

Psychology and Parapsychology

This article explores the overlap between parapsychology and psychology. It includes discussions of psychological variables related to psychic phenomena, for instance with regard to personality, and of psychological concepts that are used to make sense of ESP and other phenomena. The implications of parapsychology for psychology are also considered, including the variety of human experience, clinical issues and the idea of nonphysicality.

Psychological Aspects of Psi Phenomena

Psychic phenomena manifest dynamic aspects, and personality and cognitive variables, suggesting they are part of normal psychological processes. A good example is ESP, which the earliest psi researchers recognized is expressed through various psychological means. The SPR's first major work, *Phantasms of the Living*, describes telepathy as being conveyed to consciousness through hallucinations, dreams, impressions, ideas, emotions, impulses to take action, and sensations such as pain and discomfort. In the years following its publication in 1886, the topic was discussed by Frederic Myers,¹ GNM Tyrrell,² and Louisa E Rhine,³ among others.

A case of this sort was reported by Stevenson, concerning a woman who was washing her dishes when 'an awesome feeling came over me':

I dropped the plate, turned my eyes toward heaven and prayed aloud, 'Oh God, don't let her get killed!' For some unexplained reason I knew Joicey [her five-year-old daughter] had been hit by a car or was going to be.⁴

She quickly telephoned, and confirmed that the child had indeed been in an accident moments before, but was unharmed.

ESP messages are believed to have dynamic aspects, such as elements of personal significance to the experiencers, and symbolism, as seen for example in dreams. Studies by Ehrenwald,⁵ Eisenbud,⁶ and Stevenson⁷ show that they employ the same symbols as those that appear in non-ESP dreams, and are motivated by human needs similar to those involved in other psychological processes.

Laboratory Work

JB Rhine and his associates explored the relationship between psychological issues and both ESP and psychokinesis (PK). Summarizing this work, Rhine and Pratt⁸ argued that psi was completely normal, that it involved a degree of conscious use (but with little control), and that it was affected by motivation. Psi, they stated, was an unconscious function of the mind.

A particular phenomenon that Rhine and Pratt associated with the unconscious is the tendency of certain subjects in ESP tests to obtain results that are significantly below chance, that is, to score lower than the average in a way that is just as anomalous as if they had scored above it. This characteristic, named 'psi-missing',

is seen as people using ESP to avoid getting information about a target, perhaps because of boredom with the guessing task or lack of motivation to succeed.[9](#)

Another common feature in ESP research is when subjects paranormally obtain information about something other than the intended target – a process Rhine and Pratt called ‘displacement’. This too may have a psychological basis, although that is a matter of speculation. Parapsychologists today largely echo the views of Rhine and Pratt.[10](#)

A variable explored in many ESP experiments is the effect of belief in ESP on test scores. Classic ESP guessing studies carried out by psychologist Gertrude Schmeidler[11](#) show that subjects who believed in the reality of ESP (whom she called ‘sheep’), obtained better results than those who did not believe (‘goats’). Moreover, sometimes the goats showed psi-missing, scoring below what chance would predict. A meta-analytic review of 73 studies reported between 1947 and 1993 found that the combined result was highly significant, with sheep scoring higher than goats, although the strength of the effect was low.[12](#)

The results are less clear if, instead of being asked about belief in ESP in general, the participant is asked whether she believes in the possibility that she might have ESP or might show ESP in the experiment. But even then, the studies suggest that ESP in the laboratory is affected by beliefs in the existence of the phenomenon. This makes sense if we accept that positive attitudes improve our productivity and our interactions with others. A later analysis supports this finding.[13](#)

Other studies have looked at ESP and personality variables such as introversion and extroversion. Several researchers have found that extroverts do better in ESP tests.[14](#) There is also evidence that ESP is related to creativity.[15](#)

Neuroticism has been explored in the laboratory in relation to ESP, with ambiguous results that apparently depend on the context in which participants are tested. An analysis by Palmer[16](#) found that out of 26 experiments in which participants were tested individually, 20 (77%) showed significant results with participants who scored low on neuroticism measures, while only in six (23%) experiments were there significant results between neuroticism and ESP.

