

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

### **Paranormal contagion**

In my recent article on paranormal contagion (McCue, 2022), there's a slight error in the last of the listed references, which is to a book by Paul Screeton. It appears to be a typesetting mistake, not an error of mine. The reference contains, in brackets, "pp. 213–244". But that should have come at the end of the previous reference. It's the page range for a chapter on the Skinwalker Ranch in the late Frank Salisbury's 2010 book.

Regarding security personnel at the Skinwalker Ranch, whom I mention on pp. 199-200 of the article, I state that they "spent fortnightly tours of duty on the ranch". But "fortnightly" wasn't the right word to use, since it implies frequency, not duration. I should have said that the security officers did two-week tours of duty. (I don't know how much time they had off between each one, although I'd guess that it was a week or two.)

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PETER McCUE

## REFERENCE

McCue, P. A. (2022). Paranormal contagion: A potential hazard for case investigators. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, 86(4), 193–208.

To the Editor:

### **"Life reviews, the NDE Scale, and false positives"**

I read with great interest Robert King's recent article in the *JSPR* "Life Reviews, the Greyson Scale, and False Positives" (King, 2022). He presented data suggesting that the question on my NDE Scale (Greyson, 1983) regarding a life review ("Did scenes from your past come back to you?") may yield false-positive reports of a life review. The strongest response option to this multiple-choice question, which is often used as a criterion for whether the respondent has had a life review, is "My past flashed before me, out of my control." King

sampled 136 near-death experience (NDE) reports on the NDERF website<sup>1</sup> in which the respondent selected this strongest option, indicating that they did indeed have a life review. However, when King reviewed the narrative accounts of those NDEs on the same website, he found that 43 (32%) did not include mention of a life review in the sense of an involuntary influx of past memories. His proposed explanation was that that option could be misinterpreted as a popular idiom (“My life flashed before my eyes”) for realizing that one’s life was about to come to an end, regardless of whether or not a life review (or, indeed, any NDE at all) was involved.

King then reported on three internet surveys of the general public about their interpretation of the sentence, “My life flashed before me, out of my control.” He found that in these three surveys, the sentence was interpreted to mean a revival of memories by around 60% of respondents, with the remaining 40% interpreting it to mean simply a closeness to death with no way to avoid it, or being uncertain what it meant.

These findings were surprising to me, as the developer of the NDE Scale, as no one had expressed any reason to doubt the validity of this question in the 40 years since the scale was published. I suspected that the misinterpretations that King reported were related to an indiscriminate use of the NDE Scale, which was explicitly intended to be used for people who reported NDEs and not for people who reported other kinds of altered states of consciousness, or for the general public (Greyson, 2007).

To further evaluate King’s finding of misinterpretations of the life review question, I examined 85 NDE accounts from people in the University of Virginia NDE research pool who had endorsed the strongest option on the life review question of NDE Scale. Within this group, 61 (74%) described a legitimate life review in their narratives, and 22 (26%) did not. While the “false-positive” rate among my sample was not as high as in King’s study, it was nevertheless surprisingly large.

However, I further investigated those 22 individuals who did not describe a life review in their narratives by having them respond to follow-up questions designed to elicit details of a life review (Stevenson & Cook, 1995). These questions included the number of events recalled, the chronological order of those events, the types and importance of events recalled, the speed and vividness of the life review, the individual’s control over the life review, a sense of judgement, and whether the individuals re-experienced past events only from their own perspective or also through the eyes of others. In their responses to those question, 13 of the 22 (59%) described the details of a life review that they had not mentioned in their initial narrative account. That lowered my “false-positive” rate from 22 (26%) to 9 (11%), still a meaningful number.

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1. NDERF (Near-Death Experience Research Foundation): <http://www.nderf.org>

It appears that King was correct that some people may misinterpret the life review question in the NDE Scale, and I thank him for bringing this to our attention. I do not think, however, that the solution to this problem is to change the wording of that question, as his alternative suggestion (and any other I could imagine) may also be misinterpreted. I think it is a mistake to expect either a short-answer questionnaire or an individual's initial narrative report of an NDE to provide a complete understanding of the experience. I suspect that the best (and perhaps only) solution to this issue is to not rely solely on NDE Scale responses or volunteered narratives, but to follow up both sources of information with in-depth questions to clarify the respondents' meanings.

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To the Editor:

**Can the long-term use of that ‘contagion’ term possibly ‘contaminate’ a valid theory? Response to “Paranormal contagion: A potential hazard for case investigators”**

Since Darren Ritson's intriguing book *Poltergeists Parallels and Contagion* (Ritson, 2021) the concept of contagion in paranormal cases is becoming more widely discussed. The latest addition to this discussion is that of Peter McCue in his paper “Paranormal contagion: A potential hazard for case investigators” (McCue, 2022).

McCue gives a straightforward definition of ‘contagion’ as involving cases where:

People who visit sites where anomalous activity is occurring [and who] may find that phenomena ‘follow them home’. (McCue, 2022, p. 194)

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