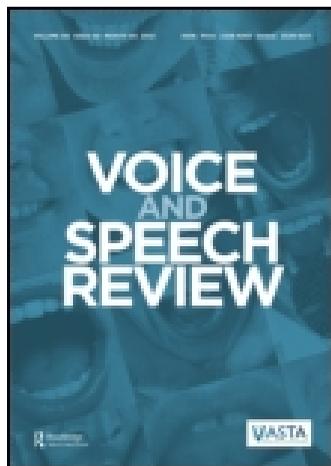


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Essay Transgender Voice: An Unexpected Journey

Douglas MacArthur^a

^a Doug MacArthur is a voice, speech and acting teacher in the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts at the University of Lethbridge in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. He graduated from York University (Toronto) with an MFA in Acting along with a Voice Teaching Diploma. During the spring of 2000 and 2001 he worked as an associate faculty member at Canada's National Voice Intensive. Doug has participated in numerous stage productions as a voice coach and as an actor. Recently, he has been applying his specialty in voice and acting to transgender voice training. Doug has also dedicated a significant amount of time to collecting dialect resource material for student and professional actors.

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Transgender Voice: An Unexpected Journey



Doug MacArthur is a voice, speech and acting teacher in the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts at the University of Lethbridge in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. He graduated from York University (Toronto) with an MFA in Acting along with a Voice Teaching Diploma. During the spring of 2000 and 2001 he worked as an associate faculty member at Canada's National Voice Intensive. Doug has participated in numerous stage productions as a voice coach and as an actor. Recently, he has been applying his specialty in voice and acting to transgender voice training. Doug has also dedicated a significant amount of time to collecting dialect resource material for student and professional actors.

As voice teachers, we help students, actors and clients in all facets of life to fulfill their potential and desire as speakers and communicators in a variety of venues and for a wide variety of impelling reasons. We are sometimes confronted with clients that push the boundaries of our experience and invite us to work outside the traditional routine of theatre-style voice training. As a result, we are often given the extraordinary opportunity to witness the power of the human spirit as these clients struggle to reveal and release a voice within them that is unrestrained by circumstance, ideology, psychology or physical limitation. A voice they can call their own.

The following paper is a description of my experience training someone who faced and faces layers of difficulties not usually encountered in routine theatre-style voice work: a Male-to-Female (MtF) transsexual. Attention will be directed to issues surrounding voice feminization for the MtF transsexual by documenting my experiences training one MtF transsexual's voice. Throughout the paper references will be made to literature, as well as voice and performance techniques that influenced the direction of the voice training. Challenges arising from this experience are presented and discussed. Finally, the importance of the theatre voice trainer in clinical models of transgender voice therapy is suggested. Also, a call is made for theatre voice trainers to share their experience, expertise and research in transgender voice training with other voice trainers and clinicians.

An Unexpected Client

The journey I am about to relay to you took me by surprise. I did not leave graduate school intending to declare transgender voice training as an area of research for myself, nor did I expect to be presented with such a research opportunity in the heart of rural Canada. However, as it has already been pointed out, voice trainers have the fortunate opportunity to work with a wide variety of people, in and outside the performing arts.

In the fall of 2001 I was contacted by one of my voice students in an anonymous email message. In this email the student indicated they had a special voice issue they needed help with, but didn't know how to proceed or where to go for help. It was obvious from the anonymity of the message the stakes were high for this student. After a reassuring reply on my part the student revealed in a second email that he was an MtF transsexual in the very earliest stages of transition and that he needed help feminizing his voice.

After a significant number of email exchanges and my assurance that anonymity would be respected, the student revealed to me his identity. For the purposes of this paper we will refer to the student as John. We scheduled a preliminary meeting where we would discuss his situation in more depth as well as my role as a voice trainer. John presented himself in this meeting, as he had done in his email, as a man. The psychological dynamics a transsexual must work through are complex and demanding. However, John made no verbal or non-verbal presentations that caused me to question the authenticity of his gender identity dysphoria or led me to believe that he was not sufficiently prepared to participate in voice training. This was further supported with the revelation that he was receiving medical support from a psychiatrist and a family physician in Calgary, and that his family, although

troubled by his gender issues, were generally supportive of his move towards transition. As part of my own disclosure, I drew attention to the fact that I was a voice trainer and not a Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP). Also, that this was new territory for me as a voice trainer and there would come a point in the training process where I would become as much an investigator as a trainer. This was satisfactory to John and the training plans proceeded.

