

## Dreams

**A**lthough Westerners tend to think of dreams as reflecting uniquely personal experiences, dreams are also shared within communities. This sharing moves individual experience outward and entails converting "inner" experience into culturally conventional forms that can be publicly accessed and interpreted. Translating dream experiences into publicly circulating forms may be, as Ludwig Wittgenstein argued for inner processes generally, requisite for the establishment of their ontological reality. Narratives, and other expressive practices through which dream experiences are shared, select and shape dream images. At the same time, publicly circulating expressions may even influence the individual's dream experience itself.

In the relatively recent anthropological consideration of the public nature of dreams, language and performance are emerging as central themes. Concern with the social uses of dreams, processes of dream sharing, and attention to the communicative contexts in which dreams are expressed, shifts what had been a prevailing focus on content and content analysis. Moving from beneath the shadow of dominant Freudian perspectives, current dream research attends to questions of *how* dreams are expressed or publicly represented, and ways in which dream expressions circulate within communities. Research is also concerned with *what* circulates in various cultural forms as dream and with dream metadiscourse.

This shift in focus entails a methodological reorientation. Researchers pay close attention to how dreams are expressed and used in and across social situations, attending particularly to dream expression as "naturally occurring discourse"—that is to reports that occur in the context of social interaction—rather than to specifically elicited texts. Language and performance-centered research does not eschew elicitation, however. It differs from earlier approaches by taking contextually situated discourse as the starting point for analysis. Elicitation and text-centered analysis are often incorporated at later stages, to illuminate specific issues.

Language and performance are central in recent anthropological considerations of dreaming because narratives and other discursive forms, such as song, are primary means of dream-sharing. Language and performance-centered studies move beyond referential discourse to consider formal properties of the language of dream narratives, the creative interplay between dream narratives and other forms of publicly circulating discourse and performance, and potential relations between the public circulation of dream expressions, individual subjectivity, and actual dream experience.

Among the formal linguistic devices scholars have noted in dream narratives are extensive use of evidentials, quotative particles, unique tense and aspect marking, and special verb forms. These linguistic devices suggest cultural perceptions of dreams. They are also constitutive of these perceptions. For example, Barbara Tedlock argues that the use of quotative particles in Quiché Maya dream accounts is evidence of a "free soul" that detaches itself from the dreamer in sleep and experiences a reality that is not associated with the individual's personal experience. Dream reports may be sprinkled with the quotative "he/she/it says," which is used in relating anecdotes and mythic narratives that do not deal with personal experience. For Quiché, the "I" of the dream is often not the "I" of narrator. However, when a dream is unambiguously positive, it is always shared without the quotative. In Cuzco, Quechua, dream (and myth) narratives employ the tense suffix *-sqa*, which marks narrated events not directly experienced by the narrator in a normal state of mind. Similarly, Kagwahiv Indians of Brazil employ a distinctive evidential past-tense marker that indexes unwitnessed past events. Among the Zuni and Quiché, dream narrators use verb forms that evidence distinct ontological and psychological orientations toward dreams. Whereas Zuni use intransitive verbs to indicate the experience as a state of being, Quiché use transitive verbs to denote that the dreamer acts upon something while dreaming.

Context may also influence discourse form. Among the Sambia of Melanesia, for example, dreams may be reported in three distinct types of social situation. Each situation has its own mode of discourse that permits pragmatic choices for disclosure.

Many language and performance-centered analyses emphasize relations and interactions between dream re-presentations and other discursive practices within communities. These studies stress that dream expressions and other narratives are part of a community's discursive field whose constituents interact and are mutually influential. Dream and myth, in particular, appear to co-mingle in many cultures. The relationship may even be formally marked, as noted above. Among the Xavante of central Brazil, where forms of dream re-presentation vary according to gender and life-cycle phase, elder men may infuse dream narratives with myth and other expressive forms. The dream performance I analyzed is highly intertextual, consisting of myth narrative, song, and dance. Intertextuality in dream-sharing serves multiple pragmatic ends, such as the invocation of interpretive frames and display of cultural knowledge.

A language-centered explanation for the affinity between myth and dream may be that in some cultures the realities of myth and dream can

only be publicly accessed through referential discourse. Dream and myth narratives referentially portray fantastic images and events that capture intense public interest and stimulate further circulation. Greg Urban, who suggests this hypothesis, observes that ceremonies contrast with myth and dreams for the southern Brazilian Xokleng. The difference between dreams and myth, on the one hand, and ceremony, on the other, lies in public accessibility. Unlike myth and dream, ceremonies are publicly experienced and sensorily accessible. Ceremonies do not form the topic of discursive re-presentation or metacommentary, as do dreams. Individual dream experiences can only be made accessible to others through semantico-referential discourse.

Bruce Mannheim reports a different relationship between myth, ritual and dreams for Cuzqueño Quechua. Their dream lexicon and interpretive codes have experienced a near total replacement since colonial times. In contrast, mythic and ritual systems have remained relatively stable over time. The difference, according to Mannheim, lies in the fact that dream interpretations encode only the semantic dimension of language whereas myths and rituals draw meaning from broader and more persistent interpretive systems, including grammar.

Although spoken narrative is a primary means of dream sharing, dream experiences may be expressed in various forms. Singing, or singing and dancing, is a significant form of dream expression and dreams are frequently cited as the source of creative inspiration in song composition. Song and dance, among other actions, are ways of "performing" dreams. In contrast to the Xokleng, where dreams are only accessible to others through narrative, the Xavante and Temiar, enact movements and sounds that are said to be experienced in dreams. For the Xavante, sharing individual dreamed songs is a powerful means of promoting sociability among young men. In giving a dreamed song to the members of his group, a young man gives an intimate subjective experience to others who, later in collective performance, transform the individual's dream into collective experience.

Dreams are a source of creativity and innovation for a culture's expressive repertoire. At the same time, those dream experiences that are culturally selected for public circulation become stylized into recognizable expressive forms. Repeated sharing of these cultural types influences the public shape of future dream expressions. Publicly circulating forms may even influence how dreams are experienced by individuals and how dream experiences are presented to consciousness. Ultimately, it is impossible to know the dream experiences of others, and possibly even one's own, without filtering them through language-centered thought processes and translating them into culturally appropriate forms for sharing.

(See also *genre, improvisation, individual, interview, music, narrative, particle, performativity, reflexivity*)

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