

A QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY OF EXPERIENTIAL REACTIONS TO A BRAZILIAN HEALER

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ABSTRACT

Ten people who visited a mental healer during a study tour of Brazil completed questionnaires shortly after their healing session as well as 6 and 12 months later. The questionnaires were designed to elicit some of the attitudes and experiential reactions of these individuals. A statistical analysis of the responses determined two significant correlations. The reported determination to change one's behavior for the sake of one's health was positively related to perceived positive change in subjects' spiritual viewpoint. Reported changes in subjects' perceived increase in 'energy and vitality' following the healing sessions were positively related to changes in subjects' mental attitudes. These correlations as well as several others had been reported in an earlier study in which the same questionnaires had been used with a group of people visiting Filipino mental healers.

Anomalous healing is a complex process and one whose results are difficult to measure (Frank, 1974, chap. 3; Solvin, 1984). The literature contains instances of apparent anomalies in mental healing with adequate follow-up (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1981), unusual healings explainable by ordinary mechanisms (e.g., Achterberg, 1975; Hall, 1983), and instances in which seemingly dramatic healings have not survived rigorous scrutiny (e.g., Randi, 1987). In an attempt to identify some of the experiential components of people's reactions to mental healers, Westerbeke and Krippner (1980) conducted a questionnaire study of 88 seriously ill persons who visited one of six Filipino practitioners. These subjects were asked to complete questionnaires several days after their healing sessions as well as 6 and 12 months later. Of the 88 approached, 11 completed all three questionnaires, making this a self-selected sample. Purported physical, mental, and spiritual changes were related at statistically significant levels to the subjects' confidence in the efficacy of mental healing and in the practitioner, to perceived increases in 'energy and vitality' following the healing sessions, to previous experiences with alleged psychic phenomena, and to the willingness to change one's behavior in order to obtain relief from one's health problems (Westerbeke, Glover & Krippner, 1977).

Procedure

A similar opportunity afforded itself in 1983 when the Institute of Noetic Sciences (Sausalito, California) organized a study tour of Brazil for 25 people interested in indigenous healing practices. The practitioner with whom this group was to spend the most time was Jose Macedo de Arruda, better known as Irmão (Brother) Macedo, a self-styled 'spiritual healer' from Recife who was scheduled to spend four days with the group as it celebrated Carnival, an annual Brazilian folk festival, in the city of Salvador in the province of Bahia.

Brother Macedo told the group that he once had been a successful executive in the armed forces and in business. However, his life changed dramatically at the age of 49. Macedo was walking by a young woman who was paralyzed in her

upper limbs when he felt tremors. He realized that a minor earthquake was in progress, and the young woman moved toward him for support. Macedo embraced the stranger and claims that he felt a sudden 'surge of energy' as well as a strong conviction that he could heal her paralysis. When the earthquake tremors subsided, the woman realized that she had used her arms for the first time in many years. Because the stranger's paralysis did not return, she proclaimed herself 'healed' and gave Brother Macedo the credit.

From the time of the experience, Macedo has devoted himself to 'spiritual healing', using a curative power he purportedly generates through prayer. Macedo uses the word 'telergy' to describe his work. In a typical healing session, he will ask people to close their eyes and will hold his hands a short distance from their body. He will then pray in an attempt to generate and transfer the 'telergy'. His prayers are directed to Jesus Christ.

Brother Macedo's reputation has grown to the extent that he has been visited by people from various parts of Brazil, as well as individuals from several foreign countries. In addition, he claims that sometimes it is possible for him to heal people at a distance. Macedo holds weekly healing seminars each Thursday and encourages people to focus upon his meetings at that time, believing that the effects of his curative powers will transcend distance.

Unlike the members of the previous group, the individuals on this study tour were not seriously ill but joined it for other personal or professional reasons. Responses from this group were elicited to the same questions as had been used in the previous study. In this case, however, the questionnaires were mailed to the subjects upon their return; the previous subjects had completed the questionnaires on their flight back to North America, several days after the conclusion of their healing sessions. Most questions were phrased so that they could be answered on a 3-, 4-, or 5-point scale. To avoid a 'halo effect', the value of a rating of '1' varied; for half the questions it meant 'a great amount', and for the other half it signified 'a small amount'. (For this reason, a number of negative correlations were obtained, but for clarity Table 1 presents all correlations as positive, including those obtained from the earlier sample.)

Using the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation, the 4 quantitative items from the first questionnaire were correlated with the 3 outcome items from the third questionnaire. The 3 quantitative items in the second questionnaire were correlated with the 3 outcome items in the third questionnaire. A total of 21 correlations were made. Fifteen individuals did not complete either or both of their follow-up questionnaires, reducing the number of subjects to 10 (6 women, 4 men).

