

## **Association Between Anomalous Experiences and Artistic Creativity and Spirituality**

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**ABSTRACT:** Responses on the two-page Life Experiences Questionnaire were collected from a convenience sample of 98 people and, using a modified form of the questionnaire, from another convenience sample of 114 people. Both samples confirmed the previously found positive correlation between psychic or paranormal experiences and rating artistic creativity as an important purpose of life. Likewise, both samples confirmed that spiritual interests, overall meaning in life, and reports of psychic experiences were all correlated with reports of transcendent/spiritual experiences. The data also confirmed that over 90% of the respondents with transcendent experiences considered them valuable. The majority of respondents reporting psychic experiences also rated them valuable. Very few respondents rated either type of experience as detrimental. The previously reported negative relationship between anomalous experiences and interest in obtaining wealth was not found in these data.

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A previous survey of college students found (a) a positive correlation between psychic experiences and self-reported importance of expressing artistic creativity, (b) a positive correlation between transcendent/spiritual experiences and interest in spiritual or religious beliefs, (c) negative correlations between psychic and transcendent experiences and interest in obtaining wealth, and (d) positive correlations between psychic and transcendent experiences and overall meaning in life (Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer, 1994). In addition, that study found that the students tended to rate transcendent experiences as more valuable or beneficial than psychic experiences, and rarely rated either type of experience as detrimental. The previous study also found that reports of psychic experiences were correlated with reports of transcendent experiences. The present report presents the results for these same analyses applied to three other samples.

### **METHODS**

#### *Questionnaire*

The two-page Life Experiences Questionnaire asks respondents several items about their meaning in life, health, well-being, and psychic and transcendent experiences. The final version of the

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questionnaire is provided in the Appendix. The detailed rationale for the questionnaire was described previously (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994).<sup>2</sup> One set of items asks the respondent "to what extent do the following values and motivations give your life meaning and purpose" and includes "express artistic or literary creativity" and "observe spiritual or religious beliefs." The five response options range from "Not at all a purpose of life" to "Extremely important purpose of life." Another item addresses overall meaning in life and asks "Have you found purpose and meaning for your life?" This item has four response options ranging from "very much" to "no."

The transcendent experience question is "Have you ever had a transcendent or spiritual experience (overwhelming feeling of peace and unity with the entire creation, or profound inner sense of Divine presence)?" The initial version of the questionnaire asked about psychic experiences: "Have you ever had a psychic experience (ESP, precognition, telepathy, or mind over matter) or out of body experience?" For each of these experience questions, those who answered yes are asked "What effect did the experience(s) have on your life?" with five response options ranging from "very disruptive, detrimental" to "very valuable, enhanced understanding, appreciation of life." Those who answered no to an experience question are asked "How do you think it would affect you to have such an experience?" with the same five response options plus a "don't know" option.

The psychic experience question was later replaced by a more general question on paranormal phenomena: "Have you ever had a paranormal experience such as psychic phenomena (ESP, precognition, telepathy, mind over matter), out-of-body experience, healing miracle, communication with the dead, apparition, etc.?" We made this change because follow-up investigation of the respondents' "most important" experiences revealed that some of these experiences involved communication with the dead or apparitions rather than simple ESP or PK. To assure uniform interpretation of the scope of the question and to assure that we did not exclude important anomalous experiences, the question was expanded to include explicitly a wide range of paranormal experiences. In addition, the response options for beneficial effects of the experiences were simplified to "very valuable or beneficial."

For purposes of this report, the initial (psychic experience) version of the questionnaire will be called Version 1 and the later (paranormal experience) version will be called Version 2. The previous survey of college students used questionnaire Version 1. In addition to the change in scope of the

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<sup>2</sup>The questionnaire used in the previous study had a third page (Part B) with items for measuring absorption and temporal lobe symptoms. The third page was used only in that study and was not used with the respondents reported here.

paranormal experience question, the questionnaire underwent changes in format and a few minor changes in wording during the course of data collection for the data reported here.

### *Respondents*

The questionnaire was administered on an opportunistic, convenience basis. At this stage, we were primarily interested in questionnaire development and obtaining initial data from a diverse range of people, particularly with a wide range of ages. The respondents can be divided into three groups.

