

HERESY TO ARTISTRY: THE UPWARD MOBILITY OF MUSICAL WHISTLING
THROUGH RHETORICAL REFRAMING

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

California State University, Los Angeles

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

By

Carole Anne Kaufman

December, 2017

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Dr. Robert DeChaine, Committee Chair

Dr. Kamran Afary

Dr. Cynthia Wang

Dr. David Olsen, Department Chair

California State University, Los Angeles

December 2017

ABSTRACT

Heresy to Artistry:

The Upward Mobility of Musical Whistling Through Rhetorical Framing

By

Carole Anne Kaufman

Mouth whistling is one of the oldest forms of communication known to humans. Though often overlooked and underappreciated, whistling has been a powerful, universal tactic of message sending for millennia. Research reveals historical contexts of whistling as an uncouth, unlucky and unladylike act reserved for the working class. This has resulted in the disparagement of all forms of whistling. Despite its status as a marginalized act, people around the world partake of whistling for many purposes, including music. Competitive whistling events which showcase virtuosic musical talent have existed for over forty years, yet the art form does not receive the respect other musical instruments have been awarded. This thesis explores the rhetorical influences that have consigned whistling to low-culture, muting its voice and restricting its existence as a legitimate musical art form. It examines how essentialist perspectives, empowered by hegemonic ideologies of gender and class, have constrained the potential of musical whistling to grow as a culturally credible musical contribution. Patriarchal hierarchies and gendered, linguistic cues promote subtle sexist practices which marginalize people and practices based on arbitrary cultural constructs. Historically, women have been expressly forbidden from whistling. Direct and subtle sexist messages, perpetuated through language and folklore have sustained the status quo across generations, silencing women's voices and whistles. Exposing unconscious acts which support and sustain the

status quo reveal subtle, marginalizing forces which promulgate ideologies across generations. Nescience is investigated as a powerful element sustaining archaic ideological perspectives. Through autoethnography, the author, a world-champion whistler, describes strategic rhetorical processes employed with the intention of reframing and transforming musical whistling from noise to art.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to all that have supported my success as a student, professional, and individual. My parents, Ed Kaufman, Bonnie Kaufman, and Darlyne Blythe, are to be acknowledged first. Thank you for giving me life and providing a diverse and supportive foundation in which to thrive. A resounding “Thank you!” to my friends, family, associates, and cohort who have consistently poured their generous support and unconditional faith into my educational, personal, and professional endeavors.

I have been blessed to work with a world-class committee of supremely intelligent and knowledgeable advisors who have guided me through this process. Thank you for saying “Yes.” Dr. Robert DeChaine: A generous, committed team captain who brought insights, expertise and experience to every conference. Dr. Kamran Afary: Provided a compassionate voice of guidance and focus. Dr. Cynthia Wang: Her precision, scope of knowledge, and dynamic insights were invaluable to the success of this life-affirming project. I would like to express my gratitude to CSULA, its faculty and staff for being the foundation on which I have become a more complete version of myself through confidence, knowledge, and community.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the inner spirit, the light that drives us all – an invisible yet undeniable force that draws us forward to create what only we can. By being open, loving, and willing, we become extraordinary and expand what is possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter	
1. Framing the Study.....	1
Whistling as a Universal Communication Device.....	2
Whistling as Artistry.....	5
Whistling as an Ignored Art Form.....	6
Whistling as a Devalued Communicative Form.....	8
Noise Not Music.....	8
Superstition.....	9
Low-Culture.....	10
2. The Rhetoric of Whistling: Feminist and Cultural Perspectives.....	15
Feminist Theory.....	16
Cultural Theory.....	22
Nescience.....	30
Ethnography and Autoethnography.....	32
3. Whistling and Gender Exclusion.....	38
Women’s Division.....	42
Endorsing the Gender Divide.....	43
Influence of Folklore.....	45
Blogs.....	48

IWC Webpage.....	52
The Whistling Diva is Born	55
The Whistling Boy.....	57
4. The Journey from Shrill to Thrill.....	61
The Spirit of Competition	62
Competitive Whistling: Then.....	63
Competitive Whistling: Now	64
Raising the Bar.....	67
Strategies for MMW 2017	70
Venue	70
Illustrious Guests, Illustrious Event.....	72
Master Class.....	74
Online Representation and Media Framing	74
Upward Mobility Happens	78
5. Insights and Implications	80
References.....	86
Appendices	
A. The Whistling Wife.....	96
B. Pasadena Weekly: Cover One	97
C. Pasadena Weekly: Cover Two	98
D. Masters of Whistling Website: Homepage	99
E. Masters of Musical Whistling 2017 Flyer	100
F. Masters of Whistling 2015 Photos.....	101

G. Masters of Whistling 2017 Photos	102
H. Whistling as an Art: Los Angeles Times Article	103

CHAPTER 1

Framing the Study

It's a beautiful Southern California morning and I have just taken the stage to perform the musical offering to this congregation. My accompanist is at my right and I am breathing deeply to calm myself and expand my lung capacity. Jeffrey begins the piano intro to Somewhere Over the Rainbow, chosen for its familiarity, heartfelt message, and poignant composition. I am nervous, excited, and proud to have been invited to warm the hearts of these worshipers seeking peace. As the song's introduction ends, I take a deep breath and begin to whistle. The first few notes emanate throughout the room and I notice the familiar look of surprise on faces in the audience. I ascend into the melody, and surprise turns to appreciation. I continue to breathe, expanding my diaphragm to capture as much air as possible, sustaining my legato notes. I am open and connected with my audience. Many are being swept away by the music; some are tearing up while others relax into a state of aural ecstasy. I become moved by my own performance; the sweetness of the tones and the depth of feeling emanating from the congregants is deeply touching. As the last sweet, high note blows forth from my pursed lips, I soak in the glory of this contribution knowing I have conjured two profound experiences for my audience: a divine moment of musical artistry and a recognition that would never be forgotten – whistling is a beautiful art.

At the end of the service, quite a few people come to me to share their personal comments and stories. One woman wistfully mentions that my whistling reminds her of her father's and a gentleman recalls the special whistle pattern he used to call his kids with. Finally, an elderly woman reveals a story I have heard too many times: "I always

wanted to whistle but my mother would not let me, she always said ‘A whistling woman and a crowing hen will always come to some bad end.’” There was a sadness in her voice and for a brief moment I saw the little girl that wanted to whistle, just like the boys, but was told to be quiet, like a good girl should.

Whistling as a Universal Communication Device

Human mouth whistling has been a part of everyday life for thousands of years. Whether one is whistling while they work, “wolf” whistling, hailing a cab, or calling the dog, not a day goes by on this planet without an oral whistle of some sort sounding off (Meyer, 2015; Ostwald, 1959; Van Stekelenburg, 2014). This universal action has been performed throughout human history, on every continent, for multiple significant purposes including language, nonverbal communication, and music (Meyer, 2015; Ostwald, 1959; Van Stekelenburg, 2014). The presence of whistling and its many functions has been recorded throughout antiquity. Ancient Chinese texts mention the practice of “xiao,” or whistling; Greek historians record that North African people used “whistle-like sounds” in their speaking; and the Holy Bible mentions that the Lord “whistled” a signal to summon his people (Meyer, 2015, p. 12; Van Stekelenburg, 2014, p. 68).

Whistling has been a tonal element included in languages on every hemisphere of the planet. Whistled communication, referred to as Silbo in Spanish speaking countries where it is still practiced and taught, can be used to send messages across great distances because the piercing tones can be heard across mountain ranges (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; Meyer, 2015). Shepherds and farmers could communicate about weather or pasture conditions using a whistling technique that would traverse over five miles. Whistled

directives were signaled to a plow horse, or used to convey directions to a shepherd's dog guiding and directing a flock of sheep (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; Meyer, 2015). From Turkey to Thailand, Greece to French Guiana, and the Canary Islands to the Alps, whistling has been a historical, communicative element in communities across the world (Meyer, 2015).

For cultures both primitive and modern, whistling has long been a practical, all-purpose communication tool with a diverse repertoire. From attention-getting to soothing, distracting to delightful, painfully loud, to surprisingly delicate, whistling has unlimited potential as a communicative device and musical expression (Meyer, 2015; Ostwald, 1959; Van Stekelenburg, 2014). Despite the fact that it is pervasive, functional, and useful for a variety of essential purposes, it is rarely recognized as the ubiquitous, beneficial contribution to communication and culture that it is, and has been, for millennia (Van Stekelenburg, 2014). While whistling may initially conjure associations with rudeness, incessant noise, or harassment by construction workers, it is also used to perform intricate jazz solos, Mozart symphonies, and virtuosic entertainment.

Although it is used as an essential communication tool, over time whistling has been somehow stripped of its positive value and is now framed as an inferior, even problematic, communicative act. Gaining a reputation as a low-class behavior in the Industrial Age, whistling has since been drastically reduced as a predominant activity (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013). Patriarchal attitudes toward women promulgated perceptions that whistling was a repulsive and low-class behavior which could cause a woman to lose her most important asset: social standing. Years of marginalization, distributed and reinforced through rhetorical messages, have reduced the number of people that engage

in whistling and has stunted the ability of musical whistling to grow as an art. Whistling, in this project, serves as a site for illuminating the dominant power dynamics people uphold while robbing themselves and others of art, creativity, and access to full self-expression.

These issues have spurred the present study, and prompt a number of pressing questions. What are the communicative processes by which whistling has been relegated to the realm of low culture? How do common communicative expressions become symbolically annihilated? How do rhetorical messages create and perpetuate cultural attitudes across generations that marginalize or mute certain groups? How do such cultural attitudes endure in society, even long after their explicit evocations no longer exist? Finally, can the reputation of acts deemed as low culture be elevated and transformed through intentional rhetorical reframing?

The purpose of this study is to discover the conscious and unconscious rhetorical messages that have muted whistling, restricted women's participation in it, and restrained musical whistling's ability to be perceived as a fine art form. The main argument of this study asserts that rhetorical representations have consigned whistling to the status of low culture and have muted women's freedom to whistle by marginalizing the act. This research aims to reveal how dominant power structures and cultural mandates, delivered through rhetoric, have led to the degradation of a once common communicative act and severely diminished whistling as a personal expression for women. Subtle and unconscious messages can reduce or annihilate a universal action and the opportunity to practice it.

Hegemonic ideologies, directed by those in power, can create disdain for ideas,

people, art forms, and groups. This research furthers the understanding of how processes of marginalization are effected in and through communication practices. This thesis intends to contribute to the field of communication studies by examining the processes by which forms of cultural expression such as whistling are marginalized, and by extension, how women and women's voices are concomitantly marginalized. Additionally, it expands the existing literature regarding musical whistling as a fine art and competitive category as it relates to rhetorical influence.

Whistling as Artistry

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, "Music is the universal language of mankind" (1919, p. 219). An ever-present ingredient in human life, cultures around the world have expressed themselves through music for millennia. Playing music demonstrates self-expression and artistry, revered qualities that enhance communication, self-fulfillment, and meaning. Humans possess an apparatus, integrated with the body, which enables them to produce this treasured form of expression wherever they go. It is available to most anyone in the world, free of charge, no matter one's location, income, or social stature. Enabled with the power to inspire and move people to tears with its profound musicality, it can invoke wonder, confusion, and delight. This instrument, the human mouth whistle, has the potential to move an audience to tears with its exquisite tone.

Though rare, there exist virtuosic whistlers thrilling audiences around the world with exceptional and unexpected musicianship. Inexperienced listeners often reveal the wave of shock, awe, and new appreciation they feel after hearing virtuosic whistling for the first time. As a two-time musical whistling world champion, I have intimately

experienced finely executed, world-class musical whistling. From arias to symphonies, pop songs to jazz, musical whistling, when demonstrated by a master, can go toe-to-toe with any traditional musical instrument. For over a decade, I attended and competed at the *International Whistlers Convention (IWC)*, where whistling was performed by participants from across the globe. World-class whistlers and novices competed in both classical and popular music divisions with the ambition of receiving a trophy and title. Those with the highest scores in musicality, technique, and performance were selected as world-champions.

I received three second-place trophies and one third-place win before earning the title of “International Whistling Grand Champion” in 2008 and 2009. I also received the “International Whistling Entertainer of the Year Award,” recognizing my performances on stage, film, and television. I now produce the bi-annual *Masters of Musical Whistling International Festival and Competition (MMW)* in Los Angeles, California. We are currently only one of only two whistling contests taking place worldwide. In September 2017, we provided over thirty musical whistlers from seven countries the opportunity to compete for the world championship title. Some of the best whistlers alive performed at the festival and the excellence of our “International Concert of the Masters” epitomized world-class musical artistry.

Whistling as an Ignored Art Form

Whistling is predominantly absent from public and professional musical performances. Although whistlers were celebrated briefly during the vaudeville and big band eras, musical whistling has been denied respect for ages. Most sophisticated melodic instruments, and instrumentalists, have been allowed to contribute their voice to

the mélange of vehicles that deliver music to the masses; whistling, it would seem, has not. Often ignored, undervalued, or belittled, musical whistling is denied recognition as a fine art form and is missing or restricted from a vast array of musical environments including orchestras, bands, and popular music. Granted, there are many non-musical uses for the mouth whistle, but in this study, I am focusing on the common act of producing tones and musical notes with the mouth through an opening in the lips. Here I reference “whistle” as a synecdoche referencing the mouth, and all of the necessary components that comprise an “instrument” that produces musical notes.

Merriam-Webster declares the “whistle” as “a device through which air or steam is forced into a cavity or against a thin edge to produce a loud sound,” and “a shrill clear sound produced by forcing breath out or air in through the puckered lips” (Whistle, n.d.). This is a painfully incomplete definition of a beautiful, compelling musical device. Other instruments are defined as musical; whistling, in contrast, has no mention of musicality—only that it is “shrill,” which according to *Merriam-Webster*, is “to make a very loud, high-pitched sound” (Shrill, n.d.). Although there is some accuracy to this description, it rhetorically eliminates the reality of its potential as a pleasant, music producing device.

At first glance, the topic may appear obscure, yet it is a purely commonplace act, timeless and universal. Produced merely by breathing, one can, even if accidentally, whistle. There exist many stories of toddlers and infants producing notes through pursed lips. This type of “pucker” whistling is the most typical, although whistling tones can also be produced using the teeth, palate, or throat. Whistling, in its various incarnations for a multitude of uses, has been performed for thousands of years and was likely enacted as the world’s first melodic instrumentation. Why would anyone minimize an opportunity to

glorify an accessible, free instrument that provides access to communication, creativity, music, and self-expression to people of all ages?

Whistling as a Devalued Communicative Form

From songs to news articles, much has been written or said to degrade whistling and the folk who dare to demonstrate it. There are a plethora of superstitions, wives' tales, and fables associating whistling with bad luck (DeLys, 1948). Although known to produce a happy tune, throughout history whistling has been categorized as vulgar and ominous, often framed as an unsophisticated remnant of countrified life (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; Van Stekelenburg, 2014). Whistling was muted at a man's industrialized workplace and off limits to women completely. Often experienced as loud, unmusical, and uncomfortable to the ear, whistling has gained a reputation as an annoying, noise-making activity, robbing it of any connection with beauty and music (McGiffert, 1955).

