

POSSIBILITIES OF WORKING WITH BULGARIAN FOLK TALES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE



Veronika Ivanova

Ph.D, clinical psychologist,

Certified Positive Psychotherapist (Varna, Bulgaria)

Chief Assistant Professor at the Medical University of Varna

Email: veronica_ivanovi@abv.bg

ORCID: [0000-0002-9237-5496](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9237-5496)

Received 15.05.2022

Accepted for publication 30.06.2022

Published 20.07.2022

Abstract

The purpose of this report is to describe how women and girls who have suffered from physical and sexual violence can learn to love their gender again through the use of the images of women in Bulgarian folktales and strengthen their belief that female nature, despite its vulnerability, is beautiful and creates goodness and life. Several cases from clinical practice will be presented, taking into account the high efficiency of working with fairy tales with women and girls who have experienced a traumatic event. Some of the images that appear in the fairy-tale heritage of Bulgaria will be analyzed. Some clinical notes will be presented to show that crisis work does not remain only at the level of crisis counseling, but moves into a deeper psychotherapeutic process.

Keywords: early psychosis, adolescent, positive psychotherapy, counselling

Introduction

Statistics on clinical and outpatient cases of psychotherapy with women and girls show that there are psychotraumatic experiences of sexual and physical violence in 65% of cases, including cases where girls and women are not direct victims but witnesses of violence. In such cases, one of the most difficult tasks of psychotherapy is the return to femininity. Some of these women feel hatred and irritation towards their own gender because they have experienced or witnessed humiliation and violence from men. In the still-patriarchal Bulgarian culture, violence is not talked about, the victim feels guilty and humiliated, and the methods of

obtaining evidence against the perpetrator by law enforcement agencies are often an additional humiliation for the victim, who has to "prove" that her testimony is the truth. The return to femininity and the beauty of being a woman is a long, ongoing inner process in which the methods of positive psychotherapy and the healing role of fairy tales play an important role.

Researchers such as Ruth Block (1996) have explored the role of the traumatic female story-about grandmother, mother, and daughter-which, while anything but fairy tale-like, shows how the language of science can be related to and so sharply contrasted with the language of the fairy tale. In practice, two types of injuries are generally distinguished for women and girls who have suffered violence: type 1 - unexpected, unpredictable, one-time incidents; type 2

trauma - chronically recurring, usually physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Both types of injuries require different approaches to treatment and therapy (Saxe 2007). Kalshed, in his study *The Inner World of Trauma*, highlights the role of healing in the fairy tales of the world. In them, as in Bulgarian tales, the human world of misfortune or innocence exists in a kind of counterpoint to another radiance represented by transpersonal forces introduced by the old wizard. In the study of Bulgarian folk tales and the image of women in them, the contribution of Baichinska (2009) is undoubtedly enormous. In her study she divides the female characters into two major groups - victim and heroine. I could add that the practical use of fairy tales in psychotherapy shows that there is a connection and transition from victim to heroine in women and girls who have suffered violence. Another author who shares experiences of working with Bulgarian folk tales is Marinova (2013) in the collection "20 years of Positive Psychotherapy in Bulgaria", who sees an analogy between Bulgarian folk tales and the Eastern parables used, their universal sound and relevance.

In positive psychotherapy, the use of parables and fairy tales is an established method. (Peseschkian 2008). Through the transcultural aspect, we see how the image of the feminine develops in the fairy tales, and when they come from one's own collective unconscious, the native folk tales, they take on a special significance in the work of the psychotherapist and come to the fore, and the specific traumatic events remain secondary.

Methodology

Clinical Notes:

A case of a 14-year-old girl, psychotrauma related to violence inside and outside the family, abandoned by her mother at the age of 4, raised by grandparents when she returned home, escaped from home, attempted rape, beatings at home and in a drug group. The girl shows the expression and behavior of an older person, but the emotional vulnerability of a child. She perceives herself as a "lonely girl, abandoned, an outsider, with no one there." Working with two female characters, resistance appears at the beginning, "I do not understand what this is all about." Projection reveals conflicting feelings toward the significant female character, both a desire to be like her, but also rivalry and competition. She describes the male image as "cold, gloomy" and the woman is "full of love, ... she draws him to her, but he is as if in a cage and wants to run away." One possible interpretation is related to the psychotraumatic experience of one's own parental family. In therapeutic work, the girl identifies with a

significant female image that tends to have competing relationships - the golden girl and the black girl, having fun playing the lazy, bad, restless black girl until she gradually begins to recognize in herself and in parts of the other - the golden girl.

