

EDITORIAL

Querying Dialogues: A Performative Editorial on Queering Music Therapy

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Candice: When I started my music therapy education, I remember feeling unsettled by the essentialism within the purview of the field. From diagnoses to “clinical populations” and the “evidence-based” “protocols” to address patterns of pathologized behaviors – everything I was learning felt reductionistic. On one hand, I understand why we conceptualize things in terms of fixed categories. Our brains are wired to perceive similarities. However, I started to reflect on my understandings of myself and realized that some of my own identities resisted fixed categories. I identify as queer and mixed race, and I started to reflect on what it means to be in the “in-between” or the “both and” or the “outside of.”

During my undergraduate music therapy program in 2012, I took an introductory queer theory course, a post-structuralist critical theory that destabilizes sexuality and gender categories and challenges the concept of normal, fixed, and binary identities. I was particularly impacted by *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1978) by Michel Foucault, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) by Eve Sedgwick, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) by Judith Butler, Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer’s (1994) paper, “I can’t even think straight: ‘Queer’ theory and the missing sexual revolution in sociology,” Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004), and Audre Lorde’s (1979) “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” What I was learning about queer theory initially seemed to be at odds with what I was learning in my music therapy classes and reading in our literature. It is now 2019, and after much more reading, engagement, and dialogue, the conversation about queer theory in music therapy has: expanded beyond sexual orientation and gender to other cultural identities, started to attend more to intersectionality, and started to challenge the very foundations, boundaries, and biases of music therapy.

Maevon: Two years into working on a dual degree in music education and women's and gender studies, I realized that I did not want to teach music but rather to be in music with others within a more therapeutic context. At this point, I explored within a feminist research methods course what feminist music therapy was, casually interviewing several music therapists who had written on this topic. I became most aware of issues of power and privilege, particularly considering how these issues might be at play within music therapy. Through these intersections, I found myself entering the music

therapy field, attending the university where two of the feminist music therapists that I interviewed taught. Through the discussions that I had been having with them and others, I think that I was a bit ignorant to the fact that these ideas weren't as widely accepted by the broader field. I began engaging more directly with queer theory and, similar to some of the texts that Candice has mentioned, I was particularly impacted by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004) and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1978). Through reading their work, I have realized that queer theory is rich with opportunity, offering an ever-expanding framework from which we can attempt to queer—that is, to call into question, to critique, to dismantle, to unsettle—dominant and normative ways of existing with both ourselves and with others in music therapy practice, education, and research.

Maevon and Candice: For the sake of transparency, positioning ourselves, and deeply engaging with these concepts, we want to dialogue around the following question for our editorial: What does it mean to queer music therapy? The phrase “dialogue around” is intentionally used to represent anti-essentialism and refute clear, stable, and fixed meanings. After all, queer theory is not a monolith and we are not the experts. Stating this is not to obscure our understandings on this topic or to relinquish responsibility as co-editors of this special issue but to situate this conversation as a query between not only us but with the field as a whole. Our personal journeys and engagement with queer theory “met” at Slippery Rock University, where we both completed our Master of Music Therapy degrees and where we started dialoguing with each other and our peers about queer theory in complex ways. We continued to consider the implications of these ideas beyond gender and sexuality to identity more broadly and to how queer theory and ‘queering’ might be one way of destabilizing dominant normative understandings within music therapy.

What does queer theory mean, to us?

Queer theory foregoes the fixity and steadiness of cut-and-dry labels, of clarity and certainty. Instead, we understand queer theory as begging of us to embrace the complexities and becoming-ness of human existence—to sit within river deltas,

where the river meets the ocean or a larger body of water,

where the water slows down, almost stagnant, to deposit sediments that cannot be carried on,

where some of the most fertile lands exist with some of the most diverse vegetation,

where growth is plentiful and change is as constant as the ever-flowing water.

Alongside the beauty of queer theory as the water in a river delta, queer theory also calls for a violent dismantling of rigid identity categories – establishing space where this water might rush in to shatter normative understandings of the glass houses we *all* live in. This is where we can contest hegemony – because, perhaps, we *should* throw stones.

