

## QUASI-THERAPEUTIC GROUP PROCESS AND ESP

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**ABSTRACT:** The spontaneous behavior and themes that emerge in the course of an unstructured, quasi-psychotherapeutic group session were treated as the medium of psi response in three series of sessions in which randomly selected pictures served as targets. When the members' ratings of the target pictures were contrasted with their ratings of the control pictures, there was psi-hitting in a pilot series. In two confirmatory series, overall hitting was not significant but the hitting rate showed a predicted relationship with ratings of session quality. Implications of this method of psi-response ESP testing are discussed.

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On a bright summer morning, five of the six members of a group gather for their weekly meeting. The sunshine glows pleasantly through the curtains in the windows of the second-floor office, and outside the maple leaves turn lightly in the North Carolina breeze. Bookshelves rise to the high ceiling, filled with volumes on subjects related to parapsychology, Indian thought, psychology, and philosophy. With some change in membership, these meetings have been ongoing for 10 months. The people sit facing one another in a rough circle. Their ages range from late twenties to late forties, and all have training and experience in both parapsychology and psychotherapy. A few minutes of light talking and joking transpire, and a comfortable, warm atmosphere is apparent. After a while the talk becomes more earnest with long, thoughtful silences, and an observer would realize that something very much like a psychotherapy group is taking place. The group is not being clearly directed by any one person, but themes are taking shape as people talk, and all seem committed to explore with honesty and trust whatever issues develop among them this day. Two men in the group become particularly revealing. They have known each other for a long time, were once very close friends, but have grown apart, and the group is providing them an occasion to catch up on their relationship. They talk at some length about memories of very significant and close times they shared previously, and then each comes

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out with some things that have never before been said, disclosures about issues over which they had grown apart. These are admissions that convey risk, and emotions are being felt. Everyone is taking part actively now, and all seem moved by the revelations being made and by the sense that an old and rather deadened relationship has started a cleaner, new chapter. Some very old air has been cleared, and as the time for ending the session nears, a mood of warmth and relief prevails, and a sense of something significant having been achieved.

Then the group does something very unlike any typical therapy group. One person leaves and returns with an envelope that has been selected randomly with a computer by someone not in the group during the time of the session just finished. It is opened and the four pictures inside are spread out for everyone to see. One of the four has been selected, by the same random means, as the day's target. The previous session has been intended, not only as a vehicle for therapeutic change, but also as an exercise in responding inadvertently to an unknown ESP target that all knew would be chosen during the session. As the four pictures are laid out, one of the two men who had been most involved in the day's session gasps, "Damn! That one looks like Mayola's Chili House!" That beer hall and cafe had been the scene of many of the more significant memories just discussed, and, indeed, both agree that the picture of the grim, highway diner with the seedy patrons on stools does resemble that now extinct place. The other three potential target pictures are of the midsection of a man wearing a shiny vest with a prominent rabbit's foot; a colorful, vividly patterned wingback chair; and a row of American Indian adobe structures. A round of discussion about the pictures follows, with people venturing how they associate each one to the just-finished session. Then, each makes independent rankings of the four pictures, from their first to their last choice as the day's target, and then each also assigns a rating to each picture, between 1 and 100, indicating the degree to which they believe the picture shows correspondence to the group experience. Finally, each person rates the day's group session. On a scale from 1 to 5, the ratings reflect each person's judgment about the quality of that session: its level of intensity, depth, and emotional involvement. That day's average rating of 3.9 shows a consensus that this session has been one of the more intense and involving. Finally, after having met for 90 minutes, the group adjourns and goes downstairs where, with a cheer, they learn that the day's target had, indeed, been the picture of the diner. (See Figure 1, p. 298) Everyone had given it a first-place rank, for a clear hit.



This paper reports the current status of an ongoing research project that was inspired by the idea that the patient's attempt to gain personal understanding in psychotherapy is a lot like trying to gain "unavailable" information in an ESP experiment. There are historical, conceptual, and phenomenological parallels to draw between the two endeavors (Carpenter, 1988), and the psychotherapeutic relationship has been described by several writers as being a fruitful environment for ESP experiences. In initiating this research, I felt that quasi-therapeutic approaches and procedures could be helpful in facilitating access to ESP information. Although I have conducted individual sessions, a quasi-therapeutic group setting was the main form for this effort, and that is the focus of this report.

Unfortunately, little empirical precedent for this research can be cited. Hudesman and Schmeidler (1971, 1976) reported two studies in which patients in individual psychotherapy were given forced-choice ESP tests following (and, in one study, also before) the therapy sessions. In one study, scoring success was greater after sessions that the therapist had rated highly in terms of likely gain for the patient, and poorer after sessions that were rated lower. In the second study, a patient in analysis showed greater improvement (pre to post) in scoring following sessions that were "better" from his point of view, as reflected by mood reports. This obsessive patient, described as being in a negative transference at the time of testing, showed better scoring after sessions that left him in a more aggressive, angry mood, and less well when he was left feeling more depressed. This post-session testing procedure was one way around the ethical problem that would be presented by imposing ESP research in a real psychotherapy setting: that it could interfere with the care of the patient, which must be the primary goal of treatment. Our group has approached this problem by setting up a quasi-therapeutic group situation in which everyone understands that ESP testing will be a central goal and practice, no less important than the personal gains individuals may also hope to achieve.

Batchelder (1966), Brookes-Smith (1973), and Owen (1976) used group process in exploring parapsychological questions, but their groups focussed on PK rather than ESP, and issues of therapeutic process were not studied as such.

