Attention Focusing Facilitated Through Remote Mental Interaction[1]

William Braud[2], Donna Shafer, Katherine McNeill, and Valerie Guerra[3]

Introduction

For several years, we have been exploring direct mental interactions with remote, spatially distant living systems. In most of these investigations, we have studied the ability of one person to influence, mentally and at a distance, the ongoing physiological activity of another person who is located in a separate room and isolated from the first person in terms of conventional energetic and informational connections. The first person (the "influencer") uses mental processes of attention, intention, and imagery in order to influence the distant second person (the "influencee") in a prespecified manner. The rationales, procedural details, and experimental findings of these investigations have been presented in two recent summary papers (Braud & Schlitz, 1989, 1991). A general conclusion from this work is that these direct mental interactions can occur under well-controlled laboratory conditions, that the effect is replicable and relatively robust, and that the overall effect size (*r*) for these studies (.33) is not trivial.

A general implication that derives from this work is that in any dyadic situation, the mental "work" of one member of the dyad could directly influence the course of some physical, physiological, emotional, or cognitive process in the other member of the dyad. In various educational, counseling, therapeutic, or healing contexts, the actual progress of the student, counselee, client, or patient might be directly facilitated if appropriate and powerful attention, intentions, and images are held concurrently in the mind of the teacher, counselor, therapist or healer. Direct mental influence, therefore, may be a useful adjunctive tool in these and other dyadic practices. The present experimental report represents an initial test of this general implication or application in a new context (a focused attention task) and using a cognitive, instead of a

physiological, measure (frequency of self-reported mental distractions). It also explores the interaction of the direct mental influence effect with several relevant psychological characteristics of the "influencees" (assessments of their ability to focus attention and of their concentration difficulties in everyday life).

The experimental design is simple and straightforward. A participant sits in a quiet room and attempts to focus attention upon a particular object. Whenever the mind wanders from this attentional focus (whenever the participant experiences a distraction), this lapse of attention is registered by means of a push-button that is monitored by a computer. A "helper" is stationed in a distant room, isolated (under the protocol conditions of the study) from all conventional energetic or information interactions with the participant. Control (baseline) and helping periods are randomly interspersed. During control (baseline) periods, the helper occupies her mind with everyday matters and does not think about the participant or the experiment. During helping periods, the helper focuses her own attention upon a similar attentional focus and concurrently maintains an intention for the distant participant to focus well on his or her object and remain free from mental distractions (i.e., to succeed in the attentional task). The participant, of course, does not know when the randomly occurring control and helping periods are in effect. Incidence of mind-wandering (frequency of registered distractions) is compared for the control versus the helping periods. At the end of the session, the participant completes several psychological assessments that measure attention, concentration, distractibility, and absorption. A measure of the efficacy of "remote helping of attention" is correlated with the various psychological measures in order to assess psychological interactions.

Method

Participants

The experiment involved the participation of 60 unpaid male and female volunteers, ranging in age from 16 to 65 years. Most of the volunteers were college-aged friends, acquaintances, fellow

students, or co-workers of the three "helpers". Approximately 75 percent of the participants were females (n = 44), and 25 percent were male (n = 16). Participants were solicited by the three helpers and were asked whether they would be interested in participating, for about an hour, in a laboratory experiment investigating attention and remote mental influence. We were not interested in working with a so-called "random sample" of participants. Instead, we used "purpose sampling" to pick persons with the requisite interest in the processes we were studying. We have no desire to generalize our results (nomothetically) to the population at large, but only to the population of similar, self-selected individuals.

Three of the co-authors functioned as "remote helpers" in this study, each working with 20 participants. These sample sizes were planned in advance. D.S. has an undergraduate psychology degree and has extensive experience in conducting parapsychological and psychological experiments as a research assistant at the Mind Science Foundation. K.M. has an undergraduate psychology degree and had recently been trained in parapsychological research in the Summer Studies Program at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man (Durham, NC). V.G. conducted her portion of the study as part of an Independent Studies program at a local college through which interested students may participate in research practica (internships) at the Mind Science Foundation. The three helpers served dual roles as helper and experimenter during their own portions of the study.

