The Five Star Method: A Relational Dream Work Methodology

Based on Cocreative Dream Theory

Abstract

This paper presents a view of dreaming as an interactive process between the dreamer and the dream imagery, and the dream as a co-created product of this interaction. From this standpoint, dreams are indeterminate from the outset and co-created through the reciprocal interplay between dreamer and dream content. By embracing co-creative dream theory and shifting the principal focus in dream analysis to the dreamer's specific responses and overal style of relating, a counselor can foster the client/dreamer's awareness of problematic patterns of relating, underscore competencies, and elicit a commitment to relating intrapersonally and interpersonally in more resilient and responsible ways. This relational orientation has the potential of positively impacting subsequent dreams and ongoing waking relationships, as well, thus fostering "relational competence" (Jordan, 1999). The theory and research that supports a co-created view of the dream are reviewed and a systematic method of dream analysis called the Five Star Method consistent with this model, is introduced.

Keywords: dream sharing, relational dream analysis, relational competence, lucid dreaming, co-creative dream theory, five star method

The Five Star Method: A Relational Dream Work Methodology Based on Cocreative Dream Theory

Dream analysis has been used in psychotherapy since Freud declared that dreams were “the royal road to a knowledge of the activities of the unconscious” (1900/1965). Other theorists have since incorporated dream analysis into Analytical Psychology (Jung, 1974, 1986), Individual Psychology (Adler, 1936), existential-phenomenology (Boss, 1958, 1977; Craig & Walsh, 1993), Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1968, 1973), Focusing (Gendlin, 1986), person-centered counseling (Barrineau, 1992), group therapy (Taylor, 1992; Ullman, 1996; Ullman & Zimmerman, 1985), cognitive-behavioral therapy (Freeman & Boyll, 1992), family systems (Beck, 2005; Bynum, 1980, 1993; Kane, 1997; Kaplan, et. al, 1981), couples therapy (Duffey, Wooten, Lumadue, and Comstock, 2004) and contemporary psychoanalytic therapy (Weiss, 1993). Systematic, eclectic methods that can be used in individual therapy regardless of one's theoretical rationale for practice have also been introduced (Delaney, 1993b; Flowers, 1993; Hill, 1996, 2003; Reed, 2006).

The results are limited by the paucity of studies to date, but studies have shown that dream sharing increases self-disclosure and exploration (Provost, 1999), results in deeper work in the early sessions of therapy (Diemer, et. al, 1998), produces superior client outcome measures when compared with self-esteem and insight work (Falk & Hill, 1995), and fosters intimacy among couples (Duffey, Wooten, Lumadue, and Comstock, 2004). In one of the few surveys of practicioner utilization, 83 percent of the respondents

reported discussing dreams at least occasionally, but only 13 percent of the therapists employed dream analysis on a regular basis (Keller, et. al, 1995). Another survey (Schredl, et. al, 2000) of German psychotherapists indicated that while respondents used dreams in 28 percent of their sessions, their clients initiated the dream work two-thirds of the time. In a more recent study (Crook & Hill, 2004), 92 percent of therapists surveyed reported that they worked with dreams at least occasionally, but only 15 percent had worked with client dreams during the previous year.

The positive benefits of dream sharing thus stand in contrast to low practicioner utlization. This failure to encourage dream sharing may be due, in part, to a perceived mismatch between dream material and the therapeutic goals of a variety of contemporary non-psychoanalytic models, which tend to focus on here-and-now affective states, personal choices, cognitions, relational processes, and behavioral outcomes rather the interpretation of intrapsychic content.

In addition to a perceived mismatch between dream material and the goals of many of the contempoary schools of therapy, the current low utilization of dream analysis may be due to the way that clients *report* their dreams and to the way that practitioners *perceive* them. From this standpoint, the problem of incorporating dream analysis into the therapeutic process may have less to do with the *kind* of information that dreams provide, and more to do with the way that clients and therapists *view* dreams in the first place.

In this paper, we review two theoretical factors that can account for the perceived absence of reflective awareness and agency in dream reports. In addition, we review some research that supports the idea that ordinary dreams contain a measurable degree of

reflective awareness. Based on these arguments, we then conclude that the dream is an interactive, reciprocal exchange between the dreamer and the dream content. When viewed in this way, dreams are *indeterminate* from the outset, and *co-created* through the interplay between the dreamer and the emergent dream content. This orientation allows for the somewhat independent character of dream content, but permits an analysis and troubleshooting of the dreamer's responses to the dream—and by implication, to waking life, as well. From our clinical experience, this form of dream inquiry supports the client/dreamer's capacity to relate inwardly and outwardly with a greater sense of agency and resiliency, thus fostering relational compentence (Jordan, 1999). After reviewing the basis for what we have termed "co-creative dream theory" (CDT), we will outline a relational approach to dream sharing and analysis called the Five Star Method (Sparrow, 2006a, 2007b).

The Dream as an Interactive Process

Approaching the dream as an interactive, co-created process requires that we treat the dreamer and the dream content as independent contributors to the experience. Instead of asking content-oriented questions such as, "What does this image mean?," or "What is this dream saying to you?" we would track the dreamer's interaction with the imagery through the course of the dream. We would ask process questions (Bowen, 1978) such as, "What did you do before she gave you the hug?" or "What do think would have happened if you had stopped running from the dog?" While this style of relational inquiry represents a significant departure from the traditional content-analysis approach, we will present theoretical and empirical evidence to support it. Further, we believe that this

orientation generates a dynamic approach to dream analysis that is congruent with an array of modern therapies that focus specifically on interpersonal relating. Specifically, this approach: 1) focuses on the affective relationship between the dreamer and the dream imagery, thus illuminating a dimension that is important to Object Relations (Segal, 1964; Winnicott. 1965) and Attachment Theory (Johnson, 1996); 2) analyzes the dreamer's responses in the dream for evidence of chronic patterns of thinking and reacting, thus supporting the aims of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Beck, 1976); 3) explores the dream for unacknowledged competencies that may serve as solutions for presenting problems, as emphasized in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (de Schazer, 1988; de Shazer, Dolan, Korman, Trepper, Berg, & McCollum, 2007) and relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 1999; Miller, 1988); 4) examines dreamer responses and content changes in light of “circular causality” or reciprocity (Bertalanffy, 1968; Sparrow, 2007b; Weiner, 1948)—the focus of systemic therapies; 5) analyzes dream imagery non-intrusively, as a synthesis of the dreamer’s unique experience with the dream content (Delaney, 1993a, 1993b; Jung, 1966, 1974, 1984); 6) formulates a plan of action that respects the emphasis on behavior change as a principal goal of the therapeutic process.