Noise Not Music

Research reveals multiple contexts that help to explain why whistling has struggled to become a celebrated addition to popular culture and fine art. Whistling is often collapsed into the category of noise. Admittedly, whistling is used in many "noisy" ways, such as when signaling a cab, getting someone's attention, and producing bad music. *Merriam-Webster* defines "noise" with words such as "loud," "confused," and "senseless" (Noise, n.d.). It goes on to distinguish "noise" as a sound "that lacks agreeable musical quality or is noticeably unpleasant" (Noise, n.d.). Understandably, an incessant, out-of-tune chirping of the of the *Star Wars* theme may be noticeably unpleasant and, predictably, valuatively weighted as noise rather than as a bona fide musical art form. In a fashionable song published in 1898, *A Whistling Wife*, a husband

gripes that his wife “drives me mad with her whistling” and describes in detail the pain of being married to an incessant whistler (Green, 2015, p. 60) (See Appendix A).

The tonal characteristics account, in part, for whistling’s consignment to noise. When measured, it was found that the frequency range of whistling, approximately 1,000 to 4,000 cycles per second, can pierce the human ear in a most painful way (Ostwald, 1959). Despite the fact that careful, well-rehearsed whistling can potentially create beautiful music, its most common incarnations may be uncomfortable, even excruciating to listen to. John McGiffert’s 1955 *New Yorker Magazine* article portrays a variety of “maddening whistling” demonstrations (p. 51). In it, he complains that whistling is a “type of noise that has received too little recognition as a menace to the nation’s nerves” (McGiffert, 1955, p. 51). This combination of connotations leaves little room for society to consider whistling’s more pleasant possibilities

Superstition

Superstition is a powerful force that can cause both action and inaction. Believed to fend off bad luck or invoke good luck, superstitions tend to be culturally specific (Kramer & Block, 2008). Primarily handed down orally, through the family, they still command a powerful, often unconscious, influence in society today. The leading expert on folklore cites the impressive power of superstition to influence thinking in children (Dundes, 1980). Handed down via family leaders, an impressionable child will absorb the messages of fables and wives’ tales with total acceptance, often perpetuating those beliefs throughout their lives. Despite the fact that superstitions may not require any evidence of causation, they can become deeply ingrained beliefs and truths that affect people’s decisions. *Merriam-Webster* defines “superstition” as “a belief or practice resulting from

ignorance, fear of the unknown.....or a false conception of causation...a notion maintained despite evidence to the contrary” (Superstition, n.d.). Just as many will avoid opening an umbrella indoors for fear of negative, almost magical repercussions, there are those who adhere to superstitious directives about whistling.

Superstitions about whistling have circulated across many generations and cultures, influencing public perception (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; Ostwald, 1959). Although light-hearted whistling maxims exist, an abundance of old phrases from around the world frame whistling as an unlucky act. *A Treasury of American Superstitions* refers to a multitude of superstitions associating whistling with fear, bad manners, the Devil, and spell casting (De Lys, 1948). It is said to both keep ghosts and witches away, as well as conjure them into existence (DeLys, 1948). To whistle was forbidden in theaters, on sailing ships, and underground mining shafts for fear of the detriment or confusion it could incite (DeLys, 1948; Lucas & Chatburn, 2013). A subset of superstitions about whistling were directed specifically toward women, prescribing the perils of such unladylike behavior. It was said that a woman’s mouth was impure for a minimum of fifty days after the act of whistling, and little girls were taught they would grow a beard if they whistled (DeLys, 1948). Most whistling superstitions and their accompanying justifications have long been forgotten, but its reputation as a dangerous, portentous act remains. Through the wide distribution of oratorical memorandums, what was once a common cultural phenomenon has been effectively reduced to a novelty.

Low Culture

Whistling has been historically relegated to the status of “low culture” for a plethora of reasons. The ruling class of the 1700’s considered it a simpleminded activity

reserved for laborers and uncivilized folk (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; Van Stekelenburg, 2014). Considered un-gentlemanly, whistling was frowned upon in certain circles and subsequently forbidden in some public schools. Criminals were known to whistle a secret language to each other in the night, while prostitutes were said to whistle at prospective clients to gain attention (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013). Truly it was a working man's instrument. Employed in the work fields of agrarian communities for personal company, work, and communication, whistling was not only used to entertain oneself while working; it was an essential element to successfully accomplish one's work. Its association with folk music and folk traditions further demoted whistling on the refinement scale.

As the industrial age began to expand, residents from agrarian communities began to migrate to towns searching for work in the factories. Fresh from the farm, factory workers incorporated whistling during all aspects of personal and professional life. Primarily used for musical companionship, occasionally whistling would be employed as a subversive act. Workers, forbidden from singing or saying any words of revolt, could whistle a song's lyrics, expressing their frustration without being revealed. Eventually, overseers created rigid factory rules muting their whistled voices. Seen as a personal expression of emotion, whistling was eventually banned at many factories because "human expressiveness wasn't considered conducive to efficient work" (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013 p. 44).

Men continued to whistle in the street in their free time but not during the long work day. There was a time when seemingly every working-class gent on the street was whistling: newspaper boys, grocers, milkmen, postmen, and more (Lucas & Chatburn,

2013). As people became more indoctrinated by prescriptive social norms, whistling eventually became policed by the people that loved it most, becoming a vestige of the freedoms once taken for granted in rural culture. Today, we see scant remnants of the flurry of melodic warbling once flowing from men strolling the avenues. Women, however, were not authorized to whistle at all, for it was too risqué. The whistle, a synonym for a pipe and a penis, distorts the lips and the woman's reputation. Delicacy in females was prized, if not required for marriage, and a whistling woman appeared cheap or "rough" (Lucas & Chatburn, 2013, p. 15). Historical connotations of whistling as uncouth and offensive have long prevented it from being appreciated for the music it produces.

Universal accessibility was, ironically, a limitation for musical whistling. Having a unique distinction as an instrument available to all people and places free of charge, expertise in whistling technique can be self-taught without the necessity of wealth or education. The fact that anyone, especially the working class, could whistle devalued its merit. Its reputation as an unskilled act exclusively for commoners rendered it unsophisticated and unacceptable as legitimate artistry. Unlike recognized instruments such as piano or voice, which require conservatories and tutelage for those wishing to master their art, musical whistling was not formally taught. This has resulted in scarce opportunities for formal musical whistling productions and education, keeping growth stunted. Although music and communication are fundamental human expressions, there are certain cultural restrictions in place which have caused the veritable erasure of this culturally un-sanctioned musical expression over time.

Location is another meter to measure cultural value. People were always impressed with my status as a whistling champion. However, when I mentioned that the championship was held in North Carolina, a condescending nod of understanding occurred, followed by remarks about hog calling, yodeling, or whistling as “popular in the south.” Such comments never failed to elicit a defensive comment on my part. I would quickly retort with, “Yodelers don’t perform Bach or Mozart!” in an attempt to defend and elevate my art form to a high-culture context. I knew that coupling my performances with classical music would indicate refined culture, and I did not shy away from this free pass to correlate whistling with high-culture. Now, when I really want to impress an audience, I reveal that I won the championship in Japan. I learned that the level of respect given to my title is instantly heightened at the mention of this “high-class” country.

In our current historical moment, prevailing socio-cultural attitudes regarding whistling are restricting men and especially women from appreciating and accessing an activity that has profound artistic and musical potential. This thesis will explore the ideologies that promulgate these attitudes and restrictions. Examining how whistling became a gendered act will serve to clarify how rhetorical messages virtually eliminated women’s participation in whistling on a personal and competitive level. The literature review in Chapter Two engages research on power dynamics and gendered forms of communication and how such communication operates ideologically. The chapter also describes the methodological framework used to investigate the topic at hand. In particular, feminist theory is utilized to critique the contexts, structures, and rhetorical messages that have solidified hegemonic ideologies. Feminist scholars and others will

assist in revealing gendered justifications as to why women did not engage in whistling. The analysis in Chapter Three will engage the author's experience as a musical whistler exposed to gendered rhetoric. Autoethnographic narrative, first-hand accounts, and rhetorical analysis will expose the widely distributed enactment of direct repression of whistling. Chapter Four details rhetorical representations the author employed in performance and promotion in an attempt to elevate the cultural status of whistling in the *Masters of Musical Whistling International Festival and Competition*. The concluding chapter will reflect upon the impact of the research and the transformation experienced by this researcher. Future directions will be discussed to suggest pathways for continuing the growth of the inquiry and the art.

CHAPTER 2

The Rhetoric of Whistling: Feminist and Cultural Perspectives

I'm standing amongst my fellow contestants on the stage of a state-of-the-art theater in Ushiku, Japan. We are all awaiting the revelation of the 2008 International Whistlers Convention competition winners. I am doing my best to look calm and confident but my heart is racing with anticipation and anxiety. I've given the best musical performances of my life this weekend and I know I am a contender for the illusive, first-place trophy. Three second place titles followed by a third-place win have left me doubtful, but I am still hopeful of my chances to earn first-place.

First, they announce me as the winner of the classical division. I was ecstatic to receive the medal for first-place in one of two divisions, but I need to dominate both in order to win. I hold my breath as they announce the winner of the popular division. My biggest competition from Japan, Akiko, is revealed as the winner and I instantly realize that there is a fifty percent chance that she will win the title. I have flown all the way across the planet with the hope of being named the world's best whistler and everything is hinged on this moment. Time slows down to a halt. Suddenly I hear my name as I am declared the International Whistling Grand Champion. I walk forward in a daze as I accept my beautiful trophy. My cool façade quickly melts into a joyful, "ugly cry" that I could not restrain. I am overwhelmed with emotion. After five years of dedication and four near-wins I have finally accomplished my dream of being number one.

As I revel in the jubilation of my hard-won victory, even the knowledge that I will not be thought of as the "real" champion cannot minimize my triumph. You see, my trophy plate reads "2008 Women's International Whistling Grand Champion." This

designation inescapably indicates the existence of a male champion, and I have already learned that revealing the full name of my title prompts a conversation about who the other winner is. Inevitably, these conversations always have a way of making me feel that I am, in fact, the “other.”

Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind for the soul is dyed by the thoughts. (Marcus Aurelius, 167 A.C.E./2013)

In order to trace the processes by which musical whistling continues to exist as a marginalized and marginalizing form of artistic communication, three central methodological strands will guide the analysis: feminist theory, cultural theory, and autoethnography. Feminist theory is employed to identify and critique patriarchal ideologies that have created and promoted the hegemonic status quo. It will be applied to analyze pertinent artifacts and examine how common rhetoric has induced negative attitudes towards whistling and female whistlers. Key concepts in cultural theory will reveal how rhetorical messages are disseminated through society to become cultural ideologies. Finally, ethnography and autoethnography provided some guidelines for my fieldwork at the site of this research—a bi-annual musical whistling competition in Los Angeles County, California in 2015 and 2017.

Feminist Theory

This study is centrally informed by feminist-based theories regarding gender, language, and gender-based forms of oppression that circulate in society. Sexism, defined as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance” has been a dominant force in evolution of modern culture (Lorde, 2016, p. 17). Hierarchies based on a patriarchal system of oppression fortify and justify a hegemonic system. Language based on patriarchal contexts has restricted women’s

personal and artistic freedoms. A belief in gender differences as essential, natural, and mandatory has been propagated by men and women throughout history (Aiken, Anderson, Dinnerstein, & Temple, 1988). These essentialist beliefs, adopted by society, create and maintain a rigid binary system that places one sex over another.

Bell hooks insists that we live in a culture of domination which pairs a paradigm of inferior and superior beings with the idea that the former should rule the latter (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 2006). Women must remain substandard to maintain the status quo in a binary system (Barnes, 2011). The heteronormative attitude of masculinity as the normal, natural, context for humanity has been, and continues to be, disseminated through diverse rhetorical messages (Barnes, 2011). hooks asserts that acceptance of social domination was easily integrated into society because it is often first seen in the family structure - husband over wife, parent over child (Foss et al., 2006). Ferguson asserts that these gender imbalances create a cycle where men want to dominate and women want to be dominated (1989). Hegemonic attitudes are upheld and embodied by the common population, unconsciously preserving gendered prescriptions through everyday conversation (Foss et al., 2006).

Language is hostile to women; embedded with patriarchal ideologies, it privileges male perspectives and modes of expressions. The English language is male-centric and man-made, created predominantly for and by white, straight, educated, middle-class males. Language in its current state is framed around men and cannot encompass the experience of women. Constant rejection and omission has resulted in women being muted and symbolically annihilated through rhetoric (Butler, 2011; Thorne, Kramarae, &

Henley, 1993; Spender, 1980). Unexamined, ingrained, misogynistic beliefs, perpetuated through damaging discourse, become truths through repetition and conviction.

Power dynamics established in language ensure that dominant perspectives will be normalized, setting the bar for cultural expectations. Popular phrases such as “Be a man” or “You run like a girl” solidify hypermasculinity; reinforce the superiority of men; and vilify women. An accomplished female professional is validated only if she is “as good as a man.” Phrases such as ‘female CEO’ and ‘lady lawyer’ immediately invite comparison to the work that men do. Gender, in this instance, does not reveal clarity but rank. Even words that have been contemporized to include diversity, such as actor/actress or waiter/waitress, utilize the male root, implying that the role is supplemental to something or someone else.

Thorne et al. (1993) contend that the comments such as, “Women are as good as men,” reinforce of the patriarchal paradigm and creates a skewed sense of equality which promotes inherent superiority between differences. Masculine superiority can only exist in relationship to feminine inferiority; to be dominant, there must be someone to dominate. Prioritizing a man’s value simultaneously minimizes a woman’s value, creating a patriarchal hierarchy that places men in power positions within a social structure.

Sexist ideas, encoded into the language, influence thoughts and beliefs about reality and reinforce the binary system of male and “other” (Spender, 1980, p. 147). Females are portrayed with a duality that creates confusion and prejudice: virgin/whore; innocent girl/cunning wife; sweet in the streets and a freak in the sheets; passive/bitch (Hall, 1995). Implied male supremacy was not sufficient; therefore, linguistic structures

promoting the idea that “superiority should be reflected in the structure of language” became the norm (Spender, 1980, p. 147). In the 1500’s, English, male grammarians decided it was more “natural” to put a man before woman linguistically, and later the concept of “he and she” as an ordered pair came into being, implying men come first in the natural order (Spender, 1980, p. 147). Positioning hegemonic beliefs into grammatical rule allowed for arbitrary rules, disguised as a principled action, to become embedded into language. Grammatical guidelines are thought of as legitimate social norms despite their genesis as contrived patriarchal rule. This establishes men as the focal point while women remain underrepresented or invisible.

Herbert Blumer’s concept of symbolic interactionism stresses that language creates one’s personal sense of reality by infusing meaning into all symbols (1986). Meanings are created with ideas and contexts created in conversations with the most significant individuals in one’s life. A child brought up hearing that “emotions are useless” will predictably relate to this information as fact. Proceeding into adulthood without questioning this belief, one can easily justify labelling an emotional person as useless despite evidence to the contrary. Judith Butler echoes Blumer’s (1986) point by stating that the “socially real” is created through language (2011, p. 115). One’s reality regarding the value of women is created and perpetuated in the verbal exchanges they have with people on a daily basis. Degrading, pervasive phrases in language solidify dominant sexist ideals on an unconscious level. Common rhetoric is rarely distinguished, deconstructed, and analyzed as the detrimental factor that it can be.

Essentialism promotes the idea that categories such as gender have a true nature that gives their identity (Gelman, 2003). Gendered categories, justified by biological

assumptions, result in an imbalance of power between men and women - justified by the divine forces of nature. Essentialist beliefs reinforce assertions that the human male is naturally superior over all other earthly creatures (Aiken et al., 1988). Viewing gender categories as inborn, predictive, and natural promotes rejection of the notion that social ideologies influence behavior (Aiken et al., 1988).