The study was conceived, designed, analyzed, and written by senior author W.B. in collaboration with the three co-authors. W.B. also trained the helpers for their experimental roles, set up the necessary equipment, and selected the psychological assessments used in the study.

Procedure

Physical layout. During the experimental sessions, it was essential to guarantee that there be no sensory cues that could inadvertently let the participant know which condition was in effect at any given time. This was accomplished by situating the participant and the helper in separate closed

rooms. The helper and participant were isolated from each other during the actual session by means of two closed doors and an intervening corridor. Verbalizations or other distinctive sounds by the helper were disallowed by the experimental protocol. The randomized condition schedule was revealed to the helper by means of computer monitor signals and low volume auditory signals heard via headphones; these signals were inaccessible to the distant participant.

Participant's activities. After being greeted and engaged in a few minutes of rapport-building general discussion, the participant was given instructions for the attention task. This task was a variation on one introduced by Van Nuys (1971). The participant was simply to attend as fully as possible to the attentional focus object, a lighted votive candle in a pale blue, transparent, glass candle holder placed on a small table approximately two meters away. The participant sat in a comfortable armchair. The participant was instructed to simply press a hand-held button whenever he or she observed the mind wandering away from the focusing object (the candle holder and candle). Button-presses thus served to register frequency of mental distractions away from the object of concentration. After pressing the button, the participant was asked to gently return attention to the candle holder and candle and to attend fully to it once again. All mental distractions away from the attention object were to be witnessed and registered by button-presses. A participant was told that the entire session would last approximately 20 minutes, and that at random times during the session, a "helper" would be concentrating upon a similar candle while attempting, mentally and at a distance, to help the participant to pay attention to the object. A participant was asked not to attempt to "figure out" when the helping periods were occurring but, rather, to be "open" to such help throughout the session. There was an attempt to play down the "task" and "success" aspects of maintaining attention on the object. This was done by indicating to the participant that there was really no success or failure, and that our interest was simply in learning how persons actually respond in such a situation and whether that response could be remotely influenced.

Helper activities. Each of three "helpers" worked with 20 participants. After instructing the participant and returning to her own room, the helper activated a computer program that controlled the experiment, monitored results, and printed out distraction scores. The participant had been instructed to take a few minutes to settle down and prepare for the beginning of the session. When ready, the participant pressed the hand-held button one time. This first press served as a signal to the computer to begin the session; it was not counted as a distraction. When it detected this start signal, the computer program began a sequence of 16 one-minute periods. These 16 periods were arranged in 8 pairs. For each pair, the computer determined (by means of a random algorithm) whether the pair sequence would be Control/Help or Help/Control. The eight independent random orderings of the two types of periods within each pair were determined by the random algorithm operating upon a seed number that was based upon the value of the computer's internal clock at the time of the experimenter's initiation of a session. The number of the current period, and the nature of the period (whether Help or Control) was indicated to the helper by means of a monitor display. In addition, Help periods were signaled auditorily to the helper by means of a low volume, low pitched tone through the helper's headphones. This signal could not be heard by the distant participant. During the 8, one-minute duration, randomly scheduled, Control (baseline) periods, the helper attempted not to think of the participant or of the experiment, but to think instead of everyday matters. During the 8, one-minute duration, randomly scheduled, Help periods, the helper focused her own attention fully upon her own candle and holder (identical to that of the participant), and concurrently maintained an intention for the distant participant to sustain attention upon the focusing object and to be free of distracting thoughts. The helper did not receive any real-time feedback of the participant's button presses. At the conclusion of the session, the computer provided a paper printout of the participant's distraction scores during each of the 16 periods. In order to rule out possible disruptive emotional reactions to early data returns, the helper did not observe the scores for the sessions. The helper carefully removed the data printout without looking at the scores, folded the printout, and

deposited it, unobserved, into a special file folder. The helper then returned to the participant's room and administered the psychological assessments (described below). Upon the completion of the assessments, the helper discussed the experiment, in general terms, with the participant. The participant did not receive any numerical feedback, since the helper herself was unaware of the scores.

