

MAPPING EXPERIENCES OF INVISIBLE OTHERS THROUGH TALENT AND TRAINING IN A VIRTUAL REALITY PSYCHOMANTIUM

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Grant 322/22

Background: Experiences of “Invisible Others” (IO) includes God(s), spirits, ghosts, or other non-physical beings. Such experiences are widespread but poorly understood. This study explores IO through a Virtual Reality experience that encourages participants to gaze into a reflective stream and use their creative imagination to encounter departed loved ones based on a guided meditation. The study compares high and low absorption people (Talent) over 3 sessions (Training) on grief and transpersonal experiences. The study is an extension of a study comparing a physical chamber and VR. The study examines a theory of mind that posits permeability between subjective states and the physical world.

Aims:

1. Compare outcomes on grief and transpersonal experiences between high and low absorption, anxiety, and openness to new experiences.
2. Examine depth of absorption over 3 sessions.
3. Measure physiological arousal.
4. Analyse types of experiences and perceived “realness”.

Methods: 40 participants will complete 3 VR experiences over 25 minutes each for a total of 120 sessions. The participant’s mentation is recorded during the sessions. Assessments are completed before and following each session and a short journaling exercise is conducted before and after the sessions. Scales include the Tellegan Absorption and Beck’s Anxiety Inventory. Repeated measures of bereavement are assessed using a questionnaire with Likert scales. The qualitative data includes open ended items on the questionnaires. Descriptions during the psychomantium experience are recorded through the VR headset. Physiological data is collected during each session.

Preliminary Results: Mixed methods data collection is underway. All psychometric, physiological and language use data will be treated to prespecified statistical analyses. Quantitative data will be triangulated with the qualitative analyses of all discourse, both written and spoken.

Keywords: Grief, Altered states of consciousness, Absorption, VR

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