

# Marilyn Schlitz

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## Summary

Marilyn Schlitz is a social anthropologist and psi researcher, holding a PhD in anthropology. She is department chair at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology at Sofia University and president emeritus and senior fellow at the [Institute of Noetic Sciences](#). Schlitz has contributed to psi research in the areas of distant intentionality, healing and special gifted populations. She has also addressed the sceptic-proponent relationship through research and dialogue.

Schlitz is currently conducting studies on the psychomantium as a means to explore grief and other altered states of consciousness. Her team is comparing outcomes before and after sessions, and also between a physical immersion chamber and a virtual reality condition.

## Remote Viewing

In an experiment reported in 1980, Schlitz collaborated with Elmer Gruber in long-distance remote-viewing.<sup>[1]</sup> Gruber, in Rome, travelled to a randomly-chosen venue and attempted to transmit what he saw there to Schlitz in Detroit, who sketched her impressions; five independent judges later assessed the accuracy of these during visits to the locations. Overall results were extremely significant ( $p = 10 \times 4.7^{-6}$ ); six out of ten sessions were direct hits where two are expected by chance. Schlitz and Gruber successfully replicated this experiment a few years later.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Ganzfeld

Schlitz investigated whether certain populations are more psi conducive than others taking part in ganzfeld telepathy experiments. Twenty dance, drama and music undergraduates at the Juilliard School of Performing Arts in New York City acted as receivers in a [standard automated ganzfeld session](#). The overall hit rate was large at 50% ( $p = 0.014$ ), double the chance expectation and far exceeding typical hit rates in ganzfeld experiments, which are around 32%. Musicians were the most successful, scoring six hits in eight sessions ( $p = 0.0042$ ).<sup>[3]</sup> (See [Creative Subjects in Ganzfeld](#))

## Intuitive Data Sorting

Schlitz tested the hypothesis that experimental subjects can use precognition to exploit short-term biases, creating a psychokinetic (PK) effect. She had experimental subjects try to influence the physiology of individuals located remotely from within a shielded room. Each session was divided into 12 runs, during which time the receiver's electrodermal activity (EDA) was recorded and

presented as feedback to the influencer. The influencer attempted to decrease the EDA of the distant participant for six runs and increase the EDA for the remaining six runs. One session was conducted under a new condition, in which the influencer had multiple opportunities to utilize intuitive data sorting by being allowed to start runs at her discretion. The effect sizes from the instructed runs were higher than those from the intuitive data sorting runs, indicating results more consistent with a force-like PK model than a precognition-like intuitive data sorting model.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Distant Influence**

In the first of many such experiments, Schlitz investigated whether humans can influence other people and organisms at a distance, a line of research subsequently termed DMILS (direct mental influence on living systems). Schlitz tested whether anxious volunteers with a strong need to be calmed by distant influence would show greater evidence of a psi effect than people without such a need. At randomly-chosen times Schlitz directed her calming attention at participants to try to reduce their skin conductance activity. A significant calming influence was found for the participants that required it but not for those that did not ( $p = 0.01$ ). This was interpreted as evidence of a needs-based role for psi.<sup>[5]</sup>

## **DMILS Review**

In 1991, Schlitz and her co-experimenter [William Braud](#) reviewed their DMILS program, describing thirteen years of research. They draw attention to tight experimental controls that reduce the likelihood of such confounds as subtle cues, recording errors, expectancy effects, file drawer effects and subject and experimenter fraud. The range of targets included a person's electrodermal activity, blood pressure and muscular activity, also the spatial orientation of fish, the activity of small mammals, and the rate of hemolysis of human red blood cells. The experiments are viewed as laboratory analogs of mental healing. The results were clear-cut across target domains: electrodermal activity (15 experiments,  $p = 0.000023$ ), orientation of fish (4 experiments,  $p = 0.00005$ ), locomotion of small animals (4 experiments,  $p = 0.00003$ ), hemolysis of blood cells (4 experiments,  $p = 0.000025$ ), ideomotor actions in humans (3 experiments,  $p = 0.0016$ ). Across the program and 655 sessions the overall  $p$  value was  $2.58 \times 10^{-14}$ , astronomically significant. These effects are confirmed by numerous other researchers in a meta-analysis of human DMILS studies published in 2003.<sup>[6]</sup>

## **Sceptic-Proponent Collaboration**

By 1997 several distant influence experiments had been conducted, including several with a negative outcome by [Richard Wiseman](#), a sceptical psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. To identify the cause of the disparity a joint project was organized in which two studies of the sense of being stared at were conducted at Wiseman's laboratory. The only variable was the experimenter (Schlitz in the first and Wiseman in the second); the equipment, procedures and participant pool (sixteen subjects for each study) were identical. Schlitz obtained significant effects of intention on electrodermal activity ( $p = 0.04$ ), Wiseman obtained insignificant results.<sup>[7]</sup>

The effects were replicated in a second collaboration held at Schlitz's laboratory at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, again employing the same procedures, equipment and participant pool. Schlitz found significant effects ( $p = 0.05$ ) while Wiseman found null results.<sup>[8]</sup>

In a third replication, either Wiseman or Schlitz welcomed the participants while the other acted as sender. This design aimed to distinguish between two potential kinds of experimenter effect, one caused by influence on the participants of the experimenter's attitude and behaviour, the other by a (hypothetical) innate psi ability on the part of the experimenter. No conclusion could be drawn from this experiment, as every measure was insignificant. Overall, the trio of experiments provide some support to the experimenter psi hypothesis.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Compassionate Intention

