



“When is the next training?”

We organized a training series for mentally handicapped women where I was a project manager and a trainer. The first series included 10 occasions and its aim was to develop self-awareness in handicapped women. We used nonverbal, theatrical techniques as some of the participants had problems with understanding complex speech or speaking. The second series included 12 occasions, it was open to men as well, and focused on sex education training. The training was a huge success, participants really enjoyed it, trainers and participants became emotionally close to each other. It was closed by a theatre performance created and played by the participants where I even invited my grandmother. Months after the training series ended, one of the participants, a 22-24 year old girl (let's call her Emma) started to call me through Facebook (we were Facebook friends). She wanted to know “When will be the next theatre training?” I explained to her, that for the moment there is no plan to continue the training. She seemed to understand it, as the conversation ended quickly. Or so I thought, because from then on she called me frequently, first, once a week, then twice a week, for several months. She always asked the same questions: “When will be the next training?” and after that wanted to have some small talk perhaps, as she asked me how I was doing. After a while I did not answer her Facebook calls. Then, somehow she got my private mobile number and called me there (I suppose my trainer partner gave it to her, and maybe Emma called my trainer partner as well, but we never discussed it with each other). I don't know whether these calls stopped or not for good, but I did not get any from her during the past 1-2 months. I felt an enormous guilt about this situation.

Hungary, 2017

IDENTITIES OF THE NARRATOR AND THE PERSON(S) TRIGGERING THE SHOCK

THE NARRATOR

Rebeka is a 32 years old Hungarian woman. She's coordinator and trainer in an association of sexuality education. She's from the middle social class and doesn't belong to a minority.

THE OTHER PERSON(S)

Emma is a 22 years old Hungarian woman. The mother of this person takes care of her because she's mentally handicapped and she's a participant in the narrator's workshop. She's from the lower-middle class.

SIMILARITIES / DIFFERENCES

What brings together these two people are their genders and their nationalities. What separates them are their ages, their social classes, the fact that one of them belongs to a minority and the other does not and also their status in society and the workshop.

CONTEXT

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

Facebook calls, phone calls.

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT

1 other trainer who was a co-trainer in the workshop.

Rebeka imagined that her co-trainer could be the one who gave her private mobile phone number to Emma.

LARGER SOCIAL CONTEXT

"Social acceptance of people living with mental disorders in Hungary is well below that of other European states or overseas countries... Society's aversion originates in a false notion associating mental disorders with aggressive and violent behavior. Lacking adequate explanation, this aversion seems to stem from the fear of incomprehensible, often bizarre, human behaviors."
<https://akademiai.com/doi/pdf/10.1556/2066.2.2019.001>

Sexuality education for people with mental disability is not provided systematically, only a few organisations deliver such workshops.

PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP, ANTECEDENTS

None.

FRAME OF REFERENCES OF THE NARRATOR “REBEKA”

GUILT

IRRITATION

SADNESS

WORRIED

After the series of sexuality education workshops, a participant keeps on calling the facilitator, on her mobile number, for months, inquiring about the next theatre training.

Helpers are in a position of power: when helpers manage to raise the expectations of their clients, encourage them to express their needs, thoughts, when they show empathy and acceptance towards clients they get to be seen as powerful and as a source of hope for the clients. Here, these people never had this liberating experience before and they missed each other as well as the trainers, while they did not have the means to organize such trainings for themselves.

Nature of theatre/nonverbal methods: these methods are very good at creating trust between people, to ease up people (but maybe there is also a danger linked to it – to manage these bonds after the training is over)

The need to be nice to people, don't hurt them: If someone calls you more and more with the same question that you already answered to several times, you cannot just block the person, you should deal with this situation in a respectful way.

Indicator of a successful training: participants feel good, relaxed, they open up, they trust each other, they create something valuable together (based on these indicators the trainings were very successful)

Goal of the training: to involve participants, to be able to create connections with them and among them, to create an environment where they can be relaxed, they can explore their thoughts and feelings and their relationship with their bodies

The nature of relationship between participants and trainers: they are close during the training, but the relationship ends as soon as the training ends.

Responsibility of the trainer: to be close enough to participants to be able to develop their skills, knowledge, to dissolve boundaries to an extent. It is also the responsibility of the trainer to know their participants' problems (here they were mentally handicapped which meant that not everyone could understand that this training is a project with a fixed duration).

Facebook friendship status doesn't mean people are real friends: It is OK for a trainer to accept a participant's Facebook friend request during or after the training and to react to and like each other's posts, but it does not mean that are now real friends.

Responsibility of the organizer: to find ways to organize trainings that target the rights and well-being of people in disadvantaged positions. He/she has to think long term, taking into account the longer term consequences of such trainings (if they are successful, if they mean something to the participants who want to continue, he/she can't just move on to another project).

Everybody should feel satisfied: If the trainer/organizer disappoints even 1 participant, it questions the whole experience, questions the morality of the whole project.

FRAME OF REFERENCES OF THE PERSON AT THE ORIGIN OF THE INCIDENT “EMMA”

After the series of sexuality education workshops, a participant keeps on calling the facilitator, on her mobile number, for months, inquiring about the next theatre training.

Importance of giving feedback: Emma might have thought that it was important that she gave positive feedback, that she indicated that this training was important, effective, meant a lot.

Power of the organiser: Emma might have thought that it was completely up to the organisers to launch such trainings again if there is a need for it.

The need to remain in contact: Emma might have developed a bond to the participants and the trainers and she wanted to maintain these bonds.

Representation of powerful women: Emma might have regarded Rebeka as a powerful woman, as a role model, as Rebeka could organize these types of trainings, she could live independently, could make decisions freely about her sexuality (sometimes mentally handicapped people are forcefully sterilized)

If someone is “green” (available) on Facebook than she/he can be called: Rebeka was on Facebook a lot and she seemed available all the time (she did not modify this setting).

If someone share details of her private lives, then she can be contacted freely: Emma could follow details of Rebeka’s private life on Facebook (as they were Facebook friends) and she might feel a personal connection to her based on this.

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