

Forgetting the Past

To the Editor:

In a recent editorial in the *JP* Etzel Cardeña (2017) referred to the “ignorance or disregard [some show] . . . of earlier and very pertinent research and literature, as if somehow the topic had not been studied until the authors decided to focus their attention on it” (p. 4). This situation, also discussed by others (e.g., Alvarado, 2014; Braude, 2012), may produce incomplete views based on lack of historical continuity that, in turn, cause misconceptions, as well as rediscoveries or reformulations of previous findings and ideas.

Cardeña (2017) states that this neglect of the relevant literature “evidences an inadequate literature review and a failure to do one’s homework, but also arrogance in the assumption that what was done previously is not worth reading, as if somehow we are now more knowledgeable and/or brighter than people in the past” (p. 4). But this problem also suggests we have forgotten the functions of literature reviews in science (something that may vary across some disciplines). This includes the exploration of relevant theoretical ideas and assistance in the development of hypotheses and the selection of research methodology. Furthermore, knowledge of the previous literature is essential to assess our findings in relation to previous knowledge in the field.

We would also argue (e.g., Zingrone, 2006), that some persons in the field, particularly those coming from other areas, have a low level of basic literacy in the parapsychological literature. This is easy to understand due to the marginal status of parapsychology in academia and, consequently, the lack of formal educational programs.

It is not hard to find papers in the literature whose authors do not cite relevant literature. One example is the paper by Vasilescu and Vasilescu (2001), in which they presented an experimental study of precognition, but did not cite a single laboratory study of the phenomenon.

Similarly, there was no mention of previous relevant discussions in an interesting study on the introspective experiences of mediums (Rock, Beischel, & Schwartz, 2008). Another author mistakenly assumed that ESP from the living as an explanations of mediumship started in the publications of the early Society for Psychical Research (Sudduth, 2009).

It may be argued that such omissions are trivial and not worth so much criticism. We disagree, pointing out that if we believe that science is to some extent a cumulative enterprise, we need to have more continuity in our writings, continuity that may bring progress or at least increase the possibility of new developments. We also disagree with those who want to minimize the issue arguing that this is a common problem in science and that there are explanations for such citation myopias, such as per-

ceived lack of relevance or the existence of biases against citing older references (among them, thinking that just because something is old it is invalid and not relevant today). The issue should not be brushed aside on these terms; instead we need, to recognize the problem and then to try to solve it.

Trying to go beyond only criticism, we have tried to improve the situation by focusing on the dissemination of information about the field. This includes, for example, bibliographies (e.g., Alvarado, 2002, Zingrone, 2006), and the organization of the Parapsychology Research and Education series of free, open online courses (also know as ParaMOOC) (Zingrone, 2016). Others have contributed significantly to these efforts as well as to the compilation of comprehensive collections of essays that survey the field's history, research, and theory on the global stage (e.g., Cardeña, Palmer, & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015; May & Marwaha, 2015).

In addition to the constant growth of literature in all topics—a somewhat less daunting prospect in parapsychological literature than in mainstream science—a key problem here is the belief that trying to know as much as we can about the past literature relevant to our topics of concern is not important to our future success. Authors are the first ones who need to be concerned about this, but they can and need to be assisted by the critical eye of editors and referees. After all, papers published without relevant literature reviews diminish both the reputation of the journal and the usefulness of its content to present and future researchers. For this reason we are very pleased to see Cardeña's (2017) statement: "As one of my editorship policies, I demand that papers contain adequate literature reviews of relevant works, no matter how old" (p. 104). We are not arguing that every paper needs a long review going back to antiquity, drawing in historical sources for every aspect of the topic. In fact, some reviews are too general or unfocused, full of references not of direct relevance to the topic at hand. But a good review is important, as we have argued, because it provides context, builds consensus, and deepens the meaningfulness of our research.

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Nancy L. Zingrone, nancy@theazire.org

Carlos S. Alvarado, carlos@theazire.org

Parapsychology Foundation