips, 2009). BDD is slightly more common in women than in men (Koran, Abujaoude, Large & Serpe, 2008; Phillips, n.d.). Some people with BDD, more often women than men, have a comorbid eating disorder (Ruffolo, Phillips, Menard, Fay & Weisberg, 2006). Those individuals experience greater levels of body image disturbances (Ibid.). BDD symptoms range from mild to severe, and can even be life-threatening (Phillips, 2009).

Eating disorder risk is multifactorial; a person’s genetics, family environment, cultural experience, and individual development all play a part (Striegel-Moore & Cachelin, 2001). For most women, a negative body image will not lead to an eating disorder, but the consequences for those who do suffer from an eating disorder can be severe (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Anorexia Nervosa is the deadliest mental health disorder, with a standardized mortality ratio⁷ of 5.86% (Smink, Van Hoeken & Hoek, 2012). Anorexia is characterized by an abnormally low body weight, and people who are anorexic experience symptoms akin to those of starvation (Mayo Clinic, 2018). Rates of anorexia have remained stable in the general population since the 1970’s but have increased in girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (Smink, Van Hoeken & Hoek, 2012). Bulimia nervosa is characterized by habitual bingeing and purging, and can lead to severe

⁷ Standardized Mortality Ratio (SMR) is a ratio between the observed number of deaths in a study population and the number of deaths would be expected, based on the age- and sex-specific rates in a standard population and the population size of the study population by the same age/sex groups.

dehydration, tooth decay, digestive problems, and death in rare cases (Mayo Clinic, 2018). Bulimia is also more prevalent in women than in men, at a ratio of 10:1 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Bulimia can cause heart and digestive problems, as well as esophageal erosion and tooth decay, due to the frequency of vomiting experienced by many patients (Mayo Clinic, 2018). Persistent vomiting causes a particular problem for singers, as repeated exposure to stomach acid can have an adverse effect on the vocal tract (Sataloff, 2017).

Even in the absence of the severe consequences of body image outlined above, women who have a negative body image suffer from a lack of self-esteem that detracts from our overall wellbeing. Media, men, and mirrors constantly present women with challenges to their sense of self that may seem individually inconsequential but have an incalculable cumulative impact. As Wolf articulates:

“because ‘beauty’ lives so deep in the psyche, where sexuality mingles with self-esteem, and since it has been usefully defined as something that is continually bestowed from the outside and can always be taken away, to tell a woman she is ugly can make her feel ugly, act ugly, and, as far as her experience is concerned, *be* ugly, in the place where feeling beautiful keeps her whole” (p. 809).

Body Image, Identities, and Intersectionality

Of course, body image is not the same for all women. Many different factors may influence one’s experience of body image including racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, ability status, and personal beliefs. The ways in which racial and ethnic identity impact body image for women in America are complex, sometimes contradictory, and overall in need of further study. Different studies report opposing results for different ethnic groups, and too often these results have been framed through comparison to the experiences of white women, which limits our understanding of beauty

ideals as defined and impacted by culture (Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019; Winter, Danforth, Landor & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, 2019).

Although the bulk of early research substantiating objectification theory looked solely at white women, multiple studies now show that this model can be applied to understand the experiences of Black⁸, Latina, and Asian American women as well (Frederick, Forbes, Grigorian & Jarcho, 2007; Hebl, King & Lin, 2004; Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019). However, the strength of the relationship between body surveillance and body dissatisfaction differs between racial groups and between studies (Frederick, Forbes, Grigorian & Jarcho, 2007; Schaefer, Burke, Calogero, Menzel, Krawczyk & Thompson, 2018). The inconsistencies of these results may be partially explained by the mediating effects of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity, or “the process of identifying with one's cultural group and the acceptance of its norms and practices” (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016, p. 1) has been shown to be a protective factor against body image distress for Black, Latina, and Asian American women⁹; however the degree to which this phenomenon occurs, or even whether or not it occurs at all for a particular group, varies from study to study (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016; Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019; Winter, Danforth, Landor & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, 2019). Differences between samples may also be explained by the environment in which participants were socialized; some research demonstrates that black women going to school in predominantly white environments feel more pressure to conform to the thin, white beauty ideal (Watson,

⁸ For black women, objectification is also tied to the history of slavery in the United States. In this sense, objectification is not just sexual, and is experienced through intersectionality as both racial and gender oppression (Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019).

⁹ Rakhkovskaya and Warren also investigated ethnic identity as a buffer for European American women, but most European American women have very little, if any, ethnic identity (2016).

Lewis & Moody, 2019). The limited research available reaches no definitive conclusions about how different ethnic identities affect one's body image, beyond that race and ethnicity clearly do have an effect, be it positive or negative, on how a woman views her body.

Perhaps surprisingly, sexual orientation seems to have little effect on women's body image, although it is a strong mediating variable for men (Basabas, Greaves, Barlow & Sibley, 2019). Multiple studies comparing body dissatisfaction in hetero-, homo-, and plurisexual women have found no significant differences between these groups (Basabas, Greaves, Barlow & Sibley, 2019; Moreno-Domínguez, Raposo & Elipe, 2019; Smith, Telford & Tree, 2017). Researchers have also found that homo- and heterosexual women experience similar levels of sexual objectification, harassment, and self-objectification, which may explain the similarities in body dissatisfaction (Hill & Fischer, 2016). The recent increase in LGBTQ representation in mainstream media may also have a negative impact on body image for these groups, as most media encourages a traditional, heteronormative standard of beauty (Smith, Telford & Tree, 2017). However, the effects of body image concerns on wellbeing differ based on sexual orientation in one key area: homosexual women's body image concerns have significantly less of an impact on their sexual satisfaction, compared to bi- and heterosexual women, likely because they do not experience the "male gaze" in this arena (Moreno-Domínguez, Raposo & Elipe, 2019).

Women with disabilities, both visible and invisible, may experience greater body dissatisfaction (Moin, Duvdevany & Mazor, 2009; Taleporos & McCabe, 2002; Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019; Taub, Fanflik & McLorg 2003). Research suggests that

women with physical disabilities internalize the same standards of beauty that apply to women in general but may feel a greater sense of anger and discontentment at their perceived inability to meet those standards due to lack of mobility, differences in outward appearance, and/or accessibility devices (Taub, Fanflik & McLorg 2003). More severe disabilities may produce greater body dissatisfaction (Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019). Recent research suggests that women with physical disabilities may develop a concept of body image that is based on functionality as well as appearance (Thomas, Warren-Findlow, Webb, Quinlan, Laditka & Reeve, 2019). Body functionality appreciation is a key factor of positive body image, and the ways in which experience with disability may inform a positive body image deserve further exploration (Thomas, Warren-Findlow, Webb, Quinlan, Laditka & Reeve, 2019; Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010).

Feminist identity may also attenuate body dissatisfaction. In a meta-analysis of 26 different studies on feminist identity and body image, Murnen and Smolak found compelling, although complex, evidence to support this idea (2009). Feminist identity was consistently associated with less body shame, less drive for thinness, and lower scores on eating disorder inventories. In most studies examined, these relationships were relatively weak; however observed relationships were stronger when participants explicitly identified as feminists (rather than just agreeing to ideological ideas of feminism) and with older participants. The authors hypothesize that while societal body image pressures are strong enough to have some effect on all women, the stronger a feminist identity, the more likely a woman is to reap the benefits for her body image.

Singers, Singing, and Bodies

Identity and Industry

One's identity as a singer and its effect on their body image is an underexplored phenomenon, but it is almost certainly unique. Like athletes and dancers — two groups with whom much body image research has been conducted — singers' bodies are more than just our personal implements of interaction with the world. A singer, like dancers and athletes, builds her career on her body, and her livelihood depends not just on her use of that body, but also on others' appreciation of it. Athletes often experience body functionality appreciation, likely based on their habitual use of their bodies to accomplish specific goals (Soulliard, Kauffman, Fitterman-Harris, Perry & Ross, 2019). Singers may have a similar gateway to this facet of positive body image. But I posit that singers occupy a uniquely difficult space for their own body image. A singer's sense of self is inextricably intermingled with her voice:

Our voices provide our first and most deeply instinctual way of communicating in our environment, and our voices are thoroughly shaped by our conscious and unconscious sense of who we are. How we speak and sing are not only vehicles for our self-expression, they are an embodiment of it. (Becker & Goffi-Fynn, 2016)

As one young singer, the subject of O'Bryan's (2015) case study, described: “[Your voice type] is an identity, because in opera you are boxed into a *fach*¹⁰, and that's what it is ... It IS your identity” (p. 131). That identity is intimately linked with one's appearance:

“I know that you have to look like you sound; this is the biggest thing, if you have a massive voice, but you look like a little Despina or something like that it's kind

¹⁰ A *fach* is an operatic voice classification.

of weird, but if you have a massive frame and you have a tiny voice that doesn't match up also" (O'Bryan, 2015, p. 130).

Feeling as if one "matches" her voice may lead to body satisfaction for some singers. As one singer participating in Frey's (2017) phenomenological study of opera singers and body image expressed: "I get a lot of roles because I look a certain way" (p. 52). A mismatch, however, may cause distress and limit the repertoire one is assigned regardless of vocal ability:

"I don't know who said it, but they'd always implied there's certain roles I would never play, that I would never play Cherubino...I was like 'You've never even given me a chance to sing that, to try it.' I feel like it was a really super subtle way of them saying 'You're too big, you're way too big to play this role, it's never going to happen. Any of those pants roles, not going to happen. Anything that's a pretty, young girl, not going to happen.' It's just like, I'm too big. That's the feeling that I got, right?" (Frey, 2017, p. 52).

A singer's fach may have specific implications for her body image. Research with female athletes shows that athletes in leanness focused sports feel more pressure to be thin, and therefore experience greater body image distress, than athletes in non-leanness focused sports (Kong & Harris, 2015). Singers with voice types associated with smaller or more attractive characters may therefore experience greater pressure to be thin:

"I sing Mimi. Mimi's very comfortable, and I think now that I've lost weight—actually that's what the catalyst was for losing weight. The discussion and 'cause I said to [my voice teacher], "at 110 kilos, who is going to cast me as a Mimi, as a Tosca, as anything"? Nobody's going to cast me as a lyric looking like this" (O'Bryan, 2015, p. 131).

The opera industry looms large for an aspiring professional singer's view of herself and her body. Singers may view themselves as potential employees for whom being small enough for their roles is a part of their job description (Frey, 2017). The highly competitive nature of the modern opera industry often translates into more

pressure to look attractive (Frey, 2017; Lowe, 2014; Moussaoui, 2018). More distressingly, one singer in Frey's (2017) study indicated she thinks of herself as a product, rather than a person: "I'd be a lot less sellable as a product if I were larger" (p. 55). The self-objectification here, brought on by the pressures of finding and maintaining a career in the opera industry, is self-evident.

I decided a long time ago that pursuing a performance career was not for me. There were plenty of reasons for that decision, many of which were joyful recognitions of my strengths and passions that could be better applied in a teaching career. But the visual scrutiny to which I would have been subjected as a professional opera singer was a deterrent. It seems exhausting. One former voice teacher of mine, a working opera singer, lamented to our studio class that so many dresses she would like to wear in recitals or auditions were sleeveless, and that she occasionally had sleeves tailor-made so she wouldn't expose her arms. I remember one career-readiness seminar in which a coach discussed at length what women singers should wear to rehearsals so as to look professional yet stylish, put-together yet comfortable, and of course attractive. "Men just wear button-downs," she said. And these are just the things people say in public. I didn't want to imagine what they might have said about my appearance when I left the audition room. I didn't want my livelihood to be dependent upon those comments.

For some, the demands of the opera industry are viewed not as shallow restrictions based on appearance, but as reasonable expectations of maintaining one's health (Frey, 2017; O'Bryan, 2015; Sandgren, 2005). If it is a musician's responsibility to care for their instrument, then it is the singer's responsibility to care for her body. Unfortunately, society broadly associates thinness with health, and fatness with ill-health

and irresponsible behavior (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011). The evidence linking excess weight with increased morbidity and mortality is, however, less definitive than most assume. Research citing correlations between excess weight and increased health risk often fails to investigate causation or examine pertinent contributing factors, such as fitness, nutrient intake, or socio-economic status (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011). Yet weight stigma is a powerful force. Weight stigma has been shown to negatively impact one's ability to make healthy food choices (Major, Hunger, Bunyan & Miller, 2014). Furthermore, weight stigma's impact on stress-related hormones suggests that the stigma, apart from the weight itself, may be partially responsible for the poor health underlying obesity (Tomiya, Epel, McClatchey, Poelke, Kemeny, McCoy & Daubenmier, 2014).

Despite the stereotype of opera as the domain of singing fat ladies, singers are susceptible to weight stigma within their field—both as its victims and perpetrators: “friends who are the traditional opera singer, who are big and maybe don't take care of themselves in the best way, but then they open their mouths and it's just this glorious instrument that comes out of them. I'm like ‘that is stunning, and you will not have a career, and that is a shame’” (Frey, 2017, p. 59). Even for other singers, it seems it is not enough just to make a beautiful sound. The above quote suggests that this particular singer has equated weight with health and assumed based on the hypothetical singer's size that she does not “take care of herself” and is therefore undeserving of a career. Another singer from a different study shares a similar perspective: “You need to be fit, and you need to be healthy, and you need to look half decent on stage, too. I mean, no one's going to look at you for an hour if you look terrible and you don't take care of yourself” (O'Bryan, 2015; p. 130).

Intersections: Singing and Body Image

When a singer opens her mouth to sing, a complex set of physiological, mental, and emotional processes must all occur in an instant. She decides to sing, and the diaphragm descends, the rib cage opens, the glottis closes. She hears the sound she wants to create in her mind and her tiny vocal folds move with unimaginable precision into their specific configuration for that pitch and volume. She remembers the first syllable she must speak, and her vocal tract and articulators prepare for the combination of vowels and consonants to follow, unique to the language at hand. And of course, she knows the words she is about to say, the emotion she is trying to express, the work of art she is about to recreate both in its uniqueness and her own. And then she sings, in a wild flurry of activity that must appear to be simple, effortless, and magical—the exact opposite of what it actually is.

Too few researchers have yet investigated the effects body image concerns may have on one's ability to execute all of these processes, but it seems from the literature that the effects of a negative body image would hit a singer in all the wrong places — in all the places that are most essential to her voice. Singing, like the experience of body image, is perceptual, cognitive, affective, and behavioral: the singer must perceive the action of her body, think about the music, feel the emotions of the text, and then perform. Therefore, I will examine the potential intersections of these two concepts through the following four dimensions.

1. Perceptual

“Because women are vigilantly aware of their outer bodily appearance, they may be left with fewer perceptual resources available for attending to inner body experience. This limited-resources perspective would predict that those particular social contexts that highlight women's awareness of observers' evaluations of their

bodies would be associated with a correspondent muting of inner sensations” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 185).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that women may struggle to recognize and interpret their bodies’ internal signals in relation to men (Pennebaker & Roberts, 1992). For singers, a lack of awareness of your sensory experiences becomes ignorance of the functioning of your instrument. Furthermore, any kind of performance is likely a social context in which the singer is acutely aware of others judging her body, particularly in evaluative settings like auditions, competitions, or juries.

2. **Cognitive** Good singing and positive body image share a cognitive enemy: perfectionism. Shelton characterizes perfectionism as “one of the first and foremost psychological problems among singers” (1997, p. 9) that robs a singer of the freedom to take risks, grow, and perform (Diaz, 2018). Perfectionism also has an inverse relationship with body satisfaction and is often a component of eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder (Barnett & Sharp, 2016; Phillips, 2009). A singer who is constantly monitoring her body, preempting the judgment of teachers or judges, will then likely be prevented from being fully present in her work. Thomas Hemsley identified “self-consciousness” as the foremost enemy of engaging performances: “The ‘critic sitting on the left shoulder’ has destroyed many a singer’s performance” (1998, p. 188).

Performance anxiety is a pervasive issue for many public artists, but acutely affects the physiological mechanisms used in singing (Arneson, 2010). Performance anxiety is often the result of deeper fears stemming from other areas of a singer’s life that are heightened by the inherently stressful experience of public performance. Eric Maisel (2005) articulates these fears as fear of the unknown, fear of loss of control, fear of strangers, and fear of loss of love and approval. These fears may be amplified in women

who experience body image disturbance, simply because they are the same fears that prompt women to self-objectify. Evaluations of a woman's physical appearance can disproportionately (in relation to men) affect her career and ability to support herself, her success in interpersonal relationships, and her physical safety (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). As stated by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), "... a culture that objectifies the female body presents women with a continuous stream of anxiety-provoking experiences, requiring them to maintain an almost chronic vigilance both to their physical appearance and to their physical safety" (p.183). Simply put, a female singer's fears about how her body will be judged by an audience may amplify, or even partially cause, stage fright.

3. Affective Emotional stimuli also directly impact a singer's vocal function and output. Research has shown that singing with emotional stimuli in comparison with technical, or non-emotional singing, induces more activity in the lower abdominal muscles and uses more of a singer's vital capacity¹¹ (Foulds-Elliott, Thorpe, Cala & Davis, 2000; Pettersen & Bjørkøy, 2009). Emotional stimuli may also have an effect on acoustic features of the voice, such as vibrato, perturbation, and formant amplitude (Dromey, Holmes, Hopkin & Tanner, 2015; Scherer, Sundberg, Fantini, Trznadel & Eyben, 2017). Some research suggests that negative emotions may impact vocal health for singers "whose embodied instrument is particularly susceptible to emotional upheaval" (O'Bryan, 2015, p. 127). Many singers already experience an exaggerated fear of vocal indisposition; therefore, in extreme cases, significant negative

¹¹ Vital capacity refers to the amount of air in the lungs that one is able to expel.

emotional stimuli may lead to a downward spiral of anxiety and health issues (Sandgren, 2005).

4. **Behavioral** But the posture one adopts when trying to hide their body, particularly when trying to avoid drawing attention to sexualized parts of the female body, is antithetical to the posture necessary for singing. As Barbara Doscher says, “A singer ... should feel as if the chest were leading” (1988, p. 73). The importance of effective alignment for singers is widely acknowledged and underscored by countless articles, books, and methods all aimed at improving skeletal alignment and movement efficiency in singers (Arboleda & Frederick, 2001; McCarther, 2014a; McCarther, 2014b). Furthermore, as Hemsley states, “Good posture is not something simply to be switched on when singers enter their teacher’s studio or when they step on to the concert platform or the operatic stage. It must be habitual” (1998, p. 27). An effective adjustment of a student’s posture must therefore go beyond mechanical adjustments in the studio to address the psychological and sociological factors that influence the way she habitually carries her body throughout her life.

Camouflaging may also manifest in an omnipresent tensing of the abdominal muscles, referred to by many women as “sucking it in” (Petro-Roy, 2016; r/AskWomen, 2017). The prevalence of this particular version of body monitoring is un-researched, but numerous blog posts, Reddit threads, Instagram posts, and the publication of the book *Suck Your Stomach in and Put Some Color On!: What Southern Mamas Tell Their Daughters that the Rest of Y’all Should Know Too* (Tomlinson, 2008) certainly suggest that this behavior is relatively common:

“When I was little, my grandma used to poke my tummy and constantly remind me to suck it in ... This habit was engrained [sic] into me so deeply that I’m STILL learning how to relax my belly” (Jelkovsky, 2018).

“I was six the first time I remember sucking in my stomach ... I’d squeeze my abs tightly whenever I wanted to reduce the ostensible size of my stomach. Soon, this became such a habit, I didn’t need to think about it, and I was doing it even when I was alone” (Weiss, 2019).

This excess contraction of the abdominal muscles can have an adverse impact on respiration. Inhalation begins with the contraction of the diaphragm to create space within the thoracic cavity (McCoy, 2012). When the diaphragm contracts, it descends upon vital organs in the abdominal cavity. These organs—referred to as the abdominal viscera—are mostly incompressible, meaning that in order for the diaphragm to fully descend, the viscera must be displaced (McCoy, 2012). If the abdominal muscles are contracted and the abdominal wall held rigid, the viscera will be unable to move, and the diaphragm’s descent will be curtailed. Since the amount of space in the thoracic cavity, created partially by the contraction of the diaphragm, determines the amount of air intake, contraction of the abdominal muscles during inhalation can reduce air intake (Austin, 2013; McCoy, 2012; Sundberg, 1993).

Preventing the diaphragm from fully descending does far more than limit a singer’s supply of air. The direct connections between the diaphragm, ribcage, and trachea allow the contraction of the diaphragm to mechanically alter the position of the larynx itself through the *tracheal pull*. The downward force that the trachea can exert on the larynx increases as the diaphragm descends (Herbst, 2017; Sundberg, 2018; Sundberg, 1993). A lowered larynx is an essential component of classical vocal timbre. Tracheal pull may also affect glottal adduction, subglottic pressure, and contraction of the

cricothyroid muscle (Doscher, 1994; Sataloff, 2017; Sundberg, 1993). It is for these reasons that many prominent vocal pedagogues, of the past and present, recommend relaxing the abdominal muscles and thereby allowing the abdomen to gently expand during inhalation, including Barbara Doscher (1994), Richard Miller (2013), James McKinney (2005), Scott McCoy (2012), Stephen Austin (2013) and Janice Chapman (2016).

Mirror checking is another common body checking behavior and can be compulsive and debilitating (Farrell, 2004; Kraus, 2015; Phillips, 2009). Phillips (2009) describes the in-the-moment effect of mirror-checking: “The longer they look, the more self-focused they become, and the worse they typically feel” (p. 72). Many voice teachers advocate for the use of mirrors in practice to help a student be more aware of their body’s movements and develop their kinesthetic sense. Indeed, I have never seen a voice studio or practice room that did not include a mirror. However, studies done with dancers support the idea that mirrors in a learning environment have a negative effect on body image and serve more to distract the student than support learning outcomes (Radell, Adame, & Cole, 2002). Dancers who take class in a room without a mirror have been shown to perform better than those who learned with a mirror (Radell, Adame, & Cole, 2004). Singers who experience body image concerns may be similarly distracted by the constant presence of mirrors in their learning environments, and thus hindered in their ability to learn and perform.

Conclusion

Body image is a biopsychosocial phenomenon that affects all of us. Our body image can be positive, negative, or neutral, but it will always impact our sense of self.

Decades of research into women's experiences of body image have shown us that, largely due to the social component of this phenomenon, many if not most women struggle with body dissatisfaction. The consequences of that struggle range from mild to deadly, and reach into one's perception of herself, her thinking, her emotions, and her behaviors. While every woman's body image is shaped within a societal context that often values her body over her person, each occupies a different space within that society. A woman's various identities, be they racial or ethnic, sexual, ability status, ideological, or vocational, will inevitably shape how she views her body, just as they shape how she views herself.

Very little research has yet explored how one's identity as a singer may impact one's body image. And, perhaps more importantly for the singers, we have not yet discovered how one's body image may affect one's singing ability. The well-documented effects of a negative body image seem uniquely, almost perfectly, antithetical to the skill sets and functions required for excellent singing. Could disdain for her body be part of what holds a singer back from reaching her full potential? Could it be the unseen wrench in the gears that won't allow her to grow, that her teacher can't find or see? Conversely, could love for her body translate into love for her voice, allowing her to take ownership of her instrument and use it more efficiently, effectively, and beautifully?

Let's find out.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

“—*How could I discover?*”

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

How could I discover, indeed? My research questions, although broad and simple, are difficult to answer. Plenty of measures exist to quantify both body image and singing. Scales, surveys, and questionnaires can assign numbers to a woman’s body dissatisfaction, experiences of objectification, or functionality appreciation (Mutale, Dunn, Stiller, & Larkin, 2016; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Alleva, Tylka, & Van Diest, 2017). Programs and equipment can measure a singer’s resonance, breath flow, or registration (VoceVista, 2021; Pentax Medical, n.d.a; Pentax Medical, n.d.b).¹ But I believe that numbers cannot express the essence of excellent singing, nor the fullness of the relationship one has with her body. Working towards an understanding of *how* body image impacts vocal performance necessitated a qualitative approach.

¹ I’ve spent time with that hardware and software when I worked as a graduate assistant in a voice laboratory. There’s a lot you can measure with VoceVista, or a computerized speech laboratory, or a phonatory aerodynamic system (VoceVista, 2021; Pentax Medical, n.d.a; Pentax Medical, n.d.b). Those measurements can be very useful in a research context; I’ve conducted quantitative research (stats and all) based on those systems and measurements. My point here is not that they are not useful, just that they cannot answer every question and that, despite my comfort with them, they were not the right choice for this research.

But just asking singers questions and recording their answers seemed insufficient. If someone had asked me, when I was 20, how my body image impacted my singing I probably would have said it didn't! I was almost entirely unaware of the concept of body image, let alone its daily impacts on my life. In my experience, and in my singing, body image works behind the scenes, subtly yet deeply influencing the way one perceives, thinks, feels, and acts. I was unconscious of this force for most of my life; only through chance encounters with casual feminism did I slowly begin to wake up. My ability to notice the insidious influence of my body image was contingent upon my consciousness of it. In order to understand how it affects my co-researchers, they needed to be conscious of it as well.

Feminist Methodology

The history of research in every field is dominated by men who studied other men.¹ Feminist theory posits that the absence of women in the contexts in which our knowledge was generated means that our knowledge is, at best, incomplete. The feminist methodology I draw from sprung from second wave feminism to illuminate the knowledge and experiences of women and to improve our collective knowledge “by including and accounting for women, the other half of humankind” (Golombisky, 2017, p. 175).

¹ The vast majority of these men who studied other men were white, at least here in the United States. Feminist methodologies have not always acknowledged the racial inequities inherent in the history of research practices, but modern feminism, through its focus on intersectionality, is more likely to acknowledge the influence of white supremacy and racial bigotry in conjunction with the influence of society's patriarchal structure.

Research that doesn't include or account for women has often labeled itself as objective, rationalist, humanist (ironically), or positivist. "Objectivity itself is an ideal which has a long history of identification with the masculine" (Fox Keller, 1978, p. 42). Thus, feminists reject the concept of objective knowledge and assert that all research has a lived point-of-view and is therefore inherently subjective and political (Cook & Fonow, 1986; Golombisky, 2017). Rather than masquerade as neutral observers, feminist researchers embrace, interrogate, and utilize their personal perspectives: "Feminist women must deliberately and courageously integrate their repressed, unconscious female subjectivity, i.e., their own experience of oppression and discrimination, into the research process" (Mies, 1983, p. 121). This subjectivity allows the researcher to bring her data "into sharper focus" (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 73).

Subjectivity also allows feminist research to have a goal beyond the seeking of knowledge. Feminist methodology is characterized by a commitment to social justice, both within and beyond gender. In the tradition of action or activist research, feminist research actively seeks to better the lives of women (Golombisky, 2017). This improvement is often enacted through consciousness-raising: the process of giving voice to the experiences of marginalized individuals in order to generate and promote a critical awareness of our culture (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). Within a feminist methodology, consciousness-raising can be incorporated throughout the research process through the researcher herself, as a research method, and as a goal of the research (Cook & Fonow, 1986). Consciousness is integral both to my research and to feminist research in general:

"consciousness can be viewed as women's sphere of freedom, a sphere that exists simultaneously with unfree, conforming behavior," so that methodological overreliance on recording behavior and failure to tap the private terrain of consciousness neglects "the most important area of women's creative

expression of self in a society which denies that freedom in behavior" (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 74).

These first three tenets of feminist methodology—studying women’s lives, embracing subjectivity, and consciousness-raising—were all integral parts of my research concept. This alignment of principles and purpose led me to choose this methodology, and its other principles and perspectives further guided the research design.

Pilot Study

In December of 2019, I conducted a pilot study. Five undergraduate women classical singers participated, and I conducted 15-minute interviews with each of them. The interviews were semi-structured; I started with a short list of questions and digressed where necessary to gain deeper insight into their experiences. My participants’ responses confirmed many of my suspicions about how body image might impact vocal performance. For example, without specifically asking about a similar phenomenon, all five participants shared that they have sucked in their stomachs to maintain a certain appearance while singing. Many acknowledged actively choosing to suck it in despite knowing how this practice adversely affects their singing technique. In another example, many of them also brought up the distracting effect of mirrors on their practicing and in their lessons, how their body image heightens performance anxiety, and general tension in the vocal mechanism as a result of body image distress.

The results of the pilot study were remarkable in some respects, but naturally incomplete in others. Oddly, many aspects of singing were not addressed in these interviews. Furthermore, the lack of specificity in participants’ stories, both musical and personal, lead me to question an interview-only research design. Four out of the five

participants had experienced treatment for eating disorders, meaning that they had developed a vocabulary and awareness through which to discuss their body image, but the other participants were not able to be as reflective or articulate about what they were experiencing. This disparity led me to seek out a method that would raise the consciousness of all participants and give them a vocabulary and broader social context through which to describe, interpret, and analyze their experiences (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

During the pilot study, participants shared some of the thoughts they had about their bodies during their singing experiences, but in analyzing the results, I realized that more specific information is necessary. I sought a method that would allow for data collection within different contexts and without delays. Context-specific data helped me understand when thoughts about one's body are most present and impactful. Collecting this data during or immediately after the experience also allowed my co-researchers to provide more detailed information about not only their thoughts, but the effect of those thoughts on their singing.

Research Design

Recruitment

Co-researchers were recruited through my personal connections with voice teachers at two different institutions, who I first contacted in July of 2020. The first institution is located in the southeastern United States and is a liberal arts university. The music department at this university is undergraduate only and has approximately 220 music majors. The second institution is a small conservatory-style school in the

northeastern United States. This institution enrolls both graduate and undergraduate musicians and has about 300 total students.

Recruitment was difficult for this project for a few reasons. Recruiting through faculty members provided access to students in a way that was likely more salient than any method of reaching out to potential co-researchers directly, but it also required the attentions of busy people during the busiest time of the year, at the beginning of a semester full of unprecedented difficulties. Also, as you will see from my procedures, I asked a lot of those who chose to research with me. A month-long (or more) commitment for no tangible personal benefit is a tough sell, especially to often over-extended music students during the Covid trials of 2020. Although I had intended to begin this research in late August, recruitment did not conclude until mid-September, and I was left with fewer co-researchers than I had hoped. The time, insight, and commitment provided by my four co-researchers is therefore all the more appreciated.

Dana and Karina hail from the Southeastern institution. Dana, a bisexual white woman, is a senior, majoring in Music Education, who turned 22 just two days after the study concluded. During the focus group, she shared that she and her voice teacher had not settled on a fach, but by the end of the study she referred to herself as a soprano. Dana's health affects her body image; she suffers from IBS and an adrenal gland hormone imbalance, as well as scoliosis and knock knees. She takes medication for depression but doesn't currently see a therapist or counselor. She's currently in a stable and happy relationship and feels supported and cared for by her boyfriend. She recently moved into her own apartment and out of her parents' house and has been juggling all the responsibilities that come with being newly independent. In our correspondence after the

study had concluded, Dana shared with me that she was diagnosed with bulimia in the winter of 2019.²

Karina, a 30-year-old white woman, describes herself as someone who “does things backwards.” She entered the workforce and got married before deciding to go to college in her mid-20s. She started studying voice when she was 24 as a much-needed creative outlet and escape from her draining corporate job. She quickly found a passion for it, however, and decided to pursue a singing career more formally. She’s a soprano who describes her instrument as round and warm, like her body. Although she aspires towards performance, she’s chosen a less specific major in music that also allows for a minor in German. Her husband is a source of love and support, but relationships with her mother-in-law and other family members offer less validation. During this study, she was in her senior year and looking forward to applying to graduate programs.

Aksha and Marissa study at the Northeastern institution. Aksha, a 24-year-old Indian American woman, is a graduate student in her second year studying vocal performance. She studies both Western and Indian classical music, and classifies herself as a mezzo-soprano, with a machine-like instrument, and she delights in fast runs and ragas. She aspires to be a professional singer in both genres and takes her technical training very seriously. She was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome at a young age. Aksha worries often about the judgments of others, but she feels supported by her friends, voice teachers, and family.

² Dana provided her explicit permission for me to include her bulimia diagnosis in this document in our written correspondence following the study.

Marissa, a 20-year-old bisexual white woman, is a junior majoring in vocal performance. She classifies herself as a soubrette³, with a voice that is “warm and creamy ... like a bagel.” She aspires to be a performer but is often aware and critical of the pressures put on performers by both the industry and her current institution. Marissa is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and has therefore spent many years engaging in therapy. She feels supported by her therapist and voice teacher but describes her relationships with family as an area where she “has some work to do.”

Marissa was also a participant in my pilot study and was excited about the opportunity to contribute more to this research. Although participating in both the pilot study and the resulting research project is sometimes considered ill-advised, it seemed permissible in this instance for a few reasons (Leon, Davis, & Kramer, 2011). First, the procedures for this full study differed drastically from the single interviews conducted during the pilot study. Marissa was as new to these procedures as the other three co-researchers, and her experiences provided drastically different data than what she shared during the pilot study. Secondly, since consciousness-raising is an explicit part of this research, Marissa’s prior attention to this issue was not a problem, but an asset. Finally, since recruiting for this study was so difficult, I was reluctant to turn down the enthusiastic participation of an otherwise ideal candidate. Marissa’s data, as reported in the following chapters, comes entirely from this present study and provides an invaluable perspective to the discussion of this topic.

³ A soubrette is a type of soprano with lighter voice.

Procedures

Feminist methodologies espouse the use of multiple methods to triangulate data (Cook & Fonow, 1986; Golombisky, 2017). Feminist research is also inherently transdisciplinary, which suits the interdisciplinary nature of this research and allows for the borrowing of research methods from other fields (Golombisky, 2017). This study utilized a three-part strategy for data collection that allowed me to raise the consciousness of my co-researchers, observe changes over time and in different settings, and develop a deep qualitative understanding through dialogue.

Part 1: Focus group

Feminist research often eschews traditional research methods because of their hierarchical structure; these methods, wherein the researcher holds far more power than her participants, can lead to “the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge” (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 73). When a researcher defines all the questions and offers her participants few ways to inject their own ideas and priorities into the research, research can become a mining operation, wherein the researcher aims to extract valuable insight that will bolster her own reputation, without concern for the individual woman in front of her (Brinkman & Kvale, 2018). The structure of a focus group, however, is non-hierarchical, as it focuses not on the researcher’s interactions with participants, but on interactions within the participant group. Taking the researcher out of the equation as much as possible allows participants to more freely explore their own ideas and experiences and take part in defining the scope of the research (Wilkinson, 1999). For example, our focus group produced a discussion of typecasting, which was not a topic I intended to explore but one that enriched this research.

Many traditional research methods (surveys, interviews, etc.) examine an individual apart from her surroundings; feminist criticism asserts that in these isolated research settings “the reality of human experience—namely that it always occurs in context ...is lost” (Bohan, 1992, as cited in Wilkinson, 1999, p. 3). A focus group, however, functions as a social context, as participants work to make meaning together (Wilkinson, 1999). This group work also functions as a powerful tool for consciousness-raising, because it invites participants to interpret their experiences through a social, rather than personal, context (Mies, 1983; Wilkinson, 1999). I was touched by the ways in which my co-researchers leapt to support each other during our focus group, even those who did not know each other or attend the same institution. These interactions generated powerful moments of realization for my co-researchers about how they experience the gaze of others. Focus groups routinely function as gateways to more in-depth research activities; beginning with this kind of group interaction provided a broader lens through which the co-researchers analyzed their singing experiences during the rest of the study (Leslie, 2017; Wilson 1997).

Our initial focus group meeting took place on September 19, 2020, from 1-3 pm. Unfortunately, Marissa could not attend, so only Dana, Karina, and Aksha were present. After introductions, I guided them through six different body image self-assessments, as published in Cash’s *Body Image Workbook* (2008). After completing these assessments, we engaged in a broader discussion about our body images, singing experiences, and how they related to one another. I replicated this experience to the best of my ability with Marissa on September 26th. I guided her through the self-assessments, asked the same questions, and interjected occasionally with answers the other co-researchers provided in

an attempt to replicate some of the social aspects of a focus group. Co-researchers were provided with a summary of the focus group for their review. Although the opportunity was offered, none of them elected to revise the provided summary in any way.

Part 2: Diary study

Diary studies fit well within a feminist methodology because they give participants control over their data and essentially involve them as co-researchers (Milligan & Bartlett, 2019). This structure allows the researcher to understand the priorities of participants and the weight they give to different experiences, and therefore provides a more nuanced perspective on the issue at hand (Milligan & Bartlett, 2019). For example, the frequency of Karina's statements about her lack of awareness of her body greatly informed my analysis (more on this in Chapters 4 and 5). Participants are also afforded the opportunity to continuously reflect on the topic which will hopefully further raise their consciousness and help generate lasting benefits from participating in the research (Bodwitch, 2014; Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). These continual opportunities to reflect were particularly powerful for Dana, as you'll see in the coming chapters.

