

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

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For your info, a brief bio: Linda Leblanc is a co-founder and director of PSYCHOGNOSIA, a privately-funded, not-for-profit centre for dissemination of reliable information on psychic phenomena and related disciplines, based in Paphos. In summer 1997, she completed the Summer Study Program at the Rhine Research Center (RRC), Institute for Parapsychology, the successor of the world-famous lab Dr. J.B.Rhine headed for three decades at Duke University. She has completed five residential programs at The Monroe Institute (TMI) and is a Monroe certified intern trainer. Before taking up residence in Paphos in 1989, Linda, a native of Canada, worked in various specialized United Nations organizations in Geneva. Since 1976, she has travelled widely in over thirty countries and lived for extensive periods in eight.

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Introduction

Perhaps Albert Einstein captured the essence of the high degree of popular interest in psychic phenomena when he was quoted as saying, "The most beautiful thing man can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science." It has long been believed by a majority of people that such phenomena as clairvoyance, telepathy, psychic mediumship, psychokinesis, poltergeists, apparitions, out-of-body and near-death experiences, are real. Psychics have used their skills to assist in police investigations, archaeology, business, healing and military intelligence services, to name but a few areas of activity.

There is an immense amount of persuasive evidence, dating from the 1880s, when modern scientific methodology was applied to studying psi. Based on an analysis of data collected in scientific laboratory experiments conducted by parapsychologists, many researchers now concede that psi functioning is indeed real and agree that the focus should now be away from proof-oriented experiments and directed towards focusing on how the phenomena actually work.

While there is abundant anecdotal evidence for them, very little is really known about their nature and how they function. It is difficult to study spontaneous, little-understood psychic phenomena by applying scientific methodologies, which require independent replication of controlled experiments. Despite this, a handful of dedicated scientists are working full-time on parapsychological research, although owing to inadequate funding, fewer than 10 laboratories worldwide are active in this field.

Rhine Research Center

One such institute is the Rhine Research Center (RRC), Institute for Parapsychology, the successor of the world-famous laboratory Dr. J.B. Rhine headed for three decades at Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, USA. From the late 1920s onward, Dr. Rhine and his wife, Dr. Louisa Rhine, were pioneers in applying rigorous scientific methodology to the study of psi. Their groundbreaking research over three decades demonstrated conclusively that certain persons are able to acquire information without the use of the five normal senses. The Drs. Rhine coined the term “extrasensory perception” (ESP) to describe this ability and used the word “parapsychology” to distinguish their scientific approach from earlier methods. The RRC is known internationally as one of the premier research and educational centres in the field of the scientific study of psychic phenomena. In addition to conducting research into ESP, the RRC provides educational programmes, public information services and publishes the quarterly *Journal of Parapsychology*, a professional forum for presenting original, peer-reviewed research reports. The home of the RRC, adjacent to Duke University, is where their two-month Summer Study Program (SSP) takes place. This well-respected course is the pre-eminent training ground for future parapsychologists. The programme covers an impressive array of subjects; the lecturers are some of the world’s leading researchers into psychic phenomena. The SSP’s main focus is on experimental parapsychology - the methods and findings of laboratory research into extrasensory perception (ESP) and psychokinesis (PK), and the controversies surrounding and implications of the findings of psychical research for science and society. Spontaneous phenomena such as out-of-body experiences (OOBEs) and near death experiences (NDEs), as well as such topics as reincarnation, apparitions, poltergeists and mediumship are also covered. Much of the course material is quite technical, and includes statistical and mathematical analyses of laboratory data. Workshops provide students an opportunity to take part, as both subjects and experimenters, in laboratory psi experiments.

