A TANGO BETWEEN THEORY AND STORYTELLING: A CRITICAL
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY EXPLORING THE ROLE OF A STUDENT GROUP FOR QUEER
CREATIVE ARTS THERAPISTS IN PROMOTING INCLUSIVE TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Many graduate mental health trainees, and practicing creative arts therapists, reflect not having enough training on working with sexual and gender minorities, which suggests a gap in existing curricula. Creative arts therapies are acknowledging a cultural shift, and the possibilities of adopting social models towards culturally sensitive practice and challenging the power dynamics of societal hierarchies which influence the field and the context of training. This paper will highlight the researcher's experience co-creating a group for queer students in creative arts therapies, the motivations for creating such a group, and the contributions to learning that it offered. Through an autoethnographic approach, literature and personal narratives together offer explorations of frameworks for applying critical theory to creative arts therapy training, as well as considerations for LGBTQ clinicians and the impacts of the student group created. This group established a resource for connection and social support amongst queer students, networking and engaging in a professional community, educational and outreach activities as well as advocacy and awareness promoting greater inclusion in the field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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"Tango is the dance of the impromptu rethinking of the politics of communication. Tango is the dream of the known played out in the night of the unknown."

-    Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch*, p. 3

Introduction

Growth and change are fostered in the training to become creative art therapists, while skills for using creative expression to support growth and change for others are developed. The current classroom environment and content taught does not reflect the experiences of all students and may not be an inclusive space. Student-lead initiatives hold the potential spaces to bring students together and actively engage them around issues or experiences of common interest or concern. This paper will highlight my experience co-creating a group for queer students in creative arts therapies, the motivations for creating such a group, and the contributions to the experience of pedagogy and learning that it offered. This research explores the question: how has my role in creating an extra-curricular queer student group affected my pedagogical experience as a queer, non-binary art therapist in training?

Published research in the creative arts therapies has been complicit in replicating oppressive practices, through misgendering, erasure and pathologization, in the representation and treatment of trans and gender creative people (Zappa, 2017). The voices of trans and gender non-conforming creative arts therapists are representing a movement of change and centering voices of those from marginalized communities (Fansler, 2019; Gumble, 2019; Karcher, 2017; Talwar, Clinton, Ospina & Sit, 2019; Zappa, 2017). Writing from my experiences as a queer, non-binary student in the creative arts therapy classroom aims to add to the growing literature and attention given to working with clients from sexual and gender minorities by authors holding these identities (MacWilliam, Harris, Trottier & Long, 2019).

As with research practice, the classroom setting may be environments which do not reflect or address sexual and gender diversity. Inclusive pedagogy is essential for welcoming students holding these identities. Creative arts therapists are being trained to work with communities that are most targeted, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer folks, as well as people of colour, people with disabilities and those with mental health challenges (Gipson, 2017). In order to prepare students for this work, increased sensitivity, interventions and space for critical discussion about systems of oppression within the classroom can better equip future therapists to treat these communities with respect and dignity.

To explore inclusion for gender and sexual minority students in the creative arts therapies, an autoethnographic approach incorporates and examines personal narratives alongside

related literature. Practicing queer research and storytelling holds power to "awaken us to the existence and experiences of others—especially those others who are different from us," (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 231). While the literature in creative arts therapies regarding sexual and gender minorities mainly considers the client-therapist relationship, the importance of greater training and sensitivity in pedagogy regarding these communities will be outlined. This paper incorporates interdisciplinary theoretical research from critical theory, queer theory and mental health fields, including emerging conversations on critical pedagogy in the creative arts therapies. Highlighting how the student-lead group, Queer Creative Arts Therapists (CATs) contributed to raising awareness of gender and sexual minorities for training therapists as well as professionals, this research seeks to offer a framework for readers and future students in creative arts therapies or related fields, to create similar community support groups. By reflecting on the present limits of inclusion, hopes and intentions for how pedagogy can become more inclusive will be outlined.

Definitions

Queer, non-binary and praxis will be operationalized for the purpose of this paper.

Queer is a word that connotes 'strange' or 'peculiar' and a term that was widely used derogatorily, initially towards homosexual men. It was reclaimed among activist groups and is now more widely attributed to diverse gender and sexual minority groups. It is important to acknowledge that this term continues to hold negative connotations for some people identifying as LGBTQ2SPIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit, Pansexual, Intersex and Asexual), who continue to associate it with the harm the use of the word as a slur has caused, particularly those of an older generation (Zosky & Alberts, 2016). Members of Queer CATS chose to include queer in the name in recognition of the activist work behind its reclamation. Following the emergence of queer theory, the term queer is now also widely used in academic settings (Butler, 1990; Bornstein, 1994). The term queer can be applied to both gender and sexual identity.

Gender and sexual minorities (GSM) has also been widely used in research to describe groups outside of cisgender and heterosexual identities. In some research it is significant to separate identifiers of sexual orientation, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer (LGBQ), from identifiers

of gender identity, trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC). This distinction is important, and it has been noted that in mental health research the LGBT acronym has been utilized even when participants are mainly from sexual minorities, predominantly focusing on the experience of gay men, and lesbian women, with less bisexual representation and often few research participants representing gender minorities (Lurie, 2014; Zappa 2017). This paper focuses on a group for any students questioning or identifying as other than heterosexual and cisgender. The shortened acronym LGBTQ will be used in this text, with the understanding that greater research, knowledge and awareness must be brought to intersex, asexual and two-spirit identities, which are often left out of the scope of research and teachings regarding queer communities.

The emergence of *non-binary* as a term to describe gender identity is attributed to several theorists, and expressions of non-binary gender identities have long histories in many different global cultures (Richards et al., 2016). Non-binary is also used as an umbrella term for multiple identities outside of the gender binary of male and female. Such identities may exist on a spectrum between or holding parts of both man and woman, such as bi-gender, multi-gender and gender fluid. Some individuals do not identify with gender as a concept or identify entirely outside of the gender binary, such as agender. The term genderqueer predated non-binary and holds political meaning of disrupting and challenging the gender binary (Bornstein, 1994; Richards et al., 2016). It is important to acknowledge that the terminology continues to evolve, and that people use these same identifiers to mean different things about their own identities.

Praxis, a concept widely used in the field of education, connotes the bringing together of reflection and action. Praxis moves from theory into real-world action and is then followed by reflection. Developed from many disciplines, this research will focus on Paolo Friere's (1972) conceptualization of praxis, which holds transformative aims and capacities of praxis.

Literature Review

Training programs in the creative arts therapies have an ethical responsibility to hold sensitivity towards cultural differences and teach how biases may negatively impact their clients, colleagues and community members (American Art Therapy Association, 2013; Gipson, 2015; Sajnani, 2012; Zappa, 2017). This literature review brings together interdisciplinary research from critical theory, queer theory, counselling psychology and creative arts therapies. In setting up the discussion of my personal learning experiences in art therapy, literature around the

inclusion of content about LGBTQ identities in therapist training programs was explored. A social justice framework for art therapy has been formulated as a tool for art therapy practice and pedagogy that critically examines power relations (Gipson, 2015; Karcher, 2017). The emergence of research and public dialogue around critical pedagogy in the arts therapies draws attention to inequities and sources of oppression within systems of education, to critique and transform power imbalance (Critical Pedagogy in the Arts Therapies, n.d.). Critical pedagogy will be examined as a call for greater inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in training for creative arts therapists. Minority stress will be introduced as a model for understanding the elevated rates of mental health challenges among sexual and gender minorities, from which links can be made for potential similar impacts on students. Considerations around self-disclosure specific to LGBTQ clinicians and queer students training to be creative arts therapists will also be explored.

Critical Theory and Social Justice in Art Therapy

Publications by creative arts therapists have increasingly applied critical theory, feminist theory and queer theory to advocate for a more inclusive field in research, pedagogy and practice (Bain, Grzanka, Crowe, 2016; Hadley, 2013; Hahna, 2013; Sajnani, Marxen & Zarate, 2017; Talwar, 2010, 2015). Critical approaches to pedagogy and research in creative arts therapies involve reflection both on individual social locators, lived experiences as well as a wider socio-political context. These different lenses and the dominant narratives which are being increasingly named and contested within creative arts therapy research will be overviewed. Transformation is called for when recognizing that the structures of art therapy and art therapy education have a "White hetero-patriarchal norm at its center" (Gipson, 2015, p. 143). While holding a focus on sexual and gender minorities in this paper, it is important to consider interrelated impacts of other systems of oppression through the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality conceptualized by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) refers to a lens to understand experiences impacted simultaneously by multiple systems of oppression. Early work conceptualizing intersectionality was forwarded by activists and scholars working at the intersections of feminism and race studies, promoting the unique experiences of oppression faced by black women (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1994). Within art therapy and other mental health professions an understanding of intersectionality can promote a critical view on the concept of

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multiculturalism; in particular in the ways it has served to examine the experience of the "other" and ignore cultural specificities of privileged identities such as Whiteness (Talwar, 2010). Understanding the structures of institutions and systems which give power and privilege to certain groups and cultural identities is essential towards being able to shift power and perspectives to hold marginalized groups at the centre. Intersectionality is an important framework for research in creative arts therapies and may also contribute to understanding power dynamics in pedagogy, and the challenges of integrating diversity through the student body.

The classroom is an important arena in which to examine the interactions of forces of oppression, inequality and discrimination (Sajnani et al., 2017). Creative arts therapies classrooms are called upon to incorporate the histories and cultural viewpoints of those who have been marginalized from the institution (Gipson, 2015). Faculty can question the representation of different groups in the student body as well as in course content (Critical Pedagogy in the Arts Therapies, 2018; hooks, 1994). However, confronting one's biases and shifting authority towards valuing diverse cultural perspectives may result in discomfort, even for professors (hooks, 1994). Despite the challenges and discomfort, the efforts of such conscientiousness will result in important benefits for underrepresented groups of students who are often called upon to explain their cultures to "White, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, temporarily able art therapists" (Gipson, 2015, p. 143). This conscientiousness will shift the responsibility from marginalized students and require the educator to be responsible for teaching about diversity and inequity. Understanding the dominant narratives held in the field is necessary to unpack and redistribute power and voice towards underrepresented perspectives.

Dominant narratives hold power and can exercise social control, making it critical to become aware of and challenge how institutions, and even the framework of creative arts therapies professions, may uphold such narratives (Hadley, 2013; Sajnani et al., 2017). To shift a dominant narrative takes intentional work; however, it is possible because of the "fluid nature of narratives" (Hadley, 2013, p. 374). The dominant narratives within psychology, mental health, and the history of research have pathologized and stigmatized gender and sexual minorities, compromising inclusion within the existing systems (Bain et al., 2016; Hadley, 2013; Karcher, 2017; Lytle et al, 2014; Meyer, 2013; Zappa, 2017). In consideration of race, art therapy has held a homogenized and singular voice from White therapists and scholars. In response, calls to action to promote the recruitment and retention of students from diverse cultural backgrounds have

emerged (Awais & Yali, 2015; Gipson, 2015). Borrowing from other disciplines, strategies for diversifying a field include modeling, social support and hiring faculty who represent minority groups or engage in multicultural research (Awais & Yali, 2015; Calisch, 2003). This leads to critical reflection, such as in Sajnani's question: "how the diversity or lack thereof in our field influences and limits our perspective of the profession—what it is, what it is not, and what it might become" (Sajnani, et al., 2017, p. 31). Without critical reflexivity, seeking to include different people and bodies into settings which are built on these dominant narratives is superficial diversity (Ahmed, 2012). A social justice orientation may contribute to challenging dominant narratives in the field, and to turn a critical lens on the foundations of the creative arts therapies (Hadley, 2013; Talwar, 2015). This brings into question which voices are represented in classroom content, the student body and faculty.

