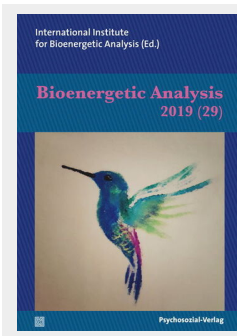


Rosaria Filoni

Modesty versus Shame



Bioenergetic Analysis

29. Volume, No. 1, 2019, Page 11–22

Psychozoal-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2019-29-11](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2019-29-11)



Reviewers for this issue:

Garry Cockburn, Helen Resneck-Sannes, Maê Nascimento and Scott Baum

Translators of abstracts for this issue:

Claudia Ucros (French), Maria Rosaria Filoni (Italian), Maê Nascimento (Portuguese), Pablo Telezon (Spanish), Olga Nazarova and Alesya Kudinova (Russian)

Submissions for consideration for the next volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* must be sent to Leia Cardenuto (leiacardenuto52@gmail.com) between June 1st and September 1st, 2019.

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2019 Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license allows private use and unmodified distribution, but prohibits editing and commercial use (further information can be found at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). The terms of the Creative Commons licence only apply to the original material. The reuse of material from other sources (marked with a reference) such as charts, illustrations, photos and text extracts may require further permission for use from the respective copyrights holder.

Cover image: Vincentia Schroeter, *Hummingbird* © Vincentia Schroeter
Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar
Typesetting: metiTec-Software, me-ti GmbH, Berlin, www.me-ti.de

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2019-29>
ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-7492-8
ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-8254-1
ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

Modesty versus Shame

Identity Building through Nature, Personal History and Culture

Rosaria Filoni

Abstracts

The author addresses the subject of modesty, firstly by referring to an article by Alexander Lowen (IIBA Newsletter, 1994), and then an article by Umberto Galimberti, a philosopher and Jungian analyst. Lowen speaks of modesty as “natural pride”, as the expression of the degree of self-perception and self-esteem of the person. It denotes the individual’s ability to contain their feelings and therefore indicates their ability to hold a strong sexual charge. For Galimberti, the human being – who has both a body and individuality – “modesty” expresses the contrasting dialectic between the ego and their animal condition, the two dimensions that intimately constitute the person and tear him or her apart. Each dimension, in fact, hosts two subjectivities. One subjectivity that says “I”, with which we usually identify ourselves, and the other that establishes us as “officials of the species” ensuring its continuity. According to Galimberti, modesty does not limit sexuality but identifies it. The author then reflects on the social and historical aspects of modesty in Italy over the last 50 years.

Keywords: modesty, shame, body, myths

La Modestie *versus* la Honte. Construction De L’identité à Travers La Nature, L’histoire Personnelle et La Culture (French)

L’auteure aborde le sujet de la modestie à partir d’un article de Lowen publié dans la Newsletter de l’IIBA en 1994 et un article d’Umberto Galimberti, un philosophe et psychanalyste Jungien. Lowen décrit la modestie comme une fierté naturelle, l’expression de perception de soi et d’estime de soi. La modestie dénote la capacité à contenir ses sentiments et par là indique aussi la capacité à contenir une forte charge sexuelle. Pour Galimberti, l’humain qui a un corps et une individualité exprime dans la modestie la dialectique contrastée entre sa condition animale et son égo, deux dimensions qui le constituent intimement et qui le mettent à part. En fait, chacune de ces dimen-

sions abrite deux subjectivités. Celle qui dit “Je”, avec laquelle nous nous identifions généralement, et l’autre qui nous pose en tant que “représentants de l’espèce humaine” en vue de sa continuité. Selon Galimberti, la modestie ne limite pas la sexualité mais la définit. L’auteure examine les différents aspects historiques et sociaux de la modestie en Italie durant ces 50 dernières années.

