

Parapsychology: the non-existence of ghosts

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Ghosts are a paranormal phenomenon that has been given a lot of credibility to which it may not be entitled. People are willing to believe the existence of ghosts based mostly on the readings of electronic equipment, the explanations of the equipment operators regarding those readings and the account of eyewitnesses. The real explanations may be much more scientific and much less fanciful. There are a few “ signs” that a ghost is present, according to the believers. These are:

- Unusual cold spots
- Unusual drafty or windy areas
- Unusual smells
- Strange sounds (voices, footsteps, moaning, crying, banging, etc)
- Anywhere you feel a strange “ being watched” sensation (Santore)

These sound like flimsy evidence to convince someone that a ghost is present and yet the majority of believers will attribute any or all of these “ signs” as proof that ghosts exist. Science takes a much different view of these “ signs” and can offer more reasonable explanations for these occurrences. Most of the ghost sightings and paranormal experiences concerning ghosts can be scientifically analyzed and explained. There is no correlation between the lifestyles, IQs, or financial status of believers and non believers of ghosts.

Religion may play a part in the willingness or not to accept ghosts as real. As with almost anything, if someone looks for it, it will usually be found. That is the way most ghosts are discovered, through the belief that they are present

and can be witnessed if one perseveres. This is proven by most of the "Ghost Walks" and tours of haunted establishments around the world. People who attend these walks and visit these establishments do so with the preconceived idea that they will see a ghost or some phenomenon that represents a ghostly presence.

This state of mind sets them up to see what they wish to see and few will try to explain away the ghost sighting with science and investigation. Among the most common phenomena found at ghost research sites are apparently floating, circular or diamond-shaped objects called "orbs," which have been captured in many photographs. Video cameras have shown their images floating across the screen, while digital and 35- millimeter cameras have photographed orbs larger than basketballs or as small as a postcard. (Krivyanski 140) These orbs are one of the more frequently produced "evidence" of the existence of a ghost.

Most people using a digital camera have seen these floating spheres in many of their pictures. Believers claim these orbs are the photographic evidence of a spirit presence. Joe Nickell, Senior Research Fellow for CSICOP, says, "We do know that dust, fingers, camera straps, mist, and lint can reflect the camera's flash and produce ghostly effects. Dust particles are a major source of orbs. We do not know that ghosts are the explanation of any orbs." In fact, Nickell has intentionally produced orbs in experiments. (Peterson) Another photoanomaly is the ectoplasm.

This is similar to the orb but is more of a stream of smoke than a sphere shape. Ghost hunters have seized on ectoplasm as a pseudo explanation for various strand and mist effects in photos. Such effects can be caused by the
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flash rebounding from the camera's wrist strap, jewelry, hair, insects, a wandering fingertip, etc. , etc. (Nickell 1996). Photographs of ghosts continue to fascinate those who are looking for proof of a ghost's existence. Over the years there have been thousands of ghost photographs but none have been proven without a doubt to be of a spiritual presence.

Photography recreated reality so exactly that it became the medium of choice for the rendition of the ultimate non-reality: the " spirit". " Spirit photos" became spectacularly popular by the 1880s and remain colorful reminders of quaint Victorian sensibility. They were ultimately embarrassing; both for the purchasers and the providers, once word got out that the " spirits" they showed were merely the by-products of deliberate double exposure. (Packer 30) Photographer William L. Mumler caused a sensation in the late 1800 when he produced photographs of ghosts for exhibition.

When his " ghosts" were found alive and working in Boston, he admitted to fraud and explained that he had found a crude method of double exposure while working in his photographs and used it to create the photos. (Nickell 146-159) With the advances in photography and digital enhancements, it has become easier to manipulate photographs and mislead people looking for proof of ghosts. Most times, a good researcher can discover the methods used to fake the " spirits" in the photos and prove the image to be a fake.

While admittedly, there are some photos that cannot be explained by modern research methods, this does not indicate proof of a ghost's existence. It simply means that the method used to create the image has not been positively identified. There have been many proven frauds in the cases of ghost evidence and sightings. Some fakes are misunderstandings of the <https://assignbuster.com/parapsychology-the-non-existence-of-ghosts/>

situation or cause, as in the following case: Vic Tandy of Coventry University in Scotland. His experience suggests that it may be possible to attribute many of the classic signs of ghosts to very low frequency sound waves trapped inside buildings.

Although these sound waves cannot be heard, tests have revealed that they can induce the perception of wraithlike "ghosts" and even a feeling of cold and terror. Tandy was working alone one night in a laboratory. He began sweating despite feeling cold and then noticed a figure in the room. He was terrified. The following morning a fencing enthusiast who had left a foil clamped in a vise returned to the lab and noticed the blade's free end frantically moving up and down. Tandy, who is a trained engineer, realized that it might be getting energy from low-frequency, inaudible sound waves filling the laboratory.

Indeed, tests revealed a standing wave trapped in the lab and reaching a peak intensity next to his desk. Further site inspection led to the source of the standing wave: a new extraction fan. When the fan's mountings were altered, the suspected ghost left. (Krivyanski 140) One case in particular proves the power of imagination and suggestion in regards to those who are searching for proof that ghosts do exist. Arthur Machen, a journalist and author of paranormal fiction wrote a fictional account of the British Army's retreat from the occupying German forces from Mons, France in 1914.

