

ABSTRACT

POSTMENOPAUSAL EMPOWERMENT: AUTHENTIC TRUST AND ARCHETYPAL INSTINCTS

by

Diane Soash Harnish

Menopause is a physiological process that invites a potential renewal of identity. This study posed the Research Problem: What is required psychologically to transition into a hopeful and empowered postmenopausal identity? The hypothesis was: Effective transition into postmenopausal identity involves the ability to connect with one's voice of the future and align with one's destiny.

The Literature Review examines psychological, cultural, and spiritual perspectives on postmenopausal identity. Key concepts include adaptive identity, authentic power, core identity, reflexive dialogue, and initiatory threshold. The literature reveals Western culture's lack of transformational practices that could support postmenopausal women's passage into their elder years.

This study utilized the methodology of Imaginal Inquiry, which involves four phases: evoking, expressing, interpreting, and integrating experience. The primary experience evoked was increased awareness of postmenopausal identity through creative arts, creative ritual, and reflexive dialogue.

The Cumulative Learning was: postmenopausal women's initiation into a hopeful and empowered future is aided by the transcendent function of a postmenopausal

women's group. For these postmenopausal women, creatively accessing the collective unconscious enhances authentic trust and empowers archetypal instinct. Four additional learnings emerged. First, without the support of empowering expectations by parents and despite the feminist consciousness raising movement, postmenopausal women struggle with adaptive identity structures mired in a devalued self, including structures of inadequacy, self-doubt, and inhibited creativity. Second, the recurring metaphor of *space* carries multiple and paradoxical meanings for the participants, such as the womb's *empty space*, the *liminal space* of identity transition, *shared space* between self and other, and *taking up space* through speaking up. Third, although postmenopausal women may experience significant trust in their self-created medicine objects to carry guidance, they might have a low degree of trust in their medial instincts and intuition. Fourth, shared exploration and creative ritualizing can validate newly postmenopausal women's identity transition, normalizing their fears and regrets while reducing isolation and self-judgment.

Reflections on this research suggest that the transition into postmenopausal identity offers opportunities for developing empowering instincts. Developmental tasks of menopause are viewed through the mythical lenses of the crone Hecate, Vasalisa the Wise, and Inanna.