A new method of dream analysis congruent with contemporary counseling approaches

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Summary. Dream analysis appears to deepen and accelerate the psychotherapeutic process, but it is not widely employed in modern practice. This may be due, in part, to the belief that the value of a dream lies in the analysis of its visual content, and that reflective awareness, volition, and personal responsibility—qualities valued highly by non-psychodynamic therapies—are presumed to be lacking in most dreams. While modern research has largely overturned this view, it may still impede the adoption of dream analysis by modern psychotherapists. Add to that a psychotherapist's lack of training and concomitant discomfort with his or her own dreams and it is no surprise that dream work utilization remains low. Drawing on an array of theoretical, clinical, and empirical sources, this paper presents a view of normal dreaming as an interactive process between the dreamer and the dream imagery, and views the dream outcome as a co-determined or co-created experience. By shifting the focus in dream analysis away from content to interactive process, a counselor view the dream in such a way as to support the goals of contemporary therapy. By adopting this paradigm, he or she can assist clients in discerning the dream ego's responses to the dream content, and evaluate how these re-sponses influence the overall experience and, by implication, parallel waking relationships. Such an approach is congruent with the client-centered, competency-based aims of many schools of modern therapy, and thus may result in a more widespread adoption of dream analysis by psychotherapists. The author presents a case example of employing an approach to dream analysis consistent that is congruent with the goals of many of the schools of modern psychotherapy

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1. Introduction

In my role as a counselor educator at the University of Texas-Pan American, I regularly include dream analysis training as part of my group counseling classes. For a topic that is optional, dream analysis is by far the most popular subject that I cover during the semester. I introduce dream work in the context of our full-class sessions, comprised of 16-18 students meeting for the first two hours of a three-hour class. Rather than introducing dream work early in the semester, I wait until the students have a firm grasp of group theory and methods, and have learned to facilitate group process. During the second half of the course, I introduce several advanced methods during our full-class sessions, including dream work. Thereafter, students are encouraged to incorporate dream work into their own small groups, which convene for the final hour of each three-hour class. Meanwhile, I monitor their work from a nearby office by way of live video camera, in order to provide subsequent feedback to the leader, and to intervene if necessary.

Given the enthusiasm expressed by these graduate students, one might think that training future counselors in dream analysis would be a straightforward process of in-troducing one or more of the most commonly employed therapeutic dream work methods, such as the Hill Method (Hill, 1996), the Interview Technique (Delaney, 1993, 195-240; 1996), or the Story Telling Method (Diccico, 2007) for individual therapy, or the Ullman method (Ullman and Zimmerman, 1985; Ullman, 1996) for group work. However, in my experience there is a perceived mismatch between the philosophy and goals of contemporary psychotherapy, and the objectives of dream analysis as it is often understood by untrained therapists.

The Problems Inherent in Teaching Dream Work to Counselors in Training

Studies have shown that dream analysis results in deeper work in the early sessions of therapy (Diemer,, Lobell, Vivino, and Hill, 1996), produces superior client outcome measures when compared with self-esteem and insight work (Falk and Hill, 1995), and increases self-disclosure and exploration (Provost, 1999). Understandably, such outcomes depend somewhat on the clients' level of trust and enthusiasm toward dream sharing (Knox, Hill, Hess, and Crook-Lyon, 2008), as well as the therapist's interest and active solicitation of dream sharing (Hill and Rochlen, 2004).

Despite these encouraging findings, only a small percentage of practicing psychotherapists actively solicit dream reports from their clients. In one study, only 13 percent of the therapists employed dream analysis on a regular basis (Keller, Brown, Maier, Steinfurth, Hall, and Piotrowski, 1995). Another survey (Schredl, Bohusch, Kahl, Mader, and Somesan, 2000) of German psychotherapists indicated that while respondents used dreams in 28 percent of their sessions,

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their clients initiated the dream work twice as often than the therapists did. And in a more recent study (Crook and Hill, 2004), 92 percent of therapists surveyed claimed that they worked with dreams at least occasionally, but only 15 percent had worked with a client's dream during the previous year.