Initial Response and Important Preliminary Information

My initial response of course was to acquire preliminary information on transgendered persons, and in particular on an MtF transsexual. I quickly found that I had many questions regarding voice training for clients seeking to permanently feminize their voices. Where does the voice teacher begin? Can the process begin with the natural voice? What then is the natural voice? What role can the theatre voice trainer play in the complicated puzzle of creating the female identity?

While accumulating information I gathered a heightened appreciation of the importance of voice to the transgendered person. The transgendered person, and more specifically the MtF transsexual, must negotiate her way through complicated stages of transition in order to become the gender, and finally the person, she knows herself to be. One of those transition processes, or stages, is the development of a feminine voice. The voice is like a fingerprint in many ways. It is almost an "infallible form of identification" (Rodenburg 1992). There are endless numbers of testimonies from MtF transsexuals who feel their voice betrays them. Lynn Gold highlights one such testimony in a VASTA newsletter. "I feel I am a woman, but if I can only speak with a man's voice my whole identity is shattered" (Gold 1999, 10). In the stark reality of this statement we see how key the voice is in the MtF transsexual's gender identity journey. A transsexual is then highly motivated. Voice is often the final piece of the equation.

It is important to note that both John and I were living in a community quite some distance from a large urban centre, where support groups and helpful resources might normally be readily available to either a member of the transgender community or a professional voice specialist. In many ways we were both isolated.

On an initial assessment of John's voice and body, I found him to be soft-spoken and somewhat withdrawn. He had a minimal investment in sound production, frequently devoicing. He was quite tall, but did not extend his spine to its full length and he collapsed in the sternum. As a result, he thrust his jaw forward and diminished the length of the back of his neck. His breath support was weakened and his vocal instrument had very little openness or freedom to it. Naturally, his inner

dilemma was evident in his body and voice. Up until recently, John always presented himself as male in all voice training sessions. In fact, he presented as a man in all public situations that I was aware of. He very rarely presented as a woman, other than in the privacy of his own residence. He made no request that I call him by his female name and for that reason I will continue to use his masculine identifier and the masculine pronoun as I describe these first stages of our professional relationship.

My email discussions and initial meeting with John revealed to me how very little I knew about the transsexual and transgender situation. One of my first tasks was to become much more familiar with the proper terminology, beginning with the terms transsexual and transgender.

It would be useful to define these terms at this juncture. A transsexual (TS) can be described as a person who has a deep long standing and irresistible longing to become a member of the opposite sex (Bailey 2003). The MtF transsexual is an individual who is biologically male but identifies himself as a female, and may or may not seek sexual reassignment surgery (SRS). The MtF transsexual often has a profound sense of dysphoria. The term transgender (TG) is an umbrella term used to refer to those with various forms and degrees of cross gender practices including the transsexual (Meyerowitz 2002). John very rarely referred to himself using either term. He hoped that one day he would be a full and complete woman and that the prefix "trans" wasn't really necessary.

As I continued to seek a basic understanding of the TG/TS situation and sub-culture, I became cognizant of the fact that the TG/TS individual walks a complicated path on their quest for wholeness, a path that is confounded with a complex array of physical, psychological and psychosocial influences and obstacles. Discrimination, employment trouble, family issues, religious issues, medical complications, legal and civil issues are just a few of these (Adler, Hirsch and Mordaunt 2006). Aware that core voice work has its own psychodynamic to it, I knew that it was important I proceed with sensitivity and caution. With an undergraduate degree in psychology and 11 years experience working in that field, I felt I had sufficient understanding to recognize the need to refer to other professionals should the work surpass my area of expertise. I am glad to report that this was never required.

Beginning with the Natural Voice

Patsy Rodenburg (1992) begins her book *The Right to Speak* with the short but powerful statement, "Voice work is for everybody." Rodenburg, like many other voice teachers is concerned with training the speaking voice, with a specific interest in training actors. But as she clearly states in the opening

sentence of her book, voice training is for everybody, not just actors. Rodenburg does not invite her readers to sound like Maggie Smith or James Earl Jones. In fact, she cautions her readers not to attempt to recreate the beautiful voice of someone else, but instead, to realize that, “every human voice has thrilling potential waiting to be discovered and unleashed. And [she does] mean *every* human voice” (Rodenburg 1992, 14). The process that voice teachers like Rodenburg invite students to embark on is one designed to uncover the natural sound of the individual human speaker. The natural sound, or what is often referred to as the natural voice, is the unrestricted and supported sound that is unique to every individual. It represents the vocal equipment each of us is born with and the potential we have to respond fully in a vocal manner to any given need for self-expression.

