

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

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A Small Survey of College Student Attitudes and Beliefs about Science, Pseudoscience and the Paranormal

by Professor Joseph E. Armstrong

In several recent semesters I have taught a science readings course for junior/senior nonscience majors. My general approach has been to concentrate on critical thinking and the use of science as a means of explaining and understanding phenomena. I introduce students to the concept of constructive skepticism and have them evaluate themselves as skeptics. A variety of readings introduce them to alternative medical therapies, risk assessment of human activities (e.g., air travel on planes versus hang gliders), and assorted pseudosciences.

To provide a baseline I conduct an attitude/belief survey about a wide range of scientific, paranormal, and pseudoscientific subjects. The results are withheld pending an end of the course survey to determine any changes. Clearly this survey is biased in several ways. First, all the students surveyed are residents of Illinois, not surprising, but clearly a bias. Second, the class is small—12-13 students per semester—a size restriction dictated by the discussion format. Third, the class composition is based upon enrollment at large, but curricular needs and interest vary tremendously with majors, resulting in a doubly skewed sample. 84% of the students have been elementary education majors, students who wish to teach in grades K-7. The need of this class for elementary education majors results in the second bias; 92% of the enrollment has been female. These biases notwithstanding, there is no particular reason to think that elementary education majors or women differ significantly from the general college population, so these results indicate some of the attitudes and beliefs of college-attending, college-aged adults.

The survey is constructed with numerous distractors and organized to minimize the chance that students will detect a trend or theme and alter their responses in some manner. The construction of items and responses is typical of sociological surveys. The results are anonymous and do not affect their grade evaluation, and the results aren't analyzed until the end of the semester so as not to bias my interaction with the class. This is explained prior to presenting the survey. Below I regroup a selection of the survey items for purposes of discussion. The percentages are cumulative over several semesters and repre-

sent the initial survey results. Any significant changes in attitude that developed during the course are discussed.

Science

Science and scientists are dogmatic and do not readily adopt new ideas.

(0%) Strongly agree, (0%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (55%) Strongly Disagree.

I find these results gratifying considering how scientists are portrayed on TV and in movies. Particularly after the unit on skepticism, making predictions from hypotheses, and the construction and use of controlled tests, virtually 96% of students will disagree with this statement. As potential teachers, it was also encouraging that many saw this as a good teaching technique. However, their evaluations indicate that they think science is unfair to different opinions, and they don't think science is taught "fairly" unless other "opinions" are included (see Creationism below). This echoes a post-modern, deconstructionist perspective about science that is fashionable in the humanities.

Astrology

Astrology is a valid means of finding out about ourselves and future events that may affect us.

(0%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (18%) Disagree, (55%) Strongly Disagree.

Almost 1 in 5 believe in astrology, but that is lower than usually reported for the general public where belief in astrology runs 28-35%. It's somewhat encouraging that 55% strongly disagree and some were openly quite critical of the intellectual

("Survey" continued on page 4)



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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

As I discussed last month, I continue to be disgusted with the way so-called psychics have done their best to take advantage of the September 11 attacks. I have not had enough time to put it together into a full talk, but I will try to do so for December's meeting. I have found several other "psychics" who claim to have predicted the attacks, always with excuses as to why they missed the date, etc. Indeed, one of the articles I wrote here, while dealing with predictions for the new TV season, also addresses this issue.

Of course, "psychics" aren't the only ones taking advantage. I was told about a website selling homeopathic remedies for anthrax. These folks are even worse than the "psychics" as they have the potential to actually **kill** somebody if they take this "treatment" rather than antibiotics. This is always a potential problem with alternative medicine, but to directly link it to a potentially fatal disease caused by terrorists is unconscionable.

November Meeting

This month's meeting, however, will deal with none of this. Instead we will watch the final episode of the PBS series on evolution. While I have not seen any of the series myself, I have heard great things about it. The final episode dealt with creationism as well, so I think it is the most appropriate for us to see. I hope to see you at the meeting—7:00 on Tuesday, November 6. 🍷

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Crossing Over the Boundaries of Good Taste

by David Bloomberg

Shortly after the September 11 attacks, I predicted that John Edward, host of the television show *Crossing Over* (and discussed in an article last issue), would have a special World Trade Center edition of his show. I echoed that in my “Psychic Parasites” article last month, saying: “I would not at all be surprised to see a ‘special’ World Trade Center victim edition of his show, which has moved from the Science Fiction Channel to syndication across the country. In fact, I will be surprised if he does *not* have such a special.”

