Dreams of a music enthusiast: Analysis of a long dream series

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Summary. In this study, we analyzed a voice-recorded dream series (N=625) from a music enthusiast with severe sight impairment. We found a very high frequency of musical dreams (58.2%). Our findings supported the continuity hypothesis, suggesting that music engagement impacts dream content. General music themes and listening to music were more predominant, than dreams with making music, singing, and creativity. The finding that the frequency of musical dreams is even higher than in professional musicians, might be explained by the dreamer's musical enthusiasm combined with her severe sight impairment, resulting in her reliance on auditory experiences. In addition, music celebrities (e.g., Celine Dion) occurred relatively often. Notably, making and/or listening to music in dreams often conveyed negative emotions, while singing was associated with mostly positive emotions. These negative emotions are related to problems with musical performance and scary feelings while listening to specific music.

Keywords: Musical dreams, dream content analysis, continuity hypothesis, dream diary, voice-recorded dreams

1. Introduction

The continuity hypothesis of dreaming, emphasizing the strong relationship between waking-life and dream imagery, finds ample support in the literature, suggesting that dreams are intricately connected to waking-life conceptions and events (Schredl, 2003; Domhoff, 2003). For instance, waking-life activities, such as sports (Schredl & Erlacher, 2008, 2010), significant life events like divorce (Cartwright et al., 2006), emotionally charged experiences (Malinowski & Horton, 2014), and even contemporary events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Giovanardi et al., 2022), have been found to be frequently integrated into dream reports. Accordingly, it makes sense to assume that other activities that are considered emotionally expressive in waking-life, such as engagement with music (Zentner et al., 2008; Liljeström et al., 2013) would also integrate into the dream content.

There are different types of music dreams, such as playing music, singing, hearing known or even new melodies, talking or thinking about music (Schredl, 2015; Webb, 2017; Schredl, 2019; Olbrich & Schredl, 2019). Retrospectively, the frequency of music dreams are estimated about 6% to 12% (König et al., 2018). In diary studies, music played part in 8% of all reported dreams (König & Schredl, 2021). Dreams with musical elements are linked to a more positive emotional tone (Schredl et al., 2015), as participants consistently rated them more positively than their overall dream experiences (Kern et al., 2014).

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The study of Uga et al., (2006) showed that musicians dream more often about music compared to non-musicians (40% vs. 18%). Similarly in Vogelsang et al. (2016), choir members and music students reported more music-related dreams than psychology students. This is in line with studies (Vogelsang et al., 2016; König et al., 2018) showing that daily active engagement with music is a significant predictor of the prevalence of music dreams; thus, supporting the continuity hypothesis (Schredl, 2003).

Music dreams were also analyzed in long dream series: dream content analyses of two dream series obtained from participants with musical hobbies both revealed similar music dream frequencies, yielding 5.41 % for a male (Schredl, 2015), and 5.58 % for a female dreamer (Schredl, 2022). Over a time period of 28 years, the musical dream frequency was relatively stable (Schredl, 2015). The male participant dreamt about playing instruments (e.g. guitar), that he was also most involved with in his waking-life (Schredl, 2015). The female case study (Schredl, 2022) revealed that nearly half of her music-related dreams reflected singing, reflecting waking-life engagement with music (i.e., being a nun). Domhoff and Schneider (2020) analyzed a dream series (N = 664 dreams) of a young woman, who was very much interested in music, such as playing the organ and operating musical equipment. Of her dreams, 55.1% dreams included at least one music-related keyword. This dream series including the keywords is available online at DreamBank.net ("Jasmine"). Also, these dream series analyses are in accordance with the continuity hypothesis.

In the present study, we also analyzed the "Jasmine" series, using classical dream content analysis techniques. In addition to coding for presence and absence of music related topics in dreams, we also looked for emotions related to musical activities, and topics of creativity, music-related celebrities, singing, making music, listening to music and the music themes. As already reported, "Jasmine" was a music enthusiast and, thus, we expected a very high frequency of music-related dreams.

