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 REMOTELY INFLUENCED ESP PERFORMANCE IN A COMPUTER TASK:
 A PRELIMINARY STUDY I

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Abstract

A computer-controlled psi testing system, the ESPerciser, was used in this study to examine a 'helper' effect in an ESP task. Twenty-five participants contributed two sessions, completing ten runs of ten trials in each session, for a total of 200 trials per participant. There were two conditions, 'influenced', in which a volunteer mediated on a photograph of the participant with the intention of helping them to obtain a higher scoring rate for that session; and 'uninfluenced', in which participants received no outside psychic help. Participants experienced each condition through counter-balanced random assignment and the experimenter was kept blind to session condition for all trials for all participants. The study hypothesis, participants' ESP scores will be improved during the influenced sessions as compared with the uninfluenced sessions, was not significantly supported. Results were suggestive in the predicted direction at $t = 1.465$, $p = .078$. The effect size between the influenced and uninfluenced groups was $(h) = .418$.

A comparison of hit rates for the influenced condition against MCE (.25) was performed yielding a non-significant result at $t = 1.168$, $p = .127$. A similar test performed comparing the uninfluenced condition scores to MCE also yielded a non-significant result at $t = -.941$, $p = .178$. A post hoc 2x2 ANOVA analysis was performed in order to look at a suspected decline in performance by the influencer. Results showed no statistically significant interaction at $F = 1.136$; $p = .298$. Total number of hits for the study was exactly at chance. The implications of a helper effect are discussed, along with recommendations for future research in this area.

Introduction

The concept of someone who acts as a psi 'helper', around whom others' own psychic abilities are enhanced or boosted, is not a new idea. In past literature, this effect could conceivably be used to either 'help' or 'hinder'. The 'helper/hinder' effect has been investigated in parapsychology in various ways. In experiments employing the dice methodology, Feather and L.E. Rhine (1969) asked pairs of subjects to work together to

I The author wishes to thank the Institute for Parapsychology for making C. Honorton's ESPerciser program and the necessary hardware available to her for this study. Thanks and gratitude are extended to Drs. John Palmer and Richard Broughton for their roles and assistance throughout the study. Special thanks to Debra Weiner, Carlos Alvarado, Nancy Zingrone, Caroline Watt and E.D. for their help and comments on at various stages of this study. This study was conducted at the Institute during the author's time there as Research Fellow.

achieve the same target face, 'helper', or against each other to achieve different targets, 'hinder'. The run variance was greater when the pair of subjects worked together for the same target. This seems to indicate that two people working together toward a common goal (i.e., same die face, more hits) may be either combining their individual psi abilities to achieve their goal or that one of the pair may be having a boosting or amplifying effect on their partners psi. An earlier similar study by Humphrey (1947) using dice, had also found that subjects working together to achieve the same target were more effective than when each tried for a different target. Participants were either the 'thrower' or the 'observer' on a team of two. Observers were instructed to help the thrower with their positive mental attitude during the help phase, and to focus their attention on making another number come up during the hinder phase. The CR for the help phase was significant at 3.91, and the CR of the difference between the two conditions had a probability of .02. In research with healers, some have reported that they feel they accomplish the healing of patients through enhancement, or boosting, the healing capabilities of their patients (Solfwin, 1984), rather than the healers themselves doing the healing.

An incident reported by Schmeidler (1970), relates a visit by a swami who wanted to show ESP to one of her experimental psychology classes. The class first made an ESP run under her supervision, one target list of ESP symbols per student, the scores of which were at chance. They then listened to a talk from the swami, after which he sat benignly at the side of the room while they made another ESP run. Surprisingly to Schmeidler and the class, the scores were significantly higher than chance for that run. Although this incident could have been coincidence, it was consistent with the swami's promise to show the class ESP. Although this was viewed as a meditative study, Schmeidler also speculated on the possibility of a psychic influence from the swami, and the possibility remains that the swami may have somehow exerted a boosting, or helping, effect on the students' psi, along with other alternative explanations.

