

Psi vs. survival: A qualitative investigation of mediums' phenomenology comparing psychic readings and ostensible communication with the deceased

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Certain mediums are able to report accurate and specific information about the deceased loved ones (termed 'discarnates') of living people (termed 'sitters') even without any prior knowledge about the sitters or the discarnates, in the complete absence of any sensory feedback, and without using deception. Despite recent experimental research investigating this phenomenon (e.g. Beischel & Schwartz, 2007), few systematic qualitative studies (e.g. Rock, Beischel & Schwartz, 2008) have been conducted. Consequently, six certified research mediums were asked to describe in as much detail as possible their subjective experiences during discarnate communication and psychic readings for the living. Thematic analysis revealed various comprehensive constituent themes for each experience type. Mediumship and psychic reading experiences were subsequently situated within Grof's (1975) cartography of the transpersonal dimensions of the psyche. The present study constitutes an initial step towards isolating the phenomenological processes underlying discarnate communication readings. A detailed understanding of these processes may, in turn, assist researchers with regards to determining the source of the purportedly non-local, non-sensory information mediums report.

GROF (1988) asserted that mediumship phenomena constitute transpersonal experiences characterised by the extension of one's consciousness 'beyond the phenomenal world and the time-space continuum as we perceive it in our everyday life' (p.105). Skilled mediums can report accurate and specific information about the deceased loved ones (termed 'discarnates') of living people (termed 'sitters'¹) using anomalous information reception (AIR) – that is, without any prior knowledge about the discarnates or sitters, in the absence of any sensory feedback, and without using deceptive means (e.g. Beischel & Schwartz,

2007). However, after over a century of research (reviewed by Braude, 2003; Fontana, 2005; Gauld, 1983), the current state of mediumship findings does not directly address which parapsychological mechanisms are involved in AIR by mediums. In and of themselves, the data cannot distinguish between hypotheses including: (a) the survival of consciousness (i.e. life after death; the continued existence, separate from the body, of an individual's consciousness or personality after physical death); (b) super-psi (i.e. the retrieval of information through clairvoyance, precognition, and/or telepathy with the living, also

¹ Mediums performing readings with proxy sitters provide information for (and sometimes about) living people who are not present at the reading. Consequently, 'sitter' would be more completely defined as a living person who requested a reading from a medium and who has a desire to receive information about one or more deceased people with whom s/he had an emotionally close relationship, irrespective of whether or not s/he is present for or hears the reading as it takes place. Conversely, a 'proxy sitter' is a living person who is present for the reading, but is not the person for whom the information reported during a reading is intended. A proxy sitter may or may not have knowledge about the absent sitter or the deceased persons contacted during the reading.

called super-ESP; reviewed in Braude, 2003, and Fontana, 2005); and (c) the psychic reservoir hypothesis (i.e. that all information since the beginning of time is stored somehow and somewhere in the universe and mediums are accessing that cosmic store rather than communicating with the deceased; reviewed in Fontana, 2005).

The continued evaluation of the mediumship process together with research addressing the survival of consciousness hypothesis are important for many reasons, including those that are academically important as well as those that are socially relevant. First, an understanding of the mediumship process may aid in determining which mechanisms may be at work during the processing of non-local, non-sensory information. Second, survival and mediumship studies provide unique evidence for an issue central to consciousness science: the relationship between the mind/consciousness and the brain. That is, is consciousness (a) a product of the brain as theorised by materialist neuroscientists (e.g. Crick & Koch, 2003) or is consciousness (b) mediated, transmitted, transformed, guided, or arbitrated by the brain (e.g. Clarke, 1995)?

On a socially applicable front, this research is important beyond just addressing the public's growing interest in mediumship and the survival of consciousness. First, mediums may be able to perform socially useful tasks like finding missing persons or contributing to criminal investigations, but in order for society to sensibly utilise the information mediums provide, the process by which it is acquired needs to be better understood. In addition, the information mediums provide may contain wisdom or knowledge that could benefit scientific, technological, and/or social progress. Furthermore, scientific evidence for life after death could revolutionise healthcare by alleviating the anxiety felt by hospice and end-of-life patients and their families and changing the way allopathic physicians view death. Mediumship readings may also be helpful in grief counselling and recovery. Finally, evidence

for immortality may affect individual and group behaviour. For example, research in Terror Management Theory has found that belief in an afterlife may liberate people from 'the compulsion to continually prove our value and the correctness of our beliefs' (Dechesne et al., 2003), an impulse that can manifest in extreme cases as radical actions that defend or propagate the dominance of one's beliefs, religion, nation, etc. (which provides the individual with the psychological comfort of symbolic immortality). For these academic and socially relevant reasons, it is important to continue investigating the information mediums report as well as the mediumship process itself.

