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## Book review: Handbook of music, adolescents, and wellbeing

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## Book review

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McFerran, K., Derrington, P., & Saarikallio, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Handbook of music, adolescents, and wellbeing*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0198808992.

**Reviewed by:** Jenny M Goarke , *Centre for Improving Health-Related Quality of Life, School of Psychology, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK*  
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The most recent consumer report on music listening indicates that more than half of people surveyed say they love or are fanatical about music, but 16–24 years olds had the highest proportion of music lovers (IFPI, 2019). This edited collection looks more closely at the relationship between music and wellbeing in adolescence. Relative to other age groups musical activities are most prevalent and frequent in adolescence. Arguably, music is most important during this developmental period when emotion regulation skills are in development, identity is being constructed, and social connection is challenged by these internal psychological forces but also by external challenges associated with becoming independent in modern society. This handbook focuses on how music is used by adolescents to support their wellbeing in everyday contexts, as well as, how music can be used to enhance adolescents' wellbeing in a therapeutic context.

The book is edited by Katrina McFerran, Philippa Derrington and Sui Saarikallio. MacFerran (Australia) and Derrington (Scotland) are both music therapists based in academic institutions and researching music and music therapy for adolescents. Saarikallio (Finland) is well known for her research on musical mood regulation, and her more recent work regarding music and socio-emotional development. Contributions come from a number of fields, but music therapy and music psychology feature most strongly.

The predominant view throughout the book is of music as a resource that offers certain affordances that benefit wellbeing, such as, emotion regulation, identity development, and social connection. This perspective is inherently psychological – and I imagine a different perspective would be offered by music education, theory, and musicology. At the very outset, McFerran outlines the idea of crystallization as a frame for understanding knowledge about music and wellbeing in adolescence drawn from multiple sources of research, scholarship, and practice. This thread

of 'embracing and celebrating the complexity' of music (p. 12) runs throughout this collection. Music is not viewed solely as a positive force. The opening chapter urges a move away from binary thinking in terms of the adaptivity of music listening behaviours, or indeed states of emotion and wellbeing. The collection does not shy away from the potential dangers or downsides of music, such as, its potential to make adolescents feel worse (p.34, p.229), its role in 'reinforcing dominant norms' (p. 154), and its ability to 'separate . . . exclude' (p. 177). At the same time, the simplistic idea that certain genres of music, like rap and metal, are problematic or damaging is countered many times throughout this book (chapter 1, p. 10; chapter 3, p. 30; chapter 17, p. 188; chapter 18, p. 202; chapter 19, p. 211).

The book is divided into 3 sections; Emotions, Identity and Connectedness.

1. The first section Emotions deals with music's impact on some of the most pressing emotional issues facing young people today – depression (chapter 5), aggression (chapter 2), anxiety, anger (chapter 3), sadness (chapter 1) – and wider issues that impact upon and are impacted by emotions, such as, violence, bullying, and exclusion (chapters 2 and 7). In chapter 1, McFerran is critical of the focus of much experimental studies that manipulate musical features (eg., tempo, mode, genre) and examine changes in emotional response, arguing it has limited utility for understanding music in real world contexts – something I fully agree with and have tried to avoid in my own experimental research (Goarke & Hogan, 2019; Goarke et al., 2019). This is laudable, but will require new approaches to research, as well as, the development of tools and techniques to capture the dynamic nature of music's impact on wellbeing in everyday life. This is addressed to some extent by Tan-Chyuan Chin (chapter 4). Chin offers a very useful guide for researchers on how to measure emotional responses to music. She recommends a multiple methods approach to quantitative measurement, while considering the level of both participant and researcher burden. However, this chapter doesn't go far enough in offering solutions for measuring the



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- variation in the relationship between music and emotional responses in everyday life, and fails to fully acknowledge the lack of convergence between self-report and biological and neurophysiological responses that has been a major problem in studies of music and emotion, and in other fields. This opening section is most aligned to my own research interests, and though many of the works and citations were familiar to me, I was offered inspiration for future research, such as, how does music affect those with mental health problems? (p. 34), the need for controlled lab studies of the effects of music for emotional immersion (p. 29), and empirical testing of the conceptual model of affect self-regulation through music described by Margarida Baltazar (p. 72).
2. Saarikallio opens the second section on Identity by describing the role of music as a force for empowerment and agency in adolescence. The next chapters review literature demonstrating an association between personality and music preferences (chapter 9), and between preferences and social identity development (chapter 10). In chapter 11, Tia DeNora offers a fascinating sociological perspective of music as a form of time-travel between our younger and older selves. The next chapters document how music therapy helps adolescents navigate the journey of identity development under different circumstances – such as ADHD, intellectual disability (chapter 13), and in child welfare settings (chapter 12). The section closes by returning to the topic of empowerment through inclusive music therapy by adopting an ‘after-queer’ approach that challenges dominant narratives around patriarchy and heteronormativity (chapter 14). In this chapter Elly Scrine urges practitioners to confront and challenge their beliefs surrounding power and privilege when working with young people (p.154). Attending to conscious and unconscious biases should be an important goal for researchers as well. The multi-disciplinary format of this book encourages us to leave behind the hierarchy of evidence we have inherited from our parent disciplines in order to learn from each other. Contributors were instructed to ‘position themselves respectfully towards diverse bodies of knowledge to avoid generalising about beliefs that may be held in some disciplines but not in others’ (p. 10). The content is focused on findings rather than detailing methods and this increases the accessibility of the book. This is a positive step and so it is a shame that many readers will not read the collection from start to finish, but instead will read the chapters that are most relevant to their discipline or therapeutic practice.
  3. The third section Connectedness is firmly positioned in the here and now. Recent research in the

