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The Social Dreaming Matrix as a Container for the Processing of Implicit Racial Bias and Collective Racial Trauma

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ABSTRACT

The central thesis of this article is that social dreaming theory and the modified application of Gordon Lawrence’s social dreaming matrix, a group-as-a-whole method, not only provides a window into the social unconscious, but may serve as a “container,” in the Bionian sense, for the processing and potential healing of “racial trauma” and “white fragility.” The article describes episodes of aversive racism and white fragility surrounding social dreaming experiments. Finally, the article summarizes some lessons learned in facilitating and managing two fundamental types of “resistances” encountered in social dreamwork: “attacks on social linking” and “defenses against moral witnessing.”

The work of restoring this regression in our democracy is daunting, but we are fighting for the lost promises of liberty, justice, and the pursuit of happiness... Hope will be found by understanding that diversity is the essence of the American Dream and why we need each other to fulfill it.

To bridge the divide:

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- We must realize that most of our differences are exaggerated nuances fueled by uncompromising ignorance.
- We must see others' struggles as our own, and their success as our success, so we can speak to our common humanity.
- We must build a more connected society, using our resources to uplift one another so we collectively benefit.

This is a generational project; do not underestimate the power of human connection. (Ilhan Omar, Minnesota State Representative [The first Somali-American Muslim lawmaker], *Time Magazine*, August 28, 2017, pp. 44–45)

The emergence of a neuroscience of racism (Cunningham et al., 2004; Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2010; Ito & Bartholow, 2009; Kubota, Banaji, & Phelps, 2012) supports the validity of the socio-psychoanalytic concept of a “social unconscious” (Hopper, 1996; Hopper & Weinberg, 2011, 2016, 2017), subsuming a “cultural/racial unconscious” (Adams, 2002) and an “ethnic unconscious” (Herron, 1995; Javier & Rendon, 1995), both characterized by implicit, unconscious racial and ethnic organizing principles. The construct of a social unconscious, in turn, provides theoretical illumination for the research findings regarding “implicit racial bias” (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Eberhardt, 2005; Banks, Eberhardt, & Ross, 2006; Nosek et al., 2002) and “stereotype threat” (Steele, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, 2002). Gordon Lawrence’s “social dreaming theory” and “social dreaming matrix” (Lawrence, 2003a, 2003b; Lawrence & Daniel, 1982) offer a way of accessing the social unconscious through communal dream-sharing. I am proposing that social dreaming theory and the modified application of Gordon Lawrence’s social dreaming matrix, a group-as-a-whole (Bion, 1961) method, not only provides a window into the social unconscious, but may serve as a “container,” in the Bionian sense, for the processing and potential healing of “racial trauma” (Bermudez, 2015; Comas-Diaz, 2016) and “white fragility” (DiAngelo, 2011).

In contrast to Lawrence’s open-ended and nontherapeutic approach, I’ve facilitated social dreaming matrices with focused themes: for example, American xenophobia; Whiteness and the American social unconscious; Black reparations and the social unconscious; and the tri-faith social unconscious: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Bermudez, 2015; Silverstein, 2013). Integrating group theory with contemporary dream

theory (Bion, 1962, 1992; Bromberg, 2000, 2003; Erikson, 1954; Hartmann, 1998), I am suggesting that this approach illuminates a traumatized “racialized group self,” including the “white fragility” identified by DiAngelo (2011), and yields potential for healing collective racial trauma. Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) have demonstrated through their research that White Americans generally define themselves as racially unbiased. However, procedurally these same Americans often display discomfort and uneasiness when in contact with members of other racial groups, sometimes manifesting outright traumatic reactions when issues of racial privilege, status, and power are discussed. Dovidio and Gaertner (1998, 2004) term the unconscious avoidance of racialized others “aversive racism,” and I suggest that DiAngelo’s (2011) proposed “white fragility” underlies the aversive racism. I describe episodes of aversive racism and white fragility surrounding social dreaming experiments. Finally, the article provides recommendations from lessons I learned in facilitating and managing two fundamental types of “resistances” encountered: “attacks on social linking” (Layton, 2006) and “defenses against moral witnessing” (Gerson, 2009).

