

Pilot demonstration of a dreamer-centered dream series methodology for enriched phenomenological data and improved testing of the Continuity and Embodied Cognition Theories of Dreaming

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Summary. This article demonstrates a new dreamer-centered dream series methodology that can enhance the quality and phenomenological richness of the data used in dream research. In particular, this pilot study offers a more direct method of testing both the Continuity and Embodied Cognition Theories of Dreaming (ECTD) by (1) systematically identifying waking-life referents and their recency in relation to specific dream contents; (2) empowering individualized subjective interpretation and ratings of the personal meaning, bizarreness and emotionality of their own dreams; (3) expanding analysis from singular “whole dreams” to encompass a comprehensive series of multiple dreams; (4) enabling more detailed analysis of segments within whole dreams; and (5) collecting naïve self-interpretive impressions that can facilitate identification of metaphors and schemas across the dream/waking continuum. In support of the “continuity” required for both theories, this single-case series analysis of 22 dreams (subdivided into 74 dream segments) found 30% of dream content could be connected to waking life referents occurring in the preceding day, 50% within a week and 70% within 2 weeks. Most importantly, the proposed methodology yields the type of direct experiential data that can go beyond the mere question of “what” we dream about to seeing “how” dream consciousness incorporates waking life experiences in generating meaningful perceptions and alternative perspectives that can have practical and creative utility for living.

Keywords: Dream analysis, dream research, dream phenomenology, Continuity Hypothesis

1. Introduction

As we finish the first quarter of the 21st century, there is an expansive research literature on dreaming, a wealth of available dream data, including massive data-sets like Dream-Bank.net and DreamResearch.net, and a variety of established dream research methods, including lab awakenings, home dream logs, and questionnaires. The predominant approach continues to be *systematic content analysis*, in which researchers use classification and coding schemes to objectively count (or rate) the frequencies of various types of dream content as occurring in various aggregate samples of dream narratives. Originating with C.S. Hall’s ground-breaking dream studies in the 1940’s, Hall and Van De Castle (1966) developed and validated a comprehensive coding system for dream content analysis and “norms”, which are still used widely in dream research today (Schredl, 2010).

In addition to analyzing the content of thousands of individual dream narratives across comparative groups, populations, and eras of time, systematic content analysis has also been applied to analyze the content of *dream series*, in which a collection of dreams from the same individual are studied longitudinally. The advantage of dream series data is the ability to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth

psychological understanding of the individual as revealed in the consistency and changes in the content of their dreaming life over time. Dream series studies have ranged from “short” series that entail 15 to 25 dreams over a period of a few months (e.g., Hall, 1966), to 20 long-term longitudinal studies since 1888, ranging from one to 53 years in duration and encompassing hundreds of dreams by single individuals (Schredl, 2024, p. 23-24).

By comparison, this proposed dreamer-centered dream series methodology (DCDS) is “very short” in duration, but more bountiful in the data obtained. As explained later, the method is restricted to seven consecutive days because it puts extensive practical time demands upon the participant dreamer to collect and process *all* of their dreams as they occur each night. In this demonstration case example, the dreamer averaged 3 dreams per night for a total of 20 dreams and two “musical ear-worms.” The DCDS method is designed to enhance the quality and phenomenological richness of the dream data we collect for analysis by (1) empowering individual interpretation and ratings of the personal meaning, bizarreness and emotionality of their own dreams; (2) systematically identifying waking-life referents and their recency in relation to specific dream contents; (3) expanding analysis from a singular focus on discrete “whole dreams” to encompass a comprehensive series of multiple dreams; (4) enabling more detailed analysis of subsections within individual whole dreams; and (5) collecting naïve self-interpretive impressions that can facilitate identification of embodied metaphors, image schemas and schemas across the dream/waking continuum per ECTD theory.

The proposed DCDS method is also designed to provide a more direct and effective means of empirically testing both the *Continuity Hypothesis*, and the *Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming* (Wagener, 2023) as explained below:

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1) Using DCDS to test Continuity Theory. The Continuity Hypothesis has probably been the most fruitful theory in generating dream research since its original statement by Hall & Nordby (1972, p. 104) over 50 years ago: “The dream world is neither discontinuous nor inverse in its relationship to the conscious world. We remain the same person, the same personality with the same characteristics and the same basic beliefs and convictions whether awake or asleep.” According to Continuity Theory, we dream about people, experiences, and concerns that are important to us, such as family members, spouses and partners, friends, career, hobbies, sexuality, sources of stress and worry, and other everyday concerns, which shows a lot of *continuity* between our waking and dreaming life. In their summary of sleep lab and home-based dream content research, Zadra and Domhoff (2011, p. 585) affirm this continuity in asserting that “dreams are a reasonable simulation of waking life characters, social interactions, activities, and settings and dreams show systematic relationships to various dimensions of the dreamer’s waking life – *but not to day-to-day events*” (emphasis by author). By systematically identifying waking life referents for dream content, this DCDS methodology can *directly measure the level of continuity* between waking and dreaming consciousness. In fact, this study contrarily suggests that 70% of dream images *can* be linked to “*day to day events*” of the preceding 14 days.

Recently, as one of the foremost dream scientists, Schredl (2024, p. 214) concluded that the “continuity hypothesis, in its current form, is not complete” because “there is discontinuity (elements that do not fit into the waking world of the dreamer) and creativity (elements the dreamer never experienced in waking life) in dreams.” Schredl’s conclusion is empirically based on the results of his own extraordinary and ongoing lifelong dream research project, which covers over 12,679 of his own dreams over 30 consecutive years (Schredl, 2024), as well as his encyclopedic knowledge of the dream research literature (Schredl, 2018). Accordingly, Schredl proposes that Continuity Theory should be expanded to a “broader framework,” which he terms the “Continuity-Discontinuity-Creativity (CDC) theory.”

In contradiction, this article will argue that Continuity Theory remains compelling and ideal in its *parsimony* by showing that both the seeming “discontinuity” and the seeming inability of the theory to account for “creativity” are artifacts arising from the shortcomings of the systematic content analysis method – especially because of its reliance on “stale” (i.e., not “fresh” – see below) and *impoverished dream content data that is disconnected from the context of the individuals’ waking-life experiences at the time of their dreams*. In short, any data about waking life connections to dream experience is never collected and forever lost, along with the opportunity to directly measure the continuity of dreaming and waking consciousness. This proposed dream series methodology enables direct study of continuity by improving the scope, quality and meaningfulness of the dream data in three essential ways.

