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Jazz and gender : teaching improvisation to girls

Valerie A. Shanley
University of Northern Iowa

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Jazz and gender : teaching improvisation to girls

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons that girls do not pursue advanced jazz education and to suggest teaching strategies that could encourage greater female participation. I have observed that the number of female students is approximately equal to that of the male students in concert band, and in a concert band setting these girls do seem to advance more quickly than boys. Through literature review and interviews with music educators and female jazz musicians, this study will examine whether some of the teaching techniques that allow girls to succeed in concert band could be adapted to facilitate success in the jazz band setting. In particular, the following questions will be addressed: 1. Do girls learn jazz improvisation differently than boys? 2. If so, should music educators utilize teaching strategies to accommodate these differences?

JAZZ AND GENDER: TEACHING IMPROVISATION TO GIRLS

A Research Project
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

Valerie A. Shanley
University of Northern Iowa

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Director of Research Paper / John Henning

Reader of Research Paper – Barry Wilson

Reader of Research Paper – Robert Washut

Graduate Faculty Advisor – John Henning

Department Head - Radhi Al-Mabuk
Educational Psychology & Foundations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I just know the girls never wanted to (improvise). It's so true, and the guys, they didn't care.

They just went for it. I think it's always been that way. (Jane, 2008)

Statement of the Problem

As a music educator, I have observed that the number of girls and women in high school, college, and professional jazz ensembles is much smaller than the number of men and boys. Research suggests that the attrition rate for women between high school and college jazz programs is especially dramatic. One study noted that “while 62% of men who played jazz in high school played in college, only 26 % of women who played in high school attempted jazz in college” (McKeage, 2004, p. 7). In casual conversation with music educators and female music students, I have detected that this attrition rate is not related to actual musical skill but rather perceived musical skill. Research of J. G. Nicholls found that “girls are more likely than boys to attribute failure to their lack of ability even though their achievement is higher” (Nichols cited in Alderman 1999, p. 35).

Improvisation is a central element to jazz performance and its significance appears to increase as the level of jazz progresses. I have observed that the eagerness of girls to improvise and solo in a jazz ensemble diminishes greatly during the middle school and high school years. I suspected that this unwillingness to improvise correlated with an unwillingness to take risks in front of peers. Jonathan Cohen notes that “the fear of making mistakes and looking foolish is one of the strongest obstacles to developing high self-esteem and motivation” (Cohen, 1999 p. 71). If this fear of improvisation does discourage girls from pursuing an advanced jazz education, perhaps it can be overcome through specific teaching strategies.

“Jazz is considered America’s music, and the genre is often used as an example of the strengths of American diversity” (McKeage, 2004, p. 1). However, this diversity is not evident in college and professional jazz ensembles. While the women I interviewed for this study were part of middle school and high school jazz bands with nearly equal numbers of boys and girls, these female musicians found themselves in a distinct minority in their college jazz ensembles. One woman remembered, “I was so scared, and now I realize that I was pretty advanced for my age (17). I was second-guessing it, and my first couple of rehearsals (in college) I wanted to die. I was just so freaked out by it all. I realize that I was further-advanced and probably had a little more confidence than the typical girl. Luckily enough, I’ve been raised by this amazing, supportive network of (band) directors and my family. If I was that scared, and I already had this big boost of confidence, maybe more than what other people would have, then I’m sure that it (being female) really is a deterrent” (Rhonda, 2008).

Lucy Green argues that a musical patriarchy exists in our society which makes it virtually impossible for women instrumentalists to play in a public sphere without the definition of their femininity being brought to bear on the intrinsic meanings of their playing (Green, 1997). Traditionally, women have an established history of participation in advanced orchestral and wind ensembles, but this participation is not evident in advanced jazz ensembles. “In jazz, women must not only master their instrument, but must negotiate a place within a traditionally male-dominated community” (McKeage, 2004, p. 9). A jazz educator explained, “Even when you have really good ones (female students), then when they leave and go out, they can’t do it (perform jazz). You know, life’s too tough. It’s too hard for girls by themselves in New York City, and it must just be scary as hell, you know?” (Dan, 2008)

The high attrition rate of female jazz musicians from high school to college may not only affect the number of female jazz performers but also the number of female music educators. “Although there has been no research conducted into the link between jazz experience and secondary school band positions, several authors have predicted that by limiting their participation in jazz ensembles, women may unknowingly limit their career options as both educators and performers” (Delzell cited in McKeage 2004, p. 2).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons that girls do not pursue advanced jazz education and to suggest teaching strategies that could encourage greater female participation in advanced jazz performance. I have observed that the number of female students is approximately equal to that of the male students in concert band, and in a concert band setting these girls do seem to advance more quickly than boys. Through literature review and interviews with music educators and female jazz musicians, this study will examine whether some of the teaching techniques that allow girls to succeed in concert band could be adapted to facilitate success in the jazz band setting. In particular, the following questions will be addressed:

1. Do girls learn jazz improvisation differently than boys?
2. If so, should music educators utilize teaching strategies to accommodate these differences?

Significance of the Problem

Because there are so few female jazz performers and educators, young female jazz students rarely have the opportunity to study jazz with another female or model their playing after a female jazz player. Thus, the cycle of small numbers of women pursuing advanced jazz education and performance continues. In order for this cycle to be broken and the numbers of

women in advanced jazz to increase, the reasons for females' lack of participation must be uncovered and addressed. While women continue to excel at Classical music performance and teaching, their music experience is often inferior to that of a man's because it is devoid of jazz.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions clarify how terms commonly used in jazz education will be used in this paper.

General music terms:

Classical music – music produced by an instrumental ensemble without improvisation
advanced (in reference to jazz education or jazz performance) – college or professional level

improvisation – spontaneously composing and performing a solo as part of a jazz performance

jazz ensemble – jazz band of approximately 20 -25 musicians with traditional instrumentation: 5-6 saxes, 4-5 trumpets, 4 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, and drums

combo – small group of jazz musicians usually consisting of 3 or 4 horns and a rhythm section (piano and/or guitar, bass, and drums)

chart – a written piece of jazz band music

Specific jazz terms:

blues – a standard rhythmic-harmonic structure in a which the 12-bar progression I-I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I-V-IV-I-I is tied to the AAB couplet of (1) in three 4-bar phrases (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1999)

bebop – a jazz style that flourished between about 1944 and 1958, stressing melodic improvisation. Among its leading exponents were Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1999)

Purpose and Organization of Paper

Chapter 1 includes the introduction, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the problem, the initial questions used to guide the research, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of gender issues in education and improvisation and the effect of these two subjects on jazz participation and performance. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to complete the research. Chapter 4 examines the responses of the interview subjects who participated in this study. Chapter 5 discusses the research findings and offers recommendations for jazz educators.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the related literature on jazz, gender, and teaching improvisation to girls. Specifically, the following seven topics will be addressed: (a) number of girls vs. number of boys, (b) instrument choice, (c) personality differences between genders, (d) learning style differences between genders, (e) musical patriarchy, (f) tools for improvising, and (g) teaching improvisation to girls.

Although girls and boys participate in concert bands in approximately equal numbers, the number of girls in comparison to the number of boys is smaller in jazz bands. Some of this discrepancy is simply related to the likelihood that more girls than boys play jazz-band appropriate instruments. However, the small number of advanced female jazz students is also a result of more complicated issues such as gender differences in personality and learning style. These differences often cause girls to be less willing than boys to improvise. Because improvisation is such an integral part of jazz performance, this reluctance may taint females' overall jazz experience.

Number of Girls vs. Number of Boys

This study examines the reasons that there are so many fewer females than males pursuing an advanced education in jazz and participating in advanced jazz performance. While girls eagerly participate in middle school and high school instrumental music ensembles, they are often reluctant to continue in college. According to Zervoudakes and Tanur (1994), "females make up more than half the instrumentalists, on average, in elementary and high school bands, but less than half in college bands" (p. 63). Specifically, the ratio of men to women in advanced

jazz instrumental ensembles is even more pronounced. Responses from 22 randomly selected postsecondary schools in research of Lissa May (2003), “indicated that 6% of college jazz band members were women. The high male-to-female ratio seems to appropriately represent the predominately male population in the field of jazz. In a random sample of 79 professional jazz improvising musicians, Olson (1989) reported 72 men and seven women” (p. 2).

Educators are puzzled by the lack of female participation in advanced jazz because their female students often show more interest in music than their male students do at a young age. “Crowther and Durkin (1982) reported a questionnaire study of 12 to 18 year old respondents in which females consistently expressed more positive attitudes toward music than males, and this difference between genders was significant at the younger ages. Hargreaves, Comber, and Colley (1995) found that female adolescents liked a wider range of musical styles than did males, especially among the ‘serious’ styles” (Hargreaves, Comber, & Colley cited in LeBlanc, Jin, Stamou, & McCrary, 1992, p. 72). Music instructors struggle to understand why girls appear to be so much more successful and numerous as musicians in schools, but boys go on to become so much more successful and numerous in professional musical life (Green, 1997).