Understanding systems of domination and political movements is pertinent for actively bringing questions of social justice into creative arts therapies (Gipson, 2015). At the core of a social justice framework, Talwar (2015) identifies four social movements which have greatly impacted the concepts of identity and multiculturalism in mental health, one of which is the LGBTQ rights advocacy in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. The current sociopolitical climate in the United States and North America is exacerbating harm and oppression towards marginalized groups (Gipson, 2015; Karcher, 2017). As awareness and public media attention about trans and gender diverse people are increasing, so too are impacts of transphobic legislation and ideologies, which must be followed by deep self-reflection towards offering ethical and culturally sensitive services in the creative arts therapies (Zappa, 2017). Research, pedagogy and clinical contexts in creative arts therapies can all be served by bringing greater awareness to political movements, climates, and issues.

Creative arts therapies are well situated to take on ideas from critical theory and serve marginalized communities. A social model of art therapy gives space to alternative stories which challenge dominant narratives by representing lived experiences which may hold contradictions (Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019). Empowerment and identifying strength and resilience are also integral in the model. Among LGBTQ individuals, the capacity to find social support in chosen families and sharing resources which are non-discriminatory show resilience while navigating oppression (Karcher, 2017). The potential of art, to promote healing, empower creators and contribute to resistance or revolution, uniquely positions creative arts therapists to

promote creative arts therapies as an agent for social change (Gipson, 2015; Karcher, 2017). Art therapy and creative expression have been identified as tools for externalizing internalized oppressions to promote well-being for gender diverse groups (Abdellahi, 2016). There is a forthcoming book, *Creative arts therapies and the LGBTQ community: Theory and practice* (MacWilliam et al., 2019), that will contribute to the field's approach and understanding of best practices working with the LGBTQ community.

Minority Stress Model

Considering inclusion and support for queer students in mental health professions, it is helpful to outline a framework which can be applied across clinical and pedagogical contexts. Meyer's (1995, 2013) minority stress model proposes that the stigma and prejudice experienced by LGBTQ people may account for the greater prevalence of mental health challenges amongst these communities. The stressors faced by sexual minorities may be distal, which involve those forms of discrimination which are overt and marked by objective events, or proximal describing the subject perceptions related to prejudice experienced (Meyer, 2013). Literature on minority stress also acknowledges "dual stigmatization" (Meyer, 1995, p. 52), the additional mental health stressors and impacts on double minorities, for example those who are racialized and of a sexual minority. For those who hold multiple marginalized identities, experiences of minority stress may be exacerbated (Alessi, 2014). Meyer (1993, 2013)'s research focused on sexual minority groups, however the model has been proposed as relevant to other marginalized identities and research has also applied the minority stress model in surveys of transgender people's mental health and perceived stigma (Scandurra, 2017).

Internalized homophobia is a concept written about within the minority stress model, where the impact of societal homophobic attitudes are internalized, threatening psychological well-being (Meyer, 1995). The impact of internalized homophobia on sexual minorities is suggested to have lifelong impacts (Meyer, 2013). The behaviours associated with internalized homophobia may be subtle, such as tolerating mistreatment, or overt such as conscious distress related to sexual orientation (Russell & Bohan, 2006). Russell and Bohan stress the importance of the relational nature of the distress, in situating what is called internalized homophobia "in an intersection between interiority and social and political contexts . . . we are all embedded in pervasive, socially and linguistically constructed homophobia; we are all its enactors and

recipients" (Russell & Bohan, 2006, pp. 346-350). These authors question whether the concept of internalized homophobia continues to pathologize and marginalize sexual minorities by situating the negative impacts of these societal oppressive views within individuals and not considering social, contextual and political implications of how someone relates to their own identity and experiences the external forces of homophobia (Russell & Bohan, 2006). It remains useful, however, as one model to consider how living within a cultural context that stigmatizes these identities impacts the psychological well-being of gender and sexual minorities. Including models such as minority stress in mental health training may promote greater awareness of the potential higher risk of mental health challenges with LGBTQ clients, as well as generate reflection on societal attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities in the classroom and in clinical practice.

Despite being faced with stressors from societal and cultural oppression, compounded with other social determinants of health, it is important to recognize the resiliency of sexual and gender minority groups. Along with research on the forms of stress experienced by minority groups, minority stress models identify coping mechanisms, such as the creation of strong social support systems as a promoter of mental health and mitigating factor of the impacts of minority stress (Alessi, 2014; Feinstein & Marx, 2016; Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2013; Scandurra, 2017). Experience in environments and groups where one's identity is not stigmatized contributes positively to mental health and community cohesion. Affirming one's gender or sexual minority identity can also result in experiences of freedom to not adhere to societal norms, greater capacity for insight, self-awareness and empathy (Feinstein & Marx, 2016). The impact of minority stress affects people differently and an individual's ability to access group-level resources is related to different contextual and individual factors (Meyer, 2013). While it is important to seek the stories of resilience and empowerment in the face of societal stressors, it is also essential to value the unique experiences of individuals which cannot be fully encompassed or represented by models.

Although this research will not delve into clinical approaches, several theoretical stances have been identified as helpful for addressing the impacts of minority stress. Meyer (1995) in his early research on minority stress identifies that a gay-affirmative stance has been proposed as necessary to counteract the stressful impacts of anti-gay attitudes. More recent research has proposed using positive psychology theory to frame treatment for LGBTQ clients and pedagogy

about LGBTQ identity development (Lytle et al., 2014; Meyer, 2014). Whereas the majority of LGBTQ persons presenting for mental health services interact with systems which hold a focus on disease prevention rather than health promotion, positive psychology offers a theory which highlights health outcomes such as growth and resilience (Meyer, 2014). A caution associated with the positive psychology perspective is the tendency towards focusing on individual strengths without holding an awareness of the institutional supports also required (Meyer, 2014). Positive psychology research has not widely included LGBTQ health concerns, whereas LGBTQ health has done more to incorporate positive psychology (Meyer, 2014). Mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches have also been identified as supportive in addressing the impacts of minority stress and supporting LGBTQ clients (Feinstein & Marx, 2016). An affirmative stance towards sexual and gender minorities is a psychological approach which may be applied in pedagogical as well as clinical contexts.

Experiences of LGBTQ Clients and Clinicians

It is important for research in mental health fields to consider perspectives of LGBTQ people. Identifying qualities in mental health professionals that LGBTQ clients report as useful s could be used to inform educators on areas to focus on in training. A survey of 42 LGBTQ individuals who had sought therapy identified situations, patterns and factors that were deemed "helpful" and "unhelpful" to their experience of therapy (Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes & Walther, 2008). This study revealed that many basic counselling skills, such as warmth and alliance building, are key to therapy being seen as helpful. Training therapists were more represented in unhelpful than helpful interactions (Israel et al., 2008). Specific training in working with LGBTQ clients, as well as attention to not making assumptions about sexual orientation or gender identity of all clients have been proposed as tools towards more helpful practice (Israel et al., 2008; Matthews, 2004). This points toward the need for training and cultural awareness towards LGBTQ communities for training and working therapists. Respect for client's decisions about when and to whom to come out, as well as only discussing sexual orientation and gender identity if relevant to the presenting concerns were viewed as helpful (Israel et al., 2008; Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2003). Self-disclosure, when not excessive, was seen as helpful for LGBTQ clients, and it was identified as helpful to know when a therapist identified with or was engaged in LGBTQ community (Israel et al., 2008). Therapist self-disclosure refers to a therapist revealing

something about themselves that the client would not otherwise know, and is an intervention typically used judiciously (Jeffery & Tweed, 2015).

The affirmative stance and self-disclosure of therapists could also translate to the importance of professors offering the same sharing that they expect of students in a classroom setting (hooks, 1994). Self-disclosure is a consideration which merits further discussion as it applies across clinical and pedagogical contexts. Reviewing literature related to self-disclosure interventions in practice with LGBTQ therapists may indicate some influences on decisions about coming out in the classroom context and inform supervisors and professors on supportive practices. Considerations around self-disclosure in either context are shaped by the social locators of the students, faculty and clinicians. For therapists who are gender diverse, disclosing some aspects of their unique experience can promote an authentic therapeutic alliance and build trust with clients (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Lurie, 2014). This can be especially helpful in working with clients who are also of a sexual or gender minority; and from this population there is interest for clinicians who understand their experiences from a lived perspective (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Jeffery & Tweed, 2015).

For gender diverse training-therapists, the ability to discuss when making decisions about in which situations to disclose aspects of their identity can be supported by a trans-informed supervisor (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). However, it is important to note that due to previous invalidating experiences in supervisory contexts, many trans and gender-nonconforming therapists may choose not to bring certain vulnerable issues to clinical supervision (Lurie, 2014). For gender fluid art therapist, Clinton (2019), the experience of navigating gender in different contexts was described as complex. Determining how different identities would be perceived, what impact they may have on professional relationships, lead at times to excluding parts of identity, which was experienced as compartmentalization or erasure (Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019). This chapter is cited throughout the text listing all authors in order to not erase the contributions of this author. Feeling unable to disclose one's sexual or gender minority identity in a therapeutic relationship can take a toll on the therapist, demanding energy, and concealment can lead to feelings of guilt, dishonesty or shame (Jeffery & Tweed, 2015). In a study of trans and gender non-conforming therapists, many sought informal groups and peer supervision in order to discuss topics related to their gender and role as clinicians (Lurie, 2014). Creating academic and professional environments which are supportive of the expression of

diverse gender identities is a task ahead for creative arts therapies, as well as other mental health professions.

Inclusion in Mental Health Curricula

Literature related to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in creative arts therapies has largely focused on clinical implications and practice. While a review of all literature pertaining to work with LGBTQ populations is beyond the scope of this research, understanding the patterns and representation of sexual and gender minorities in creative arts therapy research is relevant in consideration of the content that is being taught or available to students in the field. In a survey of research in art therapy, serious negative consequences were noted as "prior research replicates oppressive practices," pointing towards a need for greater awareness and cultural competence for therapists working with gender diverse groups (Zappa, 2017, p. 133). Practices in the current literature that were oppressive have been categorized as misgendering, erasure and pathologization (Zappa, 2017). These harmful impacts in the literature demonstrate the entrenched concept of binary gender identities, failure to acknowledge impacts of discrimination on historical and cultural levels, and demeaning people who do not conform to societal notions of gender (Zappa, 2017). Transforming creative arts therapies training is a complex endeavor and must address the past "hostility towards non-normative sexualities and genders" (Bain et al., 2016, p. 22). Gender identities are often compounded with sexual orientations in research and teaching. Although some theories and models, as well as studies explore impacts of social stigma and discrimination on both sexual and gender minorities, it is important to recognize these as distinct experiences. Creative arts therapies lack tailored ethical guidelines, curricular consideration and professional development about minority sexualities (Hadley, 2013, p. 378). This may be reflected in the treatment of sexual and gender minorities in curricula in the creative arts therapies as well as other mental health professions.