I should open my own psychic hotline, because I was far more accurate than any other psychic in the country was in predicting the original attack.

Various media outlets announced on October 25 that *Crossing Over* would indeed feature John Edward claiming to talk to those who perished in the September 11 attacks—in several episodes during November sweeps. The president of Studios USA domestic syndication, Steve Rosenberg, claimed they would “be done tastefully ... and won’t be exploitive.” I’m sorry, but how the hell do you use pretend powers to prey off the families of murdered people and **not** have it be exploitive? We’re supposed to believe that maybe it just *accidentally* happens to fall during sweeps?

Rosenberg added, “It seemed wrong not to do it.” Sure it did! It seemed wrong to miss out on a golden opportunity to pull in some extra dough!

But it was not meant to be.

Advertisers and the stations that air the syndicated show were less than happy with this idea. It seems that they actually have consciences. This appears to differentiate them from *Crossing Over* team, who failed to think that perhaps this wasn’t such a great idea after all. E! Online described the affiliates’ view that the idea “was a crass attempt to cash in on a national tragedy.” Ya think?

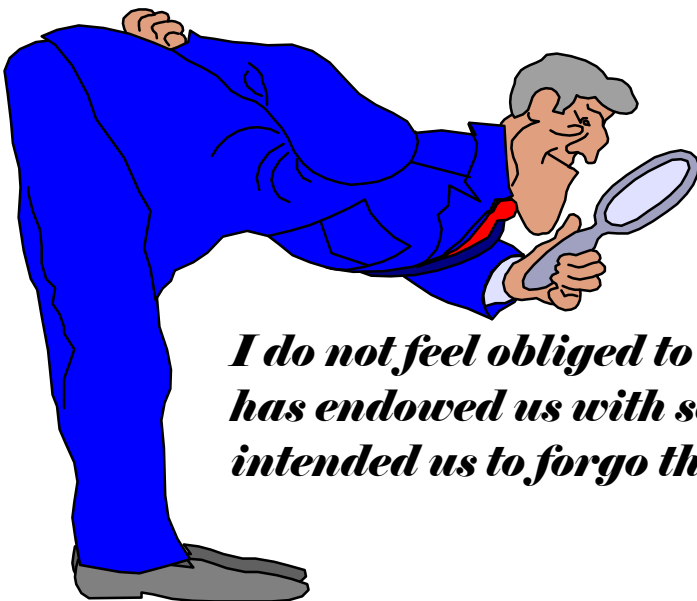
I mean, normally the show is just a crass attempt to cash in on the individual tragedies of everyday life and death. Apparently, that is okay with the affiliates and advertisers. But cashing in on a big tragedy is not. It’s no wonder John Edward didn’t see it coming. He probably figured he’d gotten them all used to cashing in on tragedy.

Still, Studios USA defends the idea and goes so far as to say that they have “been inundated with calls and pleas for readings from grieving families of the World Trade Center victims looking for comfort and closure.” They want comfort and closure? Fine. Send them to a grief counselor, not a parasite. Alas, that’s not their plan. They add, “Many of these readings have been done privately and will continue to be done privately.”

Looking at it, this was really a great opportunity for Edward. Usually, he has to guess how a person died. With the World Trade Center, it’s pretty obvious. And even if he’s wrong—for example, saying that a person died in the fire rather than in the building’s collapse—who’s going to know? An automatic hit. Plus, since these people have been contacting him and the show, he or his production crew know their names, which can easily be looked up in the various articles, obituaries, whatever. He doesn’t need to worry about cold reading—all of the information is already in the public eye. Add in a few nice tokens of love and kindness like, “He loves you, but wanted to try to save the handicapped woman before saving himself,” and voila, he’s got the reading done.

No word on if he was going to try to talk to the terrorists themselves to find out how hot Hell was or if, perhaps, they have since decided they made a mistake. Just think how much help he could have been to the FBI. Maybe dead terrorists aren’t as talkative, though.

