

## Do People Guide Psi or Does Psi Guide People? Evidence and Implications from Life and Lab

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**ABSTRACT:** An emerging and potentially important strategy in parapsychological research has researchers openly discussing how their personal psi experiences have influenced their thinking about psi. The present paper discusses characteristics of psi based on research findings supplemented by the author's personal psi experiences and professional experiences outside of parapsychology. Psi experiences tend to inspire a worldview that is more interconnected, purposeful, and/or spiritual. The change in worldview may be the primary function of psi. The great majority of spontaneous psi experiences do not change the outcome of events or have other tangible, practical benefits. Situations that involve strong motivations may be convenient vehicles for this transformative function rather than indicating that psi is directed by other human motivations as traditionally assumed in parapsychology. Examination of one of the author's experiences that had a clear practical benefit revealed that the benefit could have been achieved more easily in a less dramatic and less conspicuously paranormal manner. The possibility that psi is guided by factors other than the motivations of the people involved is suggested by the recurring theme that psi appears to be "self-obscuring" and by cases when psi experiences change a person's life direction. The occurrence of psi varies greatly among individuals and appears to reflect substantial innate or genetic differences. Transpersonal research methods may provide valuable insights into these aspects of psi.

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As numerous writers have pointed out, the lack of understanding of the basic nature of psi phenomena presents several fundamental dilemmas and questions for parapsychology:

1. Psi is assumed to be directed by human motivation and intention (Braud & Schlitz, 1991; Ehrenwald, 1984; Rhine, 1964; Stanford, 1990), but at the same time, many psi effects are described as nonintentional (Stanford, 1990; Weiner & Geller, 1984), and the basic role or function of psi in human life is not understood (Beloff, 1994; Broughton, 1988).
2. It has not been established whether psi is a basic capacity that all people share or if it is a special ability limited to certain individuals (Braude, 1992; Broughton, 1988).
3. Parapsychology has a long-standing approach-avoidance relationship with religion and spirituality; on the one hand, suggesting that psi offers evidence for an expanded view of human potential and interconnectedness (Rhine, 1966; Tart, 1997a, 1997b), while on the other hand, carefully avoiding or ignoring the central possibility that a higher intelligence or power may influence peoples' lives in a way that manifests as psi.

These dilemmas and questions may contribute to the lack of scientific recognition for parapsychology. Rather than offering a coherent concept with supporting data, the field is usually presented as being at the very early stages of understanding the phenomena—in spite of over a century of research. The speculations about the nature and functions of psi vary widely among parapsychological writers and have little empirical support.

Rhea White (1990, 1998) has suggested that valuable insights on the nature and function of psi may come from scientists examining the role of psi in their own lives and professional activities. Several researchers have presented information in line with this suggestion (Blackmore, 1992; Braud, 1994; Grosso, 1990; Harary, 1992; Irwin, 1990; McClenon, 1991; Targ & Katra, 1998; Ullman, 1995; Vilenskaya, 1991; White, 1994a). Rather than being a basic change in research strategy, this may be a matter of more openly discussing what has always been practiced. For example, Eisenbud (1992) described many ostensible psi experiences in his clinical practice that influenced his thinking about parapsychology, and Stanford (1981) noted that his personal experiences had a role in developing and designing experiments.

In thinking about the dilemmas and questions listed above, I realized that I had definite views on these topics that were based on personal experiences that complemented or provided a context for the research findings. The present paper describes several of these experiences and key findings from relevant research. The long-term aftereffects of the experiences are described, as well as the context in which they occurred. This approach is consistent with White's (1990) recommendations and also with Braud's (1998) strategy of "integral inquiry," which integrates traditional quantitative cause-effect research methods with qualitative research methods and insights from personal experience. The value of a narrative approach in understanding the meaning and context of experiences is being increasingly recognized in psychology (Sarbin, 1986). White (1992, 1993b) has written review essays on narrative approaches that she relates to psi research.

#### SOME EXPERIENCES AND THEIR MEANING AND CONTEXT

##### *Psi as Destiny*

Sometime in adolescence or before, I developed the conviction that it was my destiny to do research on paranormal phenomena. I do not know how or when this conviction developed, but it was well established by early high school. My technical undergraduate education was selected with this perspective.

During my undergraduate college years, I had many apparent psi experiences that strongly reinforced this interest and sense of destiny.

