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Voices from the Inside: Working with the Hidden Trauma Narratives of Women in Custody

Introduction

Echoes of trauma are not always visible. Long after the traumatic event, the resounding "inadvertent and unwished-for repetition" (Caruth, 1996, p. 2) lingers on in the bodies and minds, soma and psyche, of those who bear its wounding. Trauma, as an "unspeakable" (Herman, 1992, p. 1) phenomenon, can remain veiled, masking its presence yet leaving traces, concealed in the flesh of its survivors. Complex trauma, experienced through repeated exposure such as adverse childhood experiences or domestic violence, manifests deeply and can lead to a continued cycle of re-traumatization (Covington, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014). Within the context of the criminal justice system, the cause and effect of trauma narrative is becoming more widely understood. Those who have experienced trauma in the form of prolonged adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 1998), domestic or sexual violence, especially within what should be the safe construct of familial relationships, are more likely to end up demonstrating destructive and risky behaviors that lead to criminal activity (Covington, 2016; Lempert, 2016).

Recent statistics around incarcerated citizens identify a high proportion of the current prison population in the UK who have experienced prior trauma (Covington, 2016). Pinpointing more specific data to support the explorations of this chapter, the Prison Reform Trust[1] states that "women in prison are highly likely to be victims as well as offenders. Over half the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence with 53% of women

[1] Founded in 1981, the London-based charity, Prison Reform Trust, seeks to 'build a just, humane and effective penal system [by reducing] the use of prison, [improving] conditions for prisoners [and promoting] equality and human rights in the criminal justice system' (http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk). The charity has a specific Women's Programme, considering how to cater for the needs of women in custody and acknowledging a change in the system is warranted.

reporting having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child." The significance of these statistics is becoming more widely understood and acknowledged as impactful both in the enacting of crime and the continuation of traumatic experience in its aftermath. Sentenced women live with a "narrative of belated experience" (Caruth, 1996, p. 7) and exposure to the potential for re-traumatization throughout their incarceration. Women with lived experience of trauma have often been silenced (Belenky et al., 1986), their suffering hidden from view, cutting them off from others and negatively impacting their ability to create deep interpersonal connections. The enclosed space of a prison cell further reinforces this silence and separation; the hidden narratives remain buried, only "to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

For these women, can "the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out" (Caruth, 1996, p. 2), be heard and understood? Can those who facilitate creative activity seek to bear witness to their trauma narrative, and in thus doing, validate the "memory of the trauma" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 194) even if it is not presented as a cohesive account[2]? As a community musician working within this contextual location, is there a way to redress the inequity and imbalance of participants' experiences? What creative interactions with the women might enable them to begin to feel heard, understood, valued, as opposed to silenced, stigmatized, oppressed?

This chapter examines a particular locus of creative musical engagement within a maximum-security women's prison in the north of England. Using the illustration of a singing and songwriting project, and with the theoretical framework of trauma-informed

[2] Traumatic memories are not presented by trauma survivors as chronological and coherent stories. They become fragmented, hard to piece together and are often dissociated. This, in part, explains why there can be a concern for those who have experienced traumatic events, particularly in the case of physical or sexual abuse, that they will not be believed. The disjointed narratives can be misunderstood, and gaps in the retelling viewed with suspicion. For more information on how the brain processes traumatic memory, please refer to van der Kolk (2014) chapter 12.

practice, the approaches to practice (musical, relational, and pedagogical) are unpacked and examined. Drawing on reflections and observations from the project, I explore what it means to be trauma-informed as a community music practitioner. Defining clear boundary lines around the responsibility of "bearing witness" to trauma, as opposed to providing a remedy for the traumatic experience, the paradoxical complexity of this practice is situated within a wider discourse of both trauma theory and community music literature.