Altered States of Consciousness

Research has shown that it is in altered states of consciousness (ASCs) that people most often report psychic phenomena. Other psi-conducive characteristics, associated with ASCs, are a physically relaxed state, reduced physical arousal, reduction in sensory input, increased awareness of internal processes and increased right brain hemisphere functioning. One experiment, designed to take advantage of these characteristics, is the Ganzfeld (German, “total field”) procedure. This technique, which is extensively used in parapsychology laboratories, induces a mild form of sensory isolation. Wearing translucent eye covers, red lighting in the room is perceived as pink by the participant, who also hears "pink noise" through headphones. This induces a mild ASC. There are two participants, a sender and a receiver, each relaxing in separate recliner chairs in different, unconnected rooms. After they both listen to a relaxation tape, the sender is shown a target which has been randomly selected by computer from a pool of 156 different targets. Only the sender knows the target, which he or she attempts to “transmit” to the receiver. Meanwhile, the receiver, who is experiencing the ganzfeld, reports orally all images, thoughts and feelings that come to mind. At the end of the “sending” period, the receiver is shown 4 pictures and asked to rank them according to their correspondence with the images experienced during the ganzfeld. If the receiver correctly identifies the target, this is a “direct hit”. There is a 25% (1 chance in 4) probability of correct scoring by pure chance alone. By collating the scores of large numbers of tests, it is possible to determine if something beyond chance is occurring. For example, if in 100 sessions, the scoring rate is significantly above or below 25%, it can be concluded that this is an indication of psychic functioning. A score below chance is called “psi missing”, because this too deviates from chance probability. Between 1974 and 1997, over 2,500 Ganzfeld sessions were reported in over 40 publications by researchers. Ganzfeld experiments at several laboratories around the world have shown statistically highly significant results, with above a 1 in 3 score. The overall hit rate is 33.2%, with odds against chance statistically beyond a million billion to one!

The Monroe Institute

The Monroe Institute (TMI), a non-profit educational and research organization based in Virginia, USA, has an entirely different approach to studying altered states of consciousness. TMI has pioneered research based on the discovery that specific sound patterns have identifiable, beneficial effects on our capabilities. For example, certain combinations of frequencies enhance alertness; others induce sleep; and still others evoke non-ordinary expanded states of consciousness. TMI’s unique, patented, world-renowned sound technology, called Hemi-Sync®, facilitates desired brainwave activity by synchronizing the electrical frequencies of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Hemispheric synchronization enables listeners to accomplish

goals by achieving a focused, productive, coherent whole-brain state. Based on four decades of research, the Institute's audio products and educational, experiential programmes have proved useful for enhancing learning and memory, pain control, stress management, physical wellness, emotional well-being, overcoming sleep disturbances, problem solving, personal growth and expansion of consciousness. Many Hemi-Sync listeners report an increased intuition and psychic awareness. Hemi-Sync applications are used extensively by physicians and other therapists, educators and other professionals in many countries. In the Spring of this year, for the first time in Cyprus, TMI Gateway Outreach programmes will be held in Paphos and Lefkosia. The 2-day programme, Excursion Workshop, is designed to introduce participants to specific states of consciousness, as well as to techniques and tools for further exploration.

Out-of-Body Experiences

The founder of TMI, the late Robert Monroe, was both the author of three books on his own out-of-body experiences (OOBEs) and the subject of laboratory experiments conducted by researchers interested in studying OOBEs. During the 1960s, Dr. Charles Tart, then at the University of California at Davis, conducted a series of experiments with Monroe, with the aim of inducing OOBEs in a laboratory setting. Monroe's physiological monitoring showed both great variability in his EEG patterns, with unusually high theta waves and that he spent considerable time in hypnagogic states. Despite much discomfort caused by the monitoring equipment, Monroe reported two OOBEs during the sessions, in one of which he reported seeing a man with the female technician, who was normally alone. This was later verified by the technician. Tart, who recommended that future OOBE research concentrate on these borderline states, hypothesized that at least some of Monroe's OOBEs might be a mixture of dreaming and "something else", which was seen by many as an important conclusion from a prominent and highly-respected researcher.

