SELF-EFFICACY AND ESP TEST SCORES

JULIE FLANNERY

SELF-EFFICACY AND ESP TEST SCORES

An Abstract

Presented to the

Graduate and Research Council of

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Julie Flannery

December 1990

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between a subject's perceived self-efficacy and the score on an ESP test. The hypothesis under investigation suggested that self-efficacy would be a better predictor of high ESP test scores than a general belief in ESP. In other words, as the subject's perceived competence level increases, then the ESP score should also increase.

Forty students in graduate and undergraduate psychology classes at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, volunteered to participate in this study. Both males and females were included and the subjects ranged in age from 18 to 60. Each subject was given the "Flannery's Test for Perceived ESP Ability" and the standard ESP test. The questionnaire was designed to assess perceived ESP ability and the level of self-efficacy held by each subject.

There was not a significant relationship between self-efficacy and ESP test performance, nor was there a significant relationship between the belief in ESP and the ESP test performance.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Julie Flannery entitled "Self-Efficacy and ESP Test Scores." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Clinical Psychology.

Jean G Lewis
Major Professor

We have read this Thesis,
and recommend its
acceptance:

Charles R Lyle
Second Committee Member

Garland E. Blair
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate
and Research Council:

William H Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Review of the Literature

To the general public, ESP is considered to be anything mystic or out of the ordinary. However, ESP is only a category within the field of psychic phenomena. Extra-sensory perception (ESP) is the gaining of knowledge without the use of the presently known senses (Rhine, 1973). Does ESP or other psychic abilities exist in people? No one really knows the answer to this question and this research project is not designed to prove or disprove the existence of psychic phenomena. Over a century ago, researchers were preoccupied with trying to prove that psychic phenomena actually existed. Gradually, it was determined that proving the existence of ESP, by applying the scientific method, was not going to result in consensus for the existence of ESP. As a result, research efforts were directed at the relationship between psychic phenomena and psychological or sociological factors (Edge, 1986). This study is intended to provide additional information related to the question of what characteristics influence a person's score on an ESP test. The recent findings from a variety of researchers were used to further explore the question about ESP test scores.

Although there are various forms of ESP, the focus here is on clairvoyance. Clairvoyance is a form of ESP in which information is acquired directly from some external

source without the mediation of a second mind or person, as opposed to telepathy (Beloff, 1974, p. 16). Telepathy involves gaining information through the use of another person's mind, also referred to as "mind-reading." Clairvoyance is typically tested by using what is known as ESP Cards which were developed in 1930 by K. E. Zener (Hansel, 1980). The deck contains twenty-five cards with five different symbols: a circle, a rectangle, a plus sign, a set of wavy lines, and a star. Each symbol is represented five times. The standard record sheet used to test ESP has space to record 25 calls (guesses) in each of ten times (runs) through the deck. Beside each vertical column where the subject's guesses are recorded is another column to record the actual symbol that appeared. To begin the test, the experimenter shuffles the deck of cards. Then, the top card is held face down while the subject records his or her guess on the record sheet. The card is laid to the side and the next card is repeated the same way. After all 25 cards have been guessed, the experimenter turns the deck face up to record the actual symbols that appeared. This process is repeated ten times. The test is supposed to measure a subject's ability to guess a target card and inferences may be made based on the test results. Therefore, this test could be considered reliable, but not valid.