It may be that the concept of boosting, or helping to amplify the inherent psi ability of someone else, is a similar type of phenomena to the 'transference' of psi abilities occasionally reported by 'gifted' subjects. In research designed to determine if Matthew Manning could improve the scores of someone doing a psi task through "transference" of his psychic abilities to a person with whom he had developed a special rapport and who had demonstrated no such abilities previously, Palmer, Tart & Redington (1979), used a forced-choice ESP task. Mr. Manning had reported that he felt he would be able to improve the scores of a 'Miss X', with whom he felt he had established a special rapport, during her attempts on the psi task. In this instance, while the percipient, 'Miss X', was located in a separate room and engaged in a computerized ESP task, Mr. Manning attempted to send her energy, intending to help Miss 'X' to perform significantly better on the ESP task. However, the results of this study, while interesting, were not significant and non conclusive.

Reports in the anecdotal literature show us that investigators had encountered the idea of transference early on, in their work with physical mediums and special subjects. Again, one must wonder if the phenomena of transference of psi abilities, or the amplification of someone's own inherent psi abilities, is the same or very similar. Hereward Carrington felt he was the recipient of such an effect from Eusapia Palladino on several occasions. It appears that she needed to be in physical contact with him to do this, and on these occasions placed her hand on his shoulder, after which the cabinet curtains or small stools would move about, following wherever he placed his hands above them, backwards and forwards (Carrington, 1920). The medium D.D. Home could apparently not only cause himself to be immune to the effects of fire, but was reported to be able to enable someone else to do the same (Dunraven, 1924; Home, 1921). In a 1868 seance, Home apparently enabled Lord Adare to pick up a burning ember in his bare hand by making two rapid passes over that hand with his own (Dunraven, 1924). At the same time that one takes into account other obvious possible explanations (especially suggestion, hallucination, low heat conductivity, etc.), one must wonder if it is possible that Home was having a boosting or 'helper' effect on Lord Adares' own psi ability.

The research conducted thus far on the 'helper' effect in parapsychology has been ambiguous, and inconclusive. Therefore, the present experiment was undertaken in an attempt to explore the possibility of someone helping, or boosting, the psi ability of another. It was thought to be crucial to the study that the influencer feel that they could have this effect on another's ability, viewed it as a positive, helpful effect, and felt they had some indication that they had caused, or been involved in, such an effect in the past. Using a forced-choice ESP task, the ESPerciser, participants took part in two separate sessions, each session a different condition - influenced or uninfluenced. During the influenced session the influencer would concentrate, from a remote location, on a photograph of the participant in an attempt to boost or enhance the psi ability of that participant. This was expected to result in a higher hit rate for that session. During the uninfluenced session, participants would simply play the ESPerciser game with no outside psychic 'help'. Participants were kept blind to the session condition, as was the experimental researcher, Kathy Dalton, with whom they interacted. The hypothesis then, is that participants' ESP scores will be improved (higher) for the influenced session as compared with the uninfluenced session.

Method

Participants:

This study used 29 unpaid volunteer participants and one volunteer helper/influencer. Twenty-five participants took part in the study, 8 males and 17 females with an age range of 18 - 52. Volunteers were recruited from Duke University campus and the local community. Many were individuals who had contacted the Institute for Parapsychology out of their interest in the subject, or who had attended talks by the staff. Those who took part in the study were encouraged to invite any like-minded friends or relatives to participate. Prior to their participation in the study, all volunteers completed a personality questionnaire (the MBTI-Myers Briggs Type Indicator), and the 60 item demographic survey (Participant Information Form - PIF) used at the Institute. A mood adjective check list was filled out just prior to the participants first session. None of these were scored until the completion of the study.

All participants performed each of the two tasks. If any participants were unable to complete all tasks or sessions, that participant's data was invalidated and removed from the data pool. Two participants completed only one of the two experimental conditions, the scores of which would not have effected the outcome of this study. The data for two other participants' sessions could not be retrieved from a bad data disk by either myself or Dr. Broughton, the Director of Research at the Institute, leaving a total of 25 participants in the data base for analysis.

