

To the Editor:

Introducing the Psi Dynamics Research Unit

I am writing to introduce readers to a developing project within the Society for Psychical Research's Spontaneous Cases Committee (SCC): the Psi Dynamics Research Unit (PDRU). This initiative exists within the Committee's current structure and is intended to complement, rather than modify the SCC's established approach to spontaneous case work. The SCC continues to operate as it has for many years; the PDRU is a small exploratory unit focused on deepening analytical practice and preparing for more data-driven methods that may assist investigators in the future.

Our Society has a long tradition of methodological innovation. The early work of Gurney et al. (1886) in *Phantasms of the Living* demonstrated the value of systematic case cataloguing. *The Census of Hallucinations* (Sidgwick et al., 1894) illustrated the benefits of collecting large, comparable datasets. *Apparitions* (Tyrrell, 1953) highlighted the analytical importance of identifying recurring experiential motifs, while Cornell's (2002) SPIDER project represented a significant shift towards structured, instrumented field investigation. The PDRU continues this tradition by examining how contemporary digital tools might support clearer documentation, improved consistency, and richer cross-case comparison, while maintaining the Society's standards of caution and non-speculative reporting.

AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE PDRU

At its present stage, the PDRU is focused on three developmental goals.

1. Improved capture and structuring of case contacts

The SCC increasingly receives case contacts in the form of emails, message threads, multi-part narratives, and attachments. A key aim of the PDRU is to explore methods for converting these into a consistent, structured format. This includes event segmentation, identification of witnesses, and extraction of contextual notes. The purpose is not to interpret the material but to clarify it for investigators reviewing potential cases.

2. Structured analysis of investigated cases

Where investigations are undertaken, the PDRU seeks to develop tools for integrating investigator notes, interview transcripts, environmental logs,

floorplans, and follow-up communications into unified analytical outputs. This helps preserve detail, minimize fragmentation, and ensure that investigated cases retain long-term research value for the Society's archives.

3. Foundations for macro-level, cross-case analysis

Building upon the Society's early statistical and comparative efforts (e.g., Green & McCreery, 1975; Sidgwick et al., 1894), the PDRU aims to lay the groundwork for identifying recurring temporal, spatial, contextual, or phenomenological patterns across multiple spontaneous cases. These patterns, while strictly descriptive, may shape future research questions and help focus investigative resources.

These aims do not replace existing SCC practice. Instead, they explore whether new tools can assist investigators by improving clarity, consistency, and analytical depth.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPiDER-X

A significant aspect of the PDRU's exploratory work is the development of SPiDER-X (Spontaneous Phenomena Integrated Data Evaluation & Reporting), a system that applies generative AI solely to procedural tasks. SPiDER-X is intended as a digital successor to the organizational principles behind Cornell's SPIDER system—updated for the era of digital submissions, multi-document case material, and the need for consistent analytical formatting.

SPiDER-X has explicitly limited functions:

- organizing narrative material into discrete, chronologically ordered events
- producing neutral, non-interpretive descriptions
- mapping witnesses, documents, and observational overlap
- extracting contextual references such as time of day, environmental factors, or social circumstances
- generating structured datasets suitable for long-term research and cross-case comparison.

SPiDER-X does not draw conclusions, judge credibility, or offer interpretations, and it is not intended to replace the investigator's role. All evaluative work remains with human researchers. Its purpose is to reduce administrative burden and enhance methodological consistency—mirroring the procedural, rather than interpretive, role that SPIDER played in Cornell's investigations.

MICRO- AND MACRO-LEVEL RESEARCH VALUE

These methods provide two distinct benefits.

Micro-level (single case)

Clearer structuring of incoming material allows investigators to see the internal chronology, witness relationships, and contextual factors of a case

more readily. This can aid in preliminary assessment, investigative planning, and archival clarity.

Macro-level (multiple cases)

Over time, consistently structured cases allow for the identification of recurring motifs across large datasets, something that earlier Society projects repeatedly demonstrated as valuable (e.g., Sidgwick et al., 1894; Green & McCreery, 1975). Such patterns may inform future research questions, highlight under-examined areas, or suggest where field resources could be most effectively allocated.

The PDRU's work is still exploratory, but it aims to support the SCC in developing tools that may prove useful as case contacts grow larger and more complex.

INVITATION TO THE SOCIETY

As the PDRU is at an early stage, I would very much welcome comment, critique, and suggestions from Society members. Perspectives from investigators, archivists, historians, statisticians, and members with experience in digital methods would be particularly valuable. Even critical reflections may highlight practical concerns or opportunities we have not yet considered.

The intention of the PDRU is not to impose new methods but to explore possibilities and offer tools that may support the SCC's long-standing investigative and archival responsibilities. I hope that this brief introduction may encourage discussion within the Society and generate constructive feedback, ideas, or collaborations as the work continues.

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