Partly because we are exploring a new approach to free-response ESP testing, this report is rather narrative in tone, as the preceding vignette illustrates. In addition, although we have attempted to carry out a piece of science, we have also been personally involved to an unusual degree with the phenomena being studied. It seems

best to try to convey this involvement to the reader. Three series were carried out, all of predetermined length.

#### PILOT SERIES

To begin to explore the idea of a parallel between psychotherapeutic and extrasensory discovery, some co-explorers were needed. I approached the students at the FRNM Summer Study Program in Parapsychology with a request for volunteers to help. I had told them before in lecture about the analogy just mentioned between psychotherapy and an ESP experiment. I had also told them that some procedures that seem to have special promise as being psi-conducive (notably, hypnosis, the study of dreaming sleep, and the ganzfeld) have clear connections to procedures relied on in psychotherapy since the nineteenth century. The use of hypnosis and dreams in psychotherapy is obvious, and the ganzfeld procedure is a close experimental analogue to the free-association technique of psychoanalysis (Carpenter, 1988).

#### *Initial Sessions*

Apparently the group found these ideas interesting enough, and probably no more preposterous than many others they had become used to considering in their course, and several volunteered to help. Our pilot series began. When we first met, I had only the vaguest idea of how to proceed. I had made up a number of packets, each containing four target pictures taken from magazines. An FRNM staff member agreed to select a packet and target using a random method during the time the group was meeting downstairs. I told the group that although I was a psychotherapist, I did not intend our work together to be primarily therapeutic. At the same time, I thought that probably our interaction would be somewhat different from the kind we normally had within our accustomed roles. I suspected that we would end up knowing each other better than we had before. I thought that we would be more revealing and immediate than usual and that this would probably feel both a little risky and exciting. Whatever happened, I suggested we would all probably enjoy it and learn something.

I began honestly not knowing just how to proceed. I had in mind to let the group form itself and to be alert to the beginning stages of group process as possibly containing allusions to the ESP



target. I was prepared to reflect feelings, disclose my own, make a few observations about the group process, and pull out a gestalt exercise or two, just as I might do at an introductory workshop on therapeutic techniques. If too much anxiety arose anywhere, I wanted to find ways to contain it helpfully. Basically, I wanted to see what would happen. I was aware of being anxious because I wanted somehow to "get" the target. At the same time I found myself appreciating the little group around me, their openness and energy and tolerance for the ambiguity I was giving them, and I told them so.

That first meeting was not taped, and I don't remember it very clearly. A couple of people, perhaps not knowing what to do with the situation, closed their eyes and became rather trance-like and began to report their imagery as if they were in the ganzfeld situation, with which they had been experimenting earlier. Although some material came forth, it did not feel exactly right to me in this context. It was somehow stale and dissociated and wasted the potential for creative interaction that a group provides. At some point I proposed a bit of gestalt work where people are encouraged to respond to each other and to things that they notice around them. This part of the meeting was livelier. We then spread out the four potential targets, and each person ranked them independently.

When I averaged these rankings for a group decision, the results, in fact, were not especially encouraging. The correct target was tied with another for the rank of 2.5, and thus, by the usual criterion, it was neither a hit nor a miss. In quantitative terms, a very lukewarm result!

Still, I found the results interesting. My own ranking had been a hit, and I had been intuitively responding to the livelier material that had come forth. Quite a mix of stuff had come out in an hour, and the images and impulses of a couple of people, in particular, seemed highly resonant to the target. The group and I both felt encouraged enough to try again.

At the next week's meeting I had a clearer agenda. I presented the target from the week before and asked everyone to examine it. Then I asked them to pretend for a few minutes that we were carrying out an experiment in subliminal perception and to imagine that the target that they had just seen again had been presented to them subliminally. I mentioned some research that had been done on subliminal perception and on forgotten experiences. This work had shown that subliminal stimuli and forgotten events could show up in the form of indirect references when subjects had to use their

imagination in performing projective tests like the Rorschach. I asked them to treat our whole current situation—group, room, and so forth—as a big ink blot, using a gestalt exercise, and to develop whatever awareness they found emerging. Then we would return to the target and see if we could see any correspondences. This might give us some clues about how to try to retrieve an ESP target. The gestalt exercise went easily and quickly. Two people worked for a few minutes each, when I asked them to do things such as: “Let your attention move around the room until something strikes you. . . . Now focus upon it. . . . What about it seems to grab you especially? . . . Now become that and see how it feels. . . . Act like that and feel what it’s like. . . .” and so on. We carried out this sort of exploration for a few minutes and found it to be full of the kind of alert excitement that Fritz Perls discovered how to set free (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951). Then we settled back around the target, which I think had been genuinely forgotten by those caught up in their exploration.

Some delightful allusions were obvious. One man had become dramatically engaged with an old book in a bookcase, and had become its face on which part of the cover was missing, with an inner layer exposed. The target picture featured a tree that had had part of its bark chewed off by a beaver, exposing an underlayer. We seemed to be getting somewhere, at least with ostensibly forgotten material.

With new excitement, we settled down to search for the day’s new ESP target. It was being selected as before, this time by my son Barnaby. I conducted somewhat more structured gestalt work and tried to facilitate especially the experiences of the two who had seemed most responsive to the target before. One of them came suddenly to a clear image of fingernails—very bright, painted, shiny, and red. She developed these images, entered them, acted some of them out. Then the other person, exploring his bodily feelings, became a tree. He planted himself firmly in the center of the group and stretched out his arms. Eyes closed, he saw his limbs stretching out over everyone there, even over the whole world of people. I vividly imagined the overarching limbs that bound us all. When we examined the four potential target pictures, one leapt out at everyone. It was a telephone ad, dominated by a bright, very shiny red phone, looking very much like a shiny red fingernail. The words on the ad featured the idea of connections among people and suggested that that was the important meaning of telephones. We were all delighted to find that this was the correct target.



