

Foreword

Gender based violence, from society to family. Discussions of a hypothesis and the efficaciousness of various interventions

Ines Testoni[§]

Our society continues to minimize atrocities perpetrated against women, especially acts of domestic violence, which constitute the most common form of violence against women worldwide. In fact, between 16 and 41 per cent of women are physically assaulted by a male partner in an intimate relationship (Crow, 2000). In spite of a huge development of an international agenda put forth by the Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) promoted by women's rights activists (Hosken, 1981), and from which the Commission on the Status of Women Agenda (CSWA), World Conferences on Women and European Daphne Programme (Bunch, 1995; Larson, 1995; Zulficar, 1995), originate, the problem still persists and it is a challenge to try to go from policy making to creating hands-on interventions that produce tangible results in mitigating gender violence. Furthermore, despite the launch of the third wave of feminism consisting in the successful presence of an international women's rights movement in academia, real women around the world are still trafficked as sex slaves, forced into marriage, vitriolaged, sexually assaulted during war by soldiers and in daily life, they are mobbed, controlled, denied the freedom of reproduction, stoned to death, bought and sold, persecuted, abused by their partner and killed (Vlachova, 2005). These actions deny their human identity. Women are thus seen as objects and are still denied the opportunity for self-realization both refusing/limiting their access to

[§]Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education & Applied Psychology (FISPPA), Section of Applied Psychology, University of Padua (Italy).
E-mail: ines.testoni@unipd.it

social/political decisions and are prevented from making deeply personal choices in their private lives (MacKinnon, 2006).

This volume discusses some of these issues presenting both the development of a discussion with respect to the genesis of the problem and the research results obtained by the psychosocial, clinical and sociological interventions designed to address the problem or resolve the consequences arising from it. Our contribution includes the papers discussed at the international conference, held in Padua at the end of the Daphne III Empower Project, involving Italy, Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Portugal and Romania. Our action-research intervention led by the University of Padua utilized psychodramatic techniques to promote the empowerment of women victims of domestic violence.

The work is divided into two parts: the first part encompasses the articles which have developed into an entire and complete course of analysis or research, the second part includes the section "Family nodes," where crucial points of our work in progress are discussed.

First part: studies and research

The first article introduces the problem of the origins of male violence in western culture; Luigi Zoja presents "Centauri. A violent masculine myth" and considers the mythological Centauri double not only as joined together as man and horse, but also as possessing a dual nature. They represent figures of wisdom and are healers, but they are also violent men and rapists. The author considers how, far more than the feminine identity, the masculine identity is split, along the lines of the animalism of a stud and a civic paternity and consider the hypothesis that far from being the fruit of prolonged evolution, this social polarity is the work of culture and a recent development.

Claudio Tugnoli develops an anthropological discourse on the link between religious beliefs of Western cultures and the ritualization of violence through regular sacrificial ceremonies, comparing this phenomena to the probable absence of sacrifice in pre-Indo-European culture, in which the matrilinear structure still prevails. The author illustrates how the sacrificial system could be a feature of a male dominant society that is strongly hierarchical and that keeps women in a position of subordination. From this point of view, the educational-formative issues arise in order to define a new strategy for managing violence symbolism.

The discussion is followed by the parallel matter presented by Maria Gabriella Sartori “The legend of the end of matriarchy” where the problem of femicide is considered making reference to the Selk’Nam ethnic group and, in particular, Ona who used to live on the “Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego,” in South America. This tribe lived in the tradition of hunters-collectors (Paleolithic) up until their extinction caused by white colonization (XX century). The ritual of their manly initiation allows us to understand the origin of patriarchy in this population that creates an exclusively male alliance. Ana María Fernández further develops the problem in “Gender violence: femicides in Argentina,” where she presents a research on femicides in Argentina during the time period 2008 to 2009. She emphasizes that suicide-homicide tension is linked to inconsistencies in case records. From this point, she questions how femicides can be covered up, suggesting patriarchy and State abandonment as causes.

If femicides may be considered the first and most severe expression of female dehumanization, a close second is the trafficking phenomenon. The issue is presented by Eleonora Bordon and Mariselda Tessarolo in “Women victims of trafficking and prostitution,” where they present some theoretical studies and action research on the subject of prostitution and human trafficking. The aim of their study is to listen to the stories of women who have been victims of trafficking or prostitution. Their work, therefore, presents a textual research realized through Spad-t applied on the text arising from the victims.

