

DOES GANZFELD STIMULATION ELICIT A SHIFT AWAY FROM NORMAL WAKING CONSCIOUSNESS, AND IS THIS ASSOCIATED WITH ESP TASK SUCCESS?

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Background: Ganzfeld stimulation has been used since the 1970s as a means to facilitate ESP under controlled experimental conditions, and remains one of the most successful paradigms in parapsychology. The belief that this was because it encouraged participants to enter a hypnopompic state has been challenged by EEG studies designed to test this. However, such experiments have in turn been criticized for lacking ecological validity. The present experiments were intended to address this by monitoring EEG during a more 'standard' ganzfeld protocol.

Aims: To produce evidence for ESP using the ganzfeld protocol. To test whether ganzfeld stimulation is capable of inducing a state that is neuro-physiologically reflective of a hypnagogic state. To explore whether degree of state shift is correlated with ESP task performance.

Methods: Two ganzfeld clairvoyance experiments ($N = 20$) were conducted with unselected participants. EEG data were collected using a SmartBCI wireless 24-channel system. Participants also completed an abbreviated Phenomenology of Consciousness Index. A target clip was randomly selected as the session began and was played in a separate locked and empty room. Participants reported on their imagery and this was subsequently used to rate its similarity to the target and 3 decoys (presented in random order). Once data were recorded the target was revealed for feedback.

Results: Across the two experiments, participants achieved 13 hits (32.5%) where 25% is expected by chance (Binomial $p = 0.05$ 1-tailed). PCI dimensions of Altered self-awareness and Volitional control predicted ESP score when experiments 1 and 2 were combined. Participants who scored direct hits showed a smaller shift in vigilance from baseline, contrary to expectation.

Conclusions: Ganzfeld stimulation continues to provide a state that is conducive to ESP performance. Subjective estimates of phenomenology suggest some important parameters but these effects are unreliable. A clear relationship between brain state on ESP remains to be established.

Keywords: Ganzfeld stimulation, Phenomenology of consciousness, EEG

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