This concept of uncovering the natural voice of the speaker is a shared ideal for many preeminent voice teachers. Kristin Linklater, whose work I am most familiar with and practice myself, is one such teacher. Her landmark voice training text is simply titled *Freeing the Natural Voice*. Linklater makes a basic assumption that everyone possesses a voice capable of expressing a multitude of complex emotions and thoughts through a vocal range of two to four octaves but a combination of physical and psychological “tensions” impede the natural voice from its most expressive and unadulterated form (Linklater 1976). At first impression, a two to four octave range would be quite sufficient to handle higher feminine sounds.

Like Rodenburg, Linklater starts with the human vocal instrument and through her pedagogy helps the client reach a level of voice capacity, the natural voice, that already exists and then helps the client adapt to their vocal needs, actor or not. Voice training begins with the discovery and the development of the natural voice—“your own God-given voice” as Rodenburg (1992, 16) so aptly puts it.

My experiences and training as a voice trainer led me to believe that it was vital we begin John’s training with the development and release of his natural voice. This of course raised the question what was John’s natural voice? If the natural voice is what Rodenburg calls “our God given voice” how would that definition be described by, or to, a transsexual or transgendered person? Linklater (1976) suggests that freeing the voice results in freeing the person, and that each person is indivisibly mind and body. Would the investigation of the natural voice lead to or away from my client’s desired sound? The decision to begin with traditional voice work would not have caused me concern if it were one of my male voice students seeking to prepare to play a female character in a play, but in the case of my client, I knew this suggested course of action

could be unsettling. Exploring the natural voice for this client meant he would have to reveal his maleness because the natural voice for him will fall somewhere in the male spectrum. This was incongruent with his gender destination as a female.

Despite the troublesome questions related to the natural voice and gender identity, it was vital that John develop awareness and proficiency of his vocal instrument, as well as develop healthy voice practices, especially if he was going to attain his desired voice target and maintain that voice on an ongoing basis. I presented this concept to John and he objectively responded with, “I hate the sound of my voice, but I know that I am going to have to put up with this voice for a while until I find my female voice, so it’s okay.” This was a most difficult response for John but an encouraging response for our training program.

Over the course of the next six months I led John through a voice training sequence based predominantly on the work of Kristin Linklater and David Smukler. Key elements of this sequence included physical awareness, breath awareness, breath support, connecting breath and impulse with sound, freeing the channel for sound, developing mid, facial and head resonance and an exploration with vocal range. Throughout all our investigations unnecessary physical tensions impeding the voice were identified and, where possible, released through a variety of physical /sound related exercises. The material we covered in our coaching sessions was much like the curriculum of an introductory voice course in an undergraduate acting program. We met for an hour and a half once every two weeks, on the average.

The Training Proceeds

During these first six months of work the client revealed some very deep, rich sounds that in any other situations would have been immediately celebrated. Since the client was biologically male, but his identity was female, there would be no celebration. It was just hard work for him to get where he needed to be. Gender became more than a word. I witnessed the angst.

The revelation of this new sound experience was a key indicator that John was investing himself in the full potential and use of his natural voice. From a trainer’s point of view this observation meant that a proper vocal foundation was being laid. Future voice work could continue towards the feminine sound explorations. Up to this time I have been unable to find any study where the male vocal instrument was well developed as a planned precursor to the voice training for female gender identity to follow. Most studies I found focused on pitch and its importance in being perceived as female (Spencer 1988; Wolfe et al. 1990; Pausewang-Gelfer and Schofield 2000).

It would be helpful to know the success rate approaching gender voice training by first developing the full range of the client's vocal instrument (i.e. natural voice) in MtF clients as opposed to moving directly to frequency alteration.