2. Method

2.1. Participant

The participant was a female dream journalist born in the mid-1980s, who started recording her dreams at age 14 (1999), with the last recording done at age 27 (late- December of 2011). She was born with optic nerve hypoplasia, which is associated with severe sight impairment. She can still recognize people by means of their hairstyle, their hair color, and the way they walk. She did not rely on Braille while growing up but was using magnifying equipment to aid her sight during everyday activities, such as reading and handling the computer. After high school graduation in 2003, Jasmine went to a community college for a year, then a technical school for year, and then returned to college a year or two after finishing her technical training. She completed her college with a Bachelor of Arts degree in December 2010, and started working with blind children, using Braille. She then returned to college for a Master of Arts degree in the field of education. According to the Dreambank.net webpage and to the additional description provided by Domhoff and Schneider (2020), Jasmine had strong interest in audio and electrical equipment, as well as in playing musical instruments (e.g. organ, keyboard) and singing. She grew up listening to various music genres, sang in the school chorus, and had an interest in the piano. While away at technical school, she acquired a keyboard and learned to play with guidance from her music professor. Upon returning home, she took piano lessons and was also performing for diverse audiences (e.g. nursing homes, hospitals and churches) using the organ and the piano.

Overall, 625 dream reports recorded between 2001 and 2011 (with no reports between 2007-2009) were included in the present analysis. The average word count was 351.98 ± 216.392, with the minimum of 25 and maximum of 1433 words.

2.2. Dream content analysis

For the first analysis, scales for rating the presence and absence of music-related activities in dreams that have already been used in the studies of König and Schredl (2021), Schredl (2015) and Schredl (2022) were applied.

Similarly in the current study, the hereby applied scales investigated the binary coded presence or absence (1/0) of specific music related topics in each individual dream report. Overall, four scales (listening to music, making music, singing, and general music-related topics) were applied and coded for the presence or absence (1/0) in each individual dream report. Inter-rater reliability, as reported in König and Schredl (2021) correspond for the scale of listening to/hearing music as Cohen's $\kappa = 0.84$, making music as $\kappa = 0.80$, singing as $\kappa = 0.73$, and the general theme of music as $\kappa = 0.98$. In addition, the dreams were coded for the presence of celebrities (i.e. appearance of any known characters or public figures) and music-related creativity (i.e. new or uniquely modified melodies, lyrics reported in the dream).

Once the topic of music was discovered, further analyses were performed. If a music-related topic occurred, they were classified into eight categories: equipment (handling it or being present), music related occupation, music related environment, intention of playing music or singing, talking about music, activities related to music (e.g. being part of a choir, going to a concert), writing music and imagining music. If a dream included a scene of listening to music, the following categorizations were performed: location (e.g. at home), activity (e.g. dancing), title (0 = not title/genre specified, 1 = title/genre specified), live music (0 = non-live, 1 = live, 2 = inconclusive), emotion (-1 = negative emotions, 0 = neutral/non-specified, +1 = positive emotions). If a specific genre, music title or lyrics was mentioned, it was documented. The subscales of making music were the type of instrument (e.g. organ), company (alone), location, title, emotion and qualitative description of the emotion as mentioned by the dreamer in the report. For the scale of singing, the subscales were company, location, title, emotion, type of instrument and also the qualitative variable of text of the singing (i.e. What was sang?). The topic of celebrities was grouped into five categories: musicians, actors/actresses, talk show moderators, historical figures and fictional characters.

2.3. Procedure

The dreamer contacted G. William Domhoff who set up the DreamBank.net website and offered to share her dream series with him. "Jasmine" was the pseudonym for her dream series. From the complete body of 664 dreams, 625 dream reports were selected for further dream content analysis, beginning from the high-school age of the participant (mind-June of 2001) until after college years (late-December of 2011), because the first 39 dreams were recorded non-consecutively. The dreams were voice-recorded (due to the severe sight impairment of "Jasmine"), transcribed by the personnel of the DreamBank.net website, and subsequently uploaded to the website. No reports were obtained between 2007 and 2009; according to the participant, this was due to issues with her recording equipment and loss of motivation to keep recording her dreams. There was no thematic preference in the recordings of the dreams, as the participant did not specifically focus on collecting dreams that were centered on the topic of music.