THE SOCIAL UNCONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS ETHNIC AND RACIAL ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

First introduced and applied clinically by Erich Fromm (1956, 1962) and Karen Horney (1937), pioneering psychoanalytic cultural critics, the concept of the social unconscious has been more contemporaneously defined and explored by group analysts (Hopper, 1996; Hopper & Weinberg, 2011). Hopper (1996) suggests that

The effects of social facts are more likely to be unconscious than conscious. The concept of the social unconscious refers to the existence and constraints of social, cultural, and communication arrangements of which people are unaware, in so far as these arrangements are not perceived (not ‘known’), and if perceived, not acknowledged (‘denied’), and if acknowledged, not taken as problematic (‘given’), and if taken as problematic, not considered with an optimal degree of detachment and objectivity. (p. 9)

In addition, a number of American psychoanalysts have proposed that the social unconscious is sub-organized into racial (Adams, 2002) and ethnic (Herron, 1995; Javier & Rendon, 1995) realms. In an extraordinary convergence, four research strategies have emerged in the late 20th century and early 21st century for which the findings confirm the existence of unconscious racial and ethnic organizing principles:

- *Neuroscience of race* (Cunningham et al., 2004; Ito & Bartholow, 2009; Kubota et al., 2012) research has converged on the discovery that there is increased neuronal firing in the amygdala, the brain region associated with fearful stimuli, when subjects are viewing the faces of people of color. In addition, similar brain-focused research suggests that in-group affective empathy is stronger than out-group empathy (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2010; Meyer et al., 2013; Xu, Zuo, Wang, & Han, 2009).
- *Implicit racial bias* as assessed by the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) often contradicts explicitly verbalized attitudes. This line of research has also demonstrated that implicit racial bias facilitates discrimination in the real world. Whites are often given preferential treatment as compared to people of color.
- *Bias in the workplace*. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) demonstrated that even when companies are actively looking for qualified racial minority candidates, White-sounding names generated 50% more calls for interviews than resumes of Black-sounding names, resulting in lower skilled White applicants receiving more interviews than higher skilled Black applicants.
- *Bias in healthcare*. Green et al. (2007) found in a simulation that physicians with high levels of unconscious anti-Black bias prescribed lifesaving medication less frequently to Blacks than to Whites presenting with the same cardiac symptoms.
- *Bias in police work*: Hardin and Banaji (2012) reviewed more than two dozen experiments on “weapons bias” and discovered that subjects with higher levels of anti-Black bias are consistently more likely to misperceive a wallet or a cellphone for a weapon in the hands of a Black person.
- *Stereotype threat* (Steele, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, 2002; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999): Social psychology research has demonstrated that Black students perform poorly on standardized tests when race is perceived as a salient contextual factor. When race is not emphasized Blacks perform as well as White students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). On the other hand, Whites’ performance on tasks linked to “natural sports ability” is impacted negatively when they are told they are being compared to Blacks

and Latinos. Apparently, social cues suggesting that stereotypes are being used to judge performance can trigger either a performance-impairing “stereotype threat” or a performance-enhancing “stereotype lift,” reflecting the culture’s unconscious ethnic/racial organizing principles.

- *Aversive racism* is a concept first defined by Kovel (1970), who differentiated two subtypes of racism: dominative versus aversive racism. Kovel’s framework inspired research on aversive racism by Dovidio and Gaertner (2000, 2004), who defined it, in contrast to the “‘old-fashioned,’ blatant” form of acting out of bigoted beliefs, as

more indirect and subtle and is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal whites in the United States. Aversive racists ... sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about blacks, which may be unconscious ... the consequences of aversive racism (e.g., the restriction of economic opportunity) are as significant and pernicious as those of the traditional, overt form. (2004, p. 3)

The heart of the phenomenon of aversive racism is the contradiction between the conscious denial of racism and the unconscious negative attitudes. According to the Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) aversive racism framework, context is a crucial releaser of aversive racism: Situations in which interracial interaction is unavoidable generate either quick disengagement by aversive racists or strict adherence to “established rules and codes of behavior” to avoid the appearance of racist attitudes. However, racism is expressed in subtler behavior that disadvantages racial minorities.