Participants were asked to record semi-structured diary entries over the course of one month after practice sessions, lessons, and performances, beginning immediately after their participation in the focus group. Audio diaries allow participants to easily record their thoughts in the moment; this format was chosen to reduce participation barriers and to encourage each co-researcher to share their unedited thoughts and experiences (Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). Semi-structured prompts help to maintain focus on the research aims and avoid co-researcher anxiety about what is

expected of them or what they should say, but co-researchers were also encouraged to include anything outside of the prompts that they felt relevant to the research (Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015).

I initially asked for co-researchers to record diaries twice per week after practice sessions, after any and all lessons, and after any and all performances. Although I did provide ample gentle reminders, none of my co-researchers were able to be this consistent, but some came closer than others. Dana recorded one practice diary per week, as did Karina. Both Dana and Karina recorded diaries after every lesson they attended, but Dana's teacher was absent due to a death in the family during one week of the study, so no lesson diaries were provided by Dana that week. Dana, unlike Karina and Marissa, had two half hour lessons per week rather than a single hour-long lesson, so she was still able to submit five lesson diary entries. Both Dana and Karina submitted one performance diary entry, which happened to be recordings they submitted for the same competition. Marissa recorded four practice diaries, one of which was during the first week of the study, and three of which came from the last week of the study. Marissa only recorded two lesson diaries, again from the first and last weeks of the study. She also recorded one performance diary, which was in response to a memorization exam.⁴ Aksha was the least consistent; she only recorded two practice diaries, one of which did not address the provided prompts or the topic of body image at all.

⁴ Memorization exams are sometimes given in choirs or operatic production rehearsals in academic settings. During these exams, students perform excerpts of a work on their own, from memory, in front of their peers. Although these exams are not performances in the most traditional sense, they still have high stakes (perhaps higher stakes than some other performances) and are performed in front of an audience. Marissa had no question about whether or not this instance constituted a performance, suggesting that she reacted as she would to a more conventional performance.

This variance in participation certainly colors the data. However, the intent of this study was not to compare outcomes across co-researchers after implementing a specific procedure. The journey is more important than the destination; I was more interested in their experiences as they reported them than any particular outcome. Each diary, even Aksha's single diary, provided valuable data worthy of inclusion both in the ensuing interviews and the data analysis process as a whole. More diary entries would certainly have enhanced this research, but the lack of them does not invalidate the insights my co-researchers were able to share.

Part 3: Interviews

Hour-long one-on-one interviews were conducted with each co-researcher within two weeks of their completion of the diary portion of the study. Dana, Karina, and Aksha completed the diary portion of the study on October 17th, and Marissa finished a week later on October 24th. Interviews were conducted between October 22nd and October 31st. This slight gap between completion of the diary study and the interviews allowed me to transcribe and analyze the focus group, Marissa's initial interview, and their diary entries and incorporate their unique experiences into each interview. Still, I aimed to leave as little time as possible so that co-researchers' experiences were fresh in their minds. I also sent them the completed transcripts of their diaries before the interview and invited them to reflect on their responses prior to our interview.

The interview protocol was designed to serve dual purposes: to invite co-researchers to share their unvarnished experiences, opinions, and ideas, and to more deeply explore the insights I gained from analyzing the audio diary and focus group transcripts. I began each interview by asking the co-researcher standard questions about

their experiences and views. After my co-researchers shared everything they wanted to, I asked each of them specific questions about their responses in the earlier stages of research. These questions focused on clarifying their stories and points of view, exploring themes of high intensity or frequency, and examining moments of strong alignment or divergence from the connection between body image and singing. Finally, I invited the co-researchers to weigh in on an emergent theme from the data and the existence and nature of the connection between body image and singing. In line with feminist methodologies, my co-researchers and I acted in a spirit of co-analysis, and I treated each woman as an expert on her own data (Golombisky, 2017).

Sites

As this research took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the research sites were virtual spaces. Our focus group and interviews were conducted via Zoom, with each co-researcher and me communicating from our homes. Conditions differed, however, for the audio diaries. The Northeastern institution, where Marissa and Aksha studied, was entirely closed during the fall semester of 2020, so all of their lessons, practices, and even performances took place in their homes. Dana and Karina operated differently; their institution chose to partially re-open during the fall semester, and students were able to practice and take lessons on the premises. All of Dana's and Karina's lessons took place at their institution, in person with their teachers, although not always in their teachers' offices. For the purposes of social distancing, classrooms were occasionally repurposed as studios. Most of Dana and Karina's practice sessions occurred onsite as well, although Karina did occasionally practice in her home. Dana and Karina

each reported one performance during the duration of the study, which was actually a recording made on the premises of their institution.

I wonder how these virtual spaces may have impacted the research. I am certainly more conscious of how I look during zoom meetings than I would be meeting in person; constantly staring at your own face seems to have that effect. Perhaps my co-researchers were more self-conscious during our virtual focus group and interviews than they would have been had we met in person. I wonder if the same is true for voice lessons; is a singer more aware of the way she looks during virtual voice lessons thanks to her webcam? Or is the opposite true? Through a webcam, a singer can control what portion of her body her teacher sees. Perhaps the ability to leave certain parts of one's body out of the picture is liberating.

I wonder, too, how being in one's own home affects the way they think about their bodies, particularly during practice. Aksha mentioned that she didn't have a mirror in her bedroom turned practice room. Does that allow her to focus more on her singing than on her looks? Perhaps the people outside of the practice room affect the singer's thoughts inside of it. Does knowing that your judgmental mother is listening to you practice make you think more about how your stomach looks? Does knowing that your loving partner is waiting for you beyond that door make it easier to accept the way you look in your makeshift practice room mirror? Or does having your cat sleeping on your bed make it difficult to focus on practicing at all, unlike the sterile white walls of your pre-pandemic practice room?

Of course, the shift to virtual spaces caused by the pandemic allowed me to recruit outside of the New York City metropolitan area. Having grown up in the south, I

appreciated the opportunity to recruit co-researchers from that area of the country, who have spent time in and around that distinctive southern United States culture. That extra diversity would not have been possible without Zoom and the necessity of staying home this past year.

Materials

In an effort to use the focus group to raise co-researchers' consciousness, the researcher provided materials designed to educate, stimulate discussion, and offer opportunities for self-assessment. Cash's *Body Image Workbook* (2008) was the source of these materials. Cash has been a pioneer and leader of the body image field for decades: "[Cash] laid the foundation for how to study body image: how to measure it, how to conceptualize it, and how to improve it (Tylka, 2019, p. 1). Reviews of his *Body Image Workbook* written by professionals in psychiatric fields routinely characterize it as well-researched, easy to understand, and most importantly, helpful to readers (Bassesen, 2008; Broniarczyk, Student & Knous, 1998; Kent Crossroads Consumer Review Committee, 1999). The same reviews indicate that this material is flexible and can efficiently be partially employed or revised and has been successful with groups.

Cash's workbook is designed to provide an introduction to the concept of body image and offers multiple validated measures of body image self-assessment. These measures were not used as data, but rather as a means for each co-researcher to gain an understanding of her body image, its components, and its influences. They were revised to include questions about classical singing and performing contexts to better prepare co-researchers for the specific awareness required during the following portion of data collection (see Appendix B for complete self-assessment measures used). Feminist

researchers have often revised surveys and other quantitative measures to better suit participants and research objectives (Cook & Fonow, 1986).

Co-researchers' personal cell phones and their preference for an audio recording app were utilized for the diary study portion of data collection. Allowing co-researchers to choose a method of data recording made it convenient to provide entries immediately and within the appropriate context (i.e. in the practice room after a practice session). Data collection that does not require excess materials or competencies for participants helps reduce barriers to participation and has been suggested to curb attrition (Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). The researcher's personal laptop was used to engage in the Zoom calls for each interview and the focus group, which were recorded and saved on the cloud through Teachers College's secure server. Co-researchers sent their diaries via email, text, and Google Drive. All recordings were deleted immediately upon transcription from all devices and cloud storage sites.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began after the diary portion of the study, in preparation for the co-analysis situation provided by the interviews. I began by poring over the transcripts of our focus group and initial interview and my co-researchers' diaries looking for stories and points of view that needed clarification, themes of high intensity or frequency, and moments of strong alignment with (or divergence from) the connection between body image and singing. I highlighted these stand-out moments and then grouped them into loose categories around the themes that seemed most prevalent in each co-researcher's responses—or, put more succinctly, I engaged in a process of inductive coding (Brinkman & Kvale, 2018; Leslie, 2017; Milligan & Bartlett, 2019;

Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). I brought as many of these ideas as I could into our hour-long interviews. I later reincorporated the interview data into these codes. Since these inductive codes varied widely across co-researchers, I chose to present these themes in a narrative style that focused on each co-researcher's individual journey, as you'll see in Chapter 4 (Milligan & Bartlett, 2019).

One theme that emerged across all four co-researchers was a sense of separation between body and voice, and I chose to explore this theme explicitly with my co-researchers in our interviews. After the interviews, this theme of separation had bloomed into multiple versions of itself, and I once again coded all of my co-researchers' transcripts, now including their interviews, with these manifestations of separateness. These codes shifted and were recategorized, but eventually settled into five distinct states that I examine in Chapter 5.

Finally, I sifted through and re-coded the data for a third time, this time looking explicitly for effects my co-researchers experienced in their singing, mostly in their diary entries, but also in specific stories shared in the focus group and interviews. I categorized and recategorized these effects, and then looked for patterns within each co-researcher. Admittedly, this process was more difficult with Aksha's data, as she provided very few diary entries. But generally, I found that these categories of effects of singing seemed to cluster around the different states of separation mentioned in the previous paragraph. I report on these effects in Chapter 6.

Reflexivity and Ethics

Reflexivity is paramount within a feminist methodology: feminist research requires a critical approach both to gender bias in society at large and to the researcher's

personal biases. These personal biases need not, nor can they, be neutralized. In fact, they can guide the data collection and analysis process as long as they are identified and interrogated (Allsup, 2017; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Golombisky, 2017). Reflexivity in qualitative research has long been used to provide legitimacy and rigor in place of the statistics and calculations of quantitative research (Pillow, 2010).

But what really is reflexivity, and what does it do for this research? What am I offering to you, the reader, beyond the promise of my own meta-cognition, and should that suffice to substantiate my claims? Daphne Patai (1994) suggested that even 30 years ago, reflexivity had become little more than a self-aggrandizing stamp of ideological conformity to an academy that fraudulently presents its research as activism. In her view, endless discourse about one's own positionality affords that position more power than it actually enacts on the research process and, more importantly, falsely absolves the researcher of the consequences of her privilege:

“The fact is that those of us whose medium is words do occupy privileged positions, and we hardly give up those positions when we engage in endless self-scrutiny and anxious self-identification” (Patai, 1994, p. 78).

Reflexivity has been described as “analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research” (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16, as cited in Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). It is both a concept and a process through which a researcher defines her relationship to her participants, research, and the broader social context in which all of those things exist:

It is about the recognition that as researchers, we are part of the social world that we study... It is a continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values... This process determines the filters through which researchers are working... This [process] must be seen as a dialogue—challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher him/herself. (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017)

But the important question is, as Patai asks, “Does all this self-reflexivity produce better research?” (Patai, 1994, p. 80). Pillow (2010) responds that the answer here is not to abolish this practice, but rather “to move beyond reflexivity as simply a validity method, to something more uncomfortable” (Pillow, 2010, p. 271). Pillow (2010) argues that reflexivity must go beyond many doctoral researchers’ desire (myself included) to “get reflexivity right” (p. 275) or a false attempt to brand findings as “valid” or “objective”: “Reflexivity, rigorous and dangerous reflexivity, pushes us to question and deconstruct what is most hegemonic in our lives” (p. 278). This type of reflexivity promises not only better, realer research, but also shifts in our social reality that can only come when those deep, hegemonic truths are brought to light.

Ending a paragraph with a promise for social change through research seems to epitomize the self-aggrandizing intellectual masturbation that Patai (1994) so vehemently opposes. After all, regardless of how many ten-syllable words I use, this dissertation may end up languishing in the annals of ProQuest like so many worthy others: read by few and affecting little change on the ground. But I do honestly believe that it has changed my co-researchers, and in the next hundred pages, you will see the ways in which it has changed me. Perhaps it will change you, dear reader, as well, and through you and others like you, exert some bit of influence. So my attempt at reflexivity has been an attempt to find balance: to be serious, but not arrogant; to be self-conscious, but not self-absorbed; to be reflexive and yet responsive.

This attempt has been made in community and dialogue with my co-researchers and tempered and guided by their reflexivity. The term “co-researchers” is loaded with responsibility. Co-researchers are usually people who collaborate with the researcher

throughout the research process; they help define questions, explore the literature, and create procedures; they observe, analyze, and report (Smith, 1994). My co-researchers were not so involved. They were recruited in a traditional fashion after I had already chosen questions, read the literature, and decided on a methodology. Beyond the process of member-checking, they were not involved in analyzing our findings after data collection was completed. The term “co-researchers” may also imply that I shared an equal role with them, but I clearly did not. Whether or not they truly fit the description of “co-researchers” is a fair question.

But calling them “participants” felt overly reductive. As I discovered in the pilot study, exploring my research questions with the necessary depth required more of my “participants” than just simple interviews. I asked them to contribute to this research multiple times per week for a month, and their contributions were not just simple reports, but detailed and personal reflections. In the small microcosm of data collection, they observed, analyzed, and reported their own experiences. In a way, they spent a month as auto-ethnographers, each of them delving deeply into their own experiences. Since this research relied on consciousness-raising, passive participation in my protocols was not enough; I had to ask them to actively search their own experiences and feelings in order to honestly explore this topic. Calling these women my co-researchers while we worked together was a choice I made to empower them to actively engage in and shape our research (Smith, 1994). Calling them mere “participants” now doesn’t seem an appropriate way to honor their effort in researching with me.

Many feminist researchers, in an attempt to counteract their privilege, choose a collaborative model, wherein the researched become the researchers (Golombisky, 2017).

This inclusive approach aided in raising the consciousnesses of my co-researchers and hopefully allowed them to benefit from this research experience in their future singing. I relied on member-checking throughout the data analysis process to ensure that my co-researchers' voices and experiences were accurately characterized (Candela, 2019). Dana, Marissa, and Aksha have all weighed in on various drafts, but unfortunately, Karina has not responded to any of my many attempts to seek her feedback.

Relying on my co-researchers as I did required that I attend to their experience in this research and acknowledge potential risks. Self-reflexivity, especially about such sensitive topics, comes with emotional risk (Sampson, Bloor & Fincham, 2008). In order to mitigate this risk, co-researchers were provided with information on how to access mental health resources through their educational institution and free resources, like national helplines. I am not a mental health professional, and I made no attempt to offer guidance to co-researchers about their body image. Thankfully, none of my co-researchers reported emotional difficulties as a result of engaging in this research process, and I did not observe any behavior through their diaries that caused alarm.

I am still left wondering what I offer to you, dear reader, beyond my gratitude for making it thus far. What you will hopefully find in the next hundred pages are authentic experiences of body image and singing as observed, reported, and analyzed by myself and my co-researchers, represented in a way that is faithful to their lives and that honors their effort in researching with me. I have chosen to rely on my co-researchers' voices as much as possible in my continual effort to treat my co-researchers not as objects of knowledge, but as individuals in communion (Cook & Fonow, 1986). I have shared with you the ways in which my judgment is skewed, both in the ways that you expect and in

those that you don't: I will freely tell you now that I am a white, heterosexual, middle class woman and also that I am an only-child, prone to perfectionism and to taking myself too seriously. I've aimed for trustworthiness rather than "objectivity" or "validity," not because I don't stand fully behind my own work, but because I believe those claims to be over-simplifications of our complex reality in any research context (Allsup, 2017).⁵ Instead, I will allow you and your fellow readers, however few or many of you there might be, to decide for yourselves what the knowledge my co-researchers and I have generated means and can do for you.

⁵ Even the concept of statistical significance, long hailed as the standard of truth and objectivity, is being called into question by hundreds of researchers who have experienced its inability to fully represent the reality of our lived experiences, and its propensity for over-simplification (Amrhein, Greenland & McShane, 2019).

Chapter IV
WOMANHOOD

“Why am I a girl?

*I ask my doctors, and they tell me they
don’t know, that it is just “given.”*

*But it has such
implications—;
and sometimes,
I even feel like a girl.”*

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

Each of my co-researchers is a woman. Each is a singer. But those identities are where any similarities shared by all of them end. They are all different ages. Three of them are white (Dana, Karina, and Marissa), and one is Indian American (Aksha). Three of them are chasing careers in performance (Aksha, Karina, and Marissa), one of them is a future educator (Dana). Three of them are sopranos (Dana, Karina, and Marissa), one is a mezzo (Aksha). They grew up in different parts of the country, have different relationship statuses, and sing different repertoire. Even in this very basic demographic information, not one of them is like another.

I knew that each of my co-researchers would be different. Every woman is different, every body is different, every voice is different. I selected my co-researchers through broad criteria. Even the idea that I “selected” them is a bit misleading: all four of

these accomplished women singers volunteered enthusiastically to spend more than a month contributing to this research.

And yet, even as I tried to invite and account for a plurality of experiences in designing my study, I continued to realize that not one of them is exactly like the co-researchers I pictured in my head before embarking on this research—which is to say, in some way, *they are not like me*. Each of them is divergent from what I considered to be the general population of collegiate women singers in some significant way, and this affects the way they think about their bodies and their voices. In each woman's experience I found ideas that surprised me, but also those that I could relate to deeply. In this chapter, I aim to allow these women to introduce themselves to you, in their own words as much as possible.¹

Dana

During the focus group, my co-researchers responded to a set of body image self-assessments, one of which asked them to rate how often they experience negative emotions about their bodies in each of twenty-five different settings. When I asked for reactions, Dana immediately jumped in:

That one was pretty crazy, I put 'frequently' for every single one. Those negative emotions ... it's so crazy how often they creep in. You don't realize it. I'm going through [the assessment], and I'm trying to think of specific moments, like during my lesson [I'm] definitely self-conscious. Even performing by myself or practicing—there's mirrors in a practice room ... When I finished that part, I said to myself, 'I want to grow from this' ... I definitely want to overcome.

¹ My intention to represent my co-researchers as faithfully as possible through their own words results in a lot of block quotes. I apologize if this overabundance of quotes makes this document more difficult to read, but I chose intentionally to err on the side of over quoting so that my co-researchers' unique personalities could shine through.

Dana, a white woman, is a senior at the Southeastern institution from which I recruited, majoring in Music Education. She turned 22 just two days after the study concluded. During the focus group, she shared that she and her voice teacher had not settled on a fach, but by the end of the study she referred to herself as a soprano. Dana's health affects her body image; she suffers from irritable bowel syndrome and an adrenal gland hormone imbalance, as well as scoliosis and knock knees. She takes medication for depression but doesn't currently see a therapist or counselor. She's currently in a stable and happy relationship and feels supported and cared for by her boyfriend. She recently moved into her own apartment and out of her parents' house and has been juggling all the responsibilities that come with being newly independent.

Dana describes her younger self as "the heavier kid." Heavier than who, or what? Heavier than her peers? Dana often compared herself to others, particularly another girl who shared her name, whom she described as "naturally blonde, very skinny;" Dana also perceived her as more accomplished: "She did volleyball. She did theater. She did choir. She did like everything you could." Or perhaps she meant heavier than her parents' ideal. Comments from parents, like "Should you be eating that? Should you go get seconds?" and her mother's instruction to "pull in my tummy" have stuck with her into adulthood. Dana remembers her mother finally refusing to go shopping with her, "because you always have a breakdown in the dressing room." Dana doesn't deny it, "[It was] true because I just couldn't look at myself in the mirror."

Clothing is still a source of anxiety for Dana: "I just hate it touching my body." She generally chooses loose fitting clothes, but in a practice session that she described as

“horrible,” she’d chosen an old, closer fitting t-shirt that made her feel “vulnerable.” I asked her about it in our interview:

Dana: That day, I picked out a t-shirt that I liked... It wasn't obnoxiously tight, but I wasn't drowning in it. But to me, having a shirt that was kind of fitted was too tight. Because when I would sit down at the piano bench, I looked to my left and saw the full-length mirror, I could see how my stomach was shaped. I would try to sit up more to make my gut look flatter... I couldn't stop thinking about how my stomach looked in the t-shirt.

Kirsten: Yeah. You said something interesting [in your diary]: "I really made myself vulnerable." Can you say more about what you mean by making yourself vulnerable, vulnerable to what?

Dana: Vulnerable to people looking at me and perceiving me and seeing the weight that I am... it definitely makes me feel really vulnerable to others just looking at me... I just don't think I like that idea of someone being able to kind of know, maybe, how big my body is. Because I don't like it myself. I don't want to know either. I don't like to see it either. I don't want others to see it.

There was no greater source of clothing anxiety for Dana than her choir dress.

The floor length black gown that Dana described might not be revealing, but it still makes her feel incredibly exposed. She purchased the dress years earlier, and weight gain during college has made it tighter than is comfortable. “But I refuse to buy another dress,” she said defiantly during our focus group. Perhaps it’s the cost—I’ve never purchased a choir dress for less than \$60. Or maybe it’s that it would be an unnecessary, or even irresponsible cost; if she hadn’t gained the weight, the dress she already paid \$60 dollars for sophomore year would still suffice. Or maybe it’s a sense of embarrassment or shame that might come from having to tell her choir director that she needed to order a new dress this year because she’d gotten too fat. At least, those were the reasons I struggled to zip up my own college choir dress.

Whatever her reasons, Dana relied on shapewear to get her through concerts and spring choir tours. But one day, she forgot her Spanx.

I had a panic attack in the bathroom because I didn't know what to do without [my Spanx], with just wearing a dress and not having anything underneath... I just needed something to be touching my body, my stomach, even if it didn't actually suck everything in... I literally was panicking. I was having a panic attack in the bathroom because of the idea of having to go out and sing, and be naked; it's like you feel naked without having that Shapewear on... I feel like it's not normal to panic, but the idea of not wearing Shapewear under a dress is very foreign to me. The idea that you just throw on a dress and you're ready to go, that's not me.
(Focus group)

Dana doesn't see herself as the type of person who gets to just be as she is, without correction or cover-up. If it weren't for a good friend with an extra pair of Spanx, Dana's fear of being seen as she is would have kept her from singing entirely, trapped in a bathroom rather than out on stage. But singing so often necessitates being seen, and Dana knows this.

“When we're singing, we're always being kind of judged. People are always looking at your face, your sound, your body, you know, voice. My voice teacher is always looking to see, ‘how is she breathing.’ So of course, they're going to look at your body to see, like, are you actually expanding your rib cage? Did I collapse immediately like I love doing? You have to look at me, I get it.”

So how does she cope? Sometimes she focuses on things she can control, like loose fitting shirts that camouflage her stomach. Dresses that are long enough to hide her knees became a prominent concern after a comment from her teacher:

Dana: Okay, I have knock knees, where my knees kind of go in... One time, I'm on stage and we're doing studio and my voice teacher makes a comment about my knees... ‘Can you stand a different way, your legs kind of look weird.’ And I just like, oh man, I just was messed up for the rest of the week because... I kept thinking for the rest of the week, ‘Do people think my knees look weird? Do my legs look weird?’ ...

Kirsten: Do you remember how you sang after that comment?

Dana: I couldn't focus on singing because I was focusing on what my knees looked like. It's not something I can physically change. There's no exercises. There's no corrective surgery—believe me, I've looked—to change your bone structure like that. But once she told me that, and she's like, 'All right, let's go ahead and start back at measure whatever' I could not focus on singing. I still sang, I still tried. But in my mind, I was like, 'Oh my god, I'm on stage ... I'm displayed for everyone's eyes to look at my *knees*, that my voice teacher thought were weird and she pointed it out.' (Focus group)

But she can't always choose her clothing, as is the case with her choir dress. Nor does her clothing always camouflage her perceived flaws as much as she might like, as with her t-shirt. And, like her knees, there are things about her body that she cannot control:

Some days, maybe I don't like being short. But you can't change that ... there's these things [about my body] that maybe I'm mostly satisfied or mostly dissatisfied, but I know there's things that I can do about it. But some of them, I feel like I can't. (Focus group)

When negative thoughts and feelings about her body confront her in spaces where she has no immediate control, she turns to avoidance:

During the performance I didn't fully think about my body until I turned and saw my reflection in the plexiglass that is between me and my collaborative pianist. And I saw the reflection of myself and I was like "eww... *don't think about it.*" (Performance diary 1)

In this performance, a recorded entry for a vocal competition, Dana felt that her thoughts about her body didn't negatively affect her performance. Perhaps the immediate and demanding nature of being in performance kept her focused on her singing. Alone in the practice room, however, thoughts about her body take up more oxygen.

I'm watching myself sing, and I'm just thinking like, "Gosh, I look large. I wish I hadn't worn this to studio." (Practice diary 1)

I think [thoughts about my body] really affected my singing today, because I could just not stop focusing on how gross my body is, and how much I just did

not, I did not like looking in the mirror, and I feel like that's all I can think about today. (Practice diary 2)

Sometimes I'll just stop, or I'll get frustrated. or I'll restart, or I'll start getting more nitpicky with my sound. Because it'll throw me off my rhythm, my groove, my workflow. And so maybe I'm singing through a piece, and the [body] thoughts come in, ... I end up maybe going on my phone to try and kind of reset, and minutes pass, I go, 'I should start singing again.' And it's like, a little cycle ... All of a sudden, any form of focus or confidence I have is skewed. It just makes me want to not practice anymore. Because I feel frustrated in my body. And then I find things to be frustrated with in my voice. And then I just want to go home, you know, and then I'm like, 'Well, I guess I go home now.' (Interview)

Of course, in a lesson, it's not easy to stop and go home. But even with her teacher in the room directing the lesson, Dana still found herself getting distracted.

I thought about my body a lot ... I kept thinking like, "I wonder how my lower torso looks in these jeans," I don't think [thoughts about my body] totally affected my singing today, but I do think part of my mind was distracted the entire time. (Lesson diary 2)

Today I'm wearing a spaghetti strap tank top with a cardigan ... it was kind of, I'm gonna classify it as kind of lower cut. I do not have any cleavage and I don't have a very large chest, but I still felt exposed and a little uncomfortable, so I just kept thinking about that the entire time and adjusting my shirt as I was singing, and pulling my cardigan back over my, um, myself ... I don't think it fully affected my signing other than I was just really distracted. (Lesson diary 3)

But being distracted can have a powerful effect on one's singing. In our interview, I asked Dana to be more specific about what she meant by being "distracted." Dana described how these thoughts affect her ability to be productive:

I kind of forget everything else I should be thinking about. And it's like it takes over. Instead of the main thoughts that I'm trying to focus on, it overtakes them, like a storm cloud, and I can't get back to them. And it makes it harder for me to get back to, 'Okay, what was I working on in this piece? French diction, resonance, legato lines, got it.' And it makes it hard for me to get back to that place of productivity. Because instead it feels like the storm cloud of negative thoughts, or even just neutral thoughts, but just thoughts about my outfit, my

body, my acne, they kind of literally cloud my judgment, cloud my thinking, cloud my thought process, cloud my focus. (Interview)

When I asked Dana how this cloud affected her singing, the technical struggles she listed sounded familiar to me. In her lesson diaries and the focus group, she talked about working to maintain vibrato, but in that storm cloud, her vibrato cuts out. In the focus group, she shared her pride in the lighter and more forward tone she'd worked to discover since entering college; in the cloud, her resonance falls back. In her lesson diaries, she explained how her teacher helps her bring her upper body out of her hips, but in the cloud, she sinks back down. The cloud puts her on "autopilot," which is antithetical to her vocal progress.

In classical singing, what I've learned is that I can't be on autopilot. I'm constantly thinking, 'Is my ribcage still open? Where's my palate? Where's my space? Is it forward? Is my vibrato still there?' (Interview)

If I have a bad body day ... I'm probably going back to my old habits, which means I'm not progressing that day. I don't think I'm regressing. But it's just another day. Because every day I want to try and get a little bit better at my pieces, at automatically finding the right XYZ, locking into everything. And I think if it's a bad body day, a bad voice day, it doesn't become a productive day, in terms of my voice. (Interview)

But not every day is a "bad body day" for Dana. Towards the end of our study, the tone of her voice in her diaries lifted, she had more productive practice sessions, and she started to notice a shift.

I know a lot of times it'll distract me, but I think I did a really good job today kind of blocking out my body thoughts and focusing on the task at hand, focusing on my work, and I'm really proud of myself for that. (Practice diary 4).

I felt like a really good singer today... I feel really good in my skin today and that's really big. (Practice diary 5).

The last lesson diary Dana sent me was completely new. In that lesson, Dana experienced her body, and her singing, in an unprecedented way:

I had a really good rep lesson today... I did not think about my body once, like seriously, I know it's crazy. I did not think about my body... And, you know, I could have thought about my body when we were doing some just different things that involved the body. I was sitting into my hips, so I had to raise my arms up, put them back down, kind of get myself out of my hips in a good singer's posture. And I didn't think about my body then. You know my body was there obviously, but I wasn't thinking about it in the way that I normally do, like "Oh, people are looking at me, how do I look?" that kind of thinking. And then another time we did a catch breath [exercise] where, I inhale, I hold it, then I sing, and I try not to let my ribs collapse. And usually, I will put my hands on my body, on my torso, or on my ribs. And sometimes when I do that, when its on my stomach specifically, I will feel my stomach and I will think, 'God, I wish this was not the stomach that I have.' But today, I didn't feel that way. It was just a stomach, it was just a tummy, and I really am proud of myself for the headspace that I'm in today. (Lesson diary 5)

This breakthrough stood in stark contrast to her stories from the focus group—like being trapped in a bathroom without shapewear—and even from some of her earlier diaries. In our interview, I asked her what caused this shift:

I think it was the experience of all the audio diaries, and constantly reflecting, and then having a day where I thought, 'let's try and overcome this.' Because it's been a new goal that I want to overcome getting—I don't know if obsessive is the right word, but we're going to use obsessive—about my body thoughts. And I think I just had one of those really good days where it was not at the forefront, or the back of my mind, it just was not there that day. The negative body thoughts, the obsessive thoughts. That was very exciting.

It's not all rainbows and butterflies now; the day of our interview, Dana had a difficult lesson, after which she felt "frustrated" and "gross." But the idea of reflecting on those experiences and feelings is something she says will stick with her:

Learning how to take time to reflect has been really big, because I didn't usually do that. Maybe I'd walk away from a lesson and think 'I guess that was a lesson.'

But now I walk away from a lesson and I think, ‘How did that go? How did I feel? How do I feel about my body today?’

But perhaps Dana’s biggest takeaway was the interconnected and fragile nature of her sense of confidence. After reviewing her own diaries, she noticed that confidence in her clothing choices often translated to confidence in her singing. But she wants that confidence to remain regardless of her outfit choice, or the state of her acne, or how her digestive system might be treating her. She sees developing confidence in her voice as a potential way to achieve that goal:

I think finding that confidence in my voice kind of gives me a boost. Like this is my voice and my body. No one else has this body. No one else has the vocal cords that I do. No one else can make the same exact sound that I can. And it makes, like a very special unique feeling, because you can't replicate the intricacies of a voice. (Interview)

Karina

The first self-assessment my co-researchers completed during the focus group presented them with a list of different parts of their body and asked them to identify how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each one. When I asked for reactions, Karina was quick to respond: “Overall I'm pretty cool with myself, and then it's like, ‘Okay, let's nitpick this.’ I don't want to nitpick this, I'm cool with me as a whole.” The ways in which she was dissatisfied, with her complexion and her hair, surprised her: “Overall I'm cool with me but breaking it down, I did not expect to feel the way that I feel right now.”

Karina, a 30-year-old white woman, describes herself as someone who “does things backwards.” She entered the workforce and got married before deciding to go to college in her mid-20s. She’s a soprano who describes her instrument as round and warm, like her body. Although she aspires towards performance, she’s chosen a less specific

major in music that also allows for a minor in German. Her husband is a source of love and support, but relationships with her mother-in-law and other family members offer less validation. During this study, she was in her senior year and looking forward to applying to graduate programs for vocal performance.

For me, and for other women like Dana, it's moments of comfort with our body, not moments of discomfort, that take us by surprise. But Karina has found a different perspective:

So I'm a heavier lady, I always have been. I think I'm actually classified as obese. But my body does what I need it to do, it gets me where I need to go. It digests really well, my skin keeps all my organs in place. I just, I like my body. It's been a long way for me to come, but I'm cool with being fat. I'm still healthy. My blood pressure is good. I can still run. I don't like it, but I can. I can do all the things that I want to do and need to do and she gets me around.

Later in the focus group, Karina briefly described how she has reshaped her body image over the past 10 years of her life. She has a loving and supportive husband, chooses accepting and kind friends, and subscribes to social media channels that provide messages of body positivity every day. "It's been a long process for me, it's the last 10-ish years, but I really have grown to love me and love my body."

After sharing such a positive outlook in the focus group, I was surprised to find very little love for her body in Karina's diaries. In fact, I found very little of her body at all:

I did not think about my body except for my larynx during this practice session today (Practice diary 1).

I didn't think about my body at all during my lesson. (Lesson diary 2).

I thought about my body not at all during my lesson. (Lesson diary 3).

We talked more in our interview about the absence of Karina's body in her diaries. "I just don't think about it. You know, when I'm singing, that's where my focus is. My focus is on my timing and my pitches and my diction. I don't think about what my belly is doing, or whatever." I wonder if avoidance is Karina's strategy. If she's feeling negatively about her body that day, she either avoids those thoughts in her singing, or avoids singing altogether: "I mean, on days when I don't feel good, I tend not to sing."

But it is impossible to entirely avoid one's body in singing, and Karina's diaries feature moments of contradiction:

How often did I think about my body during my lesson? Not at all! I'm so sorry I keep saying that but it's true, I just don't think about my body as a whole when I'm singing except for, I did notice I had a lot of jaw tension ... So, today I seem to be having a jaw tension day. A little bit of negativity just because I can't seem to get my jaw to do what I want it to do. But yeah, I was definitely more conscientious of what my body was doing while I was singing today. (Lesson diary 1).

I didn't really think about my body that much during this session. I'm in a practice room here, I've got that full length mirror to my left, so it was more for me today about, okay let's look at my posture since yesterday was such a posture day and see if that helps with the jaw tension (Practice diary 2).

I asked Karina in our interview why thinking about posture didn't register as thinking about her body, and her answer surprised me:

Because posture is something that I have control over immediately, it's something I can change in five seconds. And generally, how one's body looks is not something that can be dealt with in five seconds, not dealt with, but changed or handled, immediately. Posture, I have control over that.

Karina's focus on what she feels she can control in her singing, and her avoidance of the things she can't control, seems to have shaped her understanding of vocal technique: "For me, singing is from here up (holds hand just below her breasts)." I asked her about this perspective in our interview:

Kirsten: In the focus group, you said that you think of singing as, like from boobs up. Why do you say that?

Karina: Because that's where all the action happens. My lungs are kind of boob area up, diaphragm is there, all those fun vocal ligaments and muscles and things are in the throat. We're focusing a lot in my lesson about keeping my chest up... just to keep it from collapsing. Because that can have a negative impact when I sing. So we want to keep the chest up. And shoulders not necessarily back, but upright, ears aligned with the shoulders. And that's kind of where all the action happens. Below mid torso, I tend not to think about my body unless it's to make a significant gesture, like to step forward, or make a gesture with my arm somehow.

Kirsten: So, have you encountered different ideas about how involved the body is in singing?

Karina: I mean, I know your abdomen really is engaged with breathing and with singing. But it mostly really has to do with, you know, the muscles in your rib cage and the muscles in your back, which is bizarre to me to think about. We did an exercise in my pedagogy class with different ways to try and breathe, so like keeping your, the abdominis rectus muscles... keeping those like tightened, and then trying to breathe in. And then having them, pushing your stomach all the way out and trying to breathe in and just kind of like—what's the word I want? Having your muscles engaged in different ways and trying to breathe in or out and how it affects your breathing, which obviously has an impact on singing. You know, your stomach has something to do with it. And it's just kind of like if I'm breathing in, my stomach expands. That's what it does, you know, but it's not something that I think about because I have to breathe. I'm a wind instrument, I have to breathe to make the sound... When you breathe in, and your diaphragm pushes down and it moves all those other fun gross organs out of the way, it's gonna, you know, the belly expands. That's what happens.

Kirsten: Absolutely, absolutely. You're absolutely right. So there is activity below that boob area.

Karina: Yeah.

Kirsten: Yeah. So, I'm gonna ask you one more time: why do you think of singing as from boobs up?

Karina: Because directly, that's where the breathing happens. Everything else is kind of a side effect... everything else that happens when I breathe, to my sides, to my stomach, whatever, is a side effect. The breathing happens and I know where the breathing happens, whatever it feels like.

Contradictions arise again for Karina as she considers outside expectations for her body as a singer. In some moments, ideas about what others expect a singer to look like bring her comfort:

I'm kind of the big Wagnerian body type. I feel like I fit the singer image in that way... I feel more accepted by my community. Not necessarily despite of or because of how I look. But you know, this is the way that my body is and that's okay for this (Focus group).

