

“It’s raining again” – Bad weather in a long dream series

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Summary. The cognitive theory of dreams, proposed by Calvin Hall in 1953, postulated that dream images serve to picture conceptions the dreamer has in his or her waking life. Dream settings, like stormy weather, might reflect the dreamer’s emotionally influenced conception of the world. In a long series (N = 11,777 dreams) rain dreams (about 1.40% of the dreams) were analyzed to study how rain in dreams affect the dream ego. Although rain had an effect on the dreamer in two thirds of the dreams and is often not accompanied by explicitly mentioned emotions, the negative emotions (48 dreams) outweighed the positive ones (4 dreams) indicating that rain dreams may picture negative conceptions of the world, i.e., the emotionally negative perceptions of their world experiences. However, the large variety of topics in rain dreams also support the idea that rain in dreams might depict a variety of different world-conceptions, from obstacles in waking life to “real” danger. Future research could link rain dreams to waking life events of the dreamer, e.g., loss of a friend (cf. the song “It’s raining again” by Supertramp) and provide empirical evidence of a representative continuity – in addition to the confirmative findings regarding a thematic continuity between waking and dreaming.

Keywords: Dream series, rain dreams, negative dream emotions, conceptions, continuity hypothesis, representative continuity

1. Introduction

Over the years, biological, evolutionary, and psychological theories about dreaming have been proposed (Hoss, Valli, & Gongloff, 2019), e.g., the continuity hypothesis (Hall & Nordby, 1972), the neurocognitive theory of dreaming (Domhoff, 2018), the protoconsciousness theory (Hobson, 2009), or the social simulation theory (Revonsuo, Tuominen, & Valli, 2015). For this particular paper, the focus is on a cognitive theory developed by Hall (1953). In this theory, the basic postulates are: “The images of a dream are pictures of conceptions. (Hall, 1953, p. 275)” and “A conception is an item of knowledge, a formulation of experience which has meaning for a person. (Hall, 1953, p. 275)” Conceptions can be related to the self, other people, actions, problems, and the world. Hall (1953) hypothesized that “world-conceptions are often conveyed by the character of the dream setting (p. 277) and provides the following examples: “If the dreamer feels that the world presents a cold, bleak face, he may materialize this conception in the form of a cold climate and a bleak, rocky setting. A dreamer who feels that his world is one of turbulence and agitation, may dream of thunderstorms, raging seas, battles, milling crowds, and traffic jams. (Hall, 1953, p. 277)” Within the framework of the continuity hypotheses later developed by (Hall & Nordby, 1972), this relationship can also be conceptualized under the broader umbrella of emotional continuity, i.e., waking life emotions are reoccurring in dreams but in different context

(Hartmann, 2010, 2011a). The song “It’s raining again” of Supertramp released in 1982 portrays the connection between bad weather (setting) and negative experiences like the pain associated with losing a friend.

Domhoff (2003) and Malinowski and Horton (2015) agreed in their evaluation that systematic empirical research regarding this type of continuity between waking and dreaming – which can also be conceptualized as conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, 1993) or representative continuity (Malinowski, Fylan, & Horton, 2014) – is rather sparse. In the qualitative study of Malinowski et al. (2014) one dreamer, for example, associated the maiden voyage of the starship Enterprise that occurred within a dream with her new career taking off. Tidal wave dreams have been associated with feelings of being overwhelmed in waking life (Hartmann, 2011b) or car trouble dreams with current stressful waking-life situations (Schredl, 2020; Zwick, 2020). That is, quantitative studies like those that have been carried out for testing the thematic continuity between waking and dreaming (Schredl, 2018), e.g., music dreams in music students (Vogelsang, Anold, Schormann, Wübbelmann, & Schredl, 2016), have not yet been carried out for representative continuity. If one takes a step back, these theoretical approaches postulate that a specific dream action, dream element, or dream setting has a specific effect on the dreamer within the dream, reflecting Hall’s (1953) idea of dreams depicting conceptions. For example, if bad weather in the dream is perceived as annoying, a specific conception is “materialized”. But if the dreamer enjoys seeing rain or being in the rain, the corresponding conception might be a totally different one. The unanswered question is how variable specific topics are experienced by the dreamer within dreams. These studies would indicate that it is not sufficient to look at the topic per se, e.g., thunder storm, but to include also the dreamer’s emotions regarding this dream element.

