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The A.I.P.R. News

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AIPR and the Mass Media *by Robb Tilley*

IN MY ROLE as AIPR Public Officer since 1999, I've received numerous requests from mass media to appear on their television or radio programs, or feature in a newspaper or magazine article. Very few AIPR members want to do this; our new president, Dr. Tony Jinks, handles live media well, but just like the rest of us, he is very wary.

I too am very wary of the media; I've had enough bad experiences with them. Typically it is an email, or a phone call, or both, from some network who want me, or someone else from AIPR, to be on air, *now*, *right now*, or in a few hour's time. The urgency is caused by a gap in time on that network that day and they need to fill a few minutes of air time with something or someone.

AIPR members are expected to drop everything immediately to be interviewed by someone who usually doesn't know what the questions are, let alone the answers. Here are some examples:

In 2005, ABC Radio National invited me to be on air in what seemed to be a sensible program about parapsychology. I spent a lot of time preparing for that, and was looking forward to it. On the day, I got a phone call from them before 8am saying the London underground bombings had taken precedent and that they would get back to me. They never ever did.

More recently I agreed to be on a 2JJJ radio show, *Sunday Night Safran*, hosted by John Safran and Father Bob Maguire. They were in the ABC Melbourne studio; I was here in Sydney at the Ultimo ABC Centre.

After a wild goose chase, I finally found the right building, the right floor, and the right studio, and I was left all to myself for a long time with earphones on, in front of a microphone.

Without warning, I'm 'on-air' talking to them; I couldn't see them; they asked some questions; I responded.

Maguire was shocked at what I said, but we never got to engage in any worthwhile conversation about anything before the line went dead, mid-sentence, and the editor's voice told me "That's all. You can go now"!

I felt like I had been used; it was entertainment. That's all. Nothing worthwhile. I won't be doing that ever again. I was just filling in air time, and they really were not interested in what I had to say. I've never heard from them since.

Anyone in this country who watches the ABC TV show *Media Watch* on a Monday night knows that the 6.30pm time-slot on commercial channels is 'tabloid TV', which usually incorporates "flashy graphics and sensationalized stories", as Wikipedia describe it.[1] TV stations Channel Seven, Channel Nine, and Channel Ten, all 'star' every week with their appalling behaviour.

Channel Seven invited me to see some security camera evidence of a ghostly being coming up the stairwell in an old building in Martin Place, Sydney.

I agreed to see it.

". . . Channel Seven invited me to see some security camera evidence of a ghostly being . . ."

"Yes," I said, "It's definitely a spook".

Someone from *Australian Skeptics* had viewed the recording ahead of me, and a Channel Seven spokesperson said *Skeptics* didn't know what it was.

The recording was displayed on the Channel Seven website for all the world to see. I asked if I could see the *Skeptics*' pre-recorded response for the 6.30pm show. They wouldn't let me hear the audio; but I could see it. I sensed I was being set-up.

"You are going to be on National TV in 12 minutes time", they said.

I replied that I only agreed to see the recording not to be on live TV. But they weren't going to let me go. Channel Seven men were actually blocking the doorway pressuring me to submit!

At My Desk

In this issue, AIPR Public Officer, Mr. Robb Tilley, describes his experiences with the mass media. In that context, I referred to "the good, the bad, and the ugly" (p. 1) — a term borrowed from Dr. Adrian Parker's 2001 article, "Parapsychology: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (*Paranormal Review*). Parker borrowed from Ed May, who borrowed from a 1966 Clint Eastwood western. This editor wonders if their reference to 'cowboys'—good, bad, and ugly—was intentional. Note that in the English-speaking world, 'cowboys' are people who do questionable (read 'bad') work, and most of Parker's article is spent disparaging the anti-psi brigade, and denigrating the cowboys who seek "funding, fame and fortune" ("vulgar aspects of academic life") from sources such as the Perrott-Warrick Fund. In fairness to Parker, he is praise-worthy of people and institutions where praise is due (the 'good'), and he does mention the growth in psi research. What's changed in 15 years? While it could be argued that P-W funded some, er, cowboys in the past, later recipients, like Rupert Sheldrake and Caroline Watt, are exemplary researchers. And there's more psi research than ever, and more universities hosting it. Funding opportunities, however, are still rare—the only new funding body that I can think of is Australia's own Cardigan Fund managed by the AIPR. The first two recipients outside AIPR's own research team are Dr. Hannah Jenkins and Dr. Alex De Foe. And there's more—AIPR and SPR have both launched new websites. These sites not only have a new look, but they function on hand-held electronic devices, making parapsychology accessible to on-the-go kids who can't put their devices down for a second. But the greatest good that hasn't changed since 2001 is that optimism still burns bright. The world may change, but parapsychology is keeping up.

