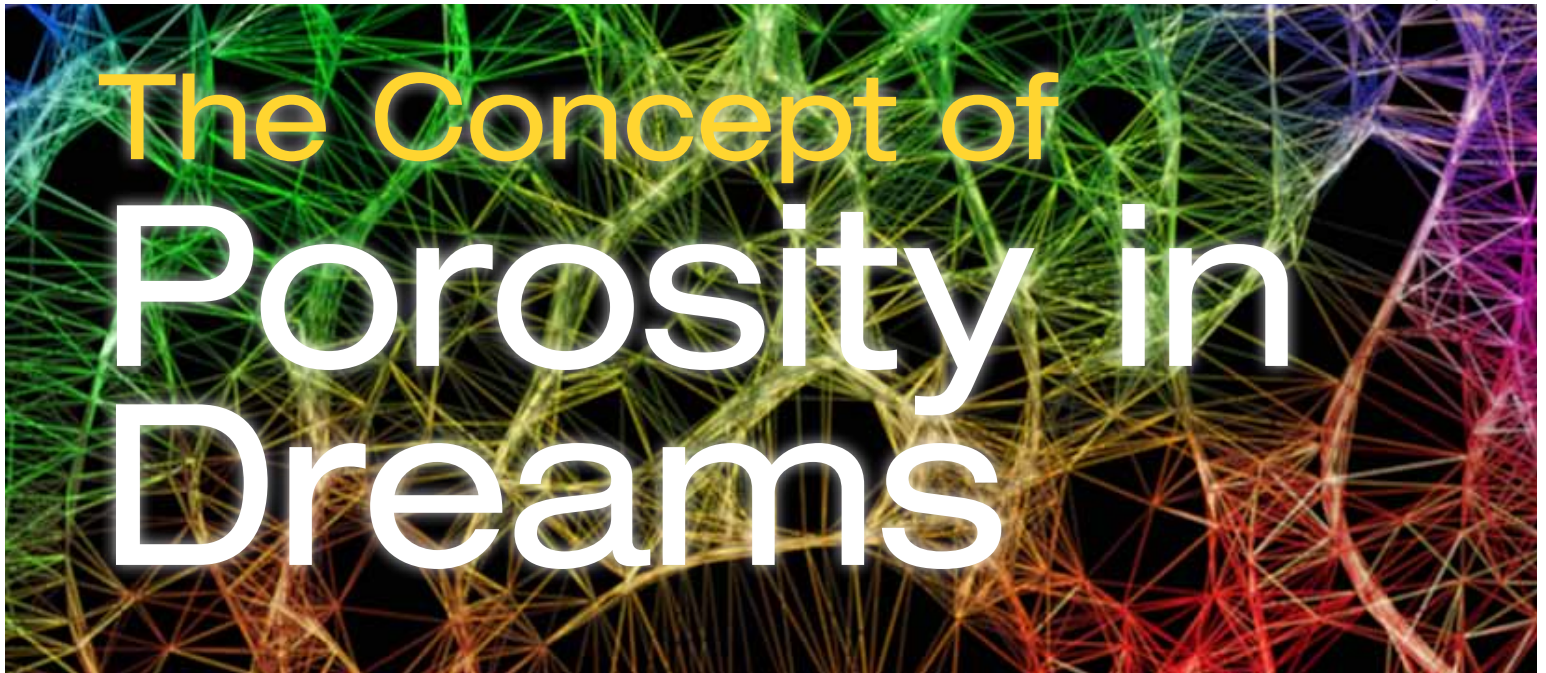


Robert L. Van de Castle

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My lifelong pursuit of dreams began rather reluctantly. After receiving my PhD degree in clinical psychology from the University of North Carolina, I took a full-time teaching position at the University of Denver. In addition to some undergraduate courses, I was also supposed to teach an open-ended graduate clinical course on some area of interest that would appeal to the eight or so students enrolled. When I inquired as to what topic they might wish to learn more about, they almost, to a person, said “dreams.” I explained to them that I knew practically nothing about dreams as it was a topic hardly ever mentioned in any of my own previous classes. I asked them to suggest another topic, but they insisted that they wanted to learn about dreams. I again explained my ignorance about dreams, and they again demanded that dreams become the topic of focus for the course. We wound up as the “blind leading the blind.” We agreed to read various journal articles on dreams and exchange our notes during class meetings. Everyone’s interest seemed to subsequently “leap frog” in ways that were meaningful for each student. Since I had developed an interest in projective techniques previously (Rorschach Ink Blots etc.), I began to appreciate the similarities between interpreting the ambiguous images of inkblots with eyes wide open, and the dream images we develop with our eyes closed while sleeping.

