

“An Occ-Asian to Make Myself Perfectly Queer”: Exploration of a Queer Asian Music  
Therapist’s Identities

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## ABSTRACT

“An Occ-Asian to Make Myself Perfectly Queer”: Exploration of a Queer Asian Music  
Therapist’s Identities

Wen Xian Jennifer Lin

Minoritized music therapists are increasingly represented in music therapy research, but the literature base that includes the experience and expertise of racialized music therapists who also identify as Queer remains small. The purpose of this heuristic self-inquiry was to examine how the researcher’s intersecting Queer and Asian identities and their experiences growing up in western culture inform their early career music therapist identity. Moustakas’ (1990) six phases of heuristic self-inquiry were used to generate and analyze data and to support the final creative synthesis. Qualitative data was generated through journaling and songwriting (with a specific focus on lyric writing) after daily music improvisation sessions that took place over a four week period. Thematic analysis of the data generated three thematic categories with three to four sub-themes each. Categories include: *Feelings Associated with Self & Identity Exploration*, *Challenging Life Experiences*, and *Generating Momentum*. A visual art piece was created to summarize and synthesize the researcher’s experience of the enquiry process. Personal and professional implications were explicated and include a focus on the importance of critical self-reflection, understanding how experiences of marginalization inform our music therapy work, and increasing the representation of minoritized voices in research, education, and practice settings.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### Situating Myself as a Researcher

Growing up living with and alongside multiple marginalizing, and even rejected, identity markers has generated repeated experiences of rejection by self and others. Yet, it has also contributed to the development of a commitment to a full exploration of how those experiences matter in the context of my clinical music therapy work. Ultimately, they have formed the foundation of a commitment to make visible and disrupt the norms that produce those experiences, and of my desire to understand the meaning of those experiences and what they now offer to my work as a music therapist (in the early years of my career).

I am of Indian Chinese descent, and I grew up in a single parent household raised primarily in a big Chinese community in Ontario, Canada. I also identify as a first generation Canadian, bisexual, gender fluid, low-class, multilingual speaker, classical musician, and someone who has been diagnosed and lives with borderline personality traits and dysthymia. These identifiers, and the institutional and societal responses they often generate, contribute to the complex experiences I live in many contexts.

I have had many experiences that challenged me to think about my position in society and about how my different identifiers interact with and/or are rejected within normative cultural contexts. As a child, I received disapproval from others due to their knowledge of my separated parents, my father living with schizophrenia, and/or my socioeconomic status. At ten years old, I was aware that I was Queer and was noticing and feeling internalized homophobia creeping up as I explored my sexuality. I felt shame and hurt when identifying as Queer led to rejection by a close friend. As a teen, the mental health challenges I had been facing were more overtly affecting me. Suicidal and struggling to make social connections, I was excessively bullied for exhibiting mental health challenges – many of which appear to be the emergence of borderline personality traits.

After high school, I started to embrace more of my Indian heritage and was always met with disbelief because I did not have the phenotypical features of an *Indian* person. Having to prove my Indian heritage became the norm. In fact, a white man once asked what kind of Indian I was and hearing “are you British or French Indian?” left me

in shock that my identity could be questioned in a way that required me to identify according to the categories connected to the colonization of my people.

I began to explore my gender identity more intentionally in my early twenties. At twenty five, I realized that I did not identify according to dominant gender binary expectations and started to share my gender fluid identity with others. It has been difficult reintroducing myself as they/she while emphasizing that they/them is my preference. Part of my fluid identity is that I often feel most comfortable in the middle, neither male nor female, while at other times I do feel more aligned with my assigned gender. I am happy with my progress despite not being fully out.

It was not until I started my journey as a music therapy student that I began to think critically about how my intersecting identities influence the music that I create and the ways I interact with colleagues and clients. I have been playing flute for seventeen years, and during that time I have played in various contexts. Meanwhile, I have learned other instruments, sung in various vocal groups, and arranged/composed music. It has felt increasingly important for me to be present as a Queer person of colour (QPOC) and these identities and the associated experiences are integral to my professional identity development.

Now, as I complete my graduate studies in music therapy, I increasingly notice the importance of embracing these identities because I am surrounded by many Caucasian and heterosexual/heteronormative colleagues and clients who remind me implicitly and explicitly of my marginalized position in society. This research allowed me to explore how my Queer and Asian identities inform, at this early stage of my career, my work as a music therapist through the purposeful use of music songwriting.

### **From the Personal to the Professional**

In today's social and political climate, it is critical to pay attention to issues of representation in music therapy. Yet, we are only doing so nominally; a reality that leaves minoritized music therapists to forge their music therapist identities in the absence of a diversity of voices to support that process (Gombert, 2022). As a music therapy student, I had minimal exposure to published literature that centred the experiences of minoritized music therapists. As a Queer Asian, this made it difficult to meaningfully connect with what I was reading and learning. As an early career music therapist who now seeks out

research to support my developing approach to clinical practice, I continue to find that the literature inadequately represents issues and perspectives of marginalized music therapists and clients. This lack of representation makes the work of forging an emergent music therapist identity exponentially more difficult, and it links any sense of belonging to acceptance of the white heteronormative perspectives that are dominant.

I often find myself being one of, if not the only, QPOC in music therapy education and professional settings. The field is dominated by white heteronormative voices (Norris, Williams, & Gipson, 2021) which makes it difficult for marginalized persons to draw upon and engage with a diversity of perspectives as they develop their own music therapist identities. While there is an emergent body of literature that amplifies minoritized perspectives and centres their social justice activism (Swamy & Webb, 2022), the voices of those who live at the intersection of multiple oppressive systems continue to be minimally, if at all, represented. It can be difficult, as a QPOC, to have discussions about exclusion with cisgender (cis) heterosexual white folk about issues of inequity and under-representation within the field. The similarities between societal inequities and those that surface in the profession can easily stay hidden. As Norris (2020) points out, understanding “the tenuous nature of racial discourse and the cognitive dissonance often experienced by privileged members of our profession[,] many might perceive an incompatibility in comparing societal violence with the harms enacted in the field” (p. 2).

In order to engage more effectively in these necessary dialogues and to examine how to include and centre missing or silenced minoritized voices, music therapists need to have a better understanding of who they are and how this shapes their interactions with clients and colleagues (Swamy, 2021). The complicated process of developing a professional identity often fails to consider the influence of our multiple intersecting individual social locators. While there are emerging works that examine how culture or musical backgrounds inform the ways early career music therapists see themselves as professionals, there appears to be little research that explicitly looks at how our intersecting minoritized identities and the interpersonal dynamics they generate shape who we are and how we work. It is insufficient to look at only one core identity when we

have “lived experience[s] of multiple interlocking oppressions— [we] cannot separate intersecting identities from each other” (Swamy, 2021, p. 182).

Feeling a sense of belonging in the field of music therapy can be difficult to achieve when your identities exist outside of the dominant norms. There is a fine line, in my experience, between experiencing acceptance and rejection when living with multiple intersecting identities and their associated systems of oppression. At first glance, I appear to be the model minority – a stereotypical depiction of Asians in western countries as smart, hard-working, and submissive/obedient. These traits, among others, are what garner respect from the white majority. Although some of these traits may be applicable to me, the way I present myself and navigate the world does not adhere to this perceived norm. My constant navigation of acceptable and potentially unacceptable ways of being does not distort my own perception of myself, but it does influence how I choose to present myself with colleagues and clients. Others’ stereotypical perceptions and understandings of who I am often seem to influence how they interact with me. It often appears that “dominant metanarratives [...] tend to take hold and limit the ways in which people are able to conceptualize themselves and others [and] the identities of people are in many ways distorted” (Hadley, 2013, p. 4-5).

The harms that QPOCs experience when navigating oppressive systems are exacerbated by the rejection from communities of which they are a part. Swamy (2021) articulates an understanding of this feeling of isolation when she<sup>1</sup> says “my sense of identity often felt fragmented and did not seem to fit neatly into any clear categories” (p. 187). Discussing his own intersecting identities, Lee (2019) acknowledges that the music therapy profession is comprised of primarily white, heterosexual, and cis individuals. In my experience, publically sharing Queer identities within such a non-white community is no easy feat. There are many safety concerns that stem from being outed, especially if the culture actively rejects Queer persons. Lee’s assertion, as a white man, arguably makes it evident that doing so as a QPOC will add layers of difficulty to an already risky process.

Developing music therapy competencies to address Queer needs requires more than just including sexual orientation and gender identity within pre-existing disciplinary frameworks that have been “historically hostile towards non-normative sexualities and

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<sup>1</sup> Swamy identifies as she/they and both pronouns will be used throughout.

genders” (Bain, Grzanka, & Crowe, 2016, p. 22). Those who exist outside of the norm live complex experiences as they interact with the world and the field; experiences that are poorly understood by those who benefit from the norm or the status quo. This lack of understanding manifests in ways that are dismissive of diverse experiences which ostracizes non-normative individuals who should be at the centre of the research needed to further diversity and to develop an understanding of the causes of harm. Only more recently is our society highly encouraging each person to do the necessary learning about others’ experiences. However, prior to that it is essential to support and prioritize the voices that can help us better understand their values, their experiences of trauma, and the ways that we can better serve folk<sup>2</sup> from diverse minoritized backgrounds.

Our understanding of these intricacies can enhance our work as music therapists, especially with marginalized groups. Engaging in deep introspection can reveal important information about the nuances of our actions and reactions towards social locators like gender and race. Moreover, the process of self-exploration reveals how crucial it is to examine ourselves from multiple angles. You cannot isolate elements of yourself and your core identities. For instance, Han (2015), a student music therapist’s exploration of her cultural identities in relation to music therapy revealed the importance of building strong therapeutic relationships through understanding one’s own feelings and experiences. It is important to note that while this is a long and ongoing process it is a good starting point to moving the profession to where it needs to be – a genuinely inclusive space where (Queer) people of colour can show up and be valued without using a white heteronormative lens to do so. It is imperative for therapists to better understand who they are as people and as professionals to be able to provide safe practices for themselves and their clients. This research, therefore, was important as a way of exploring my identity by intentionally engaging with the few minoritized voices in the literature and exploring, through the intentional use of songwriting as a mode of expression, how my intersecting Queer and Asian identities influence my work as an early career music therapist.

### **Purpose of the Study**

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<sup>2</sup> An inclusionary spelling for *folks* commonly used to include marginalized groups.

The purpose of this study was to examine how my intersecting identities and experiences growing up Queer and Asian in western culture have informed my emerging identity as a music therapist.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question was: How do my experiences as a Queer and Asian person intersect to shape my emerging music therapist identity? The subsidiary research questions were: (a) What are the defining themes of my intersecting Queer and Asian identities?; (b) What are the current defining themes of my emerging music therapist identity and how do these compare and/or contrast with the defining themes of my intersecting Queer and Asian identities?