I wonder if I would still like my body if I didn't sing what I sing. Because it kind of falls into that stereotypical, you know, 19th century opera singer physique (Interview).

But in other moments, these expectations were upsetting:

You have to be pretty now, you have to be conventionally attractive to be famous, or to not even to be famous, but to get work, or to sing and have people come see you. And I just think that's such garbage. I hate it (Interview).

You know what I did today right before this? I went to Walgreens, and I got fake lashes for my competition recording. And it's just like, Why do I have to do this?... I've got my fake fingernails, because I chew mine terribly, I've got my fake eyelashes, how much fake stuff do I have to put on myself to be acceptable? (Focus group)

I was absolutely typecast for that role. If I went to the director right now and asked her, 'Why did you cast me in that role?' she would never say it's because of your size. Nobody would say that. But it was part of it. (Interview)

I asked her about this contradiction in our interview:

Kirsten: What I'm hearing here is that there are ways that these ideas about a singer's body and what it means, the body type a traditional singer has, has been a positive thing for you. And then there's these other ways that those ideas have affected you negatively. So there's a little bit of tension there, can you talk about that?

Karina: Do you want me to cry? (getting choked up)

Kirsten: Definitely don't *want* you to cry (both laughing). And I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable.

Karina: No, no. Like I said, in the focus group, I said, this is like a therapy session, man, this is great. It's just a double-edged sword. (crying) I mean, most things are, you know, it can't always be [lead roles] and rainbows and sunshine. Sometimes it's going to be you're the fat friend, or you're the mom friend, or you're the whatever.

Karina was recently cast in a leading role in an opera at her school. She was surprised and elated; she'd never had the opportunity to portray a romantic lead before, a fact she attributes to typecasting: "Normally when you have a body like mine people tend to make you the funny one or the friend one" (focus group). Unfortunately, a problem with her costuming "diminished it a little bit" (focus group). She supplied her measurements as instructed, but when the costumes arrived, they were too small.

For four of us [in the cast], our costumes came in and they were too small. And it was frustrating ... It's like, we gave you our measurements. You know, don't try and - (starts to cry) What was frustrating for me was when the director said that I must not have filled out the form correctly with my measurements. I'm like, 'I wasn't the one who put the numbers in man. That was your work-study people, they took the measurements, they wrote them down.' ... I think the insinuation was that I was vanity sizing. And I am not one to do that. I'm one to buy clothes that fit me right. Because I know that having clothes that fit properly, regardless of the size, they feel better, and they look better.

Karina has spent years of her time and energy working on her body image. The insinuation that she might be "vanity sizing" runs counter to her hard-won values: "I try to make an effort to dress the body that I have. And I make an effort to dress it in a way that is comfortable, and at the same time, flattering" (Interview). In other words, Karina doesn't deny what her body is: "I have a big fat belly. I don't give a shit" (Focus group). And yet, sometimes her reactions to that body surprise her:

Overall, I'm cool with me, but breaking it down, I did not expect to feel the way that I feel right now. (Focus group)

It was a little bit hurtful, in a way I didn't expect, that he told me I hadn't written down my size correctly (Focus group).

I was just very conscious of my belly and my thighs yesterday... not sure why (Practice diary 4).

If it's not her actual body that surprises her, maybe it's not her actual body that she's avoiding. After years of hard work to accept herself, perhaps what she's most afraid of is that that struggle might be unfinished.

Throughout the study, Karina was confronting issues of alignment and tension in her singing. In one diary entry, she noticed how her lack of awareness informed that struggle: "I actually thought about my body too little this time. [My teacher] got on me because my posture was really bad." (Lesson diary 3). When I asked Karina what would stick with her from this research experience, she talked about developing her awareness of her body: "I think that's going to be the biggest thing is just being more aware of what I am physically doing" (Interview). When I asked her about her body as her instrument, she articulated exactly why that awareness is so important to her:

It's everything that I do, everything that I put into my body or expose myself to affects the way that I sound. Emotionally, everything that I do, everything that I feel affects the way that I sound. You know, the body being my instrument is personal. (getting choked up) It is a very intimate thing to share my instrument with people. It's scary. But I love it (laughing). I also like roller coasters. So, you know, do with that what you will.

Aksha

One of the assessments I asked my co-researchers to complete in the focus group asked them to rate how often they have specific negative thoughts about their bodies. When I asked how these thoughts connected to their singing, Aksha had this to say: "I should have more stamina and I should lose weight. Just to project the sound a little bit further, and just support the sound in a more consistent manner for singing long phrases."

Aksha, a 24-year-old Indian American woman, is a graduate student in her second year studying vocal performance at the Northeastern institution from which I recruited. She studies both Western and Indian classical music, and classifies herself as a mezzo-soprano, with a machine-like instrument, and she delights in fast runs and ragas. She aspires to be a professional singer in both genres and takes her technical training very seriously. She was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at a young age, and often worries often about the judgments of others. But she feels supported by her friends and voice teachers and she maintains close relationships with her family.

As the quote above suggests, Aksha has a very integrated view of her singing technique and her body:

Kirsten: How do you feel like your experiences as a singer have affected your body image?

Aksha: I mean, they're practically the same. Mostly in a positive way though, I've gotten a really good response from those who have heard me sing...

Kirsten Brown: So would you say that when people comment positively about your singing it makes you feel good about your body?

Aksha: Yeah, because I'm basically engaging my body when I'm singing. That's how it's done.

This connection manifests both positively and negatively. When she accomplishes her technical goals, she appreciates her body:

I thought a lot about my body during my practice session, it was very often that I thought of it. And the way that I would characterize the majority of my thoughts about my body is neutral. So it was neither positive nor negative. Actually, I would say it is a little more on the positive side, because I felt like I was able to project the sound from my lower abdomen instead of projecting from the throat. (Practice diary 2)

When her practice doesn't go as well as she'd hoped, she's disappointed with her body:

I was sad in the sense that I felt like my body was just not prepared for it because it started all of a sudden, and I tend to lose patience a lot when I have to do my practice, especially in that Indian musical field because I want to be able to be established, I want to be able to sing easily, sing and just let my voice float out there. (Practice diary 2)

Aksha thinks about her technique often; she's a driven singer: "I'm all about challenging myself" (focus group). She's critical of her singing ability and worries about impressing others: "If I was good, I would have already impressed everybody, I would have already impressed my professors, I would have already impressed my coach" (Interview). Perhaps because she's nearing the end of her graduate degree, she frequently thinks about her goal of being a professional singer, in both the Indian and Western classical music genres, and what it will take to get there. She compares herself to this professional standard in her practice: "I'm still having a little bit of difficulty with singing faster runs that professional singers use" (Practice diary 2). This comparison also applies to her body: "I wish I was as good looking as others in terms of singing because others have more powerful voices than I do naturally" (Focus group).

Perhaps Aksha compares herself to others because she's worried about the judgments and comparisons other people make about her: "It's not fair to be judged. I just worry that people are going to judge me" (Focus group). She was bullied as a kid, both for her appearance and "how I socialized with other people" (Focus group). The thought of being judged by others makes Aksha angry. During the focus group, Dana shared a story wherein a friend made a critical comment about her outfit choice during teaching fieldwork. Even to someone else's experience of judgment, Aksha reacted strongly:

I still feel like, not to be rude or anything, but I just feel like what she said [about you] was out of line and it doesn't serve as an excuse to judge anybody. And I'm sorry that she felt that way about you. But honestly, I think, in my opinion, she needs serious help.

Judgments about Aksha's body and Aksha's singing provoke similar emotional responses, and stoke similar fears:

Kirsten: You mentioned feeling judged for your singing, and you've mentioned a little bit about feeling judged for the way that you look. Are those feelings similar when that happens?

Aksha: Yeah, it does. They're quite similar when that happens...

Kirsten: Can you talk about why those feelings are similar and what those feelings are?

Aksha: They're similar, because this is how I truly feel for both areas. If I'm singing, if I look at myself in the mirror, and I look at a belly full of fat, I think I'm not pretty enough. I need to look beautiful. I need to impress myself, and make sure I don't get shunned. And then when it comes to singing, I always think they always think the same thing. When I do like a fast run, for instance, and it doesn't come out and the tempo slows over time, I always think 'no, I'm not good enough.' I really wish I was just as good as other people...

Kirsten: What would that mean if you got shunned? Who are you worried about shunning you?

Aksha: I'm just worried about my friends shunning me, I'm just worried about my family shunning me. Even the teachers who've helped me to be where I am today. I'm worried that they would shun me. I'm most worried about the people that actually care about me. That's where I feel like I'm letting them down sometimes, when I feel like I'm not doing enough, even if I am. (Interview)

Aksha describes a close relationship with her family and her parents. When she practices in her room, she keeps her eyes focused on the bookshelf her dad and brother built for her. She feels pressure from her parents, but she interprets this as an expression of their love for her:

This is their way of expressing their unconditional love to their child ... they're the ones that raised us, right, so it's their job as a parent to tell us right from wrong... Indian parents, especially, like my parents, are completely strictly old fashioned.

She describes her parents as both “super concerned” and “very critical” of her body and her weight. Her parents’ views and expectations for her body have influenced the way she thinks about singing: “[My parents] gave me the impression that, I wish I could just lose weight and, and actually be like other people, especially when it comes to singing.” Aksha’s desire to please her parents and meet their expectations seems to be part of the connection between her singing and her body:

Kirsten: If you're having a rough singing day, does that make you feel worse about your body?

Aksha: It does in a way, because I always feel like I'm not so good at it. And these thoughts are like, especially when I tell my parents this. And when they watch me sing, I feel like I'm letting them down. Or sometimes I just feel like physically, maybe my body needs to be more worked out with weightlifting or doing cardio exercises just to strengthen my abdominal muscles so that I can use it to activate my voice, and the intensity of how I project the sound and build up my stamina. (Interview)

But Aksha’s expectations for her voice and her body don’t always align:

I know I have the capacity to project the sound from my abdominal cavity and downwards instead of letting my sound take over from [my throat] ... but at the same time, I just feel like if I'm looking at myself, I look at the shape of my belly, my entire belly, and I always think to myself, and instantly become insecure, ‘Hey, why do I look like that?’ (Focus group).

Despite these fears, pressures, and conflicts, Aksha works hard to stay positive.

She believes that her ability to sing “easily and effortlessly” relies partly on “the positive attitude that I have to exhibit, no matter what” (Focus group). For her, attitude and emotion is a determining factor in how she relates to her body in her singing:

Kirsten: So, some days in your singing you feel connected to your whole body and some days they feel separate.

Aksha: Yeah, absolutely.

Kirsten: Do you have any ideas about what might cause that to change for you?

Aksha: Yeah. A lot of it has to do with the emotion that we experience, a lot of it has to do with the thought and the behaviors that we also display. Because when it comes to singing, it's all about communication through our art, and everyone deserves that kind of communication in some way...

Kirsten: What I'm hearing you say is that, depending on your emotions, your emotions are what kind of dictates whether or not you feel connected to your body that day. Is that right?

Aksha: Yes, absolutely. (Interview)

Aksha's emotions influence how she feels about her body, and in turn, how Aksha uses her body influences her emotional state:

[When I am] able to sing long phrases in one breath without any mishaps, that's when I start to enjoy more because I feel like 'okay I'm using my entire body, I'm using my belly muscles to support the sound, rather than the throat.' (Practice diary 2)

Singing is a very physical thing. It's a very physical activity that artists need to use in order to have fun, in order to capture the audience's hearts in some way. (Interview)

Aksha's experience of her body while she's singing is different when she sings Indian classical music versus Western classical music:

In Indian music and in western classical music, the techniques are the same. There's no question about that. My coach just told me today ... in Indian music, and in western music, there's no difference in technique. ... I don't think too much about my body when it comes to Indian music, surprisingly, now that my guru told me, 'Don't listen to yourself too much. Don't think of it just let it flow.' ... But in Western music, however, I've had to think a little bit extra about the way I use my body to produce the sound. (Interview)

Finding and maintaining that sense of easy flow seems to be one of Aksha's primary goals as a singer, in both genres. She often referenced tension as a technical issue, and she sees acceptance of oneself and one's differences as a remedy for that tension:

When people feel like they have to be self-conscious all the time, especially when they're singing a specific piece, like an aria or an art song that they're working on in their lessons or in their coaching sessions, they would always end up tensing and thinking negatively about themselves. So what I think people should do is to understand that it's okay to be different. And the world would be boring if we were all the same inside and out.

By the end of the study, Aksha felt like she had learned something about how to accept herself:

I honestly could say that it has been one of the best experiences in my life that I would be involved in someone's research project like yours. And to be honest, I really enjoyed it, I really felt like I was more vulnerable. And I was able to open up about my body confidently without any judgment, without any destructive criticism from anybody. I felt like the [other co-researchers] that we have worked with in your study have helped me to feel that I'm not alone in what I'm feeling. I'm not alone in what I'm going through. And I'm not alone with being self-conscious about my appearance, because in the world, everyone is experiencing something about their image. And a lot of it has to do with self-love, how they can take care of themselves, and still love themselves, even if they may not feel that they're the appropriate package. So I think that with me sharing about it, I think it has helped me to understand that I am unique, I am who I am. And I will not let that control my life or control my way of approaching my musical career.
(Interview)

Marissa

Marissa was unable to attend our larger focus group, so instead we met for a one-on-one interview and talked through the main points of the focus group. She engaged with the same self-assessments as the other co-researchers. After the assessment in which she rated the frequency of negative emotions related to her body in different settings, I asked her how she feels about her body in singing situations: “I don't really feel negatively about my body when I'm singing... It's nice to have my body be good at something and doing the thing that I want it to do effectively” (Initial interview).

Marissa, a 20-year-old bisexual white woman, is a junior majoring in vocal performance at the Northeastern institution from which I recruited. She classifies herself as a soubrette, with a voice that is “warm and creamy ... like a bagel” (Initial interview). She aspires to be a performer but is often aware and critical of the pressures put on performers by both the industry and her current institution. Marissa is a survivor of child sexual abuse and has therefore spent many years engaging in therapy. She feels supported by her therapist and voice teacher but describes her relationships with family as an area where she “has some work to do.”

Marissa’s singing is a source of gratitude in her life: “[When I’m singing] I’m focusing on, ‘This sound is so great, I’m lucky to be doing this’ or focusing on the gratitude of what my body can do” (Final interview). That gratitude helps Marissa deal with some of the unique challenges that come from her childhood trauma:

I am a survivor of child sexual abuse, and a lot of my adolescence and throughout puberty, and whatever was super, super uncomfortable, because I wanted to look how I did when my childhood effectively was over and ended and whatnot. That was hard to deal with. And even into adulthood, you know, I’m still like, ‘why am I a size six’ or something, that’s crazy. And my therapist is like, ‘It’s not crazy. It’s very normal to be an adult, and to look like an adult.’ And those aspects of dealing with the way that you look at your body and just being like, ‘I don’t really connect to this at all, like, this is weird.’ I think it can be kind of disorienting... dealing with dissociation and being like, ‘Oh, wow, now I’m an adult.’ That’s kind of a creepy feeling. (Initial interview).

I don’t oftentimes feel super great about the way that I’m an adult, and I look like this. And that’s never going to change, this is it. That’s kind of difficult to deal with. But if I can sing, and I can do cool stuff with my body, and I can hike and whatever, that’s cool... appreciating those things, as opposed to being negative about what I wish I looked like is very useful. (Final interview).

Singing is a great avenue for feeling more okay about my adult body, which is something that I spend an enormous amount of time trying to refocus and go to therapy for. (Final interview)

For Marissa, appreciating her voice helps her appreciate her body. Unfortunately, at times this relationship has also functioned negatively:

I definitely felt like the worse my singing was, I felt more and more badly about my body because I was like, ‘Now I can't even do anything useful. I can't do the things I like to do.’ And I just felt very inadequate. I remember when that sort of started turning around, it was easier to be nicer to myself about my body, because I was like, ‘Well, I'm good at doing this thing. And if I'm good at doing this thing, I'm a nice person to be around, it doesn't really matter.’ ... It was easier to build on that. (Initial interview).

But as gratitude and positivity about her voice influence her feelings about her body, so too do positive feelings about her body influence her singing” I think [gratitude] really helps my singing because I'm like, ‘This is great. I can do this. I'm proud of myself’” (Final interview). By keeping her from focusing on negative thoughts about the way she looks, like “‘I wonder how this looks’ or ‘my shoulders look weird’” this sense of appreciation allows her to focus on the sensations that arise as she sings:

Sensation, I think is always a better route to go in terms of being able to deeply notice what you're doing. If I'm able to think more clearly about quality of breath and character research and putting that into meaningful gestures and meaningful movement of my body, then I'm fully invested... I'm physically involved in singing—just singing, not singing in myself, or singing in the clothes that I'm wearing or singing in the context of what other people think about me—just ‘What is my body doing? What are my ribs doing?’ Just more factual, as opposed to my personal take on what should be happening or whatever. (Final interview).

During a particular rehearsal, Marissa felt so nervous that her Apple watch detected her raised heart rate: “Yeah, definitely performance anxiety, my apple watch was like, ‘How was your workout?’ and I was like, ‘What workout?’” (Performance diary 1). Since this was taking place over zoom, she also noticed that her face was flushed, another sign of her anxiety. But without these external indicators, she’s not sure she would have noticed these physical effects of her anxiety:

Had it not been for looking at myself or getting an alert, I don't know that I would have [noticed] as quickly. I think I would have afterwards probably thought like, okay, I feel really different afterwards than when I was in this performance. (Final interview)

When Marissa is experiencing negative emotions, about her body or in general, she notices that she is less in tune with her physical sensations:

If it's a day where I had recently thought about something or was triggered by something, talked about something in therapy that was really rough... I feel a little uncomfy in just existing in my body. So, anything that touches me, like jeans or formal shirts that have collars, I just don't want to deal with it. So singing is definitely harder on those days. Because just like, you can feel jeans, and you can feel like the seams of shirts... I just don't want to be touched or bothered or have too much like physical sensation. It's just kind of a little too much. So on days like that, noticing all the things that I want to notice, I think would be too overwhelming. (Final interview).

On these days when negative thoughts and feelings about her body are taking up mental space, Marissa also finds it difficult to focus on her practice:

Not feeling super vocally awesome today. How did I think about my body during my practice? Quite a bit, I'm having a negative body day... Did those thoughts affect my singing? I tried not to because I was like 'We need to focus,' but it was hard to stay focused. (Practice diary 2).

So if I feel badly about the way that I am feeling about my body image, I think that comes through in like, in the sense that I'll try to focus on breathing, and I'll be like, 'Oh, I look so gross,' or something, but I'm trying to do this thing. I'm feeling frustrated with myself that I can't get over it and just move on. But then I'm also totally sidetracked by whatever negative thing is going on in my head. (Final interview).

Getting sidetracked for Marissa can take many forms. Sometimes she spends 45 minutes on the same five pages. Other times repetitive thoughts like "I don't like the way that I look. I don't know why I don't like the way that I look," stop her from singing entirely. Technically, it seems to manifest in her breath, with an overall "lack of support and a lack of energy" (Final interview).

Marissa's biggest takeaway from this research experience was that these thoughts that cause her to lose focus and disconnect from her physical sensations are always connected to something else:

I think my perception of body image has changed. I thought body image was its own little thing... but that does not exist in a vacuum. I just don't have random feelings about my body for no reason, that's coming from someplace, that's coming from some feeling of inadequacy or some feeling of insecurity, or other people's commentary. (Final interview).

I thought about my body a little bit more than I would have liked to. I've been feeling pretty tense, so I know that any time I am having a hard time with myself or a hard time with a situation then I tend to make it into a body problem. (Practice diary 3).

During the course of the study, Marissa had a difficult experience as a singer. She was cast in a school production of a 21st century opera, and she found the music very difficult. After talking with her teacher and the director, they discovered that her teacher had never signed off on her participation in that project, and she ultimately decided not to continue in the cast. The negative feelings that this experience generated for Marissa often colored her thoughts about her body.

I felt just uncomfortable around the people that were there [at the rehearsal] so I think I was a little bit like, "I look silly, I sound bad, I look weird" you know. None of that stuff is really true, it was just sort of like, I felt insecure to start with. (Performance diary 1)

It was hard to deal with the self-confidence [issues] that I'm having just academically and professionally. Sometimes that can just get me down on how I feel about myself. And if I feel bad about myself, I'm like, "I look stupid," or "I sound bad" or something like that. (Practice diary 3).

Experiences working with her classmates can be sources of anxiety and stress for Marissa. She described another rehearsal experience wherein she was unfavorably compared to another singer:

Somebody compares me to another cast member, and they're like, "they can do it, why can't you?" They're not saying anything about my body specifically, but it's so easy to go there because ... I think the weird thing about [singing] is that it always feels like you, because your voice is you, you are your instrument. So, they're saying that she can do that, which is awesome and I'm so glad that she can, but the fact that I can't do that feels like a commentary on who I am and not just my singing, but my body and my general person. And that's hard. (Practice diary 2).

I asked her more about this feeling in our final interview:

Kirsten: You mentioned that that feels like a commentary on your body. What kind of commentary on your body, or what commentary?

Marissa: If somebody says, 'Her singing is so great. Have you heard the way that she does XYZ? That's a beautiful thing to do.' And they sort of edge you towards that way of thinking like, 'Well, she said, she uses blah, blah, like, maybe you could try that.' It's hard not to read between the lines. If that person is thinking about me in comparison to this other person, they probably thought about my singing, and the way that I act. And then it's not too far of a stretch to think that they're thinking about me in comparison to her in all the different ways, not just singing, but like, 'What kind of person is she? What kind of way does she present her body?' Does this person think that I have a good sense of style in comparison to this person? Obviously, they're thinking about us and comparing and contrasting, as opposed to two different entire entities.

Kirsten: You're talking about feeling like they're comparing you? If they're comparing your voices, they're probably comparing you in other ways. So, the thoughts that you have about your body that come out of that, are they general? Are they specific? And if they're specific, how do you arrive at those specific places?

Marissa: They're usually pretty general. Because I'm usually reading in between the lines. So, it's basically whatever I'm feeling insecure about, that will be the thing that I'm like, they're obviously comparing that. Probably not, but it's just what's on my mind.

Comparisons, both implicit and explicit, cause Marissa to think negatively about her body. She reacts similarly to implicit, or perhaps inferred, comparisons about her voice.

There's definitely people that I'm related to that sometimes will talk about their bodies, and I'm like, 'Hey, we are pretty much the same looking person. We're related. And if you're talking about how gross XYZ physical trait is that you have, mine's pretty similar.' When people say 'I need to lose weight' or something, and they're the same size as you or maybe even thinner than you and you're just like, 'Okay', and then they're like, 'But you look good.' I'm like, 'I know, you're probably just feeling insecure about yourself.' But like, that's a comment that doesn't feel like it's about them. It feels like they're commenting about you. (Initial interview)

That person doesn't like their sound. And they sound amazing. And they're always saying they sound terrible. So they must think I'm a fool. (Final interview)

A particularly salient moment of comparison to one of her classmates came up in a performance class last year. Marissa was wearing a tank top that day and thought nothing of it: "I sang a Mozart aria, and I had fun." But after her performance, she got the message that exposing her shoulders might have been a problem:

Marissa: The girl who got up and sang after me was wearing a mock turtleneck and a jacket or whatever. And she was on stage for two seconds and she's like, 'I have to apologize. I have to take off my jacket. I don't think I can sing well in it.' And I was like, 'Okay, whatever.' And she took off her jacket. And she was like, 'I am so sorry. I really apologize about showing my shoulders like that. I know that it's not professional. I know it's not okay. I won't let it happen again.' And I was like, 'That's really weird.' But the teacher was really complimentary of her. They're like, 'Oh, it's okay. I understand. Thank you so much for thinking about other people'... I was like, 'I just sang! Are you saying that I shouldn't have done that?' ... This is a person that oftentimes people will say is a little similar to me vocally.

Kirsten: What kind of effect do you think that environment and those kinds of comments have on your singing?

Marissa: I think it can sort of throw off my sense of confidence and sense of grounded-ness, and my breath, specifically... I think physically, that's a direct impact to the way that you're gonna stand and the way that you're gonna breathe, because you're feeling like you want to be small and kind of more covered up than you thought you had to be.

Even before this incident, Marissa often thought about how she dressed in performance settings:

I've gotten a lot of comments over the years, actually from piano performances. They're like, 'You wear low cut shirts.' And I'm like, 'I do? I didn't think I did. I think I just have breasts. I think that's the main problem here is that I have breasts, and they're never gonna go away.' As far as I know. So, I try to wear things that come up to like here (gestures to her neck) for performances and stuff, because it just makes me feel really gross when I get those comments. As if I've somehow done something negative in order to prepare, like I didn't think that through or whatever. And I try to avoid that. (Initial interview).

Dressing conservatively is one way that Marissa exerts some agency over how people perceive her and control potential threats to her body image:

[I remember] freshman year, people crying leaving juries because they were like 'This professor said that like, blah, blah, blah.' And I was like, 'Oh my god, I really just hope they like my diction, I didn't even know it was possible that they could be like, you look bad.' ... So I've always tried to be really conservative about the way that I present... I just don't want anyone to comment about anything aside from what I've worked hard to present. (Initial interview)

Marissa actively responds to potential body image threats and has multiple coping strategies. She listens to the advice of her therapist, monitors her social media intake, and relies on good relationships with others. Her voice teacher is a source of support in this area. Marissa shared that when she feels down for an extended period of time, she'll often lose weight because she doesn't eat as much when she's depressed.

Whenever I lose weight it's hard because I know that to be a healthy and happy adult person I have to go back to the weight that I normally am, but I feel very rewarded for being thinner... people would be like 'Oh my gosh you look so good.' People who love me and know me well ... like a vocal teacher or a family member or a friend say like 'you don't look like yourself, you look upset.'

I asked Marissa in our interview how her relationship with her voice teacher has affected her body image: "I think it has cemented the feeling, the sensation prioritized above the

perception of how I should look or how I should sound. That has been really positive” (Final interview). Her teacher’s reinforcement of the idea that how Marissa looks doesn’t matter seems to be borne out in her diaries. Marissa didn’t report having any thoughts about her appearance, beyond an affinity for her sweater or her headband, in her lesson diaries.

Marissa finished this research project with a broader awareness of her mental health and how it impacts her singing.

Am I really taking care of myself? Am I taking care of the way that I'm feeling about my own self as a person? And if I'm not, then that's going to come through in my singing in some way, some shape or form. (Final interview)

Singing is so like, full contact sport, that if you feel uncomfortable about yourself, or something's not right, or you're having cramps, or whatever it is, it doesn't—you have to be all in. (Final interview)

Why am I a girl?

When Ellen West, our recurrent poetic heroine, asks her doctors the provocative question above, their answer is that her gender is just a “given.” They are of course, wrong. The reason that Ellen is a girl lies further down in the stanza: “sometimes I even feel like a girl.” As stated in previous chapters, the emerging—*only*—criterion for womanhood is that you feel like one, that you self-identify as a woman. There are many different ways to be a woman, and you can subscribe to that label to varying degrees. I chose to write this chapter on womanhood through individual stories to highlight the ways in which the experiences of women are vast and varied. But the four accounts I presented are invariable in one crucial way that bears examination.

For all the differences between my co-researchers, they have all experienced womanhood as ciswomen. They—or more accurately, we, as I am also a ciswoman—have always enjoyed the privilege of being identified by others in the way that we would identify ourselves. That unity in identity results in a fundamentally different experience of our bodies than the experiences of those whose gender identities do not reflect what others have assigned them. As I expressed in Chapter 1, I want this research to promote an inclusive vision of the gender spectrum. To do that, I must be explicit about the perspectives that were not included in this chapter on womanhood, those of transwomen and AFAB nonbinary singers. It is possible that the operative variable when it comes to body image and singing is how one is identified by others and experiences self-objectification, or the male gaze, more so than how one identifies oneself. If so, transwomen singers or AFAB nonbinary singers might have similar experiences to the women of this document, but we can't know for sure. In the coming cross-case analyses of Chapters 5 and 6, I hope you'll keep in mind what is outside of the frame.

Chapter V

EMBODIMENT

“—Then I think, No. The ideal of being thin

*conceals the ideal
not to have a body—;
which is NOT trivial ...*

This wish seems now as much a “given” of my existence

*as the intolerable
fact that I am dark-complexioned; big-boned;
and once weighed
one hundred and sixty-five pounds ...*

—But then I think, No. That’s too simple,—

*without a body, who can
know himself at all?
Only by
acting; choosing; rejecting; have I
made myself—
discovered who and what Ellen can be ...*

*—But then again I think, NO. This I is anterior
to name; gender; action;
fashion;
MATTER ITSELF,—*

*... trying to stop my hunger with FOOD
is like trying to appease thirst
with ink.”*

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

The phrase “Your body is your instrument” suggests, beyond its practical truth, a unity, or synergy, of body and voice. To me, there’s a sort of wholeness within that idea,

some expression of cosmic convergence, a deep and profound alignment of movement and purpose. There's something sacred about that phrase for us singers, and yet it means something slightly different to each of us:

My body is my instrument... I think it means that I'm engaging the entire body while I'm singing. (Aksha final interview)

It means I carry it with me everywhere I go. I'm if I'm having a bad vocal day, it might not be because of something that I did or did wrong, it might be because of my environment. It might be that my allergies are really bad that day, and that affects the way that my instrument performs. If a trumpet player has a bad instrument day, they can say, 'Oh, sticky valve, oh, no. Sorry about the valve, or whatever.' You know, it doesn't reflect directly back onto them like it does for a singer... It's everything that I do, everything that I put into my body or expose myself to affects the way that I sound. Emotionally, everything that I do, everything that I feel affects the way that I sound. You know, the body being my instrument is personal. (getting choked up) It is a very intimate thing to share my instrument with people. It's scary. But I love it (laughing). I also like roller coasters. So, you know, do with that what you will. (Karina final interview)

The sound comes out of me. So, I make the sound therefore, I'm responsible for all the tonality, the interpretation of the text, the everything. I'm responsible for everything that comes out of me. (Marissa final interview)

I usually take it quite literally, because it is. I am able to create sound and beautiful sound using just what is on me. And, you know, I create the air that flows through. And I carry my instrument with me wherever I go. And I think with that, you want to take care of your instrument, and that's something I forget a lot is that I want to take care of my instrument. And it's not just here (gestures to throat), but it's all of me. And it's also up here too (points to head) because I feel like my brain works just as hard as my cords in producing a nice piece. (Dana final interview)

In describing the meaning of this phrase, each of my co-researchers expressed some aspect of embodiment. Embodiment is a complex concept, with applications in many different fields, but philosophically, it echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's works on perception: "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 1945/2012, p. 151). Merleau-Ponty argued that the body and the mind are not

separate entities, that they are one and the same. As such, *we both sense and make sense of our world through our bodies*, in a single act of perception that is inseparably “sensational and meaningful” (Crossley, 1995, p. 46). Merleau-Ponty goes on to insist that all perception is based in our action: “[the body] does not passively receive messages from the world, but actively interrogates the world” (Crossley, 1995, p. 47). Doing is thinking, the mind is the body, and we are one whole being, both “sentient and sensible” (Crossley, 1995, p. 46).

Some vocal pedagogues have espoused this idea as well; Shirlee Emmons writes: “there is strong evidence to support the notion that *we think with our entire body*” (Emmons, 1998, p. 66). Bessel van der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2015) confirms this philosophical notion with neuroscience and psychiatry. The areas of our brain that are responsible for consciousness and our sense of self are closely connected to the areas of our brain that monitor our sensations and to the rest of the body itself, where those sensations are generated. He explains:

... the core of our self-awareness rests on the physical sensations that convey the inner states of the body... Our sensory world takes shape even before we are born... After birth, physical sensation defines our relationship to ourselves and to our surroundings. We start off *being* our wetness, hunger, satiation, and sleepiness... Even after we acquire consciousness and language, our bodily sensing system provides crucial feedback on our moment-to-moment condition. Its constant hum communicates changes in our viscera and in the muscles of our face, torso, and extremities that signal pain and comfort... (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 95-96).

Our bodies and their sensations provide vital information, about both our internal states and our surroundings, that shapes our thoughts and actions, our emotions and memories.

Ellen West puts it simply:

without a body, who can
know himself at all?

Only by
acting; choosing; rejecting; have I
made myself—

discovered who and what Ellen can be ... (Bidart, 1990)

So then why do my co-researchers and I often feel separate? Rarely did my co-researchers express the unity of being that Merleau-Ponty describes. Sometimes they experienced conflict: “Do I like how I look? I keep wavering between yes and no, and especially like, you know when we sing our bellies go out, and that’s just healthy. And so, it’s always hard to see your stomach” (Dana practice diary 3). Often, their bodies weren’t present at all: “How often did I think about my body during the lesson? I didn’t” (Marissa lesson diary 2). Occasionally, their bodies were so present that their minds couldn’t function as they would have liked: “I just could not stop focusing on how gross my body is and how much I just did not like looking in the mirror, and I feel like that’s all I can think about today” (Dana practice diary 2).

Simone de Beauvoir provides an answer; she asserts that when girls become women we are "doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she ... [also] exist[s] outside" (1952, p. 316, as cited in Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that this doubling, this outside perspective, is the result of being socialized in a culture that treats women as objects to be looked at, and thus teaches women to appraise and monitor their own value based on how they look from the outside, separating us from how we feel on the inside. It is through self-objectification that we are split in two.¹

¹ Merleau-Ponty’s writings also address the idea that one could, and should for the purposes of development, take an outsider’s perspective on their body, and he argues that the occasional use of this

The more I listened to my co-researchers in our focus group, interviews, and their diaries, the more I felt this separation between their singer-selves and their woman-selves. I wondered if they felt it too, so I asked. Their answers were clear:

Absolutely. (Aksha final interview)

Hundred percent. (Marissa final interview)

That really resonates with me. (Dana final interview)

I think you're right. I think they are two very separate things. I have my singer body and I have my everyday life body. Even though they're the same thing, they're not. (Karina final interview)

Women singers—or at the very least my co-researchers and I—*have two bodies*, divided by divergent purposes. Our singer's body, or our instrument, operates with a clear purpose: to create beautiful, expressive sound. Our “everyday body's” ostensible purpose is to allow us to be in the world, “to sense and to make sense.” Ostensibly, these two purposes are aligned; singing is just one mode of interaction with the world, made up of both sensation and sentience, doing and thinking, perceiving and being perceived. This unity of purpose *should* allow for a unified body, and a conscious recognition of our embodied experience. But objectification interrupts our ability to consciously experience our embodiment by introducing a new purpose for this body: to look pleasing to an outside observer. This expectation robs the body of its sentience and its sensing; it becomes an inanimate object without its own purpose and can therefore only serve to fulfill others' needs and desires. Self-objectification means that this purpose is not simply

perspective does not negate his principles of embodiment. The difference between what Merleau-Ponty describes and Fredrickson and Roberts' theory of objectification is that when one experiences self-objectification, that outside perspective is not occasional, but habitual. Self-objectification occurs when that outside perspective is not an option, but a compulsion, and it can disrupt rather than coincide with one's internal awareness.

suggested or constructed by society, but constantly imposed by the woman herself. The call is coming from inside the house.

Karina expressed how these two purposes conflict: “Nobody looks pretty when they're singing, nobody. If you're trying to look pretty when you're singing, you're not going to sing well and I feel like singing well is more important than looking good” (Karina, focus group). Your body can't be your instrument and someone else's object at the same time. So we split in two. We are doubled. We are a singer and/or a woman, an instrument and/or a body, a person and/or an object. This separateness was my most surprising discovery and yet it felt deeply familiar—like suddenly noticing and naming something that has always been there. Much of the rest of this document is about this doubling; in this chapter, I aim to describe this phenomenon to you as my co-researchers observed it, and as I have interpreted it.

Relational States of Body and Instrument

Charting the relationship between body and instrument began with my awareness of my co-researcher's separateness or doubling. As I compiled these instances of separation, I began to notice that there were different ways to be separate, and I started to group them into categories. Categories formed and reformed, broke apart and were resorbed, and finally the wall of my apartment that is still covered with post-it notes arranged itself into five distinct columns.



Figure 1. *The Wall of My Apartment That I Turned Into a Low-Tech Whiteboard/Art Installation.*

Deciding what to call these columns was challenging. It became clear to me that the defining characteristic of these columns was how these two aspects of each of my co-researchers, woman and singer, related to each other, and so I settled on the term “relational states.” These aspects of woman and singer are each a collection of expectations, citations, and inscriptions. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the “Body” entity in this relationship as shorthand for the set of expectations my co-researchers had for their bodies based on their identities as women, and “Instrument” as shorthand for the set of expectations my co-researchers had for their bodies based on their identities as singers. I picture them almost like the cartoon angel and devil sitting on opposite shoulders. My co-researchers’ thoughts, feelings, and singing were influenced by the conversation these entities were having in that moment: by which of them was talking, and which was silent, and whether or not they agreed with each other. I will explore each one in detail, but here is a brief table describing each relational state in these terms:

Table 1. *Relational States of Body and Instrument in Conversational Terms*

Relational State	Who is talking	Who is silent?	If both are talking, do they agree?
1. Body without Instrument ²	Body	Instrument	
2. Body with/and Instrument	Body and Instrument		Yes
3. Body vs. Instrument	Body and Instrument		No
4. Disembodied voice		Body and Instrument	
5. Instrument without Body	Instrument	Body	

These relational states describe a conversation, not a permanent state of being, or essence. As such, they are not hierarchical or stages that you move through linearly. But there are versions of this conversation that are more productive than others, or that are more conducive to different kinds of progress. Like a conversation, they can change on a dime based on what's happening within that conversation or outside of it. But, like any relationship, there are patterns of conversation, or ways of relating to one another that become habitual. Some of my co-researchers experienced one relational state that seemed most habitual, and others experienced more variance, but none of them were stuck in just one mode. Each of their Body/Instrument conversations shifted and changed, sometimes even in the middle of a single diary entry, as both Body and Instrument responded to the singer and the world around her.