The 'helper/influencer' used for this study had participated in several research studies at the Institute and had consistently scored well in those psi tasks (i.e., direct hits in the ganzfeld, above average scoring in PK tasks). She had indicated that she felt she had the ability to 'boost', or positively increase, the psi ability of others and was enthusiastic about assisting others in a positive manner. She is hereafter referred to as AP.

Materials:

The apparatus and materials used in this study were: An Apple Iplus computer with two disk drives and color monitor used to run the ESPerciser program; the ESPerciser program software and corresponding RNG board; questionnaires and forms for participants to fill out consisting of the MBTI, the 60 item PIF used by Institute, a mood adjective check list, and a participant consent form. In addition, a Polaroid camera with Polaroid film was used to take a color photograph of the participant.

The ESPerciser is a computer-controlled psi testing system developed by the Psychophysical Research Laboratories. It was designed to be a self-paced ESP training program with immediate feedback provided after every trial and is described in detail below. The ESPerciser program was run on the Apple Iplus computer using a PsiLab II, hardware

based, random number generator (RNG). Randomness checks on the RNG output were conducted by Dr. Broughton, just prior to the beginning of the study and again at midway point. Randomness tests on RNG output using the PsiLab II Random Analysis Protocol (Psychophysical Research Laboratories, 1985) were conducted. Chi-square and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests performed by the frequency and serial dependence analysis packages indicated that the RNG output did not deviate significantly from the theoretical expectations on these occasions.

Procedure:

Each participant performed two separate sessions of ten ESPerciser runs of ten trials each, each session being either an 'influenced' or an 'uninfluenced' condition. Session condition was randomly assigned and counter-balanced through use of a permutation program by Dr. John Palmer, a researcher at the Institute, at the beginning of each participant's initial session. The session condition information was kept by Dr. Palmer in a secure location known only to himself or the assigned designee, if Dr. Palmer in a secure location experimenter, Kathy Dalton, hereafter referred to as KD, was thus kept blind to all session conditions for the duration of the study. A photograph of the participant with the participant's ID number on it was taken at the initial meeting with participants. This was done to aid the influencer's focusing effort, and the photograph was provided to the influencer prior to the participant's first session. After completion of the study, participants were debriefed about their results either via mail, or by picking them up in person at the Institute, if they chose.

Participants performed a goal-oriented task on the ESPerciser, attempting to pick the correct target for each trial. Prior to the session, the participants received a tour of the facility, which included a demonstration run of the ESPerciser. A full disclosure and discussion of the study's possible conditions served to evaluate the participants' reaction to being influenced. A consent form was signed, and a Polaroid photograph, returned to the participants after the study, was taken.

The influencer was aware of session times, which were randomly assigned, so that she could be available. Once assignment to session condition was made, the 'influencer', AP, Dr. Palmer was notified by phone at her residence by Dr. Palmer, or Dr. Palmer's assigned designee, if session condition was unavailable, and informed of the appropriate participant's ID number and the building. As Dr. Palmer's office is on the second floor it was not possible for her to overhear these phone calls. If the session was not 'influenced' AP then went about her daily routine. If the condition was influenced, she meditated on the participant's photograph and attempted to help them achieve higher scores (more hits) for that session, concentrating on boosting or raising the participants own psi ability. At session conclusion, AP was once again phoned and told that the session was over. For the second session for the same subject this process was repeated, with Dr. Palmer phoning AP with the session condition. As ESPerciser is a self-paced program, session length varied from 45 minutes to two hours per session.

Prior to the initial session for the participant, KD would write the participant's ID number on their photograph and place it in a sealed, opaque envelope with the participant's number written on the outside. KD then placed this envelope in AP's mailbox for retrieval for use during their sessions. AP placed photographs in a separate envelope after both sessions were completed to remove them from the target pool. These were retrieved by KD at the end of the study for return to participants. AP received no other information about participants and was not debriefed on individual session results until after the conclusion of the study, at which time she also received feedback on overall study results. Each session consisted of ten runs of ten trials each, presented in either the clairvoyance or the precognition target mode. The target mode was determined by RNG output at the beginning of each run, with equal probability of occurrence. Target selections were also determined by RNG. For clairvoyance runs, the target on each trial was selected at the start of the trial; for precognition runs, the target on each trial was selected only after the subject

made their choice for that trial. The subject was not informed whether a run was presented in the clairvoyance or precognition mode until completion of the run. A performance summary was displayed on the video screen at the end of the each run. Performance data were also stored on floppy disk after each run. Hard copies of the data were printed to be stored in subjects' files. The number of hits appearing on the printed and disk records were checked for agreement at the end of the experiment and no discrepancies were found.