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Queer*: Hidalgo and Barber (2017) define Queer as “an umbrella term to denote sexual identity within a particular community” (para. 2) outside of those who identify as heterosexual. This includes but is not limited to: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer. Additionally, it is a word that has been reclaimed as a political term, used to indicate nonconformity with traditional ideas regarding gender and sexual identity (Bain, Grzanka, & Crowe, 2016).

*Asian*: A person who is of Asian (the continent of Asia) descent.

*Music Therapist*: In adherence with The Canadian Association of Music Therapists, an accredited music therapist is a person who has undergone training through a CAMT approved university program including a 1000 hour clinical internship in addition to passing the Certification Board for Music Therapists exam (Canadian Association of Music Therapists, 2020).

*Intersectionality*: A framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, “intersectionality [is] a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender... a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple [identities] and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296).

### **Chapters Summary**

This thesis has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 highlights the personal contexts, importance of this research, purpose, research questions, and key terms. Chapter 2 presents a literature review that provides essential context for the

research topic and is organized according to the following topics: identity, defining identity, professional identity development, music therapists' lived experiences of marginality, critical self-reflection, racial/cultural experiences, and Queer experiences. Chapter 3 delves into the study design, rationale for the methodology used, materials, data collection, and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 explicates the research findings and shares what I have taken from this experience. Chapter 5 explains the creative synthesis (visual art), explores and outlines personal and professional implications, shares limitations, and offers concluding thoughts.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### Introduction

Identity is variably defined, and the literature that focuses on music therapist professional identity development and intersectionality is not clearly grounded in one definition. Yet, “in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 130). So, identity is a complex formation of our unique individual characteristics which can be expressed and experienced in different ways.

This chapter provides a general overview of current literature pertaining to music therapist identity and explores how the personal minoritized identities of music therapists inform their professional identity and work. It is important to note that this literature review is not an exhaustive analysis of all that has been written regarding the topic of music therapy and identity. Rather, it aims to centre the experiences and perspectives of minoritized music therapists in order to explicate how their experiences of minoritization contribute to the development of their professional approach and identity.

### Identity

#### *Defining Identity*

Defining identity is complex, and the literature suggests that, in fact, there is no single accepted definition. Identity encompasses multiple parts of a person (e.g., physical or social) and diverse, yet intersecting, markers such as gender and ethnicity. In the psychological framework (American Psychological Association, n.d.), identity is a person’s sense of self that involves the sense of continuity and is comprised of “(a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations and social roles” (para. 1). Identity has also been defined in the social science framework as “(a) a social category, defined by membership rules and allegedly characteristic attributes or expected behaviours, or (b) a socially distinguished feature that a person takes special pride in or views as unchangeable or socially consequential, (or (a) and (b) at once)” (Fearon, 1999, p. 36).

Ruud (2009) emphasized this complexity by highlighting, for music therapists, a number of ways identity can be understood or defined. Identity, on one hand, can be made up of personal characteristics such as the ones mentioned above. In another sense,



aligning with social and personality psychology, identity could also be described as “dimensions within the personality, or traits which distinguish people” (Ruud, 2009, p. 5). Meanwhile, identity in a phenomenological sense could reflect an individual’s conscious experience of continuity and of being unique. Although there are several divergent definitions, each can inform music therapy work in different ways.

### ***Professional Identity Development***

The literature suggests that several aspects of personal experience influence professional music therapist identity development. The ability to engage in critical self-reflection is important, but factors such as work environment and values also have an impact (Byers & Meadows, 2022). The differing aspects of who we are similarly shape our work, and those are equally important to consider. Developing a music therapist identity is not straight forward (Odell-Miller, 2016), but the literature suggests that it may be grounded in the learned capacity to engage in critical self-reflection (Barry & O’Callaghan, 2008). Developing a professional music therapist identity begins in the pre-professional training context and entails engagement in and support to develop capacity for critical self-reflection (Edwards, 2015).

During music therapy training, we are often reminded of the importance of self-reflection. Yet, we do not always receive the necessary resources to enable, support, and guide us on how to engage in critical self-reflection. Such guidance, from experienced music therapists and educators, could really help music therapy students begin the important process of self-reflection to enhance their developing clinical work. Edwards’ (2015) narrative reflection on her experience of the profession of music therapy with regards to increasing professionalism and regulation highlighted the importance of encouraging music therapy students to examine their history, psychological states, and reason for pursuing the field. “The curiosity of students and their capacity for self-reflection needs to be encouraged within a context that can support them” (Edwards, 2015, p. 48). Edwards (2015) concluded that students should have the support necessary to “have experiences of exploring theoretical and philosophical resonances that are personally meaningful” (p. 49).

Research suggests that it is important for music therapists to consider their personal identities, their interactions with others, and the environments in which they

work when developing and examining their professional identity since they are interwoven and inseparable. Byers & Meadows (2022) examined the early professional experiences of music therapists and found that new music therapist identities were highly influenced by their work environments, practicum and life experiences, and personal values. Their qualitative content analysis also indicated that new music therapists “described their professional identities as fluid and strongly associated with the clinical setting in which they worked” (Byers & Meadows, 2022, p. 40). Although the knowledge gained from these interviews was valuable in highlighting gaps in the research regarding identity formation of new music therapists, there needs to be practical opportunities wherein students can “examine and integrate their own life experiences and values into [their] developing clinical practice perspective” (Byers & Meadows, 2022, p. 40) as a part of their work and not just for research. Interestingly, the authors highlighted the limitation of having 14 white individuals versus one person of colour (POC) in their study. However, they did not explicitly discuss the implications of this limitation which emphasizes the need for more extended consideration of minoritized experiences in future research.

Additional factors that should be considered include the ways in which aspects of identity intersect with one another and with professional identities. Ledger (2010), a health care ethnographer, explored her dual practitioner-researcher identities and how these additional identities (experienced music therapist, researcher, colleague, and friend) helped strengthen her work. She emphasized the need to explore and develop awareness of multiple identities as the researcher because “exploration of multiple identities added a layer of complexity to the research that would not have been possible otherwise” (Ledger, 2010, p. 301). Ledger (2010) used an ethnographic method and came to the conclusion that it is important to develop flexibility and responsiveness in her role as the researcher. The researcher further emphasized her “[need] to develop [her] role over time and to explore and be aware of [her] multiple identities” (Ledger, 2010, p. 300) which helped advance her work and navigate complex interactions.

### **Music Therapists’ Lived Experiences of Marginality**

Experiences of marginality and the marginalized identity matter because, as the emergent body of literature from racialized and Queer music therapists indicates, it

shapes who we are as music therapists and how we do our work in varying contexts (Gumble, 2019; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Imeri & Jones, 2022; Kim & Hadley, 2013; Swamy & Webb, 2022; Tan & Hsiao, 2017). Current music therapy literature highlights a noticeable increase in work that supports music therapists to work toward, or within, a multicultural framework (Hadley & Norris, 2016). This increased focus on multicultural practice, because of the recognized need to be more responsive to cultural diversity among clients, is clearly important, but the profession itself is not similarly focused on becoming increasingly representative of a diversity of cultural and other minoritized music therapist voices. This highlights the importance of developing a better understanding of who we are as people and as professionals and how experiences of marginalization influence what we bring to our work with a diversity of clients.

While there is minimal representation of racialized and Queer voices in the music therapy literature, those that do exist offer key insights about how critical self-reflection has bolstered their capacity to highlight the value their perspectives bring to clients, students, and the profession. They challenge the profession to think about how dominant voices so often shape how we respond to, or write about, experiences of marginality, and they encourage deep introspection about intersections of privilege and marginalization. The emergent literature from minoritized, and specifically Queer and racialized music therapists, often draws on critical self-reflection as a strategy to consider how they might bring their experiences of marginalization to the work they do with clients and students.

### ***Critical Self-Reflection***

Critical self-reflection, or reflexivity, is increasingly common in theorizing and research related to the experiences and perspectives of a diversity of music therapists. It can lead to important discoveries about how music therapists' identities and experiences variably influence the therapist/client relationship (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008). Building reflexive knowledge involves examining and reflecting back to ourselves our perceptions and insights of our personal experiences (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008). It is important that music therapists are "aware of what [their]<sup>3</sup> values are and of how [their] personal and professional values may influence [their] feelings or decision making within the

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<sup>3</sup> In quotes where the author uses he/she, or another form of gender binary, I have inserted [their] as a conscious move away from the binary.

therapy setting, or if [their] personal and professional values are in conflict” (Bates, 2017, p. 67). Furthermore, the most important aspect of critical reflection is not the how but rather “the why, the reasons for and the consequences of what we do” (Mezirow, 1991, p.13). This process of self-reflexivity has been used in research as exemplified in the next section.

### ***Racial/Cultural Experiences***

The literature suggests that it is critically important to examine all of the ways our identities and experiences of marginalization shape the work we do and the relationships we develop with our clients. Kim (Kim & Hadley, 2013) who identifies as Korean and shares many experiences of marginalization with her Asian clients, wrote of the invaluable learning that she has gained by reflecting on such similarities. Although a therapist and client may identify similarly, their experience of navigating life can differ drastically. This influences our feelings about and relationship with the client, and this is important to acknowledge (Kim & Hadley, 2013). Kim highlighted, in her narrative, how prominent her identity was as an immigrant Asian woman (Kim & Hadley, 2013). She observed that the almost instantaneous connection between her and Asian clients may have been due to a mutual understanding of the intricacies of navigating their foreignness. However, she further acknowledged that although her identity as a Korean woman allowed her to connect strongly with clients who identify similarly, a client’s perception of the therapist’s ethnic or racial background may also hinder the process of building trust and rapport. It is vital, then, to understand the complexities that can emerge in therapeutic relationships, even when client and therapist have some shared experience of racialization.

The increasing, albeit limited, representation of racialized music therapists in music therapy literature, does not always explicitly explore identity development. Their experiences, however, do offer important insights into what it is like to be and develop as a racialized music therapist in multiple contexts. Webb (2019) examined the academic and professional experiences of Black music therapists that also reflected the “current attitudes within the field towards diversity and cultural awareness, and how understanding those experiences can lead to enhanced, culturally sensitive practice” (p. ii). Using an arts-based narrative inquiry, Webb (2019) sought to help readers better

understand the experiences of Black music therapists, specifically those of the participants. She found that participants did not feel as if they fully belonged in the profession and that the music therapy community inconsistently recognized and addressed the need for diversity, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Webb highlighted the importance of representation and mentorship when she stated "... it could be considered validating for students to see faculty who look like them. Students could be reassured that they can successfully engage in the profession" (Webb, 2019, p. 77). Students also commented that "lack of representation led to a lack of relevant, adequate mentorship because few people could understand [their] experience and guide [them] through it" (Webb, 2019, p.77).

