

# Dreams of Untenured Female Faculty

## Exploring the Deep Structures of Power

by Pat Bradshaw and Stephanie Newell

*Dans cet article, l'auteure utilise les techniques d'analyse du rêve pour initier une discussion sur une série d'images oniriques qui se rapportent au travail des femmes des facultés universitaires qui n'ont pas leur permanence.*

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Advice about how to be a successful woman within patriarchal structures, such as universities, has, until recently, tended to revolve around concerns about how to "play the game." Incorporated into these discussions are direct attempts to deal with the realities of university power and politics. For example, Aisenberg and Harrington's study of women academics identifies a number of ways in which existing power structures in universities negatively affect a woman's career path. At the beginning of their final chapter entitled "Countervailing and Change" they conclude that the female university faculty they interviewed "want a radically different system of professional organization—indeed of social organization—from the one that prevails" (136). The prescriptions they offer are not for radical change. They focus instead on more traditional political strategies and suggest that women, for example, focus on publishing, finding mentors, joining professional organizations, drawing up five- to ten-year career plans, and getting appointed to high visibility committees.

Theoretically we have begun to recognize that these types of political strategies do not address the deeper dynamic of power and feminist academics are increasingly resisting the dominance of hegemonic discourses and other more invisible forms of sexism (Martin; Bannerji *et al.*). Power and politics can be more subtle and complex and merely playing the game and understanding the rules is not sufficient. We recognize that power resides in latent forms and that we need to move from reflecting on the surface types of power to understanding unconscious and latent power dimensions (Bradshaw). The challenge with understanding deeper, unconscious aspects of power is accessing them and bringing them to the surface so we can consciously reflect on them.

In this paper we want to share one approach to exploring

unconscious aspects of power as reflected in the experiences of a few untenured women in one university. The paper is exploratory and tentative and offered in the spirit of play, reflection, and learning. Our way of accessing deep structures and framing the issues of the unconscious is through dream analysis. Our interpretations are of course open to other interpretations and we cannot draw conclusions about the generalizability of our insights.

The interpretations of the dreams presented here are based on a Jungian approach (Jung). Aspects of Jungian psychology have already been introduced into organizational theory (Mitroff; Bird). In the more popular literature the idea of using myth as a way of understanding the human condition is becoming increasingly prevalent (e.g. Bly). Feminists, while providing excellent critiques of Jung's theories (e.g. Douglas), have also been able to extend and enhance the Jungian approach for their own understandings of women in the patriarchy (e.g. Woodman; Woodman *et al.*; Woodman and Dickson; de Castillejo; Bolen).

We have structured the paper by first presenting a dream and then sharing our initial attempt at an interpretation. We believe that dreams are a gift from the Self and that dream analysis is not a logical process. Dreams that are not noticed have been compared to letters left unopened (Asper) and we wanted to explore these particular messages and share this deeper understanding of women in the university. The symbols presented in these dreams seem to be an evocative way of helping the reader understand the perspective presented by this theoretical framework.

Neither of us are trained psychotherapists. We rely on existing literature to help make sense of the dream images. The dreams all involve individual characters who can be identified with the dreamer's university life. We, of course, will not identify any specific colleagues by name. They are not the important focus of the discussion. In dream analysis each character in the dream is a reflection of some aspect of the dreamer's own psyche. The process of interpretation involves exploring the dreamer's own sense of the essence of the various dream images and then looking inward to see what the images reveal about the structure of the dreamer's own unconscious.

### Dream one

*I have murdered a young woman and my male colleagues in their black academic robes file into a courtroom to try me for this crime. (I feel so much guilt and shame that I awake in tears.)*

This dream appears to be about the death of the young

"inner feminine." In Jungian theory the concept of the feminine has been recently critiqued and refocussed (Douglas). We define the feminine as an archetype free of gender linkages; the unconscious feminine and the unconscious masculine are present in both men and women. Recent books from the men's movement reflect their efforts to identify the potent feminine within themselves (Absher; Keen). There are an increasingly wide variety of archetypal images of the feminine being described. The definition and redefinition of these images are attempts to recover lost aspects of the feminine. These efforts include re-evaluation of the dark side of the

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feminine and the increasing use of the pre-patriarchal images of the feminine contained in images of the goddesses (Douglas). Many are attempting to describe the inner feminine and they include characteristics such as acausality, nonrationality, relatedness, receptivity, process, and embodiment (Woodman and Dickson; Jaffe).