A systematic approach to dream analysis that incorporates the above objectives has only recently been introduced (Sparrow, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b). However, the theoretical foundation for such an approach has been in development for some time (Rossi, 1972, 2000; Sparrow, 1976, 1978, 1983, 1997).

Antecedents to Co-Creative Dream Theory

Some dream theorists have ventured to say that the dreamer plays a more active role in the dream's construction, giving rise to a view of the dream as an indeterminate, interactive *process*. For instance, Jung cited the dreamer's direct participation in the co-creation of the manifest dream when he said,

> This constellation [dream image] is the result of the spontaneous activity of the unconscious on one hand and of momentary conscious situation on the other. The interpretation of its meaning, therefore, can start neither from the conscious alone nor from the unconscious alone, but only from their reciprocal relationship (Jung, 1966; p. 386).

This statement promotes a view of the dream image as a moment-to-moment vectoring of conscious and unconscious influences—a mutable interface between the observer and the unseen. In retrospect, Jung's well-known preoccupation with the archetypal elements in dreams (Delaney, 1993b, p. 206) may have underplayed the dreamer's unique contributions to the dream's creation and the "reciprocal relationship" to which he once alluded.

Boss (1977) implicitly affirmed the co-created nature of at least some dreams, when he asserted that people can exercise volition while dreaming:

> Again and again it happens that a dreamer purposefully decides to intervene in the dream events, then carries out his decision to the letter. Even people who don't quite know what is happening to them in their waking lives, allowing themselves to be driven by their momentary moods, often show astounding strength of will while dreaming (p. 184).

While Boss acknowledged the dreamer's capacity to exercise volition, he did not emphasize this dimension in his approach to dreams, perhaps because a theoretically driven analysis of the

dreamer's influence as a general practice is inconsistent with a purely phenomenological orientation of accepting the dream “as it is.”

Perls viewed the dream as co-created—or even largely self-created—when he argued that the experience of the dream’s "happening to us" is a fiction born of our unwillingness to take responsibility for the dream. Speaking of the dream’s frustrating qualities, Perls says, "You prevent yourself from achieving what you want to achieve. But you don’t experience this as your doing it. You experience this as some other power that is preventing you" (1973, p. 178). For Perls, the dream depicts our alienation from parts of ourselves, the solution to which is a here-and-now dialoguing with the various dream characters and objects. Thus a co-created view of the manifest dream, while implied by Perls’ words, does not figure prominently in the exclusively present-oriented Gestalt method.

Rossi (1972) was the first to articulate an encompassing theory around the dreamer's capacity to reflect upon and freely interact with the dream imagery. In his “co-creative” view of dreaming, the synthesis of new identity takes place through the interaction and dialogue between the dreamer and dream imagery. According to Rossi, dreamer self-awareness manifests to some extent—sometimes minimally—in virtually every dream, such that there is "a continuum of all possible balances of control between the autonomous process and the dreamer’s self-awareness and consciously directed effort" (1972, p. 163). Further, he has observed that as dreamer self-awareness increases, the autonomous quality of the dream decreases. Rossi has continued to develop his theory (2000) without, as yet, translating it into an imminently applicable dream work methodology.

Lucid Dream Research

In his initial work, Rossi (1972) never mentioned “lucid dreaming”—defined as *the experience of becoming aware that one is dreaming during the dream* (Van Eeden, 1913). This is not surprising given the fact that it was not until the late 60s that the work of early lucid dream researchers was introduced in contemporary literature (Green, 1968; Tart, 1968). Subsequent writers (Gackenbach & LaBerge, 1988; Kelzer, 1987; LaBerge,1980, 1985; Sparrow, 1976) demonstrated that some dreamers, at least, were capable of becoming fully conscious in the dream, and acting creatively and autonomously during the experience. LaBerge's *Lucid Dreaming* (1985) has been hailed as "one of the most influential books on modern dream research since Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams,*" and "a major turning point in twentieth-century dream study" (Bulkeley, 1994, p. 59). And yet, one can argue that the phenomenon of lucid dreaming has not influenced the practice of clinical dream analysis to any significant extent. Delaney’s (1993a) review of contemporary approaches to dream analysis includes only a single passing reference to lucid dreaming (Flowers, 1993, p. 251). While Delaney's work is dated, it appeared over a decade after lucid dreaming was established as a REM-correlated phenomenon (Hearne, 1978; LaBerge, 1982), and two decades after Rossi (1972) introduced his own view of the co-creative nature of dreaming. Hill's more recent works (1996; 2003) on the use of dreams in psychotherapy mention lucid dreaming in the larger context of various strategies for changing unpleasant dream endings (p. 110-120), but stops short of incorporating a co-created view of the dream's formation.

Lucid dream researchers may have undermined lucid dreaming's broader impact on the field of dream analysis by minimizing the importance of the dream imagery in favor of

emphasizing the lucid dreamer's virtually unlimited powers. LaBerge and Reingold (1990) capture this pioneering spirit when they say,

> If fully lucid, you would realize that the entire dream world was your own creation, and with this awareness might come an exhilarating feeling of freedom. Nothing external, no laws of society or physics, would constrain your experience; you could do anything your mind could conceive (1990, p. 14-15).

