A Music Therapy Student's Personal Development Through Music and Imagery in a Virtual Setting

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Abstract

This case example illustrates a music therapy student's personal development through Music and Imagery (MI) in a virtual individual therapy setting. The primary therapeutic goals for her include heightening self-awareness, identifying and strengthening inner resources, uncovering and accepting unaddressed feelings, and enhancing authenticity. Her intrapersonal process throughout the total of five MI sessions in seven weeks is described in detail. Each level of MI within the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM) is explained throughout this case illustration.

Keywords: Music and Imagery (MI); Guided Imagery and Music (GIM); Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM); music therapy student; personal development

Introduction

Self-awareness is a foundational component of therapeutic skills (Camilleri, 2001; Mojta et al., 2014). Personal therapy can help inform a therapist's identity and affect their presence and effectiveness with a client (Geller, 2013). Music therapy students and advanced trainees can benefit from personal music therapy not only for their professional understanding of the therapeutic process, but also for their personal growth and well-being (Abbott, 2014; Abrams, 2014; Fox & McKinney, 2016; Gardstrom & Jackson, 2014; Hesser, 2014; Jackson & Gardstrom, 2012; Scheiby, 1991; Vaillancourt, 1996). Likewise, clinicians' and trainees' engagement in personal therapy has been highly valued in the field of psychotherapy (Edwards, 2018; Norcross, 2000, 2005; Rake & Paley, 2009; Ziede & Norcross, 2020).

A therapist's personal development within the context of clinical practice is bound to a therapeutic relationship with a client. In this context, personal development can be goal-

oriented, purposefully structured and evaluated (Irving & Williams, 1999). The therapist's personal development could directly influence their overall personal growth throughout life. The following case example illustrates a music therapy student's personal development through Music and Imagery (MI) in a virtual individual therapy setting.

The Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM)

Brief History of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) and Music and Imagery (MI)

Helen Bonny established Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) in the 1970s, based on her profound belief that music, especially its aesthetic dimension, can foster psychological and spiritual transformation. She initially defined GIM as "the conscious use of imagery which has been evoked by relaxation and music to effect self-understanding and personal growth processes in the individual" (Bonny, 2002c, p. 95) and intended to assist those who are "seeking fuller experience and insight in the areas of the humanistic and transpersonal" (Bonny, 2002b, p. 60). GIM is a receptive method of music therapy and "an individual form of therapy, healing, or self-actualization that involves imaging to music in an altered state of consciousness while dialoguing with a guide" (Bruscia, 1998, p. 493). In this altered, deeply relaxed state, the client's imagery experience is not directed but guided by the therapist "in a very specific and careful way to allow the client the fullest expression of his psyche which is possible during the session hours" (Bonny, 2002c, p. 98). Facilitating GIM requires in-depth training.

In the 1980s, Frances Goldberg and Lisa Summer, who trained with Bonny, developed a new method of GIM that they named Music and Imagery (MI; Montgomery, 2012; Summer, 2015a). MI was designed to be a more client-centered method for individuals within clinical populations for whom GIM is contraindicated (Summer, 2011). Bonny altered her GIM training to be more clinically informed in 1989, defining GIM as psychotherapy (Summer, 2015a). The purpose for MI was to "simplify and shorten each component of the GIM method to 'contain' the client's experience to a single image that was easily verbalized and readily understood" (Summer, 2015a, p. 341). Summer (2015a) further clarifies the difference between the Bonny Method of GIM (BMGIM) and MI:

> Whereas the Bonny Method is an exploratory method that utilizes a deeply altered state of consciousness and sequenced, evocative music programs to stimulate many images, music and imagery is a directed method that utilizes brief relaxation and simple, repeated music to stimulate a single image. (p. 341)

Applying Wolberg's (1988/1995) identification of psychotherapeutic classification (i.e., supportive, re-educative, and reconstructive), which was introduced to the field of music therapy by Wheeler (1983), Goldberg and Summer continued designing their GIM/MI trainings in a more methodical and pedagogical manner (Goldberg, 2015), advancing a continuum of music and imagery practice.

The Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM)

The Continuum Model of GIM (CMGIM) consists of two receptive music therapy methods, Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) and Music and Imagery (MI) (Summer, 2015a, 2015b). Given that GIM can be counterproductive for clients without adequately resilient emotional skills, it is the therapist's responsibility to adjust their therapeutic approaches and interventions. Wolberg (1988/1995) warns that "a callous therapist who batters away with any technique without adapting tactics to the immediate reactions and sensitivities

of patients may become a greater instrument of harm than of help" (p. 104). Understanding the ability and psycho-emotional location of the client is crucial; employing only one method as profound as GIM for every client in every session, with no consideration of its countereffect, could potentially cause ethical issues in the practice of music psychotherapy (Bruscia, 2015). Therefore, the therapist must be aware of the therapeutic intentions within the context of the continuum of GIM and MI practice. Clear therapeutic intentions may enable the therapist to be flexible and responsive in tailoring their therapeutic approach to the distinctive needs of the client. The decision-making process during each session is like a reciprocal dance between the client and therapist. The client is invited to examine themselves inwardly; the therapist, based upon what the client is presenting, strives to determine what possibilities for the client there are in the session, while simultaneously acknowledging their own inner responses.

Constructing GIM in accord with humanistic and transpersonal psychologies, Bonny (2002a) believed that "we as humans are capable of exploring the depths and heights of our potentialities, and that psychological aberrations may be less an illness than a growth potential" (p. 12). Despite the goals and approaches of each therapeutic level, central to CMGIM practice is the attitude of "allowing oneself to step into, or to become one with the music" (Bonny, 2002d, p. 133). With this attitude, the client is invited to the process of activating and integrating inner resources to increase self-awareness and bring about "insight and wholeness" (Bonny, 2002c, p. 96).

Summer (2005) provides an analogy of an ocean with the CMGIM to help clarify each level and psychological depths of the CMGIM practice. In her analogy, the ocean water is the metaphor for music used in the CMGIM. In oceanography, a continuum of the ocean depths would include one end being very shallow (e.g., sandy beaches), and the other end being extremely deep (e.g., ocean trenches). Equivalently, the CMGIM encompasses supportive MI on the shallowest end and reconstructive GIM on the deepest end.

On the supportive MI level, the client may explore the shallow water (Summer, 2005). Supportive MI is a place for psychological resourcing of conscious materials for emotional equilibrium; the client is encouraged to search for positive inner resources (e.g., what feels positive and/or supportive within themselves). Identifying, understanding, owning, and maximizing these positive inner qualities would nurture the client's ego strength and emotional skills. Images serve to help contain the client's psychological materials. For instance, the client might recognize the internal presence of music that befriends them unconditionally. Once there is something supportive, safe, or reliable, it is important for the client to feel it as vividly as possible so that they can build rapport with their resources at the very foundation of their intrapersonal work.

On the re-educative MI level, the client goes slightly deeper than the shallow water (Summer, 2005); they can investigate more marine life by using their enhanced inner resources. Gaining insight is crucial on this level, based on a theoretical premise that "if one succeeds in altering a significant pattern in one's life, the restored sense of mastery will generalize over a broad spectrum of behavior" (Wolberg, 1988/1995, p. 144). The client directly deals with internal materials that raise tension, such as difficult feelings, symptoms, or relatively conscious psychological conflicts. For example, the client could spend time with a long-submerged feeling of loneliness, investigate it, learn about it anew, and gain further insight about it. The process of being "re-educated" within oneself occurs while gaining insight. The therapist thus assists the client to "bring experiences of intrapersonal incongruence fully into conscious awareness" (Abbott, 2010, p. 3).

On the reconstructive MI level, the client may delve much deeper than the shallow water, maneuvering the ocean waves (Summer, 2005). The goal on this level is to find ways to release the client from their own emotional constraints (Summer, 2015a). For example, the client may work through their anxiety, uncovering a transformative and integrative solution that helps them accept and coexist with their anxiety. Wolberg (1988/1995)

declared the therapeutic purpose of the reconstructive inner work as such:

> Reconstructive psychotherapy strives not only to bring about a restoration of the individual to effective life functioning, through the resolution of disabling symptoms and disturbed interpersonal relationships, but also to promote maturation of emotional development with the creation of new adaptive potentialities. (p. 225)

The fluid nature of the continuum model allows the client to explore their inner resources, gradually expanding their psycho-emotional, transpersonal, and spiritual growth.

Music and Imagery (MI) Procedure

Unlike GIM sessions, MI sessions do not involve extended relaxation, deep altered states of consciousness, sequences of evocative music, or verbal conversations between the client and therapist while listening to music. The client does not lie down on a couch or mat during MI experiences.

