



BOOK REVIEW

**Beer, L., & Birnbaum, J.C. (Eds.)
(2023): *Trauma-Informed Music
Therapy: Theory and Practice.*
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Trauma-Informed Music Therapy: Theory and Practice, edited by Laura E. Beer and Jacqueline C. Birnbaum, provides an essential guide to the understanding and implementation of trauma-informed approaches within the context of music therapy in a variety of settings. Embedded throughout the book is the attention to the high prevalence of trauma in those served by music therapists, the need for music therapists to attend to their own trauma and well-being, and the recognition that everyone's culture must be honored throughout service delivery. Though music therapists should not delve into the realm of trauma treatment without proper advanced clinical training, all music therapists can and ought to take the perspective of trauma-informed care with every service user. Trauma-informed practice is not a separate theoretical or practice approach; because of the prevalence of trauma in the world, and in particular, clients served by music therapists, understanding the factors, impacts, and needs related to trauma and applying general principles of trauma-informed practice must be the underpinning of every music therapist's work. This book provides music therapists and music therapy students with generalizable information in all settings, as well as specific clinical applications for those working directly to address the trauma of their service users. Each chapter can stand alone as a resource on the subtopics represented in this book and will be very useful in the education and clinical training of music therapy students, given the extensive and detailed case examples and recommendations from the authors. Educators may find that pairing together a chapter from the first section on Theories and Perspectives with a later chapter may enhance their students' understanding of the clinical examples shared in those later chapters.

The book is divided into three parts: Theories and Perspectives; Children and Adolescents; and Adults. Part I provides the grounding concepts necessary for all music therapists to consider how to implement trauma-informed approaches into their practice. Chapter 1, *The Resilience Framework for Trauma-Informed Music Therapy*, written by Jennifer Sokira, Joy Allen, and Heather Wagner, recognizes that while music therapists practice from a variety of theoretical orientations and approaches, all can assume that every service user has experienced something potentially traumatic. Music therapists can also all benefit from a framework that supports their work to meet the needs for safety and work with the symptoms of trauma. The Resilience Framework builds on Herman's three-stage process designed to promote an individual's ability to navigate the effects of traumatic experiences. The chapter takes each of these stages and provides information relating to clinical focus areas, clinical considerations for music therapists, and questions for reflection. Importantly, the writers do not provide a scripted method of responding to trauma in service users but encourage each reader to be thoughtful and intentional in their own process of clinical work.

Chapter 2, *Global Trends in Music Therapy for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery*, builds on the extensive experiences of the authors, Barbara A. Else and Mireya González, in responding to natural disasters and crisis. This chapter in particular highlights the need for cultural awareness, humility, and responsiveness as music therapists respond to those impacted by disasters. The theory, frameworks, and principles of Trauma-Informed Care and Psychological First Aid provide the reader with the background information necessary to understand the purpose and goals of the music therapist in the case vignette shared in this chapter. The authors describe the

logistics and interventions offered following the 2010 earthquake in Chile, along with lessons learned and recommendations that music therapists responding to disasters should consider.

Jasmine Edwards wrote chapter 3, *Cultural Humility in Music Therapy Practice*. This chapter could easily be a stand-alone essay for music therapists and music therapy students to study and reflect upon in their clinical practice. The author shares definitions of terms, such as “cultural competency” and “cultural sensitivity,” and how the understanding of what best serves others has continued to evolve into “cultural humility.” Cultural humility is an essential thread through all of the principles of trauma-informed care, as cultural identity can affect both the impact of potentially traumatic experiences and the treatments provided to the person. This chapter includes a comprehensive section on suggestions for practice, providing questions for reflection on the client-therapist relationship, clinical vignettes with more questions for consideration, and questions regarding education and training.

The fourth chapter, *Questioning the Promise of Safety in Trauma-Informed Practice*, was written by Elly Scrine and Asami Koike. A previous work of Scrine’s, which is critical of oft-mentioned priorities of creating safety and building resilience in trauma-informed work, is cited multiple times throughout this entire book, and for excellent reason. This chapter builds upon that earlier criticism and calls forth a broader consideration of power dynamics and historical and systemic trauma. The authors propose a paradigm shift away from “individualizing approaches that seek only to address the client’s functioning rather than the social conditions that enable harm” (p. 38). As music therapists consider what is meant by providing safe spaces for their

service users, we must ask who decides what safety means and recognize that intersecting identities will impact safety in various environments. This chapter offers a complex case example for the reader to examine the implications of dominant cultural norms in therapeutic spaces. The conclusion of this chapter provides important considerations for music therapists to reconceptualize safety for all those they serve.