The present analysis of rain dreams, stemming from a long dream series, was undertaken to investigate the effect

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of dreamed rain on the dreamer within the dream, i.e., has the rain a significant effect on the dream actions and the dreamer's emotions.

2. Method

2.1. Participant and dream diary

The male participant kept an unstructured dream diary from the age of 22, beginning in September, 1984. The database includes all his dreams till June, 2015. For the present analysis, all 11,777 dreams were included. The mean dream length of all the dreams was 135.79 ± 85.31 words.

2.2. Procedure

The dream reports were originally hand-written but were then typed and entered into a database (Alchera 3.72, created by Harry Bosma, www.mythwell.com) by the dreamer himself. This database allows the assigning of key words to the dreams, a task also carried out by the dreamer. Each dream was coded by the dreamer while typing the dreams for the occurrence of rain in the dream. In a second step, the dreams included were classified as to whether the dreamer and/or his actions were affected by the rain and whether he experienced any emotions related to the occurrence of rain within the dream. The dreams were grouped into 14 categories (see Table 1).

The Alchera software also provides a word count for each dream report. Dream reports included only dream experience related words and all redundancies were excluded. The analysis unit was an individual dream report. The data were exported into an Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft) and the data analysis was carried out using the SAS 9.4 software package for Windows.

3. Results

Overall, rain in some form occurred in 1.40% of the dreams (165 out of 11,777). The mean word count of these 165 rain dreams was 189.01 ± 99.69. Most rain dreams did not include specific emotions regarding the rain but, overall, more negative emotions were associated with rain compared to positive emotions (see Table 1). In 112 of the 165 rain dreams (67.88%), the dreamer and/or his actions were affected by the rain (see examples presented in Table 2).

Dream example 1: Rain dream with positive emotions

"I am in a landscape with a hurricane wind. It's in the Russian tundra. The area is suitable for vacation, but you can also be unlucky if the weather is not so good. There is a lake nearby, a beautiful landscape. Since it's starting to rain a little, I want to go back to the village. I slide driven by the tail wind on the muddy dirt road. It's very fast. Once I stumble a little, sit on my bottom, but then everything is fine, I dash down the dirt road at a crazy

pace. It is fun. A few people meet me at the entrance to the village. I pass by quickly so they don't notice that I'm really dirty. The village is small; there is an inn, a covered path that leads to stables. Right next to the inn are some little pigs that have woolly fur and look really cute. I look at them. An elderly woman joins them and wants to scratch one of the animals. But the little pigs are afraid of the sudden approach and flee. However, a medium-sized pig can be petted."

Dream example 2: Rain dream with rain playing a dominant role

"It's a big old house. We live in it as holiday guests. The house is very lonely. Since there is a risk of flooding, the house should be sacrificed as protection against further disasters. It is supposed to take up part of the water and weaken the tidal wave that comes from the mountain. The big, beautiful house would be destroyed. Two men who join our holiday group are tasked with taking all the necessary measures at the crucial moment. I ask them who had the idea of sacrificing the house; is it of any use. They couldn't answer either question. The tidal wave was initiated by rainfall, that's what we're waiting for now. It starts raining; the two men do their duties and secure the house. I'm in a bathroom and I'm asking if I should keep the window open. He tells me it has to be as stable as possible. I should close the shutter and both windows. Then I think about what to bring to safety. I am now in front of the house and see how the water flows in. I walk along the edge and step into a pile of clay. My foot is very dirty. The others laugh. Then I am back in the house. We have to swim and dive to recover our clothes."