*Hypothesis and Procedure*

Shortly afterward, the summer session ended and the students departed. It had been my intention to conduct enough group sessions to permit some statistical evaluation of the overall success rate of this approach. To continue these sessions, I solicited the help of some staff members and frequent visitors to the FRNM. I described my approach, and seven people agreed to help. All but one of them had had some previous experience with group approaches to psychotherapy, and some were experienced psychotherapists.

The hypothesis guiding these series was simply that the averaged group rankings would show statistical evidence of psi-hitting.

The new group agreed that we would conduct 10 one-hour sessions, and that these 10, together with the two sessions already done with the student group, would comprise a 12-trial pilot study. All sessions would be tape-recorded. As before, the target would be selected for each session by someone not in the group while the session was ongoing. Thirty-five packets, containing four potential targets each, were made up using full-page pictures taken from an assortment of magazines. An FRNM staff member agreed to select a target envelope and a target number for each session using a computer program for generating random numbers. After the envelope was selected, it was placed on a table outside the group room. The experimenter selecting the target did not open the envelope and did not know the pictorial content of the day's particular target. This clairvoyance procedure was chosen to preclude the possibility of any confounding of results caused by any cues that might have been left on the target because of handling. When each group session ended, the envelope was brought in, opened, and the four pictures examined by each person. As with the student group, each target was ranked by each member from 1 to 4 depending on how relevant the picture seemed to be to the experiences that had just transpired. A period of free discussion followed in which members aired any associations that they wished between pictures and sessions. Thus, rankings cannot be said to be independent. However, no explicit consensus was ever reached, and each person's actual ratings were made in silence. That a fairly large degree of independence actually existed may be seen in the discussion of inter-rater reliability, which is in the Results section of Series B. These rankings were then summed for each picture, and the sums were themselves ranked for a final "call." Thus, each session produced a single set of rankings for a single set of four potential targets. (That target packet then

re-entered the pool for later sessions.) After all arithmetic was done, the correct target number was given by the cooperating experimenter. The analysis planned for the end of the series was simply to test the number of obtained hits against the number expected by chance. Average ranks of 1 or 2 were to be considered hits, so chance probability of a hit was equal to .5.

As the "leader" of this group, I largely adopted a nondirective position. I did not urge gestalt work during most sessions. With so many co-experimenters, so much experience in group process, and so much deep interest in ESP present in the room, I preferred to let the group form itself as everyone wished. I did try to facilitate genuine self-disclosure by modeling it myself and by gently urging others to respond to the deeper and more feelingful expressions of other members. Each session after the first began with an examination of the previous session's target pool and some discussion about how those who had ranked the correct target highly had reached their decisions and how others felt they might have made mistakes in ranking it less highly. Thus, we always spent a few minutes discussing in what ways the ESP target might be making itself known to us, developing and airing tentative hypotheses about how correct judgments might best be made, and pondering the mystery and whimsy of what we were trying to do. Then for some portion of each session, we always settled into doing similar things to what any developing experiential group might do. Emotional issues began to be discussed, we began to get to know one another at a deeper level than we had in our previous, more work-bound and propriety-bound relationships. Some sessions were intense, some light, some sad, some playful, some confusing, some enlightening. One member dropped out after attending four sessions, another joined at the fifth meeting. The ongoing success rate was high enough that a sense of excitement prevailed about the ESP work, and the group as a group was developing in a way that all members found to be engaging and satisfying.

### *Results*

After the tenth session, results were tallied and combined with the previous group sessions. Altogether, an 82% hit rate was observed, considering ranks of 1 or 2 hits. One trial was excluded owing to a target ranking of 2.5, and 9 of the remaining 11 trials were



hits. Six of 11, or 55%, were direct hits or ranked first. The exact binomial probability of having 9 hits in 11 trials is .03.

The group did not need statistics to be excited about what we were doing at that point, and there was a unanimous desire to continue. It was agreed that we meet for a 20-session confirmatory series, continuing basically as we had been doing. The next week's session was to be the first of the series.

## SERIES A

### *Procedure and Hypotheses*

Although this group was planning to continue basically as it had been doing, there were some procedural changes that must be mentioned:

1. Two random-number generating programs had been used at different times during the pilot series, one using the laboratory's PDP-11 computer, the other an Apple II-E. The group agreed on a sentimental preference for the smaller-scale, more personal Apple computer for this series.

2. More target packets were prepared and added to the pool of potential packets as the series progressed, while previous packets were retained in the pool. By the 15th session there were 63 packets, and this remained the size of the pool for the rest of the series.

3. For this series, we agreed to add a rating procedure to the ranking one we had been using in making judgments of target pictures. Ratings were made on a scale from 1 to 100, depending on the judged similarity of the picture to the group experience, and the rankings were carried out as well. Although I still intended to use the simple picture ranks as the primary method of analysis, I also decided to resolve any average ESP rank scores of 2.5 to either a 2 or 3 (hit or miss) using the rank of average rating scores in sessions in which those ratings were made. This rating procedure, reduced to ranks, would simply produce a more sensitive final ranking and permit an analysis of all data.