Schlitz and colleagues investigated the effects of loving intention between couples. Thirty-six couples volunteered in 38 test sessions, one sending compassionate intention to the other (in 22 cases one of the pair was a cancer patient). Overall, there was a highly significant effect of intention on receivers' skin conductance ( $p = 0.00009$ ). Further analyses showed stronger effects among couples trained to give and receive loving intention.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Replicating Bem

In 2011, [Daryl Bem](#) created controversy with his [report on psi experiments](#) that reversed the sequence of standard psychological protocols, appearing to show that reaction times can be influenced by information received in the immediate future.<sup>[11]</sup> Because of the relative simplicity of design and widespread attention this publication received, many replications followed and a review in 2015 found extremely strong evidence ( $p$  value  $6 \times 10^{-9}$ ) in support of Bem's original findings.<sup>[12]</sup>

Following on from this review, attention has shifted towards understanding the effect rather than solely accumulating more evidence. Schlitz and several co-authors have been active in such process-oriented research and decided to replicate Bem's retropriming experiment, in which an image presented to a person is more quickly assessed as being either positive or negative in nature if the words presented afterwards are congruent with the image (negative image–negative word, or positive image–positive word) than incongruent.

## Multi-lab Collaboration

In two experiments published in 2021, Schlitz was part of a large collaboration involving 14 academics. The first experiment did not support Bem's finding. Notably, exploratory analyses revealed a significant effect in English-language participants, paralleling Bem's original study, while non-English translations showed no significant deviations from chance.

The second experiment attempted to strengthen the predicted effect by having participants read either a pro-psi or anti-psi statement at the experiment's outset. While the primary psi hypothesis was not supported, it was observed that those

subjects who were exposed to the pro-psi statement had a higher psi score than the anti-psi group ( $p = 0.05$ ). Neither experimenter nor participant beliefs significantly correlated with the outcome, emphasizing the challenges of replicating the Bem Effect. More encouragingly, sensation seeking, a component of extraversion, was a fairly robust psi performance correlate ( $p < 0.005$ ).<sup>[13]</sup>

## Implicit Beliefs

A core debate in parapsychology concerns whether independent researchers can reproduce successful psi experiments. Beliefs, both of the experimenters and participants, play a pivotal role.

In a third preregistered experiment published in 2021 with [Arnaud Delorme](#), at the [Institute of Noetic Sciences \(IONS\)](#), the influence of implicit beliefs on psi performance was measured. In the experiment, participants engaged in a time-reversed psi version of a standard priming task, as in the first two experiments. The study also examined the expectations of success among 32 enlisted experimenters and their 12 participants. There was no overall psi effect and neither implicit beliefs or expectation of success in the experiment had any influence on psi performance.

[14]

## Reviewing Distant Healing Intention

A 2015 review co-authored by [Dean Radin](#) and Schlitz examines the evidence for distant healing intention (DHI). It can be categorized into two main areas: proof-of-principle studies and clinical efficacy investigations, each offering insights into DHI's validity and impact.

- **Proof-of-Principle Studies:** These studies explore whether individuals can exert influence from afar. Notably, the field of “distant mental interactions with living systems” (DMILS) consistently reveals statistically significant effects, albeit with modest effect sizes (measured as Cohen's  $d$ ).
- **Remote Intention Experiments:** Here, distant individuals affect physiological variables in recipients, like heart rate and brain activity. These experiments, involving thousands of test sessions, show statistically significant effect sizes with  $p$ -values ( $p < 0.001$ ).
- **Remote Staring Experiments:** Studies involving one person gazing at another through a video link while directing intention also report statistically significant effects (Cohen's  $d \sim 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- **Remote Helping Experiments:** Investigations into intention's influence on a recipient's attention or behavior reveal statistically significant effects (Cohen's  $d \sim 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- **Clinical Efficacy Investigations:** Clinical trials assessing DHI's effectiveness in treating health conditions yield mixed results due to the challenge of adapting conventional methodologies to DHI's unique nature.
- **Meta-Analyses:** Despite variability in clinical trials, meta-analyses involving humans receiving DHI report statistically significant effects, with an overall small but consistent effect (Cohen's  $d \sim 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

- Methodological Challenges: Mixed results in clinical trials may stem from methodological flaws and the difficulty of controlling unknown influences in DHI studies. Schlitz and Radin concluded that while clinical efficacy studies exhibit variable outcomes, proof-of-principle studies, especially DMILS experiments, consistently offer statistically significant evidence of nonlocal interactions, despite their small effect sizes.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Death Makes Life Possible

Schlitz has produced a [film](#) and [book](#) titled *Death Makes Life Possible* that examine how popular culture deals with the fear of death, giving interviews with scientists, mental health professionals, religious leaders and members of the public.<sup>[16]</sup>

Michael Duggan

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

1. ^ Schlitz & Gruber (1980).
2. ^ Schlitz & Haight (1984).
3. ^ Schlitz & Honorton (1992).
4. ^ Braud & Schlitz (1989).
5. ^ Braud & Schlitz (1983).
6. ^ Schmidt (2003).
7. ^ Wiseman & Schlitz (1997).
8. ^ Wiseman & Schlitz (1999).
9. ^ Schlitz et al (2006).
10. ^ Radin et al (2008).
11. ^ Bem (2011).
12. ^ Bem et al (2016).
13. ^ Schlitz et al (2021).
14. ^ Schlitz & Delorme (2021).
15. ^ Radin et al (2015).
16. ^ Schlitz (2018). <https://deathmakeslifepossible.com/>