Dr. Robin DiAngelo (2011), based on her experiences as a White social justice educator, has developed the concept of “white fragility” as defining the sociopsychological state of aversive racists:

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation,

silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (p. 54)

I propose “social dreaming” as a potential fifth strategy for accessing unconscious ethnic/racial organizing principles.

CONTEMPORARY DREAM THEORY AND RELEVANCE FOR SOCIAL DREAMING

Despite Freud’s (1900) influential perspective that dreams evince wishful thinking drawing us away from reality, contemporary dream theory, inaugurated by Erik Erikson’s (1954) monumental reassessment of Freud’s prototypical dream analysis of the so-called *specimen dream* (“The Dream of Irma’s Injection”), has moved some distance from Freud’s initial formulation. Erikson developed a nuanced refinement of the Freudian psychosexual focus, adding a psychosocial dimension, which was “violently resisted” (p. 37) by colleagues and patients alike. Erikson’s discovery of this broad resistance to the social dimension foreshadows my own experience and provides more validation for the hypothesis suggested by Hopper and Weinberg (2011): “Recognition and understanding of the social unconscious constitutes another painful blow to our narcissistic grandiosity, omnipotence, and omniscience” (p. li).

Contemporary psychoanalytic dream theory has continued to evolve, converging on the following assumptions and hypotheses:

- Dreams metaphorically express the dreamer’s emotional state (Bromberg, 2000, 2003; Friedman, 2012; Hartmann, 1998; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992).
- Dreams are a form of emotional thinking and problem solving (Barrett, 2001; Bion, 1962, 1992; Hartmann, 1998; Lawrence, 2003a).
- Dreams are the body-mind’s process for thinking new thoughts (Bion, 1962, 1992; Blechner, 1998, 2001; Lawrence, 2003b).
- Dreams are the body-mind’s process for restoring organization after stressful or traumatizing experiences, which Hartmann (1998) refers to as “calming the storm” (Bion, 1962, 1992; Erikson, 1954; Fosshage, 1997).

Influenced by all the foregoing theorists and researchers, I have evolved a view of dreams: In general, they are metaphoric attempts at integrating, resolving, and rehearsing solutions to events (stressful or

traumatizing or disorganizing) that have yet to be fully experienced, represented, and witnessed by the dreamer's own mind or another mind. Traumatizing and disorganizing experiences need another mind to aid in metabolizing, creating meaning, and restoring psychological coherence, continuity, and self-esteem (Bromberg, 2000, 2003; Fosshage, 1997). Adding the influence of Erikson and Lawrence, I contend that the "social dreaming matrix" (SDM) provides a container for achieving reflective capacity for unformulated and nonsymbolized collective experience for groups. The SDM is a pathway for healing collective trauma, if the SDM generates the requisite communal recognition and witnessing of the dissociated, linguistically unsymbolized trauma.

A Brief History and Description of Social Dreaming

Lawrence (1982, 1998, 2003b), the architect of the "social dreaming matrix" (SDM), profoundly influenced by Charlotte Beradt's (1968) *Third Reich of Dreams* (a book reporting the dreams of ordinary German citizens during the period of 1933–1939—dreams reflecting their intuitive but unconscious foreknowledge of the Nazi regime's intentions) (Manley, 2014), organized a process involving a group of participants who share dreams and associations to those dreams. The working hypothesis was that the dreams shared reflect a collective cultural product, a social unconscious comprised of dissociated and disavowed social, political, and cultural experience. The basic task is to "discover the social meaning of available dreams in the matrix" (Lawrence, 1998, p. 30).