On the website keywords were provided to search the dream series for music related topics. For instance, "keyboard", "equipment", "microphones", "singing", "choir", "Bach", "Beethoven" (for a full list see website). After searching for music-related dreams using the keywords, all 625 dreams were inspected manually for further music-related topics. There were few mismatches that have been corrected. For all 625 dreams the content analytic scales (see above) were applied. In the second step all music-related dreams were analyzed with additional scales. Descriptive statistics were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27).

Table 1. Summary table of co-occurring main topics within all dreams (N=625).

Number of Topics	Frequency	Percent
0	261	41.7%
1	197	31.5%
2	116	18.6%
3	42	6.7%
4	9	1.4%

Table 2. Frequency of dreams with at least one of the muscial activities (N=625).

Topics	Frequency	Percent
Listening to Music	137	21.9%
Musical theme	289	46.2%
Making Music	26	4.2%
Singing	43	6.9%
Music Celebrities	71	11.4%
Creativity	10	1.6%

3. Results

More than half of the total number of dream reports (58.2%) contained some reference to music, and most music-related dreams contained one or two musical topics (see Table 1). Three or four musical topics in one dream were relatively rare. Music as a general theme was the most common of all musical topics and occurred 405times in 289 dreams (see Table 2). Listening to music occurred also quite often (153 times in 137 dreams). Making music, singing and encounters with music celebrities were less often present in the dreams. Furthermore, expressions of music-related creativity occurred in the dream series rarely, with 2.7% of musical dreams referring to either previously unheard lyrics or modified versions of existing pieces. Most of these creative dreams unfolded while listening to music or singing. In Table 3, the different musical themes were categorized. The participant most commonly dreamt about the musical equipment itself, and other musical themes occurred less often. For the three musical activities, listening to music, making music and singing, the emotional quality was analyzed (see Table 4). For listening and making music, the negative emotions outweighed the positive emotions. In contrast, for singing the ratio was reversed. In most cases, no explicit emotions were specified. One example of negative emotions related to listening to music was being scared (see dream example 1; dream examples were presented in the "Dream Examples" section below). Emotions of disappointment (e.g. due to playing the notes wrong or doing a poor job as a Disc Jockey), worry and doubt (directly linked to the dreamer's musical performance) were associated with making music (see dream examples 2 and 3). Positive emotions related to singing were having fun and experiencing joy (see dream examples 4 and 5).

Most frequently occurred locations across making music, listening to music and singing topics were at home, school, and also frequently at unclear locations. A number of locations, like parties, restaurants and outdoors were varying across the topics. The dreamer reported engaging in singing or making music in the dreams most commonly alone,

Table 3. Frequency of general music themes within music dreams.

Musical Themes	Frequency	Percent
Equipment presence/ handling equipment (e.g. setting up sound system)	228	56.3%
Intention of playing music/singing (but ending up not doing so)	29	7.2%
Activities related to music (e.g. being at a party, going to a concert, being in a choir)	55	13.6%
Talking about music/about making music (e.g. talking about a song)	36	8.9%
Music related environment (e.g. sound room, studio, recording booth, radio station)	29	7.2%
Music related occupation (e.g. sound man, intern at a radio station)	22	5.4%
Writing music (e.g. writing musical notes)	5	1.2%
Imagining music (i.e. actively imagining a melody or song playing out)	1	0.2%

rather than with company. In 23 dreams with making music, the musical instrument was explicitly mentioned. The keyboard (N = 8), organ (N = 7) and piano (N = 6) were the most commonly used instruments for playing music. A specific "instrument" was the mixer (N = 2), used for DJ-ing.

In the following, most often occurring music titles, artists and/or genres were listed. Notably, Celine Dion's compositions, particularly "The Prayer," appeared frequently (N =13) dreams). Another recurrent piece was the "Bluebird song" (N = 7), followed by the "Wee Sing" songbook (N = 6), and the "La La Lu" song (N = 3). The most frequently heard genres were Pop, Rock & Roll/Metal, church/religious, children's songs/lullabies, and classical music.