We chose to use the computer simply as a device to randomize and control the order and timings of various experimental events and to objectively record the distraction (button-press) responses. We could have stored the button-press results in computer files, as well as or instead of the paper printout we actually used, but chose not to do so. We have just as much confidence and trust in paper printouts as in electronic events stored in computers. In fact, it could be argued that computer stored information is *more* liable to destruction, loss, or tampering than is information on paper printouts. We think this is something that should be borne in mind in these days of computer-fetishism. Many experimental tasks can be done just as validly, reliably, and objectively without computers as with them. The printout results were checked carefully and redundantly by several persons during stages of data reduction and data analysis. The purpose of having the helper remove the printout without looking at its contents (which, by the way, was very easily accomplished) was simply to prevent the helpers from having knowledge of early results that could have influenced their moods and then possibly influenced results of subsequent sessions via an experimenter effect. If the helpers had peeked at the printouts, this would not have compromised the integrity of the experiment; it would merely have influenced their moods. We trusted the helpers to follow instructions, just as investigators have to trust personnel not to tamper with sophisticated equipment in sophisticated ways.

Psychological assessments. Immediately upon returning to the participant's room, the helper asked the participant to complete four psychological assessments. The first assessment was a one-item visual analog scale on which the participant marked a 160-mm long line to indicate how well

attention had been maintained on the candle holder and candle for the overall session. The two extremes of the line were labeled "not successful at all" and "extremely successful", respectively. The second assessment was a post-session questionnaire on which the participant: (a) indicated how quickly he or she realized that the mind was wandering (immediately, after some time, or long after the distraction had occurred), (b) indicated whether the distracting thoughts tended to be of past, present, or future events, and (c) provided a general description of the types of distracting thoughts that had occurred during the session. The third assessment was a 15-item measure of the degree to which the participant experienced difficulties in focusing attention or concentrating in everyday life. The fourth assessment was a 34-item scale of the tendency to become totally absorbed in everyday events (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). The completed questionnaires and assessments were coded with the participant's number and were stored with the computer printout in the helper's special file until the conclusion of the experiment.

Assessment scoring and data reduction. When all 60 experimental sessions had been completed, the distraction score printouts were examined and analyzed by W.B.; scoring was double-checked by D.S. The psychological assessments were scored by D.S.

Hypotheses. The primary experimental hypothesis was that the participants' distraction scores (button presses) would differ for Control (baseline) *versus* remote Helping periods. This hypothesis was to be tested by pooling results for all 60 sessions (60 participants) and comparing the sum of all distractions (button presses) during the 8 Control periods with the sum of all distractions (button presses) during the 8 Helping periods; i.e., we would obtain a Control score and a Helping score for each of the 60 participants and would compare those pairs of scores using a matched *t* test statistic. Since this was the first experiment of this particular type, a two-tailed test was to be used, with alpha set at $p = .05$, two-tailed. An effect size (r) and the "binary effect size display" equivalent of this effect size were to be calculated (Rosenthal, 1984).

Of secondary interest in this experiment was an examination of possible interrelationships

among the psychological assessments and between the psi scores and the psychological assessment scores. These interrelationships were to be examined by calculating a correlation matrix of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (*r*'s) for the following 5 response measures: (a) the psi score (for this purpose, the "influence score" which was defined as the ratio of button presses during the 8 Control periods to total number of button presses for all 16 periods), (b) the total distraction score (which was simply the sum of all button presses over all 16 periods), (c) self-estimated success in the attention task (the visual analog score), (d) concentration difficulties in everyday life (the score on the concentration difficulties assessment), and (e) the absorption score (score on the Tellegen absorption scale).

Finally, and for descriptive purposes only, we planned to characterize the nature of the participants' experienced distractions in terms of: (a) how quickly the participant became aware of a distraction, and (b) the typical time frame (past, present, future) of the distractions. These scores were to be examined through simple frequency tabulations and chi-square tests were to be used to assess possible score patterns.

