CONSISTENT MISSING

Authored by

mohammad looti

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1. Core Definition and Context

The term **Consistent Missing** refers to an observable phenomenon primarily documented within the field of parapsychology and experimental tests designed to measure forms of extrasensory perception (ESP) or psychokinesis (PK). It describes a pattern of performance in which a subject's scores are not only below the expected mean score dictated by chance probability but are statistically significantly and consistently lower across multiple trials or experimental sessions. Unlike random chance results, which tend to cluster around the null hypothesis mean, consistent missing represents a systematic deviation toward incorrect responses, suggesting that the outcomes are not merely attributable to ordinary luck or random error.

In the standard protocol for testing clairvoyance or telepathy, subjects are typically asked to guess the identity of hidden targets, frequently employing materials such as **Zener cards** (a deck consisting of five symbols: circle, cross, wavy lines, square, and star). If the subject were guessing randomly, the probability of scoring correctly in any single trial is 1 in 5, or 20%. Therefore, in a standard run of 25 trials, the expected mean score is 5 hits. Consistent missing occurs when a subject consistently scores 0, 1, or 2 hits per run, and when the cumulative probability of achieving such a persistently low score by chance alone falls below established statistical thresholds (e.g., $p < 0.05$).

The recognition of **consistent missing** is crucial because it challenges the simple dichotomy of "success or failure" in psi research. It implies that if a subject is demonstrating a non-random, statistically significant ability to be wrong, this deviation must be caused by some systematic factor--potentially a negative manifestation of the very ability being tested. Researchers hypothesize that the active mechanism causing the consistently low scores is a form of negative correlation, where the subject unconsciously or unintentionally avoids the correct target, rather than merely failing to identify it.

2. Statistical Basis and Deviation from Chance

Statistically, consistent missing is treated as an inverted form of the desired positive psi effect (known as **psi-hitting**). If a subject achieves 9 or 10 hits in a 25-trial run consistently, this is considered evidence for psi-hitting. Conversely, if the subject consistently achieves 0 or 1 hit, the magnitude of the statistical deviation from the mean (5 hits) is equivalent, though in the opposite direction. Both deviations are equally improbable under the null hypothesis of random chance.

The analysis relies heavily on binomial probability distributions, which model the probability of a

certain number of successes (hits) in a fixed number of trials (guesses) given a known probability of success on each trial (0.20 for Zener cards). When the observed number of hits falls into the extreme lower tail of this distribution, the scores are deemed statistically significant. The significance of consistent missing is therefore not based on the assumption that the subject is attempting to score low, but on the inability of random chance to explain the systematic low scoring pattern.

Researchers must perform careful statistical controls to rule out non-parapsychological explanations, such as flaws in randomization procedures, subject bias (e.g., actively trying to avoid guessing the last symbol seen), or sensory leakage. However, even after rigorous controls, statistically reliable instances of consistent missing--or negative scoring--have been documented throughout the history of ESP testing, leading parapsychologists to accept it as a legitimate, albeit inverted, form of psi manifestation.

3. Historical Context: Zener Cards and Early ESP Testing

The concept of consistent missing arose directly from the pioneering work conducted by J.B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University in the 1930s. As Rhine standardized the testing of ESP using the Zener card deck, researchers began recording scores not just above the chance mean, but also far below it. While initially, the focus was strictly on finding evidence for psi-hitting, the persistent appearance of low scores demanded explanation.

Early analysis often focused on the "decline effect," a separate but related phenomenon where subjects who initially showed high scores would see their performance drop back toward chance or even into the negative scoring range as the experiment progressed, often attributed to fatigue or loss of interest. However, **consistent missing** differs in that it can be the subject's primary and stable mode of scoring from the outset of the experiment, independent of any initial positive run.

The formal recognition of low-scoring as statistically meaningful was crucial for the development of parapsychology as a statistical science. If only high scores were counted as evidence for ESP, the methodology would be inherently biased. By accepting that statistically significant negative scores (consistent missing) were just as important as positive scores, researchers acknowledged that psi ability, if it exists, is not always controllable or consciously directed toward success. This expansion of the statistical framework allowed for a more complete understanding of how psi might manifest in experimental settings.

4. Manifestations and Experimental Protocols

Consistent missing manifests in various experimental setups, not limited solely to direct guessing of targets. It is observed wherever a binomial distribution model is applicable for measuring success rates.

Direct Guessing Trials: The most common manifestation, involving the subject attempting to identify the symbol on a Zener card or predicting the outcome of a random number generator, resulting in scores consistently below the expected average.
Displacement Scoring: In some experiments, although the subject fails to hit the immediate target, their response may statistically correlate with the target immediately preceding or succeeding the current target. Consistent missing can manifest here as a statistically significant negative correlation with these displaced targets.
PK Testing: When subjects attempt to influence random physical systems (e.g., coin flips or dice rolls) to produce a specific outcome, consistent missing would be observed if the subject consistently caused the system to produce the *opposite* of the intended outcome at a statistically significant rate.
"Avoidance" Trials: Some experiments are designed to test for unconscious avoidance. In these cases, consistent missing aligns with the theoretical prediction that the subject is unconsciously sensing the target but actively steering their response away from it.

The strict protocol necessitates pre-registration of experimental designs and analyses. Researchers must define what constitutes **consistent missing** before the data is collected, preventing post-hoc interpretation where runs of low scores are only deemed significant after the fact. This commitment to rigorous statistical methods ensures that the observed negative scoring patterns are genuinely anomalous and not products of experimental flexibility.

