



CORRESPONDENCE

The *Journal of Scientific Exploration* is an Important Forum for Exploratory and Visionary Science

Gary E. Schwartz

geschwartzphd@gmail.com

Houran and Orcutt (2026) have written a powerful editorial addressing the ever-growing importance of “*niche journals*” that “*play a vital yet often underrecognized role*” in fostering frontier science. Houran and Orcutt wrote:

“In particular, they serve as irreplaceable incubators where high-risk, high-reward ideas can be proposed, critiqued, and iteratively improved before they face the stringent demands of mainstream, high-impact venues. Niche journals are not sidelines; they arguably are the experimental engine room that primes bold ideas for broader dissemination, where validation in cross-disciplinary, preeminent journals can catalyze the paradigm shifts in method or theory that reshape whole fields.”

Reading their scholarly editorial, I was reminded of two scientifically unseemly experiences I had involving mainstream journals that speak to this increasingly challenging issue for science and society. One instance was briefly reported in this journal (Schwartz, 2016), the other is being revealed here for the first time. Both instances are shared in the spirit of acknowledging the continuing challenges present in the publishing of frontier science and the recognition and appreciation of high-quality peer reviewed niche journals (Houran and Darby, 2026). Paraphrasing a metaphor inspired by a colleague, this correspondence is an expression of ‘salutary’ rather than ‘sour’ grapes.

In brief, my 2016 Letter to the Editor of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* began:

“Cardena (2015) has provided an important and timely service by voicing his concerns about past and present censorship in science in general, and of psi in particular. Coincidentally, I had just experienced an apparent instance of censorship in Psychological Science. Thanks to Cardena propitiously sharing this article with his peers, I was inspired to write this brief Letter to the Editor and summarize the circumstances of my recent experience with the hope that this kind of suppressive practice can be addressed more openly. At some point, mainstream science should own up to this unfair censoring tactic concerning challenging and controversial research in science in general and psi research in particular.”

To illustrate the instance, I encouraged the reader to consider what he or she would conclude from the following:

1. You submitted an article regarding a triple-blind experiment involving claimant evidential mediums to the journal *Psychological Science*, and you explicitly acknowledged the innovative and controversial nature of the research.

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20264113>

GOLD OPEN ACCESS



Creative Commons License 4.0.
CC-BY-NC. Attribution required.
No commercial use.



2. The editor wrote back and said, “*I do not perceive your evidence as persuasive.*” No explanation was provided. The manuscript was rejected by the editor, and therefore was not sent out for extended reviewer comments.
3. You wrote back to the editor and indicated that this terse sentence was subjective and vague. You requested that the editor provide a brief paragraph or two explaining how he reached this decision.
4. The editor wrote back and said no. He stated he would not provide an “*extended explanation.*” He said this was his choice about how he would “*invest his limited time.*”
5. You wrote back to the editor explaining your history of prior positive experiences in working with editors at the AAAS journal *Science*. You requested that since he was this busy, that he reconsider sending the paper out for extended reviews which could confirm (or disconfirm) his seemingly vague subjective impressions.
6. The editor wrote back and said “*Sorry, Dr. Schwartz, but no.*”
7. You wrote back to the editor and asked him if he was sure about this decision, explaining that some people might interpret this as evidence of bias or prejudice about the research area.
8. The editor made the choice to not respond to this email.

My account of this instance of censorship by *Psychological Science* (in 2006) is available at <https://journalofscientificexploration.org/index.php/jse/article/view/1007>. The triple-blind mediumship experiment was subsequently published in *EXPLORE* (Beischel and Schwartz, 2007).

I later experienced a more scientifically unseemly instance of editorial censorship by *Frontiers in Psychology* in early 2021, and it was frankly discouraging.

Again, I invite the reader to consider what you would conclude from the following:

1. You were informed that the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* had a call for papers on methodology in consciousness studies, and you submitted the required 1,000 words pre-submission abstract which you titled “Conceptual and experimental methodology for reexamining the relationship between consciousness and the brain.” Your abstract included a summary of the replicated findings of six large scale original experiments. Your abstract was positively received by the action editor, and you prepared and submitted a 12,000 words manuscript for review.
2. However, after waiting for a few months, the action editor emailed you indicating that “*only 4 of the 250 reviewers invited posted their comments.*”

3. You learned that of the four reviews submitted, only one provided a serious review (approximately 1,600 words). It focused almost exclusively on philosophical and theoretical issues and recommended resubmission. By contrast, a second reviewer literally “*apologized*” for not reviewing it citing “*how heavy it is re: data analysis / experimental designs.*” You then discovered that the other two reviewers each wrote a brief paragraph, and **they did not comment at all about the research methods or the detailed findings.** In other words, none of the four reviews addressed the innovative methods or the replicated results.
4. You were startled that the third reviewer wrote that “*this is a NONSENSE manuscript*” (caps used by the reviewer), and he wrote it twice. I have quoted the first and last sentences of the reviewer’s summary evaluation below; I have underlined some phrases suggesting bias:

“This is a pseudo-scientific manuscript whose main purpose is (1) to promote the belief in survival of consciousness after physical death, and (2) to advocate the claim that the brain is not a creator, but a receiver of consciousness...”

