

Replicability

There is an interesting white paper from The Journal of Parapsychology, Volume 67, from the Spring of 2003. The title is Research Strategies for Enhancing Conceptual Development and Replicability, by Rex G. Stanford. He brings up some interesting concepts. In fact, he blew my mind. His opening sentence was;

“Some inconsistency of outcomes is not unique to any particular research field.”

This is so true.

He goes on to say that the consistency with which inconsistency is found in many research domains is a major reason that meta-analysis has become something of a cottage industry. (In statistics, a meta-analysis combines the results of several studies that address a set of related research hypotheses. The first meta-analysis was performed by Karl Pearson in 1904, in an attempt to overcome the problem of reduced statistical power in studies with small sample sizes; analyzing the results from a group of studies can allow more accurate data analysis.)

What Rex is talking about here is that often, experiments are difficult to replicate to arrive at similar data. Often times the inconsistencies outweigh the consistencies. In the field of paranormal research, like in his area of research, Psi, the thing we can agree on the most is the inconsistency of the evidence we encounter. In a field where inconsistency is the constant, this offers a perplexing problem to the paranormal researcher.

What we MUST do, however, is focus on the consistencies that remain. I will try to explain why this is important, but it is not an easy task, and I may lose some of you, so bear with me. There can be many causes for experimental repetition failures. Cross studies inconsistencies in situational variables may differentially affect data gathering, environmental differences may affect phenomena measured, and so forth. Since we don't know everything that affects paranormal phenomena, it is difficult to exactly replicate any given experiment even when it IS done on the same premises in the same spot. Meaning, if I were to perform an ion bombardment experiment in New Jersey in a reportedly active house, and Joe Blow performed the same experiment in Seattle Washington in an abandoned factory, also reportedly active, chances are we will not yield an exact match in findings. That being the case, HOW do we establish any form of replicability in our research?

Let's take a different perspective for a moment.

Let's assume that all effects have boundary conditions and that replication failure potentially can provide clues to those boundary conditions. Learning about those boundary conditions for effects is one of the most important tools for understanding the underlying causes of those effects. If we carefully examine

replication failures they can provide a major direction for future work that can possibly identify boundary conditions, allowing us to glean some understanding into the replication failures, which in turn would enhance replication as well as support conceptual advance. "Whew that was a mouthful." I know this all sounds like mumbo jumbo to some of you, but in essence it means that there are interfaces between what we witness as unexplainable and what is explainable.

These interfaces are where the variables lie that tends to skew our methodology when it comes to replication. If we observe these interfaces, and even explore their nature, it is possible that we will find the answer to the effect we are observing. In other words we have to look beyond the effect to find the source.

And the source may be an independent variable.

Replicability in this field is difficult at best; we are never in the same conditions in any situation and there are always variables that are different even if we were. Because of this, we must set aside inconsistencies and focus on the consistencies. The case of paranormal phenomena research is a very complex building of sorts, and we are just now laying the foundation. We are not sure what is important, and what isn't. However, by comparing consistencies, we will know what may be important. Do we lay the plumbing in before running the electrical wiring? It doesn't matter because we know will need them both.

Consistencies are what will guide us and give us direction. So while I may have found that I had a green cloud in a room that I was investigating, and Joe Blow found a blue fog, then we must focus on the fact that we both experienced "colors" or "fog" in our experiment. The next logical step would be to determine why and what caused the fog or what determined the colors witnessed. That would make us focus specific atmospheric conditions and on a particular wavelength of light involving the color, and we would begin to measure in that band of frequencies in hopes of discovering a source. Does that make sense? In the end the point is this. When you find a point of commonality, you must explore that point, and everything around that point, in an effort to identify what is at work to create the point.

Now THAT is a lot of points.