The low utilization of dream work in therapy may be due, in part, to therapists' lack of training and competency in dream analysis, and a concomitant discomfort in discussing client dreams, as well as their own. However, the absence of dream analysis in therapy may also be attributable to the still-popular view that dreams are entirely synonymous with their visual content, and that dream analysis only involves an interpretation of the imagery. While this content intrepretive view has been largely overturned by modern dream research, it still has deep roots our cultural heritage. Indeed, traditional hermeneutics is grounded in the theory of mimetics (Sontag, 1966), which has its origins in ancient Greece. In her famous essay Against Interpretation, Sontag provides a critique that is still relevant to our consideration of dreams today:

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

The focus on interpreting the content of one's experience independent of subjective, contextual and relational considerations is a well recognized problem in contemporary psychotherapy (Young, 2008, p. 144), and is eschewed by a variety of modern schools. For instance, counselors who practice within an existential or client-centered framework consider interpretation to be of minimal importance in the therapeutic process, preferring instead to foster the qualities of here-and-now self-awareness, choice, and personal responsibility in their clients. Similarly, cognitive-behavioral therapists may assume that dreams—if defined principally as visual content—would be deficient in the qualities of thinking and acting, which are central to their paradigm. Meanwhile, therapists who practice systemic or relational therapies, and who favor an analysis of relational process over intrapsychic content, might be deterred from exploring dreams because of the presumed absence of any interactive process in dreams. Regardless of the particular theoretical rationale embraced by the practitioner, Egan's description of the goal of the modern counseling process being to "help clients manage their problems in living more effectively and develop unused or underused opportunities more fully" Egan (2007) shifts the focus in counseling away from a retrospective, intrapsychic interpretation toward a client-centered, competency- and action-based orientation, in which the dreamer is supported and held accountable for his or her contribution to a dynamic relational process.

In this paper, I review factors that can account for the perceived absence of reflective awareness, volition, and responsiveness in dream reports. In addition, I review some empirical findings that support the emergent viewpoint that self-awareness, intentionality, and behavior regulation––once deemed lacking in dreams—can be found in ordinary dreams (Kahan and LaBerge, 2010). On the basis of this foundation, one can reasonably view the dream as 1) an interactive, reciprocal exchange between a reflective and active dream ego, and the dream content, and 2) indeterminate from the outset, and co-determined through the interplay between the dream ego and the emergent dream content. This orientation allows for the autonomous character of dream content, but permits an analysis and troubleshooting of the dream ego's responses to the dream—and by implication, to waking life, as well. This dreamer-focused methodology maps onto a therapeutic process that intends to promote greater self-awareness, responsiveness, and accountability. In reviewing the basis for a co-creative dream theory, I will discuss how dream analysis can draw on concepts and methods that are currently used in psychotherapy, and thus be more easily incorporated into modern practice. Finally, I will outline and demonstrate a systematic approach to dream analysis based on this model.

The Dream as an Interactive, Constructed Process

Approaching the dream as an interactive or constructed experience requires that we treat the dream ego 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?" a dream facilitator who adopts a co-creative model would track the dream ego's interaction with the imagery through the course of the dream. Further, the dream facilitator would ideally ask "process questions" (Bowen, 1978) such as,

What feelings or thoughts prompted your reactions?
How did you respond to what was presented?
How could you have responded differently?
What do think would have happened if you had responded differently?

This shift in perspective does not come easily to novice dream facilitators, who may still be laboring under the popular conception of dreams as visual content only. Thus, before I introduce dream work methods to my graduate counseling students, I ask them to list the questions that a counselor might ask of a client who has just reported a dream. Predictably, they list, "What does this dream mean to you?" "What do you think this dream is telling you?" and "What does this symbol or image mean to you?"

I go on to ask my students to list the questions that a counselor would ask of a client who has just reported a significant waking experience. They predictably list such questions as, "What did you feel when…?" "What did you think about…?" "What did you want to do?" and "What happened when you…?"

After they make this list, I point out the differences between the two approaches, and ask them if they would customarily encourage a client to interpret a recent experience, or try to figure out another person's thoughts or motives. They agree that such an approach would distract the client away from his or her own capabilities and resources. I point out that by encouraging clients to "interpret" everything and everyone that is external to the dream ego, we unwittingly foster a passive relationship to the dream experience in which the dreamer's choices and actions are easily overlooked. Such an orientation contradicts the prevailing therapeutic ideal of encouraging greater self-awareness, responsibility, and agency toward life experiences.

I close my introduction by suggesting to them that we would do well to undertake a similar dreamer-centered approach to dreams if we want clients to benefit therapeuti-

cally from the results of our dream work, but that we need a method that will help us in this endeavor.

