

# **A Compendium of Suggested Research Projects in Areas of Research Methods, Transpersonal Psychology, Parapsychology, and Psychical Research**

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For many decades I have been very actively involved in both empirical research projects and scholarly writing projects in areas of research methods, transpersonal psychology, parapsychology, and psychical research, as well as in many other more “established” areas (perception, learning, motivation, memory, biochemistry of memory, psychophysiology, psychoneuroimmunology, exceptional human experiences, consciousness studies, and spirituality). Since I retired in July, 2009, I have continued to enjoy my various writing projects—both for publication in books and journals and for posting on this website. However, I don’t foresee that I will be conducting any additional empirical research projects. I do have ideas about many research projects that I think would be very useful, but it is unlikely that I will be conducting these myself. So, I am writing this article to share these ideas with others, so that perhaps someone will follow through with some of these ideas. I think some of these projects could make excellent thesis or dissertation projects for students interested in these areas, as well as provide rewarding projects for established researchers who already are actively involved in these fields.

I am presenting, below, several listings of suggested research projects. These can involve a variety of forms of disciplined inquiry—not only empirical studies but also conceptual and theoretical studies, reviews and integrations of existing literature, and other forms of scholarly treatment. In some cases, I provide details and explanations. In other cases, I simply have listed some topics, the nature of which I would hope to be self-evident.

## ***Ways of Extending and Expanding the Nature and Practice of Research***

1. Studies could be conducted on the relative efficacy of various ways of doing research. A given topic could be investigated using a set of different research approaches or methods, and the relative accuracy and satisfactory nature of the findings could be assessed by researchers, participants, and various “audiences.”
2. One could conduct a study that includes direct empirical comparisons of more analytical (e.g., identifying and sorting “meaning units”) versus more intuitive ways of treating qualitative data.
3. I have wondered whether the findings of certain qualitative studies—e.g., obtained phenomenological “structures” and the depictions and portraits of heuristic research—truly match the specific qualities of the experiences being studied, as opposed to being so general that these results might match a great variety of experiences other than the “targeted” experience. A well-designed mixed methods study involving multiple experience sets and multiple results sets, and appropriate “blinded” judging conditions, could explore the specificity and accuracy of qualitative findings. If findings of qualitative studies simply are accepted and not questioned, one will never know whether the Emperor is or is not wearing clothes.
4. How might various psychospiritual principles and practices (e.g., practices involved in the eight limbs of the Patanjali Yoga system or various Buddhism-informed practices) be

- introduced into research praxis, and how might these improve study findings?
5. How might fictional writing techniques be applied to the production of research reports (e.g., how might fictional narratives be used in the presentation of findings, theories and reviews), in order to make research reports more inviting, accessible, and interesting? A small beginning of such an approach can be found in one of my book chapters: Braud, William. (2006). Conversations about survival: Novel theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches to afterlife research. In L. Storm & M. A. Thalbourne (Eds.), *The survival of human consciousness: Essays on the possibility of life after death* (pp. 75-93). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
  6. Science tends to privilege the general (nomothetic) over the particular (idiographic). Which issues does this raise? What are the pros and cons of such an emphasis? Should this change? How?
  7. How does science conceptualize “illusion,” and what are the advantages and disadvantages of such an attitude?
  8. In a 1972 article in *Science*, Charles T. Tart introduced the idea of “state-specific sciences.” Do these seem possible? How might these differ from or agree with our conventional understandings of “science” and scientific values and practices? Is it possible that state-specific sciences already exist? If so, what are some possible instances?

### ***Possible Research Projects in Transpersonal Psychology***

1. Many of the well-known spiritual or wisdom traditions appear to privilege the unchanging and eternal over the transient, temporal, and changing. Which sorts of issues does such a view raise?
2. An interesting article could be written regarding the relevance of *interconnectedness* for issues of responsibility, compassion, and altruism, and the possible role of interconnectedness in a “higher Selfishness.”
3. How is “illusion” understood in the various spiritual or wisdom traditions? Might we add to or improve upon such understandings?
4. Would it be useful to prepare an article reviewing the many understandings of “spirituality” of active transpersonal psychologists, similar to what has been done regarding the variety of views of the nature of what is “transpersonal”?

