



What does 'guiding' involve in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music?

The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is a form of depth psychotherapy. It involves the client's engaging in an imagery based experience whilst listening to a sequence of thirty to forty-five minutes of classical music in a deeply relaxed state, eyes closed, lying down.

People interested in GIM often wonder how the work is guided, which is not necessarily in the way it might be imagined to be. This article describes some of what is involved. For ease of exposition, the client is referred to as she and the therapist as he.



The first thing to be said is that the therapist does not tell the client what to imagine. Rather, the client's imagery experience emerges spontaneously as an expression of her inner process in response to the music. The therapist supports its unfolding through making non-directive interventions, which often involves asking open questions such as "what are you experiencing now", or "can you say more about that?" when the client reports she is visualizing something.

The therapist asks about the different sensory aspects of the client's experience and how she is feeling, encouraging her to become as fully and deeply involved in the experience as she can, actively engaged in it. What almost inevitably then happens is that the process itself does the rest. The therapist certainly has a vital role to play as guide, but also needs to learn to trust the process and not interfere with it.

The experience in GIM for the client is a little bit like dreaming awake, the method having affinities with other psychotherapeutic techniques such as the Jung's Active Imagination, for example. The big difference is the involvement of the music.

Although the music is recorded, and in this sense fixed and unresponsive to the client, this is not true to the experience itself. This is what is remarkable about GIM, the music effectively functioning as intersubjective partner in the client's process in the way it is experienced.

It is also the case that many of the deeper and most transformative experiences occur for clients when they are deeply connected to the music. This means that the therapist needs to

remain connected to the music himself whilst he supports the unfolding of the client's process. He needs to work as if in partnership with the music, encouraging the client to open to it and to what it may have to offer. The music then acts as a kind of dynamic archetypal container for the client's experience, allowing her to discover inner resources, work through difficulties, and experience healing and transformation, often in unexpected ways that yet have an authenticity and inevitability for her.

Both the therapist and the music thus have a role to play in guiding the client's process in GIM, but not in any sort of a prescriptive way. Any one piece of music, for example, whilst it may have a certain type of potential in the work, can also be experienced in endless different ways by the client, including when the same music is used on different occasions. The client creatively experiences the music in the ways she needs to, whilst the music also in a certain sense guides her process.

Along with the Bonny Method are other simpler types of GIM where the guiding may be more structured on the part of the therapist, or the client (or clients in group work) may image to a very short piece of music without any guiding. There are also re-scripting techniques similar to those used in CBT. These are used in work with people who have experienced trauma, for example.

In summary, guiding in GIM may be different to what it is imagined to be, most especially in the Bonny Method of GIM. It involves both the therapist and the music having a role to play in supporting the unfolding of a process that is experienced to be very deeply the client's own, whilst as in every therapeutic relationship, the client's experience is shaped by the intersubjectivity of the encounter.

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