An examination of counselling education in the United States revealed a lack of specialized classes in working with sexual minorities, a tendency for these topics to be solely in courses on multicultural topics, and a deficit of sexual and gender diversity in main texts (Carroll & Gilroy, 2001, p. 50). Trainees in mental health programs have reported feeling that they have insufficient skills and knowledge about LGBTQ issues and communities, and that some showed implicit bias and tendency to assume clients are heterosexual when no information is given about

sexual orientation (Lytle et al., 2014; Matthews, 2005). Hahna (2013) identified that not directly addressing or critiquing social issues such as racism or misogyny present in course readings, media or other content may imply that the instructor or field as a whole tacitly approves of these messages (Hahna, 2013). This points to the importance of critiquing content which stigmatizes or contributes to the erasure of sexual and gender minorities. LGBTQ students may be impacted by reading literature and assigned texts which are not inclusive or perpetuate harmful stereotypes towards these groups. Surveys about therapists' attitudes and actions towards LGBTQ and gender non-conforming communities with dance and movement, music and drama therapists have all indicated a lack of preparedness, few reported tailored interventions and few practitioners seeking supervision specific to working with this group (Kawano, Cruz & Tan, 2018; Beauregard et al., 2016; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013). The literature shows an ongoing need for further integration of content to promote sensitive work with sexual and gender minorities in mental health training.

Positive psychology, a clinical approach used when working with sexual minorities, may also be applied in pedagogical contexts. An approach which is affirmative towards sexual minorities has been proposed as complementary to existing treatment models of mental health practitioners (Alessi, 2014; Lytle et al., 2014). However, within efforts to establish positive psychology as an approach to address sexual minority and transgender and gender diverse issues in graduate psychology training, there is a call for further research on "the impact of universities as positive social institutions in the development or hindrance of graduate student strengths and positive subjective experiences" (Phillips, 2014, p. 354). This reflects that students in different stages of their own identity formation around sexual orientation and gender may have different experiences with the framework of positive psychology which reinforces the narrative of the courage and resilience demonstrated by coming out (Phillips, 2014). Through the narrative of healthy development and celebrating only those who are open in their sexual orientation or gender identity, students who are not out may be made to feel stress or shame. In clinical work it has been promoted the "assumption that being out is the only "healthy" way to be does a disservice to those who do not have the necessary emotional support or resources, who many not feel safe, or who simply are not ready" (Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008, p. 172). Similarly, it is necessary to hold an accepting stance for students and training therapists who continue to explore and define their multiple identities. It is also significant to question what it means to strive for the

university to be a positive social institution, as not all bodies and people will feel at home in institutions through ascribing to or being different from the presumed norm (Ahmed, 2012). The importance of considering the experience of sexual and gender minority individuals in client, student and clinician roles will be explored further.

To address bias in counselling trainees applications of queer theory have been proposed for counselor training, and in music therapy (Bain et al., 2016; Carroll & Gilroy, 2001; Hadley, 2013). Queer theory is not monolithic, rather encompasses diverse critiques and areas of inquiry (Bain et al., 2016). There is potential to concretize abstract and jargon-heavy queer theory in such ways that apply and shift the praxis fundamentally for work with queer clients (Bain et al., 2016). Applying queer theory in therapy training invites interdisciplinary study, challenges to past definitions of gender and sexuality, and brings an attention to power dynamics in readings (Carroll & Gilroy, 2001). A core of queer theory is viewing identities as fluid rather than fixed (Hadley, 2013). Higher education institutions largely uphold binary assumptions and gender expectations and "fluidity and alternatives are rarely acknowledged or affirmed" (Jourian, 2015, p. 14). Flexible identity constructs as well as interdisciplinary theoretical influences (Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019), may promote self-reflexivity and relational learning in creative arts therapies research, clinical practice and pedagogy. Applying the fluidity and critical lens of queer theory to practice and teaching in creative arts therapies may hold a focus on radical inclusivity and empowerment, that may be more beneficial than incorporating queer identities into frameworks which have been historically harmful and oppressive towards sexual and gender identities outside the norm (Bain et al., 2016). Challenging dominant structures and systems of power through alternative frameworks such as queer theory may develop a more inclusive training for therapists, including creative arts therapists.

Methodology

Rationale

Qualitative research methodologies favour rich description and contribute diverse and multifaceted explorations to social science research. Using an autoethnographic approach, this research considers the question: how has my role in creating an extra-curricular queer student group affected my pedagogical experience as a queer, non-binary art therapist in training? Considering the cultural contexts of both being a student in the creative arts therapies, and

belonging to sexual and gender minority groups, autoethnography offers tools for utilizing individual experience as research data to explore this topic (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2013). While navigating and disrupting boundaries, autoethnographers seek to create accessible texts from personal experience which have a positive impact on the world (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Holding a perspective of critical and queer autoethnography invites the researcher to embrace fluidity, challenge dominant narratives, and question systems of power (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). This research methodology promotes an artistic sensibility and uses story as theory and alongside theory, to capture an individual experience in a way that it may inform or resonate with readers (Gannon, 2018). In exploring personal involvement in co-creating a queer student group in the creative arts therapies, this research method allows a sensitive and vulnerable inquiry into lived experience of one student. This study may offer a template for student readers to develop similar programs, reflect on experiences or feelings they may share and for faculty and professionals in the field to reflect on the learning environments in which they have trained in and are teaching. Critical autoethnography offers a reflexive and creative approach that lends itself to research in the creative arts therapies.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method with a focus on self: the researcher is also the participant. The term ethnography refers to study of culture, and autoethnography remains "context-conscious" by implicating the culture around the self (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Common across approaches to autoethnography is a vision towards hope and change, through some form of a "*systematic* approach using ethnographic strategies, the *linking* of personal experience to social, cultural and political issues, and a *critique* of certain discourses within a cultural context" (Stahlke Wall, 2016, p. 5). The purpose of this method has been identified as "disrupting norms of research practice and representation" to prioritize and value "insider knowledge" and focus on "making work accessible" (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2013). Autoethnography is a methodology which explores the self (auto) culture (ethno) through research (graphy) and individual researchers hold different emphases between these aspects (Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

The breadth of research using autoethnography incorporates different amounts of autobiography and ethnography, occupying different places on a continuum between what has been termed analytic and evocative autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 65; Stahlke Wall, 2016). The former refers to a methodology in line with analytic ethnography, where the researcher has "insider experience" of the community and phenomena under investigation, and then relates the self-understanding to social structures (Anderson, 2006). An analytical autoethnographic approach involves a visible and reflexive researcher within the text, and typically includes dialogue with further research informants and a theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). The naming of evocative autoethnography emerged from readers acknowledging that some autoethnography was distinct from ethnographic writings for its evocative quality (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). This perspective holds autoethnography as an "unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative" style of inquiry with the potential "to move ethnography away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433-434). Authors characterized as evocative autoethnographers recognize the power of stories as a mode of inquiry and as potential tools to communicate and impact the audience (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). In the academic factions that have developed along the continuum adopting this methodology, shared goals include writing from a personal and emic perspective. There have also been proposals towards a "moderate autoethnography" which assembles events in one's life and their meaning while contributing to collective thinking (Stahlke Wall, 2016, p. 7). The moderate approach seeks to combine aspects of the focus on theoretical analysis in the analytic approach to autoethnography and the crafting of rich story and moving personal narrative which is a focus of evocative autoethnography. The richness of autoethnography has also been identified in the continued ability for diverse authors to tell their own stories in different ways (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). This paper will hold a moderate approach to autoethnography through the structure of the Master's research project which requires certain organization and theoretical literature as a backing to the personal narrative exploration of the topic.

Critical and Queer Autoethnographies. In addition, frameworks of critical autoethnography and applications of queer theory are relevant to the research question at hand which explores student experiences in relation to queer community. Critical autoethnography has

an individual focus, creative potential and political frame. Through capturing personal stories from the perspective of a queer and non-binary student in art therapy around the creation of a student group for queer creative arts therapists, critical autoethnography supports exploring personal narrative and challenging traditional research methods and themes. This approach harnesses the power of storytelling to bring light to perspectives outside of traditional academic canon (Holman Jones, 2016). Contributing to the social justice stance of critical autoethnography, this method has been harnessed to center marginalized voices (Crawley, 2014). Autoethnography has been widely applied to explorations of identity, including gender identity and sexuality, as well as identity development within contexts such as the academy (Crawley & Husakouskaya, 2018; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Ngunjiri, et al., 2010). This methodology draws from personal experience as data to connect with critical theory in order to examine a cultural setting and offer unique contributions and future directions to the field and other scholars through the results. Critical autoethnography holds a stance towards social justice. Three core commitments of this approach have been identified:

- Theory and story work together in a dance of collaborative engagement
- Critical autoethnography involves both a material and ethical praxis
- Doing critical autoethnography engages us in processes of becoming and because of this, shows us ways of embodying change (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 229)

These are powerful commitments which clearly situate the potential of critical autoethnography to challenge traditional research practices and contribute transformative research. The title of this research project, "a tango between theory and storytelling", and the actual incorporation of stories from dancing tango into the research findings was inspired by the first commitment.

Autoethnography has been identified as a queer methodology, by bringing a focus on relational and performative aspects of communities and identities (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). Holman Jones and Adams (2010) assert that "autoethnography is a queer method" (p. 212) and go on to state that "saying so means taking a stand on a poetics of change" (p. 212), which aligns with Homan Jones' (2016) third commitment of critical autoethnography related to embodying change. Critical theorist Sara Ahmed recognizes that "queer does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact" (2006, p. 4). This research situates queerness as integral, throughout the research process

and within the content, rather than simply a theoretical framework that is peripheral to the content. Other authors have identified the political re-appropriation of the word queer and incorporating it into academic settings through queer theory as a queer act (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010) Queer research endeavours to challenge the academic canon and notions of normalcy as well as traditional scholarship (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010; Crawley & Husakouskaya, 2018). Through engaging queer as a verb, autoethnography queers research practice (Crawley & Husakouskaya, 2018). Queer autoethnography holds potential for political commentary as a method as well as in the narratives it holds.

A queer autoethnography is one that resists fixity, conceptually and in its definition (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). To further self-understanding, a researcher may produce queer texts through autoethnography, challenging categories and acknowledging the limitations of language to capture the self (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). A critical autoethnography "tolerates, even encourages, uncertainty" (Gannon, 2018, p. 231). Embracing an understanding of fluidity in queer methods is challenged by the "permanency of print" which can inadvertently solidify an identity or community and limit the ability to capture the transience and flexibility in these concepts (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). Researchers holding a queer lens are more likely to accept ambiguity and break down borders "between theory and data, researcher and researched, hetero and homo, right and wrong" (Heckert, 2010, p. 43). A queer approach holds these complexities:

> We encourage you to claim and reclaim the word *queer* in the name of autoethnography, in the name of challenging categories and achieving identities and communities that are fluid yet complex, multiple yet cognizant of the attention, negotiation and care that impinge on any scholarly project. (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010, p. 213)

Care is needed to attend to the fluctuation and relational aspects of identities and how to treat them in text. Autoethnography may serve as a methodology with capacity to "highlight the complexities of the experience of people operating between or on the edges of cultures" (Egeli, 2017, p. 13). Through written text the self can be understood as a subject produced relationally, between author, words and readers, thus a self in a state of continuous becoming (Gannon, 2018). Considerations of how to present shifting and fluid facets of identity are of importance to the exploration of the current research question.