Modestia versus Vergüenza. Construyendo Identidad a Través de la Naturaleza, Historia Personal y Cultura (Spanish)

La autora enfoca el tema de la modestia comenzando por un artículo de Lowen, publicado en ante liba newsletter en 1994, y por otro de Umberto Galimberti, filósofo y analista Jungiano. Lowen habla de la Modestia como un orgullo natural, expresión del grado de auto-percepción y auto-estima de la persona. Denota la habilidad individual de contener los propios sentimientos y por lo tanto indica su habilidad para sostener una fuerte carga sexual. Para Galimberti, el ser humano que tiene cuerpo e individualidad, expresa en la modestia el contraste dialéctico entre su condición animal y el ego, dos dimensiones que lo constituyen íntimamente y que lo desgarran. Cada uno de hecho, alberga dos dimensiones. Una, que dice “yo”, con la cual generalmente nos identificamos, y otra que nos hace “oficiales de la Especie”, para la propia continuidad. De acuerdo con Galimberti, la modestia no limita la sexualidad pero sí la identifica. La autora reflexiona acerca de los aspectos socio históricos de la modestia en Italia en los últimos 50 años.

Pudore versus Vergogna. La Costruzione dell’Identità tra Natura, Storia Personale e Cultura (Italian)

L’autrice affronta il tema del pudore a partire da un articolo di Lowen, pubblicato in una newsletter dell’Iiba nel 1994 e da uno di Umberto Galimberti, filosofo e analista Jungiano. Lowen parla del pudore come di orgoglio naturale, espressione del grado di auto percezione e di autostima della persona. Denota la capacità dell’individuo di contenere i propri sentimenti e ne indica perciò la capacità di reggere una forte carica sessuale. Per Galimberti l’essere umano che ha corpo e individualità, esprime nel pudore la dialettica contrastante tra la sua condizione animale e l’Io, due dimensioni che intimamente lo costituiscono e lo lacerano. Ciascuno infatti, ospita due soggettività. Una che dice ‘Io’, con cui siamo soliti identificarci, e una che ci prevede “funzionari della specie” per la sua continuità. Secondo lui il pudore non limita la sessualità ma la individua. L’autrice riflette su aspetti sociali e storici del pudore in Italia negli ultimi 50 anni.

Modéstia x Vergonha. A Identidade Construída através da Natureza, da história pessoal e da cultura (Portuguese)

A autora analisa o tema da modéstia, a partir de um artigo de A. Lowen, publicado em uma Newsletter do IIBA, de 1994, e de outro, de Umberto Galimberti, filósofo e analista junguiano. Lowen se refere à modéstia como um orgulho natural, a expressão

do grau de auto-percepção e auto-estima de uma pessoa. Ela mostra a capacidade do indivíduo para conter seus sentimentos, indicando, assim, sua capacidade de suportar uma carga sexual forte. Para Galimberti, o ser humano, que tem um corpo e uma individualidade, expressa, na modéstia, a dialética contrastante entre sua condição animal e o ego – duas condições que o constituem intimamente e que também o dividem. Na verdade, cada um possui duas subjetividades: uma que diz “eu”, com a qual nos identificamos e outra que nos caracteriza como “oficiais da espécie”, em prol de sua continuidade. De acordo com Galimberti, a modéstia não limita a sexualidade e sim, a identifica. A autora reflete sobre aspectos sociais e históricos da modéstia, na Itália, nos últimos cinquenta anos.

Скромность Или Стыд. Построение Идентичности Через Природу, Личную Историю И Культуру (Russian)

Рассмотрение темы скромности автор начинает статьей Лоуэна, которая была опубликована в новостной рассылке ПВА в 1994 году, и статьей Умберто Галимберти, юнгианского философа и аналитика. Лоуэн говорит о скромности как о естественной гордости, как о выражении степени самовосприятия и самооценки человека. Она означает способность индивидуума контейнировать свои чувства и таким образом указывает на его/её способность удерживать сильный сексуальный заряд. По мнению Галимберти человек, у которого есть тело и индивидуальность, выражает через скромность сильно отличающуюся диалектику между животным и эго, двумя частями которые непосредственно его/её составляют и которые разрывают его/её на части. На самом деле каждая из них несет в себе два вида субъективности. Одна говорит ‘Я’, именно с этой частью мы, как правило, себя идентифицируем, а другая субъективность говорит о нас как о представителях животного вида, обеспечивающих его продолжение. По мнению Галимберти скромность не ограничивает сексуальность, а определяет её. Автор размышляет над социальными и историческими аспектами скромности, существующими в Италии на протяжении последних 50 лет.

