

Robert Van de Castle

Robert Van de Castle (1927–2014) was an American psychologist specializing in dream research. He was active in parapsychology, both as an experimenter in ESP dreaming and also as a subject, in which he was notably successful.

Life and Career

Robert Leon Van de Castle was born in Rochester, New York, USA on 15 November 1927. He served eighteen months in the US Army at Fort Belvoir in the state of Virginia in 1946 and 1947, then pursued studies in clinical psychology. He earned his baccalaureate at Syracuse University in 1951, his masters at the University of Missouri in 1953 and his doctorate at the University of North Carolina in 1959. This was the basis of a successful academic career in dream research and parapsychology, which continued throughout his retirement from university teaching.

Van de Castle taught psychology at Idaho State College, the University of Denver, Dade County Community College (Miami, Florida), Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the University of North Carolina Medical School (Chapel Hill). He was Professor of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia (UVA) Health Sciences Center for 25 years.¹ Post-retirement teaching included lecturing for the LifeLine program at the Monroe Institute, founded by [Robert Monroe](#), starting in 2003.

Van de Castle completed a one-year clinical internship at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, while working on his doctorate. He maintained clinical practices at the UVA Department of Behavioral Medicine's Adult Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic, the University of North Carolina Department of Psychiatry's Psychiatric Inpatient Services.

His first professional research experience was at the [Duke Parapsychology Laboratory](#), also while working on his doctorate. There he investigated personality correlates of [psychokinesis](#) performance and variance patterns of ESP test scores, and also developed a Projective Psi Belief Scale.

At Idaho State College he did further work on personality correlates of psychokinesis, and at the University of Denver he studied personality correlates of ESP, both projects funded by the [Parapsychology Foundation](#).

In the early 60s Van de Castle began focusing on dreams, working at the Institute of Dream Research for two years, then holding the position of Director of the Sleep and Dream Laboratory at UVA's Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry from 1967 to 1985. During this time he studied the dream patterns and ESP scores of tribal cultures, concentrating on the Cuna people of Panama.

Van de Castle also worked as an editor and editorial consultant up until 2010, supervising the publishing of thirteen books as an editor for the State University of

New York Press. He consulted on sleep and dream-related manuscripts for journals, including *Dreaming*, *Science*, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychological Medicine*, *Sleep*, *Journal of Perceptual and Motor Skills*, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* and book manuscripts for Prentice-Hall and Worth Publishing. He consulted on parapsychological manuscripts for journals including *Science*, *Journal of Parapsychology*, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, and on book manuscripts for Wiley Publishing and Harper and Row.

Van de Castle was invited to lecture, hold workshops, and present exhibits at numerous venues including universities and professional associations all over the USA and in many other nations, and organizations, ranging from the Women of the Judicial 4th Circuit (USA) to the Ontario Institute of Bodywork Techniques, Psychotherapy and Emotional Bodywork (Canada). He presented often for the Association for Research and Enlightenment, founded by [Edgar Cayce](#), and was a regular presenter for the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

Van de Castle was President, Board member or Executive Committee member for the Association for the Study of Dreams, the Virginia Psychological Association and the Colorado Psychological Association. At the [Parapsychological Association](#), he was a Council member for ten years and served as Public Information Officer, Treasure, Secretary, Vice President and President.²

He died on 29 January 2014 in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, outliving three sons and leaving two sons and a daughter.³

Dream Telepathy Experiments

Of his experimental work, Van de Castle wrote, ‘I have been the white-coated scientist attaching EEG electrodes to a subject’s head and face to study his or her sleep and dream patterns, and I have been the pajama-wearing research subject to whom other scientists have attached EEG electrodes.’⁴