There are five phases in an MI session: (a) prelude, where the client is invited to turn inward and pay close attention to themselves, and the therapist gathers information necessary for the client's upcoming MI experience; (b) transition, during which the client and therapist select inner material for the client to focus on, as well as a piece of music that matches the selected inner material; (c) induction, which serves as "an initial frame for the music experience" (Summer, 2002, p. 303), helping the client slow down to access the inner material as much as possible; (d) music and imagery experience, where the client feels and explores the inner material through artforms (e.g., drawing, movement, etc.) while listening to music (one piece of music is often used repeatedly depending upon its length); and (e) postlude, where the therapist helps the client process and reflect on their MI experience to reinforce what has emerged (Abbott, 2014).

Context

I believe, from a humanistic standpoint, that my primary role as a therapist is to activate my clients' innate ability to grow and to help them enhance their inner resources. We encounter various obstacles throughout life, and when struggling, we are in the midst of a change, inwardly. According to Rogers (1989), "the person who is psychologically free moves in the direction of becoming a more fully functioning person" (p. 191). Such psycho-emotional transformation can be a gradual process, rather than an instant fix.

In recent years my private practice has mainly focused on relatively well adults, supporting their self-care and personal growth. When May (a pseudonym) was referred to me, my practice was under the restriction of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was thus meeting with my clients only remotely, using Zoom (2017), a HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022) compliant videoconference program. I met with May for five 90-minute sessions over seven weeks. In addition, she also worked on two between-session projects, which I assigned her during the weeks we had no meeting. Every session was followed by a set of reflective questions, and May shared her answers with me, which aided my understanding of her inner process.

Confidentiality and Transparency

After our session series, I reached out to May and introduced the idea of writing an academic paper about her work. She seemed curious about how her MI process might be summarized and felt it might help her understanding from an educational standpoint. She gave me permission to use her case material and provided written informed consent, under

the condition that her confidentiality be protected by having her identity anonymized.

All parts of this manuscript that involved May's description and comments have been sent to her through email; they were then reviewed and approved by May herself, and she provided written consent for this manuscript to be published. This process helped preserve the accuracy of how I interpreted her statements.

Because this is not a research study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not sought for this manuscript. However, to adhere to sound ethical principles, I followed the Association for Music and Imagery's Code for Ethical Conduct and Standards of Practice for the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (2015), as well as the American Music Therapy Association's Code of Ethics (2019). I used my session logs and May's reflection notes as references; neither of them mentioned her by name or provided any information that might serve to identify her.

Client

May, in her 20s, was an undergraduate music therapy student. She was looking to gain knowledge about Guided Imagery and Music (GIM). At referral by her academic advisor, May was also interested in exploring herself through receptive music therapy, such as Music and Imagery (MI). May appeared rather quiet, but polite and attentive; she also had a gentle and sensible demeanor. During our assessment interview, she deliberately shared her personal history, thoughts, and feelings.

May's daily life was occupied with her course assignments, clinical internship, part-time job, house chores, and practicing instruments. May seemed to have a good circle of friends. She stated that her mother was fun and positive and her father kind and gentle. They divorced when she was a teenager. May gradually lost contact with her paternal grandparents and cousins. No school counseling or other forms of therapy were offered to her then, nor did she discuss the divorce with anyone outside of her family. The divorce, along with the distancing from her father, might have made her acutely independent for her age, and she seemed to have suppressed some of her own psycho-emotional needs to protect her mother from additional worries.

May started to play music at a young age, and expressed that music has helped her many times, especially because verbal communication did not come naturally to her. Being able to reach out to people non-verbally, particularly through music, was freeing and fulfilling to her.

May was aware that she was self-conscious and anxious about her academic assignments and clinical work. When she was tired, physically and mentally, she tended to become negative and judgmental toward herself. She would even become critical of being self-critical. Most of her self-care methods are externally oriented (e.g., going shopping, deep cleaning her room, etc.). She often listened to pop music for pleasure, as well as soothing classical music for relaxation. The only therapy experience she had in the past was a 60-minute GIM session with a GIM trainee two years prior.

During the assessment interview, May's self-criticism became evident. She appeared to be thinking much more than feeling, as if she was moderately disconnected from her own emotions and bodily sensations. Conceivably, this could have created a sense of discomfort and incongruence within herself. Her overall response indicated to me that she lacked genuineness, even though she was polite and articulate. May's primary motives were rather educational: "exploring myself through music and imagery" was her stated goal for this session series. My therapeutic goals for her, in addition, were to heighten self-awareness, identify and strengthen inner resources, uncover and accept unaddressed feelings, and enhance authenticity.

