

Book Review

Sociocultural Identities in Music Therapy (2021)

Edited by Susan Hadley (Barcelona Publishers)

Reviewer: May Bee Choo Clulee 吳美珠

MA (Music Therapy), PG Dip (Bicultural Professional Supervision), NZ RMTh
Southern Music Therapy (Canterbury); private practice

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Susan Hadley is a strong social justice advocate, borne of her own lived experiences of inhabiting multiple sociocultural spaces. Her writings and collaborations hold space for considering how the dominant narratives that comprise much music therapy discourse, continue to perpetuate injustice and oppression for both clients and therapists (Hadley 2013a, 2013b; Norris & Hadley, 2019). As a journal editor for *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*,¹ she advocates for greater inclusion and embracing multiple ways of knowing and being across all facets of our practice (Hadley 2021; Ikuno et al., 2021; Oosthuizen et al, 2022).

Hadley's latest book, *Sociocultural Identities in Music Therapy*, is a collection of intensely personal narratives. It invites us to critically reflect on how issues of cultural intersection impact music therapists' practice. This topic is of deep personal interest to me, a Southeast Asian post-colonial music therapist living in Aotearoa New Zealand, seeking to reframe my practice to align with my lived experience and values.

The book is dedicated to the late Carolyn Kenny, who "honoured the whole aesthetic of the therapist and client" (p. 4). In her (2014) *Field of Play* theory, Kenny offers her indigenous lens through which to understand music therapy, a lens that emphasises the interconnectedness of all things. The aesthetic is one of three core fields described by Kenny and refers to each person's unique way of being in the world. This is a fitting dedication, and Kenny's

¹ <https://voices.no>

influence is evident among the book's narratives. In her acknowledgement, Hadley draws attention to this interconnectedness, acknowledging not only named and known contributors but also the unnamed and unnoticed, such as the people who provide food for the authors and the materials used for the book.

Hadley has curated a collection of eighteen diverse voices from the international music therapy community who share candid, honest, and vulnerable narratives. A US-born Australian and Music Therapy Program Director at Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania, Hadley positions herself in the introduction by sharing her own story and its impact on her life and professional practice. The contributing authors represent “gender diversity, diversity of sexualities, racial diversity, ethnic diversity, neurodiversity, geographical diversity, linguistic diversity, educational diversity, and more” (p. 21). They apply critical theory frameworks to reflect on how their own unique cultural contexts and lived experiences have shaped their music therapy journey. A range of issues are explored, such as inhabiting multiple cultural realities, reflecting on white privilege, creating openness for diverse understandings of therapy, and navigating gender identity as a music therapist.

Hadley shows both deliberation and nuance in her editing, enabling each individual's story to come through in their authentic voice and style, including untranslated words and phrases in their mother tongue. The text is committed to values of inclusion and diversity, such as capitalising Black but not white²; using non-binary, gender neutral language; and the avoidance of ableist metaphors. This results in a reading that is “intentional around discourse” (p. 22). Throughout the book is the consistent message that “the identity of the therapist affects the therapeutic relationship and everything in therapy” (p. 401). Bringing to awareness and embracing the cultural landscapes that define who we are becomes, therefore, an ethical responsibility of every music therapist.

I found this book both a joy and a challenge to read. Some chapters resonated with me, when my own lived experiences were reflected back to me in the authors' writing. I learnt from other authors' deep reflections, uncovering unconscious truths about myself. I struggled with a few chapters, because I could not relate to them, despite thinking that my multicultural heritage makes me comfortable with diversity. These responses further revealed the extent of my internalised colonialism and unconscious feelings

² Hadley chose to capitalise *Black* and not *white*, as she wanted to highlight the fact that “white people have not had a history of racial discrimination and oppression based on skin color and [...] that Black has become a preferred identity marker for many African diasporic peoples” (p.22). For more discussion around this, see Appiah (2020) and Laws (2020).

of superiority to others. This discomfort is the stuff of reflexivity, and the authors implore us to sit in that space, name our biases, and consider fully the unique diversity of each person's contexts. I have decided not to detail individual chapters: each is unique and each reader will have their own responses and reflections to the stories.

I needed time and space to acknowledge and reflect on my emerging responses, and it was here I found many of the strategies in the final chapter for cultivating sociocultural reflexivity helpful. I was reminded too that this is not a solitary venture but “an inherently dialogical process that involves paradigm shifts in both thinking and learning” (p. 403).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the importance of attending to cultural contexts has been gaining momentum in the last decade. The Te Kōki, New Zealand School of Music Conference theme in November 2013 was Linking Cultures: Collaborative Partnerships in Music Therapy and Related Disciplines. This included keynote lectures by Sangeeta Swamy (2013, 2014), one of this book's contributing authors, and Māori academic, Te Manaaroha Rollo (2013a, 2013b, 2014). Aotearoa New Zealand music therapists Sarah Hoskyns and Dennis Kahui were featured in Hadley's earlier book, *Experiencing Race as a Music Therapist* (Hadley 2013a; Hoskyns & Hadley, 2013; Kahui & Hadley, 2013). Māori and Pasifika music therapists have described their work through their own cultural lenses (Hodgson, 2014, 2018; Kahui, 2008; Solly, 2019; Van Dam, 2020). Recently, O'Connor's (2022) action research thesis critically examined how to mitigate potential harm in music therapists and clients in his own practice as an emerging Pākehā music therapist. Other music therapists have shared their sociocultural reflexivity journeys in a wide range of contexts (Cho, ; Cho et al., 2021; Clulee, 2021; Shaw, 2019, 2022; Willis et al., 2014).

Roestenberg and Hoskyns (2022) have recently co-authored a book chapter describing a wānanga between music therapy and Māori sound healing, engaging in “radical mutuality” (Kenny 2017, cited in Roestenberg & Hoskyns, 2022, p.124). “A willingness to disturb the dominant White narrative backgrounds our interwoven story” (p. 147).³ Their journey is both individual and collective, involving personal and institutional shifts. This is significant work, not only for music therapy, but also in the nation's journey towards developing a bicultural identity that honours Te Tiriti and holds space for diversity and multiple ways of knowing and being to flourish.

A few years ago, I reviewed another book exploring cultural intersections in music therapy. My conclusion was that “we need to continue the

³ Note, the use of capitalised *White* here, in contrast with my comment above. Both forms are seen, variously reflecting local context or author stance.

conversations that have been started about cultural intersections in music therapy in our NZ context” (Clulee, 2018, p. 149) My sentiments are now stronger than ever, as my own thinking has shifted. Having conversations is not enough. The process of “[being] open to having your perspective challenged and possibly cracked” (p. 68) starts with active introspection, as this book’s authors have demonstrated through their stories.

The reality of our interconnectedness as human beings makes us aware of our ethical responsibility as therapists to think deeply about who we are and how this impacts ourselves, our clients, and our practice. I invite all music therapists – students and mature practitioners alike – to explore what this book has to offer as we journey towards deeper sociocultural reflexivity.

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