McKeage’s 2002 research identified three possible reasons that women did not pursue advanced jazz educations when leaving high school: (1) an inability to link jazz ensemble participation to career aspirations; (b) institutional obstacles to participation that included the structure of degree programs, ensemble requirements, and pressure from studio teachers to specialize in a primary instrument; and (c) the jazz environment, which included comfort levels in jazz ensembles and jazz pedagogy (McKeage cited in McKeage, 2004, p. 2). The volume of coursework for music education majors is large, and while classical music ensembles and even marching bands are often required courses, jazz ensembles are usually electives. Eccles (1997)

believes that girls may have a more realistic understanding than boys of the time commitment required to succeed in jazz and therefore choose not to participate in these elective ensembles (Eccles cited in McKeage, 2004, p. 2). Unfortunately, this lack of participation in advanced jazz ensembles contributes to the cycle of small numbers of female jazz educators and performers. “The 2001 MENC (Music Educators National Conference) membership study indicated that while women make up 42% and 56% of senior high school orchestra and choral directors, respectively, only 25% of high school band directors were women” (McKeage, 2004, p. 2).

Instrument Choice

One significant determinant affecting a woman’s opportunity to participate in an advanced jazz ensemble is her choice of a primary instrument. “The instrumentation commonly found in jazz (trumpet, trombone saxophone, and rhythm section) includes instruments generally associated with males” (McKeage, 2004, p.2). Although music educators attempt to downplay this gender-stereotyping of instruments, its existence is has been repeatedly identified in research. The Abeles & Porter Masculine-Feminine Continuum (1978) provides a graphic demonstration of the way students tend to react to the instruments (Abeles & Porter cited in Delzell & Leppla, 1992, p. 94):

Most masculine	drums
	trombone
	trumpet
	saxophone
	cello
	clarinet
	violin
Most feminine	flute

According to McKeage's research, "28% of the women and 72% of the men reported a primary instrument commonly found in jazz ensembles" (2004, p.2). She cited Fisher's (1984) warning "that students who played instruments not commonly found in jazz ensembles would be unable to participate unless they chose to play a secondary instrument" (McKeage, 2004, p. 3). Considering the already tightly-packed curriculum of the music education major, it is not surprising that many women are unwilling or unable to master a secondary instrument and therefore choose not to participate in advanced jazz.

Personality Differences between Genders

Jazz educator Jerry Coker notes that the style of the individual jazz musician "is affected by his personality, his intelligence, his talent, and his coordination" (1964, p. 2). It is important to recognize how personality differences between males and females might affect their willingness and ability to participate in jazz. Improvisation is a key component of jazz and students' reactions and abilities to do it most certainly affects their overall jazz experience.

Because improvisation is the spontaneous creation of music, it requires risk-taking, confidence, and independence. From a young age, these active characteristics are often

encouraged in boys while girls are encouraged to be more docile and dependent (Biehler & Snowman, 1990, p. 106). "One of the clear-cut differences that has been repeatedly supported by consistent evidence (reviewed by Parke and Slaby, 1983) is that males are more aggressive than females. It is impossible to trace the causes of this difference precisely, but it seems likely that it is due to hormonal as well as cultural factors" (Biehler & Snowman, 1990, p. 664-665). Green (1997) argues that girls' music, "unlike that of boys, is largely associated with being good or conformist; their musical practices allow for the expression of enabling and cooperative attitudes" (p. 190). This personality difference in genders may not only affect a student's musical performance but also his or her musical preferences. "May (1985) found that among grade-school children, although both genders preferred 'aggressive' sorts of music to 'passive' ones, boys' preferences for aggressive styles exceeded girls' and girls' preferences for passive style exceeded boys'" (May cited in Zervoudakes & Tanur, 1994, p. 58).

Frieze (1980) argues that "girls tend to underestimate their performance, whereas males tend to overestimate performance" (Frieze cited in Alderman, 1999, p. 35). For example, McKeage found that women who were still playing jazz had less positive feelings about improvisation than men who were no longer playing jazz (2004). Green argues that a female's lack of confidence and pride in her playing in contrast to a male's confident performance often affects the way other students and teachers react to musical compositions even if the reaction is not based on actual musical quality (1997). Brooks (1991) found that "students with a positive self-image view mistakes as experiences to learn from while those with low self-esteem perceive mistakes as failures that cannot be corrected easily" (Brooks cited in Cohen, 1999, p. 71). Eccles (1987) noted that "women tend to make choices based on an 'expectation for success'" (Eccles

cited in McKeage, 2004, p. 9). It seems unsurprising then, that women are often unwilling to take a chance in the field of advanced jazz.

Learning Style Differences between Genders

The independent-thinking required for jazz improvisation is often encouraged in boys more than it is in girls from a very young age. “Parents, particularly fathers, emphasize achievement and exploration more for boys than for girls. Girls tend to be kept under closer supervision and given more help in solving problems. Boys often are told directly or indirectly to handle things themselves” (Biehler & Snowman, 1990, p. 48). When this independence is encouraged in education, it often benefits the boys. “Young and McIntyre (1992) confirmed that an informal classroom environment that encouraged active learning and mobility appealed more to male students than to female students. In addition, Pizzo, Dunn, and Dunn (1990) found that female students needed significantly more quiet than did male students when learning new and difficult information” (Pizzo, Dunn, & Dunn cited in Honigsfeld & Dunn, 2003, p. 2).

Hoffman (1972) suggests that girls’ school achievements partly result from their desire to please. “Boys, by contrast, appear more interested in working on tasks that interest them and less concerned about earning approval. Because of these tendencies, girls may try to earn high grades to get a positive response from parents and teachers; boys may engage in more self-motivated study” (Hoffman cited in Biehler & Snowman, 1990, p. 123). Biehler and Snowman suggest that the tendency girls have to ask for help is strengthened by the positive results they earn from adults when they do so (1990). Honigsfeld and Dunn write that because they seek the approval of parents and teachers, female students are more likely than male students to be authority-oriented and conforming (2003). This might explain why girls are more comfortable in Classical musical ensembles where they understand the rules and feel protected by the authority

of the conductor (McKeage, 2004). Unfortunately, music educators may mistake the lack of comfort that girls feel in a jazz ensemble for a lack of musical ability or a lack of desire to achieve. Green explains, “Girls taking part in musical activities in school are overwhelmingly engaged in activities which symbolically affirm their femininity, an affirmation which is reiterated not merely in the reproduction of historically gendered musical practices but in gendered musical meanings and, beyond these, in gendered musical experiences themselves” (1997, p. 167).

Musical Patriarchy

Lucy Green’s 1997 book, *Music, Gender, Education*, is an extensive discussion of what she terms *musical patriarchy*. In the book, Green argues that women’s music, whether played or composed, “has been appraised in terms of the masculine delineation of music, the cerebral and historical connotations of which together conflict with conventional constructions of femininity” (p. 216). “Gendered musical meanings are not only handed down through history; they persist in the organization of musical production and reception in present-day society at large, and they are also re-enacted daily in the life of the music classroom as a dynamic, microcosmic version of the wider society” (Green, 1997, p. 229).

While singing has always been viewed as feminine, Green argues that when we watch and listen to the performance of a female instrumentalist, we evaluate her playing within the construct of musical patriarchy. She explains, “Whereas the display of singing reproduces femininity by locking the woman singer in a an affirmation of the contrary definition of femininity as susceptible, natural, desirable and dangerous, women’s instrumental performance threatens to break out of patriarchal definitions and offer a femininity which controls, a femininity which alienates itself in an object and impinges on the world” (1997, p. 54). Green

continues, “Women are perceived not as ‘instrumentalists,’ but as ‘women instrumentalists,’ how much so depending not only on the instrument and the style of music that they are playing, but also on the degree of autonomy of the music, and the type of display being enacted” (1997, p. 80).

The concept of musical patriarchy acknowledges the belief that “music delineates masculinity, a male mind, a man behind the music; and this has become so normal and acceptable that we do not even notice its presence, until something happens to break it” (Green, 199, p. 114). Green believes that this musical patriarchy powerfully threatens a woman’s ability to successfully compose or improvise music (1997). In relation to the differences in gender described earlier, she explains that a female’s instrumental music performance is subtly and often unnoticeably impacted by her willingness to conform, her reluctance to deviate, her embarrassment, and her fear (Green, 1997, p. 57). Green also warns that music educators must take into account musical patriarchy when evaluating a student’s musical abilities, compositions, and performances (1997, p. 241). “The delineation of femininity or masculinity enters the experience of pupils and teachers; and according to where each individual positions himself or herself with relation to the music, the delineation gives confidence, or takes confidence away; affirms identity, or interrupts and problematises it” (Green, 1997, p. 186).

