Experiences, demographic variables and locus of control orientation of individuals who have been guided by diviners

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Abstract

In this study the first author explores the experiences, locus of control orientation, and demographic variables of five individuals who have been guided by diviners. The study is underpinned by three assumptions—that multiple accounts of reality exist (postmodern philosophy), that knowledge cannot be void of subjectivity (constructivist epistemology), and that ‘meaning’ is influenced by dominant discourses (social constructionist paradigm). Individuals’ experiences with diviners are documented in the form of thematic network analysis. Using the Levenson’s Locus of Control Questionnaire, it was established that an internal locus of control orientation predominated amongst participants. This finding contradicts existing literature. Implications for clinical practice and focal areas for future research are highlighted.

Keywords: constructivism; divination; diviners; hermeneutics; locus of control; paranormal; postmodernism; qualitative research; social constructionism; supernatural; superstitiousness; thematic network analysis

As an MA Clinical Psychology student, the first author is curious about individuals’ quests for self knowledge and how these journeys are embroidered with healing. Until recently, she primarily perceived healing as being that which occurs in conversation between two people within the context of Western psychotherapy, in which it is suggested that ‘dialogue’ and the skill of maneuvering the relationship between therapist and client are the primary avenues to facilitate change. However, she came to experience within her the need to re-search her own conceptualisation of what constitutes healing and, given her own profound experiences, is drawn to the intriguing context of divination.
Divination can be defined as the art or technique of gaining knowledge or exploring the unknown in order to elicit answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding, of future events or distant states, by means of observing and interpreting psychometry (adapted from Cline, n. d.). The term *psychometry*, hereafter referred to as ‘methods of divination’ includes, but is not limited to (a) Natal astrology: Formulating a natal (birth) chart based on cosmological occurrences, for example, planetary alignment, (b) Cartomancy: Interpreting symbols and signs appearing on tarot cards, (c) Palmistry: Interpreting the lines on the palm of the hand, (d) Numerology: The configuration of numbers, (e) Necromancy (channeling): Receiving messages from spirits, and (f) Clairvoyance: A ‘form of extra-sensory perception wherein a person perceives distant objects, persons, or events and types of energy not normally perceptible to humans’ (Wikipedia, 2008, p. 1). Individuals demonstrating the art or technique of divination are more commonly referred to as ‘diviners’, whose role is to be mediators between the ‘known’ and ‘unknown’.

Divination is conceptualised and defined differently, depending on the geographic location and frame of reference of individuals practising and consulting therein. The most popular synonym for divination appears to be fortune telling (Maroney, 2002), given that many individuals consult with diviners to know answers pertaining to questions such as ‘What does the future hold for me?’ and ‘How should I handle a specific situation or difficulty?’ (Gibson & Gibson, 1973). According to the New World Encyclopedia (2009), divination should be distinguished from fortune-telling in that divination has a formal or ritualistic and often social character, usually in religious contexts, while fortune telling is a more everyday practice for personal purposes. Fortune telling is therefore, associated with questions pertaining primarily to what the future holds, whereas divination is related to fundamental issues related to living with meaning and purpose and is a way to a deeper understanding of events and influences surrounding an individual. Divination therefore, includes but is not limited to the practice of fortune telling.

Many sceptics reject the divinatory context because it, unlike the secular/scientific, cannot always be explained rationally and because of the uncertainty it provokes, many discredit the context all together. Yet, despite the incredulity, this context is supported and sourced by many South Africans on a daily basis. If psychology can be defined as ‘the study of behaviour and experience, carried out in a manner which will enable us both to draw out general principles and to achieve an understanding of the unique nature and quality of an individual’s personal experiences as a human being’ (Louw & Edwards, 1997, p. 5), then one becomes unsettled by the fact that the context of divination has not been given more credit within an academic milieu.
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AIMS

In an attempt to address this inadequacy, the study aims to:

Give voice to the experiences of individuals who have been guided by diviners

Although detailed information is available about various methods of divination in both academic and non-academic settings, individuals’ experiences of these methods have not been given due credit or documented extensively. This study therefore, aims to provide a context for individuals to share their unique experiences with diviners, without being restricted or limited in terms of the nature of the information they disclose.

Explore the locus of control orientation of individuals who have been guided by diviners

A preliminary review of the literature proved interesting, because the methods of divination were documented extensively under the umbrella term ‘paranormal psychology’, and this field appeared to evoke ambivalence, debate, scepticism and dispute amongst researchers. However, the same did not apply when reviewing the locus of control orientation of individuals consulting with diviners, because here, there was less discrepancy and debate, with the greatest consensus amongst researchers. The most prominent finding within the literature is that an external locus of control orientation characterises individuals consulting with diviners.

Explore whether any traits or demographic variables characterise individuals consulting with diviners

The first author is of the opinion that an experience is influenced by an individual’s demographic variables, for example, age, gender and traits, such as interpersonal style and temperament. The study therefore, also aims to explore whether individuals consulting diviners could be typecast according to general traits or demographic variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individuals’ experiences with diviners

Individuals’ experiences with diviners have not, according to the researcher’s knowledge, been documented in academic literature. Apart from this present study, individuals have only used the opportunity to articulate their experiences on the World Wide Web. Given that the internet is a ‘promising and powerful research
medium, especially for non-representative studies which are exploratory in nature’ (Goritz & Schumacher, 2000, p. 2), web sites belonging to diviners were consulted and the testimonials posted reviewed. Various testimonies were grouped together into themes and these comprise the literature review pertaining to individuals’ experiences with diviners.

