Again this result can be explained by:

a. psi does not exist.
b. psychological reasons like the extra pressure on the subjects and
c. a deeper theoretical notion such as that developed by von Lucadon.

Happily enough there is the triple blind experimenter prediction which may be concretised as follows:

2. If one has found reasonably well established correlation between psi scores and for example a personality variable, then this correlation tends to decrease or disappear upon replication if the personality measurement is made before the psi test. However the correlation remains if the personality assessment is made after the psi test.

Therefore, rather than selecting groups as suggested by Marilyn Schlitz, I would advocate in line with Amorim’s suggestions to continue to study these correlations in future ganzfeld research using set-ups that either enable or disable the use of the correlation for signal transfer.

SUBJECTS’ EVALUATION OF A TAROT READING

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Abstract

In this paper it is argued that, in many ways, the psychic reading constitutes an ideal environment for the action of the Barnum Effect, as it incorporates factors of relevance and mysteriousness which have been found to increase acceptance. It is also suggested that the traditional characterisation of the Barnum acceptor, coined the gullibility hypothesis, may be less valuable than one derived from the cognitive processing artifact hypothesis. These models were tested by presenting Barnum statements via a computer link and under the guise of a Tarot card reading, to 46 Ss. The accuracy of the reading was rated statement by statement. After a delay to allow memory decay, Ss were given a surprise recall task. Recollections were rated by independent judges for the accuracy with which Ss remembered the detail of the reading. Acceptance did not covary significantly with measures of need for approval or locus of control [r_e = 0.065 and 0.231 respectively], thus failing to support the gullibility hypothesis. Although there was no significant difference between gross recall for accepted items versus rejected items [F^2 = 1.427], there was a tendency for greater levels of initial acceptance to be associated with greater distortion in recall [r_e = -1.15, p<.01, 1-tail], as predicted by the cognitive processing artifact hypothesis. The author suggests that this latter represents a promising model through which to understand the acceptance of general statements as feedback from psychic readings.

Introduction

(0) acceptance of the content of psychic readings

There is little evidence to support the view that psychic readers have paranormal access to information about their clients. In the most recent and most extensive review of quantitative studies evaluating material produced during ostensibly psychic readings, Schutten (1991) concluded that “there is little reason to expect mediums more often to make correct statements about matters unknown at the time than ... can be expected by chance” (p.356).

Yet this does not accord with public opinion, with surveys consistently finding that belief in the paranormal – and in psychic readings in particular – is widespread (cf Apleck & Tobin, 1989; Haraldsson, 1985). How can we reconcile the experimental evidence with the beliefs of the many individuals who hold a high regard for mental mediums, and who have been impressed by their performance during readings they have solicited? The stock skeptical response has revolved around claims of deception on the part of the reader and gullibility or special neediness on the part of the client (eg Dutton, 1988).

Deception by the reader can span the range from an unconscious response to non-verbal cues emanating from the client through to the wholly deliberate use of “cold reading” (see Hyman, 1977). Recently, attempts have been made to characterise cold reading in terms of a hierarchy of processes, the different levels of which require different degrees of interaction with the client for their success (Roe, 1991). One result of such a scheme is that in the process of comprehension, the reader is not simply drawing information from the client’s mannerisms, but actively feeding back hints and indicators that are understood and then acted upon by the client.
discovery that even in situations where quite sophisticated deceptive practices could be used, a significant proportion of the reading would still necessarily be in the form of general statements. This somewhat unexpected finding suggests that the perceived success of such a reading would depend in no small part upon the client’s willingness to accept vague or ambiguous information as accurately reflecting their circumstances.