After laying down the fundamental building blocks of vocal technique the next step in our investigation was to look towards creating a feminine sound. What then are the characteristics of the feminine sound? The first and most apparent characteristic is pitch or frequency. Much of the research I found on voice feminization focused on frequency and its relationship to being perceived as feminine. Intuitively I knew there was much more to creating a feminine sound than just pitch and subsequent readings supported this (Gold 1999; Dacakis 2000; de Bruin, Coerts and Greven, 2000; Van Borsel, De Cuypere and Van den Berghe 2001) but increasing John's pitch seemed to fit well with the natural progression of our work to date.

The fundamental pitch of a woman is most often perceived as higher than a man's. These pitch values are usually represented in measures of frequency. This fundamental pitch is referred to as the speaking fundamental frequency (sf_0), which generally means the habitual speaking frequency of an individual (Adler, Hirsch and Mordaunt 2006). Frequency ranges in males and females are about two octaves (65 Hz to 262 Hz for males and 128 Hz to 523 Hz for females) (Gold 1999). This indicates an overlap of about one octave. Spencer (1988) and Wolfe et al (1990) indicate that a speaking fundamental frequency of 156-160Hz is the dividing line between male and female voices. An MtF transgendered person must reach this dividing line or beyond to be perceived as a female (Spencer 1988). Michelle Mordaunt refers to this interval as an area of gender-ambiguous pitch, but after a literature review she expands this interval to include fundamental frequencies as high as 185Hz. She cautions clinicians to set realistic goals in regards to pitch modification stating that a "natural sounding voice" will be more suitable than a high voice (Adler, Hirsch and Mordaunt 2006).

With an overlap of frequency values of about an octave between male and female voices, and a reasonably low dividing line, raising John's fundamental frequency seemed attainable. In voice training terms this meant expanding the accessible range of the client's voice, establishing a target speaking fundamental frequency, sustaining that target frequency in a healthy manner and finally introducing the articulation of vowel sounds, words and phrases within and around the target frequency. It was this course of action I took with John.

A Challenge for Both of Us

During our early explorations of head resonance, placement

and pitch I thought John might be ready to explore words and/or phrases on some higher frequencies. We had just been creating some falsetto sounds on the vowel /i/ with good success so I introduced the idea of speaking in a falsetto by doing so myself with a short nonsense phrase. I knew this was not a voice we were striving to find. This was just an exploration with sound. As I began to create the falsetto sound myself he suddenly got self-conscious and mumbled out "I don't think we need to go there right now. I am not sure if I want to do that at this stage." He exhibited no particular angst about his decision to "not go there" right away. I determined to go ahead slowly and carefully without pressure. I expected and hoped the client would move to where he really desired to be as soon as he was ready.

By now I had some deepening insight into the difficult journey to "truth" in voice that the transgendered client must travel. There were many psychosocial considerations. For the most part he was alone in this journey to becoming a whole woman. Furthermore he was about to give voice to his deepest joy and perhaps his greatest fear.

This whole situation caused me to pause in the process. I began to have doubts about my place in all of this. Did we move too fast too soon? Was I prepared for these next steps in our journey? I wondered what I had to offer as a man to the process or at what point my effectiveness as a voice teacher might be limited by my male experience. On the other hand, if an individual came to me and asked for my help acquiring an Irish dialect I wouldn't hesitate on the basis that I wasn't Irish. Voice coaches are often asked to assist actors in the creation of character voices that are unfamiliar and push the boundaries of the human voice. However, John was not an actor in a play. I think that is what was most troubling for me. I realized this was real life for John and the stakes were high. Even still, I recognized that I had skills that were useful to his journey. John had invited me on this journey and I accepted the offer. I had a deep desire to assist him. It was important that I continue with him and support him as long as I could. Admittedly, a whole new experience of voice training had opened up to me, an experience that was causing me to reevaluate my perception of the natural voice and its relationship to gender. At this point I didn't feel like I had stepped outside the boundaries of my training or profession. My conclusion was that it was vital I carry on.

I later consulted with Sandy Hirsch, a Speech/Language Pathologist, voice clinician and co-author of the recently published text *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide* (Plural Publishing 2006) about this event. She reminded me that John, although perceiving himself

identifying as a woman, has been experiencing life heretofore as a man. Even though there may be nothing more pressing for him than moving along in the transition, leaving his male experience behind can still be difficult and produce, among other manifestations, hesitancy.