Introduction

I began paying attention to the theme of modesty in 2002 when I read an article by Umberto Galimberti, philosopher and Jungian analyst, that appeared in the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica* (Galimberti, 2002). I was so struck and persuaded by his arguments that I photocopied the article and have had the occasion to read the article to some patients and to speak of it in training sessions and conferences. On more than one occasion, I encountered my listener’s difficulty in distinguishing the concept of modesty from that of shame, and I was astounded by this. Then I realized that in times of immodesty and narcissism, it may

inevitably be unclear what modesty is. What I understood is that shame annuls modesty, and that people who feel shame are unlikely to feel modesty.

Modesty for Lowen and Galimberti

In this article, I will be citing some passages from Galimberti's article, and passages from an article by Lowen, published in an IIBA Newsletter in 1994¹. In his article, entitled *Elogio del Pudore* ("In Praise of Modesty"), Lowen's thinking is structured in the same way as Galimberti's: a profoundly secular point of view. The person who translated Lowen's article into Italian ran into a "false friend": English uses the word "modesty" for the Italian "*pudore*," but in Italian the word *modestia* means something different. It has to do with a "serious and dignified restraint in the dress and behaviour traditionally attributed to an "honest woman", in which "honesty" means being brought up for a role – patriarchally, I would say – deemed suited for a woman. Lowen's and Galimberti's articles give the word "modesty" an entirely different meaning. In using the Italian word *modestia* instead of *pudore*, the article became rather incomprehensible. And this also brought to my mind the difficulty of accessing the concept of modesty.

Galimberti writes: "God has no modesty because he has no body. Animals have no modesty because they have no sense of their own individuality. Men and women, who have both a body and individuality, express in modesty the opposing dialectics of these two dimensions that so intimately constitute and lacerate them. Each of us, in fact, has two subjectivities². One that says 'I', the ego, with which we customarily identify ourselves, and one that has us be 'functionaries of the species' for its continuity."

These words immediately make it clear that there is a dialectic, in fact, more than one dialectic, constantly in action. Before everything, every woman and every man lives an "inner" dialectic between the ego and being the "functionary of the species," and in each of us, the space that these two aspects occupy is different. But this dialectic is also the result of a personal history influenced by transgenerational transmission, and by the given political/social and historic moment.

Moreover, the part of us that is the "functionary of the species," with the objective of its continuity, can as such have only two different ways of expressing itself – in the masculine and feminine. The masculine needs to "use" a woman to reproduce, and to be assured of reproduction requires the maximum spread of his seed. And, as Professor Zoja reminds us in the book *Centauri* (2016), the masculine has in its nature an aggressiveness that may be present to different degrees.

1 Unfortunately, I do not possess the original, but only the Italian translation.

2 In this article I use the word subjectivity in a philosophical sense: "the character of the subject as such, and also the subject itself." Treccani Dictionary online.

Let us not forget that the founding myth of the City and Empire of Rome, with the Rape of the Sabine women, is a tale of abduction and rape³.

The other gender, the female gender, in order to ensure reproduction, needs to choose the “best” male, the healthiest one who can better defend and support the growth of children. As Zoja points out, the female will have an innate capacity for care and receptiveness. But as a species, we do not experience the animal dimension alone, but also that of the ego. Therefore, what intervenes is “love, which plays on the double register of our subjectivity, which establishes that it is our ego that loves and is loved, that intimately constitutes us and identifies us, and that, against generic, unidentified sexuality, raises the barrier of modesty.”

“If this is how things are,” Galimberti continues, “we may then say that modesty is that sentiment that defends the individual against the anguish of foundering in animal genericness, and that by renouncing ourselves, we are forced to perceive ourselves as a simple functionary of the species.” From this perspective, “it is untrue that modesty limits sexuality; modesty identifies it.” One speaks of “common sense of modesty” and this brings us to the need to place the experience of it in the historic period of reference, and in its culture. When we are no longer just “animals,” history comes to the fore.

