

# SILENCE

The impact of sexual violence in the community.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION <sup>1</sup>

## *1. 1. WHY THIS TOPIC?*

This work deals with sexual violence, a type of violence that is experienced in silence, usually generates different reactions and emotions, and, especially if you have lived in first person some traumatic experience or someone very close to you, it may be important to first give yourself some space to know if it is the right time or not to read this text. How can you notice it? Stop reading, close your eyes and observe the sensations in your body, your posture and notice if there are any signs of resistance, however small. For example, you may notice that your posture tends to move away from the screen, or you may notice that you have become a bit frozen or blocked, or that you feel a bit shaken. You may also feel a lot of energy, your body may be moving forward, your mind may be overpowering, you may want answers... Welcome your state, whatever it is, and keep these subtle signs in mind throughout this reading, as they may be indicators of when it's time to stop or continue reading. And if at any point it's too much, make a note of what it is that you're so upset about and I invite you to find a way to make space for it, either with friends, or with yourself, your therapist if you have one, or a support group.

I am going to name data and statistics, I will talk about concrete and real examples that can be shocking, can affect in some way and can generate certain reactions. I will also explain how the dynamics of trauma works, which sometimes leads to the awakening of certain traumas, memories or sensations that are not pleasant. All of this is accompanied by a journey through methodologies and experiences that, from my vision and professional experience, support the transformation of trauma and break the silence of sexual violence, which, although uncomfortable, painful, unpleasant, it is necessary to name it so that it ceases to exist at some point in the future of humanity. Talking about this issue helps to bring about a historical recognition of all traumatic experiences, facilitates the detection and acknowledgement of past and present experiences, and reinforces the prevention of sexual violence individually and as a society.

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<sup>1</sup> The language I use is feminine singular and plural when addressing people, I also use the plural with the final e, for example, nosotres, as a neutral gender. Throughout the work I use it interchangeably.

What I am going to write below is based on my life and professional experience. I want to frame the social and contextual prism from which I am going to do this work. I am a white, 32 year old, anti-racist, dyke feminist woman<sup>2</sup>, although I also like cis<sup>3</sup>men. On a personal level I have had several experiences related to sexual violence and I have also accompanied friends closely.

I grew up in a small town in Valencia, in a middle-class family, of which I am the first to have a university education. I have been living in Barcelona for 11 years, where I got to know activism and social movements, and where I have done part of my studies. At the age of 23 I started to create a work cooperative dedicated to the prevention of gender violence and to the accompaniment of people, organisations and groups. At the age of 25 I started to study process work, and since then I have specialised in facilitating group conflicts and in accompanying people and groups.

I have been developing my experience in the field of sexual violence over the last 5 years, where I have dedicated myself to facilitating groups and organisations in a restorative way around situations where there has been some sexual aggression. I have facilitated open forums on child sexual abuse and street sexual harassment. I have given workshops with teenagers and adults on the impact of street sexual harassment.

I have coordinated and I am a trainer of Protocols against sexual aggressions in nightlife spaces, and a specialist in "Puntos lilas" as well as a trainer in sexual violence for professionals in the social field. For the last 2 years, I have also been working on individual accompaniment with people who have experienced sexual violence, from the paradigm of Process Work.

When I start thinking about writing this work, I don't know where to take it, I even question whether I have enough knowledge and experience to write about this. And at the same time, I feel an inner strength that supports me and legitimises me to write from where I know and know up to the present moment, knowing that when I finish this work, I will have learned a lot more and I will realise many other aspects of this field that I will still have to know and investigate.

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<sup>2</sup> Bollera: is a political identity that involves questioning heteropatriarchy and pink washing, it goes beyond sexual attraction to women. There is also an attraction to other dissident identities (people who do not fit into the norm).

<sup>3</sup> Cis: or cisgender refers to someone who assumes the gender they were assigned at birth.

It is a very complex issue that generates a lot of pain. Sexual violence is the cruelest form of exercising power over another person and dominating another person's body that I have ever seen. It is like torture. It can be physical (abuse, rape) or psychological (sexual harassment, sexual terror). Historically, silence has prevailed, and since the #metoo and #yotecreo movements, the silence has started to break strongly. I just googled when #metoo started and this movement has existed since 2006 thanks to Tarana Burke, a black woman activist from the south of the USA who works with migrant women and who began to use it to promote a community project where she invited racialised women to talk about sexual violence, then in 2017 the actress Alyssa Milano used it to denounce the producer Harvey Weinstein. Since then, many cases of sexual violence have come to light in the West and every time there is a sexual assault, feminists come out to support the assaulted party, to make the aggressor/aggressors visible and to denounce the low convictions, impunity or malpractice of the institution. But this is only a small part of everything that is moving socially around this issue in different parts of the world.

I would like to explain what moved me to choose this topic for the final work, it all started a few years ago, in 2018, when I did 24 open forums on sexual violence, they were two different projects where the format was to do a play and then an open forum.

The play "Inercia"<sup>4</sup> is about child sexual abuse and we performed it 14 times in various theatres with audiences of all kinds, an average of 50 people came to see it and between 30 and 40 people participated each time. Facilitated by Eva Sanchez<sup>5</sup> and myself.

The play "El carrer és nostre"<sup>6</sup>, is about street sexual harassment, and we did it 10 times in educational contexts with audiences from the age of 13. Some 20-30 people took part. Created by Anna Bigordà, Núria Corominas and myself, facilitated with Anna Bigordà and Edurne Larracochea.

Parallel to this year-long process, I started reading and researching about Restorative Justice, and saw connections between this paradigm and the

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<sup>4</sup> It is a short play, written and directed by Marina Paytubí and performed by Celia Baeza and David Font. More information: <https://www.barts.cat/es/e-809/INERCIA>

<sup>5</sup> Eva Sánchez, Graduate in Process Work: <https://evasanchezdiaz.wordpress.com>

<sup>6</sup> I share a video explaining the project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USFVT-GFi3A>

methodology of open forums for process work. The main focus of Restorative Justice is to heal human beings, relationships and communities. One of its principles is that of community responsibility, where it talks about the importance of addressing the impact and needs of the community. At the same time it names that communities have a responsibility to care for their members and to prevent future harm.

The process-oriented Open Forum promotes awareness of the deepest feelings and communicative signals of all people in the community, and is an ideal setting to get to know the wide diversity of impacts and ideas of its participants. A space in which to come together to solve problems and build community.

Then it became clear to me, through the experience of the Open Forums, I felt that a part of the impact of sexual violence in communities was beginning to be repaired. And that's how I chose the topic, and since then, I have been researching, practicing and facilitating around sexual violence, the restorative approach and process work.

### ***1. 2. WHO IS IT AIMED AT?***

It is aimed at anyone who is curious about the subject, and especially at those who work in the field of facilitation of people, relationships and groups from the paradigm of process work, so that they can become more aware of how sexual violence affects them and how we can intervene.

This work aims to be a space where I can share my experience, sort out ideas and contribute to the community everything I have learnt so far.

### ***1. 3. WHAT METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES DO I EXPLAIN?***

In the following, I will name the concepts and methodologies on which I base my work in the field of sexual violence and the community, and in point 4 of this paper, I will develop each of them from theory and examples based on my work experience.

I first remember being introduced to the restorative approach, meeting Hector Aristizábal<sup>7</sup>, one of my greatest mentors in working with people around the impact that social oppressions generate on an individual and collective level. I did this through talking circles or restorative circles, a very powerful tool that I have been using for years to process difficult issues in communities (institutes, organisations, social movement collectives, coexistence groups, etc). I also learned with him the importance of ritual and its transformative power. Later, investigating more resources in the same line, I got to know Restorative Justice, which has given me a broader perspective when facilitating groups, the key point was to realise that the responsibility for sexual violence is not only in the person who assaults, but that the aggressor role can also occur in how the community acts when a sexual aggression occurs, and therefore, also has part of the responsibility, and at the same time, part of the role of victim, for the insecurity that such a situation can generate in the community and that it can be repeated. I will explain in more detail later.

In parallel, I became acquainted with the paradigm of Process-Oriented Psychology, also known as Process Work. Created by Arnold Mindell and other colleagues in Switzerland, it is now being developed in several countries around the world. The method is based on the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, communication theory, Eastern philosophies, systems theory and quantum physics.

One of its main premises is that we can explore and integrate all and *especially* the most difficult aspects of *our* lives, such as relationship problems, bodily symptoms, disturbing dreams, unexpected changes, trauma and other experiences. We can find deeper insights into the sources of our problems and new, often surprising, solutions. In addition, this exploration can show us pathways to further development and provide support for creating new and enriching patterns. Process work can be used in various settings: with individuals, couples, communities, groups and organisations. I recommend the contributions

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<sup>7</sup> Hector Aristizábal: <https://imagination.org/artists/hector>, this is from his project with his new way of working that he has developed over the years in different countries around the world and that he now uses in Colombia to work on the collective trauma of the political situation in the country <https://www.reconectando.org/index.html> .



of Arlene Audergon <sup>8</sup>and Neus Andreu <sup>9</sup>on trauma and restorative justice in other contexts from a process work perspective.

In this work I focus on trauma and open forums. Understanding trauma explained from the paradigm of process work has helped me a lot to understand what happens to us on an intrapsychic level when we experience some kind of sexual violence, but also how trauma roles occur in the community to understand more about the tensions and challenges arising from the impact of sexual violence in the groups where I have facilitated the management of sexual aggression.

The open forums have allowed me to experience intervening in the community through processing the impact of sexual violence on a social level and to be able to break the silence, process the field and raise awareness about how this type of violence affects our lives individually and collectively.

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<sup>8</sup> Audergon, Arlene (2005) *The War Hotel: Psychological Dynamics in Violent Conflict*, Book Review: *Europe's Journal of Psychology*.

<sup>9</sup> Andreu, Neus (2017) *The footprints of the past: The role of the history in the present*. Final project submitted as part of the process work UK diploma program.

## **2. SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

In the following, I will describe some key concepts to share the interpretative framework from which I understand sexual violence, as there are different voices from different academic fields, from activism and social movements, from justice systems, from the multiple and varied experiences of equally diverse people, etc.

### **The patriarchal and heteropatriarchal system**

Sexual violence exists and occurs within the framework of the oppressions of the patriarchal and heteropatriarchal system.

Patriarchy can be defined as social, political and cultural organisation, structured in such a way that those who hold hegemonic masculinity have more power than women, girls, boys and other more vulnerable bodies in this organisation.

Heteropatriarchy can be defined as a social, political and cultural organisation in which heterosexuality constitutes a norm that regulates behaviour, giving rise to inequalities and violence based on its ostentation or presumption. This concept does not have a defined origin; it has been nourished by various contributions from feminist sociology. With the spread of gender theory and queer theory in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the concept of patriarchy evolved into the idea of 'heteropatriarchy'.

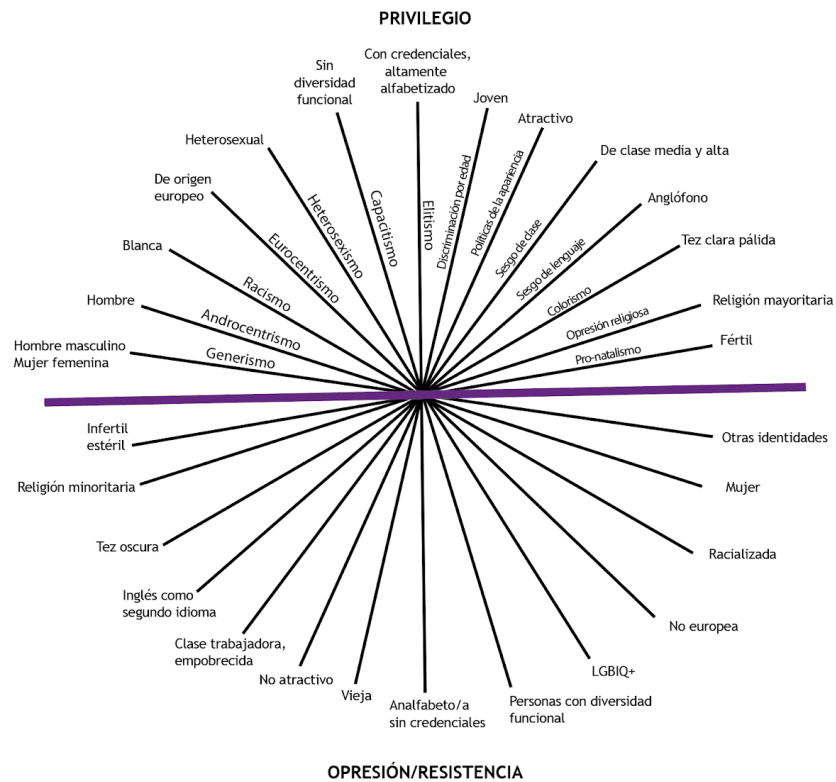
### **The intersectional gaze**

Sexual violence and its consequences, like any other form of gender-based violence, do not affect all women and dissident identities in the same way. The various forms of discrimination that affect women in societies have an impact on the violence that affects them and, above all, on institutional responses to this violence. From this perspective, factors such as women's ethnicity or race, minority or indigenous status, colour, socio-economic status and/or caste, language, religion or belief, political opinion, national origin, marital status, maternity, age, urban/rural origin, health status, disability, age, property rights, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, or other dissidences have an impact on the violence that affects them, intersex or other dissent, illiteracy, asylum seeker, refugee status, displaced person status, internally displaced or stateless persons, older persons, migration status, head of household status, living with HIV/AIDS, deprivation of liberty and prostitution, as well as trafficking

in women, situations of armed conflict, illegal immigration, geography" (CEDAW, 2017, p. 12), interact by adopting forms of gendered forms of discrimination and discrimination. 12), interact to take different forms of discrimination.

Given that women experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on these factors (among others), it is necessary that the various interventions (preventive, protective, care, investigation, sanctioning and reparation) take into account the aggrieved effects, or the different impacts that sexual violence has on particular groups of women, and which require appropriate responses (CEDAW, 2017, p. 12).

It is important that the intersectional perspective goes beyond naming the



Source: Patricia Hill Collins

diversity of identities and intersections that exist and that we focus on what inequalities are generated, in what systems they are inscribed and how we perpetuate oppressions of power through structural violence. Decolonial feminist Ochy Curiel says "it is not about describing that they are black, that they are poor and that they are women; it is about understanding why they are black, why they are poor and why they are women" (Curiel, 2015, p. 54).

## Definitions

**Violence** according to WHO is the intentional use of physical power or force, threats against oneself, another person, a group or a community that results in or is likely to result in trauma, psychological harm, developmental problems or death. The nature of the acts of violence can be: physical, sexual, psychological, the above include deprivation or neglect.

Another definition of violence provided by Johan Galtung (1990) is that it can be seen as a deprivation of fundamental human rights, in more generic terms towards life, *eudaimonia*, the pursuit of happiness and prosperity, but it is also a lowering of the actual level of satisfaction of basic needs below what is potentially possible. Threats are also violence. Violence always occurs when people are influenced in such a way that their physical and mental development is below their real potential. Violence is therefore the cause of the difference between potential development and actual development.

**Abuse**, according to Mindell (1995), is the unjust use of physical, psychological or social power against others who cannot defend themselves because they do not have the same physical, psychological or social power.

Abuse is an emotionally charged term. In an abusive situation, there is usually one person without contextual power, and the other person on the other hand, if she intends to reach a particular goal, regardless of the effects on herself and her opponent, then she is ready to take the situation to the point where her opponent can no longer defend herself and becomes abused. Then, the person who does not include security and human relationship in her goals has at least the intention to abuse the other, and becomes an abuser. Successfully dominating someone leads to more destructive and covert consequences in the long run. (Goodbread, 2010)

**Sexual violence** is an act against people's sexual freedom; any form of sexual interaction without consent, the latter concept being understood as consensual, participatory, an expression of the other person's will. Although it is a concept under discussion, broadly understood, we would say that 'sexual violence' includes all violations of sexual autonomy and sexual integrity.

These are all acts of a sexual nature carried out by one person, usually a man, against the will of another, usually a woman or a child, in the form of a threat, intrusion, intimidation or attack, which can be expressed in many different ways.

The manifestations of this violence take on multiple expressions, and the spheres in which they are expressed occupy all spheres of life, ranging from the intimate partner, family and work



environment, the community sphere and even the symbolic sphere (Freixanet, 2020). (Freixanet, 2020) Global estimates published by the WHO indicate that around one in three (35%) women in the world have suffered physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by third parties at some point in their lives. In Annex 1 of this paper, I share a series of indications on how we can feel after sexual violence. And I recommend the [VickiBernadetFoundation](#) for cases of child sexual abuse, which is located in Barcelona and Zaragoza.