(ii) Psychic readers and the Barnum Effect

Unhurried acceptance of general feedback is well-known in the clinical literature, where it has been described in terms of susceptibility to the Barnum Effect. Research into the nature and causes of this phenomenon has generated a substantial literature, and to date has been the subject of three comprehensive reviews (Dickson & Kelly, 1985; Furnham & Schofield, 1987; Snyder et al., 1977), which can be regarded as concentrating on three broad factors: characteristics of the subject, characteristics of the feedback items, and characteristics of the context within which feedback is given. Underpinning this analytic approach is the assumption (made explicitly or implicitly) that SSs accept general feedback at face value as unbiased and accurate, regardless of the social context. This work is thus briefly reviewed in the following section:

(a) characteristics of the subject

From the earliest studies of the phenomenon, susceptibility to the Barnum effect has been portrayed as an expression of some generally-defined, negatively-oriented personality dimension akin to gullibility. Forer’s (1949) original investigation was alternatively titled “A Classroom Demonstration of Gullibility”, and this characterisation has been widely adopted by others (e.g. Latul & Latul, 1967). Persistent attempts have been made to identify personality correlates of acceptance which could conceivably reflect a general gullibility trait. The more robust findings resulting from these investigations suggest that people characterised as Barnum acceptors do possess a high need for approval (e.g. Mosher, 1965; Snyder & Larson, 1972), and to external the external locus of control (e.g. Orpen & Jamote, 1975; Snyder & Larson, 1972), although for both of these variables the effect sizes are small to medium (after Howell, 1987, p. 198).

(b) characteristics of the feedback items

Many studies have demonstrated that general personality profiles are judged by SSs to be accurate descriptions of themselves (e.g. Carrier, 1963; Snyder, 1974). Indeed, there is even been found that SSs perceive a ‘fake’ generalised interpretation as more accurate than interpretations actually derived from their personality tests (Merrens & Richards, 1970). Similarly, perceived favourability of items has been found to influence the degree to which a personality sketch will be accepted, with favourable descriptions being regarded as more accurate (e.g. Collins et al., 1977).

(c) characteristics of the feedback context

Richards & Merrens (1971) reported that SSs who completed an abbreviated Rorschach test subsequently rated their feedback more highly than others who believed the same feedback to be derived from their responses on Q & A measures. They accounted for these results in terms of the perceived ambiguity or ‘mysteriousness’ of the assessment measure; whereas objective tests could appear relatively transparent in their action, and thus easily faked by the SS, these other measures are more difficult to understand, such that SSs feel less in control of the information they are revealing about themselves. Interestingly, Snyder et al. (1976) discovered that similarly high acceptability levels were elicited when the mysterious assessment device was a graphologically-based test, or an astrologically-based test.

A second situational factor is the degree to which the protocol implies that the feedback given to SSs was directed specifically for them (Snyder and Larson, 1972). Direct manipulation of feedback relevance, simply by telling SSs either that the personality interpretation was specifically derived for them or was generally true of people, caused greater acceptance when relevance was high (Collins et al., 1977). When presented thus, the effect is undoubtedly trivial. However, in more naturalistic settings it has also been found that increasing the level of specificity of information upon which a reading is ostensibly based, leads to greater acceptance of subsequent feedback (Snyder & Shenkel, 1979).

(iv) characteristics of the psychic reading context

It is interesting to note that, on the basis of the findings noted above, the pseudopsychic reading situation could be regarded in a number of ways as approximating an ‘ideal’ Barnum context. With regard to so-called general gullibility, it has been suggested (e.g. Alcock, 1980) that believers in psi phenomena exhibit deficient reasoning skills consistent with non-believers. This account has received some empirical support (Alcock & Osis, 1981; Gray & Mill, 1990; but see also Irwin, 1991). On the basis of survey data, Tyson (1982) has suggested that people with an external locus of control, and those who consult diviners in this context, are particularly gullible and have an external locus of control. Pseudopsychics have long advocated using general and favourable statements during readings (e.g. Jones, 1989), and sample statements drawn from such sources have been shown to exhibit similar acceptance patterns to Barnum statements when presented using a conventional Barnum protocol (Kone, unpublished).

