**How Fitzmaurice Voicework® Can Help with Body Image**

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**Abstract**

In this proposal, I am requesting funding for my studies on voicework, specifically Fitzmaurice Voicework ® and how it can help actors improve their perceived body image. What is voice work and why is it important? What does having a positive body image have to do with actors? Fitzmaurice Voicework ® is a sequence of dynamic efforts that actors can use to loosen up their bodies and to get in touch with their emotions which is important for their work. Voicework ™ may also offer various levels of healing to many different kinds of stress. For my proposal, I want to look at another benefit of voicework: how it can be used to help people with their perceived body images. While there is not a lot of research on how voice work can help with body image specifically, I hope to build on the positive physiological and psychological findings that have been observed from Fitzmaurice Voicework ®. I hope that my research can be used by actors as a resource when preparing for auditions, roles, and that it can help with overall well-being.

**Introduction**

The human body is the foundation for the voice and the voice is the expression of what people feel in their bodies, such as breath or sensation. The thoughts, ideas, and emotions one can observe in a performance all start from the actor’s breath (Fitzmaurice, 2); however, many people, including actors carry a lot of muscle tension in their bodies that can inhibit breathing. While having tension is not necessarily a bad thing, as tension can help prevent injury, having an unhealthy relationship with one’s own tension prevents them from accessing their emotions and can thus inhibit them from communicating their thoughts effectively (Kotzubei, 2). One resource that actors can use to form a healthy relationship with their tension is through somatic dynamic efforts, which are exercise that opens the actors’ bodies to breath and movement. There are variety of institutions that offer training in these efforts, but for the purpose of my research, I will be focusing on the efforts taught in Fitzmaurice Voicework ®. While the effects of Fitzmaurice Voicework ® is not the same for every person, the somatic dynamic efforts can help participants form a more effective relationship with the tension in their bodies and can even free them from unhelpful tension.

Fitzmaurice Voicework ® can help participants transition from feeling self-conscious to feeling self- aware. Self-consciousness is feeling unnecessary awareness of oneself, one's appearance, or one's actions. Self-awareness on the other hand is conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires. These dynamic efforts encourage participants to let go of judgement and begin to experience and observe what happens when they participate in the efforts as well as observe their bodies objectively outside of the class (Fitzmaurice and Kotzubei, 9). Awareness is helpful to actors because the better they know themselves the more they can bring to their performances.

**Background**

The voicework I will be studying in my research is the work of Catherine Fitzmaurice, a renowned vocal coach and founder of the Fitzmaurice Institute. Fitzmaurice Voicework ® is one of many resources that actors can use to engage with their bodies and prepare for roles. The dynamic efforts taught in these classes may also be used for different levels of healing. Voicework ™ can also cause actors to feel a whole range of emotions; some actors don’t feel anything from these efforts, but each experience is equally valid (Fitzmaurice and Kotzubei, 6). Every actor’s reaction to these efforts is going to be different because each person’s body is different.

The core of Fitzmaurice Voicework ® centers around two types of efforts that Fitzmaurice coined as Destructuring and Restructuring. The destructuring methods introduced by Fitzmaurice affects daily breathing and voice habits. The core of these efforts specifically targets unhelpful learned breathing patterns the actors have picked up over time. These efforts allow sound to vibrate through the participants body when they are engaging in destructuring which frees the actors’ bodies from the protective armor the have put up to block out their emotions. This then opens the actor’s breath and body to respond organically to shift in mood and idea (Fitzmaurice, 2). The actors’ responses to destructuring are reflexive and can be an actor’s response to healing from stress, whether physical, mental or emotional.

Restructuring is the management of breath patterns and learning how to bring the actor’s idea from the breath into focus through the use of bioenergetic tremoring and modified yoga positions (Fitzmaurice, 4). Somatic or emotional responses to destructuring and restructuring also vary from actor to actor; some positions elicit more of a response than others. In both destructuring and restructuring, each actor is going to be taken to a different place emotionally by these efforts.

Body image today sometimes plays a role in some of the stress actors coming into this class may be feeling. By definition, body image is a person’s perception about his or her body and qualifying it in terms of size or “attractiveness” (Grogan, 524). Negative body image perception is often manifested in people wearing baggier clothes to hide their bodies. People also may carry tension around the stomach from pulling in the abdomen to look thinner which restricts breath and thus access to thought. While this often scares actors when the begin participating in the voice work exercises, letting go of belly is important, as holding it in restricts breathing, and thus limits access to the actor’s ideas (Kotzubei, 2). Regardless of gender, body image and low self-esteem effects both genders (Furnham, Badmin, & Snead, 582) and is in part caused by the rise of social media (Vonderen, 51).

Fitzmaurice emphasizes that the goal of her work is not being “perfect,” but getting the actor back in harmony with his or her body, tension and all (Meier, 6). There is not one “perfect” way to do voice work that will work for everyone, as each position will affect different bodies in different ways. Likewise, there is not one “perfect” body type that everyone should have. In both instances it’s a spectrum. Letting go of conceptions that there is a “perfect” way to do things opens up a whole realm of possibilities for actors in their work.

**Methods**

Because voice work is best understood when it is observed rather than read about, I hope to collect my data from observing willing students taking a Voice and Movement class, also with the consent of the instructor. I will collect my data by giving out surveys to the group of students periodically to track their progress. I will ask questions throughout the process about their self-esteem and ask them to estimate how often they compare themselves to their peers both in physical appearance and performance. I will ask questions about the physical sensations they feel such as if they feel a release of tension and if so, where.

I will also continue reading Fitzmaurice’s work on voice and body and interviews. Because she created these techniques, she has the best understanding of the work. I have also noticed that each time I re-read her interviews, I learn something new. Her interviews provide many valuable insights as she founded these sets of techniques and she has worked with countless students and is able to speak for many people’s experiences. I will continue reading studies on the techniques of Fitzmaurice work to better understand the other outcomes of Fitzmaurice Voicework ®.

Finally, I will continue to research studies on perceived body image and body positivity. This is a multifaceted issue that stems from many factors and will require me to read a variety of sources.

**Expected Results**

From my observations, I hope to see a change in how students who participate in the Fitzmaurice Voicework ® view their own bodies. I hope that the students to have a comparatively more realistic and healthy relationship their own body images during and after training. Some student may even feel more inclined to take care of their bodies and listen to their own needs. While I do not expect the participants to be completely satisfied with everything about themselves, I do predict that they will be much more objective and less subjective on themselves. As a result, I also expect their self-confidence to be higher than when they started the class. I also hope that the students to not feel the need to hide behind baggy clothes, and that it is more of a function of being able to participate in the dynamic efforts better, instead of armor to hide behind. I expect to see less feelings about body insecurities, more focus on the sensations and what the work is doing for them.

**Conclusion**

It is incredibly important for actors to be in harmony with their bodies because their bodies are their instruments, and the only ones they have. Of course, it is normal for one to want his body to look different; however, setting unrealistic standards and constantly judging oneself can severely hold actors back from their potentials. Actors being comfortable with their own bodies allows them to get in touch with their emotions. Being better in touch with their emotions then allows actors to bring more to their performances. While I don’t expect to completely change people’s perceived body images, I do hope that I can raise awareness about the effects of having a detrimental body image and I hope that my research can reassure actors who are critical of their bodies that acting doesn’t come in one size, and that many body types are needed to fill many roles.

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**Budget:**

Time- 1 semester/5 months

Subscriptions to websites/articles on body image studies- $20

Access to printer/paper for printing the surveys- $10