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## Playing in the Borderlands: The Transformative Possibilities of Queering Music Therapy Pedagogy

Vee Fansler<sup>1\*</sup>, Rachel Reed<sup>2</sup>, ezequiel bautista<sup>3</sup>, Ashley Taylor Arnett<sup>4</sup>, Freddy Perkins<sup>5</sup>,  
Susan Hadley<sup>2</sup>

1 Snohomish County Music Project

2 Slippery Rock University

3 Phoenix Children's Hospital

4 Center for Relational Change

5 Pasadena Villa Outpatient Treatment Center

\*[vee@scmusicproject.org](mailto:vee@scmusicproject.org)

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### Abstract

Music therapy pedagogy has traditionally been defined by rigid roles and structures, including fixed teacher/learner identity categories, systematized hierarchies of knowledge and communication, cultural and musical gatekeeping practices, and standardized musical, clinical, and professional competencies. These structures represent narrowly defined borders, which limit who enters the profession, how we understand human variability, and whose knowledges are acceptable within the field of music therapy.

This article challenges educational stakeholders to destabilize long-held oppressive categorizations and move into generative liminal spaces as an opportunity to experience radically inclusive relationships. We believe that these relationships are key to the transformative learning process of understanding ourselves, others, and the worlds we inhabit. We engage queer theory literature to establish key tenets of “queering” as an active practice applicable beyond gender and sexuality to include other socially constructed identity categories such as race and disability. We then move beyond identity categories themselves to address systemic educational and institutional practices. We draw from Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands as a generative space of liminality, deconstructing the borders that limit full, authentic access to and within spaces of teaching, learning, practicing, communicating, working, relating, musicking, moving, and living; Maria Lugones’ concept of “world” traveling, loving perception, and playfulness; Luce Irigaray’s concept of wonder; and Carolyn Kenny’s writings on the field of play that illustrate that when we play in music therapy, there is a need for containers and boundaries that are open to multiple, fluid ways of being and ways of being in relationship.

**Keywords:** *pedagogy, critical pedagogy, education, supervision, queer theory, queering, borderlands, unfixed, radical*

### Who are we?

Collectively we are socially located in multiple spaces: we are African American, Xicanx<sup>1</sup>, white<sup>2</sup> settler/colonizer; we are trans/non-binary, cis women, and cis men; we are queer and nonqueer; we are disabled and nondisabled; we are 25–52 years of age; and we are (previously) unpublished and published. We know one another intimately within a pedagogical environment. We are all participants in the early years of a Masters in Music Therapy (MMT) program at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania in the USA. Susan Hadley holds the official “educator” title for this program; however, we recognize that we are all teachers and all learners in relationship to each other. In this social justice oriented MMT program, we render normative hegemonic understandings strange and challenge one another to “queer” our collective educational processes by subverting hierarchical relationships, sharing knowledge outside classroom settings, creatively maximizing financial and disability related accessibility of the program, challenging discrete categorizations of people and musics, and emphasizing visceral and emotional ways of knowing. The impetus to bring queer theory into the program and into our pedagogy was student initiated. It was no wonder that queer theory entered our discussions and became incorporated into our curricula materials as we had Candice Bain in our first cohort of students. Candice was the lead author for the first article with a focus on queer theory in music therapy (Bain, Grzanka, & Crowe, 2016) and was a co-author on the second major article of significance on queer theory in music therapy (Boggan, Grzanka, & Bain, 2017). Candice’s familiarity with and passion for queer theory inspired many of us to delve into these concepts and to become excited by them. Through our engagement with queer theory, we began to question so much of what we had previously taken at face value. As we queered our understandings and our practices we began a process of queering the education process itself.

Our intentionally destabilized education process in the MMT program serves as a foil to our past educational experiences, highlighting the problematic rigid categories typically imbued within mainstream music therapy education. Over the past two years, we have repeatedly asked ourselves and one another: Which knowledges are upheld as standard in music therapy pedagogy, and which are understood as auxiliary or unacceptable? Whose ways of knowing does music therapy pedagogy reinforce, and whose are rendered insignificant or incorrect? How do we understand socially constructed identities? How does this impact our understandings of ourselves and those with whom we work? Which identities are inscribed into the pragmatics of auditioning, attending university, interning, and becoming certified as a music therapist in the United States? Using our experience in the SRU MMT program as a foundation, we envision a radically queer music therapy pedagogy that deconstructs binary hierarchies (teacher/student, music therapy/not music therapy, therapist/client, man/woman, cis/trans, enabled<sup>3</sup>/disabled, white/BIPOC, and so on) and embraces liminality for a more inclusive and just field.

### What are the demographics in music therapy?

People of marginalized identities tend to be underrepresented in those who are music therapists, yet overrepresented in those with whom music therapists work (often referred to as clients, patients, service users). According to the American Music Therapy Association Workforce Analysis (2013), music therapy professionals are overwhelmingly white (88.4 %), cisgender (98.9 %) women (87.1 %). Lack of data representing disability, sexuality, and class demographics further reflects an assumption of dominant identities in the profession. Conversely, descriptions of those with whom we work in music therapy, listed in the Workforce Analysis as “populations,” reflect a person’s diagnosis or perceived problem as the defining feature of those with whom music therapists work. Of 522 practitioners, only thirteen (2.5 %) indicated that they worked

with “nondisabled” clients. Only seven out of AMTA’s thirty-eight “population” descriptors categorized clients in terms not defined explicitly in terms of diagnosis (e.g. “music therapy students,” “school-age children”), indicating that the professional organization encourages practitioners to define those with whom they work in terms of diagnoses (e.g. “autism spectrum disorders,” “hearing impaired”) by default. Further, many music therapists in the United States work with people defined implicitly by racialized and class-related factors such as “at-risk youth” and “forensic populations.”

This demographic data yields two revelations: 1) overrepresentation of dominant identities indicates that systemic barriers prevent people with minoritized/marginalized identities from entering and staying in the music therapy profession, and 2) because of these barriers, those with whom music therapists work overwhelmingly do not have access to “self-relevant role models” in music therapy (Covarrubius & Fryberg, 2015). Covarrubius and Fryberg (2015) referred to “self-relevant role models” as people who shared subjugated identities with those they served, using the example of Native American teachers working with Native American middle school students. They found self-relevant role models to have a significant impact on students’ sense of school belonging and academic performance, even when delivering the same messages as ethnically ambiguous or white role models. This indicates that therapists and educators’ identities matter, and those with whom we work in educational settings and in music therapy settings may respond more readily if more music therapy educators and music therapists reflect their marginalized identities (see Hadley, 2013).