### ***Possible Parapsychological Research Projects***

1. Careful laboratory studies have demonstrated that persons are able to exert direct intentional influences (distant mental influences) upon a variety of physical and biological target systems. What are some ways of exploring the range and possible limits of such direct mental (intentional) influences upon a variety of psychological, social, and environmental processes?
2. How might we study the *practical applicability* of direct intentional influences in areas of therapy, counseling, coaching, spiritual guidance, education, and various forms of training?
3. Distant mental influences (direct intentional influences) have been shown to act nonlocally with regard to *space*—they do not appear to be appreciably influenced by distance or shields. There is evidence that such influences also may act nonlocally with respect to *time*—they may influence events not only in the “present” but also in the “past.” A common understanding is that such retroactive intentional influences (influences that seem to work “backward in time”) do not actually *change* past events (i.e., things that already have

happened do not suddenly change from what they actually were) but rather, they appear to influence *what happened in the past in the first place*. If the word “change” is used, it would mean a change (or difference) compared to what might have occurred otherwise (i.e., in the absence of the later intentions). There are three areas in which the study of time-displaced direct intentional influences could be quite productive and useful: (a) study of the conditions under which such influences become more or less likely or possible, (b) study of direct intentional influences upon *future* events, and (c) study of the *practical applicability* of retroactive direct intentional influences in areas of therapy, counseling, coaching, spiritual guidance, education, and various forms of training.

4. In studies of psychokinesis (direct mental or intentional influences upon physical and biological systems), psi researchers have focused on a very narrow range of target systems—dice, radioactivity-based random event generators, psychophysiological activities of other persons. What might be learned about the range and limits of psychokinetic influences by greatly increasing the kinds of target events that might be susceptible to such influences? Some possible target systems that might be studied are weather conditions (e.g., wind velocity) and continuously varying signal strength in short-wave radio reception. I mention these two rather exotic targets because they are characterized by *great lability/free variability*, which seems to be an important characteristic of susceptible systems.
5. A very important area of study of psi experiences (experiences of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and remote healing) would be to explore their impacts on the lives of the experiencers, rather than continuing to attempt to “prove” the existence of these phenomena. What are their accompaniments, outcomes, meanings, and practical applications and implications *in lived experience*?
6. Virtually all of our parapsychological studies have been guided by the (often unstated) assumption that psi operates chiefly in ways that are redundant with sensory processing. Why would nature have developed a psi process that merely duplicates our already excellent sensory functioning? Might psi operate, more effectively, in areas that are not so readily accessible by our regular senses? Perhaps an important function of psi is to provide knowledge of qualities of the world that are not immediately evident to the senses. Such *nonevident* qualities would include relationships in which various objects, events, or persons are embedded; the past histories and possible future trajectories of present objects and events; associative networks of which particular objects or events are but nodes; instances that are parts of the same whole; meanings; potentials; and the nature of “psychic space” and the relative locations of various things or event within that possible “space.” We can attempt to develop creative research designs and approaches that might allow us to learn about other realms in which psi might be more active, more accurate, and more at home. Two specific methods might serve us well in exploring *nonevident psi*. One of these is to conduct very thoughtful and probing phenomenological studies of persons’ subjective experiences upon confronting a given ESP target; by identifying a greater range of experiences, including bodily and other “preconceptual” experiences, and by noting possible commonalities of such experiences—especially those that are present in many percipient reports but are not obviously related to the formal properties of the target—across percipients. Another promising method could be the use of the *projective differential* (PD) technique developed by Peter Raynolds (see Raynolds, P. A. (1997). On taming the evaluation monster: Toward holistic assessments of transformational training effects. *Simulation and Gaming: An International Journal of Theory, Practice and Research*, 28(3), 286-316) and his co-workers. This technique assesses persons’ reactions to rapidly presented pairs of abstract images as a

way of measuring holistic and intuitive responses to a wide range of objects, persons, situations, or concepts, and it can provide both quantitative and qualitative assessments of subtle, nonevident qualities and meanings, as well as indications of the degree to which these might be shared by the research participants.

