

The Feminine Identarian Archetype – a Symbolic-Experiential Perspective Revealed within the Creative Improvisation through Literature

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Abstract

Introduction: *Creative improvisation through literature is an experiential-unifying work technique in personal development and optimisation.*

Objectives: *The present study aims to explore the relationship between the connected symbols of the feminine identarian role and anxiety, from an experiential-unifying perspective.*

Methods: *Through the analysis of 400 stories, created by personal development groups participants, analysis devised to validate the above-mentioned technique, it becomes apparent that the anxiety symptomatology is closely connected to the high rate of feminine Ego symbols in these stories.*

Results: *Understanding symbols and their conscious integration has led to a decreased level of anxiety.*

Conclusions: *Through symbol analysis in an experiential-unifying group, participants gained the capacity to adjust in a creative-adaptive manner.*

Keywords: *personal development, metaphor, therapeutic stories, unifying therapy*

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Introduction

Creative improvisation through literature is an experiential-unifying technique, which has as starting point the spontaneous writing of stories, within the personal development group, with psychodiagnostic, projective and restructuring value. Developing this technique within the personal development groups' level proceeds on the assumption that such an expressive provocation leads to emotional unlocking, accessing repressed feelings and reassessment of experiences previously-perceived by clients as grief and existential dread-inducing.

In broad terms, the main actor of this technique is the literary metaphor – projective words, phrases and expressions, with a different meaning for each client and representing a starting point for an efficient restructuring analysis, with profound correlation to life events experienced by clients.

At the beginning of each personal development session through literary improvisation, participants receive the task of performing the stimulating exercise: to write a story, in 10 to 15 minutes, on a theme given by the trainer. Afterwards, participants share their stories and, under the guidance of the facilitator, discover the meaning of metaphors present in their own stories. Essential to this is the trainers' keen eye, not only concerning the verbal behavior, but also the non-verbal and especially the symbolic perspective.

Constructing creative improvisation through literature started from the concept of therapeutic storytelling, which was adapted to experiential-unifying therapy (Mitrofan, 2004). In other words, therapeutic stories become healing landmarks to those to whom these are read (Burns, 2012), they build value systems for children (Peseschkian, 2005) and improve relationship communications system (Correa et al., 1991).

As revealed in specialty literature, utilizing stories for therapeutic purposes has elicited the interest of many researchers who wished to provide an added benefit to the psychotherapeutic process, through the use of literary metaphors (Grove, 1989). As such, using stories in working with children (Constantino et al., 1994), adults (Sana, 2008) or individuals with psychosomatic disorders can have positive effects, if implemented properly. Many therapists choose to make use of already-written stories, with the purpose of highlighting some life themes of certain individuals, or stories based on symptoms or, better yet, the plainly-visible effects in a person's life (Sasaki et al., 2007).

Many of these approaches are limited though: they rely on already-written stories (Peseschkian, 2005).

Utilizing short-stories, written by the person itself, has a higher holistic value, as it takes into consideration the whole process and leads to the mobilization of all the resources one possesses. These results are even better and last longer (Mitrofan, 2005).

The technique, provocative and restructuring, rallies behind the PEU method. The manner of intervention and meditative assistance (especially in the first part of the unifying process), supporting the group – facilitate emotional unlocking and metaphoric access to the all the above mentioned. What happens is basically externalizing, in a non-defensive and especially secure way for the client.

With the help of the creative improvisation through literature technique, participants have the chance, with each meeting, to transform into writers who are able to draw up their own stories (from a given theme), putting on paper their thoughts, emotions, giving life to new characters (which certainly represent a projection of significant people in their lives or even sub-components of their inner selves). They have the opportunity to give meaning to some events, to offer a significant title to those stories, to “play” with the characters, to create their own narrative, to find solutions and to offer an authentic ending (as it belongs to them and reflects a part of them). Creative improvisation through literature becomes a “painting”, a diary or a micro-novel. If unfolded in a creative way, it offers the client the chance to arrange, through words and the impression of a fictional creation, a content which up until that point was difficult to access or express, due to the fact that barriers posed by words and direct expression of things which generated suffering were large and difficult to manage.