We took a break from the regular training during the summer and met again several times over the course of the next school year. John had a heavy workload at school and was trying to work on the side to pay his rent. We met only once a month on average, sometimes more frequently and sometimes less. As a result, we spent a lot of time revisiting the basic vocal work we had begun in the first six months of coaching. John began to make minor cosmetic changes to his appearance such as removing facial hair permanently from his face and chest through the process of electrolysis, nothing that affected his voice or the production of sound. It was during this time we began to work again on raising his fundamental pitch. There was no reservation on either of our parts as we revisited this work. Perhaps we were both more prepared for embarking on the next stage of our journey.

Internet Resources

About the time John and I resumed work on raising his fundamental frequency he indicated that he had discovered what seemed to be a reputable voice training program for MtF transsexuals. This was an Internet resource available in a video or DVD format. I had already begun collecting numerous resources as part of my investigations, so it seemed prudent of me to familiarize myself with as many voice training methods for transsexuals as possible, clinical or otherwise. However, I remained cautious given the source of the material, the Internet. John, whose lifeline in many ways was the Internet, was more optimistic about the program and anxious to see what it offered. Arrangements were made to purchase a copy of the DVD and additional materials.

John was first to receive the material, an instructional booklet, DVD and audio CD titled *Finding Your Female Voice*, produced by Deep Stealth Productions, Inc. He gave me the instructional booklet and audio CD to review while he kept the DVD. By this point John had already read through the booklet and watched the DVD several times. After reading through the booklet and listening to the audio CD I remained cautious but curious about some of the concepts and approaches presented in the material. I knew John was already exploring these concepts and approaches in his own practice so I decided we should investigate them together in our voice sessions.

Some of the introductory material was informative giving the user practical information about vocal anatomy and hygiene as

well as a very cursory description of a vocal warm up. Time and commitment to vocal exercises were also discussed and highlighted.

Attempting to walk through the material as if we were beginners, investing ourselves as objectively as possible in each new exercise, was challenging to say the least. I guess what concerned me the most was the emphasis in the exercises on moving from a pinched sound to a breathy sound as a way of discovering proper placement and resonance for a feminine voice. An endless number of exercises involving constricting pharyngeal and laryngeal muscles to create a "pinched voice" and then moderately releasing that tension into a breathy sound were outlined. The instructor on the DVD, Andrea James, pointed out that the optimal feminine sound lay between the pinched sound and the breathy sound. After spending two or three sessions exploring these exercises I suggested we discontinue the use of the material. I was very concerned that prolonged participation in these exercises would lead to the use of unnecessary laryngeal tension during speech. John's voice would soon be pushing the boundaries of his range. In order to maintain his vocal health over a long period of time (a lifetime) his larynx needed to be free of as much tension as possible during feminine speech. I could understand where the instructor was headed in regards to resonance and tone, but I was aware of other vocal exercises that could be used to reach the same results with less risk to the voice. My concerns were confirmed as I shared them with a Speech and Language Pathologist.

There are several voice training systems available online designed to assist the transgender community with vocal transition. These systems are disseminated by well meaning people seeking to serve a community that receives only minimal support at the best of times. For many transgender persons these voice training systems represent their only resource to make the necessary changes to their voices. However, it is important to recognize that individuals that have been successful with their own vocal transition, but don't necessarily have the credentials or training required to be trainers or clinicians, design many of these programs. Anyone using these programs should be encouraged to follow up with a professional voice clinician or voice trainer.

Back on Track

After a short side-track with the Internet we returned to the work we had resumed earlier. Exploring pitch could not take place effectively without exploring resonance and placement. Prior to this type of investigation with John, I had spent three days with Richard Armstrong at the International Voice Intensive at the Banff Centre, Canada. Two key focal points of

our three-day intensive were range and resonance. Armstrong led us through an array of vocal explorations that seemed to extend the possibilities for range in the human voice. His work is often referred to as “extended voice,” but in Armstrong’s opinion, “a multi-octave expression is in fact the normal healthy range of the human being” (Armstrong 2004, under “the voice is the muscle of the soul”). Armstrong demonstrated this with all the participants of the workshop. In each exploration we discovered the potential to experience and create pitch in a variety of resonating regions in the body: head, neck and upper chest, rib case and lower torso. Using a variety of character images that Armstrong insisted we embody as we created sound, a clear sensation of each resonating area was established—always on the same pitch. After a clear sense of placement and sensation was established Armstrong began to explore range within each region through a variety of individual and group exercises. Singing-type explorations were frequently employed. The end results were outstanding to observe. All participants experienced an unexpected growth in the range of their voices. From my own perspective, I was able to release sound in a free and open manner unlike any notes, higher or lower, that I had sounded in the past. There was no doubt this experience would have profound influence on my work with John in the area of resonance and range.