One of the first experiences involved efforts to send "life energy" to a

friend from high school who was in coma with a brain tumor. Although I never saw him in the hospital, almost every day for several weeks I would make an effort to establish a “connection” with him and then send “energy.” The sense of a successful connection and energy transfer were related to sensations in the region of my heart. We had not been close in recent years and my efforts were motivated by a sense of exploration as well as concern.

One morning as I began this practice, I had a clear inner insight that my efforts were actually holding him back from his own path or destiny. On that day my efforts focused on transmitting the message that I was ending contact and wished him well with whatever lay ahead for him. Two days later I learned that he died within a day after this insight. The close timing between my release of effort and his death from a gradual decline over many weeks, combined with the clarity of the experiences for me, made this seem like more than coincidence.

The primary result of this experience for me was an enhanced appreciation and respect for the different paths or destinies of people, and for a worldview that allows higher purposes and connectedness. Other than this sense of understanding, I have found no apparent benefit for anyone resulting from this experience. Of course, it may have significant implications for research on prayer and psychic healing.

During these college years, I also met the only person I have known who had unambiguous psi ability available almost at will. As part of my explorations, I would periodically get readings from a variety of psychics. The readings were uniformly unimpressive, with little information resulting from my brief, noncommittal answers to the usual probing questions such as “Does the name George mean anything to you?” At a local Spiritualist church, several psychics offered short readings one night each week. One evening I got in line for a reading from a new psychic who seemed to have an unusual sparkle. The reading for the person in line before me started with the following exchange (with P being the psychic and R the young man getting the reading):

P: I see you are an artist.

R: Yes.

P: You don't paint, you do sculpture.

R: Yes.

P: (emphatically): Why don't you sculpture the tree?

R: (very excited): I can't! It's the landlord's!

Further discussion verified that the primary interest in the young man's life was to be allowed to sculpture a tree in the yard where he lived.

For my reading she made simple, unambiguous statements that accurately described details of where I lived and certain events in my life. We became friends, and I subsequently witnessed many instances of psi in her readings.

The following exchange may give an idea of the tone of these readings. The person getting the reading was a woman, an experimental psycholo-

gist, interested in parapsychological research and visiting from another state. She and the psychic had never met before, and I arranged the reading.

P: I see that you have a close friend who is a black male.

R: Yes.

P: And he's gay.

R: Yes. What does he do?

P: Well, let's see. (P looks up momentarily. Then with a radiant smile and complete confidence, she says:) He's a nightclub entertainer. He plays the piano and does card tricks.

R: I can't handle this.

P then described his clothes during the performances and his mannerisms, which R verified were correct.

With a few exceptions, these various experiences during and right after college had no tangible benefit or motivation for me other than reaffirming my interest in psychic research and sense of destiny. The fact that someone could know in detail how my room was laid out and what was happening in my life affirmed that psi phenomena occur but did not affect my daily life as a student. The three cases with tangible benefits to myself or to others are described in the Appendix in order to present a more complete picture. It may also be useful to add that the psychic viewed her ability entirely as God operating through her to help people on their spiritual paths. She had no interest in research and considered my interest in research as a temporary phase.

After graduating, I expected to do research on paranormal phenomena, but did not know when or how that would happen. While traveling in the eastern U.S., I visited the Institute for Parapsychology in Durham, North Carolina and ended up staying and working at the Institute for about six years.

### *Successful Psi Experimenters Are Born Not Made*

The initial conversations with the staff at the Institute for Parapsychology quickly revealed that the key question for any prospective researcher was "Are you a psi-conducive experimenter?" The situation was described clearly—certain experimenters get positive results and others do not. At the Institute at that time (1973), Jay Levy, Helmut Schmidt, and H. Kanthamani were considered psi-conducive experimenters, whereas Chuck Akers was not. However, Chuck made useful contributions to statistics and methodology.

The attitude at the Institute seemed to be that successful experimenters were born, not made, whereas successful subjects were made, not born. J. B. Rhine's writings were explicit on these points. Rhine and Pratt (1957, p. 133) took the position that "good subjects are not born, but made." However, for experimenters,

the only rule to follow is that of the old motto: "Pretty is as pretty does." A psi experimenter is one who, under conditions that insure he is not fooling himself, can get results. All others should do something they *can* do well. (p. 132)

The expectation was that unsuccessful experimenters would not be able to develop the ability to become successful. This principle was consistent with the history of the researchers at the Institute at that time and with lab lore about other researchers.

