

Dreams and Free Child

In recent times there has been an inquiry into the death of an Australian soldier in Iraq (Pte Kovco). He was shot with his own gun in the head. At this point it looks like it was an accident and not a suicide.

The inquiry has taken an odd turn because it has now been revealed that this same man kept a diary. One month before his death he recited a dream that was about him shooting himself in the head. This has led to statements about how eerie this is and so forth. Quite an understandable conclusion.

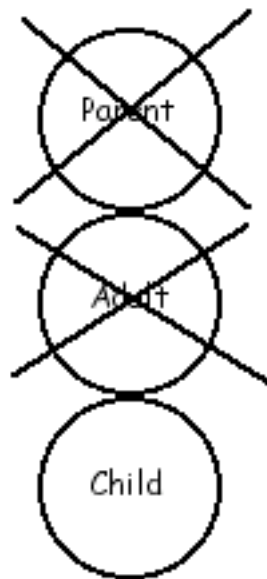
However from the psychologist's perspective it is quite understandable. In fact if he wasn't having those type of dreams then that would be more surprising. People tend to have content in their dreams about things that they have come across in their daily lives. Sometimes it seems quite bizarre such as having a long dream about pies when that is what you had for lunch yesterday. Then in other cases it is much more understandable. If one is chewed out by their boss and then has a dream about work matters people feel like they understand that.

The content that tends to be in our dreams is more often about things that have some emotional significance for us (but not always, remember the pie dream!). Being in a war zone is a traumatic experience for anyone and thus one would expect most soldiers would have violent content of some kind in their dreams. If that was not happening then that would be more reflective of some psychological difficulties.

The soldier's diary entry was published in the press today. Here is some of it,

"I dreamt that I was sitting in my room by myself and for some unknown reason I pulled out my 9mm pistol and shot myself in the head!? I have no idea why but it seemed I wanted to see what it felt like. I didn't die but I felt like I did, but I didn't (if that makes sense)..... A few seconds later I went limp and started gushing blood from my wounds, nose, ears and mouth. I felt the top of my head and there was an entry and exit wound and it was still bleeding. I looked at my hand and there was blood on it. I woke bolt upright..... It shook me up a bit as I have not felt like that since I went through a rough patch (very bloody rough) about four years or so ago" (end quote)

This is a good dream in that it shows some of the features that psychologically dreams can take. In Transactional Analysis one would do a structural analysis of the dreaming state where the Parent and Adult ego states are completely deattached and there is only a Child ego state left. So when one is dreaming one is all Child ego state. In fact all Free Child ego state



Sleep.

The Parent and Adult are decathected leaving only the Child ego state to operate. So in sleep we can find more 'true' emotions because they are not sanitised by the Parent and the Adult

"for some unknown reason I pulled out my 9mm pistol" - In dreams one finds actions that have no sense or rational basis. Rationality is what the Adult ego state does and that is decathected. This shows the impulsivity of the Child ego state and that it can act without thinking it through first. Usually the Adult and Parent temper such actions by the Child ego state, but not always. In people where the Parent and Adult are underdeveloped, such as with teenagers, you can get impulsive acts and at time impulsive violent acts. This is one reason why the deterrent effect of the law is ineffective with some teenagers.

"I wanted to see what it felt like(dying)". The curiosity of the Free Child is boundless. Here is a person who works with death and dying everyday. Such a natural thing for the Free Child to wonder - what would it feel like to die?

"I didn't die but I felt like I did". Again the irrational and magical thinking of the Free Child. So dreams can go anywhere in anyway and give them at times the bizarre feeling they can induce when one recollects a dream.

Finally the statement, "I woke bolt upright". This is where I as a counsellor would go with this dream in a piece of dreamwork. This is the place where the

psychopathology has the potential to develop. Raw fear. The Free Child is currently experiencing raw fear. Of course! the guy is in the middle of a war zone and could die any day at any time, even by accident!! He is being traumatised each day he is there and thus the feelings and attitudes around that need to be dealt with or the emotional dysfunction will develop over time. At the moment it is here and now appropriate anxiety, but over time it will develop into neurotic anxiety if it is not dealt with.

So have a good sleep tonight readers. And have a dream about pies. Those of you who do are the ones who would be good hypnotic subjects. You are highly suggestible. Trust me I know.



Tony White
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