After incorporating this introductory work of Richard Armstrong’s into my own practice and teaching, I felt ready to introduce John to some of the explorations (I had been introduced to Armstrong’s work in several workshops and voice intensives prior to working with him directly). Of course, at this stage in the journey there was no need to explore lower regions of resonance or lower pitches. Generally speaking, higher vocal sounds are experienced in the face and head and lower vocal sounds are experienced in the chest. Literature indicates increasing and maintaining head resonance and reducing chest resonance is important to feminization of the voice (Gold 1999; de Bruin, Coerts and Greven 2000; Adler, Hirsch and Mordaunt 2006). Richard Armstrong’s work became invaluable in helping John identify and maintain a generally head/face centred voice.

Other exercises and explorations employed to establish face and head resonance, increase the range of his voice and establish an increased sf_0 included simple singing exercises, chanting phrases and slowly raising the pitch on each repetition of a phrase and focus exercises emphasizing the continuant /m/. I followed my original plan of working with sound, then using words and short phrases and eventually lengthening phrases into larger thought groups in conversation.

The measuring equipment we had to use did not include the high-tech frequency measuring tools used to determine sf_0

values and other measurements in referenced scientific studies. I simply employed a piano and a sense of pitch. Using this scientifically crude method of evaluation I determined John’s sf_0 to be approximately 110 Hz. After a period of approximately ten voice coaching sessions, John’s sf_0 was increased to 185 - 196 Hz. A proper assessment has yet to be conducted to determine our accuracy. However, the client’s ability to converse for increasing lengths of time during the hour-long sessions continued to improve.

A considerable amount of time was spent developing the client’s ability to place and sustain a targeted sf_0 and head resonance during speech. Frequently the client’s sound had a nasal quality to it, which diminished the authenticity of the sound. Placing the sound in the head without a dominant nasal sound was a difficult challenge to overcome. Many sessions were spent on reducing the nasal quality, with reasonable success. Strangely enough, an in-depth exploration of nasality with the /m/ sound was very useful in reducing the nasality. By having a clearer sense of hyper-nasality in the continuant consonant /m/, John was able to better identify sounds that were not hyper-nasal. Constant encouragement to allow the sound to move through his full mask (head and mouth) proved especially useful. Whispering phrases before voicing them was also productive. But the problem was not completely resolved. This was one of several stumbling blocks we encountered at this stage of our journey. Not only was it difficult to avoid a predominantly nasal sound to the voice, it also became difficult for the client to maintain the new sf_0 . His voice in my opinion sounded affected and not at all natural.

Beyond Pitch and Resonance

Up until this point most of our work had been dedicated to pitch and resonance, but I knew all along that an increase in the speaking fundamental frequency of a voice alone would not ensure a feminine sounding voice. A study by Spencer (1988) with eight MtF transsexual subjects, all with an sf_0 above 160 Hz, had only four subjects recognized as female and three of these were judged low on a femininity scale. Obviously there are other characteristics that need to be considered. My continued investigations had determined that fundamental frequency and resonance focus are only two of many gender related markers that could affect the male-to-female transsexual passing as a woman. Lynn Gold indicates ten markers that should be considered. These include: raising fundamental frequency; higher functional intonation range and pitch variability; more expression with a variety of pitch, stress and duration patterns; occasional breathy phrases and breathier voice; tag questions for consensus; use of modals such as can, will, trust, may; light but precise articulation; wider range of qualifiers e.g. such a little, quite cute; compound polite requests e.g. “Would you—please?” (Gold 1999, 13-14)

Gold also identifies several nonverbal markers that need to be considered such as maintaining eye contact, increased use of hand, arm and body gestures and spatial proximity to other speakers. Gold, of course, warns that stereotypical use of nonverbal gestures will result in a reduced perception by others as an authentic woman. Several recent publications support most of, if not all of Gold's observations in regards to verbal and nonverbal markers. These include *Changing Speech* by Shelagh Davies and Joshua Mira Goldberg, a resource paper prepared for the Trans Care Project in British Columbia, Canada and *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide* by Richard Adler, Sandy Hirsch and Michelle Mordaunt. Unfortunately, these publications weren't available at this juncture of my work with John, but each publication supports the understanding that creating a feminine voice has a broad group of influences outside of pitch and resonance.