Edward made a mistake. He overestimated just how far he could push the limits of good taste. I would like to think that perhaps those who objected to this “special” might take this opportunity to realize that he really wouldn’t have been doing anything different from what he always does—making money by preying on traumatized family members. Unfortunately, I know better than to even hope they would figure that out. ☹️



I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.

— Galileo Galilei

(“Survey” continued from page 1)

abilities of believers. If articles debunking astrology were included in their readings and discussions, over 90% would subsequently disagree with a similar statement.

Psychics

At least some people are psychic and can tell us about past and future events by just looking at us or talking to us.

(0%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (27%) Strongly Disagree.

Certain psychics can communicate with the dead and help solve crimes.

(0%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (27%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (9%) Strongly Disagree.

Considering how frequently we encounter purported psychic powers on television, I'm actually surprised that only 27% believe. Given TV's positive representation of psychic powers, it is not surprising that belief in psychics is greater than belief in astrology. Although 55% strongly disagreed with the statement on astrology, only half as many strongly disagreed with a similar statement on psychics. In one class a student knew someone who worked as a psychic on a telephone hotline and told her how phony it was. She really lambasted the idea and even gave testimony of a failed psychic reading. That had a profound impact on that class. About 50% of the believers will change their minds, but those who have been fooled by cold reads resist strongly even when the method is described. More are uncertain about communication with the dead, and they admit to having heard how some psychic solved an insoluble crime, but with no specifics, it amounts to just urban legend.

Luck & Probability

Some people are truly lucky or unlucky, getting more than their share of good or bad results.

(0%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (18%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

9-17-23-25-36-41 is more likely to win a lottery (6 out of 44) than 1-2-3-4-5-6.

(0%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (46%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

If a couple has 7 children and all 7 are the same sex, the odds are improving that their next child will be of the opposite sex.

(0%) Strongly agree, (46%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (9%) Strongly Disagree.

Their attitudes about luck are quite interesting. The strong parallel with psychic belief suggests the two are related, but discussions show the same people don't necessarily share these beliefs, and no one has ever suggested psychic abilities contrib-

ute to good luck. Tales of consistent winning at the local gambling boat (Peoria) are common student folklore. I have always queried my students, why wouldn't true psychics clean up on betting pools and gambling rather than wasting their time with hotline calls. This causes a few people to change their minds, but most believers remain believers.

Their understanding of probability may explain the beliefs about luck. Almost half admitted they had no idea which set of numbers was more likely to win. One perceptive student asked if it was a set of numbers or a sequence, and another then wondered why it mattered! Both of us gave the latter a shocked look. I have asked them if they thought the classes' sex ratio was due to chance and chance alone; about half thought it was just luck, the other half was certain of bias, but couldn't begin to calculate any probabilities. Combining biology with probability was pretty demoralizing; almost half don't understand that sex determination of siblings are independent events. Clearly basic math skills in probability are lacking in 4 out of 5 students. Perhaps it remains in the State's best interest to keeping its citizens from being able to understand lotteries.

UFOs & Alien Abductions

UFOs, extraterrestrial beings and vehicles, have visited Earth.

(0%) Strongly agree, (0%) Agree, (18%) Don't know, (64%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

With the assistance of therapists thousands of humans have recovered repressed memories of alien abduction, and the similarity of their memories is evidence of the existence of UFOs.

(0%) Strongly agree, (0%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (64%) Disagree, (27%) Strongly Disagree.