Two other initial experiences at the Institute gave me the early impression that parapsychological research was dominated by experimenter effects. In one of the first experiments I participated in, my task was to try to make a machine driven by an electronic random number generator count up to a high number. I found the task uninteresting and had little motivation. On the other hand, the experimenter, Helmut Schmidt, sat beside me and focused intently on the machine. As it was counting he would say under his breath "go, go, go." He was very enthusiastic about high counts. There was little question in my mind that any effects that were produced in these sessions were due to the experimenter.

In addition, a pervasive topic of discussion was whether the effects in Jay Levy's experiments with animals were due to psi by the animals or by the experimenter. In these experiments gerbils or laboratory rats would receive positive or negative stimulation based on the outcome from an electronic random number generator. A few months later, Levy was exposed as fraudulently manipulating his experiments (Rhine, 1975). Despite this setback for animal psi research, the basic issue of experimenter effects in psi research still remained.

Within two years several review articles brought together clear evidence for psi-mediated experimenter effects (Kennedy & Taddonio, 1976; White, 1976a, 1976b). The evidence included: (a) consistent differences among experimenters even when the experimenters did not come in contact with the participants, such as experiments carried out through the mail; (b) striking evidence that successful experimenters tended to have demonstrated psi abilities when serving as participants; (c) clear evidence that psi could occur without conscious intention, and the suggestion that psi may operate more effectively in a nonintentional manner, which implies that a typical experiment may provide optimum conditions for experimenter psi; and (d) suggestive evidence that the prevalent mechanism for experimenter effects was not simply due to factors such as the experimenter's tone of voice and mannerisms as traditionally assumed in parapsychology. Regarding the issue of whether the experimenter effects were mediated by psi or by sensory processes, Rosenthal's (1966, 1969) extensive research on experimenter expectancy effects in psychological studies investigated similar processes of subtle communication of expectations through voice and mannerisms. The available evidence indicated that this type of uncon-

scious subtle communication appeared to be learned, and the experimenters became better at eliciting the expected results from their participants. However, the pervasive trend in parapsychology depicted *declines* in psi results across participants and studies, which suggested a different process for experimenter effects (Kennedy & Taddonio, 1976).

Subsequent developments provide further evidence for experimenter psi. Experimental outcomes change when the experimenter's interests and intentions change (Kennedy, 2001; Targ, 2001). Also, studies that attempted to use majority vote or repeated sampling techniques to enhance psi have consistently had significant internal patterns that are consistent with experimenter psi (Kennedy, 1979, 1995). Further, these internal patterns offer the intriguing suggestion that the psi operated in the most efficient manner possible. In addition, the relationships between significance level and sample size in meta-analyses have often been significantly different from what would be expected if the participants were producing the effect and have been consistent with psi influence by the experimenter (Kennedy, 1994). However, several factors complicate the interpretation of the meta-analysis results at present. More recent reviews have continued to support the findings described in the initial experimenter effect reviews (Palmer, 1989a, 1989b, 1997).

The extensive evidence for psi influences on living systems (Braud, 1993, 2000; Braud & Schlitz, 1991) brings into focus the fact that the participants' responses in psi experiments constitute a labile living system that may be subject to psi influence by the experimenter. In particular, Eisenbud (1992, pp. 87–98) and Braud (1993) summarized evidence for apparent psi influence on a person's decisions and actions. Following this line of thought, the Ganzfeld and other psi-conductive procedures may establish optimal conditions for experimenter influence rather than bringing out latent psi abilities by the participants.

In a revealing personal anecdote, Palmer (1997) described why he believed that psi by Chuck Honorton contributed to Palmer's getting a direct hit in a Ganzfeld session at Honorton's lab. Palmer experienced an uncharacteristic degree of imagery in this session compared to Ganzfeld sessions with other experimenters. Further, for personal reasons, he was not in a relaxed, comfortable state as normally expected for success with the Ganzfeld.

The accumulating evidence has not altered the basic impression that the ability to obtain consistently significant results on psi experiments is largely an innate characteristic and not something that can be learned or developed. The evidence also (a) raises doubts about whether unselected subjects in psi experiments are the source of psi, and (b) raises the likelihood that experiments by psi-conductive experimenters do not provide true insights into the nature of psi because the experimenters obtain the results they are looking for.

*Genetics and Psi*

Studies of twins have demonstrated that genetic factors have a substantial role in personality. A common estimate is that about half of the variation in personality is due to genetic factors (Heath, Cloninger, & Martin, 1994; Stallings, Hewitt, Cloninger, Heath, & Eaves, 1996; Tellegen et al., 1988).