The psychic reading offers an assessment device which is characteristically mysterious, since its method of action is typically described in terms of paranormal processes which are poorly understood (even by the initiate). Much of the ceremony associated with readings tends to reinforce the obscurity of the forces at work, and to emphasise the reader’s privileged position as a vehicle for its expression. At the same time, however, the client usually plays a direct role in the divination process, heightening the relevance of the process to them; this may be achieved by using their own hands as a source of anram reading through to merely shuffling a Tarot card deck prior to producing a spread of cards to be interpreted.

(v) Differences between the two contexts

But although the similarities between conditions which are considered conducive for generating the Barnum effect, and those found in ‘live’ psychic readings are striking, the evidence is only circumstantial, and there are grounds for suggesting that such a facile assumption may be mistaken. The method by which pseudopsychics present material is quite different from that conventionally adopted in the Barnum literature; Barnum feedback is invariably presented as a single body of text, so that the subject is able to construe the sketch as a whole, whereas in psychic readings information is transmitted verbally and sequentially presenting different properties to the communication and making different demands upon the recipient. Two factors are considered here: the indexing of spoken language, and the greater reliance upon visual representation of the material.

It has been claimed that the vast majority of expressions normally used in conversation are indexical, that is, the meaning of the expression alters with the context of use (e.g. Barnes & Law’ 1976). Such verbal communications require a more active role on the part of the listener. Instead of meaning being inherent in the message itself, the listener must decide which of the multiplicity of possible meanings will be most in accord with what intended by the speaker. The choice is influenced by the way the listener interprets the environment in which the message is uttered, who the speaker is, what their status is, and so on. Pseudopsychics, however, appear to be firmly committed by the context, this process can run quite seamlessly, as the listener’s adopted meaning approximates that intended by the speaker.

In the pseudopsychic communication, however, just such a relationship may be exploited by the use of statements which would not be regarded as a genuine attempt to communicate any specific information known to the speaker, rather, the utterances are chosen because they are sufficiently free of meaning to encourage the listener to impose one of their own. The listener, guided by the assumption that the speaker is speaking to and about them, and thus
that what is communicated should in some way be personally relevant, interpreting the message in terms of their own personality, circumstances and experiences.

Clients can be encouraged to work harder than usual to decipher messages, as the reader
"only see pieces, as in a jigsaw puzzle" which only the client could truly understand (Earle,
1990, p.56). They may even \"remember\" information which was never actually part of their
reading, but was evoked in some way by the process of interpreting the given material.
As a result, clients may evaluate the reading not on the basis of what was actually said, but
with interpreted, elaborated, personalised, such that it should not be surprising that the reading is
seen as impressive.

The dynamic and transient nature of a message presented in real-time places greater
demands on cognitive resources. The listener must depend upon memory as the only record
of the reading, while the complexity of the interaction encourages the organisation of
incoming information into forms which are less costly in terms of processing. It has been
suggested that individuals make use of conceptual frameworks or schemata to impose
meaning upon putatively meaningful material in other contexts (cf. eg Pichott & Anderson,
1977). This process tends to prioritise incoming information according to how salient it is
defined by the schema that has been adopted, emphasising those aspects of the
communication which accord with expectation, and de-emphasising those which do not.

This process is very prone to incorporating distortions, especially in recall, in a manner
which serves to make the whole more coherent and meaningful for the client (see eg Loftus,
1979).

Pseud psychics are aware that Ss come with particular expectations of their reading (see, eg.
Jones, 1990), especially in terms of the problems they would like to be resolved or
questions to be answered, and that these will tend to bias their interpretation of the reading
so that it bears upon them rather than other questions. The reconstructive nature of memory
is similarly exploited by recommending that readers not be afraid of feeding clients with
possibly contradictory information during the course of a reading. In the knowledge that they
will only attend to and subsequently recall what was true of them and safely forget the rest
(eg Rutchild, 1981).

