

## Beyond WEIRD and towards the decolonisation of music for wellbeing and health

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**Disciplinary background A.** Background in critical anthropology of music for wellbeing and health. The recent surge of interest in how music is used in everyday life to support wellbeing and health (Sheppard & Broughton 2020; MacDonald 2013) has been characterised by an over-representation of Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic societies (WEIRD) (Bradley 2012; Henrich et al 2010). This proposal takes a critical stance regarding pervasive WEIRD biases in the current understanding of music for wellbeing and health.

**Disciplinary background B.** Background in the embodied, ecological, and enactive -“4E”- cognitive science and the philosophy of participatory sense-making (PSM). The proposal builds on PSM and 4E’s fundamental hypothesis about mind and behaviour as shaped by the continuous coordination between body, brain, physical and social environment at and across multiple timescales (Chemero 2011; Loaiza 2016; Schiavio et al 2017; Moran 2014).

### Abstract

Our aim is to identify an alternative understanding of music for wellbeing and health grounded in anthropological accounts of Afro-Brazilian music [9,10], and explore a theoretical framework and methodological implications that link this alternative understanding with 4E conceptions of irreducible ecology between body, mind and environment and coordination across multiple spatio-temporal-scales.

WEIRD-based research conclusions have tended to endorse assumptions about music, wellbeing, and cognition that are couched in terms of individual-centred processes and internal psychological mechanisms. Anthropological accounts of, for example Afro-Brazilian music, present an important alternative understanding of music for wellbeing and health, namely music-as-health-establishing. The process of musicking in ritual and festival contexts establishes health in its maintenance and repairing of relationships (or ‘coordination’) with ancestors, each other, materials and environment (Daniel 2005).

By foregrounding this holistic, ethnographic conceptualisation of music’s socio-functional connection with health, we eschew methodological and ontological individualism and seek to contribute to a decolonising research position in cognitive science (Smith 2013). Furthermore, we see a connection to unorthodox 4E approaches to cognition that emphasise the situatedness and irreducibility of cognition (not restricted to the ‘head’ and not separated from body and environment) (Loaiza 2016; Moran 2014). This connection offers a theoretical and methodological framework for joint advancement.

Highlighting the relationships between coordination, music and health furthermore helps to understand how people can use their knowledge and heritage - as embodied in coordinated activities - to recover and reorganise their experiences of wellbeing. This has particular relevance in the disrupted context of the pandemic. Our critical starting point takes into consideration the interactions between dissimilar forms of knowledge and promotes marginalised knowledge about musical healing.

**Interdisciplinary implications.** Our proposal establishes new interdisciplinary insights by bringing together 4E cognition, anthropology and music for wellbeing and health. It shows concrete ways in which 'traditional or holistic' experiences of ritual healing and 'novel' thinking can be married into new synergetic understanding. Questions raised in this process include: Are the efforts to make music research more inclusive and the larger project of decolonisation of research equivalent? How can innovative ways of framing the subject of study through 4E approaches to music cognitive science move us forward towards a decolonising view? What innovations in methods for empirical research are required to support holistic ways of understanding music and health and that moreover promote the voice of marginalised communities in a non-individualist manner?

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