



Voice pedagogy for transgender/non-binary singers

Liz Jackson Hearn (she/her/they/them), MM



Use of the term “transgender”

In an attempt to maintain cohesiveness and simplicity, this presentation will use “transgender” as an umbrella term that encompasses any individual whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex and/or gender they were assigned at birth.



What do we hear in a voice?

- Accent/dialect
- Age
- Gender



Cues that lead to gender perception in voices

- Pitch (high/low)
- Resonance (bright/dark)
- Registration (CT-dominant/TA-dominant)
- Inflection and emphasis (glide & slide/volume & percussion)
- Cutoffs and onsets (smooth/abrupt, balanced or aspirated/glottal)
- Gestures (elbows and wrists/shoulders and hips)



Meet Q!

<http://www.genderlessvoice.com>

- What are our biases and how do we hear gender as individuals?
- Where do you hear gender neutral, feminine, masculine? Is it different from your neighbor?
- What aspects of voice do you hear that lead you to hear feminine, masculine, or neutral?



Gender dysphoria and voice

Gender dysphoria:

The feeling that one's assigned sex and/or gender is not congruent with one's experienced gender. Dysphoria can manifest as discomfort or distress about various aspects of gender identity, expression, and perception, including voice.

Voice dysphoria:

The discomfort that arises when some aspect(s) of voice, speech, and communication are not congruent with how someone wishes to express themselves or be perceived as they move through the world.



The collision of singing and gender

- Repertoire
- Voice part and Fach assignments
- Choral titles and voice parts
- Singing competitions
- Auditions and casting
- Bathrooms/dressing rooms




We can't assume what our students want

- What are your pronouns? (Groovy! Mine are _____)
- What do you like or dislike about your voice?
- How do you feel about the high and low parts of your voice?
- Are there times when you feel disconnected from your voice?
- How is it for you to sing certain [gendered] roles?
- What kinds of repertoire do you envision yourself exploring?
- How would you describe your ideal voice?



Vocal transition and considerations for trans and non-binary singers



Vocal transition: the process of shaping a voice to reflect gender identity, expression, and perception

- Medical transition
- Voice feminization and masculinization through technique



Medical transition: Hormone Therapy

- Once testosterone is present in the body, whether it is generated internally or received from an outside source, changes to the voice are permanent
- Estrogen does not impact voice range or vocal structures
- Testosterone therapy voice change looks similar to testosterone puberty, but not the same



Medical transition: Body-Shaping Garments

- Feminizing: corsets, waist trainers
- Masculinizing: binders
- Challenges in respiration, range, registration, volume
- Our responsibility is to support, not challenge or suggest alternatives without being asked