Perceptions of the diviner before and after the consultation

It seems that the majority of individuals were sceptical about going to see a diviner for the first time (Brownstone, 2008; Justis, 2008; Nirup, 2008). What seems meaningful to individuals is the diviner’s ability to be ‘in tune with them’, or as a testimonial described ‘understood my feelings as though she had known me for years’ (Kathleen, cited in Justis, 2008, testimonial section), or as was said by another ‘she was like an old friend’ (Sedona, cited in Nirup, 2008, testimonial section). Diviners were also described as generous, kind, welcoming, compassionate, loving, and warm (Goldston, 2008). Numerous testimonials also acknowledged and appreciated diviners accommodating interpersonal styles and tendency to self disclosure, as is suggested by ‘it’s sharing of experiences at a reading that’s an eye opener’ (Janton, cited in Brownstone, 2008, testimonial section).

Circumstances before consulting a diviner

Appointments are almost always preceded by a period of uncertainty, lack of direction or difficulty (Brownstone, 2008; Justis, 2008; Lightwalker, 2008; Lori, 2008; Meredith, 2008; Nirup, 2008; Siegar, 2008). Most individuals experience problems in and were confused in various areas of their lives, for example business or relationships, and sought guidance in this regard. Others reported unresolved ‘business’ with a loved one who had crossed over and they needed to re-establish contact one last time. Many individuals also doubted their experiences and perceptions and required validation from an external source as evident in the following testimonial ‘I was unsure, uncertain if I could feel what I was feeling about people’ (Susanna, cited in Justis, 2008, testimonial section). Some experienced stagnation in their lives and required advice on how to facilitate growth and development, and others experienced depression and found it difficult to remain optimistic as highlighted in the testimonial ‘it was for me a time where everything was getting on top of me, a time where I was close to throwing in the towel and going back to a ridiculous existence’ (Lorna, cited in Lori, 2008, testimonial section).

Feelings during and after the consultation

One of the paramount reasons why individuals continually visit and re-visit diviners seems to be a need to encounter or re-experience how they felt during the previous consultations (Lori, 2008; Nirup, 2008). Individuals reported feeling enlightened,
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peaceful, rejuvenated and ‘balanced’ after consultations and others excited, inspired, surprised and empowered (Judith, 2008; Lightwalker, 2008; Lori, 2008, Siegar, 2008). Cleansing and cathartic experiences during consultations allowed individuals to feel relieved, hopeful and optimistic and as one testimony highlighted, to experience ‘a revived sense of joyfulness’ (Eric, cited in Nirup, 2008, testimonial section).

Nature of information provided by the diviners

The testimonials indicate that diviners provide information pertaining to the past, present, and future, and offered advice pertaining to the following broad categories: (a) relationships, family and romance; (b) health and illness, (c) career and employment; (d) personality, character and temperament; (e) wealth, finances and career; (f) travel and living arrangements, and (g) life purpose, goals, and aspirations (Brownstone, 2008; Justis, 2008; Lightwalker, 2008; Lori, 2008; Meredith, 2008; Nirup, 2008).

How the consultation impacted on individuals’ lives

It seems that any one single consultation ‘continues to affect day to day life and decisions’ (Maggie, cited in Judith, 2008, testimonial section). The divinatory experience also seems to facilitate intrapersonal and interpersonal growth and development, given that it provides access to and knowledge about soul wishes, needs and desires. Perhaps the most striking impact of divination is its ability to provide guidance on how to proceed into the future. Through dialogue, individuals find for themselves a new path to follow; and thereby have a refreshed hope for and faith in the future, as is suggested by the testimonial ‘I could see beyond the muck’ (Rachel, cited in Lightwalker, 2008, testimonial section).

Traits of individuals who consult diviners

The umbrella terms ‘supernatural’, ‘paranormal’, ‘superstition’, and ‘magical thinking’, as well as their underlying constructs seem to have been used synonymously and interchangeably by various authors over different decades. This is further compounded by the fact that few authors use the term divination as referred to in this study, and yet, their works on the paranormal (Beck & Miller, 2001; Clarke, 1991; Hines, 1988; Irwin, 1993; Radford, 2000; Rice, 2003); superstitiousness (Dudycha, 1933; Jahoda, 1969; Routledge & Salter, 1971; Tyson, 1979; Watt & Wiseman, 2004); and the supernatural (Scheidt, 1973) all encompass and include, to varying degrees, the different methods of divination referred to in this particular study. The researcher therefore presumes that findings from previous research studies are relevant to this study and will, for purposes of transparency, cite terms and constructs as used by specific researchers in this section.
Sensation seeking, creativity and imagination

Individuals with a creative personality are more inclined to have paranormal beliefs (Irwin, 1993). It is also proposed that sensation-seeking behaviours are more predominant amongst individuals with paranormal beliefs (Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Tobacyk & Milford, 1983).