Results and Discussion

Psi Scoring (Remote Helping Effect)

The presence of a remote mental influence upon participants' ability to sustain a focused state of attention was examined by comparing distraction scores (button presses) during Control periods with those occurring during remote mental Help periods. It had been planned in advance that we would pool the data from the three experimenter/helpers. In fact, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the 3 sets of 20 difference scores (20 scores for each of the 3 experimenter/helpers) indicated no significant differences among the three data sets, yielding $F(2,57) = 0.79$, $p = .46$. This ANOVA result indicated that scoring was fairly consistent across the three sets of experimenters/helpers/participants, and that it was appropriate to pool the scores. For each of the 60 participants, the distraction scores were summed across the 8 one-minute Control

(baseline) periods and across the 8 one-minute Help periods. The mean numbers of total distractions (button presses) during the Control and Help periods were 13.60 and 12.43, respectively. These numbers correspond to distraction rates of 1.70 and 1.55 distractions per minute, respectively. A matched t test calculated for these measures indicates a significant difference between the Control and Help distraction scores ($t = 2.0023$, 59 df, $p = .049$, two-tailed). The effect size (r) associated with this t is .25. An appealing presentation of effect size is the binomial effect size display (BESD) which converts an effect size to the change in success rate (e.g., survival rate, improvement rate, etc.) that would be expected if a treatment or procedure having that effect size were to be instituted (Rosenthal, 1984). According to a BESD, a baseline treatment which ordinarily produces, e.g., a 37.5 percent average survival rate in some population can be augmented by another treatment with an effect size of .25 (the effect size of the remote mental interaction in this experiment) to a 62.5 percent average survival rate. This is hardly a trivial effect.

Not all statisticians agree with Rosenthal about the appropriateness of the BESD for summarizing data. For those who question such a measure, we can summarize our results even more conservatively by simply noting that, in the present study, there was a 9 percent decrease in distractions in the Help periods compared to the Control periods. In other words, out of 100 possible periods of distraction under normal circumstances, these results suggest that there would only be about 91 such episodes during Help periods.

Interrelationships Among Measures

For purposes of examining the interrelationships among the five major measures in this experiment (total distractions, psi influence, estimated attentional success, concentration difficulties in everyday life, and absorption), a Pearson r correlation matrix was produced. This correlation matrix is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Pearson r Correlations for Five Measures

	Total Distractions	Psi Influence	Attention Success	Concentration Difficulties	Absorption Score
Total Distractions	1.00	.09	- .36**	.18	.26*
Psi Influence		1.00	- .32*	.26*	.13
Attention Success			1.00	-.32*	-.09
Concentration Difficulties				1.00	-.10
Absorption Score					1.00

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.
** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Of the 10 meaningful correlations in Table 1, 5 are statistically significant. Two of these are "reasonable" correlations between psychological variables. The significant negative correlation between self-estimated success in the attentional task and total number of distractions (button presses) indicates a congruence between subjective and behavioral assessments of distractions to focused attention within the experimental setting. The significant negative correlation between self-reported difficulties of concentration in everyday life and self-estimated success in the attentional focusing task in the experimental setting is an expected one, given validity of the two measures, and indicates the generality of the attentional measures. The third significant correlation involving strictly psychological measures (that between absorption score and total distractions) is in an unexpected direction, and its interpretation is unclear. A possible interpretation is that persons with

high absorption scores are more aware of their internal processes, including distractions, and therefore are more likely to report such distractions. It is recognized that the self-report assessments for attentional success in the experiment and for concentration difficulties in everyday life were both made immediately after the laboratory attention task had been completed and therefore could have been influenced by knowledge of performance in the latter. This was done because: (a) the self-rated attentional success assessment necessarily had to follow what was being rated and, in fact, we simply wished to compare self-rated success with a more "objective" behavioral measure of success (button presses), and (b) we wished to assess both laboratory distractibility and everyday life distractibility under as identical conditions as possible, and this required that we make the assessments at the times we chose to do them.

