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Book Review

Dream work in therapy: Facilitating exploration, insight, and action. Clara Hill (Ed.). (2004). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 304 pages, $49.95.

Once upon a time more than hundred years ago a Viennese physician named Dr. S. Freud published a book that — preceded by the author's conscious wishes — was to become one of the most frequently cited texts in the century to come. It truly became a seminal book. It became *the* introductory text on psychoanalysis for intellectuals who were always aware that dreams are another form of symbolic reality. Literature and dreams have been bedfellows long before Freud's masterpiece appeared and will be so long after.

Psychoanalysts have given credit to this work over and over again, calling the dream the royal road to the unconscious, but with the broadening scope of psychoanalysis into the wide bed of psychodynamics, working with dreams in increasingly shorter therapies became less pronounced. For a while the discovery of REM-sleep cycles seemed to finish off the royal position. The products of nightly mentation were pushed aside into a waste paper basket as mere by-products of brain stem activity. Recently neuroscience rediscovered the unconsious; and the journal *Neuro-Psychoanalysis* — a happy marriage of neuroscience and psychoanalysis — is worth reading for heated debates on dreaming and its cortical and subcortical correlates. These debates are led by the psychoanalysts M. Solms and his neuropsychologist collegue and wife K. Kaplan-Solms. The clinical world should be well advised not only to accept that all our patients are dreaming, and want to talk about them, but also that dreams should be a respectable topic for clinical work.

For a number of years, Clara Hill and her team have focused their research efforts on a critically important issue: given the widely accepted notion of dreaming as an internal housekeeping procedure, is reporting about dreams therapeutically helpful and if so, how should it be done? Her work is based on assumptions that she is careful to spell out at the outset: Dreams are a continuation of waking thinking without input from the external world; during NREM and REM sleep phases, individuals work on personally relevant issues. Standard dictionary type interpretation therefore are not helpful (referring especially to rather outdated Freudian sexual symbolism and Jungian archetypes). And working with dreams should be a "collaborative process between therapist and client for which any therapist should have expertise in using basic helping skills and therapeutic techniques before they do dream work" This last point surprises a psychoanalytic oriented reviewer, but it may suggest that the book's target audience may be fairly early in their training, which makes it necessary to underline this aspect too.

Hill's general theoretical orientation is "heavily" influenced by her client-centered training, but her dream interpretation model reaches as far back to A. Adler's interpretation of dreams (1936) and covers a wide range of humanistic-experiential authors like Cartwright, Ullman, and Greenberg. Her main point is that any model should have a theoretically consistent structure. Her theory is structured in terms of three main phases: (a) exploration, (b) insight), and (c) action. The first part of the book, which is the most important one, is a detailed explanation of how the three steps of her dream interpretation model should be implemented. In fact, it is a "manual of how to do cognitive-experiential dreamwork." This part is truly rich and convincing given the detailed example of how to coach the client (not the patient) toward arriving at her or his understanding of a dream. Her insistence on the need to explore potential action following the exploration and insight phases is an idea that is congruent with my own thinking. Therapists are but consultants and facilitators of client change.

Part II of the book reports about applications of Hill's model to diverse groups of clients (in individual and group therapy, with bereaved clients, with male clients and clients with nightmare dreams). The diversity of potential confounders for successful dream work does not seem to be small, the advantage being that a clearly defined intervention is at hand which allows for many more studies for Hill's students. Of special interest to me was the section of the application of the dreamwork model in the context of self-help (chap. 6 by J. Zack). Given the huge amount of people with significant pathology that never reach out for professional help, any workable tool such as the Dream Box Tool should have a fair test. But care needs to be exercised: the finding of Zack and Hill's research (1998), that the best outcome came from dreams that were extremely pleasant, whereas the worst outcome came from

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dreams that were extremely unpleasant, points to a risk of promoting dream self-help methods to disturbed people.

Part III of the book reports on training experiences and research findings with Hill's model of working with dreams. Hill & Goates reviewed 19 studies that were conducted by Hill's team. The summary of their extensive research findings collected over a number of years remains succinct: clients rated dream sessions high on depth, working alliance, and insight; "clients made consistent gains in understanding their dreams, with more modest changes in symptomatology and interpersonal functioning" (p. 273). So if one teaches people in a systematic fashion, they will better understand what a dream may tell them. Given the endless opaqueness of dream materials, anything found suitable to make personal, convincing sense to the nightly experience constitutes a gain. The authors rightly point out that their approach would benefit the often lacking investigation of other expressive creative techniques (p. 282). It could well be that there will be a kernel of shared substance that the pictorial world of human experience benefits from re-representing it in a language; an idea W. Bucci might underscore.

Most important is the substantial discussion of imbedded methodological issues provided at the end. Using primarily undergraduate students as clients and graduate student therapists certainly is understandable for the feasibility aspects of the research enterprise. But the real tolerance test of such experimental treatment research will be real life, be it with clients or patients.

The issue of how to help people make sense out of dreams is not touched upon by this exercise: what is the epistemological status of dreams as the product of unconscious mentation. U. Moser, professor of clinical psychology in Zurich, and his wife, I. von Zeppelin, both psychoanalysts and members of SPR, have spent their academic life in re-working Freud's model on the generation of dreams, using the most advanced cognitive and affective theories. Maybe they would insist that dreams have an epistemological status of their own and the task of understanding them, which Freud had hoped to arrive at by interpretation, is more a matter of translation. But this is another story.

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