Such enthusiasm can tilt so far in the direction of solipsism that the dream imagery, by implication, ceases to have any independent agency or meaning apart from the dreamer. While this emphasis on the dreamer's powers may compensate for the traditional focus on content, it overlooks the possibility that the dream may be an interactive process between functionally independent systems, both of which deserve consideration in the analysis of dreams.

Content-focused approaches to dream analysis fail to acknowledge the possibility of the functional independence of the dreamer and the interactive potential inherent in every dream. Conversely, the singular quest for lucidity effectively overshadows the relational potential of the dream by overlooking the independent agency of the imagery. Our conception of CDT effectively synthesizes these two orientations. It acknowledges the role of dreamer awareness and responsiveness, while maintaining a view of the dream imagery as a somewhat autonomous creation. By regarding the dream as an interactive process, CDT preserves a relational orientation to the dream experience.

A Crucial Question

Lucid dream researchers, by placing so much emphasis on lucidity per se, may have inadvertently overlooked the presence of nonlucid reflective awareness in ordinary dreams,

leaving open the important question*: Can the ordinary, nonlucid dream be regarded as an interactive process between the dream content and a somewhat reflective, freely choosing agent?*

The validity of CDT ultimately depends on the answer to this question. If the answer is "yes," then researchers and dream workers can legitimately turn their attention to the analysis of the dreamer-dream interactive process. If, however, the answer is "no," then CDT cannot reasonably apply to the vast majority of dreams reported, and an approach to dream analysis based on CDT would have to be reserved for those dreams in which the dreamer is clearly reflecting on alternatives, and exercising free will. During the early years of modern lucid dream research, Rechtschaffen expressed a belief that the answer was "no":

> Only when we can see the possibility of the lucid dream do we fully realize what a massively non-reflective state dreaming usually is—what a truly distinctive psychological experience it is. In fact, I can think of no other single state short of severe and chronic psychosis in which there is such a persistent, massive, regular loss of reflectiveness . . . (Rechtschaffen, 1978)

Rechtschaffen's (1978) statement contrasts starkly with Rossi's observation that there is a "continuum of all possible balances of control between the autonomous process and the dreamer's self-awareness and consciously directed effort" (1972, p. 163). Commenting on this discrepancy, Moffitt (2000) acknowledges that in a preliminary study of Rossi's Self Reflectiveness Scale (Rossi, 2000), most dreams scored low on reflectiveness, but that frequent dream recallers scored "slightly but significantly higher" than low recallers. On the basis of this finding, Moffitt concluded, "In Rossi's terms, it could be argued that Rechtschaffen painted with too broad a brush, ignoring . . . the

potential for the emergence of self-reflective awareness in dreaming" (Moffit, p. 151). Some researchers agree theoretically with Rechtschaffen that reflective awareness is temporarily withheld in dreaming (Cicogna & Bosinelli, 2001) to allow for the consolidation of new information into long-term memory. Weinstein, et al. (1988) find support for this hypothesis in the discussion of their research. However, other studies have found evidence of significant measurable reflective awareness in ordinary dreams (Kosmova & Wolman, 2006; Snyder, 1970), or shown that reflectiveness can be enhanced through a variety of pre-sleep strategies (Purcell, 1987; Sparrow, 1983). One might ask, What accounts for these contrasting findings? We believe that there are two unacknowledged factors that may account for the apparent paucity of reflective awareness in dream reports.

Factor One: The Theory of Mimesis

The traditional practice of dream interpretation treats the dream "as a *product* drawn from sleeping into waking, to be worked with by the application of various *waking* techniques" (Moffit 2000, p. 162). Whether one believes the dream is a clever disguise for an unacceptable truth (Freud, 1900/1965), the message itself (Jung, 1984, 1986), a part of ourselves from which we are alienated (Perls, 1968, 1973), or another experience in the life of the individual (Boss, 1958, 1977), there is an assumption embedded in the Western view of dreaming—that the dream is a product whose value lies in the consideration of its visual content.

The assumption that the dream is synonymous with its visual content can be traced to ancient Greece and the theory of *mimesis.* Plato believed that the physical world

was a mere shadow of the supraordinate realm, and that dreams and art, in turn, mirrored the physical world. From this premise, dream content came to be seen as *representative* of the world we knew. This belief is so deeply embedded in the Western worldview that most of are us are unaware of its influence. Sontag puts it this way:

> The fact is, all Western consciousness of and reflection upon art, have remained within the confines staked out by the Greek theory of art [and dreams] as mimesis or representation . . . it is still assumed that a work of art is its content. Or, as it's usually put today, that a work of art by definition says something" (1966, p. 4).

Maimonides (1135-1204) is known to have said, “An unexamined dream is like an unopened letter.” These widely-quoted words suggest that the dream contains *information* about our waking lives that has to be translated to be of any value. This approach has time-tested usefulness, but it also has its limitations. When one contemplates a completed work of art, or a published text, it may make sense to analyze its content in terms of what it means or says, or what its creator intended. But when a dream can unfold in a number of possible directions based on the dreamer’s responses to it, treating the experience as a fixed, interpretable communication effectively disregards the dreamer's influence in the quest for the dream content’s presumed meaning.

Consider, for instance, a recurring dream, in which a 23-year old man dreamt—repeatedly over the course of a year that a deceased friend kept appearing and attacking him. During the first several of these nonlucid dreams, the dreamer did what most people do: He tried to get away. But in one dream that took place months after the series began, he fought back when his old friend cornered him and attacked him with a knife. To the

dreamer's surprise, he managed to disarm the assailant. Shortly afterward, he dreamt that his old friend attacked him, pinned him the ground, and proceeded to pummel the dreamer's face. The dreamer believed that the man would soon kill him, but in struggling for his life, he managed to free one arm. Instead of hitting the attacker, the dreamer simply rubbed the man's shoulder. The crazed assailant immediately stopped hitting him and began to cry, saying over and over again, "I only want to be loved" (Sparrow, 1997).

It is likely that interpreting the content of each dream in this series would have produced useful information. However, the greater value from a relational or therapeutic standpoint can be seen in the dreamer's increasing relational competence (Jordan, 1999) over the course of the dream series, the reciprocal changes in the behavior of the dream character, and the overall enchancement of the dreamer-dream relationship.