4. At the eighth session, after it had become clear that both our ESP results and the quality of our sessions were becoming more variable, I decided to add a "session rating" to our judgments prior to learning the identity of the day's target. These ratings, from 1 to 5, with fractions permitted, were to reflect each person's appraisal of

the quality of the group session: its intensity, depth, spontaneity, and meaningfulness. Lower numbers were to reflect lighter sessions, with more role-defined, "comfortable" interaction, or a sense of avoiding more real or emotional issues. Higher numbers reflected sessions of greater intensity, spontaneity, risk, and depth. There was already a strong feeling among many members that better ESP results had been coming from sessions with greater intensity and spontaneity, and there was a unanimous desire to test this hypothesis in the remaining sessions.

5. At the ninth session, I decided to change the length of time of the meeting to 90 minutes because many members had felt that an hour was insufficient for both the group process and the target-judging.

One other procedural matter must be mentioned because it led to a session of equivocal status. At the 14th session, when the target packet was opened it was discovered that the pictures within were not numbered. I arbitrarily numbered them, and then the group proceeded to carry out judgments about the pictures as usual. Because the target number had been selected prior to the time I numbered the pictures, and because I had been through the group experience before assigning the numbers, some confounding elements were added to the situation. If a hit were obtained, should it be seen as being due to the group process and group decision or to my own ESP in doing the numbering? Of course, I had previously numbered all the pictures in the other packets, so any results with them might still be contaminated by my own precognitive ESP. Even so, this error seemed to contribute enough of a difference in procedure that we agreed to add an additional session to our series. The results are presented both with and without this session included, with the proviso that excluding it may be more conservative and preferable.

Two hypotheses may be stated for this series. Psi-hitting in the average group ranks was again predicted; and a positive association was predicted between average session ratings and ESP success for all sessions in which session ratings were made. Average group ranks were to be tested as before against the number of hits expected by chance, and average ESP ratings were to be tested as well using a *t* test. The second hypothesis was to be tested by dividing the session ratings at the median and comparing the ESP success rates in the two groups of sessions.



TABLE I  
RELATION OF SESSION RATINGS TO GROUP ESP SUCCESS  
(SERIES A)

	Higher session ratings	Lower session ratings
Excluding Session 14		
Hits	5	1
Misses	1	6
	$p = .025$	
Including Session 14		
Hits	6	1
Misses	1	6
	$p = .01$	

Note: The  $p$  values are Fisher's summed exact probabilities.

### Results

The overall results of the confirmatory series were disappointing. With rankings used as before, and with a session excluded that had an average rank of 2.5 and for which ratings were not also made, there were 9 hits and 10 misses, for a hit rate of 47%. When the equivocal extra session is added, the results change negligibly to 10 hits and 10 misses. Fisher's exact probability for this is, of course, insignificant. It had been planned that results would also be analyzed using rating scores in a parametric test, but the failure of any effect made that pointless.

When results were analyzed in terms of the session ratings, a more meaningful pattern emerged. As a simple test for a relationship, I ranked and divided at their median the average session ratings for the 13 sessions in which the ratings were made. The results were analyzed by Fisher's exact probability and are given in Table 1.

A significant result ( $p = .04$ ) was obtained in the expected direction. With the additional session included in the analysis, the result is somewhat more significant ( $p = .01$ ). Thus, although the group process did not continue to produce overall psi-hitting in the confirmatory series, the hypothesis that differential ESP success should be correlated with different levels of group process did receive support.

*Discussion*

At the end of Series A some effort was made to interpret this finding. To do that, we looked at the life history of the group up to this point. After the first session of Series A (which yielded a strong hit) the group had a 2-week hiatus. At the end of that session the atmosphere of the group seemed confident, almost cocky. Even though we thought we had some hints about correlates of greater and lesser success, we almost assumed that we could keep producing an abundance of hits. So much for self-confidence. Two sessions later, the group was dealing with its first "crisis": the termination, and departure from the country, of a member who had become central and beloved. I sensed in the two sessions in which that issue was prominent, strong feelings and the initial signs of the ambivalence just described, and we struggled for the first time with how to deal with difficult and partly negative feelings. An atmosphere of some strain, defensiveness, and superficiality was present. Both sessions yielded weak ESP results.

In general, this strain seemed to stem partly from the fact that there were always two purposes to the group's existence, and at times these seem to have conflicted. On the one hand, the group was an effort at very open-ended exploration of free-response ESP, in which we could rely on no subjects other than ourselves, no manipulation of variables, no special psi-conducive states. This was deeply interesting to each of us in different ways, and, from this angle, the hidden ESP target and its retrieval were the central concerns. At the same time, we were indulging in a situation that encourages, almost demands, a very special kind of interaction and the formation of relationships that are very different from those ordinarily found in the workaday world. Even though the group was conducted nondirectively for the most part, the presence of so many people experienced in intensive group process, who liked one another and wanted to know each other more deeply, pulled strongly for intimate self-disclosure, emotional honesty, and undefensive immediacy. This seemed fine for the period of the pilot sessions, when the excitement over seeking the targets was paramount and the group was in a forming phase. As sessions went on, however, I believe that there was increasing ambivalence about this. For one thing, the group had always been understood to be nontherapeutic in its intent, and some people who joined would probably not have been interested in an encounter group as such. Most of the members of the group worked with one another daily, had congenial and



effective, if somewhat superficial relationships, and had a strong need to preserve harmony. For another thing, some of the group members had known each other for a long time, and some of those relationships had histories of conflict (some long past and some more recent), which had never been confronted and about which some were covertly anxious.

