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Psychomanteum Research: Experiences and Effects on Bereavement

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Abstract

A Psychomanteum Process involving mirror-gazing was conducted in a research setting to explore apparent facilitated contact with deceased friends and relatives, and to collect data on the phenomena, experiences, and effects on bereavement. A pilot study with 5 participants resulted in strong experiences and 4 apparent contacts. The main study took 27 participants through a three stage process: remembering a deceased friend or relative, sitting in a darkened room gazing into a mirror while thinking of the person, and finally discussing and reflecting on the experience. Data were collected with pre- and post-questionnaires, a follow-up questionnaire at least 4 weeks after the session, interviews by the facilitators, and two personality measures, the Tellegen Absorption Scale and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Contacts with the sought person were reported by 13 participants. Participants reported that a variety of imagery appeared in the mirror, as well as experiences of dialogue, sounds, light, body sensations, and smell. Several specific messages were reported by participants who believed that they were from the sought persons. Twenty-one self report items relating to bereavement were analyzed for changes between pre- and follow-up questionnaires. Statistically significant reductions in bereavement responses occurred over the entire group using a Wilcoxon signed ranks analysis ($p = .05$ to $.0008$). These included unresolved feelings, loss, grief, guilt, sadness, and need to communicate. Participants also reported significant impact on their lives following the session.

For the past four years, a research team at ITP has studied the effects of a mirror gazing procedure on apparent communication with deceased individuals. This is a report on the experiential phenomena that occurred, and the effects on bereavement of participants in a three stage process to communicate with deceased relatives and friends. As will be clear in this report, this was not an attempt to establish that the experiences were genuine contacts with deceased individuals, nor is this claimed. Rather it was to obtain data on whether individuals going through our procedure would report relevant experiences and what the reported effects would be on their feelings of bereavement.

This form of the mirror gazing procedure was developed by Raymond Moody (Moody, 1992; Moody and Perry, 1993), which he called a Psychomanteum, a dimly lit room in which a sitter gazes with open eyes into a mirror, with the intention of contacting a deceased individual. Moody developed a process of remembrance and counseling combined with the mirror-gazing, and reported that about 50% of the participants believed they had a reunion with a loved one.

A study by Roll and Braun (1995) of 41 persons in workshop formats found that 22% reported strong reunion experiences. Radin and Rebman (1995), interested in the empirical nature of any experienced phenomena, used sophisticated electronic monitoring to detect any physical changes in the mirror room and in the physiology of the individuals. The seven participants variously reported fluctuations in illumination and temperature, feelings of presence, and mild apparitions. The instruments showed significant correlations between the physiological changes in the participants and physical environmental changes in the room, such as temperature, electrical and magnetic field

strength, and ionizing radiation. Five of the seven participants reported that they felt the presence of a deceased individual, an animal, or angelic spirits. Two of these included perception of apparitions, though not full visionary experiences. The results suggested that the participants were experiencing altered states which corresponded to physiology and physical environmental shifts and that the effects might be stronger as these factors moved toward extreme changes.

As part of a counseling and mirror gazing procedure in a hospice, Archangel (1997) gave participants the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, an indicator of Jungian typology. Though the range of types in the group was limited, the results showed that the participants high in Feeling and Intuitive functions were more likely to report a contact with a deceased person.

None of the above studies collected data on how the Psychomanteum experiences affected feelings of loss, grief, and other effects of bereavement. As we prepared our research we wished to learn how many persons would report experiences of reunion or contact with the intended person, what experiential phenomena in the Psychomanteum chamber would be reported by the participants, and particularly how the experience would affect unresolved feelings of the participant in relation to the deceased person.

Pilot Study

An initial study was conducted with five individuals from the research team who were learning to be facilitators for the Psychomanteum process. After facilitation and mirror-gazing sessions, four felt they had experienced contact with a deceased individual, including fathers, a deceased twin sister, and a favorite dog from childhood, and some of these contacts had beneficial effects for their feelings and concerns. The modes of contact

were visual, both in and out of the mirror, tactile, dreamlike imagery, and mental dialog. The results of this pilot (Hastings, Hutton, Bennett, et al., 1998) encouraged us to develop a study with more participants, and with specific measures of the experiences and their effects.