The inclusion of multiple identities into the research focus is important because doing so can produce valuable insights. Han (2015) actively explored how her multiple identities as a student music therapist, a musician, and a Korean and New Zealander influenced her interactions/relationships with clients. Han (2015) aimed to explore her journey as an emerging music therapist working with a diverse clientele. Using a heuristic inquiry, she reflected on the relationship between her student music therapist identity, cultural identity, and musician identity. Importantly, the findings indicated that each theme was connected to an aspect of her identity. Han (2015) stated "it was my student identity and roles that were highlighted when confronted with unfamiliar experiences, whereas my Asian identity [that was] prominent when I connected with other ethnicities" (p. 44).

It can be difficult to engage with the experiences of racialized music therapists because their stories are often filtered through a white gaze or perspective that interprets, for example, "Black people 'through the lens of whiteness' and 'distorts perceptions of people who deviate from whiteness'" (Rabelo, Robotham, & McCluney, 2020, p.1840). Music therapy is notably taught through a Eurocentric framework and consequently, "those with privilege are the ones declaring what is appropriate, thereby erasing or excluding the experiences of other therapists and clients" (Gombert, 2022, p. 171). This, in turn, upholds a colonial positioning" (Norris, Williams, & Gipson, 2021). Gombert (2022) conducted a phenomenological study to examine lived experiences of music therapists regarding the "sociocultural and privilege dynamics within music therapy

education” (p. 164). Through the conduct and analysis of semi-structured interviews, Gombert (2022) found that participants experienced the “de-centering of minoritized voices within music therapy education” which was directly correlated with issues surrounding “discourse about diversity, equity, and cultural intersections” (p. 170).

### ***Queer Experiences***

There is a need for more research that thoroughly examines the intersections between race/ethnicity/culture and Queerness or Queer identities including sexual orientation and gender expression. Lee’s (2019) contribution highlighted the importance of examining both marginality and privilege when engaging in exploratory work. In addition to the whiteness of the field in general, Queer identity in the music therapy literature has, too, been dominated by cis white voices. Lee (2019) conducted a Queer autoethnography to explore his personal experiences in the field as both “a composer-music therapist and a Queer cisgender man” (p. 1). He found that recordings of his own songwriting and improvisations represented his sexuality and musical passion, and they also represented his other intersecting identities (e.g., race, ability, privilege). This is interesting since these other identities were not part of his research focus. Lee (2019) concluded that this experience offered “an authentic space in which to explore the artistic integrity of [his] clinical practice” (p. 7). He continued by acknowledging his commitment to reflecting on his power and privilege as a white man while navigating challenges as a Queer person.

Recent research similarly highlights the insufficient body of knowledge that supports anti-oppressive work with trans/non-binary individuals. Through a Queer autoethnography, Gumble (2019), a non-binary trans music therapist, explored and introduced “gender affirming voicework in music therapy, the training that it might involve, and several questions/issues that need further exploration” (p. 1). Sharing their experience, Gumble (2019; 2020) highlighted how talking about their lived experiences shaped their identities and their practice. Their findings pointed to the insight that their “personal, emotional story is academic and a source of important knowledge without requiring literature to make sense of it” (Gumble, 2020, p. 31). Their aim was to address how gender affirming voice work can help with the stigma and trauma experienced as a result of living in a binary world for Queer folx.

Open discussion surrounding Queer POCs in music therapy is scarce. The historically homophobic and transphobic values in Asian culture are an enormous hurdle to cross that it seems better to stay silent. So, it is understandable why there is almost no research on this specific intersection. Swamy (2021) shared their story living and experiencing different dynamics as a Queer South Asian. Through their narrative, Swamy highlighted the difficult realities of navigating oppressive systems. “The intersection of being both a racial and sexual minority made [them] exponentially more vulnerable to discrimination” (Swamy, 2021, p. 189). At the end of her narrative, Swamy (2021) shared two important insights: “the systemic context of our work is critical” and “we cannot truly effect social justice without some form of deep, inner practice that connects us to phenomena greater than ourselves” (p. 195).

### **Conclusion**

While there are still very few Queer and racialized voices represented in the music therapy literature, the few critical voices that have emerged provide important insight into how greater diversity can enrich therapeutic relationships and promote an increased sense of inclusion and belonging in the profession. There is an insufficient amount of literature that explores the ways in which these intersections interact and influence one another. The common connections drawn from these narratives and articles highlight the importance of acknowledging and comprehending the intricacies and interactions of identities through critical self-reflection.

There are some important publications that focus on identity and lived experiences of POC music therapists; however, currently this knowledge is not plentiful. Queer and Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) experiences and insights are valuable as they provide potentially new perspectives and clarity on how the many identities of these music therapists inform their work. Scholarly works on minoritized folk were often completed by the same few authors. There needs to be more experienced-based works that serve to be resources and represent individuals who are otherwise largely unseen in the field. These articles would then be stepping stones for newer music therapists to start developing and drawing on their own experiences.

The concept of identity is broad and complex and this small sample of minoritized identities excludes many other identities. Compared to scholarly books and peer reviewed

articles that have begun to look explicitly at race/ethnicities, publications about Queer experiences in music therapy were less plentiful. Considering there are so many aspects to an identity, it would be insightful to discover the ways in which the layers of identity interact or even sit in tension with one another. Furthermore, research on intersecting identities could potentially reveal other important and complex sets of challenges such as opposing beliefs connected to each identity layer. For example, Tan and Hsiao (2017) brought focus to the difficulties associated with living as a Queer person in a culture that strongly values heterosexuality and shared that “LGBT Asian-Americans who were more attached to Asian values had a higher level of internalized homophobia” (p. 56).

It is impossible to separate personal identities from our professional as we have developed our personal identities throughout our lifetime. There is more to discover about our complex formations and how these formations influence one another. As Ruud (2009) states, “identity no longer comes to us ready-made, because identity is a process, something never fulfilled” (p. 6).



## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The deeply personal nature of the research question I set out to explore demanded a methodology that involved generating “qualitative depictions that are at the heart and depths of a person’s experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). Heuristic self-inquiry is a methodology that allows the researcher to gain insight by engaging deeply in self-reflexive experiences and to make meaning of all that was elucidated. This process requires the researcher to connect personally through their own “internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). In light of the reflexive nature of this method, I determined that a heuristic self-inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) would best support the exploration of my intersecting identities as a Queer Asian early career music therapist. Consequently, I was the sole participant.

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

The scope of my Master’s thesis influenced the following assumptions and delimitations. The assumptions of my study included: my lived experiences as a Queer Asian early career music therapist were valid and meaningful and the experiences provided me with meaningful insight into the research questions being posed. I believed that our relationship with our own personal identities play an integral role in how we engage and experience ourselves as music therapists.

There were some notable delimitations to this research process. First, I was the only participant in this study. I aimed to only examine three of my identities which include: Queer, Asian, and emerging music therapist. As a result, I narrowed down the publications I included in the literature review. I am aware that there may be numerous music therapists who identify as Queer and/or who are racialized who are not cited or centred in this study, however, their exclusion is not intended to devalue their work. Rather, it was my choice to centre the work of minoritized music therapists who explicitly explore how their lived experiences of minoritization influence their work. A prime example is Carolyn Kenny. Her work is significantly grounded in her Indigenous identity and she clearly made a significant contribution to the profession of music therapy (see for example Kenny, 1989). Her theoretical work and its origins in her Indigenous cultural traditions is extensive, but it was more than was possible to examine in the scope

of this study. Whereas my research is more relevant, I argue, to early career music therapists.

Each phase of the research process was delimited to a specific duration (outlined below). Importantly, the reflexive processes that I engaged in throughout this study were not used as therapy. They served as a process of contemplation aimed at understanding how my personal identities intersect and influence my music therapist identity and practice. Additionally, due to the personal nature of the songs and to ensure my own safety, only the lyrics will be shared and the recordings of the songs will be omitted. Finally, the music itself was not analyzed as data. Rather, the music helped generate the data and was a significant part of the meaning making process.

Upon engaging in this research process, I soon realized that I had to amend my research question to narrow the focus which led to the revised question: how do my experiences as a Queer and Asian person inform my work as an early career music therapist? While I began this study with the aim of exploring my intersecting identities and how they shaped my emerging music therapist identity, the data generation process produced significantly more data than anticipated. As a result, I chose to focus on the first subsidiary question and to explore relevant themes without comparing them to my emerging music therapist identity.

### **Materials**

Materials used included: a Blue Yeti microphone, a Yamaha Piaggero NP-11 keyboard, a digital journal to write my reflections in, spreadsheet for coding using Google Spreadsheets, a laptop used as data storage and for data analysis, a recording application (Voice Memos) on an iPhone XR for recording improvisations, the software Cakewalk for recording the songwritings, the software MuseScore to notate the songwritings, and Avenir Scratch Notes for the creative synthesis.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Moustakas' (1990) six phases of heuristic self-inquiry were used to help "guide unfolding investigations and comprise the basic research design" (p. 27). These phases include: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. I began the initial engagement in the autumn of 2020 where the topic was formulated during a research course that I was taking during my Master's degree at

Concordia University. The purpose of the initial engagement phase was to discover a passionate interest; one that held important social meanings and personal, compelling implications (Moustakas, 1990). During the initial engagement phase, I clarified the topic and questions, conducted a literature review, and discussed the topic with peers and professors. Throughout the rest of my coursework, I was able to refine the topic and develop an understanding of gaps in current research through a literature review.

Upon completion of this phase, in the autumn of 2021, I finally engaged in the immersion phase and started the data collection process. The immersion phase enabled me to become acquainted with the research question(s); to live and grow in the knowledge and understanding of it (Moustakas, 1990). I committed two hours to songwriting and journaling each day for 28 days in December of 2021. Songwriting was a significant part of the meaning making process. It was an opportunity for me to experience a transformation process, allowed me to sit with different ideas and change them to reflect my thoughts/feelings accurately, and exercise putting words to music which was an important step in my need to develop an advocate voice. I started this songwriting process by listening to music that resonated with me (see Appendix A) and writing down thoughts or feelings that arose. Using these ideas, I wrote poems that formed the basis of the lyrics for my songs. The ideas that I narrowed down reflected my lived experiences as a Queer Asian music therapist which included: fears, the voice, strengths, and forging your own path. To help generate motifs and melodic inspiration for the songwritings, I improvised on my keyboard using the ideas from the poems. MuseScore was then used to transcribe the improvisations and notate the subsequent songwritings. Once the songwriting process was completed, I then used Cakewalk to record and edit my four songs. On the last day of the immersion phase I listened to the recordings to ensure that the songs were a good representation of my thoughts and experiences and to finally experience my songwritings as a whole. Both the lyrics (see Appendix B1-B4) and the journals were the data that was later analyzed. After delving deeply into the topic at hand, I entered the incubation phase.

