

The Major Problems Faced by Parapsychology Today: A Survey of Members of the Parapsychological Association

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Abstract: The academic discipline of parapsychology has faced major challenges throughout its history. An online survey of members of the Parapsychological Association (PA) was undertaken with the aim of identifying the range of significant problems held to confront parapsychology today. This paper presents a collation of the views of PA members. A sample of 114 people participated in the survey, 95 of whom revealed their perception of parapsychology's principal problems. Many such problems would appear to stem from being forced to work within a hostile academic zeitgeist. The lack of funding for research and teaching, lack of an adequate career path, and lack of ready access to mainstream journals were cited as hindering academics wanting to pursue parapsychological research. Associated issues such as the lack of a conclusive database (despite technological advances), the lack of a widely endorsed theory, and the failure to resolve the experimenter-psi effect also are deemed problematic. Some parapsychologists look to a solution in quantum physics, multidisciplinary research, or practical applications of psi research.

Keywords: parapsychology's problems, Parapsychological Association

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history the academic discipline of parapsychology has been confronted by major challenges to its viability. In recent years, some

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of its key specialist journals have ceased publication; in most countries, universities rarely employ academics with openly parapsychological interests; academics who wish to pursue parapsychological research face severe obstacles in executing this objective; and even well-established academics may have difficulty in attracting young graduate students to the field. This paper reports the findings of an online survey of members of the Parapsychological Association (PA) concerning what they see as the major problems faced by parapsychology today.

The PA is an international society of professional academic parapsychologists and was established in 1957 with the aims of advancing parapsychology as a science, disseminating knowledge of the field, and integrating the findings of parapsychology with those of other branches of science (Parapsychological Association, 2010). The PA is currently the most widely representative international body of parapsychologists and thereby constitutes an ideal reference group for a survey of the views of academic parapsychologists. The association has four principal categories of membership: professional members, who are highly qualified academically and have an impressive publication record in the field; associate members, who also have academic qualifications and are engaged in the advancement on the field; supporting members, who have a general interest in the field; and student members, who have an academic interest in the field and are currently engaged in secondary or tertiary study.

The perceived difficulties faced by parapsychology have rarely been systematically surveyed among PA members. One notable exception was the study by Allison (1979). His survey asked PA members about various ancillary issues such as the extent of their involvement in research, their publication record, their academic qualifications, their attendance at PA Conventions, the extent of their interaction with other parapsychologists and with other scientists, and the theoretical significance of parapsychological research; but Allison also probed specific professional problems encountered by this sample. He reported that participants described difficulties in getting their research published in mainstream academic journals, difficulties in having their parapsychological research interests accepted by the university in which they worked, difficulties in securing funds to support their research (and in particular, funds which did not severely restrict the topics to be investigated), difficulties in recruiting graduate students to work in parapsychology, and more generally, problems in undertaking their research and teaching in a scientifically hostile environment. It is notable that these difficulties reported by Allison's sample were evident ten years after the acceptance (in 1969) of the PA as an affiliated organization of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Again, one may be moved to ask if much has changed in the three decades since Allison's work. My study sought to address this question.

METHOD

Following Allison's (1979) lead the author undertook an online survey of the views of current PA members on a wide range of issues. The design of the study was endorsed by the Board of the Parapsychological Association and by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the host university (Approval Number HE12-240).

Participants

On the membership database of the PA, as of 2013, the vast majority, 320 people, had listed a valid email address. Of this population 114 PA members undertook the online survey, a response rate of 36 per cent, and of these participants 95 (30% of total) responded to an additional request to identify parapsychology's most significant problem.

