

On Gender and the Creative Arts Therapies

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Keywords: creative arts therapies; gender; feminism; political activism

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It was with much anticipation that I awaited the “birth” of this special issue on *Gender and the Creative Arts Therapies*. This issue brings together the writings of creative arts therapists reflecting a diversity of ideas and frames of reference, yet sharing a common understanding of the importance of gender in our work and our lives. The hope for this issue was to create a space – a room of our own as it were – in which we could examine the rich complexity of gender and its meaning within a sociopolitical context; an examination of gender and its multiple interactions with race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ability, and age. The reflections presented in the articles which follow certainly do not represent a monolithic view of this complex issue. The authors come from many different backgrounds and bring their own worldviews to their understanding of gender and what it means for creative arts therapists; as such, gender is explored through such lenses as feminism, critical race theory, disability activism, queer theory and sexuality studies.

Such an examination of gender is greatly needed in the creative arts therapies. Creative arts therapies’ work is often done without an understanding of gender and “without an understanding of the social, economic, and political contexts that influence what we along with our clients are up against and which constrain our best efforts” (Sajnani & Kaplan, 2012, p. 165). While earlier inroads have been made in such other disciplines as psychology and social work, this has only recently emerged in the various creative arts therapies (Curtis, 2013). A critical feminist understanding of gender has, however, been seen in a few recent publications in art therapy (Hogan, 1997 & 2003), in dance/movement therapy (Allegranti, 2009), and in music therapy (Curtis, 2000, 2007, & 2008; Edwards & Hadley, 2007; Hadley, 2006). This emergent trend has faced challenges including: Belief that there is no further need for feminism or anti-

oppression work; belief that work with clients is individual not political; and concern about negative connotations associated with the term “feminism” (Curtis, 2013; Hadley & Edwards, 2004). Yet the reality is that our sociopolitical context does not reflect equity; individuals within it have very different experiences of privilege or oppression depending on their social locations of gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and ability.

While on one hand this *Special Issue on Gender* may be late in coming, on the other hand its arrival is timely, following on the heels of an international conference on Gender, Health and the Creative Arts Therapies held in Montreal in 2012, a meeting of feminist music therapy researchers supported by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), and a recent Social Justice Issue of *Arts in Psychotherapy* (Sajnani & Kaplan, 2012). What those working in the area of social justice and those working in the area of gender have in common is an understanding that our work *is* political. We may meet our clients in therapy, but we bring with us our experiences and social locations of the outer world; we also, clients and therapists alike, return to that outer world.

Since our clients are either men or women and we therapists are either men or women, work around gender (and all the intersecting dimensions of race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) becomes not the work of some music therapists; it becomes an ethical imperative for all music therapists. (Curtis, 2013, para. 11)

Critical feminist understanding of gender contends that not only is our work as therapists political, our responsibility as therapists is to be political activists for social change in the community at large. We are held accountable to work to change lives in therapy, and to work to change the world.

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Creative arts therapies use the relationship between the client and therapist and among clients in group or dyadic therapy in the context of the creative-expressive process as a dynamic and vital force for growth and change. The creative-expressive process engages physiological sensations, emotions, and cognition; facilitates verbal and non-verbal symbolization, narration, and expression of conscious or unconscious conflicts and meaning-making through internal and external dialogue and communication between oneself and others. The major objective of this Research Topic was to introduce, collect, discuss, and disseminate new clinical practices, scientific evidence, methodologies, theoretical concepts, and notions about Creative Arts Therapies. The theme of "Gender and Difference in the Arts Therapies"™ allows the authors to dig deep into the soil and landscape of the arts therapies. Much of it has not been excavated before, and there are rich gems to be found. "This timely book representing the insights of leading creative arts therapies scholars and the diverse range of people with whom they work is a welcome addition to the literature. Hogan has amassed a comprehensive collection of chapters critically examining the most pertinent questions and concepts related to gender and difference impacting marginalized groups and society at large today. As a creative practitioner of two decades, primarily working as a painter, it has become essential that my arts practice not only be led by my research, but also that my research be influenced by my arts practice. Indeed the justification of this research and creative project in its entirety is to critically reflect upon the importance of the visual image of gender fluidity and the role it has and does play in the ongoing perception and treatment of gender fluid people like myself. For me, the importance of this project is directly related to education about, and the equitable emancipation of,...