The Immediate Advantages of a Dreamer-Focused Approach

None of the prevailing dream work methods (Delaney, 1993, 195-240; 1996; Diccico, 2007; Hill, 1996; Ullman, 1996; Ullman and Zimmerman, 1985) deny an active role for the dream ego. However, neither do they focus principally on the co-determined nature of the dream outcome, nor feature methods for exploring and modifying the dream ego's responses to the dream content. At the risk of creating a straw man, I believe it's important to emphasize the differences between well-established methods and the method described herein, in order to firmly establish an approach that may represent a better fit with many of the schools of modern psychotherapy

While a dreamer-focused inquiry represents a departure from a content-oriented approach, it generates an approach to dream analysis that is congruent with contemporary counseling objectives. Specifically, it fosters an exploration of the dream ego's subjectivity, including awarenesses, choices, and responses. Further, it analyzes the dreaming self's responses for evidence of chronic patterns and/ or emerging competencies, and examines responses and content changes in light of "circular causality" or reciprocity (Bertalanffy, 1968; Weiner, 1948), which is the "governing principle of relationships" according to Nichols (2010). This emphasis on circular causality honors the relational emphasis in systemic therapies and maps the interactive process onto general waking scenarios. This naturally leads to the formulation of a plan of action that respects the emphasis in action-oriented therapies for actual behavior change as the principal fruit of the therapeutic process.

A Significant Question

The validity of employing co-creative dream theory as a framework for understanding ordinary dreams ultimately depends on the answer to the question, Can the ordinary dream be regarded as an interactive process between a sufficiently reflective, freely choosing agent and the dream content? If the answer is "yes," then researchers and dream work facilitators can legitimately turn their attention to the analysis of the dreamer-dream interactive process in every dream.

Rossi (1972) was the first to answer this question in the affirmative. In the early 70s (Rossi, 1972), he articulated a series of hypotheses around the dreamer's capacity to reflect upon and freely interact with the dream imagery. Drawn from a single case study of a client's dreams in therapy, Rossi posited a "co-creative" view of dreaming in which 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 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).

In his initial work, Rossi (1972) never mentioned the term lucid dreaming, which is not surprising given the fact that it was not until the late 60s that Van Eeden's work (1913) was brought into public awareness (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 influencing its outcome. 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, lucid dreaming has not influenced the practice of dream analysis to any significant extent. Delaney's (1993a) review of contemporary approaches to dream interpretation includes only a single passing reference to lucid dreaming as synonymous with dream control, which is a common misconception (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 co-creative dream theory. Hill's more recent work (1996) on the use of dreams in psychotherapy mentions lucid dreaming briefly 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 dream analysis by minimizing the importance of the dream imagery in favor of emphasizing the lucid dreamer's virtually unlimited powers. While this emphasis on the dreamer's powers may compensate for the traditional neglect of the dreamer, it overlooks the possibility that the dream can be seen as an interactive process between functionally independent systems, both of which may deserve equal consideration in the analysis of dreams. In contrast to these one-sided perspectives, cocreative dream theory 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, co-creative theory preserves a relational orientation to the dream experience.

Some researchers have disputed this view of the dream ego's capability, believing instead that reflective awareness is temporarily withheld in dreaming (Cicogna and Bosinelli, 2001) to allow for the consolidation of new information into long-term memory. Weinstein, Schwartz, and Ellman, (1988) found support for this hypothesis in the discussion of their research. However, other studies have found evidence of significant measurable reflective awareness in ordinary dreams (Snyder, 1970; Kozmova and Wolman, 2006; Kahan and LaBerge, 2010). In addressing why it has taken us so long to realize this, Kahan and LaBerge (2010) point to the fact that the scale used previously to content-analyze dreams—the Hall-Van de Castle scale (Hall and Van de Castle, 1966)—focuses primarily on structural or content dimensions, while including a few subjective states, such as anger, sadness, happiness, apprehension and confusion. The development of the MACE (Metacognitive, Affective, Cognitive Experiences) scale (Kahan and LaBerge, 2010), as well as earlier efforts to measure dreamer reflectiveness (Purcell, 1987; Rossi, 1972, 2000; Sparrow, 1983) have shifted the analysis of dream reports to previously unreported dimensions of dreamer subjectivity, including emotion, reflective awareness, interaction, choice, sudden attention, and focused attention.