During this time, I frequently came across references to Calvin Hall and his “continuity theory” of dreaming. Briefly stated, he proposed that dream images are “the embodiment of thoughts” and that by examining their content, one could become familiar with the important conceptual areas that organized one’s life. He wrote a valuable book in 1953 entitled *The Meaning of Dreams* that offered comments on over 200 dreams. I became interested in his work and contacted him

to inquire as to whether there might be any possibilities for working with him. He said he was just beginning a new study and would be happy to hire me if his proposed \$7,000 annual salary were acceptable to me. Although I was married and had five sons, I was willing to make any sacrifice necessary to join him on the exciting projects that would be forthcoming.

In the two years that I spent with Hall in Miami, we worked together on developing an elaborate system for scoring up dreams in a quantitative fashion that would enable objective techniques to be employed with dreams so that they would receive the scientific respectability that they deserved. We utilized the scoring system we developed to objectively evaluate 500 dreams from American male college students and 500 dreams from American female college students. These results provided the baselines for what type of dream content might be found for any sample of dreamers. We published our “norms”, and our rationale for how they were developed, in our 1966 book, *The Content Analysis of Dreams*. Our system became the most widely used one in the world for researchers who wished to treat dreams in the same objective way as other researchers employed standardized personality tests.

In addition to our work on developing dream “norms,” our main project at the Institute of Dream Research focused upon comparing dream content from the same subjects when sleeping in their own beds at home and in our laboratory (actually the basement of Hall’s home). We both served in the roles of experimenter and subject for this research. In one chapter of an unpublished book entitled *The Scientific Study of Dreams*, Hall described his efforts to investigate “the effects of subliminal stimuli on dreams” and admitted that “when the experiments were begun I was skeptical of obtaining positive results.... These personal observations are pertinent because

investigators of psychic phenomena have been accused of finding what they want to find, and of not being sufficiently critical of their experiments.”

Hall had not told me he was starting to seriously investigate this area and use me as a subject. On one of the nights when I served as the sleeping subject, Hall reported: “the first two presentations with Van de Castle did not have any discernible effect on the dreams he reported. The third topic consisted of watching a prizefight. The experimenter visualized a prize fight mentally, looked at pictures of prize fighters in a magazine, wrote out the message: ‘you are watching a prize fight,’ and stood up and engaged in shadowboxing. These activities were continued for about 15 minutes. When the subject was awakened, he reported a long dream into the tape recorder. The first third of the dream was sexual in character, then the following episode was recorded: ‘this setting shifted to a large auditorium and it was a boxing match going on. There were two young lightweight boxers who were fighting and one of them was doing much better than the other. It seems his opponent became vanquished and then another lightweight contender got into the ring with him. This new contender now started to give a pretty savage beating to the other boxer who at one point kind of started to use a double punch where both hands would be brought from the outside and would simultaneously hit the other boxer’s head at the same time. My sentiments began to be for the underdog, and I remember standing up and throwing a few imaginary punches myself because I was so involved with the action in the ring.” Hall then wrote: “The description of the fight continued for nine more lines, and then shifted back to the theme of the first part of the dream.”

Although I experienced this dream back in 1967, I can still recall the vividness and intensity of that dream 46 years later. It served as my *personal* introduction to the reality of psychic phenomena, even though I had a broad previous reading background on the subject. For persons experiencing this kind of impactful dream, no amount of skepticism by omniscient scientists can ever dissuade an experiencer of this kind of powerful psychic event that they were deluded. If you get hit by a truck, you know that you were hit by a truck, and no amount of critical comments by “the arbiters of reality” will ever convince you that the truck that hit you was an imaginary truck. Hall mentioned: “we obtained 97 dreams from that subject who had dreamed of a prize fight when that topic was sent. There was no mention of a boxing match in any of his other 97 dreams.”