(v) The Barnum Effect: a reinterpretation

This characterisation suggests a modified or expanded account of Barnum acceptance. The
reading is successful not simply because it is accepted at face value as uniquely accurate,
but Ss' unsophisticated evaluation or because they are coerced by situational demands
(although these play an important role). Rather, the reading is treated just like any other
communication event, with Ss scanning past experiences to find appropriate meanings for
statements addressed to them, unconsciously elaborating on themes in uniquely personal
ways, and subsequently evaluating the elaboration, not the reading itself. Thus the
mechanism by which the Barnum Effect acts may reflect an artifact of normal efficient
social processes concerned with making sense of communications from others, and may
have more in common with other cognitive or processing biases (see, eg. Nisbett & Ross,
1980) that has been previously thought.

(vi) Characteristics of the present study

The present study is a preliminary attempt to assess whether the Barnum Effect is especially
influential in the psychic reading context, by presenting Barnum statements as feedback in a
simulated psychic reading. The intention is to retain those aspects of the reading context
which emphasise the process's mysteriousness and relevance, as well as those which
emphasise the normally transient nature of such communications. To evaluate the relative
contribution of the gullibility hypothesis and the cognitive processing artifact hypothesis, we
consider some of the personality factors claimed by the former to covary with acceptance as

The effects upon S's representations claimed by the latter to generate differences in
memory of item recall with initial acceptance of the item's meaning.

Experimental hypotheses

General acceptance will be high, and in the range of previous FE research.

S's overall acceptance ratings will increase as their locus of control scores tend
to the external.

S's overall acceptance ratings will increase as their scores increase on a measure of
need for approval.

Gross recall on the surprise test will be better for those statements that achieved a
high initial acceptance than for those that were rejected.

Of those statements that are recalled, there will be a tendency for the degree of
distortion in recall to increase as acceptance ratings increase.

Method

Measures of locus of control and need for approval were used as predictors of mean
acceptance level in a between-subjects design. S's acceptance ratings were also used as
predictors of subsequent recall using a within-subjects design.

A Belief in Paranormal (BP) scale was specially constructed because the focus of interest
was quite different from that addressed by existing scales (see Palmer, 1986 for a
review). The BP scale includes items relating specifically to previous experience of and
belief in the Tarot as a divination tool. Inventories of locus of control and social desirability
were taken from Rotter (1966) and Crowne & Marlowe (1961) respectively.

Six first year psychology undergraduates at Edinburgh University (16 male, 30 female, aged
16-23) acted as subjects. The sample was chosen to minimise the likelihood that they had
been exposed to the Barnum Effect through their studies, or that they had become suspicious
of hidden agendas as a result of experiencing deception in other psychology class
experiments.

Procedure

Subjects were approached during compulsory tutorials, and were asked to participate in an
evaluation of a Tarot Reading. It was emphasised that they would not themselves be the
subjects of the study, but instead would be acting as independent judges helping us to
evaluate a claim of psychic ability made by a third party. Upon recruitment, Ss were given
measures of need for approval, locus of control and belief in the paranormal. These were
meant to be used to provide a more \"objective\" measure against which to gauge the Tarot
reading's content. Ss completed the questionnaires at home and returned them to E
immediately prior to the reading.

The study

The study was organised in time blocks of 60 minutes duration arranged over a period of
weeks. The timetable format was designed to keep Ss separate immediately before and
after their readings so that they could not discuss its content with each other (which could
Subjects Evaluation of a Tarot Reading

undermine the sham context), as well as to reinforce the impression that a Tarot card reader was giving up his or her own time to attend the department.

Ss were informed that to avoid any involuntary transfer of information (particularly non-verbally) there could be no direct contact between them and the claimant. Instead, communication would take place via a cable link-up between BBC microcomputers. The procedure was actually necessary to disguise the fact that there was no 'reader' at all, but rather it was the experimenter (E) who would be transmitting the reading.