7. A number of parapsychologists have suggested that people in general, as well as psi investigators themselves, may have an unconscious fear of psi. Such a fear may inhibit psi performance of research participants, the success of psi experiments that certain investigator may conduct, and also could account for the marginal results of many psi experiments (successful enough to suggest the presence of psi but not dramatic enough to yield a conscious surfacing of fear). It is likely that such a fear of psi could be present in different degrees in different people. It may be possible to use the Defense Mechanism Test (DMT), appropriately modified to tap different sources of psi-related anxiety (i.e., different psi-related threats), with both research participants and psi investigators, and correlate their degree of unconscious fear of psi with participants' performance in psi experiments and with investigators' ability to conduct successful psi experiments. The DMT was invented by Professor Ulf Kragh of Lund University, Sweden, and has been developed, validated and quantified within the Swedish Air Force by Dr. Thomas Neuman. It is a projective test in which pictures of threatening motifs are presented tachistoscopically in standardized low-lighting conditions. It is built on the theory that presentation of pictures at extremely short exposure times (milliseconds) will reveal subconscious personality factors. In several scientific studies the DMT has proved highly accurate in predicting performance and accident-proneness under stress. An expert in the area of subliminal perception has suggested that the DMT is probably the best researched instrument for the study of preconscious processes. The DMT has been used in parapsychological research by Martin Johnson (who took part in developing the DMT for use by the Swedish military for personnel selection), Erlendur Haraldsson, and others.
8. How might we use hypnotic regression techniques to learn more about psi experiences and EHEs in general, and to help experiencers to recall more about and better understand and better integrate their experiences?
9. Typically, a phenomenological study involves collecting information from participants during individual sessions. It can be useful to extend the approach and have a *group phenomenological session*, involving persons who have had similar psi experiences or other types of exceptional human experiences (EHEs). In this way, information related by some group members can help prompt recall or additional thoughts in other group members, and this can help provide more complete understandings and integrations of the experiences in all members.
10. How might we foster psi experiences in psi counteradvocates (persons who tend not to accept the reality of psi)? This is important because personal experiences can be much more convincing than can exposure to research findings.
11. Parapsychologists tend to focus on the information acquiring aspect of psi experiences. Might psi serve other functions as well or even better? Consideration of various types or *levels of interpretations* (literal, symbolic, moral, allegorical, anagogical) may reveal other meanings and lessons we can learn from psi experiences. A few of these additional possibilities are that we are profoundly interconnected, that there is Something More to us and to the world, and that psi might provide a guiding function by serving to affirm or confirm recent actions or decisions we have made.
12. Rather than focus on psi experiences and phenomena only within the narrow contexts of

parapsychology and psychical research, what might we learn about such experiences and phenomena from other disciplines and other areas of study—for example, from psychology as a whole, from anthropology, from transpersonal psychology, philosophy, the spiritual/wisdom traditions, and mystical studies?

13. There is a temptation and risk, among psi investigators, of focusing too much on current fads and the latest new thing in research methods or designs and also of focusing almost exclusively on recent and narrow time frames in our reviews of literature and in our writings and scholarship. What might be done to counter these tendencies and thereby expand our understandings of our subject matter?
14. Psi researchers sometimes reach conclusions too quickly, by prematurely extrapolating findings and by not considering a greater number of alternative possibilities. How might we engage in deeper and more thoughtful analyses of our conclusions, generalizations and assumptions? We might begin by reconsidering issues such as the following. Do “psi-favorable test conditions” such as Ganzfeld procedures really *facilitate* psi? Is psi really *independent* (in the true and full meaning of “independent”) of distance? Is system susceptibility to psychokinetic influence related to *physical* randomness or *perceived* (psychological) randomness (variability)? Do our commonly used research designs adequately address the functions that psi might ordinarily serve in everyday life situations? It is commonly assumed that, in receptive psi, the true “target” is the actual, concrete target instance at hand. What if, however, what actually is accessed in receptive psi is not the specific, concrete, particularly actualized target, but a more generic form of which the particular target is but one instance? What if psi taps into the more abstract forms, “ideas,” potentials, possibilities, or “archetypes” of which particular targets happens to be only one of many possible instantiations? This could help account for some of the “misses” that are observed in psi studies. Another assumption that has been guiding our research is that alphanumerical targets are much more difficult to psychically access than are more nonverbal target properties such as shapes, forms, textures, colors, and so on. Although there are intimations that this might be true, there is no strong, direct empirical support for such an assumption or conclusion. Perhaps there have been so few successful “readings” of left-hemispheric-type targets not because such tasks have been tried repeatedly and have consistently failed, but rather because such attempts are extremely few and have not been given fair or adequate tests. Rarely, if ever, do psi researchers make use of *manipulation checks* to be certain that ostensible altered state inducers really have altered the state of consciousness of research participants; how might we gain better knowledge of the actual psychological conditions of our research participants?
15. Parapsychologists have devoted great attention to finding ways to *increase* psi functioning. This is understandable, because this could allow greater access to psi in the laboratory and provide greater opportunities to learn about its nature. However, if fear of psi does exist, one component of this fear could be a fear of not being able to “turn off” psi and become victimized by it, in everyday life. So, if we could learn more about ways of *decreasing* unwanted psi, this could greatly decrease fear of psi and could possibly, somewhat paradoxically, result in greater instances of psi in the laboratory as well. Which sorts of research might be done, with the aim of learning more about how to decrease and “block” psi functioning?
16. Still another way of countering fear of psi is to focus on practical, useful applications of psi. If enough accurate information about positive aspects and uses of psi are made available, this could help balance a view that emphasizes possible negative uses of psi.