In Italy, until the 1960s, the representatives of what was then understood as feminine modesty (and in this case the Italian word “*modestia*” is exact) was Saint Maria Goretti, killed by her rapist, and Manzoni’s Lucia⁴. In the first case (a true story), the twelve-year-old girl was made a saint for having attempted to defend herself against her attacker; this was held up for girls and young women as an example, not so much of a legitimate personal right, (in the times of neofeminism we referred to it as the untouchability of the female body) but as an example of virtuous behaviour.

Also in Italy, we are acquainted with the story of Lucia in *The Betrothed*⁵, another example of female modesty and virtue who fights not so much to have her right to love her Renzo recognized, but to defend her virtue from the desires of Don Rodrigo. It is a matter of virtue, something linked to morality – a morality influenced by religion – and not to possession of oneself.

A little digression: in Italy, the law against sexual violence is a relatively recent one, and a large and long mobilization of the women’s movement was

3 According to legend, upon the founding of Rome, the men realized there were no women, and they abducted a neighbouring population – the Sabines. The sugar-coated story taught in elementary schools recounts that the women were needed to clean and cook, and when the Sabines made war against the Romans, the women placed themselves between the armies as they had grown attached to their abductors.

4 *The Betrothed*, a 3-volume famous Italian historical novel by Alessandro Manzoni (1827).

5 To summarize: the young villager Lucia, betrothed to Renzo, is desired by a town nobleman and goes through countless vicissitudes, including an abduction, before being able to marry Renzo.

needed for the law to call rape a crime “against the person” and not “against morality.” If it is against the person, we recognize the individual right; if it is against morality we recognize a sort of social or religious ownership over *feminine virtue*.

If we set virtue aside and return to modesty, we may state that it is an eminently bodily experience. We may consider it one of the attributions of possession of the self that we help patients attain through the analytic, bioenergetic process. Both – possession of the self and modesty – are present when the body is sufficiently free of contractions that annul its awareness, and the person is felt, perceived, and acknowledged in his or her uniqueness, and is able to choose: what to show of his own or her own body, and to whom; what intimacy to access, with whom; what to reveal of him or herself, where, and with whom.

Therefore, if we imagine a *continuum*, on one end we have modesty with the sense of the self, and on the other shame, pathological shame, with the desire to disappear, which at times goes hand in hand with immodesty. In both cases, there is a strong feeling that comes from the body. With modesty there is a sense of well-being and pride and a sufficiently good sense of oneself, but with shame there is the feeling of being awkward, accompanied by the desire to disappear.

On the side of modesty, we have the ability to feel, to express, to choose – we have a person who, in his or her developmental history, has been sufficiently seen, respected, and supported; on the other hand, with shame we have a person who, to the contrary, has felt guilty and inappropriate. But it is also clear to us that it is not individual history alone that determines this possession, but also the historic period in which one lives.

Modesty in the Myths

As always, myths can lend us a hand to better understand what we are speaking about. Artemis, goddess of the hunt, is indignant because the hunter Actaeon has dared to spy on her as she bathes, and punishes him for his behaviour. She transforms him into a stag so he cannot recount what he has seen, and sets upon him his own pack of hounds, who tear him to pieces. Artemis is proud, and proudly defends her privacy.

I use this term “privacy” which recurs a number of times in Lowen’s article. It expresses not only the concept of intimacy, but also of the full right to choose what must remain private. Lowen writes in his article that, “Natural pride is an expression of the degree of the person’s self-perception and self-esteem. It denotes the individual’s ability to contain his or her sentiments, and therefore indicates the ability to bear a strong sexual energy.”

If we turn to a biblical story, the images of Adam and Eve banished from the Garden of Eden are quite different. These are images of pain, of shame. With

regard to the Bible passage “they realized they were naked, and were ashamed”, Galimberti writes that this shame

“is born not from the nudity of their bodies, but from God’s gaze, which makes them naked. They were nude, but only after that gaze did they become naked, and thus hid and fled. Modesty does not defend the body from its nudity, which reminds people of their animal kinship, but from the objectification to which it is reduced when a gaze, coming upon it, deprives it of subjectivity.”⁶

It is from this objectification that Artemis defends herself by annihilating Actaeon, while Adam and Eve, through God’s gaze, become painfully aware of their “sin.”