These genetic factors include characteristics that are related to reports of psi experiences. The personality characteristics of absorption and hypnotic susceptibility have been found to be associated with psi experiences (Glickson, 1990; Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994; Nadon & Kihlstrom, 1987; Richards, 1990; Wilson & Barber, 1983). Research with twins found that genetics accounted for 50% of the variation among people in absorption (Tellegen et al., 1988) and 64% of the variation in hypnotic susceptibility (Morgan, 1973). Perhaps more surprising, recent studies have found that genetics accounts for about 30% to 50% of the variation in spirituality factors such as interest in religion (Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990), personal devotion (Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 1997), self-transcendence (Kirk, Eaves, & Martin, 1999), and intrinsic religiosity (Bouchard, McGue, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1999).

These results provide a basis for the hypothesis that psi ability (whether as experimenter or subject) has a substantial innate or genetic component.

*Looking for Psi in the Real World*

One of the reasons I left full-time psi research was to observe first hand whether psi could have a role in the practical decisions and events of life outside the laboratory. Although, like most psi researchers, I often speculated that psi may have a significant role in all aspects of life, I recognized that my limited experience provided little understanding of how events actually unfolded in the world outside of the research center and academia. Other reasons for changing careers were that my thinking on psi seemed to be retracing the same ideas rather than evolving in new directions, and I wanted to try to make contributions beyond the field of parapsychology.

Work in environmental protection offered an ideal way to fulfill these various interests. This work included direct involvement in government, law, engineering, diverse types of business and industry, politics, the media, and academic and applied research. After obtaining a graduate degree, I worked in environmental protection for about seven years. Subsequent professional experience included working in medical centers and in the pharmaceutical industry.

This work provided many opportunities to observe how decisions are made and events unfold in a variety of settings in both the public and private sectors. For a couple of years the work was heavily involved with lawsuits and related legal actions.

When I began working with successful lawyers, I thought many of their decisions might be paranormal. In this context, “successful” means those lawyers who made substantial money or worked with firms that made substantial money. These lawyers would routinely take on much more work than they could get done and had an uncanny ability to put effort into matters that later turned out to be important and to put aside matters that would later turn out not to be needed. My personal journal during that time has numerous speculations about psi among lawyers.

However, one day one of the lawyers explained what was happening. As we were leaving a meeting, I commented that we were going to have to scramble to prepare documents for a deadline we had just agreed to. The lawyer said “Oh, it’s not going to happen” and then explained that the opposing lawyer had proposed this deadline because his client wanted the case to move along at a fast pace. In fact, there was an unstated understanding among the lawyers that this deadline would be changed when the time came. The implication was that the opposing client might not continue the case if he knew how much time and money was really going to be required. The lawyers had an implicit understanding to support each other in generating billable hours. After this realization, the behavior of the lawyers was much more predictable and decidedly less amazing to me.

In addition to the legal actions, there were numerous other situations in which events that appeared to be inexplicable or random to someone on the outside were actually controlled by knowledge and ability, subtle communication, implicit understandings, and behind-the-scenes activity. For some of these situations, I was an outside observer watching the insiders operate. In other cases, I had a depth of understanding of the dynamics and opportunities in a situation that allowed me to instigate outcomes that appeared virtually impossible to those with less knowledge.

My overall impression at this point is that psi, as we normally think of it, has little role in most professional activities. This does not mean that psi never has a role in these activities, only that it is relatively rare. The greatest potential for paranormal effects may be in helping to place people in certain positions from which they can operate through normal channels.

## DISCUSSION

### *Psi as Career Guide*

Psi experiences have influenced the career interests of others as well as myself. In my case, the experiences reinforced an existing interest in psi research. Osis (1987), Targ (Targ & Katra, 1998), Ullman (1987), and White (1994a) have reported that their long research interests in parapsychology were initiated by psi or exceptional personal experiences early in their lives. Braud (1994) noted that his psi experiences sometimes seemed to affirm what he was undertaking. A survey of people who were interested

in parapsychology and reported having paranormal or transcendent experiences showed that (a) 45% agreed with the statement "I feel like I have a purpose or mission in life as a result of my paranormal or transcendent experience(s)," (b) 38% agreed with "One or more paranormal or transcendent experiences seemed to confirm or reinforce that I was doing what I should be doing," and (c) 25% agreed with "One or more paranormal or transcendent experiences motivated me to make a major life change that I was not previously thinking about making" (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995).