**Rape Culture**, a term that emerged in the 1970s with the second wave of feminism<sup>10</sup>, was created to describe the ways in which societies normalise sexual violence by ignoring it, minimising it, silencing it, blaming the victims, and even encouraging it with misogynistic attitudes.

Rape culture is a belief system that naturalises that cis men assault, which makes them the ultimate perpetrators, as they are the ones who commit 99% <sup>11</sup>of reported rapes.

It is transmitted through television, jokes, advertisements, the world of work, certain pornography, jokes, the film industry, in legislation and everywhere. Violence is assumed to be inherent in life and relationships, therefore it is inevitable. Some violence is even sexualised or sexualisable.

<sup>10</sup> Reference taken from [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culturadelaviolación#cite\\_note-10](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culturadelaviolación#cite_note-10)

<sup>11</sup> Statistical references in the field of sexual violence:

- <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>
- <https://www.epdata.es/datos/denuncias-delitos-agresion-abuso-sexual-datos-graficos/251>

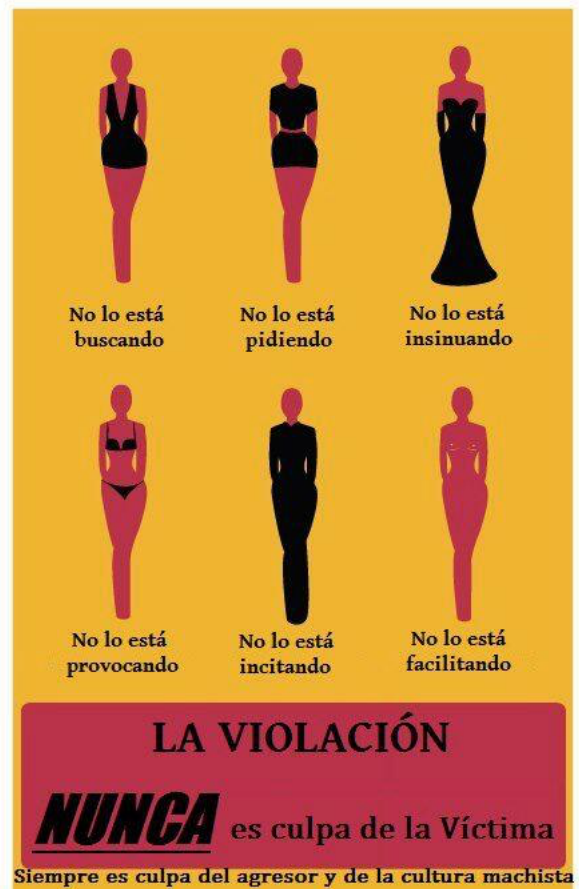
Due to the patriarchal system, the degradation of women is a constant, as they are seen as objects over which they have power, control or rights. On the other hand, it is recurrent to consider that men are violent simply because they are men, which justifies their actions because we make macho behaviour natural.



*Real images of advertisements of some well-known brands from the last 5 years.*

**Sexual terror**, a term developed by Nerea Barjola (2018), is a very interesting concept that is articulated on the basis of a story about sexual violence that focuses on women and sends them constant messages of danger. It is part of the discourse that is conveyed to girls from an early age and that ends up with the usual "be careful", "let me know when you arrive", "are you coming with someone" or "have your keys ready when you approach the door". This causes, according to a report published in 2016 by Emakune, the Basque Women's Institute, a "discrimination" in itself against women, who are subjected to "systematic" emotional discomfort. Could this fear among women have increased as a result of the visibility of sexual violence in recent years? Violence against women is exercised doubly on their bodies: through explicit physical violence and through the sobering narrative that will control their behaviour.

A belief system has been created in our western society through stories, education, mothers, grandmothers, the media. These construct a corrective narrative, thus contributing to the spread of sexual violence against the bodies of all women, dictating to them their social role and the role model to follow if they wish to be protected. For example, in 1992 there was a rape and murder of 3 teenage girls in Alcàsser (Valencia), the well-known "Alcàsser case", where the media relied on covering the lives of the girls, blaming them for what happened, exhibiting their mortal remains and generating debates about general social violence. When the three photos of the murdered girls were shown together with the photo of the friend who did not go out that day, she embodied the body being taught, but at the same time a whole generation of young girls was taught. The message given was: "learn what happens to women



who walk alone in the street, hitchhike, occupy public space or party". This discourse turns the female body into a vulnerable body that can be violated at any time.

The consequences are the so-called "sexual terror", as Barjola (2018) mentions in her book, and in my professional experience I have been able to observe it very clearly, there is a fear of going out alone in the street, of drinking too much, of dressing in certain ways, of silencing the sexual violence experienced for fear of being blamed. These are mechanisms learned and internalised in the daily practices of most women where there is a reformulation of attitudes (stop hitchhiking, dress in baggy clothes, walk in a masculine way, call someone on the phone when you are alone, ...).

This leads to a social imaginary in which a man can harass or rape a woman at any time, but in 85% of cases of sexual violence, the assaulted woman knew the aggressor beforehand, which calls this imaginary into question.

Sexual violence **related to armed conflict** includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation and any other act of grave sexual violence against persons directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. It is a deliberate and planned method of warfare that seeks to humiliate, degrade and destroy the social fabric of the "enemy" and affects women, men, girls and boys, although it is mostly directed against women. Its effectiveness as an instrument of collective and individual terror simultaneously explains in part its presence in a large number of contexts affected by armed and political violence. Since sexual violence as a weapon of war became a matter of public concern in the 1990s, following the genocide in Rwanda and the armed conflicts that ravaged the Balkan region after a long history of silencing, its presence in public debates about armed conflict and its impact on civilians has been growing (Skjelsbaek, 2001).

Sexual violence as a weapon of war has several objectives. Firstly, it has an individual dimension: that of subjugating the victim through the terror provoked by sexual abuse. On the other hand, it has a very important collective dimension, since its use is intended to humiliate the entire enemy community and not only the woman who is the victim. The woman's body, which is considered male property and the property of society, is the means of transmitting a message of humiliation and power to the enemy. In other words, through women's bodies, control is not only exercised over women, but this control is extended to the entire enemy society.



## **3. DEFINITIONS**

### ***3. 1. PROCESS WORK: BASIC CONCEPTS***<sup>12</sup>

Process-Oriented Psychology (or "Process Work") is a paradigm of theory and practice developed by Arnold Mindell, a physicist and Jungian analyst. Mindell's work, spanning over 30 years, began with a mind-body approach to working with individuals and expanded to work with relationships, group and organisational dynamics and community conflict resolution.

In the following, I define different concepts that I will use throughout this paper with concrete examples in relation to the field of sexual violence:

#### **Deep democracy**

Deep democracy, in its most profound manifestation, refers to an openness not only to the views of other individuals and groups, but also encompasses an openness to personal emotions and experiences, which tend to be excluded from conflict and rational public discourse (Mindell, 1992).

It has many aspects, many of which are related to philosophical concepts derived from quantum physics. It suggests that wisdom and direction will be found within a community when interaction is facilitated between all points of view, including those at the centre and those at the margins, and the emotions of conflict.

Deep democracy is also about awareness of the different dimensions of individual, group and community life: the social and political issues of concern, the underlying roles and polarisations, and the deeper shared level of experience.

#### **Three levels of reality**

The concept of reality is linked to the perception of reality and the experiences we live and which occur in different levels or "parallel worlds" at the same time, although we usually focus on one. As a matter of practicality and coordination with everyday life, we have been defining aspects that we call "real" by common agreement, within the cultural or regional context in which we live. However, in the context of experiences, what is "real" has other parameters, because it is in another dimension that does not conform to a consensus:

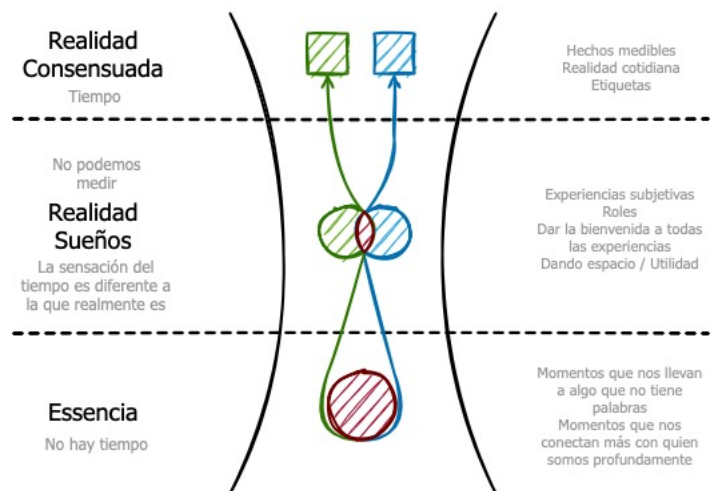
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<sup>12</sup> Definitions are drawn from Arnold Mindell (1995), Gill Emslie (2014) and Julie Diamond (2005).

- Consensual reality is that which is based on a general collective agreement of the dominant international culture, i.e. it is the objective experiences that are accepted or agreed upon as the "real".
- The reality of dreams is that which belongs to the personal realm of experience and which has less consensus in the dominant culture, i.e. subjective experiences that are not accepted as "real", and which have to do with dreams, feelings, fantasies, projections and other experiences that construct our inner world.

- The essence level is where wholeness, interconnectedness and a sense of oneness with the universe or life is experienced. In different traditions of the world it is referred to as: the Tao that cannot be named, God in Western culture, the Buddha mind, the intelligence of Nature or the Nagual.

## Los tres Niveles de Realidad



This multidimensional map of reality provides a framework for the facilitation of all information in the field. This includes the atmosphere, the unintentional signals of communication, the style and tone of voice or body language, the issues being presented and the power dynamics.

### Primary process

These are those experiences that are most familiar and closest to the person's identity. It conveys intentional communication through language and deliberate gestures. The description of self, the methods and culture by which we identify ourselves as individuals and as groups. The term "process" emphasises the fact that identity changes over time.

### Secondary process

Secondary Processes are those experiences that are removed from the sense of identity of the person and the group. It transmits unintentional non-verbal communication, through body postures, gestures and movements, and verbal

communication through speech patterns containing implicit meanings and paralanguage - including tone of voice, rhythm and volume.

### **Limit**

The boundary separates both processes (primary and secondary). It represents the limit of known experience as well as the point of contact with unknown experiences or identities. They are a product of marginalisation. It is felt as uncomfortable, brings nervousness or excitement, because it is an encounter with something new and unfamiliar. Once some secondary experiences are brought into ordinary consciousness, they become primary, transforming other experiences into secondary ones and creating new boundaries.

### **Signals**

Intentional and unintentional communication is made up of numerous "signals" or pieces of information. Signals can be easily perceptible or difficult to detect. Those that are perceptible to the senses are called "stable" or "non-flashing", because they persist long enough for perception to occur. Signals that barely cross the threshold of perception are called "intermittent", "flirts" or "pre-signals". These signals may be seen fleetingly, but do not persist long enough or with sufficient intensity to become the focus of attention.

### **Double signal**

An unintentional signal that sends a message that is inconsistent with the intended message. For example, when you say you are fine but your tone of voice and facial expression imply that you are not fine, that there is something else you are not saying.

### **Field**

As Process Work developed its applications in the group setting and in relation to what is going on in the world, groups of people and their atmosphere began to be seen as a field. Mindell drew this concept from quantum physics.

The field refers to the atmosphere or climate of any community, including its physical, environmental and emotional surroundings.

In the field there are several polarising roles. As Diamond (2005) puts it, a role can be defined as a unit of socially meaningful behaviour. The field constellates a series of roles that appear around an intention, for example, in a group process or open forum, the group decides to talk about abuse and that constellates the

roles of the field, and the process that happens there not only has to do with the psychology or experiences of the people present, but also serves to process global issues, roles in the field, beyond the individuals who are present.

### **Role/Roles**

It is a point of view or function within a field, usually occupied by several people at different times.

The concept of roles pertains to the dream aspect of the group process. Although each role, such as boss, subordinate, patient or helper, seems to be located in a particular individual or group, in reality it is a spirit of time that must be occupied by many of us. In other words, each role is much larger than any individual or group. And, each of us is bigger than any role. In other words, people are not roles.

### **Ghost role**

A role in a field that is unoccupied (no one is representing or expressing the role, no one identifies with the role) but which nevertheless feels present. Ghosts are part of the reality of dreams. They refer to those things that are talked about but not directly represented by anyone in a given group. They contain important information about the secondary process of the relationship or group.

Some typical ghost roles are ancestors who are talked about but no longer present, "the bad guy or girl" who is not in the room, the environment, etc. Entering, acting out, expressing the opinions and thoughts of the ghost roles can be important keys in the processes and it is important to know that everyone shares these ghost roles.

### **Levels of interaction in relationships:**

In process work we see three levels of interaction happening simultaneously: **the individual or intrapersonal level**, where the relationship is a channel for each of the two individuals and the relationship reflects their internal processes (there is the primary and secondary process of each of the people), the **relationship or communication level** which involves interaction between people, and **the field or world level** which involves the relationship as an entity unto itself with its own dream process (a primary and secondary process of the relationship) and the relationship as a channel for the wider field (the social context within which the relationship exists).

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### **Hots pots/Puntos álgios/Points álgols**

A flashpoint is a potentially volatile moment in communication where a conflict can escalate rapidly or people, sensing the tension, may back away from the issue. While it is natural to try to avoid a flashpoint, avoidance can be dangerous. When flashpoints are ignored, they resurface and - if ignored repeatedly - lead to escalation and possible violence. However, flashpoints can also serve as a gateway to conflict transformation.

Encouraging and facilitating dialogue at flashpoints can lead to a deeper understanding between people in conflict or to finding a direction forward.

### **Worldwork or global work**

It is the generic term for deep democratic methods used in community building and conflict resolution for both small and large groups (up to a thousand people). *Worldwork* has been created both to deal with communities that are in equilibrium and those that are in extremely chaotic states of transformation. On one side of the worldwork spectrum are negotiation procedures and business meetings, where the focus is on finding immediate solutions to problems. On the other side of the spectrum are large group interactions in which emotional, sometimes traumatic, and deep-seated issues are processed. The goal in these cases is not immediate resolution but to uncover and explore those issues.

### **Metahability**

The meta-quality, or the intention behind the use of a skill. The "way" in which one says or does something, which can be harsh, helpful, compassionate, playful, scientific, ... it is a meta-skill.

### **Elderliness**

Mindell distinguishes between leadership and leadership. Leadership is a role and a meta-skill: the ability to care for others and the whole system simultaneously from all points of view.

### **3. 2. OTHER DEFINITIONS**

#### **Community**

In this paper, community refers to all those systems or networks of relationships in which we are immersed, which share a sense of belonging, value systems, affinities and goals. They are groups of people who constitute a sector of society. It differs from the term *society* in that it is a set of people who interact with each other, but do not necessarily have traits in common beyond culture and dominant belief systems. We could also say that society is a set of people who make up certain types of communities.

Examples of communities are: the blood or chosen family, friendship circles, school, college, university, collectives to which we belong (sports, political, cultural, social movements, artistic, etc.), work, the neighbourhood or town where we live, religious and spiritual communities, among others.

#### **Trauma**

A traumatic event is one that generates trauma in a person or community, and is defined as an intense event that arises in a violent way, that is unexpected and out of control and that, by endangering the physical or psychological integrity of a person, who does not have the resources to deal with it, has difficult consequences for the person who experiences it, especially terror, helplessness and loss of security. It is usually an event that you do not expect to encounter, it is not usual and this means that it is experienced with intensity and without knowing very well how to act. The key element is the basic loss of confidence. Some examples: sexual assault, domestic violence, acts of terrorism, kidnapping, torture, violent crime, suicide of a loved one, natural disasters, war.

One of the strongest impacts is when violence is intentional and unjustified, generated by another person.

According to McCann and Pearlman (1990), an event can be considered to be traumatic from a psychological point of view if it is a threat or attack which:

- Occurs suddenly, unexpectedly or out of the ordinary (this includes ongoing abuse).
- Exceeds the individual's perceived ability to handle the threat or attack.
- It disrupts the individual's frames of reference and other basic schemas that help him or her to understand and manage in the world.