Ss were primed to expect personality-based information by being told that the reader had been instructed to concentrate on information which was instantly verifiable by the client. They were then introduced to an old style and slightly worn Tarot deck which would be used to produce the card spread. Written instructions were provided which detailed how to generate the Grand Cross arrangement (after King, 1989), although E was present to ensure that the procedure was followed accurately. Cards were placed face down and without looking at them on a 24" x 18" green baize-covered 'portable table'. Once the arrangement was complete, E removed the table along with unused cards, ostensibly to transport them to R. Upon E's departure, S would sit at the terminal and wait for R to interpret the arrangement and start to relay any impressions formed.

(iii) Transmitting and rating the reading

The reading was relayed from E to S in real time, typed letter by letter to S's terminal screen. A question mark would be typed to indicate that a message was complete, prompting S to rate the statement for accuracy using a 5-point scale (after Carrier, 1962). Ss were told that the assessment would appear to them on-screen as feedback and to E to be recorded, but that R was given no feedback other than that the client was ready for the next impression, after which feedback had been registered. That message would disappear from the screen.

All Ss received feedback consisting of the same 20 Barnum statements. The order of presentation of statements was counterbalanced across Ss, principally to control for any primacy and recency effects which could confound any recall measure, and to encourage different Ss to remember different items should they subsequently compare experiences. Once the statement list was exhausted, S received a message on-screen from R which indicated that the reading was over.

(iv) Recall

After a delay, Ss were given a 'surprise' recall test, being asked to "give an account, as accurately as possible, of what the reader said to you". Ss recorded their recollections on a sheet which consisted of a series of numbered boxes corresponding to the number of statements they had been given. Ss were informed that they were not expected to remember all the items, and certainly not in the order in which they were given. There was no time limit to this recall stage.

Ss were then provided with a handwritten account of the reading, contained on a printed sheet similar to that used to record their recall, and which had ostensibly been completed by E as the reading was being transmitted. They were asked to try and link their recall to the specific statements which prompted them. In this way we hoped to avoid the difficulties of

1 This was to avoid potential problems of subject familiarity with the meanings of some of the cards, which could have prejudiced them during the reading assessment phase.

2 Where 1 = almost entirely wrong, 2 = more wrong than right, 3 = about half and half, 4 = rather good, and 5 = amazingly accurate.

3 To exploit the logarithmic decay of memories, delays were set at 20 minutes, 24 hours or 7 days to consider the effects of time on recall patterns. Given the scope of the present paper, I am not able to discuss the effects of differential delay beyond stating that although increased forgetting is associated with longer delays, there are no gross change in pattern of recall.

Results

General acceptance

It is of interest to determine whether the use of the novel environment of a simulated psychic reading had any effect on Ss willingness to accept feedback. Table 1 presents the incidence of acceptance or rejection of items, with responses collapsed to give three cells, accept, neutral and reject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accept</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Reject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(&quot;amazingly accurate&quot;</td>
<td>(&quot;about half and</td>
<td>(&quot;more wrong than right&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Incidence of acceptance or rejection of statements

It is evident that there is a very unequal distribution of ratings, with a marked tendency for Ss to accept items as being accurate. Data from the "about half and half" category represents acceptance or rejection of an item, and theoretically is problematic to interpreted. Comparing only the incidence of Ss acceptance or rejection with expected values, we find a highly significant deviation in the predicted direction [c² = 65.56, 1df, p < .001], which allows us to accept H₁.

Examination of the personality measures

The gullibility hypothesis predicts that Barnum statement acceptance will covary with Ss' scores on personality measures believed to be related to the fairly nebulous concept of gullibility. Two of the most successful indicators reported thus far - locus of control and need for approval - were implemented here. However, both personality indicators gave rise to negative, but ultimately non-significant correlations [r₇ = .065, ns; r₈ = .231, ns], thus failing to lend support for H₂ and H₃. It is interesting to note a positive relationship between belief and acceptance [r₉ = .353, p < .05], which indicates that believers were more persuaded that the reading was an accurate description of themselves.

