

The Predator

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Women in Power: initiating ourselves to the Predator Within is a women's leadership experience in its fifth year. We're often asked what we mean by "Predator." The term was first used in this context by Shadow Work™ founders Cliff Barry and Mary Ellen Blandford to describe a primal energy that exists in all of us. In its healthy manifestation, the predator energy is our smarts, our strategic thinking, our creative intellect, our ability to hold many truths at once, our capacity to embrace paradox, our wit, our sense of play. Picture the she-wolf hunting to feed her young. She is wild, healthy, capable, smart. The wolf shows no malice when she kills the deer in the hunt. She is simply following her instincts to feed her young. She is not evil, abusive, shaming; just hungry. In the wild, predation happens and it is natural, right and keeps the cycles in balance.

Predator and prey, the circuit of life and death is the natural way of the world. The insidious challenge for many of us is in our culture is that this template is corrupted so that the predator lives in us in unhealthy ways. We carry the instinct of the hunt, but because of having been the victims of abuse, it manifests in the pervasive painful patterns of human predators and their human prey. We were perpetrated on in some way and we carry the vampire bite of this wound. Like in the mythology, the victim of a vampire is at risk of becoming the next vampire.

We use the term "vampire" metaphorically, because so often, the victim who gets "bit" by rape, or violence or rage sadly is at risk of becoming a vampire to the next generation, "biting" her victim with sexual abuse or violence or rage and a whole new generation of wounded people who are ripe

to become vampires themselves is born. The predator in this negative form can be the one who is deceitful, abusive, shaming, violent, brutal.

How do we break this chain and create a new pattern? How can we heal and guide others to do the same? The first step to accessing our healthy predator energy is becoming aware of what we call our “predator shadow.” Shadows according to Carl Jung are those parts of our psyches that we don’t see, but act out of unconsciously. I make a solemn vow never to be like my raging dad, then I find myself yelling at my husband. I swear never to be depressed like my mother, then I find myself unable to get out of bed for six months at a time. I swear never to be violent with anyone, and then I hit the dog when I am raging mad and sleep deprived from caring for young twins. All of these behaviors "leak out" from my shadow side by accident and when I least expect them. And once the energies of judgment, fear, and violence are out of the bag, they run the show. They have power over me -- I have lost my control and composure.

When we, usually with the help of colleagues or counselors after things have gotten pretty bad in our lives, begin to recognize this vampire/victim dynamic recurring, that's a sure sign that we're on the trail of the predator. Then we begin to look for events that trigger this in ourselves and notice patterns. When my partner gets depressed my first desire is to go for the jugular. Why? When Jane, who is a skilled and gifted leader, is working with other strong leaders, voices in her head tell her she's no good, not worthy, a fraud. She swallows her voice and attempts to fade into the background. When Jennifer is tired from overwork, she is sure that she is a bitch and nobody likes her. So she acts short and bitchy and . . . guess what? These are all examples of the disowned shadowy predator at work. Shadow Work™ in the **Women in Power** context gives women who

have played out these roles unwillingly and unconsciously in their lives a safe place to explore, learn and shift these behaviors.

Because the bitch, the abuser, the addicted, the depressed are such shamed characters in our culture, they often stay closeted, perpetuating their dark secrets and abusive patterns. It takes courage, support and what we call a "safe, shame-free container" to have the courage to emerge and face our shadows. To have the courage, really, to betray our childhood vow, "I will never be like that brutal one." Because the painful irony is that in order to reclaim our goodness, to put the unhealthy predators in a place in our psyche where they are rendered harmless, we must step fully into that predator archetype. We do it on purpose in a ritualized, safe container, so that we will not continue to do it by accident in our real lives. And we do it on purpose in ritual, so that we can gain insight into and control over this dynamic. Then we no longer have to fear the predator in our selves and others and can free ourselves to claim the power and grace and intelligence of the predator that is our birth-rite as human beings.