Such OOBEs, with a seemingly cross-cultural distribution, have been reported throughout the ages. For the past three decades, they have been the subject of serious research by a number of parapsychologists, due possibly to a growing interest in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Various testable theories to explain OOBEs have emerged, with the psychological approach dominating the research. These theories generally fall into two categories: Paranormal or Ecsomatic, from the Greek, exo (out) and soma (body), i.e., that something actually leaves the body; and Imaginal (dream or hallucination). The imaginal theories postulate that the OOBE is an hallucinatory experience which arises in various psychological conditions, such as distortion of body image, depersonalization, lucid dreams and sensory input disruption.

Parapsychologists are interested in OOBEs for several reasons. Researchers are reluctant to rely solely on subjective experience and look for objective evidence of psi. OOBEs may be accompanied by ESP, which can provide evidence of psi functioning, but this, of course, does not necessarily confirm that an OOBEE as such has occurred. During a controlled experiment, while experiencing an OOBEE, the subject might be asked to report back on an object hidden somewhere in a nearby location, placed well above “physical” eye level. If successful, this could provide independent evidence of psi functioning. The study of OOBEEs induced in controlled laboratory conditions contributes information about the physiological state of the subject. This could provide hints on how to produce this state, possibly leading to a fuller understanding of the nature of the experience and of ESP. Another reason why OOBEEs are of interest to psychic researchers is that there may be implications for survival after death. If “something” actually leaves the physical body during an OOBEE, this might mean that this “something” might survive physical death. But, as some parapsychologists have pointed out, even if scientists were able to demonstrate that a measurable substance leaves the body, this does not of itself indicate that the entity possesses consciousness or that it may be able to survive the death of the biological body for any appreciable time.

Much OOBEE research has followed a pattern similar to that of survival research. About one hundred years ago, at the turn of the century, there were attempts to weigh deathbed patients, to determine if something actually left the body at the time of death. Several of the patients did exhibit sudden weight loss and the researcher thought that this might be attributed to a “soul” leaving the body. One problem with the weight-loss hypothesis is that it assumes that whatever leaves the body occupies space and has weight.

A similar type of methodology has been applied to OOBEE experiments, with attempts made to register the presence of a physical entity during the OOBEE. In one such experiment, strain gauge fluctuations during the ESP segment of the OOBEE did provide evidence suggestive of the presence of the subject’s “externalized mind” at the target location. Another experiment used the OOBEEer’s cat as a detector, with some positive results.

Another type of OOBEE, the so-called Near Death Experience (NDE), is increasingly experienced by people who are now being resuscitated by modern medical techniques, who would previously have died. The millions of people who have experienced NDEs have reported similar experiences of exaltation, a firm conviction of the soul’s immortality, being embraced by

the light and release from a fear of death. They appear to date their lives anew from this experience.

Reincarnation Research

Yet another interesting area of parapsychology is reincarnation. Renowned researcher and scientific investigator, Dr. Ian Stevenson, a physician and psychiatrist, has devoted his career to compiling solid, empirical evidence suggestive that physical death is not necessarily the end of an individual. For almost 40 years, Dr. Stevenson, based at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA, has meticulously researched scores of cases around the world where children have supplied detailed memories of previous lives. His collection of nearly 3,000 cases, scrupulous research and scholarly publications are impressive evidence to support reincarnation. His cases appear on five continents, many of which occur in Buddhist or Hindu cultures where the idea of reincarnation is widely accepted. Many arise in India, Turkey and Lebanon. In one of his recently-published books, "Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect", Stevenson reports on extensive research linking birthmarks or other physical markings to experiences in remembered previous lives, particularly those involving violent deaths.

Psychic Spying

Further debate on the topic of psychic functioning has been sparked by a project labelled "Stargate", which for 20 years, was a top-secret, \$20 million experiment funded by the US Defense Department. These scientific studies into so-called "psychic spying" have become known as "remote viewing", basically the use of ESP within strict scientific protocols. Many of the gifted remote viewers in the Stargate programme have written best-selling books about their experiences and a few have developed educational courses to teach this psychic skill. Rigorous scientific procedures were established and perfected during the Stargate project, and have recently been computerized as a research project that the RRC is conducting with gifted participants.