World view

According to Aarnio and Lindeman (2007) there are three primary worldviews/philosophies of life. ‘Paranormal’ believers are individuals who are inclined to believe in the supernatural—‘religious’ believers are those individuals who believe in, and subscribe only to secular religions—for example, Christianity, while ‘double believers’ are individuals who have both ‘paranormal’ and ‘religious’ world views. Studies suggest that a person inclined to religious beliefs is also likely to support paranormal beliefs, and vice versa, given that ‘supernatural’ beings and phenomena (for example, angels or ghosts) feature in both ‘paranormal’ and ‘religious’ belief systems (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2007). Individuals consulting diviners generally have an esoteric worldview, which is characterised by beliefs in transcendent phenomena, planes of higher existence, hierarchy of spiritual beings, mysticism, and altered states of consciousness (Ludwig & Madison, 1966).

‘Religious’ beliefs

A study conducted by Emmons and Sobal (1981) concluded that individuals with more liberal religious beliefs (for instance, the Baptists) are more likely to believe in nonreligious paranormal phenomena, as compared to, for example the Protestant denomination, who have more conservative beliefs. Wagner (cited in Tyson, 1979) found that Jewish participants reported being the most superstitious, while Catholics reported being the least superstitious. Rattet and Bursik (2001) and Thalbourne and Houtkooper (2002) found that individuals who believed in, and had alleged experiences with the paranormal were more likely to describe themselves as religious.

Personality

One of the most prominent personality dimensions linked to superstitious thinking is anxiety (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2007; Beck & Miller, 2001; Watt & Wiseman, 2004; Zebb & Moore, 2001). Belief in the paranormal is also stronger in the feeling, perceiving and intuitive personality types, as proposed in Jung’s personality theory (Rattet & Bursik, 2001).
Locus of control orientation

Broadly speaking, locus of control orientation refers to an individual’s reactions to and perceptions of an event, based on the ascribed role of reward, gratification and reinforcement (Rotter, 1966). There are two predominant loci of control orientations:

Internal locus of control orientation

Individuals with an internal locus of control are those that ascribe the outcomes of events to their own behaviour/actions, such that they radiate more innate power and control. An internal locus of control suggests that individuals will (a) elicit information from present situations in order to improve future behaviour in similar situations, (b) emphasise inner skill and goal achievement, (c) are more likely to resist manipulation by others, and (d) make better mental health recovery (Joe, 1971; Levenson, 1973; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966; Steptoe & Appels, 1989).

External locus of control orientation

External locus of control is ‘when a reinforcement is perceived by the individual as following some action of his own, but not being entirely contingent upon his action, typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him’ (Rotter, 1966, p. 1). Individuals with an external locus of control orientation (a) are more suggestible and less likely to resist coercion, (b) change beliefs because of reinforcement from others, (c) more commonly report distress, anxiety and symptomatic behaviour, (d) have a high need for social approval, (e) make slower mental health recovery, and (f) feel they cannot do anything about their problems (Joe, 1971; Levenson, 1973; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966; Steptoe & Appels, 1989).

An external locus of control has been associated with a higher degree of belief in the paranormal/superstition and divination (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2007; Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Jahoda, 1969; Pelzer, 2003; Scheidt, 1973; Stanke, 2004; Tobacyk, Nagot, & Miller, 1988; Vyse, 1997). Consulting with diviners seems to provide an illusion of control and provides feelings of satisfaction and mastery (Irwin, 1993, Langer, 1975; Pervin, 1963). According to Levenson (cited in Lefcourt, 1981), who designed a locus of control questionnaire comprising scales, male adults are more likely to display externality on the ‘powerful others’ scale than female adults. Younger individuals tend towards internality on the ‘powerful others’ and ‘chance’ scales and individuals 50 years or older, are more likely to believe that ‘powerful others’ and ‘fate’ control their lives (Lao, cited in Lefcourt, 1981). This may be related to increased fears of diminishing power and decline of abilities associated with aging (Lefcourt, 1981). Internality features more pertinently in individuals who were raised in small families and have first-born status (Frischlag, cited in Lefcourt,
1981). It seems that individuals with an internal locus of control orientation ‘who are experiencing failure at a task consider that their ability, their effort, the difficulty of the task, and chance, can all be contributing to their performance, and may alter something within their performance to determine which, if any, of these factors may be influencing the outcome’ (Pittman & Pittman, cited in Lefcourt, 1981). Individuals with an external locus of control orientation are therefore, more likely to continue making the same ‘mistakes’ and experience elevated levels of helplessness.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Postmodernism formed the philosophical framework of this study and postulates that there are as many truths, knowledge, and realities as there are people (Hibberd, 2005). This study was conducted using a constructivist epistemology, which suggests that reality is constructed through an individual’s active experience of it and that the observer creates reality by giving meaning to it (Doan, 1997; Raskin, 2002). Social constructionism formed the ontological framework of the study. According to social constructionism, an individual’s ‘meaning making’ is influenced by the dominant viewpoints, discourses and stories embedded within their environment (Doan, 1997).

**Methodological underpinning of the study**

The methodological underpinning of this study is a qualitative research approach, although a questionnaire was utilised. Qualitative research seeks to discover and capture the meaning of an individual’s experiences, and because emphasis is on interactive dialogue and creating a shared view of reality, the researcher is more involved with the participants (Neuman, 1997).