(1) *Freshness* – Dreams must be recorded as immediately as possible upon recall to capture the details of the dream and to optimize the completeness and accuracy of the dream narrative data. Given that dreams evaporate very quickly, the slightest delay or momentary lapse in the dreamer’s motivation to record a given dream on awakening can result in its complete loss or the loss of vital details.

(2) *Connectedness to waking life referents* – It is important to seek and identify any relevant waking life events and experiences that are connected to, continuous with, and/or incorporated into the recorded dream narrative, along with a determination of the recency of those events (i.e., hours, days, weeks, etc.). Only the dreamer can provide this data about waking life context and continuity. Here, too, freshness (timeliness) is crucial to identifying likely waking life referents, although it is not as urgent as capturing the dream experience itself on awakening.

(3) *Inclusion of the dreamer’s felt experience* – Only the individual dreamer can provide their direct experience (i.e., “impression”) of the felt sense of the meaning, significance/importance, bizarreness, and emotional intensity of their dreams and of the component events/elements within their dreams. In contrast to an in-depth analysis and “interpretation” by a clinical professional, the present method captures the dreamer’s *immediate* and naïve “first impressions” or gut sense of the significance and meaning of given dream elements and images.

2) Using DSDS to test the ECTD. The DCDS method can also facilitate testing of the presumed “continuity” that is crucial for the Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming (ECTD), which holds that the function of dreaming is to “prepare schemas” for waking life by “organiz[ing] schemas congruent with individuals’ affective and sensorimotor understandings of self-in-context” (Wagener, 2023, p. 35).

Dreams depict emotionally salient concerns as a sensori-motor and affective experience in which “abstract concepts” appear as simulated “*embodied metaphors*,” such as “a lion in a shopping cart” (Jennings, 2007) or “giant hovering lips” (this study). By means of these embodied metaphors, dreams organize and transform recent waking life experience and cognitions into sensori-motor and affectively-based *schemas*. Schemas are associative mental structures that are learned through experience, which create expectations and pre-conceived strategies and can be triggered by relevant contextual cues for rapid response. ECTD asserts that dreams cannot perform abstract conceptual thinking (as easily as waking consciousness), but dreams are notably effective in generating *image schemas*, which can transform abstract ideas into recognizable patterns (structures) that convey affective and sensori-motor experience. In turn, these schemas *prepare* the individual’s sensori-motor processes to manage the waking life concerns that prompted the given dream. Thus, ECTD gives dreams an important functional role in creating, structuring and enacting schemas which “prepare individuals to use sensorimotor processes likely to be needed in waking experience” (Wagener, 2023, p. 35).

As explained later, the DCDS method is ideal for studying embodied metaphors and image schemas because it breaks any given dream down into its multiple component “segments” based on naturally occurring transitional shifts in the narrative (e.g., “my dream then shifts to another scene...”) and/or highly salient dream images. By identifying the occurrence and recency of waking life referents that are linked to these various dream segments/images (when memory is fresh) and by facilitating the dreamer’s natural naïve capacity to self-understand the meaning of these component

Table 1. Using the dreamer-centered dream series methodology (DCDS) to test the Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming (ECTD).

Research questions about ECTD:	How DCDS method can test them:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure the degree of continuity between waking events/concerns and the dreaming content as required by ECTD. 	DCDS systematically identifies specific details of waking life referents to dream content (and their recency), which is only available from individual's experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test whether the creations of dreaming are truly <i>preparatory</i> (i.e., anticipatory of waking concerns) or <i>consolidating and expressing</i> perceptions (from preceding day). 	DCDS yields detailed day-by-day series data to study the actual sequence of "waking event → dream prep → subsequent waking day → dream prep...."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to identify and analyze metaphoric content within dreams. 	DCDS yields the naïve interpretations of meaning of dream segments that can take form of implicit or explicit metaphors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test whether metaphors (and schemas) of waking life are incorporated or repeated in dreaming consciousness. (Note: See examples in discussion section). 	DCDS yields relevant waking life experiences connected to dreamer's dream content, including identifiable metaphors and schemas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the hypothesis that bizarreness of dreams <i>obscures links to waking life experience</i> and <i>prevents schemas</i> from being established (Wagener, 2023, p. 37). 	If, as suggested by the results of this study, bizarreness is not nearly as pervasive as supposed by ECTD, this would challenge this hypothesis.

"segments", the DCDS method can test multiple research questions about the ECTD, such as shown in Table 1.

3) The shared issue of subjective data: One key aspect of the Dreamer-Centered Dream Series methodology is inviting the dreamer to give his/her own *subjective* evaluation/opinion about the meaning or significance of the various component segments of their dreams, as well as their dreams as a whole. This will probably be most unacceptable to empirical researchers of the dreaming/waking Continuity Theory – both traditional content analytic and ECTD researchers alike – because the biases and idiosyncrasies of the individual's subjective perceptions would, ostensibly, introduce too much uncontrolled variability and threaten the validity of the data. In fact, the experimentalist's demand for *objective* scientific data (i.e., data that multiple independent observers can reliably agree upon in applying a strictly standardized procedure/tool) may be the biggest reason that most content analysis researchers have ignored, avoided or otherwise rejected the collection of such subjective "self-interpretive" dream data from the dreamers themselves.

In simple terms, how can researchers trust that the dreaming subjects are being honest and conscientious in reporting and evaluating their own dreams and that the data obtained is viable for use? In defending the integrity of their dream research data, Schneider and Domhoff (2024) provide a three-fold rationale that addresses this concern: First, dreamer subjects have the protection of *anonymity*. Second, subjects "*have nothing to hide*" in providing dream content data. They typically do not feel personally responsible for, or believe that, the content of their dreams are (potentially embarrassing) revelations of their true character and motives. Third, the *consistency of empirical findings* across a plethora of large aggregate samples shows that their dream content data is reliable and valid. The same anonymity and lack of concern about embarrassment would also apply to naïve subjects in the DCDS research design. As for the third rationale, the uncontrolled variability across single case studies could be statistically balanced by an appropriately sized sample of other dreamers.

