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How Perception Meets Hermeneutics: An Empirical Investigation of Tasseography

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Tasseography is a divination method to provide insight about the seeker’s past, present, or future life by interpreting patterns in the dregs of a liquid. Although it has been practiced with coffee throughout Europe and Middle East, particularly among women, no known studies exist on the seer’s perceptual process of the ambiguous patterns or how the roles of the seeker and seer, symbols, ritual, and cultural epistemology shape the divinatory hermeneutics. This study focused on the Armenian coffee divination ritual, asking what are the processes and conditions that enable experienced cup readers to obtain divinatory insight in tasseography? Two seekers each produced one cup, photographed and presented virtually to roughly half of a sample of 17 female seers through video-recorded virtual sessions. Seers were interviewed about their experiences of providing reading, data triangulated with their reading data and the two seekers’ reflections on the readings. Thematic analysis revealed that tasseographic interpretation is a psychodynamic embodied process, influenced by the seer’s subjective world and informed by intuitive sources, that engenders empathetic attunement with the seeker. Readings revealed significant thematic convergence and relevance to each seeker’s central query, and reflected the seekers’ life at the time the cup was produced rather than at the time of reading. Interpretation convergence occurred independent of perceptual variation, suggesting that the seers’ semiotic processes involve transpersonal states and sources.

Keywords: coffee reading, tasseography, Armenian tasseography, divination, embodied perception, semiotic process

Divination is a structured inquiry through a practice of established ritual and in conjunction with a symbolic system to obtain knowledge about past, present, or future, either from sources within oneself or from a diviner, for healing, problem-solving, guidance, and decision-making (Karcher, 1997, 1998; Kripal, 2014; Larson, 2019; Metzner, 2017; Struck, 2016; Tedlock, 2001). Humans have sought divination to empower themselves over the unknown and gain some sense of control, certainty, and predictability or to receive some assurance from the divine (Gurney, 1981; Larson, 2019; Maul, 2007; Morrison, 1981; Raphals, 2013; Rochberg, 2004). Divination “combines multidimensional inductive, intuitive and interpretative ways of knowing within a dialogical narrative in order to diagnose, to comfort, and to heal” (Tedlock, 2001, p. 194). The diviner is central to the expression and enactment of the cultural truths, the seeker contributes by way of receptivity and trust, and the members of the society partake indirectly through collective endorsement or disapproval of the specific practices and rituals (Guo, 2012; Lévi-Strauss, 1963; Loewe & Blacker, 1981; Peek, 1991).

Material divinations entail “verbal divinatory pronouncements triggered by the outcome of the manipulation (usually in intersubjective, collectively defined ways) of an object … serving as a random generator” (van Binsbergen, 2008, p. 3). The signs are invoked on the spot, have relevance only within the ritual, and the interpretation is based on the immediate context following a particular semiotic system. Examples of material divinations in current practice, embodying Eastern, African, and Western religious and occult traditions, respectively, include the I Ching (Jansen, 2012; King & Skinner, 2000; Loewe, 1981; Müller, 1963; Stoneman, 2011), tia (Bascom, 1969; Karcher, 1997; Peek, 1991; UNESCO ICH, 1992–2002), the runes (Antonsen, 2002; Blum,
and subsequent references to tasseography refer to that coffee ritual.

**Functional Dynamics of Tasseography**

Coffee divination was first practiced in the Arab world around the 16th century when coffee made its way from Africa to Turkey (McHugo, 2013). Originally consumed by Sufi monks as a stimulant and a substitute for wine, coffee drinking quickly became a daily habit throughout the Islamic world (Pendergrast, 2011), giving rise to professional seers who charged for their service as well as common folk who read coffee cups casually within their close circles. Tasseography has remained an understated domestic practice to mediate socializing and bonding, mostly among women, in familiar settings over conversations centered around common life concerns in which the focus is less prophecy and more intersubjective discourse. Hence, it is approached with a relaxed attitude as an instrument of guidance rather than magic, without an aura of mystery attending the cup or the ritual. Armenian tasseography involves the following ritual: (a) coffee is brewed according to the cultural tradition, (b) it is poured into a plain, light-colored porcelain cup to allow the patterns to be seen, (c) the seeker drinks the coffee while thinking of an unspoken question or intention, (d) the cup is inverted over the saucer following a specific method (swirling, turning toward or away from the seeker, etc.), (e) the cup is left to drain for a few minutes to allow the dregs to form patterns, and (f) without being told the seeker’s question or intent, the seer interprets the patterns following the cultural symbol system.

According to Zed (1997), “The reading of coffee grounds demands a much higher degree of inspiration and communication, and an inner strength that takes over and guides the coffee reader” (p. 7). Inner strength refers to the diviner’s ability to pick up the “mysterious system of vibrations that affect the intermediary object” (p. 15), tune in to the seeker’s intention, and translate the signs and their relations to the seeker’s lived world into language. As Larson (2019) suggested, “The integrative narratives that result from such a convoluted process require a high level of competency and their expression requires some esthetic skill as well professional acumen” (p. 86).
An Empirical Investigation of Tasseography

Such “combinatorial interpretations” of multiple elements and “integrative narratives” (Larson, 2019, p. 86) are at the heart of tasseography, in which whole meaning is constructed by putting together fragmented patterns within the hermeneutics of the divinatory context (Aphek & Tobin, 1990). The complexity of such divinatory hermeneutics is compounded by the ambiguity of the images. Perhaps this is why the weight in tasseography is less on decision-making and more on psychospiritual healing, particularly arising from its intersubjective discourse that includes linguistic, visual, ceremonial, social, cultural, and perceptual semiotic systems (Aphek & Tobin, 1990).

According to von Franz (1980), random pattern divination techniques utilize chaotic patterns that catalyze unconscious knowledge projected into the images. She postulated that disordered images confuse the conscious mind as it tries to make sense of ambiguity, lowering its psychic energy and activating the unconscious, thereby enabling imagination to express itself. She suggested that this “primitive divination technique has been rediscovered … in the Rorschach test” (p. 40). Indeed, Rorschach’s (1921/2013) eponymous experiment, introduced in 1921, assessed the “perceptive power of the subject” (chapter 1, heading 3, para. 7) from responses to 10 inkblot cards containing abstract and ambiguous images. The Rorschach test (RT) was rooted in the principle that pictures produce feelings and sensations in the viewer, triggered by conscious and unconscious associations with previous experiences, thereby revealing “the pattern of perceptive process” (chapter 4, heading 12, para. 2). How one visually integrates the incoherent forms reflects one’s inner coherence, revealing how one structures and organizes life experiences and responds to them affectively at the current moment (Exner, 2003; Frank, 1949). RT became one of the leading projective clinical tests in the world (Exner, 2003; Kleiger, 2015) after Frank’s (1949) projective hypothesis suggested that when the stimulus field lacks objective content, interpretation of the perceptual input is influenced by the observer’s subjective world, which reveals implicit personality characteristics (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2010; Exner, 2003; Meyer & Kurtz, 2006). Unlike structured stimuli that elicit specific responses, ambiguous stimuli elicit projections over a broad range of responses, revealing material the individual is not aware of. According to Frank (1949), unstructured stimuli “offer a ground upon which the subject must impose or project whatever configural patterns he ‘sees’ therein, because he can only see what he personally looks for or ‘perceives’ in that ground” (pp. 471–472).

The psychological mechanism behind perception of ambiguous forms has since been known as pareidolia, a universal ability to perceive meaningful patterns in amorphous shapes or random stimuli, such as rock formations and clouds (Bednarik, 2017; Rieth et al., 2011; Schott, 2014; Sheen & Jordan, 2016). Pareidolia is mediated by the visual system as a survival mechanism to rapidly disambiguate and organize sensory input for a timely and appropriate response (Bednarik, 2017; Shermer, 2008). Pareidolia involves both conscious and subconscious processes and is influenced by personality traits, life experiences, and cultural conditioning, and therefore varies greatly among individuals (Bednarik, 2017; van Gaal & Lamme, 2012). The ability to perceive and interpret patterns in meaningless data in general is central to many superstitious and paranormal beliefs (van Elk, 2015).

Although imagination plays an important role in pareidolia (Aphek & Tobin, 1990), turning fragments of random, static images into a dynamic story involves a complex perceptual process. Rorschach (1921/2013) discovered that perception of movement in the inkblots (kinesthesia) corresponded to distinct psychological operations (Exner & Erdberg, 2005; Mihura et al., 2013) arising from internalizing the external image such that the subject feels the inner movement induced by the image in their body (Porcelli et al., 2013; Schott, 2014; Sears, 2017). Kinesthesia is expressed as embodied empathy as the subject loses their sense of fixed identity and becomes one with the object’s world (Akavia, 2013; Kleiger, 2015; Rorschach, 1921/2013; Sears, 2017). The human movement (M) response in RT, in particular, has been clinically linked to imagination, creativity, social cognition, and empathy (Mihura et al., 2013; Porcelli et al., 2013). Brain areas related to the
mirror neuron system (MNS) were activated when people imagined or felt movement in static inkblots, linking M responses with the MNS (Giromini et al., 2010; Pineda et al., 2011; Porcelli et al., 2013) and confirming findings linking M responses with higher interpersonal psychological functioning, including perspective taking, identifying with and relating to others, empathetic concern, and understanding others’ mental states and intentions.

Examples of M responses in RT include (Exner & Erdberg, 2005) “two little girls talking to each other” (p. 85) and “a man and woman about to embrace” (p. 1041). Dynamic stories, often portraying human action, emerge in tasseography, laden with animated narratives with specific characters in the seeker’s life, suggesting that the perceptual process in tasseography mediated by pareidolia likely contributes to empathy, relatedness, and psychoemotional attunement with the seeker. Such an emotionally supportive and mutually validated “holding environment” (Semetsky, 2006a, p. 191) created by the ritual potentiates its therapeutic effects (Semetsky, 2005; Tedlock, 2001), which might explain the value placed on the tasseography ritual by some cultures. Both pareidolia and empathy are predominantly mediated by the right hemisphere (van Gaal & Lamme, 2012), which also correlates with belief in the paranormal (Brugger & Mohr, 2008); hence, pareidolia may be stronger among diviners.

Although RT has been administered to millions since its inception (Exner, 2003; ISR, 2019), it has been repeatedly criticized for the validity of its variables and inter-rater reliability (Exner & Erdberg, 2005; Mihura et al., 2013). However, the controversy lay not in the functional validity of its conceptual framework but in its clinical validity as a psychodiagnostic device. RT here is presented for its value on the phenomenology of embodied perception and functional mechanism rather than its psychodiagnostic merits—particularly since its validity outside the diagnostic frame has been proven for multiple applications (e.g., forensic consultations, academic performance, behavior assessment, etc.; Exner, 2003).

What distinguishes RT and tasseography are set (expectation, intention, mood, and attitude) and setting (the physical and social context, including the participants’ attitudes and intentions; Metzner, 2017). Intentions serve as a “selective device” for which specific images must “be raised into consciousness from a range of alternatives” (Aphek & Tobin, 1990, p. 181). In the RT, the subject’s only intention is to provide verbal answers to the examiner’s question, “What might this be?” (Exner, 2003), while viewing the inkblots. Hence, the inkblots are perceived as raw images associated with inner representations shaped by the subject’s experiences, reflecting their psychological structure (Exner, 2003; Rorschach, 1921/2013). In the divinatory context, the perceptual process is guided by the seeker’s unspoken inquiry or intention, giving rise to a semiotic process of interpretation and meaning making, which turns the raw images into symbols and facilitates communication with the mystical world (Herman, 2015; Johnson, 1989; Jung 1993; Semetsky, 2013; von Franz, 1980). Consequently, divinatory hermeneutics are anchored in two representation systems: subjective, arising from the perceptual process, and objective, arising from the semiotic process (Semetsky, 2006b). The former stems from the seer’s conscious and unconscious beliefs and impressions arising from the personal unconscious; the latter includes standard guidelines pertaining to the various attributes of the signs and their essential symbolic representations arising from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1993; Rochberg, 2004; von Franz, 1980), colored by cultural character (Campbell & Moyer, 1991; Eliade, 1991). The collective unconscious projected on the divinatory images is experienced as synchronicity, the connection of an inner psychological event (such as insight, thought, or feeling) and an outer physical event connected by subjective meaning rather than causally (Combs & Holland, 2001; Jung, 1993, 2010; von Franz, 1980).

Hence, the divination ritual can catalyze altered states of mind and energy, enabling subliminal knowledge to emerge into awareness (Combs & Holland, 2001; Herman, 2015; Johnson, 1989; Metzner, 2017, 2018; Stein, 1983; Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1974; von Franz, 1980). Such intuitive perceptions, sometimes called “gut feelings” or “sixth sense,” are inaccessible to consciousness and
rational processes (Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012; Epstein, 2010; Gigerenzer, 2007; Petitmengin, 2007; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005). Intuitive thinking is automatic, effortless, emotional, a verbal, context-specific, and operates by heuristic rules through associations, images, metaphors, and approximation, and therefore is considered intrinsically imprecise. Although unreliable, intuitive insight often provides knowledge otherwise unavailable outside ordinary consciousness (Jung, 1993) and is often accurate in social perceptions helping people emotionally apprehend others, particularly their internal states (Lieberman, 2000). Intuition appears more developed in some people than others, while those with stronger intuitive abilities are also believed to have the telepathic skills to read other people’s thoughts (Erickson, 2011). Such intuitive cognition enables affective attunement between diviner and seeker, loosening the boundaries between them. Boundary permeability and affect synchronization create sympathetic tuning between people, much like in therapeutic relationships (Petitmengin, 2007; Semetsky, 2005), enabling the diviner to tap into the seeker’s psyche. The diviner–seeker interaction dynamics are grounded in such sympathetic resonance. In fact, in the absence of energetic and emotional attunement with the seeker, diviners cannot perform effective readings (Combs & Holland, 2001; von Franz, 1980).

The phenomenon in which the dregs form specific patterns in the moment for a particular seeker that give rise to the seer’s insight is regarded as a random coincidence or chance event in the scientific paradigm, but not in the world of divination. Divination ideally is a parapsychological process involving intuition and precognition.