Autoethnography in Creative Arts Therapies. Applied across social science research, autoethnography demonstrates great potential as a methodology for the creative arts therapies. Creativity and artistry through narrative, including performance, are acknowledged as central to autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Gannon, 2018; Holman Jones & Adams, 2010; Mesner, 2015). Challenging the binary categorizations of art and science, autoethnography is situated in a process rather than solely a product, and defies categorization existing as "part self and part culture, yet other than both" (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p. 129). It has been adopted in counselling psychology research, where reflexivity and the subjectivity of the methodology are upheld as related to therapeutic practice (Egeli, 2017). Qualities associated with being a good autoethnographer include being a good listener and an ability to consider events through both cultural and personal lenses (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). These qualities can be likened to characteristics fostered in therapy, including capacity for empathic listening, and holding oscillating attention. As well as therapeutic qualities, creativity is encouraged in this methodology. Critical arts-based inquiry shares a focus on storytelling and reflexivity, as well as a lens for justice and sharing underrepresented stories with critical autoethnography. Talwar et al. (2019) share reflections from the perspective of four art therapists exploring intersectional reflexivity. In this chapter, Clinton a gender fluid artist and art therapist reflects on artwork reflecting experiences of navigating gender in both professional and personal realms (Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019). Sharing individual experiences offers insight which cannot be easily captured within traditional research methods and has not historically been represented in academic canons.

Data Collection and Analysis

In autoethnography, there are diverse conceptualizations of data analysis and data may take many forms. The ability to experiment and even adapt data collection and interpretation in the process is a virtue of the methodological openness (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). It is the systematic collection of data and subsequent analysis, leading to "interpretation about self and social phenomena involving self" that discerns autoethnography from forms of writing such as memoir or autobiography (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 2). Towards a "moderate" autoethnography, Stahlke Wall (2016) holds that to be considered legitimate research, the stage of analyzing the

data is crucial, and that distinct sections for method, findings and discussion brings autoethnography closer to scholarly method. Following the requirements of a cumulative research project for a Master's degree, this paper aligns with a moderate approach to autoethnography, weaving theory and data through personal narrative, while also outlining the approach to the method, analysis and discussion of the data.

In this research process, data was gathered through several methods. Through the openness of this methodology, researchers may collect diverse forms of data, and find data evoked in multiple ways (Egeli, 2017). For many autoethnographers, the events described occur in one's own life, rather than as a result of field work (Crawley, 2014). The group for queer creative arts therapists began as a personal project, and natural response to a personal need in the community. The motivation to research this student group arose later, and autoethnography became a suitable method to explore the impacts and relay the motives for creating the group. This was helpful as "the imperative to transform all experience into writing can reduce the value of an experience by treating experience as a means to an end" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 5). Instead, Queer CATs existed and could be engaged in as a personal project. In composing this research, the process of writing down recollections was re-orienting (Ahmed, 2006).

Data can be taken from multiple sources which might include journals, sketching, emails, self-interviews, drawings (Stahlke Wall, 2016; Egeli, 2017). The three types of data identified as most widely used in autoethnography are fieldnotes, personal documents, and interviews (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). As more interaction and planning is assisted by the internet, there is a proliferation of forms of personal documents in artifacts which includes not only field notes and diary entries but also emails, text messages and Facebook "likes" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). The range of material that can be harnessed as data by autoethnographers is vast, and the value of different sources comes from "its ability to either open the researcher to deeper reflection on relevant experiences and relationship or to evoke compelling images, emotions, or understandings in others" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 68). Field notes and personal documents may be closely related categories. Privileging memory as data and choosing to write about the events which occurred in the past is tied to an understanding that what remains salient over time, and memories which are recurrent may be related to how we theorize ourselves (Crawley, 2014).

In this research, digital material reviewed as data included: email exchanges, promotional messages to listservs for Queer CATs events, posts made to the Facebook group, and shared online documents for planning with peers. In addition, a typed document of ongoing reflective writings was kept between November 2018 and May 2019. These included reflections based on specific events, meetings, and encounters with the Queer CATs group as well as writings based on my experience as a student in art therapy, focusing on moments of microaggressions or discomfort as well as those of allyship and a sense of belonging. This document also included a general journal-like collection of thoughts from the research process. I created a separate document where I recorded personal responses related to the literature which I reviewed for this research. Between November 2018 and March 2019, nine audio recordings were taken to collect spontaneous personal reflections and an ongoing reflective document for ideas and reflections arising throughout the data collection process.

Self-interviews are often used for data collection in autoethnographic work. Crawley (2014) uses self-interview as a term analogous to the process of autoethnography, acknowledging the balance of subjectivity, the marginalized voice, and theorizing that simultaneously take place. Other authors have referred to using self-interviews (Egeli, 2017). These may take the form of textual based exploration, or engage with others, and may be a "dialogue between one's past and present selves" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 69). Autoethnographers recognize that there is much about oneself that they might not already know. The process of a self-interview in this research was valuable in collecting my thoughts in a different way. For this data collection I distinguished the role of the researcher, Kristina, and the self who sought to create a support group for queer students, KP. Two written dialogues between these two voices were created in May 2019.

Additional materials such as event posters, and two art responses created during conference workshops I co-facilitated were also points of departure for curating the autoethnographic narrative and vignettes. Finally, writings about queer tango and metaphors related to the ongoing reflections were kept throughout data collection, to be later woven throughout the text. The data was then organized to reflect the main functions of Queer CATs. The themes and examples which were recurrent across multiple sources of data or most evocative were incorporated to illustrate the motivation, impact and intentions behind co-

founding a group for queer creative art therapy students. Reflections from tango were matched to the feelings and used to metaphorically share what the data represented.

Position of the Researcher

Reflexivity about social locators and aspects of identity is significant in situating personal experiences within their unique context and setting. Within the research question I have identified myself as a queer and non-binary person. While not identifying as cisgender, I do hold certain cisgender privilege. I feel most affirmed through using *they* and *them* as personal pronouns, however, have continued to use *she* and *her* pronouns in clinical settings and some other contexts. As other gender-independent researchers have named, having a choice in how I present myself and benefitting from being viewed as cisgender in certain social or professional situations may be to my advantage (Talwar, Clinton , Sit & Ospina, 2019; Zappa, 2017). I do not face the same harm or discrimination that other trans and gender non-conforming people face daily. In a bilingual city and country, I am fluent in both official languages of English and French. Working and communicating in my second language, French, impacts how I present my gender identity and where I choose to use the feminine pronoun *elle*. Although there are current movements and creative adaptations of this language to better express and reflect non-binary identities, using pronouns such as *iel* and *eil*, these are not yet commonly understood. As they become a more current part of modern vernacular it may change how I express myself in other settings and in the future.

I recognize the privilege I hold as a White art therapist in training. Being part of the racial group that dominates this field and profession, I must acknowledge potential biases this introduces. I live in a colonized country and specifically in a city built upon unceded Indigenous lands. As a non-Indigenous person, I actively benefit from settler-colonialism and I view it as essential to continually reflect on how this impacts work in the mental health field and how to engage in active allyship in my personal and professional life. This is also relevant when considering gender identity, as colonization enforced notions of a gender binary for Indigenous communities who held different and diverse cultural understandings of gender. As well, financial stability and class privilege impact my available resources including time and energy that allows me to be actively engaged in organizing student groups and events. This has also allowed me the time and means to travel to events and conferences which have contributed to my thinking and

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experiences shared in this research. Being able-bodied also contributes to the ease I have in navigating institutions which is not afforded to all. Coming from a family where my parents and sister have pursued graduate education has also contributed to my experience and ability to navigate university institutions. In this research I am describing and writing about marginalization and experience of minority groups while I actively benefit from different societal systems of power.

Ethics and limitations

Important ethical considerations arise when using a methodology where the researcher is also a participant. In response to claims that it may be "self-knowing or self-sacrificing rather than self-indulgent", autoethnographers have identified that the research process is "more painful than narcissistic" (Egeli, 2017, p. 11). As such, the potential risks to the researcher themselves becomes an ethical concern (Stahlke Wall, 2016). The vulnerability of sharing personal experiences puts autoethnographers at risk for criticism and exposure. To mitigate this risk "autoethnographers also make choices about which selves and experiences to share" (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 24). Having a visible self who is authoring the experiences of belonging to the culture or group in question is an important characteristic of this methodology (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). A researcher from a feminist standpoint critically questions what subjects they can write about as a member (Crawley, 2014). Supportive supervisory relationships, and self-reflexivity can assist an autoethnographer in determining the level of detail and aspects of experience to disclose.

Despite its focus on the author, other individuals around the researcher inevitably become implicated in the stories that are told. This creates cause for considering relational ethics in autoethnographic research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Considerations in the process and presentation of the research may mitigate potential risk to the researcher and others involved. While the methodology harnesses vulnerability, judicious selections for the final published texts may be made from all the material that is included in fieldnotes or collected as data (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Even those encounters with others that are not included in the text may shape the researcher's perspectives and analysis (Tullis, 2013). The choices involved in creating an autoethnographic text have ethical and material consequences, and examining these is part of a critical approach, one that recognizes the situated and relational aspects of the self, as well as

holding space for a multiplicity of possible interpretations (Gannon, 2018). Applying ethical principles to research includes careful consideration in research design, engagement with others, data analysis and research dissemination. Beneficence calls for researchers to strive to do no harm, and the principle of justice promotes research design that assures risk is not burdened unequally upon research participants (Tullis, 2013).

Reflexivity is a part of ethical research and a socially conscious art therapy practice (Talwar et al., 2019; Sajnani et al., 2017). This concept is a method to "use the 'self' as a point of reference for an intersectional analysis of one's social position" (Talwar et al., 2019, p. 67). The importance of an intersectional understanding of privileges and marginalizations for the researcher and reflected in the research process through reflexivity is also a central concept in critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016, 2018). As well as understanding identity markers such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation as a noun, some authors challenge us to consider how identity could function as a verb which is relational, performative and active (Sajnani et al., 2017). Power dynamics are not sufficiently addressed if reflexivity is simply confessional on the part of the researcher; instead reflexivity must be continually put into practice (Taylor, 2010, p. 73). This encourages reflection on the researcher's relationship to others, research topic, cultural assumptions and biases throughout the research process.

As a methodology, autoethnography responds to the assumption that research can be done from an objective stance, and rather embraces subjectivity and the impact of the researcher on the research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Through this approach, the researcher is necessarily vulnerable, and the research creates intimacy with readers, engaging them to care and empathize rather than hold distance through theory (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). To mediate the potential ethical dilemmas of this proximity and questions of relational ethics, creative techniques such as metaphor, symbol and composite vignettes may be used (Mesner, 2016; Tullis, 2013). This research project will utilize some creative approaches to protect identities of others who participate in the queer student group and may be implicated in the research question.

This methodology allows an in-depth qualitative exploration of lived experience. In highlighting a project which was collaborative, it was an important ethical consideration to identify that this paper prioritizes my unique perspective. Speaking from my perspective as a queer and non-binary student, I am not seeking to speak for others who share these identities. Protecting the identities of others who were involved in the experiences being written about was

accomplished through writing about encounters in a generalized way, and through using metaphor to describe these experiences. As such, the unintended potential of taking credit for the work and contributions of others is a power held by the researcher in this paper. Recognizing collaborative efforts and situating this research as reflections on the initial development of this group have sought to draw attention to the important role that other queer students have had in this project. Determining what parts of experience and of self to share was facilitated through open dialogue with a research supervisor, and motivated through reading the works of queer thinkers and the vulnerability of autoethnographers. The risk to the researcher was mitigated through the review of this paper by the supervisor and other readers.