What this dream, thus, seems to ask the dreamer to explore, partially within the context of the university, is the death of the inner feminine. Apparently, the dreamer is not honouring and respecting parts of herself. The feminine within her has not only died, but the dreamer is presented as the murderer. As a "daughter of the patriarchy" this dreamer is not alone. Literature by feminist Jungian theorists helps us understand that there is a pattern of women who have killed their own inner feminine. As Murdock says "when we recognize our spiritual daughterhood in the patriarchy we have some excavation to do" (Murdock 102).

Sylvia Perera describes this pattern powerfully and characterizes "daughters of the father" as women who are well adapted to a masculine-oriented society and who "have repudiated our own full feminine instincts and energy patterns, just as the culture has maimed or derogated most of them" (Perera 7). The death of inner feminine in these women leads to a lack of healing, empowerment, and creativity. The suppression of the feminine is not unique to women as individuals but is also a reflection of society's suppression of women's dark side and contemporary shadow projections onto anything feminine as well as society's fear of birth, death, and the body (Douglas 231).

Within the university, women often comply unconsciously to the performance expectations of a system which undervalues anything associated with the feminine. For example, we often write abstractly in the third person

doing quantitative research which obscures individuality and emotion. We deny the existence of family obligations or hurry back from maternity leaves. In business schools we often dress in the corporate style and even our language starts to fit the dominant discourses of the masculine power structures.

#### **Dream two**

*I am in the Resistance (maybe in one of the Ghettos), at any rate some place with a lot of bombed and burned out buildings. I am being chased by Gestapo, some of whom have the faces of senior male faculty from my university. I am quite good at hiding from them and they are having a hard time catching me.*

#### **Dream three**

*I have been captured and am being tortured by three very high ranking Gestapo (all of whom are clearly identified as full professors in my university). However, I refuse to cooperate and will not answer their questions and give away the hiding places of my compatriots.*

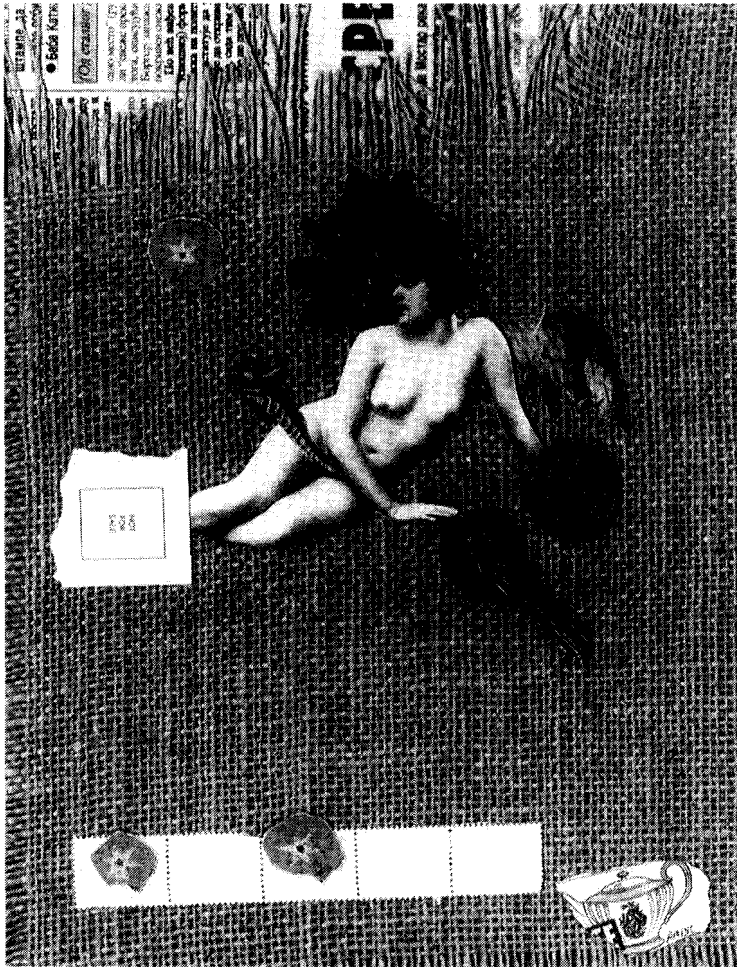
In the second and third dreams the symbolism of patriarchy and authoritarianism within the psyche of the dreamer herself is starkly represented by the images of the Gestapo. These parts of the dreamer's psyche are made literal by uniformed representatives of one of the most repressive and violent groups of this century. The Gestapo conformed to rigid chains of command, unquestionably obeyed higher authority, and often acted without conscience or awareness. They projected the qualities they abhorred on to the Jews (as well as feminists, homosexuals, gypsies, and the mentally ill) in order to feel pure, strong, hard, clean, good, unambivalent, and morally right themselves (Miller).

