

Psychics vs. Non-Psychics in “Face-to-Face” and “Remote” Token-Object Reading Conditions

BY ALEJANDRO PARRA AND JUAN CARLOS ARGIBAY

Abstract: Psychic reading is a method used to foretell the future of an individual. However, cold reading is a non-paranormal technique used by many self-claimed psychics and mediums to determine details about another person in order to convince them that the reader knows much more about a subject than he or she actually does. We wanted to explore some strategies for using and appraising the so-called “token-object” effect common in psychic reading. We planned to follow the design of our earlier research using a psychometry procedure with a sample of ordinary people (non-psychics) and a sample of self-claimed psychics. One of the aims of the study was to determine if the ‘psychics’ participants could give impressions while touching the objects of two sitters. The experiment was introduced to the participants by telling them that two different conditions, “face-to-face” and “remote” psychometry, were being undertaken using a physical object as psi-stimuli. The sample consisted of 83 participants. We concluded that those participants who claimed to have psychometry psi ability (“Psychic” group) showed greater psi hitting than “Non-Psychics” in both conditions (“remote” and “face-to-face”). Because face-to-face readings allow for sensory cues, no firm conclusion of “genuine” psi can be justified from such an experiment. Therefore we should treat this significant finding with caution.

Keywords: extra-sensory perception, ESP, non-psychics, psi, psychics, psychometry, token-object reading.

INTRODUCTION

The term “psychometry” refers to a type of anomalous cognition (or ESP) which permits a psychic or “sensitive” to receive impressions using a physical object as an inductor or instrument for information (Bentley, 1961; Rogo, 1974). This confers some methodological advantages over a face-to-face “psychic reading” performed by a psychic consultant or through control spirits by spiritualist mediums in which some sensory

channels may be available to allow fraud or unwitting self-deception (Hyman, 1977; Roe, 1991, 1996, 1998). We use the term "psychic" in this paper with reference to the paranormal activity of providing information not known at the time and not obtainable by normal means. Psychometry exemplifies this activity and has been defined as an anomalous cognition system for psi-detection (Richet, 1922). However, in our view, the proper question, and the only one of practical use, is not whether psychics are able to do better than chance, but whether psychics are able to do better than non-psychics of comparable experience in dealing with target objects.

The main advantage of experimental research is that in principle the activities of the psychic are under control and that all statements and verbal interactions can be recorded. Even then it is often not easy to assess the value of the statements. When a client interacts with a psychic, and comments on the psychic's statements, these comments can provide additional information that should be taken into account when evaluating subsequent statements. For quantitative analysis this constitutes such a problem that, as a rule in experiments, such comments are excluded. Therefore these experimental studies are not entirely representative of the conditions under which a psychic normally works.

Schouten (1993) has suggested that other than experiences of spontaneous psi, the major source of interest in the subject matter of parapsychology is through encounters with professional psychics. Dutton (1988) has similarly argued that "for many people, belief in the paranormal derives from personal experience of face-to-face interviews with astrologers, palm readers, aura and Tarot readers, and spirit mediums" (p. 326). A number of commentators have claimed that clients are typically impressed with the content of the readings they have solicited (Hyman, 1989, p. 346; French, Fowler, McCarthy, & Peers, 1991). Blackmore (1983) noted that "people who consult astrologers, palmists or Tarot readers often claim that the information they are given provides an accurate and specific description of their personality" (p. 97).

A psychic reading is a type of method used in an attempt to foretell the future of an individual. A professional psychic may have one or more specialized areas of expertise such as tarot cards, distant readings (just using the name and the birth data), aura readings or any number of other methods. However, most psychic readings do not usually use any tools and can include face-to-face readings such as in-person readings at home. However, cold reading is a technique used by many self-claimed psychics and mediums to determine details about another person in order to convince them that the reader knows much more about a subject than he or she actually does. A practiced cold reader can still quickly obtain a great deal of information about the subject by carefully analyzing the person's body language, gender, religion and level of education and overall, the manner to

speech. The real cold reader usually employs high probability guesses about the subject, quickly picking up on signals from their subjects as to whether their guesses are in the right direction or not, and then emphasizing and reinforcing any chance connections the subjects acknowledge while quickly moving on from missed guesses.

There is some limited empirical evidence to suggest that encounters with psychic readers are typically regarded as quite impressive. Haraldsson (1985) found that of those who had attended a séance, a surprising 83% had found the experience "useful." In Palmer's (1979) student sample, evaluations of the readings were similarly quite favorable, as 67% found the experience to have been very helpful, 22% somewhat so, and 78% claimed to have acted on the advice. None reported the experience to have been harmful. For Palmer's (1979) 'townspeople', 15% found the reading very helpful and 30% somewhat helpful. However, 52% found the experience of no help, and 3% reported it actually to have been harmful.