In commenting about the boxing dream, Hall stated: “Several things will be noted about the incorporation into the dream of the topic. First it was a very direct reproduction of what the experimenter was thinking about and pantomiming. Second, the boxing episode was inserted into the dream and appeared to have no connection with what went before and what followed it. This inserted quality is also what one finds when a sleeping person is stimulated by a sound, light, or drops of water. It appears that the subject received the message in the middle of a dream which was interrupted in order to incorporate the subliminal stimulus and then return to the main

dream again. Third, the subject’s personal involvement in the action by standing up and throwing a few imaginary punches may have reflected the experimenter’s rather spirited but silent pantomiming in the next room.” Hall also conducted similar attempts with five other subjects with whom a total of 121 presentations of stimulus material were made. In 56 of these presentations, some correspondence was noted between the material that was sent and the contents of the dream that was subsequently reported. (Some examples of these correspondences can be found in my book *Our Dreaming Mind*, page 418.)

Hall also extended his explorations in another direction. “Sometimes, the sleep of two subjects was monitored on the same night. The subjects slept in separate rooms which were located on either side of the room in which the EEG was located. Occasionally, the two subjects would have REM periods close together in time, and in two instances a striking congruence between the dreams reported by the subjects from these REM periods was noted.... Subject A dreamed of receiving a special delivery letter and subject B dreamed his sister was writing a letter which was to be sent at a special rate. On another occasion, subject B dreamed of going into a store to buy something.... Subject C reported a dream in which he went into a store to buy something.”

The most startling example of dream to dream temporal correspondences between two subjects was reported by Alan Rechtschaffen, professor emeritus in the Department of Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of Chicago and a noted pioneer in the field of sleep research. He was invited to present an experimental design for a 1968 conference sponsored by the Parapsychology Foundation on “Methodology in Psi Research.” After conducting some informal research, he said: “We noted a good deal of correspondence, quite anecdotally, between dreams occurring about the same time in the night by two sleepers.”

Here was how he described his best example:

In the first dream, one subject dreamt about students singing in Russian and the other subject dreamt about students doing some kind of interpretive singing. In the second dream, the first subject was taking a violin lesson and the other subject was learning a guitar melody. In the third dream, the first subject was watching a James Cagney gangster movie, and the other subject reported a dream about a recent gangster movie, *Bonnie and Clyde*... As the subjects knew each other, the possibility of collusion, which we really doubt, could not be ruled out. So we had to go on and introduce experimentally an external stimulus into the dream. We did this by post-hypnotic suggestion. Before the subject went to sleep for the night, he was hypnotized, and while he was in a trance we told him that during the night he would have a certain dream.

The very first night we tried it, we told the subject that he would dream of the death of Martin Luther King and of the fear of riots, and he dreamt that Martin Luther King had been shot, that somebody

threw a rock and they were afraid a riot would start. The other subject, who had not received any suggestion, dreamt of a Negro policeman who was beating another man and he was afraid that somebody would throw a brick and start a riot.

On another night we told the subject to dream that he was in an amusement park, having a very good time. He dreamt that, and specifically he dreamt about riding on a merry-go-round. The other subject had a dream of people laughing and running in circles and there were “grinning, funny looking horses” in his dream.

Rechtschaffen then decided to use hypnosis to investigate the possibility of inducing simultaneous dreams. He would hypnotize subject A and tell him to dream for 10 minutes about topic X. He would then hypnotize subject B and tell him to dream about what A had dreamt. He reported some very striking correspondences between these hypnotically induced dreams. He subsequently raised this intriguing question: “We



thought that maybe the question is not so much what do dreams mean, but whose dream are you having?”

My first impressive personal introduction to the realm of “entangled dreams” and the question of whose dream are you having, occurred when I conducted an informal experiment from my home in Charlottesville, Virginia. I was a co-editor for the *Dream Network Bulletin* and announced to readers that I would concentrate on a picture on the night of November 17, 1985, and invited them to send me accounts of their dreams from that night. A total of 27 percipients from around the country responded to my request.