Respondents' year of birth ranged from 1923 to 1994; thus, their age as at their birthday in the year of the survey (i.e., 2013) varied from 19 to 90 years ($M = 56$ years, $SD = 16$ years, median = 57 years). Of the 95 respondents 25% were women and 75% men; this gender distribution approximates that for the PA membership population as a whole (see Irwin, 2014). The country of residence reported by these participants was as follows: North America (50%), Europe (22%), UK (14%), Australasia (6%), South America (4%), Asia (2%), Africa (1%), and Middle East (1%). Again, this distribution is consistent with that found in the full PA database (Irwin, 2014). In terms of gender and country of residence the sample therefore appears adequately representative of the PA population as a whole. This conformity nevertheless did not obtain in respect to the class of PA membership. The 95 respondents gave their class of membership as follows: Professional (47%), Associate (28%), Supporting (13%), and Student (12%). The sample thereby under-represented Supporting Members, with only 13% in the sample compared to 29% in the population (see Irwin, 2014). On the other hand, as Supporting Members are less likely to be involved in active parapsychological research the consequent over-representation of the Professional and Associate members could arguably be seen as a yield of a relatively professional group of PA members. This feature does not seriously compromise the study, but it should be kept in mind when interpreting the sample's views on the problems of parapsychology.

Materials

A copy of the multiple-choice items in the complete survey form is appended to the report by Irwin (2014). At the end of the form there was an open-ended item inviting participants to “describe, in 30 words or less, what you believe to be the single most significant problem facing parapsychology today”. The present paper focuses on the responses generated by the latter request.

Procedure

On 13 February, 2013 the author’s invitation to participate in an online survey was emailed by Annalisa Ventola, the Executive Director of the PA, to all members of the PA who had an email address recorded on the membership database. The questionnaire was administered as an online survey compiled using Qualtrics™ Survey Software (Qualtrics Labs Inc., Provo, UT²); the invitation to participate included the URL that would connect potential participants to the survey form on the Qualtrics website. On March 5, 2013, a reminder was e-mailed to members by Ventola, requesting them to participate in the survey if they had not already done so. Data collection was terminated one month later.

The exact words used by survey respondents are included in and italicised throughout this report, except in a very small number of instances where (invariably minor) editorial clarification seemed essential to resolve ambiguities. Respondents’ grammar, use of US spelling conventions, and ostensible typographical errors have by and large not been amended; this approach was thought to be preferable to that of second-guessing what a respondent might actually have meant and expressing this in my own idiosyncratic style.

THEMATIC COLLATION OF RESULTS

The findings of the multiple-choice section of this survey have been presented elsewhere (Irwin, 2014). Responses to the additional open-ended question were analysed for content and collated. The major problems facing parapsychology, as expressed by this sample of PA members, are presented below under thematic headings. At the risk of some repetitiveness each individual response classified under a given heading is listed here in order to maximise the transparency of the analysis. Thus, had the author boldly

² See: <http://www.qualtrics.com>

reported that some people in the sample claimed they felt “persecuted”, such a (wholly fictitious) “finding” would justifiably be suspected as merely my own interpretation of what was said and invite speculation about the actual responses given by the participants; for this reason all relevant portions of the raw data are provided as a matter of public record. In many instances participants’ own wording also is rather more instructive.

Responses varied from a single word to a relatively long discourse. Some participants mentioned more than one problem or a problem having several facets, and some identified problems that are relevant to more than one theme. To allow readers to do some cross-referencing in this regard, each response in the following collation is identified by the participant’s anonymous identity code number; thus P15, for example, signifies the fifteenth participant in the original sample of 114 PA members. Statements made by respondents themselves are italicised to distinguish them from the author’s own text.

Lack of Funds

The most commonly identified problem faced by modern academic parapsychology was deemed to be a lack of funding for its adequate implementation. This issue was noted without elaboration by several respondents:

P10, P34, P61: *lack of funding*

P14, P17: *lack of financial support*

P44: *No funding*

P78: *Today the most important problem is the funding of parapsychological research*

P97: *Funding!*

Some respondents also mentioned this issue when listing a variety of problems confronting parapsychology:

P3, P38, P99: *...lack of funding*

P55: *...Not enough funding*

In addition, a few respondents took the opportunity to explain why they believed inadequate funding was particularly problematic for the field:

P19: *The biggest problem is institutional resistance to legitimate research into parapsychological topics, manifested in funding agencies refusing to consider parapsychological research...*

P20: *We do not have enough research. We need more people in the field exploring a variety of competing research approaches. This of course depends on getting more funding.*