We believe that music therapy pedagogy is a crucial site through which power relationships based on the binary opposition (defined below) of therapist/client (dominant identity = therapist, subjugated identity = client) and others are inscribed. Thus, one aim of a queer music therapy pedagogy is a more diverse and representative field, in which the knowledges and practices of those with whom we work are reflected in music therapy educators and practitioners.

## Defining terms

Before we discuss ways of queering music therapy pedagogy, it is important that we provide definitions of some key terms and describe what we mean by queering pedagogy. However, in line with queer theory, we invite readers to generatively expand or informatively challenge these understandings. The term “queer” has been used as a noun (as a slur), an identity, an adjective, and a verb. It originated as a slur used against people who did not fit rigid binary understandings of gender (man/woman) and sexuality (heterosexuality), but it has been reclaimed in many ways, largely through the rich development of queer theory. As an identity, it is an umbrella term for those whose genders and sexualities have been minoritized or marginalized. As an adjective, it has come to describe the non-normative. As a verb, it means to destabilize or deconstruct rigid or fixed categories and to render normativity strange. Walker (2015) listed a task of [neuro]queering to include engaging in intentional practices to “‘undo’ one’s cultural conditioning toward conformity and compliance with dominant norms, with the aim of reclaiming one’s capacity to ... full expression” (para 12, #5). In line with these understandings, queer theory, while having gender and sexuality as the starting points for thinking about aspects of power and hegemony, expands questions/understandings/challenges of binary oppositions and normativity into arenas beyond gender and sexuality.

It is also important to consider whether queering is a response to hegemony of a certain sort or whether the fluidity of human variability precedes hegemonic identity categories and thus queering is now a restorative process. Both could be true. As Yancy stated:

Queering can be a response to hegemony and fluidity of human variability can precede hegemonic identity categories. One might say that queering is a response to hegemony, precisely because there is the recognition that certain socially constructed normative constraints have been deployed to render “natural” certain socially bounded sexual logics. On

this view, queering is really about bringing recognition to bear upon the ways in which fluidity of human variability has been framed as “deviant.” So, queering is about demasking heteronormative ideology that attempts to place under erasure any radically authentic or genuine variability that is before or after what the logics of heteronormativity has established as the “natural” way of being. (personal communication).

If we understand gender, race, disability, sexuality, and so on as social constructions, then we can assume that these social constructions served a function to provide clearly distinct categories of “difference” for the sake of maintaining a social order that supports certain hierarchies. Human differences have always existed on a continuum and always will and have been responded to differently in different contexts. However, hegemony, as enacted through colonization and what bell hooks (1994) refers to as imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, rigidly imposes binary and formal categorizations of alterity, epistemologically disappearing more fluid and plural ways of understanding human variability. Given this, we understand queering not simply as a critical response to hegemonic normative structures, but as a process of acknowledging, embracing, and celebrating complex fluid understandings of human lived pluralities that have always existed. As Simone de Beauvoir (1989) might say, we are not born, but rather *become* normatively fixed. Hence, we come to learn that some identificatory categories are deemed “right” while others are perceived as “strange” or “not fitting.” Over time, as our expectations vis-à-vis questions of identity undergo processes of sedimentation, we do not critically call into question the existing social arrangements that exclude various identities. The familiar becomes unnoticed. We only notice what has been deemed strange, especially as it stands out against a background of normativity. And it is in our attempt to make sense of “strangeness” that we delegitimize those who don’t align with our fixed categories. The process of queering, then, is to disorient or disalign our perceptions, to render the familiar unfamiliar. Once we have created a non-hegemonic, non-normative space within which a greater welcoming of variability occurs, the normative structure that gives rise to a false and problematic binary, that is, “strange” versus “familiar” or “deviant” versus “natural,” we can more effectively move from toxic exclusionary social ordering to radical inclusivity.

We understand queer pedagogy as a species of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy grows out of critical theory as developed through the Frankfurt School (a group comprising thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm) and “is concerned with the idea of a just society in which people have political, economic, and cultural control of their lives” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011, p. 77). It is not limited to classroom and educational settings and has the aim of creating a more just and equitable society. Critical pedagogy is perhaps most associated with Frantz Fanon, a pan-Africanist revolutionary from Martinique, and Paulo Freire, an educator and philosopher in Brazil, both of whom emphasized the need to provide the poor and oppressed with an education which was anticolonial and both of whom wrote foundational texts in critical pedagogy (Fanon, 1961/1963; Freire, 1970/2000). A central tenet of critical pedagogy is that education is a political act; that is, how we are taught (pedagogical approach), who we are taught by (representation), what we are taught (theories, texts, music, discourse, language used), and even if we are taught at all (being taught to read, for example, was withheld from enslaved Africans across the diaspora and the poor in Brazil in order to maintain oppressive relations of power), are all politically laden and most often reinforce existing power relations. Freire critiqued what they<sup>4</sup> referred to as the banking system of education (the predominant system of education in the developed world) in which teachers have all the knowledge which they deposit into the passive student receptacles. Freire contrasted this with a dialogical, problem posing model of education, shifting the idea of students “being objects of education to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011, p. 77). Freire stressed education as praxis involving reflection *and* action, interpretation *and* change, where all involved (those in roles traditionally assigned as teachers and students) are knowing subjects and where teachers are also learners and learners are also teachers, the relationship reciprocal and fluid.

Critical pedagogy involves developing critical consciousness, raising awareness of inequities, critiquing capitalism and class domination, becoming aware of the ways that what we take to be everyday experiences are actually problematic, refusing to accept practices that produce and perpetuate systems of oppression, and revealing hidden political assumptions in what has become perceived as the natural order of things, with the aim of building a more just society (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 1992, 2003; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2005). Critical pedagogy is understood as an emancipatory practice, a way to transform one's life conditions (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011), a practice of freedom (hooks, 1994).

Queer pedagogy in some ways has developed from critical pedagogy, and in some ways challenges it. Smith (2013) described a goal of queer pedagogy as unsettling "deeply held assumptions about the recognition of identities [even LGBTQQ2SIA +] and social justice" (p. 468). In other words, Smith wants to render strange or trouble the very notion of fixed identity categories. In addition, Smith (2013) challenges our understanding of social justice by suggesting that when we work towards rights we are affirming the conditions of a "civilized center" which are saturated in dominant narratives of capitalism, patriarchy, white normative supremacy, heteronormative supremacy, cisnormative supremacy, and ableist normative supremacy. That is, rights- and inclusion-focused social justice efforts may work toward including people within structures that are inherently problematic rather than exposing the ways in which these systems of ordering society that we have come to normalize are not normal or natural. In this way, queer pedagogy calls into question "the conceptual geography of normalization" (Britzman, 1995, p. 152) and requires us to move from fixed, static categories and definitions of normalcy (Zacko-Smith & Pritchey Smith, 2010) by deconstructing rigid normalizing categories and socially constructed hierarchical binary relations.