The nature of the relationship between mental imagery and ESP is ambiguous.[17](#) But that has not been the case with perceptual defenses, as measured by the Defense Mechanism Test: people with low defenses consistently obtain better ESP results than those with high defenses.[18](#)

Research has also been carried out with ESP and altered states of consciousness (ASC). Hypnotic suggestion seems to be favorable to ESP. However, Stanford and Stein[19](#) presented a model in which hypnosis is just one of several variables that still need to be identified. The complexity of this area has been outlined recently by Parker.[20](#)

Experimental studies suggest that ESP is associated with relaxed states.[21](#) Laboratory dream studies and ganzfeld experiments have also shown evidence for ESP.[22](#) [23](#) Some believe that the partial sensory deprivation produced by ganzfeld conditions favors ESP. Others are less convinced of this, arguing that factors other

than ASCs are involved²⁴ - something that must be generally considered in research with psychological variables.

The following summarizes successful ganzfeld ESP performance, in which the 'receiver' – in a relaxed state induced by the ganzfeld procedure – visualized video scenes being viewed by a 'sender' at a remote location:

One participant in the receiver role ... described the full sequence of the helicopter attack against a native village as shown in the film-clip, including its focus on a courtyard scene and soldiers running back and forth. One of the most successful participants ... gave a real-time description of the sequence of events in a rare film. This depicted a woman running through a forest, and the description included the occasion when she fell down, correctly adding that she hit her face on stony ground. Many further correct and specific details were given in real time, including the threat and presence of other women, and the mention of a boomerang object at the point when the woman picked up a crooked stick to defend herself against the women attacking her.²⁵

Several authors have stressed the importance of focusing on many variables as opposed to single ones.²⁶ An example is Honorton's²⁷ exploration of ESP in the ganzfeld that took into account the practice of meditation, spontaneous psychic experiences, previous experience as an ESP participant in experiments, and the personality factor associated with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.²⁸

Non-psi laboratory research has produced evidence of an 'experimenter effect', when study participants show different levels of performance in relation to a particular experimenter. This suggests that the experimenter may either inhibit or enhance subjects' performance in some socio-psychological way. The situation is complicated when the idea of psi experimenter effects is considered.²⁹ In addition, many experiments present evidence that ESP can be used unconsciously to accomplish certain tasks, a phenomenon referred to as 'implicit psi' (Palmer 2015). Some of these studies support the idea that ESP serves particular needs. There is also evidence that ESP responses do not need to be verbal or behavioral, but occur also through physiological body changes that can be detected by measuring electrodermal activity (changes in the electrical activity of the skin).³⁰

Studies of Cases (Mainly Surveys)

Survey studies of psychic experiences have been conducted with college students and other groups. (Most provided no follow-up about the experience beyond an answer to a question, so it is not certain if replies referred to the type of experience in question – for instance ESP or apparitions – or if they were veridical in the sense of providing evidence for non-sensory or non-motor processes.) One widely reported finding is that experiences such as ESP, OBEs, and seeing apparitions and auras are interrelated. That is, there is a tendency for persons who have had one type of experience to have had other types as well,³¹ although this is not by any means universal. The same may be said of positive relationships between psychic experiences and lucid dreams, and dream recall frequency.

ESP experiences, and sometimes other phenomena such as seeing apparitions and auras, have been reported to be related to fantasy proneness, as seen in the studies of Alvarado and Zingrone,[32](#) and Myers, Austrin, Grisso, and Nickeson.[33](#) The same may be said of other psychological constructs: absorption;[34](#) boundary thinness; an openness to experiences such as emotions, intimacy and daydreaming;[35](#) dissociation;[36](#) emotional empathy;[37](#) hypnotic susceptibility;[38](#) transliminality; and a predisposition for experiencing emotions, imagery, thoughts or other psychological material from the unconscious regions of the mind.[39](#) Extroversion was related in one study to reports of precognitive experiences, but not to dissociation or to belief in the paranormal.[40](#)

OBEs have been found to be related to several of the above-mentioned psychological variables, such as absorption, dissociation, fantasy and hallucinations.[41](#) Some studies have also examined aspects of the psychology of mediumship,[42](#) seeing auras,[43](#) and having recollections of previous lives.[44](#)

The Psychology of Psychics and Mediums

Apart from early observations of mediums such as H el ene Smith,[45](#) Eusapia Palladino,[46](#) and psychic Pascal Forthuny,[47](#) there have been few studies of the psychology of psi-gifted persons. WHC Tenhaeff[48](#) called for a life-history study of psychics, arguing that some of them focused their ESP in matters of personal relevance, sometimes in their childhood. Tenhaeff also applied psychological projective tests (such as Rorschach and TAT) to groups of psychics. According to a conference abstract:

The most characteristic tendency shown by the subjects on the basis of these tests was their 'sensitivity' to everything coming from the outside world. Will and action were manifested sporadically and hence inadequately. Also, these subjects endeavored to identify and feel themselves in union with persons and objects near them ... Also, disintegration of the personality was one of the characteristics of these subjects.[49](#)

In a paper about medium Caroline Chapman, Schmeidler reported that 'the medium's successes corresponded to the areas of her normal interests and to her most effective modes of perception'.[50](#) Another medium, Eileen J Garrett, was studied by Ira Progoff [51](#) from the point of view of Jungian concepts, with the conclusion that her 'spirit controls' represented aspects of the medium's unconscious and were part of her usual (non-mediumistic) life.

A survey of self-styled psychics and mediums showed tendencies indicating self-sufficiency, lack of discipline, and openness to feelings.[52](#) There are other interesting studies of psychodynamic aspects of gifted subjects,[53](#) and similar work has been conducted with poltergeist agents.[54](#)

Theoretical Discussions

The idea that ESP is processed unconsciously has a long history. As mentioned above, Myers[55](#) thought that telepathy was handled by the subliminal regions of the mind, and this idea can be seen in different ways in the writings of researchers

to the present day, for instance Rhine and Pratt⁵⁶ and Carpenter.⁵⁷ From the results of card-guessing experiments, it has been stated that:

The fact that psi is unconscious will explain many odd things about it. Some of these curious effects are among the most interesting features in the data of parapsychology ... Some have almost come to be considered as earmarks of psi, so that the investigator may rightly treat them as valid evidence; for example, the significant decline in scoring rate within the test unit (the run, column, set, page, etc.) or the tendency of the subject to score reliably below the chance average under certain conditions, or the consistent way in which some subjects miss a specified symbol by calling it, more often than chance would average, by some other symbol name, or their occasional tendency to displace and hit the target next to the one intended and to hold consistently to this oblique way of responding ... The psi process does not give the basis for learning by which introspection can associate error with the awareness of what was done wrong ... As one can readily see, this unconsciousness of psi has made its investigation extremely difficult. It would help to explain why the many efforts to train subjects to better performance have not been successful.⁵⁸

This view is consistent with other findings. One is the tendency of specific experiences to be associated with other experiences in surveys, such as ESP with OBEs. Reports of psychic experiences are generally associated with non-psi experiences thought also to be intimately related to unconscious processes, such as dissociative experiences. Furthermore, studies suggest that low defenses allow us to better process ESP, possibly through a more direct communication with the unconscious. The same may be said about cognitive concepts such as transliminality and boundary thinness.

Other researchers have speculated on other aspects favoring ESP such as the reduction of internal cognitive activity,⁵⁹ information-processing concepts (such as imagery and memory).⁶⁰ and ideas involving needs and dispositions.⁶¹

James Carpenter⁶² has proposed the most detailed psychological model to date, which he calls First Sight. The model assumes that psi is working continuously, but unconsciously, and that it is the initial contact our minds have with the world: first sight, so to speak. Such psi processes, like sensory and motor ones, are part of our usual cognitive processes, directed by unconscious intentions and mediated by goals, needs and dispositions. They interact with and make use of psychological resources such as memory, creativity, and conscious and unconscious perception. They are expressed primarily by inadvertent but potentially accessible experiences and behaviors. All behavior and experience are thought to begin at the psi level of transaction, even if we are not aware of it. The process is not seen as a special ability, but rather as a basic aspect of human beings, and perhaps of all sentient creatures.

Regarding the positive relationship between extroversion and ESP, Eysenck⁶³ has suggested that this may reflect the existence of cortical differences between extroverts and introverts. In his view, high cortical activation (found in introverts) is not conducive to ESP, unlike lower cortical activity (found in extroverts). A

different theoretical explanation by John Palmer⁶⁴ focuses on the possibility that extroversion is related to better social adjustment in experimental participants that facilitates their adaptation in situations such as experimental testing.