Main Study

Design

This present study was designed to explore the occurrence of perceptual, mental, and emotional phenomena, and to measure several effects on bereavement of a process combining facilitation and mirror gazing. Pre- and post-questionnaires were constructed to gather self reports of the experiences that occurred in mirror-gazing and to indicate changes in bereavement responses felt by the participant. Two standard personality inventories were included, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Tellegen Absorption Scale (TAS), to explore personality qualities that might influence the response to the process. The MBTI (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) was chosen because of research indicating that the intuitive and feeling functions appear associated with contact experiences (Archangel, 1994). The TAS was selected because it reports the individual's experiences in which the boundaries of attention, identity, sensations, and perceptions are changed significantly, e.g. being absorbed in music or a sunset, seeing colors to go with sounds (synesthesia), remembering childhood experiences (Tellegen and Atkinson, 1974). This scale has been modestly correlated with hypnotic ability, and we were curious to learn if it would correlate with the experiences that occurred in the mirror-gazing.

Participants

The participants were volunteers from students, administration, and staff of this institution. They were recruited with a one page flier distributed within the school population. The flier stated that we did not take a position on the nature of the experience; that is, there was no claim that there would be a contact or that these were actual spirits of the deceased. Applicants were given a screening interview to check for medications that might interfere with the process, disabilities that would need attention, and psychopathology. In the interview they were asked to indicate the person whom they wished to contact, the relationship, and the length of time since the loss. Questions were answered and some information given on the procedure. A continuous selection process was conducted until the time slots available were filled by 27 participants. Table #1 shows the demographics of the participants.

Table 1

Demographics

Female	19
Male	8
Total Number	27
Mean age	44
Mean years since death of sought person	16

The persons sought included uncle, mother, father, great grandmother, grandmother, grandfather, sister, cousin, friend, spiritual teacher, a favorite cat, the past lives of one individual, and historical figures (These were from several decades ago, and so skewed the mean in Table 1. They were not personally known to the participant.). Some participants had more than one person whom they initially desired to contact, and then focused on one person in the session.

The Psychomanteum Facility

The study was conducted in comfortably furnished rooms at the Institute's Transpersonal Counseling Center. Individual counseling rooms were used for pre and post interviews, and a larger group room held the Psychomanteum. This free-standing chamber had a frame 8 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 7 feet tall, covered with black opaque theater curtain cloth, with a flap for entering. A mirror at one end and a chair at the other allowed for mirror gazing. A 7 watt night light provided dim illumination, and the mirror was tilted up to reflect the darkness rather than the person gazing. The room door was closed during the gazing period to reduce noise, though occasional traffic sounds could be heard.

Procedure

Based on Moody's approach (Moody, 1992; Moody with Perry, 1993), a structured protocol was developed which could be conducted with an individual in about three hours. While Moody himself sometimes took an entire day, we wished to develop a protocol that could be used in a more traditional counseling schedule, though not limited to the 50 minute hour. In Part I a guide / facilitator invited the participant to talk about memories of the deceased, which might include bringing mementos and , photos, discussing feelings,

and telling how the loss had affected him or her. The participant was asked what she or he would like to communicate to the deceased. The pre-questionnaire was completed ahead of time along with the MBTI and the TAS and brought in at the time of the session. It asked for many of these same responses, and also included a check list of personal manifestation of bereavement. Although this was a research measure, the questions were also evocative of memories and reflective of current feelings, thus facilitating the discussion of the effects of the death on the participant.

During Part II, the participant was conducted to the mirror room. Sitting in semi-darkness, he or she was instructed to relax, and look into the mirror. We suggested to the participants that they not have specific expectations or hopes, but rather be open to whatever happened. They could mentally speak to the person or recall memories of their times with them. They remained in the mirror chamber for 45 minutes, were then notified by the facilitator, and could stay another 15 minutes if they chose to do so. The facilitator sat outside the room, remaining quiet or meditating with the thought of supporting the experience of the sitter.

