

Disturbance in Dreams as Related to Peyotism among the Navaho

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IN THIS study the dreams of Navaho respondents were used as the basis for judgments of disturbance, which in turn were related to an independent criterion, participation or nonparticipation by the dreamers in the Peyote Cult.

The present study represents a departure from the usual use of dreams in ethnological research. Most studies have focused on the content of dreams for the purpose of shedding light on personality and cultures. Thus Eggan (1949) analyzes the manifest content of one Hopi's dreams over a period of several years. In another publication (1952) she tabulates 302 of one dreamer's dreams by the various content areas represented and their affective quality. DuBois (1944) collected dreams from her eight Alorese informants from whom she collected extensive interview material and projective tests. Dreams were here used to fill out the personality picture, in some cases to add information about the relationship of the informant to the ethnologist. Roheim (1946) used Biaga dreams interpreted psychoanalytically to show that Oedipal processes occur in a society where there is no restriction of expression of infantile sexuality, thereby lending support to a theoretical point—here the dreams were not related to other material of the individual dreamers' personalities.

In the research reported here, content was not the center of interest. For reasons outlined below, the general hypothesis was that disturbance would be greater among people who adhered to the Peyote Cult than among those who did not. In the matter of "disturbance," content figured only in breaking down the dreams into major categories within which judgments were made.

THE FIELD PROJECT

Information on Navaho dreams was collected during the summer of 1952 from Navaho in three different communities in the northern and eastern parts of Navaholand. The data were collected as a minor activity in connection with a field study of contemporary Navaho problems and adjustments.

The general outlines of traditional Navaho culture are well known and have been described elsewhere (e.g., Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946). However, since the research into Navaho communities was a part of a larger project concerned with peyotism as a social movement among the Navaho Indians, some brief mention should be made here of the context within which the dream material was collected.

Peyotism among the Navaho is largely a phenomenon of the last two decades. Although peyotism has been studied in several other Indian tribes where it became established earlier, it had not received any intensive prior study

among the Navaho. The Peyote Cult is a nativistic, semi-Christian religious movement employing a ritual which involves the consumption of the peyote cactus as a means of achieving communion with God. The definition of God is derived from Christianity, but incorporates general Plains Indian and local cultural variants. Among the Navaho, the cult manifests minor influence of traditional Navaho beliefs but little of traditional overt aspects of ritual. A major function of the cult reflects the traditional Navaho emphasis on curing. There are differences among Navaho communities in number of adherents (ranging from zero to eighty percent) and in ideology. In general, however, differences within the Navaho cult reflect to a great extent the Plains Indian group which served as the principal source of the local cult. Thus different sections of the Navaho country may have either similar or different rituals, and a particular community may have different rituals practiced in it.

A study directly concerned with Navaho peyotism was being made by David F. Aberle of the University of Michigan, and the field research of the ethnologist-author of this paper (Moore) was a part of the larger project which Aberle headed.¹ It was felt that additional contributions to understanding the acceptance and rejection of peyotism could be made by a study of communities as more or less integrated wholes and by field research that included not only questions about peyotism but also questions about other major aspects of community life. Thus the researcher would not be specializing in research in peyotism, and would perhaps avoid some of the emotional reactions the Navaho might have to such specialized study. By concentrating on a number of communities, he could perhaps help clarify, among other things, some general cultural factors connected with Navaho peyotism and some special factors connected with community differentials.

The study attempted to discover problems of which the Navaho were aware and were not aware, and to discover wherein there were real solutions, imagined solutions, and no solutions. It was hypothesized that a resort to peyotism might be connected with a breakdown of traditional methods of problem solving, especially in communities whose level of acculturation would not incline them to the rational, empirical, and secular practices of Western culture.