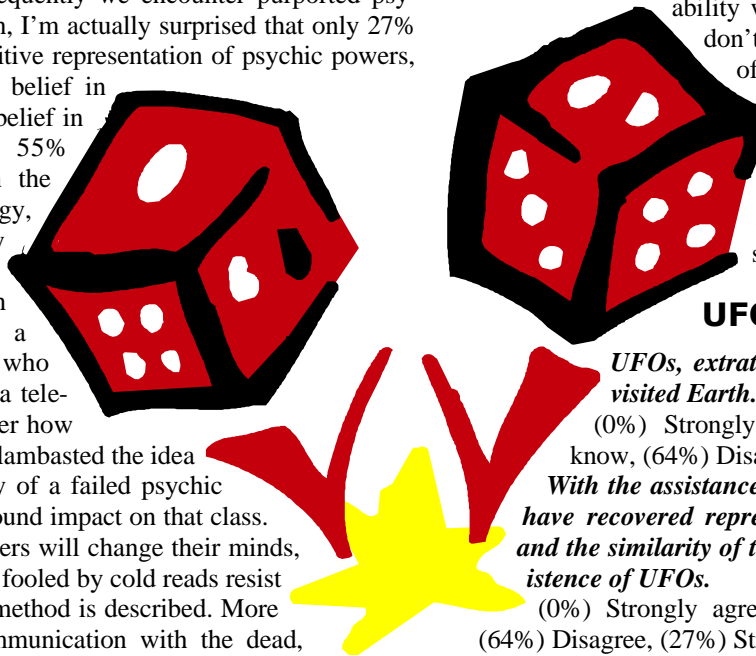
Our Illinois students just don't believe in UFOs, although a few true skeptics explain they have no means of deciding one way or the other. None have experienced UFOs and most think the TV shows “corny,” an appropriate central Illinois response. Obviously if they don't believe in UFOs then they don't believe in alien abductions either. But this is a poorly constructed item because it also requires that they believe in recovered memory therapy. But most said that didn't influence them at all, but see immediately below. John Mack has had his 15 minutes of fame; they haven't heard of him or his book.

Sexual Abuse

With the assistance of therapists thousands of people have discovered via recovered memories that their psychological problems are derived from sexual abuse as children.

(0%) Strongly agree, (73%) Agree, (27%) Don't know, (0%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Interesting when it came to sexual abuse, recovered memories were valid evidence, but not for UFO abduction. “Well, we know sexual abuse happens,” was the explanation. A psychology major in one class delighted in explaining how memories could be implanted, but many didn't even notice that they



evaluated the same evidence, recovered memories, as valid in one instance and invalid in another. Almost ¾ of our future elementary school teachers think recovered memories can be used to discover sexual abuse. Scary.

Evolution & Creationism

The Earth is over 4 billion years old with a record of life nearly that long.

(9%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (55%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

All the geological features on Earth were formed only a few thousand years ago by a worldwide cataclysmic flood.

(0%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (46%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (27%) Strongly Disagree.

Biologists think organisms change and new species appear as the result of blind, random chance.

(0%) Strongly agree, (9%) Agree, (27%) Don't know, (55%) Disagree, (9%) Strongly Disagree.

The fact that about half of my students don't know at all is rather discouraging, but they are not science majors and they aren't creationists. About 1 out of every 5 of our Illinois' public school students and future elementary school teachers is a believer in creationism, but this is still less than half the national average reported by most polls. Perhaps many students with fundamentalist religious beliefs seek private schools that cater to their beliefs rather than attend a big, secular state institution. The impact of creationism may not be that strong, since almost two-thirds of my students know evolution doesn't work by blind, random chance even though that phrase is a stock item of creationism. Of course almost half don't know about geology! I think geology has fared less well than biology in high school and college curricula.

Dinosaurs and humans coexisted in the past.

(0%) Strongly agree, (36%) Agree, (27%) Don't know, (18%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

That 35% of my students agree with this statement baffles me. Perhaps a TV influence again, perhaps geological ignorance rather than a belief. I've never explored this issue in an attempt to understand it. In final discussions, students who strongly disagreed were really critical of those who thought humans and dinosaurs contemporary. Man tracks along with dinosaur tracks have long been part of creationist lore, but no student has ever mentioned that as evidence. I conclude this is not a good indicator of creationist beliefs.

To be fair, creation science should be taught as an alternative to evolution in biology so students can make up their minds.

(9%) Strongly agree, (73%) Agree, (18%) Don't know, (0%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

The fairness argument really persuades most of these future teachers. Obviously believers in creationism always strongly agree. If the fairness issue is tackled apart from the creation/evolution issue, most of them will change their minds about what is fair. However, within the context of the creation/evolution issue, they remain committed to fairness. Here they see biologists as dogmatic or at least unwilling to offer both sides even when provided with examples of how science should be taught (testing of hypotheses). This doesn't bode well for the future of science education. Even students who were strongly

skeptical of alternative medical treatments and other pseudo-sciences became very defensive when evolution was discussed. "It makes me uncomfortable, and threatens my religious freedom," said one. I asked if freedom of religion meant freedom from confronting uncomfortable, disconcerting, or contradictory ideas? The answer was "yes." At about this time in the course my teaching evaluations begin to suffer.

