

**PSI RESEARCH  
METHODOLOGY:  
A RE-EXAMINATION**

**PROCEEDINGS OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**Held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina**

**OCTOBER 29-30, 1988**

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Edited By

Lisette Coly and Joanne D.S. McMahon

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In memory of  
Charles Honorton  
1946–1992

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## INTRODUCTION

LISETTE COLY: How do you do Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Lisette Coly and as the Parapsychology Foundation's Vice President I call to order this our 37th Annual International Conference. This conference is now in session. On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Parapsychology Foundation I welcome you all to this year's conference entitled "Psi Research Methodology: A Re-examination."

Our title reflects the fact that the Foundation sponsored twenty years ago—in 1968 to be exact—a conference devoted to "Methodology in Psi Research" at what was then the Foundation's European headquarters located in St. Paul de Vence, France. As Dr. A.R.G. Owen stated so well at the 1968 conference, "Methodology can be thought of in a restricted sense as a theory of experimental design or more broadly in terms of imaginative choice of avenues of approach." It shall be good for us to learn over the next two conference days if the intervening 20 years have indeed brought about a change—or perhaps not in some cases—in our experimental design and certainly interesting to hear if we parapsychologists have continued to choose imaginative avenues of approach in our methodologies.

We are very pleased to hold a Parapsychology Foundation conference in the Durham area and certainly one devoted to methodology is appropriate. Our founder, Eileen Garrett, was glad to participate way back in 1934 in some of Dr. J.B. Rhine's early experimental work at Duke University. The time spent in Durham was the start of a fruitful association of the Rhines and Garrett as well as the two organizations they would later come to found, Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man and Parapsychology Foundation. J.B. Rhine's obituary in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (1971) described Eileen Garrett and the Parapsychology Foundation most eloquently:

The experiments with Mrs. Garrett at Duke were a turning point in parapsychology as a science . . . Mrs. Garrett blazed her own trail and made the Parapsychology Foundation by all odds the greatest achievement of her life. Its record speaks for itself. One of its unique services was the annual international conferences . . . These gatherings filled an educational need the more scientific meetings naturally could not provide for. One of Mrs. Garrett's most laudable aims

was to establish a first-rate library for parapsychology and this became another of the Foundation's accomplishments of lasting value. Her publication program too went far to fill the gap between the scientifically edited publications and the frankly popular range . . . But to many people the Parapsychology Foundation's greatest gift to parapsychology has been in dollars. There has been nothing else to compare with the generosity of this Lady Bountiful of Parapsychology as she willingly poured out the financial aid needed by isolated workers in many countries struggling to do something in or near the field of psi research. She helped new centers to get started, stimulated publication of reports, and opened up neglected branches of inquiry. Who will ever do the like again? . . . Eileen Garrett has had a hand in the development of parapsychology in our culture that in its way will not likely be equalled. Because of her originality, her initiative and her independent spirit much of what she did was unconventional as the academic and scientific institutions regard matters. But in the way she could best make her contribution she did it inimitably and with a sparkle of enjoyment that is good to remember. (pp. 60-61)

Well, Garrett was indeed a hard act to follow, but I am sure most of you here will agree that our present President, Eileen Coly, has met the challenge well. She has continued to pledge the Foundation's resources to the support of the field albeit not having quite the financial wherewithal available to be referred to as Lady Bountiful! Mrs. Coly has nevertheless paid her dues and come a long way from 1934 when, while awaiting the finish of one of Garrett's experimental sessions with Rhine, she asked Karl Zener if he was familiar with those novel little five cards with their various symbols . . .

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you the President of Parapsychology Foundation, Eileen Coly.

## GREETINGS

EILEEN COLY: I am very pleased, both professionally and personally, to welcome you all here today. Thank you for all your efforts to join us at what we feel sure will be a very informative and valuable two conference days.

I find it hard to grasp the fact that my first visit to Durham, as Lisette has already told you, was over 50 years ago, while accompanying my mother on her initial series of experiments with Dr. J.B. Rhine. I am sure you will agree that Garrett and Rhine or as she affectionately called him "The Boss" represented quite an "Odd Couple." However, despite their disparate methods they shared a common goal. I am sure if, along with Dr. Louisa Rhine, they were present here today, they would be gratified to acknowledge the growth and continuance of the subject each did so much to shed light upon.

