

BOOK REVIEW | PEER REVIEWED

Ted Ficken: Music of Hate, Music for Healing Paired Stories from the Hate Music Industry and the Profession of Music Therapy

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Abstract

This is a book review of *Music of Hate, Music For Healing: Paired Stories from the Hate Music Industry and the Profession of Music Therapy* by Ted Ficken published by Luminare Press in 2020.

Keywords: hate groups; hate; music therapy

Book Review

Music of Hate, Music For Healing: Paired Stories from the Hate Music Industry and the Profession of Music Therapy (2020) By Ted Ficken. Published by Luminare Press, Eugene, USA. ISBN: 978-1-64388-371-7

At this time in history, we are witnessing the power of words and their intended effect on gaining and maintaining power (Fairchild, 1989; Giroux, 2019) as they play out on the political front in many countries around the world. In political speeches, rallies, and online platforms, former president of the United States, Donald J. Trump has used his words to attack many of the historically and currently marginalized groups (Giroux, 2019) named in Ted Ficken's book, *Music of Hate, Music For Healing: Paired Stories from the Hate Music Industry and the Profession of Music Therapy* (2020). Such open hate speech from the president of the US has allowed for the rise and continuation of music of hate throughout the United States. As such, there is a clear need for discussions in music therapy at this time about hate music and our role in response to it.

Hate music is not often a topic discussed in the music therapy literature. In his book, Ficken pairs stories of music used in hate groups and movements outside of music therapy with profiles of music therapists and their stories of using music for healing from within the field of music therapy. This pairing of stories allows the reader to have a respite

between stories and topics that are difficult to read. It also allows the non-music therapist reader to learn about ways in which music is used in healing. For music therapist readers, this provides a helpful grounding of our work.

To situate myself, let me start out by acknowledging that I am writing this review as a white, middle class, cis, hetero, disabled, male. Given how I am socioculturally located, the ways that I understand and make meaning of the world is shaped by my membership in many groups that hold power and privilege in society. While reading this book, I became aware of a feeling of internal tension. I could not place where this feeling was coming from for a long time. I became aware that while I was reading stories of hate groups, I was wanting to view them as stories from “the other,” as coming from people who were distinctly different from me. However, it is important to recognize that, in fact, I have internalized, to varying degrees throughout my life, many of the messages that people in these hate groups espouse. It feels comforting to distance myself as a good person. It has been much harder to locate within me the ways in which values and beliefs I was raised with resemble (although in less overt ways) those of these groups. Sitting with that is where the internal tension resides.

While reading this book I was struck by how the portions of chapters written about the music of hate were very different in tone from the portions of chapters written about the music therapists. At times it almost felt like two different books, one book that is filled with facts about people and groups associated with hate groups, and the other book filled with people with whom I share something in common, music therapy, or who have qualities to which I aspire. To address this disconnect, Ficken attempts to draw elements of the two different stories together by pointing out the differences or highlighting the connections between the two stories.

Ficken, with his background in music therapy and public health, is especially well suited to write this text. His background in public health allows him to take a broad look into this important topic to see the trends and health risks associated with these negative views and behaviors. He writes, “Based on my education, training, and experience, I decided to look at hate music from three angles: as a public health problem, as a situation that could be improved, and through the lens of a professional music therapist” (Ficken, 2020, p. 3).

As intimated earlier, this book is written in a way that both feels inviting and repelling at the same time. That may be due to the nature of the content of given topics. The author moves between sharing stories, facts, and trends in the music of hate and healing, as well as his own personal thoughts and reflections. Throughout the book, it feels as though Ficken, and the music therapists interviewed, wrestle with their conflicting feelings about the music of hate and the people that create it and use it to further establish and maintain their power.

While Ficken denounces the hate groups and the individuals perpetrating hate in each context, I felt that this book lacks a critical examination into these hate organizations. While Ficken does explore methods of intervention and possible causes of membership in a hate group, he does not fully explore the systems that cause or allow people to participate in these organizations and what we can do as music therapists to address the systems that hold up these individuals and groups. Consideration seems to be absent from this text for the ways in which societal structures allow hate groups to be formed, permit and, at times, encourage their existence, and fail to adequately protect the groups targeted by this hate.

While this book pairs stories of music for hate and stories of music for healing, it still feels as though it centers around the hate groups’ narrative and experience rather than centering the experience of those oppressed by these groups. While the stories of healing relate to the stories of hate, they do not necessarily function as a direct response to the stories of hate. I would have liked to see more centering of care for the oppressed by exploring music that directly and powerfully responded to the stories of hate. Had there been more explicit relationship in terms of direct responses to the stories of hate in the

stories of healing, it may have provided more benefit to people from marginalized and minoritized groups.

In the final chapter, Ficken outlines different approaches to clinical treatment for people that are involved in a hate group. Ficken considers possible root causes leading to hate music. These include childhood trauma, mental illness, substance abuse, home environment, and propaganda easily disseminated through technology. This challenges readers to consider the hate group member and to see their humanity.

Implicit in this book is the conversation around power and language inherent in hate music. Lyrics filled with messages that encourage violence, hate, false stereotypes, anti-social behavior, slurs, and lack of empathy serve the purpose of pursuing and maintaining power in our society (Fairchild, 1989; Ficken, 2020; Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018). The stories of hate highlight many of these issues without explicitly framing them through the lens of power.

For example, in the chapter on Johnny Rebel and Deforia Lane, Ficken begins the chapter by framing the topic of anti-Black segregationist music by outlining his process of research, looking at the history of segregationist music in America. He discusses the process of finding materials, examples of hate music from the 1800's into the 1900's. He then moves into finding more recent music reflecting these racist beliefs, including national anthems in the United States and Germany. Then when he explores the story of Johnny Rebel, he tells the story of Rebel's upbringing, history of music making, and the use of his music in other media. In a similar manner, Ficken explores Deforia Lane's upbringing, her career as a music therapist, Ficken's relationship with Dr. Lane, and her stories of racism passed down through her family. More discussion on the ways that the members of hate groups are already part of the dominant group in society (in this case white people), and thus already benefit systemically, could have strengthened this discussion. So, too, would have an analysis of how Rebel's lyrics further compound, in this case, white supremacy. This could then have been followed by a discussion of how to work in music therapy with white supremacist groups (Pendry, 2012).

Early in the book, Ficken states that this book should be considered an introduction to the topic of hate music and not an exhaustive resource. After reading this book, the breadth of this topic becomes clear as the book raises many questions that cannot be answered in a single volume. Further exploration into discourse in music of hate, as well as critical discourse analyses of lyrics of music that are less overt in their messages promoting hate, would enhance our awareness of ways in which music can be a vehicle which causes harm (Murakami, 2021). Furthermore, more in-depth exploration and evidence of music therapists' experiences working with people from hate groups would be beneficial for our field, as this is arguably a growing population with whom music therapists work.

Ted Ficken's book is an important start of the discourse on the subject of hate music and the ways that music can be used for healing the wounds left by hate groups. The book is inviting and well-conceived. This book will prompt more discussion in the field of music therapy around this important topic.

About the Author

Vern Miller is an assistant professor of music therapy at Slippery Rock University. He is currently working on his PhD at Temple University. Prior to teaching he worked clinically at an inpatient psychiatric facility.

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