It is noteworthy that previous and historic mediumship research has been primarily proof-focused; that is, it has been concerned with demonstrating a specific and replicable effect (i.e. AIR) in a laboratory setting. However, by limiting research to proof-focused studies, important phenomenological mediumship processes underlying AIR may be neglected (Rock et al., 2008). In contrast, the phenomenological researcher engages in process-orientated research investigating 'the way things are experienced by the experiencer, and ... how events are integrated into a dynamic, meaningful experience' (Hanson & Klimo, 1998, p.286). Previous research has used phenomenological analysis to investigate, for example, the experience of meditation (Gifford-May & Thompson, 1994), being unconditionally loved (Matsu-Pissot, 1998), and shamanic-like journeying (Rock, 2006). This type of analysis has the advantage of allowing the researcher to ostensibly identify the essential aspects of the experience being investigated (Fischer, 1998).

However, to date and to the best of our knowledge, there is a paucity of systematic qualitative research addressing modern-day mediums' phenomenology pertaining to AIR (e.g. Rock et al., 2008). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that numerous – arguably unsystematic – qualitative studies were conducted during the first half of the

20th century². The resulting publications often included descriptions of individual mediums or readings (e.g. Newton, 1938; Saltmarsh, 1929; Thomas, 1928) and reports about groups of mediums (e.g. Assailly, 1963; Carington, 1939). It is perhaps noteworthy that these early studies tended to neglect mental mediumship in favour of physical mediumship (e.g. Besterman, 1932) and mediums during trance states (e.g. Carington, 1939; Thomas, 1928). This is consistent with Fontana's (2003) assertion that mediumship has gone through various developmental phases: 'Initially it was rappings, table turning and ouija boards, then came more sophisticated physical phenomena, after which the focus shifted to trance work, then to automatic writing, and then to mental mediumship and channeling' (p.16).³

Going forward, additional proof-focused research in the absence of a process-focused component may continue to provide evidence for AIR, but it will also continue to neglect addressing the survival of consciousness hypothesis. Proof-focused studies alone are not able to differentiate between survival and other parapsychological explanations for the phenomenon of AIR such as super-psi and the psychic reservoir hypothesis. However, if, for instance, process-focused studies find that mediums' experiences of ostensible communication with discarnates during mediumship readings are phenomenologically different than their experiences of information received during psychic

telepathy⁴ readings for the living, then that may lend more support to the survival hypothesis than to the super-psi or psychic reservoir (collectively 'psi') theories.

The present study extends a previously published process-focused quantitative study (Rock & Beischel, 2008) that experimentally investigated the phenomenological differences that arose psychologically in accordance with the demands of a discarnate reading task versus a control task⁵. Rock and Beischel administered seven mediums, who had undergone an extensive certification procedure⁶, counter-balanced sequences of a discarnate reading and control condition. The discarnate reading condition consisted of a phone reading including questions about a target discarnate in which only a blinded medium and a blinded experimenter were on the phone. The control condition consisted of a phone conversation between the medium and the same experimenter in which the medium was asked similar questions regarding a living person s/he (i.e. the medium) knew. Mediums' phenomenology during each condition was retrospectively assessed using the *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI; Pekala, 1991). It was found that the reading condition scored significantly *higher* than the control condition with regards to phenomenological dimensions including negative affect, altered body image, altered time sense, and altered state of awareness. In contrast, the reading condition scored significantly *lower* than the

² Schouten (1994) states: 'The first extensive studies of verbal statements of mediums appeared about 100 years ago in the publications of the British and American psychical research societies. These studies were purely descriptive. Hundreds of pages were devoted to transcripts of readings of mediums and discussions of interpretations and the validity of the mediums' statements ... The subjective estimation of the significance of data became less acceptable and was gradually replaced by the application of quantitative and statistical evaluations' (pp.222-223).

³ It is also salient that, since the first half of the 20th century, several investigations of mediums' experiences 'from within a variety of academic disciplines' (Cousins, 2008, p.334) have been reported (e.g. Emmons, 2000).

⁴ Telepathy can be defined as 'a particular type of extrasensory experience that ostensibly entails direct mind-to-mind communication' (Irwin & Watt, 2007, p.5).

⁵ That is, this study was not concerned with whether phenomenological differences were due to differential information sources (i.e. a discarnate versus a living person), but rather whether phenomenological differences arose as a result of the mediums' psychological responses to different task demands.

⁶ The procedure is described in detail elsewhere (Beischel, 2007/2008; Rock et al., 2008) and briefly at www.windbridge.org/mediums.htm.

control condition with regards to dimensions including self-awareness, volitional control, and memory. Consequently, this study provided an indication of the quantitative phenomenological processes associated with mediumship readings for discarnates.