P21: *The lack of academic, institutional, and financial support for the field, as these seem to be a prime reason why there are so few active full-time researchers, and why the progression of the field is so slow paced.*

P22: *One word -- funding. For private foundations, experiments often have to have mind-body split or survivalist orientations. For other types of funding, including that of academic departments, experiments often have to obscure the fact that psi is being examined.*

P23: *...the biggest issue is horrendous public misinformation about parapsychology ...exacerbated by lack of funds for their better psi education.*

P39: *Lack of experimental innovation due, in part, to reduced funding...*

P56: *Difficulty in funding centers where research, education and community can prosper, publish, and interact with other disciplines and the public, who in turn affect the financing.*

P69: *Lack of funding to conduct high quality research in the volume that will be required to fight off criticism.*

P104: *The lack of funding... prevents many people who might become excellent parapsychologists and develop the field from exploring the field and entering it professionally.*

Attitudes of Parapsychology's Opponents

Another prominent concern focused on the seemingly intransigent attitudes of people and institutions who oppose parapsychological research or parapsychology as a legitimate academic discipline:

P11: *The ineluctable fact that some critics of parapsychology are uninterested in evidence that supports parapsychology. For them, no amount of evidence, and no variations of evidence, is enough.*

P16: *Ongoing rejection of valid psi data by materialistic mainstream scientists*

P19: *The biggest problem is institutional resistance to legitimate research into parapsychological topics, manifested in funding agencies refusing to consider parapsychological research, mainstream journals being openly hostile to parapsychological articles, and universities denying promotion and tenure to faculty who show interest in parapsychology.*

P37: *“An important scientific innovation rarely makes its way rapidly winning over and converting its opponents; it rarely happens that Saul becomes Paul. What does happen is that its opponents gradually die out and that the growing generation is familiarized with the idea from the beginning.” —Max Planck, *The Philosophy of Physics**

P38: *...Tabu in science.*

P43: *Unwillingness of many “mainstream” scientists (and non-scientists) to consider the possibility of, or allow the discussion of, anything outside their current “world view”.*

P70: *The politics of science and prejudice against parapsychology based on scientism.*

P91: *People unwilling to take it [parapsychology] seriously and pay any attention to it*

P92: *the same as always, the academic zeitgeist connects interest in, belief in, entertainment of, investigation of the psi hypothesis with insufficient education in science, lesser intelligence, and mental unbalance caused by spiritual beliefs and/or all of the above, we're fair game to the skeptics and suffer a debilitating career cost that never seems to go away*

P98: *It's not regarded to be a science.*

Another respondent conceded the problem here but held that its impact was exacerbated by parapsychologists' outlook:

P84: Parapsychology's biggest problem is "science envy". Parapsychology should proceed with independent research and the search for practical applications of psi, relatively indifferent to the opinions and criticisms of mainstream science.

In this context another respondent criticised the manner in which parapsychologists presented themselves to scientific colleagues:

P1: A lack of attention to public scholarship

Allied to the problem of opponents' attitudes is the public image of parapsychology.

Parapsychology's Public Image

Some respondents lamented the poor image of parapsychology in the public eye:

P32: Public belief of what constitutes "parapsychology". The incorrect belief that the domain is a trashcan for all phenomena that are not already neatly in some field of study.

P65: The majority of people not really knowing what parapsychology is, and being closed-minded and dismissive of it.

P76: Gaining, retaining and sustaining credibility.

The principal source of this poor image was attributed to the misinformation disseminated in the mass media, possibly abetted by insufficient public education about the field:

P2: ...high profile media stories recently have further undermined public credibility (Bem in the USA was a tragedy, Cardena's media exploits in Sweden a farce!)

P12: Popular media...

P23: ...the biggest issue is horrendous public misinformation about parapsychology as a whole fueled by the media, compounded by complete ignorance of the field's experimental research, and exacerbated by lack of funds for their better psi education.