That this image is repeated seems to indicate that this part of the dreamer's psyche is strong and is operating partially in the context of her university life. It is not her male colleagues who are acting in tortuous ways, but that part of the dreamer's unconscious. In reality, members of our university departments don't need to dominate us because we are doing it so well ourselves and we are seeing it represented vividly in these dreams.

The dreamer is fighting back as part of the resistance and is refusing to give away information on her compatriots. Perhaps what is being suggesting is that the dreamer needs to better develop the skills of the resistance movement, the ability to use the back trails, secret support systems, and sources of information this part of her psyche can provide. Within hierarchical and repressive regimes these are required survival skills but, in these dreams, the skills are not as developed as they might be. Within the dreamer some part of her psyche needs to develop in order to overcome her own inner gestapo.

Within the university strategies of resistance are only

recently being articulated. Some are subtle, such as challenging implicit dress codes, undermining the public/private split by having pictures of children on a desk, breastfeeding at a meeting, or challenging racist and sexist jokes. Some strategies are more explicit such as going to the newspapers with stories about the “chilly” climate or going over the heads of those in power to report and expose discrimination and harassment. Effective resistance does share an element of feminist consciousness and an awareness that what one is doing is directed at subversion of the status quo both within our own psyche and in the greater system.



Sonja Andic, *Untitled Nude*, collage, 28 x 21 cm, 1997

#### Dream four

*I am sitting at a small desk outside of my senior male colleague's large office. Two women come to his office to collect more of his blood. They tell me the last time they took his blood there was nothing in it they could use. They were discussing how amazing this is given the number of components of blood and his has nothing at all they can use. They go into his office and take more blood. They come out and push the end of the syringe containing the blood sample. Only clear fluid comes out and as they keep pushing they finally get a little watery red fluid.*

When the dreamer reflected on this male colleague she concluded that her perception of him is as a person who does not really understand women's issues and feminist perspectives although he does research in the area and is well-respected in the field. The dreamer understood that this character in the dream represents her own unconscious, anti-feminist, sexist self, a part of herself that may well undermine other women and take actions which conflict with her espoused feminist beliefs. In addition, while the dreamer often acts like a person who cares about women's issues she sometimes does it from a position of power. This is represented in the dream by the male colleague's larger office while the woman sits symbolically outside his office door at a small desk.

The symbolism of blood is significant in this dream. De Vries in his *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* gives many possible interpretations for blood imagery. Included is blood as passion or feeling, the seat of life, fertility, or witchcraft. This suggests the dreamer's psyche is deprived of the characteristics associated with the inner feminine.

Feminists have been trying to reclaim blood imagery, moving it away from a symbol associated with the hero and warrior archetypes or those who give their blood as a sacrifice in war, toward more feminine images. For women such as George, blood is symbolic of the cyclical nature of life and processes of purification and regeneration as in women's monthly menstrual cycles. To the dreamer, the dream seemed to be telling her that her approach to research on women and her anti-feminist power-striving have left her without the life sustaining gifts of blood itself.

We have all experienced situations in our careers where we have undermined female colleagues and acted in sexist and racist ways without awareness or heart. We have also benefitted from these actions. For example, we have won favour with a dean by not rocking the boat, we have had papers published by toning down a feminist critique to satisfy a reviewer, and we have not spoken up in support of student complaints about harassment in a classroom. The cost, while not always visible, is a deadening of ourselves.