The classic clairvoyant experiment was conducted in the early 1940's by Gertrude Schmeidler (Schmeidler, 1943). She hypothesized that the subject's attitude towards ESP would have an effect on ESP test performance. In other words, a subject's belief or disbelief in ESP would determine the direction of the subject's performance. She labeled the subjects who accepted the possibility of ESP as sheep and those who rejected the possibility as goats (Schmeidler, 1943). At the beginning of this testing session, she asked each subject about their attitude towards ESP in general and clairvoyance in particular. The subjects were then placed in one of two groups, depending upon whether their attitude was favorable or unfavorable towards ESP. The experimental setting was also different for the two groups of subjects, depending on whether they answered her questions in favor of or against ESP. The sheep were tested in a pleasant atmosphere and given candy and cigarettes as incentives. The goats were tested in a bleak-looking room and were given no incentives. Not surprising, the sheep scored significantly above chance, while the goats scored significantly below chance. These findings were interpreted to mean that a belief in ESP produced higher scores on an ESP test. Schmeidler stated, "I conclude that attitude rather than the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the situation, was the major factor"

(Schmeidler, 1943, p. 221). Although such an assumption was made, it was also possible that the physical conditions contributed as much to the scores as the subjects' general attitude towards ESP.

Many researchers tended to agree with Schmeidler's hypothesis that attitude affects performance outcome. Many different procedures were used to assess attitude and its relation to ESP scores. In 1946, J. M. Bevan went further to show how subjects' ESP scores compared by determining their acceptance, rejection, or undecided attitude towards ESP. He interviewed his subjects to determine whether they believed ESP was an "established fact" and whether ESP could be measured in an experimental setting. The subjects also rated their own attitude on a continuum from belief to disbelief. A question mark was in the middle of the continuum for indecisive responses. This allowed for three possible groups: sheep, goats, and indecisives. The same testing conditions were used for all groups during the ESP test. The results were similar to Schmeidler's in that the sheep scored significantly above chance and the goats, significantly below chance. However, the indecisive group scored higher than both of the other two groups, which did not meet the expectations of the hypothesis. Bevan suggested that the sheep may have been too motivated to succeed and this

pressure interfered with their ESP performance (Bevan, 1947).

The interest in this research area did not wane and more sophisticated methods were developed. Casper (1951) believed that the attitude of the subject was an important factor in ESP scores and he used popular assessment instruments to place subjects within groups. He ran two series of experiments that were similar to Schmeidler's and Bevan's. In the first series, a short interview with each subject was conducted to determine belief in ESP. In the second series, a written questionnaire was used to obtain information about the subject's knowledge of ESP, belief in the possibility of ESP, and belief in one's own ESP ability. Both groups were asked to fill out the Stuart Interest Inventory and a personality inventory (name not given). The second group was also required to complete a second task which involved making two drawings. Subjects were placed in the sheep, goat, or indecisive group, based upon their response to the question assessing belief in ESP. The personality instruments used were meant to provide additional information about the personality of the subjects, but the answers were not used to determine group placements. When the results were grouped to resemble past research, some interesting findings appeared. Contrary to Schmeidler's results, the goats scored higher than the

sheep in this experiment. Also, the indecisives scored lower than both the sheep and goats, which is in opposition to Bevan's results. However, the results obtained by Schmeidler and Bevan were significant and Casper's findings were not. Therefore, although Casper's findings are interesting, they must be evaluated with caution.

The increased development of assessment instruments led other ESP researchers to utilize them in their experiments. For example, Nicol and Humphrey (1953) used the Guilford-Martin Inventory, Guilford's Inventory, Cattell's 16 PF Test, and Cason's Test of Annoyances to assess twenty different personality characteristics and their relation to ESP scores. Although no significant results were obtained, self-confidence was the only characteristic that suggested a possible relationship with ESP scores. Subjects with high confidence scores tended to have more successes than low-confidence subjects. Nicol and Humphrey concluded that further research with self-confidence, as a factor affecting ESP test scores, was needed. Another study conducted by Osis and Dean (1964) also addressed confidence in personal ability as it relates to ESP scores. They classified their subjects into five different groups and used two different experimenters. The five groups included: 1) High sheep, 2) Sheep, 3) Conflict, 4) Goats, and 5) Extreme goats. This meant

a comparison of ten different groups was made to differentiate high/low scorers on the ESP test. None of the findings were significant and the researchers speculated that it may have been a result of the differences in the experimenters, instead of the subjects' abilities.

