

To the Editor:

Response to Richard Wiseman's letter (The null hypothesis)

In his letter, Professor Wiseman raises a legitimate concern about confirmation bias in parapsychological research, but his proposed remedy—requiring authors to discuss the ‘non-existence of psi’—rests on a misunderstanding of what null results actually demonstrate in experimental science. The null hypothesis in any given study concerns the absence of a specified relationship under specified conditions—it cannot speak to the existence or non-existence of psi as a class of phenomena. To require researchers to interpret a failure to reject the null as evidence of ‘non-existence’ is to demand a logical leap that the data cannot support. As in any experimental field, a single null result is more accurately interpreted as a failure to replicate a specific effect rather than an erasure of a broader class of phenomena. The definitional issue compounds this: psi is intended to be a neutral term denoting the unknown factors underlying parapsychological phenomena (e.g., Rush, 1985, p. 7). Asking researchers to discuss the non-existence of an ‘unknown’ conflates the failure to demonstrate a specific effect with a definitive claim about the underlying nature of the phenomenon itself. If the genuine concern is that null results are insufficiently interrogated, the more productive editorial question is simply: what does the null result tell us about the specific conditions under which the hypothesised effect did not manifest? This is a question which is both scientifically meaningful and considerably more informative than a ritual acknowledgement of non-existence.

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REFERENCES

- Rush, J. H. (1985). What is parapsychology? In H. L. Edge, R. L. Morris, J. H. Rush & J. Palmer (Eds), *Foundations of parapsychology*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.