

# EPATH 2023

## Voice and Communication Year in Review

### **Matthew Mills (he / they)**

Lead Consultant Speech and Language Therapist, London Gender Identity Clinic

Voice practitioner and pedagogue

President of the British Association of Gender Identity Specialists (2019-)

Royal College of Speech & Language Therapist National Adviser Trans Voice (2015-)

External Examiner Royal Central School of Speech and Drama Voice Teaching and Coaching Programmes (2018-)



26-28 APRIL 2023

**KILLARNEY, IRELAND**

# Positionality

- cis liminality (he/they)
- queer community
- gay right's activist since 1988
- HIV survivor
- intersectional professional identities: voice pedagogy, music education and speech and language therapist, community activist
- clinical and lived expertise: beyond collaboration to co-production
- acknowledging imperfection and limitation
- thanks to EPATH board and scientific committee
- towards a world of belonging



26-28 APRIL 2023

**KILLARNEY, IRELAND**

# Review: What will I cover?

- Selected/themed Papers 2021-23 (since EPATH 2021)
- Review Foci:
  - Cultural responsiveness (Azul & Zimman, 2022; Azul et al 2022)
  - The BAGIS' Principles of Care
  - Underpinning principles of care in voice and communication therapy
- Conclusion

# Methodology

## Searches

- electronic databases: EBSCO, Proquest, Cambridge Core, Gale Reference Complete, JSTOR, Project Muse, SAGE Journals Online, Science Direct, Research Gate
- scoping reviews of specific journals (e.g. International Journal of Transgender Health, International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, Journal of Voice, American Journal of Speech and Language Pathology, Journal of Voice, Journal of Speech, Language, Hearing Research)
- Overarching search concepts **'transgender'**, **'voice'** and **'communication'** were combined
- April 2021– January 2023

## Results

- 159 papers total.
- **33 relevant papers** were extracted after duplicates and exclusions.

# Themes from Studies

- developments in phonosurgery for trans clients
- effectiveness studies related to intensity and mode of therapeutic delivery
- gender perceptions related to voice
- effects of testosterone on the singing voice
- cultural responsiveness: interrogating clinical privilege in research context, and clinical and professional *cis-tems* bias in clinical practice and beyond

# How are we doing?

Leyns et al (2021). 'Effects of Speech Therapy for Transgender Women: A systematic Review' *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 22(4), 360-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2021.1915224>

urgent need for effectiveness studies using:

- RCT designs
- larger sample sizes
- multidimensional voice assessments
- well-described therapy programs
- investigators blinded to study process
- longer-term follow-up data

# SOC 8

## V&C Statements of Recommendations

14.1: voice and communication specialists **assess** current and desired vocal and communication **function** of transgender and gender diverse people and develop **appropriate intervention** plans for those dissatisfied with their voice and communication.

14.2: voice and communication specialists working with transgender and gender diverse people **receive specific education** to develop expertise in supporting **vocal functioning, communication, and well-being**

14.3: health care professionals in transgender health working with transgender and gender diverse people who are dissatisfied with their voice or communication **consider offering a referral** to voice and communication specialists for **voice-related support, assessment, and training**.

14.4: health care professionals consider working with transgender and gender diverse people who are considering undergoing voice surgery **consider offering a referral** to a voice and communication specialist who can provide **pre- and/or postoperative support**.

14.5: health care professionals in transgender health inform transgender and gender diverse people commencing **testosterone therapy of the potential and variable effects** of this treatment on voice and communication.

# Effectiveness Studies 1

Quinn, Oates & Dacakis (2022). 'The Effectiveness of Gender Affirming Voice Training for Transfeminine Clients: A Comparison of Traditional Versus Intensive Delivery Schedules' *Journal of Voice*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2022.03.001>

- N=34
  - 17 received 'traditional' (1x45min/week x 12weeks)
  - 17 received 'compressed' (3x45min/week x 4weeks)
  - both: statistically significant auditory-perceptual and acoustic voice change, reported increased satisfaction with voice, increased congruence between gender identity and expression, reduction in the negative impact of voice concerns on everyday life
  - *Centres mean not launching pitch; relatively small sample; quasi-experimental design not randomized; listeners recruited from sample of convenience ?diversity/bias*



# Effectiveness Studies 2

Merrick, Figol & Lin (2021). 'Outcomes of Gender Affirming Voice Training: A Comparison of Hybrid and Individual Training Modules'

*Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 65, 501–507.