Method

The study was conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which required contactless procedures precluding studying the Armenian coffee ritual in its traditional setting. Hence, the study design replaced the divinatory instrument (coffee cup with dregs) produced in an in-person social setting involving seer and seeker with multiple photographic images of the coffee patterns formed in the cup and having seers interpret them remotely for the seeker in a real-time virtual face-to-face setting held via Zoom. Although the $2.2 billion psychic services industry in the United States (Statista, n.d.) provides various services via virtual platforms for remote clients (e.g., Kasamba.com; keen.com), it was foreseeable that the virtual design might involve unknowable effects on the coffee reading process, most notably undermining the intimate, social nature of a traditional ritual.

In this modified design, two Armenian seekers at different life stages independently posed a question during a coffee ritual they each carried out alone by brewing the coffee, sipping with intention, overturning the cup, and waiting for the sediments to dry. They took photographs of the patterns produced and were then matched with seers who read the digital cup images remotely during Zoom conferences with the researcher observing in the background. After the reading, the researcher interviewed the seers about their reading, and the seekers filled out a questionnaire about their response to the reading and the seer. Both the cup and seeker’s intention were held constant across each seeker’s readings to minimize confounds and assess how different seers perceived the same visual images and interpreted the same cup for the same seeker.

Each session involved one AV-recorded individual, real-time virtual reading performed by each seer for the seeker while the researcher observed virtually and one private, AV-recorded virtual interview with each seer following the reading. Interviews focused on the seers’ inner processes of interpreting the cup and communicating the messages based on their usual experiences, as well as the specific reading they provided preceding the interview. The reading was intended to provide additional real-time data for how interpretation is formulated, delivered, and received from both the observer’s objective and the seeker’s subjective perspectives, as well as to put the seer in the ritual frame of mind and enable the researcher to relate the interview to the specific procedural elements observed. Triangulating the reading with the interview data provided insight on the content, style, and pattern of the seer’s communication in the reading process, including information the seer
solicits or gathers from the seeker and processes the seer may not be aware of and/or may not explicitly state during the interview that may be observable. The seekers’ reflections of their individual cup reading experience with the respective seers were gathered to understand the interpretation process from the seekers’ perspectives and provide triangulation from a different source. Data included (a) the seers’ and seekers’ verbal and nonverbal behavior during the reading, (b) their intersubjective communication dynamics, and (c) other procedural details.

Participants

Two women in diverse life stages were chosen as seekers for variation in experience, life situation, intention, and energetic presence. Seekers were required to speak and understand English and Armenian. Eligibility criteria for seer-participants included adequate English or Armenian language competency, at least 10 years of tasseography experience, either amateur (performing strictly in social circles free of charge) or professional (charging a fee) status, ability and willingness to read remotely and be observed, AV recorded, and interviewed, and access to appropriate technology. Minimum age requirement for the seers was 30 years to ensure they had enough experience and would be perceived as mature and credible by seekers. Seers could have any occupation, marital status, education level, and religious affiliation because these factors are not known to influence the ability to read. Candidates unable to communicate clearly in either language or not comfortable with virtual reading were excluded as were men, since Armenian cup readers are traditionally females, Armenian tasseography is centered around female readers, and female readers may be more entrusted with cup reading within the culture, which may influence the seer’s belief in her own technique and performance and the seeker’s comfort level and trust in them. The study was conducted in English or Armenian, depending on each seer’s preference.

Recruitment

To reach a geographically diverse population, seers were recruited by snowball sampling via postings on Armenian Facebook community sites and through friends and family in the United States, Armenia, and internationally. Qualified candidates were contacted via messenger, email, or phone to assess eligibility. Seers were briefed on the details of the study and their role and were asked to sign an electronic consent form upon agreeing to participate, in the language of their choice. Participants’ demographic data were gathered. Recruitment proceeded until sufficient qualified seers had completed the protocol to provide robust data. No incentives were offered except the standard rate for professional seers.

Procedure

Before their initial reading, each seeker independently identified a query with most significance to her life and produced one cup through her personal coffee ritual with that intention. This intention was never revealed to the seers but was transparent to the researcher. The seeker produced five digital images of the interior of her cup, four taken with cup handle pointing four directions (right, down, left, and up), and the fifth of the bottom of the cup (Appendices A, A1–5 & B, B1–5), after the seeker had stamped it with her finger (traditionally this step is performed at the end of the reading to produce a new configuration in the sediments that the seer reads as the final step in the ritual). The digital images were cropped and edited to improve the visual quality and were utilized in all reading sessions for that seeker; the images were provided to each seer prior to the scheduled reading for additional access to the instrument on their smartphone.

To minimize the time lapse between each seeker’s first and last readings and keep the instrument as “fresh” and relevant to the seeker’s life situation as possible, readings were scheduled with the same seeker as qualified seers became available until the projected half of the seer sample completed the study, at which point the second seeker’s readings were scheduled, and her cup was produced right before her initial reading, with the goal to secure as many sessions with the second seeker within comparable period of time.

The virtual reading between seer and seeker began with the researcher’s video and audio functions disabled to minimize potential distractions, followed by an interview with the seer.
Seer and seeker were briefly introduced by first names, procedural details were explained, and the cup images were projected on the screen as the seer requested them. No other information about the seeker was revealed to the seer. The recorded session started with the researcher hidden from view and the cup image taking central stage on the screen, minimizing the participants’ video screens through which they could view each other. The seers had the option to view the cup images on their smartphone. Researcher rotated the active image and zoomed in and out as requested. The reading proceeded without a preset time restriction until the seer signaled completion. The researcher’s video and audio functions were restored, any questions were addressed, the seeker left the meeting, and the seer interview began. The seeker independently rated the reading by completing and submitting an electronic Reading Reflection Report (RRR; Appendix C). The interview entailed a semistructured inquiry about the seer’s inner processes of obtaining, interpreting, and communicating insight in general as well as in the context of the preceding reading (Appendix D).

**Treatment of Data**

The dataset included AV records of the readings and seer interviews, the seekers’ RRRs, digital images of both instruments, seers’ demographic information, and researcher’s field notes and personal reflections. Participant identities were masked in all records with pseudonyms. The AV records were transcribed manually, and Armenian records were translated into English by the researcher, reviewed by a bilingual translator against audio recordings, and discrepancies reconciled by collaborating with the translator to review the selected audio records together to ensure mutual understanding of the source, check the dictionary translation, and/or verify the statements with the respective participant.

The finalized records were subjected to thematic analysis (TA), a core process widely used in qualitative studies and particularly suited for investigating under-researched areas (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2015). This study approached the method from a social constructionist perspective, based on the epistemology that the research reality is constructed, rather than prescribed, from the shared experiences of participants and the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This perspective emphasizes participants’ values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and worldviews, while also considering the researcher’s position, preconceptions, perspectives, and interactions within the research reality achieved through critical reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014). This study further applied inductive TA arising from participant semantics rather than preexisting concepts, theories, or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2013).

First, TA was applied to the interview data to identify (a) patterns within individual seer’s self-described processes of reading, (b) trends across seers, (c) trends in seer processes across each seeker/instrument, and (d) demographic variables. Second, TA was applied to each seeker’s reading data to identify themes related to the central images in the cup, themes within the total interpretation, thematic relevance to the seeker’s central query, and patterns across all interpretations combined for that seeker. Third, the cup images were triangulated with interpretation content to formulate a descriptive knowledge of how the standard symbolic system and the seer’s perceptual processes informed the divinatory insight. Specifically, the images of each cup were mapped with thematic content of all insights derived from that instrument and thematic content related to specific images. This analysis provided information on the verbal interpretation and its relevance to the seeker’s query. Each seeker’s total interpretation content was analyzed to identify patterns across seers and seer demographics to understand different seers’ perceptual focus at the time of the reading for the seeker and which factors might account for those trends, as well as whether insights from multiple seers for the same seeker agreed. The seeker’s intention was also considered in the analysis to understand the degree to which different seers perceived the seeker’s intentional energy through the instrument. Next, seekers’ RRRs were analyzed to identify patterns within each seeker’s responses to a specific seer’s interpretation, trends within each seeker’s responses across all her readings, trends in both seekers’ combined experiences across all seers, and
demographic or personal factors that might account for patterns across each seeker’s total responses and both seekers’ responses combined. Additionally, the chronological effect on the interpretation content was considered to identify any apparent “attenuation” or decay of the instrument across time that might affect interpretation.

**Results**

The seer sample comprised 17 women of Armenian origin (age range = 33–80 years, mean = 50, median = 47; 16 amateur, 1 professional), with 9 readings for one seeker (Seeker A) and 8 for the other (Seeker B). Seers practiced the craft occasionally (10), monthly (2), weekly (4), and daily (1; professional seer). Seers learned the craft in their teens (8), 20s (8), and early 30s (1). Seers reported the following religious affiliations: Armenian Apostolic (10), spiritual but not religious (4), Armenian Catholic (2), and Armenian Native Faith/Neopaganism (1). Marital status for the seers was married (8), divorced (5), single (3), and widow (1). At the time of the study, the seers resided in the United States (10) and one each in Armenia, Germany, Russia, Argentina, Turkey, Lebanon, and Ethiopia. Seeker A was 52, residing in the United States, married with three children over age 12 living at home, and Seeker B was 27, residing in Armenia, single with no children. Both reported Armenian Apostolic affiliation and were previously unknown to all seers who read their cup.

The patterns in data saturation and seeker engagement as the study progressed with Seeker A prompted setting a maximum 45-day timeline for Seeker B’s readings but owing to slower recruitment attributed to the exhaustion of the targeted recruitment avenues, only eight readings were completed within the timeframe, one short of the targeted nine. Interviews averaged 55 minutes; 8 were conducted in Armenian and 9 in English. Seeker A’s reading sessions averaged 20 minutes and Seeker B’s 25 minutes. Without one outlier 65-minute reading, Seeker B’s average reading time would have been the same as Seeker A’s. Ten readings were in Armenian, and 7 in English (two seers performed in Armenian but interviewed in English).

Independent of religious affiliation, eight seers described a holistic approach to interpretation and expressed spiritual/metaphysical and nontraditional views about their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding the ritual, such as “we’re shown what we’re supposed to be shown … everything is a pattern” (7S), “everything happens for a reason” (3S), and “destiny is not written in stone … you have choices in that moment” (5S). Nine seers, on the other hand, described a structured approach to interpretation following the standard symbolic representation and expressed traditional/religious views, such as “an angel helps me, God helps me” (1T), “at the end you leave everything to God’s will” (2T), and “as a Christian, I don’t want to believe that I can [make predictions] … Only God knows for sure what will happen in the future” (9T). Since religious/spiritual orientation accounted for the widest variation in the data seers with a “spiritual” worldview were designated “S-seers” (identified 1S–8S) and those with “traditional” or religious worldview, “T-seers” (1T–9T); 75% of S-seers were below age 50 (mean = 44, median = 41), while T-seers were equally divided below and above mid-50s (mean = 55, median = 55). About half of the T-seers (56%) were born and raised in Armenia, whereas 75% of the S-seers were born or raised in the United States and 25% in other diasporas. S-seers tended to be more educated than T-seers: 75% had at least a four-year college education, 50% had a master’s degree or above, and 25% had doctoral-level education. More than half of the T-seers had high school level education. Of the 9 seers who read for Seeker A, seven (78%) were T-seers; and of the 8 seers who read for Seeker B, 6 (75%) were S-seers.

**Major Themes From Seer Interviews**

Seers reported having strong precognitive senses or some kind of ESP/visions, often running in the family (47%; S = 3, 38%; T = 5, 55%), strong imagination (29%; T = 5, 55%), strong intuition (29%; S = 2, 25%; T = 3, 33%), and/or symbolic/mystical thinking (18%; S = 3, 38%). Coffee reading was passed down from the matrilineal line for all but one seer. Thirteen seers (76%, S = 6; T = 7) learned
from female family members and friends and four (24%; S = 2; T = 2) on their own.

Although it was not clear to what degree attitudes about cup reading were influenced by the sociopolitical crisis affecting this community at the time of the study (see Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, n.d.), 10 seers (59%; S = 5, 63%; T = 5, 56%) reflected the stigmatized nature of the craft that caused women to give it up out of social/family pressures or for unknown reasons: “One day something happened, and she [great aunt] vowed never to talk about it and never to read,” (4S); “[My mom] would say, ‘Leave it alone … It’s satanic to read a cup’” (2T); “I feel embarrassed. … I don’t want to have a reputation of a psychic … [or] a fortune teller” (1T). Despite prevailing negative cultural attitudes, all 17 (100%) described coffee reading as a pleasurable pastime for social engagement, conversation, emotional bonding, and to help people find answers, expressing such sentiments as “we had almost nothing in common, …but over … cup reading, … [we were] talking about much deeper things about each other’s lives” (1S); “that’s the attraction, that you [the seer] engage in a conversation [with the seeker] at that moment so that their inner world is connected to the cup, to you” (6T); and “there’s a real bonding that happens; it is a pathway to emotional vulnerability and connection … a sisterhood, and a relationship develops over time” (2S).

Six seers (35%; S = 3, 38%; T = 3, 33%) stated that cup reading serves as a form of healing and therapy: “exchanging psychological feelings between people” (4T); “kind of group therapy” (1S), “talk intimately … give advice” (8T), “a coaching session” (8S). Six (35%; S = 2, 25%; T = 4, 44%) stated that cup reading helps them escape from daily life: “like an escape to a story … I get the same tunnel vision when I read … novels” (1S), “a distraction … to put away my own feelings and focus on somebody else’s life” (9T). The most rewarding aspect of reading for 76% (S = 6; T = 7) was helping the seeker feel better and validated, and the most enjoyable for 47% (S = 5; T = 3) when the seeker validates the interpretation and finds it meaningful; the least enjoyable for 41% (S = 3; T = 4) was sensing and delivering negative messages.