After leaving the mirror room, Part III consisted of talking with the facilitator and reflecting on the experience with the mirror. The facilitator assisted in exploring what occurred either externally or internally, whether there was a sense of contact or not, and what the meaning was for the individual. The post-questionnaire was completed by the participant after the discussion, with self reports on their bereavement responses at that point and a description of the experiential state that occurred in the mirror gazing. The questionnaire also was intended to assist in integration of the experience. The pre- and post-discussions were tape recorded. At least two weeks after the session, the participant

was sent a delayed follow-up questionnaire, which asked about subsequent contacts, reflections on the experience, and reports on the current level of the various items. Reminders were given for the follow-up questionnaires that were not returned, and the time of receipt varied from 4 weeks to 22 weeks. A total of 22 questionnaires were returned with a mean time of about 8 weeks. In collecting and analyzing the data, participants were randomly assigned a two digit code number from 11 to 37.

The training given the facilitators included reading the reports by Moody, Roll and others, viewing a video documentary about Moody and his use of the Psychomanteum, reading a manual by Archangel (1994), going through the process as a participant, and being coached and supervised by one of the authors (M.H.) who had completed a certification training led by Moody. As noted, several of the facilitators had apparent contact experiences in their sessions in the training. None of the facilitators were licensed therapists, though some were studying toward clinical psychology as a career. The instructions were that the facilitation was not intended to be a therapy or counseling session, though the guide should be warm, supportive, and genuinely interested in the person's feelings and responses.

Results

Reunion and Contact With the Intended Individual

Participants wrote a description of their experience in the Psychomanteum chamber at the end of the second interview. The questionnaire asked for an overall description and also responses to semi-structured questions. The facilitator also was asked to report on the success of the contact. These written reports were evaluated by three of the researchers (one singly, and two as a team) to determine if there was an experience of

contact with the intended person. Of the 27 participants, 13 reported a contact with the person they had desired to contact. There were 14 who did not have a contact with the intended person, though 6 of these reported an experience with other persons or beings, such as relatives and angels. Five of the persons who experienced a contact with the intended person also had experiences of other individuals or images.

The intensity and complexity of the reunion experience were evaluated by one researcher (A.H.) based on the strength of the effects (from nothing to a full apparition), the number of senses involved, and the extensiveness in time and quantity. These were represented as a composite number on a 1 - 7 scale. Ratings of 1 indicated no apparent contact, and a 2 rating was given for memories, thoughts and feelings about the person without a feeling of presence. Ratings of 3 to 7 were given to experiences with contact (as determined by the participant) with 7 as the strongest experience. There were no reports of full apparitions or strong external imagery or voices. Based on this preliminary evaluation, Table 2 shows the distribution of these ratings. It should be remembered that some of the experiences without reported contact were nevertheless very rich in visual, tactile, or other responses, and rating the experiences comparatively on a scale is definitely open to subjective interpretation as to what criteria should be considered. The apparent contacts were experienced principally through inner imagery, tactile experiences, voices, mental dialog, and a "sense" of presence. While the ratings presume a spectrum of increasing strength of experiences, we do not know if this is a valid way to rate strength of "contact" or whether the perceptual richness of the experience is related to the meaning and reassurance received by the participant. For example, a very limited perceptual experience of one relevant sentence could be more meaningful than a complex vision.

Table 2

Ratings of Experiences of Contact

Experience	Number of Participants
1 - No experience of contact with the person sought	10
2 - No contact, but memories or thoughts of the sought person	4
3 - Contact reported. Short message, dialog or presence	6
4 - Messages, physical effects, sensory events	5
5 - Longer messages, touch, voices, presence, love	1
6 - Strong presence, verbal dialog, personality felt	1
7 - Visual apparition, dialog	0

Examples of the Mirror Gazing Experiences

The participants reported a rich collection of inner experiences, images in the mirror, and occasional external phenomena in the room. The predominant sensory modes were visual and auditory. There were three reports of physical sensations (e.g. warmth, body energy, being touched). Nine of the participants reported seeing images in the mirror, ranging from shapes and faces to robed figures. Following are direct quotes from five participants. The participants are identified by their randomly assigned code numbers from 11 to 37.