In 1995, the CIA conducted a controversial overall assessment of the "Stargate" programme, which produced some interesting results. Dr. Jessica Utts, a Statistics Professor at the University of California at Davis, and Dr. Ray Hyman, a psychologist and a well-known critic of experimental methodology in psychic research, were commissioned to conduct the review. Utts's assessment was quite positive, declaring, "At this stage, using the standards applied to any other area of science, the case for psychic functioning has been scientifically proven". Hyman, while remaining unconvinced, found no problem with the research programme and stated, "The

case for psychic functioning seems better than it ever has been.” Strangely, and this is the debatable part, for whatever reason the CIA concluded that remote viewing had not been used successfully in actual operations, ignoring massive evidence to the contrary.

Surveys

Over the years, several surveys to gather information from the public have been conducted by parapsychologists. A 1974 psychic experiences questionnaire of the general population, in Charlottesville, Virginia, was organized by Dr. John Palmer (now of the RRC), which revealed that over half of the respondents claimed at least one ESP experience. There was also a tendency for persons reporting psychic or psi-related experiences to claim a large number of them. OOBEs were reported by 25 per cent of University of Virginia students, with the town sample being 14 per cent. Results of this particular survey were comparable to those of other questionnaires.

A variety of subjective psychic experiences, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, channeling, mediumship and OOBEs, are often connected with depersonalization or dissociative phenomena. The Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS), which is a reference “bible” for diagnosing dissociative disorders (e.g., schizophrenia), contains many references to psychic experiences. In 1991, Dr. Douglas Richards, of Atlantic University, reported the results of a survey on subjective psychic experiences, the aim of which was to study the correlation between subjective psychic experiences and dissociative experiences. The results showed a moderate correlation with dissociation, but not associated with pathology. The subjects were 184 attendees at conferences at the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE), an organization based in Virginia Beach, USA, that was established to research the readings and to promote the teachings of psychic Edgar Cayce. It also studies various types of psychic phenomena. The respondents were well-educated, middle class adults, with a high incidence of psychic experiences. When taken in the context of other surveys of the general population, the results confirmed that psychic experiences are a common occurrence in non-clinical populations. Slightly over 80 per cent of the subjects felt that their psychic experiences had a positive or inspiring effect on their lives. Around 33 per cent reported spontaneous OOBEs at least once, 17 per cent indicating OOBEs more than five times.

Stars Affecting Psi?

A fascinating recent discovery by British researcher James Spottiswoode indicates a correlation between enhanced ESP performance and a particular slot of Local Sidereal Time (LST) at

around 13:30. LST is “star time”, a specific chunk of sky overhead at varying times of our solar day. Spottiswoode is Director of Research for the Cognitive Sciences Laboratory, in California (established by Dr. Edwin May, head of the Stargate project, and set up following the end of the US government-funded psychic spying programme). Spottiswoode’s research, first published in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* in 1997, identifies an approximate 2-hour LST window with enhanced psi performance. There is also equally strong evidence for a falling off of psi functioning around 18h LST. It seems from initial studies that something in the cosmos is having an effect on psi during this time. Spottiswoode’s analysis of laboratory data covering a period of 20 years shows an incredible 450% increase in ESP performance during a particular LST slot. Researchers at RRC (and other centres) are now trying to schedule their laboratory tests, when convenient, during this window. Just what the influence is, and how it works, is yet to be discovered. One speculation is that when the earth is oriented in this particular slot of 13:30 LST, there is less “galactic noise”, which may lead to an enhancement of anomalous cognition (AC), which is another term for psychic functioning. As LST is not the same as solar time, with a difference of almost 4 minutes per day, the relationship to our solar time migrates throughout the year, with 13:30 LST equivalent solar time changing daily. Spottiswoode's latest research shows a correlation with geomagnetic field fluctuations, solar wind and anomalous cognition. The theory is that some component of solar activity is modulating the amount of AC observed in laboratory experiments.