4. Discussion

The present findings indicate that rain in dreams can affect the dream action or the dreamer but not always (about 70%). Similarly, not all rain incidences in dreams are associated with negative emotions (about 29%); however, the number of positive rain dreams is very small (N = 4). The variety of possible effects of rain in dreams is large, ranging from no effect, e.g., seeing rain from indoors, to annoying, e.g., getting wet, or even danger, e.g., risk of being flooded by rain falls. These findings indicate that drawing simple connections between rain dreams and waking life might be too hasty, as rain dreams are different, especially in regard of the effect of rain on the dreamer.

Several methodological issues have to be addressed. First, the dreams were coded by the dreamer himself. Previous studies (e.g., Schredl, Burchert, & Grabatin, 2004) demonstrated that simple scales like coding the presence or absence of specific topics in a dream showed high inter-rater reliabilities and, thus, possible bias due to the coding procedure should be minimal. Despite the large variability of how rain is affecting the dream (see Table 2), it should be noted that all dreams were recorded by one individual. One might speculate that the rain scenarios might even be more varied if a sample of substantial size is studied. This would provide further evidence that even "simple" dream elements like rain might have completely different meanings.

The frequency of dreams including rain was 1.40%; slightly higher compared to the figure of 0.8% reported for a student sample (Hall & Van de Castle, 1966). Based on the theory of Hall (1953), it would be interesting to study wheth-

Table 1. Emotions in the 165 rain dreams

Category	Dreams	Percent
Positive emotions	4	2.42%
Neutral/no emotions	113	68.48%
Negative emotions	48	29.09%

er individual differences in rain dream percentages correlate with the person's worldview.

First, it has to be noted that in this dream series in about one third of the dreams rain had no emotional effect on the dreamer, e.g., seeing rain while being safely indoors, or other dream characters are affected by the rain. One might speculate whether these rain dreams are associated with specific world-views (and emotional states related to these world-views) the dreamer holds in his waking life at all.

Although a few rain dreams were associated with positive emotions and many rain dreams did not include specific emotions related to the rain, about 30% of the emotions associated with rain in the dream were negative – in line with

the Supertramp song “It’s raining again”. It would be interesting to set up a study investigating whether these negative rain dreams occur in the context of major life events like break-up of a romantic relationship, loss of job or other negative experiences. That is, rain dreams would not reflect the dreamer's general concept of rain but the current emotional impact the waking world has currently on the dreamer.

The effects of rain in dreams on the dreamer are variable, e.g., rain causing waiting, seeking shelter, doing something faster, dangerous rain, things are getting wet. That is, taking a closer look indicates that different rain dreams might be associated with different world-conceptions (Hall, 1953), particularly conceptions related to emotions, e.g., the cur-