As the group went on, it seemed that an implicit dilemma faced it. The relatively easy stages of self-disclosure had been passed, and the group could either settle into superficial ways of relating, about which no one was pleased, or it could move on to deeper levels with more uncertainty and risk. As in any therapy or encounter group, what transpired was an expression of that ambivalence, with some sessions being relatively intimate and some rather stagnant, some confrontational, and some superficial. As a group, there was solid consensus at the end of the series that the process had been rewarding and successful. Relationships were deeper, firmer, and clearer, and everyone felt pleased with the risks they had taken.

What had this to do with success and failure at the ESP task? By the end of the pilot series there had been some consensus within the group about some things that seemed to have accompanied greater success. As I summarized in a preliminary report written at the end of the pilot series: "Unresolved anxiety, withheld material and a sense of stalemate, all aspects of therapeutic resistance, seem to have led to psi-missing, while moments of special emotional impact, of shifts of meaning and deepening of feeling which are consensually important, often seemed to carry aspects of the target" (Carpenter, 1986). The original analogy that had motivated the study seemed to hold true: those sessions, and even those moments, that were most spontaneous and open to new experience and self-discovery, were also most likely to give access to the ESP information.

One hypothesis stood supported at the end of Series A: that ESP success should be greater in the sessions in which more involving group process occurred, as measured by session ratings. To confirm this hypothesis, I needed a further series.

## SERIES B

### *Hypothesis and Procedures*

A further series of 20 sessions was planned in which an effort would be made to confirm the relation between ESP scoring (as

measured by average target ranks) and average session ratings. Although most aspects of the procedure stayed the same, there were a few changes.

1. After discussion at the end of Series A, the group decided that the REG program of the PDP-11 computer would be used for this series rather than the Apple program. The former generates truly random numbers whereas the latter draws on a pseudorandom, pre-determined sequence, and the truly random alternative seemed preferable to most members.

2. It was also decided that some sessions would be conducted by a subgroup of the members with the new set of Summer Institute students and that these sessions would be included in the series. We were interested in exploring whether the phenomenon could be carried over to other groups as well by people who were familiar with our procedure. As it happened, there were opportunities for only two such sessions, and they are included. Thus, 18 sessions were carried out by the primary group, and 2 by the student group, for a total of 20 sessions.

3. At one of the two Summer Institute sessions, no one was available to generate the group targets, so another member of the lab staff was asked to pick an envelope out of the stack "at random" and to roll a die from a cup until a number of 1 to 4 was obtained. He did this out of sight and hearing of the group session and, as in other cases, did not open the envelope himself before turning it over to the group at the end of the session.

One member left the primary group after one session; another joined at the seventh session.

Results were to be analyzed again by ranking the sum-of-ranks that all group members gave to each target picture. To make the most of these data, I resolved all tie-ranks by averaging the ratings given to the target, as was done in the case of a 2.5 average rank in Series A. Examination of target ratings revealed that some group members had not clearly understood the rating procedure and had sometimes treated the ratings idiosyncratically. It was intended that each person's ratings, if ranked, would be identical to their rankings of the same target. They should sort the four pictures in the same order but with greater sensitivity of judgment than the four ordinal ranks permitted. On a few occasions, the ratings were done differently, so they did not bear this proper relation to the rankings. Because of this, the ratings could not be consistently used across all sessions. Four sessions received tied rank-averages. All the ratings of those sessions were examined to make sure they were done cor-



TABLE 2  
RELATION OF SESSION RATINGS TO ESP SUCCESS  
(SERIES B)

	Higher session ratings	Lower session ratings
Hits	7	2
Misses	1	6
	$p = .02$	

Note: The  $p$  is Fisher's summed exact probability.

rectly and that they represented the same ordering as the ranks. All did so in these cases, so the ratings could be used to resolve ties.

### Results

Overall psi-hitting was not expected, and it was not obtained. The series yielded 12 hits and 8 misses.

The relation of ESP scoring to session ratings was tested again by finding Fisher's exact probability, with session ratings divided at their median.

The results are given in Table 2. The predicted relationship was confirmed,  $p = .02$ . Because 4 cases fell at the median value for session ratings and were excluded from the analysis, some concern could be raised about the ability of the analysis to represent the sample as a whole. As a secondary test of the hypothesis, the session ratings for hitting sessions and missing sessions were compared by  $t$  test using all 20 cases. The mean session rating for hitting sessions was 3.36 ( $SD = 0.41$ ), the mean for missing sessions was 2.75 ( $SD = 0.72$ ),  $t = 2.41$ ,  $p = .013$ , one-tailed.

Because the overall hitting rates and session ratings for Series A and B were very comparable, they were pooled for a more detailed analysis of all 33 sessions (excluding the equivocal case of Series A). Data were divided into sets in which the correct target received group rankings of 1, 2, 3, or 4. Analysis of variance of session ratings gave a significant effect ( $F[3,29] = 1.38$ ,  $p = .006$ ). The means and standard deviations are given in Table 3. A Duncan range test (Winer, 1962) showed that the ratings given to sessions receiving a rank of 4 (a "direct" miss) were significantly lower than those for all other sessions, whereas the other groups did not differ significantly from each other.

TABLE 3  
SESSION RATINGS AND GROUP TARGET-RANKING  
(SERIES A AND B COMBINED)

	Rank <sup>a</sup>			
	1	2	3	4
Mean rating	3.51	3.48	3.38	2.63
SD	0.23	0.58	0.69	0.48

<sup>a</sup>Rank refers to the rank of mean ratings given to correct targets.