The parapsychological literature presents many other theoretical speculations and models to explain various phenomena. Several ideas involving a variety of psychodynamic ideas have been presented to explain poltergeists⁶⁵ and apparitions.⁶⁶ There is also a long history of speculations involving imagery, memory, and other cognitive processes to account for OBEs.⁶⁷

Contributions of Parapsychology Relevant to Psychology

Whatever the final explanation of psychic phenomena, they are psychological phenomena (at least in part), being human experiences and being related to other psychological variables that make up human functioning. What follows is a discussion of some topics of psychological interest to which psi research has contributed.

Variety of Human Experiences

Parapsychology represents potential expansion for psychology because it brings information about the commonality and characteristics of neglected phenomena such as ESP, apparitions, OBEs, and auras. Surveys in the US and Europe show high endorsement rates. In 1991, Haraldsson and Houtkooper⁶⁸ summarized responses to questions about clairvoyance, telepathy and contact with the dead, with samples representative of national populations, concluding as follows:

Sixty percent of the American sample reported one or more of the psychic experiences ... For Europeans the figure was 46% ... [The percentages may be interpreted] to infer that perhaps as many as 145 million Americans and over 100 million Western Europeans report at least one of the three kinds of psychic experiences as defined in the survey.⁶⁹

The results of other surveys, particularly those with randomly selected samples of the general population⁷⁰ show that psychic experiences are far from rare. Surveys with college students, while not representative of the general population, also include many reports of ESP, apparitions, auras and other experiences.⁷¹ It has been stated that 'Paranormal experiences are so common in the general population ... that no theory of normal psychology or psychopathology which does not take them into account can be comprehensive'.⁷²

Knowledge of the true incidence of these phenomena may help psychologists decide what is normal from the statistical point of view. Furthermore, studies can teach much about the features of psychic experiences, showing differences as well as patterns. Much of this is summarized by Irwin and Watt,⁷³ and specific examples can be found in modern studies of phenomena such as OBEs⁷⁴ and precognitive experiences.⁷⁵

A study of ESP in the US found that they were reported in various forms, as seen in the table:

<u>Form</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Dreams	4599	65%
Intuitions	1839	26%
Hallucinations	681	9%

Forms of ESP Manifestation (N = 7119) [76](#)

The 4,599 dreams were further divided into those that were realistic (68%) and unrealistic (symbolic) (32%), showing the complexity with which they manifested. Some experiences in other studies seem to be somatic, emotional reactions, and there are also cases of motor automatisms, such as writing.

Other patterns are discerned in the seriousness of events related to ESP experiences, of which the main one is death: 35% in cases from the UK [77](#) and 41% in cases from the United States. [78](#)

OBEs show many interesting features, as revealed in a study by Alvarado and Zingrone, [79](#) notably floating sensations (71%), staying in the usual surroundings (69%), seeing the physical body (65%), and seeing the surroundings from above (63%). Less common were references to oscillations of consciousness between the out-of-body location and the physical body (1%), seeing a ray of light, cord, or similar connection between out-of-body location and the physical body (2%), hearing clicking or snapping sounds (3%), and being seen or perceived at a distance (3%).

Conventional Explanations

Skeptical psychologists have speculated about conventional explanations for psychic phenomena, [80](#) but few have bothered to discuss the subject in detail, even less to conduct empirical research. By contrast, students of psychic phenomena have a good track record of considering and developing conventional explanations. A notable early example is the analysis by Gurney, Myers and Podmore [81](#) of testimony regarding ESP cases. Some of the problems they identified were as follows:

Error of *observation* may result in a *mistake of identity* ... Of more importance are errors of *narration*, due to the tendency to make an account edifying, or graphic, or startling ... Errors of *memory* are more insidious. If the witness regards the facts in a particular speculative or emotional light, facts will be apt, in memory, to accommodate themselves to this view, and details will get introduced or dropped out in such a manner as to aid the harmonious effect. Even apart from any special bias, the mere effort to make definite what has

become dim may fill in the picture with wrong detail or the tendency to lighten the burden of retention may invest the whole occurrence with a spurious trenchancy and simplicity of form.[82](#)

Other notable contributions to the psychology of testimony include Davey's[83](#) and Besterman's[84](#) papers about mediumistic seances, and discussions of testimony related to spontaneous phenomena.[85](#)

Psychical researchers have also put forward explanations of mediumship based on subconscious elaboration and creativity. A case in point is Flournoy's famous case of [Hélène Smith](#), whose subconscious seemingly created complex mediumistic communications. The idea of the medium using her psychological resources to create artificial communicators was popularized by psychical researchers such as Joseph Maxwell [86](#) and René Sudre,[87](#) also Charles Richet who argued that the talents of the unconscious showed even more variety than those of the conscious mind.[88](#)

Certain influential psychological explanations of OBEs have been developed in the context of parapsychology, notably by Blackmore,[89](#) Irwin,[90](#) and Palmer,[91](#) contributing to the orthodox view of mind's potential to generate hallucinatory experiences.