Previous studies (Constantin et al., 2014; Constantin 2015; Constantin, 2016) reveal positive effects of intervention through literary improvisation in increasing self-esteem and lowering anxiety levels. Additionally, intervening through this technique also determines an increase in emotional intelligence (Constantin, Mitrofan, 2018). Also, another point to highlight is the experiential and symbolic value of creative improvisation through literature (Constantin, 2015) – the fact that the metaphors which the client uses in the story have a correlation with certain events or feelings, which are not integrated in his or her life. Moreover, creative improvisation through literature is an instrument of symbol reading of metaphors found in participants' stories. Decrypting these symbols may help them to better understand their feelings, to find the root causes and, last but not least, to “unlock”, from an emotional standpoint.

Adapting to the experiential-unifying intervention comes with innovations in working with therapeutic stories. The fact that participants in the group are asked to write those stories themselves paves the way to projection. This facilitates the development of metaphors. Additionally, as creators of their own stories, clients become more autonomous and available to assume responsibilities.

Through its expressive-creative value, literary improvisation allows participants in the personal development group to access more instances of the self, to broaden the field of conscience and to become more aware of repressed emotions, traumatic events or any other blockages that they have experienced. All of these occur through the means of spontaneous writing of stories.

Furthermore, another essential aspect, which distinguishes this technique from others using the literary metaphor, resides in the holistic approach, thus becoming not only a simple literary improvisation written inside the group, but also a complex process with strong implications for the emotional and creative reconversion of a person. Basically, by using creative improvisation through literature, the participants within the therapy group have, in every meeting, the opportunity to transform themselves into writers who are translating their own thoughts and emotions into stories. They have the opportunity to create some new characters (but who certainly are projections of significant people in their lives or even some unknown parts of their Ego). They also have the chance to provide a meaning for the stories, to offer them representative titles, to play with the characters, to create their own plot, to find solutions, to offer a genuine ending/conclusion and, why not, to change all of these things as self-analysis process unfolds.

Constructing creative improvisation through literature has also been achieved with the help of the symbol concept, as used in psychology. This appears when a person is unable to express or reveal to the outside certain feelings, experiences, traumas or other blockages, that remain deposited on the inside and get to be expressed only when an occasion presents itself, in a symbolic manner.

Freud thought the symbol to be a projection of compulsions from the subconscious, of childhood traumas or other cultural products. Projection was defined by Freud as the phenomenon through which a person expunges from itself and attributes specific characteristics to other people or events. Projection is also a self-defense mechanism, as symbolic expression

becomes an easily-accepted process for the individual, perhaps even at social level.

On the other hand, in Jung's opinion, symbols take other meanings. For him, a symbolic image has a collective origin, experienced individually, therefore defining the term of collective unconscious. Collective unconscious is a universal characteristic, in which each human carries in his psyche schema the model of instincts specific to the human collective and not just to the essence of an individual, as the theory of personal unconscious is treated (Jung, 1971). On the basis of the concept of collective unconscious, Jung also described the Archetypes, symbols which express themselves at the level of individual unconscious and that are metaphors of a matrix influencing human behavior on all levels: intellectual, emotional, moral or relational (Jung, 1971).

In an experiential-unifying vision, the concept of symbol is enhanced and used to unify parts of the human being and access the inner Self. In order to better argue and highlight the need and importance to correlate the symbolic from the creative improvisation through literature, with one of the four identarian symbols, we provide below Iolanda Mitrofan's perspective on these characteristics, as found in the Unification Therapy (Mitrofan, 2004, p. 204-206):

"The human being evolves as a product of unification, integration and transcendence of characteristics and the tendencies of the four forces or fundamental elements, keeping at an energetic, informational and functional level their basic attributes [...]. From a functional perspective, people and their expressions of manifesting as personalities and social roles are the end product of Everything, while the life scenarios we develop, be it personal or transgenerational, are dynamic, probabilistic functions of it.

Each person can be seen as a meeting point of fundamental natural evolutionary and integration principles, as an individualized unification and connection, unique, unrepeatable of the four manifestations and universal informational energetic forces – fire, water, air and earth. Their polar attributes translate into the functionality of the psyche and human behavior, through the roles used in the identity constellation of a person (paternal – fire, maternal – earth, masculine – air, feminine – water). The four fundamental elements are in double-polarity and mutual influence and transformation links, through some attributes regenerating, enriching, creatively transforming, evolving, while through others blocking,

annihilating themselves or destructively transforming their essence.”

