

Etzel Cardeña

Etzel Cardeña is a leading psychologist, preeminent in the study of consciousness, dissociation, trauma sequelae, and altered states of consciousness such as hypnosis and meditation. He has been Thorsen Professor of Psychology at the University of Lund Department of Psychology since 2005. Cardeña is also active in the field of parapsychology, with research interests in shamanism, spirit possession, the influence of altered states on psi performance, and other topics. He has also served the field as an organizational leader, editor and advocate.

Background and Education

Etzel Cardeña was born on 9 November 1957 in Mexico City. His interest in parapsychology was nurtured by both parents, who followed the work of [JB Rhine](#) and other researchers of the era. His father was a psychoanalyst, setting the scene for Etzel's mainstream interests; he also conducted and wrote about his own informal psi research, which Etzel witnessed.¹ Cardeña said in an interview that he was particularly impressed by 'a friend of the family who had an uncanny ability to diagnose precisely someone whose name had just been given to her'.²

In 1981, Cardeña was granted his license in clinical psychology with highest honours from the prestigious Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. In 1982–83, he interned at Wellesley Hospital in Toronto.

In 1983, he earned one MA in clinical psychology at York University in Toronto, then a second MA and his PhD in personality psychology (supervised by [Charles Tart](#)) at the University of California, Davis (in 1985 and 1988 respectively).³

While working on his dissertation, he was encouraged by Tart to take an intense summer learning program at the [Rhine Research Center](#) (at that time named the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man). Here, he solidified his knowledge of past and ongoing parapsychological research. He also participated in experiments in which he showed some indication of ability in [psychokinesis](#) and as a receiver in [ganzfeld](#) experiments.⁴

He spent the summer of 1990 at Ohio State University as a faculty fellow in psychophysiology, and 1988–91 as a postdoctoral fellow and visiting scholar at Stanford.

In 2019, he took a course from Copenhagen University in the emerging technique of [non-invasive transcranial brain stimulation](#).⁵ However, his plans to use this in psychokinesis experiments are on hold due to Covid-19.

Career

Cardeña has held the endowed position Thorsen Professor of Psychology at the University of Lund Department of Psychology since 2005. The duties of the post include research on parapsychology and hypnosis.⁶

He also heads the Center for Research on Consciousness and Anomalous Psychology (CERCAP), a group of researchers focusing on anomalous experiences, the neurophenomenology of hypnotic phenomena, high hypnotizability and dissociation, the relation between hypnotizability and performance in psi tasks, and dissociative reactions to trauma.⁷

He has served as a professor, associate professor, visiting professor or adjunct at the National Center for Disaster Psychiatry, Uppsala University Hospital (Sweden); Catholic University of Valencia (Spain); Department of Psychology and Anthropology (of which he was Department Chair) and Department of Drama (of which he was Artist-in-Residence), University of Texas-Pan American; Trinity College; Pacific Graduate School of Psychology; Universidad Complutense de Madrid; Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia; University of California, Davis; and several other institutions. He worked at Mexico's Centros de Integración Juvenil as a clinical psychologist from September 1978 to March 1980.

Cardena has presented at innumerable conferences, served as a peer reviewer for many publications, written reviews of innumerable books and some films, translated abstracts, and supervised many students through their masters and doctorates in psychology. A recipient of several [BIAL Foundation](#) grants, he also consults with the Foundation on future meetings and research grants.

He has served as a consultant on updates to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), the authoritative guide to mental illness diagnosis in much of the world.

Cardena has served as editor, guest editor, associate editor and member of editorial boards for many publications, mostly psychological. Most notably in the parapsychology field, he was editor of the [Journal of Parapsychology](#) from 2017 to 2020, and preceding that, founding editor of [Mindfield: The Bulletin of the Parapsychological Association](#) from 2009 to 2017. During the same period, he served as associate editor for the [Journal for Scientific Exploration](#). He recently launched the open-access, university-based [Journal of Anomalous Experience and Cognition](#).

Cardena's research has been covered in various mainstream media including the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *New Yorker* magazine, the BBC, The Learning Channel, *The Guardian*, and *Science News*.⁸

Theatre

Cardena has a strong side interest in theatre, having worked professionally as an actor, director, and playwright from his time in Mexico to the present. He has been the Artistic Director for the International Theatre of Malmö and many of his radio play adaptations are archived in México National University's *Descarga Cultura*.