Co-creative dream theory is congruent with the idea espoused by Jenkins (2012), who regards the dream principally as a narrative that should be treated as a whole with

its own structure, direction, and climax (or lack thereof); but co-creative theory takes it a step further. It views the dream narrative not as a single story, but as a relational event co-created in real time. So the resulting dream narrative is one of many possible stories that could have resulted. Accepting the finished product as the only possible story overlooks the impact of the dreamer's feelings, beliefs, values, and reactions through the course of the real-time encounter, and other possible outcomes that could have resulted. From the standpoint of co-creative theory, the dream worker must introduce the idea that the dream ego is constantly influencing the dream's development, and is, in turn, being influenced by it. By shifting to a co-created view of the dream, the dreamer, upon awakening, is able to perceive and measure aspects of the dream that make little sense within a content-focused approach. Specifically, co-creative theory predicts that dreams reveal measurable dreamer awarenesses and responses that precipitate shifts in imagery which, in turn, impact the dreamer's subsequent awarenesses and responses. This circular causal process establishes a reciprocal relationship between the dreamer and the imagery, from which one may discern a directional thrust of the encounter.

Circular causality, or reciprocity, is a familiar concept to marriage and family therapists (Nichols, 2012), who customarily track the interactive or circular process between family members in order to assist them in acknowledging their respective contributions to a relational process that cannot be reduced conveniently to a single cause or any one person's doing, but rather is supported by constant back-and-forth exchanges . Similarly, from the standpoint of co-creative dream work, the unfoldment of the dream narrative has to be "tracked" in order to discern its circularity. Specifically, the dream work process underscores pivotal moments in the course of its development—moments where the dream ego responds in such a way as to effect a particular shift in the dream narrative, and needs to take responsibility for the impact that he or she had on the dream. Co-creative dream theory views the dream as a "branching" experience, the end of which may be a single narrative, but whose process

entails a number of responses and commensurate imagery changes that could have produced altogether different outcomes. These "branching" moments are characterized by choices or reactions on the part of the dreamer that might, in traditional dream analysis, go unnoticed, but within co-creative theory comprise the centerpiece of the dream work. A dream worker aligned with co-creative theory will listen for these choice moments, and observe any commensurate changes in dream imagery. Thus, instead of asking what a dream means, or what a particular symbol means, the central question regarding imagery from the standpoint of co-creative dream analysis is, "How does the imagery reflect the dream self's mindset and response?" an "How does the imagery change in relation to the dream ego's own changes in response?"

2.   A Dream Work Methodology Based on Co-Creative Dream Theory

Given the necessary limitations in the length of this paper, I have listed some of the differences in emphasis between content-focused dream work and co-creative dream analysis before I introduce and demonstrate a systematic dream work method that is based on co-creative dream theory (see Table 1). Please note that these contrasts do not reflect mutually exclusive or dichotomous orientations as much as priorities.

A systematic approach to dream analysis that treats the dreamer and the dream as separate interacting systems, and addresses each of the above objectives, has recently been introduced (Sparrow, 2006, 2007; Sparrow, G. S. & Thurston, M.A., 2010). In specific, the Five Star Method (FSM) is a dream work methodology based on co-creative dream theory, which I have developed over in the course of over 30 years of outpatient practice. It includes or accommodates aspects of well-known dream work approaches (Gendlin, 1986; Jung, 1974; 1984; Perls; 1969; 1973; Taylor, 1992; Ullman and Zimmerman,1985; Ullman, 1996). However, the Five Star Method features unique interventions and

Table 1. Differences in traditional dream theory and co-creative dream theory

Traditional Dream Theory	Co-creative Dream Theory
Dream work focuses primarily on visual content.	Dream work focuses primarily on dreamer-dream interactive process.
Dream work may overlook changes in dreamer response or alterations in imagery	Dream work focuses mainly on changes in dreamer response, and reciprocal alterations in the dream imagery
Dream images or "symbols" may be analyzed independent from the dreamer's own mindset	Dream imagery is regarded to be in a contingent, reciprocal relationship to the dreamer's mindset
The dream ego is often seen as a passive observer, or at least overlooked in the analysis of the imagery.	The dreamer is, to some extent, active and responsive in every dream, whether aware of it or not.
The dream is assumed to reflect content parallels with waking life.	The dream reflects, most importantly, relational patterns or process dynamics in waking life.
The principal goal is to translate visual content into meaningful insights about one's waking life.	In addition to the traditional goal, the goal is to discern both competent and dysfunctional response patterns that may be evident in dreams and waking relationships alike, and to embrace the newfound competency or to take corrective action accordingly.

perspectives based on the interactive, relational emphasis of , and can be used flexibly in individual, conjoint, family, and group therapy. The dream work sample that is described in the following sections illustrates the use of the FSM in a small group context. Except for having to coach the group ahead of time regarding the specific procedures involved, and then monitoring the group's contributions for precipitous or invasive statements, the application of the FSM to group follows the same steps as its use in individual counseling.