Another girl 14, multiple rapes by adult men (mother's partner), before the age of 7, neglect, starvation, bondage. The mother with a psychiatric diagnosis. The girl comes after an attempt was made to set fire to the house where she lives with foster parents. The girl's name has been changed by the foster family, which adds to the difficulty of therapeutic work with current psychotraumatic situations. She relates, "Do you want me to tell you everything now, or first ... About these bad things ..." "How many times have you had to tell about it?" ... "I do not know, a lot," as if tired of repeating the subject. "How do you feel after telling about the bad things?" It's bad. "Does it help you to keep repeating? ..." "No, I feel worse afterwards" ... "My name has changed, I used to pronounce it differently. She tells, "I have always dreamed of being a mermaid, I do not know why, I even know a few ways to become a mermaid. They are made during the full moon, you can flood them with cold water, but I have not done that yet, I do not know if it works. Otherwise, there was a way to just glue your legs together. " My favorite book is *Homeless*. In her fantasies, the child chooses a fairy tale character who cannot bear the psychotrauma she has experienced. The girl is in a severe identity crisis, typical of adolescence, but exacerbated by the girl's active psychotraumatic experiences. The main conflict relates to the answer to the question "Who am I?, how am I?, am I like my mother?". Under normal circumstances, the identification process during adolescence is a crisis, and in the case of experienced traumatic events, the process is complicated and requires systematic psychotherapeutic work. One of the main tasks is the psychological separation and detachment from the mother, which occurs naturally in families where there was a well-established attachment at a young age. In this case, the separation is problematic due to the lack of attachment and requires professional help. In working with her, the narratives in which the mother dies were important, so she manages to survive the suppressed aggression towards her mother.

Regarding the strong emotions related to the experienced traumatic events, the Bulgarian folk tales in which the girl fights with the evil stepmother proved

to be very useful. The emotions that the girl feels towards her mother are on the spectrum of strong fear, anger and aggression. Since it is difficult to ventilate and process them, she directs them at herself, in the form of self-aggression, and at her immediate environment.

The next case is that of a young woman, 34 years old, who, after group psychotherapy in a day hospital, requests an individual session in which she communicates that she has been a victim of sexual abuse by her husband's brother for years, but does not dare to say it because he will beat her, knowing that the woman will always be considered guilty in such a situation. To save herself, she hides in the village toilet, goes to the psychiatric hospital because she is depressed and has an uncontrollable disorder (a symptom that becomes clear after she has shared the locks in the toilet when she is alone in the house and there is a danger that her husband's brother will attack again). Paradoxically, in subsequent psychotherapeutic work, this woman was inspired by the image of the brave dragon bride and realized that she could identify with the image of the female heroine rather than that of the female victim.

Discussion

A girl, a daughter, an unborn girl, a mother, a stepmother, a widow, a poor woman and a queen, a wise old woman. In Bulgarian folk tales, femininity has both hidden and open faces. At the beginning of most of the tales, the death of the mother is the beginning of the girl's own femininity, because otherwise the girl runs the risk of remaining attached to the image of the eternal daughter. From the nameless bride, whose name is derived from that of the man, to the magical, unearthly girl capable of many incarnations. The absence of a name introduces the archetypal image and makes it universal. The young, inexperienced girl who knows only the good in this world, but does not know herself. There is no dense, real and complete image of a woman, where everything can be seen clearly, it is hidden in the secret corners of the soul, which she herself does not know. And that is why the image at the beginning is immature, incomplete, as if cut from an old children's primer: cute, but frozen and unchanging. The woman in the folktale must live through and suffer the encounter with her femininity, and this can only happen if she descends into the depths of her own darkness and finds the strength to build up this shadow within

herself, to recognize it, tame it, and make it part of her own story.

At the end of the road, another image sometimes appears, that of the widow, "an orphan like a cuckoo and no piece of bread to give her." The fate of a woman who has never known her feminine fullness outside the confines of the home, where she is trapped not because of physical limitations but because of a lack of desire for anything else, denies and suppresses that desire, making her a good wife, a mother who feeds everyone but herself. It is a threat to the woman who lives for others, but not with the awareness of the true sacrificial power of love, but blindly, with hidden hatred and the insinuation of hidden guilt. Her self-sacrificial self-sacrifice is in reality an aggression against others, punishing them because she feels dissatisfied and unhappy. We come to a terrible image of the "poor widow" transformed into a half-dead body, surrounded by her hungry children and the spiritual archangel Michael next to her head: "The spiritual one stands next to the sick head. And in the cold room six children are rolling back and forth, some of them smaller, muscular, ragged - their flesh is visible. They have copulated with their sick mother... And the two youngest have pounced on their mother - one on the left, the other on the right. They suck on her withered breasts, and she embraces them, crying softly that she is miserable - she leaves so many orphans to the world... "This is the grim picture of a woman who cannot feed herself or others, the savior of all, she cannot even save herself. What pride it is to believe that you can help everyone and feed everyone. Only humility before the fact that others sometimes have the right to be hungry, which means they have to look for their own choices and desires, can save her. Her breasts have dried up, and they were an expression of her pride, strength and maternal warmth, and this deprives her of her maternal identity. And then, surprisingly, redemption comes, the mother becomes a woman and receives the grace of the Archangel Michael. The widow recovers and feeds her children, but this correction is related to wholeness and connects this body to the immortality of the soul, "every Saturday she goes to pray and lights a candle for the Sabbath." Redemption does not come loudly, with march and pageantry, it is quiet, hidden, there in the darkness of the temple, where it is no longer just a nurturing body, but a soul that can pray, give thanks and love.