The aim of the present study, however, was to qualitatively investigate modern-day American mental⁷ mediums' experiences of purported communication with discarnates as compared to their experiences during psychic readings for the living in which psi (i.e. telepathy, clairvoyance, and/or precognition) was ostensibly used.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study ranged in age from 44.25 to 55.67 years (mean=48.63, SEM=1.96, SD=4.81) and included five females and one male. Prior to participation in this study, each medium was screened and trained over several months using an intensive certification procedure including questionnaires, tests, interviews, and test readings; the procedure is described in detail elsewhere (Beischel, 2007/2008) and briefly below. At the time of data collection, these mediums had been participating in laboratory research from 1.66 to 5 years (mean=2.79, SEM=0.63, SD=1.53).

Materials and procedure

As stated above, each medium was screened, trained, and certified prior to participation in this study. Briefly, the screening steps were as follows:

Step 1: Written questionnaire.

Step 2: Personality/psychological tests.

Step 3: Telephone interview (with an existing certified medium).

Step 4: Telephone interview (with an investigator).

Step 5: Two blinded telephone readings.

Step 6: Mediumship research training.

Step 7: Human research participants training.

Step 8: Grief training.

Upon completion of the steps, the medium was termed a Windbridge Certified Research Medium (WCRM).

In the present study, six WCRMs were emailed the following two open-ended questions in counterbalanced sequences:⁸

1. Please describe in as much detail as possible your subjective experience during mediumship readings (that is, readings or portions of readings in which you communicate with discarnates). Use as many words as you need; the more complete the response, the better.
2. Please describe in as much detail as possible your subjective experience during psychic readings (that is, readings or portions of readings in which you DO NOT communicate with discarnates and instead use telepathy, precognition, or clairvoyance to provide information about the living). Use as many words as you need; the more complete the response, the better.

⁷ The subset of research mediums who participated in this study remain conscious and aware during readings and their abilities to report accurate and specific information have been repeatedly demonstrated under controlled conditions in the laboratory. Thus, the sample of participants in this study is not representative of claimant mediums in general, or of the extensively observed historical trance and physical mediums, but rather of modern-day, American, mental mediums whose abilities have been documented. Mental mediumship (also called 'clairvoyant' mediumship) 'occurs in a conscious and focused waking state' (Buhrman, 1997, p.13). In contrast, trance mediumship occurs in a 'sleep-like state' and involves amnesia (Sher, 1981, p.108). Mediumship can also include physical phenomena such as independent voices, paranormal lights, apports (objects that inexplicably appear), the levitation or movement of objects, ectoplasm, and raps on walls or tables (Fontana, 2005, p.244).

⁸ See Rock, Beischel and Schwartz (2009) for a defense of methodologies that involve qualitative data collection via e-mail rather than face-to-face interviews.

Thematic analysis of original protocols

The original protocols of the six WCRMs constituted the data that were analysed using the principles of a phenomenological research methodology originally developed by Giorgi (1975) and subsequently expanded on by, for example, Colaizzi (1978) and Elite (1998). Standard phenomenological inquiry stipulates that a real-time, face-to-face dialogue between researcher and research participant is the most effective method of eliciting the essential aspects of an experience (e.g. Giorgi, 2000). However, due to the considerable geographical distances separating the WCRMs and the researchers, we opted to collect data via email. Consequently, in a strict technical sense, the present study did not use a phenomenological methodology but rather used various principles of phenomenological methodology (e.g. Elite, 1998; West, 1998) to thematically analyse the WCRMs' responses to the aforementioned counterbalanced questions.

In accordance with standard phenomenological inquiry (e.g. Elite, 1998; Matsu-Pissot, 1998; West, 1998), each counter-balanced question was separately analysed using the following procedural steps:

1. Each original protocol was read and reread in order to develop an understanding of the subjective experience associated with: (a) mediumship readings; and (b) psychic readings.
2. The salient statements, phrases, or sentences were extracted *within* each original protocol.
3. The *extracted significant statements* with the same meaning were integrated and translated into *constituent themes* where we translated the WCRMs' 'words in a way that remained true to the underlying essence of the experience itself without severing any connection with the original protocol' (Elite, 1998, p.312). This allowed us to formulate comprehensive themes for each WCRM.
4. The constituent themes were subsequently examined *across* original

protocols. Those constituent themes judged to have the same meaning were pooled into *comprehensive constituent themes*.

5. A *fundamental structural definition* was then formulated for each counter-balanced question by integrating comprehensive constituent themes into a 'final definition paragraph' (Matsu-Pissot, 1998, p.325). The definitions provided a succinct description of the essential constituents of: (a) mediumship readings; and (b) psychic readings.
6. Each of the WCRMs was contacted via e-mail and invited to provide feedback and verification with regards to the comprehensive constituent themes.