Participant 24 sought to contact her grandmother, who had died 13 years previously. She did not report a contact with the grandmother, but had the following experience (rated at 1 for no contact).

Feeling deep grief at the beginning; black robed figures coming toward me; black spinning ball with trailing energy tail moving clockwise in mirror; unidentified faces in the mirror; energy streaming out of mirror into space in front of me. A foot (light skin then changed to dark skin). Hand and faint formulations of a human (?) shape.

Participant 26 wanted to contact a close friend who had died of a painful disease four months previously. Experience rated 3.

I experienced a flash of light not in the mirror but above me to the right. I experienced some mental “knowings” and my friend chided me for resorting to such trappings in order to contact her. She “said” (internally) that she did not want her energy used for my amusement. If I really wanted to connect with her I

could be more connected with the part of her that lives on in her sister who is alive.

Participant 28 sought a contact with his sister who had died about 30 years ago. His experience was rated 4.

1. At first, I experienced grief around my sister's passing. I sensed her presence and her holding me while I experienced my sadness. 2. I fell asleep and had a dream... 3. I decided to meditate and fell into an altered state where I was embodying her pain. I lost sense of having an observer [i.e. self observation] in this state. 4. I came back to having an observer and slowly worked my way back into both being in my body and acknowledging the intensity of the prior state.

Yes, I did sense her presence -- a body state more than anything, though a couple of times it seems like I heard her voice. I got the message that I have been holding this experience of her pain, my resentment that she had to suffer so much, and my sadness that she is gone for 27 years. Though I have worked in therapy around the grief issue, I didn't know that the resentment was so strong.

Participant 30 wished to contact his father, who had died about 15 years previously. His experience was rated 5.

Conversation with my father. Feelings of wanting to connect, love, gratitude, release. Throughout peace. Expressing sorrow that he died. Thanks for his life. Big shift was releasing him after I experienced angel behind and over me. Image of marble lamb face. I felt a connection with my father. Most of it hard to say at time if talking to inner sense of father or to father "out there." I heard him.

Participant 34 wished to contact an uncle who had died seven years previously. His experience was rated 4.

I believe a group of “guardians” were there in the beginning (aunts, grandmothers, friends--folks I randomly sense from time to time) -- knowing my uncle, he probably invited them all. There was an intense warmth (physically /spatially) around me. My uncle’s presence was felt but it was slight and somewhat guarded. He repeated “Don’t worry” and “Do what’s best for you,” which I somehow can’t hear enough of.

Participant 37 sought a contact with her spiritual teacher, a martial arts master, who died more than 10 years ago. The experience was rated 6:

Alternating waves of light and dark, silence and sound, and internal energy waves. Feelings of connection with my teacher. Series of intense memories of past experiences with him. Clear instructions about contacting his son and family in Indonesia today. Clear message about my future work as a teacher and mentor, especially to young people. Contact was a sense of connection, strong memories, and receiving information via thoughts.

Four of the participants fell asleep briefly during their gazing session. One of them reported dreaming about being her cat, whom she desired to contact, chasing a rabbit.

Experiential Qualities

Questions were asked on the post-questionnaire regarding the qualities of the experience in the Psychomanteum chamber itself, in regard to altered states, the location of the phenomena, interaction, and absorption in the experience.

The mean for the group on the gazing as an altered state was 4.63, and 17 of the participants gave a rating of 4 or higher on the item. Thus for more than half, this had distinct features of an altered state. This accords with the physiological shifts reported by Radin and Rebman. Interacting with the experience correlated positively (Spearman correlation 0.52, $p = .007$) with the rating of experiences (from Table 2), that is, more interaction with dialogue, questions, etc., correlated with richer contact experiences.