During the session participants were seated alone in a comfortable room located directly off of an anteroom outside of Dr. Broughton's office to perform the ESP task. This room is relatively quiet and provided an undistracted, uninterrupted environment in which the participant could concentrate upon their task. KD returned to her daily routine to await the end of the session after making sure the participant was settled in comfortably. Participants had already seen the ESPerciser during their initial meeting with KD, but were also given instructions on use of the ESPerciser program by the computerised instruction set that appears at the beginning of the program, proceeding through it at their own pace. The participant's task on each trial was to identify a randomly selected target from a pool containing the target and three decoys. The target pool of stimuli presented on each trial was randomly selected by the RNG from among a pool of 24 packs representing a wide variety of graphic images, including ESP symbols, geometric forms, line drawings of people and animals, and image-evoking words. The onset of each trial was signalled to the participant by the appearance of four blank rectangles on the video screen with the typed message "Impression Period, Press Button When Ready." See Figure 1. The participant was free to take as much time as desired to form impressions of the target.

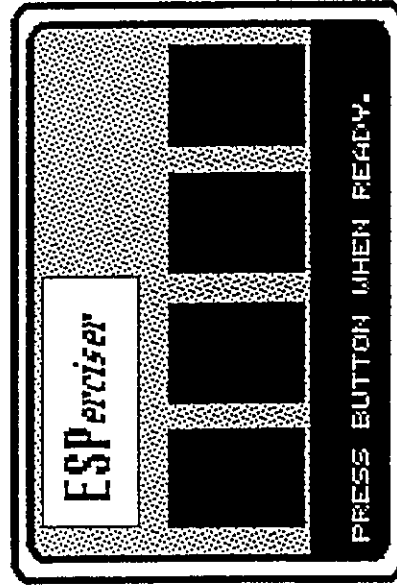


Figure 1. Computer screen during "impression period".²

When ready to view the target pack, the participant pressed a button on the Apple game controller that provided the participant's sole mode of interaction with the computer. After pressing the game-paddle button, a pack of four graphic images, comprising the target and three decoys, replaced the blank rectangles. This was accompanied by the message "Use Paddle to Point, Press Button to Select." See Figure 2. A dial on the game paddle enabled the subject to move a cursor on the screen to point to one of the four graphic stimuli. Pressing the paddle button recorded the participant's choice. After selecting their response, the participant was asked to indicate, by using the game paddle, whether their choice was based on a cognitive impression, a feeling, or a guess. The initial computerized instructions

² *ESPerciser screens reprinted here from *Journal of Parapsychology*, volume 51, pp. 298-299, 1987, with permission.

had defined 'impression' as: the participant chose that target based on a distinct cognitive impression such as an image or verbal association. A 'feeling' had been defined as the participant having no cognitive impression, but felt drawn to that choice. A 'guess' was defined as basing the choice of target neither on an impression nor a feeling, and not having any specific reason for that choice. Trial feedback was then displayed, and, if the participant's response was correct, the word "HIT" was repeatedly flashed along with rewarding auditory sound effects.

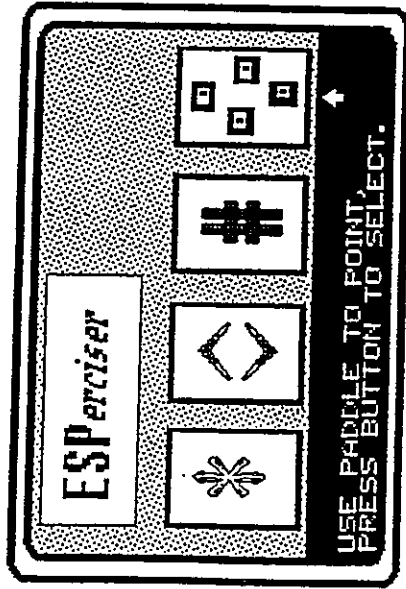


Figure 2. Computer screen during "response period", when four targets are presented.