Shame

Leaving myths behind and returning to life, we know that, in the development phase, shame arises when the energy load that accompanies the emergence of the need finds no attunement in intersubjectivity and leaves the subject “naked,” with the “sin” of having dared to be or want something “illicit” in the eyes of the other (Stern, 2011, p. 135). Since it is indispensable to maintain the bond with the caregiver, we see ourselves as sinners, we lose the Garden of Eden that is the possibility of surrendering to the body; we become painfully aware of ourselves and of own mistaken bodies, and renew the promise to ourselves no longer to show that part let down by the other, or reproached.

I am speaking here of any developmental trauma, but let us think of the shame of abused people – those also “forced” to feel guilty over the abuse they have suffered. Let us merely recall after how many years the survivors of Nazi concentration camps dealt with their shame and began to speak about and bear witness to what they experienced and saw. But let us also consider the difficulty of reporting any abuse. Even small children beaten in nursery schools (there have recently been some cases in Italy) struggle to tell their parents about the mistreatment they have suffered.

Abuse Creates Shame. Those who Suffer Abuse Feel Guilt

In Italian, the word “shame” translates as “*vergogna*.” The word *vergogna* comes from the Latin “*vereor gognam*” – “I fear the stocks” – and in ancient times punishment consisted of exposing convicts or the defeated in war, and at times this

6 See footnote n° 3.

exposure involved nudity. The people paraded naked in front of others felt profound humiliation, as Lowen reminds us. He continues by remarking that

“In human beings, the tendency to exhibit and show the body goes hand in hand with the sense of modesty, which originates from the ego’s awareness of the body. Human beings are conscious of their own bodies, and especially of their sexual nature, in a manner different from children or animals. People have developed an ego that considers the body to be an object, and are aware of its sexual function. This does not take place in animals and children, because they are totally identified with the body. In human beings, modesty is an expression of this consciousness of the self, a sign of personality and individuality. [...] Privacy is linked to personality, which masks people’s deepest feelings and allows them to hide certain bodily expressions considered intimate [...] in human beings, pride requires sexual organs to be removed from the public gaze, due precisely to the sense of privacy. Pride, privacy, and adult genitality go hand in hand.

Adult sexuality is a combined function of ego and body. The ego thus heightens sexual excitement by conveying erotic sensations on the genital apparatus, directing these sensations towards a specific individual, thereby containing the excitement and allowing it in this way to grow to a maximum peak.

In infantile or infancy-related behaviours, there is no pride, no intimacy, let alone sexual satisfaction.”

We know how this full abandonment of oneself to bodily experience can be shattered early by violence, molestation, an eroticized climate, or even the improper exposure of parental nudity. As body therapists, we are used to noting, for example, adult women who sit like children, with open legs while wearing skirts, and we know then we should look into the degree of maturity of their adult/sex identity.

Lowen speaks of nudists and says that their condition is similar to that of children, in which sexuality is diffused into a form of epidermal eroticism in which there is no strong genital charge that requires discharge. In Italy, we are full of television programmes based on this epidermal and infantile Eros; see *L’isola di Adamo ed Eva*, in which a couple of nude young women meet a young man on an island, also nude, and a sort of courtship is created. At the same time, the situation sees the main characters’ nudity as the negation of any eroticism. Another programme brings together a man and a woman – he in his underwear, and she in bra and panties – who make themselves comfortable on a bed, get to know one another, and try to decide if they like each other.

The Sixties and the Neofeminism

Moving on to the 1960s, we may recall what young men and women did to conquer a “common sense of modesty” freer than that of earlier decades: to conquer

a modesty as a right to the subjective possession of the self, and to overcome what was Victorian prudishness in the English-speaking countries, and in our countries the influence of the Church. The right to the freedom of the body, to be masters of our own bodies, was proclaimed, and fashions during those years found a way to put the body on display while at the same time reducing its more sexual characteristics.

