

James Carpenter

James Carpenter is a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist and parapsychologist. His psi research has focused on identifying the relationship between psychological variables and ESP scoring. He is best-known for his innovative First Sight Theory, which posits that psi phenomena are integral to normal perception and action.



Career

James Carpenter attended Duke University in order to be able to study with [JB Rhine](#) at the Parapsychology Laboratory, where he worked during summer holidays as an undergraduate and graduate student. After graduating, he received an MA and a PhD in clinical psychology from Ohio State University, then taught psychology at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Carpenter currently runs a private practice in North Carolina. He continues to carry out psi research and has published more than a hundred articles and book chapters.

Carpenter has served as president of the [Rhine Research Center](#), in Durham, NC. He has been a board director and president of the [Parapsychology Association](#), and received its Scientific Contributions Award. He has served as board director and secretary of the American Academy of Clinical Psychology, and is a fellow of that Academy, estimating that he has conducted at least 80,000 psychotherapy sessions.

Early Influences

At the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory, Carpenter was one of a small group of students who were intensely trained by Rhine and his colleagues (prominently [Gaither Pratt](#), John Freeman, and Winifred Nielsen). The group included [Charles Honorton](#), [Rex Stanford](#), and [Robert Morris](#), all of whom went on to make significant contributions to parapsychology.

The Duke group came to the belief that the reality of psi had been established, that it was a general human capacity, and that its functioning depended upon psychological factors, most of which had not been clearly operationalized. Rhine believed that the motivation of percipient and experimenter were very important, and had noticed that his best early performers were all charming extraverts. [Gertrude Schmeidler](#) and others^[1] had shown that performance depended upon belief in psi and emotional adjustment. This was the climate in which Carpenter and his young colleagues began their own researches in the 'psychology of psi'.

First Sight

In recent years Carpenter has become known for his First Sight Theory (FST), which posits that the individual mind extends beyond the range of the senses into a larger, pre-conscious domain.^[2] In his model, psi phenomena are placed at the outer edge of this domain, and are presumed to function in an entirely unconscious way, and to be consulted by the unconscious mind in the formation of all experience and all behaviour. The theory assumes that the psi contribution (ESP or PK) is always in a direction (toward inclusion or toward exclusion) and at some strength (negligible to dramatically strong). The prediction of these two elements – the direction of psi expression and the strength of psi expression – is taken by Carpenter to be the primary objective of parapsychological theory and research. FST specifies variables that should be important in making these predictions.

In brief, direction is expected to vary as a function of unconscious intention, and strength is expected to vary according to the consistency of unconscious intention. More specific factors are indicated as they are expected to bear upon either the direction or consistency of intention. For example, unconscious intention is expected to be more positive when the source of information is seen as valid (in parapsychology, the ‘sheep-goat’ effect), when the content of information does not arouse too much anxiety, when cognitive work is not ongoing, and when the perceiver is more interested in ‘liminal’ experience (that imply unconscious action, such as dreams, hunches and moods). Consistency of intention is expected to vary with such things as the urgency of the need for information or action, the extent to which it is blocked by normal access, and the tendency to be capable of maintaining consistent purpose in other situations.

Psi takes on aspects in this theory that are unfamiliar to parapsychology: For example, ESP is not considered a form of information, PK is not action, and neither are ever consciously available as such, although their implications may be discerned sometimes, just as the effects of subliminal primes may be indirectly discerned. The normal function of psi is assumed to be outside of consciousness, and contributory to conscious experience and everyday behavior. Only when the perception or behavior is blocked, and is important in the context of the situation, can its effects be indirectly discerned.

In his comprehensive text on this subject,^[3] Carpenter applies these predictions to relatively large bodies of experimental literature, in both parapsychology and mainstream cognitive-social-personality psychology, to demonstrate that both psi and ‘normal’ unconscious psychological processes follow generally the same patterns, also that the theory can consolidate existing findings, explaining apparent inconsistencies, and making fruitful new predictions. In greatest depth, he examines the areas of psi and memory, psi and creativity, psi and fear, psi and extraversion, psi and clinical psychology, and psi and subliminal perception.

