

Could the sender in traditional Ganzfeld ESP studies be serving as a PK agent?¹

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Abstract

Despite the relative success of clairvoyance designs in eliciting evidence for ESP when used with other protocols (see, e.g., reviews by Rhine, Pratt, Stuart, Smith & Greenwood, 1966, and Utts, 1996), it has been commonly assumed that a sender can make some positive contribution to the outcome of Ganzfeld studies. Relatively few Ganzfeld experiments have adopted a clairvoyance design except where the objective of the study was to compare sender and no sender conditions. Honorton (1995) found that of 73 Ganzfeld studies only 12 did not employ senders. His meta-analysis comparing sender and no sender experiments showed that those including senders generated better performance than those that did not, although the effect seemed to be confined to those experimenters who had used both conditions at some time. If it could be shown that the sender were unnecessary this would have practical advantages in that sessions would be easier to co-ordinate for only one participant at a time, and security would be more straightforward, since no person need know the identity of the target until after the participant's judgements had been recorded.

Eight previous Ganzfeld studies have directly compared sender and no sender conditions within the same study (Dunne, Warnock & Bisaha, 1977; Kanthamani & Khilji, nd, described in Kanthamani & Palmer, 1993; Milton, 1988-9; Morris, Dalton, Delanoy & Watt, 1995; Raburn & Manning, 1977; Roe, Sherwood & Holt, 2003; Sargent, Milton, Payne & Bennet, unpub, cited in Milton, 1988-9; Williams, Roe, Upchurch, & Lawrence, 1994). Taken together, the findings from these studies offer some support for the suggestion that the sender serves some active role in a typical Ganzfeld ESP session.

These findings may be particularly encouraging given that the experimental manipulations of the IV here are rather gross, for example in not systematically taking into account the possible moderating effect of variables such as the sender-receiver relationship. The designs also tend to assume that any sender effect will be readily apparent in the receiver's overall performance, despite this relationship being dependent upon the receiver not only being able to detect any sender mediated impressions, but also to accurately interpret them and to be able to discriminate them from internally generated 'noise' during judging. Recently we reported on an alternative method for gauging any potential sender effect (Roe, Holt & Simmonds, 2003) that promised to circumvent such complications by replacing the receiver with an REG 'virtual receiver' that would generate a virtual mentation by randomly selecting statements from among an array of descriptors. The virtual mentation was then used by an independent judge to rate the four target clips in the set just as the receiver had done with their own

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mentation. In that study, the 'live' receiver selected the correct clip as the target on 14 occasions (35% hit rate where MCE is 25%), and by pre-planned sum-of-ranks analysis performed significantly better than chance expectation ($Z = 1.77$, $p = .038$). More interestingly in the present discussion, the ratings based on the REG-generated virtual mentations gave an encouraging 13 hits (32.5%), and a suggestive sum-of-ranks outcome ($Z = 1.48$, $p = .069$). These results were regarded as sufficiently promising to warrant further investigation. In the present study we planned to compare performance of the REG on sender trials with performance on trials when there was no sender (or at least where a nominal sender was unaware of the target). In this case the mentation would presumably consist of random noise and might provide a more suitable control against which to evaluate performance in the experimental condition. In this talk we would report on the results of this study and overview suggestions for future work.

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