Children adopt culturally ordained attitudes and behaviors with regards to gender (Perry & Bussey, 1979). In the process of sex role development children come to reflect the attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and motives that are culturally defined as appropriate for their sex. First, kids learn that people are either a male or a female, then come to realize they are expected to perform similarly to the role prescribed in the gender binary (Perry & Bussey, 1979, p. 1709). Social learning theory indicates that a child is greatly influenced by observational learning and same-sex modeling of significant others is typical (Harrison & O'Neil, 2000). Children define appropriate behavior based on observation of multiple same-sex examples and accept or reject behavior based on whether or not it is socially approved of (Perry & Bussey, 1979). The gender divide is quite apparent with regard to musical instrument choice as well. Abeles & Porter (1978) note that the music world is no exception to essentialist, sexist paradigms. Gendered associations with regard to musical instruments are widespread, influencing children instrument choice in children of all ages.

There are a multitude of ways that marginalization happens unconsciously. Microaggressions and tokenism are subtle demonstrations of a patriarchal system. Language has driven people to minimize the value of women in comparison to men, and as a result, automatic, pervasive, and innocuous yet destructive attitudes are common. An

act of aggression act may be unnoticed, and subsequently critiqued, until one is taught awareness. Microaggressions may seem harmless and minute, but the cumulative effect experienced over a lifetime can be devastating to the receiver, causing diminished quality of life and confidence (Pierce, 1995; Solorzano, 1998). These impactful, automatic acts disregard people and are sourced by unconscious attributions of superiority and inferiority (Solorzano, 1998). Generations of influence and lifetimes of repetitive sexist messages create unconscious undercurrents of animosity toward women, affecting male and female alike. Attitudes at the micro level can have an impact upon the macro, although aggressors are often oblivious to the stress created by the effect of their microaggressions (Pierce, 1995). Nescient of the impact of their actions, offenders may authentically believe that they have personally harmed no person (Pierce, 1995).

Tokenism is another subtle aspect of marginalization, present when a subgroup makes up less than fifteen percent of the whole. Gender tokenism is most prevalent with regards to women in traditionally male-dominated environments where women are underrepresented (Yoder, 1994). Tokenism occurs when the numbers of females are too small to represent the whole, yet somehow a single female becomes the symbol of “how women do it” (Kanter, 1977). The presence of a token can serve as an opportunity to assert the presence of equality within an environment despite a gross imbalance. Even though women are still earning less on average than men, many citizens feel that equality is the current status quo. One may indicate the presence of women in the military, carpentry, business, and other historically male-dominated professions as proof of progress and evidence of gender equality. Equality takes on a new form—not one in

which men and women are equal, but rather, a form whereby the premise of equality can be fulfilled by a minimum ratio.

Cultural Theory

In order to uncover the function of ideological power in the gendering and devaluation of whistling, it is important to engage post-Marxist theories of culture, and specifically, how ideologies function hegemonically and less than consciously to organize structures of power in society. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony theory helps to explain how ideologies come to be embedded in culture (Duncombe, 2002). Althusser (1970) reveals the institutions that propel ideological precepts into society, while Hall (1995) explains that media distributes prejudicial attitudes. Additionally, Bourdieu's (2011) work on cultural capital provides insights into the notion of high and low culture.

Raymond Williams (1989) asserts that culture is an ordinary function of every society. Each society has its own meanings and purposes which are expressed in arts, education, and social institutions. Societies are made by sharing an agreement of common meanings and interpretations of life. Each person individualizes their interpretations from the pool of agreed-upon meanings. Williams (1989) asserts that there are two primary aspects to culture. The first is a group of known meanings which individuals are *trained* to learn through cultural directives. Second are the new meanings or observations that appear throughout one's life for each person to integrate into their lives. Culture is both a shared experience among a whole population and an evolving process of creativity through education and arts (Williams, 1989). Although culture is a natural function of

everyday life, the concept has been manipulated by dominant groups, creating false class distinctions in order to gain power.

Viewing the process of ideological domination through the lens of cultural hegemony reveals the inculcation of top-down social control, and how those processes have been perpetuated through time. Hegemony is always in relationship with domination and consent (Lears, 1985). Antonio Gramsci, a post-Marxist political theorist and leader of the Italian Communist Party in the early twentieth century, is generally credited with the concept of hegemony, which offers a theoretical explanation of how dominant ideologies are handed down through generations (Duncombe, 2002). Hegemony refers to the power that one social group wields over another and represents a large-scale socio-cultural phenomenon through which power is exercised and negotiated. More than just social force, it is the method and process by which power is gained and maintained throughout social groups (Lull, 2011). Those in power must *win the consent* of subordinated people in order for hegemony to work (Lears, 1985). Working class groups, especially, can be heavily influenced by institutions that have gained respect through demonstrating power in the realm of production and industry (Lears, 1985).

Throughout history, the ruling classes have imposed their domination on the working class, who in turn perpetuate the inherent messages through “social consent,” which can be more effective as a controlling agent than force (Lull, 2011, p. 34). Once ideologies have been circulated through society and adopted through social consent, people will effectively marginalize themselves and each other. Hegemonic ideologies, dispensed by those in power, justify the marginalization of almost anything, including ideas, people, art forms, and groups. Processes of marginalization are effected in and

through communication practices. Gramscian ideological hegemony theory describes the process of instituting plausible influential structures with regard to widespread ideologies (Lears, 1985). Viewing the process of ideological domination through the lens of cultural hegemony reveals the inculcation of top-down social control, and how those processes have been perpetuated through time.

Influential institutions attempt to exercise their social power by producing and promoting ideologies, or systems of ideas (Lull, 2011, p. 33). The media, controlled by dominant groups, is a primary agent in delivering ideological messages of domination to the masses. Hegemony occurs when people accept those ideas as normal. Television, media, educational institutions, and business perpetuate messages so omnipresent that ongoing reinforcement of the status quo is often unnoticed (Lull, 2011). Stereotypes represented by media are easily integrated on a less than conscious level. Ideologies about work, expectations, social norms, and gender are absorbed by the audience without awareness. This process is so powerful and shrewd that ideologies become ingrained and naturalized without conscious thought or discernment (Althusser, 1970). Messages sourced from trusted institutions are easily adopted, rendering average citizens more susceptible to hegemonic ideologies and dictating everything from social norms to worldview.

Althusser (1970), a French Marxist philosopher, expresses specific ideas about how ideologies become absorbed into society at a less than conscious level. He describes institutions that drive ideologies into the world. He distinguishes “Repressive State Apparatuses” such as the government, the Army, prisons, and other sanctioned organizations which function primarily by violence and repression, and “Ideological State

Apparatuses” such as family, religion, education, and the media, as functioning primarily by ideology (Althusser, 1970, p. 79). Althusser (1970) asserts that people are ideological by nature. The presence of ideologies “transforms” individuals into “subjects” through the process of “interpellation” (Althusser, 1970, p. 86). Interpellation is the experience of being the subject of an ideological position. From the moment we are born, people are subjects, subjected to categorizations riddled with ideological assumptions associated with them. From childhood, individuals are socialized into a complex series of social rules prescribing acceptable behavior. Young girls are interpellated into gender ideologies such as “girls should be nice” and “women must be beautiful.” People are interpellated into ideas about art. Hegemonic ideologies insist that one who appreciates classical art is culturally superior to one who appreciates pop music.

Once a subject has become interpellated into an ideological order, and identifies themselves as aligned with a particular position in relation to it, they are at once susceptible to suggestion and oppression. Subjects will attribute rigid, unchecked, prescriptions to themselves and others (Althusser, 1970). Sandra Bartky (1988) agrees, referring to the act of self-policing as an essential element keeping ideologies that have won consent in place. Interpellation tricks the subject into thinking that their ideas are their own, which deters critique of the message and the source. The naturalization process results in acceptance and ownership of ideas, endowing subjects with a feeling of agency—the belief that they are the authors of their values, beliefs, and actions. Once ideologies are internalized, one assumes that they are natural, authentic aspects of the self, spurring people to believe they have a “true” perspective.

Stuart Hall’s (1995) essay, “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the

Media,” reveals subtle subtexts in everyday actions. Hall focuses on ideology and asserts that media serves a crucial function in the “production and transformation of ideologies” (1995, p. 19). Hall (1995) distinguishes ideologies as ideas or concepts, driven forth by language, that give people structures which direct understanding of life and social existence. Ideologies are not isolated concepts, but rather, ideas that represent a chain of meanings associated with them (Hall, 1995). Consonant with Althusser’s (1970) conception, ideologies are created within society, but they are not the result of individual intention. People are born into ideologies that contextualize the experience of life. Ideologies are propelled through culture as a collective, not individual process, and as such, they often remain unseen and operate at the unconscious level.

Hall embeds in his perspective the notion that ideologies are “naturalized” into the minds of those that adopt them (1995, p. 19). The process of taking cultural cues and assigning them to nature is what Hall refers to as “naturalization” (1995). Both race and gender are said to be given by nature, and as such, they are profoundly susceptible to becoming naturalized. However, following Althusser’s (1970) conception of interpellation and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, there is nothing natural about the naturalizing process. Much like essentialism, it implies that social constructions of ‘how things are’ are a result of natural law, creating a sense of divine credibility. Ideologies are effective because they produce an experience of knowledge and truth which creates a confidence, allowing subjects to feel as if they are in charge of making sense of the world.

The media is a primary vehicle of control in society. Ever present, especially in the current world of technological immediacy, the impact of media is known, yet

personal lack of critical evaluation allows it to continue to influence. Mediated communication is central to ideological production: posters, billboards, videos, memes, commercials, music videos, and the rest saturate consumer minds with ideals, contexts, and explanations of how the world works. It is these ideologies that carry the message of what race and gender and culture is, or should be, creating rigid classifications with regards to others (Hall, 1995). The media, Hall (1995) points out, is an institutional sphere where ideas about a subject can be transmuted and shifted as society progresses, giving hope that destructive ideologies can eventually be transformed.

Hall distinguishes a phenomenon he refers to as “inferential” racism (1995, p. 20). As opposed to overt, obvious racism, which indicates direct actions grounded in openly racist points of view, inferential racism, by contrast, is subtler. Hall posits that certain ideologies have been naturalized to the point of becoming established premises which exist without conscious recognition of its relationship to prejudice (1995).

By inferential racism I mean those apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether “factual” or “fictional,” which have racists premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of *unquestioned assumptions*. These enable racist statements to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded. (Hall, 1995, p.20)

Hall (1995) uses an example of imperialist adventure literature, a predecessor to the *Indiana Jones* films of today, wherein the white hero (colonizer) demonstrates superiority over the savages (colonized). This narrative of the film disguises hegemonic ideologies as romantic themes, reinforcing an imperialist, patriarchal belief system.

Inferential racism consisting of portrayals of native peoples as helpless, ignorant, and savage, unconsciously promulgates racist ideologies. Subtle ideological messages can produce dramatic results. The ideological paradigms created by this type of narrative can serve to justify historical atrocities and glorify hegemonic intent - the virtuous white man must protect the innocents from the savages by any means necessary.

The opinions of the elite have directed the tastes of societies for centuries. Judgements about what behavior, clothing, and activities one should participate in have powerfully affected people's actions and opinions. A graduate of Yale University may have more social status than a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles simply because of the reputation of the former. This categorization goes beyond assumptions of superior education and moves into distinguishing class. Those who participate in realms sanctioned by the ruling class are considered high-class and culturally sophisticated. Although the line between high and low-class is an arbitrary distinction invented by the elite to exclude others and raise themselves, certain actions are thought to be more socially credible than others.

Matthew Arnold believes that the ideal of culture represents the best society can offer (As cited in Duncombe, 2002). Arnold believed that the obligation of society is to unite together in pursuit of perfection (As cited in Duncombe, 2002). A good man's responsibility, according to Arnold, was to be dedicated to upholding the "sweetness and light" of culture (Duncombe, 2002, p.56). Historically, elite classes were secure in their knowledge of what distinguished perfection and sweetness. The pursuit of perfection was akin to the pursuit of goodness, and all people are meant to meet this measure, lest they be left behind. Critical thought was unnecessary for the ruling class, for they have been

ordained as superior. Social judgments were not simply opinion – they were empirically true, given weight by the men in power making the decrees. Culture and how we conceive of it centers on the idea that formal education is necessary to enable understanding (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001). Religion was the foundation on which perfection was set upon, and it gave a sense of Godly credibility to those who created measures of right and wrong, good and bad, pure and impure (Duncombe, 2002). As opposed to Williams' (1989) assertion that culture is collective, ordinary, and free of pre-ordained conceptions, Arnold seeks to reinforce cultural rule as inherent and exclusive (As cited in Duncombe, 2002).

Pierre Bourdieu (2011) brings the idea of cultural capital into the conversation, indicating the multiple ways to accrue and utilize social value. Economic capital, such as money or property, is but one means of having power in society. Cultural capital appeals to other ways in which one can wield power and collect non-financial resources that enable one to rise on the social ladder of success (Bourdieu, 2011). Given the amount of time required to acquire cultural capital, it is assured that only those with abundant resources are able to pursue erudite activities (Bourdieu, 2011). High culture is tied strongly to formal education, making it both inaccessible to the masses and academically sanctioned (Bourdieu, 2011). Educated men can use their education to rationalize their ideologies and further justify their attachment to them.

Music and art do not escape the judgment of high or low culture. Artistic tastes reflect and create hierarchies between social classes. Adorno considered art as living in two distinct spheres - popular and "serious" (Adorno & Simpson, 1941 p. 17). Serious music, mostly classical, is structured and produced by those that have been educated by

endorsed instructions, therefore representing more importance. The listener emulates the qualities of the music they are associated with. One can increase their social standing through their associated activities. As opposed to a reflection on the quality of a work of art, cultural capital is a reflection on the quality of a person participating. One may gain cultural capital by mentioning their night at an exclusive restaurant whereas revealing an excursion to the local dive bar may produce the opposite. Regaling a narrative about a night of theater at Cirque du Soleil will likely earn more social standing than a story of an acrobatic street performer. Certain forms of art may raise one's cultural capital but musical whistling is not one currently of them.

Nescience

Drawing upon the underpinnings attributed by Hall (1995) regarding inferential racism provides a context to facilitate understanding of the ideological power of inferential sexism. On the surface, gendered ideologies may appear to be neutral but are “often still constructed on a very ancient grammar” (Hall, 1995, p. 22). For example, promoting a woman to access her masculine side in order to be assertive strengthens the status quo by reinforcing the gender binary as a valid and natural construct. People under the influence of dominant ideologies unsurprisingly refuse different opinions. One that has been indoctrinated into an ideology cannot necessarily conceive that their worldview is learned and false.

Many well-meaning and considerate folks are unaware that they are perpetuating sexist, hegemonic, and oppressive acts daily. This blind spot impels even those who subscribe to feminist ideologies to unintentionally preserve the status quo through small yet powerful, unconscious, sexist acts. Overt sexism, although less prevalent in modern

society, still continues to influence culture but can be identified and dealt with directly.

Taking a cue from Hall's (1995) concepts, a label of "nescient sexism" is utilized here to describe common, subtle acts of marginalization that occur in everyday life. Specifically, nescient sexism is distinguished as a spectrum of deeply embedded, unquestioned, and unsubstantiated assumptions that enable sexist statements to be created and expressed without recognition or awareness of the elitist, discriminatory, inequitable, and binary-based assertions on which the ideologies are grounded.