*Sample 1 (Version 1).* Responses on Version 1 of the questionnaire were obtained from 98 people in a diverse sample that included: 9 older adults who attended a talk on parapsychology at a recreation center, 8 members of the Association for Research and Enlightenment (Edgar Cayce group) who attended a talk on parapsychology, 19 retirees attending classes on parapsychology, 4 people who contacted the Institute for Parapsychology by phone or mail, 15 members of the Institute staff or their family or friends, 9 drop-in visitors to the Institute, 22 college students taking a course on psychological research methods, 6 college students attending a talk on parapsychology, and 6 college students from the previous college student survey (Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer, 1994) who returned their questionnaires late.

*Sample 2 (Version 2).* Responses on Version 2 of the questionnaire were obtained from 114 people in a diverse sample that included: 9 participants in the 1994 Summer Study Program at the Institute for Parapsychology, 12 college students in a psychology class that visited the Institute, 7 people who contacted the Institute by phone or mail, 2 Institute staff members, 2 drop-in visitors to the Institute, and 82 respondents to a mailing to 1200 names on a list of people who had ordered books or other products related to paranormal phenomena.

*High School Sample.* Responses on Version 1 of the questionnaire were obtained from 91 high school students in psychology classes.

Samples 1 and 2 are primarily people with an active interest in parapsychology. The high school sample is a more unselected group. These data constitute all of the completed questionnaires that were obtained by November 30, 1994 when support for this research project terminated.

### *Hypotheses and Data Analysis*

Based on the findings from the previous survey of college students, our hypotheses for the present analyses were that (a) artistic purpose in life will correlate positively with psychic or paranormal experiences, (b) spiritual purpose in life will correlate positively with transcendent experiences, (c) interest in obtaining wealth will correlate negatively with psychic/paranormal and transcendent experiences, (d) overall meaning in life will correlate positively with both types of

experiences, (e) transcendent experiences will be consistently rated as valuable, while psychic or paranormal experiences will be mixed between valuable and no effect, and (f) psychic/paranormal experiences will be correlated with transcendent experiences.

We originally planned to combine the data from Versions 1 and 2 of the questionnaire. However, as discussed in the following section, the responses to the experience questions differed significantly between the two groups, as did certain sample characteristics. Therefore, these two samples are analyzed separately. We considered the high school student data to be exploratory and did not make predictions about the outcomes for those data.

Pearson correlations were used for statistical analyses because they give useful effect size measures as well as statistical significance. The correlation probability values were verified with randomization tests (Edgington, 1987). The specific null hypothesis for each test is that there is no association between the two variables in this sample, or equivalently, that the observed degree of association in the sample due to chance fluctuations. The fundamental statistical test of this null hypothesis is a permutation or randomization test based on the idea that if there is no association between two variables in the sample, then any observation for one variable could have been paired with any observation of the other variable (Koch, Gillings, and Stokes, 1980). The probability that the actual outcome (original correlation) is due to chance is evaluated by counting the number of permutations of the sample that give more extreme outcomes (correlations) than the original pairings.

The basic permutation strategy underlies virtually all statistical analyses that are not applied to a strictly random sample from a defined population, and, in particular, is the basis for most experimental studies (Edgington, 1987). Parametric statistical methods generally provide useful and convenient approximations to permutation analyses (Koch, Gillings, & Stokes, 1980; Lehmann, 1959). Traditionally they have been used whenever possible because permutation methods historically were not computationally feasible and because permutation methods unfortunately do not readily provide measures of confidence intervals or effect size.

As with any survey or experiment without a strictly random sample from a defined population, the extent to which the results for this sample generalize to other samples must be determined by additional research. Permutation tests evaluate the *internal validity* of data and provide conclusions about one specific sample (Koch, Gillings, & Stokes, 1980). This is often the first step in investigating a hypothesis. The questions of why the association occurred in the sample and to what extent the association occurs in a broader population also must be addressed and normally require more expensive methodology that often must be justified based on initial data such as the present data. In many areas of applied and/or experimental research, consistent findings for a diverse range of nonrandom samples

lead to high confidence in the generalizability of a result.

It may be useful to remember that the reliability of single-item measures such as used here is normally low and results in underestimates of the true magnitude of the relationship between constructs. All data were double checked after data entry. The probability values presented here are two-tailed and uncorrected for multiple analyses. This approach is consistent with the analyses in the previous study and allows easy comparison with other studies.

## RESULTS

Of the 98 Sample 1 (Version 1) respondents, 56% reported psychic experiences and 60% reported transcendent experiences. Females were 79% of the sample. The mean age was 39 and ranged from 16 to 84, with a median of 27. About 45% were under age 25, 14% were age 25 to 39, 15% were age 40 to 59, and 26% were age 60 or over.