The analysis was performed by an independent researcher who was not affiliated with the Windbridge Institute and was unaware of the WCRMs' prior anecdotal reports regarding similarities and differences between the phenomenological processes underpinning mediumship versus psychic readings.

Results and discussion

Mediumship reading

The analysis revealed the following comprehensive constituent themes for a mediumship reading:

1. Verificatory 'sign' of contact with a discarnate.
2. Partial 'merging' with the discarnate (adopting the discarnate's emotions, personality traits, etc.).
3. Apparent independence of the discarnate from the medium.
4. Multiple modalities functioning simultaneously.
5. Visual imagery pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.
6. Auditory information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.
7. Tactile information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.
8. Olfactory information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.
9. The experience of 'just knowing'.

1. *Verificatory 'sign' of contact with a discarnate.* WCRMs routinely reported receiving some kind of corroborative evidence indicating that they had established contact with the intended discarnate. From Grof's (1988) perspective, the mediums' ostensible contact with a discarnate occurs 'beyond consensus reality and space-time', and is, thus, indicative of a transpersonal experience (p.105). This verification typically manifested in a variety of ways. Curiously, however, the WCRMs always appeared to intuitively know when a particular phenomenon constituted evidence of contact. For example, one WCRM stated that piercing auditory phenomena signified discarnate contact:

'Another really exciting communication I have with the deceased is hearing high pitched kind of rings or whines. I have asked for communication and suddenly hear inside my ears, a high ringing sound. I am thrilled to know this is contact. I have had this happen quite often.'

It was also reported that vibratory phenomena coupled with elevations in temperature indicated that connection with a discarnate had been achieved:

'During this "contact" I could physically feel a kind of vibration and heat so I felt sure I had a connection with the [deceased] brother in a very strong way.'

One WCRM emphasised that light experiences including the stroboscopic attributes of the 'spiritual eye' signified connection with the deceased:

'I often see flashes of white light during readings and the blue of the spiritual eye flashing at me. During these flashes I am sure I have connected to the deceased.'

2. *Partial 'merging' with the discarnate (adopting the discarnate's emotions, personality traits, etc.).* WCRMs commonly reported 'merging' to some degree with discarnates. This process tended to consist of WCRMs adopting, for instance, the personality traits and mannerisms of the discarnate. Thus, the WCRMs appeared to quite literally function as mechanisms that allowed discarnates to manifest

to sitters. That is to say, the experience of partial 'merging' may be conceptualised as a trans-egoic experience (i.e. each medium's individual sense of self is, to varying degrees, transcended). For example, one WCRM highlighted a union whereby his or her energy 'blended' with the discarnate's energy:

'It almost feels like my energy is "merging" (often referred to as "blending") with the energy of the discarnate. Sometimes it feels like being in two places at the same time.'

Another WCRM explained that during discarnate communication, the medium may replicate various idiosyncrasies that characterised the deceased individual:

'The personality of the discarnate may come through to where the medium uses the same vocabulary or tone that the discarnate used.'

It was also asserted that mediums are able to experience the discarnate's affective states:

'The feelings of the discarnate may be sensed and felt by the medium such as a deep feeling of love and peace or a sense of restlessness.'

3. *Apparent independence of the discarnate from the medium.* Various WCRMs reported that they were unable to exercise complete control over the behaviour of discarnates. Consequently, discarnates often appeared to function as ostensibly autonomous entities. Indeed, on occasion it was reported that discarnates engaged in actions that were contrary to the WCRMs' desires. For example, one WCRM reported that discarnates displayed a penchant for unpredictable behaviour that elicited a fear response:

'Now you would think being a medium I would want to look and connect with them sitting on the edge of my bed. What really happens is they startle me which makes me freak out!'

Furthermore, it was suggested that some discarnates exhibit a tendency to provide advice regarding aspects of a WCRM's daily routine:

'Once a discarnate decided they needed to tell me which knife I should use to cut with. I told him to leave me alone and let me do it my way.'

Indeed, one WCRM explained that the discarnate's autonomous behaviour sometimes provoked arguments:

'At times I will argue with spirit. Once prior to the reading a spirit told me not to wear my purple ring. Well, I wanted to. So I argued that I was going to wear it anyway. Then she said you are going to drop it. I replied, "No, I will not". Then I did drop my ring and it landed on the tile floor popping my purple triangle stone right out of the ring.'

