

## Gendering the middle classes: the construction of conductors' authority in youth classical music groups

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### Abstract

While many accounts of gendered embodiment focus on transformation, this article examines how normative gendered identifications are reinforced among middle-class young people playing classical music. Drawing on an ethnographic study of young people in youth orchestras and a youth choir in the south of England, it examines how the authority of the male conductor is constructed and experienced. It explores the construction of the charisma on which this gendered authority is based, through embodied craft, sexualisation, and humour, showing how conductors cultivated this mode of authority, which relied on the embodied intimacy of classical musical practice. As a consequence of these gendered power dynamics, young women talked about their conductors differently from the young men. Despite the discomfort or resistance that some of the young women voiced in private, they approached rehearsals with a willing trust which gave the public appearance of their consent to his authority. Against the ways in which participants emphasised agency and choice in interviews, observations of rehearsals revealed young people's conformity to this gendered authority. This paper therefore contributes to theorising gender among the middle classes by demonstrating how the affective power of the conductor in youth classical music ensembles produces conformity.

Recent work in this journal on gender and embodiment has foregrounded accounts of transformation (Brace-Govan 2004; Butler and Charles 2012; Stephens and Delamont 2013). By contrast, in this article I explore how gendered authority works affectively on and between bodies to reinforce norms of gendered embodiment. These processes are examined in a middle-class setting, classical music rehearsals. I take the choral and orchestral conductor as an exemplar of gendered authority in order to examine how authority is constructed in the male body, and how it is experienced by young, middle-class musicians.

The non-linguistic, embodied intimacy of this musical experience allows a shift from discursive to affective accounts. Therefore, the article focuses particularly on the affective interactions which facilitate this mode of power, as well as how it inscribes itself on and affects bodies. To this end, the construction of conductors' charisma is analysed in its workings through consensual as well as more coercive practices, such as humiliation and fear. Framing these practices in relation to the middle-class habitus of the young people in this study, it can be seen that classical music's normative practices can reinforce or entrench embodied gender norms. Furthermore, against accounts of the middle classes narrating themselves as agentic and choice-making, the gendered authority which is central to classical music practice foregrounds the way affective interactions in this setting produce conformity.

#### Authority and the gendered embodiment of classed subjectivities

This article contributes to debates in this journal and elsewhere around gendered embodiment and middle-class normativity. Recent attention to gendered embodiment has focused on how it can be altered or transformed. Brace-Govan (2004) in her study of women weightlifters argues that the strength that they acquire through this practice allows them to feel dominant and powerful, and this 'demystifies masculinity' for them. Delamont and Stephens (2013) describe how British men dancing capoeira undergo a process of transforming their British masculinity into a Brazilian mode of embodiment. Butler and Charles (2012) describe how women jockeys attempt to be accepted into a highly unequal profession through bodily transformation. The discipline and punishment of their bodies that this involves achieves a 'contradictorily gendered habitus'. These accounts suggest that transcending embodied gender norms is sometimes possible. By contrast, this article focuses on how embodied gender norms are reinforced through everyday practices of gendered authority, using the site of classical music to examine how this gendered power works within a middle-class habitus.

While some aspects of middle-class culture, such as parenting, have received extensive attention (Irwin and Elley 2013; Lareau 2011; Vincent and Ball 2007), an understanding of how middle-class normativity is produced affectively is less scrutinised (Lawler 2005), especially in comparison to a focus on working-class lived experience (Charlesworth 1999; McKenzie 2015; Skeggs 1997). This lack of theorization of middle-class norms and experience is in part behind the charge that social theory often carries a normative middle-class bias (Skeggs 2003; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Research on the middle classes reveals the bourgeois subject as a 'person for whom life is a conscious, reflexive project of the self' (Reay et al., 2010, p. 632; see also Ball 2002; Reay et al. 2011). Recent discussions of bourgeois femininity have centred on how the reproduction of class is achieved through young women's academic success; young women 'embody the values of the new meritocracy' (McRobbie, 2008, p.58). This success is produced through homogeneous pathways through education for such young women, which Walkerdine et al. (2001) describe as a 'conveyor belt' underpinned by anxiety (p168). While the young women in Forbes and Lingard's study (2015) displayed an 'assured optimism' about their futures, Maxwell and Aggleton (2014) and Allan (2010) reveal cracks in this idealised female identity, presenting young women's academic success – and therefore the reproduction of class – as fractured and not assured; their conformity to the ideal of academic success requires a difficult balancing of norms of bourgeois femininity with academic identities (Allan 2010). An array of 'agentic practices' (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2014) are required to sustain this identity. The effects of these 'agentic practices' on social change remains unclear; as Maxwell and Aggleton (2013) ask, '[d]o the outcomes of such agentic practices of necessity reproduce social relations rather than offering possibilities for social change?' (p7)