Autoethnography is a methodology with unique considerations in terms of research reliability and validity. Reliability can be reflected in questioning the credibility of the narrator, and whether the story can be considered a truthful account. However, autoethnography acknowledges the fallibility of memory and "autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does—how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, section 4.4 para. 1). Validity may also be understood through the impact on readers, that the research evokes "a feeling that what has been represented could be true" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, section 4.4 para. 3). Readers hold a role in the reception and validation of the data (Egeli, 2017). Through considering how stories in autoethnography are similar to and different from their own, readers contribute to the generalizability of the research, taking on a different meaning from that in social science where generalizations are made from large samples of respondents (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnographers may reject the positivist orientation of ideas such as triangulation of data, while recognizing that tools such as using others to elicit data could act in similar ways to techniques of triangulation (Egeli, 2017). Research concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability when considered through relational ethics can support autoethnographers in making choices about how to present their research in relation to its potential impact on the readers or audience. In the face of all these ethical questions, many autoethnographers recognize the potential and power of contributing personal perspectives to academic writing and choose to:

> Write their narratives despite the risks to themselves in the interest of challenging canonical narratives that render so many experiences voiceless. If autoethnographers don't take up this charge, especially in the academy, I'm not sure who will. For many scholars this call to self-narration *is* the ethics of autoethnography. (Tullis, 2013, p. 259)

This call to action to explore non-traditional forms of academic writing and publishing motivates me to undertake personal research. Readers may be lead to reflect on their own experiences in relation to communities of support, gender and sexual identity, and pedagogy from encountering this research.

Findings

Finding my steps

From the street I can hear the soundtrack of violins and bandaneons playing, and my heart beats faster with a sense of excitement from the familiar music. Walking up narrow staircases, or through multiple doorways in an uninteresting building, no matter the space, I am always struck by a sense of imminence and anticipation when I am arriving at a milonga, what we call a social gathering of tango dancers. Entering a dimly lit space, my eyes quickly scan the room, searching the dancers gracefully circling the dancefloor, and those engaged in conversation around small tables or the bar, seeking familiar faces, watching the dancers' footwork, wondering which potential partners might offer the type of connected embrace that creates those moments of magic and awe that have kept me returning to tango.

Beginning and writing this research was a tumultuous process. The feelings of anticipation and uncertainty as well as those of excitement and curiosity are not unlike how I feel entering a social dance space. There were several iterations before arriving at this topic for my research. In part, I was directed by the advice of students in the year ahead of me, who suggested choosing a topic you are passionate and energized about. Co-creating Queer CATs fit these criteria. Recognizing my drive behind organizing this group lead me to want to capture and record this experience. My enthusiasm for this project was clear to me, when submitting multiple grant proposals to fund a speaker series, feeling joy and fulfillment following successful events and creating meaningful personal connections through Queer CATs. Much of my growth and salient learning in becoming an art therapist has happened outside of the classroom. My ideal outcome for this cumulative project of my Master's degree is to reach students in creative arts therapies or other fields and provide some form of encouragement, framework or example to create similar initiatives and support networks. This research piece seeks to inform readers by outlining some of the impressions and impacts that co-founding the Queer CATs group has had on my learning.

In my wish to highlight the Queer CATs group, it was clear to me that I did not want my friends and peers to become my research participants in any way that would limit their possibilities for engaging in the group due to my research. I also wanted to ensure that any research endeavour did not take away or reduce the benefits and openness of the group's structure and our interactions. As a researcher and member of the community being studied, it is essential to question how it may be difficult for others to decline participation, especially when there are multiple relationships (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). As a nascent group in its early iteration and unfolding collaboration, I also questioned whether the group is "mine" to talk about, as Mesner (2015) questioned: "which stories are mine to tell" (p. 104). Grappling with these questions contributed to the tumult of the writing process.

Some parts of my own development and self-understanding, particularly around gender, are tied up closely in my motivations for creating Queer CATs. However, I wonder which of my stories I am ready to share. There is an aspect of self-consciousness as I record and revisit through personal data. I am comforted by reading the candid reflections of autoethnographers recounting their own experiences writing in this methodology. Scott-Hoy (2008) shares some of the challenges in writing and performing autoethnography, "I'm still struggling with the dilemma of how to position myself within my research project to show aspects of my own, tacit world, challenge my assumptions, locate myself through the eyes of the Other and observe myself observing" (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, p. 129). Crafting and bringing together many different events and anecdotes also poses difficult questions. I am reminded of ordering sequences, steps and movements in tango, as an improvised partner dance. The tension between predetermining which sequence or move to make and adapting to the music and space available on the dancefloor is reflected in tensions of deciding which parts of self to showcase in autoethnography. I am drawn to Visse & Niemeijer (2016)'s reflections:

> Stories: don't we choose them, isn't it all about interpretation, about form? I work with them all the time, but maybe I'd rather be without them, floating somewhere in the middle of my different selves. I'd rather be invisible than identified with merely one self. It would make me feel more vulnerable, if I would be known for only one of my stories. (p. 303)

Which of my stories am I choosing to make myself known by in this text? What is left out? I hope to tell a story that captures different aspects of one student experience, in a way that contributes to the momentum of voices from perspectives challenging the norms of this field.

I am interested in praxis, in how my values align in my work, personally and academically. Autoethnography is an exercise in praxis, that develops new understandings around relationships, identity and cultural experience (Visse & Niemeijer, 2016). Taking action through Queer CATs—hosting events, giving workshops and planning meetings—was a direct way to be involved and create change around themes that I engage with conceptually, including diversity, social action, and queer theory. To utilize a research methodology that allows me to archive, record, and represent these actions over the course of my learning in the art therapy program produces a snapshot of a moment in time, and of my experiences coming into being an art therapist. I wanted to highlight how as a student I was able to change something within the context of my academic program, to feel more included on my own terms. I leveraged my knowledge from past experiences at this institution to apply for grant funding, pursuing a project of interest to me and other group members. Suddenly, this allowed for a public platform in which queer mental health professionals, including recent graduates and current students, could share their research, clinical experience, and frameworks for engaging with LGBTQ groups.

Rather than outline a timeline or chronology of events taking part in this group, I will share reflections surrounding several key functions of the group: social support, community-building and networking, public outreach and education and advocacy and academic inclusion. Even these categorizations, are arbitrary and limited, as experience surpasses the distinctions and may relate to several themes. It has been suggested that within autoethnography it is appropriate to be open to non-positivist research strategies that hold less clarity (Egeli, 2017). Correspondingly, this paper will integrate reflective notes and self-interview writings collected during the data collection phase as well as my written reflections about dancing tango.

Social Support

Despite my love for the dance, I still find myself shy amidst a sea of tango dancers, and I find a great deal of comfort in seeing others that I know in the space. On occasions that I have travelled alone or visited a new milonga without company, I notice that I am reserved, hesitant to ask others to dance, wondering how I am perceived by others, and wishing to have access to the comfort, flow, and exchange of roles with some dancers that I know well.

Navigating the first semester of my graduate program, I was unsure who else in my cohort might identify as queer or LGBTQ and noticed that I wished for this community. Queer

encompasses an enormous range of styles and gender presentations. Through certain cues and codes of dress I felt that I was visibly queer to others, yet might not be read as such by everyone. I had a desire to scan the room and know who relates to feeling erased or invisible when faced with assumptions of heterosexuality, or pathologizing language in an older assigned text. Heterosexism is a term that describes viewing heterosexual identities as superior and the societal view of assuming everyone to be heterosexual (Hadley, 2013). The wish to relate to others while navigating these environments and expected norms can be compared to feelings of comfort I find when connecting with my queer tango friends when in a milonga. I felt drawn to building connections with other students who disclosed their sexual orientations as other than heterosexual. I hoped to create space for conversations, to seek support from students farther along in the program, to wonder together what it was like to navigate sexual orientation in the context of training as creative arts therapists. I initially brought the budding idea of creating a platform or student group for queer students in our department to two peers, and it was their enthusiastic reception and support that made Queer CATs possible.

It stands out that relationships are at the core of this group and it was through these relationships that many of my needs were met. Another strong motivation for me to create this group was hearing about political action taken at a recent art therapy conference. A queer dance party was held as a non-violent disruption to protest an association's affiliation with a politician closely linked with anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, policies and organizations. Hearing of this made me question, who would join a queer dance protest if this was happening here? I was searching for community and role models bridging the identities of activists and professionals in the creative arts therapies. Seeking connection with others I felt would help me address my complicated feelings about the politics of the professional organization in question, with which some of our faculty and students were affiliated. This topic was offered limited space for discussion in our classrooms, and Queer CATs meetings offered space to continue to share perspectives, reactions and feelings. Connecting to group members was also valued around other political and current events. Over the course of my studies there have been many current events surrounding trans and gender non-conforming communities. This included political briefings and policy surrounding definitions of gender identity both in the United States—leading to a movement of activism under the slogan "we will not be erased" (Fansler, 2019)—and locally. More recently during the process of writing this paper, the World Health Organization removed gender incongruence from

the international classification of diseases (Haynes, 2019). In processing these political events, it was valuable to acknowledge and be acknowledged by other student members of Queer CATs.

The first meetings of Queer CATs, and words of support from those who attended, were greatly encouraging. For me, it became a forum that connected me with students in the year above me, and later in the year below, that I might not otherwise have come to know. I think that connections in communities that are highly transitory, like student populations, are important and can serve as a conduit for a type of intergenerational knowledge. This concept was reflected back to me when it was described as queer mentorship by another group member. From the spaces facilitated in Queer CATs meetings, sharing my experiences in a peer supervisory context, I had a feeling of mutual support and understanding that was not present for me in the general classroom setting. One focus of our meetings was a space for check-ins and peer supervision to discuss events or interactions in clinical and classroom settings that queer students were dealing with.

Queer CATs meetings which held space for peer supervision also created opportunities to receive feedback about how other queer creative arts therapists navigate questions of self-disclosure, being out at work, bringing queer perspectives to the classroom and more. Sharing experiences of discomfort in clinical reactions, or in the language and potential lack of sensitivity to topics of gender and sexual identity from peers and colleagues, these meetings allowed for reflection and understanding between peers. For myself, choosing to engage in this research represented a decision that included disclosing my gender identity in classrooms and to peers and professors who may not yet have known. By discussing my worries and trepidations before picking this topic, I felt supported and encouraged by my classmates.

In reading the thesis research of trans-identified social worker, Samuel Lurie (2014), on self-disclosures of trans and gender non-conforming therapists, the value of peer supervision was underscored. Informal networks of support were identified as common places that clinicians turned to in order to cope with feelings of isolation and being unable to bring topics related to gender identity to clinical supervision. Lurie (2014) observed that conducting this research brought the realization of "not only the importance, but absolute necessity, of establishing peer supervision early in my career" (p. 76). Exploring questions of identity in the art therapy classroom and clinical training brought me to a similar conclusion.

