There is a psychological process of identification that has enormous effects on our lives, yet is seldom recognized in ordinary circumstances. The following introduction to identification is based on a more detailed treatment from the book on the psychology of G. I. Gurdjieff that I am currently working on.

To introduce identification, think of the date of your birthday, just the month and day. We'll call it M-day. My birthday is April 29th. Now read the following two statements aloud, thinking of your birthday where the one statement says M-day:

"People born on April 29th are wimps."
"People born on M-day are wimps."

How do you feel about the two statements? If you're like most people, the first statement about people born on your birthday will just be information. It's a strong statement, but essentially the same sort of information as "The temperature is currently 39 degrees in Fairbanks, Alaska. Just data. The same statement about people born on your birthday (that includes you!) is emotionally different. "Who says I'm a wimp?"

In analyzing the nature of altered states of consciousness some years ago (Tart, 1975), I designated one of the components or subsystems of consciousness as the "Sense of Identity" subsystem. "The primary function of the Sense of Identity subsystem is to attach a 'This is me' quality to certain aspects of experience, to certain information in consciousness, and thus to create the sense of an ego. Presumably semi-permanent structures exist incorporating criteria for what the 'This is me' quality should be attached to....Any item of information to which the 'This is me' quality is attached acquires considerable extra potency and so may arouse strong emotions and otherwise control attention-awareness energy. If I say to you, 'The face of someone you don't know, Mr. Johnson, is ugly and revolting,' this information probably will not be very important to you. But if I say to you, 'Your face is ugly and revolting,' that's a different story!.....Under some circumstances such a statement might preface more aggressive action, against which you want to defend yourself, but often such a remark prefaces no more than additional words of the same sort; yet you react to those words as if to actual physical attack. Adding the ego quality to information radically alters the way that information is treated by the system of consciousness as a whole."

(Tart, 1975, p. 130)

Regardless of the nature of whatever structures underlie it, the process of identification is one of the most important things affecting human life. Let us consider this process, without being too concerned with the particular characteristics of the objects of identification, the things that the "This is me" quality is attached to.
Pervasiveness of Identification

The reason we need not be too concerned now with the objects of identification is that the process is so powerful and pervasive that I suspect a person can identify with anything. Your name, your body, your possessions, your family, your community, "the cause," country, humanity, the planet, the universe, God, your fingernail, a victim in a newspaper story.... The list of things people have identified with is endless.

Once an object is identified with, it gets preferential attention and greatly increased psychological power, compared to objects or ideas that are just things or just information. This power may be limited to the power given by your attention being readily fixated on the object per se, but it may well link up, consciously or unconsciously, with basic biological self-preservation emotions, so a threat to the object of identification is a threat to "me."

To illustrate this in weekend workshops, I sometimes put a paper bag in the middle of the floor. There is nothing at all special about the bag (yet). An empty milk carton or styrofoam coffee cup would do just as well. I then ask the workshops participants to focus their gaze and their attention on the bag, and to try to identify with that bag, to think of it as "me," to love the bag and attend to it the way they attend to themselves.

This is no complex hypnotic induction or exotic meditation procedure. I just speak casually about this for a minute, repeating the instructions a couple of times, asking them to focus on seeing the bag as if it were something they cared about, as if it were their own self. I am asking the workshop participants to exert some voluntary control over their own normally involuntary processes of identification.

Suddenly I step forward and stamp on the bag! Gasp come forth involuntarily. People jump. Their faces show a range of emotions. Sometimes they complain about my cruelty. Many people report they felt physical pain in their body when I smashed the bag. Many are just as shocked as if I had physically hit them. But they get the point. It is all too easy to give the sense of identity to anything, and thereby give away some of our personal power.

Common Objects of Identification

Some things are easier to identify with than others. Your sensations ("I itch") and your body are naturals. Your thoughts and feelings ("I thought of it first. "I am depressed." ) are also easy to identify with, for we generally take credit for creating our thoughts, and our feelings clearly happen to us. Your name is especially deeply identified with.

Remember the old childhood rhyme?

Sticks and stones will hurt my bones,
But names will never hurt me!
Call me this and call me that,
And call yourself a dirty rat!

As adults we can see that this rhyme was intended as a morale builder, but it is clearly a lie. Most of us do not get injured by sticks or stones or other physical attacks very often today, but how often are we injured by the names people call us? Or the names we want to be called but aren't? We identify with various concepts and things, these almost always have convenient names, and then we can be psychologically injured by attacks on the names.

Remember reading about "primitive" cultures, where people have secret names? These " primitives" are supposedly so foolish that they think they would lay themselves open to magical attack if hostile people knew their secret name. "Magic" is often a matter of saying special words. Superstition, or more psychological sophistication than we have?