Context

> It is always the story of a wound that cries out. (Caruth, 1996, p. 4)

In the autumn of 2018, I piloted a singing and collaborative songwriting project under the banner of the York St. John University Prison Partnership Project.[3] The original intentions of the singing project were to give the women opportunities for self-expression, create a sense of community, and to build positive working relationships through mutual trust and negotiation of the creative process. Our weekly workshops entailed activities designed to build group cohesion as well as support development of vocal technique, breath control, posture and physical relaxation. We worked with groups of up to twelve women for a period of ten weeks, focusing on learning vocal repertoire and writing collaborative songs. I facilitated the sessions supported by undergraduate community music students from York St. John, and we worked with responsive, negotiated curriculum, tailoring the program to the specific needs of the women with a non-formal pedagogy inherent in community music practices.

[3] The York St. John University (YSJU) Prison Partnership Project was set up in 2013 by Rachel Conlon, Theatre Practitioner, Drama Therapist and Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre at YSJU. Originally a theatre program operating in two local women's prisons, it was designed as a "transformative learning experience which emphasizes creative collaboration and addresses issues of social concern" (Conlon, 2020, p. 174). The singing and songwriting project was set up in response to a request from some of the women for a singing group. For more information, please see https://www.yorksj.ac.uk.

We ran three ten-week projects within the academic year and each new project presented a fresh set of challenges in forming and maintaining positive group identity. The women who attended had signed up to the project or had been referred by a staff member or special services (for example trauma-informed services) within the prison. There was little racial diversity within the groups we worked with (the majority of the women were White) but the economic and class diversity was interesting to note. I had expected to be working with women from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, and there were certainly those representative of that demographic. However, we also worked with well educated, middle- and upper-class women, women who had professions and a family life prior to their sentencing. Interactions with the women challenged any preconceived ideas that incarceration is an issue for a particular sector of society; it also challenged the notion that trauma (particularly trauma and abuse connected to significant relationships) is reserved for only one social class.

In hindsight, it is now possible to reflect more deeply on my observations of those early sessions and recognize the hidden trauma narratives the women carried with them, the wounds that were crying out (Caruth, 1996). The word trauma implies vulnerability, connecting to the late Latin *vulnerabilis* meaning "wounding" (etymonline.com). There were visible signs of trauma and immense vulnerability: for one woman, in the bandages used to seal up slices of her self-harm; in others, problems with obesity, poor health, lung problems, all attested to prolonged experience of prior trauma (Covington, 2016; Burke Harris, 2018; Felitti et al., 1998); difficulties with mental health, low mood, anxiety, fatigue, lack of confidence, shame; behavioral issues such as disruptive, aggressive behaviors that created moments of tension and unease, both for the facilitators and the other women present. Lack of self-care was apparent in some of the women, with unkempt appearance, unwashed hair and dirty clothes, the vulnerability in their wounding starkly evident. There were moments of

dissociation, the *blank* moments where the women were not fully present. Trauma triggers associated with songs or activities were common, and there was both heightened emotional release and emotional withdrawal. Flashbacks occurred (van der Kolk, 2014), wherein the women displayed physical tension and lack of eye contact.

Trauma narrative is fragmented and often inaccessible. The women carry with them fractured and disjointed remembering of their stories as "damaged mosaics of the mind" (Langer, 1991, p. 34), making it hard for them to piece together a cohesive account (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014). What I observed in those early days of the project told a hidden story, "narrative threads" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70) woven together that were not readily accessible. What was visible was not always comprehensible—the women's pain veiled, their cries muted. Their hidden trauma narratives were speaking, whether or not I could hear them or was able to acknowledge their presence. Looking back, I now recognize that it was I who needed to learn how to attune and attend to the internal "reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). The weighty responsibility as a facilitator working with women in custody required as much understanding of the context as possible, including a way of conceptualizing traumatic experience and trauma responses. This necessitated developing an approach to practice that enabled a secure environment, responsiveness, and reflexivity, whereby the veiled trauma narratives could be heard, acknowledged, and validated within the creative process.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