The fashion during those years, the new way of acting, expressed the desire to put oneself on show, which – if we consider the words of Lowen, but also of Galimberti – brings human beings into relation with all the forms of animals that put themselves on display to reproduce, with a sort of infantile innocence that attenuated the more sexual and adult features of the female body in favour of a stronger social subjectivity. These were the years, in Italy, when young women were accessing higher education en masse for the first time.

Do you remember unisex clothing? Miniskirts exposed the legs but were worn with white stockings and flats; makeup whitened the face; lips were lightened, and eye-makeup was dark, with false eyelashes emulating the proportions of children's eyes. One of the feminine images symbolic of those years was the ultra-skinny model Twiggy. And while it seems incredible in our time, when women resort to surgery to augment their breasts, those who were too well-endowed concealed or even bound them.

In some way, to combat the old restrictions, the clearest sexual signs were attenuated, and we showed ourselves with this new, freer, more unselfconscious appearance; young women began wearing trousers, and age-related differences in manner of dress were diminishing. Women claimed their sexual freedom as the freedom of choice, and wished to build more equal, more mutually supportive bonds between men and women. All this was accompanied by the leading role of the student movement, by neofeminism, by a trade-union movement that represented the anti-authoritarian demands of working men and women.

The aim of this anti-authoritarian movement was not only to conquer tangible benefits like better wages or school for everyone, but to achieve an identity in which subjectivity had the right weight. Women discovered sisterhood, the ability to be supportive towards one another in order to give one another strength and obtain more rights and freedoms. In Italy, this meant conquering the right to scientific contraception with the legalization of the birth control pill (long opposed by the Catholic Church); the abolition of the right to honour (earlier, if a man murdered his wife or her lover, his sentence was reduced because he was accorded the right to defend his honour that had been tarnished by the woman's behaviour); divorce; reform of family law to give responsibility over children not only to fathers but to mothers as well; clinics that were to be a place of support for issues of sexuality; and the right to the voluntary interruption of pregnancy approved in 1978, the same year as Law 180 (which deinstitutionalized psychiatric care, requiring obligatory hospitalization to be reduced as much as possible

in the treatment of psychiatric illness), while a year earlier healthcare reform was approved to allow all citizens to be treated free of charge.

The women's movement was organized in self-awareness groups – small groups in which, starting from the slogan “*the personal is political*,” women questioned their received education and the organization of society, reflecting on their own identity in order to seek to build their strength and security in the world. However heavy the social and family influence was, thanks to support from other women, security was obtained of their right to struggle for their own lives.

An instrument of these self-awareness groups was the practice of separatism: women spoke among one another, excluding men – not from their own lives, of course, but from gender reflection. Male self-awareness groups were also created during those years – although few in number, and I am unaware of the path they took.

Clinical Experiences

Turning to my own experience, first as patient and later as therapist, I have had by chance the good fortune to belong for several years to a therapy group in which we participants were all young women, and I saw the emergence of themes and emphases I had never seen emerge in mixed groups. Of course, in these other groups, different aspects came up. What I gained was appreciation for the two types of experience, knowing that each facilitates or permits the emergence of certain experiences, and does not favour others.

As a therapist, too, I led groups for several years with a woman colleague, and for a long time our weekly group consisted only of women. It had happened by accident, and thanks to my experience as patient, I reassured my colleague that this group would not be poorer than a mixed one, and I have to say that during the period it stayed like that, it was possible to work far more deeply on many types of abuse: child sexual abuse; on how abusive the eroticized climate was in certain families; and on how abusive were certain types of upbringing, the account of which was raised in particular by patients who, very early on, had been kept from playing in order to be involved in housework. Some had washed the dishes when they were still so little they had to stand on a chair to reach the sink. This latter experience created no less suffering, discomfort and shame than those I cited earlier, and was a form of upbringing that through shame created submission.

This taught me to pay attention, in addition to the developmental history of individual people, also to the patients' social and family origin, in a mix of trans-generationality that appears to me to be an aspect to take into increasing account alongside geographical/social origins.