P49: *High profile entertainment venues disguised as being akin to parapsychology (e.g., Ghost Hunters and Ghost Adventurers) do the most damage. Reality show mentalities intermixed with science reduces the honesty and integrity of the goal.*

P59: *I believe the problem facing parapsychology today is the lack of private institutes or schools that teach parapsychology outside the academic institution for the more lay person to study. There are some good non secular programs that research and teach parapsychology and metaphysics, that may help future funding and open up the public's awareness in parapsychology so should be encouraged.*

Another factor underlying parapsychology's poor public image is the existence of unqualified people who call themselves "parapsychologists" but who publicly disport themselves as experts on paranormal phenomena:

P9: *Generalisation of the topic to that of media depictions of the subject. This produces amateur ghosthunters that describe themselves as 'experts' to the general public and they even take on "fake" online qualifications and doctorate degrees for a quick an easy personal status to flash around. This is happening quite often, and can cripple parapsychology in places.*

P82: *People who call themselves parapsych researchers but do NOT have the basic knowledge to design and conduct any kind of research.*

At the same time parapsychologists themselves cannot fairly claim to be entirely blameless for their own public and professional image:

P13: *I believe that the inability of many parapsychologists to publicly state their belief (or scientific opinion) that psi exists coupled with a lack of ability of many to speak well and with confidence allows the nay-sayers and disbelievers to bully researchers and, with smug confidence, dismiss our findings. We need to be more than defensive, and clearly state our opinions, results and beliefs.*

P41: *Parapsychologist are not effective united as professionals. They differ far too much in personal opinions about the field as such.*

P52: *It is waiting to be accepted by mainstream science whereas it must fight to put his ideas and data in mainstream journals, conferences, etc.*

P66: *To find a way to familiarize the public and the scientists with just how extensive the literature supporting parapsychology is*

P85: *cultural communication*

P95: *The inability of the parapsychologists to use an appropriate language to make themselves understood by members of the scientific community*

Again, as evident in the next three sections, a number of respondents conceded that some of the scepticism of the public and the belligerence of critics may not be entirely baseless.

The Replicability Issue

The extent to which psi experiments may not be strongly replicable is seen as a significant impediment to the general scientific acceptance of parapsychological research:

P2: *The concept of “psi” itself and the absence of replicable evidence for its existence*

P6: *Adequate levels of replication...*

P48: *We need to find a way to make psi effects in the laboratory more reliable...*

P53: *Finding a replicable result...*

P81: *Presenting a repeatable PK experiment to “Science”*

P83: *...replicability*

P101: *...fix the concept of experimental repeatability*

P108: *replication*

An Inadequate Database

It is possible that critics reject parapsychological evidence because as yet the database is seen as insufficiently conclusive:

P101: *parapsychology... needs more experimental evidence*

Admittedly, this problem may reflect in part the relatively small number of researchers engaged in establishing such a database and the limited funding available for this purpose:

P20: *We do not have enough research. We need more people in the field exploring a variety of competing research approaches. This of course depends on getting more funding.*

P35: *...I believe the current issue of parapsychology is the small number of researchers and a scattering of articles in journals of parapsychology.*

Again, perhaps the problem also stems from insufficient imaginativeness:

P39: *Lack of experimental innovation due, in part, to reduced funding and ambition.*

Lack of an Accepted Theoretical Account

Several respondents remarked upon the lack of a widely endorsed theory of psi and the implications of this for other scientists' perception of the field:

P5: *Satisfactory theory. First Sight [theory] goes a long way but it fails to address survival data. We need theory that relates psi and survival phenomena to mainstream psychology and biology.*

P6: *Lack of a theoretical framework with which to explain/define psi processes (e.g., what is the nature of the psi signal? how is it produced/received?).*

P33: *...Another significant problem is finding a way to adequately reconcile parapsychological phenomena with existing psychological, sociological and physical explanations about the nature of reality and perception.*

P55: *Lack of consensus on a theoretical model, and development of theory-driven experiments...*

P57: *Most important is the need to develop a theoretical model that is broad ranging, scientifically demonstrable in part, mathematically justifiable, and philosophically appropriate. However, when such a model is developed (TDVP Nepe and Close) it frightens parapsychologists possibly even more*

than many other scientists. So we need to develop openness to new broad ranging data.