The Navaho were (and are) experiencing a variety of social and economic stresses. Individuals seemed to be exploring a wide range of adaptive devices, including use of alcohol, becoming acculturated, heavy indulgence in sex activities, and intensification of traditional religious activities. Although each "solution" involves difficulties, we shall discuss here only the difficulties associated with the solution of joining the Peyote Cult. In most communities membership in the Peyote Cult is looked upon with disfavor by a majority of Navaho, and in the early days of the cult there was undoubtedly considerable disfavor even in communities where cult members today constitute a majority. Hence there was some reason to assume that more "disturbed" Navaho are most likely to join the cult. Membership might provide the individual with a reintegrated outlook and restructured goals and group memberships, but would not give him an empirical solution to his problems. It is not the purpose of this

paper to determine the source of the disturbance, however, but merely to see to what extent disturbance correlates with cult membership. It should be understood that "disturbance" as herein used is not synonymous with the existence of overt psychopathology, and that the authors make no claim that Navaho peyotists are severely neurotic.

Choice of respondents in each community was influenced by the time factor, but a careful attempt was made to secure a sample stratified by age, sex, economic condition, practice in regard to alcoholic drinking, clan membership, and religious affiliation. An interpreter, preferably a man of high status in the community, served not only as a translator but also as a means of achieving community acceptance, making social contacts, and getting insight into the community and its people. Interviewing usually occurred in the respondent's hogan and interviews lasted a minimum of two hours.

The interview schedule was an outline of subjects to be investigated rather than a set list of questions. Open-ended questions were often asked. A concern with Navaho dreams was not a part of the original research design. However, the ethnologist-author was curious to discover what kinds of answers his respondents would give concerning their dreams. Also, since understanding the kind of acculturation a person had achieved would illuminate the problems he confronted and the kinds of solutions he utilized, it was hoped that dream responses would give additional information on the individual's state of acculturation.

The questions about dreams eventually took the following form: (1) Do you dream? (2) What is a bad dream? (3) What is a good dream? Some initial confusion had developed as respondents and interpreters, knowing that whites do not generally believe in the prophetic qualities of dreams, interpreted the purpose of the questions to determine if they believed in dreams rather than to find out what constituted particular types of dreams. The matter was finally clarified by the above-mentioned wording of the questions and by an explanation that the interviewer was not interested in whether or not his respondent believed in his dreams. The dream questions were not central to the project as a whole and, when they seemed to be stirring up resentment, were not pressed to the extent that rapport would be damaged. Sixty-six people were interviewed but, because of the reluctance of some to answer questions about dreams, only 59 responses were available for this present study. Of these, 48 were reports of dreams, while the remaining 11 were various forms of denials. All of the responses, including the denials, were used in the study.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The 59 responses were typed on separate cards, together with the age and sex of the respondent. Names and educational levels were not included because they might have given some clue as to degree of acculturation, and thus have influenced judgments. Peyote status and proportion of the total number of dreamers who were peyotists were unknown to the psychologists at this time.²

Initially, only global judgments of "disturbance" were asked for from one judge and one of the authors (Dittmann). Disturbance was not defined specifically at this stage, and the other judge was told only that these were the responses to the three questions from an American Indian tribe, with no further explanation of the nature of the study as a whole. A five-point rating scale was used, and the judges were permitted to omit judgment of those responses they considered unratable. The purpose of this phase of the study was to determine the reliability of the judgments and the number of responses which could be judged with some confidence. Forty-eight responses were judged by both judges, and the reliability of the judgments of these 48 was .51. Both judges felt that since the dreams were from another culture they could not be very confident even of their judgments on very many of the dreams. Accordingly, an attempt was made to break down the dreams by content areas so that weightings could be assigned and more synthetic ratings could be made.

As might be expected from the Navaho, the chief content areas of the dreams were health-illness, and economic difficulties. Of these, the health category dominated the dreams, because it was designed to include everything about personal well-being, or lack of it, happiness or unhappiness. The economy category included references to hard times, including loss of stock, money, crops, and to their opposites of good times, stock and crops in plenty. Several references were made to the supernatural in various forms, and these were categorized separately—ghosts, life after death, and the like. There were also many references to gifts in "good" dreams, where the dreamer is given money or livestock, usually by an anonymous person, sometimes by a "white man." Finally, the different ways of denying dreams were separated out, on the rather tenuous assumption that all people had been asked all three of the questions mentioned above; actually, it was known that the interviewer often would not press, fearing loss of rapport which might jeopardize the gathering of other data.