Participants were given on-screen feedback at the end of each run as to which target mode that particular trial had been, (clairvoyance or precognition), the number of trials they had completed in that run, the types and number of responses made (guess, feeling, or impression), their hit rate and MCE. Odds against their score occurring by chance were displayed if they exceeded the .25 chance expectation. See Table 1. For more detailed information on the ESPerciser program see also Honorton, 1987; McDonough, et al, 1990; and Psychophysical Research Laboratories, 1985.

A trial		Game Number 2	
PRECOGNITION MODE			
Trials: 10	Hits: 5	RESPONSE TYPE	
PROP. HITS: .5	(expected: .25)	GUESS	FEELING
ODDS: 11 to 1		5	3
		3	2
		IMPRESSION	IMPRESSION
			2
			0

Table 1. End of trial summary.

Results

Due to the loss of participant hard copy data during shipping during the author's transition from the Institute to the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, no tests could be performed on either the MBTI information, the PJF data, or the mood adjective checklist. All data analyzed here were contained on computer disks that had been shipped separately containing participant code, session scores, dates and condition. All p-values are one-tailed unless otherwise specified. Hit rates compiled from the ten runs completed in each condition (influenced/uninfluenced) for each participant were tallied by KD, and double-checked independently by both a laboratory assistant, EM, and a laboratory friend, ED. It is unfortunate that due to the changing personal circumstances of the influencer the study was forced to terminate after 25 participants instead of the originally planned goal of 40. It was felt best not to introduce additional noise by then making use of another influencer, and the study concluded at that point. The study hypothesis, that participants' scores will be improved during the influenced sessions as compared with the uninfluenced sessions, was not significantly supported. A paired t-test was used to compare the influenced condition to the uninfluenced condition yielding paired $t = 1.465$, $p = .078$, one-tailed. This result while non significant, is suggestive in the predicted direction. The associated effect size between the influenced and uninfluenced groups was $(h) = .418$.

A comparison of hit rates for the influenced condition against MCE (.25) was performed utilizing a single-mean t-test, yielding a non-significant effect at $t = 1.168$, $p = .127$. A similar t-test was performed comparing the uninfluenced condition scores to MCE also yielded a non-significant result at $t = -.941$, $p = .178$. See Figure 3.

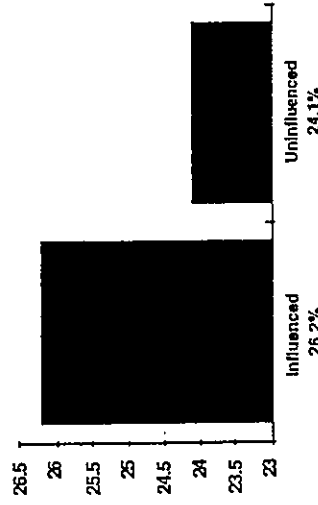


Figure 3. Influenced and Uninfluenced conditions against chance.

As illustrated by Figure 2, the mean scoring rate in the influenced condition was slightly above chance at 26.2% (SD = 4.96). While this is not significant, it is suggestive in the predicted direction. The mean scoring rate for the uninfluenced condition as shown above (24.1%, SD = 4.68), was slightly below MCE, but not significantly so. Neither of the group means differs significantly from MCE (.25), nor from each other. Combined number of hits from both conditions was exactly at chance.

A post hoc analysis was performed to look at a suspected decline effect in influence performance. The influencer, who found it increasingly difficult to be available for sessions, or to maintain a clear time slot in which to adequately focus meditatively on the participant, began feeling stressed and reported feeling anxious to have the sessions quickly completed in order to meet increasingly demanding personal and professional time constraints.

Therefore, an ANOVA was performed on the data. For this analysis the participants were divided into two groups based on their numerical placement within the study (i.e., 1-13, first half of the study and before job change, and 14-25, second half of the study and after the job

change). Hits per condition totalled 345 for the 'first' half (1-13), and 304 for the 'second' half (14-25).