Of much greater interest are the two significant correlations involving the psi measure. The magnitude of the psi influence score is positively correlated with degree of concentration difficulties in everyday life. This finding is consistent with a "need-related" consideration of psi: Those persons who generally have difficulties concentrating or focusing attention are most "in need" of attention focusing assistance, and they indeed show a stronger remote mental attention-focusing effect; those most in need of psi assistance indeed appear to derive more of this assistance. The second psi-related correlation is between degree of self-estimated success in the attentional focus task in the laboratory and the magnitude of the psi influence effect; this correlation is significantly negative. This again is quite consistent with a need-related consideration of psi. Those persons who generally had difficulty concentrating in the experimental setting are those who are most in need of remote, mental attentional assistance; the greater the need, the greater was the observed psi effect. It should be emphasized that these obtained need-reflecting relationships are not trivial ones that could be attributed to statistical artifacts such as regression to the mean. The psi influence measure is a *relative* one which is measured *within* a given participant and is not necessarily dependent upon absolute level of responding.

In order to assess the contribution of "participant need" in determining the size of the psi influence effect, a *post hoc* analysis was performed in the following manner. This method was chosen as the most reasonable one to use in defining participant need, it was the only method used, and it was decided upon before looking at how the data would fall as a result of its use. The 60 participants were dichotomized at the median according to their scores on the two "need" assessments (self-estimated success on the attentional focus experimental task and concentration difficulties in everyday life). The participants then were categorized as either "more needy" or "less needy" according to a method we are calling "conjoint classification". The "more needy" participants were those who scored below the median on the attentional success measure *and* who also scored above the median on everyday concentration difficulties. Nineteen of the 60 participants met this conjoint classification, which measured the degree of need to focus attention in both lab *and* life. The "less needy" participants were those who scored above the median on the attentional success measure and who also scored below the median on everyday concentration difficulties. Nineteen of the 60 participants met this conjoint classification, which measured relative freedom from need to focus attention in both lab and life. For the 19 "more needy" participants, an analysis of their frequencies of distractions (button presses) during the Control and Help periods yielded means of 18.08 and 14.42, respectively, a matched $t = 2.86$, 18 *df*, $p = .01$, two-tailed, and an effect size (r) = .56. On the other hand, a similar analysis for the 19 "less needy" participants yielded means of 8.87 and 8.97, $t = -0.14$, 18 *df*, $p = .89$, two-tailed, and an effect size (r) = -.03. Thus, there was a strong psi influence in the expected direction in the "more needy" participants, but an effect of essentially zero magnitude (in fact, an extremely weak effect in the *reversed* direction) in the "less needy" participants. This is exactly what would be expected according to a need-related consideration of psi. Further, this finding conceptually replicates a similar finding observed earlier in our laboratory under very different conditions in which persons who were "more needy" with respect to autonomic reactivity evidenced a strong psi influence effect in the expected direction,

whereas those who were "less needy" showed a very weak and nonsignificant reversed effect (Braud & Schlitz, 1983).

Descriptive Analysis of Distractions

The distractions were analyzed by counting the frequencies of participants who indicated that they noticed their minds wandering "right away" (33), "some time" after the distraction was already in progress (24), and "a long time" after the mind had wandered from the candle holder and candle focusing object (3). We also counted frequencies of participants who indicated that their minds wandered to "past" (12), "present" (40), or "future" (8) events or time periods.

The dominant tendency, in this particular setting, is for participants to detect distractions relatively quickly and for most of the distractions to be related to the present, rather than to past or future events or time-frames. Both of these patterns (speed of detecting distractions and time frame of distractions) differ significantly from equi-probable expected frequency distributions (yielding chi squares of 23.7 and 30.4, respectively, which, with 2 df, are both highly significant.)

General Discussion

In previous work in this laboratory, we found evidence that one person's mental processes of attention, intention, and imagery could interact with another, distant, person's physiological activity. We view that work is providing an experimental model or analog for at least certain subcomponents or subtypes of mental healing *at a somatic level*. In the present experiment, we extend this work to the mental level. We have found that one person's mental activity, in the form of attention, intention, and focusing, can interact significantly with the mental activity (i.e., attentional processes and freedom from distractions) of another, distant, person. We suggest that this sort of experimental design hold promise as an experimental model or analog for at least some subcomponents or subtypes of mental healing of *mental difficulties*. Under special conditions, calming and quieting my mind can help calm and quiet yours, even when we are spatially separated and have no conventional means of intercommunicating.