Tools for Improvising

Improvisation is a central element of jazz, and it offers an opportunity for a musician “to utilize his or her technical ability to its fullest extent, while enjoying the creative freedom of spontaneous composition” (Coker, 1964, p. 2). In his book, *Improvising Jazz*, Jerry Coker describes the five factors responsible for the outcome of the jazz player’s improvisation: “intuition, intellect, emotion, sense of pitch, and habit” (1964, p. 3).

His intuition is responsible for the bulk of his originality; his emotion determines the mood; his intellect helps him to plan the technical problems and, with intuition, to develop the melodic form; his sense of pitch transforms heard or imagined pitches into letter names and fingerings; his playing habits enable his fingers to quickly find certain established pitch patterns. Four of these elements of his thinking – intuition, emotion, sense of pitch, and habit – are largely subconscious. Consequently, any control over his improvisation must originate in the intellect. While the intellect is limited in its capacity for control over intuition and emotion, it can be responsible for the training of the ear and for establishing a variety of helpful finger patterns, in addition to its function of solving technical problems.

May (2003) found that variables “positively correlated with jazz improvisation achievement were attitude toward band, creativity, jazz experience, jazz listening, and musical achievement” (p. 5). Also, “cognitive music achievement appears to be a significant predictor of achievement in both instrumental (McDaniel, 1974) and vocal jazz improvisation (Madura, 1991)” (McDaniel and Madura cited in Madura, 1996, p. 264). Since girls and boys appear to be excelling at Classical music in equal numbers in grade school, research from this literature supports the idea that both boys and girls can excel at jazz improvisation too.

Teaching Improvisation to Girls

The review of this research supports the idea that jazz improvisation, though spontaneous and creative, can be taught. The music education majors surveyed by McKeage (2004) “agreed or strongly agreed that they could learn to play jazz with proper instruction and that it was possible to learn to play both Classical and jazz” (p. 8). Coker argues, “The most artistic accomplishment requires academic training. This training is the foundation upon which to build (1964, p. 4). In *The Jazz Ensemble Director’s Manual*, Richard Lawn explains how creativity can be sparked by a structured curriculum (1995, p. 74).

A good way to begin a junior high school student is by utilizing jazz etude or duet books as supplementary lesson material. These books are excellent at formulating an awareness of jazz rhythms, phrasing and articulation. After spending some time with these books which are written in an improvised style, the student often subconsciously (or consciously) remembers certain melodic phrases and begins putting them to use in his

own early improvisation attempts. This introductory approach to jazz is useful for the beginner for it does not involve detailed explanations of music theory.

Supplementary teaching materials such as those suggested above can help a female musician who is successful in Classical music bridge the gap between printed music and improvised music.

Green argues that we must account for gender differences rather than ignoring them if we are going to provide our female students with an outstanding education (2004). She explains that too often, the female tendency to conform is mistakenly interpreted as poor improvisation (Green, 2004, p. 200).

Feminine conformity is taken to be a symptom of lack of compositional ability and a dull musical mind, whilst, conversely, masculine non-conformity is understood to be a source of inventiveness and creativity. Likewise, girls' diligent hard work is not merely dissociated from but even opposed to attainment in musical composition, whereas boys' lack of studiousness operates as an indication of genuine understanding and creative spontaneity.

Musical patriarchy, which Green (2004) argues exists in our schools and society, affects not only the way teachers experience their students' improvisation, but also the way female students experience it. "Girl composers as well as women composers themselves must take on board the consequences of the masculine delineation, not only in listening to other people's music but moreover, in listening to their own music" (2004, p. 218).

Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003) encourage teachers of female students to "maximize this group's tendency for higher levels of self-motivation, teacher motivation, and parent motivation; persistence, and responsibility" (p. 11). If female students are eager to please their teachers and are therefore trying to avoid failure, educators must create a learning environment where risk-taking is encouraged. Cohen (1999) explains, "Placing the fear of making mistakes in the open typically serves to minimize its potency, thereby helping the classroom environment to feel

safer” (p. 71-72). Green suggests that all-girl groups can provide an advantageous learning environment (2004). In a jazz education setting, an all-female jazz combo would provide an ideal environment for girls to learn and practice jazz improvisation.

Summary

The review of this literature seeks to understand why there are fewer girls than boys pursuing an advanced jazz education. This review was used as background information to specifically address the following topics; (a) number of girls vs. number of boys, (b) instrument choice, (c) personality differences between genders, (d) learning style differences between genders, (e) musical patriarchy, (f) tools for improvising, and (g) teaching improvisation to girls. If gender differences in personality and learning style impact the way female students learn jazz, these differences should be considered when jazz educators develop and evaluate their teaching strategies. Interviews with jazz educators and female jazz musicians will provide the methodology for further research of these topics in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study examines the reasons that there are so many fewer females than males pursuing an advanced education in jazz and participating in advanced jazz performance. Through literature review and interviews of jazz educators and female jazz performers, I searched for a relationship between this lack of participation and the teaching and learning of improvisation. Specifically, I wanted to uncover whether or not girls learn improvisation differently than boys. I then sought teaching strategies to accommodate the differences which were found. Two jazz educators and four female jazz musicians participated in recorded interviews for this research. After transcribing the interviews, the data was categorized into seven topics which provide the framework for Chapter 4 of this study. These topics are as follows: (1) motivation to improvise, (2) beginning improvisation, (3) advanced improvisation, (4) improvisation instruction, (5) social dynamics of jazz, (6) gender issues, and (7) number of girls vs. number of boys.

Participants

Much of the research for this study was obtained by interviewing two jazz educators and four female jazz musicians. As a jazz educator, I had a professional relationship with the two jazz educators, and they have been recognized as two of the best in the state of Iowa. The four jazz musicians were either current or former students at the University of Northern Iowa. UNI has one of the finest collegiate jazz programs in the country, and these women were recommended to me as four of its finest female students by two jazz professors at the university. The names of the interviewees have been changed for use in this study. The following provides a brief background of each subject:

Dan is recently retired from public school instrumental music education. He spent most of his career teaching middle school jazz band, concert band, and lessons. His middle school jazz bands were recognized as some of the best in the state. Dan still teaches private instrumental and jazz improvisation lessons and serves as a jazz clinician throughout the Midwest.

Doug is currently teaching high school jazz band, concert band, and lessons. He also maintains a private studio and is well-known for his jazz improvisation instruction. Doug has also been a jazz professor at a community college.

Molly is currently a university music student. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Music with a jazz minor and her primary instrument is trumpet. Molly was also part of a very successful high school jazz band program.

Erin is a university music student and performs as a saxophonist in the university's top jazz ensemble.

Rhonda recently earned a Bachelor of Music degree with a jazz minor. She is a former student of Dan and plays jazz saxophone semi-professionally.

Jane recently earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree with a jazz minor. While earning her degree, she was a saxophonist with the university's top jazz ensemble. Jane is currently teaching elementary and middle school music.

Interview Procedures

After obtaining approval for this research from the University of Northern Iowa's Review Board, all of the subjects were invited via e-mail (Appendix A) to participate in this study. All of the contacted educators and musicians agreed to participate. Times and locations for the interviews were scheduled at the subjects' convenience. Before the interviews were conducted,

each subject signed a consent form (Appendix B) to participate in the research. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in duration and was digitally recorded.

Interview Questions

Questions (Appendix C) for the educators explored whether or not they teach boys and girls differently and if they use specific teaching strategies that are especially successful with girls. I have observed that the eagerness of girls to improvise and solo in a jazz ensemble diminishes greatly during the middle school and high school years. I sought to find out if these educators had experienced this same reluctance from their female students. More importantly, I wanted to hear about their female students that had excelled at improvisation and pursued advanced jazz educations. My questions explored the teaching strategies and instruction techniques that had helped these girls to be successful at improvisation and confident in their abilities to perform jazz.

Questions (Appendix D) for the female musicians reviewed their experiences in jazz ensembles, learning to improvise, feelings about soloing, and overall success in music. I surveyed how they felt about their first jazz experiences and how they felt about learning to improvise. All of these women pursued advanced jazz educations and are now successful jazz musicians. My questions investigated the components of their early jazz educations and how that instruction contributed to their positive feelings about improvising and advanced jazz performance in general.