> We are dealing with a dual reality: the reality of a relatively secure and predictable present that lives side by side with a ruinous, ever-present past. (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 195)

Women within the criminal justice system have been described as "some of the most neglected and misunderstood individuals in our society" (Covington, 2015, p. 13). This

recognition necessitated the need to design an appropriate trauma-informed and gender-responsive framework developed on the understanding of the body's response to trauma. The Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care (Harris & Fallot, 2001, cited in Covington, 2015) are:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

and within the *Tool Kit* developed by Stephanie Covington for the One Small Thing initiative,[4] these values are broadly unpacked in relation to working with incarcerated women in the UK. To be trauma-informed as a practitioner does not require a direct engagement with trauma narrative. It does, however, mean being responsive to the women's physical and emotional signals and attempting to avoid triggering or re-traumatizing individuals.

During the past two years of working on the Prison Partnership Project, I have spent much time considering how these values might be developed as a theoretical framework of trauma-informed community music approaches. In the following sections, I explore each value in turn, considering not only how they connect together, but also how their distinctive facets are significant when working with survivors of traumatic experience. I reflect on how these values are embraced and embodied within the weekly practice musically, relationally, and pedagogically.

Safety

Survivors feel unsafe in their bodies. Their emotions and their thinking feel out of

[4] One Small Thing is a UK-based charity set up to facilitate understanding of trauma and its impacts on those within the criminal justice system, delivering trauma-informed training for criminal justice professionals. One Small Thing partnered with Doctor Stephanie Covington to design discrete courses in acknowledgement of the differences for men and women in custody. For more information, please see www.centreforgenderandjustice.org and www.onesmallthing.org.uk

control. They also feel unsafe in relation to other people. (Herman, 1992, p. 160)

The women we work with have "deficits in feeling safe" (Porges, 2017, p. xvi) and wrestle with ongoing issues with their mental, emotional, and physical health; by contrast, we seek to create a welcoming, hospitable, and inclusive environment. Safety, as equated with being "uninjured," "in good health," and "whole" (etymonline.com) implies positive wellbeing and care. The intention in the singing sessions is to facilitate an ethics of care (Noddings, 2013) in creative collaboration and facilitation of "a deep, respectful and relational approach" (Conlon, 2020, p. 175). The ongoing nature of the project is crucial: to provide continued reinforcement of positive values and a weekly creative anchoring for the women.

Herman (1992) asserts that the first stage of recovery from trauma is that of establishing safety (p. 155). It is important to understand that the women may feel entirely overwhelmed when they first come to a singing session and that safety, connected to trust, must be established carefully and over time. I have noticed the women gravitating towards those in the group they know or to the warden who works with us. It can take time—for some a period of weeks or months—before they begin to relax their guard in each other's presence.

Safety is facilitated at the start of a session with the Focus Game. This involves initiating eye contact with each participant, using their names, and establishing positive group identity by "Looking, listening, witnessing" (Porges, 2017, p. 48). It can help establish a sense of solidarity and also fun, and as the weeks progress, individuals in the group can choose to take the leadership role, reinforcing their sense of ownership and developing their self-confidence. Herman (1992) explains that group solidarity is a robust defense for those who have experienced trauma. I have certainly observed this solidarity as the women learn to feel safe with me and with each other. As Erikson (1995) explains,

Still, trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that

> common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed. (p. 186)

The safety and solidarity of the group is, in part, connected to a shared understanding, a "communality," even if this acknowledgement is unspoken. However, some of the participants are not able to feel safe within the group and may choose to leave the project. For some women, their disruptive or bullying behavior reduces the safety of others and, after repeated warnings, they are asked to leave. This is deeply challenging as a community music practitioner, where the intention is towards genuine welcome, inclusion, and openness, but it also responds to the contradictory nature of hospitality:

> It should be noted that hospitality could paradoxically mean both "host" and "stranger," its root common to both "host" and "hostile." It is from within these tensions, a welcome from the host while hostile toward the stranger, that community music practices operate. (Higgins, 2012, p. 138)

Our hospitality is contained within the boundary lines of ethical practice. In order to give a genuine welcome, there has to be an understanding of the parameters: where the tensions of "host" and "hostility" meet, where exclusion may serve a greater purpose, even when it is deeply uncomfortable. Herman (1992) recognizes that each individual's journey of recovery is distinctive and can be both impactful to and impacted by the group. I have observed women join the group before they are ready to engage in any meaningful way, sometimes in the early stages of a life sentence.

As the level of safety develops over the course of a project, the women are able to open up more. I have noticed that there is a desire to communicate with greater freedom around the circumstances of their incarceration, for example. As the women understand that they will experience acceptance and lack of judgement from the facilitators, they begin to

share more deeply the ins and outs of their daily experiences. “The general deadening routine and intrusiveness of prison life can all work to de-motivate, shut down and shut off women from themselves, others and their environment” (Hughes 1998, p. 49). Within the safety of the group, they can begin to connect; they can begin to trust.

Trustworthiness

> They learn to trust in an environment that renders them constantly vulnerable.
>
> (Lempert, 2016, p. 132)

Trust, a verb from the Old Norse *treysta*, means to “rely on, make strong and safe” (etymonline.com). The entwined values of trustworthiness and safety abide concurrently within the trauma-informed framework, enabling both the women and the facilitators to develop a reliability and strength in the social and creative fabric of the work. For incarcerated women, their immediate environment is not one conducive to trusting relationships (Lempert, 2016). The women’s concealed trauma narratives provide an additional challenge to developing trust, preventing them from being able to interact freely with one another. The facilitators also conceal elements of our lives, as to share openly in that context has the potential to be unsafe, both for us and the women[5]. Developing and maintaining connections within these veiled relationships can be an arduous task. We skirt around conversations, alternately enacting dialogical dexterity or a stilted and uneasy discourse.

Trust, however, is imperative in developing an environment conducive to creative

[5] Within the context of the Prison Partnership Project, there is a clear expectation of both professional conduct and ongoing consideration of safeguarding. We are working in a highly complex environment and consideration of the women’s trauma experiences, how these manifest and the care that needs to be taken in trying to avoid re-traumatizing individuals is of paramount importance. To disclose personal information, for example around family life and children, has the potential to be triggering for the women, for whom issues of motherhood can be a source of re-traumatization (Conlon, 2020). In addition, as a community music facilitator in this context, I am not a trained criminal justice professional with the expertise and understanding of the processes and structures used to support rehabilitation from crime. I have to be clear, therefore, about my role and understand the boundaries needed to enable facilitation of a safe and secure environment.

potential. A community musician needs to work collaboratively, which involves "giving up control" (Higgins, 2012, p. 148) and maintaining a flexible, two-way approach to trust. The women will not grow in their trust of me if I am not willing to grow in trust towards them. The values of trust and collaboration intersect in the relinquishing of control, where artistic potential may begin to grow. In developing trust, learning to listen is a way to pay attention to the face of the *other* (Levinas, 1969). It is a way of attending to, literally stretching towards those with whom you are interacting. As I work with the women, I strive to listen attentively, waiting in expectation for even the smallest move towards creative vulnerability and openness. This listening, attentiveness, and observation can in turn develop responsiveness. As I develop in responsiveness, I am better equipped to facilitate a space in which trust can grow. As trust grows, the women become more responsive; thus, creative and social capability is enhanced.