“Because the main claim of the author of the possibility of disembodied (i.e. “brainless”) consciousness contradicts all current physical theories, my opinion is that this manuscript is not suitable for publication in any natural science journal.”

5. You subsequently discovered that the fourth reviewer expressed even more bias. I have included his paragraph comments below, with underlining added.

“The paper is an attempt to show the existence of spirits capable of having an effect on the material world. The paper is structured as a sneak attempt to disguise its objective as an elaborate and technically sophisticated experimental setting. Moreover, the paper deploys several rhetorical techniques to smuggle an unsupported hypothesis. Among them:

- a reasonable but otherwise unconnected argument against internalism and neuroscientific approaches to consciousness (which I happen to agree with) - various arguments about the importance of open-mindedness and the like. As

it is the experimental part is totally unconvincing and the paper is a collection of slights of hand (in the negative sense)."

6. You suggested to the action editor that this set of reviews did not fairly examine the methodology nor the experimental findings. The action editor's response was that he could not obtain other "eligible experts, in order to see your paper endorsed."

I was reminded of my previous experience with *Psychological Sciences*, and my Letter to the Editor of JSE. Because I was preparing to retire from my academic position at the University of Arizona, and then moving my laboratory off campus, I decided to put the manuscript aside.

However, due to the strong encouragement of some of my colleagues, I decided to update the paper and submit it to the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. I was hoping that the methods and findings would receive the examination they deserved.

The editor received three very detailed reviews totaling approximately 4,400 words. The combined reviewers' thoughtful and thorough evaluations served the ideal peer review functions of detailed examination of theory and experiments, not merely in helping maintain quality control, but in improving the analysis and communication of work. In fact, the editor's and reviewers' collective analysis led to my converting the manuscript into two papers, one focusing on theory and methodology (Schwartz, in press a), the other on the replicated findings from the six experiments (Schwartz, in press b).

Here is the encapsulated summary of one of the reviewers of the revision papers:

"This reviewer really supports the publication of this paper as they are intrigued by the ingenuity and creativity of the instrumentation designed to detect PMPs. Since this device was refined into an automated system that could run multiple repeated measures without any human intervention, it should be possible to fine tune this system even more in order to optimize the measured signal detection and reduce the noise inherent in the communication channel."

In my earlier 2016 JSE Letter to the Editor, I commented:

*"Journals such as the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* and *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science**

and Healing were created to provide a more open forum for exploratory and visionary science. The website <http://www.opensciences.org>, formed in response to the 2014 International Summit for Post-Materialist Science, Spirituality, and Society co-organized by Gary Schwartz and Mario Beauregard from the University of Arizona and Lisa Miller from Columbia University (see Beauregard et al., 2014), is attempting to foster the kind of scientific openness and integrity expressed by Cardena (2015)."

Readers of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* appreciate the essential service that JSE provides for all of us, scientists and society in general. Ideally, scientific publications that profess to communicate 'frontier' theory and research will evolve and honor this chosen opportunity and responsibility. I hope the Houran and Orcutt (2026) editorial is widely read and appreciated.

REFERENCES

- Beauregard, B., Schwartz, G. E., Miller, L., Dossey, L., Moreira-Almeida, A., Schlitz, M., Sheldrake, R., & Tart, C. (2014). Manifesto for a post-materialist science. *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing*, 10(5), 272–274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2014.06.008>
- Beischel, J., & Schwartz, G. E. (2007). Anomalous information reception by research mediums demonstrated using a novel triple-blind protocol. *Explore: The Journal of Science & Healing*, 3(1), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2006.10.004>
- Cardena, E. (2015). The unbearable fear of psi: On scientific suppression in the 21st Century. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 29(4), 601–620.
- Houran, J., & Orcutt, D. (2026). Niche journals as pivotal incubators of maverick ideas. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 48(2), 167–173. <https://doi.org/10.31275/20264047>
- Schwartz, G. E. (2016). A Recent Instance of Psi Censorship in Psychological Science? *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 30(1).
- Schwartz, G. E. (in press a). Can technology prove survival of consciousness after death? Part I – Conceptual framework and experimental methodology. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.
- Schwartz, G. E. (in press b). Can technology prove survival of consciousness after death? Part II – Replicated results from six large sample experiments. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.

