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EXPLORATORY TOKEN OBJECT TESTS WITH A "SENSITIVE"

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Exploratory Token Object Tests with a "Sensitive"

A Study from the Psychical Research Foundation, Inc.

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Introduction

Throughout the history of psychical research, certain "sensitives" have claimed the ability to get "impressions" from objects, these impressions constituting information about the owners and past histories of the objects other than what could be inferred from their known physical properties. Such claims, supported almost exclusively by anecdotal material, have been difficult to evaluate insofar as deciding whether some form of ESP must be postulated to account for the results. In the last two decades, however, there has been an important methodological advance in assessing the significance of token object tests, namely, the introduction of the Pratt-Birge method (2, 4, 5, 6), although it has not yet been widely used (3, 8).

In June of 1963, the opportunity arose to carry out some exploratory tests with a subject, Mrs. Marie Hazen,[2] who felt that she was "sensitive" and able to get impressions about the owners of objects through the use of some form of ESP. This series of exploratory experiments was helpful in allowing us to try out some new techniques for using and appraising token object reading abilities consistent with a theoretical position outlined below. The experiments also illustrated how parapsychological testing procedures may be adapted to fit the particular needs and abilities of the subject—adaptations which are, unfortunately, rare in parapsychological research. The primary purpose of the present paper is to describe the techniques employed in the hope that they may be of value to other researchers.

The theoretical position underlying the present experiments has been outlined elsewhere by W.G.R. (7). Very briefly, the theory postulates that every material object possesses a "psi field"; that events in the history of the object leave traces in its psi field; that

[1] W.G.R. made the arrangements for experimentation with the subject; W.G.R. and C.T.T. jointly planned and conducted the actual experimentation; and C.T.T. wrote the final draft of this paper.

[2] The contact was made through a letter to the Parapsychology Laboratory from Mrs. Helen Hawthorne, a friend of Mrs. Hazen, describing the latter's apparent psychic abilities. Dr. J. B. Rhine passed the letter on to W.G.R., who subsequently visited Mrs. Hawthorne and Mrs. Hazen and arranged for a week of experimentation at W.G.R.'s home office in Durham. The expenses connected with the journey and stay were borne by Mrs. Hawthorne and Mrs. Hazen in the interest of scientific research, and we wish to thank them for this generous support.

these traces constitute stored information which is retrievable, under the right conditions, by certain sensitives, using some form of ESP; and that these traces give an object "psychic distinctiveness" to a sensitive in direct proportion to the distinctiveness and intensity of the persons (owners) and events which have been associated with the object's history. Informal observations of some sensitives by C.T.T. and the "folklore" of psychical research suggest that photographs, in particular, have traces associated with the persons or events depicted in the photograph. No conjectures about the nature of psi fields, or the mechanism whereby information is retrieved from them, will be made at this time.

This theoretical position is quite sketchy and undeveloped at present, but it does generate several predictions which are testable, e.g., that a sensitive should be able to do better at discriminating a set of objects which have each belonged to a rather unique person than at discriminating a set of objects which have essentially identical and bland histories (e.g., new ESP cards, which all have a history of simple mechanical processing). While the theory is not explicit enough to predict exactly what sorts of histories produce maximal psychic distinctiveness to a sensitive, it is possible to use sensitives themselves as criteria for this: if we allow a sensitive to pick out several objects which he feels are distinctive to him psychically from a larger sample of objects, he should be able to replicate his selections or classifications at a later date more successfully than if he had been asked to discriminate among a set of psychically bland objects—objects which produced no strong impression for him. This was the rationale underlying the experiments described below.

"Strength of Vibrations" Experiments (I-IV)

In preparation for the first experiments, Mrs. Hazen (M.H.) was asked to pick out a number of photographs which were psychically distinct to her, i. e., photographs which gave her distinct "psychic impressions" as she handled, but did not look at them.

Sixteen photographic portraits ($3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 5''$) were obtained from the photographic service of the *Durham Morning Herald.* These were all single person photographs taken for a local commentary section of the newspaper, "Curbstone Comments." Each picture was placed in an opaque (to the eye) yellow envelope approximately $5'' \times 7\frac{1}{2}''$. The envelopes were closed by tucking the flaps inside, but not sealed. The sixteen envelopes[3] were placed on a table in

[3] The term "envelope" will hereinafter always mean an envelope with a photograph enclosed in it.

front of M.H. and she was asked to pick out the ones which gave her distinct "vibrations" (her term for her impressions). The experimenters (*E*s) left the room while she did this in order to put her at ease.[4]