In the case of each role represented by the four fundamental symbols, there are certain characteristics and other elements associated with or derived from the archetypal symbol, characteristics which help shape and decrypt messages transmitted by a person, possible sources of blockages and anxiety or subconscious unresolved conflicts. With regards to the feminine archetypal role, this is associated with **water** or replaced with other connected symbolic elements: any body of water (stream, river, sea, lake, etc.), rain drops, ice or other liquid, flowing elements (for example blood, inside the body). Among polar attributes, corresponding to a feminine role, we have: **purification/ dirtiness; fluidity/ rigidity; comfort/ destruction; transparency/ opacity; empathy/ lack of empathy; flowing, energetic/ stagnant, lazy.**

Methods

Objective

The present study is a qualitative one and proposes to analyze 400 stories written by the 120 participants to the personal development groups, within the validation program of creative improvisation through literature (Constantin, 2016). The purpose of this study is to highlight a diagnostic-experiential method of reading symbols present in their stories, with emphasis on the presence of symbols connected to the feminine identarian role and anxiety.

Hypothesis

We assume that there is statistically significant, positive correlation, between the symbols of the feminine identarian archetype, present in metaphors from therapeutic stories, and anxiety.

Participants

120 subjects were included in this study, with ages ranging from 20 to 33 years old, who took part in personal development groups, in order to validate and capitalize on creative improvisation through literature. Those groups went ahead over the course of 12 weeks, during which participants were required to write, in every session, a short story, on a given theme, for personal optimization purposes.

Tools

This study is qualitative and takes into account the analysis of 400 stories gathered from the above-mentioned participants, over the course of the research

program. We do mention that, although the number of stories gathered during the research program was much higher, we have chosen those which contained at least one metaphor, connected or not to the present study (some metaphors even had other meanings).

The primary tool in the study was the technique of creative improvisation through literature. We used the observation method in the process of assisted self-analysis, but also in extracting key metaphors for the study.

Procedure

The first stage of the study was the personal development program, by way of creative improvisation through literature, over the course of 12 weeks.

The second stage of the study was aimed to uncover, from the 400 analyzed stories, symbols corresponding to the feminine identarian role, i.e. those linked to the natural element of water. The purpose was to understand the way participants integrate, or not, the feminine archetypal role, the way they understand and manifest it in their own existence. As such, we have looked to decrypt these symbols by comparing and contrasting them, as signs of integration (transformation) or, on the contrary, non-integration (blockage) of certain attributes. This outlines literary improvisation as an expressive technique, with metaphors which result as projections from the personality structure of the individual, but also with diagnostic values, as it offers the possibility of assuming the existence of certain events or feelings which were not integrated.

In analyzing the 400 stories from which we extracted deeply symbolic metaphors, we decided to also focus on participants' lives. However, the repetitiveness of certain symbols determines us to highlight a certain universality of some metaphors (e.g. the four elements are themselves universal). As such, we consider that we can sketch a way of reading “between the lines”, i.e. to better understand what the participants have written on their piece of paper. We would like to point out that any such symbol reading can be enhanced with other symbols and metaphors connected to the four mentioned above (and with specific attributes), as one goes along utilizing this technique in an experiential-unifying process. A keen eye is important for a therapist in this case, as well as a high level of creativity, lucidity and passion for an experiential creative-expressive intervention.

The third stage in the qualitative study was to highlight within the 400 stories the metaphors with connections to anxiety. We have chosen this variable, as it was already qualitatively validated in another study

(Constantin, 2016). In the previously-mentioned study we have shown that participants manifested in the pre-testing phase high levels of anxiety (both as a state and as a trait). At the end of the program, the levels of anxiety dropped to statistically significant measurements, in comparison to the value measured at the beginning of the program. In working with creative improvisation through literature, we have observed that in the case of some participants, similarly to symbols corresponding to identity roles, there were some metaphors which describe anxiety.

Results

In the following, we will present metaphors extracted from the 400 stories of the participants in personal development groups through literary improvisation. As some of these were repeated from one participant to another, we will present many of these only once (naming them **unique metaphors**). Extracting these metaphors was done through content analysis of participants' stories, keeping in mind that these corresponded to the analyzed psychological constructs. This was made possible by creating an analysis grid.