Therapeutic Process

Session 1: Resourcing (Supportive MI)

After a preliminary assessment interview, I asked what feels positive in her life. May described a vivid feeling of support from her immediate family and close friends. I could observe her hesitancy to look inside of herself and intentionally focus on her feelings. I continued to invite her to gently notice whatever came up for her in the here and now. As she became more aware of her inner world, her relationship with music came forth. Music to her was like a "comrade" with whom she tackled the challenges in life. She felt close to music and supported by it. May's positive inner material was available and accessible. In preparation for her upcoming music and imagery (MI) experience, I asked May to draw a circle (approximately 5 inches in diameter) in the middle of a piece of letter-size paper. A set of colored pencils was within her reach.

May was receptive to the idea of accessing her inner music on a deeper level through MI. At this point, she was curious enough to focus on her inner world and feel the presence of her music within. I encouraged her to allow any feelings to surface with no judgment. She started to notice the feeling of warmth from her inner music. We thus sought to find a piece of music to match the state of her inner music. While listening to a short excerpt of several pieces of music together, I asked her which qualities of the music resonated with her inner music and which did not. From her pool of music, May chose a piece with which she already had a positive association: the first movement of Oboe Concerto in C major by Mozart. I started her with a brief induction that would encourage her to reconnect with her inner music as deeply as she needed. As the music came on, she thoughtfully drew on a piece of scrap paper.

May's heart became warmer and calmer as she drew, feeling held and protected by the music. The pink in the center of her picture (Figure 1) represented herself being surrounded by orange (support from family), soft green (a feeling of openness and an image of a vast grass field), yellow (sunshine guiding her to brighter feelings), and soft blue (tentativeness and indecisiveness). During this MI experience, she felt as if the music was asking, "Isn't it fun to be in music?"; silently, she responded, "Yes!" This heartfelt inner dialogue confirmed that she had a strong and positive relationship with music and that she recognized music as an inner resource.

Figure 1. Untitled.
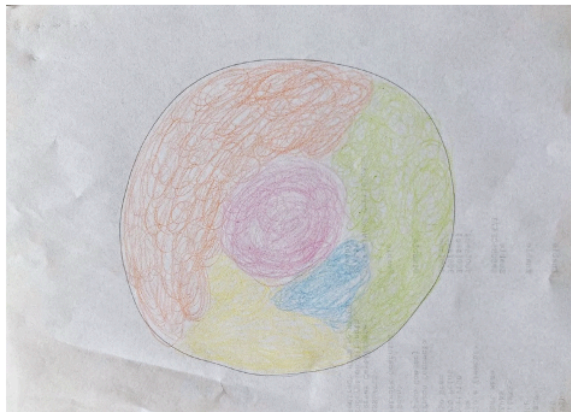
May was surprised to notice that each color around the pink also associates with specific people in her life. Moreover, she wondered how a piece of music shorter than eight minutes could evoke such emotions. This awareness made her even more curious about herself and excited about her next session.

Session 2: Confrontation (Re-educative MI) and Accessing Inner Strength (Supportive MI)

May was able to stay close to her previous image and noticed a feeling of gratitude for the support from her loved ones throughout the week. However, the soft blue part of her first picture, which depicted her tentativeness and indecisiveness, was creating anxiety. When anxious, May would become restless and feel as though her heart was being grabbed by something unavoidable, raising tension in her entire body. She would then try to distract herself, often by deep cleaning her room. Nonetheless, this would only give her a temporary and external solution; her anxiety would come back again at some point. May was exhausted by this psychological pattern. Resolutely, she decided to look at her anxiety closely through MI, instead of avoiding it. The soft blue part of her previous drawing and her anxiety were the focus of this MI experience. Matching the intensity of her anxiety, we decided to use the first movement of Violin Concerto, No. 1, by Philip Glass (upon my suggestion). This selection was repeated once.

Dark and cold colors appeared around the inner edge of the circle, depicting her negative feelings (Figure 2). The music, with its tension, held her in the here-and-now experience of her anxiety. May felt as if she were chased by the music, exactly like being chased by her own anxiety. What was surprising to her was the emergence of the yellow in the middle of the circle; May identified herself with the yellow that was trying to survive the pressure from the dark colors, especially black, her anxiety. When the violin claimed its existence through the high-pitched pianissimo during the heart of the escalating tension, she felt the sheer strength of the yellow. The orange was there to support the yellow.