An altered time sense was reported by 20 participants. Nine wrote that they had no awareness of the passage of time (“I had no sense of it,” commented one), and three reported a sense of timelessness. For 5 participants the rate of time was more rapid, for 3 it was slower.

Generally there was little feeling that they could control the experience or tried to control it (mean = 2.04). However, the participants’ mean for absorption in the experience was relatively high at 4.78.

The following sections present results on the phenomena reported in the mirror room.

Mirror Gazing Perceptions

Several visual images were seen in the mirror. These included black robed figures, animal faces, flowers, a starry night, a landscape, and faces. These may be similar to imagery seen in crystal gazing and the uses of mirrors by shamans and priests, where images are seen to form in the reflective surface (Lang, 1910; Myers, 1903). Our participants also reported colors and flashes of light, but most were not formed into images, and we presume that they could have been due to physical responses in the visual system. It may be that these images seen by our participants could be developed into more complete and long lasting images, perhaps with symbolic meaning, by those

participants. So far as our reports go, there were no definite free-standing figures or external voices, though 11 of the participants rated the external nature of the experience at 4 or more.

Other perceptual modalities that were involved were sound (hearing voices, and unusual sounds, waves of sound and silence), proprioception (warmth, being touched, body movements) and smell (incense). Voices, smells and touch have been reported with appearances of deceased persons to spouses and other survivors, but the body sensations are less common and may be worth further study.

Sense of Presence

Nine of our participants said that they felt the “presence” of the sought person through energy, presence, a connection, or a sense of contact. These wordings may represent different inner experiences, but the sense is a feeling the person is there, perhaps as one might be aware of another person through any of the subtle non-verbal senses that are in play in everyday life. For several participants there was dialogue or a message that came with the presence.

Communication and Dialogue

It appears that most of the reported communication from the deceased and resulting dialogue took place subjectively, that is in the mind of the participant. Telepathy was mentioned by one of the participants. Sometimes this was one sided, with the deceased person giving a message, and for other participants, this was a mutual dialogue. From the reports, most of the communication was brief (except for participants 30 and 37).

Because of their educational training at this institute, many of our participants were used to conducting inner dialogue with sub-personalities (as in Psychosynthesis) and imagined

persons and images (as in Jungian active imagination, Gestalt dreamwork, and guided imagery), so this is not a foreign experience for them. Almost half of the participants said they believed they had contacted the person they had sought, or that the person had contacted them. Two of the participants commented that they were not sure whether it was the deceased individual or their own minds producing the apparent contact. Whether the communication comes from an independent source outside the individual or from the depths of the mind are questions that raise larger issues, and the reports here do not have enough specificity to lead to any answers.

Changes in Bereavement Responses

The questionnaires presented 21 items listing possible responses to the death of an individual. Participants indicated their experience of these by rating them on a Likert type scale from 1 to 7, with 1 meaning No, Never, or None, and 7 meaning Yes, Always, or Strong. Table 3 analyzes the changes in ratings from the pre-questionnaire to the follow-up questionnaire for these items. The post-questionnaire asked for responses to some of these items, but the analysis was done for the follow-up questionnaire to obtain longer term changes. The changes in the non-contact group and the contact group means were statistically analyzed with a Wilcoxon signed ranks test. With persons who felt they had a contact with the deceased person, four items changed significantly. For non-contact participants, three items changed significantly. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

Comparison of Changes in Bereavement Ratings for Non-contact (n=14) and Contact (n=
13) Participants from Pre-Questionnaire to Follow-Up Questionnaire

Item (paraphrase)	Non-contact		Contact	
	Wilcoxon z	p value (2-t)	Wilcoxon z	p value (2-t)
I think of this person every day	1.05	0.29	0.42	0.67
I have unresolved feelings Unresolved issues affect my ability to carry out daily activities	1.82	0.07	1.32	0.18
Unresolved issues affect general quality of life	0.80	0.42	0.53	0.59
I miss this person	1.82	0.07	1.11	0.65
I need to improve my relationship with this person	0.91	0.36	1.71	0.08
	1.48	0.14	2.20	0.02*

