

Three Archetypes for Understanding Femininity

Practice 2



“When we bring our attention back to discovering who we are on the inside—not who we wish we were or what we think we should be—we begin a sacred path of transformation toward our innate, authentic, embodied power.”

-Heatherash Amara

What are the three feminine aspects? What does the Goddess archetype have to do with it?

When we use the term “Goddess” we are discussing it in the context of a particular feminine archetype. The term “archetype” comes from Carl Jung’s Complex Theory, which we will briefly examine.

According to Jung, a complex is an unconscious collection of thoughts, memories, experiences, images, symbols, bodily sensations, and/or behaviors that cluster together around a “primitive” and collective component. For example: “He knows how to press my buttons!” The ‘button’ would be the complex. Archetypes would be the “primitive” and universal elements around which complexes are constellated. So, when you push someone’s ‘button’ you receive an emotional reaction from the person who is now said to be “constellated.” This reaction exists on a spectrum from mild anxiety, to madness; the person’s ego has fallen into “the grip of a complex.” Archetypes are particularly stimulating in this process.

When we speak of the ego's energy, we refer to it as "free will." When we discuss the amount of energy tied up in other archetypes, such as the "Shadow Self," we refer to them as our "inner demons." And when an inner demon is stimulated, it penetrates and floods your ego, discharging stored up emotional energy and influencing it to spin a certain way. When this happens, the ego is no longer altogether in control of consciousness, or your body, for that matter. For example, an offender who is deeply remorseful over his abusive behavior, might claim, “I wasn’t myself.” According to complex theory, he probably wasn’t. Doctor Murray Stein goes so far as to say, "None of us is wholly responsible for what we say and do while in the grip of a complex. Needless to say, this does not constitute an effective defense in a court of law. Sometimes society demands a higher standard than the psyche will allow in a court of law” (1998).

Stein offers an example of how this might play out in a love relationship:

If a man reminds a woman of her harsh abusive father by his tone of voice, way of reacting to life, intensity of emotional response, and so on, he will [stimulate] her Father Complex. If she interacts with him over a period of time, material will be added to the complex. If he abuses her, the negative

father complex will become enriched and energized, and she will become all the more reactive in situations where the father complex is [stimulated]. Increasingly, she may avoid men entirely, or on the other hand, she may find herself irrationally drawn to them. In either case, her life becomes restricted by this complex; the stronger the complex, the more restricted is the range of the ego's freedom of choice (p. 44).

What's important to remember is that Archetypes are deep enduring patterns of thought and behavior laid down in the human psyche that remain powerful over long periods of time and transcend cultures.

Archetypes are found in dreams, literature, art and myth and communicate to us through many symbols. Archetypes compose the ultimate source of psychic symbols which, in turn, attract energy, structure it and influence the creation of civilization and culture. Archetypes also go beyond the psyche bridging inner and outer worlds.

Below, we offer a summary of three exemplary Greek Goddesses, as described by "Nancy." If you would like to learn more, you can contact Nancy at <http://goddess-power.com/about.htm>.

The Transformative Aspect

Often transformative goddesses are considered "virgin" goddesses. These virgin goddesses represent qualities of autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency. This archetype represents the woman whose purpose does not become distracted or diverted by relationship—but actively pursues her own goals. Virgin, therefore, is not merely referencing sexuality.

To inhabit the "virgin" feminine aspect does not necessarily mean you live a celibate life, but you avoid—on an emotional, spiritual, and mental level—the penetration of the (positive) masculine, which is a suppression of the receptive aspect of your feminine nature. You cannot be penetrated by energetic cords and are resistant to emotionally intimate exchange and connection (while at the same time, deeply yearning for it).

Please note, this is not necessarily a bad thing! Particularly when self-protection and discernment is warranted. If, however, you are seeking a deepening of intimacy with another, and you are resistant to giving and receiving on an energetic level through sexual expression (note: "sexual expression" is NOT defined only by the act of intercourse or its derivative behaviors; a cuddly caress, a home cooked meal, a lingering gaze, a deep conversation, a passionate argument—all of these things are forms of energetic, sexual expression), this aspect may become a hindrance, if it is dominant; we choose to remain "girlish,"

not fully in command of our sensuous, receptive, and relational powers as women. Thus, we are not able to feel fully sated. We constantly return and *submit* to the “father” archetype, who contains and takes control of our femininity. This speaks to the “Shadow side” or “darkside” of the Goddess archetypes or aspects (which we will tackle more in the next Practice).