[https://doi.org/10.1044/2021\\_JSLHR-21-00056](https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_JSLHR-21-00056)

- N=62 transfeminine and/or non-binary individuals
  - 43 individual sessions
  - 19 'hybrid' (=individual + group)
  - Both training modules in significant elevation of SFF and reduction of TWVQ scores.
  - Hybrid participants demonstrated significantly higher goal achievement and therapy adherence.
  - retrospective design relying on completeness and accuracy of the recorded clinical data; small number of participants, unequal sizes between modules, data gaps and drop-out rates; no controls; hybrid participants more likely to be socially motivated; SLP also psychotherapist; researchers are cis.

# Gender perceptions related to voice

Hope & Lilley (2022). 'Gender expansive listeners utilize a non-binary, multidimensional conception of gender to inform voice gender perception', *Brain & Language* 224, 105049. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandl.2021.105049>

- N= 47; 28 cis and 19 'gender expansive' (trans and non-binary) listeners.
  - How perception of gender varies with the complexity of the listener's own gender conception and identity, rating ambiguous **synthetic** voices on three independent scales of masculine, feminine, and 'other' (and to select one or multiple categorical labels for them).
  - **Results:** gender expansive listeners more likely to use the entire expanse of the rating scales and showed systematic categorization of gender-neutral voices as non-binary.
  - Useful shift away from cis privilege in this paper: many listener perception studies mostly use only cis listeners to judge whether voices fit 'male' or 'female' categories, resulting in cis people rating trans people on their 'passability'.

# Gender perception related to voice

Brennan et al (2022). 'Differences and Similarities in the Perception of Voice Gender for Individuals who are or are not Members of the LGBT+ Community',

*Journal of Voice* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2022.11.020>

- N=55 (cis, trans, non-binary adults) rated vocal recordings (4 cis men and women) on 7-point Likert scale (from [1]masculine to [7]feminine) and described gender terms of the recorded voices.
- Likert ratings and reaction time measures: no differences in perception of voice gender based on listener gender or sexuality.
- LGBT+ participants used a significantly **higher number and more descriptive terms** than cis and heterosexual participants who expressed a more restrictive perception of gender
- Recordings only cis voices: formulation of 'masculine to feminine continuum' centres binary voice; basic but useful evidence to support positioning LGBTQ+ community expertise at heart of voice exploration process from start.

# Clinical Responsiveness & Humility

Azul & Zimman (2022) 'Innovation in speech-language pathology research and writing: Transdisciplinary theoretical and ethical perspectives on cultural responsiveness', *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 24, 460–471.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17549507.2022.2084160>

- Culturally responsive research: must be attentive to the details of individual lives as they are experienced and represented by research participants themselves
- Reflexivity, transparency and responsibility for how our sociocultural positioning shapes research and affects the (human) beings whose lives it is likely to impact.

## Azul & Zimman (2022)

'...a substantial shift for SLP as a professional culture as it becomes apparent that the focus of attention in clinical practice needs to shift from assessing clients in terms of whether or not they deviate from *normal* presentations to reflecting on the validity and ethical implications of the view of sociocultural positioning that is taken for granted within the profession.'

# Azul et al (2022)

‘Supporting Well-Being in Gender-Diverse People: A Tutorial for Implementing Conceptual and Practical Shifts Toward Culturally Responsive, Person-Centered Care in Speech-Language Pathology’, *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 31,1574–1587.

[https://doi.org/10.1044/2022\\_AJSLP-21-00322](https://doi.org/10.1044/2022_AJSLP-21-00322)

- SLP/Ts develop culturally responsive approach to their work and address barriers and facilitators of gender-diverse people’s well-being—both *within* SLP/T as a professional culture *and* by adapting the clinician’s own professional practice.