Alternative Medical Therapies

Echinacea is one of the top selling herbal cold remedies and thousands of people provide testimonials of its benefits, so you can be quite sure it is an effective medicine.

(0%) Strongly agree, (9%) Agree, (73%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (9%) Strongly Disagree.

Megadoses of vitamin C can help prevent colds.

(0%) Strongly agree, (46%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (27%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

Garlic, either as a food or tablets, can help prevent cancer.

(0%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (64%) Don't know, (18%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Homeopathic medicines are so dilute that not one molecule of the original active substance is left in the mixture, but the essence, the value, of the active ingredient remains.

(0%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (64%) Don't know, (45%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

Pat Robertson prays for someone among his TV congregation that is suffering from back pain, or some other ailment. The testimonials of cured watchers demonstrate that some people have faith healing abilities.

(9%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (45%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

Attitudes and beliefs about alternative therapies vary depending upon whether they have heard of them or not. Vitamin C remains the most common belief, and I use a *Consumer Reports* article on vitamins to introduce the placebo effect and have them consider the validity of testimonials. However, I've been told more than once that "I know when some therapy works for me." Once an arch-skeptic countered, "How? Since you conducted an uncontrolled test on a small sample and had subjective evaluation based on biased expectations, you don't know squat." You live for those students.

Most of my students had never heard of homeopathy, so most decided they didn't know even though the basic premise was described. The students who disagreed with the statement on TV faith healing understood that in a huge audience there would always be some with common ailment and that they would respond to the power of suggestion. Others countered you couldn't know what caused the improvement. I asked what if an avowed charlatan could effect the same testimonials, wouldn't it demonstrate no supernatural powers or divine intervention were needed? But believers continue to believe.

Another interesting phenomenon was that if a student advocated a particular therapy (magnets have been popular), the other students became very reluctant to discuss or criticize that particular therapy. One student unloaded on alternative therapies and her parents who "bought into every goofy therapy ever invented." She explained that her skepticism was the product of resisting her mother's insistence that she use these alternative

therapies. Who says parents don't influence their kids' attitudes? As with psychics, a strong advocate of skepticism made the class's attitude more skeptical. Peer pressure is powerful in this age group.

Environmental Issues

Deforestation, depletion of natural resources, pollution, depletion of ocean fisheries, destruction and disturbance of natural areas, and species extinction are serious problems that humans should be aware of and concerned about.

(82%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (0%) Don't know, (0%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Global warming is potentially the most serious environmental problem facing the humans.

(9%) Strongly agree, (46%) Agree, (36%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Carbon dioxide makes up less than 0.1% (1 part in one thousand) of our atmosphere.

(0%) Strongly agree, (27%) Agree, (36%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

As a citizen of the United States, you, individually, will use or consume 25 times the resources and produce 100 times more pollution than one citizen in an undeveloped third world country.

(9%) Strongly agree, (55%) Agree, (36%) Don't know, (0%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Scientists have only recently discovered that chemicals of human origin have the potential to destroy atmospheric ozone which protects the Earth's surface from ultraviolet radiation.

(0%) Strongly agree, (36%) Agree, (55%) Don't know, (9%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Human population growth rate has slowed from 2.1% to 1.7% so population growth is not a serious problem.

(0%) Strongly agree, (0%) Agree, (18%) Don't know, (82%) Disagree, (0%) Strongly Disagree.

Our students have a fairly strong "green" or environmental attitude, but most profess ignorance about specific issues and facts. They don't understand the underlying science at all. These results suggest their positions on these issues are not informed positions.

Human Intelligence

There are measurable differences in intellectual abilities between human races.

(0%) Strongly agree, (36%) Agree, (9%) Don't know, (36%) Disagree, (18%) Strongly Disagree.

There are measurable differences in intellectual abilities between sexes in humans.