The FSM commences by sharing the dream in the first person, present tense—a practice pioneered by Perls (1969, 1973). This enables the dreamer to relive the original experience and its attendant emotions and thoughts, and for the facilitator(s) 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 exchange converts a private experience into a here-and-now, shared experience to which the dreamer and facilitator(s) alike can relate directly. By having students listen carefully and internalize the dreamer's story, their subsequent contributions––whether in the classroom setting or in their small groups––are more empathic and congruent with the dreamer's own experience.

Dreamers will characteristically leave out themselves out of the dream as they relate "just the facts" (Kasmova and Wolman, 2006). To compensate for this tendency, the dream facilitator may stop the dreamer at crucial junctures during this initial sharing and ask the dreamer to share any feelings and thoughts that are emerging.

Jerry's dream

A middle-aged student, to whom I have given the pseudonym of "Jerry," volunteered to work with a dream in front of his classmates in my graduate group counseling class that I teach at the University of Texas-Pan American. Jerry had previously shared with the class the most significant wounding experience of his life. Having married overseas while in the military, he had brought his pregnant Asian wife home to meet his family. When his father saw his wife for the first time, he yelled, "Why the hell did you bring that ... into my house?!" The shocked son did what he felt he needed to do to protect his wife and future family: He left abruptly and broke off contact with his father. Years passed without any further contact, and his father eventually died. The student reported experiencing a complete absence of grief at the time of his father's death. Further, he had never questioned his original decision to terminate his relationship with his father, even though they had been close prior to the breach Before the man shared the dream in the present tense, I encouraged the group members to join me in listening carefully to the dream and experiencing it inwardly The student then related the following brief dream.

I am sitting at my desk with my back to the sliding glass doors on the patio. I am working on the group paper that we have to do for this class, and I am feeling anxious about completing it. I hear a knock on the door, and turn around to see my father dressed in a suit standing outside the sliding glass door, obviously wanting to be let in. I think to myself, "I've got work to do," and turn back around. He keeps knocking for a while, and then leaves.

Step One: Sharing Feelings Aroused by the Dream Sharing

The idea of initially examining the feelings is consistent with Hartmann's theory that dreams function principally to "contextualize" emotion for the purpose of its integration through associative neural processes (Hartmann, 1998). By having the dreamer and the dream helpers share the feelings that arise when experiencing the dream narrative—a step that was pioneered by Ullman (Ullman, 1996; Ullman and Zimmerman, 1985)—this initial step may provide an affective context congruent with the contextualized affect of the dream itself. However, the dreamer may not be able or willing to experience the full range of emotion contextualized or implied in a given dream–either in the original experience because of psychodynamic resistance, or in a recollected version because of concerns about interpersonal exposure. Thus, as the dreamer and the dream helpers compare their emotional reactions to the dream narrative, they may discover differences in their feelings. This sharing often sets up a subtle tension in which the dreamer may be exposed to a variety of emotional responses that differ from his or her own feelings. If, as Taylor (1992) and Delaney (1993) assert, a dream rarely comes to tell us what we already know, then it is also makes sense that the dreamer is not always in touch with the full range of feelings contextualized, or pictured, in the dream imagery.

Various dream work methods include an assessment of the dreamer's feelings (Gendlin, 1986; Hill, 1996; Mahrer, 1990; Ullman, 1996; Ullman and Zimmerman, 1985). However, co-creative dream theory posits that the dream ego's feelings, thoughts, assumptions, and behaviors—that is, what might be referred to as the global subjective response—work together to co-create the dream's outcome. With this in mind, the dreamer's feelings provide an initial entry into the dream ego's co-determining global subjective response set.

Jerry's dream: I asked the dreamer about his feelings in the dream, and he said that he had felt anxious about his assignment, and mildly irritated about his father's interruption throughout the dream. That was the extent of his feelings. I then asked each member of the group to share whatever feelings had arisen in the course of experiencing the dream. Without exception, the other students reported having intense feelings such as sadness, fear, regret, and even affection. The dreamer was surprised at the range of the group members' reactions.

Of course, dreamers often report having little or no emotion, especially when merely witnessing the dream as it unfolds. When hearing such emotionless dreams, a dream group, or an individual facilitator may or may not experience any feelings. If they do, then those feelings could be useful to the dreamer, who may for various reasons could be cut off from significant feelings. If not, then the dream work can simply proceed to the next step.