² This title was not meant to invoke Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the body without organs, despite the similarity of phrasing.

Experiences of Embodiment

Each co-researcher's experiences in these relational states can be described as varying experiences of embodiment. Niva Piran (2016) cites Merleau-Ponty in asserting that all experience is inherently embodied and therefore that describing an experience as "disembodied" or "embodied" erroneously implies that there could ever be a mode of existence that is not intimately tied to our physical form. Rather than subscribing to the misleading terminology of "embodied" or "disembodied," she chooses to define a person's experience of embodiment as existing on a continuum from positive to negative. Negatively embodied experiences often involve a disrupted connection between a person and her body, or a feeling of disembodiment that is contrary to the reality of our embodied existence. Negative experiences of embodiment are strongly associated with a negative body image and greater self-objectification, and therefore likely lead to the myriad of consequences to one's wellbeing that stem from those issues (Menzel & Levine, 2011; Piran, 2016). Experiences of positive embodiment are, conversely, characterized by a feeling of attunement with one's body. They are strongly predictive of life satisfaction and potential counters to the negative effects of self-objectification (Gattario, Frisen, Teall, & Piran, 2020; Menzel & Levine, 2011).

Piran defines the experience of embodiment construct by five dimensions, each of which have their own positive to negative continuum:

- (a) Body Connection and Comfort vs. Disrupted Body Connection and Discomfort;
- (b) Agency and Functionality vs. Restricted Agency and Restraint;
- (c) Experience and Expression of Desire vs. Disrupted Connection to Desire;
- (d) Attuned Self-Care vs. Disrupted Attunement, Self-Harm and Neglect; and
- (e) Inhabiting the Body as a Subjective Site vs. Inhabiting the Body as an Objectified Site (Piran, 2016, p. 47)

Although not all of these dimensions are visible in the present study, some of them align quite clearly with my co-researcher's experiences. In my analysis, I frequently encountered themes of connection or disconnection, agency and functionality, and objectified experiences. Each co-researcher's experiences span a range of these continua, but the experiences that define each relational state are closely clustered. Understanding each relational state in terms of these criteria and continua is helpful both in understanding the differences between these relational states and their potential consequences.

Relational State 1: Body without Instrument

Dana's second practice session was "horrible":

My voice is not right today, I could not get into it, I really tried to be productive, I don't think I made vocal progress at all. I ended up just sitting here, and I tried to warm up, my cords are just being really funky today. I feel very frustrated, and I had to cancel my coaching, which I hate doing, but I feel like I can't sing today, I can't phonate right... I thought about my body pretty much the entire time. I'm currently sitting on the piano bench and I have the mirror, the full-length mirror to my left. And I get this lovely side profile of just, everything, and I really despise looking at it. It's all negative, all these thoughts today were negative, I think I'm in just a gross spot. Specific thoughts that I had were like, "ooh, this shirt's kind of tight fitting, there's really no way for me to hide how wide I am today." I have lower armpit back fat that I keep looking at. I didn't wear makeup today, and my acne's been really bad lately... Today I'm wearing a t-shirt, jeans, sandals. Comfy chill outfit. Did not try to dress up today and I really made myself vulnerable by choosing a tighter fitting t-shirt because usually I like to wear loose clothes... I definitely don't like them to be touching my body. These thoughts make me feel very depressed, and very anxious, to the point where I just do not want to see classmates. I don't wanna leave this practice room... I think it really affected my singing today, because I just could not stop focusing on how gross my body is, and how much I just did not like looking in the mirror, and I feel like that's all I can think about today.

Dana's appearance is very present in this diary entry—more so than she would like it to be. Her thoughts are specific, she zeroes in on her acne, specific areas of fat, and her outfit and silhouette. But her voice is almost completely absent. Beyond her attempt at a warm-up, she only mentions the singing she didn't do: "I can't sing today, I can't phonate right," and "I ended up just sitting here."

This diary entry of Dana's exemplifies relational state 1, "Body without Instrument." In this relational state, it's almost as if the woman wasn't a singer at all. Her body's capabilities and sensations are erased, and all she can think about is her appearance. Her awareness of her body is external, rather than internal. She experiences rampant self-objectification, with nothing to keep it in check. We can describe this relational state as a negative experience of embodiment by multiple dimensions: there is often extreme discomfort, a disrupted body connection, a dearth of focus on functionality, and severe objectification.

In our interview, Dana and I talked about the self-objectification she experienced in this instance. I asked her about the feeling of vulnerability that she expressed in her diary entry:

Kirsten: You said something interesting. You said, "I really made myself vulnerable." Can you say more about what you mean by making yourself vulnerable, vulnerable to what?

Dana: Vulnerable to people looking at me and perceiving me and seeing the weight that I am. Because I like to have looser blouses where I can kind of tuck into my pants and pull them out a little bit so you can't really tell someone's body, you can't tell how they're shaped. And I like to try to do that to come off as the illusion that I might be thinner than I am. And by wearing a t-shirt that shows who I am, people can now perceive me... It definitely makes me feel really vulnerable to others looking at me, whatever they may be thinking. I just don't think I like that idea of someone being able to kind of know, maybe, how big my body is.

Because I don't like it myself. I don't want to know either. I don't like to see it either. I don't want others to see it.

Kirsten: So, something really interesting just came up in what you said: you said you felt vulnerable in the practice room that day. And vulnerable to this idea of other people seeing you as you are. But you also said that you were alone in the room, which of course you were, you were practicing. So, can you talk a little bit more about that, about feeling vulnerable to what other people are thinking even when you're by yourself?

Dana: Yeah, it's like, there's little windows in the practice room door. People love looking in for no reason... But I think also vulnerable to my own thoughts, and me looking at myself and making myself vulnerable to thoughts that I don't like to think about, like, 'I don't like how I look,' that hurts. It hurts to look and be vulnerable and say, 'Oof, I don't like the weight gain I see, I don't like the stomach that I see.' And that's really hard for me to make myself vulnerable to myself, and to have those thoughts.

Dana described, almost exactly, the experience of self-objectification. Even when she is alone, the idea of others looking at her body, the persistent feeling of the male gaze, haunts her to the point that she polices her own body. The imagined judgments of others have become her own judgments of herself as she focuses solely on what her body looks like from the outside.

Dana finds herself in this place often, where her woman's body, her objectified body, nearly obliterates her instrument. Her choir tour panic attack is another example:

If I feel like my dress is just a bit too tight, and I have to go sing however many shows for choir tour in the same dress that I don't feel good in, it just becomes stressful, it becomes a stressful concert experience, when I should be focused on loving the music. But instead, I'm in the front row because I'm five two, and I'm like, 'I don't want people to look at my belly.' (Dana, focus group)

She experiences this phenomenon in her voice lessons as well:

I thought about my body every time I saw my reflection in the sad plexiglass divider [my teacher] has in her room... Today I'm wearing a spaghetti strap tank top with a cardigan... I'm gonna classify it as kind of lower cut. I do not have any cleavage and I don't have a very large chest, but I still felt very kind of like

exposed and a little uncomfortable, so I just kept thinking about that the entire time and adjusting my shirt as I was singing, and pulling my cardigan back over my, um, myself. So that was a little, that was kind of tough to just focus.

In performances too, she sometimes finds herself distracted by thoughts of her body. In one particular studio class, her teacher, likely inadvertently, drew attention to a part of Dana's body that she is uncomfortable with:

Dana: I have knocked knees, where my knees kind of go in, and that's just something about my body that I physically can't change. I have knock knees. They go in. And one time, I'm on stage and we're doing studio and my voice teacher makes a comment about my knees... like "can you stand a different way, your legs kind of look weird." And I just like, oh man, I just was messed up for the rest of the week...

Kirsten: Do you remember how you sang after that comment?

Dana: I couldn't focus on singing because I was focusing on what my knees looked like... Once she told me that, and she's like, 'All right, let's go ahead and start back at measure whatever,' I could not focus on singing. I still sang, I still tried, but in my mind, I was like, 'Oh my god, I'm on stage... I'm displayed for everyone's eyes to look at my knees, that my voice teacher thought were weird and she pointed it out.'

Although Dana found herself in this relational state most often, she is certainly not the only co-researcher in this study to experience "Body without Instrument."

Marissa and Karina both had a practice session wherein their body thoughts overtook their practicing:

Not feeling super vocally awesome today. How did I think about my body during my practice? Quite a bit, I'm having a negative body day... I tried not to [let those thoughts affect my singing] because I was like 'We need to focus,' but it was hard to stay focused. (Marissa, practice diary 2)

I was up in the practice rooms and just going through my warm-ups and everything and I was just very, very conscious of my belly and my thighs yesterday, and I don't know if it's because I was just sitting on the piano bench while I was watching myself warm up, I was just very aware of it. And just sort of like, "yeah, yeah okay, I'm wide." (Karina, practice diary 4)

My co-researchers also shared instances wherein this relational state was not self-generated, but externally imposed. Sometimes this prescription came from well-meaning teachers who, with varying degrees of subtlety, communicated expectations for their bodies' forms, rather than functions:

[My teacher and I] have a mutual friend in common, friend of mine and a former student of hers, who is a bigger lady. And she lost a lot of weight recently. And I mentioned it to [my teacher] because it was a health thing for her. And [my teacher] said something along the lines of 'Thank God because she shouldn't be so big that young, it's not good for her.' And I was like, 'Oh, okay, that's where we are. So, if I gain any weight, it's not gonna be a good thing in the eyes of [my teacher].' (Karina, final interview)

I had a vocal teacher right before I went to college, he was like, 'You know, you're not all that much to look at. So, if you want to be ready for college auditions, you should go to the gym, and look strong and have a better presence.' (Marissa, initial interview)

Sometimes, trying to anticipate and mitigate comments from judges or jury panels prompts these singers to put their voices aside, and focus on what their bodies look like:

You know what I did today right before this? I went to Walgreens, and I got fake lashes for my [vocal competition] recording. And it's just like, why do I have to do this? This is so frustrating... I've got my fake fingernails, because I chew mine terribly, I've got my fake eyelashes, which is like, how much fake stuff do I have to put on myself to be acceptable? (Karina, focus group)

When we perform, they're looking for the entire package. And if they're seeing someone who is overweight, or even a little bit, let's say over 150 pounds, which is approximately what I weigh, I instantly get the shock that 'Oh, my gosh, everyone is so slim and beautiful.' But when I'm overweight, I don't feel beautiful. And I think I'm worried that people are going to make a mockery of me for that. (Aksha, final interview)

When I was in freshman year, people were crying leaving juries because they were like 'So and so, this professor said that like, blah, blah, blah.' And I was like, 'Oh my god, I really just hope they like my diction, I didn't even know it was possible that they could be like, you look bad.' So that just added more stress into it. So, I've always tried to be really conservative about the way that I present... so

people can't say anything about it. I don't want anyone to comment about anything aside from what I've worked hard to present. (Marissa, final interview)

In all of these instances, even if just for a brief moment, singing was unimportant. What my co-researchers can do with their bodies—make beautiful sound—mattered less than what other people might expect their bodies to look like. They've internalized these perspectives to different degrees, and react to them in different ways, but each of these women has experienced objectification that renders invisible their singing, as the Body eclipses the Instrument. Sometimes it comes from within, as the result of years of socialization steeped in the idea that the way you look matters more than who you are or what you can do. Sometimes, that idea reasserts itself from the outside, jarringly and painfully, as Karina described:

I had just won this competition out of like ten colleges in the area. I had won this competition. And I went on stage and I had this dress on, I thought I looked fly as hell. ... I go out there and I sing my song and my brother was in the audience... he recorded it for me... we put it on Facebook. My mother-in-law saw that, and she goes, 'We got to get you some shapewear.' That's all she said. That was the only thing she had to say about me winning this scholarship competition. Ten other schools and all she could say was, 'We need to get you some new Shapewear.' (Karina, focus group)

Relational State 2: Body and/with Instrument

This relational state is tricky to pin down. My co-researchers' experiences of this relational state vary wildly; some of their highest and lowest points stem from this version of the Body/Instrument conversation. In relational state 1, the Body is so loud that the singer can't hear her Instrument, but here in relational state 2, Body and Instrument are talking at the same time. They influence each other, like an echo-chamber,

and together wield massive power over the person in between them. When the messages are good, its euphoria. When the messages are bad, it's all-consuming.

Aksha's Body and Instrument often relate to each other in this way. For her, body and voice are almost always interconnected, and they influence each other greatly. In the focus group, Aksha shared that positive comments from others about her singing make her feel better about her body. But that effect goes the other way too:

Kirsten: If you're having a rough singing day, does that make you feel worse about your body?

Aksha: It does in a way, because I always feel like I'm not so good at it... Sometimes I just feel like physically, maybe my body needs to be more worked out on with weightlifting or doing cardio exercises.

When Aksha doesn't perform as she would have hoped, her body is to blame: "I just didn't feel too good about the way I was practicing... [I was] sad in the sense that I felt like my body was just not prepared for it" (Aksha, practice diary 2). Her assessment of her body quickly crosses over from an evaluation of function, to one of form.

Singing is a physical thing. I am very, very self-conscious about my vocal techniques... but at the same time, I just feel like if I'm looking at myself, I look at my shape of my belly, my entire belly and I always think to myself, and instantly become insecure, 'Why do I look like that?' I should have more stamina and I should lose weight, just to project the sound a little bit further. (Aksha, focus group)

As Aksha equates her body's function and form, she loses agency. She laments that some amount of her capability as a singer is predetermined and outside of her control:

I wish I was as good looking as others in terms of singing because others have more powerful voices than I do naturally... It's just what has been god sent... it's not only that they're rigorously practicing. It's just how their bodies are built; this is how their instruments are built as well. So, everyone's different. But I'm not comfortable with that. (Aksha, focus group)

Aksha's Body/Instrument relationship and its frequent codependency often results in a negative experience of embodiment, specifically by restricting her agency and indulging her self-objectification tendencies. Aksha's not alone; Marissa too has experienced negative feelings about her body or her voice bleeding into each other: "If I feel bad about myself, I'm like 'I look stupid,' or 'I sound bad'" (Marissa, practice diary 3). During our initial interview, Marissa recalled a particularly difficult period for her relationship with her body:

I was acting as if my body was a problem... like, I'm upset therefore, I should lose weight or something, even though that's not really a connected thing... and I definitely felt like the worse my singing was, I felt more and more badly about my body because I was like, 'Now I can't even do anything useful.'

The negative manifestation of this relational state results in negatively embodied experiences. In this relational state, my co-researchers often focused on what they couldn't do in their singing, or ways that their agency was restricted. They also experienced objectification and discomfort with their bodies. However, it differs from relational state 1 in that there is an awareness of the body's functionality inherent in this relational state that suggests it occupies a point on the embodied experience continuum that is closer to the midpoint.

But this relationship doesn't always bring the singer down; sometimes it lifts her up. Dana in particular shared stories of body confidence and good singing swirling together in an upward spiral:

I feel really good about my performance... I did feel a little bit more powerful though, because I felt good about my hair and my face and my overall look... I felt stunning, I felt sexy, I felt powerful, I felt gorgeous. (Dana, performance diary 1)

If I personally feel good in what I'm wearing and I have a performance and then maybe I get compliments on both my singing and my outfit afterwards, it's just overall a really good experience. (Dana, focus group)

But today, I feel good about my makeup, I feel good about my outfit, I feel confident. And I think that because I felt confident, I also felt confident as a singer. (Dana, lesson diary 4).

As the old maxim goes, "when you look good, you feel good." What could be wrong when your Instrument and your Body are on the same friendly page? Karina too takes comfort in this:

When it comes to singing, I want to dress nicely if I'm performing... because I like wearing clothes that are pretty, I like dressing up and feeling good about myself. And so, when the two combine, it's just like, woohoo! I'm doing something that makes me happy. And I feel like I look pretty. So, I'm going to just feel really good about myself. (Karina, final interview)

At first blush, these seem like positive experiences and helpful perspectives. In these moments, my co-researchers felt "powerful" and "accepted"; they exhibited aspects of positive experiences of embodiment like comfort and agency. But despite the positive feelings, these are still moments wherein my co-researchers are evaluating themselves from the outside, by normative standards for what women and/or singers should look like. In other words, they are experiences of objectification, and therefore land on the negative side of the continuum in the final dimension of embodied experience. As a result, these positive feelings are vulnerable and fleeting:

We all have good days and bad days, and I definitely have had days where I'm really gross and I feel like I'm a really gross singer, and vice versa. I have days where I feel really good about myself and have a really good singing day. (Dana, focus group)

If I wanted to be a dancer, my body type would not be super great for being a dancer as it is right now. But it's okay for me to have the body that I have. Regardless of what other people think of course, it's okay for me to have this body. It's mine. But socially I think it's a little more acceptable, even though we

are trending towards that Met Live in HD, gotta be beautiful, you gotta have the right body to sing opera... I just think it's garbage that we have to look a certain way versus like a pianist doesn't have to look a certain way. (Karina, final interview)

Relational State 3: Body vs. Instrument

Like relational state 2, relational state 3 is a true conversation between Body and Instrument, where both are heard. But unlike in Body and/with Instrument, here in Body vs. Instrument, they don't agree; the singer's expectations for her body as a singer and as a woman contradict each other.

During our focus group, I asked my co-researchers what, if any, specific thoughts about their bodies they have in the practice room. Karina responded:

I kind of had it ingrained in me as a child to always have my tummy in, from the time I was like eight. My mom was like, 'Make sure you put your tummy in.' And then in voice pedagogy [class] yesterday we're like, "Oh, that's what that does." So, it's like this unconscious thing that I still do. Now, like even right now, I'm sitting with my tummy in a little bit, even though I don't consciously mean to. So, it just kind of makes me more aware. I don't know. Like, would my mom approve of the way that I'm pulling in my stomach right now?

Dana agreed: "My mother also told me to suck in my stomach or pull in my tummy from a very young age. And it's definitely a hard habit to break when you learn as a singer to let your tummy be loose" (Dana, focus group). Aksha had a similar reaction to expanding her midsection: "I just feel that insecurity resonate within me severely... when I'm told I have to keep my belly expanded" (Aksha, focus group). Marissa shared a similar experience:

I noticed that when I recorded videos, I was like, 'I don't want to look at that part of my body' because previously, I was not a huge fan of my stomach and/or lower torso, but then I was like, 'But that's what it takes to sing properly' (Marissa initial interview).

All four of these women have experienced moments where the singer's instrument must expand, but the woman's body must remain as slender as possible. The instrument needs to take up space, but the body has been conditioned not to. The singer is a living, breathing (literally) being, but the woman is an object, a porcelain doll, that stands fixed in the position most pleasing for its audience. It seems obvious that in these moments the singer should choose her singing, err on the side of beautiful sound over beautiful body. Chances are it's obvious to her too, or at least it always is to me when I find myself in these moments of contradiction. That's what makes it all the more distressing when I hold my stomach in any way, hoping I can slide by on a subpar breath. It's painful to admit that in those moments, all my practicing, all my knowledge, all my hard-earned progress took a back seat to the need to not look fat.

These moments exemplify the third relational state, "Body versus Instrument." The demands made on one's body by their singing and the demands made on one's body through self-objectification are often mutually exclusive. In this relational state, the singer lives in that tension, as Body and Instrument argue from their opposite shoulders. My co-researchers often expressed an objectified perspective when in relational state 3, occasionally coupled with feelings of restricted agency, which suggests that this relational state also produces a negative experience of embodiment.

But, unlike relational state 2, in relational state 3 there is pushback; their self-objectification instincts are challenged by their skill and knowledge as singers. Piran (2016) identified that women who inhabit their bodies as subjective sites, rather than objectified sites, provide narratives that often include "protest, resistance, and defiance" (p. 52) of objectification. While my co-researcher's moments of conflict might not be full

of fiery defiance, they are moments wherein they questioned the expectations that they and others held for their bodies. This relational state still includes an objectified perspective on the body, but it does not go unchecked.

The tension surrounding breathing technique was most prevalent, but it was not the only instance of the Body vs. Instrument conflict. Mirrors, in lessons or in practice rooms, often incite these conflicts. Many singers turn to the mirror to monitor certain aspects of their technique, like Marissa described: “I was looking in the mirror because I unhinge my jaw too much often times, so I was trying to make myself not look like that” (Marissa, practice diary 1). But all too often, when they looked in the mirror to monitor their instrument, they wound up monitoring their body: “If I’m having a particularly rough day in terms of body image... it is hard to practice in front of a mirror because I’m looking at myself more. That’s not what I want to be doing” (Marissa, initial interview). Sometimes they saw their stomachs expanding as they inhaled: “If I’m singing, if I look at myself in the mirror, and I look at a belly full of fat, I think I’m not pretty enough” (Aksha, final interview). Other times, the conflict came with proper alignment:

I remember specific times where I would look at the mirror [my teacher] has. When I sing with good posture, I'm going to have a little bit of a double chin situation if everything's lined up. I would look at that double chin, and I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, I can't believe it’ (Dana, focus group).

Another conflict for Dana arose not from looking at herself, but from others looking at her. As a singer, she knows people look at her for good reason, but as a woman, she worries about being judged.

When we're singing we are always being kind of judged. People are always looking at your face, your sound, your body, your voice. My voice teacher is always looking to see, ‘how is she breathing?’ So of course, they're going to look at your body to see if—are you actually expanding your rib cage? Did I collapse

immediately like I love doing? I'm like, 'Oh, you have to look at me, I get it' (Dana, focus group).

Although all of my co-researchers have experienced this relational state, for none of them is this their most habitual mode of conversation. These moments of explicit conflict don't last very long, at least not for these four women. These flashes of awareness seem to just fade. After Aksha shared her feelings about maintaining abdominal expansion, she trailed off and said, "Sorry I'm talking so much" (Aksha, focus group). After Karina shared that her mother instructed her to keep her stomach pulled in during our focus group, the tension just hung in the air, reflecting how intractable that dichotomy felt to all of us. Dana's story about her double chin just ends with disbelief, signaling an inability to reconcile these two warring ideas. Like Marissa explained, "That's what it takes to sing properly... so there's nothing I can do about that." It seems as if the conflict between these two things—the desire to be a competent singer and the need to look as close to the feminine ideal as possible—is too powerful to sit in for too long. The chemical reaction is blinding, and we have to look away.

But there are moments of resolution. Marissa has a specific coping strategy in place for days when looking in the mirror to monitor her breathing might prove challenging: "I have a wire belt, like a back support belt, which is useful if you don't want to look at your breath support, you can feel that" (Marissa, initial interview). Dana sometimes preempts this conflict with her clothing choices: "When I sang in studio, I specifically chose a dress that... wasn't super tight on the body, so I didn't have to worry about sucking in my stomach because I walked on stage just to have to expand it anyways" (Dana, focus group). As her lessons have moved into unconventional spaces

due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Dana has noticed the benefit of not having mirrors around:

There hasn't been a mirror staring at me in my lessons lately, and it's been really fun because I'm just singing. I'm doing what I love, and it has taken away a level of anxiety that I've created for myself when there is a mirror in front of me and I have to sing. It's really crazy how one piece of reflective glass can change the entire environment. (Dana, focus group).

Relational State 4: Disembodied Voice

Relational state 4, disembodied voice, is wildly different from states 1, 2, and 3. Here, the Body is silent, and the Instrument with it. The singer has no expectations for her body at all; it's almost as if her body doesn't exist.

As I referenced in Chapter 4, Karina shared a surprising perspective in the focus group: "For me, singing is from here [my chest] up." The idea that only part of your body is involved in the act of singing, that only the top 25% of your body is your instrument, runs counter to most of what I understand about classical singing technique, so I asked her to clarify in our interview:

Kirsten: You said that you think of singing as from boobs up. Why do you say that?

Karina: Because that's where all the action happens...

Kirsten: So have you encountered different ideas about how involved the body is in singing? ...

Karina: I mean, I know your abdomen really is engaged with breathing and with singing...

Kirsten: Absolutely, absolutely. You're absolutely right. So there is activity below that boob area.

Karina: Yeah

Kirsten: Yeah. So I'm gonna ask you one more time. Why do you think of singing as from boobs up?

Karina: Because directly, that's where the breathing happens. Everything else is kind of a side effect.

What Karina noticed most often in her diaries is how little she thought about her body while she sang. Through practices, lessons, performances, it rarely varied; her body just wasn't a part of the process:

[I noticed] how very little I think about my body when I'm singing, I just don't unless somebody points something out to me. I don't think about how my body looks. The only things I really tend to think about are posture. And unless I've just eaten for example, I don't think about my body in any way. (Karina, final interview)

Karina's not alone; Marissa also noted, in many of her practice and lesson diaries, that she didn't think about her body at all: "I didn't really think about my body during my practice session" (Marissa, practice diary 5).

The specific meaning of the word "body" comes into question here. It's possible that when Karina and Marissa said they didn't think about their bodies, they were referring specifically to how their bodies looked. Although the prompt for the diaries didn't specify, my co-researchers were aware that this research focused on body image, and so they could have assumed that I was only interested in thoughts they had about their appearance. However, during other diaries, when responding to the prompt "What thoughts did you have about your body?" each of them mentioned specific aspects of the function of their bodies, like noticing laryngeal tension, mouth position, or posture. From those responses, I inferred that they took the word "body" in the prompt as a holistic reference, rather than just a reference to their appearance.

There are certainly benefits to this mindset. In the focus group, Karina shared that meeting new people often makes her feel self-conscious and generates negative feelings about her body because “people can be judgy” (Karina, focus group). But when she’s performing for an audience full of strangers, she doesn’t worry: “I feel a little bit more self-conscious when I’m not singing and I’m around people I don’t know. I don’t feel self-conscious at all when I’m performing in front of people I don’t know. Not about my body” (Karina, final interview). Karina also rarely reported the self-objectification inherent in relational states 1, 2, and 3. Her diaries of lessons and practice sessions suggested a relatively consistent experience of her body, and a positive experience of her singing overall. This perspective also seemed to yield positive results for Marissa; on days that she reported not thinking about her body while singing, she also used words like “comfortable” and “positive” to describe her experience.

In relational state 4, “Disembodied voice,” Body and Instrument are inseparable. But rather than experiencing negative emotional bleed, as in relational state 2, or conflict, as in relational state 3, both body and instrument are silenced. The result is a sense that the voice exists and functions independently of the body, or that the body, both its form and functions, are immaterial to the act of singing.

It strikes me that this perspective is not uncommon. Classical singing sometimes turns into a park and bark³ affair. In some circles, it seems revolutionary to suggest that a singer might stretch before practicing or at the beginning of a lesson. My co-researchers rarely reported that their teacher addressed their bodies at all in lessons. As a young

³ “Park and bark” is a common expression in some circles that refers to the way in which some singers park themselves in front of the piano and then simply bark out their vocal line. It’s shorthand for an inexpressive and static performance.

singer, I often resisted teachers who might ask me to do things like yoga, because I was convinced that my body would always come up short. I hoped for so long that I could just rely on my mind, that my body wouldn't have to be a part of the equation—all the while nodding along as my teachers said to me, “your body is your instrument.”

Marissa spends some time here in relational state 4, and Karina seems to call it home. But neither Aksha nor Dana shared any significant experiences of this relational state. Unlike relational states 1, 2, and 3, this arrangement seems to be intentionally cultivated. When asked what shaped their body image, only Marissa and Karina mentioned intentionally working on that aspect of their lives, either through therapy or in a more self-directed way. Taking the voice away from the body seems to be a solution to the problem of negative feelings associated with the body infiltrating one's singing experience. In one of her diaries, Karina hinted at this idea: “I was very aware of the top half of my body for about five minutes, and then I was good” (Karina, performance diary 1). Her phrasing suggests that being in a state of awareness of her body is undesirable or unpleasant in some way, that she aims to forget about it. Marissa is more explicit:

If it's a day where I had recently thought about something or was triggered by something, talked about something in therapy that was like really rough, oftentimes, I'm like, ‘Okay, I know, this is probably gonna be like, not a great practicing day,’ because I feel a little uncomfy in just existing in my body. So, anything that touches me, like jeans or formal shirts that have collars, I don't want to deal with it. So singing is definitely harder on those days because... I just don't want to be touched or bothered or have too much physical sensation. It's just kind of a little too much. So, on days like that, noticing all the things that I want to notice I think would be too overwhelming. So just focusing on the bare minimum like, I warmed up, I sang the song. There we go. I think that's kind of the best I can hope for when I'm feeling like that. (Marissa, final interview)

In terms of experience of embodiment, relational state 4 differs drastically from the previous three. In this relational state, the singer doesn't experience self-

objectification. Nothing my co-researchers said suggests that they feel a lack of agency in this relational state either. What is lacking here, however, is awareness of what the body is doing and feeling, as Karina expressed: “The breathing happens and I know where the breathing happens, whatever it feels like” (Karina, final interview).

Relational State 5: Instrument without Body

Despite its title, my definition of relational state 5 does not describe a state wherein the singer is out of touch with her body and its sensations and capabilities. Rather, it describes a state wherein the singer can separate herself from her Body with a capital B, referring to the set of expectations my co-researchers had for their bodies based on their identities as women as defined earlier in this chapter. In Instrument without Body, like relational state 4, Body is silent, and self-objectification is therefore absent. But here in relational state 5, Instrument and Body are decoupled, and Instrument is allowed to speak without the interference or influence of Body. By allowing Instrument to speak, the singer (re)gains an internal awareness of the body’s sensations and actions. From that awareness flows agency, the feeling that you understand how to use your body as an instrument, and how to let it make music. Dana’s last lesson during our study, as I referenced in Chapter 4, was a powerful example of this relational state. I asked her to tell me more about it in our interview:

I was just thinking about my body as an instrument, as my body is my instrument. And this isn't just my instrument (gestures to throat) but this is my instrument (gestures to the whole body), that it's all connected. And I wasn't thinking, when I put my hand on my stomach to check my breathing, ‘Oh, there's fat underneath my skin,’ I thought, ‘I'm checking my air, I'm making sure my ribs don't collapse, I'm getting myself out of my hips.’ It felt like a very special experience, because it was one of those moments where I realized I'm not worried about the physical appearance, I'm thinking of my body as an instrument, this entire entity is an

instrument, I am my own instrument, and not just the vocal tract. (Dana, final interview)

Every one of my co-researchers had at least one experience of this relational state, although it's not always as grandiose as I've made it sound. In some of their diaries I noticed just little moments of internal awareness without external awareness, just a brief second where they took note of their body's sensation or action and let it inform their singing.

What specific thoughts did I have about my body during the lesson? I thought about not dropping my jaw too much because I have a tendency to overdo it. (Marissa, lesson diary 1)

I did notice I had a lot of jaw tension... I was definitely more conscientious of what my body was doing while I was singing today. (Karina, lesson diary 1)

That's when I start to enjoy it more because I feel like I'm using my entire body, I'm using my belly muscles to support the sound. (Aksha, practice diary 2)

These instances of relational state 5, of Instrument without Body, were positive experiences of embodiment. The singers' diaries indicated an awareness of and connection with their bodies. They experienced their bodies from the inside, without objectification. They paid attention to what their bodies could do, rather than what they could look like.

An awareness of, and appreciation for, what one's body can do is referred to as Body Functionality Appreciation (as you might recall from Chapter 2), which is an important component of a positive body image and can contribute to positive experiences of embodiment (Menzel & Levine, 2011). Although it didn't always show up in their diaries, Marissa, Karina, and Aksha expressed appreciation for their bodies' functionality in our focus group and interviews:

It was easier to be nicer to myself about my body, because I was like, ‘Well, I’m good at doing this thing. And if I’m good at doing this thing, I’m a nice person to be around, [how I look] doesn’t really matter. It was easier to build on that.
(Marissa, initial interview)

What I really like about my voice is... it just kind of does exactly what I need it to do most of the time. ... My body does what I need it to do, it gets me where I need to go. (Karina, focus group)

Once I felt that release in the air... I’m like, ‘Oh wow, I don’t’ have to involve my throat muscles anymore. And that’s what makes me feel good about my body.
(Aksha, final interview)

Body Functionality Appreciation might be somewhat of an aspirational perspective for these singers, or at least it’s not fully integrated into their daily lives. But singing provides a space for them to access this feeling, hopefully in a way that they can continue to “build on.”

For these four women, this relational state of Instrument without Body seems elusive. Focusing your attention inside the body without allowing it to slip outside feels like threading a needle: delicate and tenuous. In that way, it resembles so much of classical singing technique. We’re threading needles all the time, operating in contradictory spaces that don’t seem like they should exist. We strive to maintain an inhalatory position while exhaling, to stay perfectly aligned but also flexible, to be energized and relaxed, to be grounded while our voices soar. Maybe, with guidance and practice, we can learn to thread this needle: to be aware of our bodies but not judgmental of them, to be in our bodies, but not defined by them.

Relational State 6: ?

None of my co-researchers are people I would describe as having achieved that elusive concept of a positive body image. They’re all surely at different points within

very different journeys, and some of them are much closer than others, but in my own amateur opinion, it doesn't seem like any of them are there yet. Of course, neither am I.

The five versions of the Body/Instrument conversation I've described are the only relational states I observed within these four people, and they also happen to be the only relational states I can identify within my own experience. But there might be more. Perhaps there are other ways to experience this separation. I wonder if singers who aren't cisgender women find that their Bodies and Instruments relate differently to each other. Or perhaps their identities are perforated in different ways, and they split along different lines.

I wonder if there is some kind of happy union of body and voice that someone with a truly positive, not just neutral, body image might experience. Is relational state 5 ideal, or is there something beyond, a hypothetical—perhaps mythical—relational state 6, where the woman and the singer aren't separate at all? My co-researchers experienced their woman's bodies and their singer's bodies as divided by divergent purposes, but what if a woman only expects that her body serve her own purposes? Or is it a pipe dream to hope that those outside expectations might not influence us? In a world where women experience objectification of our bodies, is separation necessary for us to engage with those bodies to create? My co-researchers are split. Aksha associates feeling separated with feeling insecure:

Kirsten: What I've been thinking is that those of us who are women singers, we might experience a kind of separation between the body that we use for our singing and our woman's body.

Aksha: Absolutely.

Kirsten: You think so?

Aksha: Yeah, I think so... because I've experienced it in my own way... it brings me back to the self-consciousness that I had, that I once had and I still do. (Aksha, final interview)

Karina is in favor of separation:

Karina: I think they are two very separate things. I have my singer body and I have my everyday life body. Even though they're the same thing, they're not.

Kirsten: Would you say that that's been a positive thing for you?

Karina: It can be. Absolutely. I feel very confident when I sing. As long as I know what I'm doing. If I know my music really well, I feel very confident.

Kirsten: Is there anything about that separation that you think could be a negative thing?

Karina: I don't know. If there is, I can't think of what it might be. So, for me, no. (Karina, final interview)

Dana thinks we'd better off integrated:

Dana: We as women singers forget that this (gesturing to throat), and this (gesturing to body) are the same. There's a ton of 'my body, and then my instrument,' and there's not as much 'I am my instrument.' ... There's that disconnect where they think of it as kind of two separate things sometimes.

Kirsten: So, what do you think would be different if we didn't think like that?

Dana: I think people would feel a lot freer... I think there'd be a lot more freedom for women to just be okay with being themselves in terms of body and voice.

Marissa finds a middle ground:

Kirsten: How do you think that separation affects you, as a singer?

Marissa: Pretty positively. I think the only negative is like me as a regular person... As a regular person just going about your life, I think it calls attention to how often I just don't feel grateful for anything my body does, I'm just kind of more interested in what I could do to it, or how I could change it or whatever. Whereas with singing, I'm genuinely happy with just what I can do...

If I could reach a point where those two things were fully integrated, my body image would be based on the things that I'm doing, not on the things that I'm

interpreting, because the things that I'm interpreting are all through the lens and through different biases of, like, capitalism. And I don't know, just like the way that I feel like I should look, in my age bracket, the way that I compare to other women, the way that I used to look— there's all these different things. Whereas opposed to, if I'm focusing on what I'm actually doing, those are facts, those are not like, random things that I've come up with or things that people are trying to sell me. I'm doing this physical thing that I feel really happy to do... I'm a good person, I'm having fun. Then I'm going to have a good body image, I'm going to have a good perception of who I am. (Marissa, final interview)

Drawing Imaginary Lines

In her final interview, when I asked about separation between body and instrument, Aksha brought up another separateness that she feels in her singing: the divide between technique and expression. For me, it often feels like there's a wide chasm between technique and expression, and when I think about that divide, I always remember the quote from Matilde Marchesi: "First technique, afterwards aesthetics" (Coffin, 1989, p. 36). For so long as a young singer, I focused solely on my technique, waiting for permission to be expressive, to bring myself into my singing.

