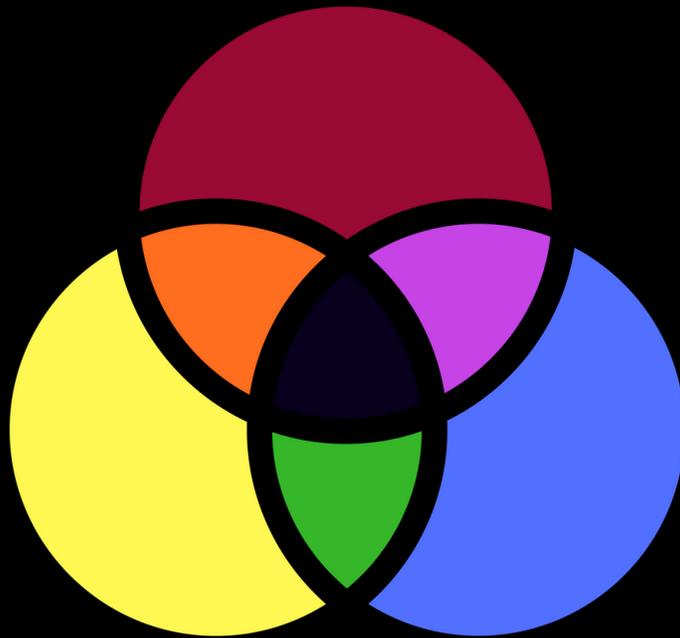


ISSN 2575-2510

# Threshold:

Journal of Interdisciplinary  
Consciousness Studies



**Volume 1, Number 2, 2017**

**2017, Volume 1, Number 2**

**THRESHOLD:  
JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES**

**A publication of the Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ, USA**

**www. TJICS.ORG**

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Specific content is tailored to meet the needs of practitioners, clinicians, scientists, and the general public.

**Publisher Contact:**

Mark Boccuzzi, Windbridge Research Center  
boccuzzi@windbridgecenter.org

**Editor-in-Chief:** David B. Metcalfe, Liminal Analytics: Applied Research Collective

**Managing Editor:** Mark Boccuzzi, Windbridge Research Center

**Copy Editor:** Susan E. Bernstein, MA, Windbridge Research Center

**Editorial Board Members:**

Charles F. Emmons, PhD, Prof. of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Gettysburg College

Neal Grossman, PhD, Author of *The Spirit of Spinoza: Healing the Mind*

Lila Massoumi, MD, Psychiatrist & Medical Director, Michigan Integrative Holistic Psychiatry

Julia Mossbridge, PhD, Institute of Noetic Sciences, Northwestern University

Patricia Pearson, MSc, Journalist and author of *Opening Heaven's Door*

Dominique Surel, PhD, Dean of Faculty, Energy Medicine University

**Publication:** Two volumes per year, with new articles posted as they become available.

**Manuscript: Submissions:** By invitation only.

**Peer-Review:** Original Research Articles are peer-reviewed by at least two independent reviewers. Other journal sections are reviewed by the editors with external content experts consulted on a case-by-case basis.

**Copyright and Open-Access:** Copyright of articles published in TJICS is retained by the authors and licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Articles may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). They may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**Fees:** TJICS does not charge any fees for publication.

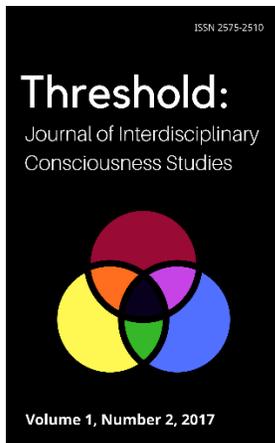
**Advertising:** TJICS does not accept advertising.

**Disclaimer:** The information presented in this publication is provided "as-is." In no respect shall the publisher incur any liability for any damages, arising out of, resulting from, or any way connected to the use of the information provided in this journal. Authors are responsible for their own content and the editorial views expressed here are their own. Always consult a licensed healthcare provider when evaluating treatment options or making lifestyle changes.

**Fonts:**

Noto Sans: Copyright 2012 Google Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Apache License, version 2.0](#)

Noto Serif: Copyright 2012 Google Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Apache License, version 2.0](#)



**THRESHOLD:  
JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY  
CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES**

A publication of the Windbridge Research Center,  
Tucson, AZ, USA

**2017, Volume 1, Number 2**

www.TJICS.org

## Table of Contents

### From the Editor

- i-ii **Between Experience and Expectation**  
David Metcalfe

### Editorial

- 21 **One Culture Haunts while Another Consoles:  
Differing Responses to the Deceased**  
Patricia Pearson, MSc

### Referenced Commentary

- 25 **Dying to live: The Power of Transcendence in the  
Treatment of Existential Anxiety**  
Sam Gandy

### Technical Brief

- 37 **Application of Digital Infrared Thermographic Imaging  
(DITI) and Other Monitors for Documenting Physical  
Phenomena during Sitzings with a Medium**  
Mark Boccuzzi

### Original Research

- 51 **Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Mediumistic and  
Psychic Experiences**  
Julie Beischel, PhD, Chad Mosher, PhD, Mark Boccuzzi

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

*Intended Audience: Researchers, Clinicians, Practitioners, General*

# Between Experience and Expectation

David B. Metcalfe

*Editor-in-Chief, Threshold*

Experience and expectation don't always coincide. We read a local news report and expect a rainy day, yet when we go out we experience sunshine as unforeseen changes alter the weather patterns. We lay down to sleep expecting a long morning commute to work, wake up with a head cold and decide to stay home. We can find similar examples in our own lives where this pattern holds true, and yet it is rare that we really consider how this common deviation between experience and expectation affects us in a deeper way.

What expectations, we might ask, do we have for what comes next after we pass on from this world? Where did these expectations come from? How different might these expectations be from the reality of what we will experience?

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* offers an exciting opportunity to dive into these questions regarding death which are so important to our lives. Confirmed, direct experience of what happens as we pass on may remain out of reach for those of us on this side of the veil; however, we can explore analogous areas of experience and investigate what influences exist in our culture and in our personal lives that affect the expectations that we have. In doing so we can develop a better understanding and perhaps even better align our expectations to the surprising reality that awaits us.

When we pursue the lines of investigation offered by *Threshold's* contributors, whether in cross-cultural studies of apparitional encounters, inquiry into social rituals surrounding death, reports of near-death and out-

of-body experiences, or scientific analysis of mediumship and psychic functioning, we begin to realize that the question of our mortality is more than just what happens to us after death. What we are really asking is related to our experience of what we call ‘consciousness’ and, if we are honest, our question deals directly with what it means to be human.

Our humanity has been defined for us through so many disparate and often incompatible concepts and ideologies. The vast nature of who and what we are, something so apparent and obvious when we look at our place in the universe, has been obscured for us. There is an unknown realm which lies beyond death that speaks to us of how little we truly understand ourselves and our place in the world.

Any effort to illuminate this darkened path is sure to offer rich rewards, and as always, dear reader, as you enjoy this second issue we are thankful that you’ve chosen to join us on this exciting and unexpected journey.

### **About the Journal**

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Content is tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences including researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and the general public. For more information, visit: [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

Content © 2017 The Author(s).

 Licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ. This manuscript is open access. It is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. It may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). It may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



## EDITORIAL

*Intended Audience: Clinicians, General*

# One Culture Haunts while Another Consoles: Differing Responses to the Deceased

Patricia Pearson, MSc

*Toronto, Canada*

The shift in the calendar from October to November demarcates a striking difference in how cultures interact with their dead. Halloween is a flashy parade of ghosts, with spooky stories, ghoulish masks and then a comforting pile of candy. We file through haunted houses, watch horror films, don disguises, and in myriad ways remind ourselves that the dead are scary Others to be shunned and shivered at.

Then comes November, and All Souls' Day, more widely observed now in Latino culture as La Dia de les Muertes. Here, the deceased are beckoned from their graves to visit with the living, offered flowers and favorite foods, encountered—not as ghosts but as lost and still-remembered loved ones. The import of this relationship to death was moving and clear in this year's parade through Mexico City, merging the skeletal costumes that all celebrants don in unison—no Donald Trump masks or sexy witch outfits—with an explicit memorialization this year of the victims of September's earthquake.

The Day of the Dead is actually much more meaningfully aligned with the real, lived experiences that human beings have with 'ghosts.' According to a review of the literature recently undertaken by myself, Dr. Julie Beischel, and Dr. Julia Mossbridge, the likeliest ghost that people will encounter across cultures is a close family member, more often an older relative or spouse than a child, whose presence is sensed or fleetingly seen after death, and from which the bereaved derive comfort. Conventional psychiatry refers to these experiences as "grief hallucinations."

In the late spring of 2015, by way of example, my brother-in-law paid a visit to my sister's tomb, in an alpine meadow cemetery in the Gatineau Hills of southern Quebec in Canada. My sister had been dead, at this point, for seven years, and the pair had been separated for twelve. He sat in the grass amidst planted geraniums for half an hour, musing about the rise and fall of their marriage. He told Katharine, or her tomb, that he was sorry for the part he had played in the dissolution. Then, plucking up and tossing away a handful of grass, desultory, he began his ninety-minute drive back to Montreal.

"It wasn't until I was maybe halfway home that I felt her presence," he later wrote to me. "The landscape is open there with a big wide sky, but it was overcast and had started to rain—just barely, but it made me a bit nervous." He was on a motorcycle. Even fit riders, as he surely was, begin to lose some confidence in their fifties.

"The sense wasn't physical at first," he went on, "just this really nice, strong awareness of her. And then I had the distinct sensation of her arms around me, and her leaning in close against my back. It was tactile and fantastic. I felt warm. I was completely calm and happy, smiling from ear to ear. That hardly ever happens to me." His nervousness about the rain ebbed, and it occurred to him that Katharine was there to keep him safe on behalf of their two sons. She—the presence, the hallucination—rode behind him for twenty minutes or so.

"What I know is that it did not feel at all like a product of my imagination," he wrote. "It felt external to me. It felt real."

He wasn't prepared to say what the experience pointed to. Like other secular North Americans, he is aware we must uphold a certain paradigm and say 'this cannot be.' He is the son of an engineer and himself an amateur astronomer. He is fully cognizant of balancing on the knife's edge of what can and cannot be. Nevertheless, the sensed presence mattered to him, deeply. "It was," he said, "a remarkable, indelible experience."

Freud was the first to articulate the concept of "wishful psychosis" in grief, a notion of temporary madness featuring willfully conjured visions. He urged his patients toward recovery by 'severing bonds' with the deceased. Move on, let go, lest sorrow bedevil and sink you. This became the counseling profession's model for grief recovery. When the physician W.D. Rees first uncovered the prevalence rate of these hallucinations in a 1973 study of Welsh widows—about fifty per cent—he found that three-quarters of the widows had never spoken of the experience before being asked in his

survey. Unsurprisingly, they didn't wish to be pathologized. They also didn't want to move on.

In 1970, the English author Sylvia Townsend Warner, a frequent contributor of short stories to *The New Yorker*, had an unexpected visit from her dead lover, Valentine Ackland, lost the previous year to breast cancer. Roused at 3 a.m. one night, she found, as she wrote in her diary, that Valentine was presently beside her in their bed. "Not remembered," Warner clarified, "not evoked, not a sense of presence. Actual."

In the dark quiet of their British cottage, this "actual" Valentine, solid yet ephemeral, there fleetingly and then gone, engaged in a reuniting embrace. "I held her again," Warner noted with deep satisfaction. "It was. It is."

These experiences of presence, now widely documented in studies around the world, appear to have radical efficacy in healing grief, which eventually prompted the therapeutic community to shift from Freud's "severed bonds" model of recovery to the "continuing bonds" model pioneered by American psychologist Dennis Klass.

"In the new model of grief," Klass notes, "the purpose of grief is the construction of a durable biography of both the dead person and the living person that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead and their ongoing interactions with the dead into their lives."

Yet, at the heart of this model there lies a metaphysical crisis. For there to be efficacy, the sensed presence experiences must be perceived as real. Therapists and doctors step lively around grief hallucinations, stranding the bereaved in a liminal space between madness and solace. One man who has been thinking about this and studying the phenomenon of late is palliative physician Christopher Kerr, the medical director at Hospice Buffalo, originally from Ontario. Another is counseling psychologist Edith Steffen of the University of Roehampton, UK. Both are grappling with the complexity and nuance of how the grieving and the dying sense the dead.

### **Additional Resources**

Christopher Kerr, MD, PhD, Hospice Buffalo

<https://www.hospicebuffalo.com/files/3714/6117/3001/KerrCW-CV-2016.pdf>

"I See Dead People: Dreams and Visions of the Dying," TEDxBuffalo, 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbnBe-vXGQM>

Edith Steffen, PsychD, PGDip, University of Roehampton, UK

[https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/edith-steffen\(ff004720-c97e-491d-8dc7-9b1d13950980\).html](https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/edith-steffen(ff004720-c97e-491d-8dc7-9b1d13950980).html)

Steffen, E., & Klass, D. (Eds). (2018). *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement: New Directions for Research and Practice*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

Patricia Pearson, MSc

Essay: “End-of-Life Experiences: Advice for Caregivers”

<http://tjics.org/index.php/TJICS/article/view/2>

Rees, W. D. (1971). The hallucinations of widowhood. *British Medical Journal*, 4(5778), 37–41. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1799198/>

“Mexico’s Day of the Dead Parade Pays Tribute to Quake Victims,” *New York Times*, 10/29/2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/29/world/americas/mexico-day-of-the-dead.html>

### About the Journal

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Content is tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences including researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and the general public. For more information, visit: [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

Content © 2017 The Author(s).

© Licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ. This manuscript is open access. It is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. It may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). It may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



## REFERENCED COMMENTARY

*Intended Audience: Researchers, Clinicians*

# Dying to live: The power of transcendence in the treatment of existential anxiety

Sam Gandy, MR

*University of Aberdeen, UK  
greensam2512@hotmail.com*

**Abstract:** There is a notable lack of effective treatments and therapies available for the treatment of existential anxiety. There are, however, a number of avenues worthy of more attention, all experiential or using insights gained from experiences. Such experiences include near-death experiences (NDEs), out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and those yielded by classical psychedelics such as psilocybin. Of these, the psychedelics may have a particular utility when it comes to the treatment of existential anxiety. Psychedelics are currently undergoing a long-overdue scientific research renaissance, and there has been some highly promising research utilizing psilocybin in the treatment of existential anxiety and depression in terminally ill cancer patients, yielding compelling and robust findings. A single dose of psilocybin produced immediate and sustained decreases in anxiety and depression and improvements in outlook and life meaning in an overwhelming majority of study participants. At sufficient doses, psychedelics can occasion mystical-type experiences, and it appears this is intimately tied to their long-term psychotherapeutic efficacy. There is some intriguing overlap in aftereffects reported by those who have undergone mystical experiences via psychedelics, NDEs, and OBEs. An interesting property of the NDE is that the psychological changes appear to be mentally contagious, so that one may reap the benefits of the experience without incurring the risk of experiencing one. A common thread and apparently psychotherapeutic element linking these experiences is the experience of being disembodied and of transcending the limits of the body.

**Keywords:** dying, death, psychedelics, psilocybin, NDE, OBE

In Western society, death is a taboo subject and, from the perspective of medical science, is viewed as a defeat and a failure. Medicine is excellent at keeping people alive but is a great deal poorer when it comes to easing the passage of the dying. In a sense, society has actually regressed in terms of the integration of death and dying, as medical science has grown in power and death has become a less common part of our lives. Existential anxiety, which includes fear and anxiety centered on death and dying, is something often overlooked (e.g., Lehto & Stein, 2009), and there is a notable lack of effective treatments or therapies, with physicians likely to feel underequipped in treating the psycho-spiritual effects of death anxiety (e.g., Bates, 2016).

Despite the lack of currently integrated treatments, there are a number of avenues worthy of much more attention in this regard. Chief among them are the classical psychedelics, a group of substances long-used by humans in the context of healing and divination, which are currently experiencing a scientific research renaissance. Psychedelics may have a unique utility in their potential efficacy in the treatment of existential anxiety. While current research has focused on terminally ill patients, with respect to life we are all terminal, and it may likely be that the benefits of these substances are too important to limit to the treatment of sick people only, although this should be made a priority.

Aldous Huxley was a pioneer of this approach of using psychedelics for treatment of the dying, writing to pioneering psychedelic researcher Dr. Humphry Osmond in 1958 about how lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) could be used to treat terminal cancer patients so their dying could be a “more spiritual, less strictly physiological process” (Huxley, 1999, p. 143). A few years later when Huxley—a man who talked the talk and walked the walk—lay dying from laryngeal cancer, he requested and received two 100 µg dose injections of LSD from his wife Laura, who reported that his death was extremely beautiful and serene in a letter she wrote in 1963 to Aldous’s brother Julian (Huxley, 1968).