4. Multiple modalities functioning simultaneously.

Generally, the term 'modality' denotes 'a sensory system' and is invoked 'to specify the sense intended, for example, visual modality, kinaesthetic modality' (Reber & Reber, 2001, p.440). On the contrary, following Rock et al. (2008), we are employing the term to indicate whether an experience is visual, kinaesthetic, olfactory, etc., regardless of whether a corresponding physical stimulus exists. WCRMs often asserted that multiple modalities were functioning simultaneously during mediumship readings for sitters. For instance, one WCRM suggested that communication with discarnates may occur outside of conventional sensory pathways:

'In mediumship readings, communication comes through in a variety of ways, and often it is a combination of methods that go beyond the normal senses.'

A distinction was also drawn between the 'spiritual' and 'physical' modalities:

'The medium is communicating on many levels and simultaneously with the different spiritual and physical senses.'

5. Visual imagery pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.

Visual information was routinely conveyed to WCRMs during readings for sitters. This information typically consisted of images of the discarnate, written words, symbolic images, and images or scenes (e.g. the discarnates' physical death) pertinent to the discarnate, the sitter, or other people important to the discarnate. One WCRM, for example, emphasised that:

'The information comes in flickers of images.'

Another WCRM stated that salient names were regularly perceived via a visual modality:

'I will see this name in my mind or in front of me in the air or with my eyes closed. At times, I have seen a hand reach out and start to write a name on the wall.'

The visual modality was also described as 'spiritual', which seemed to implicitly distinguish it from conventional sensory systems:

'I often see in my spiritual vision, symbols such as a favorite piece of jewellery.'

It was also asserted that discarnates often utilise visual information to verify their identities to mediums and sitters:

'When seeing them they will show something that will identify themselves ... It may be a gap in between their teeth that really shows when they smile ... anything that they know would identify themselves to their loved one.'

Indeed, one WCRM stated that:

'The deceased will show a location where they lived or favorite clothes they wore.'

6. Auditory information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.

Auditory information also characterised mediumship readings. In accordance with visual data, auditory data tended to be identifying information about the discarnate, or a message for the sitter. For instance, one WCRM explained that:

'I have also heard music inside me for a favourite song the deceased person loved. I have "heard" piano music in my ears or in my mind and had that identified by the sitter.'

It was also suggested that discarnates sometimes administer verbal instructions to mediums:

'One example would be a Korean man who was passed on. The man kept saying a name in Korean and instructed me to write it down. The name was the name of his living daughter in law.'

A WCRM also reported hearing the tonalities of discarnates' voices:

'Many times I can hear their voice tone as if a real person is talking to me.'

7. Tactile information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones. Tactile data was also rela-

tively common in mediumship readings, although less common than visual and auditory data. Tactile data typically consisted of physical sensations pertaining to the discarnates' 'passing':

I will also go through feelings of how they passed. If a heart attack my heart will beat really fast, drowning I will get lots of fluid in my throat.'

Another WCRM stated:

I do experience using my hands to feel spirit forms and having the sensation in my hands of coldness if it's a ghost or even the other day when a lady came through who had died in the mountains of exposure and in feeling her "form" she felt cold to me.'

One WCRM explained that tactile data sometimes highlighted a salient physical characteristic of the discarnate:

When a discarnate had a body part that they could not use or did not have (such as amputees, paraplegics, or stroke victims), I will often feel that as coldness or numbness in that part of the body.'

8. *Olfactory information pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones.* Olfactory information was also reported by various WCRMs. The olfactory data appeared to serve the performative function of providing identifying information regarding the discarnate. As one WCRM recalled:

I have smelled violets and then found out Violet was the deceased person's name for the sitter.'

Another WCRM remarked that:

I smell scents when they are around. Cigarette smoke, cigars, cologne, etc.'

9. *The experience of 'just knowing'.* Sometimes WCRMs reported simply 'knowing' a piece of information regarding the discarnate. On occasion, WCRMs voiced surprise when this information appeared to spontaneously manifest:

It is just "knowing". When this happens, it is always correct, and can even surprise me. In some cases I just look at them and start saying names and giving validations in rapid fire sequence.'

Uncertainty was also expressed regarding the nature of the epistemological process that resulted in the WCRMs' acquisition of this knowledge:

Sometimes it is just a knowing and hard to define exactly how a medium received this knowing.'

The experience of 'just knowing' was also described by one WCRM as a 'quickenings':

There is also a phenomenon that sometimes happens which is what I call a quickening, where the information is coming so fast, and it just comes out of my mouth without "seeing or feeling" anything.'

Mediumship reading fundamental structural definition

The fundamental structural definition that may be extrapolated from these comprehensive constituent themes is this: the essential aspects of mediumship reading experiences were: (1) verifiatory 'signs' of contact with a discarnate; (2) partial 'merging' with the discarnate; (3) apparent independence of the discarnate from the medium; (4) multiple modalities functioning simultaneously; (5–8) visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory imagery pertaining to the discarnate and their loved-ones; and (9) the experience of 'just knowing'.