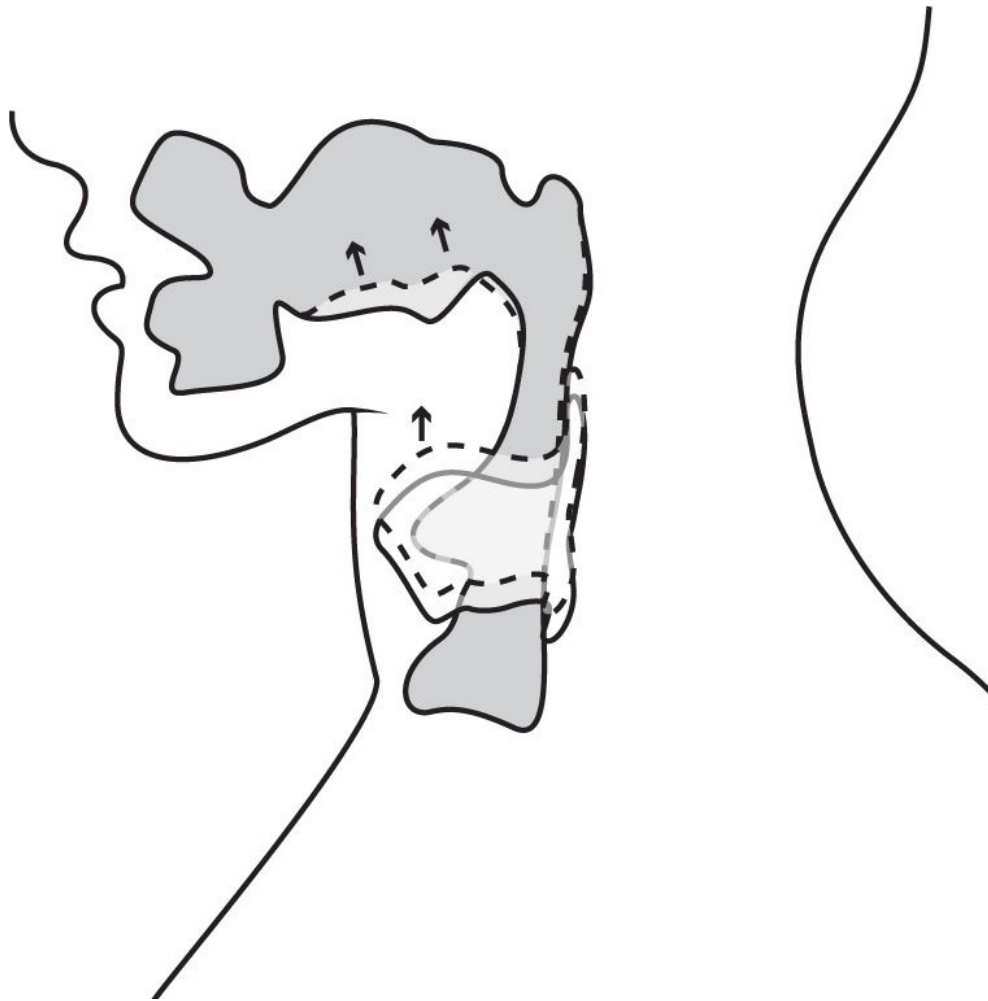
Medical transition: FFS, VFS and Speech Therapy

- Facial Feminization Surgery includes procedures which may impact voice
- Voice Feminization Surgery: raise pitch, shorten the vocal tract, shift registration
- Cricothyroid approximation/fusion - can help disengage TA muscle
- Thyrohyoid approximation - shortens the vocal tract
- Reduction of anterior vocal fold - shortens vibrating edge, raises pitch floor
 - Webbing
 - Suture
- Laser reduction of vocal fold mass - raises pitch floor
- Speech therapy can help support singing voice goals



Voice Feminization

The process of changing aspects like pitch, resonance, registration, prosody, articulation, musicality, interpretation, characterization, gesticulation, etc. in order to influence the listener or audience member to perceive a *more feminine*, though not necessarily or exclusively “female,” voice.



Voice feminization

- High, forward tongue position to achieve:
- Higher larynx position
- Smaller resonance tract
- Wider lips /i/ shape
- Resonance toward middle and front of mouth
- Articulation at tip of tongue:
 - Light, distinct, aspirated
- Light cutoffs and onsets
- Head voice/CT-dominant registration
- Higher Qo
- Release tension in tongue, jaw, thyrohyoid, palate