17. Like professionals in other disciplines, parapsychologists tend to greatly value the views of fellow professionals and tend to dismiss or distrust the views and possible useful contributions of nonprofessionals (in the case, amateurs, “New Agers,” popularizers, esoteric tradition advocates). What might we do to counter this trend and learn from a greater variety of sources?
18. It should be possible to integrate our knowledge of studied phenomena more fully with our knowledge of related processes in other areas. For example, there are great resemblances between direct intentional influences (psychokinetic influences) and what has been called *himmah* and *empowered imagination* within certain mystical strains of Islam (see the works of Henry Corbin in this regard). And there are many other descriptions of processes in various esoteric, spiritual, and wisdom traditions that bear close resemblances to the processes studied in psi research. Being aware of these and what is known about these could help advance our own knowledge of the similar phenomena that we study. To deny such similarities and to privilege our own studies as somehow more objective and valid are indicators not only of poor scholarship and limited inquiry, but of hubris, on our part, as well.
19. There has not yet been any systematic study of the possible role of the *location* at which our studies are conducted. Certainly, our study outcomes can be influenced, both directly and indirectly, by conventional physical characteristics of the testing location—e.g., the geomagnetic ambiance of the locale, or even (as James Spottiswoode’s local sidereal time work has suggested) the test site’s cosmic situation or orientation—as well as more subtle qualities of *place*. Some of the latter, no doubt, still await discovery and exploration.
20. There is a needless narrowness in the approaches and methods that we use in our investigations. For example, Rhea White described 12 approaches to the study of spontaneous psi experiences (see White, R. A. (1992). Review of approaches to the study of spontaneous psi experiences. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 6(2), 93-126), and In three Appendices of our 1998 research book, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* (SAGE, 1998), Rosemarie Anderson and I describe 17 conventional research methods, 5 transpersonal research approaches, and 6 additional, related research approaches. We tend to use only a small subset of these 40 possible research approaches and methods in psi research, in medical research, and in science in general. How might we counter this narrowness trend?

Note: Information about topics mentioned in Numbers 12 through 20, above, originally was presented in this book chapter:

Braud, William. (2005). The farther reaches of psi research: Future choices and possibilities. In M. A. Thalbourne & L. Storm (Eds.), *Parapsychology in the twenty-first century: Essays on the future of psychical research* (pp. 38-62). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

### ***Possible Psychical Research Projects on Survival of Bodily Death***

The following eight suggested areas for afterlife research originally were presented, in slightly modified form, in this book chapter:

Braud, William. (2006). Conversations about survival: Novel theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches to afterlife research. In L. Storm & M. A. Thalbourne (Eds.), *The survival of human consciousness: Essays on the possibility of life after death* (pp. 75-93). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

