



Music for Women (Survivors of Violence): A Feminist Music Therapy Interactive eBook

Sandra L. Curtis

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Review by Amanda Haste. First published online 18 February 2020.

Anyone who, like this reviewer, survived various relationship traumas by belting out Gloria Gaynor's 1978 hit *I Will Survive* will recognize the ethos behind this book, designed to harness the power of music to heal and soothe the soul.

In creating *Music for Women (Survivors of Violence)* Sandi Curtis draws on her own long experience as a music therapist working at battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers, etc. across the United States and Canada. She recounts the ways in which women survivors of violence responded to music therapy, finding in music "a welcome space [...] to hear and be heard." This involved listening to and discussing the recordings of women singer/ songwriters; singing along with them; writing their own songs and recording and producing them. All these experiences led these women to 'own' the music, to find their voice, and thus "to set themselves free."¹

The author has taken full advantage of today's hyperconnected technology to produce an interactive e-book with a therapeutic purpose. Published by Barcelona Publishers, who specialize in Music Therapy books and resources, *Music for Women (Survivors of Violence)* is packed with audio and video renditions of pop songs alongside guided readings, drawing on "pop culture and music to explore the phenomenon of male violence against women" and examining this in the light of recent research. The result is "a feminist understanding not only of this violence, but also of the meaning of gender and its impact in women's lives in terms of their health and wellbeing, self-esteem, empowerment, and love."²

Intended for music therapists, other health care professionals and their clients but also any woman seeking healing from such experiences, this book allows the reader to access the transformative power of music, and explores the reasons for its effectiveness in this domain.

¹ Kindle loc. 72

² <https://www.barcelonapublishers.com/Music-for-Women-Survivors-of-Violence-A-Feminist-Music-Therapy-Interactive-eBook>

[Survivors-of-Violence-A-Feminist-Music-Therapy-Interactive-eBook](https://www.barcelonapublishers.com/Music-for-Women-Survivors-of-Violence-A-Feminist-Music-Therapy-Interactive-eBook)



The author sets the tone with a telling account of the feminist anthem “Wings” released by Little Mix in 2012: “simple yet effective [the lyrics] speak of women’s empowerment”; “a song of resistance and resilience” inviting the listener to “ignore the haters, believe in yourself, and be true to your own spirit—“Wings are made to fly.”³

The book features a hugely rich repertoire of songs from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and, just as Little Mix refused to identify “Wings” as feminist, maintaining it was not necessary for other people to “agree that it’s feminist [...] for its content to be valuable to them (3lisabeth, 2014), these songs “reflect women’s voices” through pop, rap, country, indie, and rock, “wherever they fit on the feminism spectrum.”

Each of the nine chapters focuses on an different aspect of recovering from violence. Chapter 1: “If I Were a Boy”: The Meaning of Gender explores societal messages and learned gender roles, relating them to the “myriad ways that pop music both perpetuates and challenges the question of gender.”⁴

Chapter 2: “A Woman’s Worth” places self-esteem and confidence center-stage, favoring resistance and resilience, while Chapter 3: “Bitch”: Women, Power, and Empowerment unashamedly calls out the anomaly that sees power as “almost entirely synonymous with masculinity” and any woman daring to challenge the status quo risking “being seen as manly or being labeled a bitch.”⁵

Chapter 4: “What’s All This Talk About Love?” focuses on power in both heterosexual and same-sex intimate relationships issue of love, while Chapter 5: “Every Woman” examines issues of diversity, even though the author explores diversity in terms of race, socioeconomic status, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, Indigenous identity, immigration status, nationality, size, and looks in an integrated fashion throughout the book.

It is no coincidence that Chapter 6: “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” bears the title of Tina Turner’s hit song as that singer’s experiences of domestic abuse are well known. The author points out the “surprising” number of pop songs about violence “by everyone from Tracy Chapman, Kesha, and Lady Gaga to the Dixie Chicks, Mary J. Blige, and Sia” and asks whether this merely reflects “a keen interest in the topic” or whether violence has touched the lives of so many female singer/songwriters?⁶

The final chapters (7 through 10) include specific readings, and are designed to guide the book’s three intended groups of readers: music therapists, VAW⁷ professionals, and women survivors and others looking for personal growth. Over 200 songs spanning four decades from the 1980s onwards are grouped thematically, and the author explains her decision to include only those by women singer/ songwriters, which in her professional experience “makes it easier for my music therapy clients to hear and see themselves in the songs, thus facilitating therapeutic progress.”⁸

As well as hyperlinks throughout the book, the songs are indexed by title, performer, theme and musical genre, and the e-format allows the reader to search at will. All in all this innovative book provides a superb resource for those seeking to heal themselves, or to guide others through their recovery process.

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³ Kindle loc. 37.

⁴ Kindle loc. 185-186.

⁵ Kindle loc. 1547-1548.

⁶ Kindle loc. 2258-2265.

⁷ Violence Against Women

⁸ Kindle 129-135.