

# David Luke

David Luke is a senior lecturer for psychology at the University of Greenwich, researching transpersonal experiences, anomalous phenomena and altered states of consciousness, particularly with regard to psychoactive substances.

## Career

David Luke obtained a first in psychology at the University of Westminster followed by a PhD from Northampton University that included parapsychological research. In 2008, he joined the department of psychology, social work and counselling at the University of Greenwich, where he is course coordinator for psychology of exceptional human experience and for the undergraduate programme.

Luke is the director of Breaking Convention, an annual conference of leading academics in psychedelic research. He edits high profile anthologies of works related to psychedelics and exceptional human experiences.<sup>1</sup>

He is the author of [Otherworlds: Psychedelics and Exceptional Human Experience](#) (2017) and co-editor of [DMT Dialogues: Encounters with the Spirit Molecule](#) (2018).

## Psychology of Psychedelics

Luke's current focus is on understanding the psychological foundations of the psychedelic experience. In one study, the effects of microdosing (ingesting tiny non-psychoactive amounts to try to improve mood and cognitive function) LSD was tested in a double-blinded placebo controlled protocol.<sup>2</sup> The results indicated no effect on subjective measures (perception, concentration, mentation) but did increase time dilation (the perception of time stretching out) compared to placebos.

A review of studies investigating drug use and synaesthesia (the phenomenon of blending the senses, such as to 'hear' colours and 'smell' sounds) found a strong correlation with chemicals that excited the serotonin system such as LSD, psilocybin and 2C-B.<sup>3</sup> Methodological weaknesses discouraged strong conclusions, however.

## Northampton Research

For his PhD thesis Luke studied the judging of dream ESP transcripts, finding that groups more often correctly identified targets than individuals judging alone, although not to a statistically significant level.<sup>4</sup>

Luke also investigated the relationship between belief in luck and psi scoring, finding clear correlations with belief in luck and also other psychological measures such as perceived personal luckiness, belief in psi, belief in the paranormal and erotic sensitivity (the targets were of an erotic nature).<sup>5</sup>

In other research, a questionnaire was circulated among regular drug users who reported mystical and unusual experiences arising from particular substances: for example, ketamine with out of body experiences, marijuana with telepathy and DMT with 'entity encounters'. No relationship was found between psi experiences (telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition) and drug type, possibly because this was obscured by high level drug use among the subjects.[6](#)

## **Greenwich Research**

### **Circadian Rhythms**

An early initiative at the University of Greenwich was to investigate circadian rhythms on ESP performance, in particular the possible role of melatonin, which is known to fluctuate throughout the day. The study tested for precognition among ten participants across ten nights at 3am (when melatonin levels are highest) and 8am (when melatonin levels are lowest). Dream precognition performance was significantly better at 3am than 8am when melatonin levels were highest ( $p = 0.031$ ). Personality measures were taken but none correlated with precognition performance.[7](#)

### **Geomagnetic Activity and Meditation**

A four-year study investigated the possible influence of local geomagnetic field fluctuations and meditation experience on psi performance among 26 experienced meditators at the Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Scotland. Overall performance for males' psi scores were significantly negative ( $p = .02$ ); females scored at chance. No relationship was found with meditation experience. The participants with the highest temporal lobe activity (as estimated by a questionnaire) showed the strongest geomagnetic/psi relationship ( $p = .06$ ). The disappointing results were thought to relate to untypically low solar and geomagnetic activity during the study period, the lowest in a century. [8](#)

### **Covert Needs-based Precognition**

Luke and associates carried out a series of successful experiments exploring Stanford's psi-mediated instrumental response (PMIR) model, which proposes that psi is an evolutionarily adaptive function serving the needs of the organism at an unconscious level. They gave subjects an automated precognition task, some being asked afterwards to carry out either a further, unpleasant or pleasant, task. The findings tended to support the PMIR model. Overall precognition scoring across these experiments was highly significant ( $p = 0.001$ ). Additionally, there was a strong overall correlation between psi scoring and sheep-goat effect ( $p = 0.0013$ ).[9](#)

### **Surveillance Detection**

Luke with PhD student Ross Friday ran three studies<sup>10</sup> investigating [the sense of being stared at](#) – a line of research introduced by [Rupert Sheldrake](#).

In the first study, 112 participants underwent four conditions: being watched remotely through a one-way mirror; being listened to remotely through a

microphone; being watched and listened to remotely; or not being remotely monitored. Participants' ability to detect being watched and/or listened to was measured using three approaches: self-reporting, fluctuations in skin conductance levels and behavioural measures. Results indicated that skin conductance fluctuations and self-reports were not sensitive measures of remote attention. However, the behavioural measure (a [Stroop task](#)) produced four significant results (two of them at the  $p = 0.001$  level) from six condition comparisons – an extremely significant overall result.