Weightings were established by assigning higher weights to more disturbed content for "bad" dreams, and by adding instances of content of each weight. A dream of someone dying, for example, was assigned twice the weight of a dream of someone ill, and two instances of someone ill (usually reported as two dreams) were counted as twice as disturbed as one. On the "good" dream side, health and happiness (usually reported as interpersonal happiness, such as being with others at a ceremony having a good time) were assigned equal weight, while dreams of people being both well and happy, or two dreams of either, were assigned double weight. Double weighting for more extreme conditions was applicable only to the "health-illness" category in this group of dreams, the "economy" category being more stereotyped in content. Similarly, in the gifts category the responses were usually the same; here, however, while the gifts usually occurred in "good" dreams, there was occasionally a quality of disappointment in the gift dreams, of being offered the gift (usually

money or livestock) but not actually getting it, or of disappointment that when the dreamer awoke the gift was not there. Such dreams were credited as "bad" dreams.

Denials were weighted in a more complex fashion, and all were scored to detract from the total weightings of the dreams. The sorts of denial which detracted least were the following: (a) those which answered the questions indirectly or "intellectually," as if the investigators wanted informants to get at the generalized patterns of the culture: these told of what sorts of dreams were considered good and bad among the Navaho, and what ceremonies should be instituted in each case; (b) those in which dreaming was admitted, but which plead inability to recall any specific dreams; and (c) those in which the respondent omitted any reference to bad dreams or in some cases to good dreams: here it was assumed that questions about both bad and good dreams were asked. Twice the weight was assigned to denial of dreaming and to specific denial of bad dreams. Finally, three times the weight was assigned to those few who denied having any good dreams but reported bad ones.

Three judges participated in this phase of the work. The scores in all categories were cast in terms of + (for "good" dreams) and - (for "bad" dreams), and these were added algebraically for a final score for each judge. The reliability among the three judges for this sort of scoring ranged from .73 to .80.

The judges were now sufficiently familiar with the material that they felt this complicated system was restrictive and wished to make global ratings again. Still not knowing which dreamers were peyotists or how many peyotists there were among the 59 dreamers, the judges made ratings of every dream this time, with no permission to omit ratings. Reliability here was far more variable. The original two judges (Judges A and B) still correlated about the same (this time .52). The third judge (Judge C), however, correlated .60 with Judge A and .15 with Judge B. Since Judges B and C were apparently rating something different, an average of the ratings of Judges A and C was used when comparing these ratings with the criterion.

RESULTS

First, both the ratings and the scorings were compared with age and educational backgrounds of the respondents. No relationship was found with either. Significant community differentials could not be found in the dream material. Then the information about which of the dreamers were peyotists was secured from the field investigators. Only 12 of the 59 were of this group—that is, were people who belonged or who had belonged to the Peyote Cult.

The total score from the more complex system of judging did not differentiate the two groups, although the mean for the peyotists was slightly more toward the disturbed end of the scale than was that for the non-peyotists. Breakdown of the categories was feasible only for "health," the others being mentioned too seldom to permit statistical analysis. With respect to reference to health and illness, the peyotists reported a far greater proportion of bad

dreams (of illness and death) than did the non-peyotists, the chi square falling beyond the .01 level of confidence (one-tailed tests of significance are used throughout this paper). Only one peyotist reported a good dream in this area. It should be noted that for the whole group of 59 respondents, the scores on the health category were preponderantly on the "bad dream" side, in a ratio of about 4 to 1. In the economy category there were slightly more "bad dream" scores for the peyotists than for the non-peyotists, but not significantly so. In the denial category the reverse was true: there were more denial scores for the non-peyotists than for the peyotists, but not significantly so. There were too few entries in the supernatural and gifts categories for the tabulations to be meaningful.

A t-test of the final ratings done by the two judges who correlated highly (Judges A and C) showed differentiation of peyotists from non-peyotists at the .03 level of confidence. Since there is some question of the legitimacy of omitting Judge B, several computations were tried to find the reason for the deviation of the one judge. First, an average of all three judges' ratings was compared with the criterion. Here the mean of the peyotists was higher (more disturbed) than that of the non-peyotists, but the difference was not significant. Next, the three judges' ratings were compared separately with the criterion. The averages of Judge B's ratings were almost identical for the two groups, while those of Judges A and C differentiated the groups at the .15 and .05 levels respectively.