We usually have a number of socially defined roles with which we identify, such as parent, educated person, good listener, political activist, pillar of the community, etc. We also commonly identify with other people: an insult to my husband is an insult to me, spit on my flag and you spit on me, etc. Identifying with people we think of as role models, heroes and heroines, is also quite common.

"Advantages" of Identification?

If we personify our culture, as if it had conscious purposes, then from the point of view of the culture, identification can be a very useful process. It is useful when people in consensus trance
(the culture's "ordinary" or "normal" state of consciousness) have been conditioned to identify with socially approved roles and values. Such identification with approved things is part of the implicit definition of "normality" for a given culture: the approved objects of identification are treated as respectfully and precisely as if they were your self. If the culture needs tax money, those of us who have identified with being "good Americans" always pay all we owe, and have the psychological reward of feeling superior to tax cheaters who, by definition, are "bad Americans." People who automatically identify with the flag and feel personally insulted when they read about flag burners are going to be people who can be counted on to support the official culture.

The process of identification may also seem useful from a personal point of view. When a Student walks up to me and asks me a question, my Professor identity is immediately induced, with no conscious effort on my part. I act professorially and give the Student an answer or tell her where to research the answer for herself. She is reinforced in her orderly world view, where Professors answer Students' questions. I am reinforced in my orderly world view, where I am a smart Professor who is looked up to by sincere Students who want to learn. It all seems so effortless (although it actually takes a lot of energy). Indeed, it takes deliberate volitional control of attention, Gurdjieff's practice of "self-remembering," to avoid automatically falling into the Professor identity in this situation if I don't want to do it.

As another example of the apparent usefulness of identification, suppose I am in the middle of a long and boring task, but one which must be done. I really want to stop doing it and rest or play, do something exciting. Ideas start coming to my mind of other, more interesting, things that I think I ought to do instead. My desk really should be cleaned off, there are phone calls to be made, and I ought to make some back up copies of my computer diskettes. These ideas are rationalizations to allow me give up the boring work. It is a lot of effort to force myself to go on. But wait! I just remembered that I am a reliable and dependable person, an identity I can be proud of. By finishing the task, I can be rewarded by feeling proud, for reliable people can be justifiably proud of themselves. Now the anticipation of my reward helps me get on with the job.

Identification, then, seems like a useful process for automatically (and efficiently?) mobilizing attention and energy for useful ends. It is, however, a very costly process, as we shall see in the next issue.

Meanwhile it would be enlightening if you would try to see what are the many things you identify with. Think about this and make lists. What people? What causes? What thoughts, what feelings? After making an initial list, try to observe in the course of your everyday life when you are identifying, and what you identify with. Add these new observations to your list and, even more importantly, try to see if there is a certain internal "feeling" or "taste" that you can recognize that goes with the process of identification, so you can learn to distinguish it when it's happening.

(To be continued next issue)
In two previous issues we have discussed techniques for inducing lucid dreams by the German psychologist, Paul Tholey. If you are successful with any of his techniques, you will probably be content for a time to just experience whatever happens in this new phase of your existence. But suppose you don't like what happens naturally, or you wish to deepen or extend some particular aspect of lucid dreaming? In this concluding piece on Tholey's work, we will consider techniques for altering the content of lucid dreams at will.

Presleep Control

Just as wishing for a lucid dream during waking hours, or employing various kinds of autosuggestion during waking can bring about lucid dreams, Tholey finds that using wishing or autosuggestion techniques during waking can be used to affect the content of lucid dreams once you have learned how to induce them. Patients in psychotherapy, e.g., who had learned how to dream lucidly would wish to learn more about the nature of their conflicts in lucid dreams. This sometimes made the content of their lucid dreams very revealing, either in a symbolic way or, more dramatically, when a dream figure in a lucid dream explained the dreamer's conflicts to them!

This kind of waking wishing or autosuggestion has been used for years to influence the content of lucid dreams. The interesting reader can refer to a comprehensive review of such techniques in my "From spontaneous event to lucidity: A review of attempts to consciously control nocturnal dreaming" chapter in the Handbook of Dreams (Wolman et al., 1979). The great attraction of lucid dreaming, though, is the possibilities for immediate control of their content while you are lucidly dreaming. Such control is not absolute, but Tholey has developed a number of useful techniques.

Control by Wishing

If you want your lucid dream to be different, just wish it to be the way you want it. Successful wishes have changed the dream scenery, changed the dreamer's location in dream space and time, altered the actions of other dream characters, and changed the dreamer's own person.