Seers collectively described that the cup traditionally represents a one-year cycle in a seeker’s life: the bottom represents the seeker’s heart center and emotional life; the drinking side (where the mouth comes in contact with the cup) represents the seeker’s home life/family and personal circumstances; and the opposite side the life and relationships outside home/family. After coffee is consumed, the cup is customarily turned toward the person or away but is generally left to the seeker. Only 3 seers (S = 1; T = 2) inquired how the seeker turned the cup or which side she sipped from; 5 (S = 2; T = 3) read the cup in a clockwise direction, starting from the handle or the drinking side facing them; 4 (S = 2; T = 2) started from the bottom and moved up; 1 T-seer started from the upper parts near the rim and moved down; 1 S-seer read counterclockwise; and 6 (S = 4; T = 2) did not follow a particular system or did not share it. Most seers read both white and black patterns, some mostly black, and some mostly white based on either personal preference or how the seers learned, which did not seem to have a measurable effect on the reading process or outcome. All 17 seers reported starting with the image that stood out and grabbed their attention, such as a clearly formed image, powerful or positive symbol, larger figure, or human forms.

Although most seers alluded to the focusing and concentration required for reading, 53% (S = 7, 88%; T = 2, 22%) stated that when they focus on the cup and concentrate intensely, they detach from their surroundings and become fully absorbed in the cup.

I zoom in … I get very focused, and all I see is the cup, … the rest of the surroundings … disappear. It’s like tunnel vision. (1S)

The sensation is that I have blocked out the world. … Even when there is noise, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t seem to penetrate, doesn’t seem to affect me. I’m fully present in the cup. Before and during, it feels like it’s just me and that person. (3S)

I get fully absorbed into the cup, mentally, with my head, others may say something, and I may not hear. (4T)
Five S-seers (63%) reported that the symbol sometimes becomes a portal to the seeker’s universe and could open up information beyond the cup.

Once in a while I will exhume ... something in the cup ... and I’ll start talking about other things that I feel and see. ... the cup is just the focal point for the other senses to take over ... It can be that [one active symbol] or it can be that I really know and trust the person, and I feel comfortable to take that leap of faith to go a step beyond the cup. (2S)

When I pick up on a little tail of it [what grabs my attention first], ... that’s when I can ... keep going in. But for her [seeker], ... was that little portal that I saw and when I zoomed in, it was like the universe. (8S)

A coffee cup reading ends up becoming a catalyst, a tiny, tiny, tiny something ends up becoming the door for you to the person’s energy ... aura and Being. ... Then the cup ends up becoming a blur. The only thing I see is lines. ... I’m not seeing the person; I’m actually somewhere [else]. (4S)

Once I see this [compelling] symbol, I start talking about it. Then the information just comes in ... from them [seeker] ... their energy, their guides, it comes from their ancestors, angels, sometimes my guides. ... My words give power to [the symbol]. ... Sometimes I don’t even know what I’m talking about ... But I’m just supposed to deliver this message. They [seeker] know exactly what I’m talking about. (7S)

Although all seers based their interpretation on a semiotic system coupled with their own perceptions and inner feelings of the symbol, 65% (S = 2, 25%; T = 9, 100%), connecting it with the seeker based on various characteristics of the sign, position in the cup, and the surrounding images, six S-seers (75%) did not follow a structured system of interpretation:

I don’t have a system or structured approach ... It’s my personality that comes in obviously; I’m not a structured person. I believe that if you structure something that is not concrete, you limit its potential. ... Most of the real solid information comes from ... unstructured, intuitive conversation. (5S)

I don’t follow any books, because ... everybody has a different interpretation. ... It’s just what I feel. And the first impulse that comes, the first vision that comes, the first glance of direction it takes me, that’s where I follow. (4S)

Seven S-seers (88%) interpret holistically, perceiving the whole picture and overall situation with different symbols taken together:

Just the collective [imagery]. ... It’s the sense, but it’s also what have we learned through the process, what’s come through everything that’s around the cup, and ... how you tie it off. (3S)

I really see scenarios. I don’t see ... that creature, I see a human in my head. This translates into a scenario like a theatrical scenario, and I see ... the players. (5S)

I don’t use the cup as every single [symbol] ... it’s like a series of movie clips ... flashes of events, places, areas. The area which has a dominant something like a sign ... guides me to a different section. ... Reading for me ends up becoming like a story, ... rolling the film in front of me ... one chapter, ... another. (4S)

Even though most seers had difficulty explicating how divinatory insight arises or what informs it, 71% (S = 5; T = 7) said the messages arise spontaneously. Specifically, 59% (S = 5, 63%; T = 5, 56%) stated that the messages arise as if someone tells them what to say:

It’s incomplete sentences, ... words being thrown at me in my mind through the images. ... Whether it’s my thoughts, or it’s outside of me, it’s one and the same because it’s coming out of me. ... When I don’t question it, and I just allow things to happen, they happen more organically. (3S)

Sometimes I’ll get direct instructions. ... like, first, ... clear this particular room in the house and then go to the river and do it ... It’s crazy ..., each set of instructions is so different. ... It just comes, I can’t explain it. I hear it. (7S)
I just take a peek, and then when I see something, automatically everything else lines up, as if someone in the cup starts talking to me, someone explaining to me, and [I] start imagining more and seeing more. (4T)

I just say whatever … “they” dictate me to say. I think that whatever comes from within me that I feel and say whatever I am told, it must be accurate. … You tune in to the pictures, and the interpretation somehow … comes up, and then you just say it. (1T)

Seven seers (41%; S = 2, 25%; T = 5, 44%) stated that interpretation arises organically, inexplicably from within:

When I see that picture, something arises from within me that allows me to speak. … as though you are being told from inside what to say. … I can’t explain how. (1T)

It’s intuition. … Many times, I’m looking in the cup, I’m not seeing pictures, but thoughts are coming into my head, which I’m not controlling. And that’s the strangest part, that I don’t know what it is. (5S)

Six T-seers (67%) described that the messages come from an inner source:

You don’t read the cup, but you read from your own mind and soul. … at that moment for the other person. … It comes to your mind instantaneously when you are focused on it. (5T)

I don’t have an explanation, but it comes from inside. … It is divine, it is spiritual … it’s my angel, it’s God that’s living inside of me, … within my body and soul. … I say … not what I feel, but what comes from the inside, what “they” are telling me to say. (1T)

It’s not like reading [text], it’s something that comes from your interior perhaps you can look at the pictures, but … the interpretation … must come from your heart. … [It’s] innate, intuition. You don’t think about it, it just comes or doesn’t. (3T)

Five seers (29%; S = 3, 38%; T = 2, 22%) reported that the divinatory messages are accompanied with an inner conviction about accuracy.

What I predicted was precise with times and dates and names and places. And I knew it was accurate. And these thoughts that come in and I start speaking. … Like a story starts coming as if I knew the story, but I don’t know the story. It just comes, then I’m done. … It’s just a thought, the thought like I knew. (5S)

[What gives the conviction of accuracy is that] it persists, but then it’s not the persistence of the pattern in the cup, it is the persistence of the projection of that topic. It comes back over and over and doesn’t let me go to another topic. (4S)

It’s not just a sun, a moon. I must feel it. … I live the image at that moment and feel that whatever I say is going to happen for sure. (1T)

I could read something many different ways, but I have a feeling about what clicks, the right thing that I should be saying. … 90 plus percent of the time, it’s like a knowing or a hearing in my mind of where I should go. (2S)

Five S-seers (63%) reported occasionally seeing and feeling deceased ancestors/family members or spirit guides who give a message to the seeker.

Every part of [seeker’s] family members … who are here on this dimension and the ones who are not end up coming and showing what they signify in her life pattern at that time. … They come through … to guide you. … He [seeker’s deceased grandfather] was already part of the cup … But suddenly I realized that energy was not somebody who’s here. (4S)

It’s joy in communicating with people that have passed on that are still there for them [seeker] … They show up, and they have a message for them. (7S)

I’m always looking for … the spiritual guides that are around a person too. … I’ll say like, “Oh, you have an aunt that you’re actually really, really close to… like a family guide that I’ll see you next to the person.” And usually, it’ll be like, “Oh,
yeah, she was a dancer, and I’m a dancer and … I connected that way” or something. (2S)

Additionally, seers reported experiencing somatic sensations in response to particular symbols or the reading process, including physical sensations of color (35%; S = 4, 50% S; T = 2, 22%):

If I see the plant, I know what plant it is, I know what color it is, … I know if it’s a red rose, or a pink rose, or yellow rose, or a white rose. (7S)

Sometimes I might say, “Oh there is red dress.” I don’t know, you feel red. (3T)

I might feel what color I should say. That thing appears to me that it must be in pink or blue, just like I envision it … It paints itself in that color in front of my eyes. (9T)

Four seers (24%; S = 3, 38%; T = 1, 11%) reported clear visions inside the cup or externally:

Sometimes I will see words … clear letters … clear sequences. (5S)

It’s like I have a vision, outside [the cup]. Whatever image I see in the cup at that moment, I have a vision of what I see. (9T)

The chocolate box [in the current reading] … I could see it … it’s written [seeker’s name] and with a flower, … turquoise blue. …When I open it [the chocolate box], it’s like as if I’m actually opening it, and I can see seven … flower[s], … chocolate is made in the [shape of] flower. (4S)

Three S-seers (38%) also reported sometimes perceiving a presence or sensing physical contact with the presence.

Sometimes I will see them [presence] right there next to them [seeker] or feel that right there [in front of me]. And then they will tell me things. And it’s not like I see … the body of an old man sitting there … I just feel it. I know it. I feel their warmth, their presence. And then I just, I hear it. (7S)

Suddenly, when you’re doing the reading, other elements start popping in, the other energies come in … When that happens, I have to take another deeper breath, because I feel it in my neck that actually something grabs me, but then it’s just like … lack of oxygen. I feel like I have become breathless, but then it doesn’t affect me in any way. (4S)

Other somatic markers included bodily sensations. Five seers (29%; S = 3, 38%; T = 2, 22%) reported sensations in the upper face, near or behind eyes, or in the abdominal area: “inside my lower body, near my stomach, … front part of my body” (1T), “I speak from here [gut area], because pulsation starts in this part” (6T), “in my … face area, a tingling sensation … mostly my eyes, behind my eyes” (8S). Six seers (35%; S = 4, 50%; T = 2, 22%) reported heart palpitations and shortness of breath in response to powerful or negative symbols: “If I see bad things, death, illness … my breath gets restricted. … My heart palpitations increase” (3T), “My heart starts beating faster, like when seeing a holy image” (8T), “I felt like my breath came out of my body [in response to the symbol]. Like my diaphragm just sank in, … the air … just came out of my mouth” (8S). Similarly, 10 seers (59%; S = 3, 38%; T = 7, 78%) reported strong emotional response to powerful or negative symbols: “When I see an image and I am blown away, and I have strong emotions that I am seeing such a powerful image” (1T), “when I see … darker places in the cup, I … get a sense of either sadness or dread for the person … that can be very strong, even if I don’t know them” (1S).

Five seers (29%; S = 3, 38%; T = 2, 22%) reported feeling in their own body the same sensations the seeker was experiencing.

Sometimes I feel sick. … Sometimes I feel just sadness … if it’s something that I could see it there in front of me. … Physically, I could feel it …, just like the last [reading], I feel like she’s being choked a little bit. I felt a little heaviness [in the throat area]. (7S)

I feel that their inner world is in turmoil. … Even if they pretend to be fine and look normal, I feel what’s happening inside the person … whatever feeling they are having, and it affects my whole day. (1T)
Afterwards, … I experienced it … with this reading … a ringing in my ears … and then … blood pressure. … When I’m reading somebody’s cup, I’m in their life, even temporarily, … and I’m now absorbing what they’re experiencing. (3S)

Seven seers (41%; S = 4, 50%; T = 3, 33%) reported feeling “energy” during the reading, attributed to a variety of sources including the cup, the signs, and the seeker. Although they all referred to “energy,” the variety of descriptions suggested little convergence.

I sometimes put my hands over the cup, and I just feel a lot of energy there and a lot of the information comes through my fingers too and then it comes out. … I feel like my body is … a conduit for energy … Very magnetic. (7S)

Sometimes … I might sense a disturbance in the force, it feels kind of like a wave, like I am in my tunnel looking at the cup, and I feel kind of oscillations next to me and then I look up and I check the eyes of the seeker to see how they’re feeling. (1S)

I feel much closer to the person when I read for them, it seems like I connect with them spiritually … I could even feel their body heat at that very moment. … Occasionally I may feel what’s crossing their mind. (9T)

People have tested me … I would look and say, “This is not your cup”. … But I need to have read them at least once before. I will say, “By the way, I didn’t read it for you. I read it for [the other person].” (5S)

Seers reported being “blocked” and unable to perform when they are not in the right state of mind or being (71%; S = 6, 75%; T = 6, 67%) and when they do not read willingly (53%; S = 2, 25%; T = 7, 78%). External factors affecting seers’ ability to concentrate included distractions in the space where they performed (47%; S = 4, 50%; T = 4, 44%) and other people’s presence (24%; S = 1, 13%; T = 3, 33%). Being “blocked” was described as “[seeing] a big, huge blob, because … all the channels of intuition are cut off” (5S), “I will still see the signs, but I can’t say anything. … It’s as if I become speechless, everything shuts down and closes” (9T), “the cup is like too bright, … I can’t see anything because I am blinded by it” (1S), and “I don’t feel anything” (1T). Seven seers (41%; S = 3, 38%; T = 4, 44%) said they cannot read their own cup and experience the same type of blockage described above (traditional beliefs hold that one should not read one’s own cup): “I see nothing [in my own cup]. I just see black and white dashes” (5S), “when I pick up my cup, I can’t see anything, and I don’t feel anything” (1T). Eight seers (47%; S = 3, 38%; T = 5, 56%) stated that the reading usually drains them mentally and energetically, while six (35%; S = 4, 25%; T = 2, 22%) stated that reading usually does not take much energy from them as long as they do it willingly and enjoy the process; ten (59%; S = 3, 38%; T = 7, 78%) reported that seeker’s energy of presence influences their ability to read, especially if the seer does not like the seeker, when the seeker comes across as desperate, eager, or pushy (29%; S = 3, 38%; T = 2, 22%) or does not pay attention or engage (29%; S = 1, 13%; T = 4, 44%). Finally, six seers (35%; S = 3, 38%; T = 3, 33%) did not want to read for people who do not believe in cup reading.