When the *E*s returned, M.H. had sorted the envelopes on a quantitative basis rather than picking out several which seemed qualitatively distinct to her, as the *E*s had expected. She had selected five envelopes as giving her "strong" vibrations, another five as giving "weak" vibrations, and six in an intermediate category. As M.H. did not feel that she could make further qualitative distinctions among the sixteen envelopes,[5] it was decided to use her strong-weak classification for testing. After M.H. left the room, the six envelopes in the intermediate category were discarded; the strong envelopes were numbered 1-5 and the weak envelopes 6-10 by means of a lightly penciled numeral on one corner of each envelope. Throughout experiments I-IV, the yellow envelopes were always enclosed by another covering during testing in order to prevent the identifying numbers from being read. This outer covering for each envelope was a folder of thick gray cardboard, $6'' \times 13''$, sealed with masking tape on the two long sides and one short side. The envelopes were always inserted far enough down into the folders to make it impossible to see the envelopes without removing them from the folder, something which M.H. never attempted to do.

In all the experiments reported here, the following procedure was used for randomizing the placement of the envelopes within the folders: Prior to each run, the *E*s carried the ten envelopes and ten folders to a room other than the one M.H. was in and, out of sight of each other, W.G.R. hand-shuffled the envelopes (with the identifying numbers face down) and C.T.T. hand-shuffled the folders. C.T.T. then gave the pile of shuffled folders to W.G.R. and moved so that he could not observe W.G.R., who inserted the shuffled envelopes into the folders in serial order (top envelope into top folder, down through both piles). The pile of folders (containing the envelopes) was then given to C.T.T., who hand-shuffled the whole pile, again out of W.G.R.'s sight. The end result of this procedure was that neither of the *E*s had any knowledge of the order of the envelopes inside the folders, and so could give no clues to M.H.

[4] As will be seen from the description of the rest of the experiments, it is irrelevant whether or not M.H. could have opened the envelopes and looked at the photographs at this point. She stated that she did not look at them.

[5] In future work it would seem advantageous to use much larger samples of photographs or other objects from which the subject is to pick the psychically distinct ones.

The pile of folders was then given to M.H. and, in the presence of both *E*s, she again sorted them into "strong" and "weak" piles. When she had finished her sorting, the two piles were taken to another room by the *E*s, the envelopes removed from the folders, and M.H.'s choices recorded. Throughout all the experiments reported in this paper, both *E*s made independent records; on later checking it was found that these records never disagreed with each other. M.H.'s original sorting into strong (1-5) and weak (6-10) was used as the criterion against which these later sortings were evaluated: thus, if envelope 4 was put in the strong pile in a later sorting it was a hit, etc.[6]

Experiments I and II

Experiment I was determined in advance to consist of four runs by M.H., each run consisting of sorting all ten folders (containing envelopes) into strong and weak categories. Experiment II, planned after the *E*s knew the results of Experiment I, was also determined in advance to consist of four runs.

Since the *a priori* probability of any folder being strong or weak is one half, one would expect twenty hits in four runs by chance alone. In Experiment I, M.H. scored sixteen hits and in Experiment II twenty hits, so the results were not significantly different from chance (Table 1). M.H. was not told the results of these experiments, nor of any of the others until all the series were completed, although she was often encouraged by being informed that the results were "interesting" (as indeed they were).

Experiment III

It was noted that in the eight runs of Experiments I and II combined, envelope 4 had always been classified as strong (as it had been originally), suggesting that this envelope was indeed "psychically distinct" to M.H. She was not informed of this finding, but in Experiment III was asked (after the randomizing procedure, described above, had been completed) merely to select the folder (with the enclosed envelope) which gave her the "strongest" feeling. She picked envelope 4 as the strongest, stating that there was a feeling of peace connected with it. When the envelope was removed from its folder and opened, the picture was that of a young Negro man. There were two other pictures of Negroes in the set of ten photographs.

[6] The gray folders were also given identifying numbers (on the bottom surfaces) and these numbers recorded with the other data; since we discerned no significant effects connected with the folders *per se* (which, on the theory, were psychically bland and identical objects), these data will not be presented here.

TABLE 1
Call Distribution, Experiments I and II*

EXPERIMENT

Run 1 Called		Run 2 Called		Run 3 Called		Run 4 Called	
Strong	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*
7	9*	9	2	2*	9*	4*	1
2*	8*	6	1	6	3	7	8*
4*	5	5*	3	10	1	9	10*
6	1	8	10*	7	5	5*	3
10		4*		4*		2*	
3*		7		8		6	

EXPERIMENT II

Run 1 Called		Run 2 Called		Run 3 Called		Run 4 Called	
Strong	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*	*Strong*	*Weak*
7	9*	1*	8*	8	10*	10	2
8	2	10	3	3*	2	7	8*
5*	6*	7	6*	6	1	3*	1
4*	3	9	5	9	7*	4*	9*
10		2*		4*		6	
1*		4*		5*		5*	

* The asterisks indicate correct classification, a hit.