Historically, Hall's (1966) pioneering dream series research paradigm is notable in its direct efforts to actually *interpret the psychological meaning of dreams* in a scientifically objective fashion. Rather than relying upon the analy-

sis and interpretation of a single dream, Hall reasoned that the analysis of a *series* of dreams of an individual over several months offered the most comprehensive and accurate understanding of the individual's personality and life issues. There were two serious problems with Hall's method from the vantage point of this new dreamer-centered dream series methodology: First, for Hall, the interpretation of the meaning of each dream series must be made by an *external*, and ostensibly objective, clinician or psychologist with dream expertise. Hall's method rejects *any* interpretative input from the dreamer or validation of the expert's interpretations by the dreamer, which explicitly excludes the dreamer's direct phenomenological experience.

The second problem with Hall's dream series methodology is that it is loaded with presumptions from psychoanalytic theory. To his credit, Hall broke with the foundational Freudian premise that dreams are *disguised* expressions of forbidden unconsciousness wishes. Instead, Hall asserted that dreams are *un-disguised symbols* (i.e., pictorial depictions) that express the dreamer's self-perceptions and conceptions about other people and the world. Although Hall emphasized that the so-called *manifest* (surface) *meaning* of dreams is fully valid in its own right, he retained the presumption of *latent meaning* by shifting it to psychological factors occurring "outside" the dream itself. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic conceptions are pervasive in the clinical examples of interpretation from Hall's (1966) landmark book. For example, Hall's interpretations reveal a recurrent and prominent search for expressions of the Oedipal complex in the symbols in clients' dreams. At the same time, Hall tried to bolster the supposed validity of the psychoanalytic expert's Oedipal interpretations of dream meaning by creating new classification and coding schemes that would give the appearance of "objective" identification of Oedipal themes. Thus, for example, Hall found that males have more "castration anxiety" and females have more "penis envy" in their dreams (Hall, 1966, page xvii). Further, Hall reveals his psychoanalytic theoretical bias by explicitly asserting that, "I cannot understand man's conduct unless I start with... *the fundamental fact that sex and aggression are the two basic motivating forces of thought and behavior*" (Hall, 1966, p. 238).

In sharp contrast, this dreamer-centered dream series method rejects the use of any particular theory – whether Freudian, Neo-Freudian, Jungian, existential, Gestalt or otherwise – in favor of the presumption that *untrained lay persons have the capacity to discern the meaning of their own dreams using their own naïve impressions and ideas* (Jennings, 1986a, 1995, 2007, 2022a). The emphasis is on the individual's description of the dream experience in its original detail, taking note of how any given element may resonate with or incorporate waking life events and concerns, and getting a gut-level sense or impression (rather than a formal in-depth interpretation) about the significance of the dream imagery and experience (at the level of the component segments of the dream as a whole), which is frequently in the context of the dreamer's current life. By trusting the naïve capacity of people to make sense of their own dreams, the proposed dreamer-centered method avoids theoretical preconceptions and optimizes the phenomenological "purity" of the dream data.

The assertion that untrained, naïve dreamers can make valid interpretations of the personal meaning of their own dreams is grounded in 40 years of applied use by Jennings in a traditional dyadic counseling context (1986a, 1995, 2007, 2022a). Originating as an adaptation of Carl Rogers' nondirective person-centered approach to dream-work, the three primary principles of Jennings' method for facilitating the client's self-understanding of their own dreams include: (1) *reviewing each detail of the dream*, (2) moving from beginning to end in the original *chronological order*, and (3) *always giving authority to the dreamer* for discerning and confirming the personal meaning of each respective dream image. Analysis in chronological order is essential because the opening images of a dream typically "set the stage" of the person's foremost concerns and the evolving "story" expresses whatever issues are currently troubling or important to the dreamer (Jennings, 1986a). In short, dream images are informed by preceding images and shape subsequent ones.

Jennings' approach provides variety of facilitative techniques to help clients to explore and self-discern the meaning in their own dreams as illustrated in verbatim session transcripts (Barrineau, 1992; Jennings, 1986a, 1995, 2007, 2021). [The method has also been used to systematically demonstrate the self-evident meanings in Freud's famous dream of Irma's injection and in the two dreams featured in Freud's case of Dora (Jennings, 2022b, 2024).] Jennings' counseling techniques for facilitating the exploration of dream meaning can be adapted into a set of tips and techniques that can be taught to and then self-applied by naïve participant dreamers in a controlled research design. A new protocol for the pre-research training of participant dreamers for using DCDS entails three areas: First, and most importantly, it offers techniques for dreamers to optimally recall their dreams. Second, the pre-research training provides some practice in using the Jennings techniques to make sense of their own dreams. Finally, the dream study subjects receive standardized guidance for completing the additional tasks of identifying waking-life referents and applying the three evaluation scales as described in the Method section below. [Of note, the feasibility of training lay persons in this methodology is being tested by developing an initial protocol/guide and conducting a pilot training session with a group of psychology undergraduates.]

2. Method

2.1. Participant and dream log

The male participant is a 68-year old Caucasian American psychologist, who devised this new methodology and was selected to pilot its utility. The participant kept a record log of all of his dreams for a continuous period of seven consecutive days. Upon awakening during the night and/or in the morning, the participant used a tape recorder to describe the occurrence of each dream that could be recalled. The dreamer recorded a total of 20 discrete dreams and 2 musical "earworms", ranging from 1 to 6 dreams per night, for a daily average of 3.1 dreams remembered.

2.2. Procedure

1) Record narrative: Each morning, the dreamer used the tape recordings to type down a narrative description of each of the dreams from the preceding night.

2) Subdivide into segments: The dreamer would then break each full dream narrative into smaller analyzable segments. The decision as to where to subdivide the narrative was based on two guidelines: Identification of especially salient images or major events in the dream, or identification of abrupt shifts in location and time or shifts in the story narrative (e.g., "The dream then shifts to..." "Then I find myself somewhere else..." "The guard stopped me. So then I tried to sneak around..."). The process of subdividing would typically yield segments of one to two sentences in length, for an average of 3.4 segments per dream.