Direct wishing does not always work, however. Sometimes nothing happens, sometimes something related to the wish happens later. Indeed, sometimes wishes were fulfilled in quite unexpected ways. Thus lucid dream wishing is not the same as ordinary daydream wishing, where you can usually imagine whatever you want as you want it. The dream world seems to have an "intertia" or "lawfulness" of its own at times, rather than being totally your subjective creation.

Tholey notes that wishes that call for "miraculous" changes (by waking standards) are the most unlikely to succeed. If you want to talk with someone who isn't there at the time, for instance, it's much more likely to work if you call out to that person to please come there than if you try to conjure them up out of thin air. Traveling to a location where the person is likely to be is again much more successful. If you want to alter your lucid state toward that of an altered state such as might be induced by drugs, it's more likely to happen if you lucidly dream of taking the drug in appropriate form than if you just go for it directly.

"Laws" of the dream world? The force of conditioning and habit?

Control of Inner State

Tholey notes that the environment of a lucid dream is strongly affected by your emotional state in the dream. The scenery and, even more, the character and behavior of other dream characters is strongly affected. If you meet a threatening figure, for example, and allow yourself to become very afraid, the figure may grow in size, act more aggressively, and attack you. If, on the other hand, you control your fear, don't give energy to it, the figure may physically decrease in size, change its appearance to a less threatening one, and behave less aggressively. There is some parallel to life here, but the correlation between your inner mood and
the "outer" reality of the lucid dream is stronger than in ordinary life. The degree of emotional control you have developed in waking life will be reflected in the degree to which you can use this in lucid dreaming.

Note that I don't believe this means you should always exercise strict emotional control, in life or in lucid dreams, to always make things pleasant. When we are seeking psychological knowledge of ourselves, we may have to allow or even amplify unpleasant emotions for gaining insight. It shouldn't be necessary to point this out, but our culture often conditions us to go overboard on emotional control.

Controlling by Looking

The way you focus your gaze in lucid dreams can have major effects on the dream.

Fixing your gaze on some stationary point in the dream, for example, makes the entire dream world begin to fade and dissolve after some 4-12 seconds. If you keep your gaze fixed as this happens, you will dissolve the dream world completely and wake up. If you glance rapidly about when the fading and dissolving begins to happen, you can usually restabilize the dream world. You can also apply the other techniques for controlling the dream world as the fading and dissolving start and sometimes restabilize a changed dream world this way. Tholey hypothesizes that fixing the gaze saturates and thus destabilizes some area of the brain responsible for dreaming, but I believe this is just a first attempt at an understanding of this phenomenon.

Deliberate control of your gaze can also be used as a way of dealing with hostile dream figures. Looking a hostile figure in the eye tends to rob them of their threatening nature. Two problems arise with this control technique, however.

First, if you fix your gaze too long on the hostile figure this may dissolve the whole dream and produce awakening. This solves the problem of dealing with the hostility, but you have lost the lucid dream, so it's a little too much. Second, some hostile figures don't like to be looked in the eye and will try to avoid your gaze!

Talking to Dream Characters

You can deal with hostile dream characters by counter aggression, such as staring them in the eye, fighting with them, retreating by wishing yourself elsewhere, etc., but Tholey finds that a more positive approach is usually just as or more useful. Ask a threatening figure, "Who are you?" This can change the appearance of the dream figure or start a conversation. Your inner readiness for self-knowledge is probably an important factor here. The Senoi (Stewart, 1971) have a similar attitude: fight when you absolutely must, but try to make friends with all dream characters.

Tholey and his colleagues consider conversations with dream characters to be not only interesting, but often very useful in inducing insights about oneself. Carrying this approach further, soliciting help from dream characters often helps both produce further lucidity and alter the nature of the dream experience. In a lucid dream, for instance, you might ask a friendly person to appear in your next ordinary dream and remind you that it's a dream, so you can attain lucidity. One of Tholey's subjects was taught to fly by a friendly "ghost" in a lucid dream, another used a dream hypnotist to induce an ecstatic experience. Dream figures have been used to transport the dreamer to different locations.

I am struck by the parallels with shamanistic techniques here. The shaman, often in some sort of altered state, sometimes in a sort of "active imagination" condition, meets other characters, human or animal, and solicits their assistance, many of them becoming regular "spirit helpers." The shaman treats these figures as "real" in an important sense, rather than as "just dream characters," but I suspect lucid dream figures appreciate being treated as real while you're with them! That would be common courtesy, after all.

Tholey is writing for a psychologist audience so cannot, of course, treat lucid dream figures as anything but imaginary. He does report, however, that "...some dream figures behave as if they possessed their own perceptual perspectives, cognitive abilities (thought and memory) and even their own motivation." I expect to write about the reemergence of
shamanism in the modern world in a future issue. I will strongly recommend Michael Harner's The Way of the Shaman in that article and right now for those curious about shamanism.