Binary categories or binary opposites are two related terms or theoretical concepts that are defined in opposition to one another. Rather than mutually exclusive opposites, these are structurally related, most often with one having dominance over the other for example, white/Black, teacher/student, knowledgeable/ignorant, enslaver/enslaved, man/woman, male/female, straight/gay, healthy/sick, enabled/disabled, normal/abnormal, and so on. Binaries seem normal and natural where they are socially agreed upon, but they are constructed through discourse and are context specific (Linville, 2017). Queer pedagogy challenges our unquestioning acceptance of such binary oppositions (Bey & Washington, 2013). Linville (2017) urged us to "queer the binary categories that define social life, and disrupt the differential privileging of those who claim normative identities" (p. 5) for those that are more nuanced, plural, and approximate (Greene, 1996, p. 326).

Britzman (1995) noted that the production of binaries and our orientation to normalcy establishes the limits of what we can bear to know, without which our certainty is uprooted. According to Britzman, Foucault (1977) described the grid of intelligibility of the social order that regulates what is thinkable, recognizable, knowable. Foucault asserted that power and knowledge are intimately connected, with mechanisms of power determining the production and limits of knowledge. On this view, ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but that which we cannot bear to know. As Britzman noted:

... the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is neither oppositional nor binary. Rather they mutually implicate each other, structuring and enforcing particular forms of knowledge and forms of ignorance. In this way ignorance is analyzed as an effect of knowledge, indeed, as its limit, and not as an originary or innocent state (p. 154).

Along these lines, Bowman (2009) emphasized that discovering the cause of our ignorance involves a shedding process, a discarding of our certainty regarding the limits of our knowledge.

Another aspect of queer pedagogy is its adherence to the belief that all categories are unstable and constructed. Butler (1990), whose work is foundational in queer theory and hence essential to our understandings of queer pedagogy, challenged our un-

derstanding of fixed categories of identity by describing them as an enacted cultural fantasy, a performative act, shifting our understanding from biological essentialism to social construction. Therefore, in queer pedagogy, it is necessary to always question that which is unremarked or unremarkable, problematic or remarkable, assumed or normalized, included or excluded (Bey & Washington, 2013; Greene, 1996). And in line with Britzman (1995), it is necessary to ask oneself: What am I responding to as I read, listen, observe, interact? What is it that is difficult for me to accept, that I cannot bear to know?

Queer pedagogy is a process; it is engaged. All participants in queer pedagogy are “constant becomings” and multiply interlinked (Goodley, 2007, p. 322). They are rhizomes, as is queer pedagogy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari developed the evolving metaphor of the rhizome as an ontological model to describe systems of knowledge. Defining principles of a rhizome include

1. planar and adventitious interconnection (opposed to linear, hierarchical):
  - a. “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (p. 7).
  - b. “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (p. 7).
  - c. “There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogenous linguistic community...There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity” (p. 7);
2. cartography, acting as a map it “fosters connections between fields”:
  - a. “The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways...” (p. 12).

Deleuze and Guattari contrasted rhizomorphic being (p. 15) with “arborescence.” That is, rhizomes belong to a non-hierarchical network that is ever growing with no beginning or end, and arborescence is tree-like, unidirectional, hierarchically linked thinking marked by binarism and dualism. Unlike a tree, rhizomes are not fixed entities with rigid borders, but always in the between, always emerging, always becoming (Goodley, 2007, p. 323).

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’, but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and ... and ... and ...’. This conjunction carries enough forces to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be’... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 27–28)

While Deleuze and Guattari challenge arborescence, they themselves are cognizant of the dualism of their rhizomatic and aborescent metaphors:

We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualisms we had no wish to construct but through which we pass (p. 20).

In line with what we have described above, to queer our pedagogy is to inhabit this liminal conceptual space (Sedgwick, 1990). As we envision queer pedagogy, we may invoke a dualism between queer and dominant pedagogies, but only to then further

destabilize and deconstruct these as static categories. We understand this as playing in the in-between, in the borderlands so to speak.

### **Borders (*limit-ality*)**

A border is a line that serves to separate. Music therapy pedagogy and practice have come to be positioned within narrowly defined borders which uphold many of the dominant narratives of the culture it is situated within. Within music therapy, borders are created when access to education along multiple axes limits who is able to become certified as a music therapist, and when board certification is upheld as the primary marker of acceptable knowledge. Borders are often upheld by music therapy pedagogical practices that are intended to further the “reputability” of the profession, which is constructed according to those in power. Requirements such as proficiency in specific (Western) music skills and histories, standardized testing to gain the professional credential, academic achievement in non-music therapy coursework (limiting due to accessibility and financial standing), and expectations of “health” of the therapist (explicit or implied), act to keep certain people in and others away from becoming music therapists. Despite the exclusionary issues around these and other benchmarks, they are often held in higher regard when measuring preparedness of the music therapy student and validity of the field. Measures of “acceptable knowledge” value some types of knowledge as objective and hierarchize it above other knowledges. Furthermore, there is a correlation between those who are “in” (as cited above, primarily white, nondisabled cis women and men who have had access to higher education and are musicians trained in European classical music) as having acceptable knowledges and those who are “out” as not. “Gatekeeping” practices become established based on which knowledges are deemed (un)acceptable.

Other borders/limits we largely accept within the professional field of music therapy are understandings about health and illness, disabled and enabled, therapist and “client,” teacher and student, “appropriate” behaviors, “inappropriate” language (including censorship of participants, minoritized music therapists, and musics within music therapy practice, as well as the elevation of “standard English” in academic contexts), who is “at risk,” what is normal, and so on. These understandings lead us to construct academic requirements/curricula, standards of practice, professional competencies, codes of ethics, research standards, and so on, which all work to reinforce the borders that have been constructed in the development of the profession.

### **Borderlands (*liminality*)**

In contrast with borders which serve to separate, Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012) describes a space that is created when multiple worlds are blended. Anzaldúa was a queer (*patlache*) Xicanx who grew up on the border of Mexico and United States, in the southmost area of Texas. Their theory became a metaphor of the geographical location in which they grew up. In Borderlands Theory, Anzaldúa critiqued dualisms in favor of liminality, and described spaces in which identities are interactive, interlocking and fluid. Those drawing the line are the oppressors, gatekeepers, and upholders of “us versus them.”