Results

Table 1 presents the results of this study and compares them to the data obtained in the previous investigation. One question asked, 'If regaining health necessitates changing your personality or style of living, to what extent would you be willing to make a change?' Five types of response were possible ranging from 'I would not be willing to change my life' to 'I would make any changes at all if it meant getting well'. These responses were significantly and positively related to professed improvement in one's spiritual viewpoint for both groups the Filipino study group.

Table 1

Relationships (Pearson Product-Moment Coefficients of Correlation) among Responses from Three Questionnaires Designed to Elicit Experiential Reactions to a Brazilian Healer (N = 10) compared with Results from a Similar Study of Reactions to Filipino Healers (noted in parentheses) (N = 11)

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| Willingness to change one's behavior;                                  |                |
| physical condition   | 0.00(0.51)     |
| mental attitude  | 0.30(0.68**)   |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.68**(0.63*)  |
| Degree of religious commitment;  |                |
| physical condition   | 0.27(0.32)     |
| mental attitude  | 0.00(0.49)     |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.31(0.52)     |
| Number of reported personal experiences with psychic phenomena;        |                |
| physical condition   | 0.18(0.60*)    |
| mental attitude  | 0.24(0.73**)   |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.58(0.78***)  |
| Degree of confidence in mental healing before seeing healer;           |                |
| physical condition   | 0.24(0.70***)  |
| mental attitude  | 0.26(0.70***)  |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.11(0.63**)   |
| Degree of confidence in mental healing after seeing healer;            |                |
| physical condition   | 0.15(0.70***)  |
| mental attitude  | 0.00(0.77***)  |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.21(0.63**)   |
| Amount of help reportedly received from healer;                        |                |
| physical condition   | 0.00(0.86***)  |
| mental attitude  | 0.00(0.77***)  |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.53(0.65***)  |
| Perceived amount of 'energy and vitality' change;                      |                |
| physical condition   | 0.45(0.84***)  |
| mental attitude  | 0.63*(0.82***) |
| spiritual viewpoint  | 0.28(0.71**)   |
| * significant, .05 (8 df for Brazilian data, 9 df for Filipino data)   |                |
| ** significant, .02 (8 df for Brazilian data, 9 df for Filipino data)  |                |
| *** significant, .01 (8 df for Brazilian data, 9 df for Filipino data) |                |

The number of reported personal experiences with psychic phenomena, one's degree of confidence in their healer before and after the healing session, and the amount of perceived help retained from the healing session 6 months later, were not related to any of the three outcomes for the Brazilian study group, but these items had been related at significant levels for all the Filipino study group's reported outcomes.

The perceived change in 'energy and vitality' 6 months after the healing session was significantly related to a shift (at 12 months) toward a positive spiritual viewpoint for the Brazilian study group. 'Energy and vitality' change

(at 6 months) had been related to physical, mental, and spiritual shifts (at 12 months) for the Filipino study group.

For neither group were the number of cigarettes smoked or the number of alcoholic drinks consumed per day related to perceived changes. These data are omitted from Table 1.

In summary, 17 of the 21 attempted correlations had been significant for the Filipino study group whereas 2 of the 21 were significant for the Brazilian study group.

The open-ended questions produced a variety of interesting responses. Subject #1, a 37-year-old woman, recalled, 'My treatment was what Brother Macedo calls "telergy", which resulted in trance induction'. She recalled no short-term or long-term effects.

Subject #2, a 54-year-old man, participated in a group treatment with Brother Macedo, but no individual treatments. His short-term effects included an 'enhanced belief in spiritual power' and his long-term effects were 'continued insight and commitment to belief in the value of the spiritual path'.

Subject #3, a 47-year-old woman, wrote that she 'stood, shoeless, eyes closed, while the healer moved his hands near my body. There was a considerable focus on my head. I recall the sensation of the warmth of his hands almost touching my ears and scalp'. No short-term effects were noted but there was a long-term effect: 'Positive physical changes reflective of mental and emotional changes, in that I have increased my activity in those three areas'.

Subject #4, a 50-year-old woman, wrote that Macedo held his hands above her swollen ankle and that she 'could feel the energy of his hands, also the quietness of the room helped me focus'. There was some short-term relief of her condition but no perceived long-term effect.

Subject #5, a 62-year-old woman, 'felt a great amount of energy from Brother Macedo and watched what that power was capable of doing, physically anyway, to a few of the other persons. His strength seems to come from his deeply rooted spiritual beliefs which did affect all of us in the group'. The short-term effects were described as 'reaffirmation of what I already knew, i.e., the importance of healing myself though sometimes using the healer's energy'. Long-term effects were described as 'My spiritual growth, and mental and emotional attitudes continue to change, although I don't believe this came from the trip, but rather a direction I continue to follow'.

Subject #5, a 62-year-old woman, stated that Macedo 'fed energy to me through his hands. My eyes were closed throughout the sessions so I do not know more than this. He did not touch me at any time'. She described a long-term effect: 'Brother Macedo gave my spiritual development a strong forward thrust'.