This generally favorable impression of psychic readings is not thought to be restricted to a small subsection of the population. Encounters with psychic readers are intended here to refer to face-to-face consultations. Attempts to account for the success of psychic readings (e.g., Hyman, 1981; Roe, 1991) often implicitly assume that clients take their readings very seriously. Palmer (1979) gives a very interesting and detailed breakdown of the general impact of psychic experiences upon his respondents' lives, focusing particularly on effects upon their "feelings or attitudes" and important life decisions that they had made. On the basis of Palmer's analysis, it does appear that psi has had profound consequences for some. For example, an astounding 9% of respondents claimed that their experiences had saved them in a crisis, and a further 9% that someone else had been saved as a result of their experience. Unfortunately, Palmer's breakdown does not identify the different types of experience that gave rise to the various effects. It would be informative to see, for example, whether psychic readings have altered participants' perceptions and/or actions in important ways.

Informal feedback from subjects during a recent study of the ways in which psychic readings are processed by clients (Roe, 1994, 1998) suggests that they can recognize that readings they have solicited have been of a form which allowed them to be true for many people. Yet they remain convinced that some elements of the reading were especially true of them or their circumstances in a manner that made the reading particularly or even uniquely pertinent to them. The readings generated do not depend upon the reader sensing unique aspects of the client's life and concerns, but rather upon the client's willingness to interpret and elaborate on the limited information mechanically generated by the reader. Explanations of this process typically invoke the Barnum Effect (Roe, 1991; Dickson & Kelly,

1985, p. 367). The effect emphasizes the vague or general nature of the statements in allowing the client to read her own meaning into them, as well as focusing upon characteristics of the client that leave her especially vulnerable to such deception (e.g., Tyson, 1982).

However, if we consider what kind of information we should expect, were the reader to be genuine—that is, readings are derived paranormally—it seems likely that he would be strait-jacketed by many of the same factors that underscore the conventional account. Despite being convinced of their own uniqueness, people are actually very similar to one another; they tend to experience comparable events at the same stages in their lives, to focus on similar current problems, and to hold similar aspirations for the future (Sugarman, 1986).

Palmer (1996) did a study with a psychic who gave blind readings to 60 volunteer recipients in groups while holding a concealed photograph of the recipient. Two months later, recipients marked statements from all the readings in their session that applied to them, not knowing which one was theirs. Although other significant findings from the earlier study involving the psychic's mood during the session and recipients' scores on NEO-PI Openness did not replicate, it was concluded that the two experiments were mutually reinforcing as evidence for psi having been present in them. The replication of the sessions effect surprised the author because he had interpreted it in the face-to-face experiment as psychic reader improving her skills in the utilization of sensory cues as the result of immediate feedback from recipients to her statements.

A series of psychometry-based experimental sessions were designed to address these issues. We wanted to explore some strategies for using and appraising the so-called "token-object effect" (Parra & Argibay, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, in press). The results showed that the so-called Psychic group tended to score higher psi-hitting than the Non-Psychic group, who scored at the level of mean chance expectation. Further data analysis revealed differences in variability between the two groups: participants who claimed ESP abilities generally obtained higher psi-hitting; among the participants who claimed ESP experiences but not ability, some scored high psi-hitting, others high psi-missing. In one of these experiments, the aim was to compare a group of ordinary people (non-psychics) with self-claimed psychics in order to determine if participants were capable of distinguishing between photographs of people who had died and people who were still living. However, no significant differences were found and neither group obtained psi hitting (Parra & Argibay, 2008).

Therefore we planned to follow the design of our earlier research using a psychometry procedure with a sample of ordinary people (non-psychics) and a sample of self-claimed psychics. One of the aims of the study was to determine if the participants could give impressions touching

the object of two persons, male and female, that is, two trials. Specifically, we wanted to test whether: (1) there is a difference between the scores of the two groups ("Psychics" vs. "Non-Psychics"), and (2) there is a difference between the scores of the two conditions ("Face-to-Face" vs. "Remote" psychometry).

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 83 participants (63% females and 37% males) who were all well-educated and believed in psi. The age range was 18 to 77 years (Mean = 46.44; $SD = 14.03$). The majority of the participants reported previous personal experiences suggestive of psi, such as ESP sensations around sick people (56%) past place events (50%), token-objects (34%), unknown people (69%) and/or token-photos (38%). Seventy-eight percent of the participants had had some training in meditation or other techniques practicing an internal focus of attention.

Participants were recruited by media advertisements and a mailing list. An advertisement was also published on the internet (www.alipsi.com.ar). The advertisements contained a brief explanation of the ESP test procedure and encouraged presumptive participants to contact us for an interview in order to obtain more information.

