

# Flexible Fach

gender-affirming vocal pedagogy  
through science-informed practices

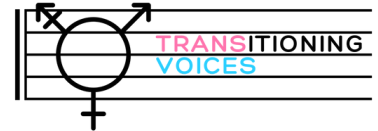
*"Transgender [individuals] have spent their lives trying to be who they are not, trying to act and talk like their gender assigned at birth... We are helping to give voice to some tender and incredibly strong, courageous individuals whose voices have been silenced for far too long."*

— Anita Kozan, "The Singing Voice," p 332.



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## Summary

Created through an understanding of the gendered associations and vocal characteristics of common fach categories and voice classifications, the **Flexible Fach Gender-Affirming Singing Protocol** synthesizes practices from gender-affirming speech-language pathology (SLP) with source-filter theory and science-informed vocal pedagogy to present a healthy practice routine for transgender and gender expansive singers who are seeking to masculinize or feminize their voices.

**Negative psychosocial factors directly impact the voice and increase the risk of pathology.<sup>1</sup>**

Est. 4,132,800 TGE individuals in the US<sup>2</sup>

4690 reported murders ('08-'23), US ranks 3rd<sup>3</sup>

510 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the US (as of 01/2024)<sup>4</sup>

81.8% of TGE students feel unsafe at school<sup>5</sup>

**Gender-Affirming Voice and Communication Therapy**

### Areas of Focus<sup>6</sup>

#### 1. Fundamental Frequency (Pitch)<sup>7</sup>

- o Average Speaking Ranges:
  - AMABs: E2-F#3
  - AFABs: E3-B3
  - Overlap E3-F#3 (target)
- o Effect of MHRT on AFAB range:
  - Possible lowering of a tritone - m6

#### 2. Prosody (Inflection)

#### 3. Intensity (Volume)

#### 4. Voice Quality (Clarity/Breathiness)

#### 5. Resonance (Timbre/Focus)

## Gender-Affirming Voice and Communication Therapy, cont.

### Gendered Voice Perception

- Can be altered by changing BOTH Fundamental AND Formant Locations<sup>8</sup>
- Fundamental, Prosody, and Intensity are mostly prescribed by the music.
  - Turns focus to **Quality** and **Resonance** in singing!
- **Feminine**: “bright,” open pharynx, higher formant frequencies, use “/i/ification,” “light”<sup>9</sup>
- **Masculine**: “dark,” closed pharynx (tongue back), lower formant frequencies, crisp<sup>(9)</sup>

## Flexible Fach: Gender-Affirming Singing Protocol

Created by Stevie J. Hirner

### Vocal Health, Goals, & Assessment

- Goals informed by: vocal capabilities, desired aesthetic, existing habits, and physiological limitations
- Areas of assessment:
  - Posture & Breathing
  - Voice Quality & Timbre
  - Onset & Articulation
  - Physiological & Performable Range

### Areas of Focus, Factors to Consider, & Types of Exercises

- Posture —
  - Balanced, Relaxed
  - Low Larynx - Dark/Masc.
  - High Larynx - Bright/Fem.
- Respiration —
  - Affects Laryngeal Height
  - Abdominal - Lower Larynx
  - Thoracic - Higher Larynx
- Voice Quality —
  - Onset and articulation are essential to clarity — *Hirsch's Acoustic Assumptions*<sup>10</sup>
  - Firm/Voiced = Clear/Dark/Masc.
  - Light/Unvoiced = Breathy/Bright/Fem.
- Resonance —
  - Vowel modification affects perception
  - “/o/ification” — masculine
  - “/i/ification” — feminine

# Final Thoughts

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS

- What Genre?
- Personal or Professional?
- Solo or Choral?
- Expectation Management

## THE FLEXIBLE FACH GENDER-AFFIRMING SINGING PROTOCOL:

an affirming foundation for TGE singers that is grounded in well-established principles of gender-affirming voice and communication therapy and voice science.

### Notes

1. Richard K. Adler and Christella Antoni, "Vocal Health and Phonotrauma," *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, ed. Richard K Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, Third (San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2019), 138.
2. Anna Brown, "About 5% of Young Adults in the U.S. Say their Gender is Different from Their Sex Assigned at Birth," Pew Research Center, 2022
3. "TMM Absolute Numbers (2008 - Sept 2022)," Trans Murder Monitoring, Transgender Europe and Carsten Balzer, 2023
4. "Mapping Attacks on LGVTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures," ACLU, accessed April 8, 2022
5. Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, *The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of LGBTQ+ Youth in Our Nation's Schools*, (New York: GLSEN, 2022)
6. Georgia Dacakis, "Considerations for Intake and Assessment," in *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, ed. Richard K Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, Third (San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2019), 109
7. Carolyn, P Hodges-Simeon, O. Grail Graham, Albert Graham, Matti D. Groll, Cara E. Stepp, Justin Carré M., and Steven A. Arnocky. "Testosterone Therapy Masculinizes Speech and Gender Presentation in Transgender Men." *Scientific Reports* (Nature Publisher Group) 11, no. 1 (2021), 1-2.
8. James M. Hillenbrand and Michael J. Clark. "The Role of F0 and Formant Frequencies in Distinguishing the Voices of Men and Women." (*Attention, Perception and Psychophysics*, 71(5)), 1150-1166
9. Jennifer M. Oates, "Evidence-Based Practice in Voice Training for Trans Women," and Christie Block, Viktória G. Papp, and Richard K. Adler, "Transmasculine Voice and Communication," in *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, ed. Richard K Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, Third (San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2019)
10. Sandy Hirsch, Marylou Pausewang Gelfer, and Joan Boonin, "The Art and Science of Resonance, Articulation, and Volume," in *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, ed. Richard K Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, Third (San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2019), 230-1.

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"All singers, no matter what their personal or vocal circumstances, deserve to be accepted where they are, and complimented on what they have achieved thus far."