Some parapsychologists have challenged conventional explanations of specific phenomena through empirical tests, for instance failing to find evidence that the passage of time leads to accounts of near-death experiences being embellished,[92](#) or that ESP tests necessarily suffer from sensory contamination.[93](#)

Parapsychologists have also actively contributed to uncovering fraud. Examples include Eugène Osty's[94](#) photograph of a medium escaping control, Deborah Delanoy's[95](#) report of a case of a metal bender, and Stevenson, Pasricha and Samararatne's[96](#) discussion of reincarnation-type cases.

Clinical Issues

As mentioned above, a psychotherapeutic literature exists in which ESP is considered in the context of dreams and other experiences. For example, Freud was initially uncommitted about the reality of telepathy, but later argued that there was nothing contradictory in the idea of telepathically communicated material being modified and transformed in a dream like any other material.[97](#)

Twentieth century psychotherapists such as Ehrenwald[98](#) and Eisenbud[99](#) stated that taking seriously the possibility of ESP in therapy enabled them to make sense of certain clinical cases. Attention to ESP, a psychotherapist has recently argued, will bring more knowledge about the unconscious: 'Psi is another royal road, perhaps an expressway, to the unconscious'.[100](#)

Clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors need to know this literature in order to be informed about the potential relationship of psychic phenomena with psychopathology, a subject that has received some recent attention.[101](#) Otherwise they may conclude erroneously that a specific set of phenomena is unique to their patient's experience, or misdiagnose it.

This leads to the difficult problem of differential diagnosis between psychopathology and psychic phenomena. Renaud Evrard concludes from a review of the literature that this issue is far from simple:

There is no psychopathological category that can be applied uniformly because of the diversity of exceptional experiences and the situations in which they occur. Thus, the categories associated with *dissociation* and *trauma* have ambivalent links with exceptional experiences ...[102](#)

Evrard goes on to contest the idea that psychological models can encompass the dimensionality of exceptional experiences and their occasional pathological pathways, maintaining that trying to analyze the issue has not led to a solution.[103](#)

Cardena, Lynn and Krippner have stated:

Although AEs [anomalous experiences] and psychopathology may overlap in some cases, AEs are neither necessary nor sufficient causes for psychopathology. When researchers have identified an apparent link, it might have been mediated by the direct or interactive effect of other variables ...[104](#)

An obvious difference is the veridical aspect of an experience. A visual or auditory hallucination that contains information that can later be corroborated as true may represent a case of ESP. However, not all cases are clear cut. Evidence for ESP does not necessarily discount pathology without more general psychological information, such as evidence of various forms of adjustment. If a person who claims to experience psychic phenomena is well adjusted, this suggests that it is not necessarily born out of pathology.

As yet we lack systematic studies contrasting pathological conditions with apparent non-pathological phenomena, for example psychotic hallucinations versus ESP hallucinations. We need to investigate other criteria, such as situational and childhood antecedents, cognitive and personality variables, and the specific features of the experiences (such as sensory modalities). Fortunately this work is beginning, however.[105](#)

Some research may be interpreted to support the idea that parapsychological phenomena relate to pathological manifestations, for instance studies that show relationships between some forms of dissociation[106](#) and temporal lobe problems.[107](#) But this is not necessarily the case. Instead of there being a direct causal relationship it may be that certain variables can be seen in both psychic phenomena and pathology. Some processes may relate to a mental lability, or openness to many experiences, that is potentially pathological in specific contexts.

Schizotypy – or perceptual and cognitive experiences that some consider to be associated to schizophrenia – has been found to be related to reports of psychic experiences.[108](#) This was reported by Parra, although he pointed out that the former were less disorganized cognitively, while people who reported paranormal experiences that were subjectively more pleasant, tended to be less impulsive and more sociable, and to exhibit fewer eccentric behaviors, suggesting a high degree of self-control.[109](#) In sum, psi experiences were related to positive schizotypy, and where they related to negative schizotypy the correlations were lower.