### *Reliability*

From a psychometric point of view, this research design implies that for each session there exists a true level of group process, as estimated by members' session ratings, and a true degree of correspondence between session experiences and target content, as estimated by members' rankings of the correct ESP target. From this perspective, each rating and ranking is an imperfect judgment of a somewhat subjective and imperfectly defined quality. It is reasonable to inquire into the reliability of these judgments, although that is not often done in free-response parapsychological research. To do this, reliability coefficients (Pearson *r*'s) were calculated for all pairs of raters across the two confirmatory series for session ratings, excluding members who provided fewer than 10 scores. For the ESP data, the individual's rank score of 1 to 4 on the correct target was used as a single score and can be construed as the subjects' "degree of rightness" on that call. For these rank scores, the inter-rater coefficients ranged from  $-.26$  to  $.88$  with a mean of  $.34$ . (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4  
RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS OF ESP RANK SCORE ON CORRECT TARGET

Raters	Raters						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
B	.03						
C	.32	.04					
D	.27	.46	.09				
E	.56	.15	.77	.63			
F	.18	.36	.02	.41	.85		
G	.21	.13	-.19	.41	.47	.31	
H	.43	.55	-.26	.88	*	*	.82

\* $N < 10$ .



TABLE 5  
RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS OF SESSION RATINGS

Raters	Raters						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
B	.54						
C	.45	.66					
D	.56	.74	.55				
E	*	*	*	*			
F	.38	.61	.71	.42	*		
G	.35	.69	.58	.62	*	.50	
H	.80	.72	.89	.82	*	*	.50

\* $N < 10$ .

This is a rather poor degree of reliability and suggests that considerable random variation could be removed from the results of such studies in the future if the ESP ranking procedure could be more objectively defined and if group members were trained to rate more reliably. Examination of the matrix of reliability coefficients for ESP rank scores shows clearly that one member was particularly idiosyncratic in ranking. Without this individual's scores, the coefficients would range from .03 to .88 with a mean of .42.

The ratings of session quality were more reliable, having coefficients ranging from .35 to .89 with a mean of .54. (See Table 5.) Although closer to the level of reliability ordinarily expected in psychological research, better specification of the dimension and rater training would be of use here, as well.

For reference, each member's target rankings and session ratings for each session in the two confirmatory series are given in Appendices A and B.

The group kept up discussion about its performance throughout, which led to several qualitative observations of the "results," although they should be considered hypotheses awaiting controlled test rather than firm conclusions. These observations follow, along with illustrative material:

1. Many times, for different people different aspects of interaction serve as cues to the target even when the group as a whole succeeds in a correct identification. For example, in one session fairly early in the life of the group, the first few minutes of talk were light, cheerful, and somewhat abstract, with members obviously pleased with the high rate of success and offering theories about it. The mood shifted when one member began talking, still

happily, about her exuberant Italian family as seen through the eyes of a distant relative. There was a lot of laughter when she described the time this person saw her family dancing without music. Then another member talked about a dinner party she had recently had for her children in which she felt appreciated for her motherhood. Attention then shifted to a member who was dressed in a colorful, slightly exotic way. He discussed his pleasure in oriental and Indian clothing and how he enjoyed shocking his students slightly by wearing it to class. He seemed to become very involved in the topic, moving almost rhapsodically as he spoke about the emotionally freeing connotations of certain clothing, the capacity of traditionally feminine clothing to release ordinarily untapped sides of a man's nature, and his own decision, at this point in his life, to dress in ways free of convention. All this aroused laughter, jokes, and some minor revelations from other members about the dualities in their own natures, both gender-related and otherwise. The very feminine characteristics of one member's Indian sari drew comment, some very thoughtful and full of feeling. The target for the session was a picture of a modern dancer, given in a double exposure. (See Figure 2.)

This picture was ranked highly by everyone but for different reasons. Some stressed imagery they had experienced with the "family who danced without music," some the femininity of motherhood, some the balletic movements of the person discussing oriental clothing, some the feminine sari, some the dualities of their experience, as reflected in the duality of the figure in the picture.

2. When members are "out of role," expressing new sides of themselves, their behavior seems especially likely to express connotations of the target. For example, in one session I was identified as providing most of the imagery that permitted the group to identify a hit. I came into the session just after having finished writing an early version of a report on this experiment. I was very relieved but tired and "spacey." As I described the process I had been through in writing, I became quite involved in telling about how absorbed I had been, how concepts had almost come alive and come to write themselves. I became slightly giddy in going on about this, and although I was definitely in a rather odd and withdrawn state, several members remarked that I was being unusually spontaneous, dropping the watchful responsibilities of group leader. The target that day was the strange fellow shown in Figure 3.

He was seen by several as resonant to the imagery they had experienced in listening to me and observing my state.



3. Moments of group interaction that are seen consensually as being especially meaningful, or as "breaking through" in terms of self-exploration or spontaneity, are likely to be psi-expressive. For example, during one session one of the younger men was describing feelings that might be called "transferential" toward an older male member. He was being urged to explore, in a gestalt therapy way, his responses, which included adulation, affection, anxiety, and intimidation. At one point he was standing facing the older man and was urged to "do something now" to act out his feeling of the moment. He said, rather out of the blue, "I want to rub your bald head." Then he did so, standing behind the older man, and talking about what the act seemed to mean to him as he did it. The target that day was identified by everyone as resonant to that moment of symbolic choice. It was a drawing of a bull, with a shiny spot on its head in the shape of a "check mark." The father-like bull, the shiny, checked head, and the sense of reckless and impetuous behavior all resonated to the session. (See Figure 4.)