Categorization Procedure

A 17-item self-report questionnaire was specially developed for this experimental series (for further information about this instrument, see Parra & Argibay, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008). Items included three types of factors, (a) Belief in psi, (b) Extrasensory experiences (telepathy, ESP dreams, anomalous cognition, clairvoyance, paranormal/anomalous feelings or impressions of being at unknown places or touching things, and aura visions), (c) Extrasensory abilities covering topics as in (b), excepting ESP dreams. Belief in psi (items 1.1 to 1.6 marked 'Yes' or 'No') was rated very high for all items on the scale (98.4% indicated all items of ESP Belief). Questions 2.1 to 3.5, which included the frequency of each experience, were marked as either 'Never', 'Once', 'Sometimes', or 'Frequently'.

We used the following criteria to split the sample into Psychics and Non-Psychics: Participants ($N = 51$, 61%) who indicated 'Yes' on the factor "Extrasensory abilities" were categorised as the Psychic group, and participants ($N = 32$; 22%) who indicated 'Yes' on the factor "Extrasensory experiences" were categorised as the Non-Psychic group (who had spontaneous psi experiences, but no ability or control over them).

Participants who indicated 'Never' on all items were excluded from the sample.¹

The items also provide descriptions of the content of sessions, when psychics apply their assumed psi abilities, under conditions which, as much as possible, resemble the every-day circumstances of sessions with clients. Our study consists of a number of series of sessions with a group of psychics and non-psychics (divided according to the items of the questionnaire) in which the participants conveyed their impressions about persons unknown to them.

Localization

The participants met during two-hour workshops free-of-charge organized at the Institute of Paranormal Psychology (IPP) in Buenos Aires. AP and JCA aimed to create an informal social atmosphere, engaging in friendly conversation with the participants before the test. Three rooms were necessary for the test procedure; one for the participants (room A), one for participant/target (room B) and the experimenter AP, and the other for participant/target and the experimenter JCA (room C).

Test Instructions

Instructions to the target persons (TP). They were two adult volunteers, male (50 years old) and female (25 years old), who lead ordinary lives. Both TPs were unknown to AP and JCA; they were recruited through a collaborator of the experiment (JV) at the Institute. After a friendly welcome, the experimenters asked them for an object of either current or previous use. No volunteer experienced any extraordinary events (that we know about) during the course of the experimental series. Explanations of the experiment were given. For instance, TPs were recommended, as much as possible, not to give verbal or non-verbal (mainly gestural) feedback.

Instructions to the participants. The experiment was introduced to the participants by telling them that two different conditions, "face-to-face" and "remote" psychometry, were being undertaken using a physical object as

¹ We developed a number of items referring to such experiences, because in their biographies, many psychics report a number of spontaneous cases before they became psychics and learned to use their psychic abilities (for a review, see Kierulff & Krippner, 2004). These kinds of intuitive or psychic impressions constitute some indicators for distinguishing psi from pseudo-psi impressions (i.e., fantasy) about the target persons.

psi-stimuli. Participants were informed that both situations could stimulate psychic abilities in people, and that this research was exploring both situations in one research project, so that their relative importance in stimulating psychic abilities could be evaluated. Before the start of each session, under both conditions, the participants underwent a nine-minute relaxation exercise (in group), which employed progressive autogenic phrases (Jacobson, 1974) read by one of the authors (AP). The instructions and relaxation exercises were delivered in a slow, soothing but confident manner with classical music played from a CD (Antonio Vivaldi's *Double concerto, Largo G Minor*) in the background. The auditory stimulation was given for a few minutes.

The order of condition testing ("face-to-face" and "remote" psychometry), were counterbalanced among the groups of participants, so that each participant was firstly tested under "face-to-face" condition, and after "remote", and *vice versa*. Participants were all present together in room A, and they were randomly selected to enter to rooms B and C using a list of randomly number identification. Each participant was called using an intercom set. For both conditions, the order to enter room B and room C was also randomized, so that each participant met, first male TP, and then female TP, and *vice versa*. Participants did not know that the objects belonged to both TPs (the same ones), although both TPs carried on their person two different objects (two for female and two for male), all the time during the experimental series. Two were used for "face-to-face" reading (handkerchief and comb for male) and two for "remote" reading session (hair brooch and billfold for female). Since the "face-to-face" condition implied having visual contact with the TP, participants were made aware that no interaction should be allowed; so that TP do not give verbal or non-verbal (as far as was possible) feedback, name and age will be no informed, and no questions will also be allowed. The experimenters were blind to who belonged to the Psychic and Non-Psychic groups. Randomization procedures were run before each experimental session. Random numbers were generated by a web-based program (www.randomizer.org).

"Face-to-face" condition. Each participant was tested individually. Participant and TP were seated in chairs, both face-to-face (no desk between them). Each experimenter was in a session room, together with one of TPs, but he did not interact with them. For each workshop, in order to minimize the possible "psychological" influence of the experimenters, experimenter presence was also counterbalanced. In room A was JCA together with female TP, and in room B was AP together with male TP for a number of sessions (JCA was also with male TP, and AP was with female TP in other groups).