As this collaborative article is being written, humanitarian crises are occurring in borderlands all over the world. On the southern border of the United States, the very space from which Anzaldúa drew inspiration, families are being separated and children are being held in cages. Within the past decade, school districts such as Tucson Unified School District banned Anzaldúa’s work and the very notion of Mexican American or Xicanx studies in these literal borderlands (Arizona House Bill 2281, 2013). This example of systemic imperialism gives us an understanding that we are still in the ongoing process of developing curriculum standards and guidelines that are hindered by hegemonic structures. Curriculum takes on a function of gatekeeping when we allow for only one way of thinking to be acceptable and recognized. It is the soil into which we place our roots. If our ways of researching, educating, and interacting are rooted

in dominant and oppressive ways of being, our profession limits itself in its ways of engaging with other “worlds.”

In line with Anzaldúa’s work, Maria Lugones (1987) described their understanding of “worlds” as being “a description of experience” (p. 11). Lugones described a process of world traveling. In this understanding, we each live in multiple worlds, that are in constant processes of change, development, and interaction with other worlds. There are worlds within ourselves and outside of ourselves that engage with each other. In all worlds, we are a mixture of how we want to be and how others perceive us. So, in all worlds our social identity is constantly being altered in multiple ways and revealed to us in multiple ways. Lugones used the metaphor of worlds as a way of understanding selves as plural, not fixed, and always in the process of becoming. Lugones discussed how, in our world-traveling, we must come with playfulness and “loving perception,” not with rigid understandings of ourselves or of those we encounter along the way. Lugones’ concepts of loving and arrogant perception grew out of Marilyn Frye’s work (Frye, 1983). For Lugones, arrogant perception fixes the object according to the perceiver’s world or how the perceiver is oriented. As Andrea Pitts (2020) stated, “Arrogant perception is a worldview that places an individual’s own desires, needs, and beliefs at a teleological center, from which the desires, needs, and beliefs of others become secondary or subservient” (p. 344). We also might term this “straight” perception.<sup>5</sup> Lugones stated that as a child, they were taught to perceive arrogantly, as we (the authors of this article) were. Learning how to perceive lovingly, or queerly, is much more challenging, because it requires disorienting our perceptions and “leaning into” the “strange,” the unfamiliar (see Hadley & Gumble, 2019). It involves affirming pluralities, embracing a not-knowing perception.

Currently, there are limited ways that music therapy pedagogy in the United States validate experiences of multiple worlds. The vast majority of those credited with developing the professional field of music therapy are in the United States, and of music therapy educators over the course of our profession’s history, are white nondisabled heterosexual cis men and women. As such, what they deem the limits of acceptable knowledge is what is bearable for them and people like them to know. Borderlands Theory moves us to challenge these limits. It encourages us to ask questions such as: How are we as a profession preparing young brown, Black, indigenous, and Asian music therapists to engage with systemic racism displayed by patients in adult acute medical settings? How are we preparing trans therapists to confront systemic cisgenderism and heteronormativity in spaces which invalidate their identities through misgendering or binary gendered physical spaces? How are we preparing young neurodivergent practitioners to confront systemic ableism in settings funded by insurance companies that prioritize harmful “therapies” such as Applied Behavior Analysis? How are we preparing cash-poor learners to survive and challenge the covert middle-class expectations of “professionalism” in university, internship, and professional spaces? And how are we preparing people with dominant identities to pursue justice in these areas with as much vigor as those of marginalized identities do?

In music therapy, Carolyn Kenny developed a model we believe is helpful in describing a space for playing (or world traveling) in the borderlands. In the *Field of Play*, Kenny (2006) described fields of play at multiple levels. The first example of this is when the aesthetic of the client and of the therapist interact and enter into the musical space or musical field of play. This borderland space is created when the worlds of those collaborating together within music therapy come together and interact, or play, together. The source of this field of play, or borderland space, is the merging of the client and therapist aesthetics. The engagement between the two (or more) aesthetics is based on the relationship between them. It is also helpful to consider how aesthetics other than just therapist/client dualities create a third space. Kenny’s work, which has important anticolonial emphases, has aspects that are in line with queering pedagogy. In an early draft of a chapter they were writing just prior to their death, they discussed a process they referred to as “radical mutuality,” which they described as necessary in



order to connect deeply (spiritually) with those with whom we work. Kenny described radical mutuality in the following way:

We have to put aside various aspects of our own identity, like “position”, or “healthy” to engage fully. How do we colonize ourselves intrapersonally as music therapists so that this deep connection cannot be realized? Then how do we subsequently colonize our patients and clients?

This type of engagement flies in the face of most Western notions of a therapist’s “place” in the therapeutic encounter. We learn in our training that the therapist is the healthy one, knows the best tools to involve the patient, has been highly trained and has many more resources than the client. The therapist is in a community (culture) of practitioners who share similar competencies. And the list goes on and on.

How can we put aside such a position of privilege to become free enough to experience a deep sense of wonder with our patients and clients, the wonder that brings transformation and change? How can we really “play” when burdened with the many complexities of our own identity? (Personal communication cited in Stige, McFerran & Hadley, 2017, para 10)

This sense of wonder is counterintuitive to us when encountering those with whom we work in music therapy. Right from the beginning of our education we are taught about “populations” of people who have certain diagnoses. We regard ourselves as experts in who they are and what they need based on normative assumptions that have pervaded our profession in the same ways as in other health professions. These assumptions limit our ability to really know and understand those with whom we work. This fixed understanding of others is not limited to how we reduce our “knowing” of the disabled to their diagnoses, but is also saturated throughout our society in how we already “know” the other based on assumptions regarding race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on. These fixed categories also limit our recognition of their rich interlocking identities and their experiences of racialized gendered disability, for example. George Yancy (2019) explored Luce Irigaray’s (1993) essay entitled “Wonder,” in which they write, “*Who art thou?* I am and I become thanks to this question.” Yancy noted that *Who art thou?* is not an interrogation, but a question posed to the other that creates a space for the other to reveal who they are. By really attending to them, Yancy said:

I refuse to reduce them to what and who I have come to see according to fixed embodied logics, ...a fixed epistemic certainty that tells me who they are in advance. Rather, as they speak, as they gesture, I understand that I am and that I become thanks to the question posed. “Who art thou?” renders explicit my being as fundamentally relational .... The question – who art thou? speaks to an anterior social world that exceeds me. The question opens up the truth regarding the fact that my being is constituted, is precarious, precisely through posing the question. So, my being and my becoming are transformed by the addressee—not fixed in advance. More radically, who art thou? is a question (and an approach to the other) that places my very being, my very identity, in abeyance.... I am suspended. Who art thou? implies that I am not quite sure of who I am as my being and my becoming are predicated on that question – I await the meaning of my being and my becoming as I await the other to be, to speak. Not to pose the question, but to say – I know who you are! – means that I’m both problematically certain about who they are and about who I am. And yet, this is partly the problem. As Irigaray (1993) writes, “Wonder goes beyond that which is or is not suitable for us. The other never suits us simply. We would in some way have reduced the other to ourselves if [they] suited us completely. An excess resists ... the reduction to sameness” (p. 13). Again, though, and this point can’t be emphasized enough, the excess exists for each of the selves embodying the relational face to face encounter. In other words, who art thou? suspends the being of the other as fixed. And yet to pose the question suspends my own alleged stasis wherein I, too, am, excessive – where I am and I become thanks to my posing the question; the answer to which and the question itself demonstrate to me just how what I am and what I can become awaits the ontological priority given to the other. (n.p.)

It is based on all of these understandings of playing/world-traveling in liminal spaces/fields of play/borderlands/plateaus with a sense of wonder in our encounters with others that we come to queer our music therapy pedagogy.

## How do we attempt to queer music therapy pedagogy?

As a caveat, while we aspire to queer music therapy pedagogy, this is an ever-evolving process. Although we engage critical pedagogy in our program, we have only recently begun to queer our pedagogy. As we explore our attempts to queer music therapy pedagogy, we do this in full recognition that we are working within the U.S. music therapy system, one that communicates Western understandings as normative and dominant, and has set borders that define what counts as music therapy and what does not.

We will begin by exploring the music therapy admission process and curriculum. According to the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM, the governing body for college and university schools of music in the United States) handbook, admission into undergraduate music programs should be based on the following:

Assessments of musical skills used to determine admission to curricula leading to an undergraduate degree in music must indicate (a) capabilities to relate musical sound to notation and terminology at a level sufficient to undertake basic musicianship studies in the freshman year, or (b) the potential to develop such capabilities within the first year of study. Institutions should provide guidance to students regarding expected levels of music literacy readiness for collegiate study and recommend resources for achieving suitable levels before program entry (2019).

In this requirement, “notation and terminology” covertly refer to Western musical notation systems used in classical music. This is a hierarchical dichotomy of what is considered worthy/unworthy of music studies at the university level. This border is the first separating those who are acceptable/unacceptable for admission. This general practice exposes the in/out dichotomy within academia. Students who are proficient in a musical art form that does not ascribe to Western notation and terminology are kept out of music programs, reinforcing Western music as the knowledge that “counts” or that is worthy of being (re)produced. This limit may be compounded by cultural factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, class, religion, and so on.

Although NASM’s musical literacy expectations potentially restrict non-classically trained students from entering the vast majority of university music programs in the United States, the handbook does not specify which instruments qualify for admission. Despite this apparent openness, music programs and conservatories center Western classical instruments in their training and degrees, only offering applied lessons in specific areas. Electronic instruments, soundboards and turn-tables, and ethnically-specific instruments outside of European classical music, (to name a few) are not only underrepresented in the music major curriculum, but are also not acceptable for admission into the vast majority of music therapy programs. These gatekeeping practices bar various musicians from entering the music therapy profession and expanding the diversity of our field. In this way, collegiate music programs place borders around who can and cannot become a music therapist. These borders uphold the middle-class, white, nondisabled demographic that comprises the majority of our profession.

Even when students outside of the dominant music therapist demographic audition for a music program, the curriculum is centered upon Western repertoire and dominant ideologies that are deemed more “acceptable.” Vocal quality, physical appearance, and other cultural, racial, and gendered factors are also viewed within the context of limiting Western norms and expectations. Audition review panels are often listening for whiteness (Koza, 2008), cis/heteronormativity (Hadley & Gumble, 2019), or looking for white middle to upper class standards of “professionalism,” and thus implicitly not attending to (or even silencing) the voices of those that do not uphold these norms.

What would it be like to queer our listening and looking (Hadley & Gumble, 2019) during auditions? As we consider musical literacy requirements, allowed instruments, and repertoire that is permitted in auditions, the essential question that arises is: what is considered music/not music? Once we identify this binary at play, we can then begin to queer the way we understand music and those creating it. Are voices and instruments placed into fixed categories of type and sound? For example, audition panels are influenced by gendered expectations: Which voice parts are expected to be male

or female, and what happens when a vocalist embodies gender expression that contradicts or expands beyond the binary? How do audition panels respond when these norms are disrupted; do they lean in, or pull away? Does this gendering also apply to instrumentalists? If audition panels subscribe to the vocal and musical norms at play within Western classical training, then there remains a high risk that self-relevant role models for people with whom music therapists work, particularly at marginalized intersections of race, gender, and disability, are denied access to music therapy training programs. Are music faculty and those tasked with making decisions in regard to auditions diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability? If not, are they able to queer their perceptions when evaluating those who are auditioning? Bringing in the perspectives of a diversity of people may help to shift rigid categories to more fluid understandings of what counts as acceptable/unacceptable music and musicians for admission into music and hence music therapy programs. However, even these shifts represent rights- and inclusion-based adjustments to the status quo. Queering pedagogy might render strange the very notion of panels existing to determine “in” and “out” status, for more fluid understandings of who can be a learner, how learning takes place, and what “student” identity represents.

Challenging classical assumptions of what counts in terms of music must then expand beyond the audition process and into the curriculum, not included into a single unit or single course, but woven into the curriculum throughout the entirety of a student’s collegiate musical training. But beyond inclusion and bringing in critical perspectives that challenge the hegemony of the Western canon which is common in programs focused on social justice, to queer our pedagogy would require us to interrogate what it is that we can bear to understand as music, what are our internal responses based on our own binary understandings of gender, sexuality, disability, race, class, and how this influences our appreciation of musics. What is it that regulates for us what is thinkable, recognizable, knowable in terms of musical expression? So, while music therapy educators should encourage their students to learn music that reflects the experiences of people of color, disabled people, queer people, and non-Christians, to queer music therapy pedagogy, we may want to deconstruct the whole concept of fixed identities and introduce music that explores the fluidity and performativity of the whole range of human variability, transcending understandings reinforced by capitalism, patriarchy, white normative supremacy, heteronormative supremacy, cisnormative supremacy, and ableist normative supremacy.