What does it mean to queer music therapy?

One answer might be that we – as music therapists, educators, and students—slow down our clinical, educational, and research practices to enter the fertile waters of our own 'river deltas,' to examine the in-between's and both/and's of our work, and also that which expands beyond, moves outside of, circles around, and goes through. This is where we notice the psychic effects of norms that maintain power hierarchies, spreading like mist through our understandings of ourselves and our self-other relations, permeating the atmosphere almost invisibly. It is, perhaps, here – as we sit within the dirt, noticing the ways it creates a mess of what we know – where we are able to grow and expand.

In this special issue, this question is deeply considered in a wide variety of ways. Vee Gilman Fansler, Ashley Taylor, Freddy Perkins, ezequiel bautista, Rachel Reed, and Su-



Figure 1

Blue and green hand-drawn aerial view of a river delta.

san Hadley explore a queering pedagogy through examining borders within music therapy education, referencing Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of borderlands. Sue Baines, Judah Pereira, Jennyfer Hatch, and Jane Edwards reflect on and reveal heteronormative and cisnormative values in music therapy education, advancing ways to make classroom and practicum settings a safer and exploring space. Maren Metell explores the overlaps of queer theory and disability studies and ideas of neuroqueering, specifically considering the language that is often used to describe disabled children and their families. Guro Klyve presents the topic of epistemic injustice and the overlaps of feminist theory and queer theory within music therapy, particularly considering children and patients in mental healthcare. Simon Gilbertson deeply presents his own thought processes and ideas related to the Queer Nervous non-System and queering our sensibilities as music therapists. Julia Fent explores the queering potential of improvisation, in particular considering Julia Kristeva's ideas of the semiotic/symbolic and queer theory. Brian Harris considers musical engagement and the possibilities for intentionally queering the psychotherapeutic relationship through intersubjectivity and disclosure. Elly Scrine presents a conceptualization of songwriting with youth to explore gender and sexuality as an 'after-queer' approach, informed by their Ph.D. work. Spencer Hardy and Juniper Monypenny explore instances of queering within a community program for trans, nonbinary, and gender creative youth. Maevon Gumble presents on the ways that queer theories have served as a foundation for the gender affirming voicework method that they continue to develop. Colin Andrew Lee explores his identity as a queer music therapist through queer autoethnography, specifically through piano improvisations and poetry. Importantly, a time-sensitive interactive space has been created that provides you the reader/listener/perceiver/interactor with the opportunity to creatively respond to Colin's work. This space can be found here <https://padlet.com/>

[queeringMT/interactive](#), where you'll be able to upload creative content up until February 28th, 2020, when the space will be archived.

To queer the finality of publications and acknowledge the fluidity of our identities over time, we welcome communication regarding name changes (or other identifiers such as gender pronouns, sexuality, etc.) within these papers (authorship, references, etc.) and bios by emailing us at <mailto:bain.gumble@gmail.com>. After communicating with the copyediting and production team, this offer is also being extended to any other papers in other issues of *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*.

We want to thank all of the contributors to this special issue, including the authors, reviewers, copyediting and production team, and the mentors that supported us throughout this inquiry. Being editors was, at times, challenging for us. Holding that position of power felt antithetical to what queer theory calls for. It came with the ability to moderate this discourse in ways that might uphold dominant ideologies of knowledge production. We've appreciated the ways that everyone involved in this process, from authors all the way to the production team, were willing to engage in substantial, productive, but at times, painful critique. There were multiple submissions that, although they would be strong contributions to the literature on LGBTQ+ issues in music therapy, did not sufficiently engage with queer theory literature outside of music therapy and were thus not a fit for what this special issue was calling for. We appreciate the efforts of these authors and hope to see them in publication here or elsewhere in the future.

Thank you for queering music therapy with us, as we sit in the discomfort of the deltas and the dirt—throwing stones at the glass castles of research, academia, and practice that uphold rigid, pathologizing, and hierarchical notions of identity. This special issue is rich with important explorations of queer theory and the field of music therapy. This richness goes to show that there are many ways to consider acts of 'queering' within this profession and even more to be realized and further explored.

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