

# David Vernon

David Vernon is a psychologist, researcher and award-winning author. His most recent book, *Quotidian Tales*, is his first work of fiction, providing a selection of short stories based on real psychic/paranormal events. His previous books include [\*Dark Cognition: Evidence for psi and its implications for consciousness\*](#), and [\*Human Potential: Exploring techniques used to enhance human performance\*](#). He is an active member of the [Society for Psychical Research](#), and current editor of the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. His published research includes articles on morphic resonance, telepathy, precognition, energy healing, as well as biofeedback techniques and creative problem solving.

## Career

David Vernon holds a visiting senior lecturer position at the School of Psychology and Life Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University. He has lectured in neuroscience, cognitive psychology and research methods, and has developed specialized modules in anomalous cognition/parapsychology.

His research in the field of psi has covered areas such as the theory of morphic resonance, telepathy, precognition, scopaesthesia (the feeling of being stared at), as well as energy healing and mediumistic communication. He is currently working on multiple collaborative projects investigating the relationship between sensory processing sensitivity (SPS), anomalous experiences, and precognitive performance, as well as the potential benefits of selectively recruiting participants for online precognition research

## Dream Precognition

In 2024 Vernon, along with Elizabeth Roxburgh and Malcolm Schofield, published a study examining the use of a home-dream paradigm to explore whether participants would be able to dream about and rate a future target image as more similar to their dreams compared to decoy images.<sup>1</sup> They also examined the potential relationship between dream precognition and sensory processing sensitivity, transliminality, boundary thinness and anomalous experiences and belief. One hundred and one participants completed an initial practice trial, to familiarise themselves with the procedure, followed by the main trial. In each trial participants were required to dream of a future target image that they would later be shown. During each trial, after they had completed their dreaming, participants were randomly presented with a set of four images and required to rate them in terms of how much similarity there was between each image and their dream on a scale from 1 to 100.

Results of the main trial showed that ratings for the target image were significantly higher than the decoy images. However, no clear relationships were found between precognitive target ratings and sensory processing sensitivity, transliminality, boundary thinness or anomalous experiences and belief. They concluded that the

result was not due to any methodological artifacts and as such represents suggestive evidence for dream precognition.

## **Psychological Correlates of Anomalous Experiences**

In a study presented at the 2023 Parapsychological Association, Vernon and coauthors explored the relationship between [Sensory Processing Sensitivity](#) (SPS), [transliminality](#), [boundary thinness](#), and anomalous experiences, beliefs, and abilities. Two hundred participants completed an online survey including standardized measures for these constructs.

Results showed significant correlations between most variables, except for the Ease of Excitation subscale of SPS and anomalous abilities. Regression analyses revealed that transliminality was the strongest predictor of anomalous experiences, beliefs, and abilities, while boundary thinness only predicted anomalous beliefs. SPS did not significantly contribute to the models. Mediation analyses indicated that transliminality mediates the relationship between SPS and anomalous experiences, beliefs, and abilities. Qualitative responses suggested that highly sensitive individuals believe their heightened awareness and ability to detect subtle changes contribute to anomalous experiences.

The study concludes that transliminality plays a crucial role in explaining the relationship between SPS and anomalous phenomena, aligning with previous research on the importance of transliminality in predicting paranormal beliefs and experiences.<sup>2</sup>

## **Cognitive Processes Used by Mediums**

In a 2021 publication, Vernon and coauthors investigated the cognitive processes employed by Spiritualist mediums during purported communication with the deceased. The study involved semi-structured interviews with 19 experienced medium tutors, revealing three primary themes: focused attention and inhibition of distractions, multitasking behaviors, and memory-related phenomena.

Mediums reported a need to focus their attention on the 'spirit world' while suppressing external distractions and avoiding eye contact with recipients. They described multitasking between multiple discarnate personalities, alternating focus between spirits and recipients, and maintaining self-awareness during communications.

Memory-related phenomena included experiencing tip-of-the-tongue moments, associating their own memories with spirits to convey information symbolically, and acquiring information from spirits beyond their existing knowledge.

These themes suggest mediums may employ specific cognitive strategies and executive functions such as inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory during mediumship. The study offers insights into the psychological processes potentially involved in mediumistic communications, though it does not address the validity of mediumship claims. Vernon and colleagues suggest future

research could explore whether trained mediums exhibit differences in executive functions compared to non-mediums.[3](#)

## **Morphic Resonance**

In 2021 Vernon, with [Chris Roe](#) and [Glenn Hitchman](#), published a study looking for evidence of morphic resonance.[4](#) This examined whether participants would implicitly prefer real Chinese characters over fake characters, and explicitly identify real Chinese characters, at levels greater than chance.

A sample of 154 participants completed an implicit preference task and an explicit identification task online, with task order counterbalanced. In each task, participants were shown, in a random order, 12 pairs of characters (one real and one decoy). In the implicit task they were required to identify which of the characters they preferred and in the explicit task they were asked to identify which of the pair was the real character.

The results showed that, contrary to prediction, participants significantly preferred the decoy Chinese characters. There was no difference in explicit identification rates and no correlations between performance and belief in psi. Vernon concluded that these findings failed to support the idea of morphic resonance and are more parsimoniously accounted for in terms of an aesthetic preference for the decoy characters.