A pioneering researcher and proponent of using psychedelics to treat the terminally ill was Dr. Walter Pahnke. Pahnke joined the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in 1967 and conducted psychedelic therapy with LSD and *N,N*-dipropyltryptamine (DPT) until his untimely death in 1971 (Coomber, 1998). He used LSD in the treatment of terminal cancer patients and wrote a number papers and book chapters with colleagues on his research findings during this time. One chapter published in *Psi and*

*altered states of consciousness: Proceedings of an International Conference on Hypnosis, Drugs, Dreams, and Psi* (Pahnke, 1968) looked at the effect of the mystical-type experience on terminal cancer patients and the potential implications for psi research. A paper published in the *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* (Pahnke et al., 1970) explored psychedelic therapy utilizing LSD with terminal cancer patients. As in the case of Huxley, Pahnke was motivated in part by his own personal mystical-type experiences catalyzed through his own psychedelic usage (Pahnke, 1964).

In central Africa, the oneirogenic ('dream-inducing') plant *Tabernanthe iboga* has a long history of use as a spiritual sacrament and medicine and is employed by a number of different groups such as the Bwiti in religious ceremonies. The Bwiti utilize a single large initiatory dose of the iboga plant, in the form of ingested root bark, consumed by the initiate to induce radical spiritual growth (Barabe, 1982). This induces an experience resembling a near-death experience (NDE) in which the initiate is instructed to go beyond the body to the spiritual realms to seek guidance and insight on life issues via communing with their ancestors (Barabe, 1982).

A number of recent studies have demonstrated both the safety and efficacy of classical psychedelics such as LSD and psilocybin in the treatment of existential anxiety and depression in the terminally ill. A pioneering pilot study by Grob et al. (2011) with psilocybin using a dose of 0.2 mg/kg reported safe physiological and psychological responses and no clinically adverse events. A reduction in anxiety was noted 1-3 months after treatment, with a long-term improvement in mood observed at six months. A study by Gasser et al. (2014) using LSD (at a dose of 200 µg) as a treatment for the anxiety associated with life-threatening diseases reported no lasting adverse reactions from LSD administration, long-term benefits sustained over a 12-month period following a single dose, and highly significant reductions in anxiety (in 77.8% of patients) and a rise in quality of life (in 66.7% of patients).

Larger scale studies using psilocybin in the treatment of anxiety and depression suffered by patients with life-threatening cancer have built on this previous research. One study conducted by Griffiths et al. (2016) at Johns Hopkins University using doses of 22 and 30 mg/70 kg found that 80% of patients reported lower depression and anxiety at a six-month follow-up including reduced death anxiety and increased quality of life, life meaning, and optimism. Study participants reported improved attitudes towards life and self and improved mood, relationships, and spirituality with over 80%

of participants describing greater well-being and life satisfaction. It is notable that the mystical-type experiences occurring through psilocybin treatment mediated the long-term therapeutic outcomes. A study conducted by Ross et al. (2016) at New York University utilizing a psilocybin dose of 0.3 mg/kg reported similar results, with study participants reporting immediate, substantial, and sustained improvements in anxiety and depression, with decreases in cancer-related demoralization and hopelessness, improved spiritual well-being, and increased quality of life. Enduring clinically significant reductions in anxiety, sustained reductions in existential distress, increased quality of life, and an improved attitude towards death were each reported by a majority of participants. Again, it was noted that the psilocybin-catalyzed mystical experience mediated the long-term therapeutic effect on anxiety and depression.

It can be seen from these studies that the mystical-type experiences reliably catalyzed through high-dose psilocybin are a core part of their long-term therapeutic effect on depression and anxiety ratings, while enhancing life meaning and outlook. It seems, too, that the mystical experience is of great importance with regard to altering perceptions of death and reducing death anxiety. Facets of the mystical experience such as the sense of unity, perceived interconnectedness of all things, a deep sense of love, reverence, sacredness, and noetic quality (Griffiths et al., 2016) are very likely contributing to the uplifting attitudinal shifts towards death but also towards self, life, and others. A recently published study by Griffiths et al. (2017) utilizing high doses of 20 mg and 30 mg/70 kg psilocybin found that mystical experiences in synergy with spiritual practices produced large significant positive changes for a number of trait measures of prosocial attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives, among them death transcendence. This study is notable in that unlike all the aforementioned studies, study participants were physically and mentally healthy and not terminally ill. However, significant numbers of these participants reported death transcendence under high-dose psilocybin, suggesting that such a shift in perspective is something intrinsic to this experience.

Medicine and psychiatry operate under the paradigm of drugs affecting patients for the duration of time they are in a patient's system. The research described here demonstrates that a single dose of a classical psychedelic like psilocybin administered in a psychotherapeutic setting can produce highly beneficial long-term psychotherapeutic effects, lasting

months to a year or more. This is an entirely novel, unprecedented, and potentially revolutionary finding which currently lacks a clear scientific explanation.

Treatment of rational suicide in the elderly is another unexplored frontier where psychedelics could hold promise. Rational suicide can be defined as suicide of the elderly to escape suffering or due to a weariness of living due to age-related losses. Psychedelic experiences in a psychotherapeutic context may help foster a sense of life-meaning and positive outlook and promote the perception that life is worth living, even in conditions of great adversity (Hendricks & Grob, 2016).

The mystical or transcendent experience catalyzed through psychedelics seems to be a key part of their long-term therapeutic efficacy and to be strongly linked to the reduction of death anxiety. These experiences may allow patients to experience a sense of connectedness to the sacred, to enhance relationships with family and loved ones, to live fully in the moment with equanimity, and to make the most of their remaining time. Through their experience with the psychedelic, individuals may be able to transcend their primary identification with their physical bodies and experience ego-free states, which in turn may generate a new perspective and acceptance. It seems likely this facet of the psychedelic-induced mystical experience is a key factor linked to a long-term reduction in death anxiety. In the recent psilocybin studies described above, it was also noted that encounters with death or dying were common in people's experiences. Such experiences would vary widely in content between different individuals, with some feeling their consciousness as something separate from their physical body that will survive its demise (Pollan, 2015).

Whether the experiences reported by study participants are valid or illusionary is of secondary importance to the psychotherapeutic benefits these experiences have for the experiencer in question. To paraphrase pioneering psychologist and philosopher William James in his seminal book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), the value of mystical experiences can only be judged "by their fruits" not "by their roots" (p. 20). Furthermore, the psychological symptoms of existential distress share a great deal of overlap with those of a hyperactive default-mode network, a part of the brain that psilocybin is known to quiet (Carhart-Harris et al., 2012).

Psilocybin may be particularly well suited for use in palliative care scenarios. It doesn't carry the same political or cultural baggage of LSD and

is shorter acting than the latter with less chance of yielding adverse reactions. It is non-toxic, physiologically well tolerated, and suitable for use by the terminally ill (Carhart-Harris et al., 2017). In the future, it could be administered in family groups in a supportive setting. Psilocybin is used in family settings by indigenous groups such as the Mazatec in Mexico (Munn, 1973) and, due to psilocybin's ability to lower psychological armor and facilitate communication, it could be an excellent catalyst for family groups to connect and say their goodbyes to loved ones with an openness that may otherwise not be easily accessible.

The psychedelic compound 5-methoxy-*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine (5-MeO-DMT) has received very little scientific research attention at the present time. It may, however, be well suited to treating death anxiety. 5-MeO-DMT treatment-provider Dr. Geraldo "Gerry" Ruben Sandoval Isaac conducted a 10-year retrospective study with 1,699 participants and noted that 85% reported a mystical or religious experience and that 60% experienced some form of dying or death (Isaac, 2016). This is twice the 30% reported in the Johns Hopkins psilocybin trials of study participants reporting profound experiences of their own death. This is a notable result, as it can be seen from the aforementioned psilocybin research that the mystical experience that psychedelics can catalyze is a core component of their long-term psychotherapeutic effect in the treatment of existential anxiety. In addition, a simulated or hallucinatory experience of death or dying can be highly cathartic with regard to people's death anxiety. This study is suggestive that 5-MeO-DMT can induce both experiences with high levels of consistency, so it may be that this compound is particularly well suited for the treatment of death anxiety. The phenomenological effects of 5-MeO-DMT are somewhat atypical in comparison to other classical psychedelics and seem to more closely resemble NDEs in experiential content (e.g., Oroc, 2009). Luke and Kittenis (2005) found that reported death-related experiences (death, rebirth, or memory of a past life) tended to be more commonly associated with 5-MeO-DMT than any other substance.

5-MeO-DMT is a great deal more powerful than the other classical psychedelics such as psilocybin and LSD, so it requires careful handling, and session preparation and integration will be highly important to maximize experiential benefits. However, the experience is a great deal shorter than that yielded by the other psychedelics like psilocybin or LSD, so it would be much less taxing on treatment providers' time.

During a program of psychedelic therapy with terminal cancer patients conducted by Dr. Stanislav Grof at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore, a number of patients reported NDEs as their diseases progressed, and they reported their prior psychedelic experiences as being very similar to their NDEs and being an invaluable experiential training for dying (Grof, Grob, Bravo, & Walsh, 2008). Both NDEs and psychedelics share a capacity for being able to change human personality in the long-term following an experience. This quantum change (C'de Baca & Wilbourne, 2004) in personality yielded by experiences catalyzed via NDEs and psychedelics are distinct from one another but also share some interesting overlap. The personality changes yielded by a classic NDE can be considered as being deeper, more comprehensive, and more robust than those yielded by psychedelics such as psilocybin which tend to be more specific, in particular affecting the personality domain of openness (MacLean, Johnson, & Griffiths, 2011). Openness includes a hunger for knowledge, and this, too, has been highlighted by experiencers of NDEs (NDErs) as a long-term effect of their experiences (Sartori, 2014). An increase in well-being, life satisfaction, and sense of life-purpose or meaning are also commonly reported after-effects of both NDEs and psychedelic-induced mystical experiences (Noyes, 1980), and a negative relation between purpose in life and death anxiety has been observed previously by Drolet (1990).

An interesting property of NDEs is that simply learning about them can promote psycho-spiritual benefits and result in changes of outlook regarding death in people without direct experience of one similar to an NDEr. Learning about NDEs through reading or hearing about them can result in such changes, but direct testimony from an NDEr seems to be the most powerful medium of transformation. A number of NDE researchers have noted such changes in outlook themselves, with Dr. Kenneth Ring (1995) being one of the pioneering NDE researchers who first noted this phenomenon, describing it as a “benign virus” (p. 3) in reference to it being positively psychologically contagious. A number of independent studies such as those by Rominger (2009) and Tassell-Matamua, Lindsay, Bennett, Valentine, and Pahina (2016) have further validated the existence of this interesting psychological phenomenon, and found that while it occurs in those at high risk of death, such as the terminally ill and those with suicidal ideation, it also occurs among clinically healthy populations. Thus, in learning about the NDE and people’s experiences, one can reap much of the benefit of the experience without the inherent risk of being near death.

A core component of the NDE is the out-of-body experience (OBE). A common anecdotal side effect of OBEs is that people lose their fear of death, something noted by pioneering OBE explorer Robert Monroe in his book *Journeys Out of the Body* (1971) and others. Even a virtual OBE induced via virtual reality (VR) technology is capable of reducing death anxiety (Bourdin, Barberia, Olivia, & Slater, 2017). This further suggests that it is the experience of being disembodied and transcending the primary identification with the physical body that is a common link and a core experiential and psychotherapeutic component shared by the OBE, NDE, and psychedelic experience and likely an integral part of its efficacy in reducing death anxiety. Moreover, there seems to be a great deal of reported phenomenological overlap between NDEs and OBEs in particular. Unlike the obvious risks involved in the generation of NDEs and the illegality of psychedelics, OBEs can, with practice, be induced voluntarily and safely.

As an aside to psychedelic therapy, NDEs, and OBEs, other consciousness practices such as holotropic breathwork have been found to reduce death anxiety (e.g., Holmes, Morris, Clance, & Putney, 1996). Holotropic breathwork is an effective alternative and legal means of accessing transpersonal states that may have useful applications for the treatment of existential anxiety. Mindfulness meditation may also have potential in alleviating existential anxiety, with a mindful outlook showing efficacy in its ability to neutralize fears of death and dying (e.g., Niemiec et al., 2010).

So, there are a number of interesting avenues that warrant further attention in relation to direct experiences, consciousness-related practices, and simply learning about these experiences from others. Given that death is something shared by all, and given that it is an unavoidable and inevitable part of our lives, it seems there could be great potential benefit in giving these experiences the attention they deserve. It seems that these various experiences may all lessen death anxiety, but the benefits may transcend this alone. A simulated dying event before one's actual dying may serve not only to reduce death anxiety but also act to reinforce one's life priorities in a positive fashion while alive.

---

## References

- Barabe, P. (1982). The religion of Iboga or the Bwiti of the Fangs. *Medicina Tropical*, *12*, 251–257.
- Bates, A. T. (2016). Addressing existential suffering. *BC Medical Journal*, *58*(5), 268–273.
- Bourdin, P., Barberia, I., Oliva, R., & Slater, M. (2017). A virtual out-of-body experience reduces fear of death. *PLoS ONE*, *12*(1): E0169343. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0169343
- Carhart-Harris, R. L., Erritzoe, D., Williams, T., Stone, J. M., Reed, L. J., Colasanti, A., ...Nutt, D. J. (2012). Neural correlates of the psychedelic state as determined by fMRI studies with psilocybin. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *109*, 2138–2143. doi:10.1073/pnas.1119598109
- Carhart-Harris, R. L., Roseman, L., Bolstridge, M., Demetriou, L., Pannekoek, J. N., Wall, M. B., ...Nutt, D. J. (2017). Psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression: fMRI-measured brain mechanisms. *Scientific Reports*, *7*, 13187. doi:10.1038/s41598-017-13282-7
- C'de Baca, J., & Wilbourne, P. (2004). Quantum change: Ten years later. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *60*(5), 531–541. doi:10.1002/jclp.20006
- Coomber, R. (1998). *The control of drugs and drug users: Reason or reaction?* Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, LLC.
- Drolet, J.-L. (1990). Transcending death during early adulthood: Symbolic immortality, death anxiety, and purpose in life. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *46*(2), 148–169. doi:10.1002/1097-4679(199003)46:2<148::AID-JCLP2270460205>3.0.CO;2-T
- Gasser, P., Holstein, D., Michel, Y., Doblin, R., Yazar-Klosinski, B., Passie, T., & Brenneisen, R. (2014). Safety and efficacy of lysergic acid diethylamide-assisted psychotherapy for anxiety associated with life-threatening diseases. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *202*(7), 513–520. doi:10.1097/NMD.000000000000113
- Griffiths, R. R., Richards, W. A., McCann, U., & Jesse, R. (2006). Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance. *Psychopharmacology*, *187*, 268–283. doi:10.1007/s00213-006-0457-5
- Griffiths, R. R., Johnson, M. W., Carducci, M. A., Umbricht, A., Richards, W. A., Richards, B. D., ...Klinedinst, M. A. (2016). Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized double-blind trial. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, *30*(12), 1181–1197. doi:10.1177/0269881116675513
- Griffiths, R. R., Johnson, M. W., Richards, W. A., Richards, B. D., Jesse, R., MacLean, K. A., ...Klinedinst, M. A. (2017). Psilocybin-occasioned mystical-type experience in combination with meditation and other spiritual practices produces enduring positive changes in psychological functioning and in trait measures of prosocial attitudes and behaviours. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0269881117731279

- Grob, C. S., Danforth, A. L., Chopra, G. S., Hagerty, M., McKay, C. R., Halberstadt, A. L., & Greer, G. R. (2011). Pilot study of psilocybin treatment for anxiety in patients with advanced-stage cancer. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 68(1), 71–78. doi:10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2010.116
- Grof, S., Grob, C. G., Bravo, G., & Walsh, R. (2008). Birthing the transpersonal. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 40(2), 155–177.
- Hendricks, P. S., & Grob, C. S. (2016). Classic psychedelics and rational suicide in the elderly: Exploring the potential utility of a reemerging treatment paradigm. In R. E. McCue and M. Balasubramaniam (Eds.), *Rational suicide in the elderly: Clinical, ethical, and sociocultural aspects* (pp. 203–210). New York, NY: Springer.
- Holmes, S. W., Morris, R., Clane, P. R., & Putney, R. T. (1996). Holotropic breathwork: An experiential approach to psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy*, 33, 114–120. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.33.1.114
- Huxley, A. L. (1999). *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's classic writings on psychedelics and the visionary experience*. South Paris, ME: Park Street Press.
- Huxley, L. A. (1968). *This timeless moment: Personal view of Aldous Huxley*. San Francisco, CA: Mercury House.
- Isaac, G. R. S. (2016). Vaporizing 5-MeO-DMT from *Bufo alvarius* as an entheogen: A retrospective case control study. In G. R. S. Isaac, *The god molecule: 5-MeO-DMT and the spiritual path to divine light* (pp. 148–155). Studio City, CA: Divine Arts Press.
- James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature, being the Gifford lectures on natural religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Lehto, R. H., & Stein, K. F. (2009). Death anxiety: An analysis of an evolving concept. *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice*, 23(1), 23–41. doi:10.1891/1541-6577.23.1.23
- Luke, D. P., & Kittenis, M. (2005). A preliminary survey of paranormal experiences with psychoactive drugs. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 69(2), 305–327.
- MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. (2011). Mystical experiences occasioned by the hallucinogen psilocybin lead to increases in the personality domain of openness. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 25(11), 1453–1461. doi:10.1177/0269881111420188
- Monroe, R. (1971). *Journeys out of the body*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Munn, H. (1973). The mushrooms of language. In M. J. Harner (Ed.), *Hallucinogens and shamanism* (pp. 86–122). London: Oxford University Press.
- Niemiec, C. P., Brown, K. W., Kashdan, T. B., Cozzolino, P. J., Breen, W. E., Levesque-Bristol, C., & Ryan, R. M. (2010). Being present in the face of existential threat: The role of trait-mindfulness in reducing defensive responses to mortality salience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(2): 344. doi:10.1037/a0019388

Noyes, R. (1980). Attitude change following near-death experiences. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 43(3), 234–242. doi:10.1080/00332747.1980.11024070

Oroc, J. (2009). *Tryptamine palace: 5-MeO-DMT and the Sonoran Desert Toad*. South Paris, ME: Park Street Press.

