Who is Gertrude Schmeidler?


Past President of the Parapsychological Association (1959, 1971)
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I'm an experimental psychologist, and my research was primarily in perception and memory - until a seminar changed my life. In 1942 I began a part-time job at Harvard (seven years after my doctorate there), saw a seminar on psychical research was offered, and listened in to find what could be said for this bizarre topic. Gardner Murphy's lectures, and his suggested readings, left me half-fascinated, half-incredulous. Murphy then offered me a stipend from Harvard's Richard Hodgson Fund to experiment on ESP. I accepted, hoping an experiment would tell me what to think about the topic.

The data convinced me. Repeatedly, average ESP scores of subjects who rejected any possibility of ESP success (whom I called goats) were lower than average ESP scores of all other subjects (whom I called sheep). This was inexplicable by the physical laws we knew: it implied unexplored processes in the universe, an exciting new field for research. From then on, naturally, my primary research interest was parapsychology.

In 1947 I became an instructor at City College, and in due course a professor, teaching only standard psychology. After many years, to my surprise, I was asked to give a parapsychology course for doctoral students, then a similar course for M.A. students, then for undergraduates. But from the first, many of the M. A. theses that I mentored were in parapsychology, and so were, later, five of the doctoral dissertations I chaired.

With student volunteers as subjects I did many small-budget ESP experiments; once even a PK experiment with Ingo Swann, financed by a grant from Carlson, inventor of Xerox. (Good PK apparatus is expensive.) The Parapsychology Foundation helped some projects with its grants. Very great help always came from the wisdom and resources of Gardner Murphy, and from cooperative and brilliant students who joined the research.

My experiments tried to address the criticism that ESP is a fact without a theory; four outcomes seem to rebut it. (1) Personality variables have similar effects on scores in ESP and in other tasks. Psychological theory makes effective predictions about ESP; thus it is a part of ESP’s theory too. (2) Telepathy not only can transmit information, it can also activate a general readiness to use or to inhibit ESP (1961). This aligns ESP processes with theories of social and cultural influences, which also activate or inhibit the use of particular abilities. (3) Precognition can be effective for information never known by any person (targets are randomized and scored by machine but never printed). This extends psychological and social theory; it shows we have access to a wide, unexplored range of stimuli. (4) PK effects in one area are balanced by compensating physical changes elsewhere (1973). ESP seems to show direct access to distant events; PK a direct influence on them.
This research explored how PK operates, implying that our influence shifts the balance of physical processes. (I must add that items 2 and 4 above have not been replicated by others; they thus are weaker than 1 and 3.)

To my regret, I could never think of a method that was both rigorous and practical for research on the most exciting possibilities suggested by ESP and PK: problems of the basic characteristics of consciousness or of the self. They await the research of others.

I also held various offices, including the presidency, in the Parapsychological Association and (while it still did research) in the American Society for Psychical Research.

Throughout I depended on my husband’s cheerful tolerance of my professional activity. We have four children and seven grandchildren.

**Selected Publications:**

Predicting good and bad scores in a clairvoyance experiment: A final report. Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 1943, 37, 210-221.


Separating the sheep from the goats. Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 1945, 39, 46-49.


Comparisons of ESP scores with Rorschachs scored by different workers. Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 1949, 43, 94-98.

Some relations between Picture-Frustration ratings and ESP scores. Journal of Personality, 1950, 18, 331-343.


Picture-Frustration ratings and ESP scores for subjects who showed moderate annoyance at the ESP task. Journal of Parapsychology, 1954, 18, 137-152.


Note on precognition with and without knowledge of results. Psychological Reports, 1962, 11, 486.


Two horns of a dilemma in relating ESP to personality. Corrective Psychiatry and Journal of Social Therapy, 1966, 12, 98-114.


High ESP scores after a swami’s brief instruction in meditation and breathing. Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 1970, 64, 100-1-3.


Using ESP: Science fiction or applied science? Counseling and Values, 1975, 19, 135-140.