Speaker Mark Passio (2014) explains the subtle yet powerful differences of context regarding nescience vs. ignorance. The word nescience is rooted in the Latin word "nesciere," meaning to "not know." The connotations associated with this concept indicate a lack of knowledge as a result of missing information so profound that one cannot aggregate the ideas presented (Passio, 2014). Nescience is a blameless state, indicating that important specifics are absent, resulting in non-understanding. "Ignorance" derives from the Latin, "ignorare," which also means to "not know;" however, the connotation is blame, not innocence (Passio, 2014). Ignorance indicates that one is willfully disregarding information and intentionally refusing ideas that are present, either because they think it is unimportant, or that they already know the answer. The main distinction is that nescience is due to lack of information while ignorance is because one is disregarding information at will.

This distinction indicates where education can make a difference. The average person is nescient with regards to sexist patterns in language. They are honestly unaware that these patterns keep an oppressive binary in existence. Many people perpetuating the status quo may even consider themselves feminist while promulgating subtle oppressive

acts through rhetorical action. Although modern culture engages in active conversations about feminism, it is not a fundamental part of education, and most, excluding those who study feminism, are unaware of the structures that keep the status quo in place.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

Contemporary critical ethnography was born out of a desire by researchers to include complex narratives, cultural specificity, and personal observations into their scholarship. Frustrated with the limitation of canonical studies, a new post-1960s generation of social scientists searched for meaningful ways to expand scholarship (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Conventional ethnographic research can be narrow and limited; often conducted by outsiders, primarily white, Christian, conventionally educated men, who are capable of evaluating research only as far as their limited encounters with another culture and their parochial world-views can provide. This type of research claims to be value-free while steeped in sterile, authoritative, colonialist perspectives (Ellis et al., 2011). Critical ethnographers recognized that both a deeper form of participant-observation, and more emphasis on subjectivity and emotionality are necessary to produce more authentic results. As a result, subjective experience has become more influential to all research and rather than hiding it, critical ethnographers seek to acknowledge and accommodate it. Critical ethnography recognizes that the researchers' gender, education, religion, location, and class influence how they see the world in a multitude of ways. Seeking a deeper experience of cultures and environments to reveal a common humanity, critical ethnographers challenge traditional research by questioning its assumptions of objectivity and neutrality and treating it as a socially-conscious endeavor. Ethnographers study cultures by focusing on roles, rituals, rites of passage,

practices, values, and shared experiences to facilitate the understanding of a culture for insiders and outsiders.

In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, Madison defines autoethnography as “the ethnography of one’s own social, ethnic, or cultural group” (2011, p.197). Autoethnography combines elements of autobiography with critical reflexivity. Researchers engaged in this form of fieldwork often analyze and reveal how they experienced moments of epiphany – for example, how the power dynamics of a particular oppressive cultural practice became manifest to them – made possible only by being an intrinsic part of a specific culture.

Given the subjective, interpretive character of ethnography, there are various conditions necessary to conduct effective research and ensure scholarly accountability. Madison (2011) acknowledges that every researcher has individualized experiences which influence their worldview and bring unique perspectives to ethnographic work. She indicates honesty and self-assessment as an element of this work, asking one to inquire to themselves what they want to contribute to or change, and why. Furthermore, she argues that in order to explore, refine, and review underlying themes, ethnographic scholars must be informed and familiar with existing research and be able to incorporate, critique, and expand other scholars’ work about the past.

Using methodological tools such as interviewing and examination of cultural artifacts, autoethnographers elevate storytelling as a form of interpretive analysis by elucidating new perspectives. In my fieldwork, I did not conduct formal interviews. However, most of my interactions and observations occurred through my participation in competitive whistling and the work of organizing and facilitating a two-day

concert/competition in Los Angeles in 2015 and 2017, *The Masters of Musical Whistling*. Throughout this work I have been open about my research, as indicated in a *Los Angeles Times* article about myself and my event. I have been an open advocate of gender equality in the public practice and representation of whistling as an art form.

In later analysis chapters I use thick descriptions of these events in order to show how certain practices and behaviors serve as symbolic actions. These accounts are intended to impart deep understanding and context inherent in the culture in which it takes place (Burke, 1966; Geertz, 1973). Within ethnography, narrative is considered access to insight. The researcher's analysis magnifies and exposes details often taken for granted, helping to illuminate what has been previously obscured. Detailed narrative can bring an environment to life by expressing the feelings, sights, sounds, and textures which facilitate understanding for the reader (Madison, 2011).

Madison's (2011) *Critical Ethnography* explicates necessary aspects required for comprehensive ethnographic research. First, she argues that it is necessary to bracket the subject by clearly identifying the population of the study while concurrently refining the research question and purpose. Focusing on identifiable questions or problems is an essential aspect of the research, but it does not require the same rigidity as quantitative research (Madison, 2011). The research question guides the direction, but may also serve to lead researchers to deeper, more pertinent questions. Research design is a crucial part of the process for the researcher. It is constructed to outline the step by step processes, methods, and plans to ensure ethical and effective field study. Through preparation and structure, one can organize and anticipate what they may encounter in the field facilitating focus, purpose, and direction.

Madison (2011) also insists that the participants must be well informed. Qualitative subjects are seen as partners, not objects, of research. Researcher and participant are in partnership and dialogue as they construct meaning as a team in search of authentic interpretation. Rapport and disclosure is essential to the success of the project. Educating the participants of basic processes and intentions creates a professional, ethical, conducive work environment (Madison, 2011).

An ethnographic approach to qualitative study allows researchers to explore an environment beyond what any survey can reveal. Recording and analyzing a culture through first-hand contact with a site provides rich insights that quantitative study cannot supply. The integrative qualities of ethnography provide the researcher, and eventually the reader, with an intimate glimpse of the individuals and attitudes of the culture under consideration. Autoethnography seeks to analyze personal experiences in order to reveal and understand a cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011). Utilizing the basic tenants of qualitative research, autoethnography allows impactful, accessible research grounded in personal experience to sensitize readers to underrepresented cultural phenomena in a way that no other research methodology can.

Drawing from the idea of rhetoric as a form of symbolic action (Burke, 1966; Geertz, 1973), rhetorical and textual analysis will also be employed in this thesis to examine how rhetorical messages can alter behavior and dictate personal action. Rhetorical studies reveal how culture is created and maintained by linguistic, visual, and written symbols. Studied and employed since the time of the ancient Greeks, rhetoricians seek to discover how language has been and can be utilized to influence how people think and act. Examining how symbols are combined to create deliberate messages designed to

direct thinking towards a certain perspective can reveal the source of existing and emerging cultural attitudes. Written and oral texts will be critically analyzed in this thesis, including historical or modern newspaper and magazine articles, promotional materials, correspondences, websites, blogs, and online content.

Exposing the processes by which forms of cultural expression are marginalized and how women and women's voices are concomitantly marginalized will help to defend society from the perpetuation of arbitrary social rules that can have devastating effects. By examining whistling through a feminist lens, we begin to discover the forces that restrict women's opportunity for self-expression. Sexist actions in the form of microaggressions and tokenism perpetuate the status quo, often unbeknownst to the offender. Revealing how women's voices have been muted in even the most niche areas will demonstrate the pervasiveness of sexist conduct and its universal impact. Distinguishing essentialist attitudes that reinforce patriarchal ideals justifying gender hierarchies will unmask rhetoric that uses nature to justify the restriction of a woman's equal right to communication.

Language is at the heart of how messages are propelled throughout culture and society. Symbols, in the form of words, work together to give people their view of life. Although language is socially constructed, most people relate to their thoughts and ideas as truth. In a society where symbols have been structured to create and maintain a gender hierarchy, it is important to distinguish where these structures have influenced and altered freedoms. Discovering contemporary language and contexts that minimize or erase women and their importance will demonstrate that common rhetoric is an active, not passive, social force.

Utilizing insights from the cultural theorists cited will uncover how dominant ideologies, adopted by individuals, enforce arbitrary culture standards that raise one person over another, one experience over another, and one art form over another. Applying the above theoretical frameworks to influential artifacts will reveal how rhetoric of all kinds can virtually annihilate a common act even while those perpetuating the messages are nescient to the impact of their actions. Examining subtle messages that influence one's behavior will expose the rhetoric that has been an invisible driving force of marginalization.

Focusing upon the competitive musical whistling world as a site, this work will bring to light a community that has been underexposed despite its deep roots throughout history. Bringing whistling to the forefront of communication studies allows scholars to blow the whistle on practices that mute the demonstration of a common communicative device that has received little attention, despite its universal reach. Conscious and unconscious messages can progressively reduce or annihilate a universal action, no matter how intrinsic to culture it once was. Identifying this transformation and attributing the causes will allow a closer look at cultural restrictions and their impact on what is celebrated as art. Creating whistling as a fine art form through deliberate rhetorical messaging provides an opportunity to transform a culturally degraded act into a legitimate art, as it deserves to be.

CHAPTER 3

Whistling and Gender Exclusion

Its July 28, 2008, I've just won the championship title in Japan, and I receive an interesting email from the director of the International Whistlers Convention:

Dear Carole Anne,

Again, congratulations. We are proud of you!

... Also, please always refer to the media that the IWC has two international adult champions (male and female) and that you are the International Female Whistling Champion. This will assist us having to explain to the press and others....

Best always.

Allen DeHart

Being someone that appreciates specificity, I quickly reply and agree to conform as requested. Soon after I send the response email, I begin to reflect and ponder the directives. I begin an online search, studying the websites of my fellow whistlers to see if everyone is holding themselves to the same standard. After a thorough exploration, I cannot find one man referring to himself as the "Male Champion." The information I observe omits gender titles altogether, although every article or picture I find about whistling features a male. World champion, David Morris' website declares him as "The World's Top Whistler," and Geert Chatrou's site describes his talent as, "world champion whistling." There are no linguistic indications of male whistlers mentioning the 'maleness' of their title.

Had Allen not taken the time to investigate whether other whistlers were

subscribing to his mandates, or was he simply hoping I would lead the way to improve clarity in the media? Nonetheless, after thorough review, and much consideration, I recognize that granting Allen's wish, to distinguish myself as a female champion in the media, would serve to promote the double standard and inadvertently perpetuate the need to continue awarding gendered trophies. I decide to break my promise to the director of the IWC in deference to my personal commitment of being a powerful ambassador for whistling, art, and feminism. I know that by ignoring Allen's request I increase my credibility; I deliberately do not distinguish myself as the female champion.

Historically, women have been forbidden from whistling. Cultures around the world have communicated using various forms of whistled technique, but women have been deliberately excluded from it. In communities where whistled languages are employed for work, females are not normally included in the practice. Those who habitually entertain themselves or others with whistled music are commonly *not* of the female persuasion - either they have been prohibited because of its masculine connotations, or because the implementation of hegemonic, cultural regulation has reinforced it as something only men do.

The *International Whistlers' Convention* is an excellent site to observe first-hand the statistical discrepancy between male and female contestants in the realm of competitive musical whistling. Because so few women were present at the first twenty-five IWC's, they added a separate women's division in order to promote representation and participation of females. This chapter will discuss women, their relationship to whistling, and how that relationship has been created through rhetoric. It covers the way in which presentation of content on the IWC's website demonstrates the gendered status

quo by consistently listing men before women. Additionally, this section will review how folklore and mediated messages perpetuate essentialist attitudes, framing whistling as unladylike, and reducing the female whistler to a social pariah. Overt restrictions on women whistling are almost obsolete in culture today, yet subtle sexist messages, framing, and nescience continue to keep old ideological dynamics engaged.

For generations, many women from around the world have been discouraged from whistling. In many cultures, folklore and wives' tales promote whistling as both bad luck, and bad for women. Misogynistic rhetoric perpetuates mythical dangers and negative attitudes which apply strictly to female whistlers. Books, lyrics, and oral legends, forcefully handed down through generations of elders, promised impending doom to girls that assume they can safely pucker their way through music. Historically, females have been openly criticized for whistling and warned that it can compromise their femininity and lead a woman to "some bad end," as a popular parable warned (Green, 2015; Lucas & Chatburn, 2013; McGiffert, 1955; Mittwoch, 1981). Whistling also was famously frowned upon in elite social circles of the antebellum era because of masculine and risqué connotations, indicating that it was not "ladylike" (Green, 2015).

The double-standard is alive and well. Although whistling was often seen as uncouth by the elite, working-class men would still often whistle a happy tune. This behavior may have been arguably inappropriate, but there was no debate as to whether women should indulge. There are many quotations and even artworks that represent and promote a man whistling. Multiple "Whistling Boy" art pieces have received acclaim, but there are no poems or statues relaying positive depictions of women whistling. Given that

reality is reflected in language, the absence of female whistling symbols corroborates the belief that whistling is only for males.

I have heard many personal accounts from women around the world who were told not to whistle. Hegemonic messages about whistling are universal. From the United States to Iran, India, and beyond, girls were told from their first note that whistling was not allowed to them. A whistler in India told me she was afraid to join an Indian whistlers' club for fear that her father would find out and berate her. I have been the recipient of such judgments as well.

While visiting Jamaica, I began to whistle while hanging out with some local Rastafarian men, hoping to impress them with my snazzy rendition of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song." Instead of praise, I was immediately admonished by two of the three men, who reminded me that "A woman shouldn't whistle, it's in the Bible." Given the rejection, I stopped, but felt suppressed and oppressed by these fellows. The Bible does not forbid women from whistling. However, this is a perfect example of nescient sexism produced by folklore that has become related to as truth, despite lack of empirical proof.

The use of language cues that reinforce patriarchal dominance often goes unnoticed by the message sender and receiver. Although people may be surprised to hear that whistling is gendered, most automatically refer to a whistler as "he," or initially identify one as male. Whistling is considered a man's 'sport.' Whether it is a piercing 'cat call' that New York construction workers are known to demonstrate in order to both compliment and contain a woman as a sex object, or the once famous "Whistling Boy" statue, most references to whistling are masculine. The wolf whistle or cat call is a signal intended to communicate a man's often unwanted attention toward women. It is meant to

objectify a woman and often results in the receiver feeling uncomfortable or intimidated. The *Telegraph News* reported that over eighteen countries have signed a document encouraging the outlawing of the wolf whistle because of its association with violence and sexual harassment (2012).

Women's Division

Historically, this result of gendered rhetoric about whistling was clearly witnessed at the annual *International Whistlers Convention*, based in North Carolina. The convention hosted a competition that featured whistlers from all over the world, competing for the title of “Whistling Grande Champion.” From the beginning of my participation in competitive whistling, I was saddened to see the statistical disparity between male and female contestants. Men dominated the numbers of contestants by huge margins. For decades, male competitors outnumbered females nearly five-to-one, and not so coincidentally, there was only one female champion crowned within the first 25 years (Allan DeHart, *Orawhistle*, 2017). Because women were not winners in the competition, they became symbolically annihilated. Omitted from IWC's public history, which focuses on award recipients, there is little to no rhetorical evidence of women's participation before the mid 1990's.

The IWC began to bestow an “International Grand Championship Award” to both men and women in 1996, at the request of female contestants who wanted a chance to be recognized for their contribution (Allan DeHart, *Orawhistle*, 2017). Separate divisions were essential to expand the art and bring rhetorical visibility to all genders. Much like affirmative action ensures the possibility of egalitarian representation in the face of hegemonic rule, the existence of two divisions helped bring light to the involvement of

women whistlers in competition that may not be represented otherwise.

Female whistlers represented in the public sphere are specifically necessary to alter current perception and participation. The existence of female whistlers is crucial to create an example for young girls. If young girls do not see adult women whistling, then they may not recognize it as an option. Children learn by modeling and girls look to female significant others to learn what is possible for them. Experiencing multi-gendered demonstrations of music is very powerful; as Marie Wilson points out, “You can’t be what you can’t see” (Bastian-Baldwin, 2012). Given that musical instrument choice in children is gendered, girls need exposure to female whistlers in order to model the behavior. Being exposed to a female whistler, framed in a dynamic, positive light, increases the possibility and frequency of girls’ participation in the act. Despite the implication of ‘female champion’ as a secondary status, I am grateful that gendered divisions guarantee women the opportunity to be framed as champions of art whistling.