The target picture involved a black-and-white photograph of a Kuna Indian woman from Panama standing in front of a house with slanted, wooden walls, and a thatched roof with some children inside (at left). The participants reported numerous correspondences to the target picture, such as mentioning a short sleeve blouse, unusual ankle jewelry, foreign locations, and children. One woman, Claudia B, who was from Brooklyn and who was a complete stranger to me, mentioned her young daughter, hands on a structure of beams and poles, wooden sliding doors and a building with an unusual looking roof. In my associations recorded that night to the target picture, I had written that a thatched roof provides good protection from the rain. Claudia mentioned she heard rain falling and realized that she didn’t have an umbrella. I recalled 4 dreams that night and there were striking correspondences between my dreams and Claudia’s dreams throughout the night.

My first dream involved a fishing scene: “I was sometimes on a boat and sometimes on shore. The man I was with caught two large flounder, and a woman insisted that I put them on top of the boat and gut them. I attempted to cut the fish open with a razor blade. Some blood came out; the fish’s face turned into a man’s face and he was bleeding. I told him to rinse his face with water and said I would need his advice as to how to cut around his ears and nose.” In her first dream, Claudia reported, “I am outdoors, perhaps on the deck of the ship... mounting the fresh, whole wet skin of a small whale or whale’s head (fish size) on a board. After removing one eye (it’s a side view) with the knife I’m using, I hear a conversation... (This could be influenced by a recent waking experience of washing flounder for cooking, but not removing their heads.) I feel a kinship, or sympathy, with the whale, which at some point transforms into a person. The wet, stretched, mounted skin is now of a man’s face, reddish-brown.”

The odds against two complete strangers on the same night, geographically separated by 500 miles, dreaming about a boat, cutting open a fish and having the face of the fish turn into a bloody man’s face are astronomical, and that both dreamers specifically mentioned flounder seems to argue against any notion that the correspondences are a chance occurrence. Rechtschaffen had noted that, “When you simply have judges match a dream against a suggested topic, a hit does not reveal the degree of the hit. A simple matching procedure does not take into account the very unlikely probability of such a specific occurrence.” Although not as striking in matching details, another female dreamer saw an “animal face and an animal with an open wound that I wanted to sew up or

heal before too much blood was lost.”

My next dream involved providing drinks that cost \$0.41 each. Claudia reported that she offered to count another person's share and wrote down figures which were an “odd amount of dollars and cents.” My next dream involved a mother dividing a cake into two portions, and in Claudia's second dream, her daughter was with her and asked the others to count out a share with “equal denominations.” In our next dreams, both Claudia and I dreamed about students and working on a project.

Dreamers other than Claudia also seemed to tune into various features mentioned in my first dream. There were references to: a water setting, an ocean, ocean trip, sea, river, yacht, boat (2x), oars for a rowboat, fishing, and fish hooks. There is no material in the target image that bears any relationship to any of this shared dream material, but it does seem as if some sort of content leakage or seeping in imagery occurs between and among the dreamers. In my fourth dream, I was using a hose to water down a pile of leaves. Two of the nine male dreamers reported urinating in their dreams, and one woman dreamt that something like tea was being splashed or dripped on the rippled pages of a magazine.

I have come up with the term “porosity” to describe how the material of multiple dreamers' dreams seems to interconnect in rather fluid ways. There has been a great deal of research conducted recently on the concept of “thin boundaries” and the term “porosity” seems relevant to this concept. I think the title illustration at the beginning of this article captures this conception of everything sort of being interconnected with everything else.

The results I obtained with Hall led to my serving as a subject for eight nights in the dream telepathy studies carried out at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn. I had EEG electrodes attached to my face and scalp to monitor my REM periods, and was repeatedly awakened throughout the night to report my dreams. A typical night's transcription would run to over 25 single-spaced pages. A total of eight potential target pictures, consisting of colored art prints, served as target stimuli. Since there were often similarly themed pictures present because of the randomization procedure to select target pictures each night, a decision was made to consider all my judging choices that were ranked as number 1-4 as “hits” and those ranked 5-8 as “misses.” Using that criterion, I received a total of 8 “hits” during my nights at Maimonides and such a result would be considered as statistically significant ($<.01$). I also frequently tuned into personal material that pertained to the senders' private lives, as well as to that of the experimenters and other laboratory personnel. Thus, the concept of porosity seemed to be applicable in numerous situations.