Each experimenter delivered one object to the participant in a small box, and he/she handled the object. The experimenters asked them to verbalize as much as possible the owner's impressions of the object. Once the participant felt that he/she had obtained information about the female or male TP, he/she talked his/her impressions. Participants gave impressions while touching the objects, and each participant completed two trials (one for female and one for male). The experimenters tape-recorded all statements, although under this condition both TPs had also listened to all the statements made by each participant.

"Remote" condition. Each participant was also tested in individually so that the TP was not present during the session. Participant and the experimenter (JCA or AP) were seated in chairs, both face-to-face in the session room B and C. In room A was JCA together with the TP's object (female) and in room B was AP together with TP's object (male) in a number of sessions (JCA was also with male TP, and AP was with female TP). Each experimenter delivered one object to the participant in a small box, and he/she handled the object. The experimenters asked them to verbalize as much as possible the owner's impressions of the object. Once the participant felt that he/she had obtained information about the female or male TP, he/she talked about his/her impressions. Participants gave impressions while touching the objects, and each participant completed two trials (one for male and one for female). The experimenters tape-recorded all statements.

Judging Procedure

The TPs were instructed to carefully rank each participant's statement according to what they considered matched their own psychological, physical, or any other trait described by the participants under "remote" (blinded) condition and "face-to-face" condition. A rank of '1' was assigned to the participant whose description corresponded most often to the target person's own impressions; a rank of '5' was assigned to the participant whose description corresponded the least often, according to them.

Also, the target persons were instructed to assign a score of '5' if the participant had not given any statement at all. TP's were aware that participants had been blind to both token-objects, under both conditions, and belonged to the same TP each time. The number of statements on the forms ranged from five to fifteen. TPs also blind scored the participant's statements, although in "face-to-face" condition TPs were aware who the participant was.

Consent Form

Participants signed an appropriate consent form, using language they could reasonably understand. The form specified that the person (1) had the capacity to consent, (2) had been informed of all significant information concerning the procedure, (3) had freely and without undue influence expressed consent, and that (4) consent had been appropriately documented (Beahrs & Gutheil, 2001). The statements were confidential.

RESULTS

A repeated measures 2×2 factorial design was used. Factor A: Condition test ("remote" vs. "face-to-face") and Factor B: Group of participants: Psychic ($N = 51$) vs. Non-Psychic ($N = 32$). Each participant (Psychic and Non-Psychic) was tested under two conditions, so that each participant performed two trials. The dependent variable was the Mean of the TP's score (1-5) in both conditions. Lowest scores are indicating psi-hitting.

As shown in Table 1, the prediction was correct in terms of the difference between both groups—that is, Psychics scored significantly higher than Non-Psychics. As hypothesized, there was also a significant scoring difference between the two conditions, "face-to-face" and "remote". While the two main effects were significant, there was no significant interaction effect between the two factors.

DISCUSSION

The experiment studied two groups (Psychics and Non-Psychics) in two conditions (Remote and Face-to-Face) using a procedure with 'token' objects in a free-response test. It can be concluded that those participants who claimed to have psychometry psi ability (the Psychic group) showed greater psi hitting than the Non-Psychic group in both conditions, Remote and Face-to-Face. Although Face-to-Face was better for both groups than Remote, no interaction effect was found between conditions and group.

Because Face-to-Face readings allow for sensory cues, no firm conclusion of "genuine" psi can be justified from such an experiment. Therefore we should treat this significant finding with caution. However, because Face-to-Face reading is the vehicle by which many persons interact with psychics (thus producing ostensible psi) outside the laboratory, we see the study of Face-to-Face readings as having value in its own right.

Table 1
Score Differences Between Psychics and Non-Psychics in "Remote" and "Face-to-Face" Conditions

Group	Condition	F	df	p	Partial η^2	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval
Factor A Condition	Remote	9.64	1, 81	.003	.106	4.10	0.95	3.89 to 4.31
	Face-to-Face					3.74	1.06	3.51 to 3.97
Factor B Participants	Non-Psychic	5.97	1, 81	.017	.069	4.15	0.86	3.85 to 4.44
	Psychic					3.69	1.09	3.45 to 3.92
Factor A \times B		1.20	1, 81	.276	.015			
Remote	Non-Psychic					4.27	0.81	3.93 to 4.60
	Psychic					3.93	1.02	3.67 to 4.19
Face-to-Face	Non-Psychic					4.03	0.96	3.67 to 4.39
	Psychic					3.44	1.07	3.16 to 3.73

We also note that cut-off points used for categorisation into Psychic and Non-Psychic groups are clearly arbitrary, but we justify it for procedural reasons (i.e., to form the two groups in the first place) so as to facilitate categorical analysis. In addition, the target persons were 'blind' as part of the judging procedure in the Remote condition but not the Face-to-Face condition. Of course, this is an inherent limitation of the design due to this inconsistent blinding. Also, many honest psychic readers may, in fact, be cold readers. Although genuine ESP might occur during such readings, any conclusions that might be drawn about the occurrence of genuine ESP in face-to-face readings will be based primarily on whether any relationships uncovered in the Face-to-Face experiment can be replicated in a parallel experiment in which the conditions are blind.