3) Spreadsheet entry: The dreamer would then enter the component segments in chronological order in the spreadsheet (see Table A1, Appendix) to perform the following seven tasks:

4) Referents and recency: The dreamer would think about and identify any specific waking life events or experiences that appeared to be a "referent" for a given dream element/segment (e.g., dreaming about pigs with dangerous teeth corresponded to recently watching three different TV shows about wild pigs and boars). Contrary to "free association," this reflection was "goal-directed association". The dreamer would determine the recency of the waking life referent (e.g. TV show occurred 23 days before the dream). The recency of the waking life events would be recorded in days, using the following time categories: within hours (i.e., the evening before), same day, 2 days, 3-7 days, 8-14 days, 15-30 days, 31-60 days, >2 months, and >year (or "unknown" if there were no recognized referents).

5) Immediate reflections on meaning of dream elements: The dreamer recorded any initial thoughts or impressions about the possible or likely personal meaning or significance of each dream element. As distinguished from an extended or in-depth analysis and interpretation of a dream, the goal was to gain an initial, immediate and brief impression or gut level sense of the personal meaning of each dream segment – while memory of the dream experience was still fresh.

The next three tasks entail the use of the same 5-point Likert rating scale as follows: **0** = *Not at all (none)*, **1** = *A little bit (mild)*, **2** = *Somewhat (low moderate)*, **3** = *Quite a bit (moderate)*, and **4** = *Very much (extreme)*.

6) Rating bizarreness/mundaneness: The dreamer used the 5-point Likert scale to rate his personal opinion as to the level of bizarreness (vs. mundaneness) of each dream

segment. Bizarreness is defined as the degree to which the dream image/event/situation (as contained in the given segment) is *surprising or shocking to oneself personally in the dream*. Conversely, if the dream image is personally experienced as ordinary, mundane, expected, normal, or commonplace to the dreamer, it is rated as not bizarre. Bizarreness was *not* defined as the impossibility or unlikelihood of the element occurring in the real world, *nor* in terms of how others might objectively view the bizarreness of a given element.

Some examples will help clarify the importance of the individual's *personal* reaction to the dream images. The dreamer rated the "WW2 movie scene" dream segment #3.2.c. as "not at all" bizarre (i.e., a rating of "0") because the dreamer is the author of three Holocaust memoirs and the movie imagery was realistic and expected (not surprising or shocking). In contrast, an objective external rater might rate this same imagery as "quite a bit" or "very much" bizarre. But it is not at all bizarre to this dreamer. Subsequently, however, the dreamer increased his rating of bizarreness for the same dream segment #3.2.d to "a little bit" bizarre because the Nazi guard was the comic actor Zach Braff, which was personally surprising. Similarly, the dreamer rated the "puma prowling on the airplane" in dream segment #2.3.h as "not at all" bizarre because the puma quickly disappears and the plane scene is otherwise calm and completely normal as expected. His *personal* reaction is key for understanding why the puma would be rated very differently by an objective rater. [Note: If desired, external raters could add "objective" ratings of the same dream narrative for an interesting comparison with the dreamer's subjective ratings.]

7) Rating personal significance/meaning: The dreamer used a 5-point scale to rate his gut level sense of the level of the potential importance or significance or personal meaningfulness of the dream segments. If the dreamer had no ideas about the meaning of a given element, it was noted, and typically rated as "0" or "1".

8) Rating emotionality and its valence: The dreamer first used a 5-point rating scale to rate the level of emotional intensity felt *in* the dream for each dream segment. The dreamer then identified whether its emotional valence was experienced as positive or negative by adding a plus (+) or minus (-) sign to the numeric rating. Intensity of emotionality was rated without distinguishing the type of emotion (e.g., fear, anger, joy, sadness).

9) Rating familiarity with dream people: The dreamer used three categories to identify any people appearing in the dreams as "strangers", "people I know", and "people close to me."

10) Identify instances of blending: Finally, the dreamer identified any instances in which elements of a dream (typically persons) appeared as "blended" or "condensed" forms of two or more entities (e.g., a close elderly cousin appeared in the form of his mid-20s youth).

To maximize freshness of recall of both the dreams and potential waking life referents, the dreamer usually completed all of the steps above within two hours of waking, and always within 8 hours. The first impressions and initial ratings were then "locked" and were not altered to reflect any subsequent reflection or insights about the dreams. [Note: Calculating the recency (i.e., number of days) of waking life referents is the one task that could be done without same-day urgency. It often requires legwork to determine

the dates of occurrence and calculate their recency, e.g., checking one's daily calendar, finding receipts, and verifying dates of a flight, trip, meeting, party, TV show or movie, etc.]

3. Results

The presentation of qualitative and quantitative results begins with a 4-page excerpt taken from the 12-page spreadsheet tool used in the study (see Table A1, Appendix). The sample excerpt is comprised of eight dreams occurring in continuous sequence on the second (dreams 2.3 and 2.4), third (3.1, 3.2, and 3.3) and fourth nights (4.1, 4.2, and 4.3) of the week-long study. The format of the spreadsheet tool illustrates how the full dream narratives were subdivided into segments for analysis (Column 1). Waking life referents (if identified) and their recency (in days) are described in Columns 2 and 3. Column 4, "immediate reflections", describes the dreamer's initial impressions and ideas about the personal meaning or significance of each given dream segment, while the three columns on the right side present the dreamer's 5-point Likert self-ratings of the level of Bizarreness (Bz), Significance/importance/meaningfulness (Sg) and Emotionality (Em) for each dream segment. Negative vs positive emotional valence is indicated by adding a plus (+) or minus (-) sign to the numeric rating in the final column. In addition, the excerpt sample shows how four instances of "Blending" that are marked and numbered in the spreadsheet tool.

