

## CSIcon 2023 Sunday Papers

Session Chairs: Ray Hall & Natalia Pasternak

10:05-10:25

### Talk 1: **Cuban Ray Guns, Schoolgirl Poisonings, and Monkey Men. Oh My!**

Rob Palmer, Retired aerospace engineer, Guerrilla Skepticism on Wikipedia (GSoW) team member, RecoveringFromReligion.org volunteer, Skeptical Inquirer online columnist.

#### Abstract:

Did a 4-ft tall roller-skating, helmeted Monkey Man with metal claws and glowing red eyes attack people throughout New Delhi and surrounding towns in India causing injuries and deaths in 2001? Have thousands of girls in hundreds of schools across Iran been poisoned by their government as retribution for the ongoing mass anti-hijab protests (or by citizens to incriminate their government)? Have over a thousand U.S. government employees and family members in Cuba and all around the world – even at the White House – been attacked and injured over the past seven years by “sci-fi” energy-weapons wielded by undiscovered assailants for unknown reasons? Believe it or not, there is a connection between these seemingly unrelated headline-grabbing stories. This presentation will discuss these events to explore the little recognized and less understood phenomena that are likely the actual culprits in these and a myriad of similar events that have occurred worldwide throughout human history: Social Contagion and Mass Psychogenic Illness.

Bio: Rob Palmer is a mechanical engineer & software engineer with a long and diverse career in the aerospace industry. Before retiring in 2020, he worked (among other things) as a spacecraft designer, computer programmer, and software systems engineer. In 2016, as a hobby Rob began working for the Guerrilla Skepticism on Wikipedia (GSoW) project which edits the online encyclopedia to promote skepticism, and in 2018 he was hired to write for Skeptical Inquirer. Rob has had 90 of his articles and interviews published in his Skeptical Inquirer online column (“The Well-Known Skeptic”), in the Skeptical Inquirer print magazine, and in other skeptical and humanist media. He is also a helpline agent and spokesperson for RecoveringFromReligion.org. Since 2018, Rob has been a public speaker, covering a variety of topics for many skeptic and humanist groups, both in person and on-line, including for Dragon Con’s Skeptic Track in 2021. This is Rob’s fourth consecutive appearance on the CSIcon stage, having been a Sunday Papers speaker at the three previous conferences.

10:30-10:50

## Talk 2: **The Truth About Sallie**

Adrienne Hill, About Time board member, GSoW editor, The Skeptic Zone reporter and retired high school mathematics teacher.

**Abstract:** The lies and half-truths about Sarah Winchester start with her name. While born Sarah Lockwood Pardee, she was called Sallie after her paternal grandmother, who had died shortly before her birth, but most references call her Sarah. Newspapers and written stories about Winchester, even while she was alive, have depicted her as eccentric, superstitious, and irrational. In truth, the woman was a pioneer. The importance of factual and well-researched journalism remains problematic 100 years after Winchester's death. There is much to be learned from this story, and it needs to be set right for Winchester's descendants and to illustrate that the truth is important and often more interesting than the lore.

**Bio:** Adrienne Hill, a former high school mathematics teacher, currently dedicates her time to various roles and interests. She serves as a board member for the non-profit organization About Time, founded by Susan Gerbic. Additionally, she holds positions as a board member, presenter, and educational consultant for the Tourette OCD Alberta Network. Adrienne also actively contributes as an editor for Guerrilla Skepticism on Wikipedia, reports for The Skeptic Zone, and co-chairs the Western Canadian Reason Conference (WeCanReason) which is held in Calgary, Canada at the beginning of May each year. One of her favorite projects that she has been involved with was volunteering for the Great Australian Psychic Prediction Project, led by Richards Saunders.

10:55-11:15

## Talk 3: **Wake up Sheeple!: Personality traits and belief in pseudoscience**

Rodney Schmaltz, PhD., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, MacEwan University, and Deljorah Crossland, Honours Student, Department of Psychology, MacEwan University

**Abstract:** The proliferation of false information on social media and other technological platforms has made it increasingly difficult for people to differentiate between truth and falsehood. This has led to a growing concern about the spread of misinformation and its potential to harm individuals and society. One way to address this problem is to understand who is most susceptible to believing in false information. Previous research has shown that personality traits play a role in this susceptibility, with conscientious individuals being better at detecting misinformation and those with dark triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) being more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. Our research builds on previous literature to investigate the role of self-interest in susceptibility to different types of pseudoscience. We theorize that people who score higher on domains of selfishness are more likely to believe in

pseudoscientific claims that promise to benefit them personally, such as those that offer miracle cures or to provide insights into how to manipulate others.

**Bio 1:** Rodney Schmaltz is an Associate Professor at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. His research explores why people fall prey to pseudoscientific claims, with an emphasis on strategies to promote and teach scientific skepticism. Dr. Schmaltz's work extends to the areas of workplace productivity and self-control, focusing on evidence-based approaches to improve performance and reduce common workplace stressors.

**Bio 2:** Deljorah (DJ) Crossland is an undergraduate honors student at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Her current research focuses on examining the connection between personality traits and belief in pseudoscientific phenomena. Additionally, she investigates the relationship between personality traits and the dissemination of misinformation. She aims to understand why some people may be more susceptible to embracing pseudoscientific beliefs, and how our personality traits may play a role in the spread of misinformation. Ultimately, she seeks to contribute to the development of strategies aimed to foster critical thinking skills as a way to mitigate the dissemination of pseudoscience and misinformation.

11:20-11:40

#### **Talk 4: The Problem with Common Sense: Naïve Realism Prevents Learning**

Kathleen Dyer PhD, Professor, Professor, Department of Child and Family Science, California State University, Fresno

**Abstract:** Naive realism is an unquestioning belief in the truth of one's own observations and the lessons learned from one's own experiences. Other folks might be biased, but not me! I argue that this position is reflected in a reliance on "common sense". In the college classroom, students do not invest in learning things they believe to be "just common sense"....and this prevents them from learning my rigorous course. I accidentally uncovered evidence of the problem of naive realism in my research methods class during the COVID19 pandemic.

**Bio:** Katie Dyer is a Professor of Child and Family Science at the Fresno campus of the California State University. Her research includes the study of infant sleep and parenting, as well as pedagogies in higher education, and efforts to reduce false beliefs in students. She has published two textbooks: one on parenting education, and one on research methods in Human Development and Family Science.

11:40-12:00

#### **Panel Discussion: Q & A with all Sunday Papers Presenters**

Moderators: Natalia Pasternak & Ray Hall