UK has identified adolescents as the most lonely of any age group, with 40% of 16-to 24-year-olds reporting that they often or very often feel lonely (Hammond, 2018). The chapters in this section explore how adolescents use music for connection in a world that is increasingly connected yet also increasingly isolating. The contributions focus on how digital technologies have shaped adolescents’ social connection through music. Applications of technology in music therapy contexts are described in chapters 15 and 20. Chapter 16 deals with the affordances that the convergence of music and technology provide for young people’s wellbeing. Chapters 19 and 21 outline how young people use social media and e-platforms to share musical preferences. Today, music is increasingly being experienced, shared and created through digital platforms and music is often accompanied by video and even advertisements (IFPI, 2019). These chapters got me thinking about how my past research findings on the functions and effects of music listening (Groarke & Hogan, 2016, 2018) might be altered by these shifts in music consumption format (Krause & Brown, 2019). Mobile technologies (e.g., smartphones) make music listening and production extremely accessible, and an important aim for future research will be to determine to what extent musicking can be considered a mobile health intervention for regulating emotions and providing social connection in everyday contexts.

Each section includes contributors from music research and therapy, as well as a range of related disciplines (ie., music psychology, sociology, philosophy, education, media studies, social work, community music). Being invited to review this book gave me the opportunity to read outside my field, and I especially valued reading the chapters that fall outside my discipline. Sadly, this is something today’s academic does not always have time for. Chapter 16 was a notable highlight as it was so far out of my comfort zone. This chapter took me on a journey from sociomateriality (p. 177) to quantum physics (p 182) in order to understand the entanglement of music with all aspects of young people’s everyday lives. The case studies, vignettes and extracts throughout the chapters from music therapists were especially moving, arousing empathy and compassion for those that have been excluded or shunned by society (chapter 7; chapter 18). This qualitative material would surely warm the heart of even the most stalwart quantitative purist. While reading in this chronological way, it struck me that music therapy practice is clearly drawing upon research. A lot of music psychology research was cited in the introductory sections of the therapy chapters. This made me wonder how music therapy insights and practice might feature more strongly in our research?

In terms of music therapy practice, the handbook offers practical guides, manuals and case stories of applications of music therapy for addressing aggression (chapter 2), depression (chapter 5), violence (chapter 7), for exploring gender and sexuality (chapter 14), with young sex offenders (chapter 18), adolescents in welfare settings (chapter 12), and those experiencing disability (chapter 13), as well as, how to use digital technology in music therapy (chapters 15 and 20). The chapters do not describe the complex theoretical frameworks guiding therapeutic work, but the reader gets a very good sense of the types of activities that make up a music therapy session and the objectives of these activities.


This makes for compelling reading for a novice reader, however, experienced practitioners may be disappointed if they were expecting a more detailed or critical analysis.

This book examines the influence of music on emotions, identity and social connection. A primer on how these 3 constructs are relevant to wellbeing would make the content more accessible to non-academics. It is not until Chapter 16 (p. 180) that we are offered a background on theoretical perspectives of wellbeing. Further, music's effect on emotions, identity and connection, have implications beyond supporting and enhancing wellbeing. Naturally, this is beyond the scope of this book, but is relevant for health psychologists, like me, who are interested in music's potential to improve physical and mental health broadly defined. What is also missing from this collection is a distinctive public health perspective on adolescents' engagement with music. That being said, this handbook would be a useful companion to *Music and Public Health: A Nordic Perspective* (Bonde & Theorell, 2018), as well as, other popular texts in this area – *Music, Health & Wellbeing* (MacDonald et al., 2013), and *The Psychology of Musical Development* (Hargreaves & Lamont, 2017).

This is not a generic text focusing on core concepts in music research and therapy. Scanning the table of contents, it is really refreshing to see the inclusion of topics, such as, disability, gender and sexuality, and sexual violence, that have been under-represented in mainstream texts. A read of the 'acknowledgements, hopes and dreams' section shows that this was a concerted effort on the part of the editors to redress the balance of findings towards more inclusivity

and diversity. This is something we should celebrate, and I hope we see more initiatives like this in future collections. The result is a book that manages to possess both breadth and depth. It is interesting, topical, and accessible. As such, it will appeal to a broad cross-section of practitioners working with young people, and scholars researching adolescents' musical lives.

### ORCID iD

Jenny M Goarke  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6370-7116>

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