P77: Developing a conceptual understanding of psi that shows its relation to normal psychological functioning.

P79: The fact that there is no explanation for how the phenomena work.

P106: A physical model that explains psychic phenomena

P107: No well-elaborated and accepted theory of psi to guide hypothesis formulation - therefore any anomaly may be interpreted as psi.

P113: Lack of acceptable scientific explanation of both PK and ESP.

Perhaps a part of the problem here is conceptual or epistemological:

P42: The main problem is basically conceptual. How can be a new science accepted by the mainstream science if it calls itself “Parapsychology” and uses terms as “paranormal” “anomalous cognition”, “ESP” (how can there be a perception without a sensuousness?). So the conceptual problem is well-rendered by its inappropriate linguistic approach.

P64: ...I think the old terminology is a hindrance in some cases, particularly for the general public, but also at the university/accreditation level.

P102: Parapsychology is too “psychological”, with all the baggage that it implies (naive positivism, operationalism, quantitativism, sole focus on individual level, etc). It needs to be much more trans-disciplinary, both in terms of epistemology and methodology. In my view, the future of parapsychology resides in what could be called “psi studies”.

The potential value of an interdisciplinary or otherwise broader approach was advocated also by other respondents:

P15: The investigation in these areas of inquiry has always benefited from cross disciplinary expertise, the early SPR included some of the best scientists and scholars of the era cooperating on research and theory. This was the same during the Manhattan Project, and the development of the internet. The illusion of parapsychology as a stand-alone branch of science has weakened this potency.

P87: *their own narrowness of vision*

Some respondents preferred a more biological approach:

P36: *There is few biophysical approach to parapsychological phenomena. Many parapsychologists discuss about Mind (psychology) and Universe (physics), but they often forget Body (biology).*

P47: *to prove the biological role of psi events*

More commonly, however, respondents looked to quantum physics and systems theory to meet the need for a viable theory of psi:

P25: *Understanding the nature of randomness and its relationship to complex informational systems*

P46: *Psi is not a causal process but merely a non-local entanglement correlation*

P53: *...Understanding the role of mind and consciousness in the universe*

P83: *...fitting in with contemporary physics*

P90: *The parapsychologist needs of highly sophisticated machines for the purpose of interpreting all parapsychology phenomena, and how psi abilities relate with physics sciences in all aspects.*

P93: *How to integrate psi theory with theoretical developments on the leading edge of physics.*

P106: *A physical model that explains psychic phenomena*

In this context a few respondents saw the very nature of the phenomena under study to be a significant difficulty for parapsychology:

P29: *ESP and related phenomena are quantum effects, quantum effects are non deterministic, therefore ESP effects are often uncertain and influenced by the observer, which is a major problem from the perspective of hard core scientists, who on the other hand accept quantum uncertainties as “normal”!!*

P55: *...Not enough consideration of the effects of the “elusiveness” and the “Trickster archetype”.*

Again, the importance of maintaining a rigorously scientific outlook was noted by a few respondents.

P60: *illegitimate arguments supporting quasi-religious academic beliefs*

P100: *Researchers' lack of scientific impartiality. Confirmation of personal beliefs is still a hidden agenda.*

P101: *parapsychology... must behave as a genuine scientific discipline*

At the same time, some warned against the narrowness of an exclusively quantitative perspective:

P64: *Perhaps too much emphasis on quantitative approaches. I feel we need more qualitative (e.g. clinical parapsychology) research...*

P86: *Attempts to apply current scientific method to study parapsychology are limited because laboratory conditions can only approximate the conditions in which psi naturally manifests.*

P87: *their own narrowness of vision*

In this context the value of spontaneous case material and a phenomenological approach were sometimes advocated:

P23: *...research with statistical significance completely ignores experiential phenomenological studies, which are valuable.*

P53: *Need to devote more work to current spontaneous cases.*

P58: *Changing research focus to phenomenology while still differentiating between presumptive genuine psi and non-genuine psi.*

P86: *...Verified anecdotal cases should be valued for their role in supporting laboratory findings (i.e., these are not just statistical flukes).*

