

# Psychomanteum Research: A Pilot Study

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**ABSTRACT:** Fifty-seven persons participated in 31 workshops seeking visionary and other reunion experiences with departed loved ones by means of a mirror-gazing procedure developed by Raymond Moody (1992; Moody and Perry, 1993). The study was an attempt to repeat Moody's findings, to alleviate the grief of the participants, and to explore psychological factors related to their experiences. Forty-one participants completed three questionnaires before the workshop: the Psi Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ), the Inventory of Childhood Memories and Imaginings (ICMI) (Wilson and Barber, 1983), and the Complex Partial Epilepsy Survey (CPES) Inventory of Common Experiences (Roberts, Varney, Hulbert, Paulson, Springer, Sheperd, Swan, Legrand, Harvey, and Steuben, 1990). Nine of the participants (22 percent) reported strong reunion experiences, compared to 50 percent of Moody's group. A positive relationship was found between reunion experiences during the workshop and reports of prior contact with the departed, as reported on the PEQ. The correlations with the ICMI and CPES were positive but insignificant.

**KEY WORDS:** psychomanteum; mirror-gazing; apparitions; bereavement; temporal lobe; fantasy-proneness.

In the attempt to facilitate visions of the departed, Raymond Moody (1992; Moody and Perry, 1993) created a modern form of the psychomanteum, the "oracle of the dead," where the ancient Greeks used to evoke the deceased. Moody has taught the method, which involves mirror-gazing in a darkened room, to others, including me. Moody reported that approximately 50 percent of the individuals he

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had taken through the procedure experience apparitions. He has found that these are mostly people who report hypnagogic images. I therefore used the Inventory of Childhood Memories and Imaginings (ICMI), devised by Sheryl Wilson and Theodore Barber (1983), to identify people with a rich imagination, whom Wilson and Barber called "fantasy-prone" individuals, a label that conceals the fact that psychic impressions often take the form of mental images. According to Wilson and Barber (1983), 4 percent of the population may be fantasy-prone.

I used the Psi Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ), a previously unpublished 14-item Likert scale (see Appendix), in order to determine whether individuals who experience reunions in the psychomanteum have a history of psychic experiences, including apparent visits from the departed. A third questionnaire, the Complex Partial Epilepsy Survey (CPES) Inventory of Common Experiences (Roberts, Varney, Hulbert, Paulson, Springer, Sheperd, Swan, Legrand, Harvey, and Steuben, 1990), concerned hypersensitivity, or lability, in the temporal lobes. Elson Montago and I have speculated that the temporal lobes may be the sensory organ for psi (Roll and Montagno, 1985). If that is the case, then individuals with labile temporal lobes may be more psychic than others.

## Methods

The workshops had three main purposes: to elicit visionary and other reunion experiences, to help the participants complete the grieving process, and to discover personal and other factors that may facilitate such experiences. I do not address in this paper the question of whether reunion experiences may provide evidence for psychic ability or for survival after death.

### *Facilities*

The sessions took place in a research facility in my home. The space consisted of a consulting room, a room with an enclosure housing a mirror and reclining chair, a bathroom, a kitchenette, and a patio. The area was surrounded by trees, and the patio faced a lake. A walking path led from the patio to a nature preserve.

The mirror was 2 feet by 3 feet and tilted upwards to reflect the ceiling, which was covered by black velvet, as were the back and sides of the enclosure. A reclining chair stood 4 feet from the mirror.

### *Hours and Conditions*

Thirty-one one-day workshops were conducted during a one-year period. The hours were from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The rooms were usually illuminated by natural light and artificial white light. In the last eight workshops, I attempted to reduce waking-state mentation and to facilitate the alpha brainwave pattern by using 25-watt red light bulbs for illumination and by conducting the workshops later in the day, from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM. A white noise generator by the reclining chair masked extraneous sounds.

### *Materials*

Three questionnaires were used in the attempt to correlate psychomanteum experiences with other factors: the Psi Experience Questionnaire (PEQ), the Inventory of Childhood Memories and Imaginings (ICMI), and the CPES Inventory of Common Experiences.