Figure 2. A Lonely Bird.

I assessed how positively May identified with the yellow and its strength, which suggested the possibility of harnessing this newfound inner strength for herself more fully. In her description, the yellow part was "thin but vivid," and its pulse was so strong that she could feel it in her chest. May was ready to have another MI experience in order to explore the yellow and reinforce her inner strength. From her pool of music this time, I asked if she could find any piece of music that matched the quality of the yellow (e.g., what would this yellow part sound like if it were a piece of music?). She chose Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance,* Op. 39: March, with which she had a positive relationship. While drawing, she silently spoke to the yellow, "You did so well surviving the anxiety." The yellow started to expand in her imagery, as well as in her drawing. The yellow circle in the middle blended out to orange, then yellow again, and then out to red, until the yellow outside of the main circle encompassed it all. Her entire body felt warmer by the time she finished drawing. Her drawing, "The Sun" (Figure 3), contained much more energy, radiation, and positive feelings than the other drawing.

Figure 3. The Sun.

I gave May an assignment along with a reflection upon our second session. The assignment involved first choosing a few pieces of music that would support her core yellow ("The Sun") to create a playlist and then intentionally listen to the playlist at her leisure. The purpose of this assignment was to help her develop a closer relationship with her imagery and empower her inner strength outside of the session hours.

Session 3: Staying with Tension (Re-educative MI)

At first, the idea of using music for herself felt foreign to her, especially because she had grown accustomed to prioritizing her clients' music through her music therapy training. Creating "The Sun" playlist, however, was solely for her self-care; its goal was to make the time to focus on herself and purposefully listen to music as much as she wanted. May reported, "It was fun choosing music … listening to my playlist was like being accompanied by music every day, not for my lessons or sessions but just for me." She was regarding the playlist as her "cheerleader." Nurturing herself with music and accepting her inner strength have gradually become part of her routine.

While verbally processing her previous drawing (Figure 2), May required much less prompting; she spontaneously shared what she noticed about it. The yellow core surrounded by negative feelings seemed lonely to her, like a tiny bird alone in its nest. She named this drawing "A Lonely Bird." While examining her feeling of loneliness, she retrieved a few childhood memories filled with sadness and loneliness, especially in relation to her parents' divorce. The connection between her anxiety and loneliness was so intriguing to her that she chose to visit and stay with the feeling of loneliness. I proposed a few pieces of music, and we sampled them together, searching for the right musical tension specifically for her feeling of loneliness. While describing what kind of quality was missing in each piece, a new piece popped into her mind: Bach's Chaconne from Partita for Violin No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004. She felt connected especially to its melodic tension.

Purple, blue, and black represented layers of May's lonely feelings (Figure 4). Red was her bursting anger. Small yellow circles, edged with soft green protection, were visiting different colors within the large circle. For example, the yellow circle covered in red was actually being suffocated by the red, depicting that she was buried in anger but unable to express it (especially as a teenager). Her inner conflict was being captured through the imagery experience. Pink, on the other hand, represented her mother's love; May realized that she was loved after all even when she was having unpleasant emotions.

Figure 4. Emotional Chaos.

It was the music that provoked her memories so affectively, and she was ready for this visceral intensity. The sensitive yet firm timbre of the violin solo reminded her how hard she had tried to suppress her feeling of loneliness and shame (for feeling lonely). Her brushstrokes became stronger and bolder as the music progressed, and she no longer exhibited hesitation over colors. Her heart felt lighter after purging her mixed feelings, especially anger, on a brand-new piece of paper (not a piece of scrap paper anymore, indicating that she started to treat her images and inner world with more care). Expressing intense feelings through drawing was cathartic for May. After drawing she stated, "I feel light and glad that I did this, letting out so much of my feelings that I had kept in."