As an important topic to this investigation related to its theoretical framework grounded in Rorschach’s phenomenology of embodied perception, seers were asked about projection with following question: “How do you personally relate to the stories or specific themes?” This question was frequently not understood, especially by the T-seers, and necessitated repeated clarification to rephrase or elaborate with examples from the current reading. Three T-seers did not directly answer that question no matter how it was presented. In contrast, S-seers were often aware of their projections, or the projective process. The following themes emerged related to projection responses. The first theme is: I don’t personally relate to the readings, and my personal experiences have no connection to the readings (41%; S = 2, 25%; T = 5, 56%).

No, no, no, it’s not related to my life whatsoever: whatever comes in that moment for that person, that’s what you say. (5T)
No, no. My life is out of what’s in the cup. I am not that person. I am reading for another person. (1T)

I try to take myself out of the picture. I try not to allow my life experiences to affect my reading. (3S)

Four S-seers (50%) endorsed the theme I have emotional associations that tend to show up in my interpretations.

I see a lot of ... people in cups, a lot of relationships ... I see that I’m projecting them because relationships are important to me, and so what I see in those cups are what is important ... to cultivate. (8S)

I try not to relate to [the stories] very much, but in this particular reading, there was a point where I started to talk about myself, and I had to kind of get away from that, ... because it’s not about me, it’s about her [seeker]. (6S)

If I’m focused on, let’s say ... connecting with my ancestors, I might be more likely to see someone’s ... grandmother or grandfather [in the reading]. ... And [seeing] pregnant lady too [in the current reading], because ... I had a lot of difficulty conceiving. (2S)

Four S-seers (50%) also expressed awareness during the reading that they might be associating the stories with their own lives.

If I’m projecting something, I’ll pay attention to it. ... If I looked at a cup, and I saw heaviness, ... am I feeling heavy? ... Am I feeling like what I’m about to tell her [seeker] is about me? (8S)

Sometimes when I feel like the story seems too close to my own life, I stop because I realize that I’m associating it with myself and maybe issues that I’m trying to think about and not the person that I’m reading for. (1S)

For sure, my personal life and state of mind have some influence. I try to hold back but I also use it as a frame of reference, like ... when I saw that ... little man ... grumbling and disapproving [in the current reading], ... my dad is always quietly disapproving of most of my life choices. (2S)

Four S-seers (50%) tried to reflect whether what they tell the seeker is about themselves.

When I tell somebody that they’re having a problem with their father ... and want to mend it, ... I wonder, “Is this my own projection and my having a problem with my father and I need to mend it?” (8S)

If I was going through a divorce or separated from someone, and that’s what I saw in the cup, then I think that the chances are ... that I would be projecting my own experience on to the person. ... That’s why sometimes when I’m pausing, ... I’m trying to ... step back so it’s not something that I’m talking about myself. (6S)

The virtual reading compromised valuable ritual elements of shared physical space, socialization, holding the actual instrument, and feeling its and the seeker’s energies, as well as posed functional challenges related to turning the cup while reading and seeing all of the images at once. Regarding the seeker’s presence, 11 seers (65%; S = 5, 63%; T = 6, 67%) said reading is easier when the seeker is physically present because they can feel seeker’s energy better, engage the seeker more, and therefore see, feel, and say more. Nine seers (53%; S = 3, 38%; T = 6, 67% T) reported that having the cup in their hand might have allowed them to say more. Nonetheless, all stated that the virtual reading process was mostly the same and did not affect their ability to read, and 29% (S = 4, 50%; T = 1, 11%) still felt the energy both from the cup and the seeker virtually.

Findings From Seeker A’s Reports and Readings

Seeker A’s central inquiry concerned her husband’s serious health condition. Two thirds (67%; S = 2; T = 4) of the seers she consulted were under 50, and 78% were T-seers (S = 2; T = 7). Seeker A resonated with some of the interpretations provided by 89% of the seers (S = 2; T = 6), finding the information revealed to be true in her life. The same (89%) seers also referred to her husband. One T-seer was unable to identify any true facts in her present life. Despite resonating with some of the messages in 8 out of 9 readings particularly
related to her central concern, Seeker A reported that those readings did not reveal information she did not already know and that she did not have any revelations or insights during or after those readings. Seeker A rated the accuracy, relevance, and quality of each reading on a Likert scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely; Table 1). Accuracy about the past and giving new insights scored lowest (mean = 2.78), and relevance of the reading to the central inquiry was scored highest (mean = 3.56). Scores varied considerably across seers, ranging from 2.00 for two T-seers to a perfect 5.00 for one S-seer. Other demographics did not seem to account for the differences, nor did the chronological effect.

Seeker A’s readings revealed considerable convergence both in the visual perception of the patterns and their interpretation. Those patterns have been marked in the photo images, and their interpretations provided verbatim, grouped by pattern or image (Appendix E, E1–3). In Figure E1, seers focused on three images. One was a large black figure (1), which three seers (33%; S = 1; T = 2) visually perceived as hat-like, suggesting successful change in married life or career (1T), the seeker’s home on the verge of collapsing (6T), and a dark cloud hanging over the man’s head (1S). Four seers (44%; S = 2; T = 2) perceived the same image as a bird or ship coming toward the seeker carrying news or abundance/money (one S-seer perceived the image both as a hat shape and a bird carrying a crown of protection for the man). The second image (2) was two human figures, which 6 seers (67%; S = 1; T = 5) perceived as a couple (5 saw the woman on the right and the man on the left, and 1 seer saw in reverse), interpreted variously as having conversation (3T), woman urging the man to take action (2T), and the couple facing misunderstanding (1S). Two additional seers (S = 1; T = 1) interpreted the figure as two people. The third image (3) was perceived as two animal figures. Six T-seers (65%) interpreted one or both figures as a nosy person with questionable intention; three of those seers perceived the left image as a black cat, and one seer as a fox. The figure on the right was perceived as a crow, mouse, or rat. Images 1 and 2 (Figure E1) were the central images in the readings and elicited the most interpretation, as well as, variously, the most resonance from the seeker.

In Figure E2 (Appendix E), seers focused on two images. The first (1) was an upside down 3 or 13. Six seers (67%; S = 1; T = 5) variously perceived the number (3, 13, 113, straight up or upside down) and associated the sign with a timeline or sum of money. Those who perceived the figure in upside-down form associated it with an upside-down state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seer</th>
<th>Accurate about the past</th>
<th>Accurate about the present</th>
<th>Personally meaningful</th>
<th>Gave new insights</th>
<th>Relevant to central inquiry</th>
<th>Detailed in scope/breadth</th>
<th>Avg.</th>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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Table 1. Seeker A’s Rating of Readings by Seer in Chronological Order
of affairs. The second image (2) 5 seers (56%; S = 1; T = 4) perceived as a moon, interpreted variously with positive connotation. In Figure E3, 7 seers (78%; S = 1; T = 6) perceived two paths, suggesting mostly logical interpretations related to physical travel, tasks, or undertaking, but an S-seer took a different interpretation that resonated with the seeker. Figure E3 also shows the bottom of the cup, the seeker’s heart center (before it was stamped), which out of 5 seers (56%; S = 1; T = 4) 3 perceived an evil eye or face, while two associated the dark area with worries (T) and someone struggling with chronic illness (S), the latter particularly resonating with the seeker. The visual perceptions and the interpretations of the stamped bottom (Figure A5, Appendix A) were widely dispersed; however, 3 T-seers associated the figure with the person of concern in the seeker’s mind when she stamped the cup, two of whom described a situation the seeker found highly accurate. Nine interpretations of Seeker A’s cup revealed 12 major themes, half of which (50%) converged 56%–78% (Table 2).

### Findings From Seeker B’s Reports and Readings

Seeker B’s central query was her future life direction. Half (50%; S = 4) the seers she consulted were under 50, and 75% were S-seers (S = 6; T = 2). Seeker B resonated with most of the interpretations provided by all seers, finding the information to be true in her life. Seven out of 8 seers (88%) also referred to her future life direction. Seeker B reported that 5 seers (S = 4; T = 1) revealed truth about the present, and 3 of those S-seers revealed specific truth about her current health condition. Although 4 seers (S = 2; T = 2) did not reveal new information, seeker B had revelations during or after the reading with four seers (S = 3; T = 1) about her character and present feelings (S = 2; T = 1) and gained new perspective on her reality (S = 1).

Seeker B’s ratings of the accuracy, relevance, and quality of each reading (Table 3) show that accuracy about the past scored lowest (mean = 3.75) whereas accuracy about the present was rated highest (mean = 4.50). The rest of the questions scored within a close range, from a low average of 3.17 for one S-seer to a perfect 5.00 for another. Other demographics did not seem to account for the differences, nor did the chronological effect.

Unlike Seeker A’s readings, which were based largely on specific images, Seeker B’s readings were based largely on the whole impression. Hence, aside from a few isolated images that the seers referenced, it was difficult to identify the specific perceptual associations with individual patterns in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeker A’s Interpretation Themes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>S / T</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is considerable distress and upheaval in seeker’s life currently.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The major issue of concern will be resolved in the near future but not immediately.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>S = 2; T = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an evil and envious person who comes in and out of the house, about whom the seeker/</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>family need to be careful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is worried about something within the home;</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone in the home is dealing with an issue or illness.</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>S = 2; T = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive, surprising news is arriving at the home that will brighten up things.</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is facing some challenges she decided to conquer.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker’s wish will come true through the help of an angel or a protective person.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seers’ physical descriptions of the “man” matched that of the seeker’s husband.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker has questions in her mind about an issue that has not been resolved.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker will be making a difficult decision that is going to re-solve the issue.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>S = 0; T = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “woman” urges the “man” to take a particular course of action that will lead to positive</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Number of seers expressing this theme who held a "spiritual" worldview  
T = Number of seers expressing this theme who held a "traditional" or religious worldview
the cup. Therefore, Seeker B’s interpretations are not grouped by significant image but are presented in a summary form only, staying as close as possible to the seers’ original verbal descriptions (Appendix F). Consequently, Seeker B’s readings converged largely thematically, based on intuitive/symbolic versus visual perception. It is important to highlight that 7 out of 8 (88%) S-seers had a holistic approach to interpretation, perceiving the overall situation with different symbols taken together rather than interpreting each individually, and 6 out of 8 (75%) S-seers did not follow a structured system and relied mostly on their intuitive perception, allowing the messages to emerge organically at the moment. Since S-seers comprised 75% of Seeker B’s seers (S = 6; T = 2), this pattern may be attributed to those two themes identified in S-seers’ self-described perceptual processes. The only image tied to specific interpretation content was the stamped image on the bottom of the cup (Figure B5, Appendix B), the narrative of which is provided verbatim in Appendix F. From that stamped image, four seers (50%; S = 3; T = 1) perceived a unicorn or dragon and associated the symbol with such character traits or behaviors as stubborn, strong, powerful, determined, fierce, protecting and defending oneself, and shedding a layer. Even though they did not interpret the image as a dragon or unicorn, three other seers associated the stamped image with similar traits or behaviors, including conquering fear, transitioning, change, and achieving through own efforts. Additionally, three S-seers mentioned the intestinal area needing healing (S = 2) and stomach pain (S = 1) when interpreting the stamped image and/or during the general reading. Seeker B confirmed her stomach issues both during the readings and in her narrative reflections, as well as having revelations about her character traits. An important pattern in Seeker B’s overall reading messages was the focus around advice (50%; S = 4) and her character (50%; S = 3; T = 1), directly in line with her central concern about her future life direction. The eight interpretations Seeker B received together revealed 17 major themes, 11 of which (65%) converged 50%–100% (Table 4). Seven out of 8 seers (88%) also referred to her future life direction, 50% of the interpretations included advice for the future, and 50% focused on her character.

Findings From Combined Readings and Ritual Observation

Although both S-seers’ and T-seers’ interpretations seemed to converge fairly evenly for both seekers, the S-seers on average were rated higher (4.21) than the T-seers (3.11) by both seekers collectively (Table 5).

Overall, interpretation accuracy about the past scored the lowest while accuracy about the present scored the highest, with personally meaningful and relevant to central inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seer</th>
<th>Accurate about the past</th>
<th>Accurate about the present</th>
<th>Personally meaningful</th>
<th>Gave new insights</th>
<th>Relevant to central inquiry</th>
<th>Detailed in scope/breadth</th>
<th>Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8T</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4S</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9T</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Seeker B’s Rating of Readings by Seer in Chronological Order
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeker B’s Interpretation Themes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>S / T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeker currently carries a lot of heaviness in her heart, but she is going to get through it over time.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>S = 6; T = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker has protection and support system from close people, alive or passed.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>S = 6; T = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker should not worry because her path will clear, and she will head in the right direction.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>S = 5; T = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is dealing with uncertainty and has a lot of questions over some decisions she is trying to make.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>S = 5; T = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is worried about or is fearful over an issue or certain situation that is causing considerable mental tension.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>S = 5; T = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker possesses a lot of inner strength and will be able to conquer the current challenges.</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>S = 5; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive change or solution is expected within spring or Easter time.</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker’s professional and financial future is very bright.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is dealing with family-related issues or challenges that will pass.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is in the process of creating something new.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>S = 4; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are decisions around traveling, moving, relocating, or a new home possibly away from where she is currently.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>S = 4; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker is holding her emotions inside and not expressing herself enough, which causes issues in her digestive track.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker has a lot of self-doubts and is questioning herself.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a large sum of money coming in or a discussion about money or property.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is faith and blessings on the seeker’s path.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 1; T = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker must be careful of somebody in her life who is jealous of her and has evil intentions.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeker’s wishes will come true with time and patience.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>S = 3; T = 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Number of seers expressing this theme who held a “spiritual” worldview
T = Number of seers expressing this theme who held a “traditional” or religious worldview

Table 4. Seeker B’s Interpretation Themes and Convergence

categories scoring the next highest. Giving new insights scored the lowest (Table 6).