The Actor Client Connection

As a voice teacher dealing primarily with actors, and being an actor myself, it was impossible for me not to think of the actor's work in relationship to gender transition and specifically the vocal transition. Gold (1999) suggests that feminization of a voice can be enhanced significantly by three major factors, one of which is talent or experience in the performing arts. I believe this to be true partly because the performing artist, and stage actor specifically, recognizes the interplay between the body and voice and invests a good amount of time and effort exploring this interplay. As voice teachers in the theatre we are constantly emphasizing the relationship between the body and the voice. Many voice training systems combine physical movement with sound production in order to free a restricted voice, develop awareness of vocal processes within the body or for the creation of character voices. Theatre voice trainers witness, almost on a daily basis, the significant change that occurs in the voice of an actor when he or she commits to the physical body of a character. The detail work an actor must participate in when building character is very similar to the work a transgender person must participate in. I am highly sensitive to the fact that the transgender person is not creating a temporary role and that the art of creating persona for the TG/TS person has high stakes attached to the process and is often complicated by a number of significant physical, psychological and psychosocial influences most actors will never have to consider when creating a role. However, my experience and sensibility as an actor and theatre trainer caused me to nudge John into the next and most vital stage of our journey.

During one of our more challenging, but productive sessions, I shared my observation that our voice work, although

successful so far, was now being limited by his masculine personae during our voice sessions. I suggested, that when he was ready, he should consider embodying his feminine personae during our voice sessions. He agreed with my observation and said he would consider my suggestion.

John was still presenting as a male in public situations. I realized this next step for him was huge and needed to take place only when he felt ready. My experience with John thus far was that he did things at his own pace, with thought and always with full commitment. I left him to consider my suggestion and didn't bring it up again. We continued with our work, meeting when we could, sometimes with less regularity than we had in the past.

Within about three months John informed me that he had started taking hormones and had set a date to live fulltime as a woman. Of course, he had consulted with his psychiatrist and family physician about this change. (In Canada, a transsexual person wanting to be considered for Sexual Reassignment Surgery must first live fulltime as their desired gender for one year.) He had already met with his manager at work and explained his situation and plans for transition. His manager was supportive and plans were put in place for John to begin this transition at work. Naturally both John and I felt an urgency to continue with our work and meet on a more regular basis.

My opinion was that vocally John was ready for this next step. He had made incredible gains with the development of a feminine voice. It wasn't perfect by any means and still needed work, but I felt that it was ready for this next step in transition. There were still many feminine markers we hadn't yet covered or even considered. I sensed that a few of these markers would take care of themselves as the transition unfolded. The other markers we would have to address after he went fulltime.

As part of our final preparation for John's transition we began to look at inflection and the feminine voice. Mordaunt (2006) points out that studies suggest women tend to have more inflection and pitch variation than men during speech. I thought it might be useful to listen to and imitate a woman's voice as a way of incorporating more natural feminine inflection into John's voice. It is not uncommon for actors preparing a dialect role to listen to samples of native speakers of a dialect and then imitate the subjects as a way of learning the proper inflection and cadence associated with the dialect. Dialectician Gillian Lane-Plescia frequently encourages her subscribers to imitate the tune of select phrases she offers in her dialect samples, insisting that by doing this the tune or

cadence of the dialect will naturally become part of the dialect during speech (Lane-Plescia 2002). I thought this concept might transfer well to our work with the feminine voice.

It was important that we choose a subject that modeled a voice that suited John's sensibility and vocal range. John suggested we consider using his roommate Mary (her name for this purpose) as a vocal model. They shared a lot of similarities and interests, and more important her *sf*₀ seemed close enough to John's feminine voice that he could imitate her vocal range in speech without too much challenge. John spoke with Mary and she agreed to help. Plans were made to record her during a natural conversation.

After recording about 40 minutes of conversation with Mary we then extracted short phrases for practice. John spent a considerable amount of time on his own repeating and imitating these phrases. I supplied John with a copy of the conversation in CD format so that he could also practice any sections of the recording that interested him. Two voice sessions were dedicated to listening and imitating specific phrases from the recording.