His best-known experimental work as a subject was as part of a series of dream telepathy experiments undertaken at the Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, USA, from 1964 to 1978, led by parapsychologists [Montague Ullman](#) and [Stanley Krippner](#). The percipients (telepathic receivers) slept in the Center’s sleep laboratory connected to an EEG machine which indicated when their sleep cycles entered each dreaming phase. At this point, the agent (telepathic sender), in a separate room, gazed at a picture, trying to transmit it to the percipient telepathically until the dreaming phase ended. At that point the percipient was awakened and asked to describe any dreams they had just had, which would be recorded. The percipient (and later an independent judge) was shown the pool of eight pictures from which the target picture had been selected and asked to rank them according to how closely they matched the target.⁵

Van de Castle was among those who distinguished themselves in preliminary experiments as being particularly effective as either agent or percipient. When acting as the sleeping percipient his dream recall proved to be unusually strong. He discussed dream telepathy with a colleague, Calvin Hall at the Institute for Dream

Research. One morning he told Hall that he had dreamed of watching a boxing match and cheering enthusiastically for his fighter, which was not a typical dream for him. He then learned that on the previous night Hall had decided to experiment with dream telepathy, trying to telepathically transmit images of a recent boxing match to Van de Castle as he slept.

The Maimonides study ran on eight nights between January and November 1967. On the first night, the randomly-chosen target picture was Dali's *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* (Fig. 1). His description of his dreams as recorded included the following:

Something to do with motherhood ... A big Mass was going on ... In the church, some of the people seemed to be dressed in the white robes ... some fairly youngish male figure ... It just seemed like it had been sort of a shrine or it had been something of national importance, something of historical significance ... It seems as if the people were wearing the kind of little white frocks that altar boys wear, and it seems that there was a whole row of these across the front ... It was solemn and dignified and mysterious in a way ...

He also dreamed of seeing an attractive young woman he had recently met, who in the dream was wearing 'silky' and 'semi-transparent pyjamas' which showed her nipples. Finding the Dali painting among the eight pictures, he ranked it as most likely to be the target with 100% confidence.



Fig. 1: *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus*, by Salvador Dali, 1959 ([Wikiart](#)).

Over the whole run of eight nights, Van de Castle made five ‘direct hits’ in the judge’s rankings – something that could happen by chance only one in a thousand times – and six in his own rankings, for one-in-ten-thousand odds, far exceeding the results of the second-best percipient.

Legacy

In his mainstream dream research, Van de Castle collaborated with Hall, considered then the world’s most prominent dream researcher, to create a standardized methodology for objective dream research. This used a comprehensive coding system of hundreds of dream images, as described in their 1966 book, *The Content*

Analysis of Dreams and has since become the standard system used by dream researchers.⁶ Van de Castle received several major awards for his mainstream work.

In parapsychology, Van de Castle's impact has been felt most in dream telepathy research. But he was also active in other lines of inquiry, including fieldwork with the Cuna, the effects of hypnosis on psi, precognitive dreams.

Colleague Jean-Marc Emden described him as 'a rare and unique integrator of science, research, dreams and anthropology, with unparalleled knowledge that was rooted within the strictest of academia, life and field experience'.⁷

Works

For a complete listing of van de Castle's works including more papers, book reviews, conference presentations, workshops and so forth, see his [curriculum vitae](#).

Books

The Content Analysis of Dreams (1966, with C Hall). New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

The Psychology of Dreaming (1971). Morristown, New Jersey, USA: General Learning Press.

Our Dreaming Mind (1994). New York: Ballantine Books.

Monograph

Studies of Dreams Reported in the Laboratory and at Home (1966, with C Hall). Monograph Series: No. 1, Institute of Dream Research. Felton, California, USA: Big Trees Press

Parapsychological Papers and Chapters

Dreams as a multidimensional expression of psi (2010, with R. Dwyer & B.A. Pimm). *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* 6, 263-68.

Psi Dreaming Contest (2010, with B.A. Pimm, R. Dwyer, & A. Morgan). *DreamTime* 27/3, 18-21, 44.