(table continues)

Item (paraphrase)	Non-contact		Contact	
	Wilcoxon z	p value	Wilcoxon z	p value
		(2-t)		(2-t)

I feel good about the status

of my relationship with this

person 1.78 0.08 1.78 .07

Indicate the strength of

your feelings on the

following items:

Grief	2.52	0.01**	2.11	0.03*
Missing the person	1.83	0.07	1.27	0.20
Anger	1.83	0.07	0.80	0.42
Worry	1.60	0.11	0.37	.071
Guilt	1.83	0.07	1.48	0.13
Sadness	2.38	0.02*	1.52	0.13
Resentment	1.34	0.18	0.81	0.42

(table continues)

Item (paraphrase)	Non-contact		Contact	
	Wilcoxon z (2-t)	p value	Wilcoxon z (2-t)	p value
Loss	1.63	0.10	2.45	0.01**
Peace	0.71	0.48	1.47	0.14
Need to communicate	2.67	0.007**	2.09	0.04*
Love	0.18	0.86	0.36	0.72
Fear	1.60	0.11	1.34	0.18
Longing	1.60	0.11	0.42	0.67
Anxiety	1.83	0.07	0.00	1.00

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

When all the participants (contact and non-contact) were analyzed as a group there were significant changes in 12 of the 21 items. Other responses moved in a direction of resolution or comfort but did not achieve significance. (See Table 4.)

Table 4.

Changes in Bereavement Ratings for All Participants (N=27) from Pre-Questionnaire to Follow-Up Questionnaire

Item	Pre-Q mean	Follow- up mean	Wilcoxon z	p value (2-t)
I think of this person every day	3.50	2.95	1.06	0.29
I have unresolved feelings Unresolved issues affect my ability to carry out daily activities	3.00	2.52	2.68	0.007**
Unresolved issues affect general quality of life	2.06	1.14	1.96	0.05*
I miss this person	4.24	3.14	1.96	0.05*
I need to improve my relationship with this person	2.80	1.36	2.84	0.004**
I feel good about the status of my relationship with this person	4.96	6.09	2.17	0.03*

(table continues)

Item	Pre-Q mean	Follow- up mean	Wilcoxon z	p value (2-t)
Grief	2.88	1.59	2.63	0.009**
Missing the person	4.04	2.59	2.30	0.02*
Anger	1.80	1.18	1.10	0.27
Worry	1.32	1.09	1.10	0.27
Guilt	2.06	1.23	2.08	0.04*
Sadness	3.60	2.00	1.83	0.005**
Resentment	1.48	1.14	1.08	0.28
Loss	4.33	2.70	2.35	0.01**
Peaceful	4.96	5.14	0.30	0.76
Need to communicate	4.40	2.14	3.36	0.0008**
Love	6.16	6.31	0.35	0.72
Fear	1.56	1.00	2.02	0.04*
Longing	3.08	2.05	1.68	0.09

(table continues)

Anxiety	1.56	1.09	1.54	0.12
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* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

We recognize that we have made multiple analyses, and statistically a number of changes might be expected to be significant by chance alone. In this case of 21 statistical tests, using $p = .05$, one significant outcome would be expected on the basis of chance. In fact, the 21 Wilcoxon tests set yielded 12 significant outcomes. In many cases, the p values associated with these tests were much less than .05.

Impact on Areas of Life

Four items on the follow-up questionnaire inquired as to the effect on the participant's life. Table 5 shows the numerical responses, with 1 meaning "has not impacted my life at all" and 7 meaning "strongly impacted my life." A Spearman test showed correlations between the rating of the contact experience (Table 2) and the means of the impact on spiritual life and general well being.