Part II of the text contains four chapters concerning the application of trauma-informed approaches with children and adolescents. Chapter 5, *I Am Safe and I Am Strong: Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences and Building Resilience through Trauma-Informed Music Therapy*, begins with the author, Oliva Swedberg Yinger, sharing a personal and powerful anecdote using music to soothe her own son. From there, the chapter details Adverse Childhood Experiences and a developmental systems perspective on developing resilience. Music therapists are encouraged to embed promotive and protective factors into their work with children impacted by adversity. Several models are highlighted in this chapter for working with children, with special attention to Perry's sequence of engagement and Lieneman's PRIDE skills (p. 51) in the clinical case example. The chapter concludes with a detailed list of recommendations for practice in "An Approach to Building Resilience Rooted in Multicultural and Social Justice Praxis."

Stephanie Holly contributed chapter 6, *Changing the Narrative: Exploring How Music Therapy Can Assist Adolescents Dealing with Race-Based Traumatic Stress*. The chapter outlines how the process of identity formation in adolescence intersects with racial identity, and how race-based traumatic stress develops. A case vignette helps to illustrate the application of therapeutic songwriting as an intervention for identity

development in the midst of race-based traumatic stress. The author also highlights the essential practices of recognizing the value of lived experience and empowering a changed narrative through music as a healing medium. Naturally, this chapter also picks up the thread of cultural humility that weaves throughout the entire text, offering practical suggestions for music therapists to consider as they work with those who are experiencing race-based traumatic stress.

Chapter 7, written by Cindybet Pérez-Martínez, is *Music Therapy with Children in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster*. The author points out that our changing climate indicates the likelihood that natural disasters will continue to increase in frequency and intensity. The chapter describes the impact of natural disasters on children and gives detailed recommendations for clinical practice. Beginning with an overall case for the use of music therapy in disaster response, the author outlines goals for treatment, followed by recommendations on assessment and treatment planning during ongoing disaster relief efforts. The chapter continues with a helpful list of specific desired outcomes and suggested music therapy interventions in the following domains: biophysical, behavioral, cognitive, psycho-emotional, psycho-social, and spiritual. The author also takes time to underscore the importance of support for music therapists who are doing this work, as it does put the clinician at risk of their own traumatic responses.

The final chapter of Part II, *Trauma-Informed Practice: Clinical Songwriting in Pediatric Cancer and Sickle Cell Disease*, by Tracie Sandheinrich and Jaime Kennington, offers a glimpse into the clinical program, Kids Rock Cancer, for a very specific setting and group of service users. The authors describe how the diagnosis, illness progression, and treatment of pediatric cancers and sickle cell disease

contributes to traumatic stress. Utilizing therapeutic songwriting as the specific modality of treatment, therapists are implementing trauma informed practice through each aspect of the songwriting process. The chapter provides step-by-step suggestions for implementation of trauma-informed songwriting, in addition to two case study examples that highlight the need for flexibility within the framework. The final section of this chapter lists twenty best-practice recommendations for music therapists to consider while providing therapeutic songwriting in a trauma-informed manner. Though the chapter was specific to pediatric cancer and sickle cell disease, this list of recommendations is valuable for all music therapists to consider in their own practice and settings.

The eight chapters in Part III review trauma informed approaches in various settings for adults. Rachel Ebeling and Sarah Michaelis detail the parameters of the Angel Band Project in Chapter 9: Music Therapy for Survivors of Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence. The Angel Band Project utilizes a variety of music therapy interventions in both group and individual settings for survivors, and case examples highlight the importance and application of trauma-informed practice in these settings. This chapter also provides detailed recommendations for practice under subheadings of safety in the therapeutic environment, music therapists' sense of safety, confidentiality, relationships (including peer support, collaboration, and mutuality), and empowerment. The conclusion of this chapter elevates how music therapy programs like the Angel Band Project can function not only as a healing mechanism for those directly impacted by sexual and intimate partner violence, but also as a means of promoting awareness and reducing the isolation associated with this type of adverse experience.

Nadine Cadesky provides important and practical applications of a trauma informed approach in Chapter 10: Group Work with Adults in Short-Term Inpatient Psychiatric Treatment and Recovery. Like the author, many music therapists find themselves in clinical work that provides limited to no opportunity for detailed assessment sessions or engagement with the clinical team. This chapter reviews the integration of the overarching goals of co-creating safety, honoring personhood, and agency, and fostering social and emotional well-being into these short-term settings. Three case examples are followed by recommendations that center on therapist well-being, person-centered perspectives, and supporting safety through musical components.