Balancing an organizational role and the wish for input and shared leadership was not without challenges. Some of my common frustrations and feelings of guilt related to this balancing act: how do I choose meeting times that support the most people? Am I prioritizing my own involvement over others? Who would hold this space if I am not setting up meetings? Are we meeting frequently enough for other people's needs? What is the group looking for from this meeting? How do I keep folks engaged in the process and these meetings? Is it too much to ask graduate students to contribute their time and energy to event planning? How can I distribute tasks and encourage others to feel able to propose events, meetings, or activities? What does non-hierarchal leadership look like in practice? Many of these questions cannot be answered without feedback, reflection and engagement with the perspectives of other members of the group.

Considering what limits exist to participation in a group or community are significant ethical questions (Watkins & Shulman, 2008; Lurie, 2014). It is important to acknowledge that there are many demands, mental and emotional, for students training in mental health fields. It is also worth noting that the group's planning and communications primarily took place through a Facebook group, which may have limited the participation of some individuals who do not use social media. Joining such a group also involves identifying oneself as queer, trans or gender non-conforming, to the other out members of the private group. For some, this may have represented a barrier to taking part in the group, such as students who are questioning their gender or sexual identity and may have felt uncertain about taking part in the group. It is important to question whether systems of power were replicated in the group membership. Being a student-parent, past burn-out or feelings of exclusion from queer and/or activist communities, or financial and living situations may all be factors that would limit someone's participation. As social support from this group contributed to my experience as a student in art therapy, considering the limitations and potential for creating welcoming spaces for LGBTQ students is important in evaluating and reflecting upon the group's activities and future growth.

Community Building and Networking

I feel most proud of my work when it serves to build community and connect people with resources. Queer CATs has shown me how much it means to me to connect people to resources, including inner resources, and the resources that exist amongst us. Valuing the power of

relationships represents personal growth for me; learning that I can reach out for support, and don't have to feel alone. From the initial call-out for forming the group through social media, I wrote "Looking forward to building up this community with you!" (Facebook post, January 2018). This project was always intended to be responsive and supportive to the community of students and our different needs, leaving it open to potential transformation and taking on new priorities with future students. Directing funds towards queer, trans and non-binary creative arts therapists in recognition of their work, critical thinking and lived experiences through the speaker series enacts this support. The speaker series created a platform for emerging creative arts therapists, recent graduates and students who could use the space to develop skills and content to offer to other organizations. Through community building and events, I continued discovering and witnessing the potential of creative approaches to reach and serve communities who most need access to this care, such as gender non-conforming youth. Many new and experienced therapists have already been making these spaces, engaging in these practices and adopting not only gay-affirmative but trans-affirmative approaches to their work.

Meeting and engaging with queer creative arts therapists at different stages of training and their careers can provide models for future practice and representation in the field to motivate and encourage current students. This has been reflected as valuable to other trans and gender non-conforming therapists (Lurie, 2014). Taking on leadership roles and establishing networking events, support groups or listservs were roles that many trans and gender non-conforming clinicians took on, and that contributed to "internal strengthening that was crucial to sustainability and balance" (Lurie, 2014, p. 59). Finding community and sharing space with students and professionals who identify as queer becomes a nourishing resource to build networks of support. Through recognizing experiences of being marginalized and devalued, it is possible to collaborate, to reframe and to build connection and self-empathy (Lurie, 2014). Mirroring is a skill of importance in a therapeutic relationship. In tango, the attunement between dance partners can also be likened to mirroring, even when the movements of each dancer are distinct, a mirroring of the energy and intensity of the dance brings cohesion. On a wider relational scale, I feel that connecting to professionals is a way of seeking something to mirror out in the field; searching for those who are working through similar considerations. By beginning this group, I hoped to find connection with other queer creative arts therapists,

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celebrate strengths and resilience in each other, and offer space to share challenges unique to holding these identities.

My learning was enriched through studying at an institution where graduate programs in art, drama and music therapy were all offered. Through Queer CATs I have had greater connections with colleagues in other modalities. New students from across the department could approach the group with questions. Our speaker series highlighted the work of professionals in each program, as well as verbal counselling. The possibilities for creating this network of support and connecting with professionals are promoted by learning in a city, where there are different mental health services directed towards LGBTQ groups, and professionals working from different creative approaches. Perhaps these opportunities and networks would look differently in a more geographically isolated or smaller community. As students, developing connections, relationships and supportive community could translate to supporting each other in future work endeavors, as colleagues and professionals in the creative arts therapies.

Public Outreach and Education

Through outreach and educational activities, I have repeatedly seen the value in learning from connecting to others. Understanding that peers and professors will encounter queer communities as clients and colleagues, I believe that knowledge is essential to reduce potential harm to these groups. A lack of knowledge about issues ranging from legal rights to language use with LGBTQ and gender diverse communities has been reported through surveys of dance and movement, music and drama therapists (Beauregard et al., 2016; Kawano, Cruz & Tan, 2018; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013). Creating public events, through a speaker series, was one of my key objectives for this group. Increased awareness and training around gender and sexual minorities for creative arts therapy students offered outside of the classroom was a tool to prioritize topics and highlight work by and for queer creative arts therapists. Through outreach and education Queer CATs may have contributed to students, faculty and community gaining or seeking further knowledge about work with queer communities.

Visibility can be a part of outreach and is an important consideration as queer and trans communities and people are often placed in a bind between being invisible or hyper-visible, which for the most vulnerable can be threatening and risk harm within heterosexist and transphobic society. In writing my reflections, I have wondered about how even the existence of

Queer CATs is a form of public outreach, marking a space and promoting a stance of welcome for incoming students who are queer. Initially through student social media groups, and eventually through a public Facebook page and email listserv promotion of our public events, awareness of the presence and activities of Queer CATs spread from students to faculty and staff, and gradually beyond the department. Being part of a department and student community that were supportive of the creation of this group is also important to that sense of welcoming. In a research study on the experiences of LGBT faculty, staff and students at a small college in the United States, students in social work reported having difficulty setting up a LGBT social work club despite advertisements of an inclusive department (Vaccara, 2012). Critically assessing the difference between the public profile and messaging versus the actions and tangible supports is a common task for organizers such as LGBTQ students. The norms and cultural values of institutions also create an environment where representation and inclusion may involve work, and "responsibility for diversity work is unevenly distributed . . .. [and] the distribution of this work is political" (Ahmed, 2012). While presence and public platform can serve to send a message of welcome, the experiences of queer students in the classroom may be different.

Within the classroom context, the role of students as educators is one that merits critical reflection. Individuals from underrepresented groups in the profession are often called upon to educate the dominant group (Gipson, 2015). Through classroom contexts, other queer authors have acknowledged that "sometimes it's exhausting to be the educator-as-student, and sometimes it's just downright unwise" (Mesner, 2015, p. 102). Being called upon to educate others, such as supervisors, from lived experiences has been described as work and as a burden by trans and gender non-conforming clinicians (Lurie, 2014). This may continue in the workplace as has been identified by drama therapists of gender and sexual minorities (Beauregard et al., 2017). Feelings of isolation can persist if the demand for educating others lies on the shoulders of a few students representing entire cultural groups. Drama therapists have also reported feeling an expectation to speak for all LGBTQ people in their workplace (Beauregard et al., 2017). In the creative arts therapy classroom, there may also be an aspect of feeling personal responsibility to educate others. Queer people are frequently faced with the burden of health professionals who do not hold adequate understandings of their experiences or may pathologize their identities (Zappa, 2017). As students in a mental health field, and emerging mental health professionals, I would often reflect on what it means to have classmates who hold different views and understandings

about queer community. At times I felt guilt for not taking on a role of educating others from my personal experiences.

Education continues to be needed as professionals who identify themselves as promoting values of equality may continue to hold negative attitudes towards LGBTQ clients (Kawano et al., 2018). Writing on perspectives of liberation psychologies, Watkins and Shulman acknowledge that "where direct knowledge of others pales, stereotype and projection thrive, contributing to the forces that further distance communities" (2008, p. 229). Continued training on "LGBTQ issues" for professionals as well as therapists in the roles of educators has been identified as best practice for music therapists (Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012, p. 162). Best practices for working with LGBTQ communities outlined by Whitehead-Pleaux et al. (2012) offers important groundwork for music therapists and provides a template for an equivalent list in other creative arts therapy modalities. Educational events have been called for to enhance therapists' sensitivity to gender and sexual diversity in the workplace (Beauregard et al., 2016; Kawano et al., 2018) as well as for training therapists (Lytle et al., 2014). Through creating a speaker series, we created opportunities to engage significant audiences and create spaces that foster our own and other's learning. Many students from Queer CATs, as well as other students in our department, attended the series. Some professionals, community members, students from related fields and faculty also attended. Reflecting on the audiences of people holding different ideas and identities, perhaps each person there took away different pieces of new knowledge, resonated with different topics, and carry forward different observations. I recall leaving each event with gratitude and respect for those present. I was particularly touched by the presence of certain professionals and professors who demonstrated support for Queer CATs and our endeavours, and who had been personal advocates and supports to me in navigating classroom and clinical contexts.

Another major educational project facilitated by the creation of Queer CATs was presenting at professional conferences of the Canadian and Ontario Art Therapy Associations. To plan, research, develop and execute a workshop on building therapeutic skills working with queer communities, alongside my peers—fellow students who were not only colleagues but friends—was a great learning experience. Presenting our affiliation with Queer CATs at these professional events spread the reach and public awareness associated with the group. I felt proud of our collaborations and this group, and it was motivating to receive feedback from others

touched by the group or inspired to develop similar projects. Receiving positive feedback about the learning that happened in these workshop spaces, where we encouraged dialogue and introspection, and witnessing the vulnerability when many participants shared, were deeply moving to me. I felt strongly connected to others and left each experience with a sense of accomplishment and renewed awareness of the significance of Queer CATs. In these workshops we shared current terminology for different sexual and gender identities, and the importance of linguistic sensitivity to utilize the language of clients (Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, & Walther, 2008). The relatively recent history of pathologization of homosexuality in psychological associations was brought to light, as well as ongoing activism concerning the current diagnosis regarding gender identity in the DSM (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003). Holding space for dialogue and art-based introspection, my own art creations from these workshops held symbols of joy, discovery, support, exposure, concealment, hurt and journeys, some of which have been threaded through the findings in this research.

Sprouting connections to new ideas and resources, I have found hope for future education and activism as well. Establishing spaces where current students and new creative arts therapists were in roles facilitating workshops and presenting their work both through the speaker series and conference presentations values the perspectives of emerging professionals. Education as a focus for Queer CATs has contributed to addressing the need for trainings that deepen cultural humility and understanding of queer communities across mental health professions. These workshops often called for the need to self-reflect and know ourselves, to educate and advocate, and to give space for all varieties of expressions of identity. A sentiment that resonated strongly with me from one of the talks was the call not to normalize but rather to celebrate diversity in sexual and gender identities. Queer CATs has developed with an intention of an adaptable framework, so that it can cater to the changing contexts of the student body and socio-political events. Co-learning environments were supported by the invited guest speakers, and the workshops lead by Queer CATs members.

Advocacy and Academic Inclusion

Connecting and witnessing others who are advocating and actively challenging the norms represented in the field of creative arts therapies, I view Queer CATs as a small piece of a much larger movement. After attending conferences on the topic of critical pedagogies, held at the

School of the Arts Institute of Chicago in Chicago in September 2018, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in March 2019, I left energized and motivated towards future change. Inspired by thinkers and leaders in the field, who work in a collaborative model and seek to center perspectives historically marginalized, I was in awe of their vulnerability, their willingness to share and be transparent in their processes, to facilitate difficult conversations, and openly vision together future directions for the arts therapies.