Table 5

Correlation of Life Impact with Experience Ratings for All Participants on Follow-Up Questionnaire (n=22)

Item	Group mean	Spearman r	p value
Relationships	3.09	0.38	0.09
Work	2.32	0.22	0.35
Spiritual life	4.14	0.50	0.02*
Sense of general well being	3.45	0.50	0.02*

* $p \leq .05$

When the participants are divided into non-contact and contact groups, it is evident that the experience of contact had a significantly stronger impact on the participants' lives.

See Table 6.

Table 6

Comparison of Non-contact and Contact Participants' Ratings of Life Impact of Experience

	Non-Contact Mean	Contact Mean	Mann-Whitney U z-score	p value
Relationships	1.71	4.18	2.46	0.01**
Work	1.73	2.91	1.87	0.06
Spiritual Life	3.00	5.27	2.79	0.005**
Sense of general well being	2.72	4.60	2.22	0.03*

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

TAS and MBTI Results

The Tellegen Absorption Scale mean score for the group was 25.42 (out of 34 possible), with the norm for adult mothers at 17.2 and adult fathers at 13.7 (Tellegen, 1982), so this group is well above the norm. There was no significant correlation of the TAS with the rating of experiences (Table 2). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator showed that 20 of the 27 participants scored as having Intuitive and Feeling preference styles. These functions are also predominant in the population from which we recruited the participants and in counselors and therapists.-This is not a wide enough distribution of the participants to draw any conclusions about the effects of the personality types on the mirror-gazing process. The research by Archangel (1997) had a similar predominance of NF participants.

We did not do an analysis of gender effects because of the small size of the group and the predominant distribution of 70% female, but both men and women reported strong contact experiences.

Facilitator's Role

Facilitators were instructed not to take a position on whether the participant had experienced a contact; we allowed him or her to decide. In the announcements of the research this information was also stated. In one case a facilitator told a participant that the contact could come verbally as well as visually, when the participant said she did not contact the person but only heard his voice. However, we learned much later that another facilitator apparently told a participant who did not experience a contact that her opinion

was that the person was not ready to come. There were no other reports of a facilitator intervening in this manner.

Discussion

Contact with the Intended Person

Thirteen participants believed they had a reunion experience, based on their subjective judgment. The most extensive communication was apparently with participants 30 and 37. The latter included instructions from her spiritual teacher, which was very persuasive to the participant because of the fullness of the experience and her familiarity with the person. The apparent reunions usually provided informative messages and emotionally charged communication for the participants, and the reports after the session and in the follow up indicated that these were helpful, comforting, and therapeutic for the participants. Many of the participants (including some who did not report a reunion) stated that their intention for the session had been accomplished. From the statistical analysis of bereavement responses, it is evident that even persons who did not believe they experienced a contact were nevertheless often significantly helped by the experience.

Regarding the messages, many of the participants found them meaningful and related to their need to contact the deceased. The messages included personal advice, family matters, and instructions on practical affairs. Some statements which might have seemed trivial to an outsider, e.g., “Don’t try to make things happen...they are happening to you”, and “Look for love inside yourself [not from me]”, could have been significant to the recipient because of timing, circumstances, and salient concerns.

These reports are similar to the results found by Moody, in that about half of the group said they felt a sense of contact. It appears that Moody's participants had a higher frequency of images in the mirror and apparitions. In our pilot study there were two visions of the sought person in the mirror, and one outside; this was not reported in the main study. It might be that Moody's longer preparation time of several hours is relevant in this regard. Both Moody and this study had cases with extensive dialogue and interaction. The kinds of phenomena reported here seem consistent with the results of Moody, Roll and Braun, and Radin and Rebman. (The frequency of contacts in this study was higher than Roll and Braun's 22%.) They are also consistent with the reports of spontaneous cases of persons who experience apparent contact with a deceased spouse. We did not conduct physiological measures as did Radin and Rebman, though some participants in both studies reported similar sensations, e.g. warmth. The high level of contact reports in our study by intuitive and feeling types on the MBTI is similar to the findings of Archangel, but as with her group, there was not a broad spread among the participants.

