

The Classification and Coding of Characters

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Introduction

Characters -- people, animals, and mythical figures -- are present in most dream reports, and the chief character in almost every dream is the dreamer. Since characters are usually so central to all else that appears or happens in a dream narrative, it is appropriate to start our discussion of the coding system with them.

Because the dreamer is such a constant factor in almost every dream, the first decision in constructing the coding system was not to list the dreamer as a character nor code him or her among the classes of characters listed below. To include the dreamer would be redundant. It should be pointed out, however, that in subsequent sections the dreamer's emotions and interactions with other characters and with the environment are always categorized and coded. Consequently, the dreamer is given a coding symbol, which is **D**.

Definition of a Character

Characters, as already mentioned, consist of people, animals, or mythical figures. They are "coded" as characters, meaning they are "categorized" or "classified," when any one of the conditions set forth below can be satisfied. It should be kept in mind that the term character is used to refer both to an individual person or animal and also to a group of such individuals. A couple or a crowd is therefore called a character. In the examples that are included to help make each coding rule more understandable, **CAPITAL LETTERS** are used to indicate [codeable items](#), while *italics* are used for [noncodeable items](#). However, neither capitals nor italics will be used to designate the dreamer.

In the following cases, characters are counted:

1. The character is described as being physically present in the dream:
 - "I met a GIRL FRIEND for lunch."
 - "My FATHER drove me and my BROTHER to school."
 - "A GIRL was being chased by a GANG OF MEN."
 - "I saw a DEER and raised my gun to fire."
 - "A GIANT walked out of the woods."
2. The character is heard or seen by some form of communication but he or she is not physically present in the dream:
 - "I spoke with my WIFE on the telephone."
 - "LOWELL THOMAS was giving the news on radio."
 - "I was watching DANNY KAYE on television."

"A telegram arrived from UNCLE FRANK."
 "I saw a movie. LASSIE was in it."
 "There was a picture of CHRIST on the wall."
 "The painting had a LOT OF ANIMALS in it."

3. The character is mentioned in the dream report:

"The POLICE were supposed to come."
 "My FRIENDS were going to meet me at the station."
 "My HUSBAND was in New York."
 "VAN GOGH is my favorite painter."
 "I was saving my money to buy a HORSE."
 "I expected to see a GHOST in the old house."

4. A character is referred to in order to establish the ownership of an object or the relationship of the character to another character:

"I went into my BROTHER'S room."
 "My FAMILY'S car is a blue Ford."
 "I was wearing my SISTER'S dress."
 "I saw GRANT'S tomb."
 "The BOYFRIEND of my best FRIEND came to visit me."
 "MR. SMITH'S DOG began to bark."

5. A part of the character appears in the dream:

"I just saw the legs of the BAND MEMBERS marching down the street."
 "The head of DONALD DUCK was sticking out of the bag."
 "I held my BOYFRIEND'S hand."

Do not code any of the following cases as characters:

1. A character is referred to in a generic sense:

"Everyone has a right to happiness."
 "I wonder if *people* believe in *ghosts* anymore."
 "*Anyone* can do that."
 "*No one* seemed to be reacting but me."
 "*Dogs* are friendly *animals*."

2. A character is referred to in order to establish that it is not that character but another character:

"I was with another BOY, not *my boyfriend*."
 "It was my OLDER SISTER, not *my younger one*."
 "They were OLD WOMEN, not *witches*."

3. A character is not mentioned in the dream report but his or her presence is implied by the action that is described:

"I heard guns being fired."
 "My car was run into by another car."
 "The airplane took off and suddenly burst into flames before crashing."

Classes of Characters

After the characters of a dream have been determined using the foregoing criteria, each codeable character, except animal characters, is classified under each of the four following headings:

1. [Number](#)
2. [Gender](#)
3. [Identity](#)
4. [Age](#)

The order of these headings is from the more general to the more specific, and the coding system for characters used throughout this book always appears in the sequence of: Number, Gender, Identity, and

Age.

Number

Number refers to whether a single individual or a group of characters is involved. There may be any number from two to a very large number in a group, but no distinction is made in this coding system between groups of different sizes.