Data Analysis

As I transcribed the recordings of the interviews, common themes began to emerge from the data. I was then able to organize the data into the seven categories listed below. After

analyzing this data and reviewing the research literature, I explored differences in the way boys and girls learn improvisation and pursued teaching strategies to accommodate these differences.

1. Motivation to Improvise: This is an examination of the reasons that female musicians who are advanced Classical musicians are often reluctant to improvise. I asked the educators how they encouraged young female musicians to improvise and excel at jazz as well as Classical playing.
2. Beginning Improvisation: In this section, the women recall their first attempts at improvising and their feelings about doing so. The educators describe how they introduce improvisation as part of their jazz education programs.
3. Advanced Improvisation: This is an exploration of the transition from early attempts at improvisation to creating more complex music. The educators illustrate their improvisation instruction in more detail, and the women describe how their feelings about improvisation change as they become more skillful at performing jazz.
4. Improvisation Instruction: In this section, both the musicians and educators explain the importance of the student-teacher relationship to a successful jazz education.
5. Social Dynamics of Jazz: The social dynamics of both a jazz ensemble and a student-teacher relationship impact a student's willingness to improvise. In this section, the women express how these dynamics affect their own playing.
6. Gender Issues: In this section, the interview subjects describe how general personality differences between boys and girls are evident in jazz education. Both the educators and musicians explain why these differences result in boys often being more willing to pursue an advanced jazz education than girls.

7. Number of Girls Vs. Number of Boys: While young jazz ensembles have nearly equal numbers of girls and boys, advanced jazz is dominated by males. In this section, the interview subjects explain the reasons that this is true.

Summary

The interviews I conducted with these successful jazz educators and female jazz musicians provided the essential data required to research the relationship amongst jazz, gender, and improvisation. Through the questions posed to the female jazz musicians, I was able to examine their experiences in jazz ensembles, learning to improvise, feelings about soloing, and overall success in music. Through the questions posed to the educators, I was able to analyze whether or not these instructors teach boys and girls differently and if they use specific teaching strategies that are especially successful with girls.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study examines the reasons that there are fewer females than males pursuing an advanced education in jazz and participating in advanced jazz performance. Through interviewing female jazz musicians, I searched for a relationship between this lack of advanced jazz participation by females and their experiences learning to improvise and their experiences performing jazz. Through interviewing jazz educators, I searched for teaching techniques that were successful in teaching improvisation and for specific strategies that were especially effective with female students.

After transcribing and evaluating the interviews, seven research topics emerged. These themes are as follows: (1) motivation to improvise, (2) beginning improvisation, (3) advanced improvisation, (4) improvisation instruction, (5) social dynamics of jazz, (6) gender issues, and (7) number of girls vs. number of boys.

Motivation to Improvise

All of the female musicians who were interviewed expressed that they were confident while playing classical music in high school. Jane recalled, "I was always advanced. I always felt like I was the leader of the group." These girls were recognized as some of the best musicians in their elementary schools. Rhonda remembered, "I guess that I'd always gotten remarks on it (my playing) doing whatever you do as a 5th and 6th grader like state solo and ensemble contest, and I'd always really, really liked it." Even those who did not describe themselves as outstanding players were comfortable in a Classical music setting. Molly explained, "I didn't think of myself

as a good player at all, but I always played loud and tried. I've never had bad confidence issues or anything like that."

Unfortunately, much of this confidence waned when the musicians began to transition from Classical music to jazz. Jane said, "I just remember I always preferred playing Classical music because everything was laid out for me. Everything was right there. All the notes were there. All the dynamics were there. I didn't really have to worry about creating my own music."

The fact that these girls were outstanding Classical players actually increased the pressure that they put on themselves to succeed as jazz players. Erin explained, "I feel like people... there's this constant thing looming over me to be a certain level, expect me to play a certain caliber of solo because I'm in this band (advanced jazz ensemble). That's what freaked me out, almost paralyzed me from wanting to solo."

All of the musicians admitted that their confidence was often shaken because they were comparing themselves to other more advanced players. Erin remembered, "I was always hearing that freak of nature, that child prodigy who nailed everything, and every time at the Jazz Championships I would leave stage crying, 'Oh, it's horrible, horrible.'"

Jane explained, "I've always had high expectations for myself. And I think that back then I probably did sound really good. I just never thought that I did because I always compared myself to someone that was way better than me that might have been older. I'd always compare myself to the best." She also expressed her desire to impress those around her. "I think now I'm more comfortable than I ever have been. But I think the pressure of impressing a teacher, impressing your peers, impressing an audience...I think that was just too much. So I've always been a little nervous."

Both the educators and the musicians emphasized that experience, performance, praise, and encouragement are vital to building confidence in young female improvisers. Doug described the importance of these. “If they (students) can get through a performance, whether that be... a performance doesn’t necessarily have to be a concert. A performance can be a rehearsal because they’re performing in front of their peers every time they do this. Once they kind of get the recognition that maybe they’re kind of good, then usually they’re hooked. Then the likelihood of them going further with it is much higher.”

Erin detailed the importance of experience. “It wasn’t until this year that I started feeling so much more comfortable. I would not jam with anybody last year because I was so afraid and because I had such little experience. This year, now, I would bring my sax to a jam session.” Jane noted that her poise in improvising continues to improve. “I’m definitely more confident now, and that came with a lot of praise from other people.”

Beginning Improvisation

Most of the women remembered being nervous about their first attempts at improvising. Erin even said, “It paralyzed me with fear. Initially, my first two years of high school, no one in our band really improvised. I got written-out solos, and my band teacher provided me with that, and said, ‘Feel free to improvise, but feel free to do the written-out solo.’ I kind of embellished it a little.”

The musicians did appreciate the new challenge that improvising gave them and the high expectations put upon them by their instructors. Rhonda explained, “I recall remembering it (first attempt at improvising) as kind of a challenge. My band director never asked you to do anything. He *told* you to do things. He said, ‘OK, there’s an improvised section on this piece so Rhonda, you’ll take that.’ I remember thinking, interesting, this should be interesting.” She added, “I

guess I don't remember the first time I actually improvised. I remember the first time it worked, and I wasn't humiliated to be improvising. It was a moment in 7th grade where I got up to play some blues and I just remember playing what I knew and just trying to get something off and hearing that it wasn't fighting everything around me. I remember thinking to myself, this is music, that's what it is."

The musicians believed that having access to some very basic music theory about a chart or some guidance for creating a solo made their initial experiences improvising much more comfortable. Erin remembered, "I guess my first improvisation started off as taking written-out solos and embellishing them or changing little things as to how I might prefer them or what I thought made them sound cooler. After that, it strictly moved into the blues scale which is obviously programmed into you as a high school student. You know, running up and down that. That was probably my first improvising. To be honest, I did not start really learning how to improvise until I started taking lessons at the end of my junior year (of high school), and then I didn't really put it into practice in a band setting until college which is scary and abnormal. I felt like I came here (to college)... I had a lesson during my senior year (of high school), and it was a transcription of "Body and Soul" that we were playing for jazz band that year. It was a ballad. I guess everyone must have assumed when I performed that I improvised, but really I was maybe trying to tastefully play what was written there and make it sound improvised just because I had never been shoved out there and made like *You must improvise*. So if anything, I wrote solos, but then I did them again and again."

The educators described the framework that they provide to beginning improvisers. Dan emphasized, "There are always parameters. You know, the simplest parameter is just playing roots. Then we're gonna play roots and the next note. Then roots and flat three or root and flat

seven and five. You don't have to play very many notes to do much of a solo. If you have a couple of notes that you can play, and a pretty good idea of the thing, the style of the piece, then you can solo."

They also stressed the importance of relating improvisation instruction to the jazz band ensemble chart and choosing charts that are age-appropriate. Dan explained what can happen if an instructor chooses music that is difficult to solo over. "If you're going to pick out some old Sammy Nestico tune, then just figure that your kids are going to sound like crap. You just can't play on top of those." He noted that some publishing companies are putting out great charts for beginning improvisers. "Each one of them (Heritage Press charts) is really nicely put together for working on a particular tonic or something that works (for improvising) for that chart, and that's the best way to do it."

After learning roots and basic chord tones, most improvisation instruction progresses to instruction about the blues. Dan picked charts with this in mind. "If we were playing a blues tune, then we would work on what the form of that blues was, and the notes in that blues. The tunes we played were F blues or Bb blues so, you know, it was all kind of the same notes. If you're playing a blues, even a low-level trombone player can play a flat third and a flat seven, and play some rhythms with it and go sit down after eight bars."

Rhonda described her first experience with the blues. "I think I probably had a blues scale written out on the sheet in front of me so I knew that those notes should work somehow depending on if I could manipulate them correctly. I kind of took those notes as a grab hat of things to choose from and just kind of pulled them."