For example, the analysis on the symbols connected to the feminine identarian role was made taking into account the fundamental element linked to this archetype, which is water, along with other similar symbols. Below, some of these symbols are presented, along with some explicative notes, in order to better reveal the context of each metaphor.

Symbols and metaphors, connected to feminine attributes:

- seduction;
- to flow;
- sensitive;
- calm;
- sadness;
- tiredness;
- female-spy (tendency to masculinize the feminine image);
- rainbow;
- shyness;
- rain ("I am the rain" – **awareness in assuming feminine attributes**);
- narrow stream (**fear of flowing, of being unseen as a woman, with feminine attributes poorly highlighted**);
- flower;
- princess;

- tenderness;
- pool;
- scented;
- water-dominated (**over-assuming femininity, excess of feminine attributes**);
- honey;
- unshed tears (**to not allow tears to fall; repression of feminine attributes; rejecting femininity**);
- steam;
- bridge;
- fountain;
- lake;
- delicate, feeble;
- get to shore (to get to smooth waters – **as if femininity is a burden; lack of acceptance and integration of feminine attributes**);
- deep sea;
- empty shell;
- wet grass;
- clear eyes;
- winter.

Therefore, after analyzing all the creative improvisations through literature, written by participants in the personal development groups, we managed to highlight 30 unique metaphors, each with its own correspondent in feminine archetypal symbolistic.

With regards to extracting metaphors which describe anxiety, we have elaborated an exploration grid to facilitate reading such symbols. In constructing this grid, we have taken into account the high levels of anxiety measured in participants to the development group, at the beginning of the program, and, on the other hand, the possibility that these variables might reveal symbols which reflect the state and feelings these individuals may go through.

Please see below the symbol exploration grid of metaphors, with a correspondent in anxiety and self-esteem within the stories in the quality study:

Psychological construct	Anxiety
Metaphorical exploration method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - words or expressions which indicate a heavy, burdened state; - expressions with correspondent in anxious and existential dread, pain, fear; - expressions which suggest insecurity, instability or inner pain;

- expressions which reflect physical states specific to anxiety: sweating, trembling, nausea etc.
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In the table below there are 49 unique metaphors, which describe anxiety, extracted from the 400 literary improvisations:

- dark brown (expresses seclusion, small space);	- inner disorder (expression of anguish, of the unknown, of a weak contact with the inner Self and own needs);
- sadness;	- dark as tar (seclusion, confinement – color which expresses the unseen, mystery, darkness, “the unclean one”, linked to tar, a heavy, dirty, foul-smelling substance);
- uncertainty;	- to get on one’s nerves;
- tiredness;	- obscure;
- fog (as an expression of uncertainty, fear of what is coming, of what cannot be seen, of what cannot be controlled);	- to be terrified;
- disease;	- black buildings;
- overloaded;	- overcast day;
- bad weather;	- metal ball (a heavy ball, which weighs and pushes down and therefore becomes immobile);
- hardship;	- pleasure from pain;
- heaviness;	- pain kept in the chest (heaviness, existential dread, pain in the symbolic office of emotions, anguish);
- emptiness;	- bitter taste;
- man in black (man who inspires fear, mystery, anguish, associated with the devil, darkness, anxiety);	- scattered;
- grumpy;	- empty citadel;
- desperation;	- flaked walls.
- pain;	
- chain of suffering (links locked one into the other, which generates suffering and which block existence by itself; to get caught in chains; to be chained up)	

In order to observe if there is correlation between the symbols of the feminine identarian role, described above and symbols of anxiety, we have devised a statistical analysis, using non-parametric SPSS Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients, which allow for ordinal data analysis.

The results are presented in the table below:

Correlation	ANXIETY
FEMININE ATTRIBUTES	Correlation coefficient = .98 Sig (2-tailed) = .00

Therefore, as seen in the above table, at a level of p (sig 2-tailed) of .00 ($p > .001$), **there is statistically significant positive correlation between the symbols of the feminine identarian role, present in metaphors from therapeutic stories and anxiety.** To conclude, the hypothesis of the study is confirmed. In other words, anxiety symptomatology of the 120 subjects is closely related to the presence of metaphors connected to the feminine identarian role in participants’ stories.

