

PLANS FOR RESEARCH

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What contribution to psychical research can be made through the investigation of spontaneous cases? We make the distinction that one finds so generally in studies of human nature, between the things that occur without our planning, and those that occur within the framework of our plans. The eye specialist may need to study how you see under special conditions; but the painter, the man who is interested in seeing as a social instrument, may take people in their life-contexts, as defined by their place in society. In psychical research we distinguish between the raw phenomena which occur without our plan, in the everyday context of the ordinary lives of ordinary people, and, on the other hand, those instances (like the study of mediumship and the study of extrasensory perception) in which we plan the investigation.

Spontaneous cases come to us at the rate of a few per year. The first problem is how to make the most of those that come. The first step is always to authenticate the cases—to make sure they actually happened as described. The second step is to study the people who are capable of having such experiences—what kinds of gifts, sensitivities or special predispositions make it possible for them. The third step is to find out about the people from whom the impressions come, and to compare them, as personalities, with those who receive impressions from them. In the case of two living persons, it is not by any means always impossible to make personality studies by the best modern clinical or experimental methods.

What we need above all else is a group of eager participants who begin to catch the importance of a broad survey of these powers of human personality, who are aware that a profoundly revolutionary conception of human nature will come when unconscious interpersonal dynamics are more fully understood, and who realize that parapsychology is one of the major neglected areas, the study of which might give us a fuller understanding of the nature of man. We need to recruit and train field researchers; to obtain more good cases while they are still fresh and available for thorough validation; to systematize and organize material as it becomes available. We need to establish effective world-collaboration in the gathering, validation, and analysis of spontaneous cases of high quality.

I believe that with a great many fresh, new cases psychologically studied shortly after they occur, carefully analyzed, thoughtfully interpreted, subject always to fresh interpretation and the building of an ever better theoretical structure, we have the possibility of proceeding at a far swifter pace and achieving a far deeper understanding than has even been possible in the past.