



Musical Care in Dialogue

Presentation summary by Yi Wang, University of Edinburgh
Marginalised Communities and Geography in Musical Care
29th January 2025, 00:00-01:00 (BST)
Online with Naomi Sunderland (Griffith University, Australia)
April L. Graham-Jackson (University of Chicago, USA)

This session of Music Care in Dialogue featured April L. Graham Jackson and Naomi Sunderland, who explored the intersection of music, care, and geography within marginalised communities.

April L. Graham Jackson discussed her research on the Black house music community in Chicago, examining how house music functioned as a geography of care within a racially segregated city. She detailed how Black migrants from the South encountered systemic racial barriers upon arriving in Chicago, leading to their confinement in the Black Belt on the city's South Side. In response, the Black LGBTQ+ community developed house music as a form of resistance and communal healing. Initially held in South Shore apartments, house parties became sites of refuge and belonging, eventually expanding into dedicated clubs and warehouses that redefined racialised spaces. Through house music and geographies of care, marginalized individuals created spaces of joy, spirituality, and freedom from discrimination. April argued that Black cultural expressions, such as house music, counter spatial exclusion and create alternative modes of care.

Naomi Sunderland presented insights from The Remedy Project, which examines First Nation's music as a cultural determinant of health in Australia. Drawing from community-based research, she highlighted how music is deeply embedded in Indigenous traditions, fostering intergenerational connections, resilience, and well-being. Participants described music as a force of cultural continuity, with its healing properties linked to land, ancestry, and identity. Through storytelling, visual art, and collaborative music-making, Naomi's research underscores the role of First Nations music in self-determined health promotion and cultural continuity in Indigenous communities.

Both speakers emphasised how marginalised communities use music not only as artistic expression but also as an essential means of care, healing, and spatial reclamation. Given this profound role of music in fostering resilience and well-being, an important question arises: How can societies better recognise and support music as a form of social and cultural care for marginalised communities?

Speaker biographies and summaries

April L. Graham-Jackson

April L. Graham-Jackson is a Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of Sociology and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Mansueto Institute for Urban Innovation at the University of Chicago, where she is also a Postdoctoral Research Affiliate with Chicago Studies, the Committee on Environment, Geography, and Urbanization (CEGU), and the Urban Theory Lab. As a proud third-generation Black Chicagolander, April's research brings together geographic development, racial capitalism, music and sound, and placemaking, focusing on how these forces shape Black life across the Chicago Metropolitan Area. April holds a PhD in Geography from the University of California, Berkeley, and graduated from Mount Holyoke College as the first person with a bachelor's degree in Black Geographies. You can find April musing at BlackChicagoland.com.

In this talk, April presents research on the placemaking practices of the Black house music and cultural community of Chicago and how they developed place-based music and sound as a form of communal care. Since the Great Migration, Black Chicagoans were confined to the South and West Sides of Chicago due to the historical effects of racial discrimination shaping their city-region. April will examine how the Black House Kids use music and sound to counter these geographies, producing places of communal care that affirm Black life in one of the most racially segregated cities in America.

Naomi Sunderland

Naomi Sunderland is Director of the Creative Arts Research Institute at Griffith University. She is a proud descendant of the Wiradjuri First Nations People of Australia alongside her mixed European heritage. Naomi has an expansive research and publishing record in arts-health, well-being, and First Nations social justice with a particular focus on creative, anti-oppressive, and trauma-informed research approaches. Naomi is an interdisciplinary arts-health researcher, singer-songwriter, and community music facilitator. She holds a PhD in applied ethics and human rights from the Queensland University of Technology.

Naomi Sunderland will present a snapshot of national findings from the Australian Research Council funded Remedy Project which explores First Nations music as a cultural determinant of health. The Remedy Project (www.remedyproject.org) is one of the first concentrated attempts to explore the potential for music to promote positive cultural health determinants and contribute to First Nations' healing, health, and wellbeing overall. The project is significant because it responds to calls for health approaches that are strength based, First Nations-led, and culturally secure.

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