There are several other fundamental assumptions: The dreams generated in the SDM are the shared property of the dreaming community; focus must be on the dream, not the dreamer, which facilitates development of a safe "mental space"; and ascertaining dream meaning should be approached with the attitude of a working hypothesis. In developing the radical psychosocial paradigm of the "social dreaming matrix" (SDM), Gordon Lawrence (2003a, 2003b; Lawrence & Daniel, 1982) experimented with a three-pronged process at social dreaming workshops, conferences, and organizational interventions:

1. The “social dreaming matrix” (SDM) in which dreams and free association and Jungian “amplification” are encouraged. The participants are instructed to share dreams and assume that each dream is “our collective dream” and treat the group associations likewise. A state of reverie is encouraged in this phase. They are also asked to attend to emergent patterns across the dreams shared, especially references to systems, organizations, groups, and so on. Part of his underlying theory was that individuals’ dreams were emergent new thoughts trying to find conscious formulation (Lawrence, 2003b).
2. The second activity (role application/synthesis) during a 3-day conference was to break the whole group into smaller groups (typically, four or five participants), with an experienced SDM leader. The task here is to focus on the individual dreamer (who could bring in a new dream or work with a dream shared in the SDM), with the goal being to help the individual dreamer apply the learning from the dream to a “social role” he or she is grappling with (workplace, school, community, etc.). The “role” concept is a systems concept that captures the integration of “self” with a “system,” or the ecological niche of the self. There were perhaps two or three of these role applications held in a 3-day conference.
3. The third activity was typically called the “reflection dialogue.” Perhaps two of these were facilitated during a 3-day conference. The idea here was to provide an opportunity for conscious reflection and formulation of the emergent ideas, concerns, feelings, and so on during a social dreaming conference (Baglioni & Fubini, 2013).

The Special Place of Social Dreaming as a “Container” for the Racial/Ethnic Unconscious

Gordon Lawrence’s discovery of social dreaming is a revolutionary twist on and integration of two already revolutionary ideas proposed by Wilfred Bion (1961, 1962, 1992): a field theory of group dynamics and dreamwork as mentalization of unresolved and undigested emotional experience. Bion proposed that the dreaming process was the human psyche’s modus operandi (“alpha function”) for transforming raw, problematic emotional experience into elements for thinking the unique iconic system, pictures and film-like imagery, employed in dream narrative. Along lines similar to Bion (1962, 1992), Blechner (1998, 2001) avers that dreamwork or the dreaming process facilitates access to unmentalized experience, that is, experience beyond words,

unformulated in narrative language. He points out that free association, because of its reliance on language, does not provide the singular access that dreams do to unformulated, unsymbolized, therefore unconscious, experience. Blechner's ideas seem to describe a process very similar to Bion's dreamwork which occurs both in sleep and wakefulness: Dreaming is a process that "transforms" raw emotional experience into a psychological organization ("alpha elements"), so it can be meaningfully thought with.

I am suggesting that "social dreaming" is a type of group-level "alpha dreamwork" (Schneider, 2010) which attempts to transform problematic, unresolved experience in larger systems (organizational, community, society, etc.) into meaningful emotional coherence. Friedman (2012) proposes a similar group-level process, distinguishing "dreaming" experience (serving intrapersonal emotional regulation) from "dream-telling" (serving, in his view, two relational/intersubjective functions: an implicit request for "containment" and an intention to influence the group). However, although Friedman notes that the dreamer may be dreaming for the whole group and expressing group-level anxieties and problems, he seems to prioritize the individual and the interpersonal, not the strictly group-level focus that Lawrence's "social dreaming" paradigm maintains. Support for the society-level hypothesis is available from social anthropology: Mageo (2013) appears to have discovered that problematic cultural scripts are reworked, transformed nightly by members of a culture. Borrowing from Hopper and Weinberg (2011), who propose that the social dreaming matrix is a "royal road" to the social unconscious, I am suggesting that "social dreaming" may also serve as a "royal road" for accessing our society's unconscious legacies and struggles with racialization and race dynamics.

I further suggest that the unconscious (unprocessed) dynamics of race may express themselves in at least three ways through "social dreaming." In descending order of the magnitude of resistance, these are:

- *Procedurally*: Whites enact their dread about thinking about racial issues through avoidance of contexts (Dovido & Gaertner, 2004) that may evoke a dissociated "White fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011). For example, Whites have avoided participating in social dreaming workshops focused on race dynamics (Bermudez, 2015).

