

GIM and the continuum model as a way of building resilience and a stronger sense of identity¹

by

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Introduction

This case study describes the use of Guided Imagery and Music (Bonny Method) and Music and Imagery modifications in supporting a 30-year old woman to explore her sense of identity and nurture emotional resilience during times of change. The case study outlines the different chapters in the client's journey whilst illustrating the benefits of working with the continuum model as developed by Lisa Summer (2002) as an approach for cultivating ownership over the therapeutic process and instilling a practice of self-care.

The continuum model and supportive music and imagery (SMI)

Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) in its original form was developed in the 1970s by Helen Bonny, a music therapist working in the USA. Subsequently, a spectrum of GIM adaptations, including the continuum model (Summer 2002), have been developed to increase accessibility for a wider range of clients. The continuum model is based on Wolberg's psychotherapy levels (1977) and includes supportive, re-educative, and reconstructive levels. Each level, whether GIM or MI interventions, aims to increase the client's awareness and understanding of their own inner world and does so in slightly different ways. The structure of each intervention includes a prelude, an induction, a music listening experience (in a normal or altered state of consciousness) and a postlude. The difference between MI and GIM interventions lies in the focus or expansiveness of the music listening experience, the selection and complexity of the music, and the induction. This case study particularly highlights the beneficial effects of SMI interventions in increasing the client's sense of ownership and self-care. SMI helps the client to strengthen inner resources by focusing on one image and by facilitating a deepening of the experience (Summer, 2015). The music used for SMI is supportive, has holding properties, a simple structure, little development, and aims to match the feeling of the resource image. Typically, for SMI the music selection is made collaboratively between therapist and client and can include different genres of music. After a brief induction the client is encouraged to draw and focus on the resource image whilst listening to the selected music on repeat. Once the drawing has been completed the experience and observations are discussed in the postlude.

The sessions

Keira is in her thirties, works full-time in a school and lives with her fiancé. Keira initially came to therapy to explore some of her family dynamics and, as she had recently started a new job and got engaged, she felt motivated to explore her sense of identity during these times of change. Keira has attended a series of 18 sessions over the course of 16 months. The overall trajectory of Keira's therapeutic journey could be split into three 'chapters' summarised below. The session vignettes illustrate the use of SMI interventions at different points in the therapy.

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Chapter 1, Sessions 1 – 7: Exploring past and current relationship patterns within the family and the couple.

During the initial sessions much of the focus was centred around exploring old thinking patterns and the impact of family relationships on Keira's present life. Leading up to session 4 Keira had travelled to the *relationship and imagery programmes* and the importance of Keira's relationship with her fiancé had become apparent. Keira reflected on her intention to protect and nurture the relationship and she had talked about both the emotional connection and the physical space they shared. Session 4 presented an opportunity to consolidate this as a resource.

Vignette session 4

Keira focused on her feeling in the new shared living space with her fiancé, a sense of having arrived. The induction particularly drew attention to the feeling of comfort Keira found there and Keira chose George Ezra's 'Listen to the man' to hold her here. In the first drawing Keira's attention was particularly drawn to the protective bubble she was in with her fiancé and she further focused on this in a second drawing. The second drawing represented Keira and her fiancé at the beach near their prospective wedding venue, and Keira deeply felt the importance of the bubble and the precious space their relationship offered.

Figure 1: Drawings from session



Chapter 2, Sessions 8 – 11: Turning inwards to explore sense of self and strengthen resources.

Reflecting on the previous sessions Keira noticed her change in responses to family members, reaping the benefits of newly established routines and feeling ready to turn more deeply inwards. Keira had previously shared an image of a rucksack which needed exploring and filling with 'new things that were hers'. This had symbolised the start of Keira's journey towards a stronger sense of identity by finding out what resources were already in the rucksack and what else could be added. During this chapter the importance of keeping healthy boundaries in her personal and professional life as well as proactively looking after herself became clear as Keira could feel the positive effects of her new routines on her own mental health and wellbeing. Keira had started to eat more mindfully, greatly enjoyed her new workout regimen and overall felt stronger and more resilient in herself. Keira felt that despite encountering challenging situations she was able to bounce back much more quickly and contain the repercussions of difficult situations better. Session 11 provided a space for Keira to focus on old and new resources.

Vignette Session 11

Keira talked about feeling the impact of her fiancé's mental health and how important her healthy routines had become in keeping herself fuelled. Keira focused on feeling a sense of achievement after having gone for a run. She chose 'Zephyr song' by 'The red hot chili peppers' to match her feeling. The drawing included some of the things that make Keira feel good, such as working out, listening to music, being in nature, her relationship, and seeing friends. Keira described a radiating sense of feeling good, coming from her core and filling her whole body after running. She emphasised the importance of feeling the positive effects, as a motivator that keeps her on track.



This had been the third SMI session in the series and Keira started to independently use the method as a new tool outside of sessions to process, reflect, and check in with herself. In comparison to a full GIM journey, SMI is accessible more readily unaccompanied and can be used positively to complement meditation or journaling practices to strengthen resources and self-reflection. Keira found that over the weeks the method had a particularly grounding effect and she could return to it when needed.

Chapter 3, Sessions 12 – 18: Deepening of sense of identity and consolidation of resources and resilience.

Keira's resilience further strengthened and her sense of self deepened. The musical journeys reflected an emerging feeling of empowerment from deep within which manifested in various life situations. Interestingly most of the programmes used during this part of the therapy were contemporary programmes, branching out from the classical repertoire. Many of the journeys took on an earthy feel and repeatedly included imagery of meditation in sacred spaces, surrounded by powerful nature scenery. Sensory imagery of feeling grounded and strong reoccurred throughout different journeys and particularly a programme called 'Earth Spirit' (Hall, 2015) became a new resource for Keira, offering containment and a space for contemplation when needed. Keira reflected on her change of perspective in the imagery, feeling that she was living the journeys fully rather than observing herself from a distance. This seemed to reflect Keira's increasingly clear sense of self.

Reflections and conclusions

Over the course of the therapy Keira has been able to engage with the variety of interventions on the continuum model very positively. Whereas the GIM journeys offered ample opportunity for expansive and transformative experiences, the SMI interventions encouraged the development of Keira's ownership over the process outside of therapy sessions. Keira's increased awareness of existing and new resources as well as the strengthening of new positive habits contributed to a stronger feeling of resilience and grounding. This manifested positively in Keira's ability to set healthy boundaries and recover more quickly when faced with challenging life events. Keira finished this third chapter with an increased sense of confidence and a stronger intention of looking after herself in order to be able to support others around her.

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