Overall, 55 different celebrities occurred in 84 dreams, and 40 (72.7%) of these celebrities were musicians. 59 out of the 84 celebrity dreams included musicians (70.2%), and in 10 of those dreams multiple musicians were reported. 15 different celebrities (27.3%) fell into non-musician categories, including actors (e.g. Colin Hanks), fictional characters (e.g. characters from the "Little Mermaid"), talk show figures (e.g. Oprah Winfrey), and historical figures (e.g. Cristopher Columbus). The most frequently appearing known figure was Celine Dion; occurred in 31 different dreams, followed by the fictional characters of the "Little Mermaid" (characters frequently shown up together), reported in 19 dreams. Some further examples of musical celebrities who appeared in the dream series include Mariah Carey (N = 2), Bryan Adams (N = 2), Andrea Bocelli (N = 2), Missy Elliot (N = 1) and Gloria Estefan (N = 1).

The percentage of musical dreams per year was fairly high over the 10 year period where dreams were reported,

Table 4. Emotions per musical activity within music dreams.

Emotions	Listening to Music		Making Music		Singing	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Positive	14	9.2%	4	14.8%	7	16.7%
Neutral/Non-specified	115	75.6%	14	51.8%	32	76.2%
Negative	23	15.1%	9	33.3%	3	7.1%

Table 5. Summary table of dreams broken down to years.

Year	Dreams per Year	Musical Dreams per Year	
		Count	Percent
2001	72	45	62.5%
2002	136	97	71.3%
2003	147	87	59.2%
2004	124	55	44.4%
2005	33	18	54.5%
2006	17	9	52.9%
2010	41	29	70.7%
2011	55	24	43.6%

with most musical dreams recorded in the year of 2002 and the least number of dreams recorded in 2006 (see Table 5).

Dream examples

Dream example 1: "…I was listening to the radio, which in reality it didn't come on yet, but in my dream it was on, and it was this techno-y rap kind of thing. And there was this scary techno song … that goes, "Dee dee dee dee dee," and then, "Bee bee bee bee bee bee bee," and then, "Dee dee dee dee dee." And in my dream it was just really scary."

Dream example 2:"…the good stuff that she was playing I couldn't find. I wasn't looking in the right place. And I felt like I was doing a terrible mix, because I wasn't playing stuff that was appropriate for the crowd, because I didn't know what I was going to queue up, because I couldn't read the darned things and I didn't, like with my collection I know what's where."

Dream example 3:"…and I was practicing, I was playing "Amazing Grace" and I was thinking how, I was really having a lot of feelings like I didn't have enough time to practice, and how was I going to pull this off? How were we going to pull off this being a good musician thing when I don't have time to practice and I don't feel like I'm getting my stuff down right?"

Dream example 4:"Celine Dion was in our kitchen… and next thing I knew, we were at the counter and we like put our heads against each other and sang it like in full voice. And that was kind of incredible..."

Dream example 5:"…and I was kind of stepping out on deck with this musician type of guy who was playing the guitar. And he had a guitar amp sitting on board. And he was playing some big easy bayou stuff and I was dancing and singing with him. And we were just having a blast."

4. Discussion

As expected, music played a prominent role in the dream content of this music enthusiast, with over half of all dreams are related to music. The most frequent topic was the general theme of music including mostly audio equipment and music related activities. Listening to music was a common dream activity, surpassing singing and making music. In addition, a considerable number of dreams contained celebrities (e.g. Celine Dion). On the other hand, the frequency of creative dreams (e.g. making new music) was rather low. Interestingly, dreams associated with listening to-, and making music revealed more negative emotions, than positive emotions; except for singing, which was mainly associated with positive emotions.

The generalizability of the present findings is limited, as we selected a specific dreamer for the analysis. However, the dream series was deliberately selected because of the dreamer's high level of musical interests. As far as to our knowledge, there was no systematic bias in recording mostly musical dreams. Thus, the high number of musical dreams seems to reflect the high waking-life engagement with music. The higher frequency of negative emotions in our findings may be influenced by the tendency of external raters to underestimate the presence of positive emotions within the dream content (Röver & Schredl, 2017). As predominantly positive emotions were found for the topic of singing, we hypothesized that the bias of overestimating negative emotions might not have affected our results in a meaningful way.