Psychological grounding is necessary especially after such catharsis; emotional release is "not always therapeutic unless it includes the follow-up of insightful understanding of where the emotion came from and why it is appearing" (Bonny, 2002c, p. 99). When looking at her emotional complexity in her drawing, I asked May what she noticed and/or remembered about each emotion that she identified in her drawing. My intention was for her to recognize its origin, notice how she used to react to it, and feel how it was affecting her in the moment. Understanding the history of each emotion enabled her to retrieve a forsaken part of herself. May started to look at her younger self in a new light and rebuild a relationship with it. When I asked what she would say to her younger self now, May said, "You really worked hard, and you are so strong." The underrepresented part of her that had been given no voice was finally recognized on a sensory-emotional level. She then came to realize that the more she had hidden her emotions from others, the more isolated she had felt. This realization helped her become empathic towards herself. Later on, while writing a follow-up reflection, she named her drawing "Emotional Chaos."

To help May stay with her inner process, I asked her to create another playlist. Her task this time was to find a few pieces of music that could deliver her message to her younger self ("You really worked hard, and you are so strong"). After creating the playlist, she listened to each piece at her leisure, accessing her younger self and acknowledging the emotions that emerged, with openness and empathy.

Session 4: Investigation (Re-educative MI) and Working Through (Reconstructive MI)

May reported that her younger self was gradually warming up to her. Gaining a new understanding about her loneliness and anxiety fueled her curiosity about herself, and she became more aware of her psychological needs. Her reflection on the previous session helped me assess her openness and readiness for mining her own depth, investigating her anxiety.

I suggested a few pieces of music to see if any of them captured the quality of her anxiety. I asked May to describe how each piece of music sounded to her. I was also trying to focus my therapeutic intentions while assessing the location of this experiential on the MI

continuum. Some pieces had too much rhythmic tension that overpowered her readiness; others had good-enough melodic and harmonic tension but lacked safety and containment. Eventually, May chose the first movement of *Palladio* by Karl Jenkins (repeated twice). She stated that this piece sounded exactly like her anxiety; its intensity crept up on her progressively and oppressively.

In her drawing (Figure 5), the anxiety (black in the center) says, "I am here to invade you." The colors behind the black are its servants; they are the feelings stemmed from her anxiety, such as fear, doubt, and resistance. Yellow circles (representing May) are overwhelmed by the black, longing to escape from this unbearable situation. Before long, small black spots are about to encroach upon the yellow circles, and the small red spots are ready to attack the yellow anytime.

Figure 5. Fighting with Anxiety.

Observing May in the midst of this turmoil brought me not only respect for her bravery, but also a sense of exuberance of a cheerleader. All I could do then was trust her inner strength, contain her in this therapeutic space with the music as my co-therapist, and be the empathic witness for her. After drawing, she reported how badly the yellow circles wanted to get out of this terrible situation, but they knew that there was no choice but to fight. May was able to grasp the spirit of the yellow, her sense of self.

Having realized how exhausting it was to fight with her anxiety, May could not fight the losing battle anymore. She had to somehow find a new way to live with it. I asked her, "If you were to help your drawing to change for the better, how would you like it to be? Not 'fixing' it, but with your empathic impulse, how would you like to support your picture?" During the next MI experience, her attitude towards her anxiety dramatically shifted. What happened while listening to Elgar's Enigma Variation, *IX: Nimrod* (therapist-curated; repeated three times)*,* was a reconciliation between May and her anxiety.

She first stayed with the black that was still offensive, but at one point the black gave the yellow permission to swallow it, only if the yellow could accept it as a friend. She then started to draw the yellow so freely with expansion; the yellow became encircled by soft green and orange (Figure 6). The black turned pink at the end (the pink appeared in the center of the circle). This was like a prize for her for confronting her anxiety. Soaking in Elgar's rich, expansive piece, May forgot how terrified she used to be by the black, and then, the idea of accepting it began to sprout. May finally took in the black; at the same time, she felt as though she was the one who was being accepted by the black. This reciprocal acceptance brought her a sense of freedom and satisfaction. She further realized that the black was in fact pink from the beginning, but she could not see it because she was blindfolded by her own fear. After this reconciliation, the black retrieved its true color, pink. May worked through her anxiety in the here and now and lived through it with insight. Reflecting on this session, a narrative of her anxiety sprung to her mind. Her anxiety played a role of an enemy for her to fight with; it was giving her a mission to grow out of the fight to become more resilient.

Figure 6. Growth.

Session 5: Integration (Supportive MI)

While summarizing her experiences throughout this five-session series, May came to realize that her attitude towards her anxiety has changed greatly, and it has been affecting her daily life. Whereas she used to avoid and push away her anxiety, she has a newfound relationship with it, which is more friendly and permissive. It was an awakening for her to feel this way; she started to appreciate the presence of her anxiety because of its contribution to her life. She became more aware of the potential depth of her inner world.