For the WHO, in ICD-10, trauma occurs when: The person has been exposed to a stressful event or situation (either brief or prolonged) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which could cause profound distress in almost everyone.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5 (APA, 2013), is more restrictive in that it considers that for PTSD to occur there must be an event involving (criterion A) exposure to death, serious injury or sexual violence, whether actual or threatened, to oneself or someone very close to one. By considering this necessary for PTSD to be present, this definition leaves out events that can be very traumatic and have devastating effects, but are not directly related to situations of physical violence or life-threatening events.

According to Levine (1999), trauma is about loss of connection - with ourselves, with our bodies, with our families, with others and with the world around us. This loss of connection is usually difficult to recognise because it does not happen all at once. It can happen slowly over time and we can adapt to these subtle changes without even realising it. These are the hidden effects of trauma, the ones that most of us keep to ourselves. We may simply feel that we are not well, without really realising what is happening; that is, the gradual undermining of our self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of well-being and connection to life.

Our choices become limited as we avoid certain feelings, people, situations and places. The result of this gradual constriction of freedom is the loss of vitality and potential to fulfil our dreams.

When it comes to trauma, no two people experience it in the same way. What may be harmful in the long term for one person may be exhilarating for another. There are many factors involved in the wide range of responses to threats. These depend on genetic factors, the individual's history of trauma or family dynamics. It is vital that we look at these differences.

We become traumatised when our ability to respond to a perceived threat is overwhelmed. This inability to respond appropriately can impact us in overt ways as well as in ways that are hidden or will not show for years.

#### **Types of trauma:**

- **Single trauma:** This is a **single, one-off critical event**, such as a sexual assault or a traffic accident. It usually has no long-term consequences or effects on the personality. However, it can generate: re-experiencing the unpleasant event (such as flashbacks), avoidance of situations reminiscent of the trauma, as well as a certain symptomatology. (Pujante, 2021)

- **Complex trauma:** This type of trauma refers to those cases in which the event is intentionally caused by another person. In addition, it occurs during the child-adolescent development stage and in a continuous and prolonged manner over time. (Pujante, 2021)
- **Transgenerational trauma:** this is an impact, a transfer where the emotional, physical or social pain suffered by a person at a given time is passed on to new generations in ways that go far beyond simple learned behaviour. It is mostly about epigenetics and how the influence of the environment can change the expression of certain genes. All of this can be determined by the style of upbringing and the educational pattern, by the weight of memory and that conscious or unconscious narrative that surrounds all family dynamics. That where the past continues to be present in many different ways. However, it is something that transcends beyond that, something that, as I have already pointed out, can even reach the genetic level. (Sabater, 2019)
- **Collective trauma:** Collective trauma is a psychological effect shared by a specific group of people who have jointly experienced the same adverse event. This effect often leads to a change in society or a search for new meanings in life (Sabater, 2020). (Sabater, 2020) Some examples are wars, terrorist attacks or sexual violence.



## 4. HOW TO FACILITATE COMMUNITY PROCESSES AROUND SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES

*Creating freedom, community and sustainable relationships comes at a price. It takes time and courage to learn to sit in the fire of diversity, to stay focused in difficult moments. All of this requires a good understanding of how small and large organisations work, a willingness to learn from open citizens' forums and tense street scenes. Facilitation without such learning is a waste of time and a repetition of the same old mistakes. (Mindell, 1995, p. 3)*

Training and individual work for those of us who facilitate cases of sexual violence is very important, as we need support to ensure that we are not isolated and overwhelmed by the emotions and high points that may arise in these processes. In process work we use the term "burning wood", which describes the process of working through your own personal and collective history when you realise that there are triggers at the high points of the accompaniment you are carrying out. It is crucial to realise how our personal experiences can be traversed and to discover how we polarise ourselves in relation to the other people, positions and situations we may encounter. In the section on open forums, I give concrete examples.

Working on self is not a one-off, but an ongoing recognition of how our deepest personal and collective histories emerge and coalesce at the flashpoints of our community interaction, how easy it is to fall into a repetition, and how our awareness makes a difference in preventing cycles of violence. To do this without repeating trauma, we need special skills to help communities work with the volatile emotional, physical, social, political and relational dynamics at the flashpoints of their interactions.

### **4. 1. INNER WORKINGS OF THE FACILITATOR**

To start facilitating in this field, it is necessary to have specific training on how sexual violence, rape culture and the heteropatriarchal system operate from an intersectional perspective. In this sense, my training has been very autonomous, reading many books, articles and, above all, from my path as a professional in the field of gender-based violence.

It is also important to understand how trauma operates in individuals, communities and society at large. Training in process work, as well as in other psychological paradigms, offers knowledge and tools that help to sustain traumatic processes in individuals and communities.

Finally, there is a need for training and education in facilitation of people, relationships and groups in order to support the interaction between the different parts of the actors involved.

In the following, I will share some key points that can help you to prepare yourself in the field of sexual violence, as each topic has its own particularities. To begin with, it is necessary to review our personal history, to know how sexual violence and the heteropatriarchal system operate in us, if we have lived through a traumatic experience, it is likely that we remember it, that our history is activated when we accompany processes. Therefore, it is advisable to give it space in therapy or doing inner work, because, in order to transform a traumatic experience, we need to consciously integrate all the roles of the trauma in ourselves, bringing them to consciousness instead of marginalising them. At this point, I recommend going to the section where I explain the roles of trauma to see how we relate to each one of them, which one is easier to identify with, which one is easier to react to, which one is more unconscious, and so on. This helps us to dream less when it comes to facilitating. This phenomenon of being "daydreamed" has been investigated in depth by Goodbread (1997). Daydreaming occurs when a person or a group has touched a boundary of the more secondary marginalised parts and is not yet ready to engage with them. At the group level, process work calls these moments 'tipping points'. Facilitators, like everyone else, experience this phenomenon. Any feeling from our past trauma history can be triggered and appear in the present. If we don't know enough about it, we are likely to get stuck, frozen or only see our part of it.

Something very typical that tends to happen in this field is to dream or polarise a lot with the role of the aggressor, as it is usually very countercultural to name oneself from there and it is very bad seen by society, but, at the same time, it is very important that we are aware of when we do harm, when we can abuse our power, and above all, when we can abuse our power, in working with individuals or groups, the role of facilitator has a lot of power, and in sexual abuse dynamics, the role of the abuser is often a phantom role, so recognising these signs, both in the group and in oneself, and bringing them to awareness can be key to

learning to relate to this role and to recognise the impact it has. I discuss the role of the abuser in more detail in the next chapter.

This point ties in with the next point, being aware of our power and privilege. Having power is not a problem in itself, but it is the lack of connection to our power that can potentially lead to abuse of power. Abuse of power is something that can be avoided if we work on awareness of our use of power. Diamond (2016) defines power, used responsibly and effectively, as the ability to impact and influence across various and unpredictable contexts with legitimacy, with implicit or explicit cooperation and agreement of others, for a common or greater good. Process work speaks to social, contextual, personal and spiritual power. *Sitting by the Fire* (Mindell, 1995) and *Power: A User's Guide* (Diamond, 2016) talk about power and there are exercises that can help to work on this aspect.

As an example of burning wood, I will share a case of an individual accompaniment, which I ended up leaving because I began to have signs in my body that made me reject the person. I remember that it was a very special case, I dedicated several spaces of supervision until I could understand what was going on. He is a person who had a history of abuse and had the experience of having been an aggressor and a victim, and in the present he was constantly reproducing this dynamic at an intrapsychic level, he felt that a part of him was abusing him and he was constantly questioning everything. It turned out that I had dreamt myself into the role of victim and I found it difficult to bring the impact this dynamic had on me. It started to happen also in our facilitator-client relationship, and I felt that I had to set very clear limits, I was setting them, but not enough, and it would have been important to be clearer and to work more on how this dynamic of abuse was happening in our relationship. Finally, and with the help of my supervisor, I understood that what disturbed me was not having given myself enough space to feel what was happening to me and to bring myself, that what I felt was legitimate, and that the limit I set for not continuing with the accompaniment was necessary to protect myself and was connected to her process, since the role that sets limits to the dynamics of abuse was missing. Throughout this process, I also dreamt of doubting myself, a dynamic that I have named that I saw in him, so it was important to connect with my power, with who I am, to validate my facilitation style and to realise that this is not a problem and that not everyone may like it. These learnings now help me in my daily practice with other clients.

#### *4.2. KNOWING WHAT TRAUMA IS FROM A PROCESS WORK PERSPECTIVE*

Sexual violence is a traumatic process of varying degrees, depending on the type of abuse of power. It is the latest and most recent trauma that has reached social consciousness thanks to the feminist movements of the 1970s, which with the desire to create social change.

I am going to talk about single trauma according to the three levels of process work reality: consensual reality, dream reality and essence.

From the **consensual reality**, we would say that a traumatic event is an event that arises suddenly, without expectation, and does not allow for self-defence. It is a word that comes from Greek and means damage, injury, defeat. It endangers the physical or psychological integrity of a person, generating a loss of confidence and security.

The trauma does not need to be directly towards a person, it can be an event that has happened in the immediate environment and affects, generating insecurity, lack of protection or other sensations and emotions. For example, sexual terror is given by all the traumatic experiences that women have lived through throughout history and by the rape culture that exists, thus creating a collective trauma in women.

It is important to underline, especially when talking about roles, the importance of recognising sexual violence and the traumatic event, its victim and perpetrator in the agreed reality. And to differentiate therapeutic work from community work, to assess when it is time to work individually or collectively and also to differentiate when it is time to work on each level of reality. Throughout the chapter I will give some hints.

If we go to the **reality of dreams** according to the perspective of Process Work, traumatic processes leave an unfulfilled process and one works to complete the state, because otherwise, because of the trauma, one returns to the situation without overcoming it, reliving it again and again. It is the meeting point where the past and the present meet. When we relive it, we are stuck in a moment, stuck in a strategy, in what could not be expressed at the time.

It is awareness that allows us to understand the dynamics of trauma and to be able to continue with what was left incomplete, and to complete the process, all the roles of trauma need to be explored.

The basic roles in the context of trauma are the victim, the perpetrator, the bystander (uninvolved), the witness (involved) and the protector (often a phantom role). On the relational level, they are concrete persons in society. On the intrapersonal level, they are roles in our own inner theatre. On the transpersonal level, they are roles that occupy whole sectors of society. Process Work goes further by saying that all these roles can be found as an intrapersonal part of each of us, because we are human, we live on this planet and we co-create the reality we live in.

We need to consciously integrate all roles within oneself, bringing them into awareness rather than marginalising them. In this way the trauma survivor can regain her human capacities, enjoy life, build security and continue with social life.

Thinking about roles in the field of trauma is very useful, however, we have to be careful not to forget that trauma is unique to each person, and each person has their own history of recovery from trauma.

### **Trauma roles**

In the following, I will give a brief overview of the meaning of these roles according to Büniger (2011):

- **Assaulted/victim/survivor role:** This is usually the role with which the survivor identifies most on the intrapersonal level, but this may not be the case. Firstly, because some people are no longer aware of the initial traumatic experience. Secondly, because, even if they do know it, knowing it intellectually and actually recognising it internally are two completely different things. Recognising oneself in this role is the first phase of trauma recovery. This role is where a lot of feelings come up and usually has a deep internal process when it unfolds.

For example, in our society there is a very strong stigma attached to being a victim of sexual assault, it is seen as fragile, to be taken care of, dirty or "poor thing", among others. Recognising oneself in this role also implies connecting with the pain or emotions that at first may be unpleasant, in my professional experience I have seen several cases where there is a rejection or denial, and this tends to make us marginalise the impact and cause detachment (so I would be more in the role of spectator than in the role of victim, as we will see later). At the world level, we tend to identify women and children as victims.

- **Aggressor role:** On the relational level it is very present. On the intrapersonal level it is the role with which the survivor identifies the least. Even so, this is expressed through symptoms or disturbances. This role, as long as it is not integrated, will be projected onto her exterior, relationships, etc. through double signals and will cause a lot of discomfort. It is necessary to support the survivor so that she can re-appropriate the power of this energy. On the world level, we tend to identify men as aggressors.

The offender's energy is frozen as a reaction to the trauma and is no longer available. To unfreeze this energy and make it useful again for the person who experiences it only as something that has happened to him or her, is one of the central goals of trauma transformation, and one of the most delicate tasks. If not integrated, this energy will remain in the realm of the secondary and will cause many irritations, not only for the trauma survivor herself but also in her relationships. This may be the most important process of the whole transformation process, it is difficult, but when one can feel safe enough to work in this role, it may be time.

On an intrapersonal level, this role is often played in relation to oneself, i.e. we self-harm without realising it, we reproduce the external dynamic in ourselves. For example, we put ourselves in situations on a sexual level where we are not comfortable, or we realise that we did not want to.

At the relational level, the aggressor role within the community could be reproduced, for example, when there has been a sexual aggression in a group and part of the group questions the aggression. This generates a re-victimisation of the victim and of the people in the community who also feel affected by the situation.

- **Bystander role:** On the intrapersonal level is when the survivor talks about the aggression with distance, as if she were seeing it from the outside. On the one hand, she separates herself from the pain, on the other hand, this disconnection makes self-pity impossible, a fact that reaffirms the trauma. She experiences detachment in herself and experiences it in relation to others. People may not believe her, or they may believe her, but they are not able to feel with her, people may not want to listen to her, and so on. One could say that this role is created by dissociation. The process of this

role tends to become a witness. It can manifest itself through a cold attitude towards oneself or towards others. It could also manifest itself as apathy or helplessness.

On the relational level, it shows in the people around them who freeze in the face of the aggression and do not get involved. Each person finds themselves in the bystander position in a different way, the way it is experienced might be unique for each person. For example, some people find it too much to deal with the impact of sexual violence, either because they are part of the perpetrator's community and find themselves in an uncomfortable situation or feel they have to take a stand and are therefore better off denying it or being a passive bystander. Or because you are closer to the perpetrator and it is difficult to support them because it is personally challenging (you may connect with your own traumatic situation and it is not the right time for you).

On a global level, in the media we are often spectators of rape culture, we see scenes of sexual violence from a place of disconnection and detachment.

- **Role of the witness:** This is the party who listens, has compassion and shares the emotional burden as well as the responsibility for the commitment to trauma transformation. She is involved, but has the capacity to distance herself temporarily. She respects the survivor's process and trusts her inner power to get out.

This role, first, on the relational level is usually filled by an outsider and progressively has to be developed on the intrapersonal level. At this level, this role is the part of us that is not totally involved; it has a form of detachment and at the same time is compassionate to the parts that are involved, allied, struggling, sad or joyful.

On the relational level, an example of how to support the victim could be through a support group, where several people are present in the transformation of the trauma, since, in the case of long processes, it can be a good strategy to share the emotional intensity that this may entail. At the global level, this is often represented by the feminist movement.

- **Protective role:** on the relational level, this is the absent role in the trauma scene, no one was able to protect her from harm. If the experience is generalised, the survivor, on the intrapersonal level, may fall into a mentality that there is never any protection and that she always has to defend herself on her own and trust no one or very few people.

At the global level, protection is taking place, for example, through the creation of protocols against sexual assault and through the prevention of sexual violence.

This role is one that needs to be nurtured on the intrapersonal level, in the process of trauma transformation. It is closely related to regaining safety, finding internal and external resources to cope with the challenges of life and relationships, and thus being able to connect with trust again. Realising one's own power, and the strength that has helped one to survive, connects a person to their mythical place, to the deepest source of their life, which C. G. Jung called the myth of life (Bünger, 2011). Feeling protected in an insecure world is a privilege, one needs to be connected to something bigger (spiritual power). Often realising that one has survived means realising that this inner power was already in us.

This has to do with the third level of reality called essence or non-consensus reality, Mindell (2007) calls the level of the essence of our own personality, where all our parts come together as one, the Big-U, distinguishing it from the small selves that make up the diversity of our constructed identity. The life myth can be seen as the symbolic formulation of that path. In the context of the life myth we can see our life as the journey of a hero/heroine, having to face various obstacles, having to fight dragons and other monsters, and we can find essential meaning in what we do and experience.

It is important in the context of trauma that neither of these levels of reality is valued more than the other. The consensual level of reality is generally much more addressed in our Western society than the other two levels. But part of the problem is the denial around sexual violence in the consensual reality and the tendency we have culturally to stay in the dream reality when we accuse victims of false memories, lies, fantasies, confusions, altered states.... Because it is easier



to believe that it did not happen, than to accept the harsh reality and connect with the pain and the impact that this type of violence generates.