# The BAGIS Principles of Care V&C Principles

- The BAGIS' Principles of Care: in the face of moral panic, gobal othering, pathologisation and dehumanisation of trans and non-binary people, and denial of trans rights
- Underpinning Principles in Voice & Communication Therapy – centres interrogation of clinical privilege, cultural humility and responsiveness
  - Vocal Journeying
  - Vocal Authenticity
  - Vocal Plurality
  - Vocal Collaboration
  - Vocal Pedagogy

# Conclusion

Advocacy &  
Allyship

Systemic &  
Professional  
paradigm shift

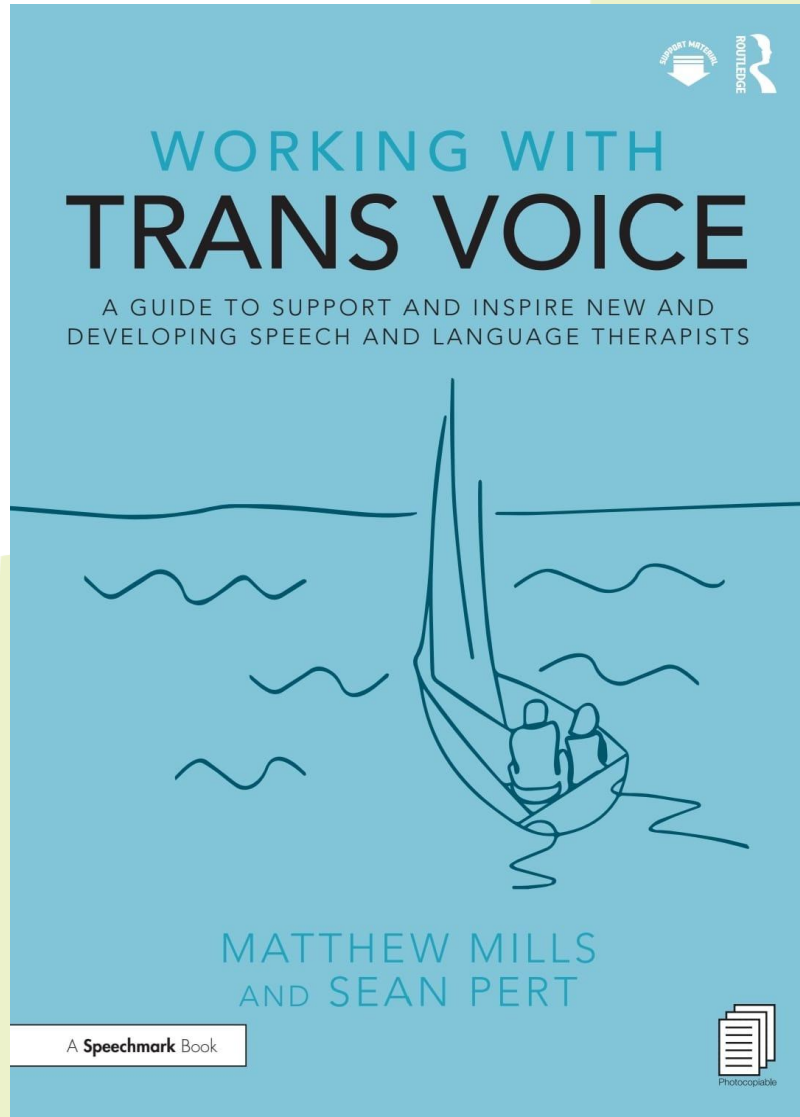
Solidarity & Co-  
Production

Personal &  
Professional

Reflexivity



# Co-production: 'in the boat together' (in memory of Simon-Anthony Ford)



**EPAH**

26-28 APRIL 2023

**KILLARNEY, IRELAND**

THANK YOU



**EPA<sup>+</sup>**  
**ETH**

26-28 APRIL 2023  
**KILLARNEY, IRELAND**