1. An **individual character** is one who is described in the dream report as being a separate and distinct entity. This ordinarily means that he or she is described as doing something or being somebody or having certain characteristics which sets him apart from others:

"The CLERK showed me a pair of shoes."

"I asked my TEACHER if I could speak to my GIRL FRIEND."

"I was being chased by a WITCH riding a black HORSE."

"ONE DOG was a collie, and the OTHER DOG was a poodle."

2. A **group** consists of two or more individuals who are not individually identified or distinguished:

"I went home to visit my PARENTS."

"THREE BOYS whistled at me."

"A HERD OF BUFFALO was running across the field."

"A big CROWD gathered around the wreck."

"I was attending a meeting of the BOARD OF DIRECTORS."

"The SEVEN DWARFS marched across the stage."

The coding symbol for an individual character is **1**; for a group, the coding symbol is **2**.

Animals are classified as individuals or groups, but they are not classified by Gender, Identity, or Age. (Coding symbol: **1ANI** for a single animal; **2ANI** for a group of animals.)

Gender

In addition to the two gender subclasses of male and female, there is a subclass for characters whose gender is non-binary or not known by the dreamer — or whose gender is not clearly identified in the dream report — and a subclass for groups made up of multiple genders.

1. **Male** (Coding symbol: **M**). Classify as Male any character identified as being male, or for whom a masculine pronoun is used:

"The MAN spoke to me."

"HE was coming closer and closer and then I awoke."

"The POLICEMAN stopped me."

"The two NFL TEAMS lined up on the field."

2. **Female** (Coding symbol: **F**). Classify as Female any character identified as being female, or for whom the feminine pronoun is used:

"This GIRL threw me a towel."

"My teacher gave me an angry look and then SHE asked me to leave the room."

If a character changes gender in the course of a dream, classify the character as both male and female, using a metamorphosis coding. See below under [Metamorphoses](#) for a description of such changes and how to treat them.

3. **Indefinite Gender** (Coding symbol: **I**). Classify as Indefinite Gender any character or small group whose gender is not identified in the dream report, or whose gender is explicitly non-binary. Classify also as Indefinite Gender any character who is identified by occupational role alone:

"SOMEONE hurried by me."

"My oldest FRIEND was there, with their PARTNER."

"There were a FEW OTHER PEOPLE in the room."

"The TEACHER wrote something on the blackboard."

4. **Joint Gender Group** (Coding symbol: **J**). Classify a group as a Joint Gender Group when the group is described as being made up of multiple genders, or when the group is a large one so that it might be expected to include members of multiple genders:

"There were both MEN AND WOMEN in the audience."

"My PARENTS asked me where I was going."

"There was a large CROWD in the street."

Identity

There are eight subclasses of identity. These subclasses are arranged below in a hierarchical order of decreasing familiarity to the dreamer. If a character can be assigned to more than one identity subclass, he or she should always be coded for the subclass indicating the greater familiarity, e.g., "my family doctor" is coded as Known (subclass 3) rather than Occupational (subclass 5).

1. **Immediate family members of the dreamer**. The following table, containing relevant coding symbols, is inclusive:

Father (F)	Husband (H)	Child (C)
Mother (M)	Wife (W)	Infant or Baby (I)
Parents (X)	Son (A)	
Brother (B)	Daughter (D)	
Sister (T)		
Family member, including siblings or children of indeterminate gender (Y)		

2. **Relatives of the dreamer** (Coding symbol: **R**). These are characters other than immediate family members who are related to the dreamer by blood, marriage, or adoption. The following list is illustrative and not exhaustive:

Grandmother	Nephew	Stepmother
Grandfather	Niece	Foster parent
Aunt	Cousin	Ex-husband
Uncle	Brother-in-law	Half-brother

3. **Known characters** (Coding symbol: **K**). If it seems clear that the dreamer is currently, or was formerly, personally acquainted with a character or the probability seems very high that the dreamer could, if requested to do so, identify by name a character in his dream, the character is coded as Known. If a large majority of a group consist of familiar characters, code the group as Known:

"My ROOMMATE cut her hand."