This article builds on these discussions of agency within conformity by focusing on the embodied affects created by male authority. Maxwell and Aggleton (2013) foreground the role of affect in making agency possible. Forbes and Lingard (2015) noted in the Scottish independent girls' school they studied that the charisma of the (female) headteacher was powerful in forming girls' views. This article develops and extends Maxwell and Aggleton's theorisation of 'agentic practices' among established middle-class young women by examining how the possibility of inhabiting authority is heavily structured by embodied gender norms. It also demonstrates how male authority is experienced differently by young men and young women. Through examining music, a non-linguistic, embodied practice, the affective experience of authority emerges in a different way.

These questions are examined through an ethnographic study of classical music. Classical music as

practice has largely escaped critical sociological analysis until recently (eg Scharff, 2015; 2016) Bartleet (2008); Yoshihara (2008); McCormick (2015), O'Toole (1994)). And yet, it is a rich lens through which to examine the reproduction of a heavily gendered bourgeois subjectivity which can be traced back to middle-class institution-building in the UK in the nineteenth-century (Ehrlich 1985; Johnson-Hill 2014; Weber 2004). Classical music is still overwhelmingly produced and consumed by the middle-classes (Bennett et al., 2008; Schermer and Savage 2010). Christopher Small argues that classical music concerts present to the industrial middle and upper classes 'their values and their sense of ideal relationships' (1998, 193). If classical music presents the middle classes' 'ideal relationships,' the stark patterns of gendered inequality in classical music become even more notable; for example, Scharff (2015) found that only 1.4% of orchestral conductors working in the UK are female. Indeed, in 2013 Marin Alsop was the first ever woman to conduct the Last Night of the Proms, and was subjected to gendered abuse as a result. Alsop links her success in this role with gendered embodiment. She described in an interview how, 'I've really worked hard at trying to, sort of, de-genderize my gestures' (Woolfe 2013).

These gendered patterns need to be understood within the context that produces them. This article takes the site of the classical music rehearsal. Rehearsals are an important space of social learning for young people, making explicit some of the tacit knowledge of this musical culture. Historically and contemporaneously, they have received little critical or theoretical attention. While Jarviluoma (2000), in her study of amateur musicians' rehearsals, links rehearsal practices to wider social structures and identities, studies of classical music rehearsals and masterclasses have instead examined them as bounded sites to explore their micro-social dynamics (see for example Bayley, 2011). And yet, in rehearsals the norms of this culture and its influences from the past can be read. Rehearsals are also a liminal space between public and private spheres, and a meeting-point for practices of intimacy and authority. Examining embodied interactions in the quasi-private space of rehearsals, can, therefore, illuminate the way gendered authority is constructed as a form of embodied intimacy.

Classical music, as I have argued elsewhere (Author, 2016), is historically as well as today expressive of the norms and values of the middle classes. Furthermore, the authority of the conductor, the composer, and the musical score are all deeply engrained in classical music practice (Kingsbury, 1988). Not only in classical music, but in the arts sector more widely, Nisbett and Walmsley provide evidence from the UK and Australia of the influence of charismatic leaders, and caution that charisma can 'supplant ethics, strategy and reason' (2016: 8). Bringing literatures on

gendered embodiment, classical music practice, and the middle classes together can therefore complicate the ways in which the middle classes narrate themselves as agentic, choice-making subjects and contribute to theorising the role of affect in shaping agency. Against this backdrop, therefore, my purpose in this article is to contribute to and extend sociological accounts of how gendered authority is produced affectively between bodies through examining how gendered middle-class subjectivities are reproduced in youth classical music ensembles. Following a brief overview of the study, the article first explores how the charisma of the male conductors in the study was produced. It then focuses in on how the physicality of the conductor worked on musicians through tone of voice, gaze, gesture, and breath. Turning to examine choral singing practices in particular, I demonstrate how young women were susceptible to the gendered authority of the conductor in different ways to young men because they were unable successfully to mirror the posture of the male conductor. I describe how this mode of authority, combining affect and surveillance, worked directly on bodies, drawing on gendered identifications and susceptibilities to construct unity – but at a cost.