Psi and Psychotherapy

Combining his interests in parapsychology and psychotherapy, Carpenter has contributed articles, lectures and papers on the intrusion of psi-material in psychotherapy. He notes that such events have been reported from the days of [Sigmund Freud](#) to the present day, describing some from his own sessions. He

argues that psychotherapists are well-served by being alert to such occurrences, remaining open-minded and aware of the ways in which they may facilitate therapeutic goals. As noted earlier, his study of the implicit expression of psi in spontaneous interpersonal activity began as an attempt to study psi in a quasi-therapeutic situation.

Experimental Studies

Emotion, Mood and ESP

Carpenter's first paper was a report of a negative relationship between ESP scoring and self-rated anxiety.^[4] Then he shifted from studying the direction of scoring to the variance of run scores (or the average extremity of scores in relation to chance). With David Rogers^[5] he found that extremity of ESP scores declined over runs in a long series of effort, and followed this with several related reports.^[6]

Assuming that the participant's mood changed over time in such a situation, from freshly positive to bored and negative, he turned to self-reported measures of participant mood, seeking predictors of extremity. In two initial studies, he hypothesized that variance might be predicted by clusters of mood adjectives indicating a positive, energetic state of mind. Participants predicted future targets at home and then indicated whether their mood was positive or negative by checking off items in a mood checklist. Both studies showed a suggestive but non-significant association between positive mood scores with high variance and between negative moods and low variance. A predicted decline effect across sessions was seen in the first study.^[7] (This study extended an earlier experiment that showed that variability in ESP scoring was highest at the beginning but declined significantly towards the end when familiarity and boredom shift the mood from positive to negative.)^[8]

In a third experiment Carpenter made specific predictions of variance based on mood scores which were confirmed significantly ($p = 0.01$).^[9]

At this point Carpenter shifted to a research strategy he used in subsequent research programs: test numerous variables against the ESP criterion of interest, reduce them to a set of optimal predictors using stepwise regression, and then test this predictive cluster in new samples. Thus, following initial pilot studies, subsequent studies were tightly prescribed with definite predictions. At a time before independent registration of studies was practised, this was a way of assuring that findings were not *post hoc* and then over-interpreted.

Following this strategy, the data of the three studies described above were pooled and analysed to yield a variance-predicting scale of items. Fifteen subsequent series were carried out using this procedure, with an accumulating rate of success that was quite significant.^[10]

Emotional Priming of Targets with Hidden Material

To test previous findings^[11] that ESP ability is influenced by hidden target differences, Carpenter arranged for 19 participants to guess the identity of Zener

cards enclosed in sealed envelopes. They were not told the target envelopes also contained cards with images, half of which were pornographic. Carpenter measured both anxiety levels and levels of belief in psi before testing began. Overall, believers (sheep) scored higher than disbelievers (goats), the effect being found to be strongest on the targets packaged with erotic material. Participants who scored low on anxiety performed significantly better on the erotic envelopes. For envelopes containing non-erotic images the effect was reversed: high anxiety individuals scored significantly better than low anxiety subjects ($p = 0.01$). The result appeared to confirm a differential effect of hidden target material on ESP performance moderated by the psychological variable: individuals who would have been more negatively affected by the erotic material if it were conscious experienced a negative influence from the same (hidden) material on their ESP scores.

In an experiment with 31 participants, differences in scoring rate between erotic and neutral envelopes were again observed, this time using sex guilt (as measured by the Mosher Guilt Scale) as a correlate. This correlation was modulated by the degree of psi belief (as measured by the Sheep-Goat scale) with both high- and low-guilt sheep scoring significantly higher on erotic envelopes than neutral envelopes and high-guilt goats scoring considerably below chance for the neutral targets. Carpenter concluded that belief in psi, sex guilt and target nature interact in complex and potentially predictable ways.^[12]

Therapeutic Settings

Carpenter explored the role of ESP in therapeutic settings, adapting group therapy sessions into ESP tests. Here, he was beginning to explore his First Sight model of psi, treating extrasensory information as something the mind uses all the time unconsciously, and that it expresses implicitly. Psi, from this point of view, is not knowledge, but rather an implicit prompt or prime for the unconscious formation of behaviors and perceptions. Working mostly with groups of friends, he asked a group to rate a selection of four pictures (one of which was the target), for its level of concordance with a previous group discussion, to see whether the target picture had had any psychic influence. Thus, he was treating the ESP target as an extrasensory 'prime', analogous to the subliminal primes studied in research on subliminal perception.

