

Peer Review and Experts in the Paranormal?

Lately, there's been much debate and argument over the necessity for peer review of data posted by paranormal investigation teams/individuals as evidence. However, after reading through many comments on various sites, discussing the topic with numerous individuals, and listening to shows such as Paranormal Talk Radio, we feel there needs to be more understanding of what peer review is. Likewise, we wish to address the issue of experts in the paranormal, and our opinion may be surprising.

In a nut-shell, peer review means that someone who knows what he/she is doing and has viable experience reviews the work/data after it has been submitted for review. It is more than a critique. It is much like a quality assurance double check. Don't get stuck on the words "peer review". Look at it more as INTELLIGENT FEEDBACK.

In science, the peer review process involves the following steps:

1. Scientists write about their experiments and their results.
2. A journal editor receives the paper and sends it out to various institutions/individuals for anonymous peer review. At times, the editor can send feedback back to the original author for revision to circumvent immediate rejection.
3. Peer reviewers read the article and submit their feedback to the editor.
4. If the work meets the scientific standards and has completed peer review, it is published in a scholarly journal.

(Cronin)

Many argue that there is no need for peer review, as the paranormal field is not an actual scientific field of study. However, peer review is not just used in science. It is also used in art, music, literature and even sports. For example, judges in sports, such as ice skating and gymnastics, are often former athletes, coaches or have received some form of training in the sport. Art can be submitted to the Arts Council for peer review, which is comprised of other artists and experts in fine arts. The same should be done with paranormal evidence.

Additionally, there have actually been studies done on the paranormal as well as published works in scholarly journals (see Auton, Glicksohn, Herbovich, and Tobacyk as examples) which were submitted for peer review prior to publishing in scholarly journals. Scholarly journals are peer reviewed journals that have articles written by experts or professionals in the field. It is important to note, "peer-reviewed work isn't necessarily correct or conclusive, but it does meet the standards of science." (Cronin) The point is, whether one agrees with the work or not, they submitted the work for peer review (remember intelligent feedback) and

it passed the process. If a team/individual investigator claims to use scientific equipment and/or techniques in their investigations, then they open themselves up for the issue of peer review. To post an occurrence captured on film or audio data as "evidence" of the paranormal without allowing it to be peer reviewed in its raw form (i.e., without filters, enhancements, compressions, etc.) disables one from accepting the work as being viable evidence.

Therefore, if one is going to post the "evidence" he/she should not fear others' rejections or disagreement. Instead, the individual can take the feedback and apply it to further investigations or techniques, which only allows for growth and more substantiated data. In simpler terms, do not be afraid that someone will disagree that it is evidence. Rather, utilize the feedback as to why they don't agree with you and apply those parameters or suggestions in the future. You may be missing something in your techniques or investigations. Furthermore, do not approach peer review with the mindset that you will be met with hostile criticism or ad hominem attacks. Real peer review is constructive and insightful. MVP often submits its work for peer review and has always welcomed the criticism and feedback. It has made us a much stronger team.

In regards to experts in the paranormal, it is often stated that "there are no experts in the paranormal" as there is no accredited university that offers a degree in paranormal investigating and/or research. However, this is not entirely true. The University of Virginia School of Medicine has a Division of Perceptual Studies program that falls under the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, in which "utilizing scientific methods, the researchers within The Division of Perceptual Studies investigate apparent paranormal phenomena" (Division of Perceptual Studies). Would a graduate of this program be the only one considered an expert then?

In the military, we have what is called a SME, which stands for Subject Matter Expert. A SME is someone who has the highest level of expertise in performing a specialized job, task or skill within the unit or organization. It could be anyone from an engineer, researcher, marksman, or even a medic. In short, it is basically anyone with substantial in-depth knowledge of the subject one is attempting to work on or learn about. Therefore, an individual with extensive, CREDIBLE, and viable knowledge working in the paranormal could be considered a SME. That does not mean that just because an individual takes a lot of pictures of "orbs" for 20 years it makes the person a SME. Do not get lost on the titles people carry as well. Just because someone has a degree or title in a particular field does not yield him/her an expert. Would you go to a lawyer for expert medical advice? No??? The key words are credible and viable, which in the paranormal community raises a lot of eyebrows. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to discount peer review from someone who has spent 10-15+ years researching, questioning, reading,

investigating, or writing about the paranormal because he/she does not have a science degree, or engineering degree, or medical degree. It's not a matter of popularity or notoriety. Just because someone is on a television show does NOT make him or her an expert. Does the individual employ critical thinking? Does the person have extensive experience researching/investigating the paranormal? We know many people who are excellent in their particular fields of study, though they may not have a degree in it, who we consider as peers and welcome their review, feedback, and critique of our work.

At the end of the day, peer review by SMEs should be welcomed in the paranormal community. We owe it, as a community, to the residents and owners of the locations we investigate to give them thorough work. We, as a community, owe it to the followers of our pages that read our posts, watch our videos, listen to our broadcasts, etc., to be as methodical, meticulous, and in-depth as we possibly can.

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