Patrizio Tressoldi

Patrizio Tressoldi is an Italian psychologist and consciousness researcher who has investigated many non-ordinary experiences, from presentiment response and psychokinetic influences to out-of body states, remote viewing, shared death experiences and mediumship.

Summary

Patrizio Tressoldi is an Italian psychologist and consciousness researcher leading the Science of Consciousness Research Group and affiliated with the Studium Patavinum of University of Padova, Italy. He has a long-term interest in psi phenomena, and began experimentation in the early 2000s, starting exploring the presentiment response and making notable progress in developing new methodologies. More recently he has designed novel experiments to investigate psychokinetic influences. He has also contributed several meta-analyses of the evidence for various forms of psi.

Presentiment

Pupillary Responses

Tressoldi experimented to discover whether human pupillary responses could accurately predict future stimuli. Eighty volunteers were exposed to 20 sounds, of which half were neutral and the other half alerting, while their pupil size was being measured. Pupillary responses before target presentations were found to correctly predict alerting stimuli, but not neutral stimuli, at a level 10% above chance, an extremely significant result ($p = 4.2 \times 10^{-9}$), calculated both with established and emerging statistical approaches.1 A somewhat lower, but still significant result was obtained in a conceptual replication using a different type of test: 2.5% above chance level; an exact replication only gave chance results.2

Cardiac Responses

Tressoldi investigated the potential of the brain to anticipate random negative events, using a portable heart-monitor (CardioAlert). The device sends an alert when heart-rate activity indicates the imminence of a negative event, providing an interval for the user to make a different choice.

In an exploratory experiment, 100 individuals were asked to take part in a binary game of chance, choosing one or other of two alternatives, with a random chance of leading to a ‘winning’ outcome. Using the CardioAlert, participants achieved winning outcomes 52.5% of the time, compared with 48.2% when they were not using it – a marginally significant result. The findings were confirmed by a pre-registered confirmatory experiment, in which volunteers achieved winning outcomes 52.7% of the time when they used the CardioAlert. A conceptual

replication experiment that allowed the CardioAlert to automatically avoid negative outcomes gave a yet higher winning outcome of 56.3% - an extremely significant finding ($p = 10 \times 10^{-6}$).3

Driving with Intuition?

Probing brain activity for presentiment effects, Tressoldi and colleagues used a simplified driving simulation that randomly presented either a car crash or no car crash at the end of each trial. Forty participants wired to EEG monitors were asked, first to passively watch the driving simulation, as the baseline condition, then to try to exert control of the car's speed by using the computer keyboard spacebar to avoid crashing. Tressoldi found statistically significant differences in participants' EEG readings in car crash trials compared to those in no-car crash trials a second before the car crash, providing more potential evidence of an 'anticipation effect'.

Tressoldi speculates on mechanisms involving quantum mechanics, citing the theoretical proposal by Hameroff and Penrose centring on microtubules in the brain. He goes on to suggest that a fuller understanding might eventually offer the potential for 'smart cars' to be fitted with machine-integrated EEG software that alerts drivers to the presence of forthcoming dangers.4

Understanding Presentiment

In an attempt to understand if presentiment is detecting actual future or probable future events, Tressoldi ran four experiments, two measuring heart rate and two measuring pupil dilation. In all four experiments, Tressoldi found that both neutral and alerting stimuli were predicted at a level 7-10% above chance, regardless of whether the stimuli were presented to the subject or not, supporting the hypothesis that it is the *probable future* that is responded to.5

Machine Learning of Presentiment Data

A paper published in 2021 by Tressoldi and colleagues described using machine learning to predict emotional responses in the brain following the presentation of a stimulus, analyzing EEG data before stimulus presentation.6 Data from a previous statistically significant presentiment study employing 28 subjects was used. In that experiment, subjects' EEGs were recorded while they were exposed to either high arousal visual and auditory stimuli, or low arousal auditory and visual stimuli. In the present investigation, those EEG data were processed by artificial intelligence – referred to as 'classifiers' – to train on both static and temporal (time evolving) features of the EEG data. Temporal features found in the pre-stimulus EEG region gave the most accurate classifier predictions (63.68%, $p = 0.001$). It was concluded that the results show a clear increase in classification accuracy with temporal features rather than static features of the EEG.