Psychic reading

The analysis revealed the following comprehensive constituent themes for a psychic reading:

1. Multiple modalities functioning simultaneously.
2. Visual information pertaining to the client.
3. Auditory information pertaining to the client.
4. Tactile information pertaining to the client.
5. Empathy with the client.
6. The experience of 'just knowing'.
7. Ostensible precognition.

1. *Multiple modalities functioning simultaneously.* Psychic readings were akin to medi-

umship readings in the sense that WCRMs reported that multiple modalities tended to function concurrently. Again, we are invoking the term ‘modality’ to stipulate whether an experience is visual, auditory, tactile, etc., irrespective of whether or not it is associated with a physical stimulus (Rock et al., 2008). One WCRM succinctly stated that:

I am accessing a combination of sensory data simultaneously.’

It was also asserted that the epistemology of psychic readings involved the ‘mind’s eye’:

‘All the above aspects of psychic ability overlap during a reading so that one minute I may be seeing something in my mind’s eye while seconds later, I might be feeling something or hearing something.’

2. Visual information pertaining to the client.

Visual information appeared to be the most typical variant of data that participants experienced during psychic readings. This information characteristically pertained to the life of the client. More specifically, the information tended to adopt the form of an image of the client in the ‘mind’s eye’, scenes relating to the client, ‘auras’, or symbolic images or words. For instance, one WCRM referred to:

‘...pictures or scenes that run through my mind, sometimes symbols.’

Another WCRM explained that they perceived auras:

I may see beautiful colours in the aura or deep red angry colours or even black if there is a health issue.’

It was also emphasised that the WCRM engaged in remote viewing during psychic readings, which was indicative of what Grof (1975, 1988, 1993) has referred to as a spatial expansion of consciousness within the parameters of consensual reality:

I am able to view or remote view the location they are in at the present time. I may see portions of their house, or vehicle, or work area of their job.’

3. Auditory information pertaining to the client.

Psychic readings were also characterised by auditory information; however, one WCRM

indicated that auditory data were more frequent during mediumship readings. Typically, auditory data manifested in the form of words, but other sounds were also reported. One WCRM, for example, explained that perceiving auditory imagery during a psychic reading was analogous to a telephone conversation:

I may hear someone speaking right in my ear, calling my name or just in my mind. To me, this is the same as hearing a phone conversation, as this is how it sounds to me.’

The same WCRM also stated that s/he could hear internal physical processes of the client:

I also have been able to hear things like blood coursing through the veins or circulatory system of a person.’

4. Tactile information pertaining to the client.

During psychic readings, tactile information typically related to the client’s physical condition, with particular emphasis on whether the client was afflicted with health problems. For example, one WCRM highlighted that the epistemology of detecting a client’s health issues included a ‘spiritual’ component:

My hands are sensitive, and I experience the physical feeling of touching a spirit form which is the living person’s spirit. I also use my hands to detect health issues in the spirit form. So I can feel cancer with my hands or the clothes someone is wearing, or their hair. This touch and feel kind of thing is communicated back to me spiritually.’

Furthermore, one WCRM succinctly stated that:

I know if I suddenly feel sick, I am picking up the sickness of a client.’

5. Empathy with the client. WCRMs reported a heightened level of empathy for their clients during psychic readings, whereby they were able to ascertain their clients’ affective states simply by watching, or listening to, the client speak. WCRMs implicitly suggested that this heightened empathy exceeded the level of ordinary human experience:

'As soon as I hear them say hello I can tell if they are skeptical, open, excited and happy, nervous, sad ... I can feel their energy, therefore, know what they are feeling.'

Another WCRM stated that:

'I am usually aware of my clients "mood and/or feelings" (i.e. deep sadness, highly stressed, extremely fatigued, very excited, etc.) – and although I am feeling this psychically (rather than physically), I am somehow aware of the depth of what they are experiencing at the time. This is clearly conveyed to me by their energy fields if they are in the room with me ... but also by the sound of their voice, if I am on the telephone with them.'

6. *The experience of 'just knowing'.* WCRMs reported spontaneously 'knowing' specific information without being able to determine the epistemological process involved. This is ostensibly consistent with the 'just knowing' phenomenon reported during mediumship readings. One WCRM asserted that during a psychic reading:

'I may just suddenly "know" something without any rational explanation.'

Another WCRM underscored that:

'In psychic readings you may receive information through seeing visions in the third eye, hearing by thought, a just knowing or sensing.'