Finally, Dan stressed the importance of teaching students how to shape a solo. "When you're working with a kid in a lesson, I'll chart down the solo you want to imagine. It's not at all

like notes. Most the time, there aren't even staves. You know, from here to focus on that note, and then focus on this note. Here's a good way to start. Here's a good way to end. Or let's take your solo and chart it with what we want to do range-wise, excitement-and-rhythm-wise, and dynamic-wise. You can get real cranial about all that stuff without having to put down notes. Let's start out...first time through your chorus let's make it pretty simple, kind of mid-range. Then after that, let's start to expand your range in the 2nd chorus. In the last chorus, let's bring it up, get really rhythmically going, get the audience more into it too."

Advanced Improvisation

After basic chord tones and the blues, improvisation instruction blossoms into other scales. Molly explained, "When you get a little older, you start learning that it's all about scales. My band director would always teach us about what scale and every chord change. That was kind of how we got into it ... scales." Jane appreciated having these scales to frame her solos. "I definitely feel more comfortable when there's changes in front of me. Yeah, like blanket scales, I think. Definitely, some sort of guide."

Doug explained that this framework is especially helpful for students who struggle with creativity. "All kids are very different, but they do seem to fall into different categories. You've got kids that the creative aspect of trying to learn to improvise is just beyond their grasp, and it really invades their comfort zone. Where other kids will jump right into that right away. The kids that struggle are the ones that we make it real clear-cut. I'll use methods to help draw that out of them based on either rhythmic or melodic concepts that we'll help them with. I'll use what's called a fixed-rhythm approach or a fixed-melodic approach. Obviously, the first thing they do is just learn some scale ideas whether it be a blues scale or a pentatonic scale or something like

that, and we'll go from there. But usually, the kids that struggle with the creative aspect, I'll really work with them ... usually it's a fixed rhythmic thing."

As the musicians gained confidence and experience, they were able to incorporate more of the aural aspects of improvisation into their playing. Molly described it this way. "Now we're all about thinking melodically. That's what I love about it. That's what we're doing now. You gotta know the scales and everything, but it's really about thinking outside the boundaries now, and that's not where you start off. You start off blues, and you only get 3 notes."

Rhonda even expressed relief that she was no longer confined by a theoretical framework. "I hate the theory part of it, and mostly because that's my weakness. Book-wise, I get it, and I can take tests on theory, and I'm fine. But for me to try to think about that while I'm playing is just ... to me, it would be like if I was a painter and you wanted me to mathematically sketch out every part of my painting before I even touched the canvas. It dries it out for me. Mostly because I don't tend to think scientifically like that anyway. So I definitely lean way more toward the expression of what's going on and a lot of it's by ear. I use thinking about the theory as a learning tool when I'm in the practice room and when I'm trying to figure something out or when I'm trying to get my head around a tune I don't know. But as soon as I start improvising over it, it's all just out the window. So I definitely rely on the ears."

Molly noted that much of this advanced instruction and playing doesn't really happen until college. "It's a whole different ballpark when you get here (to college). You're learning theory. You're learning the listening part of it. You're learning how to sing it. You're learning the whole bit."

Not surprisingly, with all of this practice and experience, the musicians gained confidence and enthusiasm for improvising. Rhonda expressed, "I love it. It's still a challenge,

but obviously with practice, I don't feel like I'm struggling to keep up anymore. There are still times when I'm definitely scrambling to keep up, but for the most part, it's like this really big canvas upon which you can put your own colors that mix with everyone else's colors too. It's like this really cool opportunity to communicate with twenty people at the same time or even more with who's listening in the audience."

Erin remembered, "*Improvisation* is a word that used to paralyze me with fear, but now that I've done it more and as I've taken lessons, it becomes something that I like and look forward to. I used to fear solos, but now I want them."

Improvisation Instruction

As is true of other student-teacher relationships, the relationships that these women had with their jazz instructors were essential to their success. Many spoke of the passion that their band directors had for jazz. Molly felt fortunate for the experience that she had. "I'm kind of lucky because I had an awesome jazz band in high school, and he (her band director) made it really fun. And we played awesome tunes that we loved to play so it was fun to improvise over them." She noted that this passion continues with her college jazz instructor. "All those tunes are awesome too. He doesn't play boring pieces so it's fun. You want to sound good. You want to get up there and everybody to turn their head and be like yeah, yeah. You want that. That feels good."

Many of their teachers were also fine musicians and were able to model improvisation. Rhonda said, "It was cool to hear Dan play trumpet with us and (my high school director) played saxophone a lot with the band. And just to see people, real people, really doing it was a huge part of it."

All of the women highlighted how important it was to impress their teachers by accepting their challenges and meeting their high expectations. Rhonda explained, “What did it was having someone who expected so much of me and never once doubted me or allowed me to doubt myself. There was no, ‘I’m so disappointed in you because I thought you could do better.’ It was, ‘I’m disappointed in you because I *know* you can do better.’” She added, “I just seem to recall that his method at least with me, and I don’t know if this was with everyone, was just to say, ‘You know you can do it. You figure out how.’ And not in a way that was, ‘I don’t know how to teach you.’ It was more of a challenge. ‘This is what I’m expecting you to do, and I know you can so you have to meet me halfway.’”

Social Dynamics of Jazz

While the interview subjects agreed that improvisation instruction is important for all jazz students, they acknowledged that it’s often the most advanced Classical players that are most encouraged to improvise. Rhonda recalled, “I think he (Dan) picked out the people who were eager to do it (solo), who were ripe for it. It wasn’t like he would take some unsuspecting student and say, ‘You’re gonna do this.’ I think he kind of scoped out, ‘Who really wants this?’”

Dan described it himself the following way. “When you hear a kid play the first time, you just know. This kid does absolutely nothing wrong. The counting is all right. They can hear the pitch. This is going to be amazing. You start giving those kids tons of stuff more right away.”

Rhonda also explained that the competitive drive that motivates outstanding musicians to excel in Classical playing also fuels their desire to improvise. “I’ll be the first person to admit, even though I don’t really like to, that I really like being top dog. I love that feeling. I think that’s one reason that I was attracted to jazz because right away, thanks to Dan and other stuff I was doing, I was kind of up there. I think that played a role, because not only did that give me

confidence to do stuff but also, whether it was real or not, it kind of places this expectation on me to set an example. If you're not going to improvise, then who will? None of these other people will. I still love that because I think of it as this opportunity to light the path for other people. I'm doing it. Just follow me!"

This competitive drive exists within the social dynamic of a jazz ensemble too. Rhonda expressed, "There's definitely a competitive feeling there. For the most part, I think it was, regardless of whether the people I was playing with were male or female. I actually, unfortunately, am just really competitive. I always was like, I don't care who you are. I want to at least be up to your level. In college, you can't always be better than everyone. It's impossible. It definitely, I guess, was more of a challenge if it was a male. You know, you see so many male musicians who are so good. And so I kind of just really wanted to be the chick who could be in the same circle as these guys, who could be equal, comparable, or better would be great. I guess I don't know if it changed depending on the sex. Unfortunately, I didn't run into that many female musicians who were really great so I always ended up competing with guys because that was just the majority of who was there."

Molly explained how the group dynamic in the jazz ensemble affects playing. "Everybody feels it. Everybody can feel what you're feeling unless you're not paying attention. If you really sit back and listen, you can tell, even in their face, or if you close your eyes, you can feel it. If somebody's just not willing to make eye contact with you, that's a huge thing. If you can't get somebody to look at you and be comfortable with looking at you for a couple of bars, knowing what you're doing, that's a hard thing to do."

The women all shared that jazz combos provided a group dynamic in contrast to the big band that was especially nurturing to their development of improvisation skills. Jane explained,

“Soloing with a big band is definitely harder because there’s more people, and you have to limit your improvisation to how many measures there are. You can’t just keep going, and the time is a lot stricter instead of like a small combo where you can open it up and be more free. So big band is definitely harder. I think I felt like I really grew with the combo setting, the smaller group setting. And being able to pick ... like our last three years (of college) we picked our groups, our combos. So we definitely picked people that we trusted and people we felt we sounded good with.”

Erin and Molly actually play in a combo together that except for the drummer is made up of all girls. Molly noted, “Usually I’m the only girl in the combos, but it’s (playing in an all-girl combo) cool. It’s cool to play with all girls.” Erin added, “I feel so comfortable in that combo! No one’s judging, and we’re all on the same page. I think it’s easing into it (soloing) in that small-group setting that allows you to feel more comfortable than in a big group.”