The first author maintained validity in the study by (a) guarding against writing about her study in a linear (cause-effect) manner, (b) substantiating her interpretations and/or conclusions by referring to multiple information sources, (c) acknowledging that the research findings were influenced by her frame of reference, and may be perceived differently when conducted or explored by another, and (d) by being fully present in the interview, allowing freedom in discussion and presenting as a mirror for that which has been said, in order for participants to feel invigorated and energised during the interview process (Stiles, 1993). Reliability was established by the researcher accentuating each participant’s social and cultural context and engaging with the participants towards a shared view of reality (Stiles, 1993).

**Methodological underpinning in ‘action’**

Purposive sampling was used for selecting research participants and the convenience selection method was used to locate and contact participants (Berg, 2007). Given that the intention of this study was not to generalise its findings, a sample size of
five participants was selected. The researcher obtained participants through referrals from unacquainted peers residing in both Johannesburg and Pretoria. Participants needed to fulfil two important criteria in order to be selected for this research study. Participants needed to have consulted diviners, using any one of the following divination methods—cartomancy, necromancy, numerology, natal astrology or palmistry. The reason for this is that the first author familiarised herself primarily with these five methods. Participants also needed to be of Caucasian ethnicity. In selecting participants of different ethnic backgrounds, there was a greater likelihood that the findings would be contaminated by additional intervening variables; for example, culture-specific beliefs and practices. There were no other variable restrictions on the selection criteria of participants.

Ethical issues were addressed by (a) obtaining written consent from participants, in which they agreed to participate in the study, and (b) discussing and guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Method of information collection and information analysis procedures

Aim One: Give voice to the experiences of individuals who have been guided by diviners

Semi-structured interviews were used as the most appropriate information collection method. Interviews with participants were guided by some of the following questions, ‘what are the reasons for seeking consultations?’; ‘how did you feel during consultations?’ and ‘how did the consultations impact on your life?’ Hermeneutics formed the theoretical stance for information analysis, which implies that emphasis was on extracting ‘meaning’ as well as describing and interpreting feelings (Sarantakos, 2005). The motivation behind using thematic network analysis as the principal tool of analysis was that it ‘unearths the themes salient in a text at different levels’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). During thematic network analysis lower-order premises evident in the text were grouped together to form basic themes. The more abstract principles were then elicited from the basic themes and grouped together into organising themes. Super-ordinate ideas from the organising themes were clustered into global themes and encapsulated the principal metaphors in the texts as a whole (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The basic, organising and global themes were then diagrammatically depicted in the form of networks.

Aim Two: Explore the locus of control orientation in individuals who have been guided by diviners

Levenson’s (1973) self-report questionnaire was utilised. The questionnaire consisted of the ‘Internal’, ‘Powerful others’ and ‘Chance’ scales, each of which is comprised of eight items in Likert format. The ‘Powerful others’ and ‘Chance scales’, when
combined, form the ‘external’ scale. Levenson (1973) accepted Rotter’s (1966) internal and external locus of control scale, but made improvements and changes to the total external locus of control scale by differentiating it into two separate scales; namely, the ‘powerful others’ scale and ‘chance’ scale. The rationale for doing this was that ‘people who believe that the world is unordered (chance) would behave and think differently than people who believe that the world is ordered but that powerful others are in control’ (Levenson, 1973, p. 398). Thus, even though individuals may possess a general external locus of control, their behaviour will depend largely on whether they expect to be controlled by forces of ‘chance’ (fate or luck); or by ‘powerful others’ (those who are perceived as more powerful, authoritative and controlling).

An individual’s locus of control orientation is based on the scores he or she obtains on each of the three scales. According to Levenson (1973), the test-retest reliabilities obtained for the normal adult sample were 0.74 for the ‘Powerful others’ scale and 0.78 for the ‘Chance’ scale. Split-half reliabilities (Spearman-Brown) for the normal adult sample were 0.62 for the ‘Internal’ scale, 0.66 for the ‘Powerful others’ scale, and 0.64 for the ‘Chance’ scale. These results suggest that the questionnaire is reliable and will produce consistent findings. No overlap of the items on the ‘Chance’, ‘Powerful others’, and ‘Internal’ control factors was reported by Levenson (1973), and this suggests that each factor “is conceptually pure in that only items from the appropriate scale load on that factor” (Levenson, 1973, p. 400).

**Aim Three: Explore whether any traits or demographic variables characterise individuals consulting diviners**

Participants were given a biographical questionnaire compiled by the first author to complete before interviews commenced. The questionnaire elicited information pertaining to (a) personal particulars– for example, date of birth, socio-economic status, highest level of education and (b) family background– for example, birth order, religious upbringing. The questionnaire was analysed qualitatively and no statistical procedures were used.