Notably, some interpretations included human movement responses similar to the active M responses in Rorschach’s (1921/2013) framework. The second figure (Two Human Figures, E1) in Seeker A’s cup in particular elicited such responses in eight out of nine seers:

One person is ... showing a very violent ... behavior, the other party turns around and leaves. ... In the middle, someone tries to intervene but has no power. ... This individual ... is holding something like a weapon in his hand; ... he wants to strike and cause harm. One person is holding their feet and is not letting them continue. (5S)

The woman is holding the man’s hand to stop him ... or she is calling him back. ... Behind them ... a few people have thrown a fishhook over the couple’s head ... to hold the house ... [that] is in a tilted position; if they don’t hold it at the moment, it’s going to fall down. (6T)

Ritual observations revealed that the seeker’s verbal affirmations or overt validation in response to messages or the divinatory process immediately elicited positive seer reactions that often manifested in subtle ways, such as excitement in the tone of voice or effort to obtain more divinatory insight, or were expressed indirectly, such as addressing the seeker with affectionate words. This additional data source from the observer’s perspective validated the seers’ statements in which helping the seeker...
feel better and validated was the most rewarding aspect of reading for 76% and delivering messages the seeker finds meaningful the most enjoyable for 47%. Similar reactions were observed with the seekers when they received positive or auspicious messages, including immediate shift in the gaze, broader smile, and overexpression of gratitude at the end of the reading.

**Interpretation**

The virtual design created an opportunity to keep both the instrument and seeker constant across multiple readings, providing a unique control on the reading process. Specifically, it enabled examination of the perceptual and semiotic processes individually and investigation of whether different seers would (a) perceive the same patterns similarly, (b) interpret similarly, and (c) interpret the cup similarly even if their individual perceptions of the sediments varied.

First, the key images around which the interpretations were centered were largely perceived similarly—particularly as revealed in the T-seers’ interpretations whose reading approach involved interpreting individual signs—empirically validating pareidolia in a divinatory context. Some perceptual convergence likely arose due to a certain degree of structure in the visual field, similar to the inkbolts designed to have some objective stimulus quality to induce a range of common percepts among respondents (Exner, 2003; Frank, 1949; Porcelli & Kleiger, 2016; Rorschach, 1921/2013). This perceptual mechanism explains the clustering of the interpretations in this study around the same (and few) key figures with more objective features, which were easier to perceive visually and hence drew the most attention within the ambiguous sediments. In fact, the seers could not perceive anything when the sediments spread too densely or too thinly, producing no distinct forms. Hence, the images must have some structure for pareidolia to be effective in integrating incomplete but somewhat suggestive visual input into an expected representation, supporting the literature on pareidolia (Gosselin & Schyns, 2003; Liu et al., 2014). Some perceptual convergence may be a byproduct of the priming effect of the divinatory context (Esterman & Yantis, 2010), conditioning seers to perceive the expected object. Moreover, perceiving certain objects, such as a black cat, which some seers commented expecting to see in every cup, supports the literature that pareidolia is influenced by cultural conditioning as well as personality traits and life experiences (Bednarik, 2017; van Gaal & Lamme, 2012). Furthermore, what each seer perceived in the image and its specific qualities likely was influenced by their subjective psyche and current state as evidenced by their inability to perceive when not in the right frame of mind/body, not in tune with the seeker’s energy, or when exposed to distractions. These conditions affect the ability to focus, diminishing the effectiveness of pareidolia, which requires considerable concentration (Baylis & Ting, 2015; Rorschach, 1921/2013). Last, independent of interpretation, the sediments evoked a multiplicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S-seers</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>T-seers</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1S 3.50</td>
<td>1T 3.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2S 5.00</td>
<td>2T 2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3S 4.00</td>
<td>3T 2.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4S 5.00</td>
<td>4T 2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5S 4.33</td>
<td>5T 3.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6S 4.33</td>
<td>6T 3.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7S 4.33</td>
<td>7T 3.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8S 3.17</td>
<td>8T 3.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. 4.21</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. S-Seers’ and T-Seers’ Average Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeker</th>
<th>Accurate about the past</th>
<th>Accurate about the present</th>
<th>Personally meaningful</th>
<th>Gave new insights</th>
<th>Relevant to central inquiry</th>
<th>Detailed in scope/breadth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 2.78</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 3.75</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. 2.78</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Seekers’ Combined Average Rating by Category
of percepts—up to 20 in seeker A’s cup, which was read mostly by T-seers—perhaps in part owing to the fractal quality of the sediments, inherently inducing rich associations or amplifying the perceptual effects (Taylor et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2017). The rich variety of percepts demonstrates strong pareidolic perceptions that characterize people with paranormal abilities (Brugger & Mohr, 2008; van Elk, 2015; van Gaal & Lamme, 2012). Many seers in this study claimed strong precognitive, imaginal, telepathic, mediumistic, and intuitive abilities that often ran in the family.

The perceptual process also revealed important insights on the projective mechanism grounded in Rorschach’s (1921/2013) framework. Even though projection as an unconscious process was difficult to explicate through inquiry, it became evident that the S-seers were largely aware of their internal states, biases, and projections, and were more mindful when reading. Together with the T-seers’ statements, which indirectly illustrated projection from an experiential perspective regarding the intersubjective dynamics with the seeker and the seers’ own state during the ritual, the interview data supported Rorschach’s projective hypothesis. Examples of embodied projection included the seers’ psychosomatic and emotional response to specific signs, themes, and the seeker’s presence; surfacing themes that had personal significance to the seer; and the seer’s personal nature, disposition, and current state of bodymind affecting perception and interpretation, up to a complete shutdown of the pareidolic and/or semiotic processes. Furthermore, Rorschach’s embodied and affective subjectivity was expressed through the seers’ empathetic resonance, specifically feeling in their own body the seeker’s physical or emotional sensations or having embodied affective responses to negative/strong messages. The findings demonstrate that the interpretation of the perceptual input is indeed influenced by the seer’s subjective world, including the inability to read as a projection of the seer’s personal issues overshadowing those of the seeker that could block the seer’s intuition or prevent her from remaining neutral (Combs & Holland, 2001; Metzner, 2017; von Franz, 1980).

Second, the forms perceived similarly (such as black cat) were also interpreted similarly, likely due to shared symbolic/cultural associations. In some cases, the seers laced the symbolism with their own personal or mythopoetic meaning as well as influences from their diasporic culture, which may not have been aligned with traditional Armenian symbolism. In those scenarios the interpretations may have acquired a different flavor (Campbell & Moyer, 1991; Eliade, 1991).

Third, interpretations for both instruments and across respective seers converged considerably, independent of variation in visual perceptions, putting greater emphasis on the semiotic process shaping the divinatory hermeneutics and the subliminal sources informing it. For example, the interpretation of the figure variously perceived as a hat, bird, or a ship and ascribed such connotations as change, news, abundance, and protection on the whole converged around a central theme connected to the seeker’s life and inquiry. Likewise, the figure perceived as a couple converged in the interpretations independent of whether the seer perceived the woman or man as the figure on the right or did not specify position. Significant thematic convergence, particularly in the S-seers’ holistic interpretations that did not reveal the perceptual outcome, suggests the possibility that the semiotic process transcends the personal unconscious and evokes the deeper psyche. This supposition is supported by Jung’s (1993, 2010) collective unconscious containing shared, universal contents, or archetypal symbols, accessed through an intuitive gateway and expressed through the divinatory hermeneutic system shaped by the specific cultural epistemology (Campbell, 1981; Jung et al., 1969). It is believed that all divination systems function at this symbolic level—indeed of the technique—enabling the diviner to bridge their personal unconscious into the collective, potentiating synchronicities in the seeker’s life (von Franz, 1980).

Although it is not known to what degree the interpretations would have converged had the seers each interpreted a different cup produced by the same seeker in the traditional ritual, controlling the instrument in this study enabled separation of the perceptual and semiotic outcomes, demonstrating greater interpretation convergence compared to perceptual convergence. This finding challenges the functional mechanism of tasseography—were the seers reading the physical cup, the seeker,
or both intertwined?—thereby adding weight to the postulation that the divinatory instrument, independent of technique and tradition, simply serves as a tool to activate subliminal processes and sources (Combs & Holland, 2001; Metzner, 2017, 2018; Radin, 2006, 2011, 2018).

This finding also challenges the materialist assumptions of randomness of the divinatory instrument in relation to time. Utilizing the same instrument across multiple readings added a time factor, possibly introducing subtle variation in the experimental conditions across these seers consecutively divining from a progressively “older” instrument, involving an interval of 1.5 months between first and last readings for Seeker A and 2 months for Seeker B. Hence, the chronological effect on the readings was closely monitored, yet the seekers’ ratings of their readings revealed that the chronological effect did not account for any data variation. In fact, Seeker A’s quantitative ratings of seers and their interpretations tended to improve over time, and Seeker B’s tended to peak for the middle readings. This finding is unexpected since it would be logical that the valence of the seekers’ central query would have diminished as their life circumstances and psychoemotional state changed over time. With one exception, seers did not ask, neither were they given information, about when the seeker had produced the cup, unless it emerged spontaneously during the readings, in which case the seers responded that it did not matter to them as long as the cup was the seeker’s.

Moreover, it was revealed in the last three S-seers’ readings for Seeker B (starting 2.5 weeks after her cup was produced) that the interpretations reflected more closely her situation at the time she produced the cup, which sharply differed from her circumstances at the time of the readings. This finding is intriguing for two reasons. First, it is traditionally believed that the cup mirrors the seeker’s current state when produced (e.g., Semetsky, 2006b). The findings empirically validated this hypothesis, suggesting that the sediments spread according to some intrinsic order influenced by the seeker’s intentional energy at the moment of contact with the divinatory instrument rather than entirely randomly. Relating the interpretation with the seeker’s situation when the cup was produced as different from the time of the reading challenges materialist assumptions of randomness that reduce the sediment patterns to Newtonian mechanics, stripping the phenomenon of the very forces that enable such divinatory insight to materialize. Rather, the dregs seemed to demonstrate self-organizing, fractal dynamics, combining to reveal the psychophysical interconnectedness of space and time (Marks-Tarlow, 2008; von Franz, 1980)—consistent with the epistemology of divination systems from different traditions and scholarly hermeneutics.

Second, this finding suggests that the interpretations were informed primarily by perceptual and semiotic processes rather than social cognition. In a traditional face-to-face setting, the seer may pick up subliminal or intuitive cues from the seeker’s current state, which can influence interpretation. The physical setting also inherently conduces to a relaxed social environment in which participants sip coffee together and converse while waiting for the sediments to dry, during which time personal information may be spontaneously shared by the seeker or solicited by the seer, intentionally or inadvertently. In the virtual setting, the reading started immediately after a brief introduction, and the cup images were center stage on the screen with both participants’ video screens minimized, hindering the seer’s ability to read the seeker’s nonverbal signals. Consequently, the virtual setup imposed significant challenges to the so-called “cold reading,” which relies more heavily on social cognition and nonverbal cues (Lieberman, 2000), and tested the seers’ perceptual and intuitive abilities. The greater interpretation convergence compared to perceptual convergence strengthens the conjecture that the divinatory insight was largely informed by the semiotic process that potentially draws upon transcendent sources. Together, these findings point to the possibility that the embodied perception in tasseography serves to channel the semiotic process through the seer’s subjective unconscious into the objective or collective unconscious—shifting the possible source of the divinatory insight to the transpersonal realm.

The subject of such intuitive or subliminal information acquisition lacks consensus in the literature (Mossbridge & Radin, 2018b; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005). Although there is no agreement on what informs intuition other than that it is
an unconscious and preverbal process—hence the seers’ difficulty explicating their perceptual experiences—most seers’ descriptions aligned with the literature characterizing intuition by unexpected emergence, absence of control, and sense of absolute certainty and conviction (Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Petitmengin, 2007). These qualities also characterize extrasensory perception or ESP, an anomalous psychological (psi) phenomenon that includes three categories of paranormal communication to acquire information not mediated by the senses or reason (Cardeña et al., 2017; Radin, 2018; Rock et al., 2015): (a) telepathy, information exchanged between minds separated by distance; (b) clairvoyance, perception of distant events or images; and (c) precognition, perception of distant events or images through time. These paranormal phenomena, largely controlled by unconscious processes, cannot be fully explained in terms of known physical or biological mechanisms and are beyond current scientific understanding (Bem, 2011; Mossbridge & Radin, 2018a, 2018b; Radin, 2011, 2018). The fact that interpretation accuracy about the past was rated lowest by both seekers and getting new insight the next lowest while the interpretations were considered by both seekers meaningful in relation to their present life and central query, suggests that interpretations largely included information the seeker knew about. Hence, it is possible that the divinatory insight may have been informed through a telepathic process. Another possibility is that interpretation involved some form of clairvoyance or precognition that functions by drawing conscious and nonconscious inferences from past experiences to imagine a present scenario or anticipate future possibilities (Mossbridge & Radin, 2018b).

Still, the potential sources of paranormal information are unknown, including whether different psi processes are governed by different mechanisms or the same. Such intuitive knowing may be more evolved in seers. Possibly some individuals have stronger predictive abilities due to highly efficient unconscious processing of sensory cues (Mossbridge & Radin, 2018b) or high degree of transliminality, permeable mental boundaries that allow psychological material including imagery, ideation, affect, and perception to cross the threshold between conscious and unconscious psyches (Houran et al., 2018; Thalbourne & Houran, 2000). Transliminality and intuitive processing are interrelated and correlated with paranormal experiences (Houran et al., 2018)—much like pareidolia—along with such psychological constructs as dissociation (“experiential and/or cognitive disconnection and disengagement”), absorption (“the propensity to experience strong attentional involvement episodes and adopt an experiential cognitive set”), and imagination (Cardeña et al., 2017, p. 9), all of which were involved in the seers’ experiences of cup reading. Furthermore, paranormal experiences tend to occur in situations of high ambiguity, which characterizes the perceptual process in tasseography. Tolerance of ambiguity, like transliminality, is an emotional and perceptual personality variable correlated with paranormal beliefs and experiences (Thalbourne & Houran, 2000). Houran et al. (2018) argued that “phenomena like transliminality and intuitive thinking can collectively facilitate markedly keen, rich, and accurate anticipatory senses or instincts that might appear practically clairvoyant in nature” (p. 104). Yet, other researchers (e.g., Mossbridge & Radin, 2018a, 2018b; Radin, 2011; Radin & Pierce, 2015) have hypothesized alternative possibilities, embedded within the ontological reality of psi and its mechanism (cf. Houran et al., 2018; Schwarzkopf, 2018), which yet have to be proven.