While I most want to highlight the enthusiasm and joy that has emerged for me through this project, the creation of Queer CATs would not have been as important to me if I had not been experiencing feelings of isolation, frustration and of being invisible in some ways that I identify. In interactions with other students, with professors, and colleagues in internship sites, there were moments when comments were made that carried assumptions and a lack of understanding, particularly about trans and gender non-conforming communities. My own tendency when faced with situations of discomfort or microaggressions which were invalidating of my gender identity, is to remain quiet, to internalize, to ruminate and not to confront. Sometimes, I have regretted not reacting or addressing certain remarks in the moment. A common situation recorded in my reflections was when peers and professors assuming gender identities or referring to groups as "girls" or "ladies" which included non-binary or genderqueer students. The entrenchment of the gender binary pervades social norms and thought, as well as enters research and publications (Zappa, 2017).

Some assigned readings relied on outdated terminology or reflected pathologizing stances towards gender and sexual minorities, which were not always addressed in discussion. Some of my frustrations for lack of inclusive language also arose through this writing process. Even in resources which have been helpful to this research, such as a guidelines for LGBTQ best practices, the authors use "s/he" and "her/his" when referencing hypothetical interactions with a co-worker, despite another section recommending best practices are to use "inclusive language" in curricula and to "ask respectfully" the preferred name and gender pronoun of students (Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2012, p. 161-163). Use of binary gendered pronouns is a practice that I also came across frequently in course syllabi. Changing sentence structure can avoid the use of pronouns, substituting a noun such as student or co-worker, or the pronoun they can be used as a gender neutral and inclusive option. Tendencies for binary language use also pervade documentation practices in the workplace (Beauregard et al., 2017). I am reflecting on how the

situations of discomfort and unease are paralleled with embodied experiences I have dancing tango.

In dancing, each embrace and dance partner creates a different feeling. Not only relationally between the two dancers and their roles, but also the music and other dancers in the space create a context where some dances are uncomfortable, or even unpleasant. For me this is often accentuated when I feel confined to another dancer's expectations, feeling forced around the dance floor and to do certain movements. Learning to say no to some dance partners, to set my own limits in the dance within these situations, and dancing in community with people who embrace reciprocity and exchange in tango supports me in spending more time connected in fulfilling dances in tango.

The previous discussion of social support and seeking connections relates to experiences of more inclusive academic spaces. Both inside and outside of classroom environments I found support from other Queer CATs members. These relationships helped me not to fear being alone or in the role of sole educator in the classroom on topics of gender and sexual minorities. I hoped that Queer CATs could provide a space where we could create opportunities to advocate for others as needed and share our emotional resources in responding to moments of difficulty, conflict, or discomfort on issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity. Having the platform of a group can be harnessed for advocacy and is helpful to hold faculty accountable for promised trainings and to lend support for students who are sharing experiences of rupture or harm in the academic environment. In part, this involved providing updates at faculty meetings, and passing information among students in different modalities and between years in order to ensure the changes sought were met. Through creating a group, it is also possible to write to faculty about concerns or issues that arise with the backing of multiple student voices, which may have a greater impact, or lessen the burden on a student feeling impacted by events to disclose and address this on their own. It is important to acknowledge that a group of students with minority sexual and/or gender identities does not necessarily imply sharing all views, be that political or personal. Queer CATs sought to support students personally, or in relation to faculty interactions, in instances where microaggressions or interactions felt targeted based on belonging to sexual and gender minority groups. The group was able to share resources such as grant examples, lists of funding organizations, event planning strategies, as well as encouragement to students organizing around other topics, identities and issues. While advocacy

is one role which could potentially be of greater importance in the future and is an important area to develop for the group, the earlier mentioned social support and peer supervision meetings held a key role in establishing connections and promoting resilience when faced with the challenges of navigating queer issues in the classroom.

There are some moments, and some people with whom in the tango embrace I feel a distinct sense of ease and comfort. It is enrapturing to be with the other, my breathing can ease, our hearts might even beat in time and our movement feels more fluid, even if there are moments of mis-communication or mis-steps in the dance.

Both individually and in the context of organizing Queer CATs events, I also experienced a wide range of supportive actions taken by peers, supervisors, faculty and staff. Collaborations and support for event planning and logistics were offered by peers and staff outside of the Queer CATs group. In the previous section, the demonstrated support of faculty and professionals showing up to events was noted. Some faculty were also helpful in making suggestions of community professionals to reach out to. Modeling of inclusive language went a long way in shaping my perceptions of someone I was newly encountering and my feeling of welcome in a space. In classroom contexts, when professors shared information, even to inform students of limitations of inclusion, such as recognizing that gender neutral washrooms were not available, or to assert that the opinions of a professor differed from what was presented in the assigned readings, I felt more included or understood in these spaces. How LGBTQ graduate students perceive their campus climate has been related to the number of "out" faculty within their departments (Vaccara, 2012). While positive learning environments have been fostered by professors who do not identify as LGBTQ, it is an important consideration that it makes a significant impact on the sense of acceptance within the University context to have representation through faculty holding these identities.

To be seen and respected as a person whose gender does not fit neatly into the binary, and as a new art therapist–was deeply validating. In my experience of art therapy internships, which are a key part of training, I was fortunate to find role models in my clinical supervisors, who met me with receptiveness, understanding, and care. Strong supervisory relationships that promote open dialogue and focusing on strengths and empowerment may be particularly important to training therapists of sexual and gender minorities (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). Although I chose not to affirm my gender identity as non-binary in clinical work, my supervisors' support

has helped me to work towards showing up authentically and on my own terms in therapeutic relationships. Questioning and considering what the context for future work will be, I am drawn to the reflections of gender-fluid art therapist Rumi Clinton, who wrote:

> I found that once I entered the professional world I had little success if I presented myself as anything other than a woman. . . I have a choice in how I present myself—not everyone does—and it has been far easier to flatten or exclude these parts of myself. But this too has been difficult. It can feel like being erased.
> (Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019, p. 76)

Authors contributing voices and reflections as trans and gender non-conforming art therapists are for me a part of the lineage of queer mentorship, modelling these potentials for current students, and creating literature that can be included in academic teachings. The need for more "out" gender diverse therapists has long been called for (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). Mentorship from queer and gender diverse professionals as well active allyship from heterosexual and cisgender creative arts therapists can support gender diverse therapists entering the field.

Witnessing people who were not a part of Queer CATs demonstrate support or contribute their voices to advocate for greater sensitivity to gender and sexual diversity was greatly touching. Through establishing a community of support, I felt increasingly able to express myself more authentically in classroom and supervisory relationships. It is my belief and hope that through its continued existence, the group Queer CATs will promote cultural humility around topics of gender identity and sexual orientation and bring this content into classroom discussions as well. I want to recognize and envision a future where diversity is not only celebrated, but all students are supported and feel included in their learning environments and workplaces. I hope that community groups may be spaces to celebrate the achievements and situate the creative arts therapies as a leading mental health field in its commitment to supporting and centering perspectives from marginalized communities. I am seeking to contribute to the creation of the community of creative art therapists that I want to see, that I believe we can be, building supportive spaces for work that I deem important and needed.

Discussion

The previous sections have recounted different experiences related to the development of Queer CATs as well as drawn connections between my personal experience and the insights of other thinkers, therapists, authors and researchers. Through metaphors from dancing tango, I

sought to demonstrate the unique perspective that I bring to this research as a queer tango dancer and thematically capture the data without identifying the precise experiences of others involved in the events. Working through reflections on the impacts of the Queer CATs group has brought to light the significance of this group on my learning experiences while training as an art therapist. Outlining the purposes and personal process of this autoethnographic exploration, some personal impacts of this research and of Queer CATs have surfaced.

The objectives of autoethnography have been described as wanting "the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). Intimacy is also essential in the tango embrace, where physical connection, attention, attunement, and trust are necessary ingredients for the moments in dance that feel the most magical. This raises questions for me about whether there were limits to the vulnerability which I allowed in the writing of this research. Potential impacts on the researcher of being vulnerable and the feelings of permanency related to publishing a text, justified a stance that is more protected and provided motivation for the use of metaphors for representing some personal experience. I wonder about how re-visiting this project in the future might feel like a tango with a past version of myself. There is a contrast between the static nature of a published text and the fluidity and change that happens with ongoing self-exploration, self-understanding and identity. As an autoethnographic researcher exploring the experience of a non-binary student studying in creative arts therapy, identity is embedded throughout the text. Bornstein (1994) critiques defining oneself through identity markers in stating: "we need to differentiate between having an identity and being an identity," (p. 117) and affirms the transient nature of categories including jobs, sexual orientation, politics, geography. I feel empowered through the advocacy and writing of other genderfluid, non-binary and genderqueer creative arts therapists who embrace their identities as fluid and in process (Gumble, 2019; Talwar, Clinton, Sit & Ospina, 2019; Zappa, 2017). Holding acceptance for the potential for change, this research has been an exploration of self, relations and co-learning.

Both the journey and activities of Queer CATs, and personal development during this research embrace ongoing and further exploration rather than a final destination. Engaging in processes of becoming is part of the autoethnographic method (Holman Jones, 2016; Heckert, 2010; Gannon, 2018). Autoethnography has been described and outlined as a queer methodology, and the ways that it challenged norms and traditions in scholarship as well as

embraced uncertainty and fluidity encouraged me to choose this methodology. Even the representation of self in this text can be seen as created or performed.

> Identities constructed through a queering of autoethnography are relational; they shift and change. We are held accountable for being particular kinds of people by numerous seen and unseen forces, but our/these kinds are in constant need of attention, negotiation and care. (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010, p. 209)

Being aware of some of the forces that call upon us to be within certain identities brings into question which identities and parts of self are expected and welcomed in the creative arts therapy classroom. Notions about identity can be extended to other ideas of self, recognizing that this is not consistent across situations but that "the self is a co-creation generated by the very process of social interaction . . . one creates a being as one relates to others, who are also beings-in-creation" (Russell & Bohan, p. 349). This concept of continually creating and co-creating a self, allowing access to different parts, resonates deeply with me. Feeling restricted to the identities that others consider or demand of us can evoke difficult feelings. The care and negotiation of identity relates closely to my experience of working towards greater authenticity in different settings including the art therapy classroom.

In developing as creative arts therapists, self-exploration and understanding of systems of power can be essential in developing an affirming and inclusive practice. Promoting the adoption of queer theory in training, Carroll and Gilroy (2001) ask: "If counseling trainees are unwilling to confront biases surrounding GLBT issues, how can we expect our society as a whole to become more open and accepting?" (p. 52). If mental health professionals are to be leading in their cultural knowledge in order to ethically work with diverse populations, ongoing opportunities for training from individuals within those communities is paramount. Creative arts therapists have indicated a need for greater training for working with LGBTQ populations (Beauregard et al., 2016; Kawano et al., 2018; Whitehead-Pleaux et al., 2013). One platform for gaining some further knowledge was offered through the speaker series hosted by Queer CATs. Critical reflection towards one's own experiences, social locators and their impact on work in the creative arts therapies is a place to begin, as has been demonstrated through intersectional reflectivity (Talwar et al., 2019). Examining any one category of identification is shaped and negotiated alongside others, such that while speaking about sexual orientation and gender identity, one should also examine the influences of class, race, size and ability (Sajnani, 2012;

Taylor, 2010). Self-reflection can also be supported through dialogue with others, and even bring together people based on shared identities, each holding unique perspectives and experiences.