As a point of explanatory clarification, the dreamer was engaged in three current scholarly "projects" that figure prominently in the dream series analysis as waking life "referents" to dream content. Just 10 days prior to conducting this dream series study (Project #3), the dreamer first met and quickly became friends with a stranger ("Professor M") and embarked on a collaborative paper (Project #1) to update the relevance of Husserl's phenomenology for contemporary experimental psychology (Jennings, 1986b). The dreamer was also already engaged in a closely-related Husserlian phenomenological analysis of dreaming consciousness (Project #2), which inspired the idea of designing and conducting this intensive one-week dream series analysis (Project #3) using enriched phenomenological data. Only Projects #1 and #3 appear in the sample excerpt (the complete 12-page spreadsheet is available for review).

3.1. Quantitative Results

The week-log study produced a total of 20 dreams and 2 musical "earworms", which were subdivided into 74 analyzable dream segments/elements. The whole-dream narratives ranged from 18 to 273 words, with an average of 108 words (SD=73) and a median of 109 words. The dream segments averaged 35 words in length (SD=18) with a median of 31 words.

As shown in Table 2, waking life referents were identified for 69 (93%) of the 74 dream segments. Nearly one third of the referents occurred within hours or the preceding day of the dream (30.4%); half within one week (49.3%), and nearly three quarters within 2 weeks of the dream (71%). The median number of days from the waking life occurrence of the referent to its appearance in the dream was 8.0 days (with an average of 27.3 days and SD of 59.9).

As shown in Table 3, the average ratings of the Bizarreness of dream segments were quite low at 0.77, while the average ratings of Significance/Meaningfulness and Emo-

Table 2. Recency of the occurrence of waking life referents.

Time since occurrence of a waking referent	Frequency Count	Recency Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Within 8 hours of dream	7	10.1%	
Within preceding day	14	20.3%	30.3%
Within 2 days	8	11.6%	42.0%
Within week (3-7 days)	5	7.2%	49.3%
Within 2 weeks (8-14 days)	15	21.7%	71.0%
Within one month (15-30 days)	7	10.1%	81.2%
Between 1 to 2 months (31-60 days)	6	8.7%	89.9%
More than 2 months (61-365 days)	6	8.7%	98.6%
One year or more	1	1.4%	100%
No referents identified	*5	*not included in percentage	

tional Intensity were at moderate and high levels of 1.54 and 2.20 respectively. The respective standard deviations of 1.1, 1.2 and 1.1 showed similar variability (i.e., high internal consistency) across the three rankings.

Correlations among the three ratings were also calculated. Bizarreness was strongly correlated with both Significance/Meaningfulness ($r = 0.41$) and Emotionality ($r = .51$), while Meaningfulness was less strongly correlated with Emotionality ($r = .30$). None of the correlations were significantly different from each other. With regard to Emotional valence, 53% of the dream segments were experienced and rated as positive, while 47% were negative.

To demonstrate that the Dreamer-Centered Dream Series method can be used for factors that are commonly studied in the dream content analysis literature, the following results were also calculated. A relevant comparison statistic, such as the Hall/Van de Castle (HVdC) Coding System, is included for each.

- Of the total of 40 persons appearing in the dreams, 40% were strangers, 37.5% were known, and 22.5% were close to the dreamer. [HVdC norms indicate 50% are not known].
- Dream characters were 58% male and 42% females. [This is consistent with norms showing males dream more about males, while females dream equally of both genders].
- In terms of the number of characters appearing in the whole dreams, 5% were the dreamer alone, 40% included one person, 35% included two, 10% included three, and 10% included four or more. [HVdC norms show 15% of dreams are dreamer alone.]

- There were ten instances of blending/condensation among the 74 dream segments, which indicates that blending distortions occurred at a rate of 13.5%. [Note: Only Blending incidents #3, #4, #5, and #6 are included in the Table A1(Appendix) excerpt.] No comparison norms are known, but all instances were consistent with research showing transformations occur within their same class, such that dream characters morph into people and objects transform into objects, but people rarely turn into objects (Rittenhouse, Stickgold & Allan, 1994).
- In terms of activities, 20% of the dreams involved a vehicle, 35% entailed active acts (e.g., walking, running, standing), while 65% were passive acts (e.g., watching, seeing, sitting). [HVdC norms suggest 15% for vehicles and 20% for passive actions].

3.2. Qualitative Results

As discussed, high continuity between dreaming and waking life experience is a crucial foundational premise for both the Continuity and Embodied Cognition Theories of Dreaming. The qualitative results that support continuity for both theories are presented in the “immediate reflections” column of Table A1 (Appendix), which presents the dreamer’s immediate “first impressions” and gut sense of the significance and meaning of given dream elements and images. The qualitative data collected by the DCDS method in this column is ideal for studying how dreams generate embodied metaphors and image schemas that organize affective and sensorimotor experience into schemas that are congru-

Table 3. Ratings of bizarreness, meaningfulness and emotional intensity of dream segments.

Rating 0 to 4	Bizarreness/ Mundaneness	# items	Significance/ Meaningfulness	# items	Emotional Intensity	# items
4 – Extreme	2.7%	2	9.5%	7	13.5%	10
3 – Very	12.2%	9	14.9%	11	25.7%	19
2 – Moderate	5.4%	4	16.2%	12	31.1%	23
1 – Low	18.9%	14	39.2%	29	27.0%	20
0 – Not at all	60.8%	45	20.3%	15	2.7%	2
Average rating per segment	0.77 sd = 1.17	74	1.54 sd = 1.24	74	2.20 sd = 1.07	74

ent with the individuals' understandings of self-in-context and help prepare the person for waking life activities. The following chart provides three examples of how the data can be applied to support investigation of the ECTD (see Table 4)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this pilot demonstration of the dreamer-centered dream series methodology is to help advance the field of dream research beyond the thoroughly-researched frequency questions of *what* we dream about to the age-old questions that still drive our great curiosity about dreams: *why* and *how* does the dreaming mind create these amazing and potentially meaningful phenomena? By expanding and enriching the phenomenological quality of dream data we collect, the methodology provides a means to directly analyze *how* dreaming consciousness is continuous with, informed by, and useful to waking life consciousness.