#### Dream five

*I and two men in my department are all coming up for tenure and are being evaluated on our research as if we are in the Olympics. The evaluators are some of the senior men in my department and the one tenured woman. As they hold up their cards with our scores it is clear that we are not going to make it to the next stage of the competition as we are all getting scores of three or four.*

Once again it is the dreamer herself who has internalized the standards of performance of some outside group. Her psyche contains a very critical voice which judges her failure in a competitive environment symbolized by the Olympics. Johnson traces the first Olympic games or festivals of sport to early religious rituals and primitive,

occult observances. He speculates that the first games were performed before a cult of the dead, perhaps even relying on gifts of human blood. These rituals were based on the early beliefs that blood sacrifices could enhance the fertility of the world (Johnson). In this dreamer's psyche the process of gaining tenure is one which parallels primitive blood sacrifices believed to make the earth bloom. Fertility rituals are typical of the feminine but the competitive context of sport presents an image of the masculine intruding on the earlier rituals associated with the goddess. We can only speculate about the comparisons with tenured faculty in universities but the dream suggests that she has internalized this competitive extreme.

For example, during the tenure process we found ourselves defining the standards of performance and then consistently overworking in such a way as to out-perform on each criteria. While academic work has the possibility to be a creative and growth-producing experience, we overemphasize its competitive aspects. In addition to consciously pushing ourselves to points of exhaustion, we are also internalizing the standards and becoming self-critical, fearful, and overly competitive. Within this context we fail to nurture our creative process and feel inferior and unworthy. The healthier response might be to resist the urge to compete and to examine our over-achievement and compliance.

## Discussion

The objective of this paper is to introduce the concept of patriarchy within the unconscious of women in universities and to make a small contribution to our understanding of the deep structures of power. Because these patriarchal structures are unconscious and can be represented by images and symbols we selected dreams as a way to access and illustrate the dynamics. If, as is suggested by this type of interpretation, the unconscious of women in settings such as universities is itself structured in terms of the patriarchy the implications are worth exploring.

Boje discusses the university as a panoptic cage and describes how, like the prison described by Foucault, the university has a dense network of disciplining mechanisms. He describes how these operate on participants "as subtle, but very complete controls to make humans docile, and dominate them by a panoptic apparatus of surveillance, examination, and normalization" (1). The panoptic gaze according to Foucault operates so effectively because those who are being gazed do not know when or if anyone is gazing at them and thus they internalize the panoptic consciousness, thus rendering the actual gaze unnecessary. The sources of these control mechanisms, however, appear to us to be even more complex than Boje's paper suggests. In fact for women, the conditioning to fit into the patriarchal structures and the mechanisms of discipline and control began long before we entered the university. The very myths which characterize our culture (Walker), the childhood discipline we were exposed to (Miller),

the structures of the families we grew up in, often with a strong father and often a weak or irrelevant mother (Perrera), and the relations of power all around us condition us to take on, without consciousness, a patriarchal ego.

Others have identified patriarchy's power to shape and dominate the world in which women live, and to numb our consciousness (Marshall). It has been suggested that we collude to maintain power relations and that, while paradoxical, part of the mechanism for ensuring women's silence lies within women's control. The only way out of this paradox, however, seems to lie in making conscious the patriarchal nature of our own unconscious being.

The dreams of these untenured women seem to be suggesting that one of the unresolved paradoxes preventing the development of a sense of self and wholeness is the loss of the inner feminine. Marion Woodman vividly describes the impact of remaining unconscious of inner tyrants, such as the bloodless anti-feminists and Gestapo in the dreams above. She says:

So long as we are blind to our inner tyrants, we blame an outer tyrant, some person or system, for victimizing us. That maintains the split because victim and tyrant are dependent on each other, and together they must be healed. Either/or thinking is systematic of the split. It is patriarchal thinking and maintains the destructive status quo. It allows people to smile benignly and say, "I don't know what you are going on about," when they themselves have had a medically inexplicable heart attack or their own cedars are dying of acid rain. Broken hearted or terrified, they smile, unaware. (Woodman 121)

The challenge seems to us to be to rediscover the inner feminine and bring it to life rather than having it murdered in both our own dreams and actions. The power structures are at the surface level for sure but they are also at the unconscious level, imbedded in the deep structures of power within our own psyches.

We think the challenge for us as members of the academy, as well as for women working in other contexts, is to support and nurture attempts to reclaim and redefine the feminine and to push further into understanding the deep structures of power and the dynamics of patriarchy within. We need to connect to our unconscious and explore the messages our own dreams are giving us about the state of our inner patriarchy. Suggestions from these dreams to develop the strategies of resistance need to be explored on the inner and outer levels.

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