#### An ethnography of youth classical musical ensembles

This paper is based on findings from a larger study looking at how class is reproduced in the body among young people playing and singing in classical music ensembles. Funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council as part of a doctoral research project, the study comprised an ethnography carried out with four extra-curricular elite youth classical music ensembles in a county in the south of England: a youth choir, two youth orchestras, and a youth opera group. (The latter is not included in this paper as it rehearsed in a different way.) I participated as a musician in the two youth orchestras and the youth opera group and observed rehearsals and performances with the youth choir. In addition, I carried out 37 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with young people, as well as interviews with nine of the adults involved in running these groups. Young people were asked about their 'musical biographies' as well as their experience of playing or singing in these ensembles. The young people were almost all white and established or second-generation middle-class, with a handful of first generation middle-class participants and one working-class participant (drawing on Reay et al.'s (2011) theorisation of middle class fractions as first-generation, second-generation or established middle-class). The participants in these groups were aged between twelve and their early twenties, but interviewees were all sixteen or over due to ethics considerations. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with permission. Thematic analysis was carried out in dialogue with fieldnotes from observations and participant

observations.

Recent research on the middle classes in the UK has relied on interview data (Reay et al., 2011; Vincent and Ball 2007; Maxwell and Aggleton 2014; Irwin and Elley 2013). This study, by using an ethnographic approach, allows a more nuanced picture of middle-class subjectivities to emerge. An interview-based study of these groups would have led to a more positive account of the experience of authority, with ambivalences and discomfort less present. In particular, ethnography has enabled a comparison between the ways participants narrated their experience of gendered authority in rehearsals, and my own observations of rehearsals. I was able to discuss these observations with participants in interviews or informal conversations and to build up relationships over time, which led to a richer seam of interview data. Most unique to this method, however, are the descriptions of how authority is experienced in the body, obtained by putting my own body into this relationship of gendered authority. As will become clear, while the interview data provided accounts from young women of how they experienced the gendered authority in these groups, the data from my participant observations showed how this embodied authority was constructed and communicated.

These observations were from my own situated perspective which had certain differences to my participants. I was older than them, and a more accomplished musician, and I was not experiencing the excitement of playing or singing these large-scale works for the first time. Most importantly, I was bringing a feminist perspective to bear on these groups; among my participants, it was only those who told me they were feminists who articulated critical perspectives on gendered authority. This means that my observations are reflecting a situated perspective which was overall more critical than that of many of my participants. This is a standpoint epistemology where concern is with 'the positive scientific and epistemic value of marginality' (Harding, 1996, 242). This account is therefore not a descriptive one of the overall experience of young people's experience of classical music ensembles, but an analytical one which focuses on the affective, embodied aspects of rehearsals in order to help explain persistent gender and class inequality both within the classical music world and in the middle classes more widely.

The construction of gendered authority through charisma

The scene: a school hall filled with 40 teenagers and a few adults. I am sitting at a table to one side with the administrator. The teenagers are standing in two rows in a semi-circle, holding musical

scores in their hands, looking at the man in front of them. He faces them, talking, gesturing, and singing musical examples. He finishes his instructions and tells the choir to start singing from the top of page five. The piece is Purcell's music for the funeral of Queen Mary. The pianist gives a note for each of the five parts, and the conductor raises his hands, all eyes in the room trained on him. Lifting his hands to indicate to the choir that they should be ready to sing, he gestures to the bass section, who mirror his in-breath. He mouths the words with them as they start singing, his body and hands drawing the sound out of them. Then he gestures towards the tenors; his face exaggerates the vowel shapes of each word and the young men's faces mirror his expressions. The altos have been waiting alertly for their turn; he brings them to life with another gesture; the sound builds further – he welcomes the second sopranos in, and then finally the sopranos join the lament. At such close proximity, the layers of sound assail me with their raw, visceral intensity.

Later, reading over my fieldnotes from observing this rehearsal, I realised I had written down a monologue from the conductor. The only speaking voice that was heard in rehearsal, for long periods of time, was his, interspersed with sung fragments by the choir. Yet the audibility of his authority in rehearsals contrasted with his silence as a musician in not making any sound himself. This silence only makes sense when we reconceptualise the choir or orchestra as his instrument, which he is playing with his hand gestures, using the 'body' of the ensemble in order to play the music – using his body to play their bodies. From my fieldnotes it could almost appear as though there is no-one else in the room. How is this consent achieved? His authority seems absolute.