Pahnke, W. (1964, March 31). *First impressions of first LSD experience of March 30, 1964*. Purdue University Libraries Psychoactive Substances Collection. Retrieved from <http://earchives.lib.purdue.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/psyc/id/7>

Pahnke, W. N. (1968). The psychedelic mystical experience in terminal cancer patients and its possible implications for psi research. In R. Cavanna & M. Ullman (Eds.), *Psi and altered states of consciousness: Proceedings of an International Conference on Hypnosis, Drugs, Dreams, and Psi* (pp. 115–128). New York, NY: Parapsychology Foundation.

Pahnke, W., Kurland, A., Unger, S., Savage, C., Wolf, S., & Goodman, L. (1970). Psychedelic therapy (utilizing LSD) with cancer patients. *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, 3, 63–75. doi:10.1080/02791072.1970.10471363

Pollan, M. (2015, February 9th). The trip treatment. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/trip-treatment>

Ring, K. (1995). The impact of near-death experiences on persons who have not had them: A report of preliminary study and two replications. *Journal of Near Death Studies*, 13(4), 223–235. Retrieved from: <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc799331/>

Rominger, R. (2009). Exploring the aftereffects of the near-death experience: Brief summary of findings. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 28(1), 5–30. Retrieved from: <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc461753/>

Ross, S., Bossis, A., Guss, J., Agin-Liebes, G., Malone, T., Cohen, B., ...Schmidt, B. L. (2016). Rapid and sustained symptom reduction following psilocybin treatment for anxiety and depression in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 30(12), 1165–1180. doi:10.1177/0269881116675512

Sartori, P. (2014). *The wisdom of near-death experiences: How understanding NDEs can help us to live more fully*. London: Watkins Publishing Limited.

Tassell-Matamua, N., Lindsay, N., Bennett, S., Valentine, H., & Pahina, J. (2016). Does learning about near-death experiences promote psycho-spiritual benefits in those who have not had a near-death experience? *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 19(2), 95–115. doi:10.1080/19349637.2016.1206844

**About the Journal**

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Content is tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences including researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and the general public. For more information, visit: [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

Content © 2017 The Author(s).

© Licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ. This manuscript is open access. It is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. It may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). It may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



## TECHNICAL BRIEF

*Intended Audience: Researchers, General*

# Application of Digital Infrared Thermographic Imaging (DITI) and Other Monitors for Documenting Physical Phenomena during Sitzings with a Medium

Mark Boccuzzi

*Windbridge Research Center*

*Tucson, AZ, USA*

*www.windbridge.org*

*boccuzzi@windbridgecenter.org*

**Abstract:** This project aimed to examine if physical phenomena in a séance room with a medium could be documented using digital infrared thermographic imaging (DITI). Additional monitors included: data logging thermometers and electromagnetic field meters; audio recorders; visible light and full spectrum (ultraviolet + visible + infrared light) video cameras; data logging three-axis accelerometers; and a Psyleron REG-1 random event generator. The medium participant was a credentialed research medium familiar with controlled experimental protocols and willing and able to be recorded using DITI technology. Results indicated that experimenters would benefit from employing DITI systems when studying physical mediums who require near or total darkness in order to produce physical effects. DITI technology allows physical mediums to operate under their required conditions while also providing researchers with the tools necessary to fully document sittings.

**Keywords:** digital infrared thermographic imaging, physical mediumship, séance, random event generator, table tipping

---

Note: This project was funded by a grant from the Parapsychological Association's Gilbert Roller Fund.

Mediums can be defined as “individuals who report experiencing regular communication with the deceased” (Beischel, 2007, p. 37). There are two main types of mediumship: mental and physical. The purpose of mental mediumship is to convey messages from deceased people or animals (called discarnates) to living people (called sitters) during a specific event (called a reading).

Physical mediumship involves “paranormal physical events in the medium’s vicinity” (Gauld, 1982, p. 4). These events can include disembodied or independent voices; raps on walls or tables; paranormal lights; ectoplasm; and the materialization, movement, and/or levitation of objects (reviewed in Braude, 2007; Fontana, 2005; Gauld, 1982; and Heath, 2011).

The validity of physical mediumship has been criticized because of some mediums’ “highly suspicious” (Fontana, 2005, p. 244) need for complete (or near-complete) darkness in order for the physical phenomena to manifest. Braude (2007) noted that “unscrupulous magicians found they could produce all sorts of marvels when séances were conducted in the dark” (p. 26).

It is unclear where and/or when this requirement originated since both spiritist and spiritualist sources were criticizing it more than 150 years ago. *The Mediums’ Book* (Kardec, 1861/2009), the primary handbook for spiritist mediums, notes that, “with a little practice,” most “nocturnal” mediums using dark séance environments “could produce the phenomena in both light and darkness” (p. 299). Similarly, in the mid-1870s even “the famed spiritualist medium D. D. Home... decried the increasing use of ‘dark séances,’ conducted in a gloom so dense that no one could follow a medium’s actions, a darkness justified by the claim that spirits preferred the shadows” (Blum, 2006, p. 61). Indeed, some modern physical mediums claim that darkness during sittings is a requirement that was communicated to them by their spirit controls (e.g., Keen, Ellison, & Fontana, 2001; Nahm, 2014).

The need for darkness serves a hindrance for researchers attempting to properly study authentic phenomena since effective documentation is difficult. The lighting conditions required make it nearly impossible to capture detailed images of the effects as they occur using conventional visible light imaging techniques (Fig. 1a). Cameras with an infrared (IR) light source (i.e., active IR photography equipment) are also not typically allowed by the mediums because it is believed that any added light (“even luminous strips”) may prevent the phenomena from taking place (e.g., Keen, Ellison, & Fontana, 2011, p. 28).

By the mid-1990s, it had been proposed that “non-invasive and harmless image-intensification equipment capable of observing phenomena in total darkness” could be used and “that full respect for mediums’ wishes, and imposed conditions, could be assured” (Lewis, 1995, cited by Keen, Ellison, & Fontana, 2011, p. 28). More recently, appropriate technologies became affordable enough to achieve this end practically. For example, investigations of the Felix Experimental Group and physical medium Kai Mügge (Braude, 2016) included a “Starlight” light intensification camera.

The aim of the project described here was to test if digital infrared thermographic imaging (DITI) technology could be used to document, under near-dark conditions, physical phenomena reported by a medium. DITI cameras create images from ambient heat allowing investigators to “see” and document the activity in the darkness of the séance setting. DITI cameras can be used without contaminating the space with artificial lighting or the need to deceive the medium by covertly using “night vision” (active IR cameras) or similar clandestine imaging techniques. However, it is only recently that the cost of high quality DITI devices came down to the point where they could be available to most investigators.

The project described here was designed specifically to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of employing DITI technology to document physical phenomena claimed by a physical medium under a range of conditions. Other aspects of physical mediumship, such as mechanisms, fraud prevention, and the relationship of physical mediumship to the survival hypothesis were outside the scope of this project. The word “discarnate” is used throughout to reflect the experiences of the participants and does not imply that the phenomena are the result of deceased intelligences.

### **Research Participants**

As the identities of the research participants need to be protected; only the most relevant information about the medium and sitters is provided.

### **The Medium**

The physical medium (referred herein as PM) is a highly successful, professional, non-denominational, psychic medium. PM regularly provides clients with private (in person and over the phone) and gallery-style mediumship readings. In addition, PM has previously demonstrated the ability to provide accurate and specific information about the deceased

under blinded, laboratory conditions as a Windbridge Certified Research Medium (Beischel, 2007).

It should be noted that unlike professional physical mediums, PM does not offer physical mediumship sittings as a paid service. PM has an interest in physical mediumship and has embarked on a personal exploration of the phenomena. As part of this exploration, PM started to experience physical effects when trying to contact discarnates. As PM is science-minded, the researcher was invited to investigate and potentially document these effects. PM agreed to participate in sittings in which DITI, environmental monitoring, and increasing levels of controls were employed.

### The Sitters

Friends, family members, and professional associates of PM act as sitters during regular private sessions. These same sitters were utilized during the investigation so that observed and documented research sittings matched PM's regular sittings as closely as possible; this maximized the possibility for effects to occur.



Figure 1. Comparison of images from a standard visible light camera using a long exposure (1a) and a thermal image (1b). Both images were collected under the same low-light conditions. Heat transfer can be seen on the table top in the thermal image.

### Reported Phenomena

In interviews with PM and sitters prior to the start of the project, the investigator was informed that a variety of physical effects had been produced during sessions. The term macroscopic psychokinetic effects (MPEs) will be used here to reflect the manner in which physical phenomena have been historically described in the parapsychological literature (e.g., Thalbourne, 2003). The MPEs reported by PM included: table tipping;

apports; the movement of objects in the séance space (e.g., cabinet doors closing); and environmental changes. To date, only table tipping has been witnessed by the investigator. It should be noted that the investigator is making a distinction between *table tipping*, where some part of the table is always in contact with the floor, and *table levitation*, where the table is “free floating” above the floor.

### A Typical Sitting

The following procedure will be referred to hereafter as a ‘Typical Sitting.’ Details of the documented sittings are provided below.

During a typical sitting, a small wooden folding tray table is placed in the center of the séance space. The table is surrounded by two or three chairs (depending on the number of sitters). The main overhead lights are turned off and the room is illuminated only by a floor lamp fitted with a small, low wattage, red-colored light bulb (floor plans can be seen in Figure 2). PM and sitters then take seats around the table. There is no “assigned seating.” Next, the participants place their fingertips lightly on the table top. Once everyone is comfortable, PM invites a discarnate to communicate with them by moving the table.

In successful sessions, the table will begin to rock, sometimes very quickly, in any direction, but it will always maintain some contact with the floor. Once the table starts to move, PM will ask the invited discarnate questions. Faster table movement is interpreted as a “yes” response, while slower movement is interpreted as a “no” response. The session length seems to be determined by the discarnate; when the table stops moving, PM and the sitters feel that indicates that the discarnate no longer wishes to communicate. A typical session lasts on average about five minutes. Multiple sessions with different discarnates can sometimes be conducted during a single sitting. It should also be noted that not all attempts to make contact with a discarnate are successful. It is during the periods when the table is moving that the participants also report experiencing other types of phenomena, but these were not witnessed by the investigator.

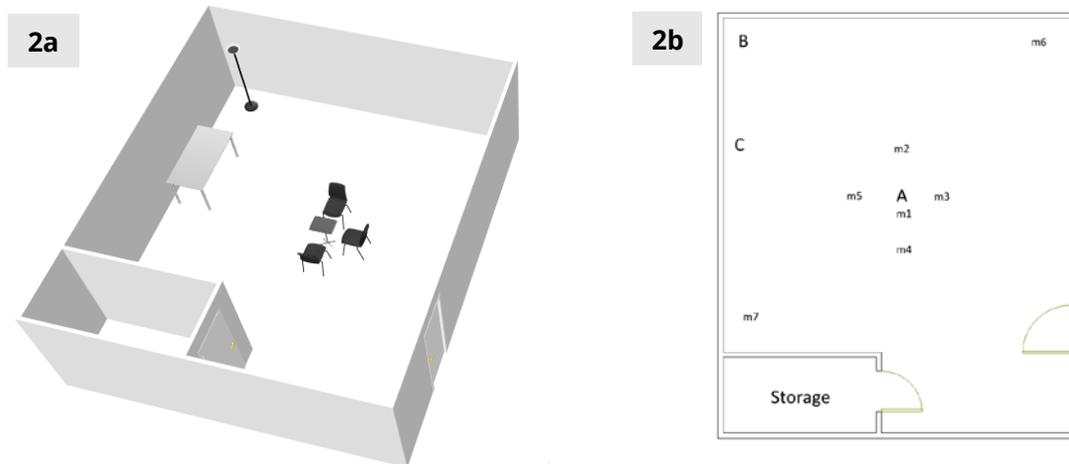


Figure 2. Data collection space. 2a: 3D model of the séance space. 2b: Séance space floor plan. *KEY*: A: Location of table and chairs; B: Lamp; C: Table with data logging and REG-1 computer; m1: Trifield Meter and data logging thermometer; m2-m5: Trifield Meters; m6 and m7: data logging thermometers.

## Equipment

### The Digital Infrared Thermographic Imaging (DITI) Technology

This project employed a FLIR Systems (<http://www.flir.com>) i7 Thermal Imaging Camera. The i7 (Fig. 3) is a still image camera that can capture and display information in the 7.5-13  $\mu\text{m}$  range.



Figure 3. The FLIR i7 camera used in this project.

The i7 was chosen because it is able to capture and display existing, radiant heat; is able to function in complete darkness; and was relatively inexpensive. In addition, the camera can be used to document heat transfer

caused by physical contact with surfaces. This allows researchers to “see” if an object has been touched and can provide insight as to the amount of contact that was made with an object (Figure 4.) At the time this project was initiated (September, 2013), the i Series cameras provided a good balance between cost and performance. However, the FLIR i Series was discontinued in early 2014. A discussion of new trends in DITI technology that have a direct impact on this line of research are discussed below.

Although near-total darkness during sittings is not required by PM, tests were performed to ensure that the DITI camera could be mounted in a light-tight housing to prevent light leakage from the camera’s controls and display. The housing, constructed from ThorLabs Optical Enclosure parts ([https://www.thorlabs.com/navigation.cfm?guide\\_id=2280](https://www.thorlabs.com/navigation.cfm?guide_id=2280)), included a custom-built Arduino-controlled (<https://www.arduino.cc/>) auto-triggering mechanism which allows the camera to automatically take consecutive still images. These images are then stitched together into an animation sequence which provides a more detailed record of the activity in the room (Fig 5).

### **Other Data Collection Methods**

In addition to the FLIR i7 thermal imaging camera, a wide range of other monitors were used to document the sittings. These included: data logging thermometers and electromagnetic field meters; audio recorders; visible light and full spectrum (ultraviolet + visible + infrared light) video cameras; and a Psyleron REG-1 random event generator. The investigator also supplied tray tables that were custom fitted with data logging 3-axis accelerometers, allowing for real-time tracking of table movement during the sessions.

## **Documented Sittings**

### **Initial Sitting**

In the first documented sitting, PM and three sitters conducted a Typical Sitting. A discarnate was contacted and table tipping occurred. Questions were asked of the discarnate, and the table moved to produce “yes” or “no” responses. No other MPEs occurred.

Since this was the first time the investigator had witnessed a sitting, it was primarily observational. The sitting was documented using seven tripod-mounted video cameras which covered the room, table, PM, and sitters from multiple angles, including below the table to monitor the placement of sitters’ feet and legs.

DITI still images were also taken of the room and table before, during, and after the session. These images clearly show the location of everyone in the room; hand, foot, and leg placements; and heat transfer patterns on the table.

**Image Analyses.** Although no specific controls were put in place to prevent deception during the initial sitting, the DITI images were detailed enough to show that no hidden apparatuses were used to move the table, that all the participants followed their established protocol, and that no undocumented attendees were in the room.

Heat patterns on the surface of the table showed that the table top in front of PM and two of the sitters had been lightly touched and their hands moved over a large area. The heat pattern in front of one of the sitters showed a higher level of heat transferred in a smaller area and clearly visible finger patterns (Fig. 4).

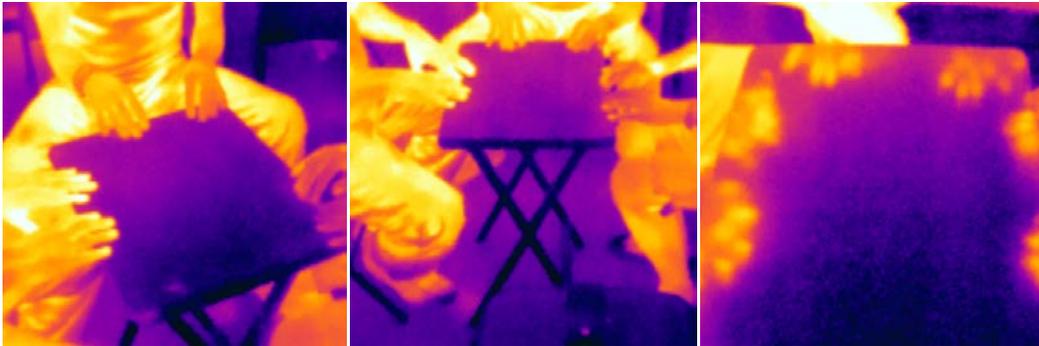


Figure 4. Thermal images of a table tipping session. Far right: heat transfer on table top.

As expected, the quality of the standard video was poor due to the low level of lighting. However, enough information was gathered to allow the investigator to understand the sitting procedures. After the sitting was over, the investigator interviewed PM and the sitters about their experiences.