Alongside the bioenergetic work to deal with these issues, I found it quite useful to suggest that the patients read certain novels able to perfectly express the widespread conditions of life and upbringing. I then discovered the results of a research work that bore witness to the ability of “good novels” to create empathy and experience, and this comforted me.

I do not wish to recount more, but in mixed groups these problems are dealt with differently. On the one hand, I can say that the solidarity of the male participants certainly brought comfort, but there was less discussion on the pain over what was experienced, the shame, the sense of injustice and some experiences did not emerge. When the group was joined by male members, the themes transformed, and most likely, without men, certain issues would perhaps have remained unexplored.

I also had what I would call the good fortune of leading – but only two or three times – group sessions that by chance were just men, given the absence of women. Here too, each time, issues different from the usual ones emerged; there was a very deep encounter among the patients, and it appeared to me that a gender solidarity was quickly created. Of course, I wondered what influence my presence as a woman therapist had. The feeling I had was of trust, and of having been able to facilitate their confidence; but I have no idea of how the group experience of men alone with a male therapist is or might be. In the end, what I think is that the experience of “separate” groups may have a lot to give, and would be quite useful alongside that of mixed groups.

But to conclude, I would like to touch on an aspect that is close to my heart, and is greatly painful to me: the identity, modesty, and shame of female patients during these years. I am continuously surprised that not only have some of the certainties the women of my generation attempted to conquer disappeared, but many forty-year-old women, let alone younger women, do not even know what we are talking about. I see a renewed mistrust in relationships of friendship and solidarity among women. I see behaviours I would define as rather free in sexuality, but accompanied by doubt as to their legitimacy. At times, I see young women turn to alcohol or drugs to facilitate sexual encounters at the end of the evening, experienced in a disassociated way between a façade of brazenness and profound feelings of guilt.

I think that many young patients during these years need to develop specific forms of modesty and identity, that increase the sense of self, and self-possession, against a culture that often encourages them to dress as sex workers (I do not know if this is only an Italian fashion) and that once again urges “catching” a rich and/or powerful man as an existential objective. Female modesty is not the same as male modesty, but there is a right to a male modesty that needs to be proclaimed against a culture that often wants brazen and violent men – those who believe “they never have to ask” (as the words of an Italian advertisement state).

Conclusion

I conclude with a passage from Galimberti, from another article of his:

“Conformism and consumerism have brought into circulation a new vice that, for the sake of convenience, we call ‘immodesty’ referring not so much to a sexual scenario as to the collapse of those walls that allow us to distinguish interiority from exteriority, the ‘discreet,’ ‘singular,’ ‘private,’ ‘intimate’ part of each of us from its being exposed and made public. If we call ‘intimate’ that which is denied to the outsider in order to give it to those one wishes to have enter into one’s own secrecy, a secrecy that is profound and often unknown to us, then modesty, which defends our intimacy, defends our freedom. And it defends it in that nucleus where our personal identity decides what type of relationship to establish with the other. Modesty, then, is not a question of clothing, undergarments, or intimate wear, but a sort of vigilance to maintain one’s subjectivity, so as to be secretly within oneself in the presence of the other” (Galimberti, 2004, p. 21).

References

- Galimberti, U. (2002). *Il mercato dell'intimità*. Roma: La Repubblica.
- Galimberti, U. (2004). *Ai tempi del desiderio cosa resta della vergogna*. Roma: La Repubblica.
- Lowen, A. (1995). In favore della modestia. *Anima e Corpo*, 2: 9–15.
- Manzoni, A. (1827). *I Promessi Sposi*. Milano: Tipografia Guglielmini e Radaelli.
- Stern, D. (1992). *Diary of a Baby*. New York: Basic Books. Tr. It. *Diario di un bambino*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Treccani Dictionary online.
- Zoja, L. (2016). *Centauri. Alle origini della violenza maschile*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

About the Author

Rosaria Filoni studied Philosophy and is Psychologist and Psychotherapist, Supervisor and Local Trainer, Training Director for Bioenergetic Analyst for Siab. She has her private practice in Rome.

mariarosaria.filoni@fastwebnet.it