Parapsychological Research

Cardena considers parapsychology to be a natural part of psychology, as anomalous experiences and [altered states of consciousness](#) are by definition aspects of consciousness. The importance of parapsychology, he argues, is in questioning the

limitations of consciousness that are assumed in materialistic-reductionist models; in agreeing with 'a model of a unified continuous aspect of reality' suggested by some interpretations of quantum mechanics; and finally, in exploring what light the link between ASCs and psi sheds on the nature of consciousness.[9](#)

Cardeña's major area of interest in parapsychology is factors that can affect performance in psi tasks, particularly hypnotizability, dissociation and ASCs, using the ganzfeld protocol.

Ganzfeld Telepathy

In 2011, Cardeña co-published with his graduate student David Marcusson-Clavertz a paper[10](#) hypothesizing that ganzfeld scores would be positively affected by three factors – belief that one will succeed, reported past psi experiences, and high hypnotizability – and also that dissociation would moderate the effect of hypnotizability, and alterations in consciousness would be significantly related both to hypnotizability and performance in the task.

Percipient expectation of individual success did moderately correlate with high scoring, as did percipient reporting of prior psi experiences; however, when other factors were controlled for, it was low hypnotizability rather than high that correlated with high psi scores. There was no effect of dissociation on hypnotizability's effect on scores.

Most notably, there was a strong correlation between experiencing an altered state during the test and high scores for high hypnotizables. The authors write: 'Generally, our results may be the clearest evidence until now of a relationship between experiencing an altered state of consciousness and psi-hitting, but only for the select group of high hypnotizables, who are the people more likely to experience such alterations'.[11](#)

A successful replication was carried out using only highly hypnotizable subjects, with a larger sample, finding a moderate correlation.[12](#)

Other Research

Cardeña has also studied various aspects of shamanism (including how its practices compare with hypnotism), spirit possession, the relationship between art and psi, the relationship between dissociation, suggestibility and anomalous experiences, meditation and anomalous experiences, the relation between body position and out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, comparing Brazilian Spiritist mediumship and dissociative identity disorder, testing a professional medium, and other anomalous phenomena.[13](#)

Research planned by Cardeña as of this writing includes using functional magnetic resonance imaging to compare brain activity of a subject performing automatic writing and high hypnotizables who can experience automatic writing, as well as subjects undergoing mystical experiences. He also plans to continue researching the ingredients of successful ganzfeld sessions by analyzing their content.[14](#)

Advocacy

Cardeña notes the negative influence of sceptic campaigns against parapsychology, decrying their ‘wrathful and prejudiced intolerance’.

The anti-parapsychology movement has been very effective so far in marginalizing the field and exerted a very high cost on those who want to work in the field, with the main exception of Great Britain. The result is that there are preciously few researchers and theoreticians working in the area.¹⁵

To counter this, Cardeña has expended much effort to try to bring parapsychology into mainstream science by placing parapsychological research papers in mainstream journals and books (see list below), by presenting overviews of the evidence for psi, and by engaging in lively debate with detractors.

Varieties of Anomalous Experience

In 2000, Cardeña collaborated with Steven Jay Lynn and [Stanley Krippner](#) on a book published by the American Psychological Association, *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence* (now available on archive.org).¹⁶ ‘Thousands of psychologists on this continent are members, receiving the APA’s journals and publication catalogs’, writes Leonard George in a review.¹⁷

The first of two sections discusses methodological concerns, notably the difficulty of trying to gather introspective data that mostly cannot be produced on demand. The second contains chapters titled ‘Hallucinatory Experiences’ (by Richard Bentall), ‘Synaesthesia’ (Lawrence E Marks), ‘[Lucid Dreaming](#)’ (Stephen LaBerge and Jayne Gackenbach), ‘[Out-of-Body Experiences](#)’ (Carlos Alvarado), ‘Psi-Related Experiences’ (Elisabeth Targ, [Marilyn Schlitz](#), and [Harvey J Irwin](#)), ‘[Alien Abduction Experiences](#)’ (Stuart Appelle, Steven Jay Lynn, and Leonard Newman), ‘[Past Life Experiences](#)’ ([Antonia Mills](#) and Steven Jay Lynn), ‘[Near-Death Experiences](#)’ ([Bruce Greyson](#)), ‘[Anomalous Healing](#)’ (Stanley Krippner) and ‘Mystical Experience’ (David M Wulff).