- *Resistance to social/moral witnessing* (Gerson, 2009; Ullman, 2011) and *attacks on social linking* (Layton, 2006): These forms of resistance are very common in SDMs: Participants resist treating the dreams of other participants as communal dreams and seem to insist on either abstract, intellectualized interpretations or interpretations focused on individuals' dreams.
- *The dreaming process itself*: There seem to be two types of “interrupted dreams” or failed dreamwork (Ogden, 2003, 2004): those who cannot remember dreams, like alexithymics, who often develop psychosomatic symptoms; and the experiencing of nightmares, which display the failure of “alpha function” in Bion’s dreamwork.

Schneider (2010) reminds us that Bion (1992) suggested that dreams are composed of both alpha elements (raw experience transformed into meaningful organization) and beta elements (unmetabolized, unintegrated psychotic-like experience). I have found this to be a helpful way to reflect on and facilitate an effective social dreaming matrix: As a facilitator, I must be prepared to personally “contain” and help the “matrix” contain/think/reflect about the often painful, unintegrated psychotic-like experiences. At other times, I can remain less active, allowing the “matrix” of participants to develop its own thinking with the “alpha elements” at its disposal:

- *Content*: anxiety dreams related to interracial contact. Anxiety dreams of this type were quite evident in the initial dreams shared at the two social dreaming explorations of Whiteness I facilitated (Bermudez, 2015). “Alpha function” appeared to be working—effectively transforming difficult group-level anxieties concerning interracial contact into “alpha elements,” enabling emotional thinking .

Moral Witnessing and the Social Dream Matrix

I believe that social dreaming is an emancipatory practice, representing a socially engaged group approach. Its practice is a form of social and “moral witnessing” (Boulanger, 2012; Margalit, 2002; Ullman, 2006, 2011), urging all dreamers and SDM participants to provide testimony to collectively and collusively dissociated human suffering and inviting participants to an “active commitment to social justice and human rights” (Boulanger, 2012). Stern (2012) has suggested

that an internal witness is necessary for the mind to distinguish between past trauma and present reality; my view, influenced by Bion (1961, 1962), is that more than one mind is needed as witness to process “culturally imposed trauma” (Holmes, 2016). In this regard, Freud felt a sense of futility, perhaps despair, at his inability to generate a therapeutically effective response to culturally imposed trauma, which generated what he referred to as “special mental operations” in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud, 1930):

No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations— ... of a victim of the Holy Inquisition, of a Jew awaiting a pogrom—it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people ... Moreover, in the most extreme possibility of suffering, special mental protective devices are brought into operation. It seems to me unprofitable to pursue this aspect of the problem any further. (p. 89)

Undeterred by Freud’s despair, one psychoanalytic author has proposed that social dreaming is potentially useful to address the overwhelming challenges of healing extreme “traumatic historical or social events, which includes the holocaust, but also war and natural disaster” (Noack, 2010, p. 683). With similar conviction, Ullman (2011) has eloquently described the psychosocial function of “social witnessing.” I contend that the social dreaming matrix provides a unique opportunity to view others’ struggles as our own, creating a group psychoanalytic path to an enhanced and proactive social and moral imagination (Glover, 1999).

AVERSIVE RACISM, WHITE FRAGILITY, AND EXPERIENCES IN SOCIAL DREAMWORK

A Social Dreaming Matrix: American Xenophobia

My first experiment with the SDM was a day-long workshop held at Antioch University in July 2011, the results of which I’ve described and summarized elsewhere (Bermudez, 2015). The focus was on American xenophobia, with the goal of interrogating the communal unconscious with regard to what I sensed was a resurgent xenophobia in our current national socio-political landscape. As facilitator I had a powerful emotional experience: both puzzled by the apparent

resistance to follow my guidelines to view dreams as communally owned and awed by the outpouring of dream images and associations. I felt haunted for weeks by the emotionally evocative dream images and the feelings aroused in me. It took several weeks before I was able to begin to reflect and organize thematic patterns. This uncanny experience brought home for me the meaning and usefulness of Bion's recommendation for an enhanced capacity for "negative capability," the psychological ability to tolerate mystery and uncertainty for long periods of time.