In the article “Human rights approach and the importance of multi-agency work to combat violence” Paola Degani debates on how violence against women represents a core issue in the human rights discourse. A key assumption among activities aimed at contrasting gender based violence and protecting the victims is that the multi-agency approach is the most effective. Multi-sector backgrounds produce useful results, both for people working in law enforcement and in the judiciary field, as well as for those individuals that intervene in the various phases of assisting the victims of violence. In Italy the adoption of the National Action Plan against Gender Violence and Stalking confirms at an institutional level the value of a holistic system when countering gender violence using a human rights oriented approach.

Franca Balsamo presents the article “New subjects for new discussions on domestic violence and women’s agency” and discusses some key issues useful in understanding domestic violence in relation to the new phenomena of globalization. This refers to the issue of “definitions” or “re-definitions” that a new multicultural repositioning of gender relations

require from us. The other major issue deals with the relationship between violence and globalization

One of the key concepts is surely related to the “victimary condition,” which is discussed by Marco Monzani in “Domestic violence: from gaining awareness of victimization to requesting help,” where he discusses the theme of awareness of victimization. The author affirms that it is only through awareness that a victim may request help and therefore it is necessary to develop strategies useful for raising awareness in victims.

The main factors that inhibit the ability to become aware of one’s own condition is the unconscious dynamics that produce or maintain conflict in relationships. Cristina Marogna, Floriana Caccamo and Ilaria Locati in their article “Separation as a protective factor: homogeneous groups for parents” consider a specific but also fundamental aspect of this topic: the inability of restoring a marriage covenant that involves the entire family. The authors indicate the importance of therapeutic groups that can act as a valuable support in raising consciousness to manage conflict. This is particularly relevant as the legal concept of “family” evolves rapidly in the contemporary legal systems, as Federica Giardini presents in her article “New Families in the Legal World: a Comparative Perspective”.

The problem is more specifically focused on interventions in violent couples by Neus Roca Cortés and Collaborators in the article “Group intervention in partner sex violence cases. Effects and processes of an open psychosocial support group,” where they describe how for several years they have focused their work on the recovery of sex abuse survivors providing enhancement of authority and agency of women in patriarchal violent situations. The authors underline that extensive research shows how group intervention is beneficial and effective, therefore indispensable at all levels of social intervention in seeking to eradicate gender violence and present the positive results of their interventions. The first dimension which has to be analyzed is inherent to the attachment style which characterizes violent relationships. The problem is discussed by Vincenzo Calvo and Collaborators in the contribution “Composition and functions of women’s attachment network in adulthood.” The aim of this study was to explore the female attachment network’s composition and to investigate the types of relationships that fulfill women’s attachment needs and the relative strength of attachment to different people in different life situations. 251 adult women completed a modified version of the Attachment Network Questionnaire-Revised (ANQ-R). Adult women without a partner assigned the role of principal attachment figure to their best friend. About one third of the participants did not transfer attachment from an individual inside to an individual outside the family of origin. This percentage is higher for

women without a partner (46.8%) than for those with a partner (19.1%). Only a minority of the adult women did not show a clear identifiable principal attachment figure. Within the attachment network of women with partners, we found that the partner is very often the principal attachment figure. Understanding the attachment network of women and identifying the specific principal attachment figure, can be useful in planning psychological guidelines for prevention and/or the treatment of violence and trauma.

This volume offers a special emphasis on interventions with active techniques, among which psychodrama stands out in importance, particularly in relation to raising awareness of the factors that produce or maintain a victim-perpetrator relationship. Denise Saint Arnault and Collaborators in their article “The use of Psychodrama in Biodynamic Psychotherapy: Case Examples from a Domestic Violence Healing workshop” consider how traumatized individuals can suffer from an array of mental and physical conditions and how psychodrama permits them to solve traumatic memories. Their research explores the application of biodynamic methods to eliminate the biochemical, hormonal and emotional effects of trauma, and fosters mind-body-spiritual healing for eight women who were receiving domestic violence support services in the West of Ireland.