This is no different than the way that counselors treat most waking experiences that clients disclose in therapy. Upon receiving an account of a waking experience, we do not interpret it as a fixed event that has a message. To the contrary, we assume that the person was a somewhat freely acting agent involved in an interactive exchange with the environment and other people Thus we treat any account as an interactive process that was indeterminate from the outset. We listen for feelings, thoughts, assumptions, and behaviors that may have influenced the direction or quality of the experience. This sensitivity to the constructed nature of a person's narrative allows us to communicate an empathic understanding of how these subjective influences interact with the environment to codetermine one's experience of the world. Such an orientation mirrors the shift away from *realism* or modernism with its emphasis on the independent existence of the world

toward *idealism* with its emphasis on subjective and phenomenological knowledge. Idealism's postmodern expression of *social constructionism* (Gergen, 1985, 1999) stresses the client's reality without disputing whether it is accurate or rational (Weishaar, 1993), and has deeply influenced modern psychotherapy (Berger & Luckman, 1967) by challenging the role of the expert and objective assessment methods, and by mandating a multicultural approach. Similarly, if the dream is constructed through the interaction between the dreamer and the dream content, then effective dream analysis can proceed only on the basis of a method that reflects this constructionist orientation.

In summary, the suppression of reflectiveness in the dream report by the dreamer may be due to a paradigm-driven emphasis on dream content as the sole carrier of meaning. That is, if dreamers are governed by the assumption that *the dream is its content,* as per the theory of mimesis, then they will record their experiences accordingly with an emphasis on the content and a concomitant disregard for the dreamer's subjective states. Then, when evaluating such reports, researchers and dream analysts who are influenced by the same assumption may further disregard whatever traces of reflective awareness may remain in the dreamer's report. Subtly influenced by the same unexamined premise, dreamers, researchers and dream analysts alike may unwittingly produce an experience that fits their jointly held paradigm.

Factor Two: Punctuated Communication

Another possible reason that dream reports exhibit minimal reflective awareness may stem from the way that people minimize their role in interpersonal conflict. Systemic theorists have observed that when people report stressful exchanges with others, they

tend to emphasize the causal nature of what the other person did. In turn, they tend to see themselves as passive participants or victims of the other person's actions. Bateson and Jackson (1964) referred to this as *punctuated* communication. Because we know that dreams overrepresent interpersonal conflict and violence (Hall & Van de Castle, 1966), it makes sense that dreamers minimize their roles in having promoted or fueled the unpleasantness, and that such dream reports thereby suffer from a commensurate absence of dreamer agency.

Overcoming the Barriers to Reporting Reflective Awareness in Dreams

In summary, the apparent absence of reflective awareness in nonlucid dreams may be a function, at least in part, of how dreamers perceive, recall and report their dreams. Kahan & LaBerge have noted the way that dreamers tend to report only the concrete attributes of the dream, such as *where*, *when*, *what*, and *who* (1994, p. 237), and that "this concentration on recounting the story of the dream does not allow researchers to discern how the dreamers recognize their own experiencing and doing" (Kozmova & Wolman, 2006, p. 201). While one might expect a person to recall "their own experiencing and doing" during the original dream, this subjective dimension may be left out due, in part, to the two factors that we have cited.

Significantly, Kozmova & Wolman (2006) implemented a style of inquiry in their study which effectively *elicited* what the dreamer had originally experienced, but had not recorded. They ". . . investigated experiential features and self-knowledge that are a) not directly observable and retrievable during dreaming, b) probably would not appear in spontaneous dream reports, and c) might nevertheless be retrievable after a certain period

of time" (p. 201). This approach parallels the mode of inquiry pioneered by Murray Bowen (1978) in marital therapy, in which therapists use *process questions* that are designed to elicit a person's awareness of the impact of his or her assumptions and responses in relationships. Bowen's approach effectively elicits reflective awareness and personal accountability in regard to critical marital events where both parties had been exclusively focused on what the other person was saying and doing.

Such process-oriented inquiry can feasibly counteract the potential suppression of reflective awareness in dream reporting that may be due to the two reasons that we have cited. Until the preoccupation with dream content is more widely challenged, however, it is likely that researchers and therapists who accept CDT will have to alter their instructions for recording and recounting dreams, and/or retroactively tease out instances of reflective awareness and volition that were not included in the dreamer's initial narrative.

A Dream Work Methodology Based on Co-Creative Dream Theory

Some researchers, who have established the capacity of dreamers to increase their reflective awareness through presleep efforts (Purcell, 1987; Sparrow, 1983), have gone on to train individuals to use dreaming as an arena for further self-development. These efforts parallel the trajectory of some of the lucid dream researchers (LaBerge, 1985; LaBerge & Reingold, 1990) and popular dream authors (Garfield, 1995) who, in establishing the availability of lucid dreaming to at least some dreamers, have focused on ways to help people induce lucid dreams. However, we believe that there is a need for an approach to dream analysis based on CDT that permits psychotherapy clients to benefit

from its predictive and explanatory power by retrospectively exploring the dreamer's relationship with the dream imagery. Building upon the clinical work of the first author (Sparrow, 1976, 1978, 1983, 1997, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b) who began developing a dream work methodology based on CDT over 35 years ago, we have arrived at an approach that we believe not only reaps the maximum therapeutic benefit from recollected dreams, but also serves as an effective rehearsal for increasing the dreamer's reflectiveness and interactivity in future dreams, as well as in waking relationships..

