

Letter to the Editor

Expanding the Experimenter Role

Dear Editor,

The previous *Journal of Parapsychology*, 86(2), included an editorial about experimenter psi that made many important points, the most salient involving the need for researchers to examine their own beliefs and for each experiment to shield investigators from the data as much as possible. This is a very good start, but I would like to see the discussion broadened to include examination of who gets defined as playing a potential role in possible experimental effects, since everyone involved in an experiment could be a source of psi.

If motivation is the issue behind an investigator's effect, we are used to thinking of the primary investigator as having the most motivation, therefore the strongest effect. Yet many published articles show experiments designed by groups, with multiple names appearing as authors. Also, many experiments are replications; previous investigators might have strong desires to see their work replicated. In addition, a primary investigator might not be the person working with participants directly. In the editorial examples, the primary investigator was also the person interacting with participants, but that is not always the case. In many experiments, research assistants work with participants who might never even see the primary investigator.

The editorial mentions in passing that the behavior of mice can be affected by the sex of human investigators. In this case, perhaps we should also ask about the sex of the person cleaning the lab, preparing food, or building equipment for the mice. This expanded concept is analogous and applies to what can happen in experiments with humans, demonstrated by the following. Dr. Stanley Krippner wrote of medium and psychic Eileen Garrett successfully describing a photo in a sealed envelope. While doing so, she also provided accurate information about the young man who prepared the envelope and about Dr. Krippner as owner of the photo, which he later gave her as a present (Krippner, 2002). Psi connections were made beyond the boundaries of the experimental parameter.

Judges are another unexamined group affiliated with experiments but not listed as authors or investigators. Ganzfeld, remote viewing, and other experiments employ them to determine which images expressed by participants are closest to specific targets. Is it the judge's psi that chooses the correct target in an ambiguous forced choice situation? Or could a participant precognitively express imagery matching a judge's later determination rather than getting the information from the target itself?

If we take the experimenter effect seriously, we need to expand our definition of who is part of an experiment to include those who are not direct investigators. At the very least, we can ask everyone connected to examine their beliefs and can try to shield their possible influence. I agree with the previous

editorial that in doing so we will still never reach 100% certainty of eliminating the experimenter effect, but we can aim for this. It requires more work, but we can learn more about how psi functions -- and that's our goal, isn't it?

Reference

Krippner, S. (2002). Remembrances. In *Adventures in the Paranormal*, E. Garrett (pp. 99-200), Helix.

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