Step Two: Formulating the Process Narrative

Some dream analysts have formulated lists of universal 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. In our early collaboration developing dream work methods and courses at the Association for the Research and Enlightenment, Mark Thurston (1978; 1988) and I (Sparrow, 1978) developed a phenomenological approach similar to Gendlin's

(1986) approach to extracting the dream "story" by summarizing the dream's underlying theme. Instead of continuing to use the term "theme" (Sparrow, 1978; Thurston, 1978) to describe this dimension of the dream, I have adopted the phrase "process narrative," even though Gendlin's "story," (1986) and Thurston's "simple story line" (1988) represents a less abstract way to describe this step to client/dreamers. Dicicco's Story Telling Method arguably accomplishes the same goal by asking the dreamer to replace the dream content with familiar images and to retell it. The Story Telling Method resembles what family therapists (Bowen, 1978) refer to as "displacement stories," in which the therapist offers a story that parallels the client's problematic narrative. The displacement story can be made up by the therapist, or taken from a popular myth, book or movie. Regardless, its purpose is to give the client sufficient distance from his or her problem and to present an alternative narrative that offers a possible approach to solving it. Regardless of whether one replaces the dream content with waking associations, as Diccico's method does, or removes it entirely as the FSM does, both encourage the dreamer to perceive a pattern that is often obscured by the literal dream imagery.

To formulate the process narrative, all one has to do is to restate, as succinctly as possible, the dream's essential story line while removing the specific names of characters, colors, places, and objects. All interpretive and evaluative statements are strictly discouraged during this step. The following statements (which are unrelated to Jerry's dream) are examples of correctly formulated process narratives, because they are stripped of specific content allusions: "Someone is relieved to find that something that he thought was lost is still possible to locate," and "Someone is trying to decide between two courses of action, one apparently easy and the other more difficult and challenging that involves receiving help from someone else." This content-free description reveals an underlying pattern that might be evident in one's waking life. By removing all of the content, the pattern becomes clearer to the dreamer.

Some dream work facilitators believe that it is important to obtain the dreamer's explanation of the characters and situations early in the dream work process (Delaney, 1993; 1996), so that the helper(s) may make contributions that are congruent with the dreamer's own understanding of who's who and what's what in the dream. In contrast, the FSM postpones any consideration of the imagery, including the dreamer's explanatory associations, until after the third step. While this may seem to encourage irrelevant associations by the facilitator(s), it frees the facilitator (and group if present) to associate to the dream without having to factor in the dreamer's own views. The dreamer, in turn, is encouraged to examine the dream without regard to the imagery, so that any subsequent "allusion" (Craig and Walsh, 1993) or "bridge" (Delaney, 1993; 1996) to waking experiences will be thoroughly informed by an exploration of the non-visual dimensions of the dream.

Jerry's dream: One of the students suggested that the theme of Jerry's dream was, "Someone is aware of someone who wants his attention, but refuses to give it because he considers something else more important." Jerry and the other group members concurred with this assessment, and we moved to the next step.

Step Three: Dreamer Response Analysis

Dreamer Response Analysis and Imagery Change Analysis (Sparrow, 2012) comprise steps three and four of the FSM, and are pure outgrowths of co-creative dream theory. Helping the dreamer see the places where his or her responses may have made a positive or negative difference represents a departure from content-focused dream analysis. Because of its novelty, it may pose somewhat of a challenge to 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 dream ego's responses and imagining new outcomes in future dreams and parallel life situations.

To accomplish this step, the facilitator and the dreamer look for points in the dream where the dreaming self 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 dream ego'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(s) and dreamer work together to critique the dreaming self's responses to the dream encounters. One dimension of Dreamer Response Analysis is to increase the dreamer's awareness of chronic responses that may have shifted the dream in an unfortunate direction. However, in the spirit of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (de Schazer, 1988; de Schazer, et. al, 2007), the goal is also to highlight creative and adaptive responses, and to reframe such responses as "exceptional moments" that the dreamer may have dismissed as ordinary. After highlighting both positive and unfortunate responses, the facilitator(s) engages the dreamer in determining what he or she would like to do more of, or differently, in future dreams with similar situations. This consideration of diverse responses to the dream has a way of questioning chronic relational patterns, discerning emerging competencies, and introducing alternatives for future consideration.