Furthermore, most seers’ descriptions of how divinatory insight arises alluded to some form of spontaneous, out-of-control process of receiving messages, while remaining in a focused, wakeful state, either without knowing where the messages came from or knowing that they came from perceived dead, living, or unknown entities through visions, sound, or somatic sensations. Such anomalous information reception (AIR) may have qualities in common with channeling or mental (nontrance) mediumship, which involves receiving, ostensibly, information not available to others and from a source other than the normal mind or self of the “channel” in the form of auditory, visual, or somatic perceptions (Anastasia et al., 2020; Roxburgh & Roe, 2011). AIR has shown correlation with dissociative symptoms, yet its sources and mechanisms are currently unknown to explain whether such paranormal experiences and states
are strictly manifestations of dissociative symptoms (Wahbeh & Radin, 2017; Wahbeh et al., 2018) and to distinguish functionally between information produced by spontaneous subliminal processes and information provided by outside sources (Crabtree, 2010). Nonetheless, many aspects of the tasseography ritual in this investigation demonstrated transpersonal qualities (Hartelius et al., 2015; Metzner, 2017).

Such transpersonal experiences in divination may be viewed as participatory events, cocreated within the divinatory relationship and enacted through reciprocal intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that give rise to the phenomenon, experiences, and insights (Ferrer, 2008, 2011). Hence, even though this study focused on the seers’ experiences, the seeker’s role cannot be ignored. Aphek and Tobin’s (1990) assertion that the seer provides generalized content that the seeker interprets through personal associations to construct her own personal and meaningful story partly held true. Even though the divinatory interpretations in this study included generalized statements applicable to most people’s circumstances, such as “surprise news,” “professional success,” “envious person,” “hardships,” and so on, the majority contained intricate stories with specific characters, actions, and motives, often including detailed descriptions that occasionally were validated by the seeker. Yet, those scenarios too still contained ambiguity and needed to be interpreted by the seeker to either furnish the missing pieces or retrofit the plot to their current or future life scenario, thereby enabling the seeker to view their existing or projected life story from a third-person perspective to acquire greater awareness. Hence the divinatory hermeneutics relies on the synergy of intersubjectivity between the two constituents.

Last, the intersubjective dynamics in the ritual observation revealed dyadic reciprocity of positive affect and behavior when auspicious or meaningful messages were delivered, received, and validated, reflecting the seers’ strong emotional attunement with the seeker. These findings demonstrate that the ritual set and setting inherently lead to sympathetic resonance between the seeker and the seer akin to a therapeutic relationship, supporting their functional similarity to provide healing and transformation (Larson, 2019; Petitmengin, 2007; Semetsky, 2005; Tedlock, 2001). One explanation is that because the roles and ritual are a shared cultural experience, some kind of attunement is possible (Sandhu et al., 2015). Another explanation is that people drawn to divination have some inherent interpersonal and/or psychic skills enabling them to attune easily to others. Finally, it may be that the perceptual process itself contributed to empathetic identification, specifically through kinesthesia, the sensation of movement in the static stimuli (Rorschach’s, 1921/2013). Over half of the seers’ interpretations revealed perception of human movement in the sediments (similar to the M response in the RT), a phenomenon empirically linked with mirror neuron system and clinically linked to imagination, creativity, social cognition, and empathy (Mihura et al., 2013; Porcelli et al., 2013; Porcelli & Klieger, 2016)—all of which manifested in seers’ processes and were endorsed in their statements—though it is impossible to discern the degree to which such perception may have contributed to the mirror phenomenon or the embodied empathy.

The results are limited in several ways. The study investigated Armenian tasseography with women and cannot be generalized. The small sample size and ritual involving only two seekers limited the variability in experiences, energy, attitudes, intentions, and beliefs influencing the ritual, seer–seeker dynamics, and outcome. Although seekers with diverse background provided two different sets of conditions, the desired even distribution of S- and T-seers for each seeker to equalize readings was not achieved. Yet, both seekers’ reading convergence and relevance to the seekers’ inquiry suggest that the divinatory outcome was likely independent of this factor or not measurably affected by it. Considering that both seekers favored S- over T-seers, the uneven balance of the seers may have influenced the seekers’ subjective experiences that favored the S-seers’ spiritual approach, which also revealed unanticipated metaphysical views of the ritual and vocabulary for the experiences and interpretations, shedding a different light on the phenomenon.

Conducting research in a language different from that of the findings posed inherent challenges since the meanings of experiences central to the study were often expressed in metaphors, idioms, and colloquial narratives that were language-
culture-specific (Polkinghorne, 2005; van Nes et al., 2010). Having a bilingual translator in addition to researcher’s bilingual fluency mitigated but did not eliminate this problem. The participants’ ability to conceptualize and communicate the nature and details of their experiences may have been further limited by their cognitive styles and level of education.

Finally, the virtual design may have attracted people nonrepresentative of traditional seers and introduced unknown confounds; however, it also eliminated a number of confounds by reducing variability and sources of bias. AV recording may have affected the seers’ ability to focus and connect with the seeker, compromising the natural reading process. Recording possibly invited artificial interaction and performance, affecting authenticity, while researcher observation may have caused further distraction for both participants, possibly inviting communication bias.

Approaching the phenomenon from the lenses of transpersonal theory and Armenian cultural epistemology and praxis, this investigation empirically demonstrated that tasseography ritual is an intricate interplay of perceptual and semiotic processes, occurring within conscious and unconscious intersubjectivity, to facilitate access to transpersonal states and sources, revealing unknown and/or hidden information the seeker finds meaningful. The evidence for, and similarity with, paranormal concomitants suggests that people with psi abilities may be unusually suited to divinatory work, and that people who find themselves functioning in such capacity may be more able to perceive subtle phenomena. Assessing the psi abilities of tasseographers and others who engage in ritual divination would be a logical next step to examine such correlations.

The intricate tasseographic imagery precludes measurement of its objective perceptual properties with which to evaluate the perceptual organization of the interpretations across a large number of respondents, unlike the inkblots. Future research could administer the RT to expert tasseographers to evaluate the link between certain psychological tendencies and tasseographic interpretation. Tasseographers’ neural activity during interpretation could be examined to identify neural correlates of specific perceptual responses, particularly related to the perception of movement. Scaling parameters of tasseography images yielding the richest interpretations can also be measured to analyze the link between their fractal properties and the breadth of interpretation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that the tasseographic interpretation 17 ordinary women provided seemingly effortlessly, through traditionally unconventional means for an unknown seeker, is indeed a complex psychoemotional, somatic, social, and spiritual process with transpersonal dimensions. Seers painted the phenomenon of reading as an embodied process involving considerable concentration effort, self-attunement, and empathetic identification with the seeker, which produces divinatory messages arising spontaneously and subconsciously from within, possibly influenced or informed by transpersonal sources. Tasseography combines affect, embodied cognition, intuition, imagination, and instinct and can be described as a transpersonal encounter with the symbols the ritual provides, stamped with cultural hermeneutics and the divinatory context, to access the transpersonal realm.

References


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Appendix A
Images of Seeker A’s Cup and Central Inquiry
Central Inquiry: Husband’s Serious Health Condition

Figure A1. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Down
Figure A2. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Left
Figure A3. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Up
Figure A4. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Right
Appendix B
Images of Seeker B’s Cup and Central Inquiry
Central Inquiry: Seeker’s Future Life Direction

Figure A5. Seeker A’s Cup: Bottom of the Cup, Stamped

Figure B1. Seeker B’s Cup: Handle Pointing Down
Figure B2. Seeker B’s Cup: Handle Pointing Left
Figure B3. Seeker B’s Cup: Handle Pointing Up
Figure B4. Seeker B’s Cup: Handle Pointing Right
Appendix C
Seeker Reading Reflection Report

Seeker _______________ Seer _______________
Date of Reading ______

Please reflect on your reading session and answer these questions with as much detail as you can. Be descriptive, use specific examples, and take as much space as you would like. If you need to, listen to the recording of your session to refresh your recollection.

1. How would you describe your overall experience with this reader in terms of how the process went for you?
2. What was your emotional and/or physical response to this reader and her interaction style? What did you like or dislike about her energy, presence, or communication style?
3. Rate your impression of the reading from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) or not applicable (N/A).

   Accurate about the past
   1 2 3
   4 5 N/A

   Accurate about the present
   1 2 3
   4 5 N/A

   Personally meaningful
   1 2 3
   4 5 N/A

   Gave me new insights
   1 2 3
   4 5 N/A

   Relevant to my central inquiry
   1 2 3
   4 5 N/A

   Detailed interpretation in scope and breadth
   1 2 3 4 5 N/A

4. What specific message(s), if any, resonated with you the most and how? Be specific.
5. What specific things, if any, were revealed that are true in your life?
6. What new information, if any, did the reader reveal about your life that you did not know, whether true or not?
7. If you had any revelations or insights during or after the reading, please describe.
8. Is there anything else you want to say about your impressions of this reading in terms of the reader, how she worked, or the message she provided?

Appendix D
Seer Interview Protocol

1. How did you become a cup-reader?
   a) How did you learn to read coffee cups?
   b) What interested or inspired you to read cups for others?
   c) What does cup reading mean to you? Why do you do it?
2. What happens during a reading, from start to finish?
   a) How do you start reading? What are your initial feelings and sensations when you look inside the cup? What happens in your body or mind in response?
   b) What typically grabs your attention first? How is it related to the cup, the seeker, your own state of being?
   c) How do you get the information that guides you as you speak? When and how does it arise? In what form—sound, vision, other sensations? Where do you feel it inside your body? Are any sensations external?
   d) What kinds of emotional responses do the images/symbols evoke in you and why?
   e) How do you connect the sign with a story or message for a specific seeker?
   f) How do you relate to the stories you tell as you read? For example, when you told the seeker [specific message], to what extent did you...
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personally relate to that situation? How did that feel for you?
g) Please show me the specific signs you saw in the cup as I display it on the screen. What do they symbolize and how do they relate to the message?
h) When you said [specific messages], what signs/images did you see? Please show me in the cup.
i) What do you feel when you interpret similar signs/shapes for different people? How do you connect to the specific seeker’s life?
j) Are there times when you’re not able to read? What is happening then? Does that come from you? The seeker? Something else? How does that feel in your body, emotions, and mind?
k) Are there times when the sign in the cup and its standard symbolic representation doesn’t agree with your inner sense of that symbol? If so, what do you do?

3. How does the seeker’s presence affect and guide your reading?
a) How do you respond to different energies? When and how are you aware of that? What do you feel?
b) To what extent do you typically engage in a conversation with the seeker that might lead you in any direction? Describe.
c) To what extent do you gather information from the seeker directly or indirectly that might inform the reading?
d) How does the seeker’s emotional and physical state affect what you perceive and feel in the cup?
e) How does your state of mind and body before and during reading affect the reading outcome?
a) How is reading virtually like this different in terms of your ability to provide a high-quality reading compared to being face-to-face?
b) How does the interpretation process differ when you read from the physical cup versus the images?

4. How do you feel when you finish reading?
a) How much effort does it take to read someone’s cup? What part of the reading process do you enjoy? What part of the process is less enjoyable? To what extent do you have your own emotional response to the specific themes you interpret in a reading? Can you give a specific example in the reading you just performed?
b) To what extent do you withhold anything or say something to please the seeker and under what circumstances?
c) What makes a “good” cup? A “good” reading session?
d) Likewise, are there any cups you cannot read? Specific type of seeker you have hard time providing reading for? When and how do you get “blocked”?
e) How do you know whether your interpretation is correct or “accurate”?

5. In closing…
a) Is there anything you would like to add that might help me better understand how you do these readings and what reading is like for you? Did you feel anything arising in your body, any feelings or emotions, during the interview that you would like to share?

Appendix E: Seeker A’s Reading Summary

Central Inquiry: Husband’s Serious Health Condition

Context: Seeker’s husband had been diagnosed with a serious health condition and underwent an experimental treatment, considerably with her urging, around the time of the study, while she had lost her job and was balancing family of three children, all living at home, during the COVID pandemic.