Although the sheep-goat studies attempted to assess the subjects' belief in ESP and its effect on performance, they did not use the same procedures, nor arrive at the same conclusions. Some researchers continued to suggest that sheep scored significantly above chance and goats scored significantly below chance (Bhadra, 1960), but no one successfully demonstrated any factors that correlated with this performance. It was becoming more evident that the relationship between belief and ESP test performance was more complicated than the original sheep-goat effect indicated (Palmer, 1972). It was also realized that the belief or disbelief in ESP did not reveal enough about the personality of the subject or the subject's general attitude towards ESP (Beloff, 1974). With this realization, some researchers directed their attention to other approaches in ESP testing. Some new topics under investigation were: ESP experiments with mice, EEG Alpha Rhythm in relation to ESP scores, IBM cards as clairvoyance targets, and psychokinetic experiments (Rhine, 1973). There were also more people claiming to have psychic ability

which needed to be tested and police departments were beginning to use psychics in their investigations (Edge, 1986).

The question of what produces high ESP test scores still remains unanswered. Past researchers studied the correlation between ESP test scores and the subject's belief in ESP. However, current research studies have provided a more indepth understanding into the power of the perceptions that individuals hold about their personal abilities. For example, Bandura's self-efficacy research indicates the importance of a subject's perceived expectations for success. Depending upon the strength of the belief, success could be produced in a variety of situations. One particular situation could be an ESP test. If the subjects' belief in their own ESP ability is positive and strong, opposed to a negative or neutral belief, then success would be more likely to occur. In other words, Bandura's self-efficacy research can be applied to ESP testing in the same manner as any other life situation.

The degree to which people believe they possess various abilities differs widely. A person's belief about his/her own abilities may be instrumental in producing the expected outcome. When many people think about performing a task, they may ask themselves, "Do I have confidence in my ability to perform this task?" In this particular example, the

word confidence is used in a general way to determine if the ability exists at all. However, confidence to begin a task does not mean success in the end. Therefore, in order to be successful, it takes more than confidence to try. A strong belief in one's personal abilities that can be directed and maintained throughout the situation is needed. Bandura (1977) has described this concept as self-efficacy, which refers to "the expectation that a particular response will be effective in a given situation and the person is able to carry out the particular response." Bandura's research with a variety of therapeutic situations emphasized the importance of self-efficacy expectations. For example, Bandura believed that the greater the person's perceived self-efficacy, the more likely they would be to enter into that situation and use the capabilities they possess (Bandura and Wood, 1989). In other words, those who have a strong belief in their efficacy will figure out ways of exercising some measure of control in even limited environments. This perceived control due to personal efficacy enables a person to maintain motivation and to increase the likelihood of success. Also, the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and they have a firmer commitment to these goals (Locke, Frederick, Lee, and Bobko, 1984).

Bandura also used self-efficacy assessment in therapy to predict how a client would act in a problem situation. For example, severely snake-phobic adults were assessed and treated, by increasing the client's self-efficacy expectancies for successful fearless performance. The therapeutic interventions involved desensitization, modeling, and counseling. In other words, he helped them gain a stronger belief in their own abilities to succeed in this particular situation (Masters, Burish, Hollon, and Rimm, 1987). The power of efficacy was also examined in relation to the cognitive functioning of bulimic women. It was found that bulimic women had a lower sense of personal efficacy with regard to successful performance in a variety of life situations and tasks (Etringer, Altmaier, and Bowers, 1989).

What are the advantages of increased self-efficacy? In a therapeutic situation, for example, Bandura stated that self-efficacy will increase when a person observes their own successfully produced outcomes over time. This increase in particular situations will be generalized to other situations and result in a sense of personal competence. R. Moulton also believes competence is an important predictor of success. He defines competence as "the degree to which the individual believes he possesses the skills necessary for successful performance on tasks"

(Atkinson and Raynor, 1974). When a person believes he is competent in undertaking a particular task, then he has a higher probability of success on these tasks on which only a proportion of the population would be expected to succeed. This degree of competence must be acquired through repeated successes in a variety of situations. Therefore, a person who has a high sense of self-efficacy will perceive himself as competent, not only on a particular task, but in novel situations as well.