7. *Ostensible precognition.* During psychic readings, WCRMs sometimes reported what appeared to be precognitive events; that is, WCRMs anticipated the occurrence of future events. Precognition may be conceptualised as a transpersonal phenomenon consisting of 'the transcendence of the usual limitations of time and the resulting temporal expansion of consciousness' (Grof, 1975, p.177). One WCRM remarked that a client is analogous to an open book:

'... a psychic reading is like reading a book, which represents your aura and energy field, that contains past, present, and future information.'

Another WCRM emphasised that:

'I often have precognitive episodes. A recent example would be seeing a man walk through a gate, and five minutes later he did walk through the gate. Another example would be a flash in my mind of a car accident up ahead in traffic and then encountering the accident a few minutes later.'

Furthermore, psychic readings were deemed akin to viewing a film set in the future:

'When tuning into my client, I see precognitive events unfold, as if watching a movie.'

Psychic reading fundamental structural definition

The fundamental structural definition that may be extrapolated from these comprehensive constituent themes is this: the essential aspects of psychic reading experiences were: (1) multiple modalities functioning simultaneously; (2–4) visual, auditory, and tactile information pertaining to the client; (5) empathy with the client; (6) the experience of 'just knowing'; and (7) ostensible precognition.

WCRMs' feedback and verification

As previously stated, the six WCRMs were contacted via e-mail and invited to provide feedback and verification with regards to the comprehensive constituent themes. All six WCRMs stated that the comprehensive constituent themes captured the essential aspects of: (1) mediumship readings; and (2) psychic readings. For example, one WCRM stated: *'I did receive and read the mediumship and psychic experiences paper. I do agree with the analysis, and think it was well written.'* Similarly, another WCRM asserted: *'Nicely done. Wow!'*

Mediumship and psychic reading experiences situated within Grof's cartography of the transpersonal dimensions of the psyche

The essential aspects of the mediumship reading and psychic reading experiences may be examined using Grof's (1975, 1988, 1993) cartography of the *transpersonal dimensions of the psyche* as an interpretative frame-

work. Broadly speaking, mediumship reading experiences may be exclusively situated within Grof's *experiential extension* beyond *consensus reality and space-time* category. That is to say, from Grof's perspective, the medium is communicating with an exosomatic (i.e. autonomous; independent of the percipient) entity that ostensibly resides in a transpersonal realm or dimension. In contrast, psychic reading experiences ostensibly co-mapped with Grof's *experiential extension* within *consensus reality and space-time* category. Thus, these experiences seem to occur within the space-time continuum inhabited by the psychic reader rather than in, for example, a parallel universe or dark matter realm. More specifically, the *precognition* theme associated with psychic reading experiences purportedly involved the temporal expansion of consciousness within consensual reality. It is perhaps also noteworthy that the *visual* theme pertaining to psychic readings included experiences that appeared indicative of a spatial expansion of consciousness within the parameters of consensual reality (Grof, 1975, 1988, 1993).

A comparative analysis of mediumship and psychic reading experiences

A comparative analysis of the essential aspects of mediumship readings versus psychic readings reveals several similarities. The *multimodal, visual, auditory, tactile, and just knowing*' themes were considered essential aspects of both the mediumship reading and psychic reading experiences, and the extracted significant statements that constituted these themes are ostensibly similar. One significant difference, however, is that psychic reading themes 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. Indeed, as one WCRM 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.'

Similarities are also evident between the *empathy* theme of the psychic readings and the *partial 'merging'* theme of the mediumship readings, to the extent that both themes included an experience of the target entity's emotions (i.e. the client and the discarnate, respectively). However, it is perhaps noteworthy that during mediumship readings, WCRMs tended to strongly 'experience' the discarnate's emotions, whereas during psychic readings WCRMs were merely 'aware' of the client's emotions.

There are, however, several themes that emerged during the mediumship analysis but were absent from the psychic readings analysis (i.e. the *olfactory, verificatory 'sign', and independence* themes). The finding that these themes were not considered essential aspects of the psychic reading experience is due, at least in part, to the fact that the target entity during psychic readings was a living person rather than a discarnate. For example, clearly the WCRMs did not require a verificatory sign of contact from the living client who had solicited the psychic reading. In contrast, the nebulous nature of discarnate communication necessitates corroborative evidence that contact has been established. Furthermore, the *independence* theme may have emerged in the mediumship analysis, and not the psychic analysis, simply because it is rather obvious that the living clients of psychics are independent from the psychics themselves, whereas in the case of mediums this is not so obvious, given that: (1) a medium may be conceptualised as a mechanism that allows a discarnate to manifest to a sitter; and (2) mediums routinely adopt the personality traits and behavioural predispositions of discarnates. Finally, the finding that the *precognition* theme was an essential aspect of the psychic reading experience, but not the mediumship reading experience, perhaps underscores the differential function of a psychic reading relative to a mediumship reading. That is, the function of a psychic reading may be, in part, to convey to the living client information regarding future events, whereas the function of a mediumship reading is to facili-

tate discarnate-sitter communication. In addition, it may not be possible to report precognitive information about a discarnate's actions in the future. Indeed, during the verification stage of the study, one WCRM stated:

'One cannot predict the future of a discarnate – unless of course, we'd like to predict what they are going to be doing "in the afterlife" – a concept that is totally subjective and completely unverifiable.'