I disengaged from the active components of this research for three months (January 2022-March 2022). Drawing back from the intense, concentrated focus of the question (Moustakas, 1990) allowed me to process my experiences unconsciously by

taking a break from the research entirely. While the intention was to take a one month break, it took three months before I felt ready to continue with the next phase.

Throughout this timeframe, I continued my music therapy practice, listened to music leisurely, and engaged in activities outside of music (e.g., hiking). The incubation phase was a time period in which I withdrew from the active components of the research but was still processing the data internally. Moustakas (1990) suggests that the expansion of knowledge works on a different level and that the data “undergoes silent nourishment... that produces a creative awareness” (p. 29). There were moments of sudden realization that were revealed as a result of tacitly processing the information.

Upon re-engaging in the active process, I entered the illumination phase, a process that offers “new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30). I re-examined the song recordings (focusing on the lyrics) and journals from the collected data for one month (April 2022-May 2022). I identified and extracted themes from the data using a three step coding process from grounded theory which includes: open, axial, and selective coding (O’Callaghan, 2016). I reviewed the accumulated data from the immersion phase and pondered the meanings of the quotes from the journals and lyrics. Afterwards, I entered codes for each important line or excerpt and charted them in an Excel Spreadsheet. This way I was able to visualize the themes and form interpretations and connections between the codes and to see the data from a broader perspective.

Open coding is the “initial phase whereby data is broken apart and concepts are created to denote data segments” (O’Callaghan, 2016, p. 1019). In the open coding, I generally named themes that stood out for me from specific lines in my journal and from the lyrics to my songs and made note of direct quotes. Some initial categories included “Emotions” and “Experience”.

In axial coding I formed newer groups from the previously established general code groups “whereby data are put back together in new ways... by making connections between the categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.96). I drew connections between codes and started creating subcategories within each initial code such as “Anger” within the “Emotions” category and renamed the main theme to “Feelings Associated with Self & Identity Exploration”.

Next, I engaged in the selective coding process. Selective coding is the “process of selecting the core category, validating its relationship to the other categories while also refining them” (O’Callaghan, 2016, p. 1019). I aimed to reorganize the axial groups into relevant overarching themes and subthemes and omitted other codes that were no longer relevant or that could be added to other codes. An example of a final theme is “Experiencing the Transformation Process”. In this phase, I aimed to provide a breakthrough into conscious awareness and new insight on my research (Moustakas, 1990) by analyzing and reflecting on the data that was produced during the immersion and incubation phases.

Next I engaged in the explication phase for six months (May 2022-October 2022). The purpose of the explication phase was to analyze completely what has been awakened in the consciousness, in order to understand the complex layers that have developed (Moustakas, 1990). After the initial analysis was completed in the illumination phase, I engaged in a complete examination of what was revealed in order to have a better understanding of the meaning behind these pieces of information. I analyzed the final codes that were developed and aimed to explain the connections between the codes and revealed important findings that were generated as a result of this process. Part of this process also included updating any codes that I felt could be merged or reconceptualised. The analysis was completed through the writing of Chapter 4 where I shared my experiences within the research process and past life experiences. I drew connections with the data to derive deeper meanings.

The final phase is the creative synthesis phase. During this phase, I was challenged to put all the ideas and main themes into a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990) to summarize my experience and findings. I spent 3 weeks from the end of October 2022 into November 2022 trying to figure out what best summarized the experience of my research process and opted to engage in visual art. After taking a nap one day I randomly had a vision pop into my head that consisted of bubbles on a black background and each bubble had its own story. To bring this into fruition, I used Avenir Scratch Notes which was a scratch pad that, underneath, revealed an array of colours. The resulting images were organically revealed which was also an important part of the process that I wanted to convey.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the personal and self-reflective nature of this study, one major ethical consideration that was accounted for was to ensure that I did not use this procedure as a form of therapy. To address this concern, I attended therapy outside of the research process and checked in with my supervisor. Other self-care actions that I engaged in included taking unlimited breaks as needed, attending peer supervision, and taking part in activities outside of music to disconnect from the research as much as possible when taking a break. To address the concern surrounding the storage of data, I used both an external and online hard drive that were encrypted and to which only I had access. Another concern regarded the validity of the data, specifically with regards to omitting uncomfortable data. My supervisor helped me to ensure that even though some sensitive data was removed, the results were still an authentic representation of my research process and remained true to the research questions being addressed. Omitting sensitive data minimized the harm to me and to others.

## Chapter 4. A Few Bumps in the Road

The purpose of this study was to examine how my intersecting identities and experiences growing up Queer and Asian in western culture have informed my emerging identity as a music therapist. Due to the vast amount of data generated, as mentioned previously, the research question was ultimately revised to narrow down the scope. The primary research question became: how do my experiences as a Queer and Asian person inform my work as an early career music therapist? Consequently, I chose to focus on the first subsidiary question: what are the defining themes of my intersecting Queer and Asian identities?, and to explore relevant themes without comparing them to my emerging music therapist identity.

To say that the research process was daunting is an enormous understatement. It took months of saying “okay, I’ll start now”, to summon the mental and emotional capacity to finally engage in the research process. Choosing to put myself on the metaphoric examining table, and to open myself up to such in-depth self-scrutiny, was difficult and vulnerable. When I finally felt ready to begin the immersion phase of this study, I had just achieved certification as a music therapist and started to take on contract work. Although later than anticipated, beginning my research at this time was interesting because I was also officially beginning my work as a certified music therapist (MTA) and was working, in real time, to understand my early career professional music therapist identity. This timing was significant for two reasons. I realized that I was finally qualified as a music therapist; and I could, therefore, draw connections from this research to my work in the real world rather than inferring how this may influence my work theoretically.

I engaged in songwriting and journaling processes for two hours every day for 28 days. This intensive 28 day process generated data that was analyzed, and the analysis produced three main categories with three to four themes each. While I had my research questions to guide me in this process, I allowed these categories and themes to emerge naturally, without specifically focusing on whether or not they constituted a specific theme of my identities. The themes that emerged were reflected upon retrospectively in relation to the revised research question.

**Table 1***Overview of Categories and Themes*

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## Category 1: Feelings Associated with Self &amp; Identity Exploration

Theme 1a: Frozen In My Tracks

Theme 1b: Seeing Red

Theme 1c: Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone

Theme 1d: Bursting with Joy

## Category 2: Challenging Life Experiences

Theme 2a: Cultural Influence on Self

Theme 2b: Proving My Worth for Self-Protection

Theme 2c: Culture Clashes

## Category 3: Generating Momentum

Theme 3a: Hope for the Future

Theme 3b: Perseverance &amp; Willingness to Try

Theme 3c: Fueled By Positivity

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**Category 1: Feelings Associated with Self & Identity Exploration**

The first important thematic category that arose during this process was feelings associated with self and identity exploration. My identity, lived experiences, and feelings are inseparable. The emotions were both generated by and highlighted as a result of this process of self-examination. There were moments where I felt stagnant and debilitated that caused me to struggle, emotionally, to continue. It happened in response to fears of speaking out, being rejected by people in my life, my unknown emergent self, and losing the capacity to engage in introspection. Anger revealed itself frequently in surges. I had visceral reactions and felt the most expressive in my writing; feelings that stemmed from frustration and sadness. While I felt a deep sense of discomfort and uncertainty throughout, I chose to continue to engage in the process because this project was an opportunity for me to be actively engaged knowing that I can contribute meaningfully to the profession. As a result, joy that was experienced highlighted the importance for me to embrace and showcase these moments. While there may have been difficult feelings associated with this process, the positive ones were signs of growth that motivated me to finish.



### ***Theme 1a: Frozen In My Tracks***

As a POC, it can be hard to take action related to activism and advocacy when it feels as though it could jeopardize your future, compromise your safety, or strip you of a voice altogether. This was one of the most common and powerful feelings I experienced throughout the research process. What I have come to realize is that there are numerous, unexpected roadblocks that can arise throughout the self-exploration process, and they were necessary and even beneficial challenges.

Analysis of the data revealed several key reasons for my acknowledged feelings of stagnancy. My Asian upbringing taught me to value social harmony and to not challenge the status quo; a reality that I am learning makes it difficult to want to scrutinize the exclusion and marginalization that I, and others like me, have experienced. It feels impossible to take the first step; there is so much that needs to be addressed in both my personal surroundings and in the music therapy profession. For instance, the treatment of QPOC by dominant social groups or the lack of understanding regarding the intersections of identity that extends further than two social locators and/or systems of oppression (Imeri & Jones, 2022) is under-examined in music therapy literature. At times, I was overwhelmed, yet I continued with the research process; a process that left me drained yet convinced of its importance. It has helped deepen my understanding of my work with clients and other professionals; something I ultimately hoped to achieve by exploring identity.

This is, importantly, the first time I have expressed perspectives outwardly that I anticipate will make many people in my life uncomfortable, upset, or lead them to distance themselves from me. Although I felt passionate about this project, my anxiety about the responses of others led me to construct multiple reasons to stall. As I wrote in my journal, *“I’m scared that I’m going to run out of things to say... maybe I’ll chicken out from speaking my truth”*. Where do I begin and what do I say?

Engaging in this process was an incredible risk because my beliefs and who I am are not acceptable to so many in my life. It felt risky because I do speak out about the dominance of white perspectives and social injustice within my professional community. The data revealed the extent to which I feel intense inner conflict and fear about speaking out in professional contexts because *“even though I pride myself on not needing anybody*

*I'm still scared of severe rejection to the point of being ostracized*". My interactions often feel difficult because I have concerns that my career success is dependent on having good, and perhaps non-disruptive, relationships with them. Consequently, I realize that this discomfort comes from a tendency to take on their feelings of guilt and/or discomfort. It has led me to resist speaking out in certain instances because I do not want to be seen as an *angry person*. I am one who is angered by injustice; a difference I am learning to embrace in order to more fully embrace an activist professional identity. It is tricky to maneuver and place yourself within a white dominant field while imagining and being hopeful for what this field can become.