The transformative aspect of the feminine is represented across cultures in a variety of divine incarnations. It would be beyond the scope of this course to explore them all in detail, however, we will offer smaller examples from perhaps more popularly understood archetypes.

In Western culture, the goddess Athena is a recognizable archetype of the transformer goddess. Athena has an extroverted and independent temperament, and represents the goddess of wisdom, civilization, and strategy (often in the context of war). Athena types are concerned with career, motivated by the desire for achievement, acquiring knowledge, she possesses a keen intellect, concerned with education, culture, social issues and politics.

Athena is “father’s daughter.” Finding her relationship to authority--will she dutifully uphold and promote the authoritarian, hierarchical fatherworld as status quo, OR emancipating herself, she will she slay the father (symbolically) to become fully herself--overthrowing the father principle--paternalism--corporations, colonialism, oppression, suppression of the feminine principle and carry the torch for the well-being of humanity.

Athena’s strong identification with the fatherworld renders her prone to inherit the patriarchal fear of “Dark Mother powers”--not recognizing these powers as aspects of her own psychic make-up. Thus Athena is most out of touch with her need for warm, physical nurturing, attention to her instinctual and bodily needs, and unconditional love.

Athena’s darkside is intimidating, critical, judgmental toward weakness in others, her air of authority and inapproachability keep others at an emotional distance. Her heart is out of touch with the two goddesses of love: Demeter, the maternal love, and Aphrodite, sensual love. Her masculine image conceals her vulnerable, underdeveloped inner feminine self, which leaves her emotionally hypersensitive. Athena’s gift is to empower women’s contribute to the political, intellectual and creative life of our cities, therefore, elevating the integrity and quality of our civilization by bringing forth the qualities of the feminine which have long been suppressed.

Abundance, Beauty and Receptivity

In our discussion of this aspect, let’s examine the example of the goddess Aphrodite (Venus), who represents the uniting of feminine and masculine energies through sexual union.

Aphrodite's origins pre-date the ancient Greeks. An even more ancient deity exhibiting more aspects than love and beauty, she can also be recognized as Astarte or Ishtar; her origins were Babylonian/Sumerian. Her domain embraced all of nature: vegetable, animal as well as human. Among her powers were associated with fertility and growth/harvesting of crops, war, descent to the underworld, birth/life/love/death and fate. She was also worshiped as sacred 'prostitute.'

Aphrodite possesses an extroverted temperament and focuses on relationships and love. Her primary concerns/interests are mature, adult relationships, romance, sexuality, beauty and the arts.

This goddess includes an autonomy similar to 'virgin' goddesses yet also includes aspects of the 'vulnerable' goddess, which are more relationship-oriented. Her consciousness is both focused (directed and goal-oriented) and diffuse (receptive, taking in the relationships between things). Aphrodite does not suffer, however, as did the 'vulnerable' goddesses. Although she is known for her numerous sexual liaisons, she is not bound by any man. However, unlike virgin' goddesses, Aphrodite did give birth to children. Aphrodite was never a victim of a man's unwanted passion for her; the desires were mutual. She values emotional experiences with others more than she desires more solitary goals; her independence does not preclude emotional involvement with others. On the other hand, she is not attracted to permanent relational bonds like her 'vulnerable' sisters.

Today, our culture has lost touch with the dimensionality of Aphrodite. Obsessed merely with her physical charms, as a culture, the feminine image activates only one aspect this goddess—we are fixated on romance, sexual pleasure, erotic images, pornography, fashion/glamour. We have lost touch with Aphrodite's sacred dimensions. Patriarchy, threatened by her 'power' over men, has attempted in every way to restrict, confine, label and demote her from her Queenly position. Furthermore, Aphrodite and Demeter were not allowed to co-mingle in the patriarchal order (in other words, whore and wife had to be kept separate). Aphrodite also experiences alienation from the other goddesses.