Of course, the dreamer ideally 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, and what is congruent with the dreamer's own beliefs, morals and values, rather than some external standard of relational health. This client-centered criterion helps the facilitator(s) and dreamer evaluate the dream ego'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 becomes evident. This orientation to desirable change, developed as the client and therapist explore the client's own value set, is a negotiated standard of evaluation, not an imposed one. In the words of Wolfe (1989),

Morality thus understood is neither a fixed set of rules handed down unchanging by powerful structures nor something that is made up on the spot. It is a negotiated process through which individuals, by reflecting what they have done in the past, try to ascertain what they ought to do next . . . Morality viewed as social construction differs from the traditional view of morality as "adherence

to rules of conduct shaped by tradition and respect for authority" (pp. 216).

It is not unusual for a highly significant response in the dream to seem entirely natural to the waking dreamer, especially if it reflects the dreamer's habitual style in responding to similar situations. However, as repetitive patterns become increasingly evident in successive dreams and waking life experiences, as well, such responses can be gently challenged if they are inconsistent with the dreamer's own stated morals and values.

Jerry's dream: When we considered the dream ego's responses alongside the group's vicarious responses, Jerry was again struck by the contrast between what he did, and what the dream group members had imagined him doing. One member imagined opening the door to let his father in. Another member was a little afraid–after all, the man was dead–and wanted to ask the father what he wanted before opening the door. Another imagined hugging his dad and hearing his father's sincere and tearful apologies as well as expressing his own remorse. Unlike Jerry's cool, business-like attitude, the group members' responses were generally intense and engaging. Since the group members had come to know each other over a period of several weeks of small group work and during classroom interactions, they were cognizant of many of Jerry's relational strengths and limitations. Through such exposure to a dreamer's waking personality, what is customarily regarded as mere "projection" in group dream work gradually becomes, to some extent, an "informed" projection more closely tied to the dreamer's somewhat unique ways of relating.

Dream Response Analysis 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 the facilitator(s) and client in Step Three helps to offset the tendency of some dreamers to disavow responsibility for the outcome of the dream. While this step can provoke defensiveness by raising questions about the dreamer's 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 Schazer, et. al, 2007). In this regard, Jerry's ability to remain committed to his task at hand was clearly, on one hand, a positive quality that had helped him excel as a student and as a military officer. Pointing out how the act of avoiding his father required strength and focus helped the dreamer to accept how he had also used his formidable personality strength to avoid a variety of stressful encounters. By framing this personality style as potentially positive and negative, Jerry was able reflect on how he might wish to redirect this strength to serve constructive goals, such as healing and reconciliation.

Jerry benefitted from the diverse feedback that only a group can provide. In individual counseling, the therapist and the client would collaborate in trouble-shooting the dream ego's responses. Of course, group members will often telegraph their own values by suggesting alternative responses based on their own relational styles, and such diversity is both a benefit and drawback of group work. With effective leadership, however, the benefits of a free-wheeling exchange between a group and the dreamer can, in my experience, far outweigh the costs.

Step Four: Imagery Change Analysis

In this step in the dream work, the facilitator assists the dreamer in exploring the imagery itself. While I often introduce standard nonintrusive approaches to imagery analysis—such as Jung's (1974, 1984) amplification method, and the Gestalt practice of dialoguing with the images—in Step Four, a nontraditional approach to the imagery that I have termed Imagery Change Analysis (Sparrow, 2012) naturally proceeds from a co-creative approach to dream analysis. Just as the dream ego's responses are no longer considered a given in co-creative dream theory, the dreaming self's responses and the dream imagery are viewed as reciprocally related, such that a change in one will usually evoke or mirror a change in the other, much in the way that "real" relationships evolve in the waking state.

Just as systems-oriented therapists consider reciprocity to be the "governing principle in relationships" (Nichols and Schwartz, 2004, p. 8), and will coach their clients to see their problems in terms of circular causality—a dream work facilitator using the Five Star Method 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 that may have occurred if the responses would have been different. Even if the dream ego and the dream imagery are "locked" into a relationship of escalating tension—as Jerry and his father had been in Jerry's dream—the facilitator can assist the dreamer in imagining what could have happened if the dream ego's stance had been different. 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 scenarios. Such a consideration, which is familiar to narrative therapists, leads naturally to the idea of identifying contexts in which to apply the fruits of the dream work process.

