

Social Dreaming in a Transactional Analysis Context

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Abstract

We all dream, individually and collectively. The latter is called "social dreaming," an established practice in a number of groups and societies. For example, elders in some tribes gather to share dreams in order to find direction. In the analytic world, social dreaming was discovered to be an important way of increasing awareness of aspects of the collectively held unconscious. In this article, the concept of the social dreaming matrix is explored along with the way it was applied and experienced during the 18th bi-annual transactional analysis conference held in Sydney, Australia, in 2006. Themes and issues from the conference experience are discussed.

Dreaming and Social Dreaming

There is a significant body of psychotherapy literature on the topic of dreaming, beginning with Freud's (1900/1955) *Traumdeutung* (translated as *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Unfortunately, much of it is based on inadequate English translations of what Freud originally meant. It was Bettelheim (1983/1991) who brought back Freud's deep sense of our holistic souls ("psyche" actually means "soul") and of psychoanalysts as "ministers of souls," something that was almost totally omitted from English translations of Freud's work. Instead, working with dreams was most often portrayed as an exclusively mental activity, something that happened in our minds. Bettelheim argued that a translation such as "the interpretation of dreams" implicitly promised a clear-cut, definite explanation of dreams (p. 67), far from the original meaning of "deutung," which is much more explorative. In fact, Bettelheim quotes Freud as saying that a dream is "a result of the activity of our own soul" (p. 71). Bettelheim suggested that a better translation for *Traumdeutung* would have been "An Inquiry for the Meaning of Dreams" (p. 70).

When a dream is considered to be more than just a mental activity, it delves into the totality of our existence, including our brains, bodies, and souls. It refers to our history, present, and future and to our existence as an individual as well as an individual-in-community. In this context, Bion's (1961) distinction between the world of the egocentric and the sociocentric is important; it is the divide between narcissism and social-ism. Dreams fit into both areas: We can look for their individual meaning for the dreamer as well as their collective meaning for the community in which the dreamer dreams. This leaves room for the thought that dreams are around, looking for a dreamer in order to be dreamt.

Berne included dreams in his understanding of individual script and described dreaming as the process during which, at night, when the controlling ego is asleep, repressed id wishes "show themselves in distinguished form in dreams" (Berne, 1947/1971, p. 76). That is what Freud meant about dreams being the royal road to the individual unconscious. In an attempt to find individual meaning for a dream, one often starts by regarding all elements (people, features, events) of the dream as personal projections and therefore parts of oneself. After all, the dreamer is the maker of the dream, and whatever one puts into the dream must be what is in oneself. A dream is, therefore, owned by the dreamer: It is a personal possession. In transactional analysis, this way of looking at dreams was worked out in the rededication approach (Goulding & Goulding, 1979) and more recently by Bowater (2003). This view fits well in individualistic Western psychology, at the expense, however, of discounting a more group-centered social psychology. It is more Jungian than Freudian to see that dreams are a collective as well as an individual phenomenon.

We-ness

Extending our existence into the social systems in which we live, it is important to take