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Dreams and ESP (2009). In *Utrecht II: Charting the Future of Parapsychology: Proceedings of an International Conference (2008)* ed. by C. Roe, W. Kramer, & L. Coly, 72-114. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.

Surprising results: Conference 2006 dream telepathy contest (2006, with R. Dwyer). *DreamTime* 23/2, 26-28.

Psi manifestations in multiple personality disorder (1993). In *Psi in Clinical Practice: Proceedings of an International Conference in London, 1989* ed. by L Coly & J.

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The dream helper ceremony: A small group paradigm for transcendent ESP (1990, with H. Reed). *Theta* 6/1, 12-20.

The D.N.B. Telepathy Project (1986). *Dream Network Bulletin* 5/1, 4-7.

Telepathy in dreaming (1978). *Sundance Community Dream Journal* 2/1, 87-105.

Precognitive dreaming (1978). *Sundance Community Dream Journal* 2/2, 174-91.

Electrographic analysis of the sleep cycle in young depressed patients (1978, with J. Taub & D. Hawkins). *Biological Psychiatry*, 203-14.

Paranormal communication; the Cuna Indians of Panama (1975). *Journal of Communication* 25, 183-90.

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Anthropology and psychic research, (1974). In *Psychic Exploration*, ed. by E. Mitchell, & J. White, 269-87. New York: Putnam Press.

Is there a madness to our methods in psi research? (1971). In *Proceedings of an International Conference*, 8, 40-46. New York: Parapsychological Foundation.

Psi abilities in primitive groups (1970). In *The 1970 Parapsychological Association Convention Proceedings* 7, 97-122. New York: Parapsychological Association. [Reprinted 1976 in *Surveys in Parapsychology: Reviews of the Literature with Updated Bibliographies*, ed. by R. White, 95-119. Metuchen, New Jersey, USA: Scarecrow Press.]

The facilitation of ESP through hypnosis (1969). *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 12, 37-56.

A review of ESP cases carried out in the classroom (1959). *International Journal of Parapsychology* 1, 84-102.

An exploratory study of some personality correlates associated with PK performance (1958). *Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research* 2, 134-50.

Differential patterns of ESP scoring as a function of differential attitudes towards ESP (1957). *Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research* 51, 43-61.

A report on a sentence completion form of sheep-goat attitude scale (1957, with R. White). *Journal of Parapsychology* 19, 171-9.

An exploratory study of some variables in individual ESP performance (1953). *Journal of Parapsychology* 17, 61-73.

Media

Van de Castle was interviewed on national TV in the USA by Phil Donahue, David Letterman, Barbara Walters, Tom Snyder and Mike Douglas, and also appeared on numerous regional TV and radio talk shows. He served as consultant on a Discovery Channel series on dreams and presented on Voice of America.

His research has been covered in publications including the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *American Weekly*, *Psychology Today*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Playboy*, *Glamour*, *McCalls*, *Self*, *Parents*, *Family Circle*, *Men's Health*, *New Yorker*, *Redbook*, *Stern* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly*.⁸

Video

Van de Castle discusses the methodological problems with an attempt to replicate the Maimonides results at the University of Wyoming [here](#).

Van de Castle explains how to do content analysis of dreams: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Interview of Van de Castle by Parapsychology Foundation president Lysette Coly, [here](#).

KM Wehrstein

Literature

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Bromley, A.E. (2014). [In Memoriam: U.Va.'s Dream Researcher, Robert Van de Castle](#). [Web page posted 7 February.]

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Van de Castle, R. (n.d.) [Curriculum vitae](#). [PDF from his website on the Internet Archive.]

Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Van de Castle (n.d.) All information in this section is drawn from this source.
- [2](#). Van de Castle (n.d.)
- [3](#). Bromley (2014).
- [4](#). Cited in Bromley (2014).
- [5](#). Ullman & Krippner (1974). All information in this section is drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
- [6](#). Anonymous (n.d.)
- [7](#). Bromley (2014).
- [8](#). Van de Castle (n.d.)

