

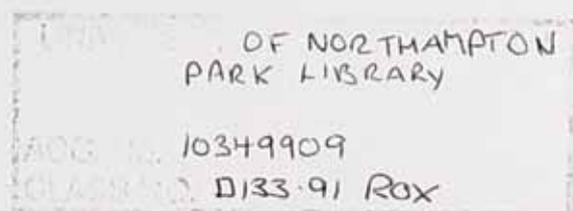


**The Psychology and Phenomenology of Spiritualist Mental Mediumship**

**Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
At the University of Northampton**

**2010**

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# APPENDIX

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## ABSTRACT

Although mediums report a range of experiences that share some similarities with symptom checklists for persons with mental health problems, relatively little systematic research has been undertaken to characterise the mental health and personalities of practising mediums, and none has been conducted in the UK. Previous research in other countries suggests that dissociation, fantasy-proneness and boundary-thinness might distinguish mediums from those who share a similar belief system but do not report mediumistic experiences. To address this, standardised measures were selected and combined in a questionnaire that was distributed to a sample of mediums and non-mediums as part of a nationwide survey. Mediums ( $N=80$ ) scored significantly higher than non-mediums ( $N=79$ ) on psychological wellbeing ( $p < .001$ ), had lower psychological distress ( $p < .001$ ), higher extraversion ( $p < .05$ ), higher neuroticism ( $p < .001$ ), and higher openness to experience ( $p < .01$ ). No significant differences were found on dissociation, boundary-thinness, fantasy-proneness, conscientiousness or agreeableness. Results suggest that mediumship is not associated with a high level of dissociative experiences or pathology. Findings are discussed in relation to previous research, which proposes that the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function for both mediums and those who consult them.

The survey also included an open-ended Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ), which was designed to map the range and incidence of mediums' experiences. A content analysis of responses found mediums reported childhood anomalous experiences, family experiences and socialization as contributing factors in the development of their ability. Findings also increased our understanding of the process and nature of mediumship, and the spirit guide phenomenon. However, in order to explore the phenomenology of mediumship, it was clear that an approach would be necessary that could capture the "lived experience" of mediums. Thus, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten mediums to explore their understanding of the mediumship process and were

analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996). Six superordinate themes were identified that illuminate key aspects of the mediumship phenomena, such as the various pathways to mediumship and how mediumistic experiences are interpreted and incorporated into a personal experiential framework: "A search for meaning: Normalisation of mediumship", "Progression of mediumship", "Relationship with spirit", "Spirit guides as transcendental", "Explanatory systems of mediumship", and "Mediumship as counselling". One of the main conclusions of this study was that the pathways to mediumship are embedded in a cultural context that provides an important environment in which mediumistic experiences are normalised and validated. Findings are discussed in relation to their clinical implications, in particular the need for mental health professionals to be aware of alternate models and beliefs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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So this is it, finally. Four years of my life neatly bound together. Hope you enjoy the read.

## Table of contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Table of contents</i>	
<i>List of figures</i>	
<i>List of tables</i>	

### **Chapter 1: Introduction, reflections of a mediumship training course and outline of the thesis**

1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Reflections of a mediumship training course	7
1.3. Outline of the thesis	9

### **Chapter 2: Exploring the psychology of mediumship: A review of previous research**

2.1. Introduction	18
2.2. Mediumship, dissociation and mental health	19
2.2.1. Is the mediumship role "pathological"?	21
2.2.2. The interface between "Dissociative Identity Disorder" (DID) and mediumship	24
2.2.3. Similarities between "spirit guides" of mediums and "alters" of "DID" individuals	25
2.2.4. Do mediumship experiences conform to the socio-cognitive theory of dissociation?	27
2.3. Mediumship and mental health: Therapeutic role of the medium	30
2.4. Mediumship, dissociation and creative abilities	33
2.5. Mediumship, fantasy and creativity	36
2.5.1. Mediumship and fantasy proneness	37
2.6. Mediumship and repression	39
2.6.1. Secondary personalities as representations of repressed material?	40
2.6.2. Repressed emotions and escapism: A psychoanalytical framework for understanding mediumship	41
2.6.3. Psychodynamic case study of a medium	42
2.7. Boundary permeability and its relationship to the subliminal and	

supraliminal	44
2.7.1. Is boundary-thinness related to mediumship experiences?	45
2.8. Chapter summary	46

