

David Vernon

David Vernon is a psychologist specializing in neuroscience, cognition and research methods. His research interests include parapsychology, enhancing human performance, creativity, and neurofeedback. In particular, he is interested in the implications of psi research for models and theories of consciousness.



Career

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

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.

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.^[1]

Precognitive Priming – Implicit Only

Vernon arranged for 102 participants to undergo a conceptual replication of Daryl Bem's retroactive priming experiment,^[2] 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.^[3]

Fast-thinking Implicit and Explicit trials

A meta-analysis of replications of Daryl Bem's 2011 precognition experiments^[4] 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.^[5]

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.^[6]

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.^[7]

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.^[8]

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.^[9]

Morphic Resonance

In 2021 Vernon, with Chris Roe and Glenn Hitchman, published a study looking for evidence of morphic resonance.^[10] 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.

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

Book

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.

Michael Duggan

Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Vernon et al (2019).
2. ^ Bem (2011).
3. ^ Vernon (2015).
4. ^ Bem et al (2015).
5. ^ Vernon (2019).
6. ^ Vernon and Ivencevic (2018).
7. ^ Vernon (2017).
8. ^ Vernon (2018).
9. ^ Vernon (2018).
10. ^ Vernon, Hitchman & Roe (2021).