We consider the results to be relevant in the context of a symbol analysis and an expressive-creative unifying intervention, based on metaphors revealed by the means of a technique of creative improvisation through literature. Positive and statistically significant correlation, revealed by the above analysis, presents us with the following possible explanation: by being aware of the identarian roles a person “can play”, i.e. by integrating aspects specific to the feminine identarian role, they will also benefit from a decrease in anxiety levels. Between the symbols which reflect the feminine identarian role and those that correspond to anxiety, the correlation coefficient is **0.98**. As per the interpretation grid offered by Hopkins (apud Popa, 2008), this result is one which describes an extremely intense correlation. A possible explanation is that, in analysis and personal development, anxiety, which more typically makes use of creative improvisation through literature (and which is the subject of this study), is generated especially by facets of the feminine Ego, which therefore leads to the connection between these symbols. On the other side, it is possible that on a group level, symbolic exploration of metaphors with feminine attributes determines not only integration and awareness, but also a decrease in anxiety levels.

We highlight the confirmation of this explanation, through the conception evidenced by Iolanda Mitrofan in the volume “Experiential orientation in psychotherapy” (2005, p. 294-295), who emphasizes the need and positive effects of integration, on a personality level, of the four universal dimensions.

“The balance of the human being is based on the agreement and unification at the personality level of the four essential dimensions, structured on two evolutive bipolar axes: masculinity/ femininity, symbolically linked to the air/ water axis and paternal/ maternal, linked to the fire/ earth axis. Per this assertion, integration in full harmony of these four cosmic structuring principles of the human being and their reflection in behavior, as an expression of personality, ensures its evolution, inside and out [...]. To work in an experiential manner, with universal symbols, which reorder the subjective world of that person (including self-perception, representation, ideas, strategies, understanding and self-evaluation) constitute in Unifying Therapy the chance for successive integrations of aspects linked to personality (correspondent to basic natural principals, expressed through symbols) of reparatory transformations on dissonant or incomplete aspects, as well as a superior inner reunification.”

Discussion

We consider the result to be extremely important, as it paves the way to another type of intervention in decreasing anxiety levels – symbolic analysis of identarian roles. Although this study did not take into consideration the other 3 identarian roles, more and enhanced research in this area can lead to the development of an alternative, expressive-creative, diagnostic and therapeutic method.

The present study is therefore perfectible. Amongst its limitations, we can recall:

- Extracting metaphors from participants' stories was done by the trainer. In this case, we can talk about a bias, linked to choosing some metaphors and involuntarily omitting others.
- Although participants' anxiety levels have decreased, intervention within the personal development program did not center solely on archetypal symbol analysis. A study centered on this analysis can yield far clearer results with regards to this aspect.

Eliminating these limits in future studies will perhaps provide more accurate results. Additionally, the other identarian symbols must be taken into account. Still, this does not render void the positive effects and results presented in this study.

Conclusions

The present study was centered on the symbol analysis of metaphors present in the stories of

participants to the research program. We consider it important not only for the major personal contributions in symbol analysis in a psychological context, but also through the results which were revealed to us.

As such, by analyzing the 400 creative improvisations through literature, we have elaborated a “metaphor map” of all those metaphors appearing in participants' stories which reflect, on one side, symbols of the feminine identarian role and, on the other, symbols connected to anxiety. By correlating these symbols with the participants' life experiences, intervention via this technique gave us the possibility to offer literary improvisation an experiential psychodiagnostic value. It also made it easier for participants to become more aware, to give meaning to their own metaphors and to integrate these metaphors, conscientiously, in their lives.

Starting on the premise of a correlation between various metaphors with feminine and masculine archetypal symbols, we have assumed that integrating these symbols contributes to a healthy and balanced personal development of the individual. In turn, these correlate to anxiety, and their integration determines a decrease in anxiety levels. The hypothesis has been confirmed and the established objective was reached.

In conclusion, through the presence of positive values of correlation coefficients, but also through the diversity of symbols which appear during the creation of an experiential-unifying therapeutic story, we can observe positive changes in participants' behavior. These symbols have offered the possibility to explore, creatively and spontaneously, the inner universe of participants, which in turn allowed them to experience self-knowledge and personal development.

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