"The BOY who lives next door came over."

"Our POSTMAN handed me a letter."

"My BOSS gave me a lot of work to do."

"My CLASSMATES were all wearing class rings."

"My FRIEND'S BOYFRIEND bought a new car."

"Some BUDDIES of my FRATERNITY BROTHER drove by the house."

4. **Prominent persons** (Coding symbol: **P**). Score as Prominent any character who is well known by her or his general reputation but who is not known personally by the dreamer. Fictional, dramatic, imaginary, and supernatural figures are also coded under this heading as they are usually familiar because of their reputation. (See #7 in the [additional coding rules](#) for more about the coding of fictional, dramatic, imaginary, and supernatural characters.)

"I saw WINSTON CHURCHILL sitting at the end of the table."

"It was like I was seeing a cartoon strip with ORPHAN ANNIE in it."

"HAMLET walked out on the stage holding his sword in front of him."

"Then GOD appeared and said everything would be all right."

5. **Occupational identification** (Coding symbol: **O**). Any character whose occupation is designated but who is not otherwise identified by the dreamer as being more familiar is coded as Occupational. Occupation includes not only vocations and professions and other forms of gainful employment, but also

avocations such as stamp collector, golfer, and hunter, as well as illegal or non-sanctioned pursuits such as gangster and prostitute. A student at any educational level who is not otherwise identified as being more familiar is coded O.

"The SERVER asked me what I wanted to eat."

"The ARMY OFFICER pointed his gun at the SOLDIER."

"The JUDGE said I was guilty and sentenced me to death."

"The CHOIR sang a hymn."

"The man turned out to be a COUNTERFEITER."

6. Ethnic, racial, national, and regional identifications (Coding symbol: **E**). These are characters whose race/ethnicity, nationality, language, or regional identification is designated but who are not otherwise identified as being more familiar by the dreamer.

"I was dancing with a group of INDIANS."

"I dreamed I was living with a GERMAN FAMILY."

"This man who was a SOUTHERNER said he knew all about growing cotton."

"In front of me in the queue were TWO WOMEN SPEAKING JAPANESE."

7. Strangers (Coding symbol: **S**). A character is considered a stranger if the dreamer specifically indicates the character is unknown or unfamiliar or his identity remains hidden because the character is faceless or wearing a mask. If, from the language used in the dream report, the probability seems very high that this is the first time that the dreamer has become acquainted with the character, the character is coded as a Stranger. A crowd, unless otherwise being identified as more familiar, is coded as a group of Strangers:

"There was a little BOY I had never seen before."

"I was being chased by some mean-looking MEN."

"I was lost in the CROWD."

8. Uncertain identity (Coding symbol: **U**). The dream report frequently does not contain sufficient information as to whether a character is known or a stranger to the dreamer. When degree of familiarity cannot be established, the character is coded as Uncertain. In addition to coding vague character descriptions as Uncertain, this coding is also used when the character is described as known in the dream but this character cannot be identified later by the dreamer when he or she is reporting his dream:

"I was with a bunch of KIDS my age."

"SOMEONE asked me if I were going to the meeting."

"I showed this GIRL my engagement ring."

"I was mad because THEY wouldn't let me out of the cellar."

"Several BOYS asked me to dance."

"A MAN had called me while I was at the store."

"I wasn't sure that I knew HIM."

"I was with a GIRL FRIEND but I didn't know who she was."

"This GUY — I knew him in the dream but I can't remember him now — took me for a ride."

Age

There are four age groups. These are arranged below in order of decreasing chronological age.

1. Adult (Coding symbol: **A**). All characters are coded as Adults unless they meet the requirements for inclusion in one of the other three age groups.

2. Teenager (Coding symbol: **T**). Any character whose age is indicated as being from 13 through 17, or whom from the context of the dream report appears to be an adolescent, should be included in this age group. All high school students, whether of junior or senior level, are coded as Teenagers. All college students are coded as Adults. The use of such terms as kid, youth, boy or girl does not in itself identify a character as a teenager since these terms are also used in referring to other age groups. The decision as to how to classify characters referred to by these terms has to depend upon the context in which they are used. Friends and acquaintances of teenage dreamers are presumed to be teenagers unless otherwise stated.