P105: *It is still too exclusive of clinical and field experience, under-emphasizing both process/qualitative research and human experience.*

More generally, account should be taken of situational factors:

P71: *Understanding environmental influences on psi phenomena.*

Practical Applications of Parapsychology

Several respondents held that greater acceptance of parapsychology could be won through the demonstration of practical applications of parapsychological research:

P24: *To find somehow an application to the everyday life (in some extent).*

P33: *The most important problem facing parapsychology today, in my view, is finding a practical application for the mass of knowledge already achieved concerning psi phenomena.*

P41: *Parapsychologists... are not oriented towards practical use of their knowledge in daily life professional settings, e.g., clinical settings and legal/law enforcement issues. So the "outside" world does not know what to expect from parapsychology as a science.*

P63: *Parapsychology research continues to be focused on proving the existence of psychic phenomena. To an open mind familiar with the research proof is no longer an issue. Research focused on training and evoking practical application of psychic phenomena is what will move acceptance to the mainstream.*

P64: *...I feel we need more qualitative (e.g. clinical parapsychology) research and public education focused on practical applications that attempt to unify parapsychology with more mainstream disciplines.*

P84: *...Parapsychology should proceed with... the search for practical applications of psi...*

P113: *...Varied success in applying PK and ESP to real-world problems.*

Career Opportunities

One of the most serious problems deemed to face contemporary parapsychology concerned the inability to attract graduate students to the field and provide them with a viable career path:

P4: *recruiting young research workers and offering adequate career opportunities*

P12: *...the lack of educational support.*

P19: *The biggest problem is institutional resistance to legitimate research into parapsychological topics, manifested in... universities denying promotion and tenure to faculty who show interest in parapsychology.*

P21: *The lack of academic, institutional, and financial support for the field, as these seem to be a prime reason why there are so few active full-time researchers, and why the progression of the field is so slow paced.*

P30: *We need an increased population of young, well educated and dedicated researchers, especially those with a creative streak and strong communication and publicity skills.*

P98: *That chairs of Parapsychology reduce at universities.*

P99: *...lack of research positions and future as parapsychologist, ruining of one's academic reputation and peace of life when promoting parapsychology.*

P104: *The lack of... academic opportunities prevents many people who might become excellent parapsychologists and develop the field from exploring the field and entering it professionally. What makes it worse is that even showing an interest in it seems to be career suicide in the academic world, and this has become worse in the 40 years since I first began working in the field.*

P110: *Insecurity.*

The Experimenter-Psi Effect

The possibility that parapsychological effects on experimental psi data may stem from experimenters themselves has been recognised for nearly 30 years. Nevertheless, many contemporary parapsychologists continue to be mindful of our failure to resolve this dilemma and see it as one of the major problems facing parapsychology today:

P7: *The Source of Psi problem*

P40: *Finding ingenious ways to unravel the role of experimenter effect in findings such as the early Ganzfeld results, Bem (2011), Wiseman & Schlitz (2003). This may include a better understanding by academic parapsychologists (and the rest of the community that espouses the*

“scientific method” which insists on replication) of Bayesian statistics and in particular the process of generating “priors”.

P48: We need to find a way to make psi effects in the laboratory more reliable. Doing so will require, among other things, coming to grips with investigator psi.

P54: Disentangling participant effects from experimenter effects.

P67: Experimenter effect - it matters enormously yet we pay almost no attention to it.

Only one respondent seemed prepared to accept experimenter-psi effects as intrinsic to the modus operandi of psi:

P86: ...Experimenter effects are expected if consciousness has nonlocal properties.

Miscellaneous Concerns

Two respondents expressed concern that parapsychology may be losing its identity because of the emergence of alternative conceptual approaches:

P31: Growth in popularity of anomalistic psychology

P74: It's erosion of identity as a field. Researchers who may have called themselves “parapsychologists” in the past are increasingly having/wanting to refer to the same work using other nomenclature.

Others decried the lack of contemporary attention to psychokinetic phenomena:

P3: ...the difficulty of getting even parapsychologists to accept and study physical phenomena.