There were four conductors who I interviewed and observed as part of this study<sup>i</sup>. Richard was the conductor of Cantando youth choir, a professional conductor in his 40s. Olly was also a successful professional conductor in his 40s who conducted one of the youth orchestras in my study. The second youth orchestra, the New Symphony Orchestra, booked young conductors, Adam and Will, who wanted to get experience and would work without being paid. All were white British except Will who was from East Asia; all had attended Oxford or Cambridge except Olly who went to one of the highly selective London conservatoires.

The charisma on which their gendered authority was based relied on the particular form of intimacy which is enabled by music as non-linguistic, embodied communication. Bodily gesture, posture, tone of voice, and use of emotion were all carefully channelled by conductors in order to get particular effects from the musicians. The two younger conductors in particular, Adam and Will, downplayed the possibilities for power and authority inherent in their role, instead focusing on

embodied strategies for maintaining the consent of the musicians. Adam told me, for example, that his conducting teacher had instructed him never to catch anyone's eye in the orchestra. It appeared that to do so might create a bond of intimacy between the conductor and an individual player, whereas we – the musicians – had to feel like we were being watched all the time without ever establishing a direct, personal connection with him. Similarly, Will told me that his conducting teacher had instructed him always to maintain an openness of posture; all of his gestures had to have a sense of welcoming and inviting the musicians to play for/with him.

The sense in which these embodied techniques constituted an explicitly learned persona became obvious when I interviewed Olly one lunchtime. I was taken aback that as soon as we started the interview, his warm, open demeanour abruptly disappeared and he immediately became very serious and focused, in what appeared to be a complete personality change. The personality which I had assumed was his 'natural' one, was in fact calculated to get a particular response from the group, which he was explicit about in the interview, saying, 'it's entirely deliberate'. His conducting persona was so successful that I nicknamed him 'the charismatic charmer'; with his dry jokes and genial, didactic manner he had the orchestra eating out of his hand within minutes of the first rehearsal. I came home from my first day's fieldwork with him and wrote in my notes how 'I was just enjoying being in his presence'. It was easy to forget that this was a mode of authority, as the trust and willingness of the musicians meant that we were always eager to carry out his instructions.

These embodied techniques, and the authoritative but carefully neutral tone of voice that accompanied them, had the effect of disavowing any power imbalance in the relationship between musicians and conductor. The young musicians also maintained this sense of equality through emphasising their agency within the rehearsal process, such as having the power to ask questions. Singer and string player Helen asserted that 'I'll ask Richard questions all the time [in rehearsals]' but in my observations of rehearsals, very few people did so. When they did, they only asked questions of clarification or technical detail which deferred to his expertise rather than making substantive or interpretive suggestions. What Helen's comment illustrates is that it was important for the musicians and singers to retain the possibility of asking questions – the sense of agency – even if they chose not to exercise it. The same disposition of making a choice to obey could be seen in Will's comment that all of his gestures must have a sense of welcoming or invitation about them. This allowed musicians to feel that they were accepting his invitation, rather than obeying his command.

Will himself described his role as a ‘people manager’, similarly underplaying any power inherent in his role. However, in the British cathedral choral tradition, as represented by the conductor of the youth choir in my study, Richard, authority was not camouflaged in this way. Indeed, the young people enjoyed this authority, telling me that Richard is really ‘inspirational’ and ‘amazing’; that ‘he’s always got the right answer, straight away, or if he [doesn’t] he always makes a decision’; ‘he’s not afraid to tell people when they’re wrong’; ‘if you’re not sure he’ll just tell you what to do’. This power appeared to come from a combination of his charisma and his expertise. In particular, his expertise was highly valued by the singers in the group because it enhanced their own musical ability, and raised the standard of the group as a whole.