Analysing recall

Recall was analysed by three judges (one of whom was E) working independently. All judges were blind to Ss' acceptance ratings for each statement. Analysis consisted of rating similarity between Ss' recollection of each item of the reading and its presented form.

There are two plausible accounts of the likely distribution of ratings should the Barnum effect not be effective here: either ratings would be evenly distributed across all 5 the five point scale constitutes an endorsement of the effect, or else incidence follows a frequency than more extreme ones. If we remove the central category, and collapse data on...

...
using a four-point scale where 0 = not recalled at all, 1 = recalled with distortions which modify the original gist of the statement, 2 = recalled with distortions, but with the overall gist retained, and 3 = recalled accurately. Recall scores were then compared with the original rating for that item.

The cognitive processing artifact hypothesis predicts that Ss will recall more items which were originally accepted than those which were rejected. Frequency of recall of each statement type is given in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accept (&quot;amazingly accurate&quot; or &quot;rather good&quot;)</th>
<th>Neutral (&quot;about half and half&quot;)</th>
<th>Reject (&quot;more wrong than right&quot; or &quot;almost entirely wrong&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recalled</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recalled</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: gross recall for accepted and rejected items

Although there is a slight trend in the direction predicted by H4, the difference is not significant ($\chi^2 = 1.427$, ns), suggesting that original acceptance of the item did not affect the likelihood of it being recalled. However, such a conclusion may be simplistic as it ignores the distinction between different types of recall. The graphs in Fig. 1 illustrate in more detail the effect of original rating upon recall.

The bars represent the proportions of items of each type that were recalled relative to that expected by a chance distribution - a positive histogram indicates that the item type was recalled more often than expected, whereas a negative one indicates that it was recalled less often. From this, we can see that Ss tend not to forget those items to which they responded extremely, either in strongly accepting or strongly rejecting the description. Rather, it seems to be those items about which Ss were ambivalent that suffer most from being forgotten completely.

However, when we consider the integrity of recalled items, we find very different patterns: where rejected items are remembered, the original meaning seems to have been retained, with any distortions in form tending to be superficial. In contrast, Ss are much more likely to remember accepted items in a form which is so distorted as to have altered the original gist of the item. Further analysis supports this impression, indicating that the higher the original rating, the greater the tendency to distort recall (giving a low recall rating) ($r_s = -.15$, p<.01, 1-tail), in line with H5.

![Acceptance rating 1: almost entirely wrong](image)

![Acceptance rating 3: about half and half](image)

![Acceptance rating 5: amazingly accurate](image)

Fig 1: No of items recalled (above that expected by chance) as a function of original acceptance rating.

**Discussion**

Direct support for the gullibility hypothesis could have been claimed if Ss' acceptance levels had covaried with their scores on measures of social desirability and locus of control - as has been reported previously (eg Snyder & Larson, 1972). It is perhaps a little surprising, then, to note that neither effect reached significance here. It could plausibly be argued that failure to detect an effect in the present study is explained, at least in part, by the relatively small subject pool involved. This is highlighted by the effect size of the correlation between scores on locus of control and their level of Barnum acceptance, which at .23 is in keeping with that reported by others (cf Mosher, 1965). The data for need for approval are less encouraging, and must be regarded as casting some doubt upon the influence of this particular personality variable here. Taken together, the two results reinforce the impression that evidence accrued to date in favour of the effect upon Barnum acceptance of both these variables is based on relatively small, but significant correlations, which may reflect constant but very weak effects. We certainly have no guarantee that these factors play a role in actually inducing the BE, although they may play some part in shaping it thereafter.