### **Chapter 3: Towards a profile of mediumship: An exploratory survey**

3.1. Introduction	48
3.2. Methodology	49
3.2.1. Choosing a data collection method: Survey designs	49
3.2.2. Designing the optimal postal survey	52
3.2.3. Identifying the population universe	54
3.2.4. Gaining access to the comparison group: Sampling method	56
3.3. Method	57
3.3.1. Hypotheses	57
3.3.2. Design	58
3.3.3. Materials	58
3.3.4. Questionnaire reliability and validity	58
3.3.4.1. Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)	58
3.3.4.2. Mental Health Inventory (MHI-17)	61
3.3.4.3. Boundary Questionnaire (BQ-18) Short Form	62
3.3.4.4. Creative Experiences Scale (CES)	63
3.3.4.5. Big Five Inventory (BFI)	64
3.3.5. Respondents	65
3.3.6. Procedure	65
3.3.7. Ethical considerations	67
3.4. Results	67
3.4.1. Response rates	67
3.4.2. Comparisons between responders for the medium sample	69
3.4.3. Data screening	70
3.4.4. Rationale for use of parametric statistics	71
3.4.5. Hypotheses testing	74
3.5. Discussion	77
3.6. Conclusion	80

## **Chapter 4: Content analysis of open-ended questions from a Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

4.1.	Introduction	82
	4.1.1. Constructing the Mediumship Activity Questionnaire	82
4.2.	Content analysis approach	85
	4.2.1. Form of content analysis: Inductive versus deductive	86
	4.2.2. Developing the codes: Component techniques	88
	4.2.3. Developing coding agendas	89
4.3.	Discovery and development of mediumship ability	94
	4.3.1. Socialization into the role	95
	4.3.2. Personal experiences	98
	4.3.3. Family members were mediums or encouraged mediumship	100
	4.3.4. Traumatic experiences	102
	4.3.5. Born with a natural ability or awareness	105
4.4.	Preparation to receive spirit communication	105
	4.4.1. In control of preparation or just happens?	106
4.5.	Can mediums "switch on" and "switch off" their ability at will?	110
4.6.	Process and nature of spirit communication: Internal mental imagery or external manifestation	110
4.7.	Nature of spirit guides	114
	4.7.1. Types of guides: Similarities and differences to DID alters	114
	4.7.2. Types of guides: Mythopoeic cultural representations	116
	4.7.3. The gatekeeper and the Inner Self Helper	119
4.8	Purpose of mediumship	121
4.9.	Information communicated during mediumship	125
4.10.	Chapter summary	126
4.11.	Conclusion	127

## **Chapter 5: Exploring the phenomenology of mediumship: A review of the relevant literature**

5.1.	Introduction	129
	5.1.1. Sources of review	130
5.2.	Biographies of mediums	131
5.3.	Interviews with mediums	137

5.4.	Preparation and altered states	140
5.5.	Modes of communicating (with spirits)	143
5.6.	The phenomenology of spirit guides	149
5.7.	Chapter summary	154

## **Chapter 6: Investigating mediums' lived experience with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

6.1.	Introduction	157
6.2.	Mixed methods: Reflecting on the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches	158
6.3.	Contemplating qualitative research in parapsychology	161
6.4.	Choosing the data collection method: Semi-structured interviews	162
	6.4.1. Choosing the qualitative analysis	163
	6.4.2. Intellectual connections: Theoretical roots of IPA	164
	6.4.3. Responding to criticisms of IPA	165
	6.4.4. Reflecting on the rationale for IPA	167
6.5.	Method	168
	6.5.1. Constructing the interview schedule	168
	6.5.2. Participants	169
	6.5.3. Procedure	170
	6.5.4. Ethical considerations	172
	6.5.5. Data analysis approach	173
	6.5.6. Validation checks	176
	6.5.7. Reflexivity: Owing ones' perspective	176