The higher average word count observed in the 'Jasmine' dream series is likely due to the method of voice recording. This aligns with the findings of Schredl et al. (2019), which demonstrated that voice-recorded dreams tend to be significantly longer, with a mean word count of 310, compared to written dream reports, which have an average word count of 100. This is beneficial for dream content analysis, as it implies substantial amount of details for each dream.

The high percentage of music-related dreams supports the continuity hypothesis of dreaming (Schredl, 2003), as the dreamer is highly involved with music-related activities in her waking-life. The minor discrepancy to the previously reported music dream frequency of this dream series (Domhoff & Schneider, 2020) is explained by the application of different analytical methods: dream content analysis versus the key word search approach. This high musical dream frequency is in line with previous research showing that musicians, music students and choir members dream more often about music than non-musician participants (Uga et al., 2006; Vogelsang et al., 2016). The music percentage in the "Jasmine" series was even higher compared to professional musicians; 58.2% vs 40% (Uga et al., 2006). This might be explained by the extensive musical engagement of "Jasmine", and by the intense reliance on her auditory senses (severe sight impairment, due to being born with optic nerve hypoplasia). Auditory perception in dreams seems to be more frequent in congenitally blind than in healthy individuals (Kang et al., 2023; Meaidi et al., 2014). However, music in dreams of blind subjects was not specifically investigated yet (Ilic et al., 2023). The occurrence of the instruments, such as keyboard, piano, and organ in her dreams mirrors her active engagement with these instruments in her waking life. Moreover, dreams including church music correspond to her role as a church organist, further reinforcing this connection.

Her intensive involvement with music can also be inferred from the analysis of celebrities occurring in the dreams. Whereas in a student sample (Alperstein & Vann, 1997) about 25% of the celebrities are music-related, in the "Jasmine" series 70.2% of the celebrity-themed dreams involved musicians. Given her occurrence in 31 dreams, it is likely that Celine Dion is among the dreamer's favorite artists.

In comparison to previous studies (König et al., 2018; Vogelsang et al., 2016), where the participants reported that

unknown music occurred in about 16-20% of their music dreams, our findings from the "Jasmine" series revealed that merely 2.7% of the musical dreams included new or modified songs. A slightly higher percentage of creative music dreams was reported by another dreamer: about 9% (Schredl, 2022). In the literature overview of Olbrich and Schredl (2019), many anecdotes of creative musical dreams were listed; making this an intriguing subject for future research. The study of Schädlich & Erlacher (2018) showed that musicians used lucid dreaming to enhance their creative potential for composing new musical pieces. This might be an interesting venue for future research.

Previous findings showed that musical dreams were mainly associated with positive emotions (Schredl et al., 2015, König & Schredl, 2021, Kern et al., 2014). However, a significant number of dreams of music students were negatively toned, e.g., having problems with musical performance (Vogelsang et al., 2016). Similarly, in "Jasmine's" series more negative than positive emotions were associated with listening to- and making music. Negative emotions related to music-making are plausible (see Vogelsang et al., 2016), as "Jasmine" experienced problems with her musical performance in dreams (e.g., due to playing the notes wrong). The preponderance of negative emotions related to listening to music was not reported previously and might be explained by "Jasmine" being scared when hearing certain pieces or melodies. In another dream series of Schredl (2015), a minority of musical dreams were negatively rated, typically explained by loudness, the dreamer's music preferences, or the emotional tone of the music. Hence, the prevalence of negative emotions may be idiosyncratic to "Jasmine", also possibly influenced by her visual impairment.

In summary, our study demonstrated a very high musical dream frequency in a music enthusiast. This uniqueness is possibly explained by the dreamer's musical enthusiasm combined with her sight impairment, highlighting her reliance on auditory experiences. Future studies should further explore the manifestations of waking-life musical activities in the dream content, utilizing dream series or musician samples. Additionally, exploring music in the dreams of blind individuals remains an intriguing avenue for future research.

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