Next, I am going to name some consensual reality data that can generate a lot of impact, at least for me it generates a lot of rage, anger, desire to cry and gives me the energy to continue writing this work. According to statistics<sup>13</sup>, there are three rapes every day in Spain, one every eight hours, including police reports and actions, according to the Ministry of Interior. In Europe, one in twenty women has been raped. It is quantified from the age of 15. They account for about 9 million, slightly more than the population of Andalusia. Every year there are 1.5 million women. About 70-80% of the cases are committed by someone close to them. Usually the rapes are committed by a partner, friends or acquaintances. In 77% of the cases, if it is not the partner, it is someone in the neighbourhood. In addition, 80% of cases are not reported to the police (including physical and sexual violence). In 2017, more than 2,000 reports of sexual assault and rape were registered. Only 68 out of 100 resulted in an investigation or subsequent arrest. More up-to-date statistics can be found here: <https://www.epdata.es/datos/denuncias-delitos-agresion-abuso-sexual-datos-graficos/251>.

That is why it is so important to create community spaces to process what happens to us in the reality of dreams about sexual violence, to give space to the impact and resistance we have in believing the facts. It is also very important to recognise as a society what part of responsibility we have in perpetuating rape culture.

Approaching trauma also from the essence level can help to give it a deeper meaning, we can create an inner space where we can hold the different emotions and feelings, be able to momentarily detach, seeing that we have them and at the same time, feeling that our whole being is more than that.

### **The cycle of violence**

Next, I show an image that explains how the circle of violence occurs. Understanding it helps to become aware of what pattern we tend to practice on a social level and it is also interesting to look at it as it occurs in our society. The points I mention do not necessarily occur in that order, it depends on each person and each situation, it may be that after the unjust act, the impact and the

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<sup>13</sup> Source: Fundamental Rights Agency

reaction comes, and then the feelings and the loss of security, and all this, in the process of the trauma, may change and the feelings may return later or the reactions may reappear.

In the field we have been talking about, one of the ways in which violence is perpetuated is when we "punish" the aggressor by expelling him from his community as an act of revenge, without giving him the opportunity to repair the impact generated and the damage caused. Or, in cases where the aggressor has experienced sexual abuse as a child and reproduces the same behaviour as an adult.



*The vector of violence is awakened when we directly experience or witness an act that we consider unjust. The impact awakens in us feelings of pain, fear, anger, confusion, etc. We often marginalise these responses in order to function and get on with our lives. However, in doing so, a process of internal dissociation begins. Dissociation from the impact of violence perpetuates the victim-offender dynamic internally and is more likely to result in a new representation of violence externally. (Rhodes, 2021)*

There is currently a lot of social movement in the field of sexual violence. The outcome can inspire in us a commitment to justice. We need justice to balance the misuse of power on a personal and societal level. We need justice to repair the damage that has been done. But it is important to maintain our conscience. Because if we seek justice out of an internal, unconscious experience of oppression, what we may really want is revenge. And revenge, as we have seen, is another form of violence that perpetuates the cycle of violence for all of us. Trauma is also relevant to issues such as understanding the dynamics of revenge, the silence that accompanies atrocity, and historical revisionism. Later I discuss

Restorative and Transformative Justice as an inspiration for redressing sexual violence in communities.

It is important to understand that sometimes when violence occurs, it is only a temporary situation with only one aggressor, as sooner or later, the party with less power will seek revenge against the aggressor, possibly in the form of covert or terrorist retaliation. The reaction may take more than a generation to emerge; retaliation can be extraordinarily patient.

Dominating someone also supports bullying. When we are dominated, we are likely to take it out on someone we perceive as weaker than ourselves. This is why it is so difficult to learn from abuse. Against all our wishes, our experience of not being able to defend ourselves is likely to be passed on in the future.

Furthermore, over-identifying with the victim role frees us to use unbridled power over those we consider stronger than ourselves. If we do not see our own victimhood as a role, we are likely to see everyone as stronger than ourselves. We are then likely to remain unaware of the role of the perpetrator of the abuse.

I remember as a child feeling very victimised in my family environment, I have a little brother, who was born with a disability, and therefore all the attention went to him. I was 3 years old when he was born and I remember that I felt terrible, and I went through episodes of a lot of crying and anger, and I developed a rejection towards my brother, the fact that he didn't have the attention of my family and the care and affection went to him, made me channel all my anger and rage towards him, being younger, I had more power and sometimes I hit him and insulted him. Not only did this happen, I also developed a caring role towards him, as my parents asked me to explain the world to him from my point of view closer to his age, and at school, I remember defending him when other children laughed at him or treated him badly.

As we got older, my anger and sense of injustice was greater, not only because of the attention I got, but also because the gender axis was crossed, and I started to see another injustice, the fact that he is a boy and I am a girl, generated differences in the treatment and education we received from my parents, I had to do the housework, come back earlier at night, not go to certain places, etc. So I kept channelling all this with him, until one day he was stronger than me and one day we hit each other, he hurt me much more than usual and I decided to stop the physical violence. But I continued to rebel in other ways with him and with my parents, I started to be more disobedient, more angry, more rebellious.

It wasn't until well into my twenties that I was able to understand what was happening to me, thanks to the circle of violence I saw that I was reproducing it in an unfair way, seeking revenge for the pain that the situation with my family had caused me and I was doing it through the power relationship I had with my brother, being the eldest. I also understood that it was very difficult for my parents to relate to my brother's disability, it was new for all of them and they did the best they could. I developed the role of witnessing in me, developing compassion for myself and my family. And that's how I connected with my power, I saw clearly all the strength I had and power over my brother from the role of the aggressor, at first it was more physical, and then it was more subtle and psychological. Knowing that I had the ability to defend myself and that I was misusing my power, helped me to also see how I was exercising it in other areas of my life, and to become aware of the impact and to want to get out of this circle of violence. At present, one of my aims is to be able to provide tools in the field of formal and non-formal education so that from childhood and adolescence we learn new ways of relating to each other that help us to be aware of our power and to take responsibility for the pain and the impact we generate.

When we are in touch with our own strength - with the source of inalienable power - we become more secure. To be confident with something that no one can take away from us, no matter how much property, wealth or reputation is taken from us. We will fight for what is ours, but we will fight fairly. By having a stable reference point in oneself, we can better judge when we are overstepping our own values, our own ethical line. According to Goodbread (2010), it is an ethical responsibility, rather than a luxury, to connect with and know our own power, for if we stand only in our weakness, we are likely to support only those things that make us feel insecure.

For those of us who have been treated unfairly and painfully by life, it is understandable to want compensation. But over-identifying with our role as victims is unhealthy, not only for ourselves but for the world at large. That is why making sweet lemonade out of even the most bitter lemons is not only a responsibility, but a gift to society, to our opponents and to ourselves.

Liberation from internal and external oppression is a political, social and communal task. It is also a deeply psychological and spiritual task. It takes courage and compassion to break the cycle of violence and generate a new pattern. It is important to develop the capacity to notice, reflect and

communicate the impact, the first step in reconnecting with our sensitivity, to be in touch with our emotions and therefore our needs, so that we can set the necessary boundaries to protect ourselves. Once the role of protection and security has been developed, it is necessary to connect internally with what would help us to repair the situation experienced, what requests do we need to make to the person who has hurt us or to the people around us? In what way can we feel that justice is done? What do we need to do and/or be done, to be able to let go or forgive?

### **Trauma and the community**

Cases of sexual violence are often dealt with in intimate spaces, with trusted individuals or within the context of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is a Western paradigm that focuses on the individual (or groups of individuals with the same experience). Goodbread (2009), points out that psychotherapy has a socially normative function:

*By focusing on the client's experience as a private, internal phenomenon, psychotherapy generally helps the client to cope with his or her own experience, rather than applying this experience to modify the social matrix of which he or she is a part. This leads to the accusation that psychotherapy can be socially regressive, in the sense of stifling social change by helping its clients to adapt to a flawed society. (Goodbread, 2009, p. 46).*

Moreover, the psychotherapy approach focuses only on the role of the victim, on the intrapersonal level, leaving the work of trauma transformation only to the people affected by sexual violence, freeing the rest of the community from any responsibility for transforming the structural violence that generates these situations, and therefore the difficulty of taking charge of leading to social change. This is an issue that can generate polarity, and it is precisely process work that can help this debate to take place.

*When you touch a flashpoint in a conflict zone, you find a lot of pain and traumatic history just beneath its surface. While it is increasingly recognised that violent conflict traumatises entire communities, and that trauma is both a response to violence and a vehicle for more violence, there is a profound need for a broader understanding of the collective dynamics of trauma and corresponding methods for working within a community. (Audergon, 2006)*

As Emslie (2014) says, many boundaries have cultural roots, which explain why certain behaviours are prohibited or silenced in a particular culture and how these factors contribute to silencing abusive behaviours and perpetuating traumatic experiences. This, in part, explains the silence that has existed and continues to exist in many cases of sexual violence throughout history.

The exposure of the extensive sexual violence that has taken place in the Catholic Church, in the Hollywood film world or in the recent case of the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona, are examples of the blindness of the *mainstream* that simply does not see what is happening or does not want to see it. This blindness is an example of strongly entrenched cultural belief systems that cannot imagine such atrocities occurring in these contexts, even when the evidence is clear.

There are even extreme examples of this that can be seen among nations, where the cycle of violence, blame and revenge perpetuates the cycle of abuse and subsequent trauma from one generation to the next. Collective trauma often occurs when one part of the culture or society wants to move on, and the part of society that has suffered the same treatment has a voice again, as for example in the post-Franco Spanish state. In this case, the 'minority' group will be left with the story, telling it over and over again. Eventually, this unjust dynamic can lead to reprisals, or acts of terrorism. This is the same dynamic that occurs in an individual. The unheard part of society will express itself indirectly through double signals, or somatise the experience (e.g. bodily symptoms related to sexual organs), dissociate (e.g. feel nothing in the face of other situations of violence it observes) or self-harm (e.g. blame itself or expose itself to situations of the same violence consciously or unconsciously).

As we see, the process of trauma transformation is not only individual, but also connected to the world and its collective and communal process, since a large part of the harm that results from sexual violence is due to the way in which society silences these experiences and perpetuates the rape culture. The fact that people close to the person assaulted are bystanders, and the fact that in many cases there is no justice or space for safety and protection for the survivor, makes trauma more difficult to transform.

It is therefore important that we talk about the implicit norms (rape culture and sexual terror) that we rely on and make them visible. In a way, it could be said that as a society we are dissociated from the pain of survivors of the trauma of sexual violence, as well as the violence of the perpetrators. I have experienced

this in my own skin, I have had personal experiences in which I have not been able to connect with all the pain of the assaulted person because it was too much, for fear of connecting with my own pain and leaving my comfort zone, and I also see it in some accompaniments to collectives. The fact of questioning certain situations of sexual aggression, saying that it is no big deal, or not wanting to get involved, among others, are positions that continue to perpetuate this type of violence, as accepting it means moving the *status quo* of the place where it happens (whether it is within a family or a youth group for example) and sometimes it can be too much, therefore, *it is better to question it than to deal with it*. The methodology of open forums, as we will see below, can be a tool to bring all positions to light: that of the aggressor, that of the victim, that of the bystander and that of the one who is committed to the cause in order to change our attitudes towards violence and make our society a safer place, and to raise awareness of the mechanisms of trauma in the collective.

#### **4.3. OPEN FORUMS**

*Community trauma mirrors the dynamics of individual trauma. In an attempt to survive and function in daily activities, an individual may isolate themselves from the traumatic experience while the trauma remains locked in their body and psyche, entering into flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, headaches and visceral memories of the traumatic experience. Similarly, an entire community may isolate itself from the horrors of the past and try to focus on rebuilding its society. Meanwhile, the pervasive trauma permeates the very fibres of the community's body, leading to community-wide exhaustion, hopelessness and episodes of renewed violence. This dynamic is also repeated when parts of society with the privilege of forgetting past atrocities talk of moving on, and even lament that those who suffered the traumas continue to talk about them. Calls for forgiveness can further fracture the community if they are not accompanied by attempts to acknowledge the pain of trauma and calls for witness and accountability. (Audergon, 2006)*

The **open forum** is a process work methodology that focuses on *worldwork*. In the words of Mindell (2015), they are "democratic and structured meetings, face-to-face or in cyberspace, in which all people feel represented", in other words "Open Forums are to a group or a city what inner work is to an individual". They

can take place in all kinds of organisations, communities or open citizens' meetings.

Process-oriented facilitation works with our inner world and our dreams, as well as with the inner world of the group, its dreams and stories. Diversity awareness is multi-layered: it is about perceiving cultures, ages, genders, races, sexual orientations, religions, economic backgrounds, professions, skills, dreams and ways of seeing the world. It is about becoming aware of and bringing to light the richness of all our diversity and complexity.

These forums create a space where different positions on an issue are welcomed in order to learn more about the diversity of ideas and feelings of the people who participate, gain awareness of one's own boundaries and belief systems, and look for ways to make changes, solve problems and create community. Forums contribute to connecting with hope through having a "vivid sense of non-governmental power of we, the people" (Mindell, 2015).

They can be magical spaces that welcome all points of view on a particular issue. Deep democracy does not see the members of communities only as separate, localised entities, but also as sentient, non-localised, interconnected, constantly changing time spirits. In other words, there is something global and eternal about each of our points of view, for even if we are not present there is always someone who seems to take our point of view. In fact, points of view are more like phantom roles than concrete facts. Even when there is no person representing a particular point of view, we somehow "feel it present". We have all noticed at one time or another how some roles such as the "rebel" or the "unconscious leader" hover like spirits around groups, or in the case of sexual violence, it is very easy to constellate the roles of the aggressor, the assaulted, witness, etc.

As Mindell (2015) says, open forums are not a new idea, it is a community ritual, which has taken place in one form or another in most countries of the world. Many ancient communities already used this kind of practices or rituals to address issues of concern to the community or to feel part of the whole, in the following sections I will tell about other practices with the same intention.

Open Forums are usually short, lasting about two hours, and focus on a particular issue. For example, a social issue is raised and some different viewpoints around the issue are examined, often polarised to find out the tension between these viewpoints. Then, a dialogue may emerge that allows for an unpredictable



emotional exchange and exploration between different roles and experiences, in this phase also new points of view not expressed at the beginning may emerge. Finally, this exchange is followed by a series of proposals drawn from the observation of the group's diversity and shared experiences in relation to the topic. It is like taking a photograph of the state of society in relation to the topic in question, but what is special is that we can comment on this photograph collectively and become aware of the diversity and the points we want to transform.

In the field of sexual violence, as I have described above, trauma is often examined as an individual experience, but it is a collective dynamic, it involves us all and affects the course of history. Therefore, we need spaces to understand trauma in its personal, communal and political dimensions... understanding the dynamics of trauma is essential to reconciliation and the prospect of a community that is safe and free from sexual violence. In addition to the courts and criminal justice, there is a need for open, community-based forums where the whole of society works on processes of accountability and collective trauma in relation to sexual violence.

#### **4.3.1. EXPERIENCE WITH OPEN FORUMS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

During 2018 and 2019 I did approximately 24 open forums related to sexual violence. There were two different projects where the format was to do a play and then an open forum.

The play "Inercia"<sup>14</sup> was about child sexual abuse and we performed it 14 times in various theatres with audiences of all kinds, an average of 50 people came to see it and about 30-40 people participated each time. Eva Sánchez and I facilitated it.

The play "El carrer és nostre", was about street sexual harassment, and we performed it 10 times in educational contexts with audiences from the age of 13. About 20-30 people used to participate. Created by Anna Bigordà and myself, facilitated by Anna Bigordà and Edurne Larracoechea.

#### **What themes does "Inertia" showcase?**

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<sup>14</sup> It is a short play, written and directed by Marina Paytubí and performed by Celia Baeza and David Font. More information: <https://www.barts.cat/es/e-809/INERCIA>

The play *Inercia* talks about sexual abuse and gender violence, it makes visible the experience of a young girl who was abused at the age of 12 and all the intrapsychic consequences and the trauma it generates. It talks above all about guilt, but also about other aspects, such as the inertia not to listen to the pain, to survive. Also the conversation with oneself that shows the internalised oppression, and how this affects personal development and when it comes to generating other intimate relationships, among other aspects.

**What themes does "El carrer és nostre"<sup>15</sup> show?**

This project aims to raise individual and collective awareness of the issues that cause sexual harassment of women in public spaces, and the consequences of this violence. It also focuses on mutual support and empowerment strategies that address harassment and value the experiences of women who have experienced it. It also promotes community dialogue to seek social strategies to eradicate this violence.