(9%) Strongly agree, (18%) Agree, (18%) Don't know, (18%) Disagree, (36%) Strongly Disagree.

Over a third of my students think there are sexual and racial differences in intellectual abilities, although in one of these female biased classes I was told, "Women are definitely smarter," which may explain why only half of these female biased classes disagreed with the second statement. When the issue is pursued in discussion, they know of no specific studies or data, just what they have heard and believe. Another student almost got mugged when she said, "Well, on intelligence tests

they always ask you about math and science stuff, and men are smarter about that."

Conclusions

In many instances my students have shown less belief in the paranormal and pseudosciences than the public at large, but they often profess a shocking ignorance of science and math. You quickly reach the conclusion that their positions on topics are seldom based upon thought, reflection, data, or knowledge. Not surprisingly, beliefs or attitudes closely associated with religious issues will seldom change through discourse. Skepticism is initially viewed as a negative or critical attitude, but they develop a more balanced view of skepticism with practice and positive examples. In general students are better able to skeptically evaluate issues about which they have no emotional attachment or vested interest.

Only about 20% have evaluated this class as a useful or an interesting exercise, but those were highly complimentary, indicating they had learned a lesson valuable for future teachers. Of the others, one-fourth thought it a waste of time because they thought they were already critical thinkers or weren't particularly interested in the topics. Another one-fourth thought the class (and me) an exercise in faculty arrogance and an attempt to "change their thinking." "I got tired of having to justify my opinions," said one. And you may rightly conclude many justifications were weak. Here you may get a whiff of the deconstructionist attitudes so popular in some portions of academia that all opinions and claims of knowledge are equal and should be treated as such. In these class discussions I consistently maintain that alternate explanations are always encouraged so long as they take into account the known facts. A few find this position unfair, to which I point out that the value and success of science is exactly because of this. Students are surprised to learn that scientists cannot ignore the findings or data generated by other studies. Most think we selectively gather, report, and use data to make our cases for a particular position.

Students are unfamiliar with the concept of an informed or educated opinion, and they perceive, for example, my "opinion" on creationism to be authoritative in the sense of control or power, but not in terms of knowledge or experience. Some students are willing to accept everything an authority figure, a teacher, says. Others seem to take the opposite position, and disbelieve or dismiss your every statement. Some see the use of scientific studies, data, logic, and statistics as a heavy-handed attempt to change their minds. I asked what was learning if not discarding faulty notions and replacing them with informed, educated opinions? To claim you have considerable knowledge, an extremely well-informed opinion, strikes some students as arrogant. Some adopt a sort of a so-what-if-you-know-more-than-me attitude, I'm still going to believe the same things. Such attitudes always give the professional educator pause. However on the bright side, some, at least 1 in 5, find that their ability to evaluate issues and claims improved, and they provide examples of their new found ability to think critically. This is good, but I always thought my batting average in the big leagues would be better than .200.

Joseph Armstrong is a Professor of Botany and Head Curator Geo. S. Vasey Herbarium at Illinois State University. 🍄

TV Guide Psychic Predictions Sure to Be Worthless

by David Bloomberg

Last season, the *Chicago Tribune* had a “psychic” make predictions about how *Survivor 2* would play out. A review of those predictions after the series ended showed that the so-called “psychic” could hardly have been farther off. The big tip off? He said Debb (who was the first to be voted off) would win and Tina (who won) wouldn’t have the stamina to make it through.

This year, I haven’t seen any “psychic” predictions that have been quite so specific. However, *TV Guide* did have four such people who claim to see the future make predictions about the Fall TV season (in their September 15 issue). While most of the questions asked of these folks were specific to several shows, one asked what else they saw happening this season. Because of printing schedules, this was probably asked only a few weeks before the September 11 attacks. Yet none of the “psychics” foresaw this tragic event, nor (tangentially) the effect it would have on the very television season they were discussing. That right there should be a pretty good indicator of their vast psychic powers. But let’s take a look at who they are and what else they had to say.