Of the 114 Sample 2 (Version 2) respondents, 85% reported paranormal experiences and 72% reported transcendent experiences. Females were 67% of the sample. Their mean age was 43 and ranged from 16 to 89, with a median of 41. About 20% were under age 25, 27% were age 25 to 39, 32% were age 40 to 59, and 21% were age 60 or over.

The Version 2 respondents reported significantly more yes responses to the paranormal experiences question than the Version 1 respondents reported to the psychic experiences question ( $r=.32, p<.0001$ ). Version 2 respondents also reported significantly more beneficial effects from the experiences ( $r=.23, p=.002$ ). The age distribution was significantly different between the two samples; however, the different rates of paranormal/psychic experiences remained significant even when stratified by age group. Version 2 respondents also placed significantly greater importance on artistic creativity ( $r=.23, p=.001$ ) than Version 1 respondents.

Of the 91 respondents in the high school group, 52% reported psychic experiences and 48% reported transcendent experiences. Females were 52% of the sample. About 24% were age 16, 65% were age 17, and 11% were age 18.

Reports of psychic or paranormal experiences were positively and significantly correlated with interest in artistic creativity. As shown in Table 1, the correlation was .29 for both Samples 1 and 2, which compares with .20 for the previous college student sample (also shown in Table 1). The correlation for the high school sample did not approach significance. The correlation between transcendent experiences and artistic interest was significant for the high school sample ( $r=.29$ ) and Sample 2 ( $r=.45$ ), and was suggestive ( $r=.17$ ) for Sample 1. In a further investigation that is reported

separately, we found that among these respondents with experiences, interest in artistic creativity was positively correlated with the number of paranormal experiences ( $r=.30$ ) and with the number of transcendent experiences ( $r=.33$ ) (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995).

Table 1.  
CORRELATION BETWEEN ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCES AND MEANING IN LIFE VARIABLES<sup>a</sup>

	High School N=91		College <sup>b</sup> N=105		Sample/Version 1 N=98		Sample/Version 2 N=114	
	Psychic	Transcendent	Psychic	Transcendent	Psychic	Transcendent	Paranormal	Transcendent
Percent with Experience	52%	48%	41%	42%	56%	60%	85%	72%
Artistic	.12	.29 .006	.20 .04	.08	.29 .004	.17 .09	.29 .002	.45 .0000
Spiritual	.20 .06	.33 .002	.12	.58 .0000	.04	.39 .0001	.17 .07	.41 .0000
Wealth	.03	-.09	-.23 .02	-.22 .02	-.19 .07	.03	-.06	-.12
Overall Meaning in life			.27 .005	.27 .006	.05	.27 .02	.06	.30 .002
Transcendent	.24 .03		.27 .005		.39 .0001		.31 .0009	

<sup>a</sup>The columns are the types of experiences reported in the different samples. The first row is the percent of the sample that reported the corresponding type of experiences. The other rows are the Pearson correlation coefficients between the indicated factor and reports of the occurrence at least once of the corresponding type of anomalous experience. The factors are: importance of artistic creativity, importance of spiritual or religious beliefs, importance of obtaining wealth, and overall meaning in life. The last rows give the correlation between the two types of experiences. The probability values for the correlations are given below each correlation if the probabilities are less than .10. Probabilities of .0000 mean less than .0001. The last row gives the correlation between the two types of experiences. Overall meaning in life data were not collected for the high school group. The sample sizes for the correlations fluctuate slightly because of a few missing values.

<sup>b</sup>The data for the college student sample are from the previously reported study (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994).

Reports of transcendent experiences were positively and very significantly correlated with interest in spirituality for the high school group as well as the two other groups. Interest in spirituality was also suggestively related to paranormal experiences in Sample 2 and to psychic experiences in the high school student sample.

Overall meaning in life was positively and significantly correlated with transcendent experiences in Samples 1 and 2, but showed no evidence of a relationship with psychic or paranormal experiences. Interest in obtaining wealth was not significantly related to either type of experience, although the correlations did tend to be negative.

The occurrence of transcendent experiences and psychic/paranormal experiences was positively and significantly correlated in all three groups (see Table 1).