Scores were analyzed using a 2x2 ANOVA with repeated measures. Factor 1 designated as 'when', first or second half of the study, and factor 2 designated as the repeated testing under the two conditions (influenced or uninfluenced). The results showed no statistically significant interaction at $F = 1.136$; $p = .298$.

Before the loss of the MBTI data, and during scoring of participant's personality profile for participant feedback at the end of the study, it was noted that of the twenty-five study participants only two had matching profiles to that of the influencer (ENFP). The scores for these two participants were contrary to expectations, with both achieving better scoring in the uninfluenced sessions. Unfortunately, no other MBTI, PIF or mood correlates were available for analysis. Should the missing data appear, an addendum will be added to this report.

Discussion

Prior research on the helper/hinder effect in parapsychology has given no clear indications of whether such an effect exists, and results from such studies are often ambiguous and inconclusive, indicating that this is an area that could stand more scrutiny. The present study has attempted to do that. Although the hypothesis that the influenced session would show a higher overall hit rate than the uninfluenced session was not significantly supported ($p = .078$), it has led to several interesting questions.

If significant results had been obtained in this study it would have raised the question of whether there was in fact a 'helper', or boosting, effect being evidenced by the influencer on the participant's psi potential. It is possible that the influencer may have been using her own PK ability on the ESPerciser program, thereby registering more hits for that condition, or perhaps using her PK on the participant themselves to have them choose the correct target. In PK studies at the Institute in which the influencer had taken part she had consistently done well. Until we more fully understand the mechanisms of psi, these alternative explanations to an ESP influence cannot be ruled out. The opposing explanation of PK, instead of a helper or boosting effect, would have to be taken into account and adequately controlled for, such as by keeping the influencer blind to the type of psi task involved.

Participants' scores in the uninfluenced session, while slightly below chance, were not significantly so. If we entertain the notion that someone could boost psi hitting we must also address the notion of enforcing psi missing. Since the influencer was aware of the session times so that she would be available, and was informed of session condition at that time so that she could either participate or go about her business, she might have exerted some negative, or suppressing, influence on the reputed 'uninfluenced' sessions. Therefore, studies in which influencers were unaware of non-influenced session times would be recommended.

As mentioned before, some difficulties were encountered due to changes within the lifestyle of the influencing person. Because of changing jobs and work related schedules, appointment times became increasingly difficult to maintain. It is recommended that future studies of this sort involve a minimum of two or more influencers so that the work load could be shared and burn-out avoided. Although the influencer for this study was extremely generous with her time and talents, it became increasingly obvious toward the end of the study that the amount of time involved was overloading her, causing burnout and enthusiasm for the study to wane. Future work could involve several influencers, possibly even comparing psychics vs nonpsychics as influencers, as well as comparing influencing strategies.

It is also recommended that a suitable environment, insuring influencer isolation away from subjects, and reducing the chance of distraction or interruption, be available for the influencing person. Although the home of the influencer in this study provided her a warm, comforting, secure environment, it was not without numerous distractions and interruptions for the influencer, often disrupting her concentration.

Analysis on data gathered from the MBTI and PIF had been planned to explore any personality or experience-related correlations for people who scored better in the influenced condition. It was hoped that the mood adjective checklist data would allow us a closer look at whether mood immediately prior to the first session related to how well participants did. As mentioned, this data was lost during shipping, and these analyses could not be done. It is hoped that future studies in this area will supply the answers to these types of questions. Although the findings of the present study may suggest some type of helper effect, alternative explanations or variables such as suggestion (i.e. reassurances from the experimenter concerning the next session if the participant expressed concern), or a PK effect by the influencer, must also be considered (Alvarado, 1979), although the use of double-blinds can control for some of these. Possible psychological psi-conductive effects such as decreased ownership resistance, or increased motivation through a feeling of team work, should also be considered (Stanford, 1977). It is hoped that more in-depth work in this area will provide answers to the many questions that remain unanswered by this one preliminary study, and perhaps provide good evidence on whether the helper effect occurs.

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