Throughout this paper we have attempted conscientiously to use the phrase "direct mental interaction" to indicate that there is indeed an interaction or interrelationship between the mental intentions of the helper and the mental activities and behavioral reactions of the participants. Although we prefer to think of the former as influencing the latter, we recognize this is one psychic interpretation among many possible psychic interpretations. Since we know of no foolproof method, given the present state of the parapsychological art, that can be used with certainty to distinguish telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, we have chosen the more neutral term "interaction," rather than "influence" to describe the direct or remote relationships we are observing. Even when we occasionally lapse and use the term "influence," we continue to be aware that this is an interpretation of an empirical relationship that can, at least in principle, be interpreted in other ways. It is important to note, however, that the empirical relationship observed continues to hold, independently of the chosen theoretical interpretation or explanation. For example, our aim was to learn whether participants evidenced fewer distractions during periods when helpers were mentally and remotely assisting them (with the latter assistance operationally defined in terms of our protocol). We found indications that this was indeed the case. It may be that the "psychic action" is entirely within the participants, who may have telepathically or clairvoyantly or precognitive distinguished the Helping and Control periods and then responded appropriately through unconscious or conscious self-regulation of attention or of behavioral responding. The net outcome of such psychic maneuvers is the same as that expected on the basis of direct mental influence of participant by helper. For possible practical applications, it is outcome that matters, rather than inferred process or "mechanism" (this is especially relevant to the possibilities suggested in the very last paragraph of this General Discussion). In fact, we would argue that questions about the type or source of exhibited psi are outmoded and unproductive, given the emerging view of psi as a dynamic *process* that involves a *field* of persons and events--a field that is trans-spatial, trans-temporal, and trans-personal. We lapse into terminology such as "X influencing Y" for convenience of expression

and because of old linguistic habits. Recognizing such outmoded expressions and questions is, at least, the first step toward aligning our language and concepts with the new lessons that psi is teaching us.

It is of interest to note that remote mental interactions occurred in the present study without the provision of immediate sensory feedback to the helper. Feedback was deliberately excluded from the design in order to make it resemble more closely various everyday life situations in which such feedback may not be present or possible.

In both the somatic case (Braud & Schlitz, 1983) and in the mental case, the magnitude of the obtained psi-mediated helping effect was positively and significantly related to the "helpee's" experienced need to be helped. This latter need may be defined in terms of departure from balance or departure from homeostasis in some particular dimension or aspect of functioning. It appears that psi-mediated helping provides a balancing or normalizing function, helping to return the helpee to a less extreme state or condition. Similar findings have been observed in the experimental work of others (e.g., Grad's 1965 work with saline-stressed or dryness-stressed seeds as opposed to seeds growing under normal, optimal conditions), and similar observations have been made in clinical practice and in theoretical conceptualizations of mental healing (e.g., LeShan's [1974] view that a momentary "union" or "merging" experience of healer and healee may activate the healee's self-healing capabilities in the direction of balance and away from previously distorting or interfering influences on the healee's health and well-being).

If the attention-focusing or concentration exercises of the present study are viewed as protomeditational in nature, then the present findings suggest that one person's meditation process may be directly influenced by the concurrent meditation of another person. This is consistent with anecdotal reports of meditation being easier or more profound in group, as opposed to individual, settings. It is also consistent with reports of meditation in a disciple or trainee being facilitated by the presence of a master or teacher. The present findings are also consistent with the controversial

claims, within the Transcendental Meditation tradition, that meditation by a critical number of meditators can exert unconventional influences upon the social activities of persons in the local geographical vicinity (see Orme-Johnson, et al., 1988; Schrodt, 1990).

We suggest that this simple experiment and its encouraging results point to the feasibility of exploring a wide range of cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual processes that could be facilitated in dyadic situations through the practice of specific mental activities on the part of one member of the dyad. Interesting experiments could be designed to explore possible practical applications of direct mental influence as they might occur in meaningful everyday life processes such as education, counseling, therapy, healing, and spiritual development. As a complement to such an experimental approach, we recommend that equal attention be directed to the study of similar processes in more natural, nonlaboratory settings using alternative research methodologies (see, for example, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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[2] Present address: Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 744 San Antonio Road, Palo Alto, California 94303.

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William Braud, Ph.D. is Professor and Research Director at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California.