3. Child (Coding symbol: **C**). Any character whose age is from one through 12 or who is referred to as a child is included in this age group. Any elementary school pupil is coded as a Child.

4. **Baby** (Coding symbol: **B**). A character who is less than one year old or who is referred to as an infant or baby is coded Baby, except when the word baby is used as a term of endearment or one of reproach for a character who is older than one year.

Character Coding Examples

A character's coding always consists of a number followed by three letters: Number, Gender, Identity, & Age. In the following examples, italics are used for all individuals except the dreamer who should *not* be coded as characters.

- "My FATHER AND MOTHER (**2JXA**) were in the AUDIENCE (**2JUA**) when I sang one of COLE PORTER'S (**1MPA**) songs."
- "My TEENAGE BROTHER (**1MBT**) got the measles so I couldn't go out with my BOYFRIEND (**1MKA**)."
- "My SISTER-IN-LAW (**1FRA**) invited me to come over and see the INFANT TWINS (**2IRB**) she had just adopted from *Children's Hospital*."
- "Three of my CLASSMATES (**2IKA**) and several of my FRATERNITY BROTHERS (**2MKA**) were standing around at the party with a lot of older PEOPLE (**2JUA**)."
- "I dreamed I had a date with SOPHIA LOREN (**1FPA**), and she told me how difficult the life of a *movie star* is."
- "A parade of INFANTRYMEN (**2MOA**) marched by and ONE OF THEM (**1MOA**) was riding a HORSE (**1ANI**) and ANOTHER (**1MOA**) was leading a pair of HORSES (**2ANI**)."
- "A group of my FRIENDS (**2IUA**) ... well, anyway I think they were my friends, but I can't be sure now ... came over to the house and said my BROTHER'S (**1MBA**) car had been stolen by a WHITE MAN (**1MEA**) and that I should call the POLICE (**2JOA**)."
- "When I finally walked past the last GUARD (**1IOA**) and into the PRESIDENT'S (**1MPA**) office, there were all these FAMOUS PEOPLE (**2JPA**) and they were looking at a picture of the *Washington Monument*. Some MAN (**1MSA**) I didn't know began to slash at the picture with a knife until the White House GUARDS (**2IOA**) came running and took him off to jail. *No one* seemed to notice that I was there. The next thing I remember I was home with my MOTHER (**1FMA**) and STEPFATHER (**1MRA**) and they were asking me whether I wanted to be a *doctor* or *lawyer*. There was SOMEONE (**1IUA**) else in the room, too, and I heard some DOG (**1ANI**) barking outside, and that's all I can remember of that dream."
- "I was in a room with TWO PEOPLE (**2ISA**) who were *strangers* to me and a CHILD (**1IUC**) and a BABY (**1IUB**). The RUSSIANS (**2IEA**) began to break down the door, and I hid in a secret room that my GRANDFATHER (**1MRA**) had built for just such an emergency. The room was full of SPIDERS (**2ANI**) that were covered with little green ANTS (**2ANI**). Three BOYS (**2MUA**) discovered my hiding place, and *they* were going to tell on me. ONE OF THE BOYS (**1MKA**) turned out to be my BROTHER'S (**1MBA**) *friend* and then I remember I had seen *him* around the house. *He* asked me if my *brother* had got out of the *Army* yet and I said he might go to *OTS* and become an *officer*."

Metamorphoses

It sometimes happens in a dream that a character changes their gender, identity, or age in the course of the dream. It is also possible for a human being to change into an animal or vice versa. When this occurs, the character is coded in its original form and for its metamorphosis as well.

The numeral **7** is the coding symbol used for the **original form** and the numeral **8** is used for his **changed form**. These numerals precede the character's coding symbol and appear in the same number column normally used to indicate whether an individual or group character is involved. If a character dies or a dead character comes to life, this is not coded as a metamorphosis.