**Interview Results.** According to their statements, the participants believed that the movement of the table was caused directly by the invited discarnate. In addition, each described the process by which the table starts to move as a “low vibration” that grows in strength until the table visibly starts to rock.

**Assessing the Accuracy of the Discarnate Responses.** After observing the initial sitting, it was decided not to try to confirm the accuracy of the information reported by the invited discarnates. The testing of

mediumship accuracy requires a detailed protocol (Beischel, 2007) which would require significant changes to the typical sitting procedure, including the use of blinded investigators acting as proxy sitters at the table. Additionally, PM has already shown the ability to provide accurate information about discarnates under controlled conditions. Thus, if accurate information about a discarnate was obtained through table tipping it would not eliminate PM as the source of the knowledge or the table movement (consciously or unconsciously) and the addition of blinding would not provide useful information about the phenomena. It was concluded that the implementation of an accuracy testing protocol would distract from the primary goal of the project: to test whether DITI technology is a useful methodology for examining MPEs during physical mediumship sessions.

### **Follow-up Sitzings**

During the follow-up sittings, additional types of monitoring were tested and are described below.

**Digital Infrared Thermographic Imaging using the FLIR i7 Camera.** The FLIR i7 was used extensively to document the sittings. The images provided the investigator with a large amount of data which would have been impossible to obtain without more invasive techniques. However, since the i7 is a still camera, there were some limitations.

The original plan for this project was to equip the i7 with an auto-triggering device that would allow it to take a series of consecutive still images which could be stitched together using ImageJ software (<https://imagej.nih.gov/ij/>) to create a near real-time video record of the activity in the séance space. While the auto-trigger (an Arduino microcontroller that activated a servo motor which pressed the camera trigger at specific intervals, Fig. 5) was successfully developed, the frame rate was extremely low. That is, it takes the i7 approximately seven seconds to capture and store a still image (frame). This results in a frame rate of roughly eight frames per minute. [In comparison, typical video is recorded at approximately 1800 frames per minute (30 frames per second).] The seven-second delay is much slower than what the investigator's research had led him to believe was possible with the camera. Captured images were combined together and converted into videos. However, given the speed at which the table moved, much of the table movement was lost due to the slow capture rate. In addition, with the current state of DITI technology (discussed below), methods for combining still images into video are no longer necessary.

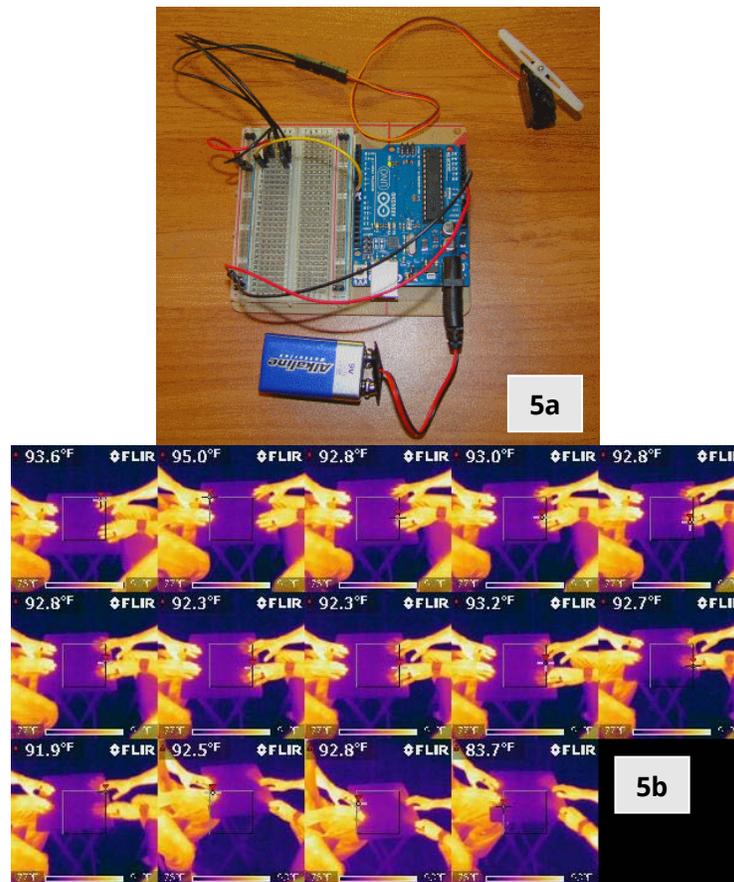


Figure 5. Auto-trigger for automatic image collection. 5a: Breadboard of the auto-trigger. An Arduino Uno running custom software instructs a servo to press, hold, and release the trigger of the FLIR i7 at a specific rate. 5b: Consecutive still thermal images of a table tipping session.

Much of the camera's utility for this type of research lies in its abilities (1) to produce detailed images under very low light conditions without the need for external light sources (like those required by IR night vision systems) which allows the medium to perform sittings under "natural" conditions and (2) to record and measure heat transfer to objects in the room. In short, it provides a way for researchers to maximize controls while also optimizing the conditions for success. With these types of detailed images and data, researchers can fully document the activity in the room. This higher quality of documentation may ultimately provide more insight into the nature of the reported phenomena.

**Triple-Axis Accelerometer Data and 3D Simulations.** During the initial interviews, participants indicated that they felt a “low vibration” in the table prior to it beginning to visibly move. To explore this idea further, a custom data-logging, triple-axis (x-y-z) accelerometer was attached to the tray table and data were recorded at 30 samples per second. The accelerometer was able to measure and record the magnitude, relative direction (forward, backward, left, right, up, and down), and duration of the movement of the table. To help measure the z-axis (up and down), the table was placed on a 3” foam pad. Without the pad, the table would be sitting on the solid floor, so movement along this axis would not be possible. The addition of the pad also allows for the tracking of the downward pressure placed on the table and the direction from which that pressure is exerted.

In a set of test trials, participants were asked to sit around the table and hold their hands *above* the table top (not making contact with the table). PM was then asked to invite a discarnate to move the table. Data from the accelerometer was then logged. PM noted that a discarnate had joined them and was trying to move the table. An analysis of the accelerometer data showed that no movement of the table occurred and thermal imaging of the table top after the session confirmed that the participants had not been in physical contact with the table.

In the next set of tests, the accelerometer-equipped table was used during a Typical Sitting. Contact with a discarnate was made, and the table moved as it had in other sittings. During these tests, the data from the accelerometer was recorded.

In order to better understand the movement of the table, the experimenter developed a real-time 3D computer simulation created using the Processing programming language (<https://processing.org/>). This simulation uses the accelerometer data to animate a virtual table. The simulation software allowed the experimenter to review the table motion at any speed and to view the movement from any angle (Fig. 6).

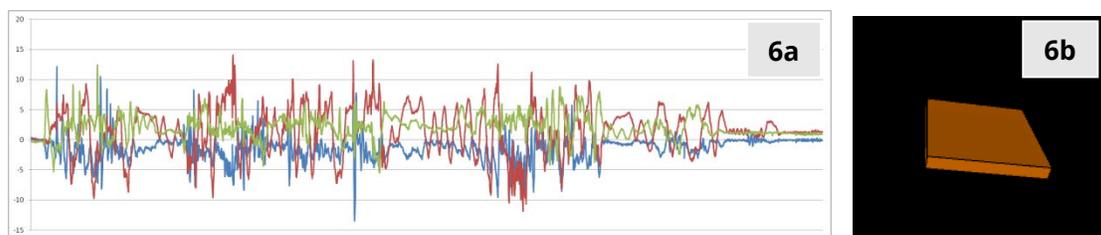


Figure 6. Accelerometer data (6a) used to drive a simulated, 3D table (6b).

Combined with the thermal imaging of the session and heat transfer data, this technique can provide new insights into the interaction between the participants and the table.

**Additional Sensors: Temperature, Electromagnetic Fields, and REG-1.** Five data-logging Alpha Lab (<https://www.alphalabinc.com/>) Trifield meters and three Onset (<http://www.onsetcomp.com/>) HOBO data-logging thermometers were deployed during the sittings. One Trifield meter and one HOBO thermometer were placed under the table while the other four Trifield meters were positioned behind each sitter, approximately six feet from the center of the table. The two other thermometers were placed in different areas of the room. Sensors were placed so that the direction, magnitude, and duration of any recorded anomalies might be determined. A Psyleron REG-1 Professional random event generator ([www.psyleron.com](http://www.psyleron.com)) was attached to a laptop computer running Psyleron's FieldREG software and placed on a table in the room (Fig. 6, position "C").

Data from these sensors were analyzed and no anomalies were found. Thermal imaging of the room, table, and nearby surfaces did not show any anomalies.

### **Technology Advancements since the Start of the Study**

This study was designed in June of 2013 and, as is the case with most technology, much has changed since then including the discontinuation of both the FLIR i Series cameras and the HOBO temperature data loggers that were used in this project. In addition, new, lower cost DITI camera systems have become available that can capture both still and video images. Given the pace at which technology advances, any review of specific devices that might be included here would become obsolete quickly. Investigators interested in this line of research are encouraged to perform their own product searches and identify current devices that meet both their budgetary and experimental needs.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Beischel (2007) states that contemporary mediumship research should include "a research environment that optimizes the mediumship process for both the medium and the hypothesized discarnate in order to increase the probability of capturing the phenomenon if it exists" (p. 40). This approach, when applied to the study of physical mediumship means

that the reported phenomena needs to be studied under the conditions which allow the medium to manifest them, and not the conditions which are most convenient for investigators.

The primary aim of this exploratory project was to demonstrate the potential application of Digital Infrared Thermographic Imaging (DITI) in the investigation of reported macroscopic psychokinetic phenomena during field investigations of physical mediumship séances. [Again, it is important to note that performing an investigation to the degree that the source of the physical phenomena witnessed during sittings could be definitively determined was outside the scope of this pilot project.] Toward its aim, this project successfully demonstrated that a properly enclosed FLIR i7 thermal camera can be used to create highly detailed photographic documentation of the activity taking place in a séance space without violating the low light requirement imposed by many physical mediums.

In light of the findings by Braude (2014) and Nahm (2014) during their investigations of physical mediumship, DITI may be especially useful for identifying or ruling out instances of intentional fraud and should be considered as a standard tool in future investigations.

### **Acknowledgments**

The primary investigator wishes to thank the Parapsychological Association's Gilbert Roller Fund for making this research possible as well as Julie Beischel, Chad Mosher, Ryan Gebhardt, the physical medium, and the sitters who participated in these research sessions.

### **References**

Blum, D. (2006). *Ghost hunters: William James and the search for scientific proof of life after death*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.

Beischel, J. (2007). Contemporary methods used in laboratory-based mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 71, 37–68.

Braude, S. E. (2007). *The gold leaf lady and other parapsychological investigations*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

[Braude, S. E. \(2014\). Investigations of the Felix Experimental Group: 2010–2013. \*Journal of Scientific Exploration\*, 28\(2\), 285–343.](#)

[Braude, S. E. \(2016\). Follow-up investigation of the Felix Circle. \*Journal of Scientific Exploration\*, 30\(1\), 27-51.](#)

Fontana, D. (2005). *Is there an afterlife? A comprehensive overview of the evidence*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: NBN.

Gauld, A. (1982). *Mediumship and survival: A century of investigations*. London: William Heinemann.

Heath, P. R. (2011). *Mind-matter interaction: A review of historical reports, theory and research*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Lewis, M. (1995, July). Is the Ark losing direction? *Noah's Ark Society*, 4(60).

Kardec, A. (1861/2009). *The mediums' book*. Brasilia, Brazil: International Spiritist Council.

Keen, M., Ellison, A., & Fontana, D. (2011). *The Scole report*. England: Saturday Night Press.

[Nahm, M. \(2014\). The development and phenomena of a circle for physical mediumship. \*Journal of Scientific Exploration\*, 28\(1\), 229–283.](#)

[Nahm, M. \(2016\). Further comments about Kai Mügge's alleged mediumship and recent developments. \*Journal of Scientific Exploration\*, 30\(1\), 56–62.](#)

Thalbourne, M. A. (2003). *A glossary of terms used in parapsychology*. Charlottesville, VA: Puente Publications.

### **About the Journal**

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Content is tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences including researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and the general public. For more information, visit: [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

Content © 2017 The Author(s).

 Licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ. This manuscript is open access. It is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. It may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). It may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



**ORIGINAL PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH***Intended Audience: Researchers, Clinicians*

# Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Mediumistic and Psychic Experiences

Julie Beischel, Chad Mosher, Mark Boccuzzi

*Windbridge Institute, LLC, Tucson, AZ, USA*

**Abstract.** Mediums are individuals who report experiencing regular communication with the deceased; the phenomenon of mediumship has been reported in cultures all over the world since time immemorial. The current study examined similarities and differences in the reported experiences of secular American mediums (those not associated with any formal religious organization) during mediumship readings involving communication with the deceased and during psychic readings for/about the living. Participant responses to two counter-balanced, open-ended online survey items were quantitatively analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) text analysis software and qualitatively analyzed using a content analysis methodology. Participants included 113 self-identified mediums and 14 Windbridge Certified Research Mediums; over 90% were white females; their average age was  $54.2 \pm 9.6$  years; 97% reported being able to distinguish between mediumistic and psychic experiences; and 122 provided complete survey responses. Statistically significant differences between descriptions of mediumistic and psychic experiences were seen regarding the proportion of words included in the LIWC categories of: social processes ( $11.76\% \pm 5.8\%$  vs.  $9.93\% \pm 5.64\%$ ,  $p=0.004$ ); perceptual processes ( $6.63\% \pm 4.31\%$  vs.  $4.81\% \pm 3.81\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); ingestion ( $0.23\% \pm 0.57\%$  vs.  $0.05\% \pm 0.20\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); past-focused time orientation ( $3.09\% \pm 3.23\%$  vs.  $2.06\% \pm 3.19\%$ ,  $p=0.001$ ); religion ( $0.90\% \pm 0.11\%$  vs.  $0.34\% \pm 0.09\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); and insight ( $5.06\% \pm 2.97\%$  vs.  $6.48\% \pm 4.30\%$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). The proportion of words describing positive and negative emotions, present-focused and future-focused time orientation, health, and money were not different. Qualitative content analysis found three overarching, summative themes regarding mediumistic communication: preparation, communication triangulated, and experience of the communication. Four overarching, summative themes emerged from the text regarding psychic readings for the living: establishing the connection, experiencing the connection, content of the reading, and psychic information flowing from various sources. Perhaps most interesting is the finding that experiences of psychic connections during readings for the living included “non-specific discarnates” as a source of information; this strongly calls into question theoretical frameworks that posit separating mediums’ experiences into categories that do and do not involve communication with the deceased as well as the continued use of terminology reflecting such a separation.

**Keywords:** medium, psychic, text analysis software, LIWC, content analysis, pluralism

Psi is an umbrella term describing various anomalous information or energy transfer processes (also termed anomalous cognition and anomalous perturbation, respectively; e.g., Palmer, 2015). Psi involves acquiring information or influencing material systems independent of sensory or other physical means. Experiences such as those involving psi are regularly viewed as bizarre or paranormal in modern times but “have been reported in all civilizations throughout the ages” (Moreira-Almeida & Lotufo-Neto, 2017, p. 283). The study of anomalous experiences such as those that occur during psi phenomena provides “valuable insights into the full range of human experience” and “can expand and enrich our understanding of human nature and potential” (Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner, 2017, p. 4). Indeed, researchers “have been exploring human experiences of psi in an attempt to pull back the curtain and expose the inner workings of individuals, groups, and cultures that have integrated psi into their daily lives” (Kruth, 2015, p. 219). Previous research has demonstrated that common themes among psi-related experiences involve feelings of connection and unity, peak emotions, and “knowing” (Heath, 2005).

The psi-based phenomenon under investigation in this study was mediumship. Here, we are defining mediums as individuals who report experiencing regular communication with the deceased (here, termed discarnates). “Using this definition opens the lived experience of mediums and their clients to multidisciplinary investigation” (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015, p. 302). Mediumship has two identities in the modern world: it has recently gained increased exposure in the popular media but is “generally rejected or marginalized as an intuitive way of knowing” (Emmons, 2000) in Western societies. In a larger, more complete sense, mediumship is “ancient and ubiquitous across cultures” (Hunter & Luke, 2014, p. 9) and “has been reported since antiquity” (Harris & Alvarado, 2013, p. 196).

### **Mediumship Research**

Modern mediumship studies (reviewed in Beischel & Zingrone, 2015) have explored the historical and anthropological roots of mediumship all over the world as well as mediums’ practices, training, use of language, psychology, neurophysiology, societal impact, and phenomenology (i.e., experiences). This research has included both quantitative and qualitative methods, though initial investigations of mediumship were primarily qualitative (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015).

Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative phenomenological research methods provides unique and valuable insights into mediumship. “Mediumship is well suited to investigation using a mixed methods approach in view of the fact that both quantitative and qualitative methods have been instrumental, thus far, in furthering our understanding of mediumship” (Roxburgh & Roe, 2013a, p. 226). “Converging on a phenomenon from a number of related points of view” produces “broader perspectives” (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015, p. 310). In order to acquire an “accurate and comprehensive assessment” of any experience being examined, “it is extremely useful to combine different research strategies, such as quantitative and qualitative methods” (Moreira-Almeida & Lotufo-Neto, 2017, p. 7).

