

QUALITATIVE INQUIRIES IN MUSIC THERAPY:

A MONOGRAPH SERIES

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Edited by  
Susan Hadley

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

As therapists, one of our aims is to gain a richer understanding of the client's *lived experience*. When a person seeks therapy, she/he is having difficulties with some aspect of his/her life. One reason that, as humans, understanding our experiences can be difficult is that we are *complex*. If we do not attempt to understand experiences in all their complexities, we can not fully understand them. In fact, whether we can ever fully understand them given the myriad complexities is difficult to say. However, given this complex *lived* reality of human beings, it is very important that as therapists we aim to understand our clients and our sessions (including the music we create) as fully as possible, taking into account as many aspects of the experience as possible.

In order to accomplish this depth of understanding, we need to *bracket* or let go of our preconceived notions and beliefs about subject and object, mind and body, organism and environment, facts and values, affect and cognition, and so on (Burston & Frie, 2006, p.5). In order to be open to *consciousness* of the phenomenon itself, that is, to be fully present and open to what the client or music reveals, this bracketing is essential. As each person and each experience is unique, there is no *one way* to experience situations. We need to enter with a not-knowing attitude that allows us to be curious and to explore the experience from many different angles (thoughts, body sensations, emotions, images, etc.). This is necessary in order to gain a rich description or awareness of the experience as a *whole*, leading the person seeking therapy to gain a synoptic understanding. After gaining a rich understanding of the experience in its complexity, we can work towards looking for the *essence* or core elements therein which can help us to differentiate this from other types of experience.

While the above description<sup>1</sup> shares commonalities with a variety of theoretical understandings of therapy, the underlying philosophical approach is phenomenological. Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that has been applied to the field of psychology (e.g., Karl Jaspers' general psychopathology approach to psychiatry and Carl Rogers' person-centered approach to psychotherapy) and is also a qualitative approach to research. According to Burston and Frie (2006), phenomenology comes in several forms, but one thing that remains consistent throughout is its *antidualistic* emphasis (p.5). This antidualistic perspective entails that there is no separation between subject and object, mind and body, facts and values, affect and cognition. As Edwards (1999) points out, most phenomenology comes from a constructivist stance in that there is no absolute reality. The focus of phenomenology is on *understanding* human experiences.

Phenomenology is very important to music therapy as can be seen in the studies in this volume. Two of the studies follow a phenomenological method of data analysis while the other two studies are informed by a phenomenological orientation and utilize phenomenological techniques. The topics of these studies include the experiences of the supervisee in cross-cultural supervision, the experience of the component parts of a BMGIM session, the experience of being present to a client in music therapy, and the experience of the piano improvisations of at-risk children.

In the first study, Seung-A Kim examines the supervisee's experience in cross-cultural supervision. Using a phenomenological retrospective research design to gather and analyze the data, Kim seeks to gain a richer understanding of the supervisee's experiences of being misunderstood and understood within the context of cross-cultural music therapy supervision. From her interviews with seven music therapists who had experiences in cross-cultural supervision, she developed individual synopses of the experience of each participant. From these synopses she extracted essential themes from which she developed an essential description of the experiences of being misunderstood or understood in cross-cultural supervision. The value of this research is her discovery of important factors that influence

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<sup>1</sup> This description of phenomenology is informed by Michele Forinash and Denise Grocke's chapter "Phenomenological Inquiry" in Barbara Wheeler (ed.) *Music Therapy Research* (Second Edition).

cross-cultural music therapy supervision which she hopes will have a positive impact on future cross-cultural supervision experiences.

In the second study, Michael Zanders examines the metaphors clients use to describe their experiences in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). Nine music therapists were interviewed about how they experience each of the five different components of a BMGIM session (the preliminary conversation, the relaxation/induction, the spontaneous music-imaging, the return, and the postlude discussion). Each participant provided metaphors to describe how she/he experiences each component and then provided a continuous metaphor or narrative of their experience of the BMGIM session as a whole. Each participant's descriptions were then coded and compared. This study provides insights into the use of metaphors to assess the client's engagement in the therapeutic process and supports Lars Ole Bonde's theory that core metaphors form a complete narrative.

In the third study, Bryan Muller examines music therapists' experiences of being present to their clients. Muller utilizes a phenomenological research design to articulate music therapists' experiences of being present and to identify the elements that make up these experiences. He explores similarities and differences within and between therapists' experiences and explores what is unique about this phenomenon in music therapy. He interviewed eight music therapists about their experience of being present to a client. From these interviews he coded the data and developed individual synopses of the experience of each participant. From these synopses he created themes of the experience of being present. While, as music therapists, we often speak about the powerful experience of being present with a client, this study sheds light on what happens between client, therapist, and music that is helpful in creating a space in which the therapist is fully present with the client.

The aim of the final study by Dorit Amir and Maya Yair was to 1) discover meanings derived from three piano improvisations that were created in the beginning stage of therapy by three children who live in residential care in Israel, 2) discover whether there were any connections between the meanings derived from the improvisations and the musical characteristics of the improvisations, and 3) discover whether there were any connections between the meanings derived from the improvisations and the clinical profiles of the three clients. Amir and Yair utilize a research method that is phenomenologically and hermeneutically informed. The improvisations were described by the client, the therapist, three independent describers, and a professional musician who transcribed and analyzed the improvisations. These descriptions were analyzed and nine motifs emerged from the data, from which three core motifs were developed. Of note in this research is that while the improvisations of these children depicted the seriousness of their situation, the improvisations also depicted hope which speaks to the resilience and inner strength of these children.

As you read these research studies, I invite you to approach them with the intention of gaining greater awareness about various phenomena. Bracket out your preconceived notions and beliefs in order to attend closely to the phenomenon itself and to be fully present and open to what the research reveals. Remember, as each person and each experience is unique, there is no single way to view situations. Enter with a not-knowing attitude that allows you to be curious and to explore the experience from many different angles (thoughts, body sensations, emotions, images, etc.) in order to gain a rich description or understanding of the experience as a whole.

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