The girl in Bulgarian fairy tales is usually conscientious, diligent, thrifty and obedient. However,

this is not enough, it is not the result of a conscious decision, but the fear of the unknown in itself. The good, obedient and hardworking Cinderella Mara from the Bulgarian folk tale must first get to know her dark, hidden side, the gypsy under the tree where she sits and waits for her beloved in her golden gown. In order to take off the robe with the precious stones that carry the illusions of perfection. At the beginning of the fairy tale, she is already without a mother and forced to look for her face, a lover, wife, mother. She is paradoxically supported by the stepmother, who repels her and thus saves her from too strong identification and a hasty entry into an image that is not syntonetic for her, that she does not recognize as her own.

The golden girl asks the grandmother she meets in the woods, "-Why don't you want a boy, Grandma? - Because I need a walker and boys can not walk." The girl has to get rid of the illusion that she will understand herself if she is only good and passive. While cleaning it should feed snakes and reptiles, lizards. To meet the bastards is not in itself an easy task. It does not allow haste, and she cannot eat hot porridge. The good soul sees the good in others, and this is her strength because it frees her from fear. But to find the treasure and lull the grandmother to sleep, she needs a very quiet song, "like a buzzing bee." Here everything is subdued, hidden, there is no place for boasting and attracting too much attention.

Conclusion

Girls and women who have been victims or witnesses of violence often need projective methods to tell the story of what happened. Working with fairy tales in crisis psychotherapy is a painless and also harmless method, minimizing the iatrogenic moment. For women and girls who have suffered trauma, fairy tales are an indispensable tool that helps to develop primarily Peseschkian (2020) typical female skills such as patience, love, time, as well as the ability to accept and preserve, mystery and secrecy, cunning in the fight against -the stronger, so characteristic of the woman in the Bulgarian folk tale. Last but not least, working with fairy tales awakens in a positive light the power of the creative female principle, which is already of interest in

the process of female development.

In conclusion, we can say that the inclusion of a tale in therapy helps women who have experienced trauma to associate with their roots, the collective unconscious of the female, women before and after them. It helps them to tell their own version of the story, to individualize the abstract meaning, making it their own. The trauma has become a history still painful and leaves its mark, but with it one can already live, it is identified, a recognized part of the Self.

References

- [1] PESECHKIAN H., REMMERS A. (2020). Positive Psychotherapy: An Introduction. In: Messias E., Peseschkian H., Cagande C. (eds.) Positive Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychology. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33264-8_2
- [2] RUTH, L., BLOCK, D. (1996). The disturbed caregiving system: Relations among childhood trauma, maternal caregiving, and infant affect and attachment. *Infant mental health journal*, 17, 3. P. 257-275.
- [3] SAXE, G. N., ELLIS, B., H., KAPLOW, J. B. (2007). *Collaborative treatment of traumatized children and teens. The trauma systems therapy approach*. New York: Guilford Press.
- [4] БАЙЧИНСКА, К. [BAICHINSKA, K.] (2009). *Златното момиче* [Golden girl]. София: Лере-Артис. 304 с.
- [5] **Имало едно време: 101 български народни приказки [Once upon a time. 101 bulgarian folk tales]** (2004). Пловдив: Хермес. 432 с.
- [6] КАЛШЕД, Д. [KALSHED, D.] (2019). *Вътрешният свят на травмата. Архетипови защити на личностния дух* [The inner world of trauma. Archetypal protections of the personal spirit]. София: Лере-Артис. 468 с.
- [7] ПЕСЕШКИАН, Н. [PESECHKIAN, N.] (2008). *Търговецът и папагалът. Ориенталски приказки в помощ на психотерапията* [Oriental Stories as Tools in Psychotherapy: The Merchant and the Parrot]. Варна: Славена. 180 с.
- [8] **СБОРНИК "20 ГОДИНИ ПОЗИТИВНА ПСИХОТЕРАПИЯ В БЪЛГАРИЯ" [COLLECTION "20 YEARS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY IN BULGARIA"]**. (2013). *Дружеството по позитивна психотерапия в България (ДППБ)*. Варна: Славена. 280 с.
- [9] **Силиан щърка [Silyan - stork]** (1979). *Приказки на балканските народи*. Том 1. [Tales of the balkan peoples. Volume 1]. Bulgarian artist published.
- [10] **Султанка-мълчанка [Sultanka - silent]** (1983). *Приказки на балканските народи*. Том 4. [Tales of the balkan peoples. Volume 4] (1983). Bulgarian artist published.
- [11] **Умница-хубавица [Clever and beautiful]** (1990). *Приказки на балканските народи*. Том 3. [Tales of the balkan peoples. Volume 3]. Bulgarian artist published.