According to the current research, a person's self-efficacy, or belief that he has the power to produce the desired outcome, will be the determining factor for successful performance. On an ESP test, the desired outcome would be the correct matching of the target card with the subject's perception of the card. On this task, the subject must feel competent in his or her own ESP ability in order to be successful. This competence is a result of the underlying self-efficacy of the subject. The perceived self-efficacy is thought to be a much stronger determinant of success than the subject's belief in ESP in general, which was assessed in the earlier studies. Therefore, the hypothesis of this research study is that subjects who report high self-efficacy scores, or those who hold a strong belief in their own abilities, as demonstrated by their responses on the "Flannery's Test for Perceived

ESP Ability" questionnaire, will produce the higher scores on an ESP test. Since the focus here is on the subject's personal efficacy and competence, it is believed the high/low contrast will be more striking than the results obtained from studies based upon a general belief in ESP.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

Subjects

A total of forty subjects was used in the experiment. The subjects were currently enrolled in graduate and undergraduate psychology classes at Austin Peay State University. The subjects were tested in groups of four. Participation was strictly voluntary. The demographic characteristics assessed for each subject were gender, age, and academic classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate).

Procedure

The same set of instructions was read to each group of subjects. The instructions are located in Appendix A. The subjects were required to sign a consent form (Appendix B), which was kept separate from the results. The subjects then completed the "Flannery's Test for Perceived ESP Ability." (For a complete description of the ESP test, refer back to Chapter I or to Appendix A.) The ESP test was then administered using the standard deck of ESP cards. A cardboard screen, approximately 18 inches by 24 inches, was placed between the experimenter and the subjects to conceal the cards during the test. The subjects recorded

their responses, one at a time, on the Standard ESP Record Sheet, located in Appendix C. The record sheet includes spaces for 10 runs. The subjects recorded their responses in the "call" column for each run. The "card" column is beside each "call" column to record each target card. After each run, the experimenter recorded the target cards on the record sheet. At the end of all ten runs, the subjects' responses were compared against the target cards to determine the score.

Instruments

The questionnaire used in the experiment was the "Flannery's Test of Perceived ESP Ability." It was designed to assess the subject's belief in ESP and his or her perceived self-efficacy in regard to ESP ability. The questionnaire is located in Appendix D. Questions 1-4 were for exploratory purposes to assess the change in society's attitude over time. Questions 5-12 address the subject's belief in ESP or general attitude towards ESP. Questions 13-20 are directed at the subject's perceived self-efficacy with regard to ESP ability and life situations.

The ESP Cards consisted of a deck of 25 cards, which contain five different symbols each represented five times. The symbols are a circle, a rectangle, a plus sign, a set

of wavy lines and a star. The cards are also known as Zener cards and they are used to test for clairvoyance.

CHAPTER 3

Results

A multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine which variable was the best predictor of the ESP test score. The three predictor variables involved in the analysis were: subject's age, belief in ESP and perceived self-efficacy. The academic class and gender of each subject was also assessed for exploratory purposes. The value keyed for the subject's belief in ESP and perceived self-efficacy was determined by the responses given on the questionnaire. Questions 5-12 produced the belief in ESP score and Questions 13-20 yielded the self-efficacy score. The ESP test score was determined by the number of responses that matched the target cards. The ESP test score was the dependent variable. The subject's age was not found to be a significant predictor, $F(2,37) = 1.714$, $p<.199$. The mean age of the subjects was 26.38. Neither the belief in ESP, $F(2,37) = 1.864$, $p<.18$) nor self-efficacy, $F(2,37) = 2.912$, $p<.096$ was found to be a significant predictor of the ESP test score. Although the belief score correlated negatively ($r = -.145$) with the ESP score and self-efficacy had a positive correlation ($r = .279$), neither was significant at the .05 level. Gender and academic class were not used in any way in the analysis because the majority of the subjects