Technique is of the body. It is physical, it is athletic, it requires finesse, precision, and incredible coordination of invisible muscles smaller than our pinky toes. But expression is of the mind, heart, and soul. What an "expressive" performance means or how it is achieved is nearly ineffable. Of course there's a gulf between things like precise amounts of subglottic pressure and that vague something, that x-factor, that mysterious stirring in the center of your being when the sound you produce could move someone.

But wouldn't Merleau-Ponty say that these things are the same? The lines between body and mind, mind and soul, feel so real, but in practice they don't really exist. It's like borders between states or countries; on the map the lines are so thick but

driving across them you realize you'd never know if it weren't for the road signs. The trees, the pavement, the shrubs, and the guard rails all look the same.

Throughout this chapter I've described this Body/Instrument relationship as existing between those two parties, but there is a third entity: the woman singer herself. If the states of this relationship are different versions of a conversation between body and instrument, the subject of that conversation is her "self." As they negotiate or argue, she listens to them or she silences them, she acquiesces to their demands or pushes back. She is there, whether or not we feel it.

Our selves are always present with our singing. I would argue that, just like body and mind, they are one and the same. I have to wonder if a sense of separation between Body and Instrument contributes to this sense of separation between self and singing, or expression and technique. If there are false walls between your body and your instrument, how could body and soul intermingle? Can you bring your self into your singing when your body is something of which you're ashamed? Can you wield your body with such precision that it makes someone cry without being in that body?

What does the Body/Instrument relationship, with all of its complexity and variability, do for, or to, our singing?

Chapter VI

SINGING

*—I know that in Tosca, in the second act,
when, humiliated, hounded by Scarpia,
she sang Vissi d'arte*

—“I lived for art”—

*and in torment, bewilderment, at the end she asks,
with a voice reaching
harrowingly for the notes,*

“Art has repaid me LIKE THIS?”

*I felt I was watching
autobiography—
an art; skill;
virtuosity*

*miles distant from the usual soprano's
athleticism,—
the usual musician's dream
of virtuosity without content ...”*

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

If I were a philosopher, or a psychologist, or an ethnographer, the relational states I described in the previous chapter might be the point of this dissertation, and this chapter might therefore be my conclusion. But I am not, at least primarily, any of those things. At my core, I am a singer, and at my best, a voice teacher. This core identity led to my research questions, wherein I asked not what the singer's experience of body image was, or how she thought or felt about it, but how those experiences, thoughts, and feelings translated into the sound she produces and the performance she gives. At the beginning of this document, I asked these questions:

1. Does a singer's body image influence her singing?
2. If so, when and how?

This chapter is about answering those questions.

“Content” and “Virtuosity”

From the first time I encountered “Ellen West,” as I described in Chapter 1, this line stood out to me: “the usual musician’s dream of virtuosity without content¹.” That line felt like an indictment, and one that I’ve heard before. I tend to struggle with the emotional aspects of performance. The vulnerability that seemed to come so naturally to my peers always eluded me. As a young singer, I preferred to focus on technique and the physical and scientific aspects of my singing that I felt I could control, through which I might achieve perfection. Dry, cold, objective perfection is not, however, what “artists” are supposed to want. Artists, those natural singers who make you want to watch and hear them, supposedly delight in opening themselves up for their audience. I have generally preferred the safety of measurable things like formant frequencies and maximum flow declination rate. In that phrase, “virtuosity without content,” I didn’t recognize “the usual musician’s dream.” I recognized my own.

I also recognized something about the way we teach singing. We all say that it’s about expression, about being an artist and communicating. But in my fifteen years of experience in taking voice lessons, that’s not where I’ve spent most of my time. Richard Miller says, “Technique is of no value except as it makes communication possible” (p.

¹ Ricky Ian Gordon’s text setting in the operatic version of “Ellen West” makes it clear that “content” in this case refers to the things held or included in something, like a table of contents, rather than a state of peaceful happiness, as in contentment.

204), but this statement comes only after 200 pages of technical minutiae. Honestly, I get it. Technique, or as Ellen West calls it, “virtuosity,” is surely important; it can enable a singer to achieve her wildest dreams of what her voice might do. It can also be clean and dispassionate. Expression, or “content,” is personal, messy, immeasurable, and even dangerous. To put it another way, technique can live up to the purely masculine, patriarchal ideal, but expression is indelibly associated with femininity. For those of us (myself included) for whom dealing in terms like “subglottic pressure” seems easier, preferable, or more enlightened than working with and through our emotions, I challenge us to consider the ways in which internalized misogyny might play a part in that perspective.

I also challenge us to consider whether that perspective is practically viable in the voice studio. Our emotional lives and identities are intimately tied to our voices. The idea that we could produce true virtuosity, not just park and bark “perfection,” without engaging with our emotional content is indeed a dream—not in the sense that it is desirable, but in the sense that it isn’t real. Singers are not malfunctioning objects in need of purely mechanical adjustments, and therefore voice teachers must approach their work as more than a technician. We, as voice teachers or as singers, may attempt to separate the mechanical body from the emotional mind. We may think we can start with just technique and circle back to artistry. We may sense, or even cultivate a false divide between our instruments and our bodies, as my co-researchers and I have experienced. But mind and body, body and voice, voice and identity will always be inseparable. As Barbara Doscher says (although only in the appendices following more than 200 pages of

technical details): “a singer’s concept of self cannot be separated from [their] instrument” (Doscher, 1994, p. 256).

The evidence for that connection is all around us, but it is more specifically displayed through the rest of this chapter. The effects of the relational states that I described in the previous chapter were not quarantined in my co-researchers’ psyches—they bled into their singing. In charting the ways in which this bleed affected my co-researchers’ practices, lessons, and performances, I noticed specific types of effects clustered around each relational state. In this chapter, I aim to describe those effects to you, and put them in the context of what we know about excellent singing and how to achieve it. This chapter is about the intersection of body image and vocal technique and performance, and the specific ways in which the emotional “content” of body image influences a singer’s ability to achieve true “virtuosity.”

Negative Experiences of Embodiment and Singing

Restriction: The Cost of “Body without Instrument”

Remember Dana’s story about forgetting her Spanx on choir tour?

I had a panic attack in the bathroom because I didn't know what to do without [shapewear], with just wearing a dress and not having anything underneath... One of my best girlfriends let me borrow an extra pair of Spanx that she had because I just needed something to be touching my body... And did it make an insane physical difference? No, but the mental difference it made got me out of that bathroom. (Dana, focus group)

What if Dana’s friend hadn’t packed an extra pair of Spanx? I wonder if she would have been able to perform at all. Dana felt trapped in that bathroom by her experience of self-objectification. Thankfully a female friendship swooped in and saved the day, but in that

moment, Dana's body image threatened her ability to even make it on stage, let alone give her best performance.

That story is a quintessential, if extreme, example of what relational state 1 (Body without Instrument) does to a singer: it erases the instrument not just in theory, but in practice, too. In this state, the body is too busy being an object to function as an instrument. In one way or another, the singer is restricted. At its most potent, experiencing the "Body without Instrument" relational state can stop someone from singing entirely.

Dana recognized this phenomenon in her friends: "I feel like I see that a lot in my friends and my colleagues, to where maybe someone will say, 'Oh, I feel really bloated. I don't want to go sing in studio today'" (Dana, final interview). She experienced it herself in the practice room:

Kirsten: So, I heard the idea of focus come up in your diaries a lot, and that thoughts about your body shifted your focus, or maybe you found them distracting from your singing... When and how did you notice you were distracted?

Dana: ... Practicing, I know I'm distracted when I just, I just kind of stop or I switch gears. I'll do that sometimes where I stop singing a piece that's hard and I go to another piece. And then I end up finding things that I don't like. And then I go 'Okay, this is not going to be productive because I can't seem to get back into the right, productive headspace.' And so sometimes I feel like I just, I call it a day maybe too soon, because I don't know how to get back to that productive headspace just yet... thoughts about my outfit, my body, my acne, they kind of literally cloud my judgment, cloud my thinking, cloud my thought process, cloud my focus. (Dana, final interview)

Marissa also shared that thoughts about her body can distract from her practice, to the point that she stops singing:

Kirsten: What does unfocused practice look like for you? How does that manifest?

Marissa: Usually, I think it's like, singing and then kind of just staring at a wall. Being like, 'I have to keep doing this. I have 20 minutes until choir I have to use this time.' But I really just want to lay down on the floor. Like I really just don't want to. Just getting totally sidetracked with what I'd rather be doing. And thinking about that as opposed to singing. (Marissa final interview)

Of course, there are plenty of moments for a collegiate singer where just stopping isn't really feasible, like during a voice lesson. Experiencing relational state 1 during a voice lesson never stopped any of my co-researchers from singing, but it did pull their focus. Dana described how these thoughts, that she described as a "storm cloud" back in Chapter 4, kept her from focusing on the technical issues she was attempting to correct. Aksha also seemed to experience thoughts about her body disrupting her technical work. One of Aksha's most frequent concerns was excess tension:

I sometimes have struggled with vocal techniques that needed more work, and my professors and even my coach had pointed it out. They're like, 'Oh Aksha, something's not right here. Your tongue is too tense, or your neck muscles are too tight.' (Aksha, final interview)

When I asked Aksha what she had learned from this research experience, she immediately talked about gaining an understanding of how body image might cause tension:

When people feel like they have to be self-conscious all the time, especially when they're singing a specific piece like an aria or an art song that they're working on in their lessons or in their coaching sessions, they would always end up tensing. (Aksha, final interview)

Even in these milder occurrences of "Body without Instrument," this imbalance of power in the Body/Instrument relationship pulls one's focus away from her singing. For a young singer who is actively working on certain aspects of her technique, losing focus means giving up ground in those technical struggles. In this way, relational state 1 of the Body/Instrument relationship doesn't attack just one specific element of vocal

performance, but rather every area that the singer is working hard to address. Dana expressed how these distracting body thoughts can undo her hard-won progress:

Kirsten: Do you notice any other ways that your voice kind of reacts to these thoughts about your body?

Dana: Most of the time, it's going to be in my vibrato, losing my vibrato. Other times, it's also my voice falling really far back. It's kind of like it slips back into old Dana voice, baby Dana voice, not big girl voice anymore. (Dana, final interview)

Even when relational state 1 doesn't keep a singer from singing entirely, it restricts her access to her best singing. I asked Dana in our interview if she felt like struggling with her body image has hindered her vocal progress:

If I have a bad body day, I most likely will have a bad singing day, and if I have a bad singing day, I'm probably not locking into all the good habits we want to keep doing. I'm probably going back to my old habits, which means I'm not progressing that day... I think if it's a bad body day, a bad voice day, it doesn't become a productive day, in terms of my voice. (Dana, final interview)

In Chapter 5, I described relational state 1 as both an internally and externally imposed state of being. Marissa described how she feels in those externally imposed moments of this relational state, and how it impacts her singing:

I think when people use shame, or embarrassment, or kind of like backhanded compliments, to get people to think about their presentation, or compare other people to one another, that impacts my singing by making me feel very depleted, and small. And if I'm feeling that way, I'm not going to stand with my best posture, I'm not going to stand with my best sense of groundedness, I'm going to be distracted and thinking about how other people are interpreting me. I'm not gonna think about 'Am I breathing all the way down to my pelvic floor muscles?' I'm thinking about 'So and so's looking at me.' That's not where I want my attention to go, but that's where it ends up going. (Marissa, final interview)

Even when objectification comes from an outside source, the singer is still restricted. As Marissa describes, focusing on her appearance rather than her singing keeps her from applying her acquired skills. She also feels restricted in a more literal sense: she describes

feeling “very depleted and small.” Being objectified makes her want to take up less space, be less visible—the exact opposite of being on stage.

The “Body without Instrument” relational state always seems to keep the singer from something: it keeps her from taking up space, or from making progress, or from singing entirely. Every time the singer experiences this relational state, she is losing out on an opportunity, big or small, for growth. Getting stuck in the bathroom during a choral performance could cost a singer a passing grade, or the respect of her ensemble and conductor. Backing out of a studio performance, as some of Dana’s friends seem prone to, costs a singer a chance for performance practice and peer and teacher feedback. Cancelling a coaching, as Dana did after her most potent experience of “Body without Instrument” during the study, costs a singer valuable rehearsal time and the insight and expertise of her coach. Perhaps most importantly, good practice days lost add up and slow a singer’s progression: “Any day devoid of technical work... will diminish the chances of ultimate success” (Miller, 1996, p. 188).

Granted, having a technically productive practice session every day is a pipe dream for anyone. There will always be little things, unavoidable mishaps or generally bad days, that get in the way from time to time. But, at least for Dana, these “bad body days” seemed to come up relatively often. During the four-week period of our study, Dana recorded 5 lesson diaries and 5 practice diaries; she described being distracted by thoughts about her body in 3 of her 5 lesson diaries and 4 of her 5 practice diaries. Marissa also experienced distracting thoughts about her body in 2 of her 5 practice diaries.

I began Dana’s story in Chapter 4 with an epiphany she had during our focus group. She realized, while completing one of the body image self-assessments, just how often she has negative thoughts and feelings about her body:

I put frequently for every single one... It's so crazy how often [negative emotions] creep in. You don't realize it. You know, I'm going through them, and I'm trying to think of specific moments. Like during my lesson, oh definitely self-conscious. Even performing by myself or practicing—there's mirrors in a practice room.
(Dana, focus group)

Over four years, how much time has Dana lost to distracting, even derailing, thoughts about her body? How much vocal progress has a negative body image cost her? What would she be capable of if she were unrestricted?

Inconsistency: The Consequence of “Body and/with Instrument”

The process of trying to affect vocal change is analogous to that of trying to heal someone medically. You observe symptoms, attempt to determine a cause for those symptoms, and then choose a course of correction that addresses that cause (McKinney, 1994). James McKinney details this process as one that teachers of singing apply to their students’ voices, but the students do it too. Karina provided a list of all the factors she might consider in determining why a performance didn’t go as planned:

I'm if I'm having a bad vocal day, it might not be because of something that I did or did wrong, it might be because of my environment. It might be that my allergies are really bad that day... Everything that I put into my body or expose myself to affects the way that I sound. Emotionally, everything that I do, everything that I feel affects the way that I sound.

As I described in Chapter 5, my co-researchers' experiences of relational state 2 (Body and/with Instrument) varied greatly, and so therefore did this relational state’s effects on their singing. Sometimes in relational state 2, when Body and Instrument are intertwined and codependent, they influence each other towards the positive:

But today, I feel good about my outfit, I feel good about my makeup. I feel confident. And I think that because I felt confident, I also felt confident as a singer. (Dana, practice diary 4)

When I feel like I look pretty, and when I feel like I'm singing well, even when I'm just singing and I think I look pretty I just feel good about me as a person. (Karina, final interview)

But in this codependent relationship, negative experiences, thoughts, or feelings about the body quickly bleed into experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the voice:

I have definitely had days where I'm really gross and I feel like I'm a really gross singer. (Dana, focus group)

I wish I was as good looking as others in terms of singing because others have more powerful voices than I do naturally. (Aksha, focus group)

The common thread between these divergent experiences is the link singers experience between how they look and the way they sing:

I should lose weight, just to project the sound a little bit further. (Aksha, focus group)

Looking how I want to look and feeling comfortable in how I look helps my singing because then I feel a bit less uncomfy in general. (Marissa, practice diary 4).

But that link is unnecessary. A zit on your face doesn't change the way your vocal tract resonates. Gaining or losing a few pounds doesn't make your diaphragm function any differently. Perhaps that's one reason why discussions of body image are largely absent from the vocal pedagogical literature—there is no mechanical or technical link between your physical presentation (or at least, the elements of physical presentation that are unchangeable in the moment) and the sound you produce.² And as Karina described,

² Of course, there are elements of vocal technique that are outwardly visible, like posture, mouth and jaw position, and the involvement of muscles in the face and neck. I would contend that these facets of one's appearance are not generally associated with body image or self-objectification because they are viewed as changeable behaviors rather than static characteristics.

there are already so many factors that affect one's singing. With so much else to contend with, why would we want another superfluous, fickle factor to influence our performance? Unfortunately, in these moments of relational state 2, it does.

This intertwining of two unnecessarily related ideas could cause plenty of problems for singers. If this intertwining is unconscious, they might ascribe their vocal successes or failures to something outside of their body image, when body image is the true culprit.³ Or, they may have difficulty landing on a diagnosis at all. I remember, as a young singer, struggling with feeling like my voice was mysterious and changeable—great one day, terrible the next—with no insight or perceived agency. Perhaps my body image was partially to blame. Beyond the obvious frustration that comes with experiencing the voice as inexplicably inconsistent, this state of mind stops the diagnostic process before the singer examines their experience, and therefore robs the singer of their agency in their practice. As a voice teacher once said to me, “You can't just cross your fingers and pray that the singing gods smile upon you today. You have to know what you're doing.”

Even if the singer is conscious of this link, it can still cause problems. Aksha often expressed a strong link between her body image and her voice, and this state of the Body/Instrument relationship leads her to ascribe vocal problems to issues with her body:

Kirsten: If you're having a rough singing day, does that make you feel worse about your body?

Aksha: It does in a way, because I always feel like I'm not so good at it... Sometimes I just feel like physically, maybe my body needs to be more worked

³ As this research worked through consciousness-raising, I could not observe any instances wherein students experienced an unconscious link between their body image with their singing. In speculating how an unconscious experience of state 2 might affect singers, I've drawn largely on my own experience and anecdotes from friends and colleagues.

out on with weightlifting or doing cardio exercises, just to strengthen my abdominal muscles so that I can use it to activate my voice. (Aksha, final interview)

I should have more stamina and I should lose weight, just to project the sound a little bit further and support the sound in a more consistent manner for singing long phrases in my rep. (Aksha, focus group)

Aksha seems to believe that losing weight would make her a better singer. But would it? Weightlifting is generally “not recommended” (Doscher, 1994, p. 254) for singers, and recent investigations have revealed that weightlifters experience a host of vocal symptoms (Rumbach, 2020). The appropriate diet for singers is often debated, and singers are generally wary of foods that might cause reflux, excess mucosal production, or dryness. A change in diet could prompt any one of these issues to affect the voice. In my many diets, I’ve often relied on the tried and true strategy of answering hunger with V8, and all that tomato juice caused me to experience reflux that noticeably affected my voice. Eating disorders are obviously incredibly harmful to anyone, but bulimia is a particular concern for singers because stomach acid can, with enough repetition, do damage to the vocal tract (Sataloff, 2017).

But even if Aksha lost weight in a way that didn’t harm her voice, would she really be a better singer? Aksha struggles with tension and support: she strives to “project the sound from my lower abdomen instead of projecting from the throat” (Aksha, practice diary 2). How would losing weight help her do that? This suggestion didn’t come from either of her teachers:

[My Indian classical singing teacher] has given a positive impact about me and the way I sing with my body. She’s not too emphatic about my image.

[My western classical singing teacher] doesn’t care about my weight. She doesn’t care about how much weight I have, how much weight I don’t have. Mainly what

she's concerned about is how musical I am with my sound. (Aksha, final interview)

Prominent pedagogues present plenty of solutions for improving support, none of which include losing weight. As Richard Miller says, “the singer should probably spend more time in the practice room and less time working out in the gymnasium or running in the park” (Miller, 1996, p. 238).

Ultimately, what comes from relational state 2, from experiencing this unnecessary link between body image and singing, is inconsistent singing:

If I feel ugly, I don't have the same confidence, and I go in and I feel like I can't sing. And if I have a day where I feel like the hottest woman in the world, I am ready to sing any aria you throw at me.” (Dana, final interview).

In this state, something other than the young singer's skills, ability, or knowledge has a hand on the reins. How can you improve in this state? One day you're incredibly capable, the next completely inept. The real problem is either unknown to you, misdiagnosed, or something that feels impossible to change. How much more could a singer learn if they could acknowledge, diagnose, and treat the real problem? How much more could she grow if her body image didn't have a hand on the scale?

Coping: The Response to “Body vs. Instrument”

Relational state 3, Body vs. Instrument, doesn't tend to last for very long. These moments of conflict, where Body and Instrument pull at the singer with equal force, tend to dissipate without resolution. When Karina talked about the tension between breathing for singing and looking slender in our focus group, her final question, “Would my mom approve of the way that I'm pulling in my stomach right now?” went unanswered. Aksha just trailed off and then apologized for talking too much—another way in which she felt

she was taking up too much space. Dana's diary entry on this topic just ended with sound effects: "When we sing our bellies go out, and that's just healthy. And so that's always hard to see your stomach, bleuh... um, tsk, tsk tsk" (Dana, practice diary 3). The effect this relational state may or may not have on my co-researchers' singing was difficult to pin down precisely because it seems to just slip away.

However, Marissa seemed to respond to this state differently. She shared ways that she actively alters her practice to cope with conflicts between her Body and her Instrument in a way that positively impacts her singing. She does this by looking for ways to evaluate her performance without having to turn to the mirror:

I have a wire belt, like a back support belt, which is useful if you don't want to look at your breath support, you can feel that. (Marissa, initial interview).

Not looking at myself was a useful way to just focus on my singing as opposed to getting hung up about, like, 'now I feel badly' or something. (Marissa, initial interview).

Marissa is the only one of my co-researchers who shared any active coping strategies, rather than just preemptive avoidance, for these moments when singing and body image collide. The wire belt is a particularly smart strategy, as many voice teachers advocate for the use of a belt to develop support regardless of a singer's feelings about their body. Both of these solutions are ways that Marissa actively steered her awareness of her body away from the external and towards the internal. Excellent singing requires this kind of internal awareness; it requires singers to "feel themselves sing from within" (Hemsley, 1998, p. 186).

I can only speculate about what led Marissa to react in this way. Perhaps her extensive experiences in therapy have trained her to look for adaptive coping mechanisms. Perhaps her voice teacher's focus on sensation helped her shift her focus

inward. Whatever the cause, her coping strategies seem to be technically sound, and might offer a solution for other women singers as they struggle with the Body vs. Instrument relational state.

Unawareness: The Side-Effect of “Disembodied Voice”

When your body is your instrument, you interact with it differently than you would an external instrument. You can't see it—at least not without a very specific kind of mirror; you can't reach out and touch it or hold it. Listening to it isn't reliable, as anyone who has ever listened to their own voicemail message knows. So, we singers rely heavily on sensation to build a functional and consistent technique. When you can't see or touch your instrument, you have to be able to feel it.

For most young singers, an awareness of sensation is something that has to be developed over time (Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017). Very few students walk into the voice studio knowing what a lifted soft palate or an expanded rib cage feel like. And sensations, especially sensations of support, are different for every singer (Doscher, 1994; Miller, 1998). It takes time not only to cultivate awareness of these feelings, but also to discover what sensations denote each singer's most effective and beautiful sound. It is this connection between desired sound and the resulting sensation that allows the singer to consistently replicate their best singing. For these reasons, many voice teachers, like Marissa's teacher, encourage their students to become attuned to their physical sensations while singing: “The individual's perception of how one kind of coordination differs from another kind is an important factor in establishing a dependable vocal technique” (Miller, 1996, p. 273).

The importance of sensation in developing classical singing technique is the reason that relational state 4 of the Body/Instrument relationship is problematic for young classical singers. As I described in Chapter 5, relational state 4, “Disembodied Voice,” is characterized by an avoidance of both the body and the instrument. In this state, the singer doesn’t experience self-objectification, but their connection to their body is disrupted. They therefore experience a lack of sensation.

Marissa described her experience of this state and how it affects her singing:

Marissa: If it's a day where I had recently thought about something or was triggered by something... anything that touches me, like jeans or formal shirts that have collars, I don't want to deal with it. So singing is definitely harder on those days because... I just don't want to be touched or bothered or have too much physical sensation. It's just kind of a little too much. So on days like that, noticing all the things that I want to notice I think would be too overwhelming...

Kirsten: What I'm hearing you say, if I can paraphrase and have you correct me, is that when you are not feeling great about your body, you kind of numb yourself to physical sensation because that's uncomfortable to feel? And that comes into your singing?

Marissa: Yeah, I don't know, if it's necessarily like, I *want* to be numb to it... But more so that any more than the amount that I can handle, which obviously varies on the day, or whatever, is too overwhelming to deal with. It's just, it's too much to think about both how I'm feeling, my body, and singing. We can only pick two of those three things. (Marissa, final interview)

Karina, unlike Marissa, never explicitly acknowledged any lack of sensation, but she did share that she experiences a distorted perception of herself:

I have this weird reverse body dysmorphia. I feel as comfortable in my own skin as when I weighed 50 pounds less than I do now. I feel the same in my body. I feel taller than I actually am. In my head I feel slimmer than I probably am. And so, it's really funny seeing myself in pictures and being like, ‘Oh, is that what I actually look like?’ Moving through the world, I don't feel big, even though I am, which is kind of interesting. (Karina, final interview)

Karina has an inaccurate body map. Some teachers of singing would describe an accurate body map as essential to effective and healthy performance:

Because your body map governs your movement, you move according to what you believe about your body... If you have an incorrect body map, your movement and your singing will be tense and could even cause injury. If you have an unclear body map, your movement and your singing will be tentative or awkward. When you have a correct and refined body map, and use that along with your kinesthesia and inclusive awareness, your movement and your singing will be fluid, expressive, and healthy (Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017, pp. 3-4)

Karina also seems to experience a lack of awareness that comes across in what is not said in her diaries. The only areas of Karina's body she addressed as part of her focus on singing technique were above the shoulders. She did explicitly note her sensations in these areas, like laryngeal or jaw tension, but any sensation below this area was never mentioned. She described the movement of the abdominal region as a "side effect" of the breathing process, and she pays little attention to any sensations of breathing: "The breathing happens and I know where the breathing happens, whatever it feels like" (Karina, interview). She thinks of singing as "from here [the chest] up" (Karina, focus group).

A lack of sensation below the chest is antithetical to the development of consistent breath support. As Richard Miller describes: "In the technique of *appoggio*⁴, little or no feeling occurs in the pectoral region in inspiration, even though the pectoral muscles contribute to the supportive framework... there is a feeling of muscular connection from sternum to pelvis" (Miller, 1996, p. 25). James McKinney, in describing how one might teach effective support advises: "Ask [the student] to describe what he

⁴ *Appoggio* is an Italian technique for breath support and is the most widely prescribed method of breathing and support for classical singing.

[sic] feels... These sensations form the foundation for the support mechanism” (McKinney, 1994, p. 64). If breath support is, as Barbara Doscher describes, “the antagonistic balance of inspiratory and expiratory musculature” (1994, p. 23) how could a singer manage or monitor it without feeling the movements and exertion of that musculature? Sensation is essential.

Sensation can also be a burden. Marissa describes sensation as being occasionally “overwhelming” and “too much to deal with” (Marissa, final interview). For Dana, feeling her body is a reminder that her body is bigger than she would like it to be. In Chapter 5, I described this relational state of “Disembodied Voice” as actively cultivated, rather than passively experienced. It seems to be a sort of coping mechanism for this burden of sensation that unfortunately has side-effects for one’s singing technique. I suspect that Karina’s belief about the locus of her singing might also be a coping mechanism for this burden. It seems as though she has (re)defined singing in a way that is comfortable for her, that can leave her body out of it.

“Because singing is movement, singers need and deserve training that creates an accurate body map, a fine-tuned kinesthetic sense, and the conscious use of inclusive awareness” (Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017, p. 1). For how many young singers is their body image a barrier to the kind of integrated technical training they need and deserve? How many young singers are shutting off their internal awareness, inadvertently silencing Instrument to get relief from Body’s constant nagging? How well can you really sing if you can’t feel your instrument?

Positive Experiences of Embodiment and Singing

Focus: The Yield of “Instrument without Body”

The most obvious, and perhaps most meaningful, instance of relational state 5 (instrument without body) that I observed in my co-researchers was Dana’s report of her final lesson in the study:

I had a really good rep lesson today. We worked on one of my German pieces, Suleika, by Mendelssohn, and I have just made really great progress on that and I’m really excited. I did not think about my body once, like seriously, I know it’s crazy. I did not think about my body. I think I was so focused on just finding the right space and resonance for the piece and that’s really what we worked on today. And, you know, I could have thought about my body when we were doing some just different things that involved the body. She wanted me to—I was sitting into my hips, so I had to raise my arms up, put them back down, kind of get myself out of my hips in a good singer’s posture. And I didn’t think about my body then. You know my body was there obviously, but I wasn’t thinking about it in the way that I normally do, like ‘Oh, people are looking at me, how do I look?’ that kind of thinking. (Dana, lesson diary 5)

In my co-researchers’ experience, engaging with your instrument in this positive way yields focus. Dana described a new ability to focus on technique:

I was just thinking about my body as an instrument, as my body is my instrument... And I wasn't thinking, when I put my hand on my stomach to check my breathing, ‘Oh, there's fat underneath my skin,’ I thought, ‘I'm checking my air, I'm making sure my ribs don't collapse, I'm getting myself out of my hips.’ (Dana, final interview)

Marissa shared that her experience of body functionality appreciation helps her be more in tune with her sensations:

Marissa: Not being focused on sound and being focused on sensation, I think, is always a better route to go in terms of being able to deeply notice what you're doing. If I'm able to think more clearly about quality of breath and character research and putting that into meaningful gestures and meaningful movement of my body, then I'm fully invested...

Kirsten: Would you say that appreciating your body for the singing that it does helps you be more aware of or in tune with physical sensation while you're singing?

Marissa: Yeah, because I'm not focused on physical sensation in relation to my presentation of myself. I'm physically involved in singing, just singing, not singing in myself, or singing in the clothes that I'm wearing or singing in the context of what other people think about me—just, what is my body doing? What are my ribs doing? Just more factual, as opposed to my personal take on what should be happening or whatever. (Marissa, final interview)

For Aksha, that focus on technique and sensation seems to feed back into a positive experience of embodiment:

Once I felt that release in the air, like I do now, as I'm singing, I'm like, 'Oh, wow, I don't even have to involve my throat muscles anymore.' And that's what makes me feel good about my body. (Aksha, final interview)

The experience of focus in the “Instrument without Body” relational state acts as an antidote to all the negative effects previously discussed in this chapter. Being able to focus on the body’s function as an instrument allows the singer a sense of control over their instrument and an ability to change and shape their sound as they like. Instead of unawareness, they experience sensation; instead of restriction, agency; instead of inconsistency, progress. As an old teacher once said to me, “If you can feel it, you can fix it.”

I wonder if these experiences of relational state 5 are also experiences of a flow state; or perhaps relational state 5 is a prerequisite for experiencing flow—that ideal state of energized focus (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Dana’s experience of relational state 5 resulted in progress and excitement. Aksha’s experiences of relational state 5 are often linked to her enjoyment of her singing. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posited that self-objectification might prevent women from entering peak motivational states, like flow. Is

this state of “Instrument without Body,” of being in their bodies but not defined by them, allowing these women to access flow? Is a positive experience of embodiment a gateway to better practice and performance? If a young singer’s Body/Instrument relationship could exist in relational state 5 more often, or even habitually, would they progress more quickly? And, more importantly, would they be more satisfied with their singing?

Art: The Fruit of a Positive Body Image?

I speculated at the end of the last chapter about the divide between technique and expression and how that might be related to this divide between body and instrument. In the singing world, this divide is the subject of much discussion. Some agree with Mathilde Marchesi and her assertion: “First technique, afterwards aesthetics” (Coffin, 1989, p. 36). Barbara Doscher quotes her directly:

Mathilde Marchesi understood the primary importance of mastery of the craft of singing: ‘Every art consists of a technical-mechanical part and an aesthetical part. A singer who cannot overcome the difficulties of the first part can never attain perfection in the second, not even a genius.’ (Doscher, 1994, p. 213).

Richard Miller also recognizes the divide between technique and expression, but he charges singers to bridge this divide and exist in both worlds from the outset of their training:

A singer must operate in two worlds, occasionally separately, mostly simultaneously... It matters not whether the singer is a novice or an established artist, technique and expression must be the supporting pillars of vocal art. These two levels of activity must go forward simultaneously and with equal intensity throughout the singing career. (Miller, 1996, p. 197)

Thomas Hemsley, like Merleau-Ponty, eschews divides entirely, and views separating technique and expression as perhaps the greatest threat to good singing:

I make no apology for repeating that the greatest enemy of interpretation is self-consciousness in all its forms. And perhaps the greatest cause of self-

consciousness among singers is obsession with voice, and the practice of divorcing what is called ‘technique’ from what is called ‘interpretation,’ and forgetting the sheer joy in singing; of failing to put into practice the principle that all singing, in all its aspects, physical emotional, and spiritual, must be initiated in the singer’s imagination. (Hemsley, 1998, p. 196)

For my co-researchers, relational state 5, “Instrument without Body,” resulted in technical focus and progress, but not in a concern for interpretation. Granted, my co-researchers experienced few instances of relational state 5, but their recorded experiences of it in their diaries avoided any discussion of musicality, text, or interpretation. Those subjects rarely came up in our interviews or focus groups either. Perhaps their teachers agree with Marchesi and choose to focus more on technique with these young singers. But I wonder too if the Body/Instrument relationship has something to do with expressive performance.

“All art is creation, idealization, self-expression in a certain medium” (MacKinlay, 1910, as cited in Austin, 2015, p. 359). If art is contingent upon expression of the self, doesn’t your woman’s body, and your experience in and of that body, have to be part of it? If it is as Merleau-Ponty says, our bodies and selves are inextricable. Is “Instrument without Body” a way of shaking off self-objectification and destructive influences, or is it another form of dissociation that maintains the divide between body and instrument? Can both of those things be true? Is there an experience in our women’s bodies that we could bring to our singing without bringing the baggage of self-objectification? Is there such a unity to be found? And what would it do for our singing?

Hemsley cautions against any notion of separateness: “The voice is the singer; it should never be thought of as in any way separate from the singer” (Hemsley, 1998, p. 20). Lamperti also espoused unity: “to sing well, body, soul, and mind are tuned together

to do it” (Lamperti, 1973, p. 32). William Shakespeare⁵ instructed his students to “feel that you are the living embodiment of what you have to sing” (Shakespeare, 1921, as cited in Coffin, 1989, p. 83). An artistic performance requires both technique and expression: “a singer is fully actor and fully musician, 100% of each” (Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017). Does it also require “body” and “instrument”? Is this mythical state 6—a true unity of singer and woman, Body and Instrument—an essential part of expressive and artistic performances? If so, does self-objectification, by preventing a positive experience of embodiment and therefore excluding us from this theoretical promised land, create a barrier to meaningful and moving performances?

I’m writing this dissertation during the Covid-19 pandemic, and as such it’s been over a year since I had a performance experience I would describe as meaningful and moving. I’m struggling to remember how I thought and felt during those performances. Was I in my body, or was I outside of it? Was my body just my instrument, or was it more than that? Was there still a tiny voice in the back of my head wondering if I looked fat? I do remember, however, multiple experiences of trying to be expressive as a young singer and feeling locked out of some other dimension of performance that my classmates seemed to access so easily. I remember feeling self-conscious and afraid, restricted and frustrated. Was my disrupted connection with my body part of what kept me from connecting with the music?

⁵ Not the bard, but a student of Francesco Lamperti and a prominent singer and teacher of singing in the early 20th century.

Or is connecting to the music not the result of, but an influence on one's connection with their body? Aksha shared that connecting to a piece of repertoire emotionally can help her connect to her body:

Kirsten: So, when you've found that kind of connection to a piece of repertoire, and it makes you excited, and you're excited to sing it, what does that do for the way that you think about your body?

Aksha: It does a lot of things, like it helps me to feel what I feel, both physically and mentally. It even helps me to understand myself better and really create that identity that I aspire to be. And it also helps me to recognize that this is who I am as a person. (Aksha, final interview)

Marissa also finds that connecting with the text helps her singing by allowing her to focus her attention on something other than herself:

I try not to really think about my voice too much, because I had this teacher my sophomore year, and she said, 'You're serving the text, you're serving the meaning of the composer.' And I found that I sound a lot better. And I get a lot better critique if I'm just focusing on the connection to the meaning as opposed to sound. (Marissa, initial interview)

One's ability to sing and sing well can certainly be negatively impacted by negative experiences of embodiment and a negative body image. But perhaps it is also true that practicing the art of singing can help a young singer be fully and positively in her body.

Who's to blame?

I hope that by now, here at the end of Chapter 6, I have convinced you that body image does influence one's singing, at least for these four women. My co-researchers seem to agree; I asked each of them towards the end of our interview if they felt that their body image and singing were connected:

Mmhmm... in a way, yeah they're connected. (Karina, final interview)

I think so. (Marissa, final interview)

Yes, they are. (Aksha, final interview)

Yeah, 100%. (Dana, final interview)

That connection worked differently for each of them, but they each experienced these two concepts as intertwined and influential. Based on the relational state of Body and Instrument that they were experiencing, my co-researchers' body images resulted in restriction, inconsistency, coping, unawareness, and occasionally those bright spots of focus in their singing.