#### DISCUSSION

This research up to this point leaves us with two main questions to attempt to answer: Why did the group procedure produce an overall abundance of hits in the initial pilot series and produce only intermittent success in the two confirmatory series; and why did the ratings of session quality discriminate hitting and missing performance in the two confirmatory series? Perhaps the answers to these two questions are related. The key may be the sense of excitement, newness, and unpredictability that group experience can offer. The early stage of a forming group, even when members are not especially revealing or self-exploring, if it goes well is still experienced as being exciting and growthful. Different things are needed to maintain and further a sense of growth after a group develops for a while. The group itself tends to form norms and roles, and interaction becomes subtly routine, defensive, and "safe." Then breakthroughs are needed to reactivate a deeper level of excitement and growth. These times of breakthrough and renewed freshness were represented by the highly rated sessions of the two confirmatory series.

Unfortunately, the precise meaning of the session ratings is unclear. They represented a global judgment made by each member on rather vaguely specified criteria. The criteria that members men-

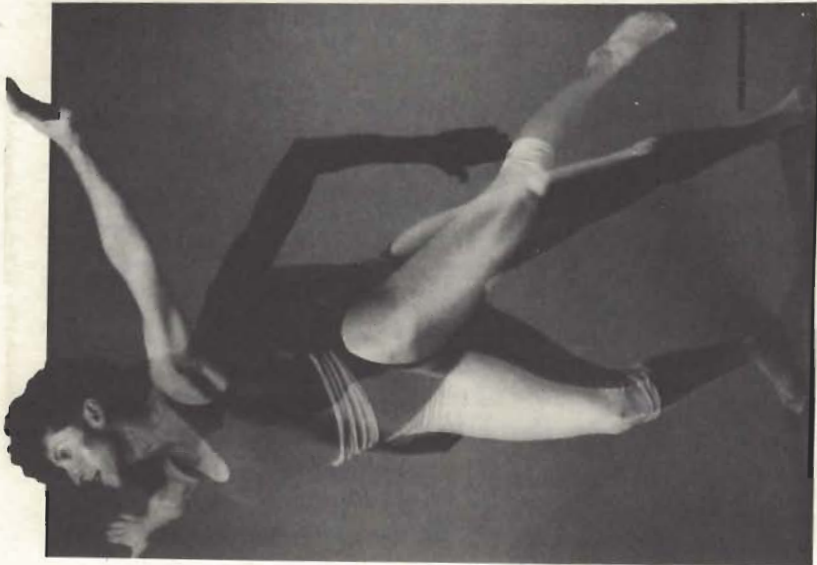


Figure 2. "Debbie Bender-Rosas." Reproduced by permission of Ed Kashi.



Figure 1. "USI near Washington DC, 1940." Photograph by Jack Delano. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress.





Figure 4. "Bull in a China Shop." Reproduced with permission of Amy Hill.

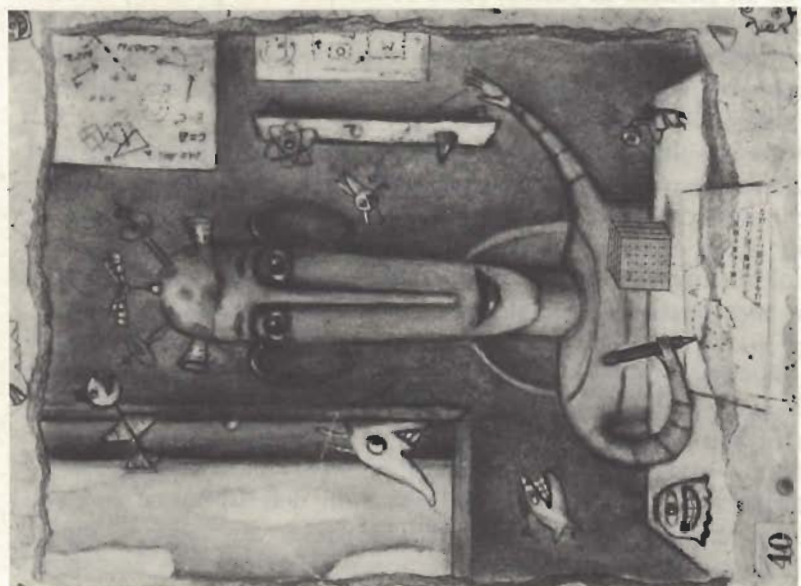


Figure 3. "Thinking Sideways." Reproduced with permission of Andrew Shachat.

tioned in determining their ratings included spontaneity, meaningfulness, depth, and closeness. As opposed to the associations voiced to the potential ESP targets, these session ratings were almost always made without any discussion, although no effort was made to keep them secret from other members. A new round of research that is currently ongoing includes rating of more specific aspects of group process, along with the global rating in an attempt to see what elements comprise it and which are most important in mediating psi success.

Two other interpretations can be made of these results other than the one discussed. It may be that the group exerted a PK effect on the target selection process in an unconscious attempt to pick a "best illustration" of the day's experiences. In this case, we are not producing an ESP effect at all. We can think of no way of determining that this is not the case. Another possible interpretation is that the main "psi act" in the procedure is not the group process but the target ranking that follows. If this is so, then our results confirm those of Hudesman and Schmeidler (1976) and demonstrate again that ESP guessing performance is better following an especially positive therapeutic experience than after one not so positive. There is some consensus among the group members that this may be an element in success some of the time but probably not in all cases. The task, after all, was to relate the potential target pictures to the interaction that had just transpired, and in most of our successes there was consensus that the correct picture did, in fact, bear a clear relation of that sort.

