

Bronislaw Malinowski: Sex (and) Repression in Savage Society  
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Dreams and day-dreams are not an easy subject for study among the Melonesians of the Trobriand Islands. It is a remarkable and characteristic feature of these natives, in which they seem to differ from other savages, that they apparently dream little, have little interest in their dreams, seldom relate them spontaneously, do not regard the ordinary dream as having any prophetic or other importance, and have no code of symbolic explanation whatever. When I tackled the subject directly, as I often did, and asked my informants whether they dreamt, and, if so, what their dreams had been, the answer was usually negative, with rare exceptions, to which we will return. Is this absence of dreams, or rather of interest in dreams, due to the fact that we are dealing with a non-repressed society, a society among whom sex, as such, is in no way restricted? Is it so because their "complex" is weak, appears late, and has few infantile elements? This rarity of free dreams and the absence of strong effect, hence absence of remembrance, points to the same conclusion as the absence of neurosis, that is, to the correctness in broad outline of the Freudian theory. For this theory affirms that the main cause of dreams is unsatisfied sexual appetite, and especially such sexual or quasi-sexual impulses as are repressed violently in infancy. To this question one could only obtain a satisfactory answer by collecting rich comparative material among two communities of similar culture and mode of living but with different repressions.

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Nor are such dreams merely spoken and only supposed to exist. Very frequently the magician himself would come to tell me that he had dreamt about a good yield in fishing, and would organize an expedition on the strength of it. Or a garden wizard would speak of a dream he had had about a long drought, and therefore order certain things to be done. During the annual ceremonial feast in honor of dead ancestors I had on two occasions opportunities of noting dreams of natives. In both cases the dream referred to the proceedings, and in one the dreamer claimed to have dreamt that he had had a conversation with the spirits, who were not satisfied with things. Another class of typical dream is concerned with the birth of babies. In these the future mother has a sort of dream annunciation from one of her dead relatives.

Now one of the typical or official dreams is the sexual dream, which interests us here more especially. A man will dream that a woman visits him at night; in dream he will have congress with her, and he will awake finding the discharge of semen on the mat. This he will conceal from his wife, but he will try to follow up the dream actively in real life and initiate an intrigue with the woman. For the dream means that she who visited him had performed love magic and that she desires him.

