

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

### **The null hypothesis**

As part of an ongoing project, I recently reviewed the experimental psi studies that have been published in *JSPR* from 2012 to the present day. On many occasions the reports contained primary hypotheses that were not confirmed by the data. When discussing these null findings, the authors almost always attributed them to the non-psi-conducive nature of the experimental conditions, participants, target material, etc. They very rarely mentioned (let alone discussed) the possibility that the null results might be due to the non-existence of psi. In fact, as far as I can tell, this possibility is only briefly mentioned in one paper (Vernon, 2015, p. 76), wherein the author noted that their null results “may fit with the interpretation that such effects are merely the result of statistical and/or methodological artifacts”. The widespread nature of this omission is worrying, as I fear that it could cause people to question the scientific objectivity of those conducting parapsychological studies. To deal with the issue, could I suggest that *JSPR* encourages authors to mention (and perhaps to briefly discuss) the possibility that any null findings may reflect the non-existence of psi? Just a line or two in the discussion section would make a big difference. This approach could be instigated as a general publication policy and/or form part of the guidance issued to authors and referees. I believe that this simple and straightforward idea will help to make discussions of null results more balanced. Several other parapsychological journals suffer from the same issue, and changes in *JSPR* may encourage them to follow suit and so provide a much-needed service to the field.

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## REFERENCES

Vernon, D. J. (2015). Exploring precognition using a repetitive priming paradigm. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 79(2), 65–79.