## **Virtual Reality Telepathy Test**

Vernon recruited 11 pairs of participants to take part in a telepathy test in which one member tries to send a target they are experiencing in virtual reality to a receiver with whom they share an emotional bond. Across all trials, receivers scored at 26%, not significantly above the 20% chance level ( $p = 0.14$ ). There was a positive correlation with psi belief ( $p = 0.04$ ). An exploratory analysis found that scoring for the top two rankings was 52% where 40% would be expected by chance – statistically significant ( $p = 0.018$ ). Although this exploratory post-hoc finding was encouraging, the results of the main analysis found no evidence for telepathy.[5](#)

## **Fast-thinking Implicit and Explicit trials**

A meta-analysis of replications of Daryl Bem's 2011 precognition experiments[6](#) found an advantage for those that used an implicit design in which rapid unconscious processing is tested, rather than explicit designs that relied on slow conscious decision making. However, some of Bem's original explicit slow tasks gave strong evidence for precognition. To explore this relationship further, Vernon conducted two fast-thinking tasks, one that tapped into predominantly implicit processes and one that explored more explicit processes with the aim of comparing both strategies for a precognitive effect. The results revealed no difference in response times between Repeated and Not Repeated conditions ( $p = 0.227$ ) and no overall evidence of any precognitive effect ( $p = 0.65$ ). Overall, the data from both the implicit preference task and the explicit recognition task failed to show any precognitive effect.[7](#)

## **Testing Precognition Using a Novel Computer Driving Game**

To boost motivation and create an engaging test of precognitive influence, Vernon arranged for participants to take part in a computerized driving game based on the popular Formula 1 racing sport. Participants undertook two timed trials, during which they were told to drive the selected car around the track as fast as they possibly could. Afterwards each subject underwent three timed post-test driving trials. It was hypothesized that these post-test priming trials would retroactively facilitate performance on the first test driving trials. Results indicated a statistically significant ( $p = 0.02$ ) driving advantage in first test performance for those participants who did the post-test driving trials compared to those who did not. This finding supports earlier findings showing that future experience can affect performance in the present.[8](#)

## **Creativity Tasks In Precognition Research**

This study attempted to elicit a precognitive effect using a creative insight task. Participants were presented with three words and were required to come up with a fourth related word (this 'compound remote associates' task is a standard test for creative insight). Half of the participants were primed for the correct word after doing the creativity test and the other were not. This was therefore a retroactive priming task. Vernon predicted that participants would be more accurate during the compound remote associates test if they were later primed compared to those that were not primed. However, the results showed no evidence of a precognitive priming effect.[9](#)

## **Influence of Cash Incentives**

In this study, cash-based incentives were used to elicit improved precognition performance using arousing images as the target. Vernon made two predictions: that post-test recall practice of images would lead to greater 'precall' of those images during testing compared to those not practised, and that a monetary reward of £10 would lead to greater levels of precognition performance than no reward. After a short relaxing induction, participants were presented with a random series of 20 arousing images, after which they were given an unexpected recall task using these presented arousing images. Following this, each volunteer was presented with a randomly chosen subset of those images to practise twice on. Images that were practised on in the future were found to elicit significantly better precognitive recall – 'precall' - during the test, while the contingent reward had no effect on precall scores.[10](#)

## **Effect of Strong Psi Belief On Precognition**

To determine whether high levels of belief in psychic ability would enhance retroactive facilitation of recall, Vernon selectively recruited participants for an online trial from the College of Psychic Studies, a mediumship organization where high levels of belief in psi are guaranteed. To further increase the precognitive

effect, both positive and negative highly arousing images were used. However, results from testing 107 participants showed no evidence for any psi effect.[11](#)

## Precognitive Priming – Implicit Only

Vernon arranged for 102 participants to undergo a conceptual replication of [Daryl Bem's](#) retroactive priming experiment,[12](#) with a major difference: multiple exposures to priming material shown after the precognitive priming test were compared to single post-test exposures to see if multiple exposures enhanced any precognitive effect. Contrary to expectation, no retroactive priming effect on response time was found. However, there was a significant effect on accuracy in responding to stimuli that would later be presented four times as opposed to just once.[13](#)

## Other Research Interests

Vernon's other research interests include:

- fields of consciousness - testing morphic resonance theory using Chinese characters;
- energy healing - the effect of energy healing techniques on cultured cell samples; comparing different energy healing techniques
- scopaesthesia - comparing different aspects of intention when staring at someone; using immersive virtual reality to explore the feeling of being stared at

## Books

Vernon's [award-winning](#) 2020 book *Dark Cognition: Evidence for psi and its implications for consciousness* has become a core text for undergraduates. It addresses some of the issues surrounding the contentious question of whether psi research is scientific or not. It also examines evidence from a range of areas including, telepathy, clairvoyance and remote viewing, precognition, psychokinesis, fields of consciousness, energy healing, and near-death-experiences. The book then explores what implications are of the findings from these areas on our understanding of consciousness.

*Quotidian Tales* (2024) is a collection of short fictional stories based on real paranormal behaviours, such as remote viewing, psychokinesis, after death communication, energy healing, precognition, near-death-experiences, and telepathy, providing insights into the paranormal informed by scientific research.

Michael Duggan

## Literature

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) Vernon et al. (2024).
- [2.](#) Roxburgh et al. (2023).
- [3.](#) Connelly et al. (2023).
- [4.](#) Vernon, Hitchman & Roe (2021).
- [5.](#) Vernon et al. (2019).
- [6.](#) Bem et al. (2015).
- [7.](#) Vernon (2019).
- [8.](#) Vernon and Ivencevic (2018).
- [9.](#) Vernon (2018).
- [10.](#) Vernon (2018).
- [11.](#) Vernon (2017).
- [12.](#) Bem (2011).
- [13.](#) Vernon (2015).