Table 2. Different types of rain dreams

Category	Dreams	Percent	Examples
Seeing rain, being indoors	21	12.73%	“I am in a large, dark apartment. The rooms are very high; the rain is pounding on the large, modern windows of this old building, certainly 4 meters high. Inspirational picture. I am happy that I have a small, cozy room, ...”
Rain but no effect described in the dream report	21	12.73%	“... I get to a kind of train station. Then I sit on a kind of scooter, wearing a rain cape, and it is raining. Once I jump over a big American car, hopefully the owner didn't notice. I want to go to work. ...”
Rain causes waiting	18	10.91%	“... I look out of the window. It's pouring rain, I'm angry because I would have liked to go home, but the rain makes me soaking wet on the bike. I am considering staying here as I have a juggling course at 7:30 p.m. but am dissatisfied. ...”
Seeking shelter from the rain	18	10.91%	“... It's raining outside. We look for shelter under trees (at the edge of a parking lot), but it's raining through the trees, but this is better than nothing. ...”
Doing something additionally because of the rain	16	9.70%	“... S. is tidying up the room, which is now open to the outside. Since it is raining or being very damp, we put the tarpaulin that was provided for it back on the bed. ...”
Hurrying due to rain	14	8.48%	“I'm going home from another part of the town. ... It's nighttime and an ominous mood tells me to go home. It's raining; I'm going as quickly as possible, I'm carrying something. ...”
Other dream characters are affected by the rain	12	7.27%	“Large living room. I let in a tall man (2 m, slim) who got wet because it was raining and he came by bike. "Done", I tell him when he comes in.”
Getting wet (explicitly mentioned)	11	6.67%	“...but then it gets windy, it starts to rain. I'm also barefoot ... I walk under a roof, but it's windy, I walk to a place where it's wider. I got a little wet, the rain is very cool. ...”
Rain is uncomfortable (but getting wet is not described)	11	6.67%	“... Then I am in W. and thinking about how to get back with Number 4 line (tram), but it's raining, everything is uncomfortable. I'm getting off a tram. ...”
Rain causes danger	7	4.42%	“... I'm about to hit the freeway. I turn on the light. Although I drive slowly, I skid on the wet (it's raining) road. A rear fender got damaged. ...”
Things are getting wet	6	3.64%	“... I push me food (scrambled eggs or something) on the coals of a fireplace. I look at it and see rain dripping from the chimney onto my food. The rain is getting stronger and stronger and eventually all of the food and coals are washed away. ...”
There is a threat rain is coming	5	3.03%	“I'm in an unfamiliar territory and want to go home. It's a strange landscape. It could be that it is raining really hard and everything will be flooded. Still, I'm on my way. ...”
Terminate vacation due to rain	3	1.82%	“I'm on a bike tour through Germany. ... A man asks what I'll do tomorrow if it keeps raining. Only now do I notice that it is raining relatively heavily. I say that I will stay in the accommodation then. If it still rains the day after that, I take the train home, and if I have to, take a taxi to the train station.“
Rain is helpful	2	1.21%	“Later I see a small passenger plane flying by right next to the house. That is dangerous, the machine pulls up, but at a distance it crashes on the ground, possibly into houses. It's burning. I run back and forth excitedly, try to put on my socks (2 pairs on top of each other), think about whether that's good because it's raining outside, want to put on more clothes because I'm afraid that we may have to leave the house. But then I think the rain is probably preventing the fire from spreading, so we're safe in the house.”

rent life situation is annoying, there is real danger ahead, there are obstacles in my way. On the other hand, there are several joyful rain dreams, the dreamer enjoys looking at the rain outside, or rain that minimizes the risk that fire is spreading. The conclusion would be that, if dream settings depict the dreamer's world-conception, the effect of the dream setting on the dreamer within the dream might modulate the association between dream setting and waking-life world conception.

Koppehele-Gossel, Klimke, Schermelleh-Engel, and Voss (2016) reviewed the dream literature finding that the dreamer rarely explicitly experiences his or her body; dreams often focus on an action like doing stuff, social interaction and so on. Interestingly, in only 11 of the 165 rain dreams (6.67%) the dreamer explicitly mentioned that he got wet, although there are many more dreams in which it is likely that he might get wet. It is an interesting question as to why the body image is rarely represented in dreams (Koppehele-Gossel et al., 2016).

To summarize, rain dreams show a variety with regard to their effects on the dreamer within the dream and may picture very different conceptions of the waking world and emotions associated with these conceptions, the whole range from positive views to negative ones. It would be very interesting to study large dream samples provided by different dreamers and correlate rain dreams with major life events, especially negative ones like break-ups, loss of close persons, and so on. This would expand the current findings regarding the thematic continuity between waking and dreaming which is also related to emotions as emotionally intense waking-life experiences are more likely to be reflected in dreams (Schredl, 2018) and provide empirical evidence of a representative continuity (Malinowski & Horton, 2015).

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