At the second meeting of the Association for the Study of Dreams in Charlottesville in 1984, I introduced the concept of a “Dream Telepathy Contest” which was loosely based on the Maimonides protocol. I did this to provide the dreamers attending the conference an informal introduction to the concept of psychic dreams, but to do so in an informal context that would be associated with the feeling of fun and relaxation. Encouraging results were obtained during that year and in every year that has been subsequently held. These

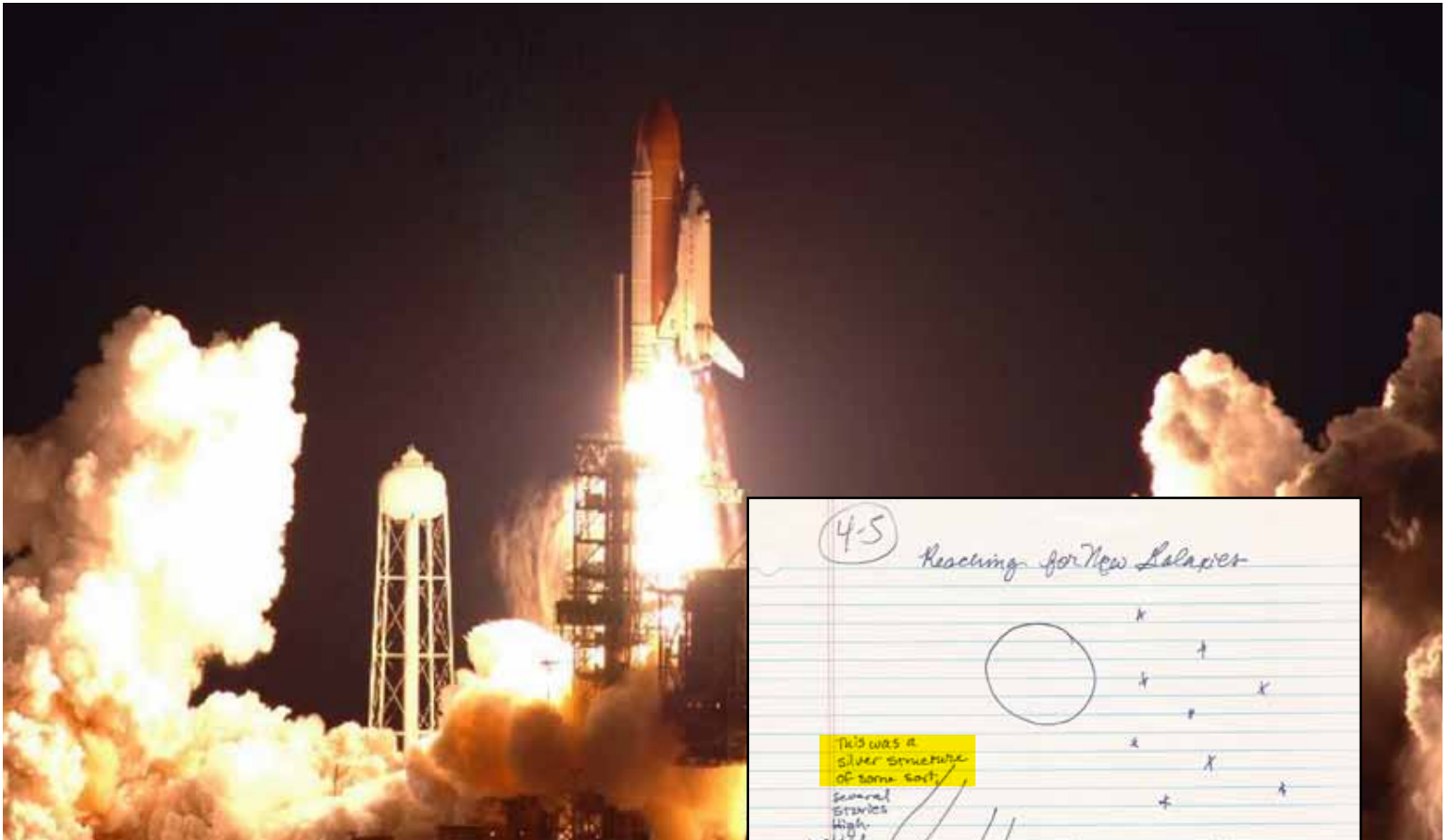
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conditions were very informal and not intended to convey any sense of rigorous experimentation.