In a pilot study the group successfully picked the correct picture ($p = 0.03$). In two follow-up experiments the group scored at chance. However, when Carpenter examined the relationship between group session quality (as agreed by all members of the group) and psi accuracy, he found a significant relationship in both studies. Overall, the relationship was very significant ($p = 0.006$).

Carpenter and his colleagues continued work with this group protocol for several years, accumulating 386 sessions excluding the initial pilot work. Overall, success at picking the correct target rose to a significant level ($p = .001$). Analysis of ratings that accompanied the sessions made it clear that success was greatest when sessions did not involve too much intense self-disclosure, and when average moods at the beginnings of sessions were low in anxiety and scepticism. Carpenter concludes that ESP is an important element in every-day interpersonal situations,

and that ESP information can be unconsciously expressed and, with attention to the question, raised to conscious awareness.^{[13] [14]}

Decoding Messages

Carpenter tested the idea that ESP can be used for some practical purpose in retrieving extrasensory information if appropriate predictions are made about the participants' guesses. Using multiple regression, he derived mood scales for predicting the extremity and the direction of ESP scoring in a task which participants carried out at home. These scales were then used to predict performance with new groups tested in similar situations. In his last studies in this line, he added the wrinkle of using these predictive scales to not only retrieve target, but also retrieve useful coded information that was yoked to the targets.

In studies of this sort, first, someone chose a word or other target information and encoded it in traditional morse-code (dots and dashes). In the first study of this line, he arranged for student volunteers to take an ESP test consisting of guessing runs of 24 binary targets (0 or +), while also checking off mood items that were intended to predict scoring direction and extremity. The students were not told that half of their targets encoded a target word. When the ESP testing was complete, Carpenter arranged their guesses into sets based upon their scores on the mood scales, tallied and averaged the responses for each of the 12 trials in the hope of concentrating the extrasensory information. When the mood scales predicted psi hitting, guesses were added to a 'majority-vote analysis'. When psi-missing was predicted, calls were reversed, turning a + into a 0 and vice versa. When high or low extremity was predicted, a more complex analysis involving scores on index targets also added or reversed their associated guesses. When all guesses in this study were added together, correct majorities were found on all 12 targets, successfully retrieving the word 'peace'.

Successive experiments in this series, all using empirically-derived mood scales attempted the retrieval of an abbreviated word ('info'), an octal number, and two sets of stock market indices. The results, while never again perfect, were all statistically significant. Overall, across all the series (including those done before coded information was yoked to targets), 127 of 163 targets 'sent' to participants were successfully retrieved. This 78% retrieval rate, where 50% is expected by chance, is highly significant, and suggests that such methods might lift experimental psi effects to a level of practical utility.

Predicting Scoring in the Ganzfeld

Carpenter carried out two studies in which he analysed transcripts of ganzfeld sessions ('mentation reports') as if they were projective material – such as are gathered in Rorschach or Thematic Apperception Test – and used the scores to attempt to predict the direction of ESP scoring in the session.

First, with the help of colleagues, he defined rating criteria for a number of scales and refined them to a point that they permitted a high level of rater reliability. All material in a session was first divided into 'idea units'. Then each item was rated as to the presence or absence of indications of each scale. Some scales were

nominated initially because prior research and incipient First Sight Theory ideas suggested they should be useful; others were included in a purely exploratory way. Three scales classified the type of utterance (Remarks, Reports, imagery or Memories); five denoted aspects of the subjective experience of the situation (Positive Experience, Neutral Experience, Discomfort, Odd Bodily Experience, and Self-Doubt); seven indicated cognitive qualities of imagery (Integration, Fluid Development, Contrived Imagery, Color, Achromatic Color, Regressed Reasoning, Deteriorated Reasoning); five indicated special aspects of imagery (Autonomy, Human, Animal or Inanimate Movement, and Personal Involvement); and eleven indicated emotional and defensive aspects of imagery (Anxiety, Hostility, Orality, Other Primary Process, Denial, Distancing, Intellectualizing, Cooperative Movement, Merger/Harmony, Barrier and Penetration). Finally, there were measures of verbal productivity (Total Words, and Total IUs).^[15]