were female and freshman. Any conclusions drawn would have been biased in that direction. In summary, the multiple regression analysis indicated that none of the simple correlations were significant and no combination of variables could predict the ESP test score.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Throughout the present study and the literature on ESP testing, it has been hypothesized that a subject's attitude towards ESP would have an effect on ESP test performance. A more indepth investigation into the subject's attitude was needed to be able to differentiate high/low scorers on the ESP test. The focus here was on self-efficacy. However, the hypothesis that subjects who reported high self-efficacy scores would produce higher ESP test scores was not supported in this study.

The findings disagree with Schmeidler's (1943) results, because the subject's attitude did not significantly affect the ESP test performance. According to Schmeidler's study, the subjects who believed in ESP (sheep) scored significantly above chance and those who did not believe (goats) scored significantly below chance. However, in the present study, no significant differences were found between the believers and nonbelievers. The subjects in this study were regrouped into sheep and goats to resemble Schmeidler's study by using the questions that were similar to hers. The questions assessed the general attitude towards ESP. Still no significant differences were seen

between the sheep and the goats. Also, neither group scored significantly above or below chance levels.

Bevan (1947) also found that the sheep scored significantly higher than the goats. However, in his study, the indecisives scored higher than both the sheep and the goats. The present findings are also inconsistent with Bevan's results. That is, no particular attitude, whether favorable, unfavorable, or indecisive, produced significant differences in relation to the ESP test. The present study is also in opposition to Casper's (1951) findings, because the goats did not score higher than the sheep or the indecisives.

Bandura (1977) attempted to show how a person's perceived self-efficacy could affect the outcome of his or her performance. According to the research, perceived self-efficacy might generalize to a variety of situations, one of which might be the ESP testing situation. The present findings did not tend to support this hypothesis. No significant relationship appeared between the self-efficacy score and the ESP test score. Some subjects held a firm belief that they had ESP power and that they could score high on the test. However, these subjects did not score any higher than the subjects who felt "sure" that they had no possibility for successful performance. It must also be remembered that the questionnaire was a

self-report inventory, which means the subjects may have interpreted the questions in different ways. It is also likely that the questionnaire was not an accurate measure of self-efficacy power.

Past researchers (Palmer, 1972; Beloff, 1974) have concluded that the relationship between attitude and ESP test performance is more complicated than originally believed. The factor under investigation here, self-efficacy, may play a part in producing high ESP scores, but a new method of determining a person's self-efficacy may be needed. Perhaps, a method that includes more precise questions and is answered using a 5-point or 7-point scale would differentiate personal self-efficacy to allow for a wider variety of responses. There may also be a number of different variables that interact to produce high ESP test scores. Concentration and attention span combined with self-efficacy may be one possibility for future research. The style of learning, whether auditory or visual, may also be worth future investigation.

Although the results of this study were not significant, the findings do add to the complexity of the questions to be answered. The results indicate that self-efficacy, as assessed in this study, alone does not provide enough information about the attitude of the subjects. One must also keep in mind that ESP is not a proven

phenomena. Perhaps, there are no psychological variables that produce high/low ESP scores. It is just as likely that the outcome of the ESP test is a matter of chance and no variable will predict it in any consistent way. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate ESP and the factors that may or may not produce high/low test scores.