The basic paradigm involved selecting four different potential target pictures that differed in the type of background setting, activities being displayed, and emotions that were presumably associated with the content of the stimulus materials. Each picture was sealed up in an opaque manila envelope. These four sealed envelopes were presented to the “agent” or “sender” who then selected one of them to take back to their hotel room and open it up in that private setting, and begin to “send” or “transmit” the imagery shown on the target picture to the participants. On the following morning, the four different pictures were posted and contestants had to determine which choice best represented their guess as to what had been the target picture. We always got impressive results, which were published in our quarterly newsletter describing the events of the conference.

A detailed description of our procedure for the 2009 conference held in Chicago was reported in *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*, edited by Larry Dossey. The article shows the sometimes striking correspondences that occur between contestants' dreams and the contents of the four pictures utilized in the contest. The category of psi includes several different psychic phenomena. The term “telepathy” is used to describe a “mind to mind” interaction, the concept of “clairvoyance” to designate a “mind to object interaction,” and the term “precognition” to describe accurate information that will become demonstrated at a future time. It becomes an extremely difficult task to try and develop a “pure or uncontaminated” state of psi involving mental imagery.

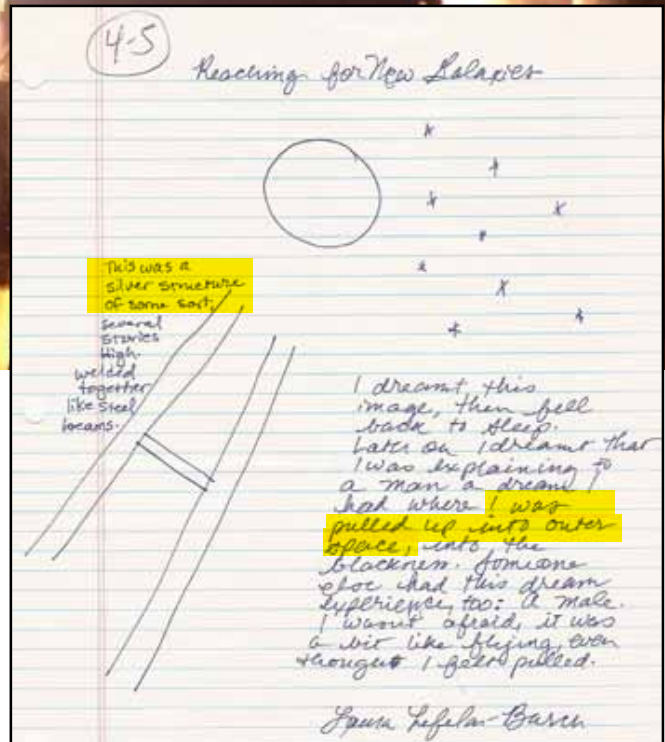
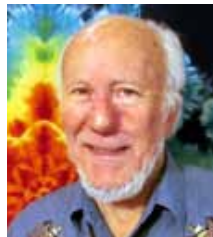
Although the agent (sender) is actively attempting to telepathically “transmit” the visible contents of the target picture to the “receivers,” it is possible that the participants could also tune clairvoyantly into the content of the material contained in the other pictures. It is also possible that the dreamer could go “forward in time” and dream about the content of the eventual target picture which will be shown on the following morning. We had a striking example of this at the Chicago conference with a target picture involving the nighttime launch of a space shuttle (next page). One female psychotherapist from New Jersey picked up the contents of the picture in striking



detail and provided a drawing that mirrored many features of the target picture and labeled her dream “Reaching for New Galaxies” (see inset). However another dreamer from Quebec showed us a dream report from her dream journal that she had titled “The Rocket Explosion.” In her dream she mentioned that she was in a grass field with a group of people to see the launch of the space shuttle at night. The interesting feature of her dream was that she experienced it three nights before the sender selected the target picture!

The concept of porosity that I am promoting is one that suggests that there is a very open, fluid, permeable, relationship shifting between and among the tangled webs of psi mental imagery associated with the state of dreaming.

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