Endorsing the Gender Divide

Over the years, there has been much debate among whistlers as to whether there should be a continuance of both male and female divisions in the competitive whistling world. A large portion of this argument has taken place online on *Orawhistle Global Whistlers Forum*, an online “Yahoo Group” that includes over 1,000 whistling enthusiasts worldwide and features over 14,000 email posts. In the early 2000’s, as the IWC grew in popularity due to online exposure, the number and quality of female contestants began to increase exponentially. Whistlers would often discuss whether a separate women’s division was still necessary.

Despite the fact that women often made up only twenty-percent of the contestants,

some asserted that the playing field was even, given the outstanding talent of a few female contestants. Contributors argued that the female whistlers were as proficient as males to justify the removal of separate male and female categories. Such a view resonates with the current widespread view that we are now in a “postfeminist” era where feminism has accomplished its goals and sexism is no longer a pressing issue in our society. At first glance, removing the gender divide may seem like a feminist stance, but well-meaning whistlers declaring that “Women are as good as the men” sustain the notion that men set the bar of excellence (*Orawhistle*, 2017). Instead of generating a compliment, as was possibly intended, these comments are evidence of hierarchal tokenism marginalizing women as secondary participants.

Many *Orawhistle* members maintained that male whistlers do not have a competitive advantage because males do not have an inherent physical benefit as whistlers. The advantage, however, is not physical; it is a privilege of opportunity and exposure. Men have been encouraged to whistle, modeling their uncles and fathers, while women have been shamed and dissuaded from the activity. Essentialist beliefs about the “nature” of whistling have produced whistling boys and annihilated whistling girls. Proponents of a single division are nescient to the fact that representation is essential to the propagation of the art. I would consistently chime in on *Orawhistle* conversations, attempting to explain that the existence of women’s division is necessary to demonstrate symbolic inclusion and fight underrepresentation caused by years of oppressive acts toward women who whistle. I often wondered if my arguments simply landed as an appeal to conserve my competitive edge by segregating competitors, as opposed to an argument intended fight symbolic annihilation.

Although statistics alone should be enough to demonstrate the gendering of whistling as problematic, tokenism allows one example to represent the whole, blurring the lines of marginalization. A dominant group with four-times the representation of another has a measurably higher probability of dominating the underrepresented group. Nescience, with regards to representation as a symptom of a bigger problem, makes room to legitimize essentialist arguments that have sustained the status quo for generations.

Influence of Folklore

Folklore, another universal communicative device, is circulated though daily, oral iterations and children's books. As such, it signifies an important rhetorical contribution to the establishment of social rule. Alan Dundes, a world expert in folklore, suggests that sexist folklore may be the most "serious" form of sexism because it is so subtle and delivered by significant others (1980, p.173). Dundes (1980) asserts that folklore is a principle vehicle driving the perpetuation of cultural values and attitudes. Wives' tales not only present a point of view but direct the thoughts of the impressionable. Folklore has a way of moving from fiction to fact with enough repetition and authority behind it (Dundes, 1980).

A mostly forgotten, seemingly innocuous fable is at the heart of why many women have never been allowed to "just put her lips together and blow," as Lauren Bacall famously suggests in the film *To Have and Have Not*. The old refrain, "A whistling woman and a crowing hen will lead a devil to his den," and its many variations was a popular saying established in the 1700's. This phrase is a prime example of how sexist, pervasive, and influential ideas are circulated and perpetuated through gendered discourse and folklore (Mittwoch, 1981). Repetition through discriminatory discourse, as

well as the power of superstition, strengthen the relationship between whistling and hegemonic attitudes of decorum (Green, 2015). The “crowing hens” quotation reinforces the gendered divide in musical whistling. Specific examples of disparaging rhetoric about whistling is rarely evident today, yet the messages live on through ideologies embedded in mass consciousness. Hall (1995) asserts that old, imperialist ideas may fade, but their traces are retained and updated.

While only some women have been directly victimized by the “crowing hens” phrase, many have been affected by it. Grandmothers and mothers have been indoctrinated by this old wives’ tale, culturally killing off women’s right to whistle for generations. Grandma was taught not to whistle, mama was taught not to whistle, so daughter never heard it happen. Young women today have likely never been directed to hush their whistle because they do not even try. The tradition of “not allowed” has been established, and there are no women whistlers for girls to emulate. Years of restriction and demonization has muted women’s whistling voices for so long that to hear a woman whistling is a rare, almost “unnatural” occurrence for most. The damage has been done; the remnants of hegemonic messages from yesteryear live on powerfully enough to still silence this convenient, expressive, and natural musical instrument.

For over fifteen years, I have heard stories from women revealing they have been forbidden to whistle by family members, with reasons varying from “It’s not ladylike” to “Your lips will wrinkle.” Although young people today are unfamiliar with the “crowing hens” adage, I have found that many older, American women remember it. At whistling performances, I learned about the presence and influence of this persuasive phrase. Some women have distinguished it as the sole reason why they were not allowed to whistle.

Jennifer Speake explains the underlying context of the phrase: “Whistling and crowing were held to be the prerogative of the males of the respective species and hence unnatural or ill-omened when done by the female” (2015, p. 345). This fable does not work solely on the unconscious level, as many folkloric tales do. It is a direct patriarchal order that operates first on the conscious level, mandating a women’s restraint. It concurrently reinforces unconscious restrictions attributed to women, causing it to be accepted more readily by all genders. The *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, and other artifacts, provide a broad view of the longevity of the phrase and its variations (Speake, 2015). The saying has been recorded as circulated all over the globe from 1721 to the 1990’s. Some examples are:

1721 - A crooning cow, a crowing hen, and a whistling maid boded never luck to a house.

1850 - A whistling woman and a crowing hen, is neither fit for God nor men.

1917 - A whistling woman and a crowing hen, will fear the old lad [the Devil] out of his den.

1933 - Whistling girls and a crowing hen, always come to some bad ends.

1979 - A whistling woman and a crowing hen, will bring Old Harry out of his den. (Speake, 2015, p. 345).

Une poule qui chante le coq et une fille qui siffle portent malheur dans la maison. (Dyer, 1883, p. 253)

Whistling maids and crowing hens should have their necks wrung without delay. (Mittwoch, 1981, p. 595)

An article about whistling from 1883 lists multiple versions and sources for the “crowing hens” fable from the peasantry of Northamptonshire, the Cornish, and France (Dyer, 1883). Dyer writes, “the universality of the prejudice against women whistling is an acknowledged fact, and there are few localities where one may not hear the familiar rhyme (1883, p. 252).

Blogs

Blogs and personal essays have power, much like folklore, because they are consumed as casual entertainment where one is unlikely to critique content. Opinion articles and information found on the internet can be related to as authoritative, assisting to embed ideologies in the interpellation of the consumer. Simply by virtue of being published online, blogs and opinion articles may denote a sense of credibility, having the potential to become ideologically powerful texts which can refute or reinforce consumer ideologies. Blogs are often written by private citizens interested in discussing various topics of choice. The information generated on a blog can easily, if unintentionally, propel misinformation into society. The writer, like the general public, is frequently nescient of cultural ideologies blogs may be promoting and fabricating. Essentialist points of view reinforcing the *natural* superiority of men can be produced by seemingly neutral blog posts.

“Futurebird,” in a blog titled, “A Whistling Woman is Up to No Good” (2003), cites multiple “crowing hens” versions she heard from her “stuffy Southern Baptist” grandmother (para. 2). She claims, “Even after reading everything I could find on the subject I still don't know why whistling is thought of as masculine” (“A Whistling Woman”, 2003, para. 9). She ponders if it has something to do with seeming “carefree

and loose” or perhaps it’s the “kiss like puckering of the whistle.” (“A Whistling Woman”, 2003, para. 6). This is yet another example of someone claiming they have no knowledge of why whistling is interpreted as masculine, while citing multiple unladylike cultural stigmas associated with whistling. To classify something as unfeminine inherently implies that it is masculine. Despite the fact that Futurebird identifies probable cause for marginalization, naturalized ideologies that normalize patriarchal perspectives cloud her judgement (“A Whistling Woman”, 2003, para. 4, 6, 9).

Another blog presents the question, “Whistling is not difficult, so why does one so rarely see or hear whistling women?” The response states, “One theory is that they don't care for the sound.... [or] don't like to whistle because doing so involves something like ‘making faces’” (Pamela, 2007, para.3). The writer reinforces essentialist views as a convenient justification, mentioning that women do not “care for the sound.” Ironically, whistling, like women’s singing voices, tend to be high register instruments, presumably enjoyed by all genders.

The blogger also suggests that perhaps women don’t *like* to whistle because of how it makes them look (Pamela, 2007). The fact is, women were *told* not to whistle because puckered ‘faces’ were not delicate, but instead expressive in a time where women should be seen but not heard (as long what was seen was met with approval). Women were ordained as objects of desire, valued for their delicacy, not their voice. The possibility of a woman being able to choose an action solely because she *liked* it was slim-to-none if the act is prohibited under penalty of social rejection. Women may want to whistle, but no one wants to be the recipient of social backlash. The properties of “like” or “want” are constructed relatively within a culture, depending on the price one

must pay to get what they want. If an act has been forbidden in culture, justified with naturalized hegemonic ideologies, and subject to reproach, it is unlikely that the experience of ‘want’ will emerge.

Another blogger continues the “A Whistling Woman is Up to No Good” (2003) thread a few years later by describing her experience with the phrase as being attributed the Bible. While living in Jamaica, she was chided for whistling by her plumber. He exclaimed, “Crowing cocks & whistling women are an abomination to the Lord,” citing the Bible as the source (V3Consulting, 2006, pp. 1). She searched her biblical concordance, finding no such reference. This writer understands that whistling women are frowned upon as “trying to take on a man’s role or simply drawing attention to herself...” yet proclaims that she cannot understand why whistling is considered masculine (V3Consulting, 2006, pp. 6). She cannot see what she, herself, has distinguished. This blogger acknowledges that women’s voices are prescribed silence, and proscribed as “unladylike,” yet is nescient to the correlation with the patriarchal ideologies she has been naturalized into. People look for overt cues of sexism to justify the existence of it and some cannot requite their logic if examples are not obvious.

The Bible has been incorrectly *cited* as the source the phrase, implying religious credibility and strengthening essentialist beliefs. By coupling a fable with the Bible, the message becomes much more significant. The Bible is an authoritarian text which, when cited, is accepted by many without further examination. The perceived source can be considered “proof” enough to satisfy. A blog post titled, “A Whistling Woman and a Crowing Hen is an Abomination to the Lord?” discusses the popular phrase. Gabyoak writes, “My mom says this is found in the *Bible* truthfully I don’t believe [*sic*] it [;] if it is

found in the *Bible* [sic] where is it found[?]" (2003, pp. 1). Multiple respondents revealed that they could find no evidence corroborating restrictions on women whistling in their review of the concordance. Given that many cultures are dominated by ideologies conveyed in institutionalized religion, it is no surprise that the Bible would be attributed to many social rules in order to justify their legitimacy. These blogs are representative of nescient sexism. The bloggers and responders are obviously looking for answers, not necessarily attempting to solidify restrictive contexts surrounding whistling. Lack of education about language and hegemonic influence hinders one's ability to put all the pieces of the ideological equation together.

A blog entitled "Can women whistle?" further demonstrates the misguided power of personal posts (Caminiti, 2014, pp. 1). The headline questioning whether women can whistle is problematic. Framing a gendered action in a can-or-can't paradigm reinforces or creates essentialist beliefs. Asserting that women "can" not whistle promotes essentialist ideologies of inherent sex differences with regards to physical capabilities. The headline alone promotes a gendered status quo, but a simple linguistic alteration can change the implication completely. Asking why women "do" not whistle would lead to a more provocative and accurate conversation, and remove the assumption that women are inherently ineffective whistlers.

Women can whistle, but they have been muted, while male whistlers, by contrast, have voice. Essentialist assertions create a subtle hierarchy of natural musical ability, suggesting that men are *naturally* better whistlers. This appears to be grounded on logic until one examines ideological prescriptions that have been influential. Women have been culturally mandated to refrain from whistling, while men have enjoyed the freedom to

pucker. Can a person be considered innately more intelligent than another if they have utilized knowledge inaccessible to the other?

Caminiti (2014) searches for some unknown, essential reason that women are not “able” to whistle. Referencing an online article with dubious credibility, Caminiti feels vindicated to find that “Apparently only about 10% of women can whistle” (2014, pp. 1). She could not figure out why this was the case, but was eager to refute “some BS about X and Y chromosomes, or women don’t whistle because it’s considered not to be ladylike” (Caminiti, 2014, pp. 1). She claims that she does not know why women can’t whistle, but she is certain that it is not because of the pressure of being ladylike. Nescient to the fact that the very ideology she dispels is an answer to her question, Caminiti (2014) simply keeps reinforcing gender inequities of whistling. Hegemony has ensured that this author is unaware of the cultural mandates that are present.

In our current post-feminist era, people are eager to believe that “We don’t think like that anymore.” Although it may be true that contemporary western culture does not police ladylike behavior as strictly as in the past, the expectations of acceptable social behavior is very much alive and well. When an action such as whistling is suppressed and muted for generations, the suppression is rationalized through some form of gendered assumptions that justify a binary paradigm. Gendered assumptions are often accepted as truth with no thought to the sexism and inequity associated with them. This oversight unknowingly redistributes gender-based falsehoods and represents the effect nescience has on the current social state of affairs.

IWC Webpage

The entities associated with the international whistling community perpetuate the

hegemonic status quo of as well. At first glance, the *International Whistlers Convention* website is informative; it includes convention guidelines, history, and an archive of contest winners and participants. A deeper review of the IWC website enables the critical viewer to observe nescient sexism in action. The framing with which winners are presented on the IWC website mirrors the misogynist ranking system. On the IWC website, you will find that where winners are posted, men are listed first. Just as Dale Spender (1980) indicates – when *he* consistently comes before *she* it fortifies the belief that it is more *natural* for men to be recognized first. Visual rhetoric that consistently displays gender hierarchies solidifies essentialist reasoning and justifies the implied importance of those listed first.

The “Winners/Awards/Photos” tab features past award winners. Each page lists years of winners from the various competitive divisions. On each of these pages, the male champion awards are *always* listed ahead of the female champions. With regards to the twenty-seven winners of the IWC’s highest honor, the Hall of Fame Award, there are twenty-seven winners listed and eight women were named, approximately 70% were men. This difference in numbers reflects the fact that the predominant number of contestants and recognized participants are men. Another page lists the male and female winners of the “Lillian Williams Entertainer of the Year Award.” Men are given top billing 66% of the time, even though the award is named after a woman, making it the most gender-neutral of the pages (“Winners/Awards/Photos,” n.d.).

The ordered effect suggests that readers of these pages will internalize that men are more important to the history of whistling (Entin & Serfaty, 2016). Ordered effect describes the phenomena in which final conclusions are affected by the order in which

information is received and processed. Researchers have found that people believe, pay the most attention, are influenced by, and prioritize what is seen first. This is the problem with the IWC website.