Interestingly, I experienced stagnancy due to the sudden realization that my complicated, sometimes confrontational, thoughts were to be shared publically. Hesitancy ensued despite feeling proud of my willingness to share my experiences for greater learning. I was reminded of moments where sharing how I felt caused tension in various personal and professional relationships, and this held me back from engaging fully. There is this looming "*fear of... being enough and seen the same... outing myself to the wrong people and things never [changing] ... losing all the things I've worked hard for... destroying myself in the process or choosing to abandon everything to be safe... my voice [being] irrelevant and meaningless to the grand scheme of things for the profession*". I am constantly engaging in an internal debate on how to move forward.

Stagnancy also manifested as fatigue, which is related to the constant work of advocacy and of surfacing and resurfacing past trauma. The feeling of slowing down caused frustration because self-exploration is such a demanding process. I acknowledge in my journal that "*I just want to exist and want to create change but this is incredibly draining in every way possible*". I was exhausted trying to suppress socially unacceptable thoughts and feelings. I kept telling myself to persevere through the trauma I was dredging up while navigating feelings of despair. I was becoming easily fatigued due to the overwhelming volume of emotions I, prior to now, had never acknowledged in such depth. More importantly however, this feeling of stagnancy was intermittent; there were important breaks that made space for the work.

Stagnancy, I learned, comes and goes. While I experienced joy, and progress was being made, I periodically return to the feelings of dread and doubt. The feelings of

doubt, I believe, come from the fact that I have only been truly, outwardly vocal about these important issues for the past few years. It is daunting, after all, to try to add to a body of literature produced by researchers who have had substantially more experience than I. Despite these experiences of discomfort, I recognize that feeling stuck is momentary. They are moments of pause, moments to gather myself and move forward.

### ***Theme 1b: Seeing Red***

Anger was a common feeling. As someone who experiences marginalization because of their racial and gender identities, the experience of feeling angry is deeply connected to how I have been engaging with the world in recent years. Anger has unearthed two conflicting but interesting realizations: it is both a springboard that is helpful and a ruthless cycle that is unrelenting. Feeling an intense emotion actually generates forward momentum. It energizes and prompts me to speak out, but it also exacerbates the intensity of anger in ways that are less helpful. For this reason, I have significant built up resentment towards the world and it leads me to revisit every moment of experienced helplessness and experienced or witnessed injustice.

There is anger directed towards myself through many internalized self-deprecating thoughts about who I am and thoughts about the feelings that arise. I battle with myself a lot and *“I always feel angry that I am outspoken but yet there are so many times where I feel the repercussions/backlash from people who don’t have a say or even fucking matter or when I feel like I am obliged to say something yet I feel like I can’t”*. Although this frustration often stems from how others interact with me, I direct the anger inward and blame the interpersonal strain on my inability, or perceived inability, to speak out effectively. These moments of disappointment and frustration contribute to my anger. While it allows me to generate the words to express how I am feeling, it is also like a ruthless cycle that I am trying to prevent and to channel the anger productively.

The songwriting process revealed anger that seems to be associated with my reluctance to come out to my family and community. My Asian upbringing has led me to internalize and become hyper-aware of the homophobic/transphobic perspectives of my family and community; prejudice that manifests in deprecating comments and resistant body language. I feel like being myself in the Asian community is not an option as I am expected to present as a straight girl who is demure and who listens unconditionally. My

feelings of anger are directed towards the ways these bigoted perspectives or prejudices are passed down through generations. I know that *“I’m not happy living a false narrative yet at the same time I don’t want my family to be disappointed in me because I’m diverging from what’s the acceptable norm”*. The pent up anger was highlighted as I felt held back in my songwriting process; feeling the need to prove my worth and resisting the temptation to conform within the music.

The research process also made visible the anger that often manifested as deep resentment toward the ongoing dismissal of my experiences of racism in clinical and educational contexts. My voice, perspectives, and experiences are so often diminished and explained away by my white colleagues who seem to mean well but fail to grasp the depth of harm. In school, we learn about the importance of recognizing and elevating minoritized voices; we are even encouraged to share our own experiences with marginality. Yet, the space that is supposedly safe rarely feels safe.

In my experience, people from their privileged positions often deal with the perspectives that I offer by trying to relate their lived experience to mine in ways that work to devalue my perspectives and elevate theirs. I am reminded of my frustration with cis white people not knowing when to just listen and *“I’m upset that I don’t feel like I can stand up for myself when it matters the most”* because I am afraid of their response and, consequently, I am mad at myself for it. While there are efforts to include diverse voices, my lived experiences reveal that there is still such discomfort regarding the things that those voices have to say. I fought so hard to get to where I am, to have a voice, yet it feels like my voice does not matter unless it is backed up by another white person’s voice or expertise. I should not care, but I am afraid that speaking out might derail the relationships I have established with people or damage opportunities that I have gained. I am upset that if I am too timid to stand up for myself then I would be too timid to stand up for the community.

This all contributes to the cycle of anger and also to my experience of feeling perpetually silenced and of deciding to stay silent. Anger, in the end, is double edged. It motivates me but also exhausts me to feel it constantly. Both of these consequences have allowed me to see how my perspectives have been largely dismissed and how I resent living with these marginalizing experiences. I recognize that I am angry and frustrated

however, I think that these *red* feelings motivate me. I accept it and I try to channel it the best that I can to push me towards generating the necessary change and growth.

### ***Theme 1c: Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone***

As a classically trained musician, improvisation was an opportunity for me to generate momentum and engage with the kind of vulnerability that revealed essential, unbiased, organic self knowledge about how I engage with and resist dominant expectations. Centering discomfort by improvising on the keyboard, an instrument I am less comfortable on, allowed for more introspective opportunities and to express myself honestly without feeling constrained or spoken over by dominant others. This choice had been influenced by my tendency to hesitate and I wanted to start actively choosing the more difficult but beneficial option which was to speak my mind. *“I feel proud that I have made it this far and that I have a voice that I’m choosing to use [because] there are many instances in my life where I choose not to”*. I do not actively avoid improvisation; rather, I use it quite often for myself and in sessions. It enables me to be vulnerable without feeling forced or selective about what I share.

The process of brainstorming seemingly sporadic random words also offered opportunities to think and feel freely and to address uncomfortable emotions like shame. Shame was highlighted through abundant reminders of how I was the odd one out. To my knowledge, I am the only Queer, the only musician and therapist, the only defiant *woman* in my family. In my journal I write: *“I fit in one way and then there’s this other part of me that is just left field and sometimes feels ‘unacceptable’ by other’s standards”*. Engaging with this brainstorming process revealed my new comfort level with being uncomfortable. I sit with discomfort knowing that I will not fit in any group perfectly and knowing that the comfort of cis white people is always prioritized.

I live my life in diverse cultural and professional contexts that have differing expectations to which I have always conformed. Now, as a result of stepping into discomfort, I have begun to intentionally integrate those aspects of myself, possibly as a form of resistance. Bringing my separate lives together in songwriting gave me a better understanding of myself and also provided a greater opportunity to enhance the way I articulate my thoughts. Interestingly, singing in both of my first languages, Hakka and English, made me surprisingly uncomfortable as *“... I never sung in English and Hakka*

*together/alternatingly before which was a very weird feeling. It's like mixing two worlds that have only ever walked past each other and observed each other from afar".* This was particularly meaningful as I freely used unique aspects and phrases from my mother tongue to enhance my own expression. This was the first time I felt like my identities actually interconnected and existed at the same time, making me feel whole.

Part of this songwriting process revealed just how important it was for me to include my language. It is easy to share my thoughts in English but to share those same sentiments in Hakka (or any other Chinese dialect) was daunting. The introduction and inclusion of my language offered me an opportunity to start sharing my thoughts to a wider audience and to be able to articulate myself to a group of people who were and are a big part of my life. I realized how necessary it was for me to be able to have the same level of comfort communicating with my own people the way that I communicate with the white majority. *"This was a very special moment for me because I've never written music that had my mother tongue as a main part of the music... just happened so organically"* and it was transformative. Being able to communicate in my language allowed me to better explain and showcase the ways that I grew up. I felt that if I did not speak to this part of my identity I would be, or feel, incomplete. I grew up only speaking Hakka at home and I only included more English when I got older. For me, my language is such an integral part of who I am. I am so proud to be part of a smaller community that is largely unknown to most people I interact with.

### ***Theme 1d: Bursting with Joy***

This research process allowed me to deeply experience joy, even as I was experiencing the more complex emotions related to anger, resentment, and uncertainty. It was surprising and gratifying to embrace the feeling of joy because it produced many important moments of reflection. It was especially important, personally, to recognize and highlight the moments of joy that I experienced because I know that I fall into the cyclical trap of highlighting all the negative things when resurfacing traumatic or difficult moments. I grew up putting pressure on and blaming myself for many things; so, highlighting the brief moments of joy revealed that I had the capacity to experience positive emotions. I acknowledge this in my journal by saying *"I'm not one to ever compliment myself for anything so I'm trying to hold onto these happy feelings"*. From

past experience, I know that these happy moments are fleeting; so, to hold onto them for any amount of time was an incredible source of strength. Many of my happy thoughts came from feeling like I did something meaningful, reaching goals, and feeling like I said exactly what I am trying to express.

Overcoming internal challenges in this research process generated a feeling of hope that it is possible to thrive while feeling bogged down. While those negative thoughts and feelings creep up, I was still able to access feelings of hope that although “*I don’t feel fully complete in what I’m meant to do but I’m definitely going somewhere and it feels right even though I’m not sure where I’m going*”. In giving myself permission to look for and acknowledge the positive things that came from past experiences and from this self-exploration process, I could experience hope that one day someone might read this and feel the emotions they need to feel.

## **Category 2: Challenging Life Experiences**

The second important thematic category relates to the impactful intersecting experiences I have had as a Queer Asian. It was important to examine these relationships because they are inseparable from each other. Cultural influences have complicated the relationship I have with myself which stems from challenging experiences within home and in society. As a result, I strive for perfection to ensure the safety of my core identities, and this seeped into my songwriting process. Balancing the often conflicting values of my western and eastern upbringing was a challenge that was deeply felt throughout.

### ***Theme 2a: Cultural Influence on Self***

Analysis of the data revealed how the complex intersections described above have generated a difficult relationship with self and frequent negative self-talk. The self-talk that emerged through the research process produced important discoveries about me and how my family had impacted the way that I see myself.

This process illuminated the extent to which I grew up with an overwhelming sense of culturally driven self pressure that still persists today. Growing up an only child in a poor family, within a society where individuals try to prove that they are better than each other consistently, made it hard to even have a spot at the table. Sometimes family members resort to unhealthy ways to try and push you. As a result, I have learned to be

proud but humble while thinking that I could always be better. Trying to fit in to survive generated the feeling that everything must go a certain way. *“It’s almost like I’m scared that if I don’t do these things perfectly I won’t be able to achieve anything. I won’t be able to help people. While I did grow up with this type of pressure, I know right now it’s self-imposed”*.