"My GIRL FRIEND (**7FKA**) suddenly changed into my BOYFRIEND (**8MKA**)."

"When I turned around the DOCTOR (**7IOA**) had turned into my FATHER (**8MFA**)."

"The MAN (**7MUA**) grew smaller and smaller until he was a CHILD (**8MUC**)."

"A BEAR (**7ANI**) was chasing me, and then it was no longer a bear but a strange MAN (**8MSA**)."

Additional Coding Rules

1. A character who makes several appearances in the same dream should be coded only once in each dream.
2. If several characters are simply enumerated and the dreamer does not further describe the appearance or activities of any of these individual characters at any point in the dream, the enumerated characters are coded as a single group.

"My *mother, father, brother, and sister* (**2JYA**) came to my graduation."

"I was being chased by a *lion, a tiger, and two snakes* (**2ANI**)."

"First, *one man*, then *another*, and *another* (**2MUA**) climbed the ladder and entered my room."
3. If some, but not all, of the members of a group are distinguished with regard to appearance or activities as individuals, code as an individual character each of them who is so distinguished and code the remainder as a group.

"My whole FAMILY (**2JYA**), all ten of us, were sitting around talking in the living room. My FATHER (**1MFA**) got up to fix the fire and then started to talk to my oldest BROTHER (**1MBA**), who began to laugh."

"A GROUP OF FIREFIGHTERS (**2IOA**) marched by. ONE (**1IOA**) was very tall and ONE OF THEM (**1IOA**) waved at me."
4. If one or more small groups are differentiated out of a large group because of their appearance or activities, code both the small groups and the large group.

"There was a big CROWD (**2JUA**) at the party. THREE SOLDIERS (**2MOA**) were fooling around and began a fight with THREE SAILORS (**2MOA**)."
5. If the dreamer says that a character might be either one person or another person, code for the first mentioned character unless the dreamer later resolves his uncertainty.

"I wasn't sure whether it was my MOTHER (**1FMA**) or my *wife*."
6. The numeral **3** is the coding symbol used to indicate **individual dead characters**; numeral **4** is the symbol for a **group of dead characters**. These numerals appear in place of the numerals 1 or 2 which would have been employed if the characters were not dead. The numerals 3 or 4 are not used if a character dies during the dream.

"I cried as I saw my FATHER'S (**3MFA**) body in the coffin."

"There were the corpses of SEVERAL YOUNG WOMEN (**4FSA**) whom I didn't know."

"These STRANGERS (**2ISA**) were laughing when suddenly they dropped dead with a horrible look on their faces."
7. The numeral **5** is the coding symbol used to indicate a **single imaginary character** or one that is a fictional or dramatic portrayal; the numeral **6** is used to indicate a **group of imaginary characters**. These numerals precede the character's coding symbol and appear in the same number column ordinarily used to indicate individual or group status. These numerals, therefore, appear in place of the numerals 1 or 2 which would have been employed if the characters were not imaginary.

"I was so surprised because in my dream I was going to a dance with SUPERMAN (**5MPA**)."

"She was playing the part of QUEEN VICTORIA (**5FPA**)."

"I dreamed I gave birth to TWINS (**6IIB**), but I'm not even pregnant."
8. Very infrequently, a character cannot be identified as either human or animal, or is referred to as a creature. In either case, code it as a **Creature** (Scoring symbol: **CZZ**).

"SOMETHING (**1CZZ**) was chasing me. I couldn't tell what it was."



"Then these ROBOT-LIKE CREATURES (**2CZZ**) climbed on my bed and I was terrified."

Summary of Coding Symbols

The following table presents an overall view of the various coding symbols employed for characters:

Number/Status	Gender	Identity		Age
1 individual	M male	F father	H husband	A adult
2 group	F female	M mother	W wife	T teenager
3 individual dead	I indefinite	X parents	K known	C child
4 group dead	J joint	B brother	P prominent	B baby
5 individual imaginary		T sister	O occupational	
6 group imaginary		A son	E ethnic/race	
7 original form		D daughter	S stranger	
8 changed form		C child	U uncertain	
		I infant		
		Y immediate family		
		R other relative		

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