I have observed women at different stages of this journey of trust and witnessed the intense lack of trust, both of the facilitators and of each other. I have seen a lack of trust in the system and heard stories of lack of trust of authority. But I have also observed growing assurance as the women understand that the weekly workshop space is confidential, enabling trust to develop at a deeper level. From his reflections on working with children who have experienced the trauma of war and displacement, Osborne (2009) states:

> *But music also generates trust: if someone sings to you, they clearly mean you no harm; they make themselves vulnerable, "bare their soul" and offer sympathy, empathy and a kind of care and love. Then there is the power of music to bring social cohesion—by consent—from chaos, and both to synchronize and to entrain.* (p. 343, original italics)

Singing together can enable the "prosodic voices, positive facial expressions, and welcoming gestures [that] trigger feelings of safety and trust" (Porges, 2017, p. 2). For

women who have engaged in the singing project over a number of months, I have observed moments when they feel safe enough to immerse themselves in a song, shutting their eyes and becoming fully absorbed in the moment. Some women have felt a deep enough level of trust to clap and dance to the music, raising their hands and swaying. The sense of social cohesion following these moments has been profound. The women each tend to wear "masks" within the larger context of prison life, hiding their fragility and trauma behind a fixed and rigid covering. In choosing to connect to the music, the women have an opportunity to lower their "masks," enabling them to make a move towards healing and recovery.

Choice

> To have your rights disregarded is to become invisible, not to count, so the sense of self is eroded. (Cattanach, 1992, p. 17)

The Old English, *cyre*, meaning "choice" or "free will" (etymonline.com) suggests a freedom in choosing: to exercise choice is to exercise liberty. The paradoxical nature of an act of liberation within the confines of incarceration, where the women have had many of their rights taken away, suggests why this third value of trauma-informed care has the potential to be powerful. Within the weekly workshop sessions, choice is enabled in song repertoire, opting in or out of activities, choosing themes and creative stimuli for songwriting, choosing to commit to the creative process or deciding not to return to the group. This is not a flawless system. We are bound by certain restrictions within the constructs of the prison environment. But in each act of choosing, the women can regain a semblance of freedom and take steps towards building self-confidence and agency.

The women's choice around the texts they create for our collaborative songs is an opportunity to use their imaginations with freedom of expression. Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk (2014) states, "Imagination gives us the opportunity to envision new possibilities" (p. 17) connecting to the idea of "future possible selves" (Henley & Cohen, 2018, pp. 156-158).

For women in the criminal justice system, envisioning new possibilities and reimagining their narratives represents a powerful way to build self-efficacy and positive social engagement.

Using metaphor, imagery, and agreed thematic stimuli, the women can choose to explore their stories within the safer creative constructs of oblique and non-direct approaches. van der Kolk (2014) suggests that freewriting supports accessing internal thoughts and hidden emotions:

> In freewriting, it is as though you ask your editor to leave you alone for a while [and] things will come out that you had no idea were there. You are free to go into a sort of trance state in which your pen…seems to channel whatever bubbles up from inside. (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 238)

I have noticed the focus, the intense concentration and silence that can descend during a freewriting session with the women. The connection between being able to choose the words that spill out of them—pen onto page—and the free will exercised in those moments can create a sense of suspension, as though time has stood still. In those parts of the workshop, it is important to be flexible, not to rush the creative outpouring, and to trust in the effectiveness of the exercise.

When I eventually draw the group back together, there is often a profound moment of sharing. Sometimes this happens in pairs, especially with newer groups or women who are less comfortable in each other's presence. At other times, the women are keen to read the prose or poems that have flowed from pen to page. There are also women who struggle with illiteracy and need others to capture their thoughts, but they can still surprise themselves with their choice of language and what they choose to communicate. When the women write, opening up their inner world of imagination, they involve others in their journey and in some cases, begin to repair an eroded "sense of self" (Cattanach, 1992, p. 17). This process can continue to develop through the fourth value: collaboration.