Over time, these cultural pressures led me to develop a difficult relationship with myself. The research process showed me how I struggle to accept who and where I am as I explored my emerging and intersecting identities. The self-imposed pressure I had while composing and recording highlighted my own feelings of inadequacy and the belief that if I am not perfect then this research will not be meaningful. Over the years I have learned coping strategies that often do not serve to necessarily uplift myself. *“... I find it difficult to think about my strengths because I am so hard on myself and often quite self-deprecating. I’m not used to talking about, let alone, acknowledge that I do have strengths”*. It is a constant battle between self-compassion and self-motivation that stemmed from unhealthy habits - I feel uncomfortable believing that I am enough and reminding myself of my achievements.

The research process revealed how my Asian upbringing has dominated my thinking regarding different topics. This influenced the way that I present myself and the way that I engage with others and with cultural values/norms that involve pleasing everyone. My given name, 捐 (pronounced: *gan* in Hakka), means to be giving/generous and I think my entire life has literally been me giving everything I am to everyone. In Chinese culture you are taught to listen to your elders, especially within your family. It is an unquestioned obligation. The need for saving your family’s face (i.e., their reputation, honour) trumps everything. It is very much a collectivist society where you put your family first and it feels like you, as a sole entity, cannot exist. In the songs I wrote for this research, a lot of the phrases that I heard growing up refer to conforming to the norm and the ways that a typical *girl* should behave. *“With my family I’m just ah gan, your stereotypical straight Asian girl, with higher education, maintaining cultural values to save both your own and your family’s face”*. When you have been relentlessly conditioned, it is arduous to break away from pleasing everybody.



Despite growing up in a collectivist society, it feels like it is not true collectivity because the acceptance by the group is conditional. Collectivity, in this sense, is about protecting the integrity of those often oppressive norms while developing individually in ways that demonstrate superiority. There is tension that results from wanting to be part of a cutthroat collectivist society while also navigating expectations to excel and uphold cultural norms. I have been so accustomed to living this way that it has influenced how I interact with other groups outside of my family and culture. I always felt like I had to be the best, respectfully. And when you come from very little within such a do-it-yourself culture you begin to internalize the idea that *“there are very few in the world who would genuinely help you so you always relied on yourself to get back up”*. There is such a constant pull from both collectivism and individualism, that I find myself not fitting anywhere.

***Theme 2b: Proving My Worth for Self-Protection***

The songwriting and journaling process highlighted the extent to which success was defined by others and the ways in which this definition continues to supersede my own conflicting thoughts regarding success. Cultural expectations are powerful, and I have been left trying to redefine success. Although I disagree with their definition being the quintessential goal in life, I still strive to achieve most of the cultural milestones. It is difficult to stray away from deeply engrained cultural values as familiarity and positive acknowledgement from family and community offer security for my position in these social groups. My need for social cohesion through adherence to cultural expectations is reflected in my lyrics when I said *“Living my life so differently, they worry, lose sleep. Chasing a lifestyle they just don’t understand. Gotta prove it to myself and to them that’s the plan”*.

Journaling has also revealed the extent to which I function out of fear and the ways I protect myself from becoming ostracized. Redefining success can be threatening. While success for me may be connected to being who I am, a genderfluid music therapist, I still have to work ten times harder than desirable to prove my worth according to cultural norms. Stemming from concerns with having a *difficult life*, my family’s overbearing involvement has only driven me further into the closet. Pursuing my career and embracing my Queerness, both of which my family disapprove and has been a source

of tension, I risk losing familial support. I sacrifice a lot of my mental health to paradoxically be myself and live up to imposed standards. Past experiences have demonstrated the lack of understanding and bigoted views of Queer folx within my immediate social groups. Queer representation in the media was minimal and often degrading and *“for me being Queer means to steer away from the norm... navigating and coming to terms with my sexual orientation and my feelings regarding my gender”*. Reflecting retrospectively, even if I achieved their definition of success I could never feel safe to express that core side of myself.

For the majority of my life I have focused on my work. I did not balance work with identity and what that brings. The rationale was that if I could be the best then I would have a form of protection. I would be meaningful enough to be excused for being *Queer* or being *a woman* or being the only POC in someone’s life. It was always my mission *“to prove that I am worth it, that I am valid, that everything I have experienced up until now and will continue to experience is what I can bring to my work”*. This need to be the best was a form of compensation, overachieving in valued areas in order to encourage acceptance of devalued areas.

### ***Theme 2c: Culture Clashes***

I have long been caught in the clash that is produced by being of East Indian heritage, raised according to Chinese cultural values, and living in a western context. I have experienced, as a result, feelings of fraud that are linked to my desire to embrace Indian culture while knowing little about it. This is exacerbated by the dominance of Chinese cultural values in my family context and the clashes with western values that arise as I navigate life outside the confines of my home and family. I am a first generation Indian Chinese Canadian from a mixed background where half my family is from Kolkata, India and the other half of my family is from Meixian, China. In my brainstorming, one of the things that popped into my mind was being told *“you’re not a [Chinese person], you are a Westerner. You’re not Indian, you don’t speak or look brown enough. Only [an Indian girl] when you want me to feel ashamed”*. Despite not having a strong understanding of what it means to be Indian, I still have a strong emotional connection to each of my core identities. This self-exploration process illuminated the

complexity of exploring lesser engrained cultures and the ways exploring your major identities can cause some uncertainty and doubt.

Self-introspection has also allowed me to be more cognizant of the ways my cultures interact and how the often conflicting values made navigating educational and professional systems difficult. Growing up with multiple cultural influences generates tensions that are difficult to navigate and people, with their limited understanding of my culture, often verbalize their assumptions about me. Around white people I unequivocally tone down my *Asianness* to ensure acceptance by code switching. *“Be less Asian to be accepted among the white people. Be less ‘white’ to be accepted in the Asian community”*. This revealed how differently I communicate as a result of my Asian upbringing; being very direct and matter of fact but respectful. My experience of talking to white people that way is always taken very personally, so I resort to speaking in ways that protect their white fragility to exude the Chinese virtue of maintaining harmony.

Western culture preaches individuality. Eastern culture made me hard headed and stoic, and growing up here in Canada made me an emotional being. I was taught to be harmonious with everyone which meant that I needed to talk less and listen more. Yet, growing up in the Western world encouraged me to speak up, but doing so seems to upset people. It is a constant tug from both sides and I want to adhere to what I can *“but the morals and values of both seem to contradict each other and feels almost impossible to coexist peacefully”*.

### **Category 3: Generating Momentum**

The third important element that arose during this process was generating and experiencing momentum in the midst of unearthing and revisiting difficult moments. Although this passion project felt largely fueled by negative emotions, it feels important to share positive experiences that surfaced sporadically throughout. These positive feelings were the reasons I felt driven, and they ultimately helped me move past feelings of stagnancy.

#### ***Theme 3a: Hope for the Future***

I learned through this process that engaging in self-exploration and dissemination are powerful motivators. The depth of self-exploration often resulted in frequent feelings of stagnancy and burnout so, it was essential for me to revisit my *why* frequently. Driven

by the fear of doing something that compromises safety, it was important for me to find and mobilize my inner strength; to show up and speak up for other QPOCs. I still experience a sense of guilt when I critique my cultural, professional, and social groups because I value what they offer in so many ways. I am learning, albeit gradually, how valuing and providing what I hope is constructive critique can and must coexist. Throughout the process of writing and songwriting, *“I felt like I had a purpose, that even though I may feel a bit unsafe... that it would be worth it for someone else to feel like they could relate and that there is more in life that we can achieve”*. There could be a lot to gain from engaging in such vulnerability, self-exploration, and self expression on your own terms.

I also learned that change is ongoing, and this discovery kept me moving forward in important ways. I accept that this is not going to be a onetime process or a change that will happen overnight. There is so much societal and systemic change I want to see happen, but I know I will be better equipped to support that change if I do the necessary personal work. The acceptance that there is no rush helped me refocus. Sometimes realizations appear when you least expect them; time can offer opportunities for deeper understanding of the intricacies of how our identities interact in varying contexts and how that information can be used to help others. While I may have the drive needed to engage in activism, I acknowledge that I am still figuring myself out and that is okay. I wrote in my journal something that really resonated and that came up a few times: *“... I still feel like there’s still lots of time for me to pave the way for other outsiders like me and no matter how many times I get turned away I’ll just try again”*. My acceptance that this is an ongoing process helps to regulate the intense feelings of anger and resentment.

This research process and the data that emerged out of the research process also revealed that I can have hope and still embrace what uncertainty has to offer. A recurring theme, it was important for me to acknowledge and accept the unknown future; sitting in uncertainty opens space for possibility. For a long time, I focused heavily on my future. Growing up in both western and eastern cultures that expect planning ahead, we are forced to make big decisions *on time* otherwise we may become shunned or given alternatives. This research has offered me the opportunity to recognize and start to trust the process and to trust that what I am doing is meaningful and useful. I kept telling

myself “*it’s okay that I’m here, I’ll be where I need to be*”. While the process may feel gruelingly slow it does not mean change is not coming. The energy I spend worrying could be better spent working on myself.

### ***Theme 3b: Perseverance & Willingness to Try***

Many opportunities arose during this self-exploration process that allowed me to view aspects of myself and my upbringing in a different way as an opportunity for growth, not just memories to be resented. It takes immense courage and determination to continue when I simply want to stop. There is a lot of self-imposed pressure to change or lessen the severity of habits like coping mechanisms. Although we may subconsciously know and dislike some of our unhealthy or self-defensive traits, it is an interesting and evocative experience to concretely and intentionally identify those traits. Despite how challenging it was to explore my own experiences at this level, I was ultimately amazed at my willingness to try in the end. My upbringing helped in this instance; many Asian folk are stubborn and often persevere in the face of adversity and quitting was not an option. I saw my stubbornness as a positive trait that kept me driven and “*when I put my mind to something, I’m always determined to see it through to the end*”.

My songwriting process of brainstorming and improvisation organically revealed deeply personal histories but the courage to continue was a testament to the resilience and determination that I experience when it comes to working on passion projects. Acknowledging the willingness to try is significant. The action of being willing or being open was necessary in my process as it not only was a positive trait that I saw in myself but also a big step from being stuck. At some point you just have to dive in. In my journal I write: “*these imperfections make me human. And I know I won’t be able to accept it fully in the near future but at least I can try*” and that is all that I can ask of me. I learned to embrace two interconnected aspects of myself – my capacity for persistence and my growing understanding of the value of simply trying. When coupled, you often move forward in unexpected ways.