Psychic experiences have also been found to relate to trauma,[110](#) a topic that deserves more study. Investigating the relationship between paranormal, traumatic and dissociative experiences, Ross and Joshi [111](#) found psychic experiences to be a normal dissociative phenomenon. 'Like dissociation in general ... paranormal experiences can be activated by trauma, especially chronic childhood abuse. This is why paranormal experiences are more common among individuals who have been abused as children.'[112](#)

In general, there is little evidence that psychic phenomena are pathological. This has been the conclusion in studies of OBEs,[113](#) mediumship,[114](#) and of children claiming to remember previous lives.[115](#) Similarly, and against the beliefs of some, ESP has not been found to relate to schizophrenia.[116](#)

However, it is possible that some psychic phenomena generate negative responses such as fear and even post-traumatic stress, described by one American transpersonal psychologist as follows: 'One is fear; a second one is 'I'm going crazy' ...; a third one is confusion – their reality is suddenly fractured'.[117](#)

A therapist needs to have knowledge of various psychological conditions in order to help the patient. The same holds true here: to help a person cope with a psychic experience (assuming help is needed), it is necessary to know something about psychic phenomena. Hastings[118](#) has suggested that such counseling may include:

- providing a sympathetic and empathic initial listening to the experiences and the concerns
- assuring the person that those experiences have happened to others and that they do not necessarily mean anything is wrong
- identifying the experience, providing a name for it to make it more normal (e.g., OBE)
- presenting information about what is known about the experience

Personal Transformation

A psychic experience may lead to personal transformation, as indicated by respondents in various questionnaire studies.[119](#) In one study, such changes included belief in life after death (68%), interest in spiritual and religious matters (66%), ability to express love (45%), and tolerance for others (46%).[120](#)

Much research with NDEs has focused on after-effects, mainly claimed changes in attitudes and values.[121](#) The authors of one study concluded that NDEs are 'associated with an increased sense of spiritual well-being, and that the "deeper" the NDE, the more profound this effect'.[122](#)

In one OBE study, people who have had the experience said it led to a change of perception of 'yourself, who you are' (61%), life, its meaning and purpose (51%), death, its meaning and purpose (51%), and the nature of human beings (42%).[123](#)

It is important also to realize that such experiences can be disturbing and lead to negative after-effects.[124](#) [125](#) This may arise from a sense of losing control, and the difficulty of dealing with the experience emotionally and intellectually.

Some NDEs have had negative impacts on the experiencers to the point of requiring clinical help: inverse NDEs, with features that are perceived as threatening; void NDEs, that engender a sense of emptiness; and hellish NDEs, in which the experiencers perceives themselves to be in a highly negative hell-like region.[126](#)

Perhaps it is to be expected that certain inherently threatening experiences such as possession and poltergeists may cause more anxiety than others, becoming a clinical problem,.

Social Issues

Social and community psychologists may find it necessary to know something about the customs, beliefs, and practices of specific groups in order to solve problems and better understand their dynamics. This is certainly the case with regard to spiritualist séances with mediums. The social and therapeutic function of these practices is related, to some extent, to the beliefs of the practitioners in the powers of mediums.[127](#) But they also depend on personal experiences with phenomena such as diagnosis and healing of medical conditions, trance, possession, and information about deceased persons and about previous lives. Psychologists can learn much about the social dynamics of these groups without needing to know the true explanations for the phenomena. The existence of real parapsychological phenomena can also help make sense of the situation, perhaps as a factor involved in the maintenance of beliefs.

Similarly, certain beliefs and practices center around individuals outside the séance environment, as in the case of healers and religious-type phenomena.[128](#) Many such occurrences prevail because the continuous manifestation of specific phenomena reinforce beliefs and associated practices.

Italian physician and parapsychologist Piero Cassoli[129](#) analyzed the case of a young woman in whose proximity a crucifix appeared to 'cry', and who saw visions of the virgin. He found the phenomena took place in a favorable psychosocial environment: the woman's family were devoutly religious, believed strongly in the virgin, and had some contact with a well-known previous case. The point here is that culture and a specific social environment of a group may affect, shape, and maintain unexplained phenomena.

Expanding Human Potential

To accept some of the phenomena of parapsychology would have clear implications for human potential, greatly expanding our ideas about our capabilities. ESP implies that we can perceive future events, information hidden at a distance, and the thoughts or intentions of a distant person. Furthermore, to accept that such phenomena have no conventional explanation carries conceptual implications about the nature of consciousness.