Interpretation Summary in Chronological Order

Something in the seeker’s life has gone upside down, causing a lot of distress. She has a question mark that has not been resolved. Some new things are going to originate …, and whatever she thought was difficult to resolve will get a resolution, not in the immediate future but soon. The future is really good for her, even though there are little things … happening now, but it will take a year or two for things to settle. (1T)

The seeker is striving to reach something good or overcome hardship but there are envious eyes that are getting in the way; there is heated conversation in the home, and the news is coming from outside toward the home, but there is envy that is not allowing the good news and the joy to reach her. (2T)
This is a somewhat distressed cup, but things will open up gradually. Seeker’s heart is very heavy, and she has questions in her mind, but it will lighten up, the more she holds her heart clear, the sooner the darkness will dissipate. There is a nice surprise in the home. In the family there is a tall and lean person…who thinks they have problems. There is a path in front of this person that needs to be taken with the urging of the woman, which will lead to positive outcome and bring this person light. (3T)

Seeker’s heart is very distressed. She is worrying or fearing something … but [it] will be resolved. There is some kind of an undertaking she has decided to do…She is going to overcome the challenge one by one, and a big success is on its way. She will get good news, and her heart will overjoy. (4T)

There is some anxiety in the home that is a source of concern. Seeker is thinking about a person in her home who is facing some issue. This person is strong and is waiting for something that will be resolved in a short time. All of a sudden news related to this person will arrive, and a solution will emerge that is very logical for her, and things … will change for the better, not today or tomorrow but a little later, which will bring huge changes for her. It is either a work-related success or some plan that is going to succeed. In the home there will be a surprise news, and all of her worries will dissipate. (5T)

There is serious distress from inside and outside, and the seeker is in an emotionally difficult and stressful state. Although there is brightness that would open things up for the seeker, at the moment it is far away. Primarily, it is about a conversation about holding the hearth that has shifted on its foundation. A difficult yes/no decision she is going to make will end the distress rapidly…and take her to lightness, but whatever is going to happen has not gone into action yet and is currently in a standstill. (6T)

There are two sides of the cup that both have a dark mountain …. One is about the seeker, such as challenges that she overcame or is overcoming, and the other one is about people she cares about. These two parts of her life that seem very disconnected currently are going to be connected in the future, but it needs the help of the man in her life to connect everything in the way that will help everyone who matters to her to heal. (1S)

Seeker is worried about someone immensely and has a lot of questions about something that is going on in the household. She is upset …, and it has taken up a lot of her mind… family problems. She is trying to make a decision on something that has to do with what is going on inside the house, but it will lighten up, though there will be a process with getting over that problem. (7T)

The first half of this year is bringing much joy and abundance …. The second half, may be because things will open back up [after Covid], will be the usual grind and more daily life. Overall, this is a very good cup with a lot of open spaces, which indicates a lot of positivity and someone who is very open, authentic, and transparent. At the same time, it is a yin and yang cup, with beauty and heartbreak. The beauty outweighs the heartbreak though. (2S)

Images and Features, Figure E1

(1) Large Black Figure (Figure E1, feature 1)

Visual Perception

Hat with smoke rising, related to successful change in married life or career (1T)

Bird (stork) carrying big basket of abundance on its back toward the home or a big ship carrying success (4T)

Hat-like roof on a house that has shifted on its foundation and needs protection (6T)

Hat-like dark cloud hanging over the man or a chubby bird carrying a crown of protection (1S)

Ship or a bird carrying news or money related to the man toward the home (7T)

Ship carrying abundance toward the seeker (2S)

Interpretation

Hat … smoke rising [from it] … related to change in job, job promotion, or compensation. … If you are going to have work-related changes or changes in your married life … something good is expected. … Hat generally signifies an increase in...
Figure E1. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Left

a job position. … [There is] an angel under the hat, on the right side … you have an angel in your life, whatever will happen … related to that hat is going to happen with the help of that angel. (1T)

Stork … flying in the air. Stork is good news, … it carries a big weight on its back, like a big basket full of stuff. The stork will be delayed a little in bringing the news because it is typically an animal that stands on one leg, … and this good thing will be happening and with abundance because it carries on its back the basket, the abundance toward your home. [It also looks like] a big ship, ship is a slow-moving big success, although it will be arriving but very slowly … Under the ship there are three figures … wishes … one of them will be achieved very soon, the other two will happen with some delays. One is in the shape of a [letter that matches husband’s
name], the other has wings like a flying angel, the third looks like someone on skies. These are the three wishes … which are going to be fulfilled thanks to the stork. The first wish, the letter … and the angel … a protective person … those wishes related to the [letter] are going to come true with God’s grace and … rapidly because the third figure is like someone on a magic carpet or on skies moving fast. (4T)

Hat-like roof and a square house with windows. Attached to that there is a long line stretching half-way in the cup. Several people have thrown this fish line with a hook over the roof to hold it … That house … is in a half hanging position on the verge of the mountain. Something is on the verge of collapsing but few people are protecting it with good intention, so that it won’t go down, because that house has not fallen yet. (6T)

Hat-like dark cloud, this man is coming from a place where there is a dark cloud hanging over it … almost … like … bottom of a well. It’s a space that’s separate from the man, that he has crossed a valley to leave and come to the woman … He was there during Christmas … and it’s … protected on both sides but above it is a dark cloud and the man left that to meet the woman, but that place still exists, it’s just that he’s separated himself from it. The dark cloud is above a … Christmas tree looking thing. And the cloud … also looks … like a very chubby bird carrying a crown … That’s also quite positive but there is a disconnect, like the ring [around the cup] needs to be connected somehow, and that has to do with the man. Directly underneath the black figure there’s … three shapes. … One … looks like a Christmas tree, in the middle, it’s kind of distorted … And then … the guy in the left … looks like he’s … bending over but has a gun strapped to his back. (1S)

Ship with something … coming from outside … [Seeker] is going to get something like news or money … or a bird with something on its back coming to them. It might have not come yet … or maybe it’s coming with this guy. … It’s connected where the mouth of the bird is … with the guy’s back … there’s gonna be change. (7T)

Something that is coming toward you [seeker] in a very, very near future, and it looks like a giant ship. It almost seems like it’s coming from above, … gifts, abundance, something … related to an aspect of luck. … The ship is on top of Aladdin’s lamp, … something unexpected, … something that you really wanted in your heart for a long time is very close to happening. (2S)

(2) Two Human Figures (Figure E1, feature 2)

Visual Perception

Two people, a couple—woman left, man right—are having a pleasant conversation. (1T)

Two people, a couple, are having a conversation in the home. (2T)

Two people, a couple—woman right, man left—woman urging the man to cross the mountain with her. (3T)

Two people are having a conversation at home about large sum of money or large undertaking. (4)

Two people, a couple—woman right, man left—woman holding the man’s hand to stop him from leaving. (6T)

Two people, a couple—woman right, man left—are having conversation about “this” person that carries a lot of anxiety. (7T)

Two people, a couple—man left, woman right—are facing each other, and there is darkness or misunderstanding between them. (1S)

Two women—the one on the left is the seeker and the other one on the right is a pregnant woman seeker cares a lot about and has her hand on her belly.

Interpretation

Two people are speaking facing each other. The one on the left side is you [seeker], your hair gathered up, and the other … is a man. It’s a pleasant meeting … there is a … Christmas tree between … you, … the meeting with this individual will be near the New Years, a little before or after, maybe not this but next … And it is going to be a pleasant conversation for both … I don’t know who it is, a new acquaintance or someone reemerging in your
life. … And this gentleman … there is a lion on his head, he is someone powerful. … it is very positive. … [Number] 5 is behind your head … [Something] is expecting you in 5 marks, whatever it is, 5 is in bright light, it is a very big success … Something like a seed, some new things are going to originate in your life; seed is news. … Something in your life … that you thought was difficult to resolve, will get resolved. (1T)

Two people are holding each other’s hands, in your home. … There is a very pretty 5, in light, behind those two people’s back. … Some kind of conversation is taking place related to that couple … and there is a 5 behind them; maybe you have news from outside related to those two people … on the 5th mark [5 days, weeks, months]. (2T)

A couple. … The man wants to go a different way, but that woman who has long hair pulls him and says, “Look, if we cross this mountain, it will be very well.” If they are able to cross that mountain, a very nice, white path … is awaiting them. But this woman … has questions in her mind … This man doesn’t want to go and has turned his head the other way, but this woman is pulling him her way. … [She] … has made up her mind, sooner or later she will cross this mountain and will also get help from someone. … This man and woman have things related to [number] 5, either … money, help, or something with 5 people. (3T)

At home two people are going to have a face-to-face conversation about a large sum of money or a large undertaking. There is a big 5 [which] is an odd number and is success. The conversation will succeed on the 5th mark, in 5 days, 5 weeks or 5 months. (4T)

Two people, … a chubby woman and a man are standing facing each other holding hands. … The woman … with her hands outstretched holding the man … This woman is in a lot of distress. … He is taller than … her, the [his] head is larger in the image. … The man is farther away, and … she is holding this man’s hand to stop him. The man is standing as a matter-of-factly against this action. … An upside-down shoe is on this head, meaning that he is leaving. The man’s outside [world] is clear, the inside is distressed … but … behind him is lightness, there is a [number] 5 on his path, and 5 is … a bright number. (6T)

A man and a woman … facing each other … The man is approaching the woman, climbing the … mountain to finally be with the woman … Behind her is … darkness, and she is at the top of this mountain, meaning that she has overcome significant challenges, and the man … meets her … but they are still facing some kind of darkness between them, … a misunderstanding. … His legs … are much longer than the rest of his body. … Right underneath his foot I see a tiny fish. Fish have a lot of symbolism but the first idea that I get is that it’s like you put fish in the ground to fertilize it, so it’s like he’s approaching with more maturity … But fish are also symbolic of religion or faith, so it’s like he’s walking on faith to reach the woman … And just behind him … a Christmas tree with a hat on top of it. (1S)

Two figures, and it looks like … a lot of conversation. The one on the right looks like a girl with long black hair and … the other one … is a guy … There’s … a lot of talk about this person or something’s happened, there is a lot of anxiety there. … But there is news coming in from outside about this person. (2S)

Two women …, the left one is the seeker. The other woman … has long brown hair. … She has another child in her arms, possibly a boy, … doesn’t look like a first pregnancy … Someone that you care about or that’s close to you is pregnant; there seems to be a special care about this pregnancy, I see two hands of protection on her belly. Normally when I see a baby in the cup I say it’s something new, it doesn’t have to be a baby but this really feels like a physical pregnancy … I don’t know what the [number] 5 is, maybe baby is due in May. … There is a … dark mountain afterward … [others may interpret as] “evil eyes” like it’s jealousy … but I don’t see the darkness … [but] more like turning inward, contemplative, quiet. (3S)

(3) Black Cat and Duck / Crow / Rat Figure
(Figure E1, feature 3)

Visual Perception

A black cat, a clandestine woman in the family who is envious and wants to cause harm. (1T)
A black cat with its head titled looking from outside in the direction of the seeker’s home to see what she is up to. (2T)

Someone within the family who looks like a fox and acts clandestinely and does not like the couple. (3T)

Seeker has two people who come in and out of her house and leave bad aura in the home. One (left) is like a black cat, an envious or evil person, and the other one (right) like a crow, a crowing person. (4T)

Someone like a mouse who comes in and out of the house and has bad intentions. (5T)

Rat, which is perceived as a bad animal. (7T)

**Interpretation**

There is a cat. … Someone in your life who is envious …., a woman who plays a role of … a black cat, someone in your family with whom you or your family members are going to turn against, or have turned against. This cat is clearly seen with a tail, it looks like it wants to strike, or do something or has done something already that you didn’t like. You are going to turn away from this person because you are not going to like their action. That person pretends they are not that character … but eventually you are going to figure out. … [She] shows off as someone fancy, someone with a fuller face. … There is a check mark …under the feet of that cat, [which] means that you have checked already or going to check and confirm that whatever you had thought about that person is exactly true. (1T)

A black cat with its head tilted … looks from outside toward the direction of your home to see what you are up to. (2T)

Within the family there is someone who does not like this … couple. She … looks like a fox [and] does things in a clandestine way, and her head … is [triangular shape], and [she] has darker complexion but eyes are light color or very shiny. (3T)

There is an individual coming and going in and out of your home who is a black cat, be careful. Cat is an evil eye; it embodies a difficult or evil person. … Across the black cat is a crow … a crowing person, who comes in and out of your home besides the cat. … These are two people who come and go to the house that leave bad aura in the home. (4T)

You have an enemy, just pay attention to that. This person is like a mouse, comes in and out, listens, it’s a close person you know, not an outsider. (5T)

Behind the woman [figure on the right] there is a … duck. Birds in general represent good news. Ducks … also for me … represent prosperity, … so this duck approaching the woman is on this opposite side of the man means that a lot of good things are coming to the woman but maybe not from the same direction as the man is coming from. (1S)

It looks like a rat …Rat is a bad animal. Maybe it’s related to … people talking. (7T)

**Images and Features, Figure E2**

(1) Upside-Down 3 or 13 (Figure E2, feature 1)

Number 13, something in your life turned upside down. … It made you worried. It [the issue] exists. (1T)

There is a 3, … in 3 days or 3 weeks you are going to receive good news. (2T)

Number 113, it’s $113 or $113K. You are going to have a conversation about this money, it’s amount will be spent or will come to your home by chance. … On the 31th you have good news or change expected … There will be a nice shift in your life. (4T)

You have an issue in your mind that you are waiting for, you’ll hear some news about it in 3 or 13 days. (5T)

There is an upside-down number 3. Three is a good number but it’s upside down, so successes, or … the good things are in upside-down state. (6T)

Backwards number 3. Three usually means good luck … It represents the trinity and in almost all cultures, 3 is a lucky number. But when it’s backwards, that doesn’t necessarily mean bad luck, but it means that the perception of luck is distorted and there is a number right next to it. It looks like it could be a 31 or a 13, like some important event will take place on the 31st for the people that you care
about. But it will be misunderstood, and the number 1 actually looks like a small man … maybe that date relates to the man that you know, that something will happen to him. (1S)

Figure E2. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Right

(2) Moon

New moon, a new love is blooming in you. … If you are not married, maybe it’s a new love, a child’s love, some new or growing love. (1T)
A half-moon is seen, in 15 days or after 15 days you’ll have a good change. (4T)

In your home there is news that’s going to lighten things up like a moon. It seems that this moon will benefit you this month and will open a nice and bright path for you. (5T)

There is ... half-moon shape ... it’s a new moon ... on this side, where the 31 was. That [means] somebody that went through an important growth process here ... But a new moon ... on one hand it’s hopeful but on the other hand half of the moon is in darkness, so somebody close to you went through that and later approached a point in their life where their head is almost outside of the darkness. ... It’s like their eyes can’t see it but their head can imagine it and it’s there, they just need to give it a little more time or...push themselves up out of the challenges that they are in right now and then there is a direct path...down the mountain to something better that actually leads to this protected place ... that has a dark cloud over it. (1S)

(1) Two Paths (Figure E2, feature 2)

There are two things smoking [happening], very nice things are going to happen within your home, I am not saying at this moment because the smoke is white, you have to give it time ... two nice things. ... Maybe if you have two children, it is connected with each of your children. (1T)

Two roads merging into one, from both sides people are coming together. It’s those two people [the couple] coming together, and it’s a short road, and there will be a nice gathering related to ... good news. (2T)

Two paths ... After crossing this mountain [challenge related to the couple], there is a very nice white door. This door goes from one road and returns on another; it’s not the same path going back and forth. (3T)

You have two short paths ... you are going to take, ... and ... lightness will open, and ... you’ll be conquering that mountain ... [and] moving that undertaking forward. (4T)