The average reader may unconsciously evaluate the reasoning, and attribute it to the simple fact that men are better whistlers. This nescience does not take into consideration that the number of female participants is so restricted. It is highly unlikely that the history of the IWC was written by a calculating, overt sexist trying to influence whistling culture through oppressive communicative acts. It is more likely that the author was simply an average writer, doing their best to convey accurate history. Nescience is to blame for this unconscious, automatic order, not intentional degradation. A gendered hierarchy is being unintentionally crafted by both the writer and the reader of the site. This hierarchy creates an unconscious experience of women being less than men which reinforces hegemonic ideals. The “IWC History” pages names a litany of whistling judges, distinguished guests, and award winners from days gone by. Throughout multiple descriptive paragraphs, an undisclosed writer consistently mentions male before female winners. Given that people expect list items to be in the order of importance, there is a subtle reinforcement of hegemonic norms when males come first in reference lists. When closely examining the document, there are many ways in which nescient sexism is present.

The body of the “IWC History” page describes fifteen years where male and female contest winners are named. In all but two, the male winner is cited first, prioritizing men 86% of the time. Of the few occurrences where men’s names were not listed, females are mentioned after children and teens, displaying their place on the

bottom of the totem pole of importance. There is also great detail about the “guests of honor” for the first years. Women were prioritized 14% of the time (“IWC History”, n.d.). The casual, seemingly random, order of names is not simply giving information about whistling, is also reinforcing gender hierarchy by means of order. This leads to a vicious cycle where symbolic annihilation becomes tangible annihilation: if women do not participate they will not be represented and lack of representation causes lack of participation.

The Whistling Diva is Born

When I entered the world of competitive whistling, I learned that many whistlers have a nickname to promote and distinguish themselves as whistlers. “Whistling Tom,” “Whistler’s Brother,” and “The California Whistler,” are just a few examples. I promptly decided on the name, “The West Coast Whistler,” hoping to sound edgy and clever. As my whistling career expanded, I began to identify as a whistler more and more. My desire to win the top prize was waylaid by three second-place titles followed by one third-place win. I became focused on winning the top prize and had no intention of stopping until I did so. In 2008, it was announced that the convention would be relocated temporarily for the first time, and the Japanese Whistlers Federation would produce it in Japan it under the bylaws of the IWC. I decided to go. As a result of a few phone calls, I was able to schedule interviews with a few newspapers. I know that mentioning Japan was part of the reason the story was desirable; Americans seem to have an inherent view of Japan as purveyors of high-culture.

After my first gendered news feature, I realized the need to frame myself as a *female* whistler, not a generic siffleur. Despite the fact that my appearance represents a

typical female phenotype, I needed to make sure that there was no mistaking my womanhood in the writing. In fact, I want it to be first and foremost. I knew I needed a more impactful moniker intended to combine the idea of women and whistling together in the eyes of the public. I searched for a name that would highlight my female-ness and expertise. After much contemplation, “The Whistling Diva” was born. Confident that my new name reflected more than just a clever quip, I immediately began to use it everywhere. I generated business cards, flyers, a new CD cover, and web address - www.WhistlingDiva.com.

Upon return from my victorious trip to the IWC in Japan, I had an opportunity to experience another victory with the use of my new moniker. The *Pasadena Star News* (2008) published an article about my success titled “The Whistling Diva Wins in Japan.” I was able to see my new label in positive action. The victory was twofold – the art of whistling was being promoted in mainstream media, and the headline, referring to a whistling “diva,” educated people about the presence of women in whistling. It was thrilling to see my rhetorical strategy, designed to correlate women with expert whistling, represented in the most influential of spheres - the media.

Changing my handle produced great results and I experienced first-hand the use of branding as an effective tool in my pursuit to alter the reputation of whistling. Observing the effects of deliberate branding, and framing my music as art in an array of interviews, gave me confidence that the status of whistling could be reconstructed. I continue to strategize ways to disintegrate any remaining naturalized ideas about whistling being strictly a man’s game in order to elevate the art and cultivate artists.

The Whistling Boy

The first, big, feature article was a learning lesson for me. I was so grateful that the *Pasadena Weekly* decided to publish a story about my upcoming trip to Japan, to vie for the title of International Whistling Grande Champion at the IWC. I was thrilled to be interviewed and could not wait to read it. Naively under the impression that the article was exclusively about my experience as a professional whistling artist, quite a few surprises came about when I finally got my hands on the June 12, 2008 edition. The first shock was the huge picture of “The Whistling Boy” statuette on the cover. This occurrence seemed extra outrageous given I was quoted in the article declaring, “There’s so much sexism in whistling because many people think it’s not OK for women to whistle — to draw attention to themselves” (Hedrick, 2008, p.13). My disappointment lies in the fact that a story presumed to be about a local woman’s journey to musical greatness, spends so much time featuring men both textually and visually, reinforcing nescient sexism. The experience emphasized my desire to work harder to eliminate the gendered lines of whistling

The cover’s only indication that the article’s focus was a female whistler was a byline stating, “Monrovia’s Carole Anne Kaufman heads to Tokyo to Whistle *As Her Work*” (see Appendix B). It was proportionately miniscule, encompassing less than 2.5% of the cover. The portrait of the male statue took up 80% of the cover art. Apparently the editors of the *Pasadena Weekly* were so naturalized into their essentialist, gendered beliefs, they were completely nescient to the fact that they were demonstrating the very sexist acts I warned against. The experience ignited my desire to work harder to eliminate gendered lines of whistling.

I am immensely grateful to the *Pasadena Weekly* for publishing a story about women in whistling. It is a win for myself and the entire community of musical whistlers. Every media moment about the art of whistling is a step in the right direction, and after all, “any publicity is good publicity.” I do not believe the author had insidious intent towards women; I do, however, believe that Hedrick was nescient to implications of framing of her subjects as aligned with patriarchal hierarchy. With that said, the article is laden with glaring, nescient sexism. While it feels risky to criticize something that was ultimately a feather in my cap, I assume the cultural demands of my womanhood influences my reticence to be completely honest about the subtle, gendered insults the author expresses. Concerns about being regarded as ungrateful or aggressive remind me that I am not beyond influence from patriarchal directives demanding my ladylike behavior.

The author opens the article by referring to my musical whistling as “awesome in its shrill but striking accuracy — not only due to the avian quality of the music but because its unnaturally high frequency had the power to crack a windshield” (Hedrick, 2008, p.12). Although it may appear to be a compliment to some, having my art form described “shrill” and “unnaturally high” did not feel supportive to women, nor does it elevate musical whistling to a fine art form. In fact, shrill is a term reserved exclusively for women to describe unpleasant sounds they produce. As the article continues to tell the history of whistling competitions, it includes quotations from Allan DeHart, the male founder of the *International Whistlers Convention*. The story also features an interview with another man, Nat Nedhar, a friend of the news office and fellow whistler.

As I am reading the piece, there is a remarkably more favorable, even ‘rapturous’ interpretation of Nedhar’s whistling, relative to my formerly piercing performance.

Hedrick writes:

...Reporters, editors and advertising representatives all listened in rapture as Nedhar’s vibrato reverberated throughout the office...In the minutes that followed his impromptu concert, a sense of ease and relaxation could be felt in the newspaper office in Old Pasadena. Gang violence, tax fraud, pedophilia — it all seemed less important for that moment. (2008, p.13)

Although the author obviously prefers Nedhar’s style of whistling, I was beyond thrilled that a sentence referring to pedophilia was not directed at my whistling. It is tragic to be correlated with the subject on any level and this was yet another flick of the dimmer switch on what was supposed to be a shining moment.

This article continues to marginalize the female subject:

Before puckering up, [Kaufman] requested a moment to drink some water and reapply her lip balm, while Nedhar prefers a completely natural approach. ‘I believe that whistling comes from within,’ Nedhar said, ‘There’s nothing you can put on the outside that will make you a better whistler.’ (2008, p.13)

I do not believe that the writer’s intention was to degrade my whistling, but the outcome subtly frames the man as the superior musician with, essentially, a more “natural” style. Hedrick goes on to say that I can whistle in a higher octave than Nedhar, which, “could awaken sleeping dogs in Tokyo” (2008, p.12). Perhaps it was an attempt at a compliment

or humor, but I do not believe readers will be inclined to interpret the statement as descriptive of beautiful, world-class musicianship, able to compete with ‘rapture’.

Finally, Hendrik addresses my complaints about sexism in whistling by including Allen DeHart’s confirmation, stating, “DeHart agreed, reciting an old Southern saw: ‘A whistling woman and a crowing hen — both will come to no good end’” (2008, p.13). Instead of taking the opportunity to dismiss the absurdity of the old adage, the author leaves this quotation to read as a declaration instead of a tired lie with no place in modern society. By providing no critique at all, Hedrick is giving this superstition a chance to continue its influence through corroboration.

I do not believe that Hedrick, the bloggers, or Allen DeHart were aware of the misogynistic connotations embedded in their communications. Most people are nescient of the source and impact of their hegemonic messages, and likely view them as neutral. Until there are equal numbers of male and female contestants at worldwide competitions, there must be structures in place to ensure that women become recognized for their contribution to musical whistling. Champions embody a powerful rhetorical message that, when coupled with whistling, helps to elevate an act to an art. The continuation of safeguarding the existence of female award winners is necessary for the art of whistling and women’s participation in it to thrive. With folklore, blogs, and websites that continue to subtly marginalize whistling and whistlers, overt, positive, rhetorical representations help to supersede old messages and encourage young women, and men, to take part in an overlooked instrument with unlimited potential.

CHAPTER 4

The Journey from Shrill to Thrill

It's a clear April day and I'm driving down a pristine, emerald-colored country road outside Louisburg, North Carolina. My mind wanders while practicing the composition I would be competing with the next day. An idea drifts into my thoughts - I could be the one to host the next generation of international whistling events. My fellow whistlers and I often complain that the IWC, and its marketing, need to be updated to keep up with the times and entice a new generation of whistlers. As a champion, performer, and event organizer, I am inspired by the thought of hosting my own whistling event. The old guard of the IWC will one day retire, leaving a gap in the competitive whistling community. I know a competition in Los Angeles has the potential to raise the respect of musical whistling around the world. Combining world-class musical whistling with a world-famous city, fueled by the power of social media (painfully missing at the IWC), could finally bring whistling into the mainstream.

Disparagement of whistling is the result of hegemonic hierarchies regarding art, which frame certain music as low-class while others are considered high. I have endeavored to reveal this line as an invented measure, created by rhetorical communications which reinforce arbitrary cultural constructs, posing as markers of class. I hope to redraw the line by manipulating it with an inundation of positive rhetorical messages intended combat current ideological perspectives, additionally demonstrating the power of rhetoric and fluidity of ideologies. In this chapter, I will disclose my journey and personal efforts to elevate the act of musical whistling from a non-art to a fine art by correlating the *Masters of Musical Whistling* with archetypal high-class indicators, in an

attempt to frame it as high-culture in order for masses to recognize and appreciate it for its potential. While the juxtaposition between high-art and mass-culture may seem contradictory, radical action must be employed in order to raise whistling from a rejected, annoying, gendered act to a justified musical art form. Given the imbalance, I felt the need to overcompensate in order to level the playing field. By first establishing acceptance and acknowledgement of whistling as a legitimate art, musical whistling can enjoy its rightful place among other popular instrumentations.

The Spirit of Competition

From ancient Greek athletics in Olympia to a chili cook-off at the country fair, people have long strived to be the premier exemplar in competition. People love to win and are drawn to winners. Competition has a way of legitimizing any event it is attached to. Winners overcome obstacles to score better than other contestants as verified by experts presumed qualified to discern the best. Competition appears to be an effective way to legitimize musical whistling as a credible exercise. Pairing musical whistling with representations of competition, laden with connotations of leadership and triumph, elevates the reputation of whistling, moving it away from low-culture.

Competition has been culturally distinguished as a credible institution, and any contestant recognized is bestowed significant social standing. It is important to note that although one may win a title declaring them as, “the best in the world,” it may be more accurate to distinguish the award as recognizing, “the best among those privileged to compete.” Competition may not be a perfect system, but it continues to be an acceptable means to distinguish a person or group as the worthiest contestant. Given this correlation, competition provides useful access to cultural credibility moving forward in the

remanufacturing of musical whistling's status.

When I came home in 2001 with my first second-place trophy, I learned firsthand that people have an unabashed respect for competition winners. People, who had no idea what hurdles I may, or may not, have crossed become instantly impressed with my accolades. Upon returning from IWC with a first runner-up trophy, previously disinterested people suddenly had gracious comments and curiosity. Given the current devalued social status of musical whistling, pronouncing champions helps to gain exposure and legitimacy for the enterprise

Elevating musical whistling by correlating it with competitive success helps to appeal to audiences who may otherwise reject an activity as correlated with low-culture. People are predictably interested when I mention that I am a musical whistler. I witness an increase of demonstrated respect when I mention that I am a two-time world champion. Often, further veneration is exhibited when I impart that my first title was earned in Japan, a country with a reputation for excellence and drive. Depending on what I am trying to achieve socially or professionally, I mention these status raising factors frequently, while I rarely, if ever, initially mention the fact that I am the “women's” champion.

Competitive Whistling: Then

Whistlers have enjoyed a few opportunities to gather and compete for top prizes in the United States, starting in the late 20th century. The *World's International Whistle-Off* in Carson City, Nevada, from 1977 to 1983 enjoyed some celebrity with a feature on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. *Holiday for Lips* was created by Mitch Hider, also the emcee for the MMW, in Eugene, Oregon from 1979 to 1984. In 1999 Michael

Cooney produced the *Millennium World Whistling Championship* in Edmonton, Canada and *Puckerama Whistling Festival* in Tulsa, Oklahoma was popular in the early 2000's ("IWC History", n.d.; "Puckerama whistling festival this weekend", 2002).

The International Whistlers Convention (IWC) took place from 1972 to 2014. Based in small-town Louisburg, North Carolina, it began as a local folk festival. The event transformed into a whistling contest after Daryl Williams won with a whistled performance. The IWC became the world's longest-running musical whistling competition and featured contestants from all over the world including India, Japan, Australia, Europe, and the U.S. Whistlers of all levels came together to compete and celebrate their love of whistling. Contestants were judged on the same merits that any musical competition would evaluate: song selection and difficulty, tone, precision, creativity, projection, performance, etc. Those vying for the world championship title were required to perform a popular and a classical composition with pre-recorded background tracks in a preliminary and a final round. Winners, awarded the title of "International Whistling Grande Champion," have become some of the most recognized whistlers in the world.

Unfortunately, the IWC was not organized by marketing geniuses. The team was a group of dedicated, mature citizens in Franklin County, North Carolina. They did the best they could with promoting the event, but in the growing age of mediated advertising and social media, they did not have a cohesive campaign or online presence. Sometimes media outlets would send a representative, but the exposure rarely reached the national or international level. In order for competitive whistling to grow, the entities promoting it needed to utilize modern resources to appeal to new audiences.

Competitive Whistling: Now

In 2014, the IWC announced that it would be closing its doors. The whistling world was distressed to lose a forty-year tradition for musical whistlers around the world. There was no other significant whistling event in production. American whistlers talked of creating a new event in the US, but no plans solidified. I knew the time had come for me to step up as an organizer, but I delayed due to a heavy university schedule and the pressure of having to reproduce a world-wide event. Although I had successfully produced a local festival, “The Monrovia Music Fest,” I was delaying the new responsibility calling my name.

Soon after the IWC’s revelation, organizers in Japan announced that they would be hosting a new international whistling competition near Tokyo in 2016. I quickly realized that I had to launch my event in the summer of 2015 if I was going to realize my goal of producing a whistling festival in the States before someone else did. This was the motivation I needed to begin the intense process that would become the first *Masters of Musical Whistling* - presented in Pasadena, California.