And So....

We have looked at a wide variety of techniques for inducing lucidity in dreams, carrying lucidity through the "gate of sleep" into dreaming, and both controlling and learning from experiences in lucid dreams. The methods have been reported to be successful with a wide variety of people. If you apply them, they may be successful with you.

Leading to.........? Most interesting.

For those who are or may become heavily involved with their dream worlds, note the publications referred to in the Dream Network Publications article in this issue.

Bon voyage!

References:


For those who are seriously immersed in their dream life, there are several small publications you may want to subscribe to. These will keep you up to date on new ideas about dreams, and can provide a forum to communicate with other serious dreamers.

The DREAM NETWORK BULLETIN is of general interest to dreamers. The May 1983 issue, for example, contained brief articles on "Using Dreams to Deal with Personality Inflation," "Senoi Dream Praxis," "Dreams and the Body," "Nightmares in the Classroom," and notices of educational seminars around the country on dreaming. Subscription is $13 per year, and includes a subscription to LUCIDITY AND BEYOND, published in San Francisco, and a third newsletter on dreams that is published in Virginia Beach. Write Dream Network Bulletin, 333 W. 21st St., Apt. 2FW, New York, NY 10011.

DREAMWEAVER, from Canada, has a literary flavor to it as well as news reporting. Volume 2 number 2 article titles included "The Sleeping Child," "Open Space: Allegories and Dreams of the Ojibway," "A New Theory about the Nature of Dreaming," and regular columns on dream interpretation, fiction, and humor. As this issue of The Open Mind goes to press, however, I have learned that Dreamweaver is now defunct, but they do offer back issues. Dreamweaver, 6 Charles St. E., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4Y 1T2.

For those particularly interested in lucid dreams, THE LUCIDITY LETTER carries brief articles and abstracts about research in this area. It is available for ten dollars per year from the editor, Dr. Jayne Gachenbach, Psychology, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 50614.

THE JOURNAL OF LUCID DREAM RESEARCH just begun, is available for twenty dollars per year from Journal of Lucid Dream Research, PO Box 84, Hull, North Humber-side, England HU1 2EL. It is edited by Dr. Keith Hearne.
September 1983 was the release date of a new book that will fascinate many readers of The Open Mind. "The Alexandria Project," by Stephan A. Schwartz, is published by Delacorte in hardcover at $18.95, softcover by Delta at $12.95.

While some "orthodox" parapsychologists are still arguing about whether there really are any psychic phenomena at all, Schwartz took a major step forward with the practical application of psi.

Accepting the fact that the impressions psychics give can be mixtures of genuine psychic insights, incorrect fantasies, or misleading analytical overlay, Schwartz used a number of psychics to provide impressions about unknown and buried sites of historical interest in Alexandria, a city that was quite important in creating our present form of Western civilization.

Treating his psychics as friends and collaborators, rather than "subjects," he had them work independently from rough maps of Alexandria. When several psychics indicated overlapping locations for desired sites, Schwartz took two of the best, George McMullen and Hella Hammid, to Alexandria for more detailed searching.

The results were quite astounding. The expedition located a probable site for Alexander's tomb. Political problems, unfortunately, made it impossible to carry out a full dig to see if they had it. They staked out walls and doorways of a unique building in the buried city of Marea, near Alexandria, and found what was psychically predicted when they excavated down several feet. Among other fascinating finds, they found underwater archaeological sites in the harbor: one may be the Lighthouse of Pharos, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The book is a delight to read, as it is written like the adventure it was, without recourse to jargon. The implications that our psychic faculties can penetrate hundreds or thousands of years into the past are quite thought provoking, and reinforce the questions raised in the first issue of The Open Mind about the nature of time.
The Open Mind is written and edited on a Morrow Micro Decision II microcomputer, enhanced with an E-Systems RAMdisk, using the Morrow supplied version of Micropro International Corporation's Wordstar. Copy is produced on a Daisywriter printer and then printed with offset process.

The Open Mind is published bimonthly by Psychological Processes, Incorporated, PO Box 371, El Cerrito, CA 94530. Subscriptions in the United States are $20.00 per year individual, $14.00 per year for full time students at an accredited US institution of higher learning (enclosed xerox of current student ID card when ordering). All foreign subscriptions are $30.00 per year, and are sent air mail. Back issues may be ordered at $3.50 each. The Open Mind is edited by Charles T. Tart. Copyright 1983 by Psychological Processes, Incorporated. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission of the publisher. Second class postage paid at El Cerrito, California.

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Letters should be addressed to The Open Mind, PO Box 371, El Cerrito, CA 94530. Put "Letters" in the lower left hand corner of the envelope.

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