Contemporary mediumship research has also included examinations of the accuracy of mediums’ statements under experimentally controlled conditions. For example, one recent replication study (Beischel, Boccuzzi, Biuso, & Rock, 2015) employed blinding methods that addressed conventional explanations for successful mediumship readings including cold reading, rater bias, experimenter cueing, and fraud. Scoring data was collected for 58 blinded phone readings performed by 20 mediums and statistically significant findings included forced-choice reading selections and higher global scores given to target (vs. decoy) readings. These types of data provide evidence for the phenomenon of anomalous information reception: the reporting of accurate and specific information about the deceased without prior knowledge about the deceased or their associated sitters, in the absence of any sensory feedback, and without using deceptive means. However, accuracy data collected under controlled conditions does not address the source of the mediums’ information. Two hypotheses have been proposed as explanations for the presumably psi-based source of accurate information reported by mediums: the term *survival psi* (Sudduth, 2009) is used to describe the theoretical phenomenon in which mediums communicate telepathically with the deceased and the term *somatic psi* (Beischel & Rock, 2009) is used for the competing theory that mediums use telepathy with the living, clairvoyance (including of a psychic reservoir), and/or precognition but not communication with the deceased to acquire information. Because the types of information theoretically accessible using psi and the times at which they could be accessed are limitless, accuracy data cannot distinguish between these two theories. As a result of this survival psi vs. somatic psi impasse, qualitative phenomenological methodologies have been used to collect data regarding mediums’ experiences and examine

which explanation they better support (Rock, Beischel, & Cott, 2009). This and additional relevant qualitative research is described below.

**Qualitative research.** Qualitative methods in general provide insight into mediumship “by gathering data that are more concerned with experiential accounts than evidence for the existence of post-mortem communication” (Roxburgh & Roe, 2013a, p. 226). This direction involves a “willingness of researchers to suspend theory-laden research questions and dig more deeply into the experience” (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015, p. 309).

In qualitative examinations of experiences like mediumship, research methods most often “entail some form of retrospective reporting” (Pekala & Cardeña, 2000, p. 61). The introspective verbal report “is used in one form or another in virtually all research on consciousness” (Farthing, 1992, p. 45). William James noted, “Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always” (1890, p. 185, cited in Farthing, 1992, p. 45). Phenomenological methods are used to examine the remembered experiences of individuals in order to specify “the essential characteristics of the phenomena” (Irwin & Watt, 2007, p. 8). Phenomenology “considers every experience to be valid in and of itself” (Heath, 2005, p. 362). An individual’s “conscious experience is an important phenomenon in its own right, and introspective reports are critically important for finding out about people’s conscious experiences” (Farthing, 1992, p. 48).

Previous qualitative phenomenological research examining the experiences of modern mediums and similar practitioners has demonstrated several common themes related to mediumistic experiences as well as comparing them to experiences during psychic readings for the living. Barrett (1996, as cited in Heath, 2005) examined the experiences of nine channelers and found seven common themes. The channelers: (1) experienced communicators as separate but close, (2) felt “in control of the staging the transmission,” (3) received and expressed the information, (4) experienced a cooperative partnership with the communicators, (5) were mentally and emotionally detached from the information, (6) experienced physical sensations, and (7) had positive feelings regarding the experience (Heath, 2005, p. 367).

Emmons and Emmons (2003) performed 40 in-depth interviews with mediums, reviewed library materials on 80 additional mediums, and observed participants in Spiritualist services including the Lily Dale community in New York. One element they examined was the “kinds of input” a medium experiences “in the process of ‘getting the message’ that they bring forth” (p. 242). They noted that mediums’ experiences were

primarily visual and auditory but could also include other modes of sensory experience. Similar to the “knowing” theme involved in other psi experiences (Heath, 2005), Emmons and Emmons (2003) noted that sometimes mediums “just ‘g-know’ (pronounced ‘guh-know’) things intuitively,” a term “based on the word ‘gnostic’” (p. 243).

Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009) used a qualitative thematic analysis methodology to analyze descriptions provided by six Windbridge Certified Research Mediums [i.e., mediums who were previously screened and certified using published criteria (Beischel, 2007) and whose abilities had been previously demonstrated under controlled laboratory conditions]. The mediums described their experiences while performing mediumship readings for the deceased and providing psychic readings about/for living clients. The analysis demonstrated nine comprehensive constituent themes of the mediumship experience: (1) “signs” confirming the presence of the discarnate; (2) “merging” with the discarnate by adopting the emotions or personality traits of the discarnate; (3) experiencing the discarnate as an autonomous entity; (4) a multi-modal sensory experience; the inclusion of pertinent (5) visual, (6) auditory, (7) tactile, and (8) olfactory imagery; and (9) “just knowing” information related to the discarnate. The descriptions of experiences during psychic readings for the living collected during the Rock, Beischel, and Cott study (2009) involved seven constituent themes, the first six of which (1-6) were similar to the mediumship themes: (1) multiple sensory modalities, pertinent (2) visual, (3) auditory, and (4) tactile information, (5) empathy (similar to the discarnate “merging”), (6) “just knowing” information about the target, and (7) apparent precognition.

Roxburgh and Roe (2013b) used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyze responses from 10 Spiritualist mediums gathered during semi-structured interviews. The medium participants reported seeing, hearing, and sensing discarnates (‘spirits’); experiencing symbols or familiar associations; “how their sense of identity is transformed;” and “how they can feel changes taking place within their personality and their body” (p. 33). One participant “used the metaphor of energy to make the distinction between a psychic link that is ‘static’ and ‘dense,’ and spirit communication that is ‘vibrant’ and ‘lighter’” (p. 33).

**Quantitative research.** Previous quantitative phenomenological research with contemporary mediums has demonstrated that the experience of communication with the deceased may be quantitatively different than experimental control conditions but may be relatively similar to experiences of obtaining psychic information from or about living targets.

Rock and Beischel (2008) examined the experiences of seven Windbridge Certified Research Mediums (described above) during mediumship readings for the deceased and a control condition in which no communication occurred. They utilized the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI; Pekala, 1991), a 53-item questionnaire used to quantify 26 phenomenological elements. The reading condition was found to be associated with significantly higher scores for negative affect, altered body image, altered time sense, and altered state of awareness. Conversely, the reading condition received significantly lower scores than the control condition for self-awareness, volitional control, and memory. These results suggest the presence of an altered state of consciousness during the mediumship reading condition as compared to the experimental control condition.

A second quantitative study (Rock, Beischel, Boccuzzi, & Biuso, 2014) also employed the PCI and compared the phenomenology of 19 claimant (vs. certified) mediums during mediumship readings and a control condition. The results suggested that the mediumship reading condition in this study did not induce an altered state of consciousness. The findings from this larger sample of claimant mediums did not replicate the previous findings (Rock & Beischel, 2008) with the sample of Windbridge Certified Research Mediums in which a difference between conditions was found.

Beischel, Rock, and Boccuzzi (2013) quantitatively compared 10 Windbridge Certified Research Mediums' phenomenological processes during mediumship readings for the deceased and during psychic readings for the living, both under blinded and randomized conditions. The participants completed the PCI regarding their experiences during the blinded mediumship and psychic readings as well as during baseline and control conditions. When the intensity scores of the 26 PCI dimensions were compared for all four conditions, no quantitative differences were seen between the mediumship and psychic readings.

**Mediumistic and Psychic Experiences.** The Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009), Roxburgh and Roe (2013b), and Beischel, Rock, and Boccuzzi (2013) studies described above included the finding that medium participants report an ability to differentiate between experiences of discarnate communication and psychic readings for living targets.

After the Beischel, Rock, and Boccuzzi (2013) study, the 10 Windbridge Certified Research Medium participants were informally interviewed about their general experiences during mediumship and psychic readings. Representative collected comments included:

*In a mediumship reading, it feels like someone is talking to me. With psychic readings, it's information about someone.*

*The physical feeling I get is a tingling or a pressure in my head when the medium stuff starts to happen or when they're entering the room. I don't get that at all during a psychic reading.*

*There's a heaviness around the sensation of living people; like air compared to helium. The auditory aspect is much sharper when I'm perceiving someone who is deceased. Their energy is more like helium.*

The population of interest for the current study was secular American mediums, a population of mediums not yet effectively described in the literature. As stated above, Emmons (e.g., 2000) has primarily examined mediums from Spiritualist communities. In addition, although Reinsel (2003) surveyed 18 American mediums using standard questionnaires as part of a pilot study, she specifically examined symptoms of dissociation, depersonalization, absorption, and temporal lobe dysfunction. Kelly and Arcangel (2011) examined the accuracy of 15 mediums and did not collect phenomenological data. Beyond the phenomenological research and accuracy testing described above, our own research with the 20 US-based Windbridge Certified Research Mediums has also included an examination of mediums' electrocortical activity (Delorme, Beischel, Michel, Boccuzzi, Radin, & Mills, 2013).

The subset of American mediums not associated with any formal organization and who hold no organized belief system may serve as the majority of mediums in the US, but the experiences of these mediums require further examination. The current study aimed to examine the similarities and differences of self-reported secular American mediums' retrospectively reported experiences during mediumship readings involving communication with the deceased and experiences during psychic readings for and/or about the living. It used the quantitative method of computerized text analysis and the qualitative method of content analysis to analyze 122 mediums' open-ended survey responses describing the two types of experiences. This is, to the best of our knowledge, the largest phenomenological study to ever systematically examine the experiences of secular American mediums.

## Method

### Participants

**Human research participant protections.** The methods used during this study were approved by the Windbridge Institutional Review Board (WIRB, #2014-BF-723). Adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in the study were provided.

**Participant recruitment.** Recruitment for the current study began during a previous study called the Online Census of Traits and Observations (OCTO) Study. OCTO Study recruitment used email, social media, and word-of-mouth methods and through calls for participation shared by other US-based organizations with similar missions including Forever Family Foundation and Rhine Research Center. The results of the OCTO Study will be reported elsewhere. After completion of the OCTO Study survey, participants could provide their contact information if they were interested in completing additional online surveys. The survey responses analyzed for the current study were collected as part of a larger, multi-part study which was called the Secular American Mediums Survey (SAMS) Study during recruitment. Other SAMS Study results will also be reported elsewhere. Self-identified medium participants were recruited by email from the contact list collected at the end of the OCTO Study. A full consenting process was performed with each SAMS Study participant. All participants reported being 18 or more years old, citizens or permanent residents of the United States, and able to read and write English easily. Experimenters did not interact in-person or over the phone with any participants; the consenting process and all data collection took place online. Participant questions were answered by experimenters by email.

As the world becomes more and more digital, the large majority of people in the US now use online services for nearly all business, social, and retail interactions often through mobile devices. “The fact that people have become more accustomed to completing various daily activities online” may make them “more receptive to completing surveys online” (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014, p. 301-302). For each survey in the SAMS Study, participants were notified if that day’s survey would include only multiple-choice items and be easily completed on a mobile device or if it would require longer, open-ended responses in which “a keyboard might be useful in answering them.” SAMS Study participants completed online survey items every other day for nine days. The two sets of responses analyzed and reported here were collected on Day 3.

**Participant selection.** Based on survey responses during the OCTO Study, participants were categorized as mediums and non-mediums. When mediums' contact information was collected at the end of the OCTO Study, they were asked to confirm that they identified as mediums and asked if they practiced mediumship or spirit communication as part of an organized religion. Only participants who identified as mediums and reported a secular practice (not as part of an organized religion) were invited to participate in the SAMS Study. During recruitment, participant requirements were again listed as including (1) self-identifying as a medium (i.e., "For the purposes of this study, you are a medium if you regularly experience communication from the deceased and report the information you receive to the living.") and (2) not practicing mediumship or spirit communication during the services of an organized religion. Only participants who reported self-identifying as mediums who did not practice mediumship as part of organized religions were consented and participated in the SAMS Study and the data collection described here.

Our mediumship research program focuses on secular participants for two reasons: (1) The beliefs, experiences, and practices of secular American mediums may be different from mediums who practice mediumship as part of the services of an organized religion such as Spiritualism or Spiritism and/or be different from other culturally- or geographically-based forms of mediumship. Regarding phenomenological research specifically, it is difficult to remove or account for the impact that organized doctrines and/or practices may have on the perceptions and experiences of participants during phenomenological research. (2) The majority of mediums practicing in the US seem to be secular. For example, of the medium participants who provided their contact information at the end of the OCTO Study, only 5% reported being a participating member in an organized religion that includes mediumship or spirit communication as part of its services. The other US-based organizations who shared our call for participants are also secular organizations with no religious affiliations.

**Participant characteristics.** A total of 127 participants provided responses to the SAMS Study items described here. "By using multiple participants, [interviews] can ascertain how generalizable a particular experience is" (Pekala & Cardeña, 2000, p. 60). The participant total for this study includes 14 Windbridge Certified Research Mediums who were, as stated above, previously screened and certified using published criteria (Beischel, 2007); they are secular mediums. The remaining 113 participants self-identified as secular mediums as described above.

**Age.** The mean age of the 127 participants was  $54.2 \pm 9.6$  years.

**Gender.** Participants were asked, “With what gender do you currently identify yourself?” and could choose female, male, intersex, transgender, and “Do not identify as female, male, intersex, or transgender” as well as “Prefer not to answer.” Participants reported being 90.6% female ( $n=115$ ) and 8.7% male ( $n=11$ ) and one participant (0.8%) reported not identifying with a listed gender (total  $n=127$ ).

**Race.** Participants were also asked, “Which category best describes you?” Three participants preferred not to answer this item. Of the remaining 124 participants, 121 reported identifying with only one racial category: 92.7% identified as White ( $n=115$ ) and 2.4% identified as Hispanic ( $n=3$ ). Each of the following three options was chosen by one participant (0.8%) each: American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and “Another race, ethnicity, or origin.” Three participants (2.4%) identified with more than one racial category: two reported identifying as Hispanic and White and one reported identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and White.

## Data Collection

**Survey Instrument.** The online questionnaire hosting and development service FormSite (<https://fs7.formsite.com/>) was used to create and host the consenting materials and survey items and to capture participant responses.

**Phenomenological Items.** During one survey in the five-part SAMS Study, participants were asked, “Can you tell the difference between communication from the deceased and psychic information about the living?” and could choose ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ or ‘I don’t know.’ Participants who chose ‘Yes’ were then asked (on another screen) for open-ended responses to both of the following: “In your own words, describe your experiences when receiving communication from the deceased” and “In your own words, describe your experiences when getting psychic information about the living.” These items were counter-balanced; that is, half of the participants were shown the communication item first and half were shown the psychic item first.

## Analyses

Participant responses to the two open-ended items regarding their mediumistic and psychic experiences were quantitatively analyzed using

text analysis software and qualitatively analyzed using a content analysis methodology.

**Text analysis software.** The collected text was quantitatively analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC, <http://liwc.wpengine.com/>) software. LIWC (pronounced ‘Luke’) is a validated text analysis software program that calculates the degree to which different psychologically meaningful categories of words are used in a given text. LIWC is used to examine text for the degree to which 80 different language categories including positive/negative emotions, self-references, causal words, attentional focus, emotionality, social relationships, and thinking styles are represented. The psychometrics of words assessed by LIWC are based on a random collection of over 2,500 blogs, experimental essays, poetry, books, science articles, and natural speech transcripts (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). LIWC has been used to “classify texts along psychological dimensions and to predict behavioral outcomes, making it a text analysis tool widely used in the social sciences” (Chung & Pennebaker, 2012, p. 206).

From the 80 different language categories provided by LIWC, we made the *a priori* choice to examine 12 characteristics: positive emotions; negative emotions; social processes; insight; perceptual processes; ingestion; health; past-focused time orientation; present-focused time orientation; future-focused time orientation; money; and religion. LIWC provides a percentage of each participant’s text that fell into each category. For this study, these percentages in the 12 categories were compared for each condition (communication with the deceased vs. psychic information about the living) using two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for paired non-parametric data; the Bonferroni-corrected  $\alpha$  was set to 0.0042.

We chose to examine *positive* and *negative affect* because previous research has not achieved consensus on the topic of affect during mediumship experiences. One quantitative study (Rock & Beischel, 2008) found that a discarnate reading condition received significantly higher scores than the control condition for negative affect. However, during the control condition, the participants were asked to describe a living person s/he (i.e., the medium) knew personally. The participants most often chose members of their families with whom they had positive relationships so it is understandable that negative affect would not be a component of those “control” experiences. In subsequent studies (Beischel, Rock, & Boccuzzi, 2013; Rock, Beischel, Boccuzzi, & Biuso, 2014), the control condition involved participants describing people with whom they did not have relationships.

Those studies did not find differences in negative affect between reading and control conditions.

The category of *social processes*, which includes words describing relationships, was chosen in order to assess if the differences in the purposes of the two types of readings would be reflected in the descriptions of the experiences. The purpose of mediumship readings is to share messages from discarnates with living sitters wanting to hear from them. Conversely, the purpose of psychic readings is primarily to share information about the living reading recipient about their own life.

The LIWC category of *insight* contains words such as ‘think,’ ‘consider,’ and ‘reason’ that refer to cognitive processes. It was included in the analysis to examine if descriptions of the two types of readings differed in their inclusion of analytical vs. intuitive (metaphorically, ‘left-brain’ vs. ‘right-brain’) language.