By confronting and deconstructing our understanding of musics and musicking, we can begin to move away from Eurocentric ideals and values and attune to the cultural voices and instruments that are underrepresented and often appropriated in music therapy. However, culturally-specific music maintains its integrity and power when taught by indigenous members of that culture. Music therapists and music therapy educators dance on the borders of cultural appropriation when they task themselves with teaching instruments that are outside of their own culture, from Native flutes to djembes to turntables. At minimum, music therapy educators can invite those who are indigenous to various cultures into learning spaces when music therapy students are exploring how to play or engage with culturally-specific instruments and musics.

Thus, if we are truly committed to deconstructing “the conceptual geography of normalization” (Britzman, 1995, p. 152) and moving away from fixed, static categories and definitions of normalcy (Zacko-Smith & Pritchey Smith, 2010), then we must always be asking: How is the music and instrumentation we are selecting normalized? How does it uphold dominant values? Who is being kept out of music? Whose personhood is being invalidated? Expansion beyond the Western classical tradition of musical repertoire and instruments and inclusion of non-white, cisgender, enabled faculty and musicians might begin to queer the music-learning aspect of music therapy curriculum. AMTA could reflect this, for example, by changing the wording in AMTA competency IIA.7.9, which states that music therapy students must: “Apply advanced musical skills in the clinical use of at least two of the following: keyboard, voice, guitar and/or percussion” to: “Apply advanced musical skills in the clinical use of a wide variety

of instruments that *facilitate human connectedness*.” Again, this type of change would still represent a mere step toward the borderlands by adjusting the language and inclusivity of the dominant system. Queer pedagogy and radically destabilized limits might further challenge the very existence of an elected governing body (such as AMTA) and of static pass/fail competencies. Regardless of their wording, these competencies represent borders of a “music therapist/not music therapist” binary inscribed with hegemonic ideals throughout. Similarly, the inclusion of faculty with marginalized or minoritized identities would simply begin to challenge, not thoroughly disrupt, the dominant hegemonic structures at play throughout university-based music therapy education.

Music therapy students must also develop skills that go beyond music and into interpersonal and verbal realms of therapy. Even these aspects of music therapy training uphold limitations as to what is socially acceptable and normed. As mentioned throughout this article, to queer our pedagogy in these areas, we must challenge our concepts of therapy, illness, health, pathology, and the value we place on normativity. As we read music therapy and related literature we must interrogate binary oppositions, question normative assumptions that uphold systems of capitalism, patriarchy, white normative supremacy, heteronormative supremacy, cisnormative supremacy, and ableist normative supremacy. For example, we must suspend or trouble how “we know” the other and challenge ideas such as learning about people as “populations” identified solely by diagnosis or other imposed categorization. Reducing a person to rigid identity categorizations, and further expanding these individual categorizations to reductionist understandings of entire “populations,” limits how we know the other. Instead of wondering “who art thou?” we come in as experts with knowledge of both how people in this group perform themselves – they are predictable to us – and we also come in as experts about what they need in order to perform themselves in more normative ways. This is more about what we can bear to know, what we can bear to recognize, what makes us comfortable with who we are. Instead, we should learn ways to suspend or trouble our prior understandings, our “knowledge” of the other, and learn to wonder, to learn who the person is, to be world-travelers, and to play in the borderlands of musical fields. This process can be quite unsettling; it can reveal things in us that we cannot bear. As Whitlock (2010) noted, “I am faced with what I cannot bear to know. Reading the world and risking the self may mean discovering what it is that one cannot bear to know – that there is in fact something that one cannot bear to know” (p 101).

### **How we try to queer the pedagogical space in the Slippery Rock University Master of Music Therapy program**

In our program, learning is neither imitation, nor is it the ability merely to accumulate and regurgitate fixed knowledge. Learning is a constant process of discovery, a process without end. We interrogate binary oppositions and work towards more fluid concepts of gender, sexuality, disability, race, and so on. We try to move from accumulation of facts or knowledge, to discovering the cause of our ignorance, a discovery that involves a shedding process (Bowman, 2009). Applying queer theory to how we understand music therapy pedagogy and multiple knowledges helps to reveal that knowledge is constructed, and acceptability is not a result of an objective or inherent characteristic of a particular knowledge base, but active result of sociocultural positioning, that we “perform” things into and out of (collective) acceptability (“what we can(not) bear to know”).

In line with a Freirean pedagogical approach, we aim to disrupt the assumed rigidity of the teacher/student binary structure, moving from a banking system of education to one which is dialogical, where all involved are teachers and also learners, the relationship reciprocal and fluid. As current participants in Slippery Rock University’s music therapy Master’s program, we are continuously engaging in the destabilization of music therapy constructs. There are many ways this destabilization manifests, but

the blurring of traditional teacher/student roles and dynamics lays the groundwork for expanding beyond binaries in other areas. Within our program, we engage in a more collaborative approach to learning, wherein everyone's personal experiences, in conjunction with the material, serve as a springboard for mutual growth. Through this approach, we all bring our epistemically informed perspectives that have emerged from our lived experiences and identities. Rather than placing borders around the educator's life experience, mistakes, and areas for growth as off-limit topics, the educator engages in productive modes of transparency as we all do. In this way, everyone is constantly exposing their humility and engaging in inquiry for their professional and personal betterment.

Susan Hadley not only expands the interpersonal work of our learning but also blurs the role of expert with students, sharing the responsibility of knowledge and growth with us. Contrary to academic custom, Susan does not write as the authority on a topic and include students as supporting roles. Instead, the entire process from writing to editing is engaged in collaboratively and equitably. "Presentations" are approached symbiotically with all in attendance, moving in and out of dialogue with each other throughout the session. These practices make space to attend to all voices in a process of understanding, knowing, and becoming rather than seeking unidirectional enlightenment from a traditionally upheld voice of authority.

This approach is similar to that written about by Whitlock (2010):

They will write themselves and write their confusion as I am writing mine. I will show them this essay—to show them what confusion really looks like. They will likely end the course feeling agitated, confused, provoked, overwhelmed, uncertain. Therein will lie the possibilities, and in order to cultivate a subversive learning community where we disrupt each other's assumptions concerning normativities and static identities, we will practice queer pedagogies (p. 102).