The consulting room had an audiotape recorder and a tape deck that played Gregorian chants and similar music. Workshop participants were asked to bring photographs and personal items from the deceased individuals they hoped to contact.

### *Participants*

Fifty-seven individuals took part in 31 workshops. Forty-one participants completed the three questionnaires, including 31 women and 10 men; 16 failed to return the questionnaires. Most of the workshops were oriented to a particular deceased individual, the participants usually consisting of one or two family members. There were two group sessions. The first one consisted of seven individuals who were members of a support group for parents of murdered children. The second consisted of six individuals with a general interest in the topic. Fourteen of the participants sought reunion with a child, nine with a parent, seven with a spouse, ten with other relatives, and one with a friend. The time elapsed since the passing of the deceased ranged from about one year to more than 10 years.

### *Procedure*

On arrival, the participants filled out the three questionnaires. This was followed by a discussion about the participants' reasons for coming, their relationship to the deceased, and the program for the day. To

prepare myself for the mirror-gazing session, I sometimes examined the participant's responses to the ICMI at this point. Also at this time, the participants usually brought out the pictures and belongings from the deceased and discussed their significance. Weather permitting, the participant(s) and I then walked through the nature preserve, usually stopping to talk at the bridges that cross a stream.

On returning, the participant was seated in the mirror enclosure. The light was adjusted to illuminate the frame, leaving the mirror itself mostly dark, and the white noise generator was activated. After suggestions for relaxation and for accepting whatever might or might not occur, the participant was left in the enclosure for 90 minutes.

The participant was then brought into the consulting room and asked to describe any experiences. That description was recorded on audiotape. If there was another participant, the procedure was repeated for the second participant. Verbal communications between the two participants were postponed until the second participant had had a mirror session. There was no verbal communication between the participants during the mirror sessions. A light dinner and resting period typically followed.

In most of the workshops, a psi session was conducted after dinner. This procedure, which is a combination of the spiritualistic seance and the "empty chair" method of Gestalt psychology, was intended to augment the mirror session by providing additional information about the deceased and his or her relationship to the participant, in particular unresolved issues, and the opportunity to complete these. The psi session included the two workshop facilitators (Beth Braun and myself), the workshop participants (if there was more than one participant, they did the psi session as a group), and Lydia Roll, who guided the session. Lydia Roll is a psychotherapist in private practice and has also received training as a psychic at the Patricia Hayes School of Inner Sense Development in Georgia. She was shown photographs and personal effects from the deceased before the session to establish a link, but otherwise had no prior information about the persons involved.

The workshop finished with a discussion about the day's events and how to integrate them into the participant's life. This was sometimes followed by a group meditation.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Following the workshops, the audiotapes were transcribed and the scores for the questionnaires computed. The Psi Questionnaire was

divided into four parts: extrasensory perceptual (ESP) experiences (questions 1–5), aura and out-of-body experiences (questions 6–7), survival-related experiences (questions 8–11), and psychokinetic experiences (questions 12–14). Only the ESP and survival items were used in this study. The response to each question received a numerical value: “never” was scored 0, “one time during my life” was scored 1, “less than one time a year but at least twice during my life” was scored 2, and so on. Since there were six possible answers for each question, discounting “never,” the highest possible score was 6 points per question, or 30 for the five ESP questions and 24 for the four survival questions. Because there are no means available for the general population in the Psi Questionnaire, I used the means for the group of workshop participants as a comparison value for individual scores.

The CPES inventory was evaluated the same way. There were 36 questions and six possible responses for each question. The score therefore an range from 0 to 216. Michael Persinger has computed the mean score for the general population as 20.4 (S.D. = 14.2) (M. Persinger, personal communication, 1994).

For the ICMI, each question checked as “true” received a score of 1. With 52 questions, the range of possible scores was from 0 to 52. Persinger has found the mean score for males to be 14.6 (S.D. = 5.6), and the mean score for women to be 19.5 (S.D. = 6.5) (M. Persinger, personal communication, 1994).

To obtain psychomanteum scores, the workshop co-facilitator and I independently rated the experiences of each participant on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating no experience and 10 indicating seeing an apparition outside the mirror. Other reported incidents, such as seeing faces in the mirror, feeling touched by someone, or sensing the presence of the deceased, received intermediate scores. Our two independent evaluations were then summed.

