EDITORIAL

Authentic Voicing Within Acts of Survival

Claire Ghetti [1*], Maevon Gumble [2], Susan Hadley [3]

Editors
[1] The Grieg Academy – Department of Music, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
[2] Shenandoah University, Virginia, USA
[3] Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania, USA
* claire.ghetti@uib.no

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Claire: In this July issue of *Voices*, Maevon Gumble weaves rich practice-oriented descriptions and extracts of musical notation together to present a composite case study illustrating the *Liberatory Music Therapy Model of Gender Affirming Voicework* (LMT-GAV) (Gumble, 2025). Their Reflection on Practice describes how the LMT-GAV model is used in individual settings to address voice-related and gender-based needs for people with all gender identities. The person emerging from the composite case, Jamie, identifies two sets of voice qualities during their process of LMT-GAV—what they describe as their "work voice" and their "actually authentic voice." The latter was described as "Not forced or contained, open and relaxed but also expressive, limitless…." (Gumble, 2025, p.5). Immersed in the telling of Jamie's experience while I proofread the near-final version, this lucid description of authentic voice gave me pause. Jamie's description is presented within the setting of gender affirming voicework, with people whose gender identity often has not been supported or resonated with by those in surrounding social circles, where cisheteronormative experiences dominate. The potential of LMT-GAV to provide a musical container for exploring one's way into accessing and embodying affirming voices is clearly and poignantly depicted through the musical extracts and corresponding practice elaborations.

Accessing, embodying, and affirming a fluidity of voices is particularly salient and central in gender affirming voicework. Readers can learn about the theoretical foundations and scope of practice of LMT-GAV in the companion article by Maevon Gumble, Braedyn Inmon, and Kaylynn Schachner (2025). The composite case describing Jamie's experience of gender affirming voicework helps us tune in to what an "actually authentic" voice might be, with its flexibility, fluidity, and fully embodied nature. But in what other contexts might it be fruitful, or even critical, to consider our actually authentic voices? As the constructed person Jamie notes, authentic voice is that which is not contained, not forced, but instead is relaxed, open, expressive, and limitless. How would it feel to discover and embody this voice? What would we say or express with it? How would this voice be different from our current "everyday" voice, from our voice that is heard in our work settings or in our homes? How would this voice navigate the challenges in our world, in

our profession, in our communities? In the present moment, how close do we feel to accessing and embodying our own authentic voices? Do the many thoughtful and contextualized contributions to *Voices* over the past 25 years get us any closer to our authentic voices?

Maevon: In returning to Jamie's narrative (Gumble, 2025), we simultaneously must not forget the importance of their "work voice"—a voice that was developed as a really intentional and authentic strategy to navigate the cisheteronormativity of her work spaces with as much agency as she could. Learning how to consensually play the "gender game" to be perceived at least somewhat accurately with this voice was a tool of survival to mitigate harm. Jamie's actually authentic voice was where the performance at work could be dialed back into something that did not require as much work—a form of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in that she had to put so much energy into performing her identity at work to navigate the misgendering they often experienced. Natalia Alvarez-Figueroa (2021) discusses *levels of authenticity,* referring to how much authenticity someone is able to bring to a current situation or interaction (as explained to me by Braedyn Inmon, Personal Communication, 2022). Her framing considers the multiple facets of one's personhood, recognizing that one's whole authenticity is not something that all people deserve access to. Instead, preserving and caring for oneself while also challenging norms is suggested. Jamie taught me what it means to be a "vocal chameleon"—that is, the power and agency that comes from, in any moment, being able to *choose* to navigate the sociocultural contexts that emerge in whatever way feels most empowering and authentic in that given moment.

To add to the compelling questions that Claire poses as she considers other contexts for authentic voicing: What might it mean to emphasize the importance of both authentic voices as well as voices of survival and self-preservation? How do these survival voices help us navigate and cope with systems as music therapists? How do they help the individuals we work alongside to do the same? What might it mean to become "chameleons" with our voices and adapt them to the sociocultural and political contexts that we exist within? How do we foster choice and agency throughout? How do we use both our "work" and "authentic voices" to navigate dominant and perhaps limiting models embedded in therapy? How do we use them to navigate our current work environments that might require us to practice in a particular way that is misaligned with our values? How do we use them to navigate this contentious political climate? How do we use them to survive while simultaneously striving to cultivate spaces that invite, embrace, and celebrate authentic voicing?

Susan: Considering the questions posed by both Claire and Maevon, I am left thinking about the plurality of voices within music therapy as well as within ourselves. Within the worldview that I embrace, the manifestation of authenticity within different spaces is always already in a process of negotiation. Our identities are always dynamically flexible as we interact with others and adapt to various social situations. What feels authentic in some contexts does not in others, yet they are all important aspects of who we are. And while some manifestations of our identities do feel more open, relaxed, and freer than others—especially when we consider other spaces in which we are unable to express those aspects of ourselves due to oppressive regimes that leave us feeling unsafe and unsupported—many manifestations are actually authentic.

