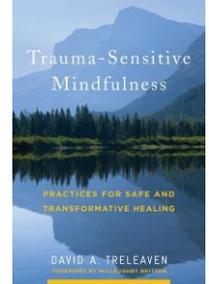


BOOK REVIEW

Trauma-sensitive mindfulness: Practices for safe and transformative healing (Treleaven)

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Title: Trauma-sensitive mindfulness: Practices for safe and transformative healing **Author:** David A. Treleaven

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Meditating on the banks of a river one day, Siddhartha overheard a musician teaching a student how to tune a sitar. "Tighten the strings too much," the teacher said, "and it will cause them to snap. Leave them too loose, however, and they will cease to make a sound. (p.87)

Nowadays, with its explosive popularity and disconnection from its Buddhist roots, mindfulness can often be promoted as a no-risk, easily grasped self-help method (Mayo Clinic, 2020; Pal et al., 2018). The Oxford Mindfulness Centre (2022) defines mindfulness as: "To be aware of your own experience, moment to moment, without judgement" and shares that "it enables anyone who practices it to live a more attentive, appreciative and vibrant life." However, instead of helping the client to establish a steady practice, therapists might see mindfulness techniques as benign stress-reduction tools to add to their therapy practice (Pollak et al., 2014).

We see similar claims from some non-music therapists when they use music in their practice and label their work as music therapy. Interestingly, the multidimensional path to become a certified mindfulness teacher is very similar to the path to become a certified music therapist; it requires formal courses, seminars, workshops, internships under supervision and essential self-experience.

Given that, *Trauma-sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* aims to support any facilitator who is interested in using mindfulness techniques and meditative interventions in their practice to develop a safer "trauma-sensitive" relationship with the client. As a music therapist and a mindfulness teacher, I believe that this safe, kindness-based relationship is crucial in any kind of therapeutic setting, and could be beneficial to music therapy practice too.

Treleaven, a trauma professional and a mindfulness facilitator, starts by emphasizing that although many people who practice meditation and mindfulness techniques regularly experience benefits, for some people who have experienced trauma, these practices can trigger traumatic stress with symptoms including flashbacks, heightened emotional arousal, and dissociation. An estimated 90% of the global population has experienced a traumatic event, and 8-20% of these people suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder proceeding the traumatic event. This means that there is a high probability that some of the clients we are working with might have a history of trauma. Fortunately, research shows that mindfulness can be a great support for trauma survivors by strengthening body awareness, boosting attention, and increasing the ability to regulate emotions (Hölzel et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015).

Treleaven claims, “the question thus becomes: how can we minimize the potential dangers of mindfulness to trauma survivors while leveraging its potential benefits at the same time?” (p.xvii). The book addresses this issue by providing an inclusive framework including tailored modifications to accompany people’s practice, suggesting that by doing this, “we can help ourselves and our clients to face and integrate traumatic stress” (p. 43).

The content of the book includes daily life stories about the widespread impact of trauma, the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, and knowledge about trauma-sensitive policies, procedures, practices, and a trauma-sensitive workplace. It mentions potential paths for recovery and strategies for the facilitator to actively resist client re-traumatization. Furthermore, self-reflective influential quotes provide useful tips for practitioners, such as, “[t]rauma-informed mindfulness involves tempering our enthusiasm” (p. 66).

The author states that the book may be used by practitioners from a range of professions. I believe it could also be useful for music therapists. As a music therapist with no specialization in trauma, reading the book provided me with many insights into how I may improve my work with this population. For example, it drew my attention to specific verbal expressions that clients may use which could indicate disassociation. It also suggests being flexible about the meditation posture one advises clients to adopt, using whatever posture supports the client’s window of tolerance. In this respect, I found the book complementary to my trauma-based work.

Treleaven does not only talk about individual trauma, but also mentions systemic trauma, the impacts of oppression and how a facilitator can be mindful of these issues while serving the client. In his words,

depending on our social identity, we are more likely to be aware of experiences that restrict our choices and freedom versus those experiences that lend us advantage... the work here is to ensure that we’re not perpetuating dynamics of oppression in our work and are attempting to create safety for our students and clients. (p. 193)

One critique of the text is that the author uses cases based solely in his own American culture, although he does actively give explanations for the context. This makes it difficult for non-American readers to comprehend some of the specific societal traumatic issues. It might have been useful to make more of an open acknowledgement of this, or to have included a chapter by another author with experience working in a different country outside the USA.

This easy-to-read book provides much useful information on aspects of trauma and how therapists can be mindful of these during their work. David A. Treleaven says: “Just as mindfulness is learned through the dedicated application of it—with increasing skill, depth, and sensitivity over time—trauma-sensitive practice is an ongoing orientation to practice and a commitment to be a continual learner” (p. 203). I believe that this book is a great start for that learning journey.

Music therapists who currently use meditative/mindfulness techniques, or may be thinking of developing these in the future in their work, can benefit from this book in many different ways. The text has the potential to be one of the required readings of a mindfulness-based music therapy program in the future.

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