Schouten's (1994) review of the literature led him to conclude that "there is little reason to expect psychics to make correct statements about matters unknown at the time more often than . . . can be expected by chance" (p. 221). Apparent successes by psychics have often been explained not as a consequence of psychic ability, but in terms of the exploitation of common (but subtle) channels of communication using what has been termed 'cold reading'. This procedure has been described in detail elsewhere (Hyman, 1977; Roe, 1991, 1996), and there is an extensive pseudopsychic literature associated with it. Sadly, there has been very little recent empirical work exploring the nature of psychic readings, for example, to determine whether pseudopsychic practices are common, despite claims noted earlier that such encounters can be very influential in providing the basis for paranormal beliefs.

The work described here had a relatively limited remit. Further studies should quantify the impact upon clients of prototypical psychic readings (face-to-face interactions with psychic readers). There is considerable scope for this work to be extended, for example, by adopting a more qualitative approach to explore in greater depth clients' accounts of readings they regard as impressive, or to consider alternative forms of psychic services such as the expanding market for readings by telephone or by mail. Our expectation is that accuracy scores proved to be much stronger and much more reliable in the face-to-face study than in the blind study. If this happens, the experiment could be supportive regarding evidence for psi.

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RESEARCH BRIEF:
AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY WITH ORDINARY PEOPLE FOR
TESTING 'SACRED' OBJECTS THROUGH PSI DETECTION

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'psychometry' refers to a type of anomalous cognition (or ESP) which permits a psychic or 'sensitive' to receive impressions using a physical object as an inductor or instrument for information (Bentley, 1961; Rogo, 1974). This confers some methodological advantages over a face-to-face 'psychic reading' performed by a psychic consultant or through control spirits by spiritualist mediums in which some sensory channels may be available to allow fraud or unwitting self-deception (Hyman, 1977, 1981; Roe, 1991; but see also the work of Schwartz, 2002, and Robertson & Roy, 2001).

A quantitative evaluation of the statements of a psychic aims to determine whether these statements are correct more often than can be expected by chance. Although a quantitative evaluation is the best way to obtain an objective assessment of the value of the psychic's impressions, it provides only a limited view of the data. Relationships between apparently unrelated statements, for instance of an emotional nature, can provide a very apt characterization of the target person or the situation, but might not lend themselves well to an objective quantitative analysis.

We use the term 'psychic' in this paper with reference to the paranormal activity of providing information not known at the time and not obtainable by normal means. Psychometry exemplifies this activity and has been defined as an anomalous cognition system for psi-detection (Buchanan, 1885; Richet, 1922). Normally in studies with psychics, the aim is to demonstrate that they are able to provide better information about a specific target than can be expected by chance. However, in our view, the proper question, and the only one of practical use, is not whether psychics are able to do better than chance, but whether psychics are able to do better than non-psychics of comparable experience in dealing with target objects.

The main advantage of experimental research is that in principle the activities of the psychic are under control and that all statements and verbal interactions can be recorded. Even then it is often not easy to assess the value of the statements. When a client interacts with a psychic and comments on the psychic's statements these comments can provide additional information that should be taken into account when evaluating subsequent statements. For quantitative analysis this constitutes such a problem that, as a rule in experiments, such comments are excluded. Therefore these experimental studies are not entirely representative of the conditions under which a psychic normally works.

The aim of a quantitative evaluation of the statements of a psychic is to establish whether these statements are more often correct than expected by chance. A qualitative analysis, based on a subjective interpretation of the

material, might often be more meaningful. However, a significant outcome of a quantitative analysis can be considered as a requirement which has to be fulfilled before a qualitative analysis is allowed. Thus only after it has been demonstrated **quantitatively** that the statements are especially applicable to the target person **does further** interpretation in a qualitative and psychological sense seem warranted.

A series of **psychometry-based experimental** sessions were designed to address these issues. We wanted to explore some strategies for using and appraising the so-called 'token-object effect' (Parra & Argibay, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008). In these studies the majority of participants reported personal experiences suggestive of psi, such as ESP 'feelings' around sick people (56%), around past place events (50.8%), around 'token' objects (34.7%), around unknown people (69.4%), and around 'token' photos (38.3%). Seventy-eight per cent of the participants had had some training in meditation or other techniques involving an internal focus of attention. Based on these responses we categorized participants as either 'psychics', who claimed personal psi ability, or 'non-psychics', who reported anomalous experiences but claimed no consistent ability.

Weekly two-hour workshops were run at the IPP during which participants initially received some information about the series of tests and completed personality and psychological inventories and questionnaires. They were informed that the psychometry procedure could help stimulate psychic abilities in people during meditative states induced by relaxation exercises that included progressive autogenic phrases.