Gender Issues

The general attitude and confidence that boys have about their playing appears to feed their willingness to improvise. Both the musicians and the educators noted that this risk-taking often does not produce outstanding results. Doug explained, “I would say girls would tend to have a little more apprehension. Not a lot, but a little bit at most ages. They know they don’t sound that good. The boys, sometimes they don’t even know. They’re more clueless. It’s like, ‘I don’t know ... I thought I was pretty good.’ The girls are like, ‘What?! You’re not good.’”

Doug suspects that this cavalier attitude might be related to the boys’ lesser proficiency at Classical playing. “Sometimes the girls end up being a little better readers, a little better playing the music, and the boys are a little behind that. And then it’s like, ‘Well OK, I’ll try something new. I don’t care if I sound stupid.’” Erin added, “I think girls are more perceptive to what other

people think about them and guys are like, 'Who cares?' I don't know one guy soloist here (in college) who's ever nervous, but I think (girls) have a tendency to freak themselves out more. Guys as a whole are a lot more laid back." Jane remembered, "It's always the guys that are more willing to get up and play."

Doug pointed out that the acceptance of failure is a key part of learning to improvise, "Obviously when you're learning to be an improviser, you have to be willing to make a lot of mistakes and willing to sound bad. And maybe there's a tendency in girls that tend to be a little bit more of a perfectionist and therefore bridging that gap where you've gotta start experimenting and possibly sounding bad. Some girls just don't wanna have a part of that."

These women were not only successful at jazz, but were also outstanding academic students and were involved in many other activities. Both the educators and musicians recognized that this may have affected their jazz education. Erin explained it this way. "If a guy has enough motivation to stick through jazz band all four years (of high school), chances are it's something that they're focusing their energy toward and getting pretty good at. The girls that were in jazz band at my school were in everything else and yeah, they loved it, but they loved every other activity. That (jazz) was not their thing." Doug added, "I think that many times girls seem to be a little more distracted by things in their lives that maybe boys aren't as concerned about. Girls tend to be more involved in other activities and in activities that have nothing to do with music as well."

Erin described the way her collegiate life differs from that of the other members of the top jazz ensemble. "If you look at the other activities that people (in the jazz band) are involved in, it's basically all music here within the jazz band, but I have lots of other things going on, and I guess that makes it sort of atypical."

Jane recalled the satisfaction she got from being actively involved in high school. “I remember in high school I kind of liked the fact that I was in cheerleading. I did do that and was still excelling at jazz. So I was like, ha, ha, I can do both. That made me happy that I could be involved in everything and still excel at that.”

These women did feel that being female gave them some advantages when playing jazz. Rhonda described the satisfaction she gets from being a successful female jazz musician. “As a woman, I have an advantage when I’m out playing because how many of those are there? Not that many. You know, like guys, there’s a million of those, but you remember. I remember every single woman I’ve ever heard play professionally. I remember because there just aren’t that many of them. So it’s kind of a cool advantage that we have at this point in time.”

Rhonda also believes that her femininity contributes to the connection she can make with an audience. “Maybe it is that because I’m female and because I come at it from this really emotional standpoint, there’s more bonding that happens. You could even say that it’s easier to bond with a female because of that maternal thing. Everyone has a mom, so maybe it’s some of that coming out. I can say that when I watch women perform, not to say that I don’t get that experience with guys that I watch, but it’s just fewer and more far between. I think there is something to be said that bonding with a female paves the way for the musical bonding.”

She continued, “I’ve definitely had the experience where you walk into the room with your horn and people are looking at you, and I know they’re looking at me mostly because I’m a girl. Like, ‘What’s this person doing here?’ And they’re like, ‘OK, let her play. This is gonna be hilarious.’ And then I play, and they’re just like, ‘Never mind.’ And I love that. You know that great feeling you get when you prove someone wrong? It’s that feeling over and over again. So I personally enjoy it. I kind of remember that. And if people remember you then that’s kind of the

point. So I choose to look at it as a good thing. Because there are enough hard and scary things about trying to be a musician, I don't need to add extra pressure. So if I try to turn it around and just say, yeah, they think I can't play because I'm a chick, but I know I can play. So the first time they hear me play, they're gonna remember it whether or not it was really that good. Just to see a woman not sucking, which is what they expect, is a boost for me."

Both the musicians and educators voiced concern that there are so few female jazz educators and performers who can serve as role models for young female jazz students. Doug explained how he has been encouraging advanced high school players to model for younger students. "I'll bring some of the better high school players, I'll say, 'Meet me at 7 o'clock over at the ninth grade building and I want you to work with some of the kids. It's an open invitation. Any time, you don't have to tell me. Just show up. Show up with your horn, and I'll put you to work.' Now they've kind of gotten to the point where it's like, 'Oh, I go there, and I'm kind of like a guest star.' You know, a lot of those have been girls. So I'll give them the whole section and say, you're gonna go work on some blues with these three players in the other room. And I've seen that girl-helping-girl make a difference. It has made a difference. Of course, part of that is student-helping-student as opposed to teacher. I guess I haven't really seen what it would be like if it was a boy. But a lot of these kids that have been coming over have been girls. The lead trumpet player's a girl, and the whole sax section is basically girls, and they're all good little solo players. So I think it would make a difference if there was more female instructors. I mean, how many female band directors are there? There's not that many. It probably has less to do with jazz than it does with just music and band in general."

Number of Girls Vs. Number of Boys

All of the interview subjects have experienced that while young jazz ensembles have nearly equal numbers of girls and boys, advanced jazz is dominated by males. This trend does appear to be instrument-related. Both the educators and the musicians noted that while female saxophone players are prevalent, it is much rarer to find advanced piano, guitar, and bass players. Dan recalled, "The number of girls and boys in middle school jazz band has been about the same, but there are more girls in middle school (jazz band) than in high school. I can remember some all-girl saxophone sections that were really, really good. More guys on trumpet and trombone and hardly ever a girl drummer. Hardly ever. I can only remember one, maybe two, one really good one. Not very many. When you think about that, that's kind of a man's world."

All of the interview subjects agreed that advanced female jazz drummers are nearly nonexistent. Doug related this phenomenon to improvisation. "The rhythm section is all improvisatory for the most part. So if you're sitting at a drum set ... that whole instrument is improvised. There's nothing not improvised about that. Basically everything you play is improvised to some degree. So that takes a certain kind of personality to sit down there. I've had not very many good female drummers in my time. I've been doing it for twenty years. I haven't had but a handful of good jazz drum set players that were girls."

Both the educators and musicians noted that many of the jazz bands from high schools with small enrollments tend to have more female members than the jazz bands from larger high schools. Rhonda suspected that this might be the result of males at larger schools being more likely to pick and choose the activities in which they participate than male students at small schools. "I think that's what I've noticed, especially in watching these small schools come in that are mostly girls, is that unfortunately those are the schools with the really good sports teams. So I

feel like guys in high school, more so than girls, choose specialties. When you're in a smaller school like that, unfortunately, your specialty's more likely to be football or basketball. And then you get in these large schools where the specialty is band, and that's where you get the strong guys. When you have less guys focusing on band and getting really good at it, then that kind of allows room for the girls who are well-rounded and good at everything to come in and fill everything out."

Jane, who noted earlier that she was in jazz band and cheerleading, also noticed that the boys at her large high school tended to be music specialists. "A lot of the guys that were in jazz band ... they were involved in show choir. So they were still involved in music, but sports? No, not really. There were rarely boys involved in sports. It was too much of a scheduling conflict too. You have to pick one or the other."

The musicians acknowledged that choosing music over one of the many other fields of study in which they excelled took a lot of nerve. Rhonda described the concerns she had before entering college. "There's just this general idea, which I can't say I disagree with, that if you're gonna be doing the jazz bands (in college) that's a full-time commitment, and most of those people are going to be music majors and 24 hours a day thinking about this stuff. It is a commitment. That was my fear of being a music major. Do I really have the chutzpah to do this? To commit to such a scary, uncertain lifestyle for the rest of my life. So I think that really does scare a lot of people away, and maybe it should. Because it's not like you're going to college to say I'm gonna be a business major, woo-hoo! You know if you're gonna be a music major you're saying goodbye to sleeping and you're saying goodbye to .. you think you're saying goodbye to all of these normal things. Which it turns out eventually you're not, but you do for a while. So I think it's just a fear more than anything. Because I was certainly scared."

The women also made clear that without a solid jazz foundation in high school, they probably would have been unlikely to continue in college. Jane said, “I think that by that time (high school graduation) you either figure I’m really good at this or I’m really not. I think you know whether you will succeed or not. I think maybe when you graduate from high school, you think it’s going to take me a lot of work in order to be like that or I’m just not going to do it at all.”