The remaining chapters of the text describe advanced levels of practice for music therapists, so readers must be aware of their clinical limitations and seek appropriate training and supervision before utilizing some of the techniques mentioned. Chapter 11, written by Andrew Rossetti, is Trauma-Informed Music Psychotherapy in Radiation Oncology: Implementation of the Trauma, Resilience, Safety Model. The Trauma, Resilience, Safety (TRS) Model was developed out of Joanne Loewy's medical music psychotherapy (MMPT) model. The chapter describes the environmental and psychosocial factors of the radiation oncology setting and the theoretical foundations of the TRS model, which includes Polyvagal Theory. An essential section of this chapter builds the connection between environmental factors and potential traumatization, making the case for the use of environmental music therapy in the radiation oncology setting. The case vignette helpfully describes the implementation of the TRS model and is followed up with implications and recommendations for practice, which includes rationale for the

use of this model of music therapy that may resonate with hospital administrators concerned with both patient experience and budgets.

Jenny Hoi Yan Fu contributed Chapter 12, *Finding One's Voice: Working through Developmental Trauma with Vocal Psychotherapy*. The chapter begins with a thorough discussion of the relationship between the voice, childhood attachment to caregivers, and trauma. An overview of Vocal Psychotherapy includes the implications for working with developmental trauma, followed by an impactful clinical example and recommendations for practice. While Vocal Psychotherapy is an advanced level of practice for music therapists, this chapter provides a concise overview of the technique that students and entry-level music therapists may find useful in their professional development.

Chapter 13, by Gillian Stephens Langdon, is titled *Music Therapy in the Treatment of Complex Trauma in Adult Mental Health*. Langdon writes from the first person about the experiences of working in an adult psychiatric setting and developing a Music-Verbal Therapy Trauma group to better meet the needs of patients. The author reviews fundamentals of trauma-informed music therapy that can serve as a guide for setting up such a group. In addition, the chapter outlines two models for application of trauma-informed music therapy: working with symptoms and topics, and improvisation. As the models described in this chapter rely on co-facilitation, music therapists who are not yet at an advanced level of practice may be able to partner with a qualified colleague in these applications.

Joanne Loewy describes the work of music psychotherapy for addressing the trauma experienced by musicians in Chapter 14: "I Hear You": The Potency of Play in

Music Psychotherapy for Treating Trauma in Musicians. Traumatic experiences are not uncommon for professional musicians, both in their full life experiences as well as in the specific exposures to toxic stress in the career path of a musician. This chapter helpfully details the assessment processes utilized at the Music and Health Clinic at the Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine, and how that assessment functions within the treatment model. Loewy's 3 P's model of musician health highlights the rationale for inclusion of "play" into treatment planning and the life of a musician. A stunning case example of a musician who abruptly lost his sight at the moment of a high-stakes performance illustrates the model. Specific treatment modalities are reviewed in a section on recommendations for practice for advanced-level music therapists working to address the trauma of musicians.

Bent Pitch: Trauma, the LGBTQAI+ Community, and Music Psychotherapy (Chapter 15), written by Brian Harris, provides important context for addressing the traumas uniquely experienced by those in the LGBTQAI+ community. Harris vulnerably shares a personal experience of self-understanding relating to gender expression, alongside details of trauma statistics and an explanation of the identity components that are relevant. Harris notes the systemic factors that contribute to traumatization of those in the LGBTQAI+ community, as well as the growing attention to these issues in music therapy literature. A composite clinical example, grounded in Analytical Music Therapy, details both the observations of the client's responses as well as the internal reflections of the therapist.

The final chapter, by Moshe Bensimon, describes Mechanisms of Change in Music Therapy When Treating Adults Coping with Trauma. After a brief but thorough

overview of the neurological functions relevant to trauma and the rationale for using music to effect change, the chapter unpacks five mechanisms of change for music therapists to employ: relaxation, playfulness, super-expressive emotions, sense of control, and interpersonal synchronization. The descriptions of each of these mechanisms includes detailed references and suggested music therapy interventions. These mechanisms may be useful for all students and music therapists to consider as they develop into more trauma-informed clinicians, as they are principles that have relevance for all settings of clinical work.

In the conclusion of *Trauma-Informed Music Therapy*, the editors share that their objective for the book was “to combine theoretical perspectives on trauma-informed practice with real-life applications in music therapy practice.” They have certainly accomplished this goal in pulling together the diverse perspectives and practices represented by the contributing authors. Even more, they have generated a robust guide for any music therapist seeking to improve their service delivery and positively impact those experiencing the effects of trauma. This text is broadly relevant to music therapists, music therapy students, and music educators alike, as trauma is so prevalent in our world and in our work. The reminders of honoring individual cultural and identity factors, therapist self-care, and attention to the functions of music, along with the detailed clinical examples and recommendations, will make this text a frequently referenced resource in the profession of music therapy.