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Appendix A

Instructions for Experiment

Hello, my name is Julie Flannery and I want to thank you for participating in this experiment. Today you are going to fill out a short questionnaire and then take an ESP test. You will try to guess the design on a card. The instructions will be explained fully in a minute. You will not be required to put your name on either the questionnaire or the ESP test. Before we get started, I need you to sign this consent form. Please read it carefully and feel free to ask any questions before you sign it. Your signature is needed to show that you volunteered for the experiment, but the forms will be kept separate from the test results. I also need you to put your name and instructor's name on this attendance sheet so that you will receive the extra credit for your class. (Take up the consent forms.) Now, I want you to answer the questionnaire by checking yes or no to the questions. Don't forget to put your gender, age and academic class in the top right corner. Please answer the questions honestly and remember your name will not be on the form. (Take up the questionnaire.)

Now, please look at the symbols shown on this screen. These are the only five symbols which appear on these cards. When we start, I will remove one card from the deck and you will write down which symbol you think is on the card. Look at the record sheet before you. (I will hold up a record sheet.) You will write your answer in the box under the "call" column. There are 25 cards in the deck and there are 25 boxes under the "call" column. You only write one answer in each box. When you write your answer, you will draw a star, a square, a circle, a set of wavy lines, or a plus sign just like the ones shown on this screen. At the end of the first deck, I will write down the answers and this will be done for ten runs, which is ten decks. Do you have any questions? After you write down your answer, look up at me and I will move to the next card.

(Take up the answer sheets.) Thank you again for participating. I hope you enjoyed it.

ESP STUDY
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to differentiate the high/low scorers on an ESP test. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigators have access to your responses. The questionnaire responses and the ESP test scores will be used only for purposes of analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without any penalty.

The scope of the project will be explained fully upon your completion of the testing session.

Thank you for your cooperation.

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, either orally or in writing or both, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries I have regarding the procedures. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

_____
Name (Please Print)

_____
Signature

_____
Date

STANDARD ESP RECORD SHEET

No. ________

Subject ________________________ Experiment ____________

Observer ________________________ Date ____________

Type of Test ________________________ Time ____________

General conditions ____________________________________

Use other side for remarks Total score ________ Avge. score ________

With ESP cards use ☆ for star, o for circle, □ for square, + for cross, = for waves

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10	
Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card	Call	Card

Subject No._____
Gender_____
Class_____

Flannery's Test for Perceived ESP Ability

please answer Yes or No to the following questions.

1. Have you ever known anyone who appeared to have any kind of psychic powers? Yes_____ No_____

2. Have you ever been in a situation where you "knew" what was gong to happen? Yes_____ No_____

3. Would you like to be able to read someone else's mind? Yes_____ No_____

4. Do you feel you can do anything when you put your mind to it? Yes_____ No_____

5. Do you believe in the possibility that some people have psychic powers? Yes_____ No_____

6. Do you think mind-reading is simply guessing correctly? Yes_____ No_____

7. Is the thought of psychic powers interesting to you? Yes_____ No_____

8. Do you think psychic powers should be studied and researched the same as any other subject? Yes_____ No_____

9. Do you feel that people who claim to have psychic powers are just quacks? Yes_____ No_____

10. Do you believe that all "unusual circumstances", such as mind-reading or psychic findings, have a logical explanation? Yes_____ No_____

11. Is the thought of psychic powers or a 6th sense too far away from reality for you to accept? Yes_____ No_____

12. Do you think anyone who guesses 10 ESP cards right, out of 25 tries, is just lucky? Yes_____ No_____

13. Do you think you have any kind of psychic powers? Yes_____ No_____

14. Do you think your mind has the power to stop yourself from doing something, even if your body has the ability to do it? Yes_____ No_____

15. Is your attitude or frame of mind as important as your ability when pursuing a task? Yes_____ No_____

16. Can a negative attitude harm your performance? Yes_____ No_____

17. Do you generally expect to be successful when pursuing a task because you believe in your own abilities? Yes_____ No_____

18. Do you have a strong belief in you own ESP ability? Yes_____ No_____

19. Do you think your belief in your own abilities affects the outcome of your performance in daily activities? Yes_____ No_____

20. Do you think your belief in your own ESP ability will affect your score on this ESP test? Yes_____ No_____