These women believe that the specialization of male students in music and jazz allows them to excel at a rapid pace. Rhonda explained, “So you have these guys who can focus completely on one thing. They decide, ‘I want to be the best improviser in my high school,’ and they do it. They don’t do their math homework. They don’t do their English homework. They don’t do anything else. They come home from school, and they practice. For two years straight, this is what happens, and of course, they turn into these technical fiends. And then you have these girls ... I can’t and I’m not willing to focus on one thing completely for two years or for however long ... it’s definitely that thing. Women are multi-taskers. Men are project-oriented. I think that really does hold true, and you can see it in music.”

Molly wondered, somewhat jokingly, if there was something about being male that just makes playing music easier. “It’s hard (playing jazz). I’ve always wondered myself ... why I can’t play a triple G. I can’t play that high. I’ve never heard a lady that can play that high. I don’t know, they (males) have bigger lungs? The male hormones? X chromosome and Y chromosome? There’s gotta be something in there.” She continued, “It comes along, maybe with your childhood. My mom didn’t ... I didn’t listen to any jazz ever. The first jazz CD I ever heard was in middle school. There’s a lot of kids here (in college), their dads were musicians. It could

be that. Boys are more exposed to stuff when they're younger because most moms don't play Coltrane when they're pregnant!"

Molly also wondered if the stereotypical jazz musician lifestyle was less appealing to girls. "Jazz, back in the day, was always in bars. Some women don't like to be seen in that scene. You learn things like that (jazz musicians using drugs). Maybe that's just a negative thing. People think you gotta be messed up to play. Maybe girls don't wanna be seen like that."

Rhonda has observed that boys seem to excel first at the technical aspect of playing jazz and then must add the emotional part later. While technical skill is highly valued in high school, she pointed out that in advanced jazz, the emotional part is equally or even more appreciated. Rhonda believes this is an advantage that female jazz musicians have over males. "I don't really know that many women that I consider to be great improvisers. So I guess the few I've seen, it definitely comes from more an emotional standpoint and then trying to gain the theoretical tools to express that thought. Where it seems that generally for males, they learn these tools for the trade, and then have to figure out what it is that they're thinking which I think is a lot of the reason why you'll hear a lot of these guys doing all these bebop licks that are really, really, really hard ... you know, I don't have any of those ... but then you try to listen to what they're saying and there's absolutely nothing there because they're spending all this time learning the tools and not thinking about that the point is . I always say, if you don't have anything to say then don't talk. I don't want to hear it. I say to myself, OK, you're about to put the horn in your mouth. Do you have something important to say? Because if you don't, take the horn out of your mouth. It's not worth it. So I guess generally I think women start with the emotional and then add the tools to help them get there, to help them express it, and guys start with the tools and have to find the emotional to go along with it."

Rhonda argued that women might be too easily intimidated by a male musician's technical abilities. "When you get up to a really advanced stage, I think the reason we see so many more successful male players is because it's easy to get sucked in by technical ability and by that kind of prodigy sensation. I think guys are more prone to that because they love jumping into things and just doing it over and over and over again until they are perfect at it. But I think if you get to a more musical level of analyzing who the good players are, I'm sure it's almost equally balanced. Because once you can look past the technical abilities of somebody, I think it really is about what they're saying and how they're expressing themselves through music, and that's not gender-oriented. That's like the artist's spirit. The further and further I get from just assuming someone's good because they have their bebop licks down the more you can see through it. You say, OK, yeah, he's technically really good, but you've got nothing. Unfortunately, a lot of those people are really successful commercially. If you're gonna look at it from a more musical standpoint you'll see that it's not about gender at all. It's just about the musicality and the spirit behind it, the emotion and the communication, which will at some point at some higher level will come out regardless of technical risk."

Summary

The female jazz musicians interviewed for this study pursued advanced jazz educations and became outstanding jazz performers. Through interviews with these three women as well as two jazz educators, I searched for the aspects of their jazz education experience that allowed them to be successful in a male-dominated field. The transcriptions of these interviews were described within seven categories (1) Motivation to Improvise: I asked the educators how they encouraged young female musicians to improvise and excel at jazz: (2) Beginning Improvisation: The women recall their first attempts at improvising and the educators describe how they

introduce improvisation; (3) Advanced Improvisation: The women describe how their feelings about improvisation changed as they became more skillful at it; (4) Improvisation Instruction: Both the musicians and educators explain the importance of the student-teacher relationship to a successful jazz education; (5) Social Dynamics of Jazz: The women express how these dynamics affect their own playing; (6) Gender Issues: The interview subjects describe how personality differences between boys and girls are evident in jazz education; and (7) Number of Girls vs. Number of Boys: The interview subjects explain the reasons that advanced jazz is dominated by males.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined the reasons that there are so many fewer females than males pursuing an advanced education in jazz and participating in advanced jazz performance. Through literature review and interviews of jazz educators and female jazz performers, I searched for a relationship between this lack of participation and the teaching and learning of improvisation. Two jazz educators and four female jazz musicians participated in recorded interviews for this research. Related literature on jazz, gender, and teaching improvisation to girls was also reviewed. Specifically, this research sought answers to the following questions:

3. Do girls learn jazz improvisation differently than boys?
4. If so, should music educators utilize teaching strategies to accommodate these differences?

In this chapter, the research findings are discussed, the implications of the research is examined, and recommendations for jazz education based on this research are offered.

Findings

Number of Girls vs. Number of Boys

This research suggests that the number of females and males participating in middle school and high school jazz programs is essentially equal. However, men greatly outnumber women in advanced jazz programs. May found that only 6% of college jazz band members were women (2003, p. 2). McKeage's 2002 research identified three possible reasons that women did not pursue advanced jazz educations when leaving high school: (a) an inability to link jazz ensemble participation to career aspirations; (b) institutional obstacles to participation that

included the structure of degree programs, ensemble requirements, and pressure from studio teachers to specialize in a primary instrument; and (c) the jazz environment, which included comfort levels in jazz ensembles and jazz pedagogy (McKeage cited in McKeage, 2004, p. 2).

The women interviewed for this study experienced that boys are more likely to specialize in one academic area such as music at an early age. Rhonda explained, “So you have these guys who can focus completely on one thing. They decide, ‘I want to be the best improviser in my high school,’ and they do it. They don’t do their math homework. They don’t do their English homework. They don’t do anything else. They come home from school, and they practice. For two years straight, this is what happens, and of course, they turn into these technical fiends. And then you have these girls ... I can’t and I’m not willing to focus on one thing completely for two years or for however long ... it’s definitely that thing. Women are multi-taskers. Men are project-oriented. I think that really does hold true, and you can see it in music.”

The interview subjects believed that this early focus allowed the male jazz students to excel more quickly at improvisation and therefore demonstrate more confidence and technical prowess in their jazz performances. In addition, the jazz educators interviewed for this study noted that their female students are often more critical than their male students are of their initial attempts at improvising. The varied academic interests of girls and the fear that they are behind their male classmates in jazz improvisation ability likely contribute to the steep attrition rate of female jazz students from high school to college.

Instrument Choice

This research suggests that a girl’s choice of a primary instrument may be a significant determinant impacting her opportunity to participate in an advanced jazz ensemble. According to McKeage’s research, “28% of the women and 72% of the men reported a primary instrument

commonly found in jazz ensembles” (2004, p.2). Both the educators and the musicians noted that while female saxophone players are prevalent, it is much rarer to find advanced piano, guitar, and bass players.

Dan recalled, “The number of girls and boys in middle school jazz band has been about the same, but there are more girls in middle school (jazz band) than in high school. I can remember some all-girl saxophone sections that were really, really good. More guys on trumpet and trombone and hardly ever a girl drummer. Hardly ever. I can only remember one, maybe two, one really good one. Not very many. When you think about that, that’s kind of a man’s world.”

The women expressed similar descriptions of their own high school bands. Molly remembered, “There were always girls in the saxophone section. The rhythm section was always guys when I was in high school.” The reality that many talented female high school musicians are required to master a secondary instrument in order to participate in jazz programs may discourage them from adding college jazz band to an already tightly-packed music education curriculum.

Personality Differences between Genders

This research suggests that personality differences between males and females may affect their willingness and ability to improvise. Because improvisation is a key component of jazz, these differences likely affect a female’s overall jazz experience. Because improvisation is the spontaneous creation of music, it requires risk-taking, confidence, and independence. From a young age, these active characteristics are often encouraged in boys while girls are encouraged to be more docile and dependent (Biehler & Snowman, 1990, p. 106).

Many of the women interviewed for this study recalled that it was difficult to transition from being a successful *note-reading* musician to being a successful *creative* musician. Jane remembered, "I just remember I always preferred playing Classical music because everything was laid out for me. Everything was right there. All the notes were there. All the dynamics were there. I didn't really have to worry about creating my own music."