This expertise and the high level of detail and technical knowledge it involved were part of the culture of the cathedral choral tradition. According to one of the vocal coaches with the group, Jeannette, its norms also included a strongly hierarchical ‘pecking order’ with the conductor at the top; the conductor ‘getting moody’ to get the choir to do what he wants and thus keeping the group in a mode of fear; and a sexualised culture of innuendo and humour. This sexualised humour was occasionally visible in Cantando rehearsals. It might involve reading innuendo into the words of a song, or as Richard said to the choir in one rehearsal, ‘your larynx should wobble like this’, before making a reference to Jimmy Savile<sup>ii</sup>. Jeanette described a famous choral conductor she’d worked with in the 1980s who would say, ‘I want this phrase to be *molto legato*’ [very smooth] and stroke the leg of one of the sopranos to demonstrate what he meant.

One singer, Francesca, thought that when Richard made sexualised jokes, they were ‘actually calculated to make us feel like he’s treating us as adults’. In rehearsals when Richard made a crude joke, everyone would laugh, but in the private space of interviews, a few of the young women expressed their discomfort with this. Holly told me that when this happens, ‘I don’t know how to react. I kind of smile...’. These jokes created an atmosphere where women’s bodies were sexualised, which played into the dynamic, which I explore below, of the musicians mirroring the conductor’s body, with women’s bodies therefore necessarily having to be ‘corrected’ as wrong.

Francesca thought that Richard’s awareness of exactly what he was doing at every point was part of a broader scheme, typical of male choral conductors, of what she called ‘emotional manipulation’. Similarly, humour was an integral part of Olly’s charm. It seemed like jokes were necessary to leaven the boredom of rehearsals, which involved periods of waiting while other sections of the group were being rehearsed. Humour was such an important part of the repertoire of conductors that

Jeanette told me she thought this was why there were hardly any female conductors, because this use of humour is gendered. This humour was used to maintain the delicate balance of the rehearsal, where emotions such as excitement, boredom, frustration, and competitiveness were constantly being cultivated or managed.

Intimacy of gaze, gesture and breath

Charisma, and the social and musical control which it was intended to bring about, was also achieved more directly through the physicality of the conductor, in a process of mirroring which was described to me by a focus group of nineteen to twenty-one year old singers. Already, before this discussion, I had become fascinated, almost fixated, by Richard's physicality when I observed rehearsals. He had a solidity to him, a groundedness combined with an openness to his torso, which allowed him to gesture with his arms to cajole sounds out of the choir, while still staying fixed in a sturdy, reliable physicality. The singers described to me how the posture of the conductor was all-important because they, the choir, would be mirroring him; in order to create a good sound with one's body, posture as a singer was integral. This was an embodied form of communication, as one focus group participant described:

'You have to project your personality, so what you want the music to sound like, you have to get across to the choir in how you stand, your arms, in the way your facial expression is – in every ounce of your body, you've got to do it.'

In the same discussion, another singer described the affective dimension of this: '[Richard] makes us be passionate about the music [...] it's also about him just sort of showing us how he wants us to feel the music'. This postural mirroring and affective communication was both enabled and made more powerful by the strong bond of trust that developed between musicians and conductors in all of the groups I worked with. This was visible in how earnestly the young people would try their best to follow the conductor's instructions, as well as in how they spoke about the conductors, one singer saying 'there's a kind of trust that Richard definitely knows best'; 'Richard is really inspirational I think and I don't think a lot of people would be here if it wasn't for him.' Another said: 'you can get away with a lot if your choir trust and respect you musically'. This trust or earnestness was notable in all of the groups in my study, and amounted to a mode of embodied, affective openness or susceptibility among the young musicians.

This deep trust also meant that the conductor's unpredictability of mood was very powerful; a couple of sharp words were enough to get a response from the musicians. In the conductor's gaze there was both a promise and a threat: the threat that if you make a mistake you might get a 'look', and similarly the promise that if you get it right when the rest of your section makes a mistake, you might be noticed for playing well. I was in Will's line of sight in the New Symphony Orchestra rehearsals. As his gaze ranged across the orchestra, I felt as though he was often looking at me. I found myself hoping that this was because he had noticed how well I was playing. This seemed to be a response to the structure of being 'played' by the conductor. However, in light of Adam's comment that he tried to avoid catching anyone's eye in the orchestra, it was clear that this feeling of intimacy was an illusion.