Psychokinesis

Random Event Generator

Tressoldi and colleagues selected participants who exhibited strong motivation and mental control and asked them to try to influence the output of a distant random event generator above pre-stated chance limits of 1 in 20. This was achieved in 78% of 50 experimental sessions compared to 48% of the control sessions – a significant finding. In a pre-registered confirmatory experiment, 82.3% of thirty-four people participating in 102 sessions achieved the pre-stated cut-off limit, compared to 13.7% of the control sessions – an extremely significant finding. The researchers suggest potential practical applications, transforming remote influence on a random event generator over a very short period into a binary acoustic or visual signal associated with a message, one signal standing for 'call me', two signals for 'be alert', and so on.[7]

In a further test of remote influence of random number generators, more equivocal effects were found, mainly in the control data not the influence trials.[8]

Remote Biophoton Emission?

'Working with Luciano Pederzoli (EvanLab in Florence, Italy) and John Kruth (Rhine Research Center), Tressoldi investigated the possibility of long-distance biophoton detection. Two studies were completed to discover whether focused intention by five subjects located over 7000 km away could increase the number of photons detected each half second by a photomultiplier in the Rhine Research Center biophoton lab. In each experiment the intention condition occurred between two control sessions in which no influence was attempted. Analysis showed little effect during the intention condition, but unexpectedly there was a clear-cut difference in counts between the first and second control sessions. Tressoldi and his US colleagues hypothesized that they were seeing an accumulative effect commencing during the first control session and developing through to the second control session.[9] In the second experiment, this cumulative effect of mental intention was not found, however.

An overall analysis across both experiments found an increase of approximately 5% for instances of extreme photon counts, that is, above 100,000, from the first to the second control session – a very unlikely finding ($p = 2.1 \times 10\text{-}4$). Tressoldi and co-authors discuss potential mechanisms for such distance effects, including geophysical influences, experimenter psi and entanglement between detector and subject.[10]

Digital Photography

A paper published in *The Journal of Parapsychology* in 2022, describes explorations into the possibility of producing images onto photographic sensors by mental intention alone.[11] Three participants who are experienced in mentally influencing physical systems completed a total of 49 trials. Each trial consisted of one participant mentally sending an image during 36 camera shots. The photographs were then converted into digital negatives, following which a measure of correspondence with the mentally transmitted images – formally referred to as the structure similarity index (SSIM) – was calculated. When all three SSIM parameters – contrast, brightness and structural features – were considered, no target SSIM values exceeded any of the other potential target SSIM values, equating to no

evidence of a PK effect on photographic sensors. However, when brightness was removed from the analyses, there was some evidence of a PK effect. This exploratory study therefore suggested some potential for a more formal investigation.

Meta-Analyses

Presentiment

Tressoldi has helped evaluate the evidence base for presentiment. In 2012,12 he co-authored a major meta-analysis of 26 presentiment studies conducted between 1978 and 2010 that utilized a wide range of measures, including heart rate, skin conductance and brain imaging techniques. The overall results were astronomically significant (fixed effect: $p < 2.7 \times 1012$); there was no clear evidence of a possible conventional explanation in terms of poor methodology, selective reporting practices and expectancy effects; the authors took measures to counteract the expected 'file drawer effect'. Also, the successful results could not be attributed to one or two unusually successful investigators: the results were distributed across all of them. Duggan and Tressoldi repeated the meta-analysis in 2018, reaching the same conclusions.13

Dream-ESP

Tressoldi and colleagues meta-analysed dream-ESP studies for the period 1966 to 2016. The studies fell into two categories: the Maimonides Dream Lab (MDL) studies of which there were 14 and independent (non-MDL) studies of which there were 36. The Maimonides experiments achieved much larger effects than other studies, possibly because participants were awoken during REM sleep and asked to record their impressions, while in most non-Maimonides they recalled impressions only after waking. A homogeneous dataset of 50 studies gave highly significant effects ($p = 5.19 \times 10\text{-}8$), suggesting that dream content can be used to identify target materials correctly, and more often than would be expected by chance.14

Remote Viewing

Tressoldi and Debra Lynn Katz carried out a meta-analysis of remote viewing studies conducted between 1974 and 2022. They retrieved 36 studies that produced an average effect size of 0.34, which is very strong by parapsychological standards and astronomically significant ($p = 8 \times 10^{-10}$), corresponding to a hit rate 19% above chance – more than double that of other free-response paradigms such as ganzfeld telepathy.