The same strategy was used by “project Empower ” whose results are presented by Ines Testoni and Collaborators in the article “A Daphne III project: the mission, the structure and the results.” The contribution develops the idea of Morenian sociatry where psychodrama can be considered an elective intervention to help those who are prisoners of a victim-perpetrator relationship, since psychodrama proves valuable for troubleshooting identity. The University of Padua is project leader, and heads a partnership, composed of groups belonging to the FEPTO, that collaborate with anti-violence centers in Easter Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania) and Western Europe (Austria, Italy and Portugal). Under the same project, another dimension was considered. In the article “Empower agency. Emotional itineraries in psychodramatic elaboration of violence: from anger to independence” we present the discussions concerning the textual analysis of the reports on the psychodrama sessions that were carried out as part of the same project. Adopting feminist and cultural psychology perspectives, according to which human processes can never be separated from the context in which they occur, the project considers the female victimary situation as a set of cultural, material and symbolic artifacts which can be understood by utilizing qualitative methods of

research, that permit the researcher to explore the contents of the experiences of the victims.

Psychodramatic techniques and qualitative research are also the fundamental ingredients of the following article, presented by Marta Codato and Collaborators “Analysis of a meeting of sociodrama on the representation of the ideal woman.” This work is part of an experimental study – involving some theoretical lessons of gender studies – that aim to promote the empowerment of a group of university students by increasing their awareness of the subordination of women and their ability to act effectively to curb it. The students were involved in a meeting of sociodrama (video-recorded) during which they could express their representations of female roles. In order to observe the development of empowerment and to analyze how it was verbally represented into the ideal woman, we used a specific software for managing and analyzing the audio-video data.

Psychodramatic techniques may be utilized also in the formative and educational processes, as Khaled Meftah Gezait, Susie See Ching Mey^o, Melissa Ng Lee Yen Abdullah show in this article “The role of psychodrama techniques in reducing the level of aggressive behavior among Libyan adolescents,” where they describe the intervention carried out on adolescents. The aim of his research is to explore the types of violence existing throughout the Arab schools and the methods that are used to resolve the issue. The study aims to explore the effectiveness of using psychodrama to reduce violent and aggressive behavior in adolescents.

Another kind of intervention with adolescents is discussed in the article “Educating students about gender relationships to fight gender-based violence: reflections from a school project in the province of Trento” by Giulia Selmi and Chiara Tamanini, who consider addressing the problem of gender-based violence as a fundamental imperative to building a democratic society with full equality between women and men. The authors underline how schools play a crucial role in achieving this objective by taking ownership of the gender dimension of education and within this framework, the article critically discusses the first results of the project “Educare alla relazione di genere” promoted in the province of Trento, with

^oProf. of Educational Psychology, Counseling Psychology, Mental Health at School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains, Malaysia. Tel: 604-653 2575, E-Mail :cmsee@usm.my

a methodological emphasis on participants' direct experience and their relationships.

Similarly, in the same area of primary level of prevention, Chiara Caravà and Collaborators in their article "Violence Against Women? An Evaluation of the Intervention Method Adopted by Ala Milano Onlus" presents the state of the art results achieved by the Italian ONG "Ala Milano Onlus" in the development of some violence prevention programs among students, using the Life Skill Training Method. The hypothesis they confirm is that the students who took part in the intervention projects show a lower level of sexism and a higher level of equality when compared to non participating students.

Patrizia Zantedeschi and Collaborators deal in detail with education and formative roles in contrasting gender violence, presenting the experience of Padua's Centro Donna which operates at a Primary/Secondary/Tertiary level and explain and show the importance of network activities that operate at the intersystemic level through which victims can rebuild social relationships and a new condition of life.

Caterina Arcidiacono and Marina Esposito in the article "Young Italian psychologists and clinical illiteracy about domestic violence against women" discuss the results of an analysis carried out on the papers of 85 psychology graduates dealing with a clinical case, after a year of post-graduate training. The content analysis of the documents shows that domestic violence against mothers and children is not properly recognized by the new-psychologists.

The contribution of Paolo Cottone "Positioning Analysis: A model for assessing change processes in group activities" presents a research aimed at showing the possible application of the positioning analysis as a tool for evaluating the processes of change in group activities. The positioning analysis takes shape within the theoretical framework of post-modern social sciences, and is proposed as a dynamic alternative to the traditional static concept of role and identity. In order to test the proposed model, a group activity was investigated.

Second part: Family nodes

The second part of the volume presents the work in progress of many authors interested in gender based violence issues.