In a first study, trained raters rated 364 session reports, collected from several laboratories, on these scales. Initial expectations were confirmed in some cases (for instance, a negative relation with scoring for Anxiety and Intellectualization, and a positive relation with Merger/Harmony). However, for the major analysis, Carpenter subjected all scores to multiple regression analysis for confirmatory testing. Six scales emerged as predictors of psi-hitting (Positive or Neutral Experience, Fluid Development, Form with Achromatic Color, Autonomy, Cooperative Movement, and Merger/Harmony), and three predicted psi-missing (Integration, Anxiety and Intellectualization). These nine variables, combined into a composite predictor, was then tested against a new set of 251 sessions taken from three other studies. The prediction was successful: $r = 0.2$, $p = 0.0018$.

When pilot and confirmatory samples were pooled, a new composite variable of six scales was nominated for future research (Positive/Neutral Experience, Form/Achromatic Color and Merger/Harmony for hitting, and Integration, Anxiety and Intellectualization for missing), which suggests mainly that a state of anxiety and cognitive effort are self-defeating in the ganzfeld, while having a positive or neutral experience, and an openness to closeness with others are facilitative. No further work has been reported.

Psi Contributes Implicitly to Experiences of Preference

Carpenter reported two studies that were intended to test the idea, taken from his First Sight theory, that everyday experience is constituted unconsciously and always contains some reference to psi information, also that the expression of this contribution can be predicted by theoretically-specified variables. In these studies, he attempted to predict the contribution of both extrasensory and subliminal-sensory primes to the formation of preferences of participants in a modified 'Mere Exposure' situation, in which prior unconscious exposure to some stimulus can be seen to influence a relative preference for that material later when it is presented consciously. Carpenter considers all such unconscious contributions to be inherently bi-directional, so he did not look simply for the presence or absence of an influence toward liking, but analysed for increases in both liking and disliking.

His first study, following his customary strategy, tested the effect of variables that were nominated by theory and by prior research as likely to moderate such effects

on preference. These included a tendency toward anxiety, an openness to inner 'liminal' experience, a tolerance of closeness with others, creativity, belief that ESP is real and possible, and a need for structure and intellectualization. Based upon both theory and the results of cognitive-psychology research, the participant's mood, good or bad, was assumed to function as a meta-moderator, all of these relations appearing more strongly when the mood is good than when it is bad. The results of the first study generally confirmed these expectations.

All the significant relations of the first study were combined into multiple regression analyses against the criteria of psi stimuli and subliminal stimuli. For ESP, effects in the second study were expected to be more positive for high levels of openness to inner fantasy, and tolerance for closeness to others, and be more negative with higher scores on anxious vulnerability. For subliminal perception, scoring was expected to be higher with higher scores on a measure of openness to 'limiminal' (unconscious-process-implying) material. All relations were expected to be stronger when the participant was in a positive mood. The results were nicely confirmatory for the ESP prediction ($r = 0.32$, $p = 0.002$ for all moods, $r = 0.38$, $p = 0.008$ for positive mood), but were at chance for the prediction of subliminal scores in both positive and negative moods. These results support the idea that ESP information contributes implicitly to the formation of ordinary preferences, and that this contribution can be revealed by appropriate, theory-specified, variables.

Michael Duggan

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Schmeidler (1945; 1950).
2. ^ Carpenter (2004; 2005; 2008).
3. ^ Carpenter (2012).
4. ^ Carpenter (1965).
5. ^ Rogers & Carpenter (1966).
6. ^ Carpenter (1966; 1967).
7. ^ Carpenter (1968).
8. ^ Carpenter (1966a; 1966b).
9. ^ Carpenter (1969).
10. ^ Carpenter (2010).
11. ^ Rao (1962).
12. ^ Carpenter (1971).
13. ^ Carpenter (1988a; 1988b).
14. ^ Carpenter & Sanks (2017).
15. ^ Carpenter (2003).