In **Women in Power** we create an opportunity for women to experience their disowned predator energy in a safe, shame-free, ritualized way. The ritual, a form of Shadow Work™, allows us to tap innate strength that has been hidden in the shadows. Women in Power gives women a chance to sculpt the patterns of their lives and their psyches, using role-players, so that they can both witness the pattern from a distance and directly experience various parts of themselves.

Every time I witness one of these processes I get a feeling of horror and grief at seeing the level of violence and abuse that people have endured and carried for so many years. But I am also gratified

when the process reaches the peak of its intensity. From experience I know that this is the darkness before the dawn. Unleashing the painful energy is like the puss oozing out of an infected wound. The healer knows that that puss has to come up and out before the body can fully recover. The greater the intensity, the greater the relief that person will feel when the wound is finally clean and free to heal.

I also have learned from my own experience of reticence to "step in" to my shadow of a raging father whom I swore I would "never" be like. As a young person I expressed one emotion: joy. I would not allow myself to feel mad because the only anger I had experienced was violent. In beginning to heal as a young adult, I still would not explore that corner of my psyche because I was afraid if I did, I might find out that I too was really a violent son-of-a-bitch and that people were inherently evil. If that turned out to be true, then every premise I'd laid my life on -- goodness, peace, healing, the potential for genuine compassion in each of us -- would be a lie. It was a huge risk to take. And I only chose to take it, in the ritual space of Shadow Work™, when I felt exceedingly safe with my guides, and when the pain of keeping that part of me in exile was too great to bear any longer.

After I had the experience, through the role-play of fully embodying my father's energy, it was as if a huge part of my life, soul, mission, purpose came into clarity after years of confusion. I could finally stop running from the ways I am like my dad and embrace the golden sides of him that are his legacy to me and my birthright. To my delight, I now have a genuinely loving relationship with my father, who is 84 years old. We made it to healing while he is still on the planet and is a gorgeous grandfather to my own children.

After witnessing hundreds of people do Shadow Work™ and hearing about hundreds more, I have never seen a violent final outcome. I have never seen a participant get stuck in the energy of the abuser and perpetrator. I have always witnessed an alchemy, where the energy that was used to hurt is transformed to energy for loving. It is remarkable really. Shadow Work restores my faith in “human nature.” Perhaps what Catholic theologian Matthew Fox calls “original blessing” really is our birth-rite, if we dig deep enough and give our shadows a chance to breath fresh and see the light.

What is the value of this dark, intense, and counter-cultural work? Why bother to dredge up ancient wounds? In doing so, don't we run the risk of fueling old fires that are better left to smolder? These are all questions I've asked myself in the past decade doing this work. Here are some of the reasons we in **Women in Power** consciously choose to work with the predator shadow.

The predator energy is alive in all of us. It is one of the core animal instincts that we inherit as mammals. We are hunters. We kill to provide food for our young. The savvy she-wolf whose tooth and claw sustain her young serves life. She is not evil. She is doing what she needs to exist.

In our personal lives we may see the predator energy manifest as relentless self-criticism, depression, addiction, or self-abuse. Sadly, we may find ourselves perpetrating judgment, condemnation, control or abuse on others, especially the vulnerable ones in our lives. At work we may project our fear of being over powered onto others and in a pre-emptive strike over-power, control, and manipulate them. On a global scale, we may see the evil perpetrator in other nations

and not see that we are clearly looking at ourselves in the mirror. Our failure to own our power to destroy makes us dangerous to ourselves, our families, our communities, our planet.

The value of Shadow Work is potentially enormous. As the cartoon character Pogo said, "we have seen the enemy and they are us." We can be truly peaceful warriors, -- warriors of the heart and spirit -- only when we have looked at our own potential for violence, claimed it, owned it, transformed it, and taken a new vow in its presence. My current vow is, "as a woman of power, I know that I have the potential to do great harm and I take responsibility to choose compassion, peace, love, and justice in all of my connections."

With great compassion, respect, and love for all the children, I ask each of us to do the work of owning our predator energy. Peace, paradoxically, begins here.