The focus of this session was to acknowledge her growth through the MI experience. After a long, thoughtful consideration of music for this finale, we chose Adagio from Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27, by Rachmaninov. The yellow circle in the center radiated outward (Figure 7), stating, "I am here." May was affirming her existence. Soft green gently supported the yellow; it did not need to protect the yellow as she was no longer afraid of the "negative" feelings. Her mother's love was present in pink, and "The Sun" (from the second session) warmly held everything in the big orange circle. Various colors (black, green, blue, purple, and red) with intense emotions (anxiety, loneliness, shame, and anger) were contained by the small yellow circles; May accepted them as different parts of herself. The entire drawing was saying to her, "Good work!"

Figure 7. A New Step Forward.

Discussion

In the process of enhancing inner resources through music and imagery (MI), May started to recognize and nurture her own positive resources. Consequently, she encountered her old, unaddressed intense feelings, and then integrated those feelings through her MI experience. At the very beginning of our series of sessions, May's self-awareness seemed rather blurry. However, as she slowed down and became more familiar with paying attention to herself, she gained more respect and care for her inner world, which became

especially evident to me when she started to use new sheets of paper for her drawings (in the third session).

Looking at her drawings, the way she chose colors became more decisive, perhaps more congruent with her inner resources, and each color in her drawings became more solid especially after the second session. Assorted segments of her inner life were randomly strewn in her first drawing (Figure 1), whereas three sessions later, those segments were deliberatively drawn in a more balanced manner (Figure 6). Internal confrontation with her anxiety brought her reconciliation and congruency within.

Figure 1. Untitled. | **Figure 6.** Growth

During her investigation of her anxiety (represented by the black circles) in the fourth session, all she could do was fight against it, which was nothing but exhausting (Figure 5). Her sense of self (represented by yellow circles) was scattered around her anxiety (the black and red), fear, doubt, and resistance. In the following session, however, because of her reconstructed relationship with her anxiety, May was intently co-existing with those feelings, encasing them in the yellow circles (Figure 7). Also, her sense of self was no longer scattered but gathered in the center, gently ringed by her positive resources. This final drawing demonstrated that May's sense of self was more grounded, and she became more connected to herself with ownership of her emotions. May as a whole took a new step forward.

Figure 5. Fighting with Anxiety. | **Figure 7.** A New Step Forward.

Several components played significant roles in her therapeutic progress. First, May's relationship to music was essential. She had positive experiences with music in her childhood (e.g., gaining a strong sense of camaraderie while playing in a band, feeling comforted by listening to Western classical music that was pre-programed in a keyboard at home, etc.). Her ability to retrieve those sensory-emotional memories was key to accessing her inner music in the first session. May was also able to stay in touch with her inner process after the session by finding and listening to music relative to her imagery. Fostering her positive relationship with music enriched her intrapersonal process throughout this session series.

Second, May's ability to think in metaphors was important. As she gradually deepened her relationship with her imagery and became fluent in it, her inner world provided her with richer information about herself, which immensely aided her self-understanding. Even though it was rather foreign for her at first to build a connection with her image (i.e., "The Sun"), listening to a playlist that was specifically dedicated to her image helped her stay in touch with it and reinforce her relationship with it. In doing so, she was able to coexist with her positive resources. Imagery within us has its own life in the manner that "the inner mind has its own laws" (Bonny & Savary, 1990, p. 33). Once the client establishes a relationship with her own imagery, an active inner dialogue can begin. This inner dialogue plays a significant role in the client's gaining self-awareness and psychological freedom.

The third component is the transition from prelude to induction. This transition should never be overlooked especially when conducting MI sessions. It is the place where the client and therapist collaboratively prepare for the upcoming MI experience. Besides maintaining safety for the client, the therapist's job here is to assist the client in channeling their energy into the single inner material that most needs attention. In preparation for her first MI experience in the second session, it was May's anxiety (represented in soft blue; Figure 1) that needed to be targeted. I thus asked her questions specifically about her anxiety (e.g., What adjectives come to you now, checking in with your anxiety? How are you experiencing your anxiety or the soft blue in your body?). She stated that her anxiety was coming from the outside while getting trapped inside. Her heart, she said, felt pinched, and she even had the feeling of being chased by her anxiety. I was seeking to understand what May was experiencing; the more attuned I was to her inner material, the more direct and grounded I could be while delivering the verbal induction, incorporating words and nuances that originated from May herself.