As for specific techniques or practices, this method—called the Five Star method (FSM) (Sparrow, 2006, 2007a)—includes or accommodates aspects of well-known dream work approaches, such sharing the dream in the present tense (Perls; 1969; 1973), exploring feelings (Ullman & Zimmerman,1985; Ullman, 1996), listening to the dream as if it is one's own (Taylor, 1992; Ullman & Zimmerman,1985; Ullman, 1996), extracting themes (Delaney, 1993a; Garfield, 2001; Gongaloff, 2006; Sparrow, 1978; Thurston, 1978, 1988), and using non-intrusive methods for analyzing the dream imagery. (Jung, 1974; 1984; Taylor, 1992;). A thorough comparison of FSM and the above-cited dream work approaches exceeds the scope of this paper, but FSM most specifically departs from the well-known approaches to dream analysis by including an analysis of the dreamer's responses to the dream, the impact of those responses on the visual content, and the reciprocal nature of the dreamer/dream relationship (Sparrow, 2006b, 2007b).

Establishing the Context for Dream Work

The Five Star Method (Sparrow, 2006a, 2007a) commences by sharing the dreams in the first person, present tense (Perls, 1969, 1973). This enables the dreamer to relive

the original experience and its attendant emotions and reflective awareness, and for the facilitator to vicariously appropriate the dream—that is, to experience the dream *as if it were one's own*—as advocated by Taylor (1992) and Ullman (1996). This shared exchange converts a private experience into a here-and-now, shared experience to which the dreamer and facilitator alike can relate directly. Also, by reliving the dream in the present tense from beginning to end, the dreamer is better able to experience the dream's initial indeterminacy and the dreamer's moment-to-moment influence on its unfoldment.

Step One: Sharing Feelings Aroused by the Dream Sharing

Various dream work methods include an assessment of the dreamer's feelings (Gendlin, 1986; Hill, 1996; Mahrer, 1990; Ullman, 1996; Ullman & Zimmerman, 1979). However, CDT posits that the dreamer's feelings, thoughts, assumptions, and behaviors work together to co-create the dream's outcome. With this in mind, the dreamer's feelings provide an initial entry into the dreamer's response set. It is also valuable for the facilitator to reveal his or her feelings as a way to illuminate emotions that may be implied by the dream, but not fully felt by the dreamer.

Take for instance a dream of Sarah—a 42-year-old female client, who had been sexually abused by her stepfather:

> I awake to find myself on a bed. I look up and see holes in the ceiling, and rats dropping down through the holes. Horrified, I jump and run out of the room. The rats seem to chase me, so I fearfully run up a stairway to get away from them. When I reach the top, I turn around to see if the rats are still following me. A huge rat is climbing the stairs and is within a few steps of where I stand. I look at it

> closely, and I'm surprised to see that its fur looks soft and lustrous. Intrigued by its beauty, I reach down as it comes closer and touch its fur. As soon as I do, the rat changes into a snow leopard.

When asked to describe her feelings in the dream, the dreamer said, "terror," "nausea," "hopelessness," and then—toward the end of the dream— "fascination," and "relief." By listening to the dream as if it had been his own, the therapist (first author) felt all of the dreamer's feelings in addition to "courage." He shared these feelings with the dreamer, as is customary during this initial step.

Step Two: Formulating the Process Narrative or Story Line

Some dream analysts have formulated lists of "themes" that typically occur in dreams (Garfield, 2001; Gongloff, 2006). However, such an approach runs the risk of fitting the dream into pre-established categories. We have taken a purely phenomenological approach to summarizing the dream's underlying structure (Sparrow, 1978; Thurston; 1978; 1988) and prefer the phrase "process narrative" to describe the objective, even though the phrase "simple story line" (Thurston, 1988) provides an excellent way to describe this step to client/dreamers.

To formulate the process narrative, all one has to do is to restate the dream's essential action while removing the specific names of characters, colors, places, and objects. All interpretive and evaluative statements are discouraged during this step. A correctly formulated process narrative might be, "Someone is trying to decide between two courses of action, one apparently easy and the other more challenging."

Systems-oriented family therapists, and group leaders familiar with Lewin’s concept of field theory (1951), will recognize the importance of observing and describing *how* the dreamer and the dream imagery are relating without reference to *what* is being communicated. This content-free description highlights the relationship dynamics that perpetuate or alleviate distress, and paves the way for interventions that can restructure problematic interactional patterns and foster relational competence (Jordan, 1999) without trying to resolve the problem on the level of content alone.

In regard to Sarah’s dream of the rats, the therapist and client worked together to formulate the dream's process narrative. This joint effort has the effect of underscoring the client’s unique and valued perspective, and ensures that the final version bears the stamp of the client’s authorship. They agreed it was, "Someone becomes afraid of something and tries to get away from it, but eventually considers it more closely and discovers attractive qualities that she was previously unaware of.” As a generic summary of the dream’s story line, the process narrative illuminates the existing structure of the dream without encumbering it with assumptions and interpretive impositions, thus protecting the dreamer from the facilitator’s projections as well as simplistic, precipitous conclusions. At this point in the process, it is not uncommon for the dreamer to see parallels between the process narrative and a waking relationship, and to conclude that the dream is “about” that relationship . Nonetheless, we have found that it is important to encourage the dreamer to continue to the next step, if time permits, in order to consider the dreamer’s role in the interactive process. That is, to become focused on the idea that the dream is “about” a familiar waking scenario may distract the dreamer from examining

the way that he or she is responding or *relating* to the dream and waking scenario in similar ways.

Step Three: Analyzing the Dreamer's Responses to the Dream

This step is the heart of FSM, and is a pure outgrowth of CDT. Helping the dreamer see the places where his or her responses may have made a difference represents a significant departure from traditional dream analysis. Because of its novelty, it may pose somewhat of a challenge with clients who are new to this way of thinking. But once the dreamer becomes aware of his or her responses in the dream, dream analysis takes on a new dimension of troubleshooting the dreamer's responses and imagining new outcomes in future dreams and parallel waking relationships.

To accomplish this step, the facilitator and the dreamer look for points in the dream where the dreamer responded—emotionally, cognitively, and/or behaviorally—in such ways that could have affected the course of the dream from thereon. As we have stated, some of these responses may be entirely unstated in the dreamer’s initial recollection, so it may take some practice to elicit the more subtle dimensions of the dreamer’s responses. Subtle or otherwise, these response points are like forks in the path where the dreamer effectively determines which way to go by his or her reactions to the visual imagery.

