Letters to the Editor

More on Psychomanteum Experimentation

To the Editor:

I usually do not respond to material printed in journals, but I feel obligated to speak out about my concern in regard to a letter in the Winter 1998 issue of the Journal, entitled “Risks of Psychomanteum Experimentation” (Brodsky, 1988). Like Beverly Brodsky, I too agree with some of Bruce Greyson’s (1996) cautions regarding the use of the psychomanteum, as presented in his review of Raymond Moody and Paul Perry’s Reunions (1993). What I must strongly object to is the publication of Brodsky’s letter, because the material presented was extremely slanted. The consequences of utilizing a psychomanteum listed by Brodsky totally misrepresent this device and are inaccurate.

Brodsky wrote that she found “the mirror’s capacity for calling upon and being visited unawares by spirits, to be personally chilling” (p. 142). She then added that, after she and a couple of her friends performed their own experiments with a psychomanteum, several of these individuals were plagued with a variety of traumas, ranging from severe emotional distress to physical ailments. She continued by suggesting that the break-up of a marriage for one of the participants was also related to the psychomanteum experience: “Even sadder was the fate of the third participant, a near-death experiencer who seemed to be very stable and well adjusted prior to this time, despite the rape and murder of her teenage daughter several years ago. Her marriage... broke up, and her daughter, the twin of the murdered daughter who was visited in the psychomanteum, ran off with a man who had previously been jailed for kidnaping her” (p. 142).

As a clinician who has worked with thousands of trauma survivors across the nation and who has published six books on topics related to this issue, I will agree that experimentation with the psychomanteum, along with near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, kundalini meditation, past-life regression, guided visual imagery, hypnosis, therapeutic empty chair work, after-death communication experiences, and
a whole host of other psychologically or spiritually based activities can trigger for the participants strong emotions, unresolved grief issues, inner conflict, confusion, and existential crisis, and even repressed traumatic experiences. I have spent most of my professional life exploring trauma, and I am fully aware that experiences in the here and now are very capable of pulling up, from the consciousness or unconscious, feelings related to past trauma experiences (see Wills-Brandon, 1990). And, as a result of this, some individuals can act out with addictive behavior, self-destructive actions, and many other dysfunctions. There will always be consequences to any form of personal growth activity. How these consequences are handled is dependent upon the mental health of the individual at that time.

To state or insinuate that the psychomanteum or any other such activity is directly responsible for the consequences presented in this letter is, in my opinion, extremely inaccurate; and for the Journal to publish this letter is concerning. Material such as this tells only part of a much more involved story and gives the reader a very biased presentation. Also, such action encourages the author and reader to focus on the psychomanteum as the total basis for psychological distress, preventing the resolution of the true causes of such triggered consequences. The publication of Brodsky’s letter has distracted the intense psychological stress of a murder, rape, divorce, or kidnaping off these tragedies and placed it squarely on the shoulders of the psychomanteum experience.

The psychomanteum did not create the psychological difficulties discussed in Brodsky’s letter. What it did do is act as a catalyst for difficulties that were already present before the experience. As an individual who deals with trauma survivors weekly, I can tell you that mundane experiences such as listening to the radio, watching a movie, or reading a book can create a great deal of emotional pain for trauma survivors who have not completely worked through the pain of their loss, abuse, anger, or grief. The environment is full of triggers capable of revealing pain that was once forgotten.

I hope that in the future, all the facts of a situation such as this will be explored completely before being presented in a forum such as the Journal.

References


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