Methodological shortcomings and suggestions for future research

One might contend that the current study's sample is too restricted to be representative of all mediums (e.g. trance and physical mediums). It is pertinent, however, that while the sample size is small, the WCRMs were carefully screened and tested (Beischel, 2007/2008). That is, the WCRMs in the present study were not mere claimant mediums, but instead a unique group of individuals who have documented mediumship ability and routinely participate in experimental research. In addition, as the trend continues to shift away from the trance and physical mediumship of the early twentieth century and toward mental mediumship (Fontana, 2003) in which the mediums remain fully conscious and aware, this small but select sample may indeed be more representative of American mediums in general than not. Consequently, the collective experiences of these modern-day mental mediums are worthy of analysis and reporting.

The present study's methodology did not constitute a controlled assessment of phenomenology associated with mediumship versus psychic readings. For instance, the present design did not control for the time elapsed between WCRMs' most recent mediumship and psychic readings and answering the two open-ended questions that constituted the foci of the present study. It is arguable that by engaging in data collection directly after WCRMs' readings, inaccurate

and/or incomplete self-reports due to false memory impressions and memory loss may be curtailed. Similarly, the current study's methodology could not control for the WCRMs' mental sets prior to the mediumship and psychic readings or the environmental settings where the readings occurred.

Due to the frequently significant geographical distances separating WCRMs' residences and the Windbridge investigators, the current study's data were collected via email. However, proponents of qualitative methodology (e.g. Giorgi, 2000) often argue that a face-to-face dialogue between researcher and participant is the most efficient process of extracting the integral constituents of an experience. Indeed, face-to-face interviews may have elicited other essential aspects of mediumship and psychic reading experiences.

Future research might use the 53-item retrospective phenomenological assessment instrument, the *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI; Pekala, 1991), to quantify the intensity and pattern of phenomenological effects (e.g. negative affect, altered body image, volitional control) experienced by mediums during mediumship versus psychic readings. This methodology has the advantage of allowing one to 'operationally define, map and diagram' phenomena typically referred to as (altered) states of consciousness (Pekala, 1985, p.207). Thus, the PCI would allow one to operationalise the 'state of consciousness'⁹ experienced by a medium during mediumship versus psychic readings. This may address whether the underlying phenomenological processes of psychic readings for living persons are quantitatively distinct from discarnate communication. Additionally, it would be prudent to adopt a complementary mixed-method approach whereby qualitative and quantitative data are triangulated to provide a more comprehensive account of mediumship versus psychic reading experiences.

⁹ Following Rock and Krippner (2007a, 2007b), we suggest that 'states of consciousness' may be more accurately referred to as 'patterns of phenomenal properties.'

Conclusion

The present study identified nine essential aspects of WCRMs' ostensible discarnate communication experiences and seven essential aspects of psychic reading experiences. A comparative analysis of the essential aspects of mediumship readings versus psychic readings revealed various similarities (i.e. the *multimodal, visual, auditory, tactile*, and *'just knowing'* themes) and differences (i.e. the *olfactory, verifactory 'sign', and independence* themes occurring during mediumship readings). This suggests that WCRMs have the ability to differentiate between ostensible discarnate communication and their use of psi during psychic readings. We also examined these themes in the context of Grof's (1975) cartography of the transpersonal dimensions of the psyche.

Although previous evidence for AIR alone cannot differentiate between survival and psi, by adding (1) mediums' reports that they are communicating directly with the deceased as well as (2) their alleged ability to differentiate between that communication and their use of psi, and including (3) experimental evidence that the two experiences are in fact different under controlled conditions, it may be possible to arrive at an empirically-driven distinction between survival and

psi. The present study addressed (1) and (2). Additionally, it would be prudent for future research to utilise a quantitative instrument (e.g. the PCI), to comparatively analyse the experimentally-induced phenomenology of ostensible discarnate communication versus psychic readings, which will potentially serve to produce (3). The conjunction of (1), (2), and (3) may assist researchers with regards to determining the source of the purportedly non-local, non-sensory information mediums receive. This determination will, in turn, bring the field closer to addressing the question at the root of mediumship research: Is there life after death?

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