I slowly realized that the resistance represented what Gerson (2009) has referred to as defenses against moral witnessing and Layton (2006) defines as attacks on social linking—a refusal to connect with the other and his or her suffering and an active defense of decontextualizing (Maduro, 2012). Some participants chose to interpret dream images as representing individual, private concerns of the dreamer; others intellectualized by applying the jargon of academic deconstructionism, emptying images of either personal or social meaning, or affective resonance. The most astonishing example of the defense against moral witnessing was the following: Several dreams presented images of people and events in a desert. One dream narrative included the dreamer meeting President George W. Bush in the desert; another dream offered images of "aliens from outer space" invading the United States by landing in the desert in the American Southwest. No one developed the obvious association to the widely disseminated stories of undocumented immigrants who have been referred to as "illegal aliens" crossing the border from Mexico into the American desert.

A remarkable development occurred during the dialogue segment of the SDM workshop: As the participants focused on reflection and meaning creation, there was the emergence of an inchoate longing to counter the Tea Party political movement with a progressive counter-movement. It seems to me in retrospect that the SDM dialogue's inchoate longing foreshadowed in embryonic form the development of the Occupy Wall Street Movement—which emerged two months later. This emergent longing appears to be an example of a "social dreaming forward edge process," which I have proposed elsewhere (Bermudez, 2015).

A Social Dreaming Matrix (SDM): Whiteness and the American Group Self at an American University

In June 2013, I organized a two-day Social Dreaming event focused on Whiteness and the American Group Self (Bermudez, 2015). I invited members of the academic community of Antioch University, Los Angeles (faculty, students, administrators) and members of the surrounding community. The low participation of Whites at a university with predominantly White faculty and students who pride themselves on their commitment to social justice was both startling and completely understandable: Here was an enactment of the persecutory anxiety that DiAngelo (2011) has identified as “white fragility” and Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) as “aversive racism.”

Despite the disappointing low participation of Whites, the emergent process was extraordinarily moving and healing. At some point (second day) the realization crystallized for me that the Whiteness SDM had created a matrix with the emergent properties of a “communal home” for healing a traumatized group self—primarily a Black American group self suffering from both intergenerationally transmitted trauma with many allusions to the Jim Crow South and more contemporary racial microaggressions and assaults directed at Black Americans. The Black group self through its “social dreams” initially displayed what I would call a *reparative ambivalence*: Dreams of nurturing, healing actions were followed by dreams images and narratives of persecution, terror, loss, and dissociation. Here is a representative sample:

- A Black woman dreams that she is caring for a baby (changing diapers, etc.) who is not hers. She happily chooses to do so.
- This is followed by another Black woman sharing a dream with images of an assaultive seven-foot-tall White women.
- Then a Black male narrates a dream in which he teaches meditation to a White client who is dying of cancer.
- This is followed by a Black woman who later reveals that she was raised by a mother who was very active in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and that she has tried all her life to put Black resentment and rage behind her. She describes a dream in which something is hidden, there is something she has to do ... but can't quite find the clarity.

Social Dreaming, Whiteness, and the Psychoanalytic Institute

I facilitated a second social dreaming matrix (SDM) focused on Whiteness at a psychoanalytic institute (April 2014): The SDM focused on eliciting and interrogating the organizational and social unconscious relating to Whiteness at the institute and, more broadly, psychoanalysis. The institute had developed a “diversity task force” to address racism and homophobia; its explicit mission was to ensure that the institute addressed these issues in its training curriculum and the culture of the institute. The task force sponsored and organized the 2-day SDM, inviting all members and candidates at the institute; the 2-day framework relies on the “Zeigarnik effect” (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995; Zeigarnik, 1967) to generate social/communal dreams related to the theme of Whiteness, its invisibility for Whites, the social unconscious, and implications for psychoanalysis.

