

Study suggests precognition may be possible

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A Cornell University scientist has demonstrated that psi anomalies, more commonly known as precognition, premonitions or extra-sensory perception (ESP), really do exist at a statistically significant level. Psi anomalies are defined as "anomalous processes of information or energy transfer that are currently unexplained in terms of known physical or biological mechanisms."

In a paper soon to appear in the leading (peer-reviewed) social psychology publication, [The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#), psychologist Daryl Bem described nine experiments, in most of which he reversed the order of well-known psychological experiments such as recall and affective priming, so that what was usually seen as the cause became the effect. The experiments were carried out over a period of eight years and were well-designed and controlled and rigorous enough to be replicated in the future by other researchers.

In one experiment subjects, all of whom were students, were briefly shown a word list and then asked to recall as many as they could. Later, they were asked to copy a list of words randomly selected from the same list by a computer. The surprising result of this experiment was that in the recall section of the experiment the subjects recalled at a significantly higher rate words they were later asked to type, even though they had no way of knowing which words would be on the list.

In another experiment subjects were shown images of two curtains alongside each other on a computer screen and told one was concealing a picture (sometimes of an erotic nature), while the other concealed a blank screen. They were then asked to click on the one they "felt" was hiding the picture. When the curtain was selected it was opened to reveal what was behind it. This was repeated 36 times for each subject, and the picture positions were computer-selected and random.

In the 100 sessions subjects consistently selected the correct curtain 53.1 percent of the time for the erotic pictures, significantly over the 50 percent expected by pure chance. For the non-erotic pictures, the success rate was only 49.8 percent.

In a third experiment Bem reversed a common test in which subjects are shown one of the words "Ugly" or "Beautiful," and then shown a picture of something unpleasant (such as a snake), or pleasant (such as a puppy or kitten), and the subject is asked to quickly decide if the picture is pleasant or unpleasant. In Bem's reversal experiment the subject was shown the picture first and was required to respond as fast as possible and was then shown the word, which was randomly selected by the computer.

Bem carried out his experiments with a total of 1,000 subjects in all, and all experiments revealed small but statistically significant psi anomalies. Data collection was automated to minimize contact between the subject and researcher.

Head of the journal's editorial board that reviewed the paper, Charles Judd, from the University of Colorado at Boulder, said the paper was reviewed by "some of our most trusted reviewers," and has held up to all scrutiny. The journal intends to publish a skeptical editorial alongside the paper in the hope other researchers will replicate the experiments. Bem said he has already had requests from dozens of researchers wanting more details.

More information: Bem, D. J. (in press) Feeling the Future: Experimental evidence for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. PDF: www.dbem.ws/FeelingFuture.pdf

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