As of 2018, there are only two major international whistling contests in operation. Organizers Ryosuke Takeuchi and his wife Chris Toyohashi produce the bi-annual *World Whistling Convention*, commonly referred to as the WWC, near Tokyo, Japan. Whistlers travel from all over the planet to compete for a title. *The Masters of Musical Whistling*, known as the MMW, and the WWC take turns hosting an event designed to crown the best whistlers in the world. Although the producers of both events are in communication with each other and share helpful information, each event is a distinct entity with different approaches and constructs.

I produced my first bi-annual *Masters of Musical Whistling* at the most affordable venue I could find – the church sanctuary at the *Ahia Center for Spiritual Living*. After some negotiation, we settled on a fantastic deal for a day and a half rental. I reserved the space and announced to *Orawhistle* the date of July 15, 2015. The venue was not the picture of professionalism I had fantasized about - the sanctuary was reminiscent of the quintessential grandmother's parlor, painted pink with burgundy trim - but time and funds were limited. Pasadena was a convenient choice; I was familiar with the area; it is close to my hometown; and it boasts an abundance of restaurants, shops, and hotels for contestants.

Of course, I had to call my old friends at the *Pasadena Weekly*, letting them know my event would be in town. I was elated to discover they were going to do another feature article about our event. My appreciation was high, but my expectations were not. I would be grateful to receive a mention in any local paper to help increase visibility. When I finally saw it, I couldn't believe my eyes. The entire cover was dedicated to our event! It was brightly colored with fabulous graphics and featured our signature phrase "Blown Away" (see Appendix C). The feminist *pièce de résistance* was the cover graphic - featuring a picture of a *woman* whistling! A woman. Whistling. At that moment, I felt that all of my dreams of whistling equality were coming true. This publicity was the first major victory for the Masters of Musical Whistling, and a major win for representation of women in whistling.

I was also interviewed for two regional radio shows with huge audiences: KNX and KCRW, public radio. Our social capital was raised by being associated with reputable sources. All of these mediated instances represented massive strides in the

public representation of whistling, and women in whistling. Being a female producer, and primary representative for the MMW, every article helped to erase the echoes of old, gendered messages by pairing a female with the whistling elite.

The MMW's first year was a success, with 15 contestants from the U.S. and Japan. Hundreds of people came to witness and hear some of the best musical whistlers on earth compete, many of which came because of our article in the *Pasadena Weekly*. We awarded Yasunori Okuno, from Japan, the title of world champion. With the advent of the live-band division, a growing social media campaign, and press exposure, it was a great start towards promoting musical whistling as a fine art. It was clear, though, that much more work needed to be done to garner the respect and appreciation of musical whistling on a worldwide level.

Raising the Bar

There were a few aspects to the competition that I implemented into the *Masters of Musical Whistling* that were not at the IWC. First, I created a live-band accompaniment division for the whistlers. No other whistling competition features this opportunity; a four-piece band including piano, guitar, bass guitar, and percussion were featured. In order to become the ultimate champion, a whistler must be accepted into the live-band division, which required more expertise. This addition was intended to challenge the contestants and elevate the professionalism of the performance and performers. Whistlers only had an average of fifteen minutes to rehearse. Being able to perform with a live band on demand is an essential characteristic of a world-class musician. I felt it was necessary to judge our ultimate champion on a task that they would need to employ many times as a professional musician. The live-band division helped to

legitimize our art form by coupling whistling with the credibility of our accomplished accompanists, and demonstrated that our whistlers could perform under pressure, as any world-class musician should.

The second aspect I altered from previous competitions was the judging system. The judging guidelines serve many purposes that facilitate the upward mobility of musical whistling as a fine art form. From tone to showmanship, our guidelines ensure that our champion can actually impress an audience on every level from musicality to performance. There are 100 points possible in each of the three divisions:

Technical Ability - Rhythmic and note accuracy, breath support, dynamics and shading, ability to perform the selection with the technique it requires. Is the tone pleasing and appropriate for the music at hand?

Musicality and Interpretation – Musicality, expressiveness, phrasing, dynamics, emotional import, communicative power. Appropriate use of legato, staccato, rubato, portamento, etc... Is the whistling style appropriate for the selection?

Stage Presence and Professionalism - Audience engagement, microphone technique, performance style, appearance, presentation, showmanship. Do you feel a connection to the performer? Does their energy and musicianship reach out and grab you?

At the MMW, showmanship is one-third of the total score, whereas, it was a much more insignificant aspect to IWC scoring. In order to increase the favorable reception of musical whistling, those designated as ‘world’s best’ need to be able alter the minds of the listener. Providing great whistling on command destabilizes the belief that whistling

is crude and enhances the knowledge that it is art. Good musicianship accompanied by debilitating, overt shyness does not demonstrate professionalism or delight audiences – it has the opposite effect. Poor performance skills can be painful to watch, resulting in the musician or the music being framed as substandard. I have been defeated in competition by a contestant I found uncomfortable to watch. Whether it was the knocking knees, shrunken posture, or closed eyes - I found a lot of reason to resent the fact that she represented my art form, beyond the fact that she beat me.

Our whistlers are expected to be ambassadors of the art, ready to impress at any moment. The best way to truly educate others about a niche activity is to let them experience it for themselves. Each person that has been transformed by a personal performance is apt to share it with another. Expanding the knowledge of whistling as legitimate art on a grass roots level is important. Every performance has the potential to alter the reputation of whistling and change the perceived status. From a quick, whistled, musical phrase utilized to impress the uninitiated, to local stage performances, impromptu and rehearsed musical moments convert audience's context about whistling, elevating it from shrill to thrill.

Although we do not have totally separate divisions for males and females, at the MMW I always make sure that a woman is crowned as a winner. Judges vote on, and award a trophy, to the best scoring female and male in the show, to ensure equal representation. Everyone loves a winner and it is necessary to have as many female ambassadors of whistling as possible out in the world. One objective of the MMW is to remind people that they have an accessible musical instrument at their disposal and provide examples of the potential of the instrument. People are more prone to model

behaviors of respected individuals that represent their gender, and we identify multiple award winners to exploit that inclination.

Strategies for MMW 2017

It is necessary to reframe musical whistling to nullify past reputations and create new, empowered ones. The MMW team, consisting of myself, various volunteers, and independent contractors, approached the idea of raising the cultural capital of whistling in multiple ways. Many new strategies were employed during the production of the 2017 *Masters of Musical Whistling* that were designed to raise the reputation of the event and the instrument. Starting with a professional venue situated in, arguably, the most famous city in the world, sent the message that we are a legitimate, cultural event. We produced an evening concert featuring world-class whistling, beautiful classical compositions, and live-band accompaniment. An elegant dancer accompanied by Geert Chatrou on two compositions increased the entertainment value, beauty, and artistic credibility to the concert. We promoted the fact that we had whistlers from over seven countries to indicate our worldwide reach. In addition, we improved all aspects of branding to give whistling an air of professionalism and enhance our high-culture credibility. We placed an abundance of focus on our online message and other mediated messages aiming to frame our event as world-class.

Venue

In 2017, the bi-annual MMW was back in the game. This time it needed a venue that could evoke the kind of credibility only a theater in the entertainment capital of the world can provide. I was beginning to lose hope of finding the perfect venue when I enlisted a local whistler friend to help me find an affordable theater. She began the hunt

immediately, and within a few days, I received a text with the name Barnsdall Gallery Theater – located at the iconic Barnsdall Art Park on Hollywood Boulevard. The theater is located in a park in the heart of East Hollywood, right next to a revered Frank Lloyd Wright building on a hill that overlooks the world-famous Hollywood sign. It was also about half the price of any other professional theater I had explored. It was a match made in heaven and I sat on the edge of my seat as I called Debbie, the theater manager, from my car. Within minutes I had tentatively reserved the last availability in September, with a promise to come view the property within a week. My instinct told me this would be our new home and my inspiration was ignited.

I was even more inspired once I got to the property. I could visualize the tables and chairs poised outside the theater and the tacos being served at a whistlers' meet and greet. I imagined the banner posted at the entrance, welcoming hipsters from all over Los Angeles coming to experience the newest, old instrument on the planet. As I walked into the foyer, I envisioned our t-shirts being sold on a table to the side, as tickets were being clamored for at the box office. Down the beautiful blue stairway, I entered the lower theater lobby and floated into the 299-seat theater, complete with beautiful blue chairs, full theater space, and professional stage accoutrements. I could see the photos that would be posted on social media, telling a story of professionalism and artistry that had never been seen in the whistling competition world (see Appendix B). To say it was an upgrade from the church was an understatement. The price was also an upgrade - six times what I had previously paid - but at least it wasn't a pink parlor! I didn't know how I would pay for it, but I knew I had to reserve it to keep inspiration alive. Big, impossible projects move me more than small, simple endeavors. Watching my creative vision come to life

and knowing that each improvement makes a difference, drives me forward. I booked the venue for two days, September 8th and 9th, 2017, feeling confident we were on an upward track.

Illustrious Guests, Illustrious Event

My friend and fellow world-champion whistler, Geert Chatrou from the Netherlands, agreed to be a judge at the 2017 MMW. Once he confirmed, I began to think of ways that we could use his accountabilities, and expand our credibility, by featuring his participation. Geert is a phenomenal whistler with virtuosic musical abilities, and specializes in classical music. He is a trained classical musician on various instruments who is admired by whistlers and audiences around the world. Not only has he performed all over the world and given a TED talk, but he has also gained a reputation for raising the perception of whistling through his performances all over Europe. Having Geert Chatrou serve as judge, Master Class instructor, and performer provided us with an opportunity to raise our cultural credibility with audiences and the whistling community. Many contestants at the MMW bought tickets to the Master Class specifically to hear him speak. Whistlers were captivated by Geert's brilliant technique, and his presence definitely upgraded our event in the eyes of attendants.

I wanted to create as many opportunities as possible to showcase Geert's refined talent, reputation, and classical repertoire. I expanded his role to include Master Class instructor, then decided to add a special event to showcase his virtuosic talent. Distinct from the competition, this event would only feature accomplished, award winners, as opposed to whistlers of all levels - novice to expert. Special invitations were sent out to certain, extraordinary visiting whistlers to create an accomplished, global lineup of

world-class whistlers for the concert. Ultimately, I chose five champions to star in our evening concert representing the best of the best: Molly Lewis and myself represented female whistlers and the U.S., Geert Chatrou represented the Netherlands, Tormod Borgen Rogne is from Norway, and Ryosuke Takeuchi hails from Japan. Molly was included at the last minute to be a secondary female representation as well as to represent our younger demographic. In her twenties, she could help us diversify our audience by appealing to younger audiences.

Titled "The International Concert of the Masters," we produced a concert designed to raise the perception of musical whistling by advertising features that indicate cultural credibility. I hoped the name would denote expertise by emphasizing the presence of mastery. Pairing the context of "international" to it implied cultural diversity and international legitimacy. The vibe was more serious and elegant, from formal attire to timing. Situating the event at night, we hoped to generate the experience of a "night at the theater" for our audience. Our goal was that anyone attending the event, or reading the flyer, would be persuaded to consider a new, elevated perspective of musical whistling through familiar connotations of refinement.

As the shape-of-show was developing, I was inspired to feature a professional dancer in the show. Knowing that dance has been accepted as a refined and classical artistic expression, I hoped that including it in our concert would distinguish us as "guilty" by association. An extraordinary dancer joined Geert on two songs, leaving the audience impressed by artistic authenticity. Not only was the concert a stunning example of how powerful and exquisite musical whistling can be, the event was incredibly entertaining. A mixture of classical and contemporary compositions, accompanied by a

live band and professional dancing, had never been seen before. It made an irrevocable statement about whistling that evolved the art form for insiders and outsiders, lifting musical whistling into the realm of artistry.

Master Class

The incorporation of a Master Class rounded out the weekend's events. A whistling school was always a part of the *International Whistlers Convention*, and I wanted to expand the MMW to accommodate those interested in a class session. Offering a "Master Class" featuring one-on-one training with respected world champions, including Geert, was a feather in the cap of our weekend. Our Master Class whistling school featured Mitch Hider from Eugene, Oregon, myself, and Geert as instructors. Mitch was the former emcee at the *International Whistlers Convention*, a world champion, and an IWC "Hall of Fame Award" recipient who is also a whistling historian, as well as a great friend and mentor. The *Los Angeles Times* described him as a "dapper older gentleman," and although we laughed together about the title, the description is apropos. His classical vaudevillian approach shades every performance with hues rooted in traditional entertainment, and exemplifies the history of whistling. Mitch spoke of the history of whistling, shared insights, and guided whistlers through group songs on his ukulele. I spoke of diaphragmatic breathing, confidence, and professionalism. Geert was allotted half of the class time to facilitate a few, individual training sessions with volunteers. The writer of the *L.A. Times* attended the Master Class, and the article was framed around the event.

Online Representation and Media Framing

Our online presence was also a strategic attempt at an upgrade. We streamlined

our website, t-shirts, and branding artifacts to display a message of modern professionalism. At the IWC, the graphics always seemed a bit juvenile and I worked hard to combine whimsy with edgy graphics in the hopes of appealing to younger and older audiences. Our branding improved from our first year and 2017 presented a cohesive look which helped to facilitate a professional message (see Appendix D). Framing, in the form of branding, dictates the context in which symbols are interpreted. In our promotions, I framed Geert Chatrou as “the best whistler alive today.” At first, I resisted being overly bold, stating that he was “one of the best,” but that was missing the dynamic implication that I desired.

There were a few phrases we utilized consistently to drive our message home. Frequently stating that our contestants were the “best in the world” drove our overall objective to assert the credibility of our competition. Strategically mentioning in our materials that our event featured thirty whistlers, from seven countries, including, specifically, Japan and Europe correlates the positive attributes associated with those cultures to our event. Our website touted the fact that our whistlers have been featured on a TED Talk, television, and radio. I placed quotations from local celebrities and a congresswoman on the homepage, in an attempt to further increase recognition, legitimacy, and visual impact of the site (See Appendix D).

With regard to social media, at the advice of my social media manager, we placed my picture as the face of the event. The intention was to create cohesive branding and emphasize the association of women to whistling competition. When creating our advertising, I wanted to ensure balanced gender representation (see Appendix G). A promotional flyer, whether hard or soft copy, is often the first rhetorical representation

one has ever seen of professional level musical whistling. They can ignite a sense of curiosity and educate audiences of the existence of a realm they never knew of. Two male whistlers had fantastic headshots that featuring attractive whistling expressions. One of those whistlers was a blonde from Norway and the other a Japanese man, hoping to communicate our message of diversity. A woman had to be featured, and I felt comfortable using myself, although I briefly wondered if it was too self-important. I was easily convinced that, as a featured artist and organizer, it was appropriate, even necessary to have my picture on the flyer.

A professional photographer and videographers were hired for one primary reason: to create professional representation. The professional footage we acquired from the event will be utilized to create dynamic advertising in the future. The work we do at each MMW sets the pathway for the following event and the choices made in 2017 will live on through photography and video. Through the power of rhetoric, carefully constructed content will help alter the reputation of musical whistling in prospective audiences and anyone exposed to our advertising.

The 2015 venue pictures had an, “I performed at Grandma’s church” look, which supports the belief that whistling is an outdated activity (See Appendix F). I did not use many of those photos in our advertising, preferring instead to generate new content for the 2017 campaign. I knew an upgraded venue would facilitate a message of professionalism in upcoming years and the pictures our photographer captured in 2017 were not only an upgrade, but exemplified the elite message we have been striving to portray (See Appendix G).

Video content is an imperative promotional element to any PR campaign.