The same may be said about affecting the environment physically, or causing healing or physiological changes in others at a distance,[130](#) with implications extending to practical applications in the case of the latter particularly.

Nonphysicality

The view of psychic phenomena as evidence of non-physical and non-biological interactions has led many to defend the concept of the mind being independent from the body.¹³¹ Much early parapsychological literature concerns spiritual ideas, for instance works such as Crowe's *The Night-Side of Nature*¹³² and Myers's *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*.¹³³ Myers argued that telepathy 'is exercised by somewhat within us which is not generated from material elements, nor confined by mechanical limitations, but which may survive and operate uninjured in a spiritual world'.¹³⁴

For his part, American psychologist and philosopher [William James](#) discussed consciousness in terms of assumptions of 'transmission' (the mind is independent and acts via the nervous system) and 'production' (the mind is produced by the nervous system). In his view:

A medium ... will show knowledge of his sitter's private affairs which it seems impossible he should have acquired through sight or hearing, or inference therefrom. Or you will have an apparition of someone who is now dying hundreds of miles away. On the production-theory one does not see from what sensations such odd bits of knowledge are produced. On the transmission-theory, they don't have to be 'produced,' – they exist ready-made in the transcendental world, and all that is needed is an abnormal lowering of the brain-threshold to let them through.¹³⁵

Later authors refer frequently to the nonphysical and nonlocal. The assumption that ESP and PK are nonphysical processes was popularized by JB Rhine in books such as *The Reach of the Mind*¹³⁶ and *New World of the Mind*.¹³⁷ His card-guessing and dice-throwing tests, he argued, showed that psi was independent of space (distance, obstacles) and time. He later wrote (with JG Pratt):

It is ... the manifestly nonphysical character of parapsychical phenomena that for the present constitutes their only general identifying feature and marks them off from the rest of general psychology ... The distinction ... from physics is not, however, an absolute one. Rather they usually involve physical events or objects, either as stimuli or as effects. *But there is always some distinct point at which a completely physical interpretation is manifestly inadequate.*¹³⁸

But Rhine did not want to separate parapsychology from psychology. In fact he argued that, 'What seems likely to have the greatest long-term consequence for psychology is the fact that parapsychology gives a degree of causal potentiality to the mental system to which psi belongs'.¹³⁹

In recent decades others have defended versions of this idea.¹⁴⁰ For instance, psychologist Charles T Tart¹⁴¹ argues that psychic phenomena are incompatible with physicalist approaches. In his view, the findings of scientific parapsychology 'force us to pragmatically accept that minds can do things... that cannot be reduced to physical explanations, given current scientific knowledge or reasonable extensions of it'.¹⁴² A particularly important contribution is the 2007 book *Irreducible Mind* by Edward Kelly and others, a thorough review of psychological,

psychophysiological, and parapsychological research that defends the independent (nonlocal) status of mind.[143](#)

Work on near-death experiences, reincarnation cases, mediumship and related topics has tended to promote ideas of transcendence. The consideration of NDEs, in particular, challenges materialist science to explain 'how complex consciousness, including mentation, sensory perception, and memory, can occur under conditions in which current physiological models of mind deem impossible'.[144](#)

It should be pointed out that parapsychology embraces diverse views, and the ideas summarized here are not necessarily all shared by its practitioners.[145](#) But they have in common a tendency towards the view that mind is more than the physical body – a classic problem of psychology.

Bibliographical Note

Much relevant material about the relationships between parapsychology and psychology appears in the writings of Beloff,[146](#) Burt,[147](#) Child,[148](#) and Van Over,[149](#) For reviews of the literature of psychological correlates of ESP and PK see Cardeña, Lynn and Krippner,[150](#) Cardeña, Palmer and Marcusson-Clavertz,[151](#) Carpenter,[152](#) Irwin,[153](#) and Schmeidler.[154](#)

Other publications deal with important specific areas. The anthology compiled by George Devereux[155](#) continues to be an excellent source for psychoanalytic writings related to ESP up to the 1950s. Also useful are publications on the use of psychic phenomena to support the idea of mind-body separation,[156](#) clinical aspects of psychic phenomena,[157](#) its relationship to humanistic psychology,[158](#) speculations about mediumship and psychopathology,[159](#) and aspects of the impact of parapsychology on psychology.[160](#)

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Endnotes

Footnotes

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