The Table A1 (Appendix) experiential data spreadsheet provides many examples of how the dreaming mind "selects" various perceptions and experiences from waking life and "arranges" them to create unique dream "stories" that provide new perspectives and ideas that are fully meaningful and often useful for daily life. DCDS offers a new "mixed method" approach (combining qualitative and quantitative data) that is ideal for further testing the Continuity Theory, which has fueled so much research in this field. But it also has utility for testing other hypotheses regarding the continuity and relatedness between dreaming and waking consciousness, especially the Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming. Implications and advantages for these two theories are discussed in turn:

Testing Continuity and CDC Theory: As observed by Schredl (2017, p. 351), "reliable instruments for measuring the occurrence, intensity, and time frame of personal concerns and preoccupations are lacking" in dream research on the Continuity Theory. This Dreamer-Centered Dream Series methodology is well-suited for simultaneously capturing the occurrence, recency and intensity of waking life concerns in combination with the individual's concurrent dreaming consciousness. By capturing the same narrative dream data used in systematic dream content analysis, the results could also be cross-analyzed using well-established coding systems and norms like the Hall/Van De Castle system and compared to existing research findings. Moreover,

the DCDS method is designed to identify the recency and connections between dream content and waking life events and concerns.

This Dreamer-Centered Dream Series method also offers a way to retain Continuity Theory without having to extend it to account for either "discontinuity" or "creativity" as suggested by Schredl's (2024) revised Continuity-Discontinuity-Creativity (CDC) theory. First, with regard to continuity, the operational definition of continuity should *not* be limited to counting instances of "dreaming about specific waking-life events" by category/type (e.g., pets, sex, arguments, vehicles, etc.). This new approach can "correct" for frequency counts that are artificially inflated by traditional externally-rated content analysis, which may suggest greater discontinuity and infrequency with waking life than is actually true. Instead, continuity should be defined and measured as the *frequency of waking-life referents* and experiences that *appear within dreams*. This approach shows that identifiable dream/waking connections are quite frequent and reflect high continuity. In short, by collecting more detailed information from individuals about the connections between dream content and waking life experiences (connections that only the dreamer can identify), this Dreamer-Centered Dream Series method allows direct assessment of continuity/discontinuity.

With regard to "creativity," this methodology shows that *creativity is an inherent feature of dreaming consciousness* (Schredl & Erlacher, 2007). By removing or muting the active evaluative capacity of the conscious ego (which can readily ignore or reject silly and nonsensical ideas in waking life), dream consciousness is free of such censorship and offers new and alternative perceptions and perspectives about one's waking life experience. Creativity is unleashed by new perspectives – whether they come from awake thinking or awake day-dreaming or, in this case, unconscious dreaming. Thus creativity does not need to be explained by an expanded CDC theory. It is up to the dreamer to recognize the value and potential utility of a given dream's "creation", but the creativity is already there. In this study, for example, the dreamer found great value in the dream image of giant hovering "psychology lips" (see Table A1 (Appendix), dream #3.1), which originated in wearing an ordinary T-shirt with the Rolling Stones' famous lips logo, and yielded an explanatory metaphor in hypothesizing about how dreams are generated.

Table 4. Examples for testing the Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming (ECTD).

Images from Dream Segments	Embodied Metaphor (of abstract ideas)	(Image) Schema that prepares for waking life
Dream 2.3.c. – Dreamer's 60 y.o. cousin & lifelong close friend appears young (like dreamer's current son in mid-20s).	Life comes full circle from own youth/young adulthood to fatherly pride/joy of own sons reaching same age as close friend/cousin who is also a senior/father.	Preparing self for developmental tasks of a senior adult (& father of adult sons) transitioning to retirement.
Dream 2.4.a&b. – Miley Cyrus performs in the small sunny church of dreamer's childhood to young adult years.	Developmental stages of growing up from "sunny" childhood to "wild" teen to young adult "finding self" (like Miley Cyrus).	Preparing self for the task of "finding self" in current developmental stage of senior adult to retired senior.
Dream 3.1 – Giant 3X12 foot long pair of hovering lips with percolating surface	Lips combine the 2 halves & texture of brain matter with the idea that dreams are both perceiving and expressing (bidirectional).	Preparing self for next round of theorizing in collaborative Project #1 with Prof. M.

Testing ECTD: The Embodied Cognition Theory of Dreaming holds that the function of dreaming is to organize affective and sensorimotor schemas that are congruent with the individuals' understandings of self-in-context in order to prepare the person for waking life activities (Wagener, 2023). As shown in the Table A1 (Appendix) spreadsheet, the DCDS methodology yields the type of individualized phenomenological experiential data that links dream content to waking life concerns. Further, as illustrated in the *Qualitative Results section*, the DCDS methodology empowers the individual dreamer to posit the personalized meanings of their actual dream content, which can enable ECTD researchers to identify and track the generation of embodied metaphors and image schemas in dream life that relate to waking life schemas and preparation for the tasks of waking life. For example, in this single-subject study, the individual's dreams expressed multiple perceptions and self-understandings in the context of his current adjustment to a new life of retirement, reflections about his health and future pursuits, and his active engagement in new academic research projects.

Limits to the method: For all its advantages, there are a number of limits to this proposed method and the validity of the results. First, as a single-subject longitudinal study, the results are impacted by individual bias and have limited generalizability. Second, the results are impacted by experimenter bias because the author is the dreaming subject and the source of the dream data. Third, as suggested by a reviewer, the dreamer is skilled in dreamwork and may be more practiced and abstract in recognizing dream/waking life connections than an inexperienced novice. Fourth, given that this a pilot demonstration, there are no other research studies to support the effectiveness and reliability of the DCDS methodology. [Of note, a second study using this method has been recently conducted, which will allow comparison of dreaming results over an extended year-long period vs. a short and intensive week-long period.] However, all of these shortcomings can be balanced and addressed by increasing the number of participant dreamer subjects applying the same method in the same way.