What often happens within professions is a sedimentation of certain practices which limit the sounding of a plurality of voices. These practices can be oppressive for many within the profession whose voices are not supported by these practices. So, while we may have a desire for affirming voices within this journal, there are ways in which we fall short. And even when we are able to affirm a plurality of authentic voices here, in what ways

does this set up false expectations that other spaces will find this kind of expressive voicing acceptable? Given this, what can we do to promote greater affirmation of, and remove obstacles to, the expression of authentic voices beyond this space?

An integration of affirming voices

And so we invite you, readers of *Voices*, to consider which voices you embody. How have you developed these voices in relation to the contexts that surround you? How are these voices liberatory or confining? How are these voices freely expressive or restricted? How do you use these voices with intention and purpose? We hope your engagement with current and past issues of *Voices* gives you pause, invites you to reflect, and opens up new possibilities.

In This Issue

Some of the ways in which we hope to affirm choice, agency, and authentic voicing at *Voices* is through a wide variety of genres of writing or presenting work through multimedia formats. Such possibilities are demonstrated in the work published in this issue. In addition to the composite case study by Maevon Gumble and the companion article on the theoretical foundations and scope of the *Liberatory Music Therapy Model of Gender Affirming Voicework* by Maevon Gumble, Braedyn Inmon, and Kaylynn Schachner described above, there are nine additional articles in this current issue.

Playing with their identities, Brede Davis, Zoë Kalenderidis, Grace Thompson, and Carolyn Shaw take up the roles of operators at a fictional call centre helpline. Within this two-part multimedia publication, they respond to questions posed by a composite character who explores the intersections of being disabled and being a music therapist within the Australian and New Zealand contexts.

Bringing the voices of Black American therapy educators to the forefront, Jian Jones, Hakeem Leonard, and Khalilah Johnson explore through an autoethnographic inquiry how their Hip Hop identity influences their educational practice and praxis. In (re)imagining Hip Hop futurism for therapy education, they encourage Black academics to show up authentically Black in all spaces, to exude Black intellectualism and to add to the Black American knowledge base.

Also focusing on feelings of belonging (or not) in music therapy spaces, Elizabeth Mitchell, Priya Zalis, Daniel Arun Robinson, Sarah Bell, and Cynthia Bruce surveyed Canadian music therapists' perspectives, concerns, and priorities related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Overarching themes from analysis of qualitative data included issues of power and representation, the role of music and the centrality of advocacy. Their process of research paralleled experiences of marginalized groups with challenges related to access, privilege, and gatekeeping occurring along the way.

Writing from the Netherlands, Germany, and Aotearoa New Zealand, Johanna Möller used semi-structured interviews of a plurality of voices to gather perspectives from peacebuilders, music therapists, musicians, and music educators in various parts of the world. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of music in peacebuilding—particularly exploring the aims of music in peacebuilding, musical frameworks, and music therapy. Recognizing its value, most participants identified the need for ongoing collaboration for the future and development of music in peacekeeping.

Focusing on the needs and voices of care providers, Marcus Bull presents a case story of "Violet"—a healthcare worker in the United Kingdom who received six sessions of music therapy as part of a staff support service. The case demonstrates the adaptation of a group improvisational intervention (Arts for the Blues) to a one-on-one setting. It is suggested that music therapy may be a powerful way to support the wellbeing of staff.

Realizing the importance of hearing multiple voices, Rut Wallius, Stine L. Jacobsen, and

Alexandra Ullsten (music therapy researchers from Denmark and Sweden) used semi-structured collaborative interviews with parent-child dyads to explore each party's experience of music therapy. They explored music therapy as a supportive intervention for family reunification upon a child's return home after temporary placement in foster care. Findings suggested that music was used to create a safe atmosphere, express emotions, and strengthen attachments when children return home after foster care.

Addressing the experiences of people whose voices and identities have undergone substantial changes over time, Irish researchers Lisa Kelly, Hilary Moss, and Ita Richardson explore the provision of telehealth music therapy services for people with dementia. The researchers used semi-structured interviews of four senior music therapists (from the UK and Canada) who implemented telehealth music therapy with people with dementia during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, people whose voices and identities have undergone substantial changes over time. Telehealth music therapy was particularly helpful for people with late stages of dementia, those with limitations to mobility and/or transport, and those who are socially isolated.

Another way of voicing how we embody our experiences is through exploring our brain activity. Drawing from music and emotion research studies as well as inconsistent results from Kim's own study, Kyung Min Mindy Kim, Jinah Kim, and Katrina Skewes McFerran suggest that EEG technologies are still emerging. One form of portable EEG technology (Emotiv Insight) was used to offer distressed young people in Australia opportunities to reflect on their emotional distress; however, these young people did not perceive the EEG visual data as actually representing their emotional worlds. The authors suggest researchers maintain vigilance and some degree of suspicion in interaction with these developing technologies.

Coming full circle to focus on voicework, Sharon R. Boyle and Rebecca L. Engen reflect on research and resources that have been generated over the past twenty-four years in the US, and continue their response to the question of whether music therapists are at risk for voice problems. The authors offer suggested paths for research and advocate for a more integrated music therapy education and training in clinical voice skills and vocal health.

Appreciation

References

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