Then, the facilitator and dreamer work together to critique the dreamer's responses to the dream encounters, and to imagine what else the dreamer might have done differently at the obvious choice points in the dream. Following this freewheeling consideration of alternatives, the facilitator engages the dreamer in determining whether

the dreamer's responses were predictable, or a departure from his or her usual reaction to such situations. As a final measure, the facilitator may ask the dreamer what he or she would have preferred to do in the dream, as well as what he or she would like to do differently in future dreams with similar situations. This consideration of diverse responses to the dream has a way of challenging old patterns of relating to the world, discerning emerging competencies, and introducing alternatives for future consideration.

Of course, the dreamer sets the standard for the direction of desirable change. What is considered "better" has more to do with what deviates constructively from a person's chronic patterns of relating. This criterion helps the facilitator and dreamer evaluate the dreamer's responses against a customary or habitual style of relating, which may become clearer over time as the person shares further dreams and/or waking experiences in which the customary style of relating becomes evident.

It is not unusual for a highly significant response in the dream to seem entirely natural to the dreamer, especially if it reflects the dreamer's habitual style in responding to similar situations. For instance, Sarah was inclined to accept without question her decision to flee from the rats. But even though it was a "natural" and ordinary response, from the standpoint of CDT, it set in motion everything that followed. As such, it was a highly significant moment that needs to be underscored and challenged. Existential therapists will recognize the importance of recovering of a sense of free will and personal responsibility in the midst of outwardly overwhelming circumstances. Such a discovery has the potential of freeing oneself from the tendency to blame circumstances and others, and forging an authentic, self-determined existence. From a different standpoint,

relational-cultural theory encourages an examination of how a dreamer's avoidant responses to dream stress, such as Sarah's flight from the rats, may represent "strategies of disconnection" (Miller, 1988) designed to avoid the vulnerability that it takes to fully connect with others in growth-enhancing relationships.

Step Three helps dreamers become more aware of chronic dysfunctional responses *and* emergent competencies, both of which are easily overlooked in the context of the often-distressing circumstances depicted by the dream content. To put it simply, the interpersonal exchange between therapist and client in Step Three offsets the tendency of dreamers to disavow responsibility for the outcome of the dream. While this step can provoke the dreamer's defensiveness by raising questions about unexamined assumptions and reactions, especially when the dreamer's responses seem counterproductive, it represents the kind of cognitive-behavioral inquiry that characterizes contemporary action-oriented therapies, such as Cognitive Therapy, Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy, and Reality Therapy. Further, by highlighting emergent competencies, Step Three comes into alignment with the philosophy and objectives of competency-based therapies such as Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (de Schazer, 1988; de Shazer, et. al, 2007), and helps to correct longstanding survival "strategies of disconnection" (Miller, 1988) that may have "worked" to protect the client from relational wounding, but have nonetheless prevented authentic, growth-enhancing relationships. In this regard, the therapist's conversation with Sarah highlighted her bold and surprising willingness to make contact with the rat, and left the dreamer considering how this pivotal stance could

translate into a broad-based willingness to engage a variety of life challenges with greater curiosity, courage,, and vulnerability

While Sarah never became lucid in her dream of the rats, she was nonetheless able to stop and reflect, and to change her responses to the dream imagery. While her turnaround lacked the drama of a full-blown lucid experience, it clearly altered the course of an experience that could have turned out much differently. It is, therefore, incumbent on the dream worker to underscore, even to exaggerate the impact of these moments so that clients will learn to recognize the importance of their choices and actions on the dream's outcome. By underscoring these shifts in the dreamer's relationship to the dream content, the therapist helps the client become more aware of her emerging relational competence (Jordan, 1999).

Step Four: Analysis of the Imagery

In this step of FSM, the facilitator assists the dreamer in exploring how imagery and scene transformations are reciprocally related to dreamer's responses. This contingent relationship may not be evident to the dreamer, who may experience the changes as unrelated to his or her responses at the time. However, by emphasizing the impact of the dreamer's freely chosen responses, the facilitator draws a contingent relationship between dreamer response and outer change, thus continuing to support a sense of personal responsibility and relational competence (Jordan, 1999).

While standard nonintrusive approaches to imagery analysis—such as Jung's amplification method, and the Gestalt practice of dialoguing with the images—can be introduced in Step Four, a nontraditional approach to the imagery proceeds from the

principles of CDT. Just as the dreamer's responses are no longer considered a *given* in CDT, the imagery itself is no longer considered *static*: Both can change in the course of a single dream's unfolding process. Indeed, changes in the dreamer's responses and the dream content are viewed as reciprocally related, such that a change in one will usually mirror a change in the other (Sparrow, 2006b; 2007b).

In regard to Sarah, it was, of course, useful to amplify her associations to the rats, the bed, the staircase, and the snow leopard. When her associations to the rat image were explored, she felt that it represented both the loathsome qualities of her perpetrator, as well as the unwanted aspects of her own sexuality. At the time of the dream, she was unable to embrace her sexuality as a positive aspect of her self expression and marital intimacy, and expressed a certain guardedness in her relationship with her therapist, who was also a man She associated the bed to the usual context of sexual encounters, and her flight from the bed as her contemporary ambivalence toward her sexuality that formed the basis for various “strategies of disconnection” (Miller, 1988). Her flight up the stairs paralleled her unsuccessful attempts to transcend her childhood memories through concerted spiritual practices. As for the snow leopard, Sarah—who had studied the world religions and embraced an ecumenical approach to spiritual practice—associated it with the high spirituality of Tibet. As such, the snow leopard represented a synthesis of her rejected instinctuality and her spiritual aspirations, providing a powerful symbol for courageous efforts to reconnect through while allowing herself to become vulnerable again.