Four target persons, two males and two females, were each provided with identical key rings made of leather and metal, which they then carried with them about their person so that a psychic connection to the object might develop for participants to pick up on. These four token objects were coded, such that the second experimenter (JCA) and the target persons remained blind to the codes. JCA and the first author (AP) kept paper-and-pencil records isolated, sensory-cues proof during all randomization procedure and handling procedure of the token-objects. AP delivered the token-objects in little boxes to the participants, who remained with eyes closed, quiet, waiting for a few minutes for mentations about the owner of the object. Each participant completed four trials, touching each of the target objects, and recorded his or her impressions. These impressions were given to the target persons, who judged each statement for its applicability to them. Statements were presented in such a way that the judges would not be able to identify which participant had written which statement.

The results of that study showed that the 'psychics' group scored higher psi-hitting than the 'non-psychics group', who scored at the level of mean chance expectation. The difference between groups was significant ($z = 1.73$; $p = 0.04$, one-tailed). Further data analysis revealed differences in variability between the two groups: participants who claimed ESP abilities generally obtained higher psi-hitting; among the participants who claimed ESP experiences but not ability, some scored high psi-hitting, others high psi-missing. A second experiment (Parra & Argibay, 2007b) compared psychometry using objects against performance on visual targets (pictures), using a similar method to

that described above. The non-psychometry condition ($p = 0.005$) resulted in higher scores than those obtained in the psychometry condition. The difference between conditions (no-psychometry vs. psychometry) was also significant ($z = 2.65$, $p = 0.008$, two-tailed).

A third study (Parra & Argibay, 2007c) explored whether there was a significant difference between psychics and non-psychics in using psychometry for medical diagnosis. Four adult volunteers who suffered from medically diagnosed diseases (viz. diabetes mellitus, hiatal hernia, osteoarthritis, and varicose veins) acted as target persons, who delivered personal objects (combs, handkerchiefs, hair brooches and billfolds), which were coded and recoded blind by the experimenters. Each participant received four pairs of objects (target and control) to be 'touched' and they performed four trials of psychic diagnosis of the target persons, who remained unidentified. Although both groups combined scored significantly above chance ($p = 0.01$), there was only slight support for the claim that the 'psychics' ($p = 0.03$) would score higher than the non-psychics ($p = 0.08$). Although neither group obtained highly significant results, high variability was found, and this was in a positive direction for the psychics and a negative direction for the non-psychics ($p < 0.05$). It appears that psychic diagnosis relates to perceptions of 'information' in and around target persons, and that these may be difficult to translate into physical diagnoses. Also, the psychics and healers were not trained in medical terminology, anatomy or physiology, and therefore they may have had difficulty in providing impressions specific to anatomical structures and quantifiable in conventional terminology.

In a fourth experiment (Parra & Argibay, 2008), the aim was to compare a group of ordinary people (non-psychics) with self-claimed psychics in order to determine whether participants were capable of distinguishing between photographs of people who had died and people who were still living. However, no significant differences were found and neither group obtained psi-hitting.

In the present study we sought to extend this approach by identifying another psychometry task that might distinguish between psychics and non-psychics, and chose to focus on a task in which participants had to decide which of two token objects was originally from a sacred site. According to some traditions, there are in countries such as India, Egypt, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, holy places that represent sacred sites or power-filled energy centres to which many people make pilgrimages. At such sites they may experience a sense of unification with nature, a feeling of bliss, inter-species communication, waking visions, unusual sounds, synchronicities, key memories, or ecstasies (Swan, 1988). People from various cultural groups, and across different periods of history, have attributed similar properties to sacred sites, ranging from inducing encounters with spiritual agencies to anomalous night-time dreaming (see Krippner & Thompson, 1996). It has been claimed that psychics are capable of distinguishing by ESP the 'sacred' nature of these sites (Devereux, 1999).

Therefore we planned to follow the design of our earlier research using a psychometry procedure with a sample of ordinary people (non-psychics) and a sample of self-claimed psychics, but here the token objects would be small samples of material from 'sacred' sites. One of the aims of the study was to determine whether the participants could distinguish between the sacred and the control objects by psychic means. Specifically, we wanted (1) to determine

whether the number of hits differed significantly from mean chance expectation (MCE); (2) to determine whether the participants would be capable of distinguishing between the 'sacred' versus 'control' objects, and (3) to test whether there was a significant difference between the scores of the two groups.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 147 participants (77.3% females and 22.7% males) who were all well educated and believed in psi. The ages ranged from 18 to 76 ($M = 45.85$; $SD = 12.29$). Personal experiences suggestive of psi were reported by the majority of the participants, such as having experienced ESP feelings around sick people (56%), around past place events (50.8%), around 'token' objects (34.7%), around unknown people (69.4%), and around 'token' photos (38.3%). Seventy-eight percent of the participants had had some training in meditation or other techniques involving an internal focus of attention.