**DISCUSSION**

The themes emerging from the interviews with each participant were organised into thematic networks comprising basic, organising, and global themes. The global themes encapsulate the interview as a whole; and therefore, form the focus of the discussion.
Avril

Avril is a 59-year-old English-speaking woman. She qualifies her socio-economic status as middle-class and reports Matric as her highest level of education. She is married and has four children. Avril is the middle born of three children, and has two sisters who are 53 and 63 years old. As a child Avril was sent to a Christian church by her parents, but reports never having experienced strong religious feelings. Avril first became interested in divination and consulted a diviner ten years ago. She consults the same clairvoyant approximately twice a year only, and has not experienced other methods of divination. For an overview of Avril’s themes, see Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overview of Avril’s themes**

**Creating order**

The organising themes of ‘control’, ‘linearity’, ‘predictability’, and ‘rationality’ all have in common Avril’s need to create order. Meredith (2008), Nirup (2008), and Brownstone (2008) report that individuals are motivated to consult diviners because they seek broad-spectrum guidance and advice. Avril, for example, consulted diviners regarding problems pertaining to business, relationships, health, and finances. It seems that the ability of diviners to answer her questions, advised on how to proceed and inform her what she can expect in the future, created the order and stability she desperately sought for in her life. Avril also only consults diviners during intermittent periods of psychological ‘distress’ and not, as is suggested by Irwin (1993), Rattet & Bursik (2001), and Zebb & Moore (2001), which is because of pervasive anxiety and emotional instability.
Soul expression

The organising themes of ‘intuitive experiences’, ‘connecting through storytelling’ and ‘different sources of healing’, when extracted on a higher logical level, speak about Avril’s soul wishes and desires. Avril has difficulty expressing and nurturing her soul within the context of daily living – hence she consults diviners. During consultations diviners revitalise and energise her depleted soul and create a space in which she can tap into and express her soul’s needs. This suggests that consultations with diviners are therapeutic because the context choreographs healing and exudes tranquillity. Similar experiences were reported by Judith (2008), Lori (2008), and Siegar (2008), who documented testimonials in which individuals reported feeling rejuvenated, enlightened, balanced and ‘cleansed’. In the global theme of ‘soul expression’, Avril narrated paranormal experiences, described herself as intuitive and indicated that feedback from diviners indicates that she has psychic abilities (Irwin, 1993). It seems that she falls into the category of the feeling, perceiving and intuitive personality type as outlined in Jung’s personality theory (Rattet & Bursik, 2001).

Elise

Elise is a 51-year old English-speaking woman. She is employed as a rental agent and is of middle socio-economic status. She completed her matric. Elise is the second oldest of four children, and she is divorced with two children. As a child, Elise was raised in the Jewish faith and followed Jewish traditions. She has consulted with channelers, pin code readers, chirolgists, astrologers, sangomas, and intuitives. She has also experienced crystal healing. For an overview of Elise’s themes, see Figure 2.
According to Irwin (1993), Langer (1975), and Paulhus (1983), individuals consult diviners to experience more control, structure, and manageability in their lives and this is supported by Elise’s organising themes of ‘powerlessness’, ‘the ability to influence’, and ‘substitution’. All the three themes encompass, to varying degrees the element of control. Elise does not perceive herself as having control over her own life, or as being able to influence her environment. In an attempt to fulfil these needs, she consults diviners, and as suggested by Judith (2008), Lightwalker (2008), Lori (2008), and Siegar (2008), this is because consulting a diviner constellated feelings of empowerment and self-confidence. Within the divinatory context, Elise can for example, choose whether to accept or reject the contents of the astrological reports and by doing so, is able to exercise decision making as well as influence and regulate her own behaviour.

Belonging

The organising theme of ‘substitution’ suggests that Elise is inclined to use substitution as a first order attempt to address that which is lacking in interpersonal relationships. Elise, for example, uses material objects and food as a substitution for the lack of acceptance and emotional fulfilment she experiences in relationships. When extracted to a higher logical level, this global theme makes reference to Elise’s inability to experience belonging. It seems that Elise struggles to co-create relationships in such a manner that who she is and what she believes in, is unconditionally accepted. It seems that she is only able to maintain certain relationships by for example, keeping...
her experiences with diviners covert. Within the divinatory context however, Elise experiences positive regard as diviners respect her as a fully functioning person.

**Abel**

Abel is a 38-year-old, Afrikaans-speaking male and an only child. His highest level of education is a PhD in Philosophy, and he is of middle-class socio-economic status. He qualified as a psychologist and minister. Abel is divorced and does not have any children. During his ministry in the Christian church, he preached against any divinatory or alternative belief systems and opposed diviners. Three years ago his life changed as he started questioning the fundamental principles of his religious beliefs. He was inspired to consult diviners after hearing about their ‘healing powers’ from others. Abel attributes the nature and number of the diviners he has consulted to his curious nature and need to experience the unfamiliar. He has consulted with chirologists, mediums, astrologers, psychics, and numerologists. For an overview of Abel’s themes, see Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Overview of Abel's themes](image)

**Inclusion versus exclusion**

The content of the organising themes of ‘rigid boundaries’ and ‘ambivalence’ highlights Abel’s profound experiences of inclusion and exclusion. When Abel challenged the religious ‘dominant voices’ he initially supported, he was ostracised from his community and shunned upon. It was however, precisely this exclusion, that permitted him inclusion into the esoteric and Buddhist contexts. ‘Inclusion’ versus ‘exclusion’ is also apparent in Abel’s thinking. By perceiving himself and
the universe and all the energies therein to be interdependent on each other, Abel demonstrates inclusive thinking. However, this could also be evidence of exclusive thinking, as Abel is excluding the possibility or notion that everything is not interdependent or interconnected.

In the organising theme of ‘ambivalence’, Abel voiced his scepticism of certain diviners and divination methods; and this suggests that he does not shape experiences according to what is said by a diviner, but rather uses what he considers useful to complement his life and enhance meaning (Meredith, 2008; Justis, 2008). Given that Abel, the only male participant, was least supportive of diviners, this study would concur that men in general are the least likely to have superstitious or paranormal beliefs (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2007; Clarke, 1991; Irwin, 1993).