Intended primarily for social media promotions, I was hoping a short promotional video would announce cultural credibility to all who viewed, dazzling audiences such that they would spring into the action of buying tickets for the festival. Our aim was to modernize our brand, display up-scale musicality, and demonstrate dynamic gender equality. Much time and effort was spent to distinguish the most dynamic frames and feature a balance between male and female representation. Each moment of visual rhetoric featuring a female whistler degrades the essentialist idea that women can't whistle. I knew watching this would be the audience's first exposure to world-class musical whistling, and given that a first-hand experience with a world-class musical whistler can change people's minds about what is considered legitimate instrumentation, I knew this video had the potential to expand people's perceptions about whistling.

We worked to create a balance with the promotional video, taking great care to emphasize our modern vibe, artistic legitimacy, and balanced gender representation. Our promotional video was a fair balance of male and female whistlers and featured current and classical music to imply well-rounded excellence. We open the video with our most visually dynamic contestant, Eric Gradman from Los Angeles. Sporting a bright red Mohawk and whistling a contemporary Adele song, his scene created a sense of modernity for our event. The second shot features a female, Lauren Elder, playing ukulele with a professional band intended to correlate whistling with women, self-accompaniment, and professionalism. Furthermore, the ukulele is currently enjoying celebrity as an up and coming instrument amongst "hipsters" a.k.a. trendy young folks, the other demographic we hoped to appeal to.

The video then jumps to Geert Chatrou, a remarkable classical musician, whistling with an orchestra in a sumptuous venue. This section was meant to increase the cultural capital associated with whistling by demonstrating. We then feature a Japanese contestant, Yasunori Okuno, hoping to display our status as an international affair. The last musical scene features Carole Anne Kaufman performing another pop song. The inclusion of the last vignette, depicting a scene from my episode with the regionally recognized host of PBS's *Visiting with Huell Howser*, was designed to appeal to older audiences. Even mentioning *Visiting* as a show associated with public television is designed to raise my credibility with you, the reader. Each frame was strategically positioned to signify artistic integrity. We complete the forty-two second advertisement by showing a slide of the iconic Hollywood sign as viewed from our venue, in an attempt to increase the legitimacy of our event via our location.

Upward Mobility Happens

Although we did not get as much online advertising, due to an outdated and ineffective press manager, having an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* Calendar section was a thrilling victory in our march towards legitimizing musical whistling as a fine art form (See Appendix G). I was ecstatic when Jessica Geltz, a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times*, contacted me about covering our event for the L.A. Times. She initially requested to come on Saturday and I implored her to come on Friday, hoping they would publish an online article on Saturday inspiring audiences to come to the Barnsdall Gallery Theater later that day. Gratefully, she agreed to come on Friday for the Master Class and a very flattering article was posted online Saturday morning. The hard

copy was published on the following Tuesday, well after any readers could attend the event.

I have noticed a positive trend in how whistling and women whistlers are represented and framed in the media since the “whistling boy incident,” published in the *Pasadena Weekly*. I have been featured as a whistler in many advantageous television shows, online interviews and hard copy articles but this *L.A. Times* article was exponentially more powerful than anything I have ever seen published about me or my events. Being featured in one of the leading publications in the world, coupled with the high praise the author embeds in her words, put me on cultural capital cloud nine. Titled, “Musical Whistlers Pucker up for Art,” I felt satisfied that my ambitions to elevate whistling to the status of high culture were coming to fruition through rhetorical representation (Geltz, 2017, p.1). Knowing this article would be available online for anyone to view, gave me a sense of relief. The presence of the title and pictures alone would help to combat disparaging blogs and articles about whistling that also come up in a general online whistling search.

The article demonstrated that many of the strategies we implemented were effective. Geert Chatrou was framed as a two-time world champion of “considerable talents” from the Netherlands. It is then mentioned that we had “31 contestants from seven countries,” validating our international status. Immediately following is a quotation about art I coined years ago, and had been promoting at the MMW; “If it comes from the heart, it is art and whistling definitely reflects that.” Jessica continues to help us accrue cultural credibility by describing Master Class participants as diverse and enthusiastic, comparing the whistlers to “orchestra musicians tuning up in the pit before a show”

(Geltz, 2017, p. C6). This comparison is a rhetorical jackpot, exemplifying the artistic image we have worked to progress – whistlers as professional musicians

I was so happy the author decided to include my mention of this master’s thesis about whistling. I know that advanced degrees connote a sense of authority and expertise and I was eager to correlate myself and the event with these connotations for the purpose of status elevation. The author then quotes one of our contestants who mentioned she had been compared to a crowing hen when she whistled. I am subsequently quoted as declaring how “precious” the women contestants are to me, which emphasizes our quest to include females in our genre (Geltz, 2017). Geltz then describes the class happily whistling “Sweet Georgia Brown” like an “imaginary wind section,” rhetorically reinforcing that we are as legitimate as any other orchestral instrument.

I am proud and grateful for the final quotation at the end of the article, as it frames the heart of our efforts; “I am the instrument for my life and artistry, and whatever I do with passion and heart makes a difference. That’s what this is all about” (Geltz, 2017, p. C6). I am overjoyed that my dream of a *Los Angeles Times* article about the MMW was realized. I am grateful that a credible news source reflecting views of whistling as legitimate artistry now exists as a powerful artifact. This article will help to sustain the pathway of whistling towards being realized as a legitimate art form.

CHAPTER 5

Insights and Implications

Whistling is an important factor in the history of human communication. Though often underappreciated, whistling has been a powerful, universal tactic of sending signals for millennia. Whether used to deliver messages across mountains in agrarian communities, calling the dog, or producing music, the diversity and usefulness of whistling is profound. The presence of whistling has become systematically reduced over the years due to its association with noise, superstition, and low culture. Framed as an uncouth, working class deed, historically, elite society marginalized all forms of whistling, which eventually minimized the frequency with which people partake in the act. Women were culturally forbidden from whistling for it was considered crude and unladylike, aspects that would compromise the attractiveness of women expected to be constrained and quiet wives.

Whistling has been the preverbal step-child of music for ages. As a communicative act, it has been reduced to either a working man's instrument or an unlucky sound, feared around the world. Although many people are currently unaware of the stigma on whistling, the outcome is still the same: musical whistling has not been accepted as art in the mainstream. In order for whistling to become an integral part of current musical culture, negative contexts must be neutralized through positive demonstration and rhetorical representation.

Musical whistling has served as an excellent site to illustrate the power of rhetorical messages. Drawing on an act that has little visibility in most cultures today demonstrates the longevity of hegemonic messages and their ability to affect areas of life

that are no longer of primary focus. Focusing on whistling enables an examination of direct and indirect rhetorical messages. This project seeks to highlight how social processes can transform the valuable into the worthless. While whistling was once actively policed and specifically forbidden, today there are very few cultural conversations that explicitly marginalize the act. No longer are there a plethora of disparaging phrases about whistling being circulated throughout most societies, yet some dynamic influence continues to restrain the presence of one of the most available, useful, powerful, portable, and diverse instruments available for human communication

Rhetorical messages influence culture. Whether reinforcing the status quo or disrupting ideologies, rhetorical representations of all kinds affect the way people perceive life. People, actions, and even musical instruments can be marginalized through the communication of naturalized, essentialist beliefs. Hegemonic, essentialist ideologies, driven through culture by the dominant class reinforce beliefs which uphold the patriarchal status quo. Through the power of hegemonic framing, whistling has become a lost art in most corners of the earth where it was once prevalent. Ideological beliefs, embedded in language, folklore, and superstition have marginalized whistling and muted the voice of the whistler over time.

Essentialist attitudes are also attributed to music and instruments. Not only is some music framed as more important than others, cultural ideologies also denote that certain genders are more acceptable for certain instruments. Men are allowed to be self-expressed and visible while women have received a cultural mandate of silence. Essentialist beliefs which proclaim a man's inherent, natural superiority assert that whistling is strictly for men. Even though there is very little active intent to marginalize

whistling today, the effects of rhetorical influence continue to constrain *female* voices. Small microaggressions such as tokenism keep the status quo in place, even while one is nescient to the impact or influence of their action.

High art is an invented construct of the elite class, designed to keep the rich in power and the poor in their place. Although the line is arbitrary, society has subscribed to these beliefs. In order to frame musical whistling as art, I took advantage of existing cultural cues that indicate art. Representations that counter essentialist perspectives have been implemented to change the gendered context with which people think of whistling. Rhetorical reframing implemented during the MMW does appear to have had a positive influence on the recognition of musical whistling as an art. Not only has this exercise reflected the power of rhetorical representation, it has exposed cultural ideology as a fluid, flexible, aspect of society, capable of being reconstructed. The purpose of correlating musical whistling with high-culture is to create access for whistling to be considered a valid art form.

Further research can expand the current study. Investigating the racial diversity of competitive whistlers may provide insight to the effects of marginalization in niche groups with regards to intersectionality. Conducting interviews with women who have been exposed to the “crowing hens” phrase would be valuable. Exploring the effects of specific or general folkloric messages on self-expression, communication, and creative confidence of women would provide interesting insight to impact of unconscious or unnoticed messages. Exploring the effects of how niche art forms are rhetorically represented may provide an opportunity to recontextualize how it is received and appreciated in society.

The term nescience may be utilized to facilitate discussion about ideological influence. Nescience does not generate the emotional response ignorance does, while still indicating that knowledge is incomplete. Given that it is a neutral term most people are unfamiliar with, nescience frames lack of knowledge as an innocent state which can be improved through basic education. Framing individuals as nescient, as opposed to ignorant, may result in less defensive communication with regards to ideologies, politics and more.

There were a few limitations with regards to this study. First, there is limited availability of research about whistling and musical whistling. In addition, generating a complete historical timeline of whistling is impossible given the longevity of the communicative act. Whistling began in pre-historical times, therefore there are no records confirming the genesis of whistling - despite the probability of its use by the first people

Whistling is but one example of how common rhetoric solidifies the status quo with invented information based on unconscious, hegemonic ideologies. By becoming aware of inadvertent acts of marginalization, individuals can establish new patterns that promote true equality and social harmony. Although most may not consider whistling to be of cultural importance, the same hegemonic ideologies that constrict the whistler and their instrument also suffocate other artists and their forms of self-expression. To alter the status quo, individuals must overcome their nescience to recognize the power and messages hidden in common, every day rhetoric. With education people can learn to alter their speaking. Discovering the power of subtle language and contexts that minimize or erase importance, can encourage people take responsibility, change their thoughts and alter their actions.

Although I felt impelled at the beginning of this thesis to use the metaphor of elevation to describe the journey of whistling from high to low-culture, in retrospect I question the constructs that indicate levels of cultural acceptability. What began as a project to justify musical whistling as a high art form concludes with a recognition of the desire to normalize the act, ultimately distinguishing it as an art form, recognized and enjoyed by mass culture.

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APPENDIX A

The Whistling Wife

Written by Harry Randall. Published in 1898

You've heard about the latest fad,
That fills us with amaze,
I mean that silly fashion, called
The female whistling craze;
My wife is fairly on the job,
Although it's so absurd,
And all day long to my dismay,
She whistles like a bird.

Chorus:

You should hear her whistling,
Drives me mad with her whistling,
She starts it in the evening,
And don't leave off till dawn;
You should hear her whistling,
Different kinds of whistling,
She whistles, 'Yankee Doodle',
And the 'Dead March in Saul!'

She never calls me by my name,
But treats me like a log,
For now she always whistles me,
As if I were a dog;
Last Sunday night we went to church,
And I with shame turned red,
For when the people sang the hymns,
She whistled 'em instead.

Chorus:

She's known at all the pubs around,
For she wets her whistle now,
And if I want my meals at home,
It don't come off somehow;
I have to whistle for my grub,
And chirrup for a sip,
And they say we are the loveliest pair,
That ever 'cocked a lip!'

APPENDIX B

Pasadena Weekly: Cover One



APPENDIX C

Pasadena Weekly: Cover Two



APPENDIX D

Masters of Whistling Website: Homepage

THE MASTERS OF
Musical Whistling
INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL AND COMPETITION

Home About Gallery More

September 8th & 9th, 2017

GET BLOWN AWAY!
30 WHISTLERS FROM 7 COUNTRIES COMPETED IN 2017

2017 Winners



Lauren Elder



Derek Bodkin

Best All-Around

3rd - Chris Lee, California
2nd - Yuki Takeda, Japan
1st Female - Lauren Elder, NY,NY
1st Male - Derek Bodkin, Monterey, CA.

World Champion - Derek Bodkin, Monterey, California

Live Band

3rd - Chris Lee, Fremont, California - *Wind*
2nd - Lauren Elder, NY,NY - *Flyin' Home, Benny Goodman*
1st - Derek Bodkin, Monterey, CA - *Lady Be Good, Gershwin*

Self-accompaniment / aka "Hikifuki"

3rd - Derek Bodkin, California - on Guitar
2nd - Yuki Takeda, Japan on the 'Quatro'
1st - Lauren Elder, NY,NY - Original Competition



THE BUZZ ABOUT MUSICAL WHISTLING:

"Amazing!"

Ellen Degeneres & Huell Howser

"Mind Blowing Entertainment."
Moon Zappa

"Beautiful"

Congresswoman Grace Napolitano

OUR WHISTLERS HAVE BEEN FEATURED ON:

TEDeX, KCRW, KNX, KLOS, NPR, NBC, Pucker Up, LA Weekly, Pasadena Weekly, Star News

APPENDIX E

Masters of Musical Whistling 2017 Flyer

The Masters of
MUSICAL WHISTLING

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017
11:30am-2:30pm: Whistling Master Class
2:30pm-6:30pm: Whistlers' Mixer with Food & Drink
7:30pm-8:30pm: International Concert of the Masters

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2017
Competition Concerts
2:00-4:00 pm: Pre-Recorded Accompaniment
6:00-8:00 pm: Live Band & Self-Accompaniment

BARNSDALL GALLERY THEATER
BARNSDALL ART PARK
4800 HOLLYWOOD BLVD, LOS ANGELES, CA 90027

MastersofWhistling.com

Friday Night Concert - \$15 / Master Class - \$30
Competition Concerts - \$13 / Presale - \$15 At the Door

@mastersofwhistling

www.mastersofwhistling.eventbrite.com

APPENDIX F

Masters of Musical Whistling 2015 Photos



APPENDIX G

Masters of Musical Whistling 2017 Photos



Whistling as an Art: Los Angeles Times Article

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2017 • LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

66 If it comes from the heart, it is art, and whistling definitely reflects that. —Carole Anne Kaufman

Musical whistlers pucker up for art

Whistling wonks from around the world vie for a championship, also a little respect. About 20 of the contestants from half a dozen countries are all, as Kaufman puts it, "the best whistler that their friends know." When Kauffman is finally whistling, he has a unique sound. He whistles like a soprano, clear, high, and full of energy. It's a sound that's hard to describe, but it's a sound that's hard to forget. Whistling is an art form, and it's one that's been around for a long time. It's a sound that's been used in many different ways, from signaling to music. Whistling is a sound that's been used in many different ways, from signaling to music. Whistling is a sound that's been used in many different ways, from signaling to music.

It's whistling as an art form



WHISTLING GURU Carole Anne Kaufman, left, calls up volunteer Emily Korman for feedback technique tips on using her diaphragm while competing. The judges are looking for a variety of things, like tone, melody, and rhythm. The judges are looking for a variety of things, like tone, melody, and rhythm. The judges are looking for a variety of things, like tone, melody, and rhythm.

INDEPENDENT THEATRE GUIDE. A grid of theater listings for various venues including Area Ensemble Project, Los Angeles Music Center, and others. Includes show titles, dates, and prices.