Finally, there are two serious practical challenges for implementation of the DCDS methodology: finding and training volunteer subjects. First, to standardize how dreamers reliably self-apply the spreadsheet methodology, participants will need pre-research training in how to best recall their dreams; how to enter the dream narratives and break them into segments in the spreadsheet, how to identify waking life referents, and how to consider the potential personal meaning of their dream segments. While the need for pre-training is not unique, the second challenge is the demanding nature of the protocol for participants. They must be willing to endure the inconvenience of a week of disturbed sleep in order to promptly record the content of each dream on every unplanned awakening (e.g., to urinate) along with planned awakening in the morning. Further, the imperative demand for the "freshness" of dream data requires the participant to promptly fulfill the tasks of the spreadsheet protocol. Each subject will likely need about two hours to write down the narrative of the dreams; think about and record waking life referents; think about and record first impressions of the meaning of the dream segments; and complete the ratings of bizarreness, significance and emotionality. As noted, the one-week timeframe was selected to reduce the intensive daily demands upon the participant subjects. This

is not a problem if the methodology is used over longer periods of time.

In closing, it is hoped that, despite its practical demands, the proposed Dreamer-Centered Dream Series methodology can help advance the field of dream research with enriched dream data that can answer more questions about the meaningfulness of dreaming and its continuity with waking life experience.

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Appendix

Table A1. Dream Log Spreadsheet Tool (Sample Excerpt)

Dream Code (Day & Ordering)	Referents from Waking Life	Rcy	Immed. Reflections	Bz	Sg	Em
<p>Dream 2.3. – “We” (not sure who I’m with) are traveling in rental car to company headquarters in far north of New Jersey.</p> <p>Dream shifts to boarding an airplane with my son Sam and my closest cousin Jay, but Jay is regressed in age to a young man of Sam’s age in the dream). [BLENDING #3]</p> <p>I am thinking about if and how the three of us will be seated together on the plane.</p> <p>Then I am by myself, turn sharply, and am amazed to find a tiny cramped single seat by itself (size of a plane bathroom) with a slanted low ceiling.</p>	<p>2.3.a – Recent trip with rental car.</p>	12 days	Actively collaborating on Project #1 with Prof. M. whose university is in far north NJ.	0	1	+1
	<p>2.3.b – Googled Prof. M’s university, which is in far north NJ.</p>	1 day		0	1	+1
<p>Dream shifts to boarding an airplane with my son Sam and my closest cousin Jay, but Jay is regressed in age to a young man of Sam’s age in the dream). [BLENDING #3]</p> <p>I am thinking about if and how the three of us will be seated together on the plane.</p> <p>Then I am by myself, turn sharply, and am amazed to find a tiny cramped single seat by itself (size of a plane bathroom) with a slanted low ceiling.</p>	<p>2.3.c - Jay is close childhood playmate/cousin who I rarely get to see, but met with him a few days before.</p>	3 days	Like Wilson above (see 2.2.c.), I’ve been a leader in my field and my greatest pride & achievement is also my sons (Sam). Cousin Jay & I are both youngest sons & both have two sons we are close to. Life comes full circle.	2	4	+3
	<p>2.3.d - Seating experiences on flights.</p>	12 days		0	2	+1
<p>Shifts from airplane to a small outdoor patch of outdoor grass: Our pet dog Stormy is chasing after two tiny wild pigs, who ignore her as they root the ground with their snouts.</p> <p>The pigs are cute, but they are wild boars and potentially dangerous with their sharp tusks and teeth. So I want to keep Stormy a safe distance away.</p>	<p>2.3.e – Recently watched first 4 <i>Harry Potter</i> movies with his cramped bedroom under stairs with slanted ceiling.</p>	17 days	I identify with Harry as a fatherless orphan son with unique brilliant talents. My childhood bedroom had slanted ceilings.	2	2	+1
	<p>2.3.f - Grassy patch is where our pet dog Stormy poops. Stormy’s squeaky rubber toys are all shaped like pigs. Stormy went extra crazy on walk to get at a cat (rarely encountered)</p>	1 day	See 2.3.g/h below.	0	0	-2
<p>Shifts back to airplane, where a medium-sized puma, slim and graceful, is loose and prowling around. I’m the only one who knows the danger, but I’m paralyzed about who and how to warn others.</p>	<p>2.3.g - Saw wild boar attack on <i>House of the Dragon</i> episode 3. Watched 2 TV reality series (<i>Tudor Monastery Farms</i> & <i>Clarkson’s Farm</i>) showing cute piglets, but pigs are released to the wild to feed, and grow huge and can become dangerous.</p>	23, 28 & 53 days (used 23)	Theme of a cute/innocent animal is actually a “wild” animal capable of causing serious, but not lethal injury.	1	1	-3
	<p>2.3.h – Nothing about puma. Most recent flight was 13 days ago.</p>	13 days	Puma of this reduced size is also “cute” and capable of causing serious, but not lethal injury.	0	1	-2
<p>Dream 2.4 – Miley Cyrus is performing in a small sunny church to a small but enthusiastic audience.</p> <p>It is the same local church that my extended family attended when I was growing up (ESC church).</p>	<p>2.4.a - Recent thoughts about how Cyrus has matured from wild/ provocative youth to seasoned adult professional (per <i>Shotgun Rider</i> duet with Beyonce)</p>	30 days	Theme of “wild” teen growing up to mature adult. See 2.4.b. below.	3	1	+2
	<p>2.4.b - I contacted my cousin about possible need for funeral service at ESC Church when my sister nearly died from medical emergency.</p>	35 days	ESC Church encompasses my development from child to teen to young adult within extended family community.	1	3	+2

Table A1. Dream Log Spreadsheet Tool (Sample Excerpt)

