

## EXPLORING APHANTASIA AND EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Christine Simmonds-Moore

University of West Georgia, USA

### Grant 179/22

**Background:** Humans range in their capacity to voluntarily experience visual mental imagery. Some experience a total lack of visual imagery, or aphantasia, while others experience vivid, photographic-like visual imagery which is known as hyperphantasia (Zeman et al., 2020). Imaging ability is implicated in memory, daydreaming, dreaming and creativity (cf. Zeman et al., 2020) and may play a role in exceptional experiences (ExE), including extrasensory perception (ESP) (Hume & Lawrence, 2005). There are different ways of experiencing anomalies (Belz & Fach, 2015) and different types of ESP experience (L.E. Rhine, 2018). The specific roles of imagery vividness (and a lack of imagery) in the etiology of different types of ExE is under-studied.

**Aims:** To explore 1). How imaging abilities correlate differently to different forms of ExE (with a particular focus on aphantasia), 2). How synesthesia interacts with aphantasia in terms of ExE and 3). The lived experience of aphantasia, and its contribution to ExE. This will be explored in a mixed methods two-stage project (survey and interview). Aphantasics will be selected for in depth interviews following participation in the survey.

**Method:** An online survey explored imagery vividness (VIVIQ), synesthesia (via one question), ExE (the PExE-II, a recent development of the PAGE-R consisting of scales measuring external, internal, dissociative and coincidence phenomena), 4 questions tapped L.E. Rhine's realistic, unrealistic, intuitive and hallucinatory types of ESP and an open ended question about ExE. Respondents were categorized into 3 groups of imager (aphantasia, mid imager, hyperphantasia) based on Zeman et al (2020).

**Preliminary results:** Hyperphantasics scored significantly higher than aphantasics and mid imagers on external, internal, and coincidence phenomena. Hyperphantasics scored higher than mid imagers on dissociative phenomena. Aphantasics were no different to mid imagers on ExE. Some aphantasics reported ESP experiences, while others reported none. Some aphantasics reported synesthesia. Realistic, unrealistic and intuitive ESP were associated with imagery vividness. Hallucinatory ESP was unrelated to vividness of imagery and may have a different etiology.

**Keywords:** Imagery vividness, Aphantasia, Hyperphantasia, Synesthesia, Exceptional experiences

**E-mail contact:** [csimmond@westga.edu](mailto:csimmond@westga.edu)