The fact that girls are often successful in Classical music may actually cause them to be more critical of their initial jazz improvisation performances. Frieze (1980) argues that "girls tend to underestimate their performance, whereas males tend to overestimate performance" (Frieze cited in Alderman, 1999, p. 35). Doug explained, "I would say girls would tend to have a little more apprehension. Not a lot, but a little bit at most ages. They know they don't sound that good. The boys, sometimes they don't even know. They're more clueless. It's like, 'I don't know ... I thought I was pretty good.' The girls are like, 'What?! You're not good.'" The general attitude and confidence that boys have about their playing appears to feed their willingness to improvise.

Implications

"Jazz is considered America's music, and the genre is often used as an example of the strengths of American diversity" (McKeage, 2004, p. 1). However, this diversity is not evident in college and professional jazz ensembles. While the women I interviewed for this study were part of middle school and high school jazz bands with nearly equal numbers of boys and girls, these female musicians found themselves in a distinct minority in their college jazz ensembles.

The high attrition rate of female jazz musicians from high school to college may not only affect the number of female jazz performers but also the number of female music educators.

"Although there has been no research conducted into the link between jazz experience and

secondary school band positions, several authors have predicted that by limiting their participation in jazz ensembles, women may unknowingly limit their career options as both educators and performers” (Delzell cited in McKeage 2004, p. 2).

Because there are so few female jazz performers and educators, young female jazz students rarely have the opportunity to study jazz with another female or model their playing after a female jazz player. Thus, the cycle of small numbers of women pursuing advanced jazz education and performance continues. In order for this cycle to be broken and the numbers of women in advanced jazz to increase, the reasons for females’ lack of participation must be uncovered and addressed. While women continue to excel at Classical music performance and teaching, their music experience is often inferior to that of a man’s because it is devoid of jazz.

Recommendations

This research suggests that middle school and high school female Classical musicians are as successful if not more so than their male classmates. As music educators, we must provide opportunities for girls to experience this same success as jazz musicians. The women interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of their early jazz improvisation instruction. All students that show an interest in jazz should be provided with the resources they need to begin improvising. If a student’s primary instrument selection prevents her from being a part of the school’s jazz ensemble, she should be encouraged to learn a secondary instrument.

The cycle of small numbers of women in advanced jazz persists when young female jazz musicians do not have exposure to female jazz role models. Doug explained how he has tackled this problem by encouraging advanced high school players to model for younger students. “I’ll bring some of the better high school players, I’ll say, “Meet me at 7 o’clock over at the ninth grade building and I want you to work with some of the kids. It’s an open invitation. Any time,

you don't have to tell me. Just show up. Show up with your horn, and I'll put you to work.' Now they've kind of gotten to the point where it's like, 'Oh, I go there, and I'm kind of like a guest star.' You know, a lot of those have been girls. So I'll give them the whole section and say, you're gonna go work on some blues with these three players in the other room. And I've seen that girl-helping-girl make a difference. It has made a difference."

Some of the interview subjects also indicated that practicing improvisation within the confines of an all-girl combo gave them a chance to take risks in a less-threatening environment. Molly explained, "Usually I'm the only girl in the combos, but it's (playing in an all-girl combo) cool. It's cool to play with all girls."

Finally, this research suggests that the most important component of teaching improvisation to girls is through individualized instruction in a nurturing environment. Doug emphasized, "You can't just tell them (jazz students), well, go transcribe this song, and go do this, and whatever. Because they just simply won't do it or they're not gonna do it so you have to guide them through the process. And then they have to also feel successful. They have to feel like they can be successful at this, and whatever it takes to get them to that point, then I'm willing to do that. I don't care what it is. Whatever hoop that is, I will do whatever it is to make them feel successful and feel good about themselves so that they want to do it. Because ultimately you teach yourself how to do it. Ultimately, every musician teaches themselves how to be a musician. Nobody teaches you how to be a musician, not really. That's your job. So my job is to get them to want to teach themselves even though they don't know that. It's all about motivation."

Summary

The findings of this research support my own observations as a music educator that the number of girls and women in high school, college, and professional jazz ensembles is much smaller than the number of men and boys. These numbers are in great contrast to the equal numbers of boys and girls in middle school and high school jazz programs. This research suggests that the attrition rate of female jazz musicians from high school to college is affected by the girls' choice of primary instrument, personality, and jazz improvisation instruction. All music students, male and female, that seek a creative and academic challenge should be provided with the opportunity and education to pursue advanced jazz instruction and experiences.

I remember I never had that moment of clarity where I literally thought, this is music, until I got into improvising. So from that moment on it was like, this is why I play the horn. Now I get it. Before, it had been fun, but it hadn't been anything special to me. When you're improvising, it's so much more personal. You're investing so much more. (Rhonda, 2008)

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APPENDIX A

SCRIPT FOR RECRUITMENT OF ADULT SUBJECTS VIA E-MAIL

script for recruitment of adult subjects (teachers) via e-mail

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa, and I am conducting research for my Master's degree research project about jazz education. I know that you are a successful jazz educator, and I would like to conduct a taped interview with you to explore how you teach jazz improvisation. I will be interviewing approximately 5 teachers and students.

I would like to interview you sometime during the next two months at a site that is convenient for you, and I expect the interview to take about one hour. The recording of our interview will be kept confidential, and I will be completing the paper this year.

Please contact me my phone or e-mail if you are interested in participating in this study. I look forward to talking with you about jazz education.

Sincerely,

Valerie Shanley

319-373-7410 (home)

319-721-1682 (cell)

valerieshanley@mchsi.com

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Valerie Shanley

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted at the University of Northern Iowa about teaching and learning jazz improvisation. UNI requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Ms. Shanley will conduct an interview with you of approximately one hour and will make an audio recording of the conversation. The information gleaned from the interview will be used to complete a research paper for the Master of Arts: Professional Development for Teachers degree.

Although Ms. Shanley will keep transcripts of the interview, information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the paper to report results of the study. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed one year after the paper has been completed.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study and no direct benefits to the participants.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all.

If you have questions about this study or desire information in the future regarding your participation, you may contact Valerie Shanley at 319-373-7410 or her faculty advisor, John Henning, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Northern Iowa at 319-273-7488. You may also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa at 319-273-6148 for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(signature of participant)

(date)

(printed name of participant)

(signature of investigator)

(date)

(signature of instructor/advisor)

(date)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER SUBJECTS

Interview Questions for Teacher Subjects

How do you determine when a student is ready to improvise?

How do you introduce students to jazz improvisation?

What level of proficiency do you expect students to have on their instrument before you introduce improvisation?

Do you use a particular text or method book with all of your students?

Please describe how the majority of your students make their first attempts at improvising? Do they want to base their improvising on music theory (following rules) or on aural skills (listening)?

Is your teaching strategy determined by the success or comfort that a student is experiencing with a particular method, or do you routinely use the same strategy with every student?

Do you notice any differences in the way that girls and boys react when first being encouraged to improvise?

Are they eager or reluctant?

How would you compare the level of instrument playing proficiency of your female students to that of your male students?

Have you noticed that your female students generally prefer one improvisation method over the other?

How does the willingness of your female students compare to that of your male students to continue improvising and performing at an advanced level?

What role do you believe the social dynamic in a jazz ensemble plays in a girl's willingness to improvise?

Advanced jazz ensembles are often comprised of more male than female students. Why do you believe this is typical?

In your years of teaching, how does the number of boys to whom you have taught jazz improvisation compare to the number of girls?

How do you feel that a teacher's gender affects a female student's willingness and ability to improvise?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT SUBJECTS

Interview Questions for Student Subjects

What is your first memory of improvising?

What was your initial reaction to doing it?

When you first learned to improvise, did your teacher use a text or method book?

Please describe your improvisation instruction.

When you improvise now, what do you feel is your primary basis for creating music?

How much do you think about music theory, and how much are you just "playing by ear?"

Do you feel more comfortable focusing on one more than the other?

If so, why do you think that is true?

How did you feel about your overall playing on your instrument *before* you started improvising?

How did improvising affect how you felt about your overall playing?

How do you feel about playing in a jazz ensemble and improvising now?

How do your feelings now compare to those when you first learned to improvise?

What do you believe would make you a better jazz musician?

What role do you believe the social dynamic of your jazz ensemble plays in your willingness to improvise?

In other words, does your willingness to improvise depend on who else is in the ensemble?

Do you believe that everyone's improvisation is affected by this social dynamic?

Do you notice any typical differences between the way male students approach improvisation and how females approach improvisation?

How did your playing compare to that of the males in your ensembles?

Do you believe that your teacher's gender affects your willingness and ability to improvise?

You have played in a number of jazz ensembles. How has the number of females compared to the number of males in these groups?

Why do you think this is true?