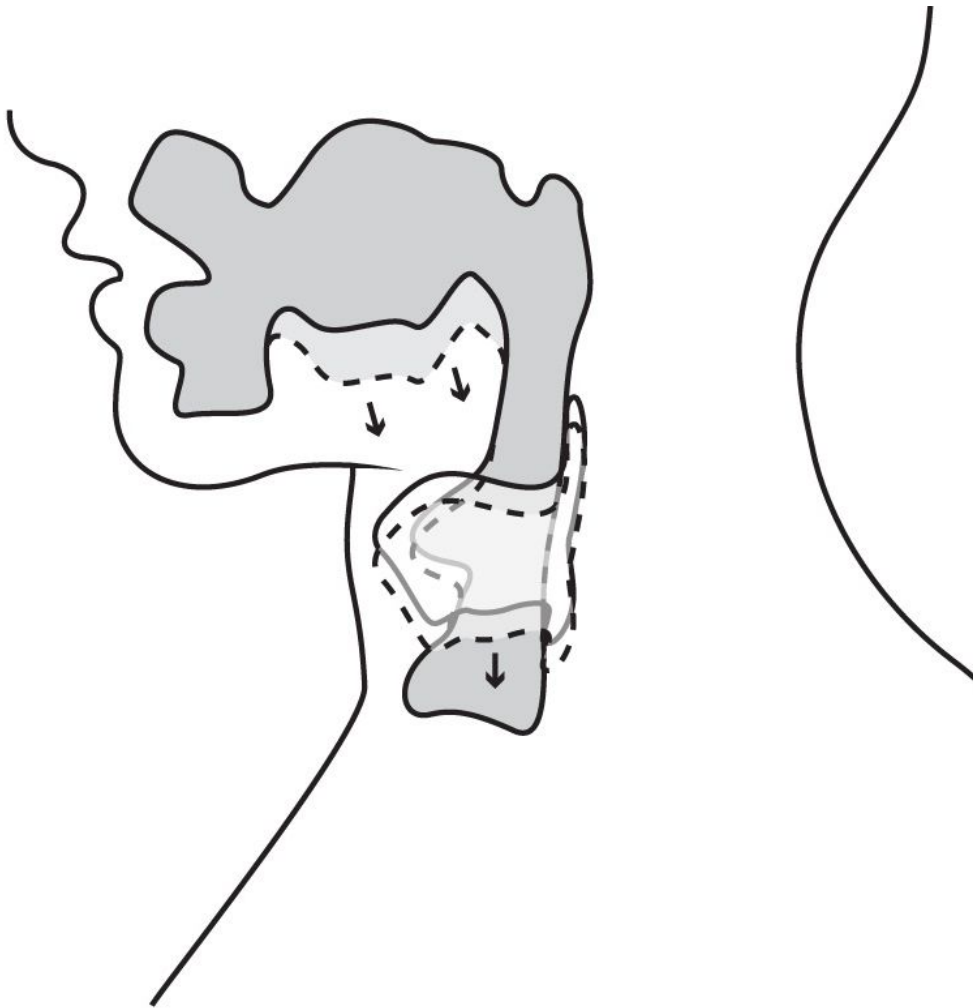
Singers to listen to (Voice Feminization)

- Breanna Sinclairé
- (Lucia Lucas)
- Laverne Cox
- Laura Jane Grace
- MJ Rodriguez
- L Morgan Lee
- Anohni
- AH MEH RAH SU
- Aneesh Sheth
- Ianne Fields Stewart
- Alexandra Billings
- Kyra Leigh



Voice Masculinization

The process of changing aspects like pitch, resonance, registration, prosody, articulation, musicality, interpretation, characterization, gesticulation, etc. in order to influence the listener or audience member to perceive a *more masculine*, though not necessarily or exclusively “male,” voice.



Voice masculinization

- Low, back tongue position to achieve:
- Lower larynx position
- Broader, longer resonance tract
- Narrower lips /u/ shape
- Resonance toward back and top of mouth
- Articulation at back of tongue:
 - Clear, percussive, not aspirated
- Percussive cutoffs and onsets
- Chest voice/TA-dominant registration
- Lower Qo
- Release tension in tongue, jaw, constrictors



Singers to listen to (Voice Masculinization)

- Holden Madagme
- Mr. Liz Bouk
- Adriano Cabral
- Lucas Silveira
- Eli Conley
- Adriano Angelico
- Oliver Rotunno
- Elliot Franks
- Samy Nour Younes
- Harrison Knights



Upcoming Teacher Training

Saturday October 17 & Sunday October 18, 10 am - 4 pm CT

One Weird Trick: Transgender Voice and Speech online weekend intensive, featuring singing curriculum for the first time

Register before October 10th at

www.thevoicelabinc.com/owt-training.html



Liz Jackson Hearn (she/her/they/them)

Co-Founder and owner of The Voice Lab Inc. in Chicago

Co-Author, *The Singing Teacher's Guide to Transgender Voices*

Author, *One Weird Trick: A User's Guide to Transgender Voice*

info@thevoicelabinc.com