Once the client's inner material and her attitude towards it become clearer, a piece of music needs to be selected. The music needs to match and contain the client's chosen inner material. In preparation for her second MI experience in the second session, May was rooting for the strength of her yellow core that did not run away from her negative feelings. In order for us to find a good-enough or acceptable piece that would match the strength of the yellow, I asked her, "what piece of music would sound like the qualities of the yellow? Or what piece or sound would best support its strength?" And then, we briefly sampled a few pieces of music together, sharing from both pools of music, hers and mine from various genres (i.e., classical, world, brass band, film soundtracks, etc.). May eventually chose a piece that she felt best fit the yellow, and I agreed with her.

For another instance, when we searched for a piece that matched the tension of her feeling of loneliness (in the third session), some of my questions to her included, "What piece of music feels like this loneliness? What piece would best help you stay together with the lonely bird?" The tension she felt in her loneliness was interpreted into her choice of music; her selection contained more tension than I initially expected, but I decided that this piece was safe enough for her as I assessed her readiness. This was my process of listening to music through the client's ears while choosing a piece of music for her MI experience. Besides paying attention to various components of the music, I had to be aware of the level of tension (e.g., harmonic tension, rhythmic complexity, timbre, melodic contour, silence, etc.), size of the musical containment (i.e., how holding or developing it is), and the client's preexisting association with particular pieces.

Fourth, the MI continuum allowed me to responsively follow May's inner process. A thoughtful combination of supportive, re-educative, and reconstructive MI experiences helped her discover and integrate the unaddressed parts of herself in an organic fashion. A continuum of MI practice fundamentally permits the therapist to be client-centered, denoting that the therapist could be as responsive as possible to the client's inner process. This does not imply that the therapist carelessly jumps from one level of practice to another

within the MI continuum. Rather, the therapist seeks to swim across the MI continuum from the very end of the supportive level to the possible end of the reconstructive level, with such sensitivity to the subtlety that exists between each level.

Lastly, our therapeutic alliance was imperative. May and I initially planned to have a total of four sessions. At the beginning of the fourth session, however, we agreed that it was more natural for us to follow May's psychological impulse than interrupt it or abort it prematurely. Therefore, we decided to add one more session for closure of the session series. This decision was made possible because of our original agreement to honor the therapeutic process, which included the possibility of adjusting the number of the sessions. This intentional flexibility allowed for an organic ascent and descent in our session series. There was a development of rapport between us, and we shared a clear intention for our therapeutic work together within the permitted time structure. The awareness of our deadline propelled us in the therapeutic process.

If our work had continued, I would have addressed May's relationship with her parents. The color pink often represented maternal affection in her drawings. During the second MI experience in the fourth session, for example, the color black turned into pink after her reconciliation with anxiety. I wondered if this prize-like surprise was symbolic of maternal approval, and if this was a validation that she had needed from her mother. I also speculated about how much as a teenager she had internalized her mother's feelings about her divorce. Given the history that May's emotional response to the divorce had never been addressed in a therapeutic fashion and that she had become protective of her mother, it would have been another psychological area to explore, with a purpose of assisting her emotional independence and individuation. The use of the Continuum Model of Guided Music and Imagery (CMGIM) as an entity for even deeper intrapersonal work could be a therapeutic option for her to pursue in the future.

Conclusion

May, an undergraduate music therapy student, was referred to music therapy for self-exploration. Throughout the total of five music and imagery (MI) sessions in seven weeks, she made many brave steps. Upon reflection, May expressed her learning as such:

> During the fourth session, I was able to reconcile with my anxiety and realized that it was not a negative emotion after all. I now know that music helps me become spontaneous and face my emotions. I am grateful that music can support me like this.

May has become more aware of her positive inner resources and emotional responses. A more solid sense of self has enhanced her authenticity. Instead of fighting with or hiding from her anxiety, May has learned to understand its meaning and accept it as part of her entire being. She not only uses music more intentionally as a supportive resource for herself, but she also gains validation and compassion from within. The use of the MI continuum with its fluidity and approachability allowed May to explore her inner world in a safe, manageable, and grounded manner. Her personal development through this session series would constructively affect her clinical skills as a music therapy student and contribute to her ongoing personal growth.

About the Author

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