**Proactivity versus reactivity**

The organising theme of ‘transformation versus conservation’ alludes to Abel’s narrative of alternating between periods of proactivity and reactivity. Although a minister (‘proactivity’) in the Christian church, Abel admits that he merely followed the Christian belief system (‘reactivity’) because this was propagated by his environment. The most pertinent example of Abel’s proactive nature was when he decided to leave the ministry, in pursuit of an alternative belief system, comprising Buddhist and esoteric principles. Abel is of the opinion that individuals are not proactive enough in religious contexts and merely react to and believe the illusions created by others. He proposes that it is an individual’s lack of education and knowledge that keeps them trapped in a reactive process and holds society’s ‘narrow mindedness’ accountable for this. Abel’s proactive nature is inspired by a need to encounter the un-encountered, explore the unknown and satisfy a curiosity in what lies ‘beyond’. This was alluded to in literature, where sensation-seeking behaviour and a need for stimulation and variety of experience featured strongly in individuals with paranormal beliefs (Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Irwin, 1993; Tobyack & Milford, 1983).

**Vanessa**

Vanessa is 47 years old and English speaking. She is the eldest of three children. Vanessa’s husband was murdered eight years prior to the interview, and there is ambiguity regarding the circumstances surrounding his death. She has since entered into a new relationship and is engaged. Vanessa holds a diploma and is of middle-class socio economic status. She grew up following the principles and attitudes of the Methodist religion but is non-practising at present. She consults mediums primarily, with the hope that they can communicate with her husband and receive answers from him about the cause and circumstances of his death. For an overview of Vanessa’s themes, see Figure 4.
Helplessness

The organising theme of ‘reactivity’ points to Vanessa’s tendency to (prior consultations with diviners) respond to what has been created for her and not what she has created for herself. When extracted to a higher logical level, the theme speaks about the helplessness she experiences in relationship with others and her environment. According to Goldston (2008) and Judith (2008), consultations with diviners are preceded by feelings of confusion and uncertainty, as is the case with Vanessa, who consulted diviners for clarity surrounding the circumstances surrounding her husband’s death. Diviners were however, unable to provide her with the answers she sought, and this, combined with fatalistic thinking, further perpetuated her helplessness. Diviners have however, also contributed meaningfully to Vanessa’s life—for example, enhancing her perceptions that personal influence and contributions have more credence than limitations.

Intermediate states

The term ‘intermediate states’ refers to the process of being in ‘limbo’ or being/interacting between two different realms or stages simultaneously—and for Vanessa, this theme seems to be a ramification of the mystery surrounding her husband’s murder. Vanessa’s current lived experiences firstly appear to centre around and within both the physical and metaphysical realms (‘connection within the context of disconnection’). Within the physical realm Vanessa is disconnected from her husband. However, by regularly consulting diviners, she also interacts with the metaphysical realm, and is able to connect with the images of her deceased husband.
Vanessa also hangs in limbo between the past and present (‘incomplete themes’). It seems she cannot fully embrace the present or plan for the future, until such time that she has made peace with her past.

**Anisa**

Anisa is 39 years old—her home language is Afrikaans and she stays with her husband. Her younger brother has passed away. She has her own business selling home décor, but aspires to start her own ‘mind-body emporium’ company, which focuses on spiritual growth and development. Anisa is of middle-class socio-economic status and has matric as her highest qualification. Anisa was raised in a Catholic home by her mother and father, whom she describes as very religious. According to Anisa, she stopped attending church from a very young age but again attended services in support of her husband, who is an active member of the NG Church. For an overview of Anisa’s themes, see Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Overview of Anisa’s themes**

**Conservation**

Conservation can be described as the process of conserving the *status quo*, in such a way that stability is maintained. In the organising themes of ‘rigidity’, ‘control’ and ‘true self’, Anisa maintains that ‘dominant voices’ in society maintain homeostasis and subsequent power, by moulding others into meek individuals, who are scared to voice their own opinions. She criticises psychologists and the Christian church as rigidly clinging to what was in the past and not embracing and welcoming what is in the present; namely spirituality, divination and esotericism. Anisa supports the notion that every individual should present themselves authentically and live in accordance
with who they are, and what they believe in and not in terms of what is superimposed on them by others supports. It seems then, that Anisa is anti ‘conservation’ and is inclined to rebel against ‘norms’.

Transformation

The global theme of ‘transformation’ is the polar opposite of the global theme of ‘conservation’. ‘Transformation’ can be described as a significant or noteworthy change in functioning or character. In both the organising themes of ‘freedom’ and ‘becoming’, it seems evident that Anisa’s consultations with diviners have encouraged her to undergo a journey of personal transformation, as was also reported by Judith (2008). Since leaving the Christian church, Anisa has discovered a kaleidoscope of spiritual practices and beliefs, which have paved the way for self actualisation, transformation and personal development. Through her consultations with diviners, she has developed self confidence, more empathy for others, and has acquired skills to cope better with complex emotional stimuli. Diviners, as documented by Judith (2008) and Nirup (2008) also inspired some ‘a-ha moments’ within Anisa; and it was these that facilitated her intra-and interpersonal growth.