Hauntings

Parapsychologists study a vast array of anomalous phenomena, some of which occur spontaneously, such as hauntings and poltergeist activity. To give just one example of unexpected results, during a 1995 investigation by psychic researchers into an alleged haunting of a house in Texas, the researchers (“ghostbusters”) reached a most interesting conclusion. The strange noises and lights, seen and heard by the frightened occupants of the house, as well as by the investigators, were thought to be the result of electro-magnetic fields around geological fault lines. A combination of limestone, underground water and a geologic fault, produced an ultra-sonic impulse which had a magnetic effect on the human brain, leading to hallucinations, a phenomenon known as the “Peltier Effect”. This type of research is extremely useful, as a natural cause was found for what at first appeared to be apparently inexplicable phenomena. It is indeed important, when evaluating these types of phenomena, to be aware of unusual physical forces which may be exerting a perfectly natural, i.e., non-paranormal, influence. Nevertheless, the poltergeist effect and hauntings do appear to have a strong evidential basis.

Mind over Matter?

Researchers also conduct experiments to study psychokinesis - the ability of mind to influence matter. Can one's thoughts influence the health of another or an inanimate electronic circuit? Traditionally receiving little attention from mainstream medical institutions or laboratories until recent times, a substantial body of published data supports the possibility of significant effects. Over the last 40 years, in one such area of research, "Distant Mental Influence on Living Systems" (DMILS), more than 150 formal, well-conducted scientific experiments on distant healing have been published, over half of which showed significant effects. Many studies researching the phenomenon of intentional or psychic healing found that it could decrease pain and anxiety, increase the rate of growth of plants, the level of human hemoglobin and induce other reactions in microorganisms, plants, animals and humans

The modern equivalent of tossing dice, computerized random number generators (RNGs) are the basis of experiments to study mind-matter effects. Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory (PEAR) at Princeton University, has amassed a database of over 1,000 studies using RNGs, which provide exceptionally strong confirmation that mind-matter interaction does exist. With such robust evidence of an effect, researchers have also used RNGs during experiments to monitor groups of people, ranging from a few dozen to billions watching TV broadcasts such as the Academy Awards, the O.J. Simpson trial, and World Cup finals. The overall results of all RNG studies exceed odds of trillions to one, which implies that "something" is going on - that there is a fundamental interconnectedness among all things.

Implications

Many of today's mainstream, conventional scientists believe that consciousness is caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain. But if distant effects of intentionality do indeed exist, as suggested by psi experiments, then our models of consciousness that restrict its effects to specific points in space and time, i.e. confined to the brain, need to be reviewed. For over a century, the scientific evidence has been accumulating that psi is real. The scientific case for psychic functioning rests on thousands of replicated studies conducted by scientists from around the world. Often orthodox scientists are just unaware of the impressive scientific evidence of psi experiments. Such evidence sometimes provokes passionate, even irrational responses from debunkers. One such example is from a skeptic (Mead 1977), who said, when remarking on the distant healing studies, "This is the kind of thing I would not believe in even if it existed". Cultural conditioning may lead people to dismiss such events, but when fair-minded scientists and truly honest sceptics actually study the evidence, they generally accept its validity.

For those interested in exploring psychic phenomena on the Internet, there are plenty of websites to surf, where one can even participate in online psi experiments. RRC is a good starting place with links to other parapsychological laboratories: <http://www.rhine.org>

Here in Cyprus, you can contact PSYCHOGNOSIA, a registered non-governmental organisation, which is a not-for-profit centre for the dissemination of reliable information on psychic phenomena and related disciplines. Based in Paphos, PSYCHOGNOSIA conducts certified Monroe Institute programmes, has an extensive reference library on the paranormal and is available to provide further information to enquirers. (www.psychognosia.com, P.O. Box 62064, 8060 Paphos, Tel.Fax: 357-26-621272)

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