Table 2.  
EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCES<sup>a</sup>

	High School N=91		College <sup>b</sup> N=105		Sample/Version 1 N=98		Sample/Version 2 N=114	
	Psychic	Transcendent	Psychic	Transcendent	Psychic	Transcendent	Paranormal	Transcendent
Number with Experience(s)	47	44	43	44	55	59	97	82
Percent Valuable	46%	95%	46%	91%	63%	98%	80%	95%
Percent No Effect	36%	5%	51%	7%	29%	0%	12%	1%
Percent Detrimental	18%	0%	2%	2%	8%	2%	8%	4%

<sup>a</sup>The percentage values in the cells are the percent of the number reporting the corresponding type of experience. Percent valuable includes those who indicated the experiences were valuable or very valuable. Percent detrimental includes those who rated the experiences as detrimental or very detrimental. A few people who did not rate the experiences and a few people who marked both detrimental and beneficial are excluded from the percentage calculation.

<sup>b</sup>The data for the college student sample are from the previously reported study (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994).

Consistent with previous results, transcendent experiences were rated as valuable by over 90% of the respondents in all three samples (see Table 2). Psychic or paranormal experiences were rated as valuable to a lesser degree, and the ratings in Samples 1 and 2 were higher than for the high school sample and for the previous college student sample. As expected, few respondents considered their experiences detrimental, particularly their transcendent experiences. The high school group had the greatest number of detrimental ratings. A few respondents (2% to 5% for each type of experience) marked both detrimental and beneficial for the effects of their experiences. These cases are excluded from the percentages given in Table 2 and have only minor effects on the percentages. These cases may indicate different responses to different experiences or simultaneous beneficial and detrimental responses to one experience. One of these respondents rated her psychic experience as "somewhat detrimental" but wrote in the margin "at the time, but I'm learning to make it beneficial." More detailed investigation of the effects of the experiences for some of the respondents in this study are given in a separate paper (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous finding that reports of psychic experiences were positively associated with interest in artistic creativity was confirmed for two adult samples. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found positive correlations between belief in psychic phenomena and creativity scores or artistic studies (Davis, Peterson, & Farley, 1973; Moon, 1975). The apparent relationship between artistic creativity and psi has long been discussed (Davis, Peterson, & Farley, 1973; Moon, 1975), and may have implications for finding talented psi subjects (e.g., Schlitz & Honorton, 1992) as well as for understanding the psychological aspects of psi.

The association between transcendent/spiritual experiences and psychic/paranormal experiences also may have implications for finding psi subjects and for understanding the psychological aspects of psi. This relationship has received relatively little attention in parapsychology.

The relatively strong relationship between transcendent/spiritual experiences and interest in spirituality combined with the weak to nonexistent relationship between psychic/paranormal experiences and spirituality suggests that the relationship between psychic and spiritual experiences may not be simple.

The failure to confirm the negative relationship between interest in obtaining wealth and psychic and transcendent experiences suggests that the previous result may have been a statistical fluke or a peculiarity of that particular college population. However, the data also could be consistent with a very weak effect that has little practical significance.

Although these were not carefully defined random samples, we believe that the consistent findings for the two adult samples are reasonably representative of people who are actively interested in paranormal phenomena and who volunteer to participate in parapsychological research. Of course, these findings, like the results of experiments using similarly recruited subjects, cannot be confidently extended to the general population. We hope that these results will inspire and justify systematic survey research with more general populations. Unfortunately, the percentages of respondents reporting psychic experiences in our samples cannot be compared to previous results from national surveys because the scope of the questions were significantly different in those studies (Davis & Smith, 1994, p. 123; Greeley, 1975; Haraldsson and Houtkooper, 1991).<sup>3</sup> For transcendent experiences, national surveys in the U.S. have consistently found that about 30% to 40% of the population report they have had a spiritual or mystical experience (Bourque, 1969; Davis & Smith, 1994, p. 124; Gallup & Castelli, 1989, pp. 68-69; Greeley, 1975; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985, pp. 182-184), which is substantially lower than the 60% and 72% found in the present samples. Our higher rates of experiences may reflect differences in the wording of the questions as well as differences in the characteristics of the samples.

Confirmation of the finding that the majority of respondents consider their paranormal and transcendent experiences valuable offers exciting research opportunities. The higher ratings of the psychic/paranormal experiences for the older samples than for the college and high school students is consistent with the suggestion made previously (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994) that the effects of anomalous experiences may be more positive as people age, but may also be due to different sampling methods. Systematic life-span research is needed to investigate this possibility.