1. There has been relatively little research among psychical researchers in trying to “contact” recently deceased psychical researchers. Quite a few very dedicated parapsychologists and psychical researchers died recently; many of these had very keen interests in survival. Of all people, it would seem they would be highly motivated to contact the living, if they did, indeed, survive in some form. It’s strange that there have been so few concerted efforts to contact such persons. This stands in stark contrast to what was attempted, in the early days, when some of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research, such as Myers, Sidgwick, and Gurney, passed away.
2. A useful approach is to simply “listen” for indications of survival more carefully and more often. If the discarnate continue to exist in some form, and are trying to communicate, how many of us are really listening? We keep our time and our minds extremely busy and occupied virtually incessantly. Metaphorically speaking, our phones are either busy or off the hook nearly all the time; if someone were attempting to call, it would be almost impossible for them to get through. What might happen if psychical researchers simply quieted themselves, unbusy-ed their minds, and simply made themselves available for possible messages, for some reasonable time periods each day?
3. Increased sensitivity and preparation on the part of the listeners would be needed. The researchers themselves would have to become more adequate to the task, more skilled in becoming aware of and understanding of subtle thoughts, feelings, and images that might carry information relevant to afterlives.
4. One of the most direct ways to explore survival would be to find persons who might be exceptionally skilled at telepathic attunement, have them connect with the mentation of persons who are near death, and monitor this mentation as closely and as continuously as possible. If this would be done, keeping the telepathists ‘blind’ as to the time of death of those they were monitoring, it might be possible to note what happened at the time of death—whether the mentation continued, and in which form, and for how long. This may seem to be a far out suggestion, but I think such a study actually could be conducted, with the help of persons in hospitals, hospices, and so on.
5. Hypnosis might be used in novel ways. Hypnotic regression could be used to help people who have had near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, past-life recall, or other afterlife-related experiences relive, recall, and better integrate those experiences. Another approach would be to hypnotically regress persons to early childhood ages, to help them recall possible past lives—given that past life memories tend to occur early, then disappear with age. Note that this differs from using hypnosis and suggestions for recall of past lives themselves. Still another approach might be to simply hypnotize persons and suggest that they be more receptive and less resistant to possible afterlife phenomena. This could increase their sensitivity and allow them to become better detectors of survival evidence.
6. The typical way of dealing with the possibility of investigator or participant bias or expectational influence upon research findings is either to ignore this factor or to reject findings entirely. However, one can deal with possible investigator and participant biases more directly by maximizing them, manipulating them, and assessing their possible roles and interactions. For example, one could use a 2x2 design to compare and contrast the types of past life recall findings that emerge from participants with two types of belief systems (reality of a past life existence versus subconscious construction of “memories”) who are studied by two types of investigators (those with strong beliefs in the reality of survival and past life recall versus those who attribute the information to subconscious construction). By studying the types of information that emerge within each of the four “cells” of this 2x2

design, and by studying themes and details that seem invariant or variant across the conditions, one could emerge with a better idea of possible interactions of findings with the belief systems of investigators and participants. The principle could be extended to explore other types of experiences, as well.

7. Hypnotic, waking suggestion, and experience-simulation work could be done in which participants are asked to imagine and fill themselves fully with the cognitive, emotional, evaluative, volitional, and expectational accompaniments of three survival alternatives or scenarios, and then act and function on the basis of those different belief patterns, so that we might be able to observe commonalities and differences associated with three “as if” answers to the survival question. The three patterns could be (a) consciousness is an epiphenomenon of brain functioning that ceases when the body dies; (b) consciousness may persist after death in a form in which fragments of individuality, specific memories, and personality characteristics may still be recognizable and which may fade after some duration; and (c) consciousness continues in a much more persistent but depersonalized, attribute-free, and nonlocal form. One could study possible life-impacts of acting as if each of these scenarios were true, and there could be appropriate follow-ups after various time intervals. Findings might suggest new insights about the three answers to the survival question that could lead to new research directions and possibilities not yet obvious to us.
8. The Projective Differential (PD) developed by Peter Raynolds, which was mentioned above, could be used to study the possibility of survival of bodily death. The PD procedure can be used to provide profiles of idiosyncratic meanings of various target referents (e.g., myself, my home environment, my view of life after death). The PD could be administered to various persons before their deaths. Later, should any of the deceased be channeled or their personalities taken on by mediums, the channelers or mediums could be asked to retake the PD when representing the deceased. The pre-death and post-life PD profiles could be compared—as an additional indicator of the possible identity of the source of the post-life PD. As far as I know, the PD has not yet been used in psychical research, but I think it holds great promise.

For more information relevant to the various projects suggested above, one can consult references cited in some of the suggestions and various relevant papers that I have posted on several pages of this Inclusive Psychology website. In addition, Internet searches of the various topics mentioned can be most useful.

I hope others will find these suggestions for possible research projects helpful.

NOTE: This article originally was prepared for the Inclusive Psychology website and may be accessed online at [http://www.inclusivepsychology.com/additional\\_content.html](http://www.inclusivepsychology.com/additional_content.html)

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