P94: Fear of, and failure to engage in, macro-PK and other spontaneous case research.

Another was concerned by parapsychologists' relative lack of academic interest in the survival hypothesis:

P73: As a trans-survival researcher, I see parapsychology as self-marginalizing without inclusion of transcommunication by survived personalities in the psi equation.

One respondent appealed for greater utilisation of the advantages of modern technology:

P72: I think that we need one global data base that connecting all parapsychologists and their efforts, activities and institutes all over the world. I think, it's the task of PA as APA one.

Finally, concerns expressed by a small number of respondents seemed too nebulous to categorise:

P55: A lot of problems due to narcissism. Not enough dynamic at the students level.

P68: The parapsychology today have Ontological, Methodological and Epistemological Problems.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This survey of members of the PA has elicited expressions of a wide number of problems deemed to face contemporary parapsychology. The foregoing summary of participants' views has been compiled with a minimum of evaluative comment and without heavy-handed editorial intervention, thereby enabling readers to have the views of parapsychologists very much as they were written.

While it has been my primary intention to allow participants' responses to speak for themselves, a few (hopefully non-judgmental) remarks are in order. First, it may be noted that many of parapsychology's problems as recorded over thirty years ago by Allison (1979) are still in evidence today, presumably reflecting the unremittingly hostile academic zeitgeist within which parapsychologists have to work. The lack of an adequate career path, lack of funding for research and teaching, and lack of ready access to mainstream journals continue to be held to plague academics wanting to pursue parapsychological research.

Associated issues, such as the lack of a conclusive database (despite technological advances) and the lack of a widely endorsed theory, also continue to be problematic in the view of many PA members. In these respects the situation has not noticeably improved since Allison's investigation. Indeed, the plight of parapsychologists may well have

become more complex, with a poor public image exacerbated by the mass media, the rise of organised sceptical organisations, and the failure to resolve the experimenter-psi effect.

Concern was expressed also that parapsychologists are not communicating effectively with either other scientists or the general public. Some parapsychologists are optimistic for a resolution, such as a crucial breakthrough in quantum physics, the fruits of multidisciplinary research, or the discovery of practical applications of psi research to justify its pursuit.

Second, I had had some concern that this survey of parapsychology's problems could have been biased by some of the multiple-choice items participants had completed immediately before this section of the study (see Irwin, 2014). Nevertheless, few of the issues raised by the multiple-choice items were taken up by respondents. Items about the threat posed by the growth of anomalistic psychology were reflected in the responses of only two participants to the present survey question. Another multiple-choice item had addressed the view that probabilistic evaluation of null hypotheses is becoming increasingly *unsatisfactory* as a statistical strategy in the behavioural sciences (Rodgers, 2010); but no respondents took up this issue in addressing contemporary parapsychology's problems, although some did express a general dissatisfaction with the focus on a quantitative perspective. Setting aside any personal feelings I may have about the number of parapsychologists sharing some of my own concerns for the field, comfort can be taken from the fact that the participants evidently were of a sufficiently independent mind to express their views largely without being primed by the content of the earlier section of the survey inventory.

Third, it must be stressed that the survey documents *perceived* problems only, and many concerns voiced here do require further substantiation. The claim, for example, that there is no career path available in parapsychology may be an overstatement. Thus, in the UK there has been a steady growth in the submission of doctoral theses on parapsychological topics and most of their authors have subsequently secured a university post, even if some have not continued their involvement in parapsychological research (Delaney, 2009). PA members' expressions of parapsychology's problems therefore should not necessarily be taken at face value. By the same token, the possible motivations underlying even the less substantiated perceptions still warrant sympathetic consideration. This paper also has avoided speculation on the possible causes of perceived problems in parapsychology. As one reviewer of the paper has remarked, perhaps some problems are self-inflicted; for example, the tendency not to pursue publication in mainstream journals may exacerbate the discipline's isolation. These concerns nevertheless are best explored through debate among parapsychologists themselves.

It is hoped that this opportunity for parapsychologists to voice their concerns has proved at least therapeutic and that the public dissemination of the field's perceived problems may inspire some remedial strategies.

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