* * *

Got something to say about the paranormal? Submit to:

Dr. Lance Storm,
School of Psychology,
University of Adelaide,
SA 5005

or e-mail me at:

aiprinc@yahoo.com

Enjoy this edition of ***The A.I.P.R. News***!

—Lance Storm

AIPR and the Mass Media *by Robb Tilley*

I swore at them, and they very reluctantly escorted me to the front door.

They were so frustrated by my actions, it made me feel good; I felt really great about it. I had taken revenge for their treatment of the "Humpty Doo" case. As an aside, in the book *Australian Poltergeist*,[2] by Tony Healy and Paul Cropper, Chapter One deals with the "Humpty Doo" case, and Channel Seven's appalling and deliberate misrepresentation of that case by Chief Editor Jimmy Hamilton. He said the show "rated its arse off" and TV management doesn't believe in ghosts—"The story's a turd and you can't polish a turd".

Channel Seven is an appalling media group; almost as bad as another network I like to call "Poxtel" (pun intended).

I have referred some media 'reps' onto AIPR member Tony Healy. Tony told me that some of those guys are 'media tarts', but he admitted they help sell copies of his book. (Good Luck Tony).

The other category of requests comes from independent film producers in the entertainment business; Once I was asked if "AIPR would grant their imprimatur to their film *based on a true shock-horror story*".

My reply was, and always is: "I doubt anyone in AIPR would want to involve themselves in such a venture." Besides, it's AIPR policy never to endorse that kind of production.

I've received contact from people in London who've advised me they will be "in Sydney for a few days next week"; they're "making a documentary", and could AIPR arrange the clearing of a haunted house to be filmed, or some Aboriginal "psychic things". All done for free of course; they control the editing and the content; AIPR has no say.

I reply, "You are in the entertainment business and you wouldn't let the facts, or the truth get in the way of a good story, would you?"

"We are working on an extraordinary reincarnation case in Southern Queensland . . ."

Some of them are offended by my reply.

In contrast, I did a magazine interview in 2007 with a young researcher, Will Storr (an award winning British journalist) because I had read his book *Will Storr vs. the Supernatural: One Man's Search for the Truth about Ghosts*.[3] It's a great read.

Will now lives in Sydney; he understands and respects the 'paranormal'; I trust him. If anything worthwhile came along, I would give the story to him alone as an exclusive.

Similarly I've been working with a young documentary film-maker, Sam Bright. We are working on an extraordinary reincarnation case in Southern Queensland concerning a two-and-a-half-year-old boy who speaks Uzbek; but not much English.

His mother is a school teacher and deciphered that he speaks the language of Uzbekistan, and can communicate in that language. I feel safe working with Sam and his film crew; we all trust each other.

Quite often students request an interview with me for their University courses. For example, I did a seven-minute video documentary called "Spooks", which was produced by a crew of young film and television students for their graduating piece. They did a great job; just a straight documentary of my work clearing haunted houses.

I also did a photo session for SBS TV last year, but nothing has come of it. I do hope I don't lose trust in SBS because, although I suppose I am far too wary of media in general, I haven't heard any bad reports about SBS.