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<sup>3</sup> The psychic experience questions that have uniformly been used in the national surveys are not closely tied to the concepts of parapsychology and tend to be more narrow in scope. Those questions also tend to be ambiguous as to whether the experiences were potentially paranormal or are believed by the respondent to be paranormal. For example, a key "ESP" or "telepathy" question asks how often the respondent "felt as though you were in touch with someone when you were far away." This question does not indicate any tangible sign of information transfer and possibly may reflect a feeling of a strong emotional bond rather than paranormal phenomena.

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APPENDIX

Life Experiences Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about your values, feelings and experiences. Keep in mind that no answer is right or wrong. All information from this questionnaire is kept confidential. For each question, mark the space or box for the response that best applies to you.

1. How much of the time during the <u>past month</u> . . .						
(Mark <u>one</u> box on each line)	<b>All of the Time</b>	<b>Most of the Time</b>	<b>A Good Bit of the Time</b>	<b>Some of the Time</b>	<b>A Little of the Time</b>	<b>None of the Time</b>
have you felt cheerful, lighthearted? . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
have you been a very nervous person? . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
have you felt so down in the dumps						
nothing could cheer you up? . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
have you felt calm and peaceful? . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
have you felt downhearted and blue? . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
have you been a happy person? . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. To what extent do the following values and motivations give your life meaning and purpose?						
(Mark <u>one</u> box on each line)	<b>Not at All a Purpose of Life</b>	<b>Minor Purpose of Life</b>	<b>Moderate Purpose of Life</b>	<b>Extremely Important Purpose of Life</b>	<b>Important Purpose of Life</b>	
provide for my family's needs . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
enjoy pleasure and leisure activities . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
maintain close relationships with loved ones	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
provide service to others (altruism) . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
express artistic or literary creativity . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
achieve personal growth and understanding	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
observe spiritual or religious beliefs . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
obtain wealth . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
obtain status and recognition . . . . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
work on social or humanitarian causes . .	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
other _____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. In general, would you say your health is: ___excellent ___very good ___good ___fair ___poor						
4. What is your: Sex____ Age____ Education_____ Ethnic Group or Race_____						
5. Do you exercise regularly? ___ Yes ___ No						
6. Do people make you angry or very irritated on most days? ___ Yes ___ No						
7. Do you normally watch your diet and eat low fat foods? ___ Yes ___ No						

8. Do you smoke? <span style="float: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</span>	
9. Was your childhood lonely? <span style="display: block; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> Very Much <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately <input type="checkbox"/> A Little <input type="checkbox"/> Not at All</span>	
10. How many times did you experience severe, painful physical punishment during childhood? <span style="display: block; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Once or Twice <input type="checkbox"/> A Few Times <input type="checkbox"/> Several Times <input type="checkbox"/> Many Times</span>	
11. Are you overweight? <span style="float: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> Very Overweight <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately <input type="checkbox"/> A Little <input type="checkbox"/> Not Overweight</span>	
12. Have you found purpose and meaning for your life? <span style="display: block; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> Very Much <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately <input type="checkbox"/> A Little <input type="checkbox"/> Not at All</span>	
13. Do you wish you had a greater sense of meaning and purpose for your life? <span style="display: block; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> am satisfied with the meaning and purpose <input type="checkbox"/> wish I had more meaning and purpose</span>	
14. Have you ever had a transcendent, mystical, or spiritual experience (overwhelming feeling of peace and unity with the entire creation, or profound inner sense of divine presence)?	
<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> YES</p> <p>If YES, what effect has the experience (or experiences) had on your life?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no effect or negligible effect</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very valuable or beneficial</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>If NO, how do you think it would affect you to have such an experience?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no effect or negligible effect</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> don't know</p>
15. Have you ever had a paranormal experience such as psychic phenomena (ESP, precognition, telepathy, mind over matter), out-of-body experience, healing miracle, communication with the dead, apparition, etc.?	
<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> YES</p> <p>If YES, what effect has the experience (or experiences) had on your life?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no effect or negligible effect</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very valuable or beneficial</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>If NO, how do you think it would affect you to have such an experience?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat disruptive or detrimental</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no effect or negligible effect</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> somewhat valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> very valuable or beneficial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> don't know</p>

**If you answered YES to question 14 or question 15, please continue with the questions on the back of this page. If you answered NO to both question 14 and question 15, you may stop here.**

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