Machen reported in a "fanciful" tale that phantom archers and soldiers from a medieval battle between the English and French from many centuries before. The ghosts, according to Machen, supplied a "rear guard" that allowed the English withdrawal and even caused some casualties within the

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Germans. Problem was the fiction quickly became "fact" as reports came in from the soldiers on the field about the "angels" assisting their efforts. Even when Machen decried the whole story as a work of fiction, people kept sending him reports of the Angels.

Even after the war, a German officer claimed a horse "rear up" and tossed him off after being startled by the ghostly soldiers. (Didier, 2007) There is a saying that goes "People see and hear exactly what they wish to see and hear." Nowhere is this more evident than the field of paranormal research. Millions of people have been taken in by false mediums, crooked illusionists and urban legends. These stories or sightings have a snowball effect on the public, one person sees or hears something that they swear is a ghost or spirit and others pick it up and continue the story.

These people are unaware that they are the victims of wishful thinking or propaganda. Personal validation is, for all practical purposes, the major reason for the persistence of divinatory and assessment procedures. If the person is not persuaded, then the story will not survive. The widespread acceptance of myths about Bigfoot, the Bermuda Triangle, ancient astronauts, ghosts, the validity of meditation and consciousness-raising schemes, and a host of other beliefs is based on persuasion through personal validation rather than scientific conviction. (Frazier 81)

Ghost stories or stories of encounters with ghosts have been produced as evidence of existence for many years. Many of these stories or encounters are actually quite old and have been retold in various versions many times. Urban legends are made from many of these stories, such as the ghost bridge, the collegesuicideand the missing party girl. Almost every state has a

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version of these stories but no one has produced concrete evidence that these tragedies ever actually occurred as told. While there are tragedies in all areas, none have been proven to produce the ghosts said to haunt the halls, bridges and roads of these stories.

Gillian Bennett states “ There are several problems with using these stories as a basis for overall conclusions about ghosts. First, most of these stories are highly traditionalized; excellent material for discussing ghost traditions, but for that reason less reliable as evidence of the nature of ghost experience. Evans says at the outset that what he proposes to do “ is to see what we can learn about ghosts by looking at people's experiences of ghosts. “ This is fine so long as one can be certain that the experience they had was exactly the same as the one they reported.

I doubt the match is usually this exact. Telling stories is a social activity and there are all sorts of reasons for doing it and for doing it in one way rather than another. A story about a strange experience will only be told if it fits expectations; if it does not but the narrator insists on telling it anyway, the hearers will ask questions and suggest details and generally try to get it into better shape as a ghost story. This might be the form in which it eventually gets into print. ” (Bennett) There are many theories regarding what we see as ghosts and what they actually may be.

Some researchers have done studies on whether the intellect of the person has an effect on their belief or disbelief of ghosts. This type of study has too many variables to be conclusive and many of the people had preconceived opinions before the study began. There is evidence that gender may be a factor in whether one believes in ghosts or not. Many researchers have found <https://assignbuster.com/parapsychology-the-non-existence-of-ghosts/>

the endorsement of paranormal beliefs to be stronger among females than males for both global belief and for most of the specific dimensions of paranormal belief (Irwin, 1993). (Smith, Foster, and Stovin) One of the more interesting theories involves geomagnetic fields.

Michael Persinger, Ph. D. , a professor of psychology at Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada, has demonstrated that a sensitive temporal lobe--the area that is responsible for regulation of emotions and motivated behaviors--together with naturally occurring magnetic fields, can trigger a ghostly encounter. " Individuals prone to paranormal experiences are sensitive to weak electromagnetic fields and to man-made electrical fields, which are becoming more prominent in the communication age," explains Persinger, who has studied the link between magnetic fields and paranormal experience for 15 years.

(Lockman 27) For every ghost hunter out there, there is a researcher with a plausible explanation for the phenomenon. If more people stop to view the evidence that science has to offer, they would be in a position to make an educated decision. While this may not prove concretely that ghosts do not exist, it offers a more reasonable explanation for those incidents that become urban legend or ghost stories. While it is sad to think of the trauma of a college suicide, it is improbable to think that the spirit of that person has nothing better to do than hang around the college dorm where they met their demise.

Paranormal research is a very wide field and new areas are opening up every day. Like wise, the opportunity to research and investigate is an open area. With more advances in science, we are closer than ever to proving that

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ghosts do not exist. The evidence presented here is a small fraction of the hoaxes, frauds and misconceptions regarding the existence of ghosts. To be fair, the majority of ghost hunters investigating an occurrence will try to determine if there is a reasonable or mundane explanation for the sights or sounds.

Many times they will find that the “ghost” is nothing more than loose floorboards or an overactive imagination. The cases that do not produce a common cause do not prove the existence of a ghost; they merely prove that more research is needed. Ghosts do not exist and science backs this up with more evidence every day. The mediums and hauntings are having to become more elaborate in order to maintain their illusions. In time, science will prove, with a doubt, that ghosts do not co-inhabit our houses, schools and roadsides.