In its discussions and preparations for the event the diversity task force expressed a great deal of anxiety. Members would repeatedly ask: “Will anybody actually share dreams?” “Will there be enough safety?” “We shouldn’t concern ourselves with safety!” “Should we come prepared with dreams, if no one shares?” “Aren’t psychoanalysts going to be concerned about other psychoanalysts interpreting their dreams and become resistant to exposing themselves?” I constantly reassured the members that attendees would share dreams and all would go well. (Privately, I held the intuitive conviction that these concerns were symptoms of organizational and institutional field phenomena reflecting anticipated “White fragility” and aversive racism, and I also maintained a cautiously optimistic faith that with sensitive, respectful facilitation the social dreaming experience would lead to more consciousness concerning White fragility and aversive racism.) My intuition seemed confirmed both by the content and anxious affect of the early dreams shared and by the comments articulating initial anxiety and subsequent containment submitted by White participants in online discussions after the social dreaming experience/workshop.

After an initial phase of sharing of anxiety dreams (ambivalent, fearful encounters cross-racially), on the second day there was a flurry of dreams and associations, following an inaugural complex dream concerning a group of men (construction contractors) trying to fit a “white sink” into a bathroom in an upscale apartment building. The “white sink” would be a

temporary replacement, substituted for the original sink, in order to pass the necessary inspection and comply with government building regulations. This dream became a focal dream leading to multiple, complex associations and analyses: examination and comparison of the oppression of gays versus the oppression of Blacks; the role that capitalism and greed play in systemic and institutional racism. This led to more transparent associations and narratives about the anxieties and shame related to cross-racial encounters. The final “movement” left me feeling that a “third act” was needed: There were no associations to the obvious reference of the “white sink” to “Whites sinking” in status, that is, “White Fragility” (DiAngelo, 2011). There were two “forward edge” dreams (the last two dreams shared late on the second day), which seemed to suggest solutions and future resolutions. In the first of these two “forward edge” dreams the board of the institute had found the “solution” to a dilemma related to two electives in the institute’s training curriculum but the dreamer could not remember what the “solution” was. This led to a discussion about how the institute needs to resolve its ambivalence concerning diversity issues: the two electives in the dream representing a double consciousness, a split; will the group self remain in a static, repetitive, developmentally arrested state, or choose a new developmental path? (As of this writing, the institute’s board has approved a Diversity, Power, and Privilege course to be required as part of the core curriculum for candidates in psychoanalytic training.)

The second “forward edge” dream, the final dream, was the following (dreamed by a White woman): “I had to change my doctor. A new physician was assigned to me at UCLA Medical Center. To my utter surprise it was Josephine Baker, but she was not dressed like a doctor. She had a fruit basket on her head, and dressed colorfully. In the dream I was critical of myself. Why this image? She was sharing fruit, healing me. I said to her ‘I think you’re dead but it’s amazing how you use your sexuality. What are you doing here?’ She said, ‘I’m a doctor.’ I realized she had changed careers. I also realized I was an hour late for my appointment.”

This remarkable dream left us tantalized: We had run out of time. However, the manifest content suggested a challenge to the cultural script that constructed Blacks as entertainers and containers of animal-like sexuality, perhaps reflecting psychological movement in the social unconscious, an embryonic recognition of Black competence and goodness: Josephine Baker develops but integrates presumably

discrepant elements—sexuality and professionalization, entertainment and physicianly healing.

The Josephine Baker dream has a postscript that confirms the extraordinary access to the social unconscious that “social dreaming” provides. Fully two years later (October 9, 2016), on a Delta Airlines flight, a Black female physician was denied access to a passenger in need of emergency care because the flight attendant did not believe she was indeed a medical doctor. According to the posting by Dr. Tamika Cross on her Facebook page, the flight attendant said the following: “Oh no sweetie ... put ur hand down, we are looking for actual physicians ... we don’t have time to talk to you.”

Dr. Cross’s Facebook posting generated more than 12,000 comments on Facebook and Twitter and a social media campaign with Black female physicians posting their photos with the taglines #whatadoctorlookslike and #wedoexist.

