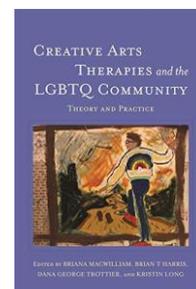


BOOK REVIEW

Creative arts therapies and the LGBTQ community: Theory and practice (Macwilliam, Harris, Trottier & Long, Eds.)

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Title: Creative arts therapies and the LGBTQ community: Theory and practice **Editors:** Briana Macwilliam, Brian T. Harris, Dana George Trottier & Kristin Long **Publication year:** 2019 **Publisher:** Jessica Kingsley Publishers **Pages:** 304 **ISBN:** 978-1785927966

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The book *Creative Arts Therapies and the LGBTQ Community*, edited by Briana Macwilliam, Brian T. Harris, Dana George Trottier and Kristin Long, presents the experiences of 16 mental health professionals (psychanalysts, music therapists, art therapists and dance therapists) describing their work with the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning) community.

The stigmatisation and discrimination that the LGBTQ community may face can cause negative feelings that can lead to mental health issues, emotional discomfort, and negative self-image. As mentioned in the book, research conducted among art therapists has made apparent the lack of sufficient education in overcoming issues that occur during sessions with the people from the LGBTQ community. The main idea of the book is to expand the knowledge base and raise awareness on the subject for arts therapists who work with the LGBTQ community while aiming at a deeper understanding of the issues that this community might face. Overall, the authors and editors of the book have made a sufficient attempt in providing information on the subject, both through their professional experience with the LGBTQ community and via their personal experiences based on their sexual orientation.

The reader can find important information in each chapter of the book, such as various techniques from different approaches that have been used in sessions. Additionally, there are examples of specific obstacles and/or challenges that the therapists faced during sessions as well as questions for future development in order to enrich LGBTQ-related research. More specifically, in the beginning of each chapter the respective authors present the topic that they will focus on and in some cases they also disclose their sexual orientation. The authors explore the topic from a cultural perspective as well as from a more social lens, while expanding qualitative, quantitative and arts-based

research. As the book focuses on arts therapies interventions, it provides examples from the contributing therapists' sessions who work with the LGBTQ community. Given that there is a need for further research and awareness on the subject, the aforementioned case examples could be very valuable and useful for therapists who work with this specific community. Another strong point of the book is the presentation of excerpts from the authors' discussions in peer supervision. This can potentially help or even challenge the reader both professionally and personally by aiming at the deconstruction of social stereotypes leading to the non-stigmatisation of the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, the book invites each therapist to think of possible biases that may come up during sessions.

From my personal interest in this subject after conducting a literature review during my postgraduate music therapy studies (Santaka, 2017), I became aware that research in relation to the LGBTQ community is limited, especially in the music therapy field. This becomes apparent from chapter seven in the subsection *Music Therapy and LGBTQ Literature*, where the author and music therapist Brian T. Harris presents previous music therapy research studies. However, there was no reference on previous research from Chase (2004) who evaluated articles that referred specifically to gay individuals, providing an overview regarding therapeutic interventions and their application in music therapy. Similarly, an article from Antebi and Gilboa (2017) presented the relation between song composition and the coming out process. A review of the literature shows that older research from Lee (1996) and Bruscia (1998a, 1998b) presented the work of music therapists with gay clients with AIDS, providing a first glance on issues deriving from sexual orientation during sessions.

In this chapter, Harris begins with disclosing his sexual orientation touching, in my opinion, a very important matter related to the implications of the therapist's disclosure on the client. He then discusses briefly research on music therapy with the LGBTQ community to date and continues with referring to his own sexual orientation and how the latter has impacted both his professional and his personal life so far. This particular chapter intrigued me because of the discussion of potential challenges that therapists may face in their professional work deriving due to their sexual orientation. However, I find the flow of this chapter slightly interrupted due to the fact that the author initially describes the impact that the disclosure of the therapist's sexual orientation has on the clients. Then, the reader is taken to something more generic through the presentation of previous research regarding music therapy generally in relation to the LGBTQ community and eventually returns to the importance of the therapists disclosing their sexual orientation while presenting case examples from sessions. Perhaps this chapter would benefit more from a more continuous flow by presenting previous relevant literature on music therapy and the LGBTQ community at the beginning of the chapter instead of the middle. Then it could move on to the analysis of the concept of each person's identity and the meaning of sexual identity, and conclude with the interesting case examples from sessions that were presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter eight *Seeking the Uncensored Self* written by music therapist Julie Lipon, offers a general picture regarding the therapeutic process with transgender clients. Lipon, drawing on her own work, describes the challenges that transgender individuals might face because as she also refers in the chapter, many individuals who self-identify as transgender have learnt from a very young age to dissociate body and mind. She also explores how lyrics discussion in groups raises questions concerning the authenticity of the self. She then employs referential improvisation, which is a

technique where the client demonstrates an idea, a feeling, an image or a story, and then encouraged to discuss in the sessions about their feelings and connect with their body.

A weak point of the book, as it was also discussed by the editors themselves, is that professionals who contributed in this book, even though they come from different cultural backgrounds, all live and work in New York. Consequently, all research that has been explored might lack geographical range as they all come from the United States. Similarly, the research studies presented in the fifth chapter *Attuning to the Needs of LGBTQ Youth* regarding the trauma that exists among LGBTQ adolescents refers only to individuals who live in USA.

Undeniably, the publication of this book constitutes a very important step towards a deeper understanding on a relatively underrepresented subject and could be perceived as one more step for further research. I would recommend this book to arts therapists who work with the LGBTQ community and to therapists/trainees who may wish to expand their knowledge on the arts therapies and the LGBTQ community. It would also be important to conduct research in other geographical regions as well with a variety of background therapeutic approaches. Research within the music therapy field would be beneficial for music therapists that work with LGBTQ individuals. Additional training programmes for arts therapists targeting issues deriving from sexual orientation, would be necessary in order to address obstacles that may arise in sessions.

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