In 2014, Cardeña, Lynn and Krippner edited the second edition of *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*,¹⁸ a fourteen-year update to the first. It has the same structure, and many of the same authors returned with then-state-of-the-art overviews of their specialties. New authors include [Ian Stevenson’s](#) successor [Jim B Tucker](#) on past-life experiences. In addition to co-editing, Cardeña wrote or co-wrote two chapters for the first edition of *Varieties* and four for the second.

Eminent Scientists

In 2013, Cardeña published a list of deceased eminent scientists, along with seminal figures in the the arts and humanities, who engaged in or supported parapsychological research. His aim was to make ‘it easier for faculty who are given the spiel that parapsychology is pseudoscience and that no “real” scientists take it seriously’.¹⁹ The list includes Einstein, Freud, Bell, Marie and Pierre Curie, more than thirty Nobel laureates including those still living, and hundreds of other pre-eminent people.²⁰

An updated version of the article can be read in the [Psi Encyclopedia](#).

‘To give some cover to those who want to work in the field’,²¹ Cardeña co-organized a ‘call for an open, informed study of all aspects of consciousness’ which was published in a mainstream journal in 2014.²² Though he is cited as the sole author, it was also signed by one hundred additional current or past academic notables in the parapsychology field. It was reprinted in *Network Review*²³ and also translated into [German](#) and [Russian](#).

Handbook

In 2015, Cardeña, John Palmer and Marcusson-Clavertz co-edited *Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century*,²⁴ placing it with a mainstream commercial publisher. As described in a review by [Caroline Watt](#), the volume is a successor to the 1977 *Handbook of Parapsychology*,²⁵ with top specialists in many branches updating the work in their fields, to create ‘a comprehensive guide to the last few decades of endeavour in parapsychology’. Chapters and authors are summarized in Watt’s review.²⁶

American Psychologist Article

In 2018, the *American Psychologist*, the flagship publication of the APA, published a paper by Cardeña which summarized the evidence produced by experimental parapsychology.²⁷ In the abstract, he restates the point he has made in many other works, that the evidence for psi is ‘comparable to that for established phenomena in psychology and other disciplines’,²⁸ and substantiates it through the presentation of several parapsychological meta-analyses. He also rebuts common complaints by critics with regard to replicability, small effects and purported poor methodological quality.

Works

Cardeña has written, co-written, edited and presented about four hundred books, papers and book chapters. A full list of citations can be found on Google Scholar [here](#). For new works as they are published, visit [here](#).

Parapsychological Research and Reviews in Mainstream Publications

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Select Commentaries

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Videos

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[Etzel Cardeña on “What do anomalous experiences tell us about the potentials of consciousness?”](#) (lecture at the International Workshop on East West Approaches to the Nature of Mind, Consciousness and Self, 2014).

[Etzel Cardeña: From Monkey-mind to Embodied Performance Presence](#) (Keynote lecture at the 5th Colloquium on Artistic Research in Performing Arts, 2017).

[Varieties of Anomalous Experience](#) (Parapsychology Foundation, 2016.)

Interviews with [Jeffrey Mishlove](#) on *New Thinking Allowed*:

- [Experimental Evidence for Parapsychological Phenomena with Etzel Cardeña](#) (2019).
- [Psi and the Visual Arts with Etzel Cardeña](#) (2021)

Parapsychological Awards and Honours

Cardeña began winning awards, scholarships and other honours as a student and continues to collect them in all his areas of interest. In parapsychology, he has earned the following:

- [Eileen Garrett Scholarship](#), to study spirit possession in Haiti, [Parapsychology Foundation](#) (1985)
- Hilgard Award, for best theoretical paper on hypnosis published in 1996, for '[Just floating on the sky: A comparison of shamanic and hypnotic phenomenology](#)'. Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (1997)
- Best Theoretical Paper, for 'The ways to study anomalous experience', Division 30 (Psychological Hypnosis) of the American Psychological Association (1999)
- President, [Parapsychological Association](#) (2008–2009)
- [Charles Honorton Integrative Contributions Award](#), Parapsychological Association (2013)
- [Parapsychological Association Book Award](#) for *Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century* (2015)
- [Parapsychological Association Book Award](#), for the second edition of *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (2016)
- [Outstanding Career Award](#), Parapsychological Association

KM Wehrstein

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Cardeña, personal communication, 25 May 2021.
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