Effects on Unresolved Feelings

The statistical analyses indicate that there were strong shifts in unresolved feelings, according to the self-reports. A study of Tables 4 and 5 shows that the changes in the means were in a direction of resolution, healing, and comfort. There is limited research on effects on interventions in the literature on bereavement, but the general tenor is that bereavement reactions are long lasting and tenacious (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993). The impact of this process on persons' feelings and lives is a strong effect for a

one time experience, and suggests that a Psychomanteum setting can have some use in encouraging grief reduction.

The experiences of our participants are quite consistent with the reports of spontaneous contacts from deceased friends and relatives which occur in many cultures. Studies of these have found that they often provide comfort for spouses and others who survive (Grimby, 1993; Rees, 1971; Rosenblatt, 1993; Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990; Yamamoto, Okonogi, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura, 1969) . In a qualitative study, Whitney (1992) interviewed 25 individuals who had experienced spontaneous reunion events and found that 12 of them reported that the event helped them resolve their grief more quickly or lowered the intensity of the feelings. She also found that the experience strengthened the interviewees' spiritual practices, which is consistent with the reports from our facilitated reunion sessions.

Cautions and Limitations

There are several cautions to consider. The first is that this report is not asserting that mirror gazing does, in fact, produce a contact with the dead. This may seem somewhat paradoxical, since the most likely reason that most participants entered the study was to contact a deceased friend or relative. Nevertheless, what the individuals reported from the mirror gazing session does not establish the claim of communication from a deceased person. We do not claim that these findings either prove or disprove theories about survival of death. Many other theoretical explanations are available, from need driven misinterpretation of sensations, to self created inner imagery, to perceptual hallucinations. The same questions of interpretation in spontaneous cases also apply to this facilitated study. Further, since there were no contrast or control conditions used in

this study, it is not possible to know with certainty how non-specific factors such as demand characteristics and the passage of time may have contributed to the changes that were reported. Strong expectations, like a self fulfilling prophecy, could also contribute to feeling better after a striking experience such as the Psychomanteum. The use of the delayed follow-up measures was an attempt to go beyond such immediate responses. We hope to conduct further studies with control conditions. Another caution is that all the participants were from this institution. There could have been peer pressure to provide the desired responses or to conform to the ways other persons responded. To address this we asked participants not to discuss their experience until the project was completed. Our participants were a homogenous group (viz. the MBTI scores) who had experience in inner self reflection, and whose belief systems were often compatible with the assumptions that the deceased might be present for the mirror gazing, and the effects may not apply to more varied participants. Also, the relative contributions of the facilitation and the mirror gazing are not addressed by this research and we do not know what the effects would be of just one or the other, though our impression is that both contribute to the healing experiences and either by itself would be less effective. Is the mirror gazing itself an essential part of the experience? Could similar experiences and effects could be obtained by guided imagery, suggestion, or a reflective mindset? The limitations mean that extending these findings to other kinds of individuals and groups, and other facilitation protocols would not be justified.

There were some participants who expressed disappointment that they did not have a contact. Several wanted a repeat and more time to be in the chamber. At least one person said she was more aware of feelings of loss and sadness after the experiences (and felt that

this was appropriate), and for a few participants some bereavement reactions were rated as being stronger after the experience (though this was lost in the group mean). At least one person was concerned that this might be a devilish process, but this did not stop her engaging in it.

These results should not be interpreted as meaning that this is an automatic technique for effective bereavement counseling. It is not a mechanical method, but requires in our view, careful facilitation and respect for the persons participating. Further, in a counseling setting, there are personal beliefs and cultural attitudes about these matters held by counselors and clients alike. These can create uncritical resistance on the one hand and uncritical acceptance on the other, neither being an optimum approach to resolution of bereavement. There can also be valid concerns about the helpfulness (and ethicality) of implying that a person lives on after death and can appear to friends and relatives in a mirror or some other way.

These are legitimate considerations, but, for at least some persons it appears that facilitated Psychomanteum sessions can provide a supportive and productive setting for therapeutic changes in bereavement.

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