Beyond supporting these conventional amplifications of the dream imagery, the Five Star Method helped Sarah to see how the dream's dramatic reversal was contingent upon her courageous response to the rat, and that the appearance of the snow leopard was itself made possible by her willingness to touch the rat's fur. Being able to reach out to the rat represented a simultaneous act of curiosity and acceptance—a profound rapprochement that permitted her instantly to put aside her lifelong “strategies of disconnection” (Miller, 1988) in favor of experiencing the unsullied power and beauty of her instinctual nature in the form of the snow leopard.

Of course, few dreams reveal such bold responses and dramatic reversals. But regardless, the facilitator engages the dreamer in examining *any* changes in dream imagery that might relate to, or mirror the dreamer's changes in response. Just as systems-oriented therapists will teach family members to see their relationship problems as a function of circular causality or *reciprocity* (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004, p. 8), a dream worker using FSM will encourage the dreamer to learn to see the impact of his or her reactions on the dream imagery itself, and to extrapolate on possible changes in the relationship that may have occurred if the responses would have been different. Even if the dreamer and the dream imagery are "locked" into a relationship of escalating tension—as Sarah and the rats had been prior to the dreamer's remarkable response—the facilitator can assist the dreamer in imagining what could have happened if the dreamer's stance had been different. The use of process questions (Bowen, 1978), mentioned previously, is especially useful at this point in the dream work.

At this stage in the dream work, the facilitator also asks the dreamer to imagine what the culmination of such an encounter would look like—in future dreams or parallel waking relationships. Such a consideration leads naturally to the idea of identifying relationship contexts in which to apply the fruits of the dream work process.

Step Five: Applying the Dream Work

Because FSM is founded on the dreamer's capacity to enact a variety of responses to the dream—and correspondingly, in parallel waking relationships—the final step of the dream work process involves identifying areas of one's life where new responses might precipitate positive changes. If the dreamer can see a parallel between the dream issue and some waking situation, then the facilitator may encourage the dreamer to practice new, contextually appropriate responses that can be made in that waking life relationship.

As for Sarah, the dream work encouraged her to accept the possibility that her willingness to become aware of, and to confront her past was bringing about healing and reconciliation, and that a closer relationship with her sexuality could be confidently explored—not apart from, but aligned with her highest aspirations. Following this dream, Sarah evidenced a greater degree of emotional spontaneity and latitude in both individual and group therapy, and reported heightened arousal and sexual satisfaction in her marriage, as well.

Possible Research Directions

While we have outlined in this paper two factors that may account for the paucity of reflective awareness in dream reports, further research is clearly indicated in order to establish whether measurable reflective awareness exists in the original dream experience

and/or can be elicited through process-oriented inquiry; whether the dreamer-dream interaction exhibits true reciprocity; and whether the dreamer-dream interactive process evidences a particular direction or purpose. In specific, three related testable hypotheses grow out of CDT.

Hypothesis One: Dreamers evidence measurable reflective awareness and agency in the recollection of their dreams.

This hypothesis is consistent with Rossi's observation that dreams reflect "a continuum of all possible balances of control between the autonomous process and the dreamer's self-awareness and consciously directed effort" (1972, p. 163). There is some empirical support for this hypothesis (Kasmova & Wolman, 2006; Snyder, 1970), and it can be further tested by altering the instructions that researchers use in soliciting dream reports to offset the influences of above-cited factors that weigh against including statements indicating reflective awareness in dream reports, such as "I felt", "I believed," "I was aware that..." or "I wondered..." It would relatively simple to compare the occurrence of such I-statements in dreams solicited through traditional content-focused instructions and those obtained through instructions that also inquire into the dreamer's subjective awarenesses during the dream.

Corollary One: The degree of measurable reflective awareness in dream reports is influenced negatively by mimesis—that is, the belief that a dream's value lies in the analysis of its visual content (Factor One). This could be tested by surveying the extent to which dreamers subscribe to the theory of mimesis. Any subject who believes in the possibility of enhanced dreamer awareness and agency—perhaps through exposure to the

lucid dream literature—will likely evidence a different reporting style than those believing that the dream is synonymous with its visual content. Thus, a research study could be conducted in which measures of reflective awareness in dream reports would be taken before and after exposing subjects to the premise that dreamers can potentially experience significant awareness and agency in their dreams.

Corollary Two: The degree of measurable reflective awareness in dream reports is influenced by the tendency for people to minimize their contributions to conflict and violence (Factor Two). This can be tested by comparing the degree of reflective awareness in low-conflict and high-conflicts dreams of the same persons. If conflict exerts a dampening effect on reflective awareness in dream reports—and because we know that dreams contain more conflict and violence than waking experiences (Hall & Van de Castle, 1964)—we could conclude that punctuated communication (Bateson & Jackson, 1964) accounts for lower overall reflective awareness in dream reports than in waking recollections.

Corollary Three: Dreamer reflectiveness that was present in the original dream can be accessed through a style of inquiry that focuses on the dreamer's subjective awarenesses during the dream's unfoldment. This has already been demonstrated, in particular, by Kozmova & Wolman (2006), and is a methodology commonly employed in marital therapy to restore a sense self-awareness, choice, and personal accountability in relationship conflicts (Bowen, 1978).

Hypothesis Two: The dreamer and the dream content are functionally autonomous systems, and the interaction between them reveals circular causality, or reciprocity.

It is a small step to go from observing correlated changes in dreamer responses and dream imagery to concluding that the changes are causally related. Borrowing from general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968; Weiner, 1948), Bateson hypothesized that living systems are constantly monitoring the feedback they are receiving, and adjusting their output accordingly. This leads to the notion of circularity as opposed to simple cause and effect in understanding the origins and perpetuation of relationship dynamics. Bateson and his colleagues are credited for establishing that "reciprocity is the governing principle of relationship" (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004, p. 8). From the perspective of systems theory, reciprocity should be observable in dreams if the dreamer and the dream are at least somewhat autonomous systems and capable of adjusting to feedback from the other.