When imagery is considered a fluctuating reality that maintains a circular relationship with the dream ego's responses, questions such as "What does this symbol mean?" have limited value by rendering the dreamer's involvement irrelevant. Instead, the dreamer learns to ask alternative questions such as, "How is my response affecting my relationship with the dream image?" Such questions respect the complexity of a dynamic reciprocal process which, if honored and kept alive, may foster a rich interchange between conscious perspectives and unrealized potentials. Process questions (Bowen, 1978), such as "What do you think would have happened if . . . ?" or "What do you wish you could have done differently?" are very useful in this step. Such inquiry encourages clients to become aware of the circular or reciprocal nature of a relationship dynamic, and to accept one's capacity to assume personal responsibility and make a difference in the dreamer-dream relationship, and in obvious waking life parallels.

Jerry's dream: In considering the dream imagery, the dream helpers were all impressed with his father's suit. Everyone felt that his father had "dressed for the occasion," or was "hoping to make a good impression." One member

suggested that it reminded him of burial clothes. The sliding glass doors provided an opening through which things could be clearly seen, and people were allowed to come and go, but this openness was behind the dreamer and ignored, not something he was facing directly. The paper that the student was working on was one of many tasks in his life–always undertaken with serious and undistracted resolve. The student contributed to and supported these various associations.

We also engaged the dreamer in considering what would have happened to the imagery if he had gone to the door and engaged his father. Since it was clear that Jerry had considerable resistance to this idea, we focused on what he could have said to his father that would have finally given voice to his anger and hurt. By focusing on how he could have expressed his deep anger, the group effectively accepted Jerry where he was at, without precluding the possibility of forgiveness and healing.

Step Five: Applying the Dream Work

Since the FSM is founded on the dream self's capacity to enact a variety of responses to the dream—and correspondingly, to parallel waking scenarios—the final step of the FSM involves identifying contexts in one's waking life where the dream ego's responses may serve as a model for enacting new responses, or might represent problematic responses that call for new approaches. If the dreamer can identify parallels between the dream scenario 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 scenario. Underlying co-creative theory is the assumption of "equifinality" that characterizes systems theory (Bertanffly, 1968), which is the principle that in living systems, a particular end state can be achieved through a variety of ways. So, from this standpoint, it does not matter which context in which the dreamer enacts new responses. Applying the dream work, therefore, can also take the form of preparing for future dreams by imagining new responses in future dreams that might free the dreamer from an arrested dream exchange, and achieve a more desirable end. Similar to Imagery Change Analysis, this approach is called Dream Reliving, and has been used (Sparrow, 1983; Sparrow and Thurston, 2013) to enhance dreamer self-reflectiveness and agency.

Jerry's dream: While the dreamer was sobered by the group process, the group did nothing that could have been construed as invasive. Remaining true to their own feelings, imaginary responses, associations with the imagery, and imagined changed in the imagery, the group members nonetheless left the dreamer wondering out loud if his decision to walk away from his father had established an overall non-negotiating stance toward a variety of circumstances in his life. While he ended the dream work unwilling to reconsider his unyielding stance toward his father, he was able to see that he had developed a tendency to "walk away without looking back" in many areas of his life where a more compromising attitude would have been appropriate. Taking steps to resolve his "emotional cutoff" (Bowen, 1978) in other relationships could, in time, inspire Jerry to acknowledge his need to revisit his relationship with his deceased father, as well. But if not, the systemic principle of equifinality suggests that any efforts to resolve this relational style will reap benefits in every context in which it has manifested.

While our overall stance should always remain respectful of the dreamer's boundaries, our responsibility also impels us to examine and reflect upon the dream ego's responses from the context of the waking self's own goals and values. As stated previously, such a values-centered orientation arises within the knowledge of the person's stated ideals, not from the standpoint of some independent moral authority (Doherty, 1995; Wolfe, 1989). Not only does this approach put constructive pressure on where a therapy client might be failing to acknowledge a counterproductive approach to relationships, but it also identifies emerging and often-overlooked competencies and values-congruent attitudes that may assist the client in resolving significant unresolved conflicts.

3.   Conclusions

Research indicates that dream work accelerates and deepens the psychotherapeutic process. However, an exclusive content-focused approach to dream analysis departs from the objectives of most non-psychodynamic therapy by 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 violates the social constructionistic (Gergen, 1985, 1999), client-centered flavor of contemporary psychotherapy.

Unlike traditional content-oriented approaches, a co-creative or co-determined approach to dream theory and 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; and the reciprocal nature of human relationships in family systems. As such, co-creative dream work methods can be seen as a supportive, supplementary practice in a diverse array of modern therapies, and thus be incorporated seamlessly into contemporary counselor training.

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