As well as the gaze, there were points when it felt like the conductor was almost a puppeteer, playing our instruments and our bodies with his gestures. The requirements of the aesthetic of classical music – precision, dynamic extremes, complexity, and large-scale structures – necessitated this way of working together. During a *pizzicato* passage (plucking the string rather than using the bow), which requires very precise timing to get the whole section playing together, we had to watch Adam's fingers intently, mirroring our hand gestures on the string with his hand movements. My awareness at such moments was expanded to include the whole string section, but at the forefront of that focus was a hyper-alert following with my entire being of his hands, body and eyes, my breathing becoming shallow with the effort of concentrating. There was an added physical intimacy of playing without the bow, but instead directly touching the string with my fingers. The conductor would give us the exact, delicate hand gesture for each note, so it was almost as if we were trying to be his fingers, or he was inhabiting our hands, the physicality of the gesture being the same for him and for us; as though he was playing our bodies. This also worked on the level of the breath. Even as string players, we would be instructed to breath together with the conductor's upbeat gesture. In *Cantando*, this mirroring of the breath was even more intimate, as the choir would mirror Richard's in-breath at the same time as his hand gestures. Adam reflected in interview on how he experimented with changing his hand gestures slightly and the sound he got back from the orchestra changed as a result. This embodied intimacy in gaze, gesture and breath had the effect of almost allowing the conductor to inhabit our bodies and draw the sound out of us. Our expression and our sound became his.

Gendered mirroring: the embodiment of 'rightness'

The mirroring of the conductor described above occurred even more intensely in choirs than in orchestras. This was in a large part because singers' bodies are their instruments, and so not only is posture an important part of making a good sound, but also there is no physical barrier between their bodies and the conductor's body. This even extended to facial expressions, for example with Richard giving instructions or demonstrating what their eyes and eyebrows should look like as they were singing. This close attention to all aspects of posture, breathing and facial expression meant that Richard often commented explicitly on the way individuals were standing, for example saying to one young woman, 'stand as if you know this piece, you look a bit unconfident'. This postural mirroring was inevitably gendered in that the female singers were trying to imitate the physicality of the male conductor, in a context where women's bodies were joked about in sexual ways, as described above. This was particularly difficult for the young women who were less confident, such as Emily, who was seventeen at the time, who described in interview the effect of this postural correction of the young women in the choir had on her:

'it's kind of quite a dangerous situation to be in because you're so focused on not being picked on and embarrassed in front of everyone that you focus really hard on doing everything right, like, every aspect from your body language, to the way you hold your book, to the way you sing'.

She focuses intently on doing everything 'right', but this is in a context where her body is mirroring Richard's stance, gesture, breath, and facial expressions. This calls to mind Coleman's (2013) work on interactive mirrors, which describes how one's body is experienced differently through a screen or mirror which reflects it back with differences or enhancements. As a singer, watching the conductor and being 'played' by him resembles this 'intensive experience' of an interactive mirror. And yet, for the young women in the choir this meant seeing in the mirror a male body which they can never hope to match perfectly. Indeed, accounts of postural corrections from a few of the young women suggested that women's bodies were, in this setting, in need of correction to try to more accurately mirror the perfect humanity of the white male body of most conductors. This 'rightness' or correction was therefore used to correct the female body into trying not to be female.

This imperative towards rightness that Emily described was, she went on to say, motivated by fear: 'I'm definitely quite afraid of Richard'. This fear appeared to be the flipside to the enormous respect and trust, almost awe, that the singers tended to have for Richard, with some of them describing that their strong attachment to the choir was mainly an attachment to him; and that he is

'top dog' or 'top of the food chain'. With this level of consent – almost hero-worship – from the group, Richard rarely needed to use coercive tactics. However, Francesca, a confident, articulate young woman and a veteran choral singer, saw the use of fear or domination as an integral part of choral singing culture. She described how:

'in one of the choirs I sing with, we're required to put all our markings in before we come to rehearse [...]. And at one point I had had so much on that I hadn't managed to finish off the markings, and this became obvious [...] and the conductor said, oh Francesca I don't think you've got that in, and I said, I'm really sorry, I haven't had time to finish off the markings, and the response was [he went] completely silent for a good ten seconds, and then he said, "thank you for telling me that, I wish you hadn't told me that". Which completely devastated me, and I just... I really... I felt absolutely tiny as a result of that.'

This fear was partly produced by the surveillance of the conductor. The following exchange between Katherine and Hannah describes how it feels to work under Richard:

K: I like it that he's so demanding, he pushes us. Sometimes I get frustrated because, he'll be like, we sing something and he sort of stops us, he keeps stopping us and saying 'you've got to do this' and you think, well, it sounds the same, what exactly are you wanting to change? And then we suddenly get it, and he says 'yes, that's it' and it sounds exactly the same to me [...] He's just so good at hearing the holistic sound, the overall sound, but actually knowing what everyone's voice... *he knows* who is not quite there.