Shared experiences

Literature documents the intrapersonal functioning of individuals who are likely to consult diviners (Beck & Miller, 2001; Musch & Ehrenberg, 2002; Tobaeyk & Milford, 1983), but neglects to report on the nature of interpersonal relationships and patterns of relatedness. The researcher and participant relationship in many ways mirrors the participants’ relationships with others and as such, participant themes can comment on what previous research has overlooked. Anisa, Avril, and Abel’s tendency to defend their viewpoints and vigorously assert their opinions, suggests that they have experienced interpersonal rejection, and have also been ridiculed and labelled. Elise, Abel, and Anisa’s global themes suggest that they are disconnected from significant others because of their unconventional beliefs, and are inclined to question the status quo. It therefore, seems that all participants have struggled to experience belonging and are disconnected from significant others.

A large body of research is available on the worldview and religious beliefs of individuals who believe in the superstitious and paranormal. Worldview as a concept is interpreted differently by various researchers. According to Aarnio and Lindeman’s (2007) conceptualisation, Abel, Elise, and Anisa would have an esoteric worldview as all projected a belief in planes of higher existence and spiritual beings. From Aarnio and Lindeman’s (2007) definition of worldview, Abel and Anisa would be ‘paranormal’ believers and Avril, Elise, and Vanessa ‘double’ believers. In terms of religious beliefs, Anisa who is Catholic and Elise, who is Jewish, appear equally interested in divination and regularly consult diviners and this does not concur with
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Wagner’s (cited in Tyson, 1979) findings that Catholics are less likely than Jews to have superstitious beliefs.

Locus of control orientation

In order to ground the discussion pertaining to the participants’ locus of control orientations, Table 1 provides each participant’s locus of control orientation as it pertains to differentiating variables.

Table 1: Locus of control orientations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Avril</th>
<th>Elise</th>
<th>Abel</th>
<th>Vanessa</th>
<th>Anisa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Chance’ Scale</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Externality</td>
<td>Externality</td>
<td>Externality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Powerful Others’ Scale</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Context specific</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ‘External Orientation’</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Externality</td>
<td>Externality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Internal’ Scale</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Context specific</td>
<td>Internality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Total Locus of Control’ Scale</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Context specific</td>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Internality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avril, Elise, Abel, and Anisa all displayed internality on the ‘internal’ scale, which indicated that these four participants strongly believed that they have control over their own lives (Rotter, 1966). Vanessa was the only participant who obtained a mid-point score on this scale; and this suggests that her perception of whether or not she controls her own life is relative to the context. Avril, Elise, Vanessa, and Anisa all presented with internality on the ‘total locus of control’ scale, which means that they perceived their lives and the outcome of situations to be determined by their own actions (Lefcourt, 1981). This study therefore, challenges one of the most pertinent findings in literature; namely, that individuals with an external locus of control orientation are more likely to consult diviners and have paranormal and superstitious beliefs (Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Irwin, 1993; Jahoda, 1969; Pelzer, 2003; Scheidt, 1973; Stanke, 2004; Tobacyk et al., 1988; Tyson, 1979; Vyse, 1997). Avril, Elise, Vanessa, and Anisa displayed internality on the ‘powerful others’ scale, and this implies that they are less dependent on external reinforcement (Joe, 1971; Levenson, 1973; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966; Steptoe & Appels, 1989). Abel, Vanessa, and Anisa are more inclined to believe that their world is unpredictable, given that they believe ‘chance’ and ‘luck’ intercepts their lives. Avril and Elise are more likely to describe their lives as ordered, structured and predictable (Rotter, 1966) as they do not believe in the influence of ‘chance’ or ‘luck’.
Birth order did not, as suggested by Lao (cited in Lefcourt, 1981), influence individuals’ locus of control orientation. Avril, the oldest participant, and Anisa, the youngest participant, both had internal locus of control orientations, despite their age discrepancies – this also suggests no correlation between age and locus of control orientation (Lao, cited in Lefcourt, 1981).

**Integrative analysis of interview themes and locus of control orientation**

Of interest is whether or not participants’ interview themes resonate with findings pertaining to locus of control orientation. For purposes of this article, the first author has grouped the main premises of each of Rotter’s (1966) scales into three locus of control themes: ‘self’, ‘control’, and ‘others/environment’. The locus of control theme of ‘self’ covers the ‘Internal’ scale; ‘control’ the ‘Powerful others’ scale and ‘others/environment’ the ‘Chance’ scale (see Table 2). Although documented independently, there is a strong overlap between the themes as one informs the other.

