

Controversial study promoting psychic ability debunked

March 14 2012

In response to a 2011 study suggesting the existence of precognition, or the ability to predict future events using psychic powers, a new group of researchers report that attempts to replicate the previous results were unsuccessful. These results therefore do not support the previous claims for the existence of psychic ability. The full [report](#) is published Mar. 14 in the open access journal [PLoS ONE](#).

Research failing to find evidence for the existence of psychic ability has been published, following a year of industry debate.

The report is a response by a group of independent researchers to the 2011 study from social psychologist Daryl Bem, purporting the existence of precognition - an ability to perceive future events.

Professor Chris French (Goldsmiths, University of London), Stuart Ritchie (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Richard Wiseman (University of Hertfordshire) collaborated to accurately replicate Bem's final experiment, and found no evidence for precognition. Their negative results have now been published by open access journal PLoS ONE.

Their report was rejected by the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP), which originally published Bem's findings along with his appeal to independent researchers to attempt replications.

"Our submission was rejected without being sent for peer review on the basis that the journal has a policy of not publishing replications," said

Professor Chris French. "Our paper has opened up the debate on the proper place of replication in the scientific literature."

In Bem's experiment, after completing a memory test on a list of words, participants were then shown a random selection of half the words from the original list. Results showed that participants were better at remembering the words they were about to be shown, indicating they had reached forward in time to 'practice' those words in the future.

Within parapsychology, there is a tendency to accept any positive replications but to dismiss failures to replicate if the procedures followed have not been exactly duplicated.

"We went to great pains to ensure we followed the same procedures as Bem," said Stuart Ritchie. "Using Bem's own computer programme and stats methods, we replicated his experiment three times, at each of our respective campuses, with the same number of participants as the original study."

"By having our paper published, we hope academic journals and popular media alike will offer the same weight to negative results as given to eye-catching positive results," said Professor Richard Wiseman.

More information: Ritchie SJ, Wiseman R, French CC (2012) Failing the Future: Three Unsuccessful Attempts to Replicate Bem's 'Retroactive Facilitation of Recall' Effect. PLoS ONE 7(3): e33423. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0033423](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0033423)

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May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-controversial-psychic-ability-debunked.html>

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