Larry Dossey (1999, p. 3) described how three precognitive dreams during his early medical career influenced the direction of his career. The dreams occurred within one week, and he has not had precognitive dreams before or since. He characterized the situation as "It was as if the universe, having delivered the message, hung up the phone. It was now up to me to make sense of it."

White (1998) describes a sense of vocational calling as a type of exceptional human experience. She also notes that when the calling is experienced as coming from beyond the conscious mind, it could originate deep in the personal unconscious or it could have a more transcendent source.

### *Psi as Spiritual Guide*

Psi experiences can promote a worldview that is more open to spiritual possibilities. In the survey of people with paranormal or transcendent experiences, the strongest effects were spiritual (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995). For example, 72% agreed with the statement "As a result of my paranormal or transcendent experience, I believe my life is guided or watched over by a higher force or being." Similarly, in a community survey of spontaneous psi experiences, Palmer (1979) found that the most frequent effects of the experiences were on attitudes toward self, meaning in life, and spirituality. Based on cross-cultural survey data, field observations, autobiographical accounts, and historical religious information, McClenon (1994) concluded that paranormal experiences play an important role in influencing spiritual beliefs.

Experimental research can also lead to a more spiritual worldview. J. B. Rhine stated: "The conclusion is inescapable that there is something operative in man that transcends the laws of matter and, therefore, by definition, a nonphysical or spiritual law is made manifest" (Rhine, 1953, p. 227). Having worked with Rhine for several years, I think it is safe to say that his primary effort or mission in life was trying to convince others of the reality of psi and of its nonphysical implications. Parapsychological researchers are increasingly acknowledging the spiritual implications of psi research (Richards, 1996; Targ & Katra, 1998; Tart, 1997a, 1997b; White, 1990, 1994b).

The question at this point is not whether psi can inspire a more spiritual worldview, but whether it does anything else. A little thought quickly reveals that the answer may be no. For the vast majority of spontaneous case reports in collections such as Louisa Rhine's (1981), the primary result of the psi experience appears to be an awareness that some form of exceptional connection or information transfer happened, with no other practical benefit. Even for highly emotional situations, such as awareness of the death of a loved one, the psi experience usually does not alter actual events, only the person's worldview relating to the events. For example, in Rhine's collection, approximately 90% of the precognition cases did not involve any effort to change the outcome (Rhine, 1981, p. 111). Eisenbud (1992, p. 13) similarly commented "that psi-derived information is on the whole quite useless in the ordinary sense of the word is one of the most obvious facts of parapsychology."

Psi experiences that do involve a practical benefit may function primarily as vehicles for an expanded worldview. For example, my experience described in the Appendix of being pulled to run back to my bag and arriving just in time to prevent it from being stolen appears to have a clearly tangible, nonspiritual benefit. However, the goal of preventing the bag from being stolen could have been achieved with less effort through several other mechanisms. It would have taken very little psi effort to implant the idea that the area was not secure and that I should carry the bag with me—as I usually did in populated areas. Alternatively, I could have been motivated to hide the bag instead of leaving it conspicuously in plain sight. And, there presumably were options for influencing the man to not come and try to steal the bag.

Looking at these alternatives, it appears that the event unfolded in one the most dramatic manners possible. In fact, the event seems contrived to result in a dramatic, exceptional experience. The psi aspect of the other cases described in the Appendix also altered the worldviews of those involved. The overall circumstances may have provided a vehicle for this result.

Situations that involve close relationships and strong emotions may be good opportunities for exceptional experiences that attract attention and expand spiritual perspectives. The traditional assumption that the psi effect is directed by other motivations and needs in these cases may be overlooking (a) the most prominent effect of these experiences, (b) the absence of a practical (nonspiritual) benefit from psi in the vast majority of cases, and (c) less dramatic alternatives for resolving the motivations and needs in the cases with practical benefits.

White (1994b) has similarly proposed that psi experiences are a type of exceptional experience that expand the boundaries of human life and are best understood in the context of their long-term transformative aftermath. Consistent with this idea, research suggests that a series or combination of experiences may produce important effects for a person (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995). Note that within this framework, psi experiences are a

process or opportunity for personal growth and do not necessarily indicate a state of high spiritual evolution.