The category of *perceptual processes* was included because numerous previous studies (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; Rock, Beischel, & Cott, 2009; Roxburgh & Roe, 2013b) have found descriptions of multiple senses at work during mediumship readings.

The category of *health*, which includes words describing illness and treatment, was included to assess if mediums’ descriptions of feeling discarnates’ causes of death would be reflected.

The categories of *past-, present-, and future-focused time orientation* were included because it was expected that descriptions of mediumship readings focused on individuals who had died would be more past-focused whereas psychic readings for the currently living might be more present- and/or future-focused.

It seemed appropriate to include the category of *money* as an example of a concern the living have which might be addressed during psychic readings; however, references in mediumship readings to inheritances or other financial issues would also be possible.

The LIWC category of *religion* includes words relating to spiritual matters including soul, angel, and afterlife. It was theorized that these words would be more prevalent in descriptions of mediumship readings than in descriptions of psychic readings.

**Content analysis.** Qualitative content analysis was performed on participant descriptions of their experiences by a researcher blinded to the LIWC quantitative analysis results. Qualitative content analysis has been defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding

and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). This occurs through “data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Content analysis was chosen and performed here because of its ability to analyze large data sets with flexibility, its ability to accommodate unstructured text data, and its unobtrusive method of analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In addition, examining retrospective reports “does not interfere with ongoing thought processes during” the task (Farthing, 1992, p. 55).

The stages of data analysis were conducted in accordance with Heath (2005) using an inductive approach whereby “evidence-based inferences” rather than preconceived categories guided the coding process (e.g., Finegold-Connett, 2013). First, a researcher with experience with qualitative methodologies (CM) analyzed the queries by initially reading over the data set in its entirety several times to get an idea of the data as a whole: content, context, flow, and potential unit of analysis. Next, each text was read separately to hone in on meaningful units for analysis and to ascertain general categories, themes, and patterns. Second, each text was read more deliberately and carefully in detail for initial categorization. Sub-categories (e.g., seeing video-like images) emerged throughout analysis. Each meaning unit that represented a sub-category was coded accordingly. Through a process of constant comparison, text data were analyzed until all meaningful phrases were categorized, and no new sub-categories emerged. Sub-categories were then compared to create categories, and, in turn, to create summative themes. An inductive method of analysis allowed for flexible, descriptive, and detailed results beyond a mere count of the words and was inclusive of latent context and meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **Philosophy**

The experimenters’ overall attitude during the current study and throughout our mediumship research in general is in line with the methodological guidelines recently specified by Moreira-Almeida and Lotufo-Neto (2017) for the rigorous study of anomalous experiences. They suggest avoiding dogmatic prejudice and pathologizing the anomalous, evaluating the phenomenon under the conditions it is normally utilized, including non-clinical populations in order to make inferences to the general population, carefully choosing terminology, distinguishing the experience from interpretations, having a neutral but empathetic attitude, and using diverse research methods.

## Results

In response to the SAMS survey item, “Can you tell the difference between communication from the deceased and psychic information about the living?” 96.9% of participants ( $n=123$ ) chose ‘Yes,’ 2.4% ( $n=3$ ) chose ‘I don’t know,’ and 0.8% ( $n=1$ ) chose ‘No.’

For the counter-balanced items “In your own words, describe your experiences when receiving communication from the deceased” and “In your own words, describe your experiences when getting psychic information about the living,” complete responses were provided by 122 of the 123 participants who answered ‘Yes’ to the previous item. These 244 retrospective narratives (122 for each type of experience) were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed.

### Quantitative Text Analysis

The means, standard deviations, significance values, and effect sizes as well as example words from participants’ texts for the 12 LIWC categories analyzed are contained in Table 1. The output of the LIWC text analysis software is the percentage of a participant’s text that falls into each category. For this study, the participants’ data were then averaged during analysis. For example, on average,  $11.76\% \pm 5.8\%$  of participants’ descriptions of mediumistic experiences were words that were categorized as relating to social processes (e.g., family, friends) whereas  $9.93\% \pm 5.64\%$  of participants’ descriptions of psychic readings were words related to social processes. That difference was statistically significant ( $p=0.004$ ).

In addition to the *social processes* finding, the participants’ descriptions of their experiences when communicating with the deceased contained statistically significantly higher percentages—compared to their descriptions of getting psychic information from the living—of words describing: *perceptual processes* (e.g., sight, sound, touch;  $6.63\% \pm 4.31\%$  vs.  $4.81\% \pm 3.81\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), *ingestion* (e.g., cooking, food;  $0.23\% \pm 0.57\%$  vs.  $0.05\% \pm 0.20\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), *past-focused time orientation* (e.g., former, previously;  $3.09\% \pm 3.23\%$  vs.  $2.06\% \pm 3.19\%$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), and *religion* (e.g., spirit, god;  $0.90\% \pm 0.11\%$  vs.  $0.34\% \pm 0.09\%$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Conversely, compared to descriptions of psychic readings, participants’ descriptions of mediumistic communication contained a statistically significantly lower percentage of words describing the cognitive process *insight* (e.g., discern, categorize;  $5.06\% \pm 2.97\%$  vs.  $6.48\% \pm 4.30\%$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). Percentages of words describing *positive* and *negative emotions*, *present-focused* and *future-focused time*

*orientation, health, and money* were not different for the two conditions. Descriptions of psychic experiences contained a higher percentage of words from the category *health* (e.g., doctor, illness, disease) but the difference did not reach significance after Bonferroni correction.

### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

**Mediumistic communication.** Three overarching, summative themes emerged from the content analysis of the text provided by participants regarding mediumistic communication (Table 2). These three themes represent nine categories and eighteen subcategories and were: (A) preparing for mediumistic communication, (B) communication triangulated, and (C) experience of the communication.

The participants described preparations for mediumistic communication. The intentional process of shifting their mental state included the use of meditation and prayer, shifting focus to open channels, calling on their guides, the use of objects such as a pendulum, and a focus on the discarnate to intentionally shift their mental state. One participant stated,

*When I am ready to communicate, I center, breathe, and focus my energy above me and out to the back and sides. This is only one method. I find that my frequency must be high in order to hold the link.*

A focus on the space within which communication occurs also helped to enhance the communication. One participant specifically described the way in which they prepared the physical surroundings: “I start off by spraying with a sage aromatherapy spray I make to clear the energy within and without.” Whether the participants “shifted” or “centered” awareness, “deepened” consciousness, or “place[d] my attention” in an intentional way, communication with the deceased necessitated internal and external preparations.

The communication itself was described as triangulated, whereby information from the deceased or from guides is received by the medium and communicated to the sitter.

*When I am working with the dead, sometimes I triangulate through my guide and sometimes I listen directly to the deceased. If I can access the deceased directly, I pose the questions asked and listen to or see the answers or messages.*

**Table 1.** Comparison of the percentages of language categories represented in descriptions of mediumistic experiences (communication with the deceased) and experiences of acquiring psychic information about the living provided by 122 mediums (14 laboratory-tested, 108 self-identified). Includes means, standard deviations (s.d.), *p* values, and Pearson's effect size *r*. The Bonferroni-corrected  $\alpha$  for these 12 analyses is 0.0042. Significant findings are listed in bold.

Category	Example Words	Communication with the Deceased		Psychic Readings for the Living		<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
		mean	<i>s.d.</i>	mean	<i>s.d.</i>		
Positive Emotions	kind, safe, grateful, happy, rewarding	2.27	2.04	2.22	2.31	.56	
Negative Emotions	afraid, alone, confused, unpleasant, difficult	0.72	0.84	0.75	1.16	.73	
<b>Social Processes</b>	communicate, marriage, family, parents, friends	11.76	5.80	9.93	5.64	<b>.004</b>	<b>.2</b>
<b>Insight</b>	discern, presume, reason, categorize, evidence	5.06	2.97	6.48	4.30	<b>.002</b>	<b>-.2</b>
<b>Perceptual Processes</b>	sight, sound, smell, touch, taste	6.63	4.31	4.81	3.81	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.2</b>
<b>Ingestion</b>	coffee, cooking, dish, food, kitchen	0.23	0.57	0.05	0.20	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.2</b>
Health	disease, doctor, headache, illness, symptom	1.03	1.28	1.59	1.90	.013	
<b>Past Focus</b>	ago, earlier, former, happened, previously	3.09	3.23	2.06	3.19	<b>.001</b>	<b>.2</b>
Present Focus	current, happen, is, now, today, begin	12.89	5.89	13.03	4.93	.23	
Future Focus	upcoming, predictions, ahead, plan, potential	1.50	1.43	1.81	2.12	.36	
Money	bills, finances, income, wealth, business	0.08	0.25	0.12	0.38	.38	
<b>Religion</b>	angel, god, soul, spirit, spiritual, afterlife	0.90	0.11	0.34	0.09	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.3</b>

**Table 2.** Mediumistic Communication: Categories (A, B, C) and subcategories that emerged from the content analysis of text provided by 122 mediums (14 laboratory-tested, 108 self-identified) describing mediumistic communication.

---

### Mediumistic Communication with the Deceased

---

#### **A. Preparing for Mediumistic Communication**

- A.1. Intentional shift in mental state for the purpose of mediumship
  - A.1.a. Meditate/pray
  - A.1.b. Open channel
  - A.1.c. Use of objects
  - A.1.d. Shift awareness/focus on discarnate
- A.2. Enhancing the space in which communication occurs

#### **B. Communication Triangulated**

- B.1. "I'm not in control of the communication with the deceased"
  - B.1.a. Spirit/deceased in control of what information I receive
  - B.1.b. Spirit/deceased in control of when information is sent to me
- B.2. Way of communicating that is meaningful to the sitter
- B.3. Medium acts as a translator for the sitter

#### **C. Experience of the Communication**

- C.1. Sensory Experience
  - C.1.a. See
  - C.1.b. Hear
  - C.1.c. Feel
  - C.1.d. Smell
  - C.1.e. Taste
- C.2. Cognitive Experience
  - C.2.a. Merging with the deceased
  - C.2.b. "Just knowing"
- C.3. Emotions
  - C.3.a. Empathy with deceased
  - C.3.b. Strong emotional reactions during communication
- C.4. Bodily Sensations
  - C.5.a. Within the medium
  - C.5.b. Outside the medium
  - C.5.c. Direction-specific sensations

The discarnate was described as controlling when the information is provided and what is contained within the communication. Participants described the spirit or discarnate as being “in control.” For example,

*The only thing is where I place my awareness. I shift my awareness to the Spirit World and when a spirit blends with me, I sense them coming into my essence from behind on my right. The Spirit is in control of the information given to me. I don't seek it out.*

Other participants discussed the discarnate as guiding the communication and the information provided.

In addition, mediumistic communication was described as spontaneous or abrupt occurrences whereby the medium was not in control of when the information was received. For instance, “I just sit and wait and if spirit would like to come through, then I provide the beautiful space of openness.” Another participant stated, “They present exactly as how they wish to present and give the information they wish to convey. And then we go wherever spirit wants to go.”

Participants described the content of the communication with the deceased as having specific and unique meaning to the sitter, sometimes in ways that were meaningful only to the sitter and other times it was necessary for the medium to translate the meaning for the sitter. For example,

*The information contains things that are in a way that relates information that is personal to the person receiving the information. Names of people, streets, personal experiences. Once I said the word pearls relating to a male and pearl beads were strung into a garland and placed over the gravestone.*

Sometimes the information is specific to the sitter, such that only the sitter may understand. One participant stated, “Sometimes I get humorous messages that only my client understands.” For one participant, communication is provided as is, not interpreted. “It is important to give the information without interpreting as you don't know their life story or how it might apply.” In contrast, information was sometimes described as needing to be translated for its “subconscious” or “symbolic” meaning. For example: “I translate feelings from the subconscious into words, symbols, images, messages.”

Participants described the communication itself as including sensory, cognitive, emotional and physical experiences. Each of the five sensory modalities was identified across the analysis. Usually, references were made

to at least three senses, but a smaller portion of participants referenced two senses. Most sensory experiences described by the participants referenced seeing, hearing, and feeling.

Participants sometimes explained communication using single sensory descriptors, such as:

*Communication from the deceased comes to me as thoughts in my mind. When really concentrating I almost “hear” words, sentences, laughter, etc. I tell people it’s much like what it “sounds like” when you have a song in your head you have trouble dismissing. There have only been a handful of times I have actually heard audible noise.*

Similarly, participants may “see scenes of accidents, or I see clairvoyantly pictures of them and they show me health conditions or the situation of their deaths.” Physical sensations, such as touch, were described. For example, one participant feels energy

*tingling around me, like a nervous energy, especially when it’s an important message to give. Many times, it is a burst of energy that comes [through] and as the message begins I feel like I almost go into a trance to get it out quickly and then almost a gasp of air once they back their energy off..*

A small minority of participants described taste or smell. “I smell a fragrance or worse, like cigarette smoke. Sometimes I am made aware of their favorite taste/food.”

In other cases, simultaneous multisensory experiences were described as with this participant:

*I know I am receiving communication from the deceased when it feels like a memory but I know it is not my memory. I know it is information about or from the deceased when I hear a phrase or words in my head, or see an image, or smell something, or feel a physical sensation or emotion while talking with someone about their loved one.*

Another participant stated,

*I will see photos, videos of the deceased or what they want me to know, I will also “hear” words, sentences, phrases, songs or lyrics of what they want me to know. But always comes in with a lot of energy rush from the left side of my body.*

In addition to the five sensory experiences, participants described two distinct cognitive processes during mediumistic communication. One was

the concept of merging with the discarnate. The experience of merging, or blending as this participant stated, was described as:

*I'm blending with the essence of a soul who is in the Spirit World and not living on Earth. ... Some spirits are better with their emotions some are better with visuals. I have to surrender to the spirit and how they want to blend with me.*

Another cognitive process reported by the participants was “just knowing” information. One participant described the experience as:

*I generally pick up communication from spirits as a ‘knowing’ that comes from behind my head and slightly to the left, and although the information comes all at once I have to translate it into words to make sense of it.*

Another participant described, “Usually I can hear, see, know and feel spirit around me.” Merging with the discarnate functioned to experience the discarnate’s energy to both confirm the connection with the medium and affirm information with the sitter. “Knowing” also served to confirm the connection and affirm information.

Participants described emotional responses to the communication with the deceased. One medium stated,

*I'm an emotional intuitive—I almost always have access to feelings from the deceased—it might be regret, joy, a sense of humor, compassion, overwhelming love, respect—I am continually amazed by ways in which Spirit will impress feelings upon me.*

Another participant referenced the consequences of blending with the deceased:

*If I blend too deeply, the emotions and/or pain that they are trying to convey, can overwhelm me and I become too emotional (crying, etc.). As I blend with spirit, I pull them close in order to read them and push them back if I feel that I'm getting too emotional.*

Such strong emotional responses and reactions during the communication were described in positive terms, such as: “The peace and healing that comes with communication from the deceased brings me joy. It feels bigger than me. It feels full of life.” For other mediums, the strong emotions can be negative, particularly if the communication includes information about the death of the discarnate: “I feel creeped out, when it (messages about their death) happens. Most often taken by surprise.” Emotional connections in the

form of empathy served as information vital to the medium and the sitter, often eliciting strong emotional responses within the medium.

Participant descriptions of bodily sensations during communication with the deceased were categorized as internal and external feelings, and as direction-specific sensations. One participant described internal experiences, stating, "I feel my body change to sense and feel the limitations the deceased experienced." Another participant stated, "I feel someone in the room. When I open to connect with them, they will often appear." Participants described external sensations such as tapping, pressure on the skin, or changes in temperature. "I tend to get a lot of body feelings such as what happened to bring about their passing. I may feel choking or get pain in the middle of my chest, for example." Similarly, another participant stated, "I am aware of a presence(s), that is, I feel a body sensation usually. Top of my head tingles, I feel very hot/cold..." The sensations served to confirm a connection with the deceased as well as providing information specific to the discarnate related to the purpose of the reading for the sitter.

Direction-specific communication such as "an incredibly strong, high-pitched sound, usually in my left ear" or a "pull on my right or left side" were identified by participants. Directional sensations may be internal such as the example used above: "and when a spirit blends with me, I sense them coming into my essence from behind on my right." Directional sensations may also be external, such as feeling "some light pressure from the top right side of my head or from the back of my head." Participants identified sensations coming from their right and left, and behind and above; no participant identified sensations coming from in front of them. As with the other forms of sensory experiences, direction-specific sensations functioned to both confirm connection with the deceased and provide information to the medium about the discarnate that was meaningful for the sitter.

**Psychic Connection.** Four overarching, summative themes emerged from the content analysis of the text provided by participants regarding psychic readings for the living (Table 3). These four themes represent seventeen categories and twelve subcategories and were: (A) establishing the connection, (B) experiencing the connection, (C) content of the reading, and (D) psychic information flows from various sources.

Participants described the process of establishing a connection with the psychic reading recipient, such as setting intentions, attuning to the recipient, and tapping into their own intuition. One participant stated,

*When I do readings, I set up very stringent energetic requirements that I receive only what is of my client's best interest in their healing journey. I set my intention of being an open conduit, clear of any aspect of self that would interfere with this process, and I connect with the client's higher self to get permission to do the reading.*

Another participant described:

*I project my consciousness into the aura of the person and tap into my intuitive centers regarding issues that come up for me or I send my consciousness into their life if they want to know about certain areas of their life.*

Participants also described the intentional attunement as “‘infused’ with that person’s energy, issues, thoughts, feelings, food preferences, health/body issues...” The connection with the reading recipient, rather than a discarnate, necessitated intentional attunement and awareness of energy specific to the recipient.