The evaluations of the psychomanteum experiences were not done blindly with respect to the three questionnaires because I sometimes examined the questionnaires to prepare myself for the psychomanteum session.

On the basis of their psychomanteum scores, participants were placed in one of three groups: individuals who received a rating between 0 and 4.0 were placed in the low-scoring group; those who received a rating between 4.1 and 5.9 were placed in the intermediate group, and those who scored between 6.0 and 10 were placed in the high-scoring group.

The values were entered into  $2 \times 2$  tables to show how individuals with high and low psychomanteum scores responded to the three

**Table 1**  
**Mean questionnaire scores of high- and low-scoring**  
**psychomanteum participants**

<i>Measurement</i>	<i>High-scorers</i> ( <i>N</i> = 9)	<i>Low-scorers</i> ( <i>N</i> = 28)
Psychomanteum score	7.0	2.5
PEQ: ESP items	12.0	9.0
PEQ: survival items	6.0	2.5
ICMI	32.0	25.0
CPES	29.0	26.0

questionnaires. Results were analyzed qualitatively. Tests of statistical significance were not carried out because specific predictions about correlations between the variables were not specified prior to analysis.

## Results

Twenty-eight participants, including 18 women and 10 men, were assigned to the low-scoring psychomanteum group. Four participants, all women, were assigned to the intermediate group. Nine participants, all women, were assigned to the high-scoring group. As shown in Table 1, the high-scoring psychomanteum group obtained high means on the ESP and survival items of the PEQ, the ICMI, and the CPES. The differences between the high-scoring and low-scoring groups were not large, however, except for the PEQ survival items, for which the mean for the high-scoring group was more than twice that of the low-scoring group.

Table 2 shows the ratings of the nine high-scoring participants and the 28 low-scoring participants according to the questionnaires. Again, the best separation between the two groups was on the PEQ survival items. Eight of the nine high-scoring participants were above the mean on the PEQ survival items (one, not shown in the table, was exactly on the mean), whereas 18 of the 28 low-scoring participants were below the mean. If predicted, this difference would have been statistically significant. The figures for the other two questionnaires follow the trends shown in Table 1, but weakly. The PEQ ESP items and ICMI responses gave a separation of 19 versus 15, and the CPES responses a somewhat better 20 versus 14.

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of high-scoring and low-scoring**  
**psychomanteum participants**

<i>Measurement</i>	<i>High-scorers</i> ( <i>N</i> = 9)	<i>Low-scorers</i> ( <i>N</i> = 28)
PEQ ESP items		
above the mean	5	11
below the mean	4	14
PEQ survival items		
above the mean	8	6
below the mean	0	18
ICMI		
above the mean	5	12
below the mean	3	14
CPES		
above the mean	6	12
below the mean	2	14

Note: Participants who scored exactly on the mean are not shown.

## Discussion

In terms of my first objective, to elicit apparitions of deceased loved ones and other striking reunion experiences, I did not succeed nearly as well as did Moody. Only nine of my 41 participants (22 percent) reported significant experiences, as contrasted to 50 percent of Moody's. In addition, not all of my nine experiencers saw full-fledged apparitions.

With regard to my second purpose, to help the participants complete the grieving process and get on with their lives, it seemed that the strong reunion experiences reduced grief. This was one of the main conclusions that Moody reached in his research as well. The psychomanteum procedure also seemed to assist the grieving process for many of the participants who had no strong experiences during the mirror session.

In several cases, veridical information about the deceased obtained in the post-psychomanteum psi sessions contributed to a sense of presence of the departed. For instance, the session leader saw an image of the deceased, a boy, taking a shower crouched on the floor of the shower stall. When the workshop participants, a friend of the boy and the

friend's mother, returned home, the mother of the deceased boy told them that that was how he used to shower. That piece of information, which was unknown to the workshop participants, convinced both them and the deceased boy's mother that he had communicated with them.