And yet, Karina, Dana, and Marissa all reported at multiple points that thoughts about their bodies did not impact their singing at all:

Thoughts about my body did not affect my singing during my lesson. (Karina, lesson diary 3)

I don't think [thoughts about my body] totally affected my singing today. (Dana, lesson diary 2)

How did thoughts about my body affect my singing? I don't think they did. (Marissa, lesson diary 2)

Perhaps some of these experiences are linked to relational state 4, an experience of "Disembodied Voice" wherein a singer genuinely doesn't experience thoughts about her body while singing. However, some of these instances of denial came after sharing explicit thoughts they had about their bodies:

My teacher did address my body this lesson with regards to my posture. I felt a little bit embarrassed because I normally have very good posture when I sing... thoughts about my body did not affect my singing during my lesson. (Karina, lesson diary 3)

I kept thinking like, 'I wonder how my lower torso looks in these jeans' ... I don't think [thoughts about my body] totally affected my singing today. (Dana, lesson diary 2)

I thought I looked nice because I got a new sweater... How did thoughts about my body affect my singing? I don't think they did. (Marissa, lesson diary 2)

I wonder if there might be another explanation for this disconnect. I wonder if my co-researchers might have occasionally felt guilty about how their body image affected their singing. As Sarah Banet-Weiser explains, popular feminism dictates that the locus of control for each woman's body image lies solely within herself. She describes the message implicit in this faulty brand of feminism: "if you don't love your body, that's because you aren't confident enough" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 1590). In my experience of music schools within higher education, the language around practicing is similarly tinged with that neoliberal overreliance on personal responsibility. The implicit message I often received was "if you're not a good enough singer, that's because you aren't practicing well enough." If you feel solely responsible for your body image and solely responsible for your progress as a singer, is it painful to admit that you lost time in the practice room because you hated the way your stomach looked? Is it shame-inducing to acknowledge that getting distracted by your double chin in your lesson kept you from singing your best? Does it feel like failure to say that your body image impacted your singing?

I want to make it clear that the blame for the negative effects I described in this chapter does not lie with my co-researchers, or with individual singers in general who struggle with their body image. The message here is *not*, "if you're not a good enough singer, it's because you aren't confident enough." My co-researchers' perceptions of themselves are constantly shaped and reshaped from without and from within: by parents and voice teachers, by partners and peers, and by their own expectations for themselves as women and as singers. The issues they have, they've come by honestly. And, most importantly, they are not defined, as singers or as women, by those struggles.

So, who's to blame? Where do we look for a solution? Largely, the fault is in how girls and women are socialized. All of my co-researchers cited incidents from their childhood as catalysts for their body image struggles. The classical music industry isn't blameless here either: the more singers are treated like commodities, the more they are likely to self-objectify (Frey, 2017). These structures and systems feel larger than life and immune to change, but it begins with individuals, particularly voice teachers and others in positions of power. And although I've heard some horror stories, most of the voice teachers I know are caring professionals, trying to do their best in an imperfect system. So, what can we do? How can we provide an environment for our students wherein they can experience their bodies positively, and thereby grow as singers and as women?

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

*“Dearest.—I remember how
at eighteen,
 on hikes with friends, when
they rested, sitting down to joke or talk,*

*I circled
around them, afraid to hike ahead alone,*

*yet afraid to rest
when I was not yet truly thin.*

*You and, yes, my husband,—
you and he*

*have by degrees drawn me within the circle;
forced me to sit down at last on the ground.*

I am grateful.”

- Frank Bidart, excerpt from “Ellen West”

I did not intend for this study to be an intervention study. Of course, by definition it was, but what I mean is that I did not design this study around the goal of improving my co-researchers’ body images or their singing. At one point, very early in the research process, I had grand dreams about designing a protocol that would drastically change their body image and then taking surveys and measurements to prove with numbers that their singing followed suit. I realized, however, that looking for such a correlation was premature; this topic was unexplored. I couldn’t really say whether or not body image played a role in singing at all, let alone through what specific measurements and

technology I might see that hypothetical relationship play out numerically. I also realized that I am not a therapist, and therefore I am woefully underqualified to try and affect change in the very delicate and personal relationship someone has with their body. So, I designed this research just to observe, think, and report. Of course, I hoped that my co-researchers might experience some benefit from their participation, but I did not believe that noticeable or meaningful change was really possible in just a month, with just a few diaries and some chats. I was surprised, and elated, to find that I was wrong.

I've talked a lot about Dana's final lesson diary in these past three chapters. Her sudden shift into "Instrument without Body" surprised us both. I asked her in our interview what brought that on, convinced that some external influence must be at work. Maybe her teacher tried a new exercise, or maybe her partner complimented her on the way out the door. Maybe she weighed herself that morning and found that she lost a couple pounds, or maybe she was wearing her favorite outfit that she knew she looked good in. But in our interview, Dana couldn't recall what she was wearing that day or what her morning was like, despite my relentless questions about it. What made the difference for her was something I didn't expect:

Kirsten: So, what do you think made that experience different?

Dana: I think it was the experience of all the audio diaries and constantly reflecting. (Dana final interview)

As a result of her participation in this research, Dana changed. A new door opened to her. She was able to have an experience of singing in her body that was unencumbered by feelings of body shame or anxiety. Even if it was just for one lesson, she was able to be free.

Not all of my co-researchers had this grand of an experience, but they all changed in some way. For some of them, they attributed their change to reflection:

Learning how to take time to reflect has been really big. Because I didn't usually do that, you know, maybe I'll walk away from a lesson, and think 'I guess that was a lesson.' But now I walk away from a lesson and I think, 'How did that go? How did I feel? How do I feel about my body today?' And I think that's been a really big takeaway is learning how to pause in a way that I didn't used to before. (Dana final interview)

[The diaries] made me think about the practice session or about the lesson that I had just had in ways that I don't normally... so that was good. (Karina final interview)

[The research] actually got me talking and thinking about things that I hadn't [thought about] in a super long period of time. And I was really glad to have thought about those things and been able to talk about them with my therapist, and just be mindful. (Marissa final interview)

For Aksha, who didn't have as many opportunities to reflect through the diaries, and for Dana, sharing with others was also a large part of their shift:

I honestly could say that it has been one of the best experiences in my life that I would be involved in someone's research project like yours. I really enjoyed it. I really felt like I was more vulnerable, and I was able to open up about my body confidently without any judgment, without any destructive criticism from anybody. I felt like [the other co-researchers] helped me to feel that I'm not alone in what I'm feeling. I'm not alone in what I'm going through. And I'm not alone with being self-conscious about my appearance. [Aksha final interview]

I liked the focus group, because it kind of reminded me how there's a lot of similarities. But we're also very different as females, as women, as people who identify as women... I thought it was really interesting to hear other people's different perspectives on things because sometimes, I think that we all get into our tunnel vision. Because we only have our self-experiences. And we only know as much as people tell us and talking about body image is definitely not something that is brought up over coffee every day. And so that felt like a very special group therapy moment. I think it was very healing to hear other people's experiences and to be able to share my own in kind of a safe space, in a very non-biased, nonjudgmental way. (Dana final interview)

Karina felt it too; at the end of our focus group she said, "This has been a really good group therapy session for me." To put it simply, all of my co-researchers felt better when

they talked about their body image in and around their singing, either with themselves or with others. It helps simply to be conscious of it and to be drawn within the circle.

Feminism(s)

Despite everything I wrote in Chapter 3, I did not expect the seemingly simple act of consciousness-raising to be quite so potent. After all, consciousness raising is the act of presenting a problem without a solution; how much good could that do? It strikes me now as a very patriarchal idea that problems only deserve oxygen when they can be solved. Eschewing the hurt that comes with these seemingly intractable societal issues is just another way of avoiding our emotions, the part of us that is most often associated with femininity. So it is that undoing misogyny in this way, engaging with our emotions and with the problem through consciousness-raising, begins to undo this larger bit of internalized misogyny.

As I referenced back in Chapter 2, research suggests that holding feminist views and identifying as a feminist might provide some remedy to a negative body image. This strategy seems to work for Marissa. Her ability to recognize the systemic misogyny around her helps her make sense of her own experience:

As a woman in America, my body is more so a project than an entity. I'm not really a person, I'm like an ongoing home improvement project. Just in the same way it can be like "I could put up tile," you could be like, "I could lose five pounds. I could do my eyebrows." It just always ends up being another thing. And looking at the videos, I was like, "Yeah, I don't think that was based in reality," because I looked exactly the same that day, when I was feeling a little bit more frustrated with myself, as I did the day before. (Marissa, final interview)

Being a feminist and a classical singer is, frankly, a weird experience. On the surface, women are everywhere. Beyond our prevalence, we are essential to the profession—we have been for the past few centuries, since men decided they no longer

wanted to literally castrate themselves to keep women off the stage. And yet, patriarchal influence is still strong. Most of the western canon of classical music is written by white men, and it is full of problematic depictions of women, like the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, or Puccini's titular Turandot, or Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata* (McClary, 1990; Clément, 1988). The people who wield the most power over singers in the industry, namely conductors, directors, and producers, are still mostly men. It is strange to be constantly surrounded by so many women, sometimes only women, and yet still feel the constant influence of men.

Here's an example. A friend of mine once studied with a teacher who only took women singers into her studio. Her whole studio was just sopranos and mezzos, every studio class was girls only. And yet, this teacher held her students to an oppressively rigorous standard of physical appearance. Not complying with her dress code for lessons and studio performances, which included makeup and heels, would result in a lowered grade. Certain students, but not all, were advised against wearing sleeveless shirts or dresses, or anything form fitting. Even in this explicitly, entirely feminine space, the male gaze could cost you your grade, or worse, your self-respect.

Feminism has only recently become part of the musicological conversation. As recently as 1990, the discipline of musicology was described as "relatively untouched" (McClary, 1990, p. 9) by feminism. Susan McClary and others generated a great deal of feminist writings on music and musicology in the early 90's, but the momentum slowed, and by 2010, feminist research seemed to all but disappear from musicology (Macarthur, Bennett, Goh, Hennekam, & Hope, 2017). Interestingly, that decline has had a tangible impact on the classical music world: "when the research tapers off and feminist issues

take a back seat, the amount of women’s music performed in the concert hall also decreases” (Macarthur, Bennett, Goh, Hennekam, & Hope, p. 74, 2017). Perhaps feminism doesn’t seem to stick because the academic study of music in general, beyond the bounds of musicology, has traditionally resisted any and all forms of social critique:

It is important to keep in mind that music traditionally has resisted not only feminist criticism but all forms of socially grounded criticism. Because of its relatively abstract modes of construction, music has long been held to be impervious to interpretations that would link its patterns to concerns of the material or social world: concerns such as gender and sexuality, but also race, ethnicity, and class. (McClary, 1990, p. 9).¹

But vocal pedagogy lags even further behind. Searching the *Journal of Singing* archives from 1995 to the present for the words “feminist” or “feminism” reveals only two articles, both of which are musicological critiques of song cycles from a perspective of gender (Andrew, 1997; Fontaine, 2013).

Despite the over representation of women in classical singing, the venerated vocal pedagogues and voice scientists, or at least those who’ve written books, are more often male: Richard Miller (2013), William Vennard (1967), James McKinney (2005), Thomas Hemsley (1998), Stephen Austin (2013), Ingo Titze (2012), Johann Sundberg (2018), Scott McCoy (2012). Certainly, there are plenty of women who have contributed massively to the field, like Barbara Doscher (1994), Shirlee Emmons (1998), Katherine Verdolini Abbott (2012) and Janice Chapman (2016), and the membership of elite professional organizations like the American Academy of Teachers of Singing suggests that this ratio might be changing to more accurately reflect the proportion of men to

¹ McClary’s commentary, although written 30 years ago, still rings true today. Quite recently, a black music theory scholar’s presentation at a conference that questioned the legacy of white supremacy inherent in Schenkerian analysis prompted outrage and racist responses in a prominent journal, which has resulted in an investigation by the publisher and calls to dissolve the journal (Flaherty, 2020).

women on the ground (American Academy of Teachers of Singing, 2021). But the books that we reach for in our studios, and in vocal pedagogy classes, are more often written from the male perspective and include gems like this:

The heaving chest of the out-of-breath, overweight singer at the conclusion of a dramatic aria is neither pleasant to watch nor healthful for the singer... The conventions of the lyric theater have undergone some improvement in recent decades with regard to singing artists. If one chooses to ply the trade of the theater, one should be willing to accept the physical discipline that goes with it. There is no more reason to accept an obese Romeo in opera than in drama. Sound simply is not everything, either in the lyric theater or on the concert stage. Young singers who want careers on the operatic stage should consider weight loss to be as essential to building a career as other parts of career preparation... It may not be fair, but it is a fact of the real world. (Miller, 2013, pp. 236-237)

Note the echoes of the male gaze inherent in demanding that something be pleasant for him to watch, the automatic and unquestioned assumption that fatness is always equivalent to ill health (despite his lack of any medical credentials), and the hint of neoliberal notions of personal responsibility inherent in the word “discipline.” And although it may seem that he directs his ire at men by using the role of Romeo as an example, in opera the role of Romeo is not always played by a man: in Bellini’s *I Capuletti e i Montecchi*, Romeo is a pants role, sung by a mezzo soprano.

Even Barbara Doscher, a woman who has been described to me by some who were close to her as a true feminist, includes the following statement: “First of all, fat singers are a thing of the past on the world’s concert and opera stages. With few exceptions, public taste demands that singers look like the characters they portray” (Doscher, 1994, p. 256). She’s not wrong, and I presume that this statement comes from a place of genuine concern for students’ success and a desire for honesty about the constraints of their intended profession. But I question whether acknowledging the

realities of the industry necessitates accepting them without question and passing the burdens they impose onto our students without pause. I suppose paying attention to appearance is inevitable for performers, but what might not be inevitable, and the aspect of that focus on appearance that I believe is most harmful, is the ways in which our definitions of acceptable and unacceptable looks are dominated by the (white) male gaze. Not everyone believes that fat people are inherently ugly, why do the people who do get to define what everyone else sees on stage?

Perhaps it is this lack of feminist perspectives, and thereby the perpetuation of the “objective” or, more accurately, masculine views, that has kept body image outside the scope of vocal pedagogical literature and practice for so long. Susan McClary reminds us that the Cartesian dualism that I rejected in Chapter 5 is ever present in the classical vocal canon and often coded to gender: the mind is masculine, the body, feminine (McClary, 1990). Vocal pedagogy has evolved with the classical vocal canon², so it is predictable that it would suffer from the same blind spots, in particular the same need to avoid, eschew, and even sometimes destroy anything associated with femininity. So, for so long, the teaching of singing lived entirely in the realm of the mind, giving no thought to the body—or, God forbid, *feelings* about one’s body. Perhaps some internalized sexism lurked behind my own desire as a young singer to make singing an entirely intellectual endeavor, to stay away from my body. *Feminism has presented a solution for me*, as I

² Vocal pedagogical practice has evolved throughout the centuries in response to the demands made upon singers by composers of the day. Pier Francesco Tosi, who was teaching during the baroque period, focused much of his writing on agility, the performance of recitative, and ornamentation like trills to match the style of the period. By contrast, Giovanni Battista Lamperti, writing in the mid 19th century, often discusses how to train the dramatic voice without overexerting it, in response to the heavier singing required by composers like Richard Wagner (Coffin, 1989).

believe it has for my co-researchers. Perhaps, when applied more broadly, feminism can be a remedy for the field as whole.

Voice Teachers and Voice Teaching

I finished the last chapter by asking what we can do. The first thing we can do as voice teachers is to be conscious of this problem and give singers space to reflect and talk about it. It is important to consider the scope of our practice in these conversations. We are not mental health or medical professionals; we have no grounds on which to suggest what a singer might do to improve her health, mental or physical (beyond the suggestion to seek the opinion of such professionals).³ We can, however, invite our singers to simply notice how they feel about their bodies when they sing, and acknowledge and appreciate the presence and contribution of their bodies as their instruments. We can bring our feminist consciousnesses into our voice studios, or we can develop such consciousnesses. By doing that, we can have a powerful impact on our women students, if not all of our students.

Marissa and Aksha suggested that their voice teachers play an important part in building on the aspects of singing that encourage a positive body image. Aksha's Indian classical singing guru has helped her experience an appreciation for her body:

She told me at one point, 'Don't ask for forgiveness... don't listen to yourself too much. And just know that you're in the right place, you're safe. And who cares about what [others] think... That made me feel good about my body in itself, like instantly, because singing is a very physical thing. You're using your body. So

³ I realize in writing this sentence that my entire fifth chapter was predicated on a rejection of the Cartesian dualism evident in the phrase "mental or physical." However, the American medical system has yet to reject such dualism, and so this phrase references the difference in practitioners of mental and physical health.

that really helped me to understand that I am fine. I'm good. I'm safe. I'm safe in my own temple. (Aksha, final interview)

Marissa's teacher has also had a positive impact:

Kirsten: Has that relationship with your teacher affected the way that you think about your body?

Marissa: I think it's cemented the feeling, the sensation prioritized above the perception of how I should look or how I should sound. That has been really positive for me, I think overall. The more I delve into that, and the more I'm supported in doing that, from teachers and coaches, the more I'm like, 'Okay, I've made some vocal progress,' and I can see that more objectively because I'm not super focused on like, 'I should sound like this right?' 'When I'm singing, I should look like that?' That doesn't matter.

Dana's voice teacher, however, has had a generally neutral, but sometimes negative impact on the way she thinks and feels about her body:

I think the only influence [my voice teacher] has on [my body image] is that, maybe she'll have a cute teacher outfit, and I think 'Ooh I like her outfit.' ... I think it's been neutral. Other than the one moment where she pointed out my knock knees, I don't think there's been any other times where it's been either very positive or very negative. I think it's always been kind of neutral. (Dana, final interview)

Karina has had similar neutral to negative experience:

Kirsten: Do you think your voice teacher has any influence on the way you think or feel about your body?

Karina: She's never said anything negative. ... We have a mutual friend in common, friend of mine and a former student of hers, who is a bigger lady. And she lost a lot of weight recently... And [my teacher] said something along the lines of 'Thank God' ... And I was like, 'Oh, okay, that's where we are. So, if I gain any weight, it's not gonna be a good thing in the eyes of [my teacher].'

Kirsten: How did that make you feel?

Karina: A little self-conscious, not gonna lie. I felt pretty self-conscious.

I would bet money that Karina's teacher doesn't recall that interaction. I doubt that her teacher was attempting to send a coded message about how much weight is acceptable. I also doubt that Dana's teacher meant any harm when she suggested that Dana might stand in a different way, thinking that the phrase "your legs look weird" was relatively innocuous. As Dana said, "I know she didn't mean it to try and attack me, you know sometimes people just say things. People don't always do things to you, they just do things" (Dana, focus group). But regardless of intentions, it is our responsibility as voice teachers to recognize the power we wield and its impact, and to wield it with care.

Far too often, how a singer might feel about her body is at best an afterthought in the voice studio. As long as it is an afterthought, voice teachers risk doing immense harm to their students. During my pilot study, one of my participants confided in me that a comment from a voice teacher contributed significantly to her eating disorder. She'd begun some extreme dieting practices and lost some weight as a result, and a voice teacher told her to keep doing whatever she was doing because she looked great. I'm sure the teacher thought this comment was harmless, even a compliment, but it caused this young singer to sink deeper into an eating disorder that she has now spent years trying to overcome.

Beyond careless comments about weight or appearance, voice teachers must also carefully choose the exercises and materials they give to their singers. Examine the exercise printed below, which is from a book I've cited multiple times in this dissertation and that (in an earlier edition) was a required textbook in one of my undergraduate classes: *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body* (Malde, Allen, & Zeller,

2017). I find this book useful and insightful, especially in that it is aimed not at teachers, but written directly for singers. But the following exercise presents dangers:

Use the mirror. Begin by describing to yourself what you would expect to see before you actually stand in front of a mirror. Think about height, width, and depth of your body. Be sure to think about size, structure, and function. Next, stand in front of a full-length mirror and ask yourself, “How does what I see differ from what I expect to see?” ... Now, with a clearer map of your torso, sing as you look at yourself in the mirror, observing how you look, feel, and sound. Palpate (touch with your hands and fingers) the area to be mapped. So, as you are mapping your torso, it is very helpful to palpate the entire area of your torso. As you palpate, ask yourself: “How does what I palpate differ from my map?” Draw the area to be mapped... It is illuminating to date and keep each map that you draw so that you can compare each new drawing to the former and then compare each drawing to the anatomical facts. (Malde, Allen, & Zeller, 2017, p. 7).

All of my co-researchers shared that they find mirrors distracting in their practice, as they prompt them to focus more on their appearance than their singing. Dana shared that touching her stomach in lessons usually makes her think about how fat she is. Dana also shared that tracking her weight gain over the course of her college career is a source of shame and anxiety. What do you think would happen if Dana’s teacher handed her this book, or asked her to try this exercise? Or what about Marissa, whose body holds the trauma of childhood sexual abuse? How would Aksha, who is afraid she’ll be shunned for being too fat, deal with this brutal confrontation of her own reflection? Karina shared happily that she sees herself as thinner than she is and that she experiences benefits from this distorted perception; how would she feel if her voice teacher, violently and carelessly, burst that bubble with an exercise like this one?

Thinking about doing that exercise myself makes me sick to my stomach. The idea of having to name out loud what I think I look like, and then confronting in cruel detail all the ways in which my hopes have been dashed, all the ways in which I don’t

measure up to my own expectations, is too painful. If my teacher handed me this exercise, even now, I wouldn't be able to do it. I would expect that most American women feel similarly, but you wouldn't know it from Malde, Allen, and Zeller's book. Two of the three authors are women, and yet they offer no warning, no caveat, no mention at all of how this exercise and others like it might cause immense distress.

I wrote in Chapter 5 about how, as a younger singer, I often avoided teachers who might ask me to do anything with my body. Perhaps this avoidance of the topic of body image within vocal pedagogy literature is part of the reason. Perhaps I intuited that I would have to suffer my shame and anxiety in silence, fully convinced of popular feminism's notion that the reason I couldn't focus on singing in these lessons was because I was deficient. But it is instead the instruction, not the singer, that is deficient in this regard. Any version of vocal pedagogy that does not address the body ignores vital parts of the instrument, but any version of vocal pedagogy that does not address or prepare for the negative emotions that may arise when any singer is asked to think critically about their body ignores vital parts of the singer.

What I'm calling for here is a change in the way we approach the instrument we teach as voice teachers. It's a tall order, especially after just one study that only observed four singers, all of whom differ from the normative population of collegiate voice students in some significant way. But I would caution against assuming that any particular singer does not struggle with their body image. I have no idea if Marissa's teacher knows that she is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, but I'm sure it didn't come up in their first lesson. When Dana added me to the very short list of people who

know about her eating disorder, I noticed her voice teacher's conspicuous absence from that list.

Moreover, I would venture a guess that body image struggles are more the norm than the exception among collegiate women singers. 58% of college-aged women feel pressure to maintain a certain weight, and there is no conceivable reason why singers would be immune to those pressures (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014). Women singers who might be considered thin are not immune either. When I shared with a male colleague the topic of this dissertation, he was surprised to hear that I had ever struggled with my body image because he considered me attractive. Men struggle with body image too, as do transgender and nonbinary people. Bodily trauma, like childhood sexual abuse, is far more common than any of us would like to believe (Van der Kolk, 2015). It is never safe to assume, based on their gender, appearance, or even demeanor, that the singer who walks into your studio has a positive experience of their body.

The change I'm calling for may necessitate a review of the resources we use as voice teachers, and particularly those that we also pass on to our students. It's not just Richard Miller, or Barbara Doscher, or Malde, Allen, and Zeller; so many texts on singing include the suggestion that singers manage their physical appearance for the good of their career or their supposed health. I contend that these unnuanced, casually inserted, one-sided discussions of weight and appearance can cause harm on multiple levels, both in the misguided perceptions they might inspire in teachers, and in the harmful advice they give to students. However, I believe these books offer incredibly valuable pedagogical information (I wouldn't have cited them otherwise). The best solution might

be a new, edited version of these books that adds caveats to these passages or removes them entirely. Short of that solution, individual voice teachers and instructors of vocal pedagogy should offer these resources with an explicit acknowledgment that they contain these discriminatory and detrimental ideas.

Every time I have shared this research interest with an experienced voice teacher, the conversation has immediately turned towards the operatic industry. In a previous chapter, I wrote that the expectations for appearance within the operatic industry loom large for singers, and it seems that they loom large for voice teachers as well. The attitude of some teachers seems to be that preparing their singers for the industry means subjecting them to the criticism and demands that they can expect out in the “real world,” regardless of that criticism’s inherent misogyny, racism, or ableism (recall the quote I borrowed from Richard Miller just a few pages back). But self-objectification and its consequences is not something for which one can be inoculated. Exposing young singers to that kind of critique does not make them better able to withstand it later, rather it makes them more vulnerable to its consequences. The best thing we can do for our singers, short of changing the industry of course, is to help them develop a sturdy shield against these forces made out of feminist thought, a positive body image, and a positive experience of embodiment. Helping students build these shields through reflective practice will create artists who are not only able to endure the current system with grace and strength, but also motivated and equipped to change it.

The most formative course I’ve taken as a voice teacher began with the phrase, “*primum non nocere*”: first, do no harm. Through this dissertation, I have endeavored to show that a woman singer’s body image can affect the way she sings. My hope was that

demonstrating the ways in which a negative body image threatens a voice teacher's work and the ways in which a positive body image bolsters it would prompt voice teachers to pay attention. But really, this primary directive, “First do no harm,” should be enough to get my fellow pedagogues on board. It is clear that a negative body image does real harm to singers and women (and everyone else), and that voice teachers have the power to reinforce those negative thoughts and feelings, inadvertently or not, for their students. If we truly strive to do no harm, we must attend to this issue.

Woman, Singer, Teacher

As a professor of mine recently, aptly, pointed out, most research is really “me-search.” This research was certainly inspired by questions I had in my own life about my body and my singing. Most research also leaves you with more questions than answers, and I’m certainly walking away with plenty of questions. But I do believe I have also found some answers to those personal queries.

As a singer, I’m less afraid of my body than I was. The idea of my voice teacher asking me to practice yoga, or Feldenkrais, or Alexander technique is no longer anxiety-inducing. In fact, it sounds like fun! I’ve become unconvinced that my body will fail me in those moments. As an instrument, my body is sufficient, functional, even favorable. As a woman however, I’ve continued to find that those feelings don’t cross over. As a singer, I’ve become more and more acquainted with relational state 5—Instrument without Body—but as a woman, self-objectification still plagues me.

The phrase “My body is my instrument,” holds new meaning. The potential fullness of that maxim that I referenced in chapter 1 is realized in my new perspective. That phrase is no longer a source of guilt about my caffeine intake (which has been

astronomical during this writing process) or my neglect of the gym. There's a reverence now that comes with those words, and it's not just because they're the title of this document. From that reverence, or with it, I've developed a new appreciation for *my* voice. For most of my life and training, I was convinced that my particular configuration of the vocal tract was subpar, at best mediocre. In the past two years, I have disavowed that notion. There's a chicken-and-egg question here about which came first, my fresh understanding of my instrument or my new love for what it can produce, but I can say that they sustain each other. It's an imperfect relationship with good and bad days, but my view of my instrument is forever changed.

As a teacher, I've always identified as a technician. As I shared in Chapter 6, I took solace as a young singer in learning the ins and outs of voice science, anatomy, and physiology, and I take great pride in bringing that knowledge into my teaching and to my students. I still believe that it is liberating to understand how your instrument functions and to thereby experience agency in your singing, rather than feeling like your voice is a mysterious entity that only responds to cryptic phrases or esoteric images (all of which are the exclusive knowledge of your voice teacher). But now I question how much of my own affinity for the technical aspects of singing is rooted in my desire to avoid my own emotions, and how avoiding the personal and emotional parts of singing as a teacher might perpetuate some form of patriarchy and harm my students. I've started wondering how I might balance these things more effectively, or if perhaps the answer is to learn to think about them as interconnected, or even one and the same.

As part of this effort to rebalance my teaching, I'm looking for ways to help my students feel and embrace my new understanding of that sacred phrase, "my body is my

instrument.” Here are some of the ways I’ve changed my teaching practice in pursuit of that goal:

- Incorporating meditation as a way to connect students with their bodies, their breath, and their sensations to foster awareness and appreciation (Blackhurst, 2021);
- Being open with my women students about my struggles with body image in my singing (for example, sharing that sometimes it’s hard to fully release my abdominal muscles), and gently leaving space for them to share if they choose;
- Being careful about how I comment on my students’ appearances. I may say I like their shirt, or that they look happy or down, but never that they look “good” or “tired” or those many variations. Even a compliment communicates to them that how they look is both noticed and valued;
- Asking my students how often they use the mirror in their practice and inviting them to step away from it;
- Inviting my students to be cognizant, perhaps even to journal, about how much they think about how they look during their practice, and what effect those thoughts have.

For most women students, adopting this perspective will be a transformative experience, and transformations take time. It remains to be seen how long that process might take, what practices might be most effective, and what precise vocal outcomes that process and those practices could generate. But I am sure that cultivating a student’s love and reverence for their own voice, instrument, and body can only help.

Further Research

There is so much more work to be done. Repeating this study with a larger and more diverse, particularly racially diverse group, of young women singers would be a great start. The mediating effects of ethnic identity on body image (as I described in Chapter II) would be interesting to observe in the context of singing, especially as that might relate to different genres of performance. Studying men, transgender, and nonbinary singers and their experience of body image and singing is also paramount. Singers in other genres face different pressures and expectations about their bodies and use their instruments in different ways; how variances in technique and industry expectations affect the relationship singers have with their bodies will be interesting and important to explore with musical theater or CCM⁴ focused singers. Pedagogical strategies for voice teaching that address the issues that body image presents for singers while staying within the voice teacher's scope of practice and that could be accessible to a wide range of voice teachers is another worthy avenue. The suggestions I've presented in this final chapter are well-informed, but untested; I would love to one day provide more concrete solutions. I look forward to exploring those topics myself, and I hope other researchers will join me.

I was surprised to find little prior research on the direct relationship between singing and the experience of embodiment. I think this line of inquiry could prove incredibly fruitful for vocal pedagogues. So often, voice teachers are working to help their students recognize sensation and build awareness of their instruments. Awareness,

⁴ "CCM" stands for contemporary commercial music and broadly refers to genres outside of classical or musical theater singing like pop, R&B, country, or hip hop.

as a key component of a positive experience of embodiment, might be mediated by that experience of embodiment. Understanding a singer's experience of embodiment and learning how to promote a positive experience of embodiment might lead to new remedies for a host of vocal issues, including performance anxiety, alignment and postural struggles, breathing and support problems, and really any area of vocal technique.

I'm very curious to explore these questions of body image and singing with women singers who have managed to develop a truly positive body image. I'd like to discover if my theorized relational state 6 really exists, or if there are more ways that Body and Instrument can relate to each other that I haven't imagined. I wonder if the questions I raised about connecting technique and expression, or "content" and "virtuosity," might be answered, or at least fruitfully expounded upon, by examining these issues with singers who have a joyful experience of their bodies.

Integrating feminism and other forms of social criticism into the vocal pedagogical canon is a tall task, but one that must be swiftly undertaken. Classical singing risks becoming obsolete if we cannot adequately confront the classist, sexist, racist, and ableist culture in which the art form bloomed (Sutton-Williams, 2021). We have to systematically and deliberately work to separate the baby from the bathwater or risk being tossed out with it, and rightfully so. I hope that my work, both this small initial foray and my future research, can be a part of this effort and inspire others to join the cause.

The tapeworm

was her soul ...

*—How her soul, uncompromising,
insatiable,*

must have loved eating the flesh from her bones,

*revealing this extraordinarily
mercurial; fragile; masterly creature ...*

*—But irresistibly, nothing
stopped there; the huge voice*

*also began to change: at first, it simply diminished
in volume, in size,*

*then the top notes became
shrill, unreliable—at last,
usually not there at all ...*

*—No one knows why. Perhaps her mind,
ravenous, still insatiable, sensed*

that to struggle with the shreds of a voice

*must make her artistry subtler, more refined,
more capable of expressing humiliation,
rage, betrayal ...*

*—Perhaps the opposite. Perhaps her spirit
loathed the unending struggle*

to embody itself, to manifest itself, on a stage whose

*mechanics, and suffocating customs,
seemed expressly designed to annihilate spirit ... (Bidart, 1990)*

What captivates me about this section is the turn, the bait and switch, about Callas' body and its relationship to her instrument.⁵ She begins believing that her body is smothering her ability to express, but by the end we know that it was instead the conduit for that expression. First, her body "obliterates" her instrument, but we later discover that her body could not obliterate her instrument, for they are, in reality, one and the same. The cruelty with which this great lie was uncovered rings of a fable to me, or a cautionary tale. Something like the old maxim "the grass is always greener on the other side," or that awful story, *The Gift of Magi*, where a great sacrifice is made meaningless when answered with even greater loss. This fictional version of Callas lost weight without realizing that meant losing some of her voice. It's the ultimate *Catch 22*, in which the tension between singer and woman is intractable.

Ellen West, or Bidart's representation of her, felt a similar tension between the "givens" of her life, like her gender and body, and her "true self." In the section of the poem that heads Chapter 5, we feel her visceral struggle with Cartesian dualism. Even though Ellen is not a singer and doesn't experience her body as an instrument in the same way, it's not unlike relational state 3 (Body vs. Instrument) in its blinding conflict. Binswanger's notes about Ellen describe her as feeling at war with nature or fate. She is tormented by "the humiliation of having a body" (Gray, 1993, p. 728). She answers this struggle by refusing to eat: "Her disease is not her torment but her solution to that torment" (Gray, 1993, p. 728). But the ever-present hunger means that despite her maladaptive solution, the tension goes unresolved.

⁵ Interestingly, Binswanger's original notes about his patient, Ellen West, never mention Callas. Bidart, however, has referenced Callas in interviews, so this metaphor for Ellen's experience seems to come from his own associations with Callas (Gray, 1993).

The bits and pieces of “Ellen West” that head each chapter do not comprise the entire poem. There are whole stories in that poem that give more shape to Ellen than I could provide here. Bidart also intersperses verses in Ellen’s voice with bits of prose written from the perspective of her psychologist. The final one of these, inserted just before the section of poetry that leads this chapter, discloses Ellen’s suicide:

On the third day of being home she is as if transformed. At breakfast she eats butter and sugar, at noon she eats so much that—for the first time in thirteen years!—she is satisfied by her food and gets really full. At afternoon coffee she eats chocolate creams and Easter eggs. She takes a walk with her husband, reads poems, listens to recordings, is in a positively festive mood, and all heaviness seems to have fallen away from her. She writes letters, the last one a letter to the fellow patient here to whom she had become so attached. In the evening she takes a lethal dose of poison, and on the following morning she is dead. “She looked as she had never looked in life—calm and happy and peaceful.”

It is, undoubtedly, dark. Apparently, according to my dissertation sponsor, there’s darkness within these pages as well. There’s certainly sadness and anger, shame and anxiety, but mostly what I see is tension. To learn there’s more struggle in this world than you anticipated is a heavy experience, but to finally acknowledge unspoken pressures is to have a weight lifted. Maybe it’s because I’ve written most of this sitting at my table, looking out my window into the sunlight, but “dark” doesn’t seem like the right word. I prefer “illuminating.”

Final Thoughts

I began serious work on this dissertation in the spring of 2020. March 6, 2020 was the last day I went to Teachers College’s campus before the Covid-19 pandemic shut everything down. I’ve written this dissertation over the past year almost entirely from my apartment. I used to have an hour-long commute that included a good bit of walking, but

now I simply walk from my bedroom to my living room each day and sit down at my laptop and write. Needless to say, I've gained 20 pounds.

I'm certainly not the only person whose pants are fitting a little tighter, or not fitting at all, after this past year stuck inside. But I am one of probably a select few who has spent nearly every day of that year thinking about body image. Like practicing in front of a mirror, it's difficult to avoid my own disappointment and disgust with my body when I spend every day writing about body image. Despite the changes I've experienced in my self-concept as a singer, I often feel like a failure as a woman. Compounding that sense of failure is the frustration of constantly confronting my own internalized biases towards myself. I'm a staunch and proud feminist, I reject the beauty myth. I have so much compassion and admiration for my co-researchers, and I see how the ways in which they talked to and about themselves hurt and hindered them. But I look at myself in the mirror, and at the jeans in my closet that no longer fit, and at the scale in my bathroom that I'm too afraid to step on, and all of that falls apart. Knowing how insidious those misogynistic ideas about what a woman should look like are, and yet being unable to free myself from them is maddening. And it is literally my job right now to confront that tension, every day.

