

unusual, or strange about it. It is quite normal.

2. The presence of an emotionally charged atmosphere is fundamental to all serious church work and is thought by many to constitute a radically charged atmosphere. It is a perfectly normal condition to churchgoers and to businessmen using special conference techniques.

3. Observers, reporters, and journalists who do not believe what they see, suffer from the common intellectual egoism, which says in effect, "If I don't understand it, it just ain't so!" The documented results of Miss Kuhlman's ministry have been truly phenomenal by any standard, and must be regarded as "hard data."

The author would have been far wiser to draw correlations and comparisons within the healing ministry itself, rather than to have cast doubt upon which must be regarded as the most emotionally dramatic, scientific phenomenon of this century.

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ESP Training

Editor: This is in response to Dennis O'Brien's critical comments on my article on "ESP Training" (*Psychic*, March/April 1976). Mr. O'Brien has published a lengthier, more technical criticism of my work in the *Journal of Parapsychology* (March, 1976), and I have submitted an extensive technical reply there. Here I will indicate more briefly why I disagree with his letter of criticism in *Psychic*.

Mr. O'Brien argues that there was no evidence of learning in my results, and that the high level of ESP manifested was probably just an "experimenter effect," i.e., due to the special attention and encouragement given the subjects by all experimenters and by one experimenter (E1) in particular.

To deal with the latter point first, there is a traditional recipe for rabbit stew which starts "First, catch your rabbit." I have argued for many years that the experimenter is indeed important, and that is why I described the characteristics of the experimenter-subject interaction at length in the full technical publication.* I agree that E1's attention to and encouragement of his subjects was quite important. As J. B. Rhine, the father of modern parapsychology, put it so well more than 20 years ago:

"All the skills and methods that can be devised by the experimenter for conveying encouragement, inspiring confidence, implanting a realization of the importance of the tests, and arousing and maintaining an ambition to perform well in the tests will be decidedly to the point."**

I believe that learning to use ESP is a difficult and quite delicate psychological task and every possible psychological support should be given to the subject. This view is not at all original with me, however, it is standard operating procedure for parapsychologists to act this way. What was different about my studies was that immediate feedback of results was *added* to this s.o.p., and the results were quite different from the common decline in performance seen in repeated guessing ESP testing done without such feedback.

I should also note that although Mr. O'Brien makes much of E1, the subject who most clearly showed learning was not one of E1's subjects.

The most basic definition of learning is an increase in performance with practice. In his *Journal of Parapsychology* review Mr. O'Brien argues that no learning occurred because other criteria of learning, such as retention of performance from session to session was not manifested. These other criteria are characteristic of the *end* phase of conventional learning processes, where the ability has been learned to near its limit. Since I stated in my technical report that the 20 sessions each subject had were too short to expect more than a start of the learning process, applying these end phase criteria is not appropriate.

I find many people misunderstood my application of learning theory to ESP, in spite of my mentioning the common misunderstanding in my technical report, so let me repeat it again. I am *not* predicting that the simple provision of immediate feedback in a repeated guessing test automatically means that a person will improve his ESP. It's more complex than that. For one thing, a person will have to have some ESP talent to begin with, or there's nothing to learn. For another, you're right by just plain guessing much of the time, and this is a kind of noise that confuses you. Thirdly you may get bored, distracted, etc. What I have predicted is that, *given subjects who have some demonstrable ESP ability to begin with*, the provision of immediate feedback: (1) will stabilize ESP performance (eliminate declines) in short to moderate length experiments; (2) will allow some

subjects to improve their ESP performance; and (3) the more ESP ability a subject has to begin with, the more he should profit from immediate feedback training. Rather than finding a "batch of statistically insignificant incline effects," as Mr. O'Brien puts it, these non-significant inclines and declines mean essentially steady performance, stabilization of ESP performance in many subjects. Two subjects did show learning, and higher levels of ESP were associated with more positive performance curves (greater inclines). The three predictions were thus strongly supported.

As I stressed in my *Psychic* article, the greatest problem parapsychological research has had and still has is the unreliability and low level of ESP typically manifested in the lab: you can't study the nature of something very well under such conditions. As Mr. O'Brien states, ESP has been characterized by an "unconscious nature." What "unconscious" means is that our past attempts to understand ESP and control it have not worked very well: there are complex, difficult to understand psychological factors that we are not conscious of that make it seem capricious. Mr. O'Brien, unfortunately, states this as if it were a doctrine to defend:

"And as most psychologists realize, the unconscious, that metaphorical no-man's land that over-sees all that we do that we either don't realize we're doing or later wish we hadn't done, is highly uncontrollable to say the least."

If he will think out the implications of this statement for research, it means that our experimentation is very unlikely to discover anything lawful but only get sporadic, paradoxical results. I don't believe that past failures at understanding and control should discourage us from trying for better results, and I believe the results of my and others' studies of immediate feedback may indeed be a key to stronger, more reliable ESP, which in turn will make it more possible to understand its nature.

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*C. Tart, *The application of learning theory to ESP performance*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation, 1975. A more extended version, *Learning to use ESP*, will be published this October by the University of Chicago Press.

**Rhine, J.B., Pratt, J.G., Stuart, C.E., Smith, B.M., & Greenwood, J.A., *Extrasensory perception after sixty years*. New York: Holt, 1940.

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