This hypothesis can be tested by tracking changes in dreamer response and dream imagery through the dream report for evidence of circular causality. That is, if a dreamer response leads to a shift in imagery—which, in turn, prompts another response from the dreamer, and so on—then it would be parsimonious to conclude that the dream process reflects a reciprocal relationship between functionally independent systems. However, it is also necessary to ascertain if this process is truly *bidirectional*; that is, if the "first cause" can conceivably originate in either system. As Tarnas (2006) says, ". . . in a relationship of true reciprocity—the potential communication of meaning and purpose must be able to move in both directions" (P. 484-485). If bidirectional, reciprocal exchanges are evident in dreams, than it is reasonable to conclude that dreams represent an unfolding relationship between independent systems. However, if the dreamer (or the

imagery) is observed to be the "first cause" in any measurable alteration of the dream drama, then the systems are not in a true reciprocal relationship. A reciprocal relationship requires that each system register and adjust to the feedback received from the other.

While we have not addressed the psychophysiological research that might support CDT, recent developments in that field do indicate a growing recognition that dreaming involves two distinct mechanisms (Nielsen, 2000). Those theorists who believe that dreams originate in the brainstem and have no psychological meaning (Hobson & McCarley, 1977; Hobson et al., 2000) have been challenged by researchers who have established that dreaming disappears when certain cortical structures (Solms, 2000) have been damaged. A compromise theory supports a “two generator” view of dreaming (Nielsen, 2000). Such a model offers the possibility that dreams represent a concurrent activation of higher and lower brain centers, thus raising the question of how these centers interface and produce the experience of dreaming. Such a model may eventually support CDT.

Hypothesis Three: The dreamer-dream interactive process reveals no discernible purpose or function. This hypothesis is stated in the null, because CDT is not, in itself, a theory of dream function. Just as a process-oriented therapist will examine *how* a client is relating to others, rather than *what* is being communicated—or, for that matter, *why*—a researcher or therapist who accepts CDT may conduct an interactional analysis of the dream without necessarily assigning an overall purpose to the experience. Refraining from taking a position on overall dream function respects the dimensionality of dreaming, and enables a nonintrusive, value-free assessment of the phenomenology of the dream

process. However, if the interactive process in a particular dream, or in a series of dreams, reveals a clear purpose, then Hypothesis Three can be rejected without necessarily establishing a single function for *all* dreams.

In summary, shifting to a co-created view of the dream permits one to perceive and measure aspects of the dream that make little sense within a traditional content-oriented approach. Specifically, CDT predicts that dreams reveal measurable *dreamer awarenesses and responses* (Hypothesis One) that precipitate *shifts in imagery* which, in turn, impact the dreamer's subsequent awarenesses and responses (Hypothesis Two). This reciprocal process, in turn, may or may not reflect a directional thrust or purpose (Hypothesis Three).

Conclusions

Dream analysis has traditionally involved treating the dream as a fixed narrative and the dreamer as a passive witness, and proceeding to analyze the visual content for its presumed meaning. Add to that the object-oriented language that characterizes the traditional consideration of dream "symbols" and "content" apart from the dreamer, and dream interpretation arguably fails to acknowledge the social constructionistic and relational flavor of contemporary psychotherapy, with its emphasis on subjectivity, context, and relationship. This approach owes it dominance, in part, to a pervasive belief rooted in our cultural foundations, as well as to the assumption that dreamers are largely incapable of reflecting upon, and interacting with their dreams. The model that we have proposed as a basis for a therapeutic approach to dream analysis enjoys considerable

theoretical support, and some empirical validation. It treats the dream as an interactive, relational process which is indeterminate from the outset and co-created by the dreamer's responses to the dream content. As such, the dream becomes a way of evaluating the dreamer's responses toward dream scenarios and parallel waking relatioships, rather than interpreting aspects of the dream content which may remain outside of the dreamer's immediate comprehension (Sparrow, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b).

The independent analysis of the imagery is, at best, an intuitive process that opens the door to precipitous conclusions on the part of the dreamer and intrusive projections on the part of the facilitator, alike. Because of this, some of the best-known contemporary dream work methods endeavor to insulate the dreamer from the interpretive leaps of the dream facilitator(s) (Delaney, 1993b; Flowers, 1993; Ullman, 1996; Ullman and Zimmerman, 1985). However, as one adopts a co-created view of dreams and a dream work methodology consistent with that paradigm, dream analysis shifts naturally to what the dreamer unequivocally did, could have done, and might conceivably do in future dreams and parallel waking relationships. By focusing on the dreamer's responses and their impact on the imagery, an understanding of the dream can be furthered without depending as much on a special knowledge of dream symbology—a knowledge that too often elevates the facilitator to the status of an expert. By remaining focused on the dreamer, a co-created view of the dream supports a spirited and engaging dialogue between the dreamer and the facilitator that may stimulate an awareness of chronic patterns of responding, deconstruct various "strategies of disconnection" (Miller, 1988), underscore emerging competencies, and foster a commitment to relating inwardly and

outwardly in more resilient and creative ways. Because this dialogue between the therapist and the client focuses on the dream's interactional process rather than on ambiguous symbolic content, the contributions of the therapist are, from our experience, less likely to be driven by so-called expert knowledge. Conversely, the client is more willing to entertain the therapist's contributions because they are derived from the client's own stated and felt experience. In such a grounded context, the therapist is arguably less fettered but more congruent with the client at the same time. By working to illuminate the dream process, and the dreamer's evident and latent competencies, the therapeutic relationship begins to reflect on an *inter*personal level the *intra*personal relational dynamism acknowledged and fostered by the Five Star Method.

Unlike traditional content-oriented approaches, a co-created approach to dream analysis comes into alignment with a variety of themes in contemporary psychotherapy, including the centrality of choice, freedom, and personal responsibility in existential therapies; the constructed nature of personal reality in social constructionism and postmodern therapies; the reciprocal nature of human relationships in family systems; and the fundamental need for connection in relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 1999). As a co-created view of the dream gathers more support from research and clinical application, dream analysis may increasingly come to be seen as a modality that is consistent with a compentency-based, relational focus in contemporary counseling and psychotherapy.

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