A work that straddles the line between stage documentary and the most naked and playful theatrical game. Based on real testimonies and their stories, two characters draw three scenes as if it were a big game. The first is the staging of a debate on the sexual harassment of women in public spaces, where the roles and positions that are usually taken when dealing with this issue are embodied. Secondly, the characters are immersed in a grotesque world where various situations of harassment are exposed. Thirdly, without abandoning the tone of the play and fleeing from victimisation, the two characters embark on a final game, where they imagine crazy strategies to deal with the aggressions they have received.

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<sup>15</sup> I share a video explaining the project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USFVT-GFi3A>



*Image of a scene from "El carrer és nostre".*

### **How do we explain open forums?**

The play is a door through which each spectator resonates and connects with their own personal stories, experiences and reflections on sexual violence. That is why it is so important as facilitators to be able to offer and create the space for dialogue, where the aim is to invite the expression of everything that this issue generates and to listen to everything that needs to be said. The role of the facilitator is to accompany the conversation that is being generated, bringing awareness of the moment in which we find ourselves as a society, of everything that an experience of having been sexually abused implies, of the role of the people who bear witness to it, of the responsibility we have as a society to face this reality, of the emotions it generates, of the reflections and needs that are named, etc. Facilitate understanding and comprehension, or the awareness that it is difficult to reach and realise what makes it difficult.

In short, to break the silence that exists around sexual violence, to bring this issue into a collective and caring space so that we can move towards the transformation of pain and abusive relationships.

As facilitators, we have to be aware that this topic is very poignant, and that not everyone wants or can be in a space talking or listening about sexual violence, and that is why we talk about the importance of caring and listening before we start the open forum space. We also have to be very aware that everyone has their own personal process, especially those who have been abused, and we want to respect and take this into account.

### **Summary of what has been shared in the open forums**

We have talked about the injustice of being a woman or a girl in this world, we have talked about women who have told personal stories of sexual abuse and other sexist aggressions that they experience on a daily basis. They have talked about what women who suffer it and the people around them who see it can do, how to support, how to denounce, what sometimes prevents it.

The role of denunciation and the judicial system was raised, accompanied by reflections on what we can do as a society, where, above all, the role of education as a protagonist emerged. The contributions of feminism, psychological support and the support of the community around us were made visible, from which we can draw many resources to deal with situations of sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Emotions, feelings and states such as anger, rage, grief, sadness, powerlessness, empowerment, feelings of injustice, resilience, vulnerability, hope, among others, have emerged.

There have been appeals to the responsibility of perpetrators, and to men as potential perpetrators, but there have also been male allies who are already making small changes and taking some of the responsibility to stand up to him, to live in a world free of gender-based violence.

Sexual abuse of minors, the consequences for their intra-psychic development, how to detect that a minor is being abused and how to accompany him/her.

The experiences of rape that exist from adolescence onwards, the taboo they represent for minors, the lack of spaces to share and the need to express, be seen and heard.



*Image of an open forum on the play Inercia at Sala Barts in Barcelona.*

### **The apprenticeship I took**

This process for me has been very revealing for my personal and professional life, I feel that two areas of my life that are part of my trajectory, theatre and process work, have come together. The topic has also been crucial and has defined my field of expertise for the last 3 years, where I feel I have deepened my understanding of trauma, the different aspects of sexual violence and defined various formats of work to deepen it (training, open forums, facilitations in restorative processes, therapy and counselling).

The play "Inercia" arrived at my door already created by Marina Paytubí, a professional theatre director, and the play "El carrer és nostre" was created by Anna Bigordà, Nuria Coriminas and myself at Cúrcuma, the cooperative where I worked. I really liked this format because I feel that theatre has the power to generate and connect spectators with different gateways to the world of dreams, to generate catharsis and empathy, to be able to see yourself in the different roles of sexual violence, to raise awareness of the most invisible and taboo parts of society around this issue through explicit and symbolic language. And together with the working methodology of the process, we created the work taking into account an exhaustive analysis of the diversity of roles that exist

around street sexual harassment and the different experiences we gathered in the experiential workshops we did with women on the subject.

In both works we chose to work from the open forum methodology with the intention of processing the impact of sexual violence at a social level and to be able to break the silence, process the field and raise awareness about how this type of violence affects our lives individually and collectively.

During this process, I became aware of a limit I had in feeling the role of victim in my stories of sexual violence, through the analysis of the dynamics that occurred, especially in the first open forums, of the role of victim as a phantom role. So I gave it space and was able to identify myself as a victim and connect with the feelings of pain, anger and rage on the one hand, and on the other hand connect with compassion, which is the role of active witnessing.

Another limit I crossed was to be direct and name the impact of certain interventions that created polarity in the field, or that attacked the role of the aggressor, the role that sets a limit and the role that wants justice.

**The process of preparing** the open forums has been key to my learning when working with the groups, it has helped me to process the field roles, polarities, environment, internal and external diversity, cultural ages and my own, and to create hypotheses about the different impacts that could occur according to what appears in the works. Also to work and be congruent with the intention and one's own positioning around this issue, in order to be honest and congruent in the groups.

Our position had to do with naming the taboo, the difficult, the pain, the unspoken about sexual violence and facilitating individual and social responsibility on this issue. For me, a congruent person is one who, even if they do not want to perpetuate this kind of violence, is able to recognise what they have done to perpetuate it and take responsibility for it.

Another aspect of the training has been on a theoretical level, I have learned about trauma, the roles of trauma, the circle of violence, the different types of sexual violence and the restorative approach, I am currently doing trainings where I feel I have a deep knowledge on the topic and I am able to develop with ease. It has also given me the ability to detect patterns of behaviour, reaction and relationship to sexual violence on a societal level.

The teamwork was very good, I have great memories. We prepared very well, both with Eva Sanchez and with Anna Bigordà and Edurne Larracochea, first analysing the field, the roles and possible limits, sharing what we needed support on, what was easier to support for each of us, and we also supported each other in our personal limits. Then, when we left, we always processed what had happened, and processed it in the next supervision. Every time we went to facilitate a new open forum, we remembered what had happened in the previous one and those points where we would be more attentive. The biggest challenge was how to give a voice to men who do not recognise themselves as potential aggressors and who you see unconscious macho behaviours in the interventions through their pre-signals and signals, for example, taking up a lot of space in the interventions, questioning some opinions of other women or reacting very defensively when there are accusations of certain macho behaviours of men.

When it comes to **facilitating open forums**, one of the lessons I highlight is the fact of being able to frame the impact that can be generated by the different interventions that generate the high points, thus helping to de-escalate in the moment and go deeper into each role, accompanying to personalise it and create moments of listening and temporary resolution. Another learning has been to be able to take me from the personal and share without losing the metacommunicator. And finally, I would like to highlight that this experience has given me a lot of security and confidence when facilitating with large groups of people who do not know each other on such a delicate subject.

At the beginning of the open forum, we named all the parts that could be awakened (personal experiences, rejection, the desire to talk about it, the difficulty to do so, etc.), the different ways of living and feeling it. The social taboo that exists is a subject that is not usually shared, only in very intimate spaces, in therapy or in the solitude of each person. We named some statistics to frame what happens in the consensual reality and the impact they can generate, for example, this in the open forum of "Inertia":

- 1 in 5 children are sexually abused before the age of 18.
- Children know their abuser in 90% of sexual abuse cases.
- 30% of perpetrators of sexual abuse are family members.
- The different roles in the dynamics of abuse and how they can be reproduced internally.

We also gave space to any experiences or thoughts they wanted to share. We invited each one to take care of herself and respect herself, to feel free to leave

whenever she wanted and the fact that we are all important, those who listen and support as well as those who express and name.

The meta-skill that I developed the most was leadership, as this issue has polarised me a lot and in the past I have positioned myself very much on the side of the victim, and in these forums I have practised listening and I have managed to support the party that generates the impact to bring awareness of how it is received.

I also learned to follow the process, the signals that emerged and that led us to talk about personal experiences, which was the high point, frame them and keep pulling the thread.

I remember one day when we did "El carrer és nostre" with a group of premonitors (teenagers preparing to be monitors) who didn't know each other, a girl started to share a personal experience of street harassment and then another, and another, and there was one who said that she was being abused by her partner and that she hadn't told anyone, the boys were very attentive, they weren't defensive at all, there was one who got emotional and recognised all the pain of women. There was another guy (the most macho profile) who said that women did not deserve to live through this and that he wanted to support them in whatever way he could, and it was really very moving and beautiful what was generated between the boys and the girls.

Until that day there had been nothing like this from the men. We also mentioned the importance of men supporting women by asking them what they need and how they want to be supported, and in this group, this also happened.

The process of **listening to the feedback and supervising** the sessions has been very enriching, the great learning was to realise that what we processed with one group was useful for the next, that is, we always facilitated with different people, and if, for example, one day we processed the role of observer and certain limits, it happened that another day, with another different group, that role was no longer so disturbing and we processed the role of witness and skipped other limits. And this also happened with Eva Sanchez and myself, the boundaries that we jumped between us and on an individual level, some of them discussed above, helped the next group to see them and to be able to cross the boundaries at times. Let's say that this has helped me to settle my knowledge of systems theory and what it means to process the field, and to see that it doesn't depend on the people who are physically in that place.



On the other hand, this work has also made me burn firewood around my personal experiences in relation to sexual violence, to be able to understand my processes, to go through the different roles and to realise, for example, that it has always been difficult for me to identify myself in the role of victim, as my main identity is the role of the witness and the one who wants justice. The limit that prevented me from connecting with the victim is to feel the vulnerability and express it, and to be read as a victim. Today I am still discovering new aspects and burning wood.

In short, this experience has opened up a whole field of specialisation, learning and passion that I did not expect, and on which I continue to walk, explore and research in order to generate processes of community restoration on the impact of social violence in our society.

#### ***4.4. RITUAL AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRAUMA***

In the following, I will explain and compare ritual and process work to see what they have in common and how they complement each other in transforming collective trauma. I will draw on Hector Aristizábal's understanding of ritual from his experiences in various aboriginal and indigenous communities in different parts of the world, and from his knowledge and experience in the following areas: psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, psychodrama, vision quest, theatre, Joanna Macy<sup>16</sup>, deep ecology, theatre of the oppressed,<sup>17</sup> and the mythopoetic<sup>18</sup> movement of Robert Bly, James Hillman, Michael J. Meade and Malidoma Somé. I do so through an interview I did with him in April 2020.

Hector Aristizábal uses ritual to transform wounds, collective trauma.

According to Aristizábal (2020), ritual is the place where humanity heals, it is an ancestral resource that appears in communities before any therapy or form of

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<sup>16</sup> <https://eltrabajoquereconecta.org/joanna-macy/>

<sup>17</sup> The [Theatre of the Oppressed](#) arose as a response to the urgency of constructing forms of theatrical representation that did not blame the oppressed for the oppressions they faced and to overcome the individualism of the theatrical approach to conflicts. It is an aesthetic and political research, which seeks to ensure the inclusion of the social structure in the staging and in the dialogue with the audience, where the audience becomes a spectator and has the possibility to go on stage to change the conflict shown in the play in order to find possible strategies of transformation of the oppression shown.

<sup>18</sup> [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimientos\\_de\\_hombres](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimientos_de_hombres)

healing. The communities of our ancestors ritualised the different stages of life and explained them through their own mythology and cosmogony. This helped their members to generate a connection with the symbolic universe of the community and through imagination, to go through the different stages of life, the changes of identity, as people die and are reborn continuously, and in this case, by doing it in community, the community sees you and celebrates with you these changes, thus enhancing the role of the witness and the connection with the psychological and spiritual power.

We experience this in the process work in individual accompaniment, where the facilitator represents the role of the community in the ritual and accompanies the awareness of the identity changes we experience in the course of life by amplifying secondary signals to unfold the disturbing energies and integrating the useful essence of the disturbing energy. In the West we have been losing the rituals, we experience the changes of life internally, in therapy in general or through creativity and art. The power of art, the modern name we give to ritual, is the way to beautify, to create meaning in the things that happen to us as human beings, says Aristizábal (2020).

First, I will explain how Hector prepares the group, without going too deeply into it, in order to understand when he uses ritual. At the beginning of the workshops, he initiates through play and the theatre of the oppressed, thus getting the group to connect from a place of fun, free of judgement and criticism. With the theatre of the oppressed, she manages to connect the oppressions we experience with the structural violence and the socio-political context in which they occur and thus show that there are resonances between individual and collective experiences. Theatre is also a way of re-signifying what happens to us and makes us the authors of our circumstances, and not just victims of them. This first part is given from a more primary language of analysis and reason, giving more space to the agreed reality. An atmosphere of security and trust is also created through play, as well as through process work in its individual and group interventions by creating the environment, security and trust to process what is necessary.

Little by little, the group is led into the reality of dreams, where, through sharing experiences, they connect with nature (relating the elements of the earth to the different stages of life, animal archetypes and the cardinal directions), and guide the group to place themselves in the place where they feel they are right now in

relation to their wounds and their high dream. Sub-groups are then formed according to where they have placed themselves and time is given to explain what it is that disturbs them in relation to the theme of the workshop.

When people on an individual level connect with the wound, and share it in the group through different dynamics, such as the mandala of truth <sup>19</sup>or other proposals that help to see and sustain in community, they manage to deepen the wound through symbolic elements related to nature. This is the moment when, in process work, the signal is deployed through amplification and the different channels where it is produced. I understand that when Hector talks about the wound, the process work refers to the energy x, that which disturbs and is more secondary. The X energy in the process work refers to the energy that creates the wound.

Once the group is in touch with its wounds, it uses ritual to transform trauma through symbolism and community. Symbolism helps to send a message to the psyche that helps it to feel the pain, move through it and heal it. Rituals are very theatrical and symbolic acts, as in myths, which have the ability to use symbols to live and understand something that we cannot understand or cannot relive. Ritual is full of tricks for the unconscious.

It is about creating an object that represents a real element related to the wound and generating an act in order to close the process within the psyche. For example, for me, the element of the stone inspired all the burden that one of my traumatic experiences meant for me, and it was very useful to bury it in one of the joint rituals we did. The images of dreams serve to play a trick on the unconscious, to make it believe that we have lived through something so that we can revisit what has happened to us and transform the pain through love into something beautiful. This is what Hector calls finding the medicine in the wound, which is like finding the useful essence of x-energy in process work. The images and symbols are equivalent to the dream reality of the process work and the process of amplification of the signals through the dream figures and the elements of nature.

The **phases of the ritual** (you move away from your community, you experience a life and death situation, you return to the community and it is celebrated)

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<sup>19</sup> <https://forumparatodas.wordpress.com/2017/02/13/el-mandala-de-la-verdad/>

represent the alchemical process, Joseph Campbell's hero's path<sup>20</sup> or Jung's path of individuation<sup>21</sup>. They reflect the stages of development that any individual experiences in their journey through life, it is when you connect with the transformative message that is in the x-energy, or in the wound and integrate it into your life, you bring it back into the community. This is experienced over and over again as we cross borders throughout life, the ritual generates belonging in the community, being seen in its medicine, connecting with the soul and what our psyche needs and the community recognises that we have been there, it is a spiritual birth that happens throughout life.

Let's say that ritual helps to cross what we call boundaries in Process Work, to move from primary identity to secondary identity, and to integrate what Hector calls the medicine, the useful essence of x-energy. What he says about resistances or boundaries during ritual is that the experience of ritual itself does not guarantee integration, but it is the work we have done with ourselves throughout our lives that helps to create a sense of what is experienced in ritual. It is like dealing with pain and violence, being able to see that we are not that, moving away from judgement and moralisation in order to connect with the soul, which is able to re-signify and turn the lived experience into medicine through the connection with one's own power. According to the trauma perspective of Process Work, this has to do with processing all the roles, how we move from being victims to feeling the energy of the aggressor, integrating it, taking agency, connecting with our power, integrating the role of the witness and being able to hold one's own pain and transform it. The symbolism of the ritual contains the essence of these roles and the final phase of the ritual, the celebration, being seen and celebrated, helps the integration of power.

For example, in a workshop I was in with Hector, we did three rituals, one of them was done by women to heal the wounds of men, one by men towards women and one by non-binary people towards binary people. I was in the one for the non-binary people, so I received the one for men and the one for women. I remember a specific moment when from the ritual that the women did, we started with our eyes closed and they guided us through the senses and at one point, they took off my blindfold, looked me in the eyes and told me that I was unique and that they loved me just the way I was. For me this moment was very

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<sup>20</sup> *The Hero's Journey*. Joseph Campbell, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> <https://lamenteesmaravillosa.com/proceso-de-individuacion-segun-carl-jung/>

healing, these are words I have always wanted to hear from my mother and to be told by a woman was very symbolic and healing.

