

PANEL 1

ALTERATIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND PSI

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Throughout history, ostensible psi phenomena have been related to qualitatively distinct states of consciousness or procedures associated with them, including meditation, dreams, and states of possession by spiritual beings. Although the research program of J. B. Rhine did little to evaluate this reputed association, various studies, summarized by Honorton (1977), found that some altered states of consciousness did seem to increase psi abilities in controlled studies, a conclusion that was generally held in a more recent review (Luke, 2011). This general idea was a catalyst for the development of one of the most successful psi research paradigms, the ganzfeld, which homogenizes sensory stimulations and, presumably, affects the state of consciousness of various participants. An unfortunate side effect of the success of the ganzfeld paradigm has been the neglect of systematic research on other procedures and states, and psi research in general has failed to keep up with developments in the study of consciousness, including appropriate measures to use and multivariate analyses (Cardeña, 2011). In this panel we will center on three techniques to affect consciousness and their effects on psi performance: hypnosis, meditation, and psychedelic drugs, discussing what has been found so far and, as importantly, what additional questions remain to be investigated systematically.

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HYPNOSIS, DISSOCIATION, AND PSI

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Dissociation has been related to psi functioning in different ways: as the lack of integration between conscious and non-conscious processes (implicit measures of psi); the psi ability of some mediums who, by definition, experience a dissociated identity; and the correlation between dissociation as a trait and reports of ostensible psi experiences (Cardeña, 1998; Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner, in press). There have also been anecdotal reports of psi abilities among people diagnosed with

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dissociative identity disorder (erstwhile known as “multiple personality disorder”) (Van de Castle, 1993). However, there has been no concerned attempt to evaluate whether dissociation as a trait correlates with psi performance in controlled experiments. Similarly, from its inception mesmerism and later hypnosis was related to reports of psi abilities. Although many of these reports could nowadays be explained away through deficient experimental controls, some remain a challenge for skeptical interpretations. More recent meta-analyses continue to find that hypnotic conditions seem to increase psi performance, although the mechanisms through which this may happen are debatable (e.g., Stanford & Stein, 1994). In a series of studies (e.g., Cardeña, Marcusson-Clavertz, & Wasmuth, 2009; Marcusson-Clavertz & Cardeña, 2011), we are attempting to elucidate how dissociation and hypnosis may relate to psi in controlled protocols. So far, the pattern seems to point out to a complex interaction between these variables, experienced alterations of consciousness, and other variables. Finding personality traits and consciousness states that facilitate psi performance should help in the search for the elusive conditions that may produce more reliable psi results.

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