The spiritual growth hypothesis shifts the focus of inquiry toward considering psi events as specifically intended to be noticed as exceptional, and it de-emphasizes speculations that psi may often occur without being noticed. At a minimum, spiritual growth should be recognized as one of the possible motivations guiding psi phenomena.

### *Destiny-Specific Science*

The occurrence of psi varies greatly among people. Palmer (1979) concluded from his community survey that psi experiences are not normally distributed and that there were “two rather distinct subgroups: those who claimed no or very few psychic experiences, and those who claimed a large number” (p. 248). Kohr (1980) found a similar bimodal distribution in a survey of a special population with high interest in paranormal phenomena. The uneven distribution of psi is also supported by the differences among experimenters described above. The pattern of psi occurrence may also differ. For example, my experiences were primarily concentrated in the few years during and immediately after undergraduate college. On the other hand, Braud (1994) describes a more sustained series of experiences that apparently have occurred throughout his life.

The overall evidence appears to me to support the idea that the differences among people are largely an innate or genetic characteristic, or perhaps a result of destiny. Some of the people I have known have had many of these experiences (the Appendix includes examples), others had a few experiences, and others have had no apparent psi experiences. Perhaps on a deep or transcendent level everyone has potential for psi in their life. But, in terms of noticeable psi and associated interest in anomalous or exceptional experiences, people appear to be living in different worlds. Research on the genetic components of personality are consistent with this idea, as is the long history of experimenter effects and special subjects in psychical research. Many people appear to have full, productive, sometimes very spiritual lives with virtually no interest in or experiences of psi, although White (1994a, 1994b) points out that it is likely they have had other types of exceptional experiences that were formative.

It also appears to me that only a minority of people have significant psi in their lives (Kennedy, 2001). This includes the impression that only a minority of researchers who attempt psi experiments consistently obtain significant results. Broughton (1991, p. 10) noted that although surveys find that over half of the population report having had a psi experience, closer examination of the cases suggests that only 10 to 15% of the population have had experiences that appear to be possible psi. Similarly, my overall impression from personal observations is that a minority of people have (likely) psi experiences, and a larger number try to find evidence for psi in

nonpsi experiences. This is also consistent with my observation that psi appears to have little role in most professional activities outside of parapsychology.

The discrepancy between actual and reported psi experiences suggests that it may be useful to distinguish factors associated with actual psi experiences from factors associated with the tendency to interpret nonpsi experiences as psi. The available research on spontaneous psi experiences may reflect primarily the latter factors. This type of investigation might also provide insight into the motivations underlying psi.

The seemingly endless controversy and skepticism about psi may derive from the differences in the presence of psi. The current strategy of using meta-analyses to provide evidence for psi appears to be based on the assumption that all or most people have the ability to demonstrate psi as either experimenter or participant. This assumption is inconsistent with the direct experience of many people, including mine. Trying to convince others of the reality of a phenomenon that is based on assumptions or models that are inconsistent with their own direct experience may greatly detract from the credibility of parapsychology. Also, this assumption underlies the skeptical position that the failure to find evidence for psi in some or many experiments is grounds for rejecting all parapsychological research. It may be advantageous to more explicitly recognize and investigate individual differences.

### *Is Psi Guided by the Personal or by the Transcendent?*

The persistent scarcity of efforts by psi-conductive experimenters to explore their own obvious role in producing their experimental results is one of the most consistent and potentially revealing phenomena in parapsychology today. One hypothesis for this phenomenon is the concept of "ownership resistance," which has been proposed to help explain the elusive nature of psi (Batchelder, 1984). However, this and related concepts such as witness inhibition (Batchelder, 1984) and fear of psi (Tart, 1984) generally appear to me to be strained, ad hoc explanations with limited applicability. Although people may have resistance to certain strong, uncontrolled psi manifestations, they would accept and even welcome more frequent occurrences of many weaker psi manifestations, such as success with slot machines and statistically significant experimental results. The popularity of books and courses on developing psychic abilities is inconsistent with the hypothesis that fear of psi is a major limitation for psi occurrence (Kennedy, 2001).