The program itself is also in a constant state of becoming, where student knowledge and experience is woven into course material. Courses are always evolving, not only through the traditional method of anonymous student survey feedback potentially shaping the way an educator teaches a course the following year, but more so in terms of a constant dialogical relationship between student experience and need. Space is always available for our voices to shape the direction a course is taking even within a current semester that is unfolding. Additionally, when a student is authentically living out an identity or experience, we attend to that student's voice. As students, we have facilitated intensive group process experiences, led classroom discussions on an array of topics, decided which articles or assignments would be most beneficial to our growth, and authored chapters that are rooted in deeply personal issues or experiences. In this way, queer students, students of color, and disabled students, are considered co-knowledge producers due to their unique lived experiences and perspectives (Jaekel, 2017; Museus et al., 2012). In addition to framing culture as an asset to students' educational experience, Museus et al. (2012) argued for the integration of the academic, social, and cultural spheres so as to enhance student development, learning, and belonging rather than framing them as separate entities. In order to achieve this, college educators must make efforts to engage the voices and stories of all students and community members within the curricula.

In parallel to Freire's theory of the "banking" system of education, traditional music therapist/client relationships can be understood as a banking relationship as well. The music therapist is the "healthy helper," who is full of knowledge and works to improve in some way the quality of life of the "unfortunate, less-than, disabled client," who is in need of help. The therapist is benevolent and speaks of the people whom they "serve." So, we want to trouble and rethink the concept of helping. We do not want to fall into a fixed way of thinking of helping as a dichotomous process which is either good or bad. Rather, we want to take time to recognize problematic aspects of the concept of helping within the context of music therapy. For example, a relationship of helper/

helped that positions the “helped” as reduced to diagnostic categories and operates upon binary, dualistic understandings of health and wellness, is limiting and oppressive.

Slippery Rock University’s MMT program aims to deconstruct the ways in which we work with people. This is done partly through a critique of the Western medicine dichotomy of broken/not broken. Susan encourages us to look at how societal structures are oppressive towards the individuals that are deemed “broken” and think about ways in which to change the system as opposed to the individual. Often what is understood as being “the problem” or “the symptom” is merely the individual’s attempt to adapt to an environment that isn’t set up to meet their needs.

Additionally, we critically dissect our assumptions about what it means to be a therapist as well as the assumptions we make about clients. We interrogate how we understand and discuss pathology, diagnosis, and client communication and behavior. We examine how understandings of pathology and diagnosis inform the ways in which we work. We deconstruct the understanding of therapist/client power dynamics. We explore ways in which pathology and diagnosis favor dominant communities. We explore systemic understandings of “the problem” or “the symptom.” We avoid “interventions” in favor of centralizing the ever-evolving, expanding, and constantly-becoming relationship of therapist, client, music. And we ask what it means to identify as a therapist. Through all of this, we explore the subjugation of clients and approach the “therapeutic relationship” as human-with-human rather than fixer-to-damaged or helper-for-those needing help. We bring a critical lens to how we approach assessment (of clients and of students), and we emphasize exploration and wonder rather than evaluation related to fixed knowledges. We learn to sit in liminal spaces, noticing the discomfort and joy that these spaces reveal in us. Our learning (personal reading and writing, weekly online face-to-face meetings, and at our intensives) is always tied to the political. As Jaekel (2017) wrote, “a place-based curriculum recognizes that place is inherently political and that it directly influences how students transition into, as well as experience, their education” (p. 135). By exploring the fluidity of our identities and bringing these explorations into the pedagogical process, we enhance a sense of belonging in the space (Jaekel, 2017).

### What is it like playing in the borderlands?

Queering pedagogy in music therapy for us means that we are always in a process of becoming. We are never in a space of absolute certainty, but always questioning. There is no safe space in the borderlands, and yet there is a sense of possibility of people learning who we are in our fluidity when we suspend our preconceived “knowledge” and sit in the liminal space of wondering and asking, *who art thou?* It is in many ways a pedagogy of unlearning and unknowing. It is a stretching into our ignorance, aspects that are unbearable to know, and learning what is right now to us unthinkable, unrecognizable, unknowable.

Reading this article might make queering pedagogy sound like a beautiful, seamless process, but in reality, it is messy, difficult, and can create a lot of tension both intrapersonally and interpersonally. Indeed, we experienced that in the very process of writing this article. It is easy to slip into arrogant perception and requires deep levels of humility to maintain an orientation steeped in loving perception. While we are still very much in process in terms of queering our pedagogy, below are our reflections of our experiences playing in the borderlands.

- Ashley: For me, playing in the borderlands has expanded beyond “just school” or “just professional” realms. I have become more attuned to pieces of myself that were previously limited by binary oppositions, and I have been able to lean into the confrontation of my own shame, assumptions, and limiting perspectives. My understanding of my body, my sense of self, and my relationships of all kinds are continually changing and expanding. This becoming is often joyful and painful simultaneously; making missteps in relationships with others induces feelings of inadequacy and guilt, yet expanding my understanding of others through these mis-

steps expands my understanding of myself. When I misgendered someone, I had to confront my own limiting presence on a dear friend. When I was a bystander to a fellow classmate using an incorrect name of a person of color, I had to accept that I am not the “good white person” I like to believe that I am. These are things I could not bear to know, and yet, I am here, bearing them continuously amidst this community that is always becoming with me.

- Susan: Some of the ways I have queered my understandings while in this program were actually regarding binary understandings of gender and sexuality. Being in this program allowed me to form close relationships with nonbinary, trans, and queer folk. I remember struggling with pronouns and finding all kinds of excuses for doing so, including claiming that grammatical correctness was the issue I was having. I was clinging to dominant discourses as a way of avoiding the possibilities of my expansiveness. As I queered my understandings of language and gender, as I explored my ignorance, the difficulties I had experienced dissipated. I also recall being stumped by hearing a woman in the program who I was sure identified as queer talking about her boyfriend. I could not square both truths to be held simultaneously. I had erased bisexuality as a construct. If a person was in a heterosexual relationship, they weren't queer. The binary opposition was strong in my understanding of sexuality. What was it about me that I could not bear this knowledge? Sharing my ignorance with other program participants allowed me to explore my fixed understandings of sexuality, to sit in the discomfort of uncertainty, and to better understand the conceptual and lived fluidity of sexuality.
- Freddy: The equitable spaces created by the SRU MMT community challenged me to deconstruct how I viewed my own race and sexuality. Previously, I viewed my Blackness within the lens of good/bad which contributed to years of internalized racism. That limited thinking in tandem with my misconceptions about how my Blackness and queerness couldn't interlock harmoniously, due to past lived experiences, prohibited me from freely exploring my personal and clinical relationships with myself and others. The SRU MMT community challenged these biases and instilled values, helping me recognize how they uphold oppressive systems within music therapy. Without this relational and collective learning process, I wouldn't have been made aware of what I couldn't bear to know or taken steps to unlearn problematic ways of thinking.
- Vee: I entered the SRU MMT program prepared to highlight my own strengths and remain in cerebral ways of learning and processing. However, my most powerful learning in the program has required visceral responses, intimate relationships, and vulnerable confessions. I learned my own gender and found a community in which I could ask others to support my gender exploration. The MMT community confronted my deeply seated biases about disability and caused me to recognize the upsetting parallels between music therapy enacted against people with certain diagnoses and conversion therapy enacted against LGBTQQIA+ people. I am continually challenged to recognize the colonial aspects of my own practice as a white settler practicing on a Coast Salish reservation. Beyond developing these concrete realizations about myself and my own biases, the process has queered my understandings of what education is, from the banking model toward a relational, shared process of learning and unlearning together.
- Rachel: My experience has been of connection and possibility through places that at times before had potential to be the most isolating as a person who inhabits marginalized identities moving through systems of music therapy education and clinical practice that often silence parts of the self which are closest to those I work with, and force distance. The pedagogical environment and community of the MMT program has provided time and space to know unbearable knowledges in others, vulnerability to lean in and trust even my own knowledges that I could not bear to know. I continue to challenge my assumptions of how I know those I am in relationship with, of how I am in relationship, to truly know them, and