### ***Theme 3c: Fueled By Positivity***

This process showed me that I had the capacity to be fueled by positivity, not simply by anger. The reaffirming statements of others became core aspects of this new found ability. When I was being self-critical, I returned to affirming statements that

others have made about who I am for grounding. The awareness of my own self-destructive behaviour that arose was mitigated by turning to those who can offer the support I need. As I reflect on this experience, I realize that although this is a lonely process, I can still draw on the support of others which allows me to embrace aspects of myself that are difficult to view as positive. For instance, *“one thing that kept popping up in my head was when my professors kept telling me my vulnerability was a major strength of mine. It really stuck with me and I think I’m going to run with that”*. Feeling affirmed is a powerful feeling.

Positivity was connected to the growing belief in the value of this work for others. Revisiting my *why* for this project rekindled my excitement for the implications that this research can have for the future. When I thought about the potential impact of my research I felt a wave of positive emotions, primarily excitement. After all, I was disappointed by the lack of representation for POCs let alone QPOC’s in literature. The dominant cultures that I exist within do not offer many opportunities for people who experience multiple marginalizations to share their experiences and speak up for injustices. I realized that *“when I’m vulnerable I show people that I’m safe to ‘come out’ to... I show that I am human and that it’s okay to feel not quite okay... shows that I care. A lot.”* Knowing that my experiences can potentially empower others was a substantial motivator in completing this project.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

### The Creation of a Transformative Space

This research enabled unanticipated personal and intellectual growth. I was able to engage with and analyze those aspects of my being that sit in tension with one another which allowed me to develop a sense of momentum and an appreciation for what can come from ambiguity. I was also able to develop and assert my authentic voice which allowed me to explore advocacy strategies that were honest but regulated. Finally, I was able to develop a deep sense of and capacity to integrate aspects of my being that I previously worked to suppress, and all of this has emerged in my creative synthesis.

### Creative Synthesis

During the final stage of this heuristic self-inquiry, I utilized visual art to synthesize and share my experience through this entire research process. Here, I will share my thoughts regarding my creative synthesis, reflect on what this research means for me as an early career music therapist, and highlight limitations and implications of this study.

Remnants of my uncertainty and indecision prevailed for much of this process. I debated on the *best* way to go about synthesizing my experience and I noticed myself coming back to an image that had randomly popped into my head after a nap. I visualized bubbles on a black background and each bubble had its own story. To bring this to fruition, I used Avenir Scratch Notes because it was a scratch pad that, underneath, revealed an array of colours. It was a good metaphor for my self-exploration journey – never knowing what would be revealed and embracing imperfections. Similar to revealing a beautiful array of colours, scratching the surface of who I am generated insights that offered me a more colourful way of being and way to experience life.

**Figure 1**

*My Colourful Journey*



*Note.* Visual art piece from the creative synthesis.

Figure 1 shows six black panels that have rainbow coloured images. The first image (top left) is a person looking at a cracked mirror. The person's body is a brick wall with a small flame in the center. Their head is filled with random squiggles. The second image (top center) is a person sitting in a fetal position inside a bubble. The third image (top right) is a person's head with a wilted plant growing from their head. The plant is wilting leaves that are falling to the head and at the base of the plant it is sprouting new plants. The fourth image (bottom left) is a wounded person with scars and lacerations walking away down a path. The fifth image (bottom center) is a person who is bursting. From the head they are shooting out beams of light that are in the shape of triangles going towards bubbles. The body is turning into mist. The sixth image (bottom right) is a person who has a speaker in the middle of the body. Their head is a microphone and it is attached to the speaker. The person is vibrating.



I started the creative synthesis by sitting down with one scratch pad waiting for inspiration to strike. I had no plans for these panels but they happily ended up becoming reflections of the six phases that I had experienced. My favourite thing about using different frames/panels was that they could be rearranged. The story is not linear and neither is this journey. While this may reflect my current experience of engaging in this type of introspection, this may change and look different each time. I created these small artworks with hope that they might feel relevant to others. The solid, thicker coloured parts represent the more positive experiences such as joy or hope. It was important that there was a stark contrast between the darkness and the colour. It depicts the intensity of each emotion that I experienced.

The silhouette of a person was the starting point that represented the very personal nature of this research. I came into this process a broken person; all I ever saw was darkness that came from the traumatic experiences I had lived. Yet, through the darkness and the walls lay the more hopeful moments and aspects of myself that were not so dark. The broken parts of the mirror and the flame are in a solid colour. These solid parts were reflective of me and my passion wanting to break through and coming through as a result of breaking me open.

In the second frame the person is crouched in a fetal position within a bubble. Coincidentally it felt like this was the second phase for me (the incubation phase). This person's outline is in colour but the body, with the exception of the arms, is completely black depicting emptiness. I had revealed so much about myself and experienced such introspection-related fatigue that I was sick of it. I did not want to think about myself anymore. I was incubating in the bubble, but I was also retreating and feeling protected. The bubble was a good representation because it was protecting me but enabling me to emerge when ready. The only solid colours in this frame were in the arms to symbolize the passion and power I still held. Whenever I felt ready, I could break free.

I then moved onto the third frame which showed a head that sprouted a wilted plant. Plants are so often associated with positive growth, but a wilted plant symbolizes how difficult growth was in the process. The wilted plant growing from the head was also dropping leaves that hit the *ground*. At the bottom of the plant you could see small little plants subtly sprouting. The small plant buds and falling leaf bits were the only things

that were solidly in colour. They represented the pain, the frustrations, the emotional rollercoaster that was shed and these acted as seeds for new opportunities, for new perspectives, and for replenished hope. You could always save a wilting plant but it takes lots of patience, love, and care. Growth is also not obvious. It comes at different times, blossoms at different rates, and you never really quite know what will come of it.

In the fourth panel, the person is facing away revealing scars and lacerations that are solid in colour. The colours emitted from the physical afflictions depict hope in the face of pain. The trauma stays, but it is also a reminder of why I pursued this type of research. It resurfaced a lot of repressed emotions and memories that ultimately helped me to begin sharing perspectives that make me vulnerable. This person continues to walk down this colourful, albeit, unknown path.

Depicting the contrasting positive, joyful moments, a more abstract version of a human silhouette appeared. The head is now a thicker band of colour while the body is disappearing with the mist effect. When I think of joy, I think of the sun and the beams that radiate the energy that reaches vast distances. Drawing a connection back to the second frame of being stuck or hiding within a bubble, these beams of light are headed straight for these dark circles with the intention of bursting them. During the times where I felt a deep sense of happiness, it was very much a mental moment, an out-of-body experience. Part of this represented the explication phase where I felt like I had a sense of clarity and that I finally had answers.

A sixth image was used to depict the present, a more confident and better advocate. The image of a speaker in the center of the body represented speaking from the heart. Naturally, I connected the speaker to the microphone head which had more solid colours and a thick solid band in the middle. When I look at this I see someone who is more secure and comfortable in general. Resulting in a state of calmness, I developed more ways to express my thoughts. The vibration lines outside of the person represented the ways in which I am communicating with others and still feeling like I resonate with everything that I advocate for. I am able to hear and feel myself.

Looking at these drawings all together makes me feel accomplished. I was able to relinquish absolute control and just let things come to me without over thinking. I drew

what came to mind or what felt right and what came out was better than I could have imagined.

## **Personal and Professional Implications**

### ***Safe Use of Self***

This research process highlighted just how important it was for me to develop a better understanding of why I react the way that I do. I feel more equipped to address feelings that arise through knowing what my own boundaries are, thorough understanding of what is triggering for me, and especially, being able to use my own experiences to inform how I interact with others in an effective and safe manner. It offered me moments to practice self-regulation and self-compassion while discussing difficult topics. The songwriting process provided a contained space to work through traumatic events safely – I could stop at any time and continue when I felt ready.

### ***Dissemination of Knowledge & Representation***

One of the reasons I was so keen to engage in this type of intense and personally challenging research process was largely driven by my understanding of how invisible QPOCs can be. Speaking to my own experience growing up Asian and Queer, it is taboo to be Queer and often frowned upon. Adding on my unconventional career makes it even more complicated. Many QPOCs are rightfully scared to out themselves but this necessary dialogue and lived knowledge needs to be included in a predominantly cis, white, heterosexual field. This information allows us to be better equipped to support clients who also identify similarly.

Additionally, this contribution to the field of music therapy offers perspectives from a (mostly) openly Queer Asian that perhaps other closeted Queers can relate to and feel seen. This may encourage or empower other music therapists who identify similarly to share their stories or perhaps even find the words to explicate the way they function as a result of lived marginality or the feelings that arise when discussing taboo subjects. They now have another resource to draw upon during the formation of their own professional identities and practice.

### ***Advocacy and Meaningful Allyship***

It is important to advocate for minoritized clients and for minoritized therapists as well. Part of the advocacy work is to increase awareness and understanding of how lived

experiences of marginalization shape the interactions we have with those who are part of the dominant groups. One of the more important insights I gained was the opportunity to develop my personal and professional voice; finding the words and being able to communicate effectively.

There has been some movement within the profession to embrace and advance Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) (see for example, Baines, 2013, 2021). There have also been important attempts to share stories of marginalization in the field of music therapy (see Hadley, 2013). As a result, an increasing number of music therapists are taking important first steps to demonstrate meaningful allyship. But, genuine allyship means moving aside and making space for, not speaking over and for, those who continue to be and feel silenced. It is important to carefully consider how to authentically practice in anti-oppressive ways. Anti-oppressive practice can too easily become an identity to claim while not doing the work of social justice. There is a difference between amplifying minoritized voices and perspectives and co-opting them.

As researchers, we often tell other people's stories. So, it is important to think carefully about how to support and promote minoritized music therapists as sole authors of their own stories and work, not co-authors with dominant and powerful others in the profession. While it is important, for example, for white people to participate in dialogue that can help them understand how they contribute to the marginalizing experiences of POCs, centring white experiences in those dialogues obscures the rich accounts of POC lived experience and decentres the very individuals who many minoritized early career music therapists might look towards when developing their professional identities.

### ***Opportunities for Growth***

It is important for therapists to grow personally to better inform their professional work. Heuristic self-inquiry offered a level of introspection that challenged me to address parts of myself that I actively avoid or pass off as just another quirk. I developed a more thorough understanding of how I function and of the ways in which social locators and other factors intersect in my work. This offered me an opportunity to grow in ways that I genuinely did not expect.