Participants were recruited through media announcements and an e-mailing list. An announcement was also placed on a web page (<http://www.alipsi.com.ar>). The announcement provided a brief explanation of the test procedure and encouraged people to attend an interview with us in order to obtain more information.

Categorisation Procedure

A 17-item self-report questionnaire was specially developed for this experimental series (for further information about this instrument, see Parra & Argibay, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008). Items included three types of factors, (a) belief in psi, (b) extrasensory experiences (telepathy, ESP dreams, anomalous cognition, clairvoyance, paranormal/anomalous feelings or impressions of being at unknown places or touching things, and aura visions), (c) extrasensory abilities (covering topics as in *b*, excepting ESP dreams). Belief in psi (items 1.1 to 1.6 to be marked Yes or No) was rated very high for all items on the scale (98.4% indicated all items of ESP Belief). Questions 2.1 to 3.5, which included the frequency of each experience, were marked as either Never, Once, Sometimes, or Frequently.

We used the following criteria to split the participant group into psychic and non-psychic groups: participants ($N = 25$) who indicated 'yes' on the factor 'Extrasensory abilities' were categorised as the 'psychic' group, and participants ($N = 122$) who indicated 'yes' on the factor 'Extrasensory experiences' were categorised as the 'non-psychic' group (who have spontaneous psi experiences, but no ability or control over them). Participants who indicated 'Never' on all items were excluded from the sample. Our study consisted of a number of sessions with groups of psychics and non-psychics (divided according to the criteria above) in which the participants conveyed their impressions from pairs of samples of water and sand.

Participant Setting

Fourteen separate groups were tested by the first author (AP) and the second author (JCA) at the Institute of Paranormal Psychology in Buenos Aires, in two-hour sessions over a period of two years. There were between 5

and 10 participants in each group. AP and JCA aimed at creating a friendly and informal social atmosphere.

Target Objects

A co-experimenter, not present during the sessions with the psychics and non-psychics, collected samples of sand, taken from the base of the Cheops Pyramid in Egypt, and an equal number of samples from a source of water to which the devotees of Marian apparitions attribute curative properties (i.e. 'blessed' water), taken from a Marian sanctuary in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The little containers were matched with control samples of sand and water from non-sacred sites. JCA also alternated in which side of a small box each member of the pair was placed. The containers were transparent, so that participants were able to see the samples, and they were also free to handle the containers. AP was blind as to which samples belonged to which category.

Security Measures

Before each session, a co-experimenter delivered the test samples in a box to JCA, who then added control samples to the box and coded both types of samples for each test. AP did not know how JCA had coded the two types of test samples (the 'sacred' and the 'control' ones). JCA did not enter the test room during the testing, but remained in a non-adjacent, sound-attenuating room. (The presence of JCA in the same room as the participants and the decoding of the samples would have allowed for sensory cues from JCA to the participants.)

Next, using a list of random numbers, JCA selected the order in which the pairs of samples (the 'sacred' and 'control') were to be rated by the participants. JCA also alternated which side of a small box each sample of the pair was placed on. The details of all these procedures were unknown to AP. Once the experimental sessions had been completed for the whole group, AP handed the samples to JCA, who recoded them as they were originally and returned them to AP. JCA and AP kept separate paper-and-pencil records of all randomization procedures and the handling of the 'sacred' and 'control' samples. This procedure was repeated for each group.

Procedure

Two rooms were required to conduct the experiment: one for AP and the participants and one for JCA. The participants were tested in groups and were seated on chairs. All participants were present together when handling the test samples. AP handed small boxes containing the pairs of samples to the participants. Each pair of samples (one 'sacred' and one 'control') was supplied with an answer sheet including written test instructions (however, instructions were also given verbally). Before the completion of the experiment, all participants underwent a 9-minute relaxation exercise, which included progressive autogenic phrases (using the voice of AP). The participants were told that we were doing a test of ESP using material said to stimulate extrasensory abilities in people due to its 'sacred' nature.

The test instructions to each participant during the test were straightforward: AP asked the participant to "remain with your eyes closed, quiet, and

wait for impressions about the object for a few minutes". AP remained in the room as a silent observer throughout the testing period, which lasted about 40 minutes. Each participant received six pairs of samples to be touched upon for impressions. Afterwards, the participants marked on their answer sheets which of each test sample pair they thought belonged to a sacred place (three of water and three of sand) by writing down the code printed on the sample. They did not give impressions about their mentations; they just marked for the 'sacred' target.

Once the participants had completed the answer sheets for each pair of samples, they passed the test samples on to AP, who handed the boxes and the answer sheets back to JCA for recoding. After having placed the participants' answer sheets in an envelope, JCA passed the test samples for the next participant to AP, but there were sufficient sample pairs for each participant to work with samples that had not previously been handled in that session. This procedure was repeated for each participant. Participants were not given any trial-by-trial target feedback during the testing period, although their total score was provided at the end of the workshop.