Failure to find convincing effects of personality variables upon Barnum acceptance would be unsurprising if the effect itself was shown to be more explicable in terms of an artifact of positive processing. An initial attempt to evaluate this interpretation of the effect was
conducted here through the analysis of Ss’ subsequent recall for their readings. If this recall is favorably selective or distorted such that it presents a more coherent and accurate account of the S’s actual personality, then it would tend to support the notion that the message has been actively processed by Ss in order for it to have meaning for them. It would also bear upon whether acceptance was anything more than mere acquiescence, as suggested by Johnson et al. (1985), since it is difficult to explain why such a process should occur if Ss are only acquiescing. Indeed the data provide some (if not wholehearted) support for this notion. Although not significant, there was a tendency for Ss to better recall those items which they had accepted over those which they had not. This can be explained in terms of accepted items being subject to greater or more successful elaboration, which allows for easier subsequent recall (in a manner reminiscent of Craik & Lockhart, 1972). More importantly, there was a distinct trend for those items which were accepted to suffer more distortion in recall than those that were less well accepted. This fits well with a model in which the attribution of meaning to a statement causes it to be modified in ways which increase the goodness of fit.

Given the exploratory nature of the study it is likely that other interpretations of the findings are possible, and which would need to be considered. One such is that Ss may simply have spent longer considering statements which they felt may have been true of them, so that improved recall may merely reflect greater exposure to those particular messages. This can be controlled for in future replications by placing specific limits on presentation time. It is also unfortunate that no attempt was made to control the frequency of items. As a result, we are unable to rule out the possibility that differential recall may have been due to the manipulated characteristic but to other attributes of the items themselves, such as topic of concern. Perhaps some issues are inherently more memorable than others.

In conclusion, then, this study reports some support for an expanded characterisation of the action of the Barnum Effect in psychic reading contexts. It suggests that it may be more fruitful to consider acceptance in terms of an artificial consequence of information processing processes geared towards deciphering communications from others, rather than simply as a result of some general personality trait or situational factor as has previously been assumed.

References


Symposium
NEW LIGHT ON APPARITIONS
Chair: William G. Roll
Raymond A. Moody, Dean I. Radin, William G. Roll

A LATTER-DAY PSYCHOMANTEUM

Raymond A. Moody
Anniston, Alabama

Abstract

Inspired by the psychomanteums, or oracles of the dead, in ancient Greece, I have developed a procedure to facilitate visionary encounters with departed loved ones. The central feature is a chamber with a large mirror into whose clear depth the subject gazes. Of 50 volunteer subjects guided through the procedure, 35 described vivid experiences. Other researchers, who have used this method, report similar results. The work helps to explain the reports from the Greek oracles of the dead, it provides opportunities to explore brain activity during visionary experiences, and it may be developed into a form of therapy for prolonged grief states.

In ancient Greece, there were curious institutions known as psychomanteums, or oracles of the dead, where people traveled allegedly to see and consult with the spirits of deceased relatives and friends. The facilities are mentioned by Homer in *The Odyssey,* the historian Herodotus, the comic playwright Aristophanes, the geographer Strabo and the travel writer Pausanius, among others. Such accounts suggest that the procedures employed were not a form of mediumship but that had their own firsthand, unmediated encounters with the departed. For millennia, scholars assumed that stories of the oracles of the dead were fabrications or that the operators of the facility were engaged in systematic fraud. In 1977, Sozitos Dakaris, a Greek classical archeologist, discovered the site of the most renowned of these facilities, the Oracle of the Dead at Ephyra on the Acheron River in Epirus. When fully excavated, the oracle turned out to be an enormous subterranean complex of dormitory rooms, corridors, and a winding labyrinthine passageway opening into a central apparition hallway approximately fifty feet in length. The remnants of an enormous round surrounded by a ballustrade were found in this chamber. Dakaris concluded that the psychomanteum was constructed using a large wall mirror surrounded by a frame to exclude reflections. Subjects sitting within the chamber are able to gaze into a clear...