It's a journey, right? I catch myself more now. I don't let those thoughts fly by unchecked; I stop myself, and I try to pivot. As Marissa reminded me: "I'll have a gut reaction to something, but I think your second thought counts more" (Marissa final interview). Sometimes I hear Karina's voice in my head saying, "Just be kind to yourself" (Karina, focus group). Like my co-researchers, I've benefited from this process of reflection and sharing. I too have been drawn within the circle.

I catch myself in my singing, too. I catch myself putting on more makeup to have a voice lesson than I do for anything else in my life right now. Before my last lesson, I actually asked my husband that infamous question: “Do I look fat?” And yet, in my lessons, I breathe deeply into my lower abdomen without a second thought. I notice the sensation flowing through my whole body, and I rejoice in it. And I catch myself noticing this experience of Instrument without Body (relational state 5) and I congratulate myself. I walked into my last lesson worried that I looked terrible, but I left feeling open, loved, and freed. Singing, in that moment, was the balm I so desperately needed. It brought me back to my body and gave me a reason to love it.

I don't spend too much time singing right now, unfortunately. Between the pandemic, the dissertation, and finishing the doctorate, I find less time and space than I would like to practice. But when I do sing, it feels different. I'm more open to and aware of sensation, and that sensation goes further. I'm painfully aware of any feeling of restriction, of any impulse I have to make myself smaller, and I work against it. I know more of what it feels like to sing with freedom, or should I say I remember more of that feeling. I knew it as a child, and I feel like so much of my singing work now is to reclaim it. I can say, with assurance, that I am closer to that goal than I was last year.

Classical singers think a lot about freedom. Ask anybody what the ideal classical sound is, and you'll almost inevitably hear the word “free.” We want a sound that is free from constriction, pushing, or pulling, that spins effortlessly from the depths of a singer's being and out to her audience. It strikes me that, during 2020, Americans thought a lot about freedom also. During this time of necessary restriction and sacrifice, we were once again confronted with the painful reality that freedom is not equally distributed here in

the United States, but rather disproportionately allocated to white, cis het men. And we saw, once again, that unjust distribution taking its lethal toll. I find myself wondering how that fundamental freedom to move about society as yourself and in your body relates to that more specific vocal freedom. Surely that “free” sound we’re looking for is not just physiological. Feeling emotionally or mentally restricted or policed must affect our physical bodies—especially if we accept that our bodies and our minds are really one and the same.

Dana was the first one of us to connect this research to the idea of freedom. I asked her what would change if women singers were able to think differently about their bodies and she said, “I think people would feel a lot freer” (Dana, final interview). At first, I was surprised by that word. But now I understand, freedom is what we’re doing here. Freedom is the whole point. Freedom of body, mind, and voice are one and the same. As Aksha says, “My body is my body. My body is me. This is who I am” (Aksha, final interview). The final argument I have to present is that the freedom we love to hear in singing is the same as the freedom to be yourself in your body, just converted into sound waves.

In writing this work, I have found more freedom. I hope in reading it, you have done the same.

References

- Alleva, J. M., Tylka, T. L., & Van Diest, A. M. K. (2017). The Functionality Appreciation Scale (FAS): Development and psychometric evaluation in US community women and men. *Body Image, 23*, 28-44.
- Allsup, R. E. (2017). Ifs, ands, and buts: A polyphonic vision of qualitative research in music education. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, (214)*, 7-18.
- American Academy of Teachers of Singing. (2021). *Active AATS members*. <http://www.americanacademyofteachersofsinging.org/current-members/>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Amrhein, V., Greenland, S., & McShane, B. (2019). Scientists rise up against statistical significance. *Nature, 567*(7748), 305-307.
- Andersen, B. L., & LeGrand, J. (1991). Body image for women: Conceptualization, assessment, and a test of its importance to sexual dysfunction and medical illness. *Journal of Sex Research, 28*(3), 457-478.
- Andrew, M. M. (1997). Schumann's "Frauenliebe und Leben": A feminist dilemma? *Journal of Singing, 54*(1), 7-10.
- Arboleda, B. M. W., & Frederick, A. L. (2008). Considerations for maintenance of postural alignment for voice production. *Journal of Voice, 22*(1), 90-99.
- Arneson, C. (2010). Performance anxiety: A twenty-first century perspective. *Journal of Singing, 66*(5), 537-546.
- Austin, S. F. (2013). Building strong voices — twelve different ways, part 3. *Journal of Singing, 69*(5), 603.
- Austin, S. F. (2015). Sterling is gold! *Journal of Singing, 71*(3), 359-364.
- Bacon, L., & Aphramor, L. (2011). Weight science: Evaluating the evidence for a paradigm shift. *Nutrition Journal, 10*(1), 9.
- Bailey, K. A., Gammage, K. L., & van Ingen, C. (2017). How do you define body image? Exploring conceptual gaps in understandings of body image at an exercise facility. *Body Image, 23*, 69-79.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny*. Duke University Press.

- Barnett, M. D., & Sharp, K. J. (2016). Maladaptive perfectionism, body image satisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors among US college women: The mediating role of self-compassion. *Personality and Individual Differences, 99*, 225-234.
- Basabas, M. C., Greaves, L., Barlow, F. K., & Sibley, C. G. (2019). Sexual orientation moderates the effect of gender on body satisfaction: Results from a national probability sample. *The Journal of Sex Research, 56*(9), 1091-1100.
- Bassesen, D. H. (2008). The body image workbook: An 8-step program for learning to like your looks, by T.F. Cash. *Obesity Management, 4*(2), 80-81.
- Bauer, K. T. (2016). The role of kinesthesia in a pedagogy for singing. *Journal of Singing, 73*(2), 129-136.
- Becker, N., & Goffi-Fynn, J. (2016). Discovering voices: Expanding students' musical and vocal ideals in an urban community children's choir. *The Choral Journal, 56*(7), 8.
- Bernard, P., Hanoteau, F., Gervais, S., Servais, L., Bertolone, I., Deltenre, P., & Colin, C. (2019). Revealing clothing does not make the object: ERP evidences that cognitive objectification is driven by posture suggestiveness, not by revealing clothing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 45*(1), 16-36.
- Bidart, F. (1990). Ellen West. In *In the western night: Collected poems*. Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Blackhurst, L. (2021). Exploring the whole singing self with technique, mindfulness, and contemplative education [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bodwitch, H. E. G. (2014). Why feminism? How feminist methodologies can aid our efforts to 'give back' through research. *Journal of Research Practice, 10*(2), M8-M8.
- Bornioli, A., Lewis-Smith, H., Smith, A., Slater, A., & Bray, I. (2019). Adolescent body dissatisfaction and disordered eating: Predictors of later risky health behaviours. *Social Science & Medicine, 238*, 112458. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112458>
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing interviews* (vol. 2). Sage.
- Broniarczyk, S., Student, D., & Knous, B. L. (1998). Book review: The body image workbook: An 8-step program for learning to like your looks, TF Cash. *Journal of Nutrition Education, 30*(2), 125.

- Brown, N. (2018, April 8). *10 brands leading the body-positive movement with unretouched ads*. SheKnows. <https://www.sheknows.com/living/slideshow/9415/brands-that-dont-retouch-models/>
- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, *100*(2), 204–232.
- Calogero, R. M. (2004). A test of objectification theory: The effect of the male gaze on appearance concerns in college women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *28*(1), 16-21.
- Candela, A. G. (2019). Exploring the function of member checking. *The Qualitative Report*, *24*(3), 619-628.
- Cash, T. (2008). *The body image workbook: an eight-step program for learning to like your looks*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Cash, T. F., & Smolak, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Body image: A handbook of science, practice, and prevention*. Guilford Press.
- CBS News. (2011, March 2). *Survey: 97 percent of women have negative body image*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/survey-97-percent-of-women-have-negative-body-image/>
- Chapman, J. L. (2016). *Singing and teaching singing: A holistic approach to classical voice*. Plural Publishing.
- Clément, C. (1988). *Opera, or, the undoing of women*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Coffin, B. (1989). *Historical vocal pedagogy classics*. Scarecrow Press.
- Cohen, R., & Blaszczynski, A. (2015). Comparative effects of Facebook and conventional media on body image dissatisfaction. *Journal of Eating Disorders*, *3*(1), 23.
- Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram. *Body image*, *29*, 47-57.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Cook, J. A., & Fonow, M. M. (1986). Knowledge and women's interests: Issues of epistemology and methodology in feminist sociological research. *Sociological Inquiry*, *56*(1), 2-29.
- Craddock, N., Ramsey, M., Spotswood, F., Halliwell, E., & Diedrichs, P. C. (2019). Can big business foster positive body image? Qualitative insights from industry leaders walking the talk. *Body Image*, *30*, 93-106.

- Crossley, N. (1995). Merleau-Ponty, the elusive body and carnal sociology. *Body & society*, 1(1), 43-63.
- Cwynar-Horta, J. (2016). The commodification of the body positive movement on Instagram. *Stream: Culture/Politics/Technology*, 8(2), 36-56.
- Czikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper & Row.
- Dalessandro, A. (2015, June 2). *7 reasons why ModCloth is body positive*. Bustle. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/87418-7-reasons-why-modcloth-is-one-of-the-most-body-positive-mainstream-retailers-of-our-day>
- Dantas, A. G., Alonso, D. A., Sánchez-Miguel, P. A., & del Río Sánchez, C. (2018). Factors dancers associate with their body dissatisfaction. *Body Image*, 25, 40-47.
- Delinsky, S. S., & Wilson, G. T. (2008). Weight gain, dietary restraint, and disordered eating in the freshman year of college. *Eating Behaviors*, 9(1), 82-90.
- Diaz, F. M. (2018). Relationships among meditation, perfectionism, mindfulness, and performance anxiety among collegiate music students. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 66(2), 150-167.
- Doscher, B. M. (1994). *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*. Scarecrow Press.
- Dromey, C., Holmes, S. O., Hopkin, J. A., & Tanner, K. (2015). The effects of emotional expression on vibrato. *Journal of Voice*, 29(2), 170-181.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Eckler, P., Kalyango, Y., & Paasch, E. (2017). Facebook use and negative body image among US college women. *Women & Health*, 57(2), 249-267.
- Emmons, S., & Thomas, A. (1998). *Power performance for singers: Transcending the barriers*. Oxford University Press.
- Evans, E. (2016). What makes a (third) wave? How and why the third-wave narrative works for contemporary feminists. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 18(3), 409-428.
- Faith, M. S., & Schare, M. L. (1993). The role of body image in sexually avoidant behavior. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 22(4), 345-356.
- Fardouly, J., Willburger, B. K., & Vartanian, L. R. (2018). Instagram use and young women's body image concerns and self-objectification: Testing mediational pathways. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1380-1395.

- Farrell, C., Shafran, R., & Fairburn, C. G. (2004). Mirror cognitions and behaviours in people concerned about their body shape. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 32(2), 225-229.
- Flaherty, C. (2020, August 7). *Whose music theory?* Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/07/music-theory-journal-criticized-symposium-supposed-white-supremacist-theorist>
- Fontaine, J. (2013). He sang, she sang: The gendered song cycle. *Journal of Singing*, 70(1), 97.
- Foulds-Elliott, S. D., Thorpe, C. W., Cala, S. J., & Davis, P. J. (2000). Respiratory function in operatic singing: Effects of emotional connection. *Logopedics Phoniatrics Vocology*, 25(4), 151-168.
- Fox Keller, E. (1978). Gender and science. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 1(3), 409-433.
- Frederick, D. A., Forbes, G. B., Grigorian, K. E., & Jarcho, J. M. (2007). The UCLA Body Project I: Gender and ethnic differences in self-objectification and body satisfaction among 2,206 undergraduates. *Sex Roles*, 57(5-6), 317-327.
- Frederick, D. A., Garcia, J. R., Gesselman, A. N., Mark, K. P., Hatfield, E., & Bohrnstedt, G. (2020). The Happy American Body 2.0: Predictors of affective body satisfaction in two US national internet panel surveys. *Body Image*, 32, 70-84.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 21(2), 173-206.
- Fredrickson, B. L., Roberts, T. A., Noll, S. M., Quinn, D. M., & Twenge, J. M. (1998). That swimsuit becomes you: Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 269.
- Frey, H. E. (2018). Female opera singers and body image: A phenomenological investigation (Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology).
- Galmiche, M., Déchelotte, P., Lambert, G., & Tavolacci, M. P. (2019). Prevalence of eating disorders over the 2000–2018 period: a systematic literature review. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 109(5), 1402-1413.
- Gardner, R. M., & Brown, D. L. (2011). Measurement of the perceptual aspects of body image. In S. B. Greene (Ed.), *Body image: perceptions, interpretations and attitudes* (pp. 81-102). Nova Science.

- Garner, D. (2017, September 14). *Body image in America: Survey results*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/199702/body-image-in-america-survey-results>.
- Gattario, K. H., & Frisé, A. (2019). From negative to positive body image: Men's and women's journeys from early adolescence to emerging adulthood. *Body image*, 28, 53-65.
- Gattario, K. H., Frisé, A., Teall, T. L., & Piran, N. (2020). Embodiment: Cultural and gender differences and associations with life satisfaction. *Body Image*, 35, 1-10.
- Gibson, B. E., Mistry, B., Smith, B., Yoshida, K. K., Abbott, D., Lindsay, S., & Hamdani, Y. (2013). The integrated use of audio diaries, photography, and interviews in research with disabled young men. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 12(1), 382-402.
- Golombisky, K. (2017). Feminist methodology. In L. Z. Leslie (Ed.), *Communication Research Methods in Postmodern Culture* (2nd ed., pp. 172-195). Routledge.
- Grady, C. (2018, July 20). *The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>
- Grant, S. J. (2014). Vocal pedagogy and the Feldenkrais method. In S. D. Harrison (Ed.), *Teaching singing in the 21st century* (pp. 175-185). Springer.
- Gray, J. (1993). "Necessary thought": Frank Bidart and the post-confessional. *Contemporary Literature*, 34(4), 714-739.
- Grogan, S. (2016). *Body image: Understanding body dissatisfaction in men, women and children*. Taylor & Francis.
- Günter, H. (1992). Mental concepts in singing: A psychological approach, II. *The NATS Journal*, 49(1), 4-7.
- Hebl, M. R., King, E. B., & Lin, J. (2004). The swimsuit becomes us all: Ethnicity, gender, and vulnerability to self-objectification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(10), 1322-1331.
- Hemsley, T. (1998). *Singing and imagination: A human approach to a great musical tradition*. Oxford University Press.
- Herbst, C. T. (2017). A review of singing voice subsystem interactions—toward an extended physiological model of “support”. *Journal of Voice*, 31(2), 249.e13-249.e19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2016.07.019>

- Hill, M. S., & Fischer, A. R. (2008). Examining objectification theory: Lesbian and heterosexual women's experiences with sexual-and self-objectification. *The Counseling Psychologist, 36*(5), 745-776.
- Hogue, J. V., & Mills, J. S. (2019). The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women. *Body Image, 28*, 1-5.
- Holsen, I., Kraft, P., & Røysamb, E. (2001). The relationship between body image and depressed mood in adolescence: A 5-year longitudinal panel study. *Journal of Health Psychology, 6*(6), 613-627.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press.
- Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C., & van Anders, S. M. (2019). The future of sex and gender in psychology: Five challenges to the gender binary. *American Psychologist, 74*(2), 171.
- Jeffers, C. S. (1998). From both sides of the looking glass: Visions of imagination, the arts, and possibility. In William F. Pinar (Ed.), *The passionate mind of Maxine Greene: "I am... not yet"* (pp. 76-80). Taylor and Francis.
- Jelkovsky, M. [@maryscupoftaa]. (2018, August 28). *When I was little, my grandma used to poke my tummy and constantly remind me to suck it in*. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BnBxMD4nTHZ/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=dlfix.
- Johnson, J. L., & Repta, R. (2012). Sex and gender: Beyond the binaries. In J. L. Oliffe & L. J. Greaves (Eds.), *Designing and conducting gender, sex, and health research* (pp. 17-37). Sage.
- Johnston, J., & Taylor, J. (2008). Feminist consumerism and fat activists: A comparative study of grassroots activism and the Dove real beauty campaign. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 33*(4), 941-966.
- Jones, B. A., Pierre Bouman, W., Haycraft, E., & Arcelus, J. (2019). Gender congruence and body satisfaction in nonbinary transgender people: A case control study. *International Journal of Transgenderism, 20*(2-3), 263-274.
- Kent Crossroads Consumer Review Committee. (1999). The body image workbook: An 8-step program for learning to like your looks. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 22*(3), 310-311.
- Knight, P. G. (1997). Naming the problem: Feminism and the figuration of conspiracy. *Cultural Studies, 11*(1), 40-63.

- Koran, L. M., Abujaoude, E., Large, M. D., & Serpe, R. T. (2008). The prevalence of body dysmorphic disorder in the United States adult population. *CNS Spectrums*, 13(4), 316-322.
- Kraus, N., Lindenberg, J., Zeeck, A., Kosfelder, J., & Vocks, S. (2015). Immediate effects of body checking behaviour on negative and positive emotions in women with eating disorders: An ecological momentary assessment approach. *European Eating Disorders Review*, 23(5), 399-407.
- Lamperti, G. B. (1973). *Vocal wisdom: Maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti*. Crescendo Publishing Company.
- Leon, A. C., Davis, L. L., & Kraemer, H. C. (2011). The role and interpretation of pilot studies in clinical research. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 45(5), 626-629.
- Leslie, L. Z. (2017). Focus group research. In L. Z. Leslie (Ed.), *Communication Research Methods in Postmodern Culture* (2nd ed., pp. 61-73). Routledge.
- Lowe, K. (2014, May 19). Opera reviewers: forget the body shaming and focus on the singing. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/19/opera-reviewers-body-shaming-focus-singing-tara-errought-glyndebourne>.
- Lowery, S. E., Kurpius, S. E. R., Befort, C., Blanks, E. H., Sollenberger, S., Nicpon, M. F., & Huser, L. (2005). Body image, self-esteem, and health-related behaviors among male and female first year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(6), 612-623.
- Luck, E. (2016). Commodity feminism and its body: The appropriation and capitalization of body positivity through advertising. *Liberated Arts: A journal for undergraduate research*, 2(1).
- Macarthur, S., Bennett, D., Goh, T., Hennekam, S., & Hope, C. (2017). The rise and fall, and the rise (again) of feminist research in music: 'What goes around comes around'. *Musicology Australia*, 39(2), 73-95.
- Maisel, E. (2005). *Performance anxiety: A workbook for actors, singers, dancers, and anyone else who performs in public*. Back Stage Books.
- Major, B., Hunger, J. M., Bunyan, D. P., & Miller, C. T. (2014). The ironic effects of weight stigma. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 51, 74-80.
- Malde, M., Allen, M., & Zeller, K. A. (2017). *What every singer needs to know about the body*. Plural Publishing.
- Manternach, B., Chipman, M., Rainero, R., & Stave, C. (2017). Teaching transgender singers. Part 1: The voice teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Singing*, 74(1), 83-88.

- Martin, K. (1998). Becoming a gendered body: Practices of preschools. *American Sociological Review*, 63, 494–511.
- Mayo Clinic. (2018, February 20). *Anorexia nervosa*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anorexia-nervosa/symptoms-causes/syc-20353591>
- Mayo Clinic. (2018, May 10). *Bulimia nervosa*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bulimia/symptoms-causes/syc-20353615>
- McCarther, S. (2014a). Being careful with cueing, part 1: The pelvis, head, and neck. *Journal of Singing*, 71(1), 17-25.
- McCarther, S. (2014b). Being careful with cueing, part 2: The shoulder girdle and ribcage. *Journal of Singing*, 71(2), 147.
- McClary, S. (1990). Towards a feminist criticism of music. *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 10(2), 9-18.
- McCoy, S. J. (2012). *Your voice: An inside view*. Inside View Press.
- McGuire, J. K., Doty, J. L., Catalpa, J. M., & Ola, C. (2016). Body image in transgender young people: Findings from a qualitative, community-based study. *Body Image*, 18, 96-107.
- McKinney, J. C. (2005). *Diagnosis and correction of vocal faults: A manual for teachers of singing and for choir directors*. Waveland Press.
- Melnyk, S. E., Cash, T. F., & Janda, L. H. (2004). Body image ups and downs: Prediction of intra-individual level and variability of women's daily body image experiences. *Body Image*, 1(3), 225-235.
- Menzel, J. E., & Levine, M. P. (2011). Embodying experiences and the promotion of positive body image: The example of competitive athletics. In R. M. Calogero, S. Tantleff-Dunn, & J. K. Thompson (Eds.), *Self-objectification in women: Causes, consequences, and counteractions* (pp. 163–186). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12304-008>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. Landes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945)
- Mies, M. (1983). Towards a methodology for feminist research. In G. Bowles and R. Duelli Klein (Eds.), *Theories of Women's Studies* (pp. 117-139). Routledge.
- Miller, R. (1986). *The structure of singing: System and art in vocal technique*. Schirmer.
- Miller, R. (1996). *On the art of singing*. Oxford University Press.

- Milligan C., & Bartlett R. (2019). Solicited diary methods. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.) *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Springer.
- Moin, V., Duvdevany, I., & Mazor, D. (2009). Sexual identity, body image and life satisfaction among women with and without physical disability. *Sexuality and Disability, 27*(2), 83-95.
- Moliterno, M. (2008). YogaVoice: Balancing the physical instrument. *Journal of Singing, 65*(1), 45.
- Moreno-Domínguez, S., Raposo, T., & Elipe, P. (2019). Body image and sexual dissatisfaction: differences among heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian women. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 903-912. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00903>
- Morris, A. (2019). *The Politics of Weight*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moussaoui, R. (2018, November 1). *Star soprano warns of rampant body-shaming in the opera world*. Yahoo News. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/star-soprano-warns-rampant-body-shaming-opera-world-144947732.html>.
- Murnen, S. K., & Smolak, L. (2009). Are feminist women protected from body image problems? A meta-analytic review of relevant research. *Sex Roles, 60*(3-4), 186.
- Muscat, A. C., & Long, B. C. (2008). Critical comments about body shape and weight: Disordered eating of female athletes and sport participants. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 20*(1), 1-24.
- Mutale, G. J., Dunn, A. K., Stiller, J., & Larkin, R. (2016). Development of a body dissatisfaction scale assessment tool. *The New School Psychology Bulletin, 13*(2), 47-57.
- Muth, J. L., & Cash, T. F. (1997). Body-image attitudes: What difference does gender make? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 27*(16), 1438-1452.
- National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders. (2014). *Eating disorder statistics*. <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>.
- National Eating Disorders Collaboration. (n.d.). *Body image*. <https://www.nedc.com.au/eating-disorders/eating-disorders-explained/body-image/>.
- Nelson, M. C., Story, M., Larson, N. I., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Lytle, L. A. (2008). Emerging adulthood and college-aged youth: An overlooked age for weight-related behavior change. *Obesity, 16*(10), 2205-2211.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1990). *Sex differences in depression*. Stanford University Press.

- Noles, S. W., Cash, T. F., & Winstead, B. A. (1985). Body image, physical attractiveness, and depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 53*(1), 88.
- Noll, S. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). A Mediational model linking self-objectification, body shame, and disordered eating. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 22*(4), 623–636. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1998.tb00181.x>
- O’Bryan, J. (2015). “We ARE our instrument!”: Forming a singer identity. *Research Studies in Music Education, 37*(1), 123-137.
- Palaganas, E. C., Sanchez, M. C., Molintas, V. P., & Caricativo, R. D. (2017). Reflexivity in qualitative research: A journey of learning. *Qualitative Report, 22*(2), 426-438.
- Patai, D. (1994). When method becomes power. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 61-73). Routledge.
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Roberts, T. A. (1992). Toward a his and hers theory of emotion: Gender differences in visceral perception. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 11*(3), 199-212.
- Pentax Medical. (n.d.a). *Computerized Speech Lab (CSL™)*.
<https://www.pentaxmedical.com/pentax/en/99/1/Computerized-Speech-Lab-CSL>
- Pentax Medical. (n.d.b). *Phonatory Aerodynamic System (PAS): Model 6600*.
<https://www.pentaxmedical.com/pentax/en/99/1/Phonatory-Aerodynamic-System-PAS-Model-6600>
- Petro-Roy, J. (2016, December 4). Sucking in my stomach was sucking the life out of me. *Huffington Post*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sucking-in-my-stomach-was-sucking-the-life-out-of-me_b_8711730.
- Pettersen, V., & Bjørkøy, K. (2009). Consequences from emotional stimulus on breathing for singing. *Journal of Voice, 23*(3), 295-303.
- Phillips, K. A. (2009). *Understanding body dysmorphic disorder*. Oxford University Press.
- Phillips, K. A. (n.d.). *Who Gets BDD?* International OCD Foundation.
<https://bdd.iocdf.org/about-bdd/who-gets/>
- Pillow, W. S. (2010). Dangerous reflexivity: Rigour, responsibility and reflexivity in qualitative research. In P. Thompson and M. Walker (Eds.), *The Routledge doctoral student’s companion* (pp. 270-282). Routledge.
- Piran, N. (2016). Embodied possibilities and disruptions: The emergence of the experience of embodiment construct from qualitative studies with girls and women. *Body Image, 18*, 43-60.

- Pollatou, E., Bakali, N., Theodorakis, Y., & Goudas, M. (2010). Body image in female professional and amateur dancers. *Research in Dance Education, 11*(2), 131-137.
- Ponterotto, D. (2016). Resisting the male gaze: Feminist responses to the “normalization” of the female body in Western culture. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 17*(1), 133-151.
- Radell, S. A., Adame, D. D., & Cole, S. P. (2002). Effect of teaching with mirrors on body image and locus of control in women college ballet dancers. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 95*(3), 1239-1247.
- Radell, S. A., Adame, D. D., & Cole, S. P. (2004). The impact of mirrors on body image and classroom performance in female college ballet dancers. *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science, 8*(2), 47-52.
- Rakhkovskaya, L. M., & Warren, C. S. (2016). Sociocultural and identity predictors of body dissatisfaction in ethnically diverse college women. *Body Image, 16*, 32-40.
- r/AskWomen. (2017, October 24). *Is it true that most women suck in their gut/engage their core muscles all day? (i.e don't just relax their belly) Even when not wearing something revealing?* [Online forum post]. Reddit.https://www.reddit.com/r/AskWomen/comments/78h5uz/is_it_true_that_most_women_suck_in_their/.
- Recording Academy. (2020, January 27). *2020 GRAMMY Awards: Complete Winners List*. <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/news/2020-grammy-awards-complete-winners-list>
- Rodin, J., Silberstein, L., & Striegel-Moore, R. (1984). Women and weight: A normative discontent. *Nebraska symposium on motivation, 32*, 267-307.
- Rubinsky, V., Hosek, A. M., & Hudak, N. (2019). “It’s better to be depressed skinny than happy fat:” College women’s memorable body messages and their impact on body image, self-esteem, and rape myth acceptance. *Health Communication, 34*(13), 1555-1563.
- Ruffolo, J. S., Phillips, K. A., Menard, W., Fay, C., & Weisberg, R. B. (2006). Comorbidity of body dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders: severity of psychopathology and body image disturbance. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 39*(1), 11-19.
- Rumbach, A. F., Maddox, M., Hull, M., & Khidr, A. (2020). Laryngeal symptoms in weightlifting athletes. *Journal of Voice, 34*(6), 964-e1-964.e10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2019.06.004>
- Saguy, A. (2012). Why fat is a feminist issue. *Sex Roles, 66*(9-10), 600-607.

- Sampson, H., Bloor, M., & Fincham, B. (2008). A price worth paying? Considering the cost of reflexive research methods and the influence of feminist ways of doing. *Sociology*, *42*(5), 919-933.
- Sandgren, M. (2005). *Becoming and being an opera singer: Health, personality and skills* (Doctoral dissertation, Psykologiska institutionen).
- Şanlıer, N., Türközü, D., & Toka, O. (2016). Body image, food addiction, depression, and body mass index in university students. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, *55*(6), 491-507.
- Sassatelli, R. (2011). Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, gaze and technology in film culture. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *28*(5), 123-143.
- Sastre, A. (2014). Towards a radical body positive: Reading the online “body positive movement”. *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(6), 929-943.
- Sataloff, R. T. (2017). *Professional Voice: The Science and Art of Clinical Care*. Plural Publishing.
- Schaefer, L. M., Burke, N. L., Calogero, R. M., Menzel, J. E., Krawczyk, R., & Thompson, J. K. (2018). Self-objectification, body shame, and disordered eating: Testing a core mediational model of objectification theory among White, Black, and Hispanic women. *Body image*, *24*, 5-12.
- Scherer, K. R., Sundberg, J., Fantini, B., Trznadel, S., & Eyben, F. (2017). The expression of emotion in the singing voice: Acoustic patterns in vocal performance. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, *142*(4), 1805-1815.
- Schilder, P. (1935/1950). *The image and appearance of the human body*. International Universities Press.
- Shelton, L. (1997). Vocal problem or body block? A look at the psyche of the singer. *Journal of Singing*, *53*(5), 9-13, 16-18.
- Shpigelman, C. N., & HaGani, N. (2019). The impact of disability type and visibility on self-concept and body image: Implications for mental health nursing. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, *26*(3-4), 77-86.
- Sims, L. (2017). Teaching Lucas: A transgender student's vocal journey from soprano to tenor. *Journal of Singing*, *73*(4), 367.
- Singh, D. (1993). Adaptive significance of female physical attractiveness: Role of waist-to-hip ratio. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *65*, 293-307.

- Sinnamon, S., Moran, A., & O'Connell, M. (2012). Flow among musicians: Measuring peak experiences of student performers. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60(1), 6-25.
- Sjoerdsma, R. D. (2008). Gender specific. *Journal of Singing*, 64(4), 405.
- Smart, M. A. (Ed.). (2000). *Siren songs: Representations of gender and sexuality in opera*. Princeton University Press.
- Smink, F. R., Van Hoeken, D., & Hoek, H. W. (2012). Epidemiology of eating disorders: incidence, prevalence and mortality rates. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 14(4), 406-414.
- Smith, J. A. (1994). Towards reflexive practice: Engaging participants as co-researchers or co-analysts in psychological inquiry. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 4(4), 253-260.
- Smith, M. L., Telford, E., & Tree, J. J. (2019). Body image and sexual orientation: The experiences of lesbian and bisexual women. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 24(9), 1178-1190.
- Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2007). Feminism and body image. In V. Swami & A. Furnham (Eds.), *The body beautiful: Evolutionary and sociocultural perspectives* (pp. 236-258). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Snyder, R. C. (2008). What is third-wave feminism? A new directions essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34(1), 175-196.
- Soulliard, Z. A., Kauffman, A. A., Fitterman-Harris, H. F., Perry, J. E., & Ross, M. J. (2019). Examining positive body image, sport confidence, flow state, and subjective performance among student athletes and non-athletes. *Body Image*, 28, 93-100.
- Sowards, S. K., & Renegar, V. R. (2004). The rhetorical functions of consciousness-raising in third wave feminism. *Communication Studies*, 55(4), 535-552.
- Sports Illustrated. (n.d.). *Ashley Graham*. <https://swimsuit.si.com/swimsuit/model/ashley-graham>
- Striegel-Moore, R. H., & Cachelin, F. M. (2001). Etiology of eating disorders in women. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 29(5), 635-661.
- Sundberg, J. (1993). Breathing behavior during singing. *The NATS Journal*, 49(3), 4-9.
- Sundberg, J. (2018). The singing voice. In S. Frühholz & P. Belin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of voice perception* (pp. 117-142). Oxford University Press.

- Sutton-Williams, E. (2021, March 8). Juilliard must modernize, or it will disappear. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/juilliard-modernize-classical-music-education-1134208/>
- Swami, V., Tran, U. S., Stieger, S., & Voracek, M. (2015). Associations between women's body image and happiness: Results of the YouBeauty.com body image survey (YBIS). *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *16*(3), 705-718.
- Taleporos, G., & McCabe, M. P. (2002). Body image and physical disability—personal perspectives. *Social science & medicine*, *54*(6), 971-980.
- Taub, D. E., Fanflik, P. L., & McLorg, P. A. (2003). Body image among women with physical disabilities: Internalization of norms and reactions to nonconformity. *Sociological Focus*, *36*(2), 159-176.
- Thomas, E. V., Warren-Findlow, J., Webb, J. B., Quinlan, M. M., Laditka, S. B., & Reeve, C. L. (2019). "It's very valuable to me that I appear capable": A qualitative study exploring relationships between body functionality and appearance among women with visible physical disabilities. *Body Image*, *30*, 81-92.
- Thompson, C. M., & Zaitchik, S. T. (2012). Struggling with the freshman fifteen: College students' recollections of parents' memorable messages about weight. *Kaleidoscope*, *11*, 39-58.
- Thompson, J. K., Heinberg, L. J., Altabe, M., & Tantleff-Dunn, S. (1999). *Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image disturbance*. American Psychological Association.
- Tiggemann, M., & Lynch, J. E. (2001). Body image across the life span in adult women: The role of self-objectification. *Developmental Psychology*, *37*(2), 243-253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.2.243>
- Tomiyama, A. J., Epel, E. S., McClatchey, T. M., Poelke, G., Kemeny, M. E., McCoy, S. K., & Daubenmier, J. (2014). Associations of weight stigma with cortisol and oxidative stress independent of adiposity. *Health Psychology*, *33*(8), 862.
- Tomlinson, S. R. (2008). *Suck your stomach in & put some color on: What southern mamas tell their daughters that the rest of y'all should know too*. Berkley Books.
- Titze, I. R., & Abbott, K. V. (2012). *Vocology: The science and practice of voice habilitation*. National Center for Voice and Speech.
- Tylka, T. L. (2019). Beyond 'truly exceptional': A tribute to Thomas F. Cash, an innovative leader in the body image field. *Body Image*, *31*, 191-197.

- Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). What is and what is not positive body image? Conceptual foundations and construct definition. *Body Image, 14*, 118-129.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books.
- Vennard, W. (1967). *Singing: the mechanism and the technic*. Carl Fischer, LLC.
- Viera, M. (2018, September 5). 10 body positive shows you should watch. *Teen Vogue*. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/body-positive-shows>
- VoceVista. (2021). *VoceVista video software*. <http://www.vocevista.com/>
- Walker, G., & Commander, C. (2017). The emotionally prepared singer. *Journal of Singing, 73*(3), 261.
- Watson, L. B., Lewis, J. A., & Moody, A. T. (2019). A sociocultural examination of body image among Black women. *Body Image, 31*, 280-287.
- Weiss, S. (2019, January 25). *I spent a week naked in public without sucking in my stomach*. Ravishly. <https://ravishly.com/i-spent-week-naked-public-without-sucking-my-stomach>.
- Wiederman, M. W. (2000). Women's body image self-consciousness during physical intimacy with a partner. *Journal of Sex Research, 37*(1), 60-68.
- Wilkinson, S. (1999). How useful are focus groups in feminist research. In R. Barbour & J. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Developing focus group research: Politics, theory and practice* (pp. 64-78). Sage.
- Williams, E. F., Cash, T. F., & Santos, M. T. (2004). Positive and negative body image: Precursors, correlates, and consequences. *Paper presented at the 38th annual Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy*.
- Williamson, I., Leeming, D., Lyttle, S., & Johnson, S. (2015). Evaluating the audio-diary method in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Journal, 15*(1), 20-34.
- Wilson, V. (1997). Focus groups: A useful qualitative method for educational research? *British Educational Research Journal, 23*(2), 209-224.
- Winter, V. R., Danforth, L. K., Landor, A., & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, D. (2019). Toward an understanding of racial and ethnic diversity in body image among women. *Social Work Research, 43*(2), 69-80.
- Wood-Barcalow, N. L., Tylka, T. L., & Augustus-Horvath, C. L. (2010). "But I like my body": Positive body image characteristics and a holistic model for young-adult women. *Body Image, 7*(2), 106-116.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: My Body, My Instrument: How Body Image Impacts Vocal Performance in Undergraduate Women

Principal Researcher: Kirsten S. Brown, ksb2177@tc.columbia.edu, (386) 682-0711

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in this research study called “My Body, My Instrument: How Body Image Impacts Vocal Performance in Undergraduate Women.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are an undergraduate vocal performance major, self-identify as a woman, and have completed at least one year of private vocal study. Approximately ten people will participate in this study and it will take approximately 10 hours of your time to complete over the course of one month.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to understand how one’s body image may affect her ability to perform as a classical singer.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, the primary researcher will ask you to participate in a focus group, keep an audio diary about your experiences of singing and body image, and participate in an individual interview.

You will first be asked to participate in a focus group run by the primary researcher where singers like yourself will discuss their experiences with singing and body image. This session will occur online via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded. The recording will be deleted once it has been transcribed. The transcription will use pseudonyms. Your identity will be known to other participants in the focus group. Everyone will be asked not to discuss what is being spoken about outside of the group but it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality. Participants will receive a summary of the content of the discussion for their review to ensure an accurate characterization. This focus group session will take about two hours.