H: *He knows* what needs to be done to get the blend perfect.

K: And *he knows* exactly who it is that isn't quite with it. And that can be quite...

H: Scary!

K: Intimidating, at times, because you know, you know if you're tired or something, you know that he will have heard it. [my italics]

Their repetition of the phrase 'he knows' suggests that there is nowhere they can hide from his aural surveillance, and that every sound they make with their bodies is scrutinised and judged by him as up to standard or not.

Any criticisms of Richard's mode of working only emerged in private, in my interviews with some of the women and young women involved in this group. However, in public the structure of hero-

worship was strongly upheld. Most of the young people accepted this mode of authority as an intrinsic part of this musical practice, appreciating the high standards of music-making that they achieved with these conductors.

### Gendered identifications with authority

These tactics of gendered mirroring, sexualised humour, omniscience, and fear of humiliation, were experienced differently by young men and young women in this group. These differences drew on the ways they were positioned differently in this sexualised culture, as well as the different modes of identification and desire which were available to the young men and young women following gendered patterns from wider society. In a focus group with seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, I had a stark example of these different modes of identification. Their adulation of Richard reached fever pitch when a young man in the group, Dan, described: 'it's like a military regime – except it's even better than a military regime because it's something that we like'. A young woman, Mollie, followed this with 'sometimes I feel like I'm his dog, you just want to obey him. In a good way'.

These comments reveal differently gendered pattern of heterosexual and homosocial desire and identification. Mollie, who declares that she feels like Richard's dog, is able to identify with a pattern of gendered domination and submission, a submission which her comment that this is 'in a good way' suggests that she enjoys. This mode of desire, to submit herself wholly to him, is one that appears to be both acceptable and pleasurable for her to explore. Francesca identified this as a broader pattern, telling me that in her experience 'there are a lot of male conductors who do rule by that... conduct by that kind of personality, half flirting, half... um, ah, dominating.'

By contrast, the mode of identification which Dan draws on, who declares 'it's better than being in the military', is a homosocial one, a model of authority from what is traditionally a closely-bonded, male-only group. Like Mollie, he wants to submit his entire persona wholly to this authority. However, Dan's mode of identification is differently gendered to Mollie's. The conductor's power is one that he can identify with, and identify being or becoming, while for Mollie the position of submission, while pleasurable, gives her less possibility of identifying with becoming powerful. The flipside of this pleasure in submission, for some of the young women in this group, was the fear and humiliation described above. The rehearsal methods of authority and correction – a discipline which was relished by some, and valued for leading to high musical standards – were experienced as humiliating and belittling by others, but these emotions were not expressed by any of the young

men in the group.

This therefore became a mode of authority which was inaccessible to the young women in my study. A few of the young women said they would like to try conducting, and one was learning to conduct as part of her teacher training, but most of them (unlike the young men) said they weren't interested, 'didn't have the skill', or had tried and failed. Helen, an extremely confident and authoritative young woman, described how her body just couldn't do it:

'we did some conducting lessons, and I was really bad, I just looked like I was doing ballet [...]. I think you can either do it or you can't, in terms of physically, it's almost a look, just a way of moving, the kind of physicalisation. It either looks like it comes very naturally, or not really. And I don't think – it's not a question of musicality. [...] But I can – I wasn't very good and I don't think I'd ever be able to try it again.'

By contrast, orchestral conductor Will described how 'the technique, fortunately, has always come quite naturally to me, [...] from all the conducting lessons I've had, I've never really had to change my technique'. The 'kind of physicalisation' that Helen lacked appears to be the same as the 'automatic posture thing' which Emily describes: the embodied, gendered confidence that Richard epitomised, and expected of all the members of his choir. The instances of correcting posture which were perceived by some of my participants as humiliating were therefore simply part of the normal gendered structure of this musical practice.

Conclusion: authority as embodied intimacy

This article has described a mode of authority that is predominantly consensual but with the coercive possibility of humiliation ever-present. Embodied intimacy is crucial to this authority; the conductor's charisma and through this, his authority, is established through his physicality, his voice, his gestures, his stance, and his gaze. Therefore, by examining authority in musical practice, one particular facet of its construction is illuminated: its non-linguistic, affective, embodied power.