DISCUSSION

A finding which needs explanation in this study is that of the differences among the judges on separating out the two groups of respondents. Chance variation in rating on a continuum which cannot be rated with high reliability is the first and most obvious explanation. The background of the judges with respect to ethnological experience is another. Judge A has had considerable course work in anthropology, both graduate and undergraduate, and has worked with projective test protocols of one Alaskan tribe; Judge B has had no contact with anthropology; Judge C, in addition to graduate and undergraduate course work, served as a psychologist on an ethnological field expedition in Africa for a period of 18 months, where he worked actively with four nonliterate tribes, and has done blind analysis of projective tests of people from India. It will be recalled that Judge B could not differentiate between the peyotists and non-peyotists, Judge A could at a questionable level of confidence, and Judge C could at a greater level of confidence. While it would be inadvisable to conclude directly that these differences in background have accounted for the differences in ability to make these judgments, the findings do raise the question of the effect of experience not only of a psychological but also of an anthropological nature on cross-cultural studies of depth-psychological material.

The results of this study, while they do add to the study of peyotism among the Navaho, serve chiefly to point out the usefulness of dreams as a source of

information in social anthropological research. In this study the collection of dreams was not a primary purpose of the research, and the allotted time did not allow for extensive questioning about dreams. Even so, however, the information derived from the dreams did contribute to the study as a whole. What would be the ideal data for research such as this? If one plans to use dreams as depth-psychological material in the way Eggan and others have done, he needs more dreams per respondent than were available for the present study. For judgments of disturbance of the individuals it might also be helpful to have series of dreams, but perhaps more important are all the respondents' reactions to the questions about their dream lives. Dreams are highly personal, and not everyone is willing to "let a stranger in" on such intimate aspects of his life. Ways of defending against the interviewer's questions about dreams give cues to a respondent's level of disturbance over inner conflicts which add to the nature of the content of the dreams themselves. How readily are dreams reported? Is it only after considerable encouragement that a dream of a certain content will finally be revealed? Does the respondent tense up or relax on the dream questions as compared to his reaction to questions about more impersonal topics in the interview? Answers to these questions and the many others which will occur to the interviewer will add to the precision with which judgments about disturbance can be made.

The major drawback of this research is that the system of analysis has been developed using the same data as that from which the findings are drawn, and confounding of results with hypotheses and with method are particularly possible under these circumstances. For further work with dream material from the Navaho, the present study may be regarded as a pretest of method. For work with other peoples' dreams, however, the study says only that dreams might be useful. This criticism is especially relevant to the breakdown of the dreams into content categories. For the Navaho the issue of health-illness is well known as a central problem of the culture, or more precisely, an issue around which many problems are expressed. For a group which is known to have other central issues, some other system of analysis would have to be used. For a relatively unknown group, prior research would be mandatory before dream analysis of the present variety could be undertaken.

SUMMARY

On the hypothesis that those Navaho whose traditional methods of problem solving had broken down would resort to peyote cultism, the dreams of 47 Navaho and 12 Peyote Cultists of Navaho origin were studied for indications of general psychological disturbance. Global judgments of disturbance were made by rating scales, and different content areas were scored and tabulated for "good" and "bad" dreams. The ratings showed the peyotists to be more disturbed than the rest of the Navaho, and in the major content area (health-illness) there was a far higher proportion of bad dreams than good among the peyotists as opposed to the other Navaho. Differences among the judges in differentiating the two groups are discussed in relation to the extent of their

experience with ethnological material, and ways of increasing the usefulness of dream material as a basis for judging disturbance in nonliterate groups or subgroups are suggested.

NOTES

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² The psychologists were Drs. Boris Ifund and Morris B. Parloff, and the authors wish to express their appreciation to them for serving as judges. Dr. Parloff gave considerable time in helping to devise ways of handling the codings within content categories.

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