The second study was mostly a replication of the first. Participant self-reports were significantly influenced in the remote watching and listening condition ( $p = 0.05$ ). Electrodermal activity, unlike the first study, produced four significant results from six condition comparisons. This improvement in psi-scoring could have been the result of a modification in which participants underwent a Stroop task during their electrodermal measurements, which possibly cultivated a sense of caring agency over their psi performance. The behavioural condition (again, a Stroop test) produced disappointing results – unlike the first study – with only one condition giving a significant outcome ( $p = 0.038$ ). Although the second study produced a range of significant effects, there was little replication of the results of the first study.

The third study employed an [ecologically valid](#) design in which 100 students were either remotely watched and listened to, or not observed – the choice being determined randomly – whilst they walked along a path in the university grounds. The path went through an area designated as 'safe' and an area designated as 'dangerous'. At the end of the path, walkers were asked if they thought they were being observed or not. There was no indication of remote observation detection in safe areas but a significant effect ( $p = 0.048$ ) in dangerous areas, giving support to evolutionary models of psi detection.

## **Psychodelomancy**

Luke has coined the term 'psychadelomancy', meaning to use psychedelics to improve psi ability. In a broad series of investigations a number of different psychedelics have been examined.[11](#)

### **Ayahuasca**

Testing indigenous tribes in Ecuador for precognition, Luke found the Ayuhuasca, which contains the active ingredient DMT (dimethyltryptamine), was ineffective at increasing scores above the pre-dosage baseline. He speculates this might be because the artificial nature of the experiment (for example, the use of a laptop to generate targets) caused anxiety among the tribesmen.

### **San Pedro Cactus**

Luke repeated the experiment using San Pedro Cactus, but found difficulty recruiting twenty volunteers, so acted as the sole subject, recording his mentation before a target was randomly selected and presented together with three decoys.

After 20 trials the overall scoring was significant ( $p = 0.032$ ) including some striking hits.

## LSD

In an LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) study involving academics, Luke obtained precognition scoring significantly below chance. He speculated that sceptical attitudes prevalent in that group might have caused them to miss more targets than chance would predict.

## DMT

Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is a plant-based psychedelic known to produce hallucinogenic experiences of other worlds. These are often intensely visual and fractal in nature and seemingly inhabited by entities including so-called 'machine elves' and insectoid creatures. Mainstream neuroscience regards these experiences as purely biological in nature. However, an open-minded investigation of the ontological nature of the DMT experience is an area of [active academic interest](#) for a few neuroscientists. Meetings instigated by Luke led to the publication in 2018 of *DMT Dialogues: Encounters with the Spirit Molecule* with contributions from experts in neuroscience, anthropology, psychology and religious studies.

Encouraged by the DMT convening, Luke, with PhD student [Pascal Immanuel Michael](#) ran a field study involving experienced DMT users undergoing semi-structured interviews immediately after a smoking DMT in their homes. The results of these psychological investigations were published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2021 and 2023.

Luke also ran parapsychological experiments by testing for precognition in two conditions: under the influence of DMT and no DMT, as a control. Tests with twenty volunteers in each condition showed that DMT gave significantly higher psi scoring than an ordinary state of consciousness ( $p = 0.048$ ).<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Luke is continuing his explorations of the veracity of the DMT state by exploring shared experiences.

## Twin Telepathy

A report published in 2022<sup>[13](#)</sup> (originally presented in 2016)<sup>[14](#)</sup> with Annekatrin Puhle, and [Goran Brusewitz](#), describes a high-quality investigation into [twin telepathy](#). In the experimental setup, one twin (the 'receiver'), was connected to equipment for measuring electrodermal activity (EDA); the other twin (the 'transmitter'), was placed in a distant room to avoid any possibility of ordinary contact. The transmitter twin was then exposed to a surprise stimulus – such as having a hand thrust in a bucket of ice-water or being exposed to a loud bang – on five occasions (trials), each chosen randomly at moments within a thirty-second window period. A hit was achieved if the EDA equipment detected when the distant twin was subjected to a surprise, and was taken to be support for telepathy. Eighteen hits were achieved in 91 trials where mean chance expectancy was 11.4 ( $p = 0.043$ ), which is statistically significant. Questionnaire data indicated that degree

of attachment between twins was not significantly related to psi-hitting, although this negative finding was most likely driven by high levels of attachment throughout the entire group of twins.

Michael Duggan

## Literature

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) Luke (2017).
- [2.](#) Luke (2018).
- [3.](#) Luke & Terhune (2013).
- [4.](#) Luke (2002).
- [5.](#) Luke (2008).
- [6.](#) Luke (2012).
- [7.](#) Luke & Zychowicz (2014).
- [8.](#) Roney-Dougal et al. (2014).
- [9.](#) Luke & Zychowicz (2014); Luke & Morin (2014).
- [10.](#) Friday (2019).
- [11.](#) Luke (2017).
- [12.](#) Personal communication, 24 February 2020.
- [13.](#) Brusewitz et al. (2022).

- [14.](#) Brusewitz et al. (2016).

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