There are two light paths here but those are not happening soon, they’ve shown up on the side ... They are in planning or in thought but not in development at the moment. (6T)

Two roads, travels, going out, but ... it’s questionable, and because the two travels are not too far apart, there’s like a pocket of window in between and the window usually means a change ... The two travels, the window in between, the first may not be good, the second much better, there maybe a change going on. ... It looks like the road has to do with the girl [of the couple]. (7T)

Two faint paths like two smoke stacks. Normally when I see columns that go all the way I would say it’s a project or dream or a goal you’re working on but this looks really different ...the top is closed which means that it has a limit. ... It looks like two separate funeral pyres of people who either live far away from you or acquaintances but not super close. ... two different people’s deaths that are not so far from one another in terms of time that they happened. (2S)

Bottom of the Cup: Seeker’s Heart Center
(Figure E3, before the bottom was stamped)

Inside your heart, all around the circle ... an ugly man’s face ... is showing, ... sourpuss man with nasty eyes ... with a round face. (2T)

In your heart there is an eye, as if someone views you with bad eye [intention], but it’s passing in a few marks ... I see worries on the bottom of the cup [in her heart]. (4T)

There is an evil eye, coffee has risen [on the bottom] like a mountain. (6T)

You have a lot of questions about something that’s going on in the household, the bottom, the heart is worried immensely. There’s a lot of people, a lot of talks, [but] it’s slowly opening up. (7T)

A raised bump; ... it looks like an illness rather than a death. It looks like somebody is either bedridden or struggling with an illness ... if it’s a person with chronic illness then this would be a time when they were sort of acutely struggling and having a difficult time. (2S)
Figure E2. Seeker A’s Cup: Handle Pointing Right
Interpretation of the Bottom of the Cup Stamped (Figure E3)

A puffed person, like a turkey, whoever you were thinking of, this individual is in light but he can’t see his own condition, he sees himself worse. He is curled but he is in a better shape than he perceived himself to be … a person with a big nose, eyes are smaller in comparison. …This person must know that he is in a better place than he thinks …, he shouldn’t worry himself from within, it’s as if this person … has an inflammation. (1T)

There is a nebulous face, it’s not clear. Like there is somebody but the face is veiled, they are not showing who they are. This is a person among your friends or acquaintances whom you have let into your heart, but this person is fake, artificial, it’s a woman’s face. She even has short hair … with … bright make-up. (2T)
It looks like a big tree. Tree is your family, it has two stumps and two branches and on top of the tree in the corner there is a large boomerang. Boomerang means whatever you throw will come back at you. If you do good unto others, good things will come to you, if you do bad things, you’ll receive bad in return. Tiny, tiny stars are shining in the sky for you. Whatever you undertake, one by one they will succeed. When I look this way, it’s a white dog. Dog is a faithful, … kind person of whom you are proud and happy. (4T)

You have thought of a person. … It’s a face … there will be success related to this person. (5T)

Here there is a curled up, but in light, chick. Like it is in a distressed, self-pitiful state … but … in a place of lightness. This person is curled up … in a fear … but he is going to emerge from this situation successfully. It’s … challenging, and the final decision is not made yet for yes or no, and the distress is overhanging with all the bad feelings, but when the issue is resolved and the path opens, this person will be in joy and lightness. (6T)

Face of … a goat or a bull and there is a … horn protruding … This goat or bull is kind of the mythical creature and has become a real one … That’s a very good sign because unicorns are usually considered a very lucky encounter and when they become real creature, that means that the luck that they bring can actually be realized, that it’s not just a myth … I am thinking of zodiac signs when I see this like taurus. Either taurus in your life or something will happen in that time period of the taurus, so like the end of April/beginning of May will be very positive that will alleviate some suffering or some weight on your heart. (1S)

I see … a physical heart … If there’s no physical issue with your actual heart, what this represents … [is] … a very, very deep feeling person that you’re the one that feels the emotions deeper than anyone else because it’s heart within a heart. If it is relating to an actual heart issue, because it’s a biological heart …, then I would say that … the outcome is going to be positive because it’s all in white. (2S)

Appendix F: Seeker B’s Reading Summary
Central Query:
Seeker’s Future Life Direction

Context: Seeker traveled from country to country and made a temporary stop at her homeland to regroup and make some decisions to figure out the direction of her new life path, including where to settle and what to pursue professionally.

Interpretation Summary
in Chronological Order

Seeker has a lot on her mind. She wants to create, and she wants a sense of freedom, but she has a lot of self-doubt and many what-if questions. But she will accomplish what she is looking for because she is unique, stubborn, determined, and creative and has people around her, alive or passed, who support her. Even though she does not see the whole picture yet, somehow, she will find her way through the challenging situation. (3S)

Seeker is in a restless and unsettled state and does not know how to deal with a certain issue. She has questions about something that appears to have turned upside down, and she is wavering. Even though her heart is terribly distressed, the sky above her is clear, and she has blessings from an older woman who prays for her. Bright future is lined up for her, and everything will go according to her heart because of her faith and positive nature. (8T)

Seeker is worried about something and tries to find a solution for it or how to get out of the situation by constantly questioning herself and holding everything inside, which is causing her tremendous physical and emotional pain. She is trying to find her true self and needs to see past the current situation into the future and do what feels right for her. She is entering a new space or home and needs to trust her heart. Someone who is not physically present, her grandfather she was very close to, is communicating … that he is there for her. She needs to conquer her fears, release creatively and emotionally, and take on her grandfather’s strong character to go past her challenges. (4S)
Seeker is currently in a very distressed state and under pressure from family and does not seem to find a way out of the situation. She is on the move and is relocating to gain freedom and power. In her current situation, she does not have full visibility over her life, but she will gain full perspective in a short time because she has protection and blessings and will be in a position to control her life and find a solution, and in the process will develop the necessary inner strength and power to put her life back together. (5S)

There is a lot of heaviness around certain decisions in seeker’s life. Things seem to be on fire, and there is a sense of loneliness and separation and considerable travel back and forth. She may be holding things and not sharing with anyone, which causes a lot of emotional and physical pain. But she has love and blessings from an older woman and will somehow protect herself from negative forces and through her inner strength and determination; everything will be fine for her. She has financial rewards in the future and may end up somewhere else where she is. (6S)

Seeker carries a lot of emotional burden and heaviness and is in a transitional phase currently. She is under tremendous pressure from family and may not know how to relieve herself. She is holding things within and absorbing everyone’s energy, and needs a creative outlet to express herself, set boundaries, and to cleanse physically and spiritually. She is a protected person and has support from people and ancestral/spirit guidance and needs to tap into her creative, feminine energy to reactivate her own inner strength and power to heal and transform herself. Whatever wishes she has are lined up for her but will take a little patience. (7S)

Seeker is going through a difficult transition in her personal journey that has taken a center stage, making everything else is less relevant at the moment. She is traveling, going from destination to destination that may change its course, and she may not end up where she was intending to due to diversions. But she is going to see it through, because she is capable and has a strong support system around her, and will emerge from the challenging situation even stronger and wiser. (8S)

There is challenge within the family and anxiety over an issue. It has left a heavy weight on the seeker’s heart, but the situation is clearing. Seeker will make a few decisions and undertake some projects to sort things out one by one. She has nice progress and financial reward lined up for her and a bright future due to her own strong faith as well as prayers and blessing of a man, physically present or passed, who deeply cares for her and whom she always carries in her heart. (9T)

**Interpretation of the Bottom of the Cup Stamped** (Figure B5, Appendix B)

It’s both a unicorn and a bull … You’re [seeker] very unique but you’re very stubborn…. in a good way … want to push through [your] dreams … Stubborn, and unique, and determined, whatever you set your mind to, you are going to do it. … as much as the bull may be perceived as scary, there is also gentleness to that animal, gentle, and strong, and stubborn, all those things have to exist for that animal to survive. And that’s how I think your ideas and what you thrive to accomplish, that’s going to happen because of your personality. (3S)

There is a black unicorn. That’s very good. Your wish will come true and very soon. Black means soon. And it will be according to your heart. And this white round thing, it’s not an evil eye but good luck eye, your opening is very good … your heavy heart has opened. (8T)

The bottom of the cup is very thick, … you have all that [emotional tension] inside you and need to open the path to release it and start breathing … You have a lot of pain, you need to put a stop to it … Take a deep breath [and] release everything so you can…relax … [and] concentrate. … At some point you will restore yourself. I am seeing in this image your stomach pain. It’s close to your intestines. … There is fear in you, don’t fear, conquer it, it is that fear that holds you back, your hands, your back. I feel something holding you, like someone is holding you back from your shoulders, but you need to release it and go, take a step. (4S)

There is great deal of emotional distress and you feel like you are not able to escape it, no matter
how much you dig, the path doesn’t open. … You are circling in the same place … and the more you circle, the more you sink into the difficulties, and you realize that something is blocking from getting whatever emotional hardship you are carrying right now resolved for you … But it is going to open up. There is a lock. You must know where that lock is so you can find the key. Lock means that there is a solution … but you must find the way to that solution. … I see … an unborn baby … This could mean … that something new is brewing for you … Maybe it is a new life, change for you. But it hasn’t been born … or maybe you must create something new. … But it is dependent upon the lock. You’ll open it in three time lapses, and it will happen through your own efforts … possibly in March. (5S)

6S: That eye part, … and then there’s a dragon around it. … there’s someone that is very jealous of you and maybe wants to cause some problems. However, it’s also protected by the dragon. And the dragon means that you’re very strong. … You’re protecting yourself from whatever negative things you feel might be toward you. … When you’re a nice person, and you’re kind and you’re soft, sometimes people might get jealous, or they might give you a bad time. And then the dragon comes out when you come to defend yourself. (6S)

7S: Whatever you wish is happening … be very patient, it’s not going to happen exactly how you want it. But … you’re gonna be more than satisfied with the results … I see two big, really interesting

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Figure F1. Seeker B’s Cup: Bottom of the Cup, Stamped
symbols ... One is a full breast ... really tapping into that divine feminine energy is ... going to be a huge part of you getting what you want ... I see this big, beautiful dragon energy, very fierce, very ancient, very protective, and tapping ... to that is ... really strong and powerful ... There's ... a lot of physical healing involved ... You want to feel it in your body, and ... dragon kind of energy is going to be ... activating what's already within you ... There's a need to cleanse the organs too, especially ... the spleen and liver and kidneys, ... the gut area to be completely cleansed out ... Once you do that, you're like shedding a layer. The dragons and snakes are very much associated with each other too. So, you definitely want to, moving forward, feel like you're shedding a whole layer of skin in order to move on to your next phase ... You're just in a transitional period right now, but you're strong. ... I do see you reaching heights and having ... a very balanced kind of family life as well. (7S)

It's very intense picture. ... the very ... center dot with a circle around it, ... gave the appearance of the universe to me. So, it's like a picture of space ... that generated a lot of feeling of ... transition for you. You're ... going through a lot right now. And it's so evident in the bottom of your cup, it's so heavy set. And there's so much, like you poked right through it, and that little dot, ... that portal right there, you're gonna go through whatever it is you're going through, and ... come out of it stronger, and even wiser ... There's a lot of heaviness around you ... your own personal journey is really tough right now. But you're gonna see through it. (8S)

Seers’ Advice for the Seeker

Explore, ask questions, interview people that you admire, if there is someone who has achieved their dream ... ask them what did they do to get where they are. ... Particularly other women, if they are successful and you admire them, ask them questions, interview them. (3S)

Don't fear, there may be people who say wait a little ... Feel what’s right and ... whatever you want to do, do it. ... You must create something new. ... Get it started, and feel everything around you. If you think you want to wait another month, do whatever that you are feeling. Don't rush. Observe around you, consider the country’s situation, connect with other people. ... Do something that you really want. ... Don't be afraid, ... don't look at the current situation, look into the future and think about the future. ... Detach yourself from whatever has happened, you need new life, new thoughts. ... Whatever you are feeling, don't hold it inside. Go either to church, or park, or garden and release it. ... Interact with positive people ... You need to muster strong traits in you. You need to take the advice of elders ... and build strong characters. And begin to think about your own life. (4S)

One way that you could ... relieve a lot of the stress is through your creative energy and just being more open with your emotions ... not being afraid to let them come out. ... If you want it to express more, and show your depth more, ... it should be the next requirement moving forward in your healing ... whether it’s ... poetry or ... creating writing with your hand, something coming out of you. ... Set boundaries with family. ... Invite more feminine energy into your life ... less controlling and more going with the flow. ... Be patient with your successes and ... your financial growth ... Cleanse yourself of people, even ... foods that you shouldn't be eating and ... thoughts, ... a spiritual ... mind-body cleanse. ... Don't be afraid to ask for help and activate those that do want to help you. ... Let out your emotions, you can’t hold it inside. (7S)

Think about what you’re doing right now, and what steps you’re going to take to get it there. Think about what diversions might come your way in the meantime. So, prepare yourself ... don’t just go into something blindly, just because you want to do it, because you think you can ... Always think of how you’re going to come out, like what’s Plan B, just in case. ... Take a look at the people around you who are capable or ... uplifting, and maybe you’re not recognizing it in that manner but definitely taking into account that there is support system there. ... Don’t feel like you’re going through it alone. Seek help ... talk to somebody. (8S)

Seers’ Portrayal of Seeker’s Character

You’re ... very creative. You are meant to create something ... either ... with your ... artwork
or words with language. ... You’re stubborn and unique and determined, whatever you set your mind to, you are going to do it. (3S)

You are a very peaceful person. (5S)

You have so much depth and ... the ability to help a lot of people with your experience and with your ... art ... but you’re also afraid to show yourself in your purest form ... You’re also hiding. ... You think globally, you think big. ... You have many different interests. ... Whatever wisdom comes your way you do process it internally; you soak it all in ... You’re a very, very good learner. ... You do have a mark of a healer ... You’re ... an empath, ... and you tend to absorb [other people’s] energy. ... You have a very big open heart. ... You’re really direct. ... You’re very, very strong. (7S)

You are a very joyful person, but a little word could bother you. ... You are a very straightforward person, you have a pure heart. ... You are a very peace-loving person. You don’t like disputes, disagreements, fights. (8T)

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