Subject #6, a 58-year-old woman, said that she had been experiencing daily constipation and swelling in the legs and feet during the study tour. Following her healing session, she reported 'less swelling in legs' and 'no constipation'. Her long-term benefits were described as 'no changes in spiritual viewpoint but an increasing depth of perspective'.

Subject #7, a 59-year-old woman with glaucoma, recalled 'feeling heat from his hands' during Macedo's healing sessions. She reported no short-term or long-term effects on her eye problem, but 'a sense of inner peace; the old impatience and anxiety seem to have disappeared, for the most part'.

APPENDIX A

First questionnaire, Administered Shortly after Healing Session

Thousands of Americans and Europeans visit traditional and spiritual healers in various parts of the world each year. However, very little information has been collected about what has happened to them. Your answers to this questionnaire will help to clarify and put into perspective what takes place. Please put down as much information as you care to. However, do not feel you need answer all of the questions if time demands or concerns for privacy are considerations for you.

- a. Your name and address.
- b. Age at the time of the healing.
- c. Ailments and conditions for which you sought healing.
- d. During the two months previous to the healing, how many cigarettes did you smoke per day? (Check correct answer.)
  - 1. None.
  - 2. One to five.
  - 3. About half a pack.
  - 4. About one pack.
  - 5. About a pack and a half.
  - 6. About two packs.
  - 7. Two and a half packs or more.
- e. During the two months previous to the healing session, how many alcoholic drinks did you usually have each day? Be sure and include beer and wine as well as hard liquor.
  - 1. None.
  - 2. One or two cans, glasses, drinks, etc.
  - 3. Three or four.
  - 4. Five or six.
  - 5. Seven or eight.
  - 6. Nine to eleven.
  - 7. Twelve or more.
- f. If regaining health necessitates changing your personality or style of living, to what extent would you be willing to make a change?
  - 1. Would not be willing to change my life.
  - 2. Would be willing to make slight changes.
  - 3. Would be willing to make moderate changes.
  - 4. Would be willing to make major changes.
  - 5. Would be willing to make any changes at all, if it meant getting well.
- g. Which of the following best describes your religious commitment or orientation at the time of the healing?
  - 1. Deeply religious.
  - 2. Moderately religious.
  - 3. Largely indifferent or opposed to religion.
- h. Have you had any previous personal experience (prior to the healing) with so-called psychic phenomena?
  - 1. None.
  - 2. Few.
  - 3. Some.
  - 4. Many.
- i. Previous to your contact with the healer, how much confidence did you have in his or her ability to assist you?
  - 1. Completely confident.
  - 2. Fairly confident.
  - 3. I had very strong doubts.

What symptoms had you experienced in the two months prior to your healing session? How often did they occur?

What was the name of the healer with whom you worked?

APPENDIX B

Second Questionnaire, Administered 6 Months after Healing Session.

By this time, you should have completed Part 1 of the questionnaire. If you have not done so, and if you wish to participate in the study, fill it out before you attempt this one. Again, write as much as you desire and omit anything that you would like to keep confidential.

Now that you have gone through the healing experience, do you have more or less confidence in the powers of 'psychic healing' than you felt prior to your trip? (Check the correct answer.)

- 1. Much more confidence now.
- 2. Somewhat more confidence now.
- 3. About the same amount of confidence now.
- 4. Somewhat less confidence now.
- 5. Much less confidence now.

- b. Please describe the treatment given you by the healer.
- c. From what you can observe so far, how much help (if any) did you receive from the healing session?

- 1. A lot of help.
- 2. Some help.
- 3. A little help.
- 4. No help.

d. If you were helped, describe how.

e. Compared to how you felt prior to the experience, do you feel more or less energy and vitality now?

- 1. Feel more energy.
- 2. Feel no change.
- 3. Feel less energy.

f. What was the name of the healer with whom you worked?

g. Your name.

APPENDIX C

Third Questionnaire, Administered 12 Months after Healing Session

By this time, you should have completed Parts 1 and 2 of the Questionnaire. If you have not done so, and if you wish to participate in this study, fill them out before you attempt this one. Again, write as much as you desire and omit anything that you would like to keep confidential.

a. Have you experienced positive changes in your physical condition?

- 1. None.
- 2. Few.
- 3. Some.
- 4. Many.

b. Have you experienced positive changes in your mental and emotional attitudes?

- 1. None.
- 2. Few.
- 3. Some.
- 4. Many.

c. Have you experienced positive changes in your spiritual viewpoint?

- 1. None.
- 2. Few.
- 3. Some.
- 4. Many.

d. Describe the changes (either positive or negative) that have taken place in your physical condition, mental and emotional attitudes, and/or your spiritual viewpoint.

e. What was the name of the healer with whom you worked?

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