You will then be asked to keep an audio diary of your experiences with singing and body image over the course of one month. You’ll be asked to record your thoughts during or after a practice session twice a week, after each lesson you have during the one-month period, and after each performance you have during the one-month period. Prompts will be provided for you to respond to in each scenario. Audio recordings can be as short or as

long as you feel is necessary to fully respond to the prompt and capture your experience. Audio recordings will be shared with the principal researcher. Once the recordings have been transcribed they will be deleted. The transcriptions will use pseudonyms.

During the individual interview you will be asked to co-analyze with the researcher your experiences in recording the audio diary. This may include very personal questions about your body image and thoughts and feelings regarding your body, appearance, and singing. This interview will be audio and video recorded. After the recording is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes and will be completed remotely via Zoom. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. It might be difficult to discuss your body image or your singing with the researcher or other participants. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might be shared outside of this study. Your information will be kept confidential by the researcher, although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for information shared in the focus group.

Examining one's body image can be difficult. If you feel you are experiencing body image-related distress during or after this study, please reach out to the appropriate mental health resource listed below:

Rider University Counseling Center (Westminster Choir College Students Only):

<https://www.rider.edu/student-life/health-wellness/counseling-services>

Stetson University Counseling Center (Stetson University Students Only):

<https://www.stetson.edu/administration/student-counseling/>

National Eating Disorders Association Helpline:

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/help-support/contact-helpline>

(800) 931-2237

The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of vocal pedagogy by helping voice teachers understand this potentially important factor in one's performance ability and vocal development.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the focus group, the month-long diary study, and the final individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The primary researcher will keep all electronic or digital information (including audio and video recordings) on a computer that is password protected or in a password protected file in the cloud. What is on the audio and video recordings will be written down and the recordings will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded **you will not be able to participate** in this research study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

Signature

_____ **I do not** consent to be recorded

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written, video and audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written, video and audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ No _____
 Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Kirsten Brown, at ksb2177@tc.columbia.edu, or at (386) 682-0711. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Randall Allsup, at allsup@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:**Print name:** _____**Date:** _____**Signature:**

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol

The focus group will take place over Zoom and will be recorded through Zoom.

Introduction

- Let them know that I'm about to start the recording, gain verbal consent from all co-researchers to record.
- Introduce myself, invite co-researchers to share their first names and voice type
- Introduce topic, body image and singing
- Thank them for participating in my dissertation research

Guidelines

- No right or wrong answers, I'm interested in your unique perspective
- One person should speak at a time, both out of respect for all co-researchers and to keep the recording clear
- My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion, but you should feel free to talk with each other
- Everyone will have a chance to speak. If you haven't entered the discussion, I may invite your input. You don't have to share, but I'll make sure you have the chance.
- Other important topics may come up during our discussion. In an effort to stay on topic, I will list these topics in a shared document that we, as individuals or as a group, may return to later, and then steer the discussion back to our topic.
- The results of our conversation will be summarized and you will receive a copy for your review. If you feel our conversation has been mischaracterized or if important details have been missed, please let me know.

Opening Questions

- Tell us about yourself as a singer!
 - What genres have you sung in?
 - How long have you been seriously studying singing?
 - What singing experiences have been most meaningful to you?
- How do you feel about your voice?
 - How would you describe your voice?
 - What do or don't you like about your voice?
- How do you feel about your body?
 - How would you describe your body image?
 - What do or don't you like about your body?

Body Image Self Assessments

During this portion, each co-researcher will take a moment to complete each self assessment measure, and then the group will discuss their results after each test. Tests will be distributed in the moment via a Google form. Results won't be collected by the researcher, these are just for co-researchers to self-assess.

These tests are taken from Thomas Cash's *Body Image Workbook* (2008). Cash has been a pioneer and leader of the body image field for decades: "[Cash] laid the foundation for how to study body image: how to measure it, how to conceptualize it, and how to improve it (Tylka, 2019, p. 1). Reviews of his Body Image Workbook written by professionals in psychiatric fields routinely characterize it as well-researched, easy to understand, and most importantly, helpful to readers (Bassesen, 2008; Broniarczyk, Student & Knous, 1998; Kent Crossroads Consumer Review Committee, 1999). The same reviews indicate that this material is flexible and can efficiently be partially employed or revised and has been successful with groups.

Cash's workbook is designed to provide an introduction to the concept of body image and offers multiple validated measures of body image self-assessment. These measures will not be used as data, but rather as a means for each co-researcher to gain an understanding of her body image, its components, and its influences. They will also be revised to include questions about singing and performing contexts to better prepare co-researchers for the specific awareness required during the following portion of data collection. Feminist researchers have often revised surveys and other quantitative measures to better suit co-researchers and research objectives (Cook & Fonow, 1986).

- [The Body Image Evaluation Test](#)
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What, if anything, surprised you?
- [The Body Image Thoughts Test](#)
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What, if anything, surprised you?
 - Do any of those thoughts connect to your singing? Are there other thoughts you have about your body that connect to your singing?
- [The Body Image Distress Test](#) (Items for singing situations added)
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What, if anything, surprised you?
 - How do your responses about singing situations relate to your responses about everyday situations?
- [The Appearance Importance Test](#)
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What, if anything, surprised you?
 - Do these statements relate to your singing? How?
- [The Body Image Coping Test](#)
 - How did that make you feel?
 - What, if anything, surprised you?
 - Do your responses relate to your singing? Do your habits change or stay the same when it comes to your singing?
- [The Body Image Quality of Life Test](#)

- How did that make you feel?
- What, if anything, surprised you?
- What about your singing? How would you answer that?

Post-Assessment Questions

- Why do you think your body image is the way it is?
- How do you think your experiences as a singer have affected your body image?
 - How have your voice teachers, directors, etc asked you to think about your body?
 - What comments have they made about your body?
 - Do you remember any specific negative or positive body-related encounters with musical authority figures? How did that affect you?
- What kind of thoughts and feelings do you have about your body when you're singing?
 - How do those thoughts affect your performance? Your technique?
 - How do you cope with those thoughts?
 - What thoughts about your body do you have during practice?
 - Lessons?
 - Performances?

Closing

- Thank co-researchers
- Clarify upcoming data collection procedures
 - Where prompts are located
 - How to record audio diaries
 - When and how often to record audio diaries
 - How to share audio diaries
 - Would any other format for prompts be helpful?

The Body Image Evaluation Test

“On this first self-test, you will discover your *evaluative body image*. This refers to how you feel about your appearance in general as well as about particular physical characteristics or features.

Put a check mark in the column that expresses how dissatisfied or satisfied you are with each characteristic listed.” (Cash, 2008, p. 29)

Physical Characteristic	Very Dissatisfied	Mostly Dissatisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1. Overall Appearance				

2. Face (facial features, complexion)				
3. Hair (color, thickness, texture)				
4. Lower torso (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)				
5. Midtorso (waist, stomach)				
6. Upper torso (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms)				
7. Muscle tone				
8. Weight				
9. Height				
10. Any other physical characteristic that you dislike? _____				

The Body Image Thoughts Test

“In the course of day-to-day life, thoughts about your appearance may run through your mind. This self-test lists some of these thoughts. Simply read each thought and decide how often, if at all, it has occurred to you in your daily life during the past month. For each thought, place a checkmark in the column that indicates how often the thought has occurred. In making this decision, don’t take any listed thought too literally. Your own thoughts might be similar in content, but consist of different words. For example, you may not have the identical thought ‘I am unattractive,’ but you may have equivalent thoughts like ‘I’m ugly,’ or ‘I look awful.’” (Cash, 2008, p. 30)

Body Image Thoughts	Rarely or Never	Once Every Several Days	Daily or Almost Daily
1. Why can’t I ever look good?			
2. My life is lousy because of how I look.			
3. My looks make me a nobody.			

4. They (other people) look better than I do.			
5. It's just not fair that I look the way I do.			
6. With my looks, nobody is ever going to love me.			
7. I wish I were better-looking.			
8. I wish I looked like someone else.			
9. They (other people) won't like me because of how I look.			
10. Something about my looks has to change.			
11. How I look is ruining everything for me.			
12. They (other people) are noticing what's wrong with my looks.			
13. They (other people) are thinking I'm unattractive.			
14. My clothes don't look good on me.			
15. I wish they (other people) wouldn't look at me.			
16. I can't stand my appearance anymore.			
17. They (other people) are judging me because of what I look like.			
18. There's nothing I can do to look good.			
19. I can't do that (something you're invited to or expected to do) because of my looks.			
20. I've got to look just right to do that (something you're invited to or expected to do).			

The Body Image Distress Test

“Negative body image motions, such as anxiety, disgust, despondency, anger, frustration, envy, shame, or self-consciousness, crop up in different situations for different people. In the next self-test, you are asked to think about occasions when you've been in each of twenty situations. Place a check mark in the column to indicate how often you've had negative emotions about your appearance in each situation. Of course, there may be some

listed situations that you haven't encountered or some that you avoided. If so, simply indicate how often you probably would have had distressing emotions if you had been in those situations." (Cash, 2008, p. 32).

I have altered this measure to include situations relevant to singers. I have also changed the evaluation categories, as I believe the categories printed in the source (rarely or never, once every several days, daily or almost daily) are confusing when applied to this set of prompts and may be an error, as those terms were used in the previous test. I have replaced these categories with "rarely or never," "occasionally," or "frequently."

I have also altered this measure to utilize more inclusive language with respect to gender.

Body Image Situations	Rarely or Never	Occasionally	Frequently
1. At social gatherings where I know few people			
2. When I look at myself in the mirror			
3. When people see me before I've "fixed up"			
4. When I am with attractive people whose gender expression is similar to my own.			
5. When I am with attractive people whose gender expression is different from mine.			
6. When someone looks at parts of my appearance that I dislike			
7. When I look at my nude body in the mirror			
8. When I am trying on new clothes at the store			
9. After I have eaten a full meal			
10. When I see attractive people on television or in magazines			
11. When I get on the scale to weigh myself			
12. When anticipating or having sexual relations			
13. When I'm already in a bad mood about			

something else			
14. When the topic of conversation pertains to physical appearance			
15. When someone comments unfavorably on my appearance			
16. When I see myself in a photograph or video			
17. When I think about what I wish I looked like			
18. When I think about how I may look in the future			
19. When I am with a certain person			
20. During certain recreational activities			
21. While I'm practicing			
22. During my lessons			
23. Before a performance			
24. While performing with others			
25. While performing by myself			

The Appearance Importance Test

“People have various beliefs and experiences about the meaning and importance of their physical appearance. Some of these beliefs are reflected in the statements in this next self-test. Read each statement and decide whether it is personally mostly true or mostly false for you. Record your answers with a check mark in the appropriate column beside each statement” (Cash, 2008, p. 34).

Experiences and Beliefs About Your Appearance	Mostly True	Mostly False
1. When I see good-looking people, I wonder about how my own looks measure up.		
2. When something makes me feel good or bad about my looks,		

I tend to dwell on it.		
3. If I like how I look on a given day, it's easy to feel happy about other things.		
4. When I meet people for the first time, I wonder what they think about how I look.		
5. In my everyday life, lots of things happen that make me think about what I look like.		
6. If I dislike how I look on a given day, it's hard to feel happy about other things.		
7. I fantasize about what it would be like to be better-looking than I am.		
8. By controlling my appearance, I can control many of the social and emotional events in my life.		
9. My appearance is responsible for much of what's happened to me in my life.		
10. I often compare my appearance to that of other people.		
11. If somebody had a negative reaction to what I look like, it would bother me.		
12. My physical appearance has a big influence on my life.		

The Body Image Coping Test

“In the course of everyday life, there are situations and events that can negatively affect our body image. These situations and events are called *body image threats or challenges*, because they threaten or challenge our ability to feel okay about how we look. Listed below are some of the ways that people may try to cope with body image threats or challenges. For each item, think about how much it characterizes how you usually cope or probably would cope with an event or situation that poses a threat or a challenge to your feelings about your body image. Indicate with a check mark whether each coping reaction is or is not characteristic of you. It doesn't matter how helpful or unhelpful your ways of coping are. Don't answer based on how you wish you reacted. Just be truthful” (Cash, 2008, p. 36).

Coping Reactions	Mostly Is Like Me	Mostly Is Not Like Me
------------------	-------------------	-----------------------

1.	I spend extra time trying to fix what I don't like about my looks.		
2.	I think about how I could cover up what's troublesome about my looks.		
3.	I do many things to try to look more attractive.		
4.	I spend a lot of time in front of the mirror.		
5.	I think about what i should do to change my looks.		
6.	I fantasize about looking different.		
7.	I seek reassurance about my looks from other people.		
8.	I compare my appearance to that of physically attractive people.		
9.	I make a lot of special efforts to look my best.		
10.	I make a special effort to hide or cover up what's troublesome about my looks.		
11.	I try to tune out my thoughts and feelings.		
12.	I eat something to help me deal with the situation.		
13.	I avoid looking at myself in the mirror.		
14.	I tell myself that I am helpless to do anything about the situation.		
15.	I withdraw and interact less with others.		
16.	I make no attempt to cope or deal with the situation.		
17.	I try to ignore the situation and my feelings.		
18.	I react by overreacting.		
19.	I consciously do something that might make me feel good about myself as a person.		
20.	I remind myself of my good qualities.		
21.	I tell myself that I'm just being irrational about my looks.		
22.	I tell myself that the situation will pass.		

23.	I try to figure out why I am challenged or threatened by the situation.		
24.	I tell myself that I am probably just overreacting to the situation.		
25.	I remind myself that I will feel better after a while.		
26.	I tell myself that there are more important things than what I look like.		
27.	I tell myself that I probably look better than I think I do.		
28.	I react by being especially patient with myself.		
29.	I tell myself that the situation is not that important.		

The Body Image Quality of Life Test

“People differ in how their body image experiences affect other aspects of their lives. Body image may have positive effects, negative effects, or no effect at all. The various ways that your own body image might influence your life are listed below. For each item, place a check mark in a column to indicate how your feelings about your appearance affect that aspect of your life. Before answering each item, think carefully about the answer that is most accurate about how your body image usually affects you” (Cash, 2008, p. 38).

I have altered this measure to utilize more inclusive language with respect to gender.

Aspects of your life	Mostly a Negative Effect	No Effect	Mostly a Positive Effect
1. My basic feelings about myself—feelings of personal adequacy and self-worth			
2. My feelings about my adequacy as, or ability to conform to, my desired gender expression.			
3. My interactions with people who share my gender, or have a similar gender expression.			

4. My interactions with people who have a different gender expression.			
5. My experiences when I meet new people.			
6. My experiences at work or at school.			
7. My relationships with friends.			
8. My relationships with family members.			
9. My day-to-day emotions.			
10. My satisfaction with my life in general.			
11. My feelings of acceptability as a sexual partner.			
12. My enjoyment of my sex life.			
13. My ability to control what and how much I eat			
14. My ability to control my weight			
15. My activities for physical exercise			
16. My willingness to do things that might call attention to my appearance.			
17. My daily grooming activities (i.e. getting dressed and physically ready for the day)			
18. How confident I feel in my everyday life			
19. How happy I feel in my everyday life			

Appendix C

Diary Study Protocol

Co-researchers will be asked to record semi-structured audio diary entries over the course of one month. Semi-structured prompts help to maintain focus on the research aims and avoid co-researcher anxiety about what is expected of them or what they should say (Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). Co-researchers will also be encouraged to include anything outside of the prompts that they feel is relevant to the research. Prompts will be provided via a shared Google Doc and/or by any other means that co-researchers suggest would be helpful. Co-researchers will be asked to record entries during or after practice sessions, after lessons, and after performances. During a month long span, each co-researcher will likely have multiple practice sessions, four lessons, and at least one performance. The use of audio diaries will be encouraged, particularly for practice sessions, so that co-researchers can easily record their thoughts in the moment ((Williamson, Leeming, Lyttle & Johnson, 2015). Co-researchers can use their cell phones and any audio recording app that they like. Audio recordings will be submitted to the researcher as soon as possible after they are recorded via email or a shared GoogleDrive file folder.

Co-researchers will be asked to record audio diaries during or after their practice sessions twice a week over the one-month duration of the study. The selected practice sessions should be at least half an hour in length, and serve the purpose of routine practice, as opposed to warming up for a particular event. For those entries, they will be provided with the following prompts:

- Please state the date, time, and type of diary entry (practice, lesson, or performance)
- How do you feel about your practice session? For example:
 - Do you feel you were productive?
 - Do you feel like you made vocal progress?
- How often did you think about your body during your practice session?
- How would you characterize the majority of your thoughts about your body? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
- What specific thoughts did you have about your body during your practice?
- What prompted those thoughts?
- How did those thoughts make you feel?
- How did you deal with those thoughts?
- How did those thoughts affect your singing?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

They will also be asked to record audio diaries after every voice lesson they have during the one-month period of the study. They will be asked to record their thoughts as soon after their lesson as possible. They will be provided with the following prompts:

- Please state the date, time, and type of diary entry (practice, lesson, or performance)
- How do you feel about your lesson?
- What was the focus of this lesson?
- How often did you think about your body during your lesson?
- How would you characterize the majority of your thoughts about your body? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
- What specific thoughts did you have about your body during your lesson?
- Did your teacher address your body during this lesson? If so, how?
 - How did that make you feel?
 - Do you think your teacher was aware of your thoughts and feelings about your body? Why or why not?
- How did thoughts about your body affect your singing during your lesson?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

They will also be asked to record audio diaries after any performances or auditions they have during the one-month period of the study. Some co-researchers may not have performances or auditions during this time. They will be asked to record their thoughts as soon after their performance or audition as possible. They will be provided with the following prompts:

- Please state the date, time, and type of diary entry (practice, lesson, or performance/audition)
- What was this performance/audition?
- How do you feel about your performance/audition?
- How often did you think about your body before your performance/audition?
 - "Before your performance/audition" is defined as the period of time directly preceding your performance/audition wherein you were actively preparing, mentally or physically, to perform.
 - For example: warming up, getting dressed/putting on makeup, waiting for your turn, etc.
- How often did you think about your body during your performance/audition?
- How would you characterize the majority of your thoughts about your body? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
- What specific thoughts did you have about your body before or during your performance/audition?
- How did your thoughts about your body affect your performance/audition?
- Did you experience performance anxiety? If so, how? How intense was it?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Appendix D

Interview Protocols

1. Dana Interview Protocol:

Topic	Questions
Introduction and context setting	<p>Hello! Thank you so much for taking the time, once again, to chat with me. This is the last part of the study, and I am endlessly grateful for your participation and dedication thus far.</p> <p>I'm going to start recording, as long as that's okay with you?</p> <p>So I'm hoping this interview will be a chance for us to analyze together your experience with the audio diaries and the focus group, and to see what we can learn about your body image and how it might interact with your singing from that experience.</p>
Co-researcher's insights	<p>Thank you so much again for doing those diaries for four weeks! I've been listening and transcribing them as they came in, and I have some ideas I'm excited to talk with you about, but before we talk about what I thought, I'd love to know what you thought.</p> <p>What's top of mind for you about this research experience?</p> <p>What was it like to do these audio diaries for four weeks?</p> <p>Did anything interesting happen? What?</p> <p>I'd love for us to think about, and see if we can come up with together, what your big takeaways from this experience are. I don't expect you to have an answer to that question ready to go, but let's just talk about what you noticed and learned and see if we can figure that out together.</p> <p>What stuck out to you about this experience?</p> <p>Did you notice any trends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any thoughts that kept coming back? <p>Is there anything that you feel like you've learned? What?</p>

	<p>Is there anything about your experience that doesn't make sense, or seems complicated? What?</p> <p>So now that we've talked a little more, what do you think your big takeaways might be?</p>
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (my analysis)</p>	<p>So there are some other things about your diaries that stuck out to me.</p> <p>You mentioned your clothing pretty often, and you talked about it in really different ways. There were a couple of moments that I found really interesting, and I'd love for you to tell me a little more about it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first one was from that one practice session that didn't quite go your way. You said, "Today I'm wearing t-shirt, jeans, sandals. Comfy chill outfit. Did not try to dress up today and I really made myself vulnerable by choosing a tighter fitting t-shirt because usually i like to wear loose clothes, at least for blouses, I definitely don't like them to be touching my body." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Talk to me about this idea... ○ Can you say a little more about what you meant by making yourself vulnerable? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable to what? • The second one was from one of your lesson diaries. You said, "I thought about my body a lot, I know I look large in the outfit I'm wearing, but I also like the outfit I'm wearing? I don't know, it's confusing. It's kind of like an outfit where its like, "yes, she is a plus size girl. Got it, great, good." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to me about this idea. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can you share more about why that was confusing? • Can you talk to me about how your clothing might affect your singing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What about the other way around? <p>I heard the idea of "focus" in your diaries, and that thoughts about your body shifted focus or distracted you from singing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you help me flesh this out? What normally happens when you're distracted? Any examples of extremes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How distracted were you? Did you stop singing? Did you have to re-do sections? • When and how did you notice this happening? • Did this come up more in practice rooms or in your lessons? Frequency/intensity? Why?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You had one practice session where you said you felt like you really overcame that. How did you do that? • How does your voice react to all these thoughts about your body? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What, if anything, changed in your singing when you felt that? <p>Something you said in one of your lesson diaries really caught my attention, and I'd love to talk more about it. It was in your last lesson diary, and you seemed really happy, like you had a good lesson. You said that you didn't think about your body at all, and also that your teacher did some exercises with you that involved your body, like posture stuff, stretching to get you out of your hips, putting your hand on your stomach for breathing. And talking about those exercises you said, "I didn't think about my body then. You know my body was there obviously, but I wasn't thinking about it in the way that I normally do, like "Oh, people are looking at me, how do I look?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So how were you thinking about your body? Or feeling about your body? • What made that experience different? • You said you didn't think about your body, but thinking about your posture and your breathing seems like thinking about your body. Why do you think those two things are different? <p>You mentioned in the focus group that your body image has improved in the last year or so because you've found supportive friends and a supportive partner. Do you think your voice teacher has any influence on the way you think and/or feel about your body? Why?</p>
Relationship between body image and singing (co-researcher's views)	<p>So you've been thinking about your body image and your singing a lot over the past four weeks, do they seem connected? What makes you say that?</p> <p>If so, how does that connection work? Can you give examples?</p> <p>What does the phrase "Your body is your instrument" mean to you?</p>
Theory testing	<p>So, in the spirit of co-analysis, I've got an idea, a little bit of a theory that has been noodling around in my brain, and I'd love to get your take on it, see if it resonates with you or not, or if parts of it resonate.</p>

	<p>So the idea is that those of us who are women singers might experience a kind of separation between the body that we use for singing and our woman's body. What do you think about that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does that make sense? • Does that resonate for you? Partly or not at all? • What about your experience supports or doesn't support that idea?
Closing and thank you	<p>So, if you can believe it, this is the last part of this research project! Is there anything else you want to share about this experience?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to make sure gets included in my analysis?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want me to know?</p> <p>So as for data collection, we're done! You'll hear from me probably a couple more times once I have some things written up so you get a final say on what I write about you. It might not be for a few weeks, but please keep an eye out. I want to thank you so much again for all the time and effort you have put into this project. If there's ever anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be eternally grateful for all of your help.</p>

2. Karina Interview Protocol:

Topic	Questions
Introduction and context setting	<p>Hello! Thank you so much for taking the time, once again, to chat with me. This is the last part of the study, and I am endlessly grateful for your participation and dedication thus far.</p> <p>So I'm hoping this interview will be a chance for us to analyze together your experience with the audio diaries, and to see what we can learn about your body image and how it might interact with your singing from that experience.</p>
Co-researcher's insights	<p>Thank you so much again for doing those diaries for four weeks! I've been listening and transcribing them as they came in, and I have some ideas I'm excited to talk with you about, before we talk about what I thought, I'd love to know what you thought.</p> <p>What's top of mind for you about this research experience?</p> <p>What was it like to do these audio diaries for four weeks?</p>

	<p>Did anything interesting happen? What?</p> <p>I'd love for us to think about, and see if we can come up with together, what your big takeaways from this experience are. I don't expect you to have an answer to that question ready to go, but let's just talk about what you noticed and learned and see if we can figure that out together.</p> <p>What stuck out to you about this experience?</p> <p>Did you notice any trends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any thoughts that kept coming back? <p>Is there anything that you feel like you've learned? What?</p> <p>Is there anything about your experience that doesn't make sense, or seems complicated? What?</p> <p>So now that we've talked a little more, what do you think your big takeaways might be?</p>
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (my analysis)</p>	<p>So there are some other things about your diaries and your responses in the focus group that stuck out to me.</p> <p>So in the focus group, you talked about appreciating your body for what it does for you. You said, "I can do all the things that I want to do and need to do and she gets me around." You said something similar about your voice, when I asked you what you liked about your voice you said "it just kind of does exactly what I need it to do most of the time."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you talk more about that? • Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm interpreting a sense of appreciation for both your body and your voice. Does that seem fair? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, do you feel like there is a connection, similarity, relationship, there between your feelings about your body and your voice? • How do you think that affects you? As a singer? As a woman? • Can you talk to me about how you developed this perspective? <p>So, in the focus group, you talked about liking your voice because it "matches your body" and you said "the big wagnerian body type. I kind of feel like I fit the singer image in that way."</p>

- So I interpreted that, and I would love for you to correct me here, as a way that outside expectations for your body as a singer have affected you positively. Would you agree with that? Why or why not?

You also talked about being typecast, that women with your body are usually the mother or the funny character. You also shared your frustration about expectations for singers in general, with the fake eyelashes and the fake fingernails.

- I interpreted those statements, again correct me please, as ways that outside expectations for your body as a singer have affected you negatively. Would you agree with that? Why or why not?

So there's a little bit of tension there - sometimes these outside expectations are positive for you, sometimes negative. Can you talk a little bit about that?

- Why do you think it changes?

So one particular moment from one of your practice diaries really struck me. You said, "I didn't really think about my body that much during this session. I'm in a practice room here, I've got that full length mirror to my left, so it was more about okay let's look at my posture." So why do you think focusing on posture didn't immediately register as thinking about your body?

From your diaries and what you said in the focus group, it seems like there's some separation from singing and your body image. You said:

- nobody looks pretty when they're singing, nobody. If you're trying to look pretty when you're singing you're not going to sing well and I feel like the singing well is more important than the looking good.
- But when I sing, that's my comfort zone. That's where I'm happy. That's where I'm in my groove and however I might happen to feel about my body that day. Let's say I'm not having a body positive day, when I sing. I'm in my happy place. I'm in my zone.

Would you agree with my previous statement?

Has that separation been intentional?

Has that separation been helpful?

You also said in the focus group that you think of singing as "from here up." Why do you say that?

You mentioned in the focus group that you intentionally surround yourself with people who give you positive messages about your body. Do you think your voice teacher has any

	<p>influence on the way you think and/or feel about your body? Why?</p>
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (co-researcher's views)</p>	<p>So you've been thinking about your body image and your singing a lot over the past four weeks, do they seem connected? What makes you say that?</p> <p>If so, how does that connection work? Can you give examples?</p> <p>What does the phrase "Your body is your instrument" mean to you?</p>
<p>Theory testing</p>	<p>So, in the spirit of co-analysis, I've got an idea, a little bit of a theory that has been noodling around in my brain, and I'd love to get your take on it, see if it resonates with you or not, or if parts of it resonate.</p> <p>So the idea is that those of us who are women singers might experience a kind of separation between the body that we use for singing and our woman's body. What do you think about that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does that make sense? • Does that resonate for you? Partly or not at all? • What about your experience supports or doesn't support that idea?
<p>Closing and thank you</p>	<p>So, if you can believe it, this is the last part of this research project! Is there anything else you want to share about this experience?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to make sure gets included in my analysis?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want me to know?</p> <p>I want to thank you so much again for all the time and effort you have put into this project. We are all done! But if there's ever anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be eternally grateful for all of your help.</p>

3. Aksha Interview Protocol

Topic	Questions
Introduction and context setting	<p>Hello! Thank you so much for taking the time, once again, to chat with me. This is the last part of the study, and I am endlessly grateful for your participation and dedication thus far.</p> <p>I'm going to start recording, as long as that's okay with you?</p> <p>So I'm hoping this interview will be a chance for us to analyze together your experience with the audio diaries and the focus group, and to see what we can learn about your body image and how it might interact with your singing from that experience.</p>
Co-researcher's insights	<p>So I've transcribed your diaries and the focus group, and I have some ideas I'm excited to talk with you about, but before we talk about what I thought, I'd love to know what you thought. I'm gonna ask you a few specific questions, and if I ask a question and your genuine answer is "no" or you don't feel like you have an answer, that's totally okay.</p> <p>What's top of mind for you about this research experience?</p> <p>What was it like to do the audio diaries?</p> <p>Was there anything in particular that made them difficult to do?</p> <p>Is there anything that you feel like you've learned from participating in this research so far? What?</p> <p>Trends?</p> <p>Is there anything about your experience that doesn't make sense, or seems complicated? What?</p> <p>Do you have anything in mind that you might take away from this experience?</p>
Relationship between body image and singing (my analysis)	<p>So there are some other things from the focus group and your diaries that stuck out to me. My goal is to try to understand as best I can how you think and feel about these ideas, so I'm hoping you can help me get inside your head so to speak.</p> <p>In your second practice diary you said: "the experimentation that I worked with was understanding my body a little bit when I was doing my practice. So when I did my practice I felt like I was able to understand who I am as an artist and as a person."</p>

- What was the experimentation that you did to understand your body?
- How did that help you understand who you are?

In the focus group, I asked you how your singing has affected your body image and you said, “they’re practically the same.” And you said that when people compliment your singing it makes you feel good about your body. Can you tell me more about that relationship?

- Does one impact the other?
- What does it mean that they’re “the same?”
- How do you think that mindset affects your singing?

You also said, “I wish I was as good looking as others in terms of singing because others have more powerful voices than I do naturally. It’s just how their bodies are built and how their instruments are built.” Can you tell me more about that idea?

- So what I took from that was ...

Another thing that piqued my interest was when you said, “I should have more stamina and I should lose weight. Just to project the sound a little bit further, you know, and just support the sound more” Talk to me about that.

- Why do you think losing weight would help your singing?

You also talked about looking at yourself when you’re singing. You said, “I just feel like if I’m looking at myself, I look at my shape of my belly and I always think to myself, why do I look like that” but you also said that for your singing technique you have to keep your belly expanded. Is it hard to do that when you don’t like the way you look?

Do you think about your body differently when you sing in the Indian style or the western classical style?

In the focus group, you said “I was severely bullied a lot for my appearance as a kid, and for how I socialized with other people. If they said I was annoying, I would stand my ground and just tell them, this is who I am. This is what I was born and diagnosed with” Do you mind sharing what you meant by that?

- Are you comfortable sharing what it is you’re diagnosed with?
- Do you think that has affected your body image?

	<p>In the focus group, you talked about being judged by other people, and that seems unfair to you. Do you ever feel judged for your singing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you ever feel judged for the way you look? • Are those feelings similar? • Do you feel judged for the way you look when you're singing? • How does that affect your singing? <p>You mentioned in your diaries that you don't have a mirror in your current practice space. Do you think you would think about your body more if you were in a normal practice room with a mirror?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why or why not? • Can you think of anything else about your body image and singing that's different since you're all online right now? <p>In the focus group you talked a little bit about your family and how they've affected your body image. Can you say more about that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You also mentioned your guru, your Indian singing teacher. Do you feel like they have had any impact on your body image? • What about your teacher at Westminster?
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (co-researcher's views)</p>	<p>So I've asked you to think about your body image and your singing a lot over the past four weeks, do they seem connected? What makes you say that?</p> <p>If so, how does that connection work? Can you give examples?</p> <p>What does the phrase "Your body is your instrument" mean to you?</p>
<p>Theory testing</p>	<p>So, in the spirit of co-analysis, I've got an idea, a little bit of a theory that has been noodling around in my brain, and I'd love to get your take on it, see if it resonates with you or not, or if parts of it resonate.</p> <p>So the idea is that those of us who are women singers might experience a kind of separation between the body that we use for singing and our woman's body. What do you think about that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does that make sense? • Does that resonate for you? Partly or not at all?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about your experience supports or doesn't support that idea?
Closing and thank you	<p>So, if you can believe it, this is the last part of this research project! Is there anything else you want to share about this experience?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to make sure gets included in my analysis?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want me to know?</p> <p>So as for data collection, we're done! You'll hear from me probably a couple more times once I have some things written up so you get a final say on what I write about you. It might not be for a few weeks, but please keep an eye out. I want to thank you so much again for all the time and effort you have put into this project. If there's ever anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be eternally grateful for all of your help.</p>

4. Marissa Interview Protocol:

Topic	Questions
Introduction and context setting	<p>Hello! Thank you so much for taking the time, once again, to chat with me. This is the last part of the study, and I am endlessly grateful for your participation and dedication thus far.</p> <p>I'm going to start recording, as long as that's okay with you?</p> <p>So I'm hoping this interview will be a chance for us to analyze together your experience with the audio diaries and the focus group, and to see what we can learn about your body image and how it might interact with your singing from that experience.</p>
Co-researcher's insights	<p>Thank you so much again for doing those diaries for four weeks! I've been listening and transcribing them as they came in, and I have some ideas I'm excited to talk with you about, but before we talk about what I thought, I'd love to know what you thought.</p> <p>What's top of mind for you about this research experience?</p> <p>What was it like to do these audio diaries for four weeks?</p>

	<p>Did anything interesting happen outside of the diaries? What?</p> <p>I'd love for us to think about, and see if we can come up with together, what your big takeaways from this experience are. I don't expect you to have an answer to that question ready to go, but let's just talk about what you noticed and learned and see if we can figure that out together.</p> <p>What stuck out to you about this experience?</p> <p>Did you notice any trends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any thoughts or feelings that kept coming back? <p>Is there anything that you feel like you've learned? What?</p> <p>Is there anything about your experience that doesn't make sense, or seems complicated? What?</p> <p>So now that we've talked a little more, what do you think your big takeaways might be?</p>
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (my analysis)</p>	<p>So there are some other things about your diaries that stuck out to me.</p> <p>I noticed in your performance diary that you seemed to actively counter thoughts about your body. You said "I don't think my thoughts about my body really influenced very much about my performance, cuz I just kept reminding myself that I might look not so beautiful right now, but that's okay. Everybody is like that sometimes."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is that a strategy you actively employed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, when during that performance did you know you needed that? ○ If you were singing already, did you notice a change? • How often were you thinking those counter thoughts? • How did that affect the performance anxiety you experienced? • How did that affect your thoughts about your singing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus? <p>In your practice diaries, you seemed to have one day where things weren't going your way. You said, "I tried not to [think about my body] because I was like we need to focus, but it was hard to stay focused." Talk to me about that experience.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you know you weren't focusing?• What was happening when you were unfocused?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ In your singing? <p>You talked in the focus group and in your diaries about negative thoughts and experiences translating into negative feelings about your body. Can you talk a little more about how that relates to your singing, if it does?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are negative thoughts about your singing specific, or more general?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Like what?• Do specific singing thoughts translate to specific body thoughts, or vice versa? <p>So in one of your diaries, you said "So if I'm feeling not so great and then somebody compares me to another cast member or something, and they're like, "they can do it, why can't you?" they're not saying anything about my body specifically, but it's so easy to go there because that comparison is just made vocally, but I think the weird thing about singing is that it always feels like you, because your voice is you, you are your instrument. So they're saying that she can do that, which is awesome and I'm so glad that she can, but the fact that I can't do that feels like a commentary on who I am and not just my singing, but my body and my general person." Can you share more about that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What kind of commentary on your body?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ General, or specific? Like what?• Do body thoughts change based on who they might be comparing you to? Why or why not? <p>You mentioned your voice teacher a couple of times, and you mentioned that she picked up on you looking unlike yourself when you were feeling down, when others might have praised you for being thinner. Can you talk about your relationship with your teacher and how that affects you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does that affect the way you think about your body?
<p>Relationship between body image and singing (co-researcher's views)</p>	<p>So you've been thinking about your body image and your singing a lot over the past four weeks, do they seem connected? What makes you say that?</p> <p>If so, how does that connection work? Can you give examples?</p> <p>What does the phrase "Your body is your instrument" mean to you?</p>

Theory testing	<p>So, in the spirit of co-analysis, I've got an idea, a little bit of a theory that has been noodling around in my brain, and I'd love to get your take on it, see if it resonates with you or not, or if parts of it resonate.</p> <p>So the idea is that those of us who are women singers might experience a kind of separation between the body that we use for singing and our woman's body. You actually said something similar in our first interview, you said "I think about [singing] pretty separately from my body."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me more about how that works for you? • What about your experience supports or doesn't support that idea? • How do you think that affects you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As a singer? ○ As a woman?
Closing and thank you	<p>So, if you can believe it, this is the last part of this research project! Is there anything else you want to share about this experience?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to make sure gets included in my analysis?</p> <p>Is there anything else you want me to know?</p> <p>So as for data collection, we're done! You'll hear from me probably a couple more times once I have some things written up so you get a final say on what I write about you. It might not be for a few weeks, but please keep an eye out. I want to thank you so much again for all the time and effort you have put into this project. If there's ever anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be eternally grateful for all of your help.</p>