In the field of contrasting gender violence, Alice Bertoldo considers the interdisciplinary perspective in Women/Gender studies enhanced by

European Thematic Networks and EU policies and, with Viola De Sando, the actions to combat violence against women in Europe are discussed; Cristina Karadole talks about the history and meanings of women's struggles against male violence in anti-violence centers and shelters; Alessandra Tozzi and Collaborators describe the activities of the women's anti-violence centre in Rovigo (Italy); Lidia Ruiz and Collaborators present the objectives and methodology of the multidisciplinary team of UMAR in the intervention with victims of gender violence; Roberto Poggi and Collaborators debate about prevention through educational and therapeutic interventions on men perpetrators of violence against women;

In the subject area related to the use of psychodramatic techniques, Hannes Krall discusses about practitioner research and research network on psychodrama; Maurizio Gasseau gives his opinion on the Italian network of empirical research in psychodynamic group therapy; Galabina Tarashoeva and Collaborators present the results of psychodrama's intervention work in Bulgaria with women victims of domestic violence; Mihaela Dana Bucuta and Collaborators work on empowering through psychodrama and discuss a psycho-social intervention model in Romania; Nicoletta Gola and Angela Chiavassa describe an Italian experience of psychodramatic groups aimed at supporting female victim of violence; Gabriela Moita and Collaborators portray the experience of the Empower project in Portugal where the project was developed jointly by the Sociedade Portuguesa de Psicodrama (SPP) and União de Mulheres de Alternativa de Resposta (UMAR), which have integrated, respectively, their ecological model, their intervention methods and psychodrama; Karin Leitgeb and Collaborators show the supporting strategy consisting in a mixed-methodology design comparing sociodrama groups with individual counseling sessions in order to empower women victim of domestic violence in Austria; Nicoletta Gola and Luciana Basilicò illustrate the experience of psychological and psychodramatic support aimed at women who are victims of trafficking or domestic abuse in Albania; Isabella Bonapace and Claudia D'Aloisio explain how to use body language and archetypes to recognize and prevent violence adopting techniques like psychodrama, dance-movement-therapy and Self-Bioenergetics-Analysys; Paola Pellegrino and Tiziana Russo deal with the role of "protagonists" through drama in traumatic experiences; Maria Koleva debate on the use of sociodramatic and sociometric techniques with women victims of trafficking in The Netherlands; Leandra Perrotta discuss the case of Irina and how Jungian Psychodrama helped her to work through fears and traumas using the transgenerational perspective; Maria Silvia Guglielmin and Collaborators present the psychodramatic and psychometric technique of the Social and Family Atom. Michela Palermo

deals with the expedience of using psychodrama with women abused by their mothers; Ornella Dutto and Martina Zilio introduce a film therapy intervention project to promote awareness of gender based violence in drug-addicted young men; Laura Consolati and Vanda Romagnoli expose their experience of psychodrama with victims of violence; Francesca Michieletto and Laura Miotto expose the efficacy of the theatre of the oppressed methodology in high schools with the aim of contrasting violence against women.

The conference also offered the opportunity to participate in the following experiential workshops: Gabriela Moita and Michael Wieser weighed in on the issue on “Normative sexuality as a violence factor;” Angelika Groterath and Thomas Wittinger presented “Gender Games in Social Work and Education;” Chiara Baratti and Chiara de Marino discussed “Exclusion from the labor market: a kind of violence;” Laura Consolati and Vanda Romagnoli presented “Recovering one’s voice: listening to the self and to others; meeting with consideration;” Vanda Druetta discussed “Betrayals and guilty-feelings in the transgenerational history of women: Jungian Psychodrama.”

References

- Bunch, C. (1995). The global campaign for Women’s Human Rights: Where next after Vienna? *St. John’s Law Review*, 69 (1–2): 171–78.
- Crow, B. A. (2000). *Radical Feminism: A documentary reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hosken, F. P. (1981). Towards a Definition of Women’s Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 3 (2): 1–10.
- Larson, E. (1996). United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development, and Peace (Beijing, China: September 1995). *Emory International Law Review*, 10 (2): 695–739.
- MacKinnon, C. A. (2006). *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press.
- Vlachova, M. & BIASON, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Women in an insecure world*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
- Zulficar, M. (1995). From Human Rights to program reality: Vienna, Cairo and Beijing in perspective. *American University Law Review*, 44: 1017–1036.