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Special Issue

## ACCULTURATIVE STRESS REDUCTION AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN MUSIC THERAPY

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Due to globalization, our demographics are constantly changing and continual change in the racial and ethnic profile is projected, especially with the ongoing influx of immigrants, young families, multiracial individuals, businesspeople and travelers (Population Reference Bureau, 2008). Therefore, the diversifying nature of the population in many countries makes it more likely that music therapists will work with more diverse populations in the coming years (Kim & Whitehead-Pleaux, in press). Individuals who have experienced living in two or more cultures may experience another layer of stress—*acculturative stress* which arises while they adjust to a new culture because they face many challenges during their cultural adjustment (Berry, 2006). Thus, one's acculturation process must be examined and any cultural conflicts need to be resolved so that one could reach the ultimate state of cultural well-being (Kim, 2013b). How then can music therapy assist clients' acculturation process, help them to reduce and prevent their acculturative stress, and achieve the state of their cultural well-being? As a cultural marker, music has been used in healing since preliterate times. Our musical behaviors are cultural, as we learn these behaviors from the culture(s) we belong to: "Naturally, cultural issues are brought into consciousness that can either raise intergroup tension or, if done wisely, create the conditions to work them through. Cultural conflicts and personal discrepancies

can be mediated and negotiated" through music (Gilboa, Yehuda, & Amir, 2009, p. 9). The preference of music is based on individual and cultural backgrounds including personality, past experiences, ethnic/racial, religion, and affiliations. We make music and assign meaning to it based on our values and beliefs. Thus music can be an effective vehicle for examining one's cultural identity (Kenny, 2006; Kim, 2013b). For example, in her case study with six older Korean immigrant women, Kim (2013a) shared that the clients used music as a medium to increase an awareness of their acculturative stress and "worked through social-political oppression experienced during their cultural adjustment phase" (p. 428). Musical experiences, e.g., music-assisted relaxation, improvisation, and folk songs were identified as the effective management of acculturative stress. Listening to music or improvising and dancing to the clients' own cultural music and sharing their feelings in group music therapy brought some insights on their own cultural identity as well as others. Music has also been studied as a treatment for stress and anxiety reduction (Kim, 2013c). The APA (2013) surveyed American adults on the status of their stress and coping strategies and reported that music was used most frequently to manage their stress. Further, other creative art mediums such as art therapy, drama therapy, creative writing, and role playing combined with music were found to be effective to manage stress

(Kim, 2013c). The role of music in stress reduction includes:

**Music as Cultural Identity Building.** Music can be an indicator of the client's status of cultural being. In turn, since music is an expression of culture, through musical experiences, it is possible that the client will develop a higher level of cultural awareness.

**Music as an Acculturative Stress Reliever.** Music can bridge cultural differences between clients. When engaged in musical communication, it seems that the clients can hear, feel and intuitively understand the music played. Whether it would be their favorite song or a community act, it seems to provide a space where they can discover who they are in music and be free of their cultural conditioning and social restrictions. This is due to the nature of music being flexible, e.g., the client can choose their own music; the client can sing/play a song at a tempo and expression that they want.

Although acculturative stress and cultural adjustment are a significant topic, there is a sparse amount of literature that discusses them in music therapy and multicultural education on these topics is scarcely offered (Kim, 2011). One's cultural awareness develops over time, while cultural knowledge can be possibly obtained in a relatively short time. In addition, multicultural training in music therapy is a life-long learning process. The lack of these scholarly activities points to a demand for more focus on future research regarding applying multicultural training in music therapy (Kim & Elefant, in press). Future studies could also focus on identifying the needs for specific multicultural music therapy training; raising awareness of the importance of such topics as acculturative stress and cultural adjustment; and developing resources that are more widely available.

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