My intention is to use this article you are now reading as a standard response to any future media requests made of AIPR and its members. Ψ

Notes

1. Tabloid television. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabloid_television
2. T. Healy and P. Cropper, *Australian Poltergeist* (Sydney: Strange Nation, 2014).
3. W. Storr, *Will Storr vs. The Supernatural: One Man's Search for the Truth about Ghosts* (London: Ebury Press, 2006).

A Question of Belief *by Lance Storm*

THE LITERATURE in the field of parapsychology suggests that people who believe in, and/or claim paranormal experiences, as measured on a range of paranormal belief scales, can be seen as potentially 'deficient' or 'dysfunctional'. Some examples of paranormal belief scales are Thalbourne's Australian Sheep-Goat Scale,[1] and Tobacyk's Revised Paranormal Belief Scale.[2] These scales are designed to measure beliefs and/or experiences in ESP, PK, and life after death. On the one hand, such beliefs and experiences are now being considered normal but, on the other hand, the deficits and dysfunctions can be characterised under two clinically oriented hypotheses: (a) the cognitive deficits hypothesis—believers have uncritical, naïve, or irrational thought processes based on deficits in intelligence and/or reasoning skills, and (b) the psychodynamic functions hypothesis, whereby believers are psychologically disadvantaged or maladapted.[3,4]

We would argue that the pathologization of paranormal believers, although warranted in some cases, has somehow become over-extended to *all* paranormal believers, and much of the past research in anomalistic psychology is responsible for this over-extension.

The pathologization can be conceptualized in two ways (neither of which is necessarily correct): Either a relationship

A Question of Belief (*cont'd*) *by Lance Storm*

(whether weak or strong) between paranormal belief/ experience and any given deficit or dysfunction implies the presence of the given deficit or dysfunction *in some number of paranormal believers* or *experients* (but not all), or every paranormal believer/experient has the deficit or dysfunction at least to some degree (i.e., at a clinical or sub-clinical level). The correlations themselves don't differentiate, and it is up to the inclined investigator to sort it out on a case-by-case basis.

In collaboration with my colleagues, Dr. Tony Jinks and Dr. Ken Drinkwater, a first step has been taken to address this sort of problem.[5] We argue that most participants in paranormal belief studies merely tend to accept most belief-scale items as either 'correct' or 'incorrect',[6] which means some believers *per se* might 'believe' in concepts they do not actually understand—circumstances that do not correspond to *informed beliefs*, or the type of beliefs paranormal belief researchers believe they are measuring. Rather, these believers may hold what we call *quasi-beliefs* — semi-propositional representations of the world superficially believed to be true prior to any truth evaluation.[7]

Individuals may often hold quasi-beliefs indefinitely, never migrating them to the status of an informed belief, casually expressing agreement with a given proposition in such a way that their answer is indistinguishable from another individual who is better informed.[8] We would go so far as to say that quasi-belief may, in large part, account for the kinds of relationships spoken of above.

Without a clearer understanding of the nature and diversity of paranormal belief, the proposition that paranormal belief indicates deficits and/or dysfunctions may likely be unwarranted, or at the very least, may not apply to some *subsets* of paranormal believers.

In our research, we find that there are at least two main types of paranormal believer: (i) 'informed believers' who understand the parapsychological concepts quite well, and (ii) so-called 'quasi-believers' who have a poor understanding of parapsychological concepts.[9,10]

To form these distinctions, we discovered that belief items on nine widely used paranormal belief scales (like the two mentioned above) could be divided into primary items and secondary items. Primary items replicate most of the familiar propositions found in common paranormal belief questionnaires referring to anomalous locations, occurrences, entities or personalities. Secondary items offer an alternative example of the primary item, but are reworded to exclude specific reference to any anomalous location, occurrence, entity, or associated personality.

Using statistical analysis, we chose the best items, and devised the Paranormal Belief Informedness Scale, comprised of 10 primary items and 10 secondary items, from which the two types—informed believers and quasi-believers—could be derived.

