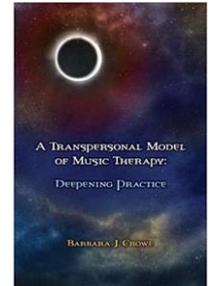


## BOOK REVIEW

# A transpersonal model of music therapy: Deepening practice (Crowe)

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**Title:** A transpersonal model of music therapy: Deepening practice **Author:** Barbara Crowe **Publication year:** 2017 **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers **Pages:** 218 **ISBN:** 9781945411267

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Transpersonal psychology has deep roots in Western psychotherapy, tightly intertwining with the humanistic, existential philosophies that responded in the 1960s to behaviourism's reductive perspectives on human experience. In *A Transpersonal Model of Music Therapy: Deepening Practice*, Barbara Crowe seeks to locate how and where those roots of transpersonal thought are intertwining with music therapy, and subsequently illustrate a model of assessment and practice distinctly transpersonal. While she falls short of developing such a model, Crowe nevertheless has provided a helpful primer for music therapists new to the 'fourth force' in psychology.

From the outset in Chapter 1, Crowe provides a tidy and succinct introduction to the history and foundational tenets of transpersonal psychology. Her reflections on the nature and functions of philosophical models offer the reader a focused lens through which to view this introductory content to transpersonal psychology. Providing a "map of the territory explored" (p. 4), Crowe actively assists learners to interact with the content, thus optimising opportunities for understanding how transpersonal concepts and constructs fit into clinical practice. Indeed, the first two chapters of the book will probably be of the greatest utility for (a) educators teaching advanced competencies, and (b) experienced professionals expanding beyond entry-level practice. I imagine Chapter 4's focus on the nature of transpersonal experiences will be similarly instructive, though perhaps for different reasons than Chapters 1 and 2. What constitutes the transpersonal is complex, and the experience of the transpersonal is consequently non-deterministic; every trip outside of conscious awareness is a drift into unpredictable waters. Crowe offers some structure to this vast openness through brief discussions of imagination, symbols, and archetypes.

Missing from the overall discourse, however, is an acknowledgement that transpersonal psychology is a Western philosophy borrowing heavily from Eastern religions in attempts to engineer

a transcultural model of that which extends beyond conscious recognition. This is an increasingly problematic stance in the context of contemporary scholarship, both within and around music therapy, on culturally responsive practices that explicitly honour the distinctly unique values, constructs, and symbols of every culture. The most glaring omission from Crowe's discussion are the contributions of Jorge Ferrer, who has challenged the transpersonal psychology community to evolve beyond "the secular post/modernist reduction of religion to cultural-linguistic artifact and [...] the religionist dogmatic privileging of a single tradition as paradigmatic" (Ferrer, 2011, p. 2). In other words, Ferrer has advocated for a participatory approach wherein clients are afforded the agency to co-construct the transpersonal event from *their* cultural location, what he refers to as spiritual individuation (Ferrer, 2002). Without this added dimension, Crowe's framing of transpersonal psychology reads as having less clinical relevance to the contemporary music therapist, which seems a missed opportunity because Crowe's discussions of transpersonal clinical processes later in the book frequently highlight client agency.

Unfortunately, as Crowe pivots in Chapter 5 to locating transpersonal psychology within music therapy approaches and techniques, clinical processes are illustrated without explicit grounding in a systematic process of assessment, intervention, and evaluation that can be located as distinctly transpersonal. For example, in concluding a section seeking to link Nordoff-Robbins music therapy to the transpersonal, Crowe writes "Improvisation is always a process, as are transpersonal experiences. The music therapist does not have to manipulate variables to promote change. The process of creative music leads the client to the shift in perspective needed at that moment" (pp. 73-74). It is difficult to read that passage and differentiate that framing from a broader humanistic philosophy that could just as easily be existential or person-centred. Crowe finds surer footing when involving the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music, frequently referring back to a helpful discussion earlier in the text about Ken Wilber's levels of transpersonal therapy. However, she merely references the levels of transpersonal therapy in context of the discussed intervention without explicitly connecting the features of the intervention to the distinct elements of the attributed level.

In Chapter 6, Crowe shifts to focusing on clinical settings rather than specific approaches and techniques with an improved alignment of the transpersonal with clinical processes. Here, Crowe's expertise is on display as she provides readers a lens through which to view practice in psychiatric, medical, and developmental treatment settings from a unique vantage point. She ably contextualises goals and outcomes from a comprehensive, holistic framework that understands symptoms, behaviours, and thoughts as individual notes in a much larger symphonic work. It is easy to see this chapter being a handy reference for experienced professionals exploring transpersonal or more broadly humanistic work for the first time.

Concluding the book is an exploration of assessment in the transpersonal tradition and techniques for music therapists to use prior to sessions they anticipate having a transpersonal component. Page 126 provides helpful questions for determining a client's readiness to engage in the transpersonal, but there is no guidance offered for how to interpret potential answers. For example, one question asks if the client is "over-tired, overwhelmed, or unstable" and another asks if the client has "a good self-observing ego and a strong ego structure" (p. 126). What happens if the client is over-tired but has a good self-observing ego, or a good self-observing ego and is feeling

overwhelmed? While Crowe goes to great lengths to map out a process of information gathering and reporting (which is indeed welcomed), it is not made clear how a music therapist assessing from a transpersonal perspective is meant to interpret this data and make ethical and competent clinical decisions.

*A Transpersonal Model of Music Therapy: Deepening Practice* is limited in scope but nevertheless a useful addition to the music therapy literature. It will serve best as an introductory text to transpersonal psychology for the experienced professional and/or graduate student interested in advanced practice. Readers are encouraged to engage with the text in the context of recent scholarship encouraging culturally-responsive and culturally-informed music therapy practices, and to further engage with contemporary scholarship in transpersonal psychology that expands beyond the traditional Western secular scope. I look forward to seeing how transpersonal philosophies grounded from a participatory, culturally-situated vantage point evolve in music therapy.

## REFERENCES

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