## **Chapter 7: Mediums views on the process and nature of mediumship and the role of spirit guides**

7.1.	Introduction	178
	7.1.1. Introducing the themes	179
7.2.	A search for meaning: Normalisation of mediumship	180
	7.2.1. "My family were mediumistic"	181
	7.2.2. Childhood anomalous experiences	184
	7.2.3. "I thought I was going mad": Reframing distressing experiences using a spiritual model	187
	7.2.4. Section summary	191
7.3.	Progression of mediumship	192

7.3.1	Continuum of ability: Innate vs. developed	193
7.3.2.	Spontaneous development/ awareness	195
7.3.3.	Section summary	196
7.4.	Relationship with spirit	197
7.4.1.	Responsibility: Internalized vs. externalized	197
7.4.2.	Regulation of communication	199
7.4.3.	Spirit guides: Autonomous beings vs. Aspects of self	202
7.4.4.	Spirit influence: Negative vs. positive	204
7.4.5.	Section summary	209
7.5.	Spirit guides as transcendental	209
7.5.1.	Highly evolved	210
7.5.2.	Specialists	212
7.5.3.	Protector status	214
7.5.4.	Section summary	215
7.6.	Explanatory systems of mediumship	215
7.6.1.	Ritualistic preparation	215
7.6.2.	Prominent modes of spirit communication	218
7.6.3.	Objective spirit representation	221
7.6.4.	Making associations	223
7.6.5.	Section summary	224
7.7.	Mediumship as evidence-based counselling	225
7.7.1	Support for the living	225
7.7.2.	Evidential information	227
7.7.3.	To help the deceased: Spirit rescue/ release	228
7.7.4.	Section summary	230
7.8.	Summary of chapter	230

**Chapter 8: Positioning themes in a theoretical context: Discussion in relation to the literature**

8.1.	Introduction	233
8.2.	Making sense of experiences: Normalising mediumship	234
8.3.	Progression of mediumship	237
8.4.	Relationship with spirit: Personal responsibility in the communication process	240
8.5.	Relationship with spirit: Guides as autonomous beings vs. aspects of self	241
8.6.	Relationship with spirit: Negative vs. positive influences	243

8.7.	Spirit guides as transcendental	244
8.8.	Explanatory systems of mediumship	247
8.9.	Mediumship as counselling	250
8.10.	Clinical implications	252
8.11.	Research limitations	255
8.12.	Reflections on the research process	256
8.13.	Conclusion	257

**Chapter 9: Contribution to knowledge, reflections on using mixed methods, implications, limitations and future research**

9.1.	Summary of main findings	259
9.2.	Integration of findings, reflections on the mixed methods approach and issues for further consideration	263
9.3.	The value of qualitative research: Recommendations for parapsychology	267
9.4.	Implications for the mental health field	268
9.5.	Limitations and suggestions for future research	270

<b>References</b>		273
-------------------	--	-----

<b>Appendices</b>		301
-------------------	--	-----

3.1.	Survey cover letters sent to mediums and non-mediums	301
3.2.	Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)	303
3.3.	Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)	310
3.4.	Mental Health Inventory (MHI-17)	314
3.5.	Boundary Questionnaire Short Form (BQ-18)	316
3.6.	Creative Experiences Scale (CES)	317
3.7.	Big Five Inventory (BFI)	319
6.1.	Interview Schedule	320

<b>Publications and conference presentations</b>		322
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## List of figures