On the other hand, the ritual we did was very empowering because 3 of us transmitted the beauty of living from the non-binary, the queer, the lgtbiq from a place of essence, connected to nature, the stars and the universe to 35 people who live within the hegemonic gender and sexual orientation.

I want to finish with the concept of mycelium that Hector explains to me in the interview, and that has to do again with the development of a process from process work. The mycelium appears in the processes of death to help life. Those fungi take the nutrients out of everything that dies and become new life and I am developing that same pattern, helping to capture human pain and extract the sense and meaning of what is behind it to nourish life, create beauty and continue living. The role of the mycelium is the mystery of ritual. It transforms wounds into something beautiful and meaningful. The great role of the human being is to witness the evolution of nature and to search for meaning.

#### ***4. 5. THE RESTORATIVE APPROACH***

The restorative approach has its roots in New Zealand where Maori believe that when someone commits a crime it affects the family and, in some way, the community. They also believe that the whole community must take responsibility for what has happened and become involved in finding solutions to make things better.

Most of the Restorative Justice models in operation today originated in indigenous Maori and North American communities.

Since the 1970s, a variety of programmes and initiatives have emerged in thousands of communities and in many countries around the world. They are offered on an optional basis, either within the existing criminal justice system or as a complement to it.

Since 1989 New Zealand has made Restorative Justice the central focus of its entire national juvenile justice system. The incorporation of restorative practices and the broad restorative approach into school contexts has been successfully initiated since the 1990s in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States, among others.

The restorative approach is a paradigm that offers a framework for conflict management in different spheres (judicial, family, community, educational, etc.). In the field of education, the restorative approach provides a new perspective in

which people can learn from conflict situations by taking responsibility and repairing the damage caused (Fiol, 2013). Restorative practices offer tools and develop relational competences to all members of the educational community, which has an impact on social cohesion and the positive and peaceful management of relationships and conflicts.

The **values** of the paradigm are: mutual respect, empowerment, collaboration, valuing others, openness, trust and tolerance and the necessary skills (knowing how to identify one's own and others' emotions, empathy and relational skills).

Author Belinda Hopkins (2011) notes that **restorative approaches** are based on five key principles or ideas:

*Principle 1* - Personal and equally valued perceptions: Everyone has a personal view on a situation or event and needs to be given the opportunity to express it, in order to feel respected, valued and listened to.

*Principle 2* - Thoughts influence emotions and emotions, in turn, influence actions: What we think at any given moment influences how we feel at that moment, and these feelings affect how we behave.

*Principle 3* - Empathy and consideration for others: When there are conflicts or disagreements, harm can occur. In order to be able to live together in harmony, people need empathy and consideration, so that we understand who and how others have been affected by their actions in a given situation.

*Principle 4* - The identification of needs comes before the identification of strategies to meet these needs:

It is likely that both the person who has caused harm and the person who has received harm are likely to have similar needs, especially when they are involved in the cycle of violence. Until these needs are met, the harm cannot be repaired and the relationship may continue to be damaged. Unmet needs may be the initial underlying cause of the harm.

For this reason, it is important to create spaces where needs can be discussed in order to break the cycle of violence. Identifying what people need comes before identifying strategies to meet these needs. Understanding what we all need is the first step to identifying commonly agreed norms of behaviour in the community where it occurs.

*Principle 5* - Collective responsibility for actions and their consequences:

The people affected by a situation or event are best placed to decide what should happen so that everyone can move on and the wrong can be righted. This ownership of the decision-making and conflict resolution process

demonstrates respect and trust, develops pro-social and trusting skills and strengthens connections between people.

#### 4.5.1. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE <sup>22</sup>

The term Restorative Justice encompasses a diversity of programmes and practices, and consists in essence of a set of principles, a philosophy, an alternative set of "guiding questions". It provides a framework for alternative thinking in dealing with crime.

Restorative Justice is a process aimed at involving, as far as possible, all those who have a stake in a particular offence, and collectively identifying and addressing the harms, needs and obligations arising from that offence, with the aim of healing and making amends in the best possible way.

It requires, at a minimum, that we address the harms and needs of victims/survivors, that we urge perpetrators to fulfil their obligation to repair those harms, and that we include the aggrieved party, aggressor and communities in this process. Strike a balance between the interests of all parties. Sexual violence has a social dimension as well as a more local and personal dimension. The legal system is primarily concerned with the public dimensions; that is, with the interests and responsibilities of society that are represented by the state. However, this perspective minimises or largely ignores the personal, relational and community aspects of these acts of violence. By highlighting the importance of the personal dimensions, Restorative Justice seeks to bring a more balanced view to our experience of justice.

#### Principles of Restorative Justice for Sexual Violence

1. *The aggrieved party first*

The priority is always safety, space and time to identify your needs.

2. *Trauma information*

Practices need to contribute to doing no more harm, they need to focus on the potential of the individual and community, resilience and hope.

3. *Structural analysis*

Interventions have to take into account the big picture, the context and social structures.

4. *Inclusion within limits*

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<sup>22</sup> Based on *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, H. Zehner, 2007 and *Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse: Hope through Trauma*, J. Oudshoorn, L. Stutzman and M. Jackett, 2015.

What are the appropriate boundaries for including someone in a community?

5. *Silence is not sacred*

Sexual violence thrives on secrecy. The best way to stop it is to talk. Prevention needs to consider how children can best be taught: pleasure, consent, boundaries. Interventions also need to avoid naming the harms. Restorative Justice has a responsibility to fight against violence.

6. *Community responsibility*

The impact on the needs of the community must be addressed. At the same time, communities have a responsibility to take care of their members and to prevent future harm.

7. *Informed voluntary participation*

If participation is forced, the processes would be counterproductive.

8. *Aspects for preparation*

Have professionals. Assess the case, safety, intentions, needs, limits and possibilities of the process, the support of the people involved and the community.

9. *Teamwork*

Key community members, therapists, criminal justice professionals, facilitators, professional community members.

#### 4.5.2. TALKING CIRCLES OR RESTORATIVE CIRCLES <sup>23</sup>

It is a practice that originated in Yukon Aboriginal communities in Canada, as a way of working on conflict resolution and transformation. Others use circles or "conferencing", a practice originating in Australia and New Zealand, as well as Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programmes in North America, as a way of strengthening and restoring communities. Pranis (2005), a promoter of Restorative Justice, describes circles as a form of participatory democracy that goes beyond the usual simple majority rule.

The Circles of Words<sup>24</sup> are a method that breaks with the perspective of punishment from a position of hierarchy and encourages the whole community (educational, family, municipal...) to speak, celebrate, conflict or express

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<sup>23</sup> To know more, I recommend the work of Mireia Parera (2018): *El bullying y los círculos de palabra. An approach from process work.*

<sup>24</sup> Taken from the *Guia didàctica per incorporar la mirada restaurativa a les tutories d'Educació Secundària Obligatòria*. Created by Esberla SCCL, commissioned by Pla de Barris Pau i Verneda.



themselves through transparency, vulnerability, courage and restoration. It is a method that allows inequalities to come to light and creates a space where they can be addressed.

### **Objectives of the circles:**

- Broaden awareness and knowledge of the oppressions and discomforts present in the group.
- To offer tools and skills for the detection and accompaniment around cases of discrimination and violence.

Promote horizontality, equal opportunities and values such as solidarity, fairness and empathy in practice.

- Establish a framework of safety and trust to share personal experiences, promoting group cohesion.
- Becoming aware of the diversity of the group and what unites them, beyond what separates them.

### **Experience with speech circles**

Talking circles have to be spaces where everyone feels included and safe to speak and be heard without being judged. The task of the facilitator is very important, as he or she has to ensure the safety of this space, setting boundaries with honesty and transparency.

The dynamics of the talking circle is intended as a ceremony, as a ritual that honours the cultures and people who have been here before us and appeals to the heart of each one and to the wisdom of the group. That is why it is so important to create an atmosphere of ritual before we begin.

In my experience, the ideal is to be two facilitators and the participants are usually an affected part of the community where there has been some sexual aggression and they want to learn how to accompany the assaulted person and how to relate to the aggressor. The demands that I have attended to and the processes that I have accompanied have been for the assaulted party and their closest circle or collective to which they belong. I have accompanied organisations, social movement collectives and associated youth groups, among others.

First of all, I usually guide them with an individual exercise of inner work where I ask them a series of questions that help them to connect with the emotions provoked by what happened, and with the needs they have in this respect.

For example:

- Remember the moment when you received the news of the aggression, whether you were present or someone told you about it. Note what feelings you have, what emotions you feel.
- Now notice if you have any resistance to what has happened, if there is something that is difficult to hear, understand or comprehend. Why do you think this is happening to you?
- Think about the situation and the relationship culture of your organisation, and ask yourself whether you bear some responsibility for what has happened.
- Finally, what needs do you have in this situation, and do you have any requests to make to the collective?

I then invite them to the talking circle, which helps to understand the harm caused and the impact it has had on the community. The circle creates a space for active listening and empathy, often providing a tailored response to repair the harm and address some of its causes. If there is a history of interpersonal conflict, the facilitators stop in order to reach an understanding between the people involved, raise awareness of the flashpoints and frame the moments of temporary resolution that occur. For example, it may happen that someone in the circle makes an accusation to another person in the circle or to the whole collective, so it would be interesting to stop and ask the person or the group if there is someone who can recognise the accusation and facilitate the interaction in the moment.

I recommend this practice when it is necessary to accompany the group to become aware of the impact and to listen to the needs and necessary steps to move forward with the process of taking responsibility and transforming the trauma. Afterwards, it makes it easier to decide on more concrete strategies to move forward with the process, as there has been space for intensities and emotions, all the voices that wanted to express themselves have been heard and the impact has been better understood.

I will illustrate this by explaining a session I did with a case of sexual abuse in a youth group context<sup>25</sup>, between an educator and a girl, who reported the case years later, when she was of age. The demand I had was to create a space for listening between the different generations of the youth group involved. When

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<sup>25</sup> This example is based on different work experiences, any similarity to real life is unintentional, it does not pertain to any particular group.

the participants arrived in the space, there was a relaxed atmosphere, they were happy to see each other and told each other about their lives, but it changed when we sat down and I started to frame the objective of the meeting and to name all the diversity of states and emotions that talking about sexual violence provokes. When we did the first round of how we are doing, they named nerves, insecurity, fear, tension, and they also named the desire to support each other. When I perceived so many signs of altered states and insecurity, I proposed to do an <sup>26</sup>individual exercise of inner work to connect with an allied figure that would be present during the whole session, I did it by going to a place on earth and becoming the element of nature that most attracted their attention, to become it and let its qualities emerge through them until they integrated them as an inner resource to turn to during the session and to give themselves advice from that place.

I then guided them through a series of questions and steps to connect with emotions, needs, requests to the group and taking responsibility, to facilitate entry into the talking circle. This helps them to become aware of what is important for each of them to express, share and/or ask of the group at that moment. Here I am attentive to whether anyone needs support in order to have more clarity or to discern what is important to express, or if there are altered states that need support.

Then the talking circle begins, we choose a talking object that represents the group and helps to ritualise the moment, I explain how the circle will work and ask the question: what is the impact of receiving the news of sexual abuse? Here they begin to share, voices appear saying that they should have seen it and done something about it, they were shocked that it had happened in front of them and they could not have detected it. Others mention shame, anger and sadness. Those who knew about it mention the exhaustion they have felt over the last few years in dealing with the trauma, and that they no longer feel like listening to certain opinions that deny what happened, they put a limit to the denialist positions, which are precisely the ones that are not present in the room. In a way, they are trying to say that it is now up to the rest of the group to manage the impact and the measures they want to take to ensure that sexual abuse does not happen again in the youth group. Others say that, thanks to this situation, they have been able to understand other dynamics of abuse of power within the group and beyond it, to be able to put on the lens of sexual violence and feel

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<sup>26</sup> See Annex 2 for a more detailed exercise.

that they no longer have to go unpunished. Much recognition is also given to the commission set up to support the reparation process. There are many shared emotions around the wear and tear and discomfort of the reparation process, including frustration, fear, mistrust that it will go anywhere, tiredness, hopelessness and disappointment at hearing voices denying or putting their needs first, feeling uncomfortable when their responsibility is questioned. It is important to frame all of this, especially when there are changes in the atmosphere, and hope, energy and determination to ensure that this does not happen again, or at least to generate protocols for action when it does.

Finally, they mention the need to continue with restorative encounters, the importance of preventive work with men and training on sexual violence for all educators, and some commit to having uncomfortable conversations where they want the consequences of trauma and the impact it has had on certain people and the group to be known, even at the cost of losing friendships.

The meeting ends with a change of atmosphere, some say that they are relieved to have been able to talk about the difficulties and listen to the others, they say that it has been nice in spite of everything, that they feel proud of the process, they have felt listened to and calmer, and they say that they want to continue, to count on mutual support and to continue learning how to deal with this situation.

#### ***4. 6. ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES***

In most conflicts, whether at home or in a war situation, people have a need for accountability. This is related to a desire for justice and closure. It includes someone admitting what happened (as opposed to denying what happened or making counter-accusations), filling in missing information gaps and expressing remorse or regret for what happened.

Surely, reading the words accountability, reparation and sexual assault in the same sentence can already generate a flashpoint because it is very secondary to societies and cultures that are driven by punishment and punitive justice. The aim of a punitive approach is to punish the perpetrator for what he/she has done, not to seek the perpetrator's reflection, opinion or participation in dealing with the sexual assault. This option can be very useful at certain moments, but if we only rely on this way of dealing with sexual aggression and seeking justice, it will be difficult to change the dynamics of sexual violence in the long term, as we have seen throughout history up to the present day. I do not know if they would really cease to exist with a restorative approach, but it does facilitate more social

and political awareness, it helps to repair the harm caused to individuals and communities and, as we will see in chapter 5.2. of this paper, transformative justice goes even further, and adds the point of transforming the social structures that allow this type of violence to occur.

In the **field of Restorative Justice**<sup>27</sup>, taking responsibility means naming the facts (I did XYZ), acknowledging the harm caused ("As a result, people are suffering..."), trying to repair the harm ("I will make sure it doesn't happen again..."), and making things as good as possible ("I will try to repair the harm..."). Responsibility is a process, often a slowly explored path from denial and justification:

- From refusal to name the facts
- From minimisation to recognition of harm
- From rationalisation to acceptance of responsibility
- From justification to accountability

How can this best be achieved? Restorative Justice processes are invitational, i.e. they support the person to take responsibility from a supportive context. The hope is that the more we treat a person with kindness, the more they will learn to do the same. This is not about naivety, or minimising, or even denying wrongdoing. It is about treating a perpetrator with dignity and respect, so that he or she can deal with harmful choices by learning to understand the cycles of violence and putting safer future relationships into practice. Restorative Justice is practical, reality-based. Sex offenders often need regular supervision. Restorative justice requires clear boundaries, behavioural expectations and the difficult work of taking responsibility. The priority is always safety.

In section 5.2. of this paper I describe the **process of community accountability** according to INCITE! a network of radical feminists of colour in the United States who organise to end state violence and violence in homes and communities.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> From *Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse: Hope through Trauma*, J. Oudshoorn, L. Stutzman and M. Jackett, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> <https://incite-national.org>

I would also like to share this **roadmap** from Philly Stands Up<sup>29</sup>, which I found very clear and can be used to guide us in this type of process, and I complement it with a series of questions from Samaran (2016)<sup>30</sup>.

The **five phases** he names are:

### 1. Identification of behaviours

The first step in a process is that a person must have awareness and understanding of the actions and behaviours for which attention is being drawn. This is critical and can sometimes take longer than imagined.

*If you hurt someone and then, when they tell you about it, you focus more on the fact that your*

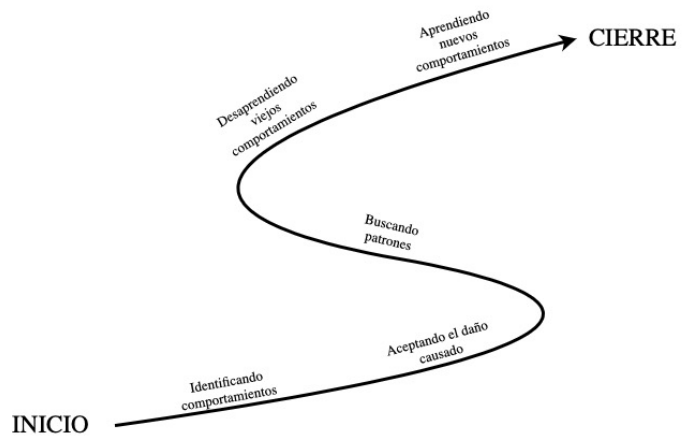
*feelings are hurt than on the fact that you have caused harm, can you stop to ask yourself if that is a response that eases the other person's pain? Do you have your own inner desire to understand when you hurt others?*

*If your answer is yes, what do you do to live that desire and make yourself available to them? Have you let those around you know how you would like to know when you have caused harm? Is the answer: do I want to know in theory, because I like people to think of me as a great feminist, but I haven't developed a good way to help people talk about it or listen to it, in real life?*

### 2. Accept the damage done

From understanding the specific behaviours that have led them to this process of taking responsibility, the next step is to recognise how these behaviours were harmful, even if the harm was unintentional. This is the seed of one of the most frequent goals in this process: empathy.