As with mediumistic communication, participants described sensory experiences during psychic readings for the living. However, only four senses were identified across the data describing psychic experiences: seeing; hearing; feeling; and smelling. Taste, which was present in descriptions of mediumistic experiences, was omitted. For example,

*I will hear information. Sometimes it will come through very quickly and I will just follow the words. Very often I will also receive the feeling of the entire concept, as well, and use that to further explain things to the client. I also will feel energy rushing through me when something is particularly important.*

The sensory experiences were not described with as much depth as for mediumistic communication and did not contain as much emphasis on multiple sensory modalities occurring simultaneously. For example, “I see these inside, it is not a hallucination, but more a conceptual visualization. It is that kind of knowing an image without having to draw it or even visualize it.”

Cognitive experiences were also described. Information felt “downloaded” and as transferred to the medium as new knowledge. One participant stated, “I get more information ‘downloaded,’ I just know things, when dealing with the living. It is much like the mediumship readings but I ask questions and get answers and guidance if needed.”

**Table 3.** Psychic Connection: Categories (A, B, C, D) and subcategories that emerged from the content analysis of text provided by 122 mediums (14 laboratory-tested, 108 self-identified) describing psychic readings for the living.

---

Psychic Readings for the Living

---

**A. Establishing the Connection**

- A.1. Setting intentions before the reading for protection
- A.2. Attunement to the recipient
- A.3. Use of objects
- A.4. Tap into my intuition

**B. Experiencing the Connection**

- B.1. Sensory Experience
  - B.1.a. See
  - B.1.b. Hear
  - B.1.c. Feel
  - B.1.d. Smell
- B.2. Cognitive Experience
  - B.2.a. Information download
  - B.2.b. "Getting ego out of the way"
  - B.2.c. Acquisition and transference of expertise
- B.3. Emotions
- B.4. Qualities
  - B.4.a. Bursts and flashes of information
  - B.4.b. Lifeless, dense energy

**C. Content of the Reading**

- C.1. Different than Mediumistic Communication
  - C.1.a. Easy to understand
  - C.1.b. Clear information
  - C.1.c. Direct format
- C.2. Specifies time
- C.3. Confirmatory check with the recipient

**D. Psychic Information Flows from Various Sources**

- D.1. From recipient's energy
- D.2. From guides/angels
- D.3. From non-specific discarnate(s)
- D.4. From Source/universe
- D.5. From within me
- D.6. From within dreams

Participants identified emotions as an integral part of psychic experiences. “Some of the kinds of psychic information I receive is about their wishes, their dreams, the days they had, criminal activity, they hate their boss, they have a lover, ethics, sincerity, what is in their hearts...” Another participant stated,

*I feel psychic information from the living. It doesn't come to me in words or pictures, but ...in feelings. Sometimes it comes to me in the form of what I call energy. It is difficult to explain because it's not really definable. I can tell how they are feeling, if they are comfortable or uncomfortable, sometimes I can feel their thoughts and know what they might be thinking about in regard to the particular situation. Often what I feel leads me to say just the right thing or ask just the right question.*

Empathic connections to the living were important components and experienced in conjunction with the four senses.

Participants described specific and clear differences between the quality of information experienced during mediumistic and psychic readings. Descriptions of psychic information from a living reading recipient referenced the weight, density, or thickness of the energy and the speed at which it was experienced. The quality of information experienced during psychic connections was described as quick flashes of information. For example: “When receiving information about the living, the information generally comes to me in either quick bursts of visual and/or verbal communication.” Participants also described the communication as dense and/or lifeless. For example, one participant noted,

*Getting psychic information is more like picking pieces of information off a person. If we all walked around wearing [sticky notes] that described us—tall, smart, funny, mother, teacher, drive blue car, etc.—then doing a psychic reading is like picking the [sticky notes] off one by one and reading them.*

Another participant described the difference in the quality of the experiences as:

*To me, psychic information has a heavier, denser quality than mediumistic information, which would make sense since it is dealing with the physical container—the body. In viewing energy, I can tell if a person is reading psychically or mediumistically because in a psychic reading, the energy is flowing horizontally between the [recipient] and*

*the [reader]. In a mediumistic reading, the energy flows mostly vertically from the crown chakra.*

One participant contrasted the experiences as: “psychic information is under my control. I set the pace and flow as well as control the information based on what I ask and want to receive.”

The content of the information experienced during psychic readings was “different than mediumship” and described as clearer and easier to understand. “It is very light and factual. Some emotions and energy come with it but rarely any that is difficult to clear away right after the reading.” Another participant noted: “What is very clear is hearing my client’s thoughts, both what they really want and what they think they should want. I also have constant physical sensations going on that give me clues about the living.”

Participants also described psychic readings as containing time-orientation (e.g., past, present, future). For example,

*While receiving information from a living person, I see very clearly all things pertaining to their life. I am shown a very slow, old, black and white movie. As I am reviewing the movie, my senses are heightened and it’s during this process that I am seeing with my non-physical eyes very quickly past, present, and future events the sitter has gone through, or is going through, or will be going through. It’s much different than connecting to spirit and doing a mediumship reading.*

Participants attributed the reason for the differences in the quality of these experiences to the source of the information. Whereas the source of information during mediumship readings was described as communication with discarnates connected to the sitters, psychic information was described as coming from multiple sources, such as guides, the psychic reading recipient and their guides, and Source. For instance, one participant described psychic experiences as such: “I am not distinguishing who I am getting info from, I just get it. It’s a lot faster and is just as accurate as mediumship can be. I have very strong guidance, so I can just let it rip.” Participants identified guides as both facilitators and sources of information about the reading recipient. For example,

*When I receive information from the living’s higher self, guides, angels, it seems to come in through the upper back of my head and radiate frontwards with a higher vibration. This information holds a deeper kinesthetic reaction and requires me to “know” what the appropriate way to communicate it to my client is.*

Source, or universal life energy, was also identified as a source of information about the living:

*The masters and teachers, or the universe, then shows me where they need to be healed or their blocks for living the best life they can. What is holding them back; is it about their relative? The universe will show me what they look like so I can describe them.*

Of particular note is that some information reported during psychic readings for living recipients was described by the participants as coming from unidentified discarnates unrelated to the recipient. For instance, one participant articulated, "I will begin, then my energy moves and a deceased individual may come through unexpectedly." Another participant cited guides as the source of information: "Information about the living generally comes to me from guides who are dead." Participants distinguished the discarnates related to the sitter that communicate during mediumship readings and discarnates unrelated to the reading recipient as a source of information during psychic readings.

Participants provided descriptive comparisons between communicating with the deceased and psychic readings for the living which were not included within the categorization of data; however, they are noteworthy and included here. One participant described a similarity in the way mediumistic and psychic readings are experienced, stating: "For both [types of experiences], sometimes I'm interpreting the information incorrectly or seeing/sensing/hearing something wrong.... If I get a 'no' for both, I can go back and FEEL where I may have gone wrong." Another participant contrasted the experiences as such: "Psychic information comes from some place different than the energy of the dead. It is all around us, less focused, less of a high vibration than the dead. It is not a specific energy. It is a potential energy." One participant attributed the difference in experiences as being a function of

*this dimension. I think that may be because the information is needed for the person's life that is in front of me, right now, this moment and in this dimension. Generally, psychic information benefits the person and the life they are living, or trying to move towards in their life.*

Thus, mediumistic and psychic experiences are qualitatively different and serve different purposes.

## Comparative Descriptions of Mediumistic and Psychic Experiences

Taking into account the independent quantitative and qualitative analyses, several similarities and differences can be seen when descriptions of mediumistic and psychic experiences are compared. Both types of experiences seem to involve similar emotional and sensory aspects. However, differences were seen related to social processes, the specific sensory modality of taste, time-orientation, and cognitive processes.

**Similarities.** Both experiences seem to have important emotional components. Qualitative analysis demonstrated themes relating to emotions for psychic connections (Table 3, B.3) and “strong emotional reactions” for mediumistic experiences (Table 2, C.3.b). Quantitative LIWC analysis implies these emotions are positive across experiences. Though no differences were seen between-experiences when mediumistic and psychic conditions were quantitatively compared for either positive or negative emotions, *post hoc* within-experiences comparisons of positive vs. negative emotions demonstrated that both types of experiences contained significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) more (roughly three times as many) words describing positive emotions than words describing negative emotions.

Both mediumistic and psychic experiences also seem to involve multiple sensory modalities, often functioning concurrently. Content analysis found that multiple modes of sensory experience were described for both types of readings (Sensory experience categories C.1. in Table 2 and B.1. in Table 3) and a relatively high content of sensory (perceptual processes) words was found in descriptions of mediumistic and psychic experiences ( $6.63\% \pm 4.31\%$  and  $4.81\% \pm 3.81\%$ , respectively; Table 1). That is, both mediumistic and psychic phenomena may involve mental sensory experiences of seeing, hearing, and feeling.

**Differences.** Notable differences were seen between mediumistic and psychic experiences in addition to the differences in purpose described above. Descriptions of mediumistic experiences contained more references to other people as is reflected by the LIWC category of social processes (Table 1) and the major theme of triangulated communication between the sitter, the medium, and the deceased discovered during content analysis (Table 2, B).

In addition, concepts related to food or taste were only present in descriptions of mediumistic experiences. Qualitatively, five sensory experiences were identified during mediumistic communication, whereas only four were identified during psychic experiences; taste was not present in the latter. Similarly, the LIWC category of perceptual processes which includes all five senses was statistically significantly more prevalent in

mediumship descriptions than for descriptions of psychic experiences. This difference can also be seen in the LIWC category of ingestion (e.g., cooking, food) which was more prevalent in descriptions of mediumistic experiences.

Differences in time-orientation were also noted. Participants' descriptions of their experiences when communicating with the deceased contained statistically significantly higher past-focused time orientation (e.g., former, previously) content than did their descriptions of psychic experiences. In addition, the psychic experiences were reported as containing time orientation (e.g., past, present, future) which was qualitatively "different than mediumship."

Descriptions of cognitive processes were also different between experiences. Psychic experiences were described as involving a download of new information, whereas mediums "just know" the information during mediumistic communication. Quantitative analysis demonstrated a lower percentage of words related to the cognitive process of insight (e.g., discern, categorize, evidence) in mediumistic experiences when compared to psychic experiences.

## Discussion

These findings from 122 secular American mediums' descriptions of mediumistic and psychic experiences provide insight into both types of experiences in that population.

### Confirmatory Findings

Several findings echoed those observed during previous research with similar and other populations of mediums. The major components of altered states, bodily sensations, 'just knowing,' time orientation, emotions, interpersonal aspects, sensory perceptions, and cognitive processes are discussed below.

**Altered states.** Qualitatively, mediumistic experiences analyzed in this study included both intentional and unintentional shifts in awareness. This finding is similar to Rock and Beischel's (2008) finding that the mediumistic experience involves an altered state of consciousness relative to an ordinary waking state including altered self-awareness; the finding of Delorme, Beischel, Michel, Boccuzzi, Radin, and Mills (2013) that communicating with the deceased is a mental state different than remembering or imagining; and Emmons and Emmons' (2003), for example, descriptions of mediumistic trance states. This shift in awareness is also

similar to the findings of Roxburgh and Roe (2013b) that mediumship experiences include changes in sense of identity and personality.

The finding here of mediums reporting “not being in control” of communication with discarnates (Table 2, B.1.) is similar to Rock and Beischel’s (2008) finding that a mediumship reading condition received lower scores for volitional control than did a control condition.

**Bodily sensations.** The present qualitative finding of changes in bodily sensations (Table 2, C.4) is similar to Barrett’s (1996) finding of channelers’ experiences of physical sensations; Roxburgh and Roe’s (2013b) finding of mediums feeling changes take place within their bodies; and the participant’s description above (Beischel, Rock, & Boccuzzi, 2013) stating that physical sensations (“a tingling or a pressure in my head”) occur during mediumistic but not psychic experiences. Emmons and Emmons’ (2003) also observed mediums’ experiences of confirmatory “goosepimples” and “tinglies” (p. 246) and Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009) observed the theme of “verificatory signs of contact with a discarnate” that included “vibratory phenomena coupled with elevations in temperature” (p. 81).

**“Just knowing.”** This theme refers to the phenomenon of knowing specific information without the conscious experience of obtaining it. The qualitative theme of the participants in this study “just knowing” information about the deceased (Table 2, C.2.b.) is resonant with Rock, Beischel, and Cott’s (2009) constituent themes of mediumship and psychic experiences including “just knowing” information related to the discarnate or the living target, respectively. It is also comparable with Spiritualist mediums just “g-knowing” things (Emmons & Emmons, 2003) and the “knowing” theme common to general psi experiences (Heath, 2005).

**Time orientation.** As stated above, it was expected that descriptions of mediumship readings centered on individuals who had died would be more past-focused than descriptions of readings for the living. Indeed, participants’ descriptions of their communication experiences contained statistically significantly higher past-focused time orientation (e.g., former, previously) content than did their descriptions of psychic experiences. In addition, the psychic experiences were reported as containing time orientation which was qualitatively “different than mediumship.” Similarly, one participant in the Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009) study noted that “a psychic reading is like reading a book... that contains past, present, and future information” (p. 85).

However, no quantitative differences were seen in the proportion of words categorized as present- or future-focused time-orientation when the

two conditions were compared. Similar present-focused content may have been seen simply because the participants were describing experiences that occur in their lives regularly not due to difference in the source or content of the information. In addition, the lack of future-focused content differences may be because neither type of experience contains considerable predictive content.

**Emotions.** The presence of important emotional components in both experiences suggests that the finding by Rock and Beischel (2008) that a discarnate reading condition involved greater negative affect than a control condition was most likely due to the positive nature of the control condition during that study and not the presence of negative emotions during the mediumistic experiences. The emotional aspect of similar experiences was also found by Barrett (1996, as cited in Heath, 2005) as reflected in the theme of positive feelings regarding the experience.

**Interpersonal aspects.** Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009) noted that descriptions of psychic readings “tended to pertain primarily to the individual client, whereas mediumship reading themes pertained to the discarnate, the sitter, and other friends and relatives of the discarnate” (p. 86). One participant in that study stated: “In a psychic reading, the information that comes through usually has to do with life issues and often does not continually make references back to family members” (p. 86). This finding was confirmed by the social processes (Table 1) finding here. It is important to note, however, that this may be a social definitional factor related to the needs and requests of the clients rather than a mental experiential factor related to the mediums’ phenomenology.

The communication triangulation (Table 2, B) theme of mediumistic experiences involving mediums experiencing information from discarnates and then conveying that information to sitters is similar to Barrett’s (1996, as cited in Heath, 2005) theme of a cooperative partnership between channelers and communicators and Emmons and Emmons’ (2003) description of the relationship between medium, discarnate, and sitter as a “relay system” (p. 225).

**Sensory perceptions.** The finding of multi-modal sensory components in each type of experience is in line with previous studies examining the experiences of mediums (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; Rock, Beischel, & Cott, 2009; Roxburgh & Roe, 2013b). In an informal collection detailing how mediums experience communication in their own words (Beischel, 2014), one Windbridge Certified Research Medium stated:

*I get a sense in my body of how they passed... I will hear names and dates, see numbers... letters... memories... [and] objects... I get a sense of smells or odors, or am able to “taste” foods with special connections with the discarnate. (chapter 2)*

It is also important to note here that just as it is difficult to categorize any individual modern medium as a “trance medium” because the states of consciousness that occur during mediumistic experiences may be “arrayed along a continuum from waking states to trance states... of varying depth and levels of dissociation” (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015, p. 302), it may be difficult to categorize any mediumistic or psychic reading experience or experiencer as clairvoyant (‘clear seeing’), clairaudient (‘clear hearing’), or clairsentient (‘clear feeling’) as all three of these perceptions may be involved for any individual or event/reading and/or for any individual reader.

**Cognitive processes.** Compared to descriptions of psychic readings, the descriptions of mediumistic communication collected for this study contained a lower content of words describing the cognitive process insight (e.g., discern, categorize). This suggests that mediumship may be a process that is more intuitive than analytical. Similarly, Heath (2005) noted that the nine channelers in Barrett’s study (1996) “saw paranormal communication as a form of right-brain activity” (Heath, 2005, p. 367).

### Novel Findings

In addition to these confirmations of previous findings from different populations, the analyses detailed here also provide unique insight into the mediumistic and psychic experiences of secular American mediums. These relate to money, religion, health, taste/food, and the source of the content experienced.

**Money, religion, and health.** As expected, descriptions of mediumistic communication with the deceased contained a statistically significantly higher content of words in the category religion (e.g., spirit, god, soul, afterlife) than did descriptions of psychic connections with the living. The quantity of words contained in the LIWC categories of money (e.g., finances, income, wealth) and health (e.g., disease, doctor, illness), however, were not different for descriptions of communication with the deceased and psychic experiences with the living.

**Taste and food.** References to the sense of taste and/or concepts related to food were present in the descriptions of mediumistic but not psychic experiences collected for this study. The LIWC text analysis software

includes the parent category of perceptual processes which includes all five senses but breaks that down only into 'see,' 'hear,' and 'feel' subcategories; thus, in order to capture olfactory and gustatory imagery, only the more inclusive parent category was included in the current analysis.