### ***A Lifelong Process***

While my engagement in this research process has come to an end, I acknowledge that this is not a one-time experience. This type of intrusive research takes a long time to really feel authentic and beneficial. There is so much to uncover and while I still firmly believe in the importance of exploring multiple intersections of our identity, it is just not possible to do it in such a short period of time especially while working full-time. Perhaps something music therapists can consider is spending the time to explore one intersection at a time and comparing them over time. As demonstrated with my sudden narrowing of my research, there is a surprising amount of data that can arise. As we grow we gain new experiences, gain lots of tacit knowledge, and evolve in general. I believe that if I were to do this again in five years time I may acquire or unveil parts of me that I did not get to examine or explore newer findings.

### ***Further Training and Education***

From my own personal experience, diversity training within the field tends to be limited to one identity or social locator (e.g., race). These factors are often isolated and the training needs to include more of how these locators intersect because intersecting identities and their associated systems of oppression reveal or exacerbate different experiences and many people are not aware of the ways in which they inform each other. They also inform how we interact with others, evaluate the relationships we build with clients and colleagues, and gain insight into what we bring as therapists, personally and musically. Especially with limited knowledge available specifically within music therapy, the findings of this research can inspire other music therapists to contribute their own unique perspectives with hopes that the compiled data could be used to support the development of further diversity training. This study therefore, serves to be an example for music therapists who feel they need or want to explore their intersecting identities/experiences in authentic ways and can learn how to engage with the discomfort in constructive ways that will inform their work.

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this research process. Firstly, I was limited to a Master's thesis timeline which restricted the time allocated for each phase. Although I had the intention of looking at my emerging music therapist identity, due to volume of data, I made a choice to not examine my music therapist identity as closely because I was

more closely affected by the Queer and Asian part. Finally, I am an emerging researcher and therefore, do not have a lot of experience generating and looking at data.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I learned in important ways that all these experiences will and have contributed to my work and how I serve my clients. What is unclear is that I still do not know how this relates to my music therapist identity. Up until this point, I had only been a certified music therapist for a year and a half. It was interesting to conduct this research while practicing as an early career music therapist as it reassured me of the importance of engaging in this type of self-reflection. An unexpected realization was that it was almost impossible for me to differentiate between my personal and my professional identity because they are so closely knit. My professional practice is informed by my core identities through engaging as my true self even in practice. I had been able to use this knowledge even before writing chapter 4 and I feel better equipped to offer services to a wide clientele, many of whom are people of colour. I am hyper-aware of how others interact with me and I have been very careful not to out myself to the wrong people.

Part of this research was to push myself towards feeling comfortable being my authentic self and developing my advocate voice. It had been difficult trying to be that person since I often feel outnumbered, isolated, and misunderstood consistently. Despite this, it only makes me more informed about how I might want to conduct myself and more aware of small nuances that can make someone feel seen or heard. This research highlighted for me that I do know a lot about some very important factors that affect the various client/work relationships I have. Ultimately I feel significantly more secure and confident in who I am and genuinely believing that I have more to offer to the field. Despite having limited professional experience, early career music therapists still have relevant and important lived knowledge that they can contribute. In spite of my fears, I am excited to see other music therapists share their experiences and contribute to the missing pieces in the literature and in practice.

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## Appendix A

### Songs Listened To During Brainstorming:

- Triggered – Jhene Aiko
- Run – Joji
- Sun Come Down – Chance the Rapper
- July – Noah Cyrus
- She Don't – Ella Mai ft Ty Dolla \$ign
- Like A Girl – Lizzo
- Nobody – Mitski
- Kids – Rich Brian
- B.S. – Jhene Aiko ft H.E.R.
- Head In The Clouds – 88rising, Joji
- Passionfruit – Drake
- Loyalty – Kendrick Lamar ft Rihanna
- Soulmate – Lizzo
- Daylight – Joji, Diplo
- None of Your Concern – Jhene Aiko, Big Sean
- Curious – Rich Brian

## Appendix B1

### Composed Song Lyrics

#### *Stepping Into Fear*

*I'm feeling so scared, I'm scared but for what?  
Oh, am I enough? Will you still see me the same?  
I've lived my life to please you, tried squeezing into hearts  
Who can you trust when you've been let down too many times?*

*I'm feeling so scared, I'm scared but for what?  
To be outing myself; what if things don't ever change?  
Try to figure all these things out while navigating freight  
I'm floating somewhere between, between all that I might*

*I'm feeling so scared, I'm scared but for what?  
All the things I've worked hard for, will they crumble in the night?  
Discomfort, go against the grain, bring to light why I'm proud  
Discomfort, do I play the part? Am I living too loud?*

*I'm feeling so scared, I'm scared but for what?  
That I'll destroy myself and stay silent out of sight*

*I'm feeling so scared, my voice is so small  
But I'm yelling inside, it rings against my broken shell  
I yearn for the same love and your support when I'm "normal"  
I hate that I crave your conditional acceptance*

*I'm feeling so scared, I'm scared and so mad  
Know that I can't turn back, tears are running down my face  
This is where I need to be.*

**Appendix B2**  
Composed Song Lyrics  
*Voiced Over*

*When I speak do you hear me? Do you hear me inside?  
Sei saang di eh (Speak softer)*

*Eggshells when I talk to you  
You mo ngeen ho geh yeh? (Is there anyone there?)  
I'm not sorry it's my truth  
Nn dou mm ming paak (You don't understand)  
We fight back and share our deepest wounds, yet does it even matter?  
No, unless the white speaks*

*As I inhale my first breath you've spoken over me  
Mi bai dou oi ngaat den set ma (Always have to bite my tongue)*

*Does your voice need to be here for mine to be heard  
Yong ah ngiuk, zhun choong tai ngeen ([Hakka saying] So sensitive, respect your elders)*

*See through my eyes, you'd be me too  
Taang fa (Be obedient)  
Stay submissive and still*

*I am screaming in the abyss, your words echoing  
When I'm all that you hate  
Ah neh mm zin song (That's not normal)*

*It's me verse me and me against the world  
Sei moi eh, ahn kai (Little girl, so naughty)*

*My feeling's valid but only when you feel safe from the judgment, shame, and from your  
guilt  
Gwai di eh, wen you di gong fa, ohk ma (Be a little more well-behaved, speak more  
gently, mean girl)*

*Dear me, I will find you  
Nn chyeem meh dao ngai mo? Gen den nyeh saang yeem goh loi (Can you find me?  
Follow your voice, come here)  
Who would listen to a Queer mutt like me? My voice is so small*

*But I'll be strong for you, future of us  
We will rise up soon  
Ngai woi chyeem nn, nga saang (I will find you, my voice)*

## Appendix B3

### Composed Song Lyrics

#### *Polar*

*[Chorus]:*

*Fire me up to cool me down,  
Boil me with your hate, no way that I'm bout to drown  
Throw me away, I'll hit you on my way 'round  
Catch me on the polar side*

*Tell me you coloured without telling me, POC,  
Stoicism, yeah that -ism, feeling's make-belief, make me believe  
Growing pains, walk through flames, God forbid you got tears  
Show them you're grateful and you're happy, it cost them their years  
Ma sacrificed her life, put fire right under your ass  
Ba loved the best that he could, now he's gone, he's passed  
Smile, pay them back, bring your family pride and joy  
Be that perfect Chinese girl, don't you dare "act like a boy"*

*Just be strong, belong, live up to your name, "gan moi"  
Mold that youngin, make her do the same, "gan moi",  
Carry the weight on your shoulders  
Act hard as shit doin hard ass shit,  
Bear the burden of their trauma, relive it, it's easy, that's it*

*My family and culture, they made me strong  
They showed me many things that still go on and on, like  
[Resiliency], when you feel like ya failed  
Creativity, got nothing, feeling your ship has sailed  
[Determination], when others aim to hinder your stride  
[I can't be played], when my people hold me oh so high  
Yeah I struggled and it's part of me,  
But I value all the people who raised me,  
The world ain't simple, neither am I so*

*[Chorus]*

*Tell me you Queer without telling me, LGBT  
(Q)Cue the spectrum of colours, rep diversity  
I fly my colours with pride but I'm my family's black sheep  
Livin my life so differently, they worry, lose sleep  
Chasin a lifestyle they just don't understand,  
Gotta prove it to myself and to them, that's the plan  
They see me walk down the path of insecurity  
Existing somewhere between genders, something they don't see*

*My own journey with me, myself, and I  
Been to hell and back, gained awareness, slowly waded back to the surface  
Better believe I'll protect and fight back  
I'm emotional and stubborn, no I won't be silenced  
My emotional turbulence, it's quiet, yet violent*

*My vulnerability and journey, they gave me strength  
What I once was ashamed of, now try and embrace, it taught me  
[Independence], when you feel like there's no one to trust  
[Self-expression], live authentically, feeling passion a must  
[Assertiveness], when others try to keep you down  
I can't be played, when I hold me oh so tight  
Both have taught me to love and care deeply,  
I struggled and it's part of me,  
But I value all the lessons that shaped me,  
The world ain't simple, neither am I so*

*[Chorus]*

## Appendix B4

### Composed Song Lyrics

#### *Where Am I Going?*

*Where am I going? Disorienting  
Dysregulating try to figure out who I am  
I don't quite fit in anywhere I go,  
Not even family, society, I'm all alone  
I feel incomplete, who am I to you, who am I to me?*

*Where am I going? Ask me what I am  
I am Chinese - I'm raised and look and speak the part  
I'm also Indian but born and live in the Western world  
I love my heritage, my culture, where my family's from  
It's hard to share when people always aim to put you down*

*Where am I going? It's hard to explain  
You're not a zhong guet ngeen (Chinese person), you are a Westerner  
You're not Indian, you don't speak or look brown enough  
Only a yin tu moi (Indian girl) when you want me to feel ashamed  
"Where are you really from?", when you're born here but that's not enough*

*Where am I going? It's so conflicting  
Collectivist, give up yourself, fulfill your family's needs  
We'll tell you how to be just listen quietly  
Save your family's face, "you" don't exist but "we" sure do  
Finding myself feels like an impossible selfish dream*

*Where am I going? What can you offer me?  
Individualist, just be yourself, explore autonomy  
Just be unique but not too much  
Don't be too odd 'cause "we" exist and "you" should not  
Finding community feels like it's just not made for me*

*Where am I going? Rediscovering  
I'm bi and fluid existing somewhere in between  
I introduce myself as she and they  
People see that I'm a girl and just throw "them" away  
I'm met with phobic remarks or they fetishize that I'm "half gay"*

*Where am I going? I'm navigating  
Embrace the unknown I guess with me I fit right in  
I wanna walk for you, so that the "others" can walk too  
It's okay that I'm here, I'll be where I need to be  
Screw where you want me to go, guess I gotta go through this on my own*