What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of this approach to free-response ESP research? Some disadvantages are: the large number of person-hours required to collect data; the complexity of the process, which makes the experimental isolation and control of important variables very difficult; and the potential emotional hazards that accompany any intensive, semitherapeutic group experience. One possible advantage is that the many skills, principles, and procedures that have been found to be helpful in psychotherapy in the effort to elaborate personal meaning and open up self-discovery may also be of use in attempting to gain ESP access to unknown target material. Creating an environment conducive to self-exploration, dealing constructively with defensiveness, and facilitating the development of new awareness are matters about which therapists have learned a lot, and these things may be useful in ESP research.

Another advantage, at least to me personally, is the excitement and sense of adventure and involvement that this approach pro-



vides. I have been involved for a long time with parapsychological research, and I have always drawn a firm line between experimenters and subjects. Thinking about parapsychology and doing experiments in it was one thing, and attempting to use and develop psychic ability was another matter, somehow vaguely forbidding. We have dissolved that line in a way that has been both lively and potentially rigorous.

However that may be, I feel lucky that we hit on something that has been personally enriching, exciting, and fun for us. As the *I Ching* said when consulted about the preparation of this paper:

A lake evaporates upward and thus gradually dries up; but when two lakes are joined they do not dry up so readily, for one replenishes the other. It is the same in the field of knowledge. Knowledge should be a refreshing and vitalizing force. It becomes so only through stimulating intercourse with congenial friends with whom one holds discussion and practices application of the truths of life. In this way, learning becomes many-sided and takes on a cheerful lightness, whereas there is always something ponderous and one-sided about the learning of the self-taught. (Wilhelm, 1950)

APPENDIX A: RATINGS OF SESSIONS

Session	Subjects <sup>a</sup>						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
<i>Series A</i>							
1	1	1	2	1	2	4	2
2	1	3	1	2	1	1	2
3	4	4	4	4	3	3	4
4	1	3	2	3	3	4	2
5	2	4	4	x	3	4	4
6	3	1	4	x	4	4	1
7	3	4	3	x	4	4	x
8	3	1	4	x	1	2	1
9	3	4	2	x	2	2	1
10	4	4	4	x	4	x	4
11	1	2	2	x	1	3	2
12	1	3	4	x	3	2	2
13	x	1	4	x	2	3	x
14 <sup>b</sup>	3	3	4	x	2	1	1
15	1	4	1	x	3	2	4
16	4	3	4	x	4	3	2
17	2	3	2	x	2	4	4
18	4	4	2	x	1	2	2
19	3	4	1	x	4	3	4
20	4	3	3	x	4	1	4
21	2	1	3	x	1	4	4
<i>Series B</i>							
1	2	2	4	x	2	4	2
2	1	3	1	x	4	3	x
3	4	3	4	x	x	4	x
4	2	2	4	x	3	4	x
5	x	2	4	x	4	4	x
6	2	1	4	x	1	2	x
7	2	4	1	x	4	x	x
8	1	x	2	x	2	2	x
9	4	x	3	x	3	2	x
10	1	x	4	x	2	x	x
11	4	x	3	x	3	x	x
12	1	x	1	x	1	1	x
13	1	x	1	x	2	x	x
14	4	2	3	x	2	1	x
15	4	3	4	x	1	2	x
16	2	1	4	x	2	4	x
17	2	1	4	x	1	2	x
18	2	2	4	x	x	1	x
19	4	2	3	x	x	4	x
20	4	2	2	x	x	2	x

<sup>a</sup>"X's" denote that a member was not present.

<sup>b</sup>The "extra" session where target pictures were numbered at the time of the session.



APPENDIX B: RANKINGS OF SESSIONS

Session	Subjects <sup>a</sup>						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
	<i>Series A</i>						
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8	3.5	4	3	x	5	3.5	2
9	4.5	4.8	5	x	5	4	5
10	3.4	3	x	x	3	x	2
11	3.5	3.5	3.5	x	4	3.2	4
12	3	3	x	x	3	2.5	3
13	x	3	x	x	4.5	x	x
14 <sup>b</sup>	3.5	4	x	x	5	4	4
15	4.5	3.5	4	x	4	3.2	3
16	3.5	3	2	x	3.5	2.8	3
17	4.5	4.5	4.3	x	4.5	4	4
18	4.3	2.5	2.3	x	4	3	2
19	3.5	2.5	x	x	3	2.8	3
20	3.6	3.8	x	x	4.5	3.3	2
21	4.5	3.5	2	x	4	3	3
	<i>Series B</i>						
1	3	4	2.9	x	3	2	2
2	3.1	3.5	4.7	x	x	3.3	x
3	x	2.5	1.7	x	3.2	1.5	x
4	3.2	3	2.8	x	2	2.8	x
5	x	2.8	2	x	2.5	2	x
6	3	3.5	4.2	x	4.5	3.2	x
7	2.8	3	2.4	x	3	x	x
8	3.2	x	3.7	x	2.5	2.8	x
9	3.5	x	2.9	x	3.7	3	x
10	3	x	2.4	x	3.5	3.4	x
11	2.3	x	1.3	x	2.5	x	x
12	4.2	x	x	x	4.2	3.1	x
13	3.8	x	3.2	x	3	x	x
14	2.7	3	2.1	x	2.5	2.2	x
15	3.7	3	3.1	x	3	3.1	x
16	3	4	3.8	x	3.5	3	x
17	3.3	3	4.4	x	3.9	2.9	x
18	3.9	3	4.8	x	x	3.2	x
19	2.8	2	2.1	x	x	2.1	x
20	4.7	3.5	4.9	x	x	3.2	x

<sup>a</sup>"X's" denote that a member was not present.

<sup>b</sup>The "extra" session where target pictures were numbered at the time of the session.

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