Dream Code (Day & Ordering)	Referents from Waking Life	Rcy	Immed. Reflections	Bz	Sg	Em
<p>Dream 3.1 – I am not bodily visible, but looking up at a giant pair of lips, 12 feet across & 3 feet high, hovering about 5 feet above the ground and about four feet away from my face.</p> <p>For a brief moment, the lips are labeled with big letters spelling “psychology”, after which the letters disappear. The label tells me the lips are the discipline of psychology.</p> <p>The lips are very active, with the flesh moving all along the length and bright teeth poking thru here and there across the length. I realize that the fleshy psychology lips are busily and actively “percolating” – both processing and expressing, perceiving and perception. The texture of the lip flesh is soft and pink, but somehow like brain tissue.</p>	<p>3.1.a - Wearing my T-shirt with Rolling Stones tongue and lips logo.</p>	2 days	The brain-tissue-like pink lips resemble two sides of the brain. It is a metaphor for theorizing the generation of dreams: Lots of random brain/mind activity, from which something coagulates and forms. Lips <u>speak</u> . Lips are both perceiving <u>and</u> articulating perceptions, simultaneously, ala Merleau-Ponty’s primary of perception.	4	4	+4
	<p>3.1.b - Current collaborative Project #1 on forgotten distinction between psychology and phenomenology.</p>	1 day		3	4	+4
	<p>3.1.c – As I am current engaged in this dream log study Project #3, I am actively thinking about how dreams are generated or take form.</p>	1 day		3	4	+4
<p>Dream 3.2 – Dream opens with a black & white panning shot of a young Jewish woman refugee, walking across the deck of a ship docked in Bremen, Germany in World War II. She carries a baby.</p> <p>Abruptly changes from black & white to super vibrant color that emphasizes the woman’s blond hair, red full-length coat, and white fur collar. She is strikingly pretty with her blond hair. She is now very pregnant (rather than carrying baby), as evident from the bulge in her red coat.</p> <p>The woman is trying to board the ship, but is blocked by a page-fence barrier and gate. She is escaping Nazi Germany because she is Jewish. The German guard is hostile & rude. It is the actor Zach Braff.</p> <p>The blond woman now brandishes a rifle, but the barrel is bent, so it cannot function. She makes a half-hearted threat gesture, which does not phase the guard. Watching from behind her, I fantasize about taking her bent barrel rifle and using it like a spear to jam in the face of the guard, but I don’t.</p>	<p>3.2.a - Red coat image from Spielberg’s black and white Holocaust movie <i>Shindler’s List</i></p>	>1 year	I am author of 3 Holocaust memoir books, which has profound personal importance to me.	0	1	-1
	<p>3.2.b - Struck by the beauty of several blond female European athletes in the Olympics.</p>	1 day	Holocaust theme above. Woman carrying a baby and then being pregnant is a person who is extremely vulnerable to danger.[BLENDING #4]	0	1	-2
	<p>3.2.c - Zach Braff appearing in frequent TV commercial.</p>	2 days	Holocaust theme above. Braff is comic, not a villain; you can’t really take him seriously as a danger. [BLENDING #5]	1	1	-4
	<p>3.2.d – No referents to bent rifle.</p>	N/A	The woman is not really threatening, you can’t take her seriously as a danger. Like Zach Braff and woman with bent rifle, you can’t take me seriously as a danger either.	0	1	-4
<p>3.3 Music earworm: Awakened to repeating snippet of rock band Kansas song with lyric: “Carry on my wayward son. There’ll be peace when you are done.”</p>	<p>3.3.a - Schredl’s list of music appearing in his dream book (p. 142) included Kansas, <i>Dust in the Wind</i>.</p>	4 hrs	Reading Schredl book as part of Projects #2 and #3.	0	1	+1

Table A1. Dream Log Spreadsheet Tool (Sample Excerpt)

Dream Code (Day & Ordering)	Referents from Waking Life	Rcy	Immed. Reflections	Bz	Sg	Em	
Dream 4.1 – Having written a new policy & procedure for a University, I participate in a committee review/discussion.	4.1.a - “Accidentally” attended a policy meeting at ADCPA conference because I was already sitting in room.	14 days	Just received email invite from another ADCPA attendee to do dream training for 20 Masters counselors at K Univ. Pleased to see dreamer-centered dream method recognized as clinically valuable.	0	0	+2	
	4.1.b - Received email invite from ADCPA participant who attended my presentation.	2 hrs		0	2	+2	
	It ends with my comment that the person would, of course, be able to use their primary native language of German.	4.1.c - Just reading about frequency of native and foreign languages in Schredl’s dream book. He is German.	4 hrs	Schredl is a leading researcher in dream field and is German.	0	1	+1
Dream 4.2 – I am socializing in a room with another male peer when my friend PA walks in with sharp clothes that match the color of his shirt.	4.2.a - Acted in community theater show with PA. Frequently socialized before shows with PA and fellow actors in male dressing room. Community theater consumed most of my time after recent retirement.	45 days	PA is longtime friend (& coworker) with whom lost close friendship time (he turned grouchy), but recently revived our friendship & enjoying playful fun again.	0	3	+2	
	I compare his outfit to mine and see similarity of style. The other actor and I tease PA light-heartedly about his perfect taste.	4.2.b - The <i>Our Town</i> cast were all outfitted with period costumes; some quite stylish and perfect to the era.	45 days	Good feelings to re-ignite an old buddy friendship with PA.	0	3	+3
	Then I am pulling twigs and small branches out of my shirt, breaking or crunching them up as I remove them.	4.2.c - Cleaned up large amounts of twigs and branches after wind storm	1 day	The image feels significant, but nothing comes to me.	0	0	-3
Dream 4.3 – I drive a rental car with 3 former coworkers into an open dirt construction site to park the car at the end of a row of trucks and cars. TP is there, but her appearance is tall and overweight (opposite to her actual short and skinny body).	4.3.a - First email contact with TP after 5.5 months of no contact since retirement.	9 days	Guilt over not keeping contact with TP, who was a close daily collaborator and friend for years (I failed to call her in 5.5 months since retirement). My neglectful treatment of TP is the polar opposite of my true positive regard. [BLENDING #6]	0	1	-4	
	TP and I get into a senseless argument about making space in parking the car. For a short time, I am genuinely angry, but then realize it is a silly argument, and I switch to teasing TP about her opinion, but she remains furious and yells at me.	4.3.b - After parking car, enjoyed a laugh with wife and son about how they always criticize my choice of parking spot.	1 day	The importance of a sense of humor and not getting angry over little things. Never ever argued with TP in real life (again opposite her true self).	4	4	-4
	Meanwhile in the background, I see two towering cranes are lifting and moving impossibly huge concrete slabs (roof sections) to put on top of a massive 20-story building under construction.	4.3.c – On several trips, I drove past a pair of gigantic sky-scraper-sized cranes on a highway bridge under construction.	8 days	Project #1 is “gigantic” in its field-defining potential, but starting to “build” the article with Prof. M feels overwhelming and unwieldy.	2	0	+2