**Table 2: Interview themes and locus of control themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus of control theme: ‘self’</th>
<th>Locus of control theme: ‘control’</th>
<th>Locus of control theme: ‘others/environment’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avril’s themes</strong></td>
<td>‘Soul expression’</td>
<td>‘Creating order’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elise’s themes</strong></td>
<td>‘Self assessment’</td>
<td>‘Influence’, ‘Perfectionism’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abel’s themes</strong></td>
<td>‘Interdependence’</td>
<td>‘Illusions’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vanessa’s themes</strong></td>
<td>‘Helplessness’</td>
<td>‘Incomplete themes’, ‘Connection within the context of disconnection’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that Avril, Elise, Vanessa, and Anisa have an internal locus of control orientation and Abel a context specific one, the researcher synthesized only the literature pertaining to an *internal* locus of control orientation (Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Joe, 1971; Tobacyk et al., 1988; Levenson, 1973).
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**Locus of control theme: ‘Self’**

Avril, Elise, and Anisa all seemed to utilize the methods of divination and its ‘teachings’ to facilitate more healthy and effective intra- and interpersonal functioning. Abel, as reflected in his theme of ‘proactivity versus reactivity’, also encountered a ‘metamorphic’ process of interpersonal growth but he, unlike the other participants, preferred to source his ‘spirituality’ to achieve this. Pittman and Pittman (cited in Lefcourt, 1981) are of the opinion that individuals with an external locus of control orientation are likely to continue making the same mistakes and often report elevated levels of helplessness. Helplessness featured as Vanessa’s global theme, but she, contrary to what has been reported in literature, has an internal locus of control orientation.

**Locus of control theme: ‘Control’**

Elise, as evident in her themes of ‘influence’ and ‘perfectionism’ tried to create contexts for herself, in which she could experience increased control and manageability over her life. Avril consulted with diviners to ‘create order’ and stability in her life. For Vanessa, the themes of ‘connection within the context of disconnection’ and ‘incomplete themes’ demonstrate that she, despite her husband’s death and the negative consequences thereof, reclaimed control over her life after consulting diviners. Anisa strongly opposed the ‘control’ and ‘rigidity’ imposed on her by others and advocates for ‘freedom’ of beliefs. Abel, on the other hand, welcomed reciprocal influence and persuasion, as he tried to influence and persuade others, while simultaneously allowing others to exercise influence and control over him. Avril and Elise were the only two participants who had an internal locus of control orientation and also believed that their lives were not controlled by ‘chance’ or ‘powerful others’, and yet it was their global interview themes which prominently emphasised the need to ‘create order’ and ‘control’.

**Locus of control theme: ‘Others/Environment’**

Vanessa permitted others to control her and was overly concerned about the opinion of others, but since consulting diviners, her actions have become less dependent on external reinforcement. Abel, as demonstrated in his themes of ‘proactivity versus reactivity’, ‘transformation/conservation’ and ‘interdependence’, seemed to be negotiating a balance between changing his beliefs because of reinforcement from others (externality) and resisting external influence and pressure (internality). Anisa (‘transformation’) and Avril (‘creating order’) were the two participants most likely to resist intimidation and coercion by others.
IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

The salient themes from the participants’ interviews suggest that clinicians should explore the divinatory experiences of individuals and acknowledge the divinatory context as a support system, facilitator of interpersonal growth and soundboard for many who seek direction and reassurance. By inquiring about divinatory experiences, a clinician gains access into an individual’s world of struggles and vulnerabilities and comes to know which areas of the psyche have been wounded. For those clinicians who neglect to engage in or are weary of discussions pertaining to divination, it is hoped that this research will stimulate a new appreciation for and understanding of the divinatory context, thereby challenging some of the negative stereotypes associated with consulting diviners. Furthermore, it appears that this study taps into the domain of the transpersonal, given that participants communicated about their spiritual and self transcendent experiences. Therapeutically, dialoguing about the existential and transpersonal domains of an individual’s functioning is invaluable as it, for example, facilitates ‘building resilience by helping a person to draw from spiritual resources when confronting life’s adversities; and mobilising relational support during crises’ (Griffith, 2005).

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

One of the strengths of this study is that is provokes the need for future research. It also has the potential to evoke ‘heated’ debates, amplify and challenge differences of opinions and as such, energises avenues for psychological research. The design served the study well as it encouraged respect for differences and appreciation for individuality. Additional strengths of this study are that it uniquely documented individuals’ experiences with diviners, and is one of the few to address the relationship between locus of control orientation and experiences with diviners. The study also has exploratory and descriptive value and has contributed towards the limited body of knowledge available on the topic.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher acknowledges that her participation influenced the way in which the interviews were constructed and recognises that her perceptions tainted how she ‘dialogued’ with the information and documented findings. A shortcoming of this study pertains to the literature review. Reports from recent literature were not cited and internet sites were referenced, both of which, impact the study’s validity. The study was also not punctuated from various theoretical and psychological frameworks and as such, has weaker psychological sophistication.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first author recommends that:

Future studies should explore the variables influencing the shift from being a predominant ‘religious believer’ to becoming either a ‘paranormal believer’ or ‘double believer’.

Individuals’ experiences with diviners be conceptualised within the context of existential theories.

A longitudinal study be conducted in which participants are given Levenson’s (1973) Locus of Control Questionnaire to complete before their first consultation, and a few months after their initial consultation and that comparisons be made.

That the study should explore the role of psychologists versus the role of diviners during periods of psychological ‘distress’

Researchers explore whether individuals who have a ‘calling for healing’ or describe themselves as intuitive are more likely to consult diviners

Researchers test the hypothesis that ‘individuals consulting diviners believe their lives are controlled by ‘chance’.

NOTE

1 Not the participants’ real names.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Prior to obtaining her M.A. in Clinical Psychology, Nicole Schluep qualified as a social worker and focused on the treatment of alcohol and substance dependence. She is currently an intern psychologist at a psychiatric hospital. Her interests include alternative healing practices and paranormal experiences.

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REFERENCES


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