

*Change.*

*A group experience using the body and archetypes  
to recognize and prevent violence\**

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***Summary.** Our project involves an intensive workshop for women that adopts a psychological and body approach towards the individual and the group. The reference model we use is a psychodynamic one with a special focus on Jungian's Depth psychology, the field of women's psychology and on two specific authors: Valcarenghi and Bolen. The myth and story of the Greek goddesses are used as archetypes, namely patterns of existence and behavior. The work through the so-called "virgin and vulnerable" goddesses, has been the key to explore women's 'forms' and roles. These aspects highlight different feminine skills with a specific focus on those aspects related to conflict within relationships. The intervention implies adopting techniques like psychodrama, dance-movement-therapy and Self-Bioenergetics-Analysis in a constant integration of body and mind.*

**Key words:** *Body, psychodrama, awareness, archetypes, empowerment*

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This work proposes several projects developed by the writers in different social contexts in the Piemontese region: Women's House of Ivrea, Centres for counselling and gender-related violence prevention, in the House of the Neighbourhood of San Salvario in Turin.

The project involves an intensive workshop for women and it adopts a psychological and whole body approach towards the individual and the group, within a so-called "holding environment": a warm and nonjudgmental environment where women can express their deepest emotional aspects together with their individual potentialities, with the purpose of gaining awareness and empowerment, as well as preventing violence.

The reference model we use is a psychodynamic one with a special focus on Jungian's Depth psychology, women's psychology and in specific two authors: Marina Valcarenghi (2003) and Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984). The intervention takes place on two levels: a psychological and corporeal one, with a constant focus on the integration of body and mind, and it implies the adoption of the techniques of psychodrama, theatre, dance movement therapy and Self Bioenergetics Analysis.

The experience in a 'protected' group, allows the development of body-emotional skills (emotional regulation) through the activation of body awareness, enhancing self-consciousness which is rooted at the individual and group level experience, based on the connections of body sensations, emotional experiences, images and words. The body is an essential component and an elective place for exploration and self-seeking. Recent discoveries in neuroscience have shown that individual identity and the mind, are essentially a social phenomenon deeply rooted in intersubjectivity and the expression of a single mechanism rooted in somatic genesis (Gallese, 2007).

The myth and story of Greek goddesses are used as archetypes, namely patterns of existence and behavior that we recognise from Jung's collective unconscious. The work developed from the Jungian analyst J. S. Bolen (1984) through the so-called 'virgin and vulnerable' goddesses, has been the key to explore women's 'forms' and roles. These aspects highlight the different feminine skills with a specific focus on those aspects related to conflict within relationships. As Jung says (1934-54), the use of imaginative language facilitates the emerge of authentic inner images, which can be looked at, listened to; images that one can become aware of as they are not filtered and conditioned by logical thinking and rational thought.

Particularly, the 'vulnerable' goddesses embody the Archetypes of women's traditional roles (mother, daughter and wife), roles that are focused on a relationship. Hence the identity and well-being of the women/goddesses depend on the presence in their lives of a significant relationship. Such Archetypes express a need of belonging and bonding typical of women, a need that makes them focus on the other and makes them vulnerable. In the myth, all three goddesses are victims: «they are raped, abducted and dominated or humiliated by male gods» (Bolen, 1984, p.17).

The title of the workshop (change) describes an approach oriented towards reflection, towards gaining awareness, and an approach that aims to change. Work that moves on a process of reflection and awareness tending towards change.

The idea is to create a protected environment that enables women to look at their situation and develop the proper skills to break free from the cycle of violence that is often perpetuated from mother to daughter. The archetypes of Demeter and Persephone, representing the archetypes of the mother and the daughter, allow these women to enter into these crucial female roles and to explore them deeply through a creative imaginative way.

In particular, the present work is addressed to a group of women between the ages of 26 and 65 years old, that took place at the Women's House of Ivrea, where we worked in particular with different forms and states that the woman experiences in the mother-daughter relationship, analyzing it through psychodramatic representations of significant moments with their mothers and daughters, real and illusory, retracing and 'mending' wounds and/or memories while, searching for new meanings.

By giving priority first to the body and emotional experience, it has been possible to build a new environment, intended as a mental and physical space, in which it was possible to experience and share the as-if dramatic fiction, as the reality of the 'here and now' in which psychodrama plays a fundamental role in the study of individual stories (De Leonardi, 1994). By building a group where one could bring and share personal difficult situations and one's suffering, the topic of the work emerged through three key words, identified by the same participants: space, mother, body.

Space: the working group, identified a fundamental need for these women to carve out a clean and dedicated space where they could stop and remain on their own outside the multiplicity of tasks and roles they have to accomplish in daily life. Thus, the specific focus of the mother-daughter relationship showed the importance of providing a body and mind space as

necessary elements for the daughter in order to grow up and become an independent woman with a Self of her own made up of her body and mind.

Mother: Working with the goddesses Demeter and Persephone proved to be important in order to break the chains of continuity and perpetuation of the cycle of violence and pain, and also as an opportunity to reflect on the female 'task' to give 'birth' as an inner creative quality that must be re-discovered and valued.

Body: In the workshop, the body was identified as the bearer of the corporal self that outlines one's own being 'here and now', as a different person but at the same time similar to the mother, in a state that is in constant change and therefore needs greater attention and care.

The adoption of a space only for women has proved to be appropriate and effective as it has encouraged the development of women's personal and social skills, allowing for a sharing and a contact able to contain and respond to the support needs of those for whom it is more difficult to ask for help and support.

In the group, the bodies of the participants expressed their difficulties and their suffering related to their past experiences and personal growth; each participant looked for a new contact and for a different and more suitable approach in living their relationship with themselves and the others.

The experience of a group that contains and shares, has allowed to reprocess the negative and crystallized experiences, revealing slowly a strong resource of empowerment. In fact, women feel more capable of dealing with certain situations and learn (i.e.: understand in their mind and feels in their body) that they are not alone or unique in these experiences.

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