5. Theoretical Explanations and Potential Mechanisms

The existence of **consistent missing** has required parapsychologists to develop specific theoretical constructs to explain why the subconscious mind would actively avoid success. This mechanism is broadly categorized under the umbrella term **Psi-Missing**.

One leading hypothesis suggests that the subject is indeed receiving the precognitive or telepathic information unconsciously, but internal psychological barriers or conscious aversion mechanisms interfere with the transfer of that information to the conscious response. For instance, if the subject possesses deep-seated skepticism about their own abilities or the concept of psi, this mental block might result in an inverted expression of the ability, leading to consistently incorrect answers.

Another mechanism involves the concept of **negative feedback loops**. If a subject is anxious about their performance or experiences mounting frustration during the test, this negative emotional state might interfere with the weak psi signal, causing the subconscious to actively suppress the correct answer. This explanation links the performance outcome not just to the existence of psi, but to the subject's psychological state and motivation during the testing period.

Furthermore, some theories explore the possibility that the experimenter's expectations, known as the **experimenter effect**, might influence the outcome negatively. If the experimenter

unconsciously expects the subject to fail, this expectation might subtly influence the test environment or the subject's performance, contributing to the phenomenon of consistent missing, especially in highly susceptible subjects.

6. Relationship to Psi-Missing and Negative Scoring

While **Consistent Missing** is the descriptive observation (the data pattern of low scores), **Psi-Missing** is the theoretical explanation applied to this observation. Psi-missing is defined as the statistically significant scoring below the mean chance expectation (MCE) in experiments designed to test for psi.

The recognition of psi-missing is integral to the overall theory of psi because it suggests that psi ability operates on a continuum. If psi were only capable of producing positive results, it would be difficult to reconcile why such a strong, systematic ability to be wrong exists. The concept of psi-missing implies that the ability to gain information via psi is real, but the conscious mechanism that translates that information into a response can either lead to success (psi-hitting) or failure (psi-missing).

In formal parapsychological meta-analyses, both statistically significant high scores and statistically significant low scores are often combined to measure the overall effect size of psi across multiple studies. This practice is based on the logic that both deviations represent a non-random interaction with the target, thereby confirming the existence of a systematic influence, regardless of its directionality. Ignoring consistent missing would artificially deflate the overall evidence base for psi phenomena.

7. Methodological Challenges and Statistical Interpretation

Interpreting consistent missing presents several methodological challenges for researchers. The primary difficulty lies in distinguishing genuine **psi-missing** from artefactual negative scoring caused by experimental error or known psychological phenomena.

One common methodological pitfall involves the application of statistics to post-hoc analysis. If an experiment yields a mixture of positive, chance, and negative results, and the researcher only focuses their statistical analysis on the runs that showed low scores, this can lead to a form of **data fishing**. To counter this, many modern parapsychological studies require the hypothesis--that a specific subject or group will exhibit consistent missing--to be stated *a priori*.

Furthermore, standard statistical methods often assume independence between trials. If a subject employs a strategy based on previous results (e.g., if they guessed 'Star' and were wrong, they decide to actively avoid 'Star' for the next five trials), the trials are no longer independent, potentially skewing the binomial probability calculation. Rigorous experimental design must

account for sequential dependencies and ensure that the consistent missing observed is not due to predictable psychological biases, such as response inhibition or conscious pattern avoidance.

8. Significance in the Replication Crisis

The phenomenon of **consistent missing** plays a complex and often contradictory role within the broader context of the psychological replication crisis. In parapsychology, replicability is notoriously difficult, often yielding inconsistent results across laboratories and even within the same study over time.

When initial attempts to replicate a positive psi finding result in consistent missing, parapsychologists argue that the replication attempt was successful, but the manifestation of psi was inverted (psi-missing). Skeptics, conversely, argue that the inability to replicate the positive finding, coupled with the appearance of a statistically anomalous negative result, points towards methodological weaknesses or publication bias. They suggest that the negative score is merely an artifact of random chance noise being misinterpreted as a meaningful, directional effect.

The statistical significance of consistent missing, however, provides a mechanism for interpreting negative findings as valuable data points rather than simple failures. By framing consistent missing as an active psychological process (psi-missing), researchers can potentially use it to study the conditions that inhibit or invert psi functioning, thereby refining theories about the nature and limitations of ESP.

9. Debates and Skeptical Interpretations

Skeptical criticism of **consistent missing** often centers on the principle of methodological naturalism and Occam's Razor. Critics argue that explaining a low score via a theoretical construct (psi-missing) is unnecessary when statistical regression to the mean and experimental flaws provide simpler explanations.

One major skeptical viewpoint is that when thousands of trials are run across hundreds of subjects, statistical probability dictates that some runs will inevitably fall into the extreme low-scoring tail of the distribution purely by chance. If a researcher selectively emphasizes these low-scoring runs, particularly when positive results are lacking, they are engaging in **p-hacking** or selective reporting. The statistical significance achieved in these isolated runs, critics contend, does not represent a genuine anti-psi effect but rather the expected noise in large datasets.

Furthermore, critics highlight the potential for subtle sensory cues or experimenter bias to influence the subject in ways that lead to systematic errors rather than paranormal avoidance. For example, if the randomization method is imperfect, or if the experimenter subtly cues the subject away from the correct answer, the resulting consistent missing is entirely a product of non-psi factors. For

consistent missing to be accepted as evidence of psi, the experimental controls must be demonstrably flawless, eliminating all known sources of conventional error.

10. Further Reading

Zener Cards (Wikipedia)
Parapsychology (Wikipedia)
Rhine, J. B. (1934). Extra-Sensory Perception.
Psi (Parapsychology) (Wikipedia)