Only minor changes in John's speech were observed such as a slight raising at the ends of declarative phrases. It is important to note that John had only been practicing with the recording for a few weeks at this point. More significant, John was still presenting as a man in our sessions and when our work was completed at the end of a session he would resume use of his masculine voice. I was curious to discover what affect studying with a voice model might reveal after he had gone fulltime as a woman. Could there be more assimilation taking place than was being expressed at this time?

I met with John for the last time a few days before his transition date. Everything was set. He had written an informational letter for his colleagues at work, which was to be distributed and read out at a Friday afternoon staff meeting. John would not be present at this meeting. His manager would answer any questions colleagues might have and facilitate discussions as needed. The following Monday, Sandy (John's female personae) would arrive at work. John was also planning to meet with his family over the weekend and introduce them to Sandy. His family had been well informed about his transition date and anticipated his arrival that weekend.

Transition

Despite all the work we had done and the accomplishments John had made with feminizing his voice, I was still very nervous about this next step. I was as much nervous for John as I was thrilled for him. We had been working together for

several years by this point and all my attention had been on preparing John's voice for transition almost forgetting that a transition day would and should actually arrive. My goal had always been to assist John with vocal transition, but the true goal was really larger than that. It involved an entire person—voice, body, mind and spirit. Like the actor, John was indivisibly all these things. The goal had always been bigger than just feminizing a voice. It was to help someone find wholeness.

On November 25, 2005 John was transformed into Sandy. Unfortunately, I was unable to meet with Sandy for quite some time after her transition date. I was directing a play for a local theatre company and we were in our last week of rehearsals before technical rehearsals began (an all consuming time in a theatrical production). In actual fact I didn't speak or see Sandy for several weeks after her transition date.

My first contact with Sandy was a call on my cell phone. I wasn't expecting to hear from Sandy by phone as most all our communications were through email. Any phone conversations I'd had with Sandy in the past were always brief. She didn't ever seem to have much to say while on the phone. I was completely taken by surprise when she called. In fact, I didn't even recognize her at first. It took me several moments to connect the name with the voice. She sounded very convincing and naturally feminine on the phone. And she was very talkative, which I found surprising and fascinating.

A week or so after this phone call I met with Sandy for the first time in a voice session. By this point she had been living as a woman for over a month. The voice elements we worked so hard on such as speaking fundamental frequency and resonance were being well maintained. I did observe further inclusion of feminine inflection in her speech and a lighter and more precise articulation pattern as well. Of course, there was more work to do in these areas, but a solid foundation had clearly been laid, and as I suspected, fully embodying the feminine personae made a significant difference in her voice.

Sandy and I continued to meet on a semi-regular basis for general vocal maintenance and to address vocal issues that arose from living fulltime as a woman. Issues surrounding volume, laughing, coughing and crying were predominant. There is still other work that needs to be done in regards to the development of her voice. Feminine verbal markers outside of speaking fundamental frequency, resonance and intonation need to be addressed. (Although intonation does need further investigation.) Non-verbal markers that affect feminine perception also need attention. A vocal maintenance program should be established so Sandy can maintain the vocal characteristics she has already mastered.

Having said that, Sandy is indeed passing as a woman. She told me of an incident where she was filing some forms at a government office. She indicated that she normally leaves the boxes blank where you are asked to indicate your sex. The clerk she had been talking to when checking the forms, noticed the open boxes related to gender identification and checked the one indicating female without any query. The client was very encouraged and excited at this modest success. In the same time frame the client reported that she is most often perceived as a woman when on the phone. Progress had been made!

Final Reflections

The journey will continue from here with emphasis on incorporating other specific feminine verbal markers. Although I had some reservations in the beginning with “natural voice” training as a launching ground for our journey, it had proved most valuable in the process. Indeed, the expanse of the natural voice has room in it for an authentic feminine sound. Several voice clinicians recognize the importance of theatre oriented voice training to the ts/tg client, but few have the theatre background or training to incorporate these techniques into their therapy programs. The need for concrete discussions between voice trainers and voice clinicians (SLPs) is far overdue. The inclusion of voice trainers in the team of “transition professionals” for transgendered persons is warranted. Finally, a call for other voice trainers to document and share their study of the transgender voice training is most needed.

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