An alternative hypothesis is that the psi-conductive experimenters have an inner knowledge or recognition that they as persons are not in any meaningful sense producing the psi effects in their experiments. The source of psi would be external to the experimenter's sense of identity. Within scientific thinking, the natural assumption would be that other people are

the source of psi. If one is open to a more spiritual worldview, other options become available. This is an aspect of the pervasive difficulty in identifying the source of psi, which underlies a variety of intractable problems, including investigating postmortem survival and identifying boundaries for experimenter effects (Palmer, 1997). Speculations about the nature of psi often involve three aspects or levels of consciousness: (a) the conscious motivations and intentions of a person, (b) the unconscious motivations of a person, and (c) some type of transcendent, transpersonal, nonlocal, or field consciousness. The interpretation and discussion of psi effects often seem to be a haphazard mixture of these different levels. One comment may assume that psi is a simple extension of the physical senses, and a few sentences later another comment may imply that psi is an independent entity with its own agenda and way of doing things. Research becomes increasingly challenging when it addresses the unconscious and transcendent aspects.

The primary distinctions between scientific thinking and spiritual thinking involve the characteristics of the transcendent aspect. Scientists (including parapsychologists) tend to view the transcendent aspect as a very homogeneous, passive, basically mechanistic medium for interconnectedness that can be utilized by living beings in fulfilling their personal motivations and needs. On the other hand, certain spiritual views accept the possibilities that the transcendent aspect could be more active, may not be homogeneous (i.e., may include something like entities), and may be a source of independent motivations and intentions that affect human life. The different abilities, interests, and destinies of different people may reflect the more active and/or nonhomogeneous nature of the transcendent rather than reflecting only random differences among people in ability to access the transcendent. Psi could be a manifestation or mechanism for an active transcendent realm that influences human life.

It is useful to recognize that the basic model for current experimental psi research is that psi is an unexplained (i.e., magical) power subservient to human will. This model results from and requires a passive transcendent aspect and imposes severe limitations for exploring possible spiritual aspects of psi. It also does not fit the phenomena well.

The recurring theme that psi appears to be “capricious” or “self-obscuring” (e.g., Batchelder, 1994; Beloff, 1994; Braud, 1985; James, 1909/1960) implies independent intentions by psi that sometimes override personal or local human intentions and motivations. Models or assumptions that reasonably fit this aspect of psi have not been developed. This may be a major factor hindering progress in parapsychology. In fact, the frustratingly slow progress with the traditional assumptions supports the hypothesis that something more is involved.

The situations when psi appears to have a guiding role in life are also consistent with an active transcendent consciousness, particularly when the experience results in unexpected, significant changes in life and worldview. Dossey (1999, p. 3) and White (1994a) are good examples of this kind of

change in worldview and life direction. In examining the events in my life, an active role by the transcendent appears to me to be by far the most likely explanation. White (1993a) suggests that the best research strategy may be to let psi lead us rather than to try to control or apply psi. Of course, the possibility that the relative roles of the personal and transcendent are not the same for all people should be recognized in this area of inquiry.

Qualitative, phenomenological, and other transpersonal research methods provide a way to begin investigating people's experiences with the transcendent aspects of psi (Braud & Anderson, 1998). These methods may be particularly useful for identifying meaningful individual differences. For example, Braud (1994) states that it has been his experience that acknowledging and paying attention to his psi experiences tends to lead to more such experiences. That has not been true for me. Rather, my experience has been more consistent with the writings that say that the occurrence and effects of psi experiences are optimized by the attitude "Go and tell no one" (Sinetar, 2000, p. 51) and by devoting minimal attention and energy to the experiences (Rama, Ballentine, & Ajaya, 1976, p. 134; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1981, pp. 181–182). Recognition of the extent and implications of individual differences may be one of the greatest challenges facing psi research.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Based on these observations, the appropriate working assumptions for psi research may be that (a) the occurrence of psi varies greatly among people and reflects substantial innate or genetic differences, with a minority of people having actual, noticeable psi in their lives and a larger number tending to interpret nonpsi experiences as psi, and (b) psi is often guided by factors other than the identifiable motivations of the people involved. Although research is much easier with the traditional assumption that everyone has psi ability that can be brought out by the correct combination of motivation and nonstructured cognitive information processing, that assumption is not consistent with my experience and has failed to produce tangible progress in understanding psi. It also may have a significant role in the perception among scientists that parapsychological claims are not realistic. The starting point for exploring alternative assumptions may be to investigate individual differences in the occurrence and effects of psi, particularly the various meanings and contexts of psi.