Aphrodite women may buy into the social mores of 'beauty' as the only valuable aspect of her gift and subsequently neglect the all-encompassing aspects of her intellectual and emotional gifts of companionship and creative inspiration. Aphrodite's task is regaining her self-respect by regaining access to her body--not as an image of a glamour girl, but rather as a flesh-and-blood sensual woman of value in her own right—in her ability to connect with heart. Her gifts include the ability to be both sexual and a spiritual guide and confidante to her partner; ability to bring civility, refinement and Love into the world around her through her value of relationship and deep caring.

Nurturance

Demeter represents the archetype of Mother. Her own grandmother was Gaia, the personification of Earth, itself. Her mother was Rhea and her father, Cronos. Archaeological evidence points to a significant Goddess cult in both the Minoan civilization of Crete (c.3000-1000 B.C.E); and the Mycenaean society of Greece (c. 1600-1400 B.C.E) suggesting her ancient matriarchal origins long before the ancient Greeks.

The expression of Demeter archetype in a woman is more than merely physical mothering; it is expressed in her instinctively obliging caring for any and all who are in need, particularly the young, needy and helpless. Although Demeter played a key role in the survival of all things that live and grow; she was powerless to prevent her daughter's abduction nor was she able to affect her immediate return. Demeter had been 'victimized' and her pleas went ignored. She belongs to the category of the 'vulnerable' goddess.

Demeter type women face similar themes in their lives: they feel victimized by people or circumstances of their lives, they experience a lack of power to impact change in their distress, they either vent or repress their anger, their feelings of powerlessness leads them to depression. Anger may underlie the depression--anger at the 'meaning' she feels had been taken from her.

Demeter type woman, feeling compelled to help or having difficulty declining any request made of her, may over-commit and then feel overwhelmed in her life--another aspect of feelings of powerlessness. She may dismiss her own feelings, judging them as un-giving. She may be subject to self-pity until she examines her own instinctive responses to 'giving'.

Another aspect of Demeter's wound is the loss, for every woman, of a particular phase of her life cycle: Maiden (innocent, untouched daughter); Mother--loss of her emerging adult children into their own marriages; Crone--biological loss at menopause. Each of these phases holds opportunity for emergence into a new phase of consciousness. For Demeter type women, healing the wound may involve acknowledging 'unpleasant' feelings, feeling the 'loss' (whatever it is--interpersonal or conceptual), going through the grieving process, feeling the anger and, ultimately reuniting with self on a deeper level.

This destructive aspect of Demeter in Demeter type women can be seen as withdrawal--withdrawing her interests from life, from her family and friends. Some Demeter mothers may withdraw their approval from their child when the child begins exhibiting more autonomy than Demeter woman feels comfortable with--she needs to feel needed. She may inadvertently have a need to foster dependency.

Demeter's gifts include the primeval love and unity that creates a magical bond between mother and daughter. Demeter also nourishes spiritually as well as physically. And, Demeter embodies matriarchal consciousness - nurturing the earth, celebrating the cycles of life, planting, tending, giving birth and assisting in the transition of death.

Art Activity

As an extension of this practice, we have attached a handout and video tutorial to create a *Feminine Aspects Pie Chart*. The attached *Feminine Aspects Assessment* may help you to isolate how to imagine these aspects on a practical, day-to-day basis. The purpose of this activity is to explore your own relationship to the three aspects we have discussed, in a tangible way. A few questions to consider after you have completed this activity:

1. Did anything jump out at you, or surprise you, about your pie chart? Did you find yourself having any immediate insights?
2. What is the relationship between the proportions, color choices, and/or adjectives you chose, and the nature of your connection to these aspects in your life?
 - a. For example:
 - i. "I feel really close to the transformative aspect, so I designate a big piece of the pie with bright warm colors."
 - ii. "I have a conflicted relationship with the abundant aspect, but I still feel like I have a lot of those traits, so I gave it a big piece of the pie, but made the color muddy and dark."
3. Complete three "I am" statements describing your pie chart.
 - a. For example:
 - i. "I am multicolored."
 - ii. "I am a little messy."
 - iii. "I am not completely defined by one aspect."
4. If your pie chart had a need, what would it be?
5. If your pie chart had some advice for you, what would it be?
6. If your pie chart could have anything in the world, what would it want?
7. If you were to imagine putting your pie chart into your body, where would it reside? How would it make your body to move?