## HOJA DE RUTA Para tomar responsabilidad



<sup>29</sup> <https://www.phillystandsup.org>

<sup>30</sup> *Own, apologize, repair: coming back to integrity* by Nora Samaran: <https://norasamaran.com/2016/02/10/variations-on-not-all-men/>

*Guilt is not empathy. Neither is shame. In fact, when people feel overwhelmed by their own internal feelings of guilt, they are more likely to lash out at the people around them rather than act empathetically. Feeling guilty does not make you a good person. Empathy and responsiveness make you a good person. Guilt blocks empathy, and empathy can overcome guilt. What's more, guilt disempowers you and takes your focus on yourself, and therefore out of the relationship. But what you need to do is the opposite, to be there for each other.*

### *3. Search for patterns*

Making a comprehensive change to prevent future aggression requires broadening the focus beyond the isolated incident(s) that triggered this process. This means identifying and naming the person's series of abusive/harmful actions and contextualising these behaviours in the beliefs and socialisation that underpin them.

*If you are the kind of person who likes to know when you have done harm, then there are some valuable questions about how to make it happen: how do you invite this information, how do you welcome it, how do you thank those who help you grow in this way, if they have to tell you because you haven't realised it yourself? How do you thank those who help you grow in this way, if they have to tell you because you haven't realised it yourself? Do you realise how scary it can be to be told, before you know how you will react? Do you confuse their fear of you with anger? Is their fear justified in any way? How can you make sure it isn't?*

### *4. Unlearning old behaviours*

The process of changing habits begins with identifying harmful dynamics and then deepens with analysis and understanding. Gain awareness and determine the types of situations that trigger or enable abusive or harmful behaviours and then have clear strategies to avoid and diffuse the path that can potentially generate harm.

*Depending on the severity and longevity of the harm, and the body's silencing effects when trauma occurs, do you make it the responsibility of those you have harmed to tell you 'nicely'?*

*Is it possible that they tried to tell you in a kind way, and you didn't get through to them or you made it difficult for them, and they eventually lost the ability to*

*be 'kind' while they were being hurt? If you think back - really think back - how long were they trusting you and quietly asking you for help and empathy and support and compassion and honesty before they lost their ability to speak kindly while they were drowning?*

#### *5. Learning new behaviours*

Building new positive/healing behaviour patterns goes hand in hand with breaking old harmful patterns. One of the tools at this stage is role-playing, where the person can rehearse their consent practices, *graceful* acceptance of criticism, communication strategies, etc. It is also important to become familiar with their resources to support more empathic behaviour [affordable therapy, places to find work, a clearly defined network of supportive friends, etc.]. This phase is about understanding ways to generate new patterns of behaviour so that this skill is sustainable and nurtured by self-confidence.

*Imagine replacing guilt with curiosity. Imagine saying "wow, it's great to recognise what I did. I'm excited to hear it and grow. I did this, I did that, here's why it's messed up, I'm so excited to learn how to get back to wholeness with you, I'm so happy that I can do this, that it's okay to mess up and say I'm sorry and learn together. This acceptance fills my heart.*

*Take it on. Completely. Don't hide what you have done. Then ask: "Did I understand you? Did I understand?" and let the person clarify. Reflect until you understand. Give this as much time as the aggrieved person deems necessary.*

*Say, "Wow, thank you for sharing that with me. I know how hard it can be to share something like that, I really appreciate you taking that risk and I take it to heart. Here's what I'm going to do - concrete practical things - to make sure I get better at this in the future. Does this meet the need?"*

*For some, empathy may require effort, focus or concentration. True empathy is not theoretical or abstract, but is about relating physiologically to other human beings, entering fully and deeply into experiences that are different from your own. If you believe that empathy requires concentration, accept that you have to cultivate this capacity within yourself, and do not attribute this responsibility to anyone else. You can admit that your empathic capacity is still limited, and*



*develop a daily practice of demonstrably expanding it as part of your responsibility to those you have harmed.*

**From a process work perspective**, according to Goodbread (2010), when we are accused of having harmed someone, our natural reaction is to deny the accusation. When we experience accusations as an attack, accusations lead to fights. It is the accusations that hurt us, against which we have to defend ourselves. And our defence is often more forceful than we intend, especially when we underestimate our own strength. There is always a grain of truth in even the most outrageous accusations. Accusations feel like attacks when they have a big impact on our reality.

There is no guarantee that admitting a piece of truth in an accusation will satisfy the accuser. There are many reasons for making an accusation, and only some have to do directly with the content of the accusation. But until we can find a piece of truth in an accusation, even one percent, especially one that impacts emotionally and psychologically, we are not fully present and cannot help untangle the knot of "he said, she said, she said, she said". Finding the truth side of an accusation helps us to clear our own minds, separating responsibility from the power, revenge, ghosts and bullying side. It is important to honour the other person's perception, even if we strongly disagree with it.

**Problematic responses to allegations**<sup>31</sup>, according to Jobe (2021):

1. Counter-accusations.
2. Apologise to get the problem out of the way.
3. "I always do the same thing". Self-blame, feeling guilty or bad because we have hurt someone.
4. "What should I do next time? How do I avoid this next time and avoid getting into trouble with you? This contract is different from making an agreement together.
5. Co-opt. Make a "we" out of an "I". "Yes, we are the kind of people who do these things".
6. "I don't remember, is it really me?" - see how it could be you.
7. Denial or other types of defence.
8. Counter attack.
9. Getting stuck on the person's side or on your side.
10. Getting stuck in a complex, not seeing your partner's feedback or your own.

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<sup>31</sup> Taken from a lecture by Kate Jobe on 'own conflict' at the School of Process Work, 2021.

Finally, I adapt the **skills and attitudes** defined by Dworkin (2019), which help us to become aware of our use and abuse of power in order to take responsibility when we are accused of having harmed someone.

1. *Keep an open mind, reflect and learn.* Listen to the aggrieved party and deeply consider their challenge. Get as much information as she is willing to give you. Allow yourself to be a learner.
2. *Pay attention to your impact and your intention.* Take seriously the impact of your behaviour on the other person. Remember: Although your intention is important, and was probably conveyed by your verbal communication, your unintended communication may have sent another message. Examine yourself. If the other party has misinterpreted your intent, defend your perspective. But do so in a way that does not negate the reality of the other person's experience.
3. *Don't be condescending.* You may have a tendency to focus on the other person's problems and put aside your own, in order to protect yourself from the harder truths. This patronising attitude can block your usual position of power. Be comfortable being uncomfortable.
4. *Temper guilt, the destroyer.* Too much guilt can make you feel powerless, self-loathing, hopeless, or prone to grand gestures or blame to exonerate yourself. You may be too willing to put yourself in emotional danger; you think you deserve the wrath or revenge of the person you have hurt, so you turn your cheek and accept being beaten. Willingness to self-sacrifice does not usually improve the situation. It can cause more harm if you later react, either internally or against the person you have hurt.
5. *Harness guilt, the motivator.* Guilt can serve as an inspiration, a pathway to responsible action. It can encourage critical self-examination and motivate you to mobilise your resources and work to become an ally.
6. *Find what truth you can in the accusation.* Be willing to take their part. Do this even if you believe that the other person is using you to "burn their firewood", i.e. that they are using the opportunity to express a historical anger or pain that goes beyond you personally but is reflected in the current conflict.
7. *Be realistic.* Once you have thought deeply about the facts, if you believe the criticism or accusation that has been levelled at you is

inaccurate, say so. Be willing to take their side. Do this to open the conversation, not to close it defensively. If the other person is willing, engage in dialogue. Enter into the conflict and hopefully, you can come to understand each other a little more.

8. *Draw a boundary, if necessary.* If you have taken your part and feel that the other party is going too far, find the inner support to draw a boundary and protect yourself.
9. *Practice self-pity.* Even if you have been fortunate enough to reap the benefits of social privilege, you are not immune to the ravages of life or the inevitability of death. Your personal history and your emotional wounds and triggers will make you fear vulnerability and cling to power. Attending to your vulnerability - places where you have been hurt and marginalised - and befriending your own fragility are important parts of developing self-compassion, a prerequisite for using power responsibly.
10. *Embrace leadership.* For brief moments, you can flow between the different experiences, roles and perspectives within yourself and appreciate when they emerge in the other person. You are genuinely open and curious. This attitude can be healing and create a sense of safety.

## 5. FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

This section is dedicated to my next research on how to continue accompanying processes of accountability around cases of sexual violence, while I was doing this work I discovered the following approaches and found them very interesting. They are initiatives from the United States that have been in practice for years and I find them inspiring to continue reflecting and creating a practice focused on survivors and the community, where, unlike the Restorative Justice model, which places the focus on rectifying evil and strengthening state power, transformative justice and community accountability processes critique the oppression of the system and focus on transforming it as we will see below.

### *5.1. TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE*<sup>32</sup>

Transformative Justice is an approach to how people - as individuals, families, communities and society - can prevent, respond to and transform the pain that occurs in the world. In the context of sexual violence, Transformative Justice is an approach that seeks healing, justice and accountability for sexual violence while transforming the current social conditions that allow such violence to occur.

Transformative Justice seeks to provide people who experience violence with immediate safety, long-term trauma transformation and reparations; to hold people who have done harm accountable for their harmful acts, while maintaining the possibility of their transformation and humanity; to mobilise communities to displace the social and systemic conditions that create the context for violence.

As an approach to respond to all forms of violence, the **objectives** of Transformative Justice are:

- Safety, healing and agency of the survivor
- Accountability and transformation of perpetrators of violence
- Community reaction and accountability
- Transforming the community and social conditions that create and perpetuate violence

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<sup>32</sup> *Ending Child Sexual Abuse. A Handbook of Transformative Justice. Generation Five.*  
<http://www.generationfive.org/resources/transformative-justice-documents/>

Each of these objectives calls for the development of new skills and competencies. To practice Transformative Justice related to sexual violence, we see that collectively we need skills in: trauma analysis and transformation, education and policy analysis, community organising, offender treatment and accountability, and group facilitation.

Transformative Justice responds to the need for a truly liberatory approach to violence. It is rooted in an understanding of trauma and resilience, as well as an understanding of how oppression and systemic injustice create and fuel sexual violence. A defining characteristic of Transformative Justice is a commitment to change conditions, to prevent further and/or future harm.

Shifting the focus from punishment-based justice interventions to more transformation-based approaches brings us to the complicated realities of individual incidents, contexts, the relationships involved and the conditions affecting each individual. On a pragmatic level, each of these objectives can easily become a world unto itself. There are no easy prescriptions for this kind of work: each situation and community needs and deserves its own adaptations. To navigate this highly complex terrain, the **principles of Transformative Justice** offer an important compass to guide the decisions to be made in the process:

- Release
- Power shift
- Security
- Accountability
- Collective action
- cultural responsiveness
- Sustainability
- Resilience

## ***5.2. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PROCESSES***

Community accountability is a way of breaking the silence and isolation and building solutions to violence, made by the people most affected by that violence - survivors and victims of violence, friends, family and community. This perspective calls for coming together to create community responses that are

balanced, sensible and thoughtful. It builds from bonds and care rather than from separation and disconnection from the community. It invites the involvement of people who have committed harm as potential allies in ending violence and in changing attitudes and behaviours that lead to a solution to violence.

**Principles of accountability** for individuals/organisations/collectives of social movements <sup>33</sup>by INCITE! :

*1. Understanding the impact of power inequality*

Oppression, abuse and gender-based violence take place in a context of patriarchal (and other forms of) power.

- a) Unequal power as a cause of abuse: recognise how unequal power dynamics caused or allowed oppression, abuse or violence to occur.
- b) Addressing unequal power in the accountability process: considering unequal power dynamics and acting to redress unequal power dynamics, making responsible use of existing unequal power relations and/or minimising their negative impact on the accountability process.

*2. Prioritise the safety of survivors.*

Oppression, abuse and gender-based violence violate the safety and integrity of women/girls/identified women and women as a collective group.

- a) Support: provide a consistent support space that includes specifically designated support persons and specific roles they can play.
- b) Safe space: consider how to maintain a safe space within the workplace, the organisation, political spaces, including asking the offender to stay away (temporarily or for a longer period of time).
- c) Confidentiality: consider and be clear about confidentiality (who knows what and for how long confidentiality will be maintained).

*3. Prioritise survivors' self-determination:*

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<sup>33</sup> Taken verbatim from a document generated by INCITE! and Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), see bibliography.

Oppression, abuse and gender-based violence exercise male privilege and power or that used by the perpetrator (including women/girls/identified as women) at the expense of women's right to self-determination.

- a) Self-determination: Constantly offer self-determination and choice over the accountability process (do you want to be a central part of it? Do you want to leave the process to others, but be updated and how often?) Do you want regular spaces and places for communication and information about the process; do you want to meet directly with the offender (with whom and how; decision making about reparations)?

#### *4. Collective responsibility and action.*

Gender oppression is often exercised as individual, interpersonal and private acts. This keeps the blame on individual victims/survivors (and individual perpetrators) and helps to keep these violations out of the public eye and off limits to collective action and responsibility.

- a) Collective responsibility for creating conditions of oppression/abuse. Understand that violations that take place within an organisational, constituent or community context are also the responsibility of that collective group.
- b) Collective action towards community accountability. Take collective responsibility for devising effective and principled accountability processes to address, stop and prevent gender oppression in the future.

#### *5. Collective responsibility for oppressive, abusive and violent organisational culture and conditions.*

Organisational conditions are often themselves systems of oppression, abuse and gender-based violence, or serve to tolerate, condone, encourage or perpetrate oppression, abuse and gender-based violence.

- a) Recognise collective responsibility for creating a culture or condition that enables abuse. Take into account any responsibility that the culture or conditions of the organisation have in perpetrating, tolerating, condoning or encouraging oppression, abuse and gender-based violence.

- b) Change the culture or conditions of the organisation. Take action to change organisational culture, structures and practices that tolerate, condone, encourage or perpetrate oppression, abuse and gender-based violence.
  - c) Transform organisational culture or conditions. Transform organisational culture, structures and practices to prevent oppression, abuse and gender-based violence; encourage survivors/victims of abuse, victims and perpetrators to come forward; and move towards gender equity and liberating gender relations.
6. *Offender responsibility for oppressive, abusive and violent attitudes and behaviour.*
- a) Acknowledge abuse. Create a process of accountability in which the oppressor/offender fully understands and acknowledges the abuse (as specific acts and patterns and their political implications) without excuses, denials, denials, minimisations or blaming the victim.
  - b) Acknowledge the consequences of the abuse. Create a process of accountability in which the oppressor/offender fully understands and acknowledges the impact and consequences on the survivor/victim, her friends and family, the organisation and the community.
  - c) Make reparations. Create a process of accountability in which the oppressor/offender makes sincere and meaningful reparations which may include a full public apology, payment of damages, repayment of debts, behavioural changes, counselling, leaving the organisation, education of self and others, etc.
  - d) Making long-term, permanent changes. Create a process of accountability in which the oppressor/aggressor can receive and act on meaningful, long-term political and personal education regarding their attitudes and actions, alternatives to abusive attitudes and actions, and be held accountable to a long-term monitoring and control plan that includes consequences if conditions are not met.



7. *Transformation towards liberation.* The overall goal of community responsibility is to transform all individuals and collectives towards gender equity and respect through liberation.
- a) The process of empowerment must enable the transformation of victims/survivors from victimisation of oppression, abuse and violence to safety, trauma transformation and self-determination.
  - b) The process of accountability must enable the transformation of abusers/offenders into responsibility, accountability and advocacy for gender equity and respect.
  - c) The process of accountability must enable the transformation of organisations and communities that tolerate, condone, encourage and perpetrate oppression, abuse and violence towards those that uphold gender equality and respect in principle and practice.
  - d) The process of empowerment must enable the transformation of relations between all these individuals and collective groups from oppression, abuse and violence to liberation.