Experiment IV

In the same initial session in which she had sorted the sixteen photographic portraits into strong, weak, and intermediate categories, M.H. had also been given a pile of forty-five large (approximately 8″ × 10″) photographs of miscellaneous news events (people, accidents, club meetings, etc.). These photographs were not enclosed in envelopes, but simply presented in a pile, face down, with the same instructions to sort them on the basis of "psychic distinctiveness," while the *E*s were out of the room. M.H. reported that she had not looked at the faces of the photographs.[7] When the *E*s returned, she had sorted these large photographs into four categories: "very strong," "fairly strong," "medium," and "weak." She could not elaborate further on these distinctions. The *E*s later examined the four category piles to see

[7] Again, the fact that M.H. could have looked at the photographs at this point is irrelevant.

if there was any basis of sorting that could be inferred from the content of the photographs; C.T.T. noticed that the "stronger" pictures seemed to be those with more people in them, regardless of what was happening in the scene (Table 2). This suggested that more people in a photograph gave a stronger impression to M.H. Although she was not told of this hypothesis, the following experiment was carried out:

TABLE 2
Data of Experiment IV*

S's Initial Sort:

Number of people appearing in the picture	*S*'s Categorization: *Very Strong*	*Fairly Strong*	*Medium*	*Weak*
> 3	11	3	4	1
3	3	3	2	0
2	1	2	6	0
1	0	4	2	1
0	0	0	2	0
Total Number of Pictures	15	12	16	2

S's Second Sort:

Number of people appearing in the picture	*S*'s Categorization: *Very Strong*	*Fairly Strong*	*Medium*	*Weak*
> 3	12	5	2	0
3	6	1	1	0
2	4	4	1	0
1	5	2	0	0
0	2	0	0	0
Total Number of Pictures	29	12	4	0

* Entries in bodies of tables are the number of photographs the *S* placed into each strength category.

Each of the forty-five photographs was enclosed, face down, in a standard 9″ × 11.75″ opaque (to the eye) manila file folder, and fastened shut with a paper clip. The folders were thoroughly hand-shuffled and then presented to M.H. with instructions to sort them into the same strength categories she had used before. Both *E*s remained with her during this task, and she did not attempt to turn over any folder or to open it.

The results did not confirm the hypothesis, although they were in the same direction (Table 2). The distribution of photographs in

the several strength categories changed in that most of the folders were rated in the stronger categories.

Matching Experiments (V-VI)

In the following two experiments, the ten photographs used in Experiments I-III were each cut in half along a diagonal. One half of each photograph was returned to its yellow envelope, while the other halves, numbered for identification by a lightly penciled number on the back, were randomly placed within the gray folders. The stack of ten envelopes (containing halves of photographs 1-10) and the stack of ten folders (containing the matching halves of photographs 1-10) were randomized according to the procedure described above, except that the envelopes were *not* inserted into the folders. W.G.R. then left the room to get M.H., and while he was gone C.T.T. spread out the folders and envelopes (with identifying numbers down) in two parallel rows. It should be noted that this procedure left the *E*s, as well as M.H., totally ignorant of which folders and envelopes contained which photographic halves.

After M.H. entered the room, she was asked to place each envelope on top of the folder which she felt contained the matching half of the photograph. She was allowed to touch the back of the folders, but never to pick them up; she could pick up the envelopes to move them, but was not permitted to turn them over.[8] Both *E*s were with M.H. at all times during these matching tests.

It was hoped that this matching task would be an easier one for M.H. than the earlier ones, which carried an implicit requirement that she maintain an internal standard of "strong vibrations" and "weak vibrations" against which she compared each folder. The matching task, on the other hand, required only that each folder-envelope pair be judged same or different, and not any specific impression of the quantitative or qualitative nature of the photographs themselves. It would also have been desirable for each of the ten photographs to have been qualitatively distinct to M.H., but, as mentioned above, she felt unable to make such distinctions.[9]

[8] Even if M.H. had turned the envelopes over and seen the identifying numbers, this could not have aided her in matching as it gave no clue as to the location of the proper matching photographic halves in the gray folders.

[9] The rationale for this "hot" matching test was worked out by one of us (C.T.T.) and Dr. Henry Puharich in 1957, but actual use of the procedure was quite limited due to practical problems extraneous to the method itself. The adjective "hot" is used because the material was selected to be meaningful, usually in an emotional way, to the sensitive, in contrast to ordinary card matching tests where the material is emotionally bland.

