

# Rhea White: An Appreciation

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I am pleased to have been asked to write a brief piece about Rhea White. I greatly value Rhea and her work, and I always have considered myself one of her biggest fans. I deeply miss her presence with us.

I often told my colleagues and students that I considered Rhea to have more knowledge about parapsychology than anyone on the planet. I made that statement based on her vast bibliographic and database work and her extensive summaries of published books, chapters, and articles relevant to the field.

Rhea herself made many original and significant contributions to our field. Among the most important of these, I would include reports of her own early psi research projects, in the 1950s and 1960s, involving teachers and pupils; her 1964 theoretical paper on old versus new methods of participant preparation and target responding, which inspired much successful free-response experimentation by other investigators; and her early recognition of the important roles played by researchers and by study participants other than the ostensible “subjects” in psi experiments (White, 1976a, 1976b). In these and other areas, Rhea always was steps ahead of the rest of us, providing advance notice of topics and approaches that later would prove to be important foci of fruitful research.

However, to me, and to Rhea herself, her greatest contributions were not these but, rather, her later extensive work with what she called exceptional human experiences (EHEs). In a way, Rhea’s work within parapsychology was a long-lasting side trip—a rewarding and productive diversion, during which her truest interests and most heart-felt work were incubating. This work burst forth in the early 1990s with her extensive writings, presentations, and personal and professional support of EHEs and of those who experienced and studied them. Although Rhea was honored in 1992 by an Outstanding Lifetime Research Award by the Parapsychological Association for being parapsychology’s bibliographer, Rhea always maintained (and I fully agree) that this award was given for the wrong reason. Rather, Rhea should have been (and will be) recognized for her emphasis of a more experiential approach to the subject matter of psi research, for her broadening of the topics and approaches that parapsychology might fruitfully emphasize, and for her investigations and conceptualizations of EHEs and of the EHE process, through which an individual’s dedicated work with anomalous and exceptional experiences can uncover human potentials not formerly recognized and contribute to one’s psychospiritual development and transformation (White, 1997).

Rhea also will be remembered for urging that we include greater feminist considerations in psi research (White, 1994), her suggestions that we greatly expand the range of research approaches to our subject matter (White, 1992, 1998b) and include intuition and heart-knowledge in our work (White, 1998c), her advocacy of greater attention to spontaneous psychic and other exceptional experiences and their *meanings* for the individual experiencer (almost all of her latest work), and, of course, her extensive editorial work for books and journals and her enlarging the ambit of these publications to include a greater number of contributions in areas of EHEs and transpersonal psychology.

On a more personal note, I fondly recall a phone call from Rhea, in the late 1980s, asking my opinion about her planned extension of the subject matter of psi research to include areas that she later began calling EHEs (little did I realize that this was soon to become a new and important field of study), her support of my own work and writings, her gracious support of our Institute's students' work and of many others through contacts via personal correspondence and via the EHE Network that she and her colleagues developed (see [www.ehe.org](http://www.ehe.org)), and many delightful exchanges regarding her move from Dix Hills, NY to New Bern, NC, her new home and environment, and her adventures with her friends and with the creatures she loved and enjoyed—plants, birds, jumping spiders, Daddy Longlegs, tree frogs, chameleons, and her beloved cats.

In a 1982 presentation, later published in 1998(a), as well as in many of her later publications, Rhea argued that in order for parapsychology to have a successful future, it would have to progressively enlarge its topics, methods, conceptualizations, and scope, and we, as investigators, would have to involve ourselves more in our work and enlarge ourselves—that is, both the field and its workers should engage in what she called *projects of transcendence*. The way to go about this was well exemplified in Rhea's own life and work.

At the time of her death, Rhea had stopped most of her other projects in order to work diligently on a book about how to write an EHE autobiography and was working on her own EHE autobiography. I hope someone will be able to see those works through to completion, because these could help those in the fields of parapsychology and EHE studies realize the future that Rhea foresaw for us.

Although she herself did not use such a term, I think of Rhea's ways of knowing, doing, and being as illustrations of how we might effectively move from a more limited *parapsychology* (a parapsychology of knowledge) to a more expansive *parapsychosophia* (a parapsychology of wisdom, a term originally suggested by Tony Lawrence). Thank you, Rhea, for showing us how we might accomplish such a transition.

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