Finally, I would like to share an example of taking collective responsibility through *Accountability Circles*<sup>34</sup>. The circle itself would be a facilitated meeting, where there are a series of questions as a group; where the perpetrator specifically commits to address the harm they have caused and the factors that have contributed to it; and some of the other participants would commit to support the perpetrator to continue their accountability process.

#### **What are they?**

- They are opportunities to share emotions, problems, tensions, fears, ideas, facts, stories and are not places to attack, degrade, punish, harm or demean;
- are collaborative and are not directed by the facilitator;
- are not a way of determining guilt/innocence (not a trial) and are a way of determining a response to a harm;
- focus on an incident or set of incidents and the best response to them and are not limited to that incident alone;

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<sup>34</sup> **What Does It Feel Like When Change Finally Comes: Male Supremacy, Accountability and Transformative Justice** *The Challenging Male Supremacy Project (CMS) Gaurav Jashnani, RJ Maccani, and Alan Greig. From The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities* (South End Press, 2011).

- are a way of holding people accountable in a compassionate way and are not a way of isolating or alienating someone;
- are not just about the "aggressor" and are an opportunity for a community to take a role in a person's healing process;
- are (probably) uncomfortable and are neither perfect nor easy;
- can be transformative, powerful and beautiful tools and are not ends in themselves.

## 6. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This work is called "El Silencio" (The Silence) because during all these years of accompanying collectives I have seen a very powerful, and I would say historic, change in relation to the silence of sexual violence. Now more and more stories are coming to light of women and dissident people who are able to name what they have lived through, to cross the boundary from the personal and intimate sphere to the collective and political sphere, and if this is happening it is because there is a whole feminist movement that supports this process. Process work has brought to my professional experience in this field a series of tools and internal resources to accompany this boundary that is being crossed more and more. When a person decides to explain their experience of sexual violence, they are crossing a personal boundary but also a social boundary, therefore, they have an impact on society that needs to be heard as well and they need support to cross another boundary, the boundary related to pain, but also to responsibility. I feel that we are at a turning point, in a collective identity change, where silence is no longer useful, where denialist positions in relation to sexual violence are no longer valid, there is no turning back. We are moving as a Western society (I don't know about other contexts) towards a new identity in which we are beginning to name the pain and to demand responsibility, not only from those who sexually assault, but also from the communities and social contexts where it happens, therefore, a new pattern is needed, and this is where the approaches I have shared throughout the work can help to generate a pattern that promotes a way out of the cycle of violence, social justice and structural change.

Process work has provided me with the lens through which to look at sexual violence from the three levels of reality, to understand the dynamics of trauma and to accompany the awareness of all that moves from a place of safety and inner confidence from which I have learned to deal with the altered states resulting from the impact and relationship we have with sexual violence.

It has helped me to understand that we can be both victims and aggressors at the same time, that these roles can be happening at the same time, and to very gradually understand how each role is expressed internally and externally through different signals.

I have been able to develop an inner support thanks to burning firewood and working from the essence. I remember a year and a half ago I was very depressed, and it was partly because of all the pain I saw in the world through

my work accompanying cases of violence of all kinds. I was overwhelmed, and I started to believe that it wasn't worth continuing, that there was no hope. What has helped me and has become my ally when I feel that state without energy and that hopelessness, is to close my eyes and let myself fall into the earth, to feel that connection with the whole, with the force of nature that transcends, goes beyond me and accompanies me, accompanies us in our day to day lives. To feel that there are a few of us who want to transform pain and violence, and that we need to go hand in hand with structural change.

The process work approach to conflict is a key piece in this field, as seeing conflict as a potentially transformative opportunity gives hope in this field, the fact of being able to go beyond the initial positions of a conflict where we tend to get stuck, helps to be able to leave your place for a moment, to be able to put yourself in the other party's place, to see the other position, this promotes empathy. True empathy is not theoretical or abstract, but is about relating physiologically to other human beings, entering fully and deeply into experiences that are different from your own. During this work I have not developed how this is developed, but I leave a link to a Fil a l'agulla <sup>35</sup>guide <sup>36</sup>that explains it very clearly.

My contribution with this work is to share how process work can be combined with the restorative and transformative approach, ritual and community accountability processes, as they complement each other by offering a series of practices that, when applied from the perspective of process work, enrich the processes much more. I will share an example of a case that illustrates how I use the different approaches and methodologies explained in this work in an accompaniment that I carried out with an organisation on the management of a sexual aggression towards a member of the organisation that occurred at a night-time celebration event, organised by the same entity<sup>37</sup>. The demand is for training on sexual violence from a feminist perspective.

The assaulted person from the organisation did not come to any of the sessions, but she was aware of everything that was happening thanks to the support group she had with a couple of colleagues, who kept informing her of the steps they

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<sup>35</sup> [www.filalagulla.org](http://www.filalagulla.org)

<sup>36</sup> Conflict management in cooperatives:  
[https://www.cooperativestrebball.coop/sites/default/files/materials/guia\\_per\\_a\\_la\\_gestio\\_de\\_conflictes.pdf](https://www.cooperativestrebball.coop/sites/default/files/materials/guia_per_a_la_gestio_de_conflictes.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> This example is based on different work experiences, any similarity to real life is unintentional, it does not pertain to any particular group.

were taking and checking with her to see how she was receiving everything they were doing.

In this case, I found that a restorative process was already underway, the organisation had already created a support group with the person who had been assaulted and had already identified some needs:

- When the aggression occurred, they immediately took protective measures against the aggressor, telling him that he was not welcome in the spaces where they could share work and leisure time.
- They sent a letter to the shared spaces, making the facts visible.
- She expressed the need for the organisation to do training on sexual violence from a feminist perspective and did not want to express any further needs or expectations about the process.

In conducting the training, some flashpoints emerge when I explain the roles of trauma at the relational level and the share of responsibility that the community has when there is a sexual assault. Here I realise that there is an unspoken need for the group to explore and process the impact of this sexual assault and possible reparation by the organisation. Because, they realise that the way they acted when it happened, generated a questioning of the facts and of the needs expressed by the person assaulted and by some of their colleagues. So I frame it and propose to make a first restorative circle with several rounds, where to express the impact of the sexual aggression, all the emotions and needs around it and all the subsequent collective management that took place until the present. In this circle there was a lot of understanding and empathy towards the assaulted person, there were people who took responsibility for the questioning and the way of acting in the first moment, not having given as much importance to what happened as it really had and the re-victimisation that this meant for the assaulted person.

When in the training I explained the part of the accompaniment to all the parties involved in a sexual aggression from a restorative perspective, and how to make a process of accountability, I proposed a space in small groups for them to review what steps they had taken so far in the line of repairing what happened and if they thought they could do something more to help repair the impact generated to the assaulted party (the assaulted person himself, but also to the part of the organisation that also felt this impact). Below, I share some of the actions they decided to take:

- Write a letter to each member of the organisation, acknowledging the events that have had an impact and caused pain to the person who was assaulted.
- Draw up a protocol for the management of sexual aggression in the organisation's leisure areas and another for the work context.
- Make a prologue in the protocol where you make visible everything that has happened, the process of accountability and the lessons learned from the process.
- Talk to the offender again to let him/her know what impact the offence had on the organisation and ask him/her to acknowledge what happened and to explain how he/she will ensure that he/she will not repeat such behaviour in the future. In particular, a number of men volunteered to talk to him.
- Explaining the process to the person attacked and listening to their feedback, seeing how everything that is being done reaches them, knowing that they are not only doing it for them, but also because they want what happened not to happen again, and if it does happen, that there is an action protocol that allows them to make it visible, denounce and act in a safe way and without generating re-victimisation.

Once the training was over, we decided to continue with the accompaniment for the creation of the protocol<sup>38</sup> for prevention and action against sexual violence in leisure environments. The process was very interesting, one of the strong points is that the group was organised to develop each part of the protocol and my role was only to advise and review what they were writing, and to support the critical points that they were having in the process. We did some sessions where we worked on them through a group process, which helped us to explore polarities. One of them was about how to support the aggressor, the polarity was whether it was necessary to create a support group for the aggressor or not. Here we were exploring the various roles and finally they decided that they would recommend that there should be a support group for the aggressor to take responsibility, but that only those who really felt able to be there would be there. Another very interesting process that took place was around knowing

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<sup>38</sup> I recommend this *Guide for the elaboration of protocols to deal with sexual violence in public leisure spaces*: [https://llibreria.diba.cat/es/libro/guia-per-a-l-elaboracio-de-protocols-davant-les-violencies-sexuals-en-espais-publics-d-oci\\_60917](https://llibreria.diba.cat/es/libro/guia-per-a-l-elaboracio-de-protocols-davant-les-violencies-sexuals-en-espais-publics-d-oci_60917)

when a process <sup>39</sup>of dealing with sexual assault ends and how to take care of oneself along the way. Regarding these issues that are raised, there are no right answers, only orientations that mainly have to do with listening to the feedback of the people involved and the signs of limit and *burn out*.

After this process, and after sharing all the steps and actions taken with the person who had been assaulted, the group decided that it was important to have a closing ritual and celebration of everything they had experienced. The ritual consisted of making a talking circle to share how they felt and what they had learned during the 3 years that this process lasted. And a meal of celebration, dance and enjoyment where the whole organisation was present and which symbolically represented a change of stage. The prologue of the protocol was read and the person who had been attacked thanked the rest for the whole process.

### **Personal position regarding the approach to sexual violence**

As we have seen throughout this work, violence generates a need for justice, and when we are talking about sexual violence that has been silenced and unpunished throughout history, there is an even greater need for social justice, but also a need to change the pattern so that it does not continue to be reproduced. This is where the role of education can contribute to this change; prevention of child sexual abuse from childhood is key to being able to detect situations. Training teachers and anyone who works in contexts involving minors, whether in formal or non-formal education, becomes a duty. The restorative approach implies a change of paradigm to learn how to manage when we hurt someone. In the institutes in which I have worked, violence tends to be very escalated, the ways of resolving conflicts are based on a punitive approach, and this leads to young people learning to solve them through punishment and not developing true empathy or understanding that the violence they are experiencing and reproducing is systemic. What is really needed is a deep understanding of how the different axes of oppression and power dynamics operate and how they are reproduced through direct, structural and symbolic violence. If we remove every person who commits a violent act from society, it will be very difficult to have an understanding of these dynamics and they will

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<sup>39</sup> In this document, you can see some reflections on when a process ends: *Breaking the Blockage to Addressing Sexual Assault and Abuse in Sexual and Reproductive Health Settings*.  
*Anarchists*  
(<https://distribuidorapeligrosidadsocial.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/responsabilizc3a1ndonos1.pdf>)

not have the opportunity to learn to relate to each other based on the commitment and responsibility that our actions have. Serious crimes are the tip of the iceberg, and these occur because there is a whole series of more subtle forms of violence that we socially allow and that are silenced. It is true that not all people are prepared to go through a process of taking responsibility and that they can be a social danger, and here it is very necessary to set a great limit to protect the assaulted party. We need all the resources at our disposal, and punitive justice is also one of them, but not the only one.

My contribution is an invitation to value and learn other ways of relating to social justice that really help to transform at the root, to change the structures that allow sexual violence to occur and not to be silenced, because when we are able to name them, learn to detect them and understand the pain and impact they generate, a substantial change occurs where the role of protection is socially integrated.

It is enough that it is only the victims/survivors who have to deal with the pain, discomfort and psychological, physical and social consequences of this kind of trauma and learn to set limits ourselves. We also need to stop perpetrators from raping, assaulting and abusing. And on a more social and systemic scale, it is urgent that we stop reproducing the culture of rape, and it is essential to review the messages given by the media. It is also essential to implement action plans and protocols for the management of sexual aggression. And as I said, all of this must be accompanied by training and prevention.

In Catalonia, an example of this is the Plan for violence-free schools<sup>40</sup>, which aims to respond to all types of violence that occur in the educational sphere from a restorative perspective.

I feel that this more systemic look at the field of sexual violence is provided by Transformative Justice, with a series of programmes, guides and resources that have been generated through experiences over the last 20 years, which you can see in the bibliography. From what little I have been able to research, it has been developed by BIPOC social movement collectives<sup>41</sup> in the United States, where women and dissident bodies have focused on intersectionality and community work.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://educacio.gencat.cat/ca/departament/linies-estrategiques/escoles-lliures-de-violencies/>

<sup>41</sup> BIPOC: "Black, indigenous and people of colour", which translates as "black, indigenous and people of colour".



From my professional experience, I realise that we still have a long way to go to apply and systematise what the methodological approaches I have shared in this work contribute. It would be interesting to have the experiences of the United States and Canada as a reference, I can imagine an international exchange where we can learn about these projects, experiences and collective wisdom that they have been compiling over the last few years.

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## 7. ANNEX 1

### HOW WE MAY FEEL AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE <sup>42</sup>

Sexual violence is a betrayal of a sense of trust in the world and in others and a profound humiliation.

It is often perceived as a terrifying event, a threat to our indemnity and a profound aggression. We experience a sense of a loss of control over our body and our environment and a disruption of the rhythm and meaning of our life. We feel shame and guilt and often feel that no one will be able to believe or understand us.

How we may feel in the immediate aftermath:

- agitated, or appear totally calm (a sign of shock)
- Having crying spells and anxiety attacks
- Having difficulties in concentrating, making decisions, and coping with daily tasks
- Not showing emotions, acting as if we are foggy or confused.
- Having few memories of violence, or amnesias in general
- Feeling disorganised
- Having sleep problems and nightmares
- Food and gastrointestinal problems
- Physical symptoms linked to the dynamics of the attack

Emotional reactions:

- Shock, and denial that this is a case of violence
- Fear
- Feelings of guilt and shame, confusion, anger, anxiety, feelings of humiliation, degradation, betrayal, depressed moods
- Uncontrolled thoughts, preoccupation, rumination

We can have some of these consequences:

- Anxiety continues
- Feelings of powerlessness

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<sup>42</sup> Retrieved from the website: <https://www.violencissexuals.org>

- Persistent fear
- Depressive state
- Nightmares, insomnia
- Physical problems
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Efforts to deny that the aggression happened or minimisation of its impact
- Social retreat
- Concerns about one's own security
- Refusal to leave the house or go to places that remind us of the attack
- Reluctance to start new relationships, or break off existing relationships
- Sexual difficulties
- Drastic changes in life routine
- Lifestyle changes; moving house, change of job, change of telephone number, etc.
- Somatisations: nausea, migraines, etc.
- Nightmares and fears
- Mood swings, anger, depression, flashbacks, rationalisations, denials, anxiety.

Sexual violence, as a traumatic event, interferes with and conditions five important areas of our lives:

- A sense of security
- Self-confidence and trust in others
- Our "strength", understood as our ability to cope with situations
- Self-esteem
- Privacy

It can be difficult to ask for help because:

- We want to forget
- We are ashamed
- We think we will not be believed
- We think it was our fault
- We are afraid that our loved ones will stop loving us or see us as "dirty" and worthless.
- We want to achieve this on our own

It is important to ask for help because:

- Because we are suffering
- Because something has happened that has made us feel alone, scared and powerless
- Because there may be physical consequences
- Because what they have done to us is a very serious crime.

## 9. ANNEX 2

### **EXERCISE: INNER WORK: FINDING AN INNER ALLY** <sup>43</sup>

1. Connect with yourself. Do some breathing.
2. Take a couple of notes for yourself; what brought you here today? It could be, for example, what you expect from this facilitation.
2. To support yourself and to invite a sense of well-being, think of a place in nature that you like, and that somehow supports your inner nature, think of a place that is a source of energy for you; it could be a wild place, or a park or a street corner.
3. Choose the place, it could be a place you know or a place you imagine.
4. Go there now through your mind's eye, and let the place resonate within you.
5. You perceive a particular quality or atmosphere that attracts you to that place.
6. Perceive where in your body this quality or atmosphere resonates.
7. Let yourself be immersed in that place, or as if you feel your body in that place, with the special quality.
8. Make a hand gesture that expresses the quality and write or think of a word that describes it.
9. Make the gesture once more and inhabit it, feeling this quality as fully your own nature.
10. From this quality, recognise this nature in yourself. How will it support you with difficulties, how will it support your hopes and whatever you may experience during facilitation?
11. Can you imagine an internal "ally" who embodies this quality? It can be a real person or a mythical figure.

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<sup>43</sup> Taken from Fil a l'agulla's annual group facilitation course ([www.filalagulla.org](http://www.filalagulla.org))

12. Go back to your notes on being in this facilitation, and add some notes now, coming from this quality of nature, and with this inner ally.
13. As an internal ally, draw an image, phrase or poem for your day-to-day person.
14. Reflect on how this message can support you during facilitation.