

The Big Names You Don't Know in Psi Research History

Scientific research into the paranormal and metaphysical claims of spiritualists have been on-going for over two centuries. This type of research is commonly referred to as an investigation of "psi" phenomena. In 1942, British psychologist Robert Thouless chose to use the twenty-third letter of the Greek alphabet, Psi, to become an all-encompassing term used in parapsychology to collectively describe psychic, paranormal or metaphysical events that are unexplainable by the laws of known physics.

In the mid 1800s, modern spiritualism was enjoying a surge of popularity in the U.S. Psychics, mediums and séances were particularly promoted as stylish dinner party entertainment. Writer H.G. Wells even contributed to the movement by suggesting that time could be bent in such a way that we could contact loved ones across the eons. Several scientists of the day found many of the claims made by practicing spiritualists to be groundless and so a spin-off movement began to debunk their assertions. These scientists formed the Society for Psychical Research followed by the founding of the American Society of Psychical Research. It's interesting to note that there were also many breakthroughs in the scientific investigation of light and color from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s. Perhaps efforts to debunk the spiritualists prompted scientists into new ways of thinking about light as well.

By the 1930s, the profound ideas of Relativity Theory and the emergence of Quantum Theory were beginning to take hold in all of the major scientific communities. Also by this time, psychology had branched off from philosophy as its own discipline. During this early research period, all psi energy was considered to be electromagnetic in nature. This was due in part to the fact that in the mid-1800s, Michael Faraday, who introduced the principle of electric and magnetic induction, was one of the first scientists to research psi phenomena. He, of course, began his investigation by looking to the properties with which he was most familiar, which were electricity and magnetism and how they interacted as a single event. The other reason for researching the EM characteristics of psi phenomenon was due to the fact that EM radiation was an invisible yet quantifiable and measurable property of work. Science cannot investigate what it cannot by some means measure. Faraday could measure electric and magnetic forces.

It's interesting to note that even by the early 1900s when electrical powerhouses dotted the American landscape, the fundamentals of what electricity was were still theoretical. To this day, that is still true. Although modern physicists can give a very detailed and accurate description of exactly what electricity does, no one as yet can definitively say what electricity is. The same holds true for the definition of light.

Practically every advancement in scientific measuring devices spawned a correlating advancement in another element of proof of the existence of psi phenomena. One example is that when brainwaves were first detected, they were interpreted by psi researchers as evidence of telepathy. Today, the detectable frequency bands emanating from the hands of energy healers is being paraded as evidence of chi, reiki or other vital life forces. But still, these measurements didn't exactly prove anything specific. They merely suggested that energetic forces arose from material substances in direct correlation to intent. While this is a significant statement, it does not fully describe what is transpiring.

In the late 1920s, J.B. Rhine was a professor at Duke University. He became intrigued with psi research after hearing a lecture by Arthur Conan Doyle concerning mediumship, or communication with the dead. Rhine was degreed as a botanist and as such, respected the validity of the scientific method. He developed a new branch of science called parapsychology and set up lab experiments which would provide data on psi phenomena that could be scrutinized by statistical analysis. In 1940 he published *Extra-Sensory Perception After Sixty Years*, which was a summary of all the legitimate scientific investigation of psi phenomena up to that point. Today, Rhine is considered a pioneer in the field and has been followed by prestigious physicists of the modern era such as John White, Fred Wolf and Jack Sarfatti who are currently

investigating the links between vital energies, consciousness and psi phenomena. Many modern-day researchers employ quantum effects in their theories.

In the 1970s, the public became aware of psi research that had been conducted by the Soviets for over two decades. Similar government funded studies had been carried out by the U.S., but were publicly denied until the early 1990s.

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