

"I AM NOT THE SAME AS WHEN WE MET": CREATING AN IDENTITY BEYOND THE VICTIM OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA THROUGH GUIDED IMAGERY AND MUSIC

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Introduction

This case presentation is about a gay man in his thirties who received fifty-five individual, modified and full-length sessions in *Guided Imagery and Music* (GIM) over a period of three and a half years. GIM is a method where the client listens to selected music in a relaxed state, allowing subconscious material in the form of imagery, memories or feelings to surface into conscious awareness.

Rediscovering of identity

In the first part of this therapy process, the client called Tor, worked on processing the trauma of being sexually abused in early childhood. He identified the next phase of the process as a rediscovering of his own identity, which is the primary focus in this presentation. In session #5 he said: *"You become what has happened to you. It becomes a part of your identity. If it's gone, you'll have to become a new one. I just don't know what kind of identity I will get then?"*

The stories we tell about ourselves are closely connected to our identity. We are constantly being remade anew during a life

span, and relational music experiences can be one of those re-makers (Ruud 2013). The GIM sessions that followed became relational music experiences for Tor, but also for me, as the therapist. He surrendered to, and dwelled in "a musical presence, alone yet connected", as Trondalen (2016, p.142) so beautifully describes it: "A gift infected with hope" (ibid.).

The metaphors and imagery appearing in Tor's GIM travels were significant identity-defining factors for him. He had several experiences of "meeting himself", both as a child and as an adult during the sessions that followed. The first time he dared "to open the door to face himself" it hurt. He said: *"Before you can love someone else, you must love yourself. But you must be worth loving. I have not dared to look at myself. Who am I really?"*

In the sessions that followed, Tor continued processing his childhood trauma; something that turned out to be a prerequisite for being able to accept and embrace himself. In one session he managed to rescue the little child

before the abuser got a hold of it. He then saw a whirlwind dissolving his childhood home, ripping it all to pieces together with the hurtful memories that had “created unfortunate patterns that now could be rediscovered and created anew”.

For this client an extensive use of repeated music listening to hold and deepen the unfolding therapeutic process (Summer 2009, p. 288) was very beneficial. Occasionally this was used in combination with vocal improvisations by the therapist on top of the repeated music used in the sessions. These improvisations were first with no words, and then phrases of text lines with positive, self-affirmative content.

Tor experienced that the more he surrendered to the method, the more he achieved, and through the GIM therapy he was trying to heal wounds and read his own story differently. The recurring image of an exposed heart turned into a smouldering red jewel: a manifestation of his strength and a feeling of being lifted up. He met himself again in a close dance, before he finally managed to embrace his wounded inner child. He said: *‘The lump in my chest shall not be removed. It is like a root from which something new is to emerge. I feel no fear. Fortunately, there are many forms of love. I feel closer to my own love for myself. I am about to become another person. I am not the same as when we met’.*

Conclusion

“It is through our narrative about ourselves that we create ourselves, both through adjusting the significance of memories and life cycles, and through choosing new forms of identification.” (Ruud, 2013 p. 62). “What happens in your imagination can become part of a new reality” (ibid. p.45).

‘The GIM sessions became the most important source to the greatest healing. The sessions played the key role in my struggle for a better existence, and for the first time I played the lead character in my own life’ (Tor).

References

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