In another session, a woman who had been unable to overcome feelings of abandonment and anger toward her deceased husband had hoped to see him in the psychomanteum and resolve those issues. She had no clear impressions and asked to be regressed hypnotically to a previous life, hoping to find him there. During the hypnotic regression, a scene from another lifetime unfolded, but with the husband in the role of the abandoned and grieving party. The experience gave rise to intense emotions in the woman but, because the roles were reversed, had the effect of relieving them. She was made aware that the regression experience might have been imagery from her imagination, but that did not seem to diminish its cathartic effect.

The death of a child may be the most difficult to overcome. A woman had lost her 14-year-old son 8 years prior to her psychomanteum session. He had been injured in a truck accident and had been comatose for several days before he died in her arms, about 6 months after the woman's husband, the boy's father, had died under almost identical circumstances. A psychiatrist had used hypnotic regression to the time of passing so that the woman might experience more fully her grief and thereby reduce it, but with no significant effect.

I proposed a different form of regression. People sometimes report undergoing something like a near-death experience (NDE) when someone close to them dies (Howarth and Kellehear, 2001; LeHew, 1979), as if they participate in the NDE of their loved one. The experience has a similar effect as familiar forms of NDEs insofar as it increases the joy of living and reduces the fear of death in the experiencer. I discussed this form of shared NDE with the woman and offered to regress her to her son's passing so that she might have the experience of participating in his NDE. The woman reported following her son to a place where his father and other deceased relatives were present. She saw him torn between returning to her and going with his father to the other world, finally choosing the latter. She also saw "the light" and saw the boy being drawn to it. She accepted his choice and they said their good-byes, the woman with the conviction that life continues for her son and that they will be reunited some day. The experience was a powerful one for the woman and also for me.

My third purpose was to explore personal and environmental factors that may facilitate reunion experiences. We conducted only eight



workshops with the different hours and illumination, which was not sufficient to ascertain what effect the new conditions may have had.

The best predictor of a reunion experience in the psychomanteum consisted of reports by the workshop participants of having had such experiences previously. It needs to be kept in mind that this study was not conducted under blind conditions. That lack of blindness could have affected the correlations; in future research, it would be preferable to have the psychomanteum sessions rated by a researcher blind to the questionnaire results. If the ICMI response was low, indicating little visual imagination, I spent more time inducing a state of relaxation. Whether or not this contributed to reports of reunion experiences, I found it encouraging that the people who had these experiences in my facility tended to be the same ones who had such experiences in other surroundings. This may suggest that it is possible to duplicate reunion experiences in the controlled environment of the research laboratory.

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## Appendix: Psi Experiences Questionnaire

Instructions: For each of the following items, indicate how frequently you have the experience by circling one of the choices. The seven possible choices are: (1) never, (2) one time in my life, (3) less than once a year, but at least twice in my life, (4) less than once

per month, but at least once per year, (5) at least once per month, (6) about once per week, or (7) more than once per week.

1. Do you sometimes gain information about the future that you could not know by reasoning or other familiar means?
2. Do you sometimes gain information about the present that you could not know by reasoning or other familiar means?
3. Do you sometimes gain information about the past that you could not know by familiar means?
4. Do you sometimes feel certain of who is calling you before you answer the phone, when you have no reason to expect that person to call, and then discover you are correct?
5. Do you sometimes when touching an object gain information about its owner or others associated with the object that you could not know by reasoning or other familiar means?
6. Do you sometimes see lights or colors around a person's head, shoulders, hands, or body that are not caused by familiar sources or light?
7. Do you sometimes have the experience that your self or I is located at a different place from your physical body?
8. Do you sometimes have the experience of a previous lifetime when you are not hypnotized?
9. Do you sometimes when awake have a vivid impression of seeing, hearing, smelling, being touched by, or being strongly aware of another being who is not present in the familiar physical sense?
10. Do you sometimes feel you communicate with the dead, or believe yourself to see or hear the spirit of someone who is deceased?
11. Do you sometimes feel you are controlled or possessed by a spirit?
12. Do you sometimes experience yourself healing or improving the health of someone without medical procedures, as by therapeutic touch?
13. Do you sometimes experience your wristwatch or computer stopping or malfunctioning for no apparent reason?
14. Do you sometimes experience objects in your vicinity moving or bending without physical contact?