Social Dreaming as a Path to an Enhanced and Proactive Social and Moral Imagination

According to Lawrence (2005), social dreaming is “the twentieth century method of engaging with the continual human struggle between the primordial elements of being human and the creative imagination” (p. 3). In a similar vein, I view social dreaming as an opportunity for the development of the “moral imagination” (Glover, 1999)—for the evolution of a capacity for “moral witnessing” (Gerson, 2009; Ullman, 2006, 2011), which requires optimal individual and communal responsiveness and responsibility. By gently challenging the “attacks on social linking” (Layton, 2006), in whatever form they may appear, urging participants to witness each dream as a communal dream that gives testimony and potential solutions to communal challenges, tensions, conflicts, traumas, and so on, paraphrasing Behr (2000, p. 170), I am using social dreaming as a contrivance to nudge us out of our social isolation and fragmentation. However, despite my intentionality I have been unable sometimes to effectively facilitate the optimal communal “moral witnessing” of “culturally imposed trauma” (Holmes, 2016), and defenses often continue to predominate. “Specificity theory” (Bacal & Carlton, 2011) and Bion (1961, 1962, 1992)

have helped me understand and bear the emergent and unique field dynamics of each group—which collectively constrain me and the participants. Sometimes the only optimal response, as an observing-participant facilitator embedded in the field's dynamics (Levenson, 2005; Sullivan, 1940; Sullivan, 1949; Bion, 1961), is to observe my body-mind-self experience, share those perceptions, and remain attentive and curious, nurturing in myself and others the capacity for “negative capability” (Bion, 1970), relying on a faith that meaning and coherence will eventually emerge out of confusion and chaos.

I end this article with a description of an extraordinary dream capturing the global scope of the need for social and moral witnessing, the vicarious pain inherent in witnessing social suffering, and the powerful resistance to consciously bearing witnessing:

This was a dream recounted at a social dreaming workshop I organized and facilitated focused on “The Tri-Faith Unconscious: Christianity, Islam, Judaism.” An Afghan-American Muslim participant narrated the following astonishing dream, which begged for moral witnessing and social linking:

The dreamer, a man, is flying a kite that has eyes painted on it but no mouth; the dreamer is holding onto a string or rope made of broken glass that cuts the dreamer's hands. The kite begins a journey that takes it from India and Pakistan to the Middle East (Palestine and Israel), and then onward to Europe and later the United States. The dreamer and the kite are witnesses to human destructiveness inflicted on other humans. In India and Pakistan drones are killing people; in the Middle East suicide bombers detonate themselves; in Europe refugees wander from country to country, seeking shelter; and in the United States (Chicago and Los Angeles) gangs wage war on each other and police brutalize civilians. With the kite flying high over Los Angeles, the dreamer finally lets go of the kite string, hands bleeding.

Ironically, this was an SDM in which the group and I were unsuccessful in securing a communal “moral witnessing.” Despite the obvious manifest content of this tantalizing dream, to my dismay the participants in the SDM withdrew from engaging emotionally with this profoundly evocative dream imagery, clearly mirroring the tragic violence and human suffering we are experiencing on a local and

global scale. Several participants seemed to be shocked by the dream, remarking in a distancing maneuver that the dream seemed “unreal,” somehow “made up” by the dreamer. The participants would not or could not own the dream as “our collective dream/nightmare.” Despite my efforts at encouraging associations and emergent feelings, the contributions were flat, unemotional, distracted. Clearly, the psychic suffering symbolized by the “bleeding hands” was unbearable for this social dreaming matrix (SDM), hence the dreamer’s letting go of the kite over Los Angeles—the venue for this SDM.

Is Ilhan Omar’s (2017) rhetoric, summoning us to “see each others’ struggles as our own” and “speak to our common humanity,” too idealistic? I don’t believe so. However, the SDM facilitator and group must respond optimally to each other’s “bleeding hands” as we collectively attempt to bear witness with silent sorrow to humanity’s inhumanity. The preceding challenging example of collective defense notwithstanding, the social dreaming communities I’ve been honored to facilitate have been sources of inspiration and hope.

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