Collaboration

> The restoration of social bonds begins with the discovery that one is not alone. Nowhere is this experience more immediate, powerful, or convincing than in a group. (Herman, 1992, p. 215)

Within the process of creative collaboration, we experience an "act of working together," a "united labor" (etymonline.com). For the women, collaborative songwriting can be the most potentially daunting part of the session, but also, ultimately, the most rewarding. As Herman (1992) suggests,

> The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. (p. 133)

This quotation goes some way to explain both the initial reticence towards, but also the subsequent unrestrained joy, in collaboration. Within the songwriting process, a "restoration of social bonds" (Herman 1992, p. 215) can begin to emerge. Sometimes this restoration follows a period of deterioration occurring in clashes of personality, tensions I have perceived as the women grapple with working closely with others (during much of their week they exist in isolation); women who find listening to others an immense challenge, and others who find they do not have the courage to speak up. Facilitating this work can cause internal conflicts: encouraging one of the women's creativity may appear to be at the expense of another's. It is not a perfect art form; navigating these tensions is part of the skill in trauma-informed approaches that needs to be developed.

A connection exists within collaborative songwriting processes to bearing witness, giving validation to the truth of another's experience, to another's trauma narrative (Anderson, 2016). This can be powerful for women whose narratives have been doubted, shut

down, and ignored. The jagged and fragmented trauma narrative can present as a confused and broken tale. Validating the women in the context of the project—creatively, personally, musically, and relationally—goes some way towards bearing witness, to validating the truth of their trauma narratives, without engaging directly in the narrative itself.

This can be complicated for songwriting processes, but in furthering this idea of validation, we make music in relationship, in encountering one another in song. Austin (2015) states "Our voices resonate inward to help us connect to our bodies and express our emotions as they resonate outward to help us connect to others" (p. 622). In singing together with the women and collaborating in writing songs, these connections can be formed, recognizing that songwriting can be a platform for the safe exploration of emotions (Hess, 2019). Building positive connections within the group is critical to this work, in maintaining the women's mental and physical health, and in developing individual and group empowerment.

Empowerment

> The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. (Herman, 1992, p. 133)

The project facilitators strive to create an environment wherein each individual can experience a sense of care, support, and value, which enables opportunity for self-expression and self-empowerment. The power dynamics present within the daily context of the prison can be stifling and oppressive. The women are used to authoritarian structures and can come into the singing sessions with the expectation that these will continue to be enacted by the facilitating team. Challenging those expected power dynamics takes time and continued reinforcement. The Prison Partnership Project operates on the basis of social and artistic equality and bridging often profound social barriers (Conlon, 2020). The women in the

project have opportunities to develop their self-empowerment, thereby making steps towards regaining a sense of value and self-worth.

Singing has been described as “an act of generosity” (Zezerson, 2005, p. 125) and as such, can be released in the women’s voices, in the courageous expression of their songs (Barnwell, 2000). I have observed moments of individual and collective empowerment in the singing sessions. As Conlon (2020) states, “Letting sound and voice out of a body that can feel like it wants to hide is an act of hope, of faith in being heard” (p. 180). The act of singing together can bring physiological and emotional changes to support victims of prior trauma (Porges, 2017). I use exercises in vocal technique and breath control that are deliberately tailored for the women. For example, breathing exercises with shorter inhale, holding the breath, and a long, sustained exhale, enable heart rate to slow, blood pressure to lower and, over time, can enable a reduction in levels of anxiety, as well as deal directly with the body’s response to trauma (van der Kolk, 2014). Some women have spoken of practicing these exercises during the week and of the improvement in overall wellbeing they have experienced as a result. These are important moments, when a participant can “author her own recovery” (Herman, 1992, p. 133).

I have also learned the importance of play. It is interesting that within the confines and restrictions of the prison, humor and playfulness can offer moments of bonding between participants. As van der Kolk (2014) states, “When we play together, we feel physically attuned and experience a sense of connection and joy. The moment you see a group of grim-faced people break out in a giggle, you know that the spell of misery has broken” (p. 215). This can in turn enable the women to feel connected and empowered in a way that can support them through the rest of the week. The women have spoken of how they spend half the week looking back on our last singing session, and the other half of the week looking forward to the next one. In those moments, lasting connections were formed.

