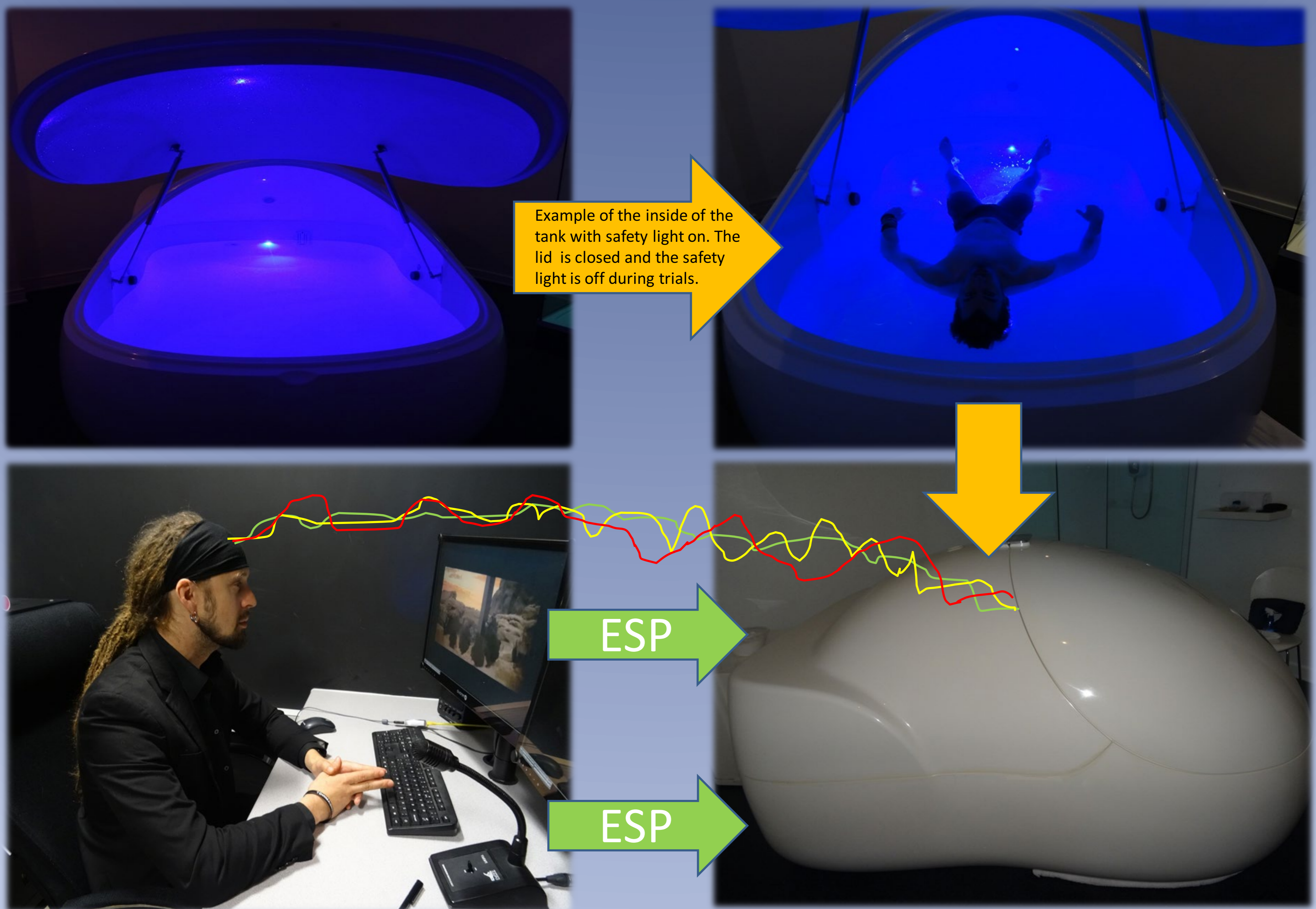


A Pilot Study of Floatation Tanks and Sensory Isolation in Producing Psi-Conducive Imagery

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BACKGROUND: Studies of psi through altered-states of consciousness are notoriously associated in parapsychology with the ganzfeld. Though opinions on the contribution of this methods have varied over time, it created a huge turning point for parapsychological research and in many cases produced compelling results (see Honorton, 1985; Hyman & Honorton, 1986). However, in 1969, John Lilly — one of the pioneers of sensory deprivation through floatation tank method — gave a speech to the Parapsychological Association Convention arguing for the use of this apparatus within parapsychology, to explore its potential for eliciting psi imagery (Lilly, 1969). Since this recommendation, only one pilot study appears to have been conducted. In this study, Rogo (1980) created a self-designed floatation tank, and followed a similar methodological set-up to the ganzfeld, including a red light inside the tank throughout trials, and participants (N = 3) required to wear eye-shields. This procedure was done for half the tests, while in the rest, participants were left to float in complete darkness. Each session lasted 35 minutes, with the first 5 minutes given for relaxation and adjustment to the environment. An agent (friend of the participant) randomly selected an envelope from 20 sets, each containing 'view-master' reels of thematically distinct groups of 4 (1 of the 4 reels, each in sealed envelopes, was randomly selected as the target). During sending times the sender was asked to view the image and try to send it to the receiver in the tank. No sender or receiver was allowed to interact until judging of the targets, decoys, and impressions from the tank was completed and rated. This small scale study demonstrated no significant findings, yet Rogo stated that testing 3 participants over 4 sessions was not likely to achieve significant results. The study served to demonstrate whether the tank could facilitate production of mental imagery, and showed what methodological problems would arise from its use in testing ESP. From exploring related books and journals beyond 1980, no further studies appear to have been carried out regarding floatation, sensory isolation, and ESP.



AIMS: (1) To explore the usefulness of the tanks in promoting potential psi imagery, (2) develop and amend an appropriate methodological procedure for such studies, and (3) identify all ethical concerns when it comes to expanding the study and using a variety of participants invited to take part following the pilot. Additionally, we have attempted to act on the suggestions given by Lilly (1969) and Rogo (1980) with regards to the use of the tanks in parapsychological exploration, and advice given through personal communication with Charles Tart, regarding altered-states within the tank setting.

METHOD: This new pilot study employs only 1 sender and 1 receiver (Saunders and Cooper respectively). A total of 12 trials are being carried out. During each trial, the receiver (located at Calm Water Floatation, Nottingham) telephones the sender (at the University of Northampton's Psychology Division) to state they are about to go in the tank and begin a session (for 1 hour). At that point, the sender begins a computer programme using the Dalton clips (e.g. Dalton, Steinkamp & Sherwood, 1999) which presents a randomly selected video, which the sender views while thinking of the receiver throughout the hour. The receiver relaxes with meditation music for the first 10 minutes, and knows the trial is at an end when the last 5 minutes of music returns, followed by the automatic activation of the blue safety light. The sender notes down which clip they watched, and seals it in an envelope noting on the front which group of clips the target is in. The receiver writes down their impressions once out of the tank and seals them in an envelope. Once all 12 trials are completed, a blind independent judge will rate the impressions against the target clip and three decoys. The study is due to be completed around September 2017, following which the findings, methods, and ethics, will be evaluated and further reported on.