The list of participants at our 1968 conference on methodology in psi research is no less impressive than today's roster. Naming just a few of those who presented papers—John Beloff, Jan Ehrenwald, Stanley Krippner, Karl Pribram, Charles Tart, Montague Ullman, Robert Van de Castle—it is worthwhile to note that they have all continued to contribute to the field. I am especially pleased that Ramakrishna Rao—a long time friend of the Parapsychology Foundation who actively participated in the 1968 conference—has consented to present a paper at this 1988 conference.

Before I turn you over to our very able conference moderator, Hoyt Edge of Rollins College, Florida, well known and respected by all of us, I would like to share with you a very apt statement made by Charley Tart at the 1968 conference:

"Our effort must be directed towards making psi phenomena function at a much higher level of significance than they currently do. The phenomena are either too weak or too sporadic and they remain trivial anomalies which do not seriously challenge the current paradigm. . . . I agree that this is a pessimistic view of the current situation in psi research, but I am afraid that it is realistic. We cannot make psi work because we do not know enough about it. We cannot learn enough about it because we cannot make it work." Tart continued: "Let me close with a perverse sort of optimism, however. A few years ago, Burke Smith and I carried out a survey of research effort in parapsychology.

We found that the amount of time and money expended on psi research each year is negligible, compared to most other fields of science. Yet consider the smoke it raises. It must be a very powerful phenomenon, indeed."

Ladies and Gentlemen . . . do we smell smoke? All right then let's get down to work. I turn the proceedings over to Dr. Hoyt Edge.

## OPENING REMARKS

HOYT EDGE: Thank you, Lisette; thank you, Eileen. It is fitting that the Parapsychology Foundation return again after 20 years to the topic of methodology in psi research and particularly fitting for us to have these participants so many of whom began their research in the middle and late 60s. Progress that we have made in parapsychology, and particularly in methodology—and we have made progress—is to a great degree attributable to them.

Roberto Cavanna laid out the platform of the conference 20 years ago. At that conference on psi research methodology, he pointed out that parapsychology had gone through two stages—the era of mediumistic investigations and the era of Rhine's card-guessing experiments. New approaches were needed, he said. A new set of methodologies was required for parapsychology to change so that it would enter into a third stage.

And change there has been. Beginning in the late 60s a plethora of approaches blossomed and we are today the heirs of these changes. But as I look over these 20 years I see change within continuity. For instance, we are still interested in the relationship between psi and altered states of consciousness, but rather than focusing on the dream state we engage in ganzfeld research. Further, parapsychologists have always been interested in the appropriate statistical approaches, but we are necessarily becoming more sophisticated in how we use statistics. For instance, we will hear papers in our program on the use of meta-analysis and on our progress in analyzing free-response data. The final example is the more sophisticated ways in which living target systems are being used (as target) in PK research in a paper by William Braud.

And yet there is a darker side to the last 20 years. The optimism of the late 60s and early 70s that a significant breakthrough was just around the corner in how to explain psi has not materialized. Many of the same questions from 20 years ago still exist today. What do we do with the ubiquitous experimenter effect? It is possible for us to obtain real psi in the laboratory? Have we conceptualized psi in such a way that our methodology is not appropriate to finding it? Is psi not the sort of phenomenon after all that can be understood scientifically? And thus will any methodology be adequate? These are serious questions. They call for serious analysis and we will get some of that in the papers in this conference.

Twenty years ago Roberto Cavanna in his introduction to the program remarked that, "Basic methodological assumptions, explicit and implicit in the experimental design, are rarely, if ever, questioned. A stagnant and sterile situation is therefore perpetuated, and the scientific status of parapsychology cannot improve." I believe that this is no longer the case for parapsychology, if it ever was the case. We are a field perpetually asking questions about our methodological assumptions and their implications for experimental designs. We are a self-reflective community, more so perhaps than any scientific community, and it is in that spirit that we turn once again to examine our field, its assumptions and the appropriateness of its methodologies. I am asked to be a hard taskmaster in my role as moderator. There are some rules . . . Having summarized our conference procedures we now begin the session officially with Ramakrishna Rao, whom we invite not only as the first speaker, but back to the United States to work full time.