In addition, working within the context of the group enables opportunity for what Herman (1992) calls “collective empowerment” (p. 216). For example, when the women develop a group contract, “Ways of Working,” at the start of a new project, they decide how we will work together over the course of ten weeks, what values are important, what they will tolerate or not, and how to define the creative space. We revisit this contract at the start of every session, with the opportunity for the women to revise the list. The women sign their names, formalizing the agreement, a crucial act when the group dynamics can be challenging and hard to shape positively in the early weeks. I have observed a tangible shift during those moments of collaboration, witnessing the “recreation of an ideal self [with the] courage to move out of the constricted stance of the victim” (Herman, 1992, p. 202) to “the author and arbiter of [their] own recovery” (p. 133).

Concluding Comments

> Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (Herman, 1992, p. 214)

Working within the hospitable and collaborative structures of the singing and songwriting project, trauma-informed approaches are key to developing an effective framework of practice in an environment where trauma is an ever-present but invisible companion. The Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care overlap and intertwine and are hard to separate from one another, each building on the next. Throughout this chapter, I have explored these values as a supportive framework for women in various stages of trauma recovery, whilst they concurrently navigate the immense challenges of their custodial sentences.

I have endeavoured to capture examples of how the singing group helps to “recreate a

sense of belonging" (Herman, 1992, p. 214). In an environment where acts of hospitality (Higgins, 2012) are contrary to many of the women's personal encounters, the community musician's ability to reinforce a welcoming, inclusive, and trustworthy workshop space is crucial for enabling positive connections to be made. The tensions of holding the known and unknown impacts of trauma, the visible and hidden, necessitate reflexivity and responsiveness, sensitivity and empathy. The shadows and hauntings of the past cannot be ignored, but neither is the practice centred around bringing them to light.

The community musician can bear witness to the women's hidden trauma narratives by understanding and acknowledging their presence, and in this way facilitate affirmation within the group. Having experienced silence, separation, and isolation, the women can encounter connection, collaboration, and belonging through sharing with and learning from each other. A trauma-informed framework of practice can enable development of positive and constructive working relationships and facilitates an opportunity for the women to develop their individual and collective voice. Approached thoughtfully with an ethic of care, there is great potential to connect, for positive encounters with each other and to offer the women the chance to be fully heard. As Caruth (1996) states:

> But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his or her own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound. (p. 8)

Developing trauma-informed approaches is a journey, as much of self-discovery as of solidifying the knowledge and understanding that frames our practice. It is also a journey that benefits from walking with others. Our own histories and complicated, tangled dealings with

trauma can become messy if not resolved through regular supervision and self-care. We need to be more aware of our own internal processes and the potential they have to both disrupt and to be positively impactful in our practice (Etherington, 2004). Becoming trauma informed is not an individual task but a relational and collective responsibility, strengthened by shared insights and collaborative practice.

Through working with trauma-informed approaches within the prison, we encountered the women not just as incarcerated citizens, but as trauma survivors. The "dehumanizing" effect for the women of both the current context and experience of prior trauma can be eradicated to an extent as the "group restores her humanity" (Herman, 1992, p. 214). As Ahonon-Eerikainen (2007) states:

> It is like voiding the spell of an old grotesque image of something that made them freeze, preventing them from being visible, audible, livable, or loved. It is like giving them permission to be different, to be themselves, to show their true self, to become visible and audible. (pp. 179–180)

As a community musician working within this context, I have had the immense privilege of observing this emergence of "true self," of witnessing the silenced becoming audible and the hidden becoming visible. I have also recognized the responsibility I have in developing trauma-informed approaches in order to facilitate this emergence. Against the backdrop of incarceration, the singing and songwriting project offers a vital layer of support within the negotiated practice of creative community.

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