The intercorporeality of this authority relies on a particular mode of embodied intimacy wherein much of the communication in rehearsals occurs through gesture, body, gaze, or breath. I have suggested that this intimacy is a kind of bodily porousness on the part of the young musicians, in that their trust, their earnest openness, and their desire to please means that they want to be

corrected and improved by the all-seeing, all-hearing conductor. This trust in turn increases his power, as every nuance of his tone of voice or tilt of eyebrow works on them. This susceptibility and openness is also therefore a vulnerability, which works differently according to the gender identifications of the young people.

This article has shown how this power is constructed as a bodily and affective craft which is consciously learnt and deliberately performed. While 'craft' today means skill, an earlier meaning was 'strength, power, might, force' (OED, 2015). This etymology draws attention to the dual meaning in these practices of the construction of this authority both as a bodily and affective craft which is consciously learnt and performed by these conductors; and as a mode of power working through and between bodies as a form of intensive mirroring. Coleman's (2013) theorisation of mirroring as 'intensive experience' is helpful to understand this relationship between bodies, by enabling a focus on how 'power works through intensity', from within. But what happens when this mirroring is not of one's own body, but of the body of someone in a position of power who is shaping one's every move, breath, and facial expression? Recall Emily's emphasis on 'doing everything right'. She describes her experience of the power of the conductor as an imperative towards rightness, which in turn constructs an affect of fear. For these young women, mirroring produces them not as opposite but as imperfect bodies. As a result, gendered identifications of the young people tended to be reinforced or entrenched with minimal space for transformation or subversion. While many of the young women in these groups were confident at speaking with authority and to authority, they still saw themselves as unable to embody the authority of a conductor. At most, they could see themselves conducting school music ensembles in the role of classroom music teacher, but not the kind of elite ensembles that the male conductors in this study worked with. In this way, this article explains the construction of the high levels of gender inequality which Scharff (2015) found among those in positions of power in classical music.

This is a mode of authority which seen as necessary for the aesthetic demands of large-scale, complex pieces which the young musicians in this study aspired to perform, and which are seen to need this central organising mind and body of the omniscient conductor<sup>iii</sup>. The difficulty of the music and the high level of detail which it is possible to achieve were among reasons given by young people for the hero-worship of their conductors. His expertise was, for most of the musicians, more than enough justification for submitting to his authority. In this way, the very aesthetic structures of classical music, as institutionalised by the nineteenth century bourgeoisie and codified in the musical score, can be seen to contribute to the mode of gendered authority I have described in

this article. This conformity was therefore productive of a musical/affective experience which was only possible within this group setting.

Finally, this article has described how this mode of authority is occurring within a predominantly middle-class setting. The particular ways of embodying gender that I have described are the gender norms of the established middle class. While the middle classes as adults have been theorised as forming their identity around reflexivity and choice, the material presented in this article extends literatures on bourgeois femininity to suggest that among young people, at least, this possibility of being a choice-making individual is being differently exercised. Their habitus tended towards conformity, and in many cases pleasure in that conformity, to the point that speaking out against sexualisation or humiliation did not occur, except in private. Despite this, both young people and conductors in these groups disavowed any power relationship between conductor and musicians, emphasising instead the agency and choice of the musicians. The sense of musicians as choice-making individuals was assumed by Will when he explained that his gestures had to invite, rather than command, musicians to play, so that they had the sense of choosing to respond to him. But this choice was illusory; the musicians always said yes.

These examples demonstrate how ethnography can illuminate aspects of classed subjectivity which are obscured by solely relying on interview data. They show how the discourse of agency that was evident in young people's accounts did not translate into the exercise of agency in practice. Finally, this article has also demonstrated that in classical music, which can be seen as a normative cultural practice of the established middle-class, the social relations codified in the aesthetic of the music work towards reinforcing normative gendered identities, which are all the more powerful for being communicated within the intimacy of this non-linguistic, embodied musical experience.

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<sup>i</sup> All names have been changed.

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ii Jimmy Savile was a well-known English TV and radio personality who, after his death in 2011, was revealed to have been a prolific sexual offender.

iii There are a small number of professional orchestras that work without a conductor. The major issue with working in this way appears to be that it takes much longer to rehearse this music without a conductor.