ask always, “but, why?” Playing in the borderlands, in the liminal spaces, it is not “safe spaces”, I think, but maybe spaces that are safe enough; not to comfortably hide and avoid unbearable knowledges, but safety of not *having* to hide yourself in order to exist.

- ezequiel<sup>6</sup>: For me, this queering process has been about queering any kind of border and questioning lines that are already in place. I question how and if the musical field of play is one that promotes justice. Which communications am I attending to when I am working with marginalized beings? Who do I lean in to? Who do I pull away from? To me, queering pedagogy also means constantly questioning how I understand the role of ethics in a practice that upholds dominant forms of being in the world. In the last two years, I have wondered about the interweavings of disability and race. Playing in the borderlands is a daily experience and has been for my life. I grew up and reside on land that is the borderlands. Where México and the USA meet, is a place unlike any other in the United States. It is a place where you can feel an energy from the land that proposes a complexity to its inhabitants. What is my role as a nondisabled, Xicanx, cis man working in a space that frequently encounters disabled brown people? In a profession that is mostly instructed by nondisabled, white, cis women, what am I learning about what it means to be in the borderlands of race and disability? And what am I learning about what it means to be in the borderlands literally? The borderlands are inhabited by many and in a place like the southern part of the USA, those seeking a safe place are being held in cages and are expected to assimilate to one way of speaking. What is my role in providing humanitarian aide ? is there a space for music, and if so, whose? What does music therapy curriculum tell me about what therapy is and who it is for? How would I be in a space with a younger version of my father crossing the Rio Grande River into the United States? How do I reconcile his recollection of learning songs by Simon and Garfunkel to retain English in order to access opportunities for his growing family? In this place, I have learned to question the borders around myself and within myself. For years, I introduced myself as a shortening of a translation of my name to make it easier for English speakers to recognize me. Today, I hold the space of being born in the United States, while also unapologetically saying my name as it was given to me.

In this process, we have all learned that queering pedagogy not only means questioning a profession or practice, but rather it changes the way we are in the world and with each other, always.

## About the authors

Vee Fansler, MT-BC, is senior music therapist at the Snohomish County Music Project based in Everett, WA. They are a master of music therapy candidate at Slippery Rock University. Their work emphasizes queer and postcolonial perspectives in music therapy supervision and practice.

Rachel Reed, MT-BC, is a music therapist in the United States. She is a master of music therapy candidate at Slippery Rock University. Her current research brings a critical analysis to disability discourse in music therapy literature.

ezequiel bautista, mt-bc, is a xicanx music therapist working in phoenix, az. he is pursuing his master of music therapy at slippery rock university and is passionate about culture and social justice work in music therapy.

Ashley Taylor Arnett, M.Ed, MT-BC is a marriage & family intern from Pittsburgh, PA. She is currently studying with Dr. Susan Hadley in Slippery Rock University's master of music therapy program. After graduation, she hopes to work in music therapy spaces with couples.

Freddy Perkins, MT-BC, is a North Carolina based music therapist. He is currently completing his master of music therapy studies through Slippery Rock University and



Analytical Music Therapy certification through Molloy College. Freddy works with LGBTQ\* survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Susan Hadley, PhD, MT-BC, is director and graduate coordinator of music therapy at Slippery Rock University. Her teaching and research centers on social change such that human variability in myriad forms is valued.

## Notes

1. We will use the term “Xicanx” throughout this paper. The first “X” emphasizes indigenous ancestries and serves to reject colonial influences upon Xicanx peoples. The second “x” reflects neutral or queer genderings.
2. While it is typical for races to be capitalized in APA, we choose to capitalize all races except for white for political reasons (see Touré, 2011).
3. We use *enabled* here rather than *ablebodied*, because this term helps to reveal and challenge the socially constructed neutrality and acceptability of “ableness,” or lack of disability. Hall (2002) described the material, historical, social, and economic means by which people whose bodies approximate norms are “enabled,” whereas those whose deviate are respectively “disabled.”
4. Throughout this article we use they/them pronouns instead of the binary use of he/she. We do this with intention. In doing so, we are troubling the convention of binary pronoun use. We do realize that we run the risk of engaging in gender erasure by doing so. However, while we do know the pronoun use of some authors we cite, we do not know this for all authors we cite. We also understand that gender identity is not static and so have intentionally decided to use they/them throughout. We understand that readers may have visceral reactions to our use of gender-neutral pronouns for authors whose gender identity they know. Leaning into this reaction and really examining it is an aspect of queering pedagogy that we want readers to engage with in the reading of this article itself.
5. “Straight” refers here to ways of looking and understanding, not to the binary opposite of “queer” as an identity. Lauren Guilmette (2020) discussed Sara Ahmed’s consideration of the “normative significance of the vertical axis by which we ‘see straight’ and reflects that this line is not absolutely given or fixed but is, rather, an effect of alignment” (p.277). We have oriented our perceptions on a fixed vertical axis. Thus, when we don’t use the vertical axis as our point of orientation, it alters our perceptions, and we become disoriented, we can’t see straight.
6. In this article, I intentionally choose to remove capitalization from my name. I do this for several reasons and because of several influences. I do this as a way of dismantling prescriptive grammar rules and to put into question the ways in which linguistics are used as a form of gatekeeping. My name spelled without capitalization is its own piece of art; it provides a perspective that differs from dominant uses of written language. To queer the presentation of my name is in line with how we engage in thinking about tradition and unlearning fixed forms of expression.

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