The authors uncovered research issues, notably a scarcity of data pertaining to variations in RV techniques, such as Associative Remote Viewing (ARV), controlled remote viewing (CRV), and comparisons between self-judging and independent judging protocols. But they concluded that its experimental protocols appear to be the most efficient in ESP research for experiments and also practical applications ranging from military and intelligence gathering to archaeology and finance.15

Forced Choice

Tressoldi together with Australian parapsychologist Lance Storm reviewed forced-choice studies conducted between 2011 and 2022. This review was motivated by previous meta-analysis in 2012 that produced strong evidence in favour of psi. Inclusions were experiments reporting hit rates and those reporting reaction times, with the latter generally of the Bem-type experiments. Of the 38 studies that reported actual hit rates, the findings indicated a substantial mean effect size (ES) of 0.02 ($p = 1.43 \times 10^{-8}$). Of the 23 new studies focusing alternatively on reaction time as a measure, findings revealed a slightly weaker mean ES of 0.01 ($p = 1.90 \times 10^{-8}$). When combined, the two datasets merged into 141 studies producing a mean effect size of 0.02 ($p < 10^{-16}$) showing no difference in outcomes from other studies measuring precognition, clairvoyance and telepathy.

The authors found no decline in effect size over a 36-year period, indicating that forced-choice testing remains a reliable way to probe psi ability.16

Mediumship

In 2020 Tressoldi and coworkers published a review of studies that tested the ability of mediums to gather information about a deceased individual under controlled conditions.17 Fourteen papers published between 2001 and 2019, describing 18 experiments were analyzed. The overall outcome was strongly supportive of anomalous cognition by mediums ($p < 10^{-9}$). Furthermore, two tests of publication bias – the tendency of some researchers to publish only significant results – found no evidence of such practices. Tressoldi and coauthors concluded that the results of their meta-analysis supported the hypothesis that some mediums can retrieve information about deceased persons through unknown means.

Brain to Brain Communication

Tressoldi investigated the possibility of brain-to-brain communication over distance without any normal means of connection. He experimented with 20 pairs of subjects, in which one individual received both visual and auditory stimulation while the other's EEG was being monitored for synchronous signals indicating telepathic transfer of information. Analysis of results revealed an overall increase in the correlation among the EEG channels of the isolated distant partners to a statistically significant degree. Additionally, Tressoldi found a correlation in the strength of EEG signals between sender and receiver volunteers.

Associated Remote Viewing

To investigate the contributing factors in associated remote viewing success, Tressoldi and colleagues completed 86 trials, comprising 220 remote viewing transcripts.18 Three teams of judges working under blinded conditions repeated the process of judging, scoring and predicting sporting events, while keeping all other variables stable. Judges were only in complete agreement on six (6.9 percent) of 86 trials, while experienced judges obtained statistically significantly higher hit rates than those that were less experienced. The results indicate the need to develop more consistent and reliable judging protocols, preferably using experienced individuals.

Out of Body Experiences

Tressoldi has explored anomalous or non-ordinary states of consciousness, recently taking part in a multi-author investigation of out-of-body experiences (OBE) induced through hypnotic suggestions.[19] In this study, 15 highly hypnotizable subjects were encouraged to have an OBE, either through hypnosis or during normal resting consciousness while a 32-channel EEG monitored their brain activity. At the end of each session, the phenomenology of consciousness inventory (PCI) was administered to check the phenomenological aspects of their experience. Significantly higher scores were found for the altered states, positive affect, altered experience and attention sub-dimensions of the PCI for hypnotically-induced OBEs over resting OBEs. Additionally, significant decreases were found in beta and gamma EEG activity in certain brain regions for the hypnotically-induced OBEs.

The researchers conclude that the features of the hypnotically-induced OBE are comparable to more transcendental OBEs that occur spontaneously or as a result of trauma, and that experiments using hypnosis can be used to investigate the phenomenon.

In a study reported in 2020, Tressoldi and coworkers tested the ability of four participants, chosen for their ability to attain an out-of-body state of consciousness via hypnotic induction, to describe five different locations, initially in an ordinary state of consciousness using remote viewing and then in an out-of-body state.[20] According to independent assessment, ordinary state remote viewing gave a hit rate of 55 percent, and performance during an out of body state gave a hit rate of 54 percent ($p = 0.06$). Interestingly, 14 percent of descriptions were exactly identical between the two consciousness states, suggesting a commonality between them. Overall, these results indicate the effectiveness of out of body states of consciousness to attain information from a distance that is on a par with ordinary state remote viewing.