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#### APPENDIX

##### *Preventing a Theft*

While on an extended canoe camping trip on the Mississippi River, I stopped at an industrial area in St. Louis as it was getting dark. No one was around and I thought the area was fenced in. I left a bag that contained my money, credit card, identification, handgun, camera, and other valuables on a concrete slab by the canoe and went for my usual evening walk along a dirt road parallel to the river. After walking approximately a half mile, I found myself running back toward the canoe with a sense of being pulled from my chest. I could see nothing ahead of me to raise concern and started

to walk, but found myself running again. I arrived back at the canoe just as a man threw my bag into his car and got in to drive away. When confronted, he handed over the bag. If I had been a minute later, the bag would have been gone and the trip would have abruptly ended in a very unfortunate and inconvenient manner.

It seems possible that there could have been some sensory cues from headlights or engine noise. However, I had no awareness of any such cues and was carefully looking for a reason to be concerned while I was returning. Perhaps more relevant, I had had a previous experience with a similar clear physical sensation of being pulled from the chest that drew me into a sequence of events that had other paranormal aspects.

Further implications of this experience are described in the Discussion section of the paper. It may also be worth noting that it was on this trip that I later visited the Institute for Parapsychology, as described in the paper.

It may also be relevant to mention that my basic mode of processing information and obtaining a sense of understanding is based on feelings and a direct sense of knowing. Mental images have little role in information processing for me. Likewise, putting these feelings into words is a later stage of information processing. My personal psi experiences reflect this nonverbal, nonimagery mode of information processing. (As might be expected, imagery based psi experiments such as the Ganzfeld and remote viewing never has appealed to me as a participant or experimenter.)

### *Resolving Spirit Possession*

A woman I met in Colorado and will refer to here as C told me that she thought she was possessed because she sometimes felt like a spirit was trying to make her destroy herself. The primary incident she described was that when she was at the ocean at age 10, she was very afraid because the spirit was trying to possess her to make her drown. She also said that she expected to have a short life because of this spirit.

I arranged for a reading with P, the psychic described previously in this paper. Of course, I gave P no information about the person receiving the reading. P asked if there was anything in particular we were interested in and C mentioned possible possession. P stated that she saw that C had been bothered throughout her life by a spirit and that she saw C at the ocean as a child, distressed because the spirit was bothering her. P said that the spirit was not truly bad, just someone C had hurt in a previous life. This reading was the only direct contact between P and C.

Over the next few days, there were some relatively intense possession-related experiences that culminated with C believing that she was communicating with the spirit (in my presence) and that the spirit left after C expressed profound regret over an incident in a past life. C told me the story of the alleged incident that happened in ancient Egypt. Later, when I

talked with P about what had happened, P related an identical story about ancient Egypt. I had not told P the story, and as far as I know, P and C had not talked about the details of the past life incident during the reading. I talked with C a couple of years later and she said the spirit possession problem was completely gone, she was much happier, and she now expected to live a long life.

I have never been certain how to interpret what happened. The things I am certain of are (a) C was greatly helped psychologically by this series of events, (b) C had some unusual, intense experiences (some of which were in my presence), and (c) P appeared to obtain relevant information with psi. I do not have an opinion one way or the other about whether there was an actual spirit bothering C. C had a strong sense of personal control and may have adapted to guilt-related psychological problems by externalizing them. Internal conflicts were not consistent with her concept of herself. P may have responded to C's views. However, P accepted the spirit explanation, as did C.

### *Setting Up a Meeting*

While in college, I visited the small town where I had attended high school. A good friend (who I will call J) said she wanted me to meet two people. Unfortunately, one was away for the duration of my visit and could not be contacted. The other lived in a town about 3 hours away, and we went to see him that evening.

As we were returning, the headlights on her car blinked off a couple of times and then went out as we passed an isolated service station. The station was at the intersection of two paved roads in a very remote area. The station operator checked the car, but could not find the problem. Each individual component of the head light system (bulbs, fuses, switches, etc.) appeared to be functioning properly, but the lights would not come on.

As we were beginning to wonder what we were going to do, a car traveling on the perpendicular road pulled in for gas. It was the other person my friend J wanted me to meet. Neither he nor J knew that the other was in this region that night. When we were ending the conversation with her friend, J and I simultaneously remembered the car problem and said "the lights will work now." The problem with the lights was gone, and it disappeared as quickly and mysteriously as it appeared.

As we drove back, J said that incidents such as this were common around this friend. This and the case described above are examples of people for whom paranormal experiences are a conspicuous part of life. This degree of paranormal activity is very different from that of most people I have known.

From my perspective, this was just another case that demonstrated the occurrence of psi and did not otherwise affect my life. The meeting had more meaning and motivation for J, who wanted very much for me to meet her friend. In fact, they later married.