Experiment V

It had been planned to have M.H. carry out five runs of matching the ten photographic halves. Her procedure was to compare the "vibrations" from each envelope with the "vibrations" from each folder by touching an envelope with one hand and a folder with her other hand. It was found, however, that this was so time-consuming and tiring to M.H., despite rest periods between runs, that only three runs could be completed.

In each of the three runs, M. H. scored zero matches (Table 3). The probability of zero matches in a single run is .3678 (1). As this outcome came up in three independent runs, and could only happen in one way, the multiplicative rule of probability gives $P = (.3678)^3 = .0498$ for the three runs of Experiment V, a value suggesting that psi-missing was taking place.

Table 3

Results of Matching Ten Photographic Halves, Experiment V*

Run 1:										
Envelopes	10	4	1	3	6	8	5	9	2	7
Folders	4	10	5	8	9	6	1	7	3	2
Run 2:										
Envelopes	7	6	8	4	5	1	10	9	2	3
Folders	2	10	9	1	8	6	7	4	3	5
Run 3:										
Envelopes	8	2	3	4	7	6	1	9	5	10
Folders	9	5	2	1	10	3	4	8	7	6

* Numbers represent the ordering of photographic halves in the yellow envelopes and the gray folders at the conclusion of each run.

Examination of the raw data (Table 3) also suggested some interesting patterns of response in terms of M.H.'s earlier classification of the photographs into strong and weak categories. This patterning was difficult to evaluate objectively, but on the basis of their impressions the *E*s decided to use some of the photographs in a smaller matching set. This also had the advantage of producing a task which was not so tiring to M.H. in a single run.

Experiment VI

The same matching test was used as in Experiment V, except that the halves of only four photographs (1, 4, 8, and 9) were to be matched. Five runs were planned in advance, and carried out.

The *E*s expected, on the basis of the results of Experiment V, that some sort of psi-missing would again occur.

M.H. made zero hits in all five runs (Table 4). In a single run there are twenty-four possible permutations of the photographs, of which nine will give zero matches, thus giving P = .375 for zero hits in a single run. As this result occurred in five independent runs, and could only happen in one way, the multiplicative rule of probability gives $P = (.375)^5 = .0074$ for the results of Experiment VI.

TABLE 4

Results of Matching Four Photographic Halves, Experiment VI*

Run 1:					*Run* 2:				
Envelopes	9	8	1	4	Envelopes	4	8	1	9
Folders	8	1	4	9	Folders	8	1	9	4
Run 3:					*Run* 4:				
Envelopes	1	4	9	8	Envelopes	9	1	8	4
Folders	8	9	1	4	Folders	1	9	4	8
Run 5:									
Envelopes	1	4	8	9					
Folders	8	1	9	4					

* Numbers represent the ordering of photographic halves in the yellow envelopes and the gray folders at the conclusion of each run.

This was the last experiment carried out with M.H. as she had to leave Durham. She was informed of the results of the experiments at this time.

DISCUSSION

In terms of results, the most interesting findings of the present study are the consistent classification of photograph 4 as "strong" by M.H. over nine independent trials in Experiments I-III, and the evidence for psi-missing in Experiments V and VI. The results do not constitute a testing of the theoretical position taken, of course, although they are consistent with it. Note that there is an assumption implicit in all the experiments that each photograph maintains its unique configuration of psi traces. It is possible, however, that some photographs did change as a result of proximity to each other and/or handling by M.H. and the *E*s, and this might account for the apparent psi-missing in the later experiments.

In terms of finding some intriguing and statistically significant patterns in what amounted to less than ten hours of actual testing, the results are encouraging.

As stated in the introduction, the primary purpose of the present study was to develop and gain experience with new techniques for exploring token object reading ability, and in this respect the study was quite successful. The two main techniques—repeated sorting on the basis of "strength of vibrations," and the "hot" matching—are both more structured tests than the Pratt-Birge technique (5) and thus are less laborious to evaluate. They may also be somewhat more convenient to use in experiments manipulating other experimental variables in order to assess their effect. The techniques were adapted to the particular needs of M.H., but could easily be modified in many ways. One drawback, the use of a two-experimenter design, could be eliminated by means of a mechanical device for randomizing the orders of the token objects.

It should also be noted that M.H.'s knowledge that the *E*s were adapting their experimental techniques to her capacities seemed to be an important factor in keeping her morale and cooperation at a very high level.

The techniques presented here are, of course, predicated on finding subjects who have some genuine ability at token object reading. If such subjects can be located and worked with extensively, not only can the value of these techniques be more fully assessed, but a number of other factors that the present authors' theoretical position postulates as important could be investigated, e.g., the amount and type of contact between objects and owners.

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