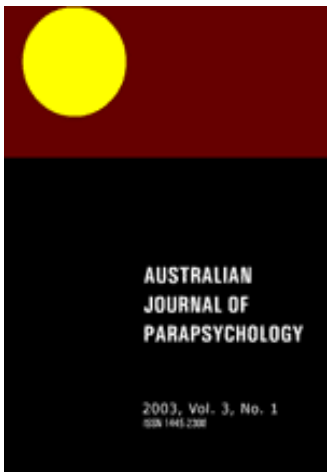
Informed believers endorsed such primary items as "*There is such a thing as extrasensory perception*", *and* the secondary item, "*Some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future*", whereas quasi-believers endorsed the primary item only. There were significant response differences between the two groups on other items. Quasi-believers appeared not to understand conceptual relationships whereby, for example, "*extrasensory perception*" includes an "*unexplained ability to predict the future*".

Importantly, we found that as paranormal belief became more and more informed, there was a rapid decline (100% to 26%) in the number of significant correlations between reality testing deficits,[11] and 19 paranormal belief scales and sub-scales.

We concluded that types such as informed paranormal believers do not have reality testing deficits. By extension (and still to be tested), informed paranormal belief may be healthy and not related to a range of pathologies or deficiencies. Ψ

Notes:

1. M. A. Thalbourne, "Further Studies of the Measurement and Correlates of Belief in the Paranormal," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 89 (1995): 234-247.
2. J. Tobacyk, "A Revised Paranormal Belief Scale," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 23 (2004): 94-98.
3. H. J. Irwin, "*The Psychology of Paranormal Belief: A Researcher's Handbook* (Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2009).
4. H. J. Irwin & C. Watt, *An Introduction to Parapsychology* (5th ed.). (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007).
5. L. Storm, K. Drinkwater, & A. L. Jinks, "A Question of Belief," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (submitted).
6. D. Walton, "A Dialogue Model of Belief," *Argument and Computation* 1 (2010): 23-46.
7. R. Recanati, "Can We Believe What We Do Not Understand?," *Mind & Language* 12 (1997): 84-100.
8. A. L. Jinks, "Paranormal and Alternative Health Beliefs as Quasibeliefs: Implications for Item Content in Paranormal Belief Questionnaires," *Australian Journal of Parapsychology* 12 (2012): 127-158.
9. Storm et al., op. cit.
10. Jinks, op. cit.
11. M. F. Lenzenweger et al., "The Inventory of Personality Organization," *Psychological Assessment* 13 (2001): 577-591.



The *Australian Journal of Parapsychology* features research articles on ESP (extra-sensory perception), PK (psychokinesis), and the afterlife.

Subscribe Now! (see page 4)

The Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research is a non-profit community association. Based in Sydney but with a world-wide membership base, it was established in 1977. The aims of the organisation are:

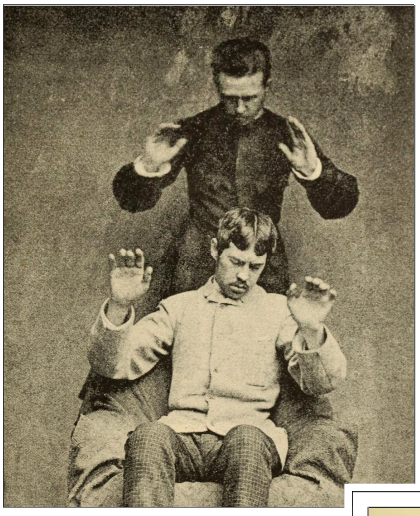
- To collect, assess and disseminate factual information about claims of psychic (paranormal) phenomena.
- To support and encourage parapsychology (the scientific study of paranormal phenomena).
- To undertake or promote activities (e.g., fundraising, social activities, etc.) in support of the above.

Looking for information on the paranormal? The AIPR has fact sheets on:

- Psychic and mystical experiences of the aborigines
- Psychic and psycho-spiritual development
- Healing
- Mystical experiences
- Apparitions, ghosts and hauntings
- Out of body experiences
- Near-death experiences

We're on the Web: www.aiprinc.org

Quid Nunc *by Hannah Jenkins*



THIS INSTALMENT OF QUID NUNC is going to bounce from pillar to post pictorially. But first of all I'd like to acknowledge and give my thanks to the sponsor of the Cardigan Fund, and the AIPR who administer the fund. QIPP (the research institute that I am getting up and running) was recently awarded a grant from the fund to undertake research into developing a more robust protocol to anticipate the outcome of a future binary event. Thanks to all who were involved in providing this much-needed support for psi researchers. It really makes a difference.