The four psychics were Shawn Robbins, Justine Kenzer, and Terry & Linda Jamison (the psychic twins). In reading through these, it’s amusing to see the contradictory answers. Obviously, not all of them have the same powers—or, perhaps I should say, they all have exactly the same powers: Zero. In any event, Robbins claimed that something in Jason Alexander’s past would come out, forcing ABC to cancel his new series. Considering that Alexander has had a successful career for years now, it seems to me that anything that bad in his past would have come out by now. But I guess it’s possible. Kenzer says Alexander’s show would be painful to watch. You don’t need to be psychic to know that is a likely possibility. She adds that it will be canceled after six episodes. Meanwhile, the psychic twins say it will be a brilliantly funny show. Hmmm.

We have a similar divergence of opinion on Emeril Lagasse’s new show. The twins and Kenzer say it will be terrible. Robbins says it will be a classic along the lines of *I Love Lucy*. Yeesh. Same with Ellen DeGeneres’s new show—Robbins says it will fold after a season, but Kenzer says it could be as big as *Roseann*. All three of them come up with different shows as the “breakout hit of the season.” Amusingly, Robbins said *Danny* would be “big in the vein of *Everybody Loves Raymond*.” For the record, *Danny* was so big that CBS announced it was being

canceled after only two episodes. Good job, Mr. Robbins!

As indicated earlier, none of them predicted the biggest “event” of the year (and, incidentally, the TV season). None mentioned the Emmys being postponed not once, but twice. Instead, when they were asked to go out on a limb and predict what else would happen, Robbins said *24*’s star would demand that a new real-life love interest be written in to the story; Kenzer said Wednesday wouldn’t be CBS’s night (ooh, really going out on a limb there, since NBC has owned Wednesday night with *Law & Order* and *West Wing*); the twins showed a bit of professional jealousy and said John Edward’s *Crossing Over* would die quickly (we can only hope they got that one right).

They were asked what they saw happening on *Survivor: Africa*. Robbins said somebody would be kicked off for being caught (and filmed) having sex with a crew member. Um, yeah. Right. It’s probably safe to say that one won’t come true. At least it will certainly be easy to check at the end.

Kenzer said a contestant would be bitten and poisoned—though not fatally—by a rare bug. OK, another one that will be easy to check at the end of the show.

She also added that she sees “strong female energy as the winner.” This gives her a better than 50/50 shot at having a correct prediction, since half the players are female, and one male is gay, so she could try to take credit for the “female energy” bit even if he wins (note that she didn’t simply say it was going to be a woman).

The twins say a female participant will be seriously injured from a fall. There are already rumors circulating that one woman does indeed get injured, but we don’t know how. Want to bet these two take credit no matter *how* that woman is hurt? They also say—you’ll love this one—that “We see knock-down, drag-out fights among the contestants.” Fighting between contestants? On *Survivor*? No way! Sheesh, they really made a tough prediction there.

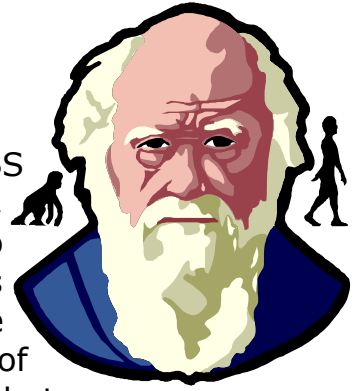
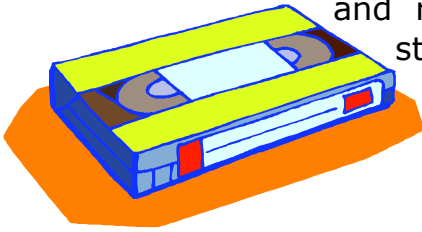
So what does all of this mean? Absolutely nothing. But here are my psychic predictions (hey, I am exactly as psychic as these other four folks): None of the specific predictions from these four “psychics” will come true. A couple of the general ones might, which is precisely why they make them so generic. Even so, all four of them will take credit for these somehow in order to further their own images.



Our Next Meeting

Evolution

This final episode of the recent seven-part PBS series *Evolution* dealt with, among other things, creationism. "Of all species, we alone attempt to explain who we are and how we came to be. This final show explores the struggle between science and religion. Through the personal stories of students and teachers, it offers the view that they are compatible." Please join us to view and discuss this videotape presentation.



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