Consent Form

Participants signed an appropriate consent form, in easily comprehensible language. The form specified that the person (1) had the capacity to consent, (2) had received all significant information about the procedure, (3) had freely and without undue influence expressed consent, and that (4) their consent had been appropriately documented (cf. Beahrs & Gutheil, 2001). Joining the group was voluntary, and all data collected were treated confidentially.

RESULTS

We analysed whether participants were able to identify correctly the sample drawn from a sacred site when presented alongside a control sample that was identical in appearance but not taken from a sacred site. If participants were performing at chance levels then they should be correct 50% of the time. Participants' performance is summarised in Table 1. Although overall scores were slightly above chance, they were not statistically significant (for water, $t(152) = 1.18$, $p = 0.12$; for sand, $t(152) = 0.54$, $p = 0.29$; for both combined, $t(152) = 1.07$, $p = 0.14$).

We analysed whether there were differences in the number of hits overall for psychics ($N = 25$) and non-psychics ($N = 122$). Given the large differences in sample sizes we used Welch's robust test of equality of means. No significant difference was found (Welch = 0.31; $p = 0.58$).

We also examined whether scores differed according to whether sand or water was being used as the target. Participants' scores were compared under both conditions. For this, we used a repeated-measures ANOVA. No significant difference was obtained ($F_{1,152} = 0.26$; $p = 0.61$).

Moreover, we analysed whether the variability of the results differed significantly from what was theoretically expected. For this calculation, we used the total number of hits obtained by each participant in the six trials (water and sand together). The variability of the obtained scores turned out significantly greater than expected by chance ($F_{1,153} = 1.51$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 1

Mean (and Standard Deviation) of Number of Correct Identifications of Sacred Samples by Sample Type and Participant Category (Psychic Versus Non-psychic)

		Participant Group		
		Non-psychic	Psychic	Overall
Sample type	Water (3 trials)	1.59 (0.96)	1.68 (1.06)	1.59 (0.99)
	Sand (3 trials)	1.48 (0.90)	1.60 (1.15)	1.54 (0.96)
	Overall (6 trials)	3.06 (1.39)	3.28 (1.88)	3.13 (1.50)

Secondary Analysis

We found it interesting to confirm whether the difference in variability between the groups, which was obtained by Levene's test of equality of variance ($F_{1,145} = 7.09$; $p = 0.009$), would preserve the MCE for the calculations. There was also a significant difference in variability between the two groups ($F_{1,122} = 1.85$; $p < 0.05$). Although we obtained a significant difference in variability, we are aware that the results could be due to Type I error or perhaps a consequence of the large differences in sample size. Therefore we should treat this significant finding with caution.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim was to compare a group of non-psychics (ordinary people) and self-claimed psychics, using 'sacred' objects as targets to determine whether the number of hits differed significantly from mean chance expectation (MCE), whether the participants would be capable of distinguishing between the 'sacred' and the 'control' objects, and to test whether there was a significant difference between the psi-scores of the two groups. Participants' scores were compared under both conditions. No significant difference was obtained when sand or water was also being used as the target. It can be concluded that those participants who claimed to have a psychometric psi ability (that is, being able to pick up impressions from an object from being in physical contact with it) showed greater variability in their psi hits.

Like our previous findings (Parra & Argibay, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008), data analysis also revealed high variability differences between the two groups. The variability was greater for the psychic group than for the non-psychic group, so that participants who claimed spontaneous psi experiences (but no ability over them) had the highest variability in their ESP scores. The difference between the two groups could be due to 'psychics' (i.e. participants who claimed ESP skills) being better at interpreting available psi information than ESP 'experients' — whereas some participants who claimed ESP experiences were among the highest psi scorers, others obtained the highest psi-missing scores. One interpretation is that members of the psychics group achieved better overall results by consistently interpreting the 'psi signal'

while only some members of the experience group decoded the signal adequately, perhaps due to a lack of proper psi-training with their clients, or as a consequence of lacking personal understanding of their own psi experiences, or insufficient openness to such experiences.

Psychometry might be understood without giving up conventional ideas about memory and mind. The mind is embedded in the environment. Since the environment is composed of animate and inanimate objects, one could argue that the mind must be embedded in these objects too. This means that objects have mental as well as material properties, which raises the expectation that both types of properties can be explored and understood; for instance, Bohm (1980) regarded memory as a special case of this process, Roll (1965, 1979) has proposed that objects contain 'psi fields,' or localized impersonal memory traces of physical and mental events, and Pagenstecher (1922) suggested that objects that had not been involved in traumatic events elicited images of the manufacturing of the objects, that is, of primary events. Arguably, it would be better to try eliciting psi with the kind of profound sacred objects psychics use in authentic cases, but it would be very hard—and beyond the limitations of the present experiment—to design an appropriate experiment which took into account all clues exclusively given by sacred objects in comparison with control objects.

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