For something a little different from my usual column, here are a few pictures and links to resources that have caught my interest of late.

This first picture (upper right) comes from an article in The Public Domain Review, which is a fantastic online resource that highlights books and pictures in the public domain.

The picture depicts an early attempt at telepathy (of course we know now to rule out completely all other possible sensory cues, but I find it interesting to see the level of public interest in psi in these early days of psychical research).

The full article can be found at The Public Domain Review,[1] where you will also see an early example (pictured right) of a drawing match between two people attempting 'thought transference'.

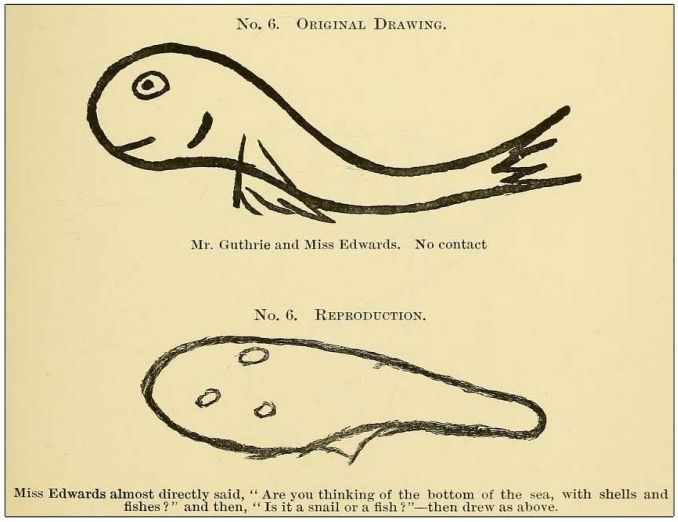
I can't help it, I am just a sucker for old-school style typography! If you are too, scroll down to the bottom of the article and you'll find links to the full text of some classic books such as William Barrett's 1911 Psychical Research (pictured bottom right).[2]

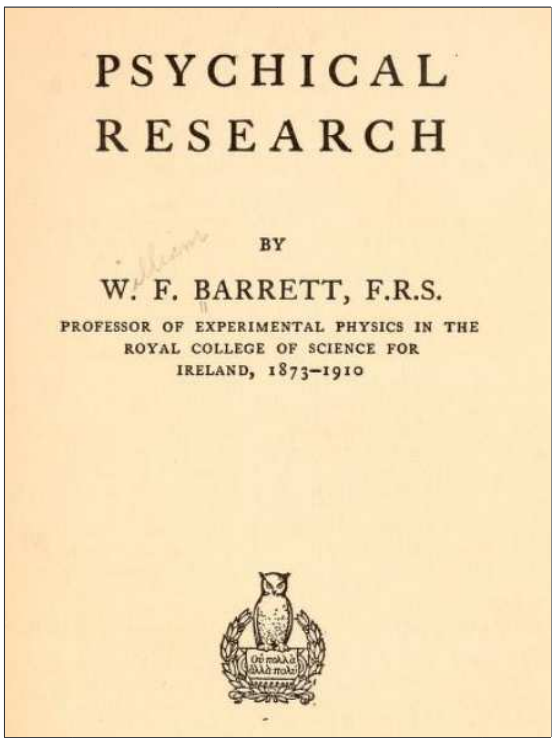
If you can't make it to the SPR library itself, these online replications of old books are a fabulous resource.

I find it interesting to look back at what was going on in these early days of psi research when it seems in those pre-TV days many more people were actively attempting to explore the possibilities of psychical research at both an amateur and professional level. Ψ

Notes

1. https://publicdomainreview.org/2015/12/09/worlds-without-end/
2. https://archive.org/details/psychicalresearc00barr





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