Rock, Beischel, and Cott (2009) previously found that olfactory imagery was present in six mediums' descriptions of mediumship readings but not psychic readings. The current study observed descriptions of olfactory imagery in the participants' descriptions of both mediumistic and psychic experiences in this larger population of mediums.

However, gustatory imagery ("Taste," Table 2, C.1.e.) was found in descriptions of mediumistic but not psychic experiences. Similarly, a statistically significantly higher proportion of words in the LIWC category of ingestion (e.g., cooking, dish, kitchen) appeared in descriptions of mediumship experiences when compared to descriptions of psychic experiences. This category was included in the analyses in order to reflect references to discarnates' favorite foods that appear in anecdotal descriptions of mediumship reading experiences. In the representative example of description included above (Beischel, 2014), the medium noted an ability to "taste' foods with special connections with the discarnate" (chapter 2). It is unclear if the inclusion of foods in mediumship readings reflects that the discarnates actually miss physically enjoying those foods or if they are just trying to convey how much they liked those items in order to identify themselves.

**Source of information.** The mediumistic experiences analyzed in this study included shifts in awareness with a focus on the discarnate as the source of information. The psychic experiences of the self-identified mediums in this study were described as flowing from multiple sources (Table 3, D) including from guides/angels, non-specific discarnates, Source/universe, self, and dreams in addition to the living reading recipient. This finding draws into question unsupported claims that mediums are using psi with the living to obtain information about the deceased when this current finding implies that they are, at least partially, communicating with the deceased in order to acquire information about the living (discussed more below).

### **Advantages of Pluralistic Research Methods**

Pluralism refers to the mixing of quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g., Barker & Pistrang, 2005) which can expand what is known about a given phenomenon. Using more than one method to analyze a single data set may both enforce findings and provide additional conclusions.

In this study, the findings of related to emotions, social processes, cognitive processes, and the multi-modal nature of sensory perceptions were reinforced due to their presence using both analysis methods. In addition, it would not have been possible to quantify altered states of consciousness using LIWC text analysis software as was previously possible using the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (e.g., Rock & Beischel, 2008) because that falls outside the scope of LIWC. However, by also including the qualitative content analysis component, altered states of awareness were observed in the descriptions. Similarly, although LIWC could find differences in the content of sensory perception words between the two types of experiences, only with content analysis could which specific sense was different be determined.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Farthing (1992) stated “introspection has some severe limitations... but it is still the best method we have” (p. 46). He also noted that “the topic of conscious experience is too interesting and important for it to be ignored merely because of difficulties in studying it” (p. 54).

The use of everyday language to describe anomalous experiences can be difficult (e.g., Hufford, 1992; Moreira-Almeida & Lotufo-Neto, 2017). These experiences are categorized as anomalous because they cannot be easily explained using traditional scientific and social paradigms. In addition, they often include phenomena that are described as ineffable. Asking someone to describe an experience that is, by definition, indescribable and drawing conclusions from those descriptions can be problematic.

In addition to verbal description difficulties, the data collected and conclusions drawn during this study are subject to the same limitations as introspective verbal reports about any experience. These limitations include: forgetting, reconstruction errors, confabulation, distortion through observation, substitution of inferences for observation, censorship, demand characteristics, social desirability, and lack of independent verification (e.g., Farthing, 1992). However, some of these limitations are mitigated in the current study because the participants described phenomena that they experience regularly rather than just once.

Furthermore, introspective verbal reports can be limited due to state-specific memories. Transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart (1985) has noted,

I think one of the tragedies of our times is that we have forgotten about the state-specificity of knowledge in regard to many vital spiritual questions. Thus, we approach them only from an ordinary states perspective, and get answers that are distorted and pale reflections of reality. (p. 3)

Consequently, the experiences examined here may, in reality, be described differently if the experiencers and/or the investigators (and, in turn, the readers of this article) completed their respective tasks in relevant altered states of consciousness. Tart (1972) has proposed that ‘state-specific sciences’ be used to study the altered states of consciousness that occur during anomalous experiences in order to prevent scientists from “concentrating on the irrelevant” and viewing experiencers as “confused or mentally ill” (p. 1204).

Another limitation of this study is that the participants whose experience descriptions were analyzed all identified as mediums. It may be possible that aspects of psychic connection experiences described here, such as non-specific discarnates as a source of information, may not be present in the experiences of psychics who do not identify as mediums. A common understanding is that all mediums are psychic but not all psychics are mediums. It may be that the experiences of non-medium psychics are different than the psychic experiences detailed here.

Finally, it is unclear if the current sample is representative of the larger population of secular American mediums in age, race, and gender. Regardless, studying a sample more varied in these attributes may provide different results if descriptions of their experiences were analyzed.

Future studies may wish to explore the experiences of psychics who do not identify as mediums and/or participant groups with more varied demographic traits.

### **Limitations of Theoretical Explanations for Mediumship**

Positing theoretical explanations for how mediumship works or the source of the information mediums report (once normal, local, sensory explanations have been addressed) is a task full of pitfalls, primarily those involving language and terminology.

Related to the linguistic limitations discussed above, Moreira-Almeida and Lotufo-Neto (2017) have noted that the “words and the structure of our language are very inappropriate tools” to describe the “nature and dimensions” of anomalous experiences (p. 287). One prime example of

problematic language used during discussions of mediumship is the continued use of the term “living-agent psi” (e.g., Kean, 2017) to describe the unsubstantiated theory that mediums are acquiring the information they report about the deceased (at least in part and perhaps subconsciously) through telepathy with living reading recipients (‘sitters’). This term is imprecise and cryptic because both the medium and the sitter are, in fact, living. As stated above, it has previously been proposed that the term survival psi (Sudduth, 2009) be used to describe the type of psi a medium would be using in order to telepathically communicate with the dead and the term somatic psi (Beischel & Rock, 2009) be used to describe the type of psi a medium would be using if she was solely using psi with the living and not communicating with the deceased to obtain information.

However, the use of terms implying an understanding of various phenomena has long been a problem in research into anomalous experiences. Early on in the life of parapsychology as a discipline, arguments about terminology occurred. For example, in a critique of J.B. Rhine’s paper “Telepathy and clairvoyance reconsidered” (1945), Carrington (1946) noted, “Telepathy and clairvoyance are not two rival hypotheses, but closely related modes of the same phenomena” (cited by Rao, 2017, p. 48).

Similarly, survival psi and somatic psi may be terms referring, in actuality, to the same phenomenon. Based on the conclusions drawn here from descriptions provided by 122 mediums which include communication with the deceased as part of psychic readings for the living, it seems appropriate to rethink the terminology used to describe mediumistic phenomena. Perhaps somatic psi actually does include survival psi and they cannot be separated. In fact, if the common wisdom that ‘all mediums are psychic but not all psychics are mediums’ holds, then none of these terms are accurately descriptive.

In addition, survival psi, somatic psi, and even the oft-mentioned “super-psi” are theoretical constructs; just names for ideas that are not backed by any empirical evidence. Thus, using them as explanations for the source of mediums’ reported information about the deceased would fall under Whitehead’s “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (1929), the error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete (also called *reification*). Because we can neither disprove that mediums are communicating with the deceased nor disprove that communication with the deceased is part of every type of psi experience (i.e., telepathy, clairvoyance/remote viewing, precognition, and psychokinesis), it would be irresponsible to posit a general “super-

survival” theory for all psi phenomena or to continue to use super-psi-like explanations for mediumistic experiences.

In addition, based on Tart’s call for state-specific sciences and the language issues described above, it may not be appropriate to conjecture about mediumistic phenomena unless one is currently or at least has previously been experiencing a mediumistic state. Moreover, the full quote from Moreira-Almeida and Lotufo-Neto (2017) above was that the “words and the structure of our language are very inappropriate tools” to describe the “nature and dimensions” of anomalous experiences “especially to those who have not experienced them” (p. 287, emphasis added). Thus, it may be required that both the conveyer and the receiver of information about mediumistic experiences be in altered states similar to a mediumistic one in order to truly understand the phenomenon.

### **Conclusions**

This study quantitatively and qualitatively examined the experiences of 122 secular American mediums as described in their retrospective reports of communication with the deceased and psychic connection with the living collected with open-ended, counter-balanced items during an online survey. Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software was used to quantitatively analyze the participants’ text responses which were also independently qualitatively analyzed using content analysis. Both types of experiences seem to involve similar emotional and sensory aspects but differences were seen related to social processes, the specific sensory modality of taste, time-orientation, and cognitive processes, mediumship seeming to be a less analytical process than psychic reading. Perhaps most interesting is the finding that experiences of psychic connections during readings for the living included “non-specific discarnates” as a source of information; this strongly calls into question theoretical frameworks that posit separating mediums’ experiences into categories that do and do not involve communication with the deceased as well as the continued use of terminology reflecting such a separation.

## Acknowledgements

This study was supported by a research bursary (#372/14) from the Bial Foundation.

This article was peer-reviewed by: Charles F. Emmons, PhD, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Gettysburg College; John G. Kruth, Executive Director, Rhine Research Center; and Chris A. Roe, PhD, Director, Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes and Professor in Psychology, The University of Northampton. The authors wish to thank these reviewers for their helpful assessments of and contributions to this article.

## Correspondence

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Julie Beischel, PhD: [beischel@windbridge.org](mailto:beischel@windbridge.org)

## References

- Barker, C., & Pistrang, N. (2005). Quality criteria under methodological pluralism: Implications for conducting and evaluating research. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(3/4), 201–212.
- Barrett, K. (1996). A phenomenological study of channeling: The experience of transmitting information from a source perceived as paranormal. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 21*, R2503.
- Beischel, J. (2007). Contemporary methods used in laboratory-based mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology, 71*, 37–68.
- Beischel, J. (Ed.) (2014). *From the mouths of mediums, vol. 1: Experiencing communication*. Retrieved from <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00LWZITP0/>
- Beischel, J., Boccuzzi, M., Biuso, M., & Rock, A. J. (2015). Anomalous information reception by research mediums under blinded conditions II: Replication and extension. *Explore, 11*(2), 136–142. doi: 10.1016/j.explore.2015.01.001
- Beischel, J., & Rock, A. J. (2009). Addressing the survival vs. psi debate through process-focused mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology, 73*, 71–90.

---

Beischel, J., Rock, A., & Boccuzzi, M. (2013, June). *The source of mediums information: A quantitative phenomenological analysis*. Presented at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Scientific Exploration, Dearborn, Michigan.

Beischel, J., & Zingrone, N. (2015). Mental mediumship. In E. Cardeña, J. Palmer, & D. Marcusson-Clavertz (Eds.), *Parapsychology: A handbook for the 21st century* (pp. 301–313). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Cardeña, E., Lynn, S. J., & Krippner, S. (2017). The psychology of anomalous experience: A rediscovery. *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 4(1), 4–22. doi: 10.1037/cns0000093

Carington, W. (1946). *Thought transference: An outline of facts, theory and implications of telepathy*. Creative Age Press, New York

Chung, C. K., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2012). Linguistic inquiry and word count (LIWC): Pronounced “Luke,”... and other useful facts. In P. M. McCarthy, & C. Boonthum-Denecke (Eds.), *Applied natural language processing: Identification, investigation and resolution* (pp. 206–229). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-60960-741-8.ch012

Delorme, A., Beischel, J., Michel, L., Boccuzzi, M., Radin, D., & Mills, P. J. (2013). Electrocortical activity associated with subjective communication with the deceased. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4: 834. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00834

Dillman, D. A, Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Emmons, C. F. (2000). On becoming a spirit medium in a “rational society.” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 12(1), 71–82.

Emmons, C. F., & Emmons, P. (2003). *Guided by spirit: A journey into the mind of the medium*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.

Farthing, G. W. (1992). *The psychology of consciousness*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Fingeld-Connett, D. (2013). Use of content analysis to conduct knowledge-building and theory-generating qualitative systematic reviews. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 341–352. doi: 10.1177/1468794113481790

Harris, K., & Alvarado, C. S. (2013). A review of qualitative mediumship research. In A. J. Rock (Ed.), *The survival hypothesis: Essays on mediumship*, (pp. 196–219). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Heath, P. R. (2005). Experiential research: Unveiling psi through phenomenological enquiry. In M. A. Thalbourne, & L. Storm (Eds.), *Parapsychology in the twenty-first century: Essays on the future of psychological research* (pp. 361–375). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

---

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. doi: 10.1177/1049732305276687

Hufford, D.J. (1992). Commentary: Paranormal experiences in the general population. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 180*, 362–368. doi: 10.1097/00005053-199206000-00005

Hunter, J., & Luke, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Talking with the spirits: Ethnographies from between the worlds*. Brisbane, Australia: Daily Grail Publishing.

Irwin, H. J., & Watt, C. A. (2007). *An introduction to parapsychology* (5th ed.). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Kean, L. (2017). *Surviving death: A journalist investigates evidence for an afterlife*. New York, NY: Crown Archetype.

Kelly, E. W., & Arcangel, D. (2011). An investigation of mediums who claim to give information about deceased persons. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 199*(1), 11–17.

Kruth, J. G. (2015). Five qualitative research approaches and their applications in parapsychology. *Journal of Parapsychology, 79*(2), 219–233.

Moreira-Almeida, A., & Lotufo-Neto, F. (2017). Methodological guidelines to investigate altered states of consciousness and anomalous experiences. *International Review of Psychiatry, 29*(3), 283–292. doi: 10.1080/09540261.2017.1285555

Palmer, J. (2015). Experimental methods in anomalous cognition and anomalous perturbation research. In E. Cardeña, J. Palmer, & D. Marcusson-Clavertz (Eds.), *Parapsychology: A handbook for the 21st century* (pp. 49–62). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pekala, R. J. (1991). *Quantifying consciousness: An empirical approach*. New York: Plenum Press.

Pekala, R. J., & Cardeña, E. (2000). Methodological issues in the study of altered states of consciousness and anomalous experiences. In E. Cardeña, S. J. Lynn, & S. Krippner (Eds.), *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence*, (pp. 47–82). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rao, K. R. (2017). *The elements of parapsychology*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Reinsel, R. (2003). *Dissociation and mental health in mediums and sensitives: A pilot survey*. Proceedings of Presented Papers: The Parapsychological Association 46th Annual Convention, 200–221.

---

Rhine, J. B. (1945). Telepathy and clairvoyance reconsidered. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 9(3), 176.

Rock, A. J., & Beischel, J. (2008). Quantitative analysis of mediums' conscious experiences during a discarnate reading versus a control task: A pilot study. *Australian Journal of Parapsychology*, 8(2), 157–179.

Rock, A. J., Beischel, J., Boccuzzi, M., & Biuso, M. (2014). Discarnate readings by claimant mediums: Assessing phenomenology and accuracy under beyond double-blind conditions. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 78(2), 183–194.

Rock, A. J., Beischel, J., & Cott, C. C. (2009). Psi vs. survival: A qualitative investigation of mediums' phenomenology comparing psychic readings and ostensible communication with the deceased. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 13(2), 76–89.

Roxburgh, E. C., & Roe, C. (2013a). A mixed methods approach to mediumship research. In A. J. Rock (Ed.), *The survival hypothesis: Essays on mediumship* (pp. 220–234). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Roxburgh, E. C., & Roe, C. A. (2013b). "Say from whence you owe this strange intelligence": Investigating explanatory systems of spiritualist mental mediumship using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 32(1), 27–42.

Sudduth, M. (2009). Super-psi and the survivalist interpretation of mediumship. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 23(2), 167–193.

Tart, C. T. (1972). States of consciousness and state-specific sciences. *Science*, 176(4040), 1203–1210.

Tart, C. T. (1985, October). *Altered states of consciousness and the possibility of survival of death*. Presented at the Symposium on Consciousness and Survival, Washington, DC.

Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: LIWC and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(1), 24–54. doi: 10.1177/0261927X09351676

Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *Process and reality*. New York, NY: Harper.

**About the Journal**

*Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies* (TJICS) is a free, online-only, open access journal that disseminates information focusing on interdisciplinary studies of consciousness as it relates to dying, death, and what comes next. Articles include original peer-reviewed research, review articles, research briefs, conference presentations, education and training aids, essays, editorials, case studies, and book reviews. Content is tailored to meet the needs of specific audiences including researchers, clinicians, practitioners, and the general public. For more information, visit: [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

Content © 2017 The Author(s).

 Licensed for publication by Windbridge Research Center, Tucson, AZ. This manuscript is open access. It is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. It may be shared, copied, and redistributed provided that appropriate credit is given (BY). It may not be used for commercial purposes (NC). No modifications or derivatives may be shared (ND). For full license details, see: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



## **Threshold: Journal of Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies (TJICS)**

TJICS is a publication of the Windbridge Research Center. The mission of the Center is to ease suffering around dying, death, and what comes next by performing rigorous scientific research and sharing the results and other customized content with practitioners, clinicians, scientists, and the general public.

To learn more about the Center, please visit [www.Windbridge.org](http://www.Windbridge.org)

Donations to the Center help keep TJICS free for both authors and readers. To make a donation please visit <http://www.windbridge.org/donate/>

To access back issues of the journal or download individual articles please visit [www.tjics.org](http://www.tjics.org)

For general inquires please email [info@tjics.org](mailto:info@tjics.org)