In examining the intentions and what I found were benefits from the creation of Queer CATs, community and relational aspects were recurrent and central. A community of support created the opportunity to critically and intentionally engage in education on topics of gender and sexual minorities and transformed the isolation and worry about being held responsible as individuals for transmitting such perspectives. The challenges of being educator-as-student were identified in the literature (Gipson, 2017; Mesner, 2015). Recognizing that students from minority groups, including gender and sexual minorities, are often held responsible for educating others, including the educators, opportunities for students to come together in supportive spaces to discuss topics of identity in the classroom and clinical settings were greatly valued. This draws together the different sections outlined in the findings; where social support and building community can serve to mitigate the challenges associated with students taking on the roles of educating others. Communities of resistance may demonstrate that "life is possible, that a future is possible," in dialogue Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan maintain that "the purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of oneself and one's community in order to be able to see clearly" (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 209). For me, creating community, sharing ideas, resources, and experiences with other queer students in the creative arts therapies established a space where I had room to attend to my own wellbeing. The aspiration of healing for oneself and community may be a consideration that draws many queer people towards helping professions. It has been widely recognized that LGBTQ communities have higher rates of anxiety and depression, disproportionately face homelessness and experience violence, particularly trans and gender non-conforming people of colour (Alessi, 2014; Bain et al., 2016; Meyer, 2013). It is significant to have creative arts therapists who represent these communities, and to develop spaces to discuss and reflect on political climates and events surrounding queer issues that impact their personal and professional lives.

As emerging professionals in a helping field, care for oneself is crucial: "Care is the gift I give myself so that I am more capable of giving and receiving with others; of creating together our own boundaries and overflowing imaginary borders" (Heckert, 2010 in Heckert, 2013, p. 53). For therapists of sexual and gender minorities, community support as well as political actions can contribute to greater personal well-being and balance (Lurie, 2014). Queer CATs was

a space of care for me, where an environment of mutual support created a context where I felt seen, comfortable, and open to share my questions, concerns and difficulties. Seeking and offering care through community can challenge and transform the feelings of isolation and invisibility when gender and sexual diversity are not addressed. Entering spaces that are by and for members of a particular group, such as queer and gender diverse people, can be felt as relief (Ahmed, 2012). The care and support felt by the existence and regrouping of Queer CATs was a feeling that I carried with me through spaces and moments when I felt ungrounded or discomfort during my training as an art therapist. Creating spaces for resourcing and nourishing practitioners expands our ability to extend care to others, including supporting the growth, healing and resilience within queer communities.

Responding to the praxis of engaging in creating the Queer CATs group, this research has served as a reflection on the activities and nature of the first iteration this group had. Change as an outcome in my community of creative arts therapists cannot be identified per se through this research. However, my impressions and the feedback that I have received support my belief that being a visible and active presence in our department and wider network of creative arts therapists, contributed to greater awareness and consideration of sexual and gender minorities in the field. Witnessing audiences of students across modalities, both belonging to the Queer CATs group and outside of it, as well as professionals attend each public talk and workshop was enormously encouraging. Receiving positive feedback from workshop attendees at conferences, who shared widely ranging motivations for attending, demonstrated that work on these topics is filling a need in the creative arts therapies' networks. These opportunities have been greatly fulfilling to me towards my upcoming transition from student to professional.

I hope to see Queer CATs continue to evolve to realize its potential in new ways. This project harnessed resources of the academic institution to create a welcoming space within the student body for queer and gender diverse creative arts therapists. I hope that it contributes to grow, establishing and celebrating our place within the field, being visible while space for care and safety.

Implications

Further research in the creative arts therapies on best practices in clinical work with gender diversity could be complemented by developing best practices for more inclusive

pedagogy and classroom environments. Through sharing my experience as a student in the creative arts therapies, the benefits of social support and fulfillment of public outreach and education achieved through a student group for queer creative arts therapists has been outlined. This research may encourage current and future students in mental health professions to seek spaces to join with others that share experiences specific to membership in a marginalized group. The importance of considering intersecting systems of oppression on individuals was identified. Discussions of the experiences of LGBTQ students in the creative arts therapies would benefit from ongoing contributions from other perspectives. Listening to the perspectives of new professionals and students who identify as gender non-conforming can support professors in developing more inclusive pedagogical practices. The applications of critical theory, intersectionality, and social justice to the practice of creative arts therapies demonstrate important tools for shifting practice towards greater inclusion, for students and work with clients who are not in those groups most advantaged (Karcher, 2017; Talwar, 2010, 2015; Sajnani et al., 2017). The work towards shifting the dominant narratives is one without a final destination, but that demands ongoing mindful, and intentional work (Hadley, 2013). This autoethnographic exploration of co-creating Queer CATs situates how student organizing can serve to contribute to such cultural change within the field.

Future research may seek to explore Queer CATs' impacts on the wider community of students and faculty. Post event surveys and focus groups could be useful in understanding the impact of this student group. Gathering data from interviews with multiple students or exploring and comparing different advocacy and support groups for other minority populations in the creative arts therapies may also contribute to a greater understanding of the role of student groups in promoting culturally sensitive pedagogy.

Moreover, future research incorporating more voices and perspectives, through collaborative autoethnography, or participatory action research, could offer additional insight into the impacts and outcomes realized by projects such as Queer CATs. Quantitative or mixed methods research considering the amount of content in course readings which relates to or includes LGBTQ perspectives could further support the call for more inclusive pedagogy in creative arts therapies training. Such studies may seek to compare programs, or to survey faculty and students about the knowledge of practice with gender and sexual minorities that they hold, and how they have received this information. Questions raised about the impacts of

geographically isolated communities, and the experiences of LGBTQ students and clinicians who may study or practice isolated from networks of peer support and professional mentorship could be an area for future study. Future research may also seek to bridge reflections of the pedagogical experiences of students with the intentions and pedagogical practices of creative arts therapists who are professors and faculty.

Limitations

This research presents the experience and perspective of the researcher as an individual. It is not possible for any singular account to represent the diversity of the community and different lived experiences implicated in examining Queer CATs. Students' experiences of being sexual and gender minorities in the classroom are impacted by many other contextual and personal factors. Utilizing autoethnographic methods was sought as a tool to elaborate on the motivation and impacts of the group created, while limiting the dual roles which would be held of researcher, peer, student and friend, in a different methodological approach such as ethnographic or case study research.

Following the ethical considerations outlined in this paper, it is critical to bring awareness that "no research is without its own processes of marginalization. . . one is encouraged to ask what and who is being marginalized by the assumptions, focus, and approach one is taking" (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 273). This research is situated through the lens of my own perspective, including from an experience informed by White privilege. Any discomfort or exclusion experienced surrounding my gender in different contexts is not comparable to the very real risks to the physical safety and wellbeing of others in the queer community, particularly trans women of colour and other racialized and gender diverse individuals. As I have been writing this paper, I am holding closely in my mind that there have already been at least ten trans women of colour who have died by violent means in the United States since the start of 2019 (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). I recall the powerful question that Gipson (2015) posed about how systemic violence continues to enter and impact the classrooms and professional work of art therapists, "I believe that a meaningful social justice framework in art therapy will take seriously the question now being posed by contemporary activists. Which lives matter in art therapy?" (p. 145). This call to commit to justice continues to be imperative and necessary to consider within the field of creative arts therapies.

Another significant limitation to this paper is that the literature reviewed has not been inclusive of indigenous groups and identities including two-spirit, which is why the writing has not included 2S within the LGBTQ acronym. The recently published findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls acknowledge that 2SLGBTQQIA individuals have faced impacts of colonial violence in ways both similar and distinct from cis-gender women and girls (National Inquiry, 2019). This report also acknowledges that "many traditional Indigenous cultures held an honourable place for 2SLGBTQQIA persons [that] was destroyed by cis-normative and heteronormative colonial policies that aimed to erase and exclude 2SLGBTQQIA identities and cultural roles" (National Inquiry, 2019).

Reflecting on enforcement of the gender binary as an act of colonial violence, I feel it is important to acknowledge as well that my ability to access and affirm my non-binary gender identity has been facilitated in some ways by my access to post-secondary education. Through learning and reading theory, having ample time and access to resources which promote self-reflection as well as being in community with other students who identify as gender-fluid, genderqueer and trans, supported reflection on my own gender identity. I will to continue to self-reflect on my positionality and power in relation to academic, clinical and community work; as well as how to promote access to resources and self-determination for marginalized groups, including racialized, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQIA communities. I believe that there will continue to be changes in the use of language, and that this research paper, as a static entity, will not be able to reflect my ongoing learning. For example, I wonder whether the term gender and sexual minorities will continue to be relevant, as the acceptance and open identification with sexual orientations outside of heterosexuality continues to grow. Language I use to describe and understand aspects of my own identity may also change over time.

The self-centered nature of this autoethnographic exploration limits the generalizability of the narratives explored. However, this methodology promotes considering the impact on readers as a measure of the resonance and generalizability of the research. If any of the following occur: a reader is impacted personally, furthers their own self-reflection, is motivated to seek out resources to expand their knowledge of LGBTQ lives, or participates in the development of a communities of support for themselves and other queer students, then I will consider that this project has held great additional value beyond the many benefits it has afforded me.

Conclusion/Inclusion

The DJ calls out when it is the final song of the night. A familiar tune to any tango regular plays across the speakers in the dance hall, La Cumparsita*, a song to mark the ending of the night. Embracing, dancers hold one another and revel in final moments on the dance floor, perhaps with someone cherished, a long-time dance partner, or a new acquaintance having shared moments of connection through tango. This closing embrace is the end of the night of dancing, a moment of reflection, nostalgia, and with the right partner, it entices and promises of dances yet to come. Violin lines echoing in my head, I head homeward, still dancing in my mind, and looking forward to the next milonga.*

The essential vulnerability that comes with writing autoethnography challenged me to engage self-exploration in new forms and take different risks in my writing. Reflecting on the impactful and important experiences I have had related to being a co-founder of Queer CATs has left me with a similar flavour of the nostalgia and hopefulness for future encounters following the last tango of a rich night of dancing.

Even as the local student group will continue with new leadership and transformative potential, this research does not represent any conclusive findings or endings. Rather, I am left with more questions, and more reflection on the conditions necessary for inclusion. Ahmed (2012) examines institutional inclusion and the political nature of what is needed to diversify these spaces. There are necessary considerations of how power, as well as dominant narratives continue to shape our field, including research and pedagogy (Hadley, 2013). This involves questions such as who are we centering, including, making space for, and who is being left out, not present, not supported, and how can this change? For me, feeling more freedom and openness to continue exploring myself and showing up authentically were supported through Queer CATs. This group established a resource and space to connect for queer students, creating connections with professionals in the community and hosting presenters for public educational events. Uplifting the voices of students and new professionals through peer support is an approach that can continue to transform to address the gaps and meet the needs of queer people training to become creative arts therapists. Through co-creating spaces that are supportive for diverse people entering the profession, we have the greatest opportunity to reflect and support the communities that we serve as creative arts therapists.

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