Afterlife Research

Readings Accuracy

A study published in 2022 by Tressoldi and an Italian mediumship research group describe testing of 28 self-described mediums in which they performed 100 readings under blinded conditions.[21] Sitters were asked to choose which readings were related to a known deceased individual among dummy (control) readings, and were far more successful in identifying the actual intended readings than chance would predict ($p = 0.000048$). Tressoldi and colleagues concluded that the results support the survival interpretation rather than the psi interpretation, based both on both the experiment design of the and the quality of the results.

Mediums and Hypnotic Inductions

In a paper published in 2021, Tressoldi and Pederzoli describe an attempt to glean information of the afterlife by means of hypnotic induction of four selected participants while in contact with the spirits of the dead.[22]The purported

channelled entities were interviewed on topics ranging from spiritual evolution, after-death experiences and the idea of a supreme being. Information given from the channelled spirits seemed to converge on these and more questions. It was concluded that hypnotic induction during channeling holds promise and the ease and flexibility of design encourages replication by sceptic groups.

Channelling

Tressoldi participated in a multi-author study of channelling, which aimed to assess the utility of channelled information. Independent judging revealed little consistency in responses across channellers for each question, and scant evidence of a shared source of information. However, some consistent themes emerged in some of the responses, highlighting the potential value of channelling for specific questions.[23]

Depictions of God in NDEs

A study co-authored with Jeffrey Long compared descriptions of God and Jesus in near-death experiences (NDEs) with conventional portrayals of these figures in major religious traditions. They found terms for God that are frequently used by NDE experiencers, such as 'light', love', 'oneness', and 'non-judgment', contrast with attributes such as 'perfection', 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience' that dominate in monotheistic religions. The religious backgrounds of participants did not strongly influence their descriptions of God in NDEs. The presence of love is more commonly reported by those who do not identify with a specific religion. [24]

Bigelow Essay Contest

In 2021 the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) – funded by aerospace billionaire Robert Bigelow – launched a ,000,000 essay competition on the cumulative evidence for an afterlife. The twenty-nine winning essays (out of 204 submitted) were examined by Tressoldi, Adam Rock and James Houran on the strength of scientific evidence described, its reproducibility and replicability. [25] Out of 29 essays, six (20.5%) were categorized in the highest evidential band. Four essays (1%) were classed as having medium scientific value and the remaining 19 (65.5%) were placed in the category with the lowest level of scientific evidence. Overall concordance between Tressoldi and the essay judges' scientific criteria was 48.8% – indicating significant disagreement. This difference is explained by higher evidential weighting given by the Bigelow judges to NDE research; possibly influenced by the fact that such research is often published in mainstream medical journals. Conversely, Tressoldi and coauthors gave more weight to well-conducted research on reincarnation phenomena, shared death and after-death communication experiences. Despite the failure to reach consensus, the strength of the evidence in favour of post-mortem survival is celebrated in the paper.

Mind-Brain

Tressoldi and colleagues have contributed to theoretical attempts to frame the accumulated experimental evidence within a model of mind functioning. They

discussed a quantum-like model,[26] a cognitive psychological model[27] and a neuropsychological model.[28]

In a 2022 preprint, Tressoldi considers eleven materialist explanations of how brain activity generates conscious awareness that are based on identity theory (the idea that brain states are identical with mental states). Tressoldi dismisses all eleven explanations as involving the 'miracle' of converting brain activity into first-person experience. Tressoldi then considers panpsychism – the philosophy that matter possesses a degree of consciousness – as the most promising materialist candidate, but expresses scepticism that it can explain 'top-down' mental phenomena such as the placebo effect, hypnotic analgesia and other psychoneuroimmunological influences (the interaction of mental states on immune and nervous system function).

In another paper, Tressoldi and Facco expand the range of phenomena that are difficult to reconcile within a materialist framework, to include non-ordinary mental expressions: near-death experiences, psi abilities and mystical experiences. Tressoldi and Facco conclude that the bulk of this evidence points towards consciousness as being fundamental (idealism) and not secondary to brain function (epiphenomenal).

Scientists and Spiritual Experience

With neuroscientist Marjorie Woollacott, Tressoldi presents an analysis of spiritually transformative experience accounts of 40 scientists.[29] Eighty-five percent described ego dissolution, while pure unconditional love was experienced by 4%. Sixty percent described reality as unitive and 47.5% described its essence as unconditional love. These accounts indicate that spiritually transformative experiences are not restricted to scientifically-illiterate people but are shared by those of all educational levels.

Michael Duggan

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