Figure 1.1.	Structure of the thesis	10
Figure 2.1.	A model of the pathways to mediumship and mental health (Seligman, 2005a)	31
Figure 3.1.	Frequency distribution histogram of the DES measure for the non-medium sample (N = 79)	73
Figure 3.2.	Frequency distribution of the DES measure for the medium sample (N = 81)	73

## List of tables

Table 2.1.	Summary of results for studies exploring the psychology of mediumship	23
Table 2.2.	Correlations between frequency of mediumship experiences and better scores on the SAS and SRQ	24
Table 2.3.	Cluster analysis data for different variables assessed in Negro, Palladino-Negro & Louza (2002)	28
Table 3.1.	Population norms for Psychological distress and Psychological wellbeing subscales of the MHI-17 by age group, gender, and illness severity (Hays, Sherbourne, & Mazel, 1995)	62
Table 3.2.	Descriptive statistics of mediums and non-mediums for the psychological measures	74
Table 3.3.	Results from t-tests comparing mediums and non-mediums on the psychological measures	76
Table 4.1.	Example of reducing text	89
Table 4.2.	Coding agenda for how mediums perceive their ability to have originated and developed	91
Table 4.3.	Coding agenda for preparation to receive spirit communication	92
Table 4.4.	Coding agenda for mediumship process: How a spirit Communicates	92
Table 4.5.	Coding agenda for purpose of mediumship	93
Table 4.6.	Coding agenda for nature of spirit guides	94

Table 4.7.	How respondents first discovered the ability to be a medium (frequencies and percentages)	95
Table 4.8.	Variables respondents believe contributed to the development of their ability (frequencies and percentages)	95
Table 4.9.	Do mediums report being in control of preparation to receive spirit communication? (frequencies and percentages)	107
Table 4.10.	Can mediums "Switch on/off" their ability at will (frequencies and percentages)	109
Table 4.11.	How mediums experience spirit communication (frequencies and percentages)	111
Table 4.12.	The range of different spirit guides that were reported	115
Table 4.13.	What mediums report to be the purpose of mediumship (frequencies and percentages) (N=91)	122
Table 4.14.	List and frequencies of different types of information communicated during mediumship	126
Table 6.1.	Participants' details	170
Table 6.2.	Step-by-step guide to the analytical process	173
Table 6.3.	Example of coding within an individual transcript	174
Table 7.1.	Master table of themes	180
Table 8.1.	Similarities and differences between the Inner Self Helper and the Spirit guide	247

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION, REFLECTIONS OF A MEDIUMSHIP TRAINING COURSE AND OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Say from whence  
You owe this strange intelligence  
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.3

#### 1.1 Introduction

Mental mediums claim to receive information in the form of auditory, visual or somatic perceptions that are not available to others. This information ostensibly derives from deceased persons and thus is purported to demonstrate evidence of survival after death (Roll, 1960). It is not surprising therefore that mediumship has attracted considerable interest from members of the public who are eager to communicate with their deceased loved ones, believing this to be possible (Wooffitt, 2006). In terms of statistics, a fairly recent survey of UK residents found that nearly half of their sample (47%) reported believing in life after death (cf. Ipsos MORI, 2003), and a similar number (46%) reported that they had personal experience of mediums (or psychics<sup>1</sup>).

Mediumship suggests novel forms of interaction that are not well understood in terms of current psychological theory, and thus is of interest to psychologists not least because it is their task to investigate, and account for, reports of anomalous belief and experience (Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000), but also because the experiences commonly reported by mediums include phenomena (for example, hearing voices, seeing spirits) that could be pathologised by Western psychiatry and labelled as symptoms of a mental disorder, such as "dissociative identity disorder (DID)"<sup>2</sup> or "schizophrenia"<sup>3</sup> (see DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). However, to date, there has been no systematic research in the UK that has explored the mental health of mediums. Furthermore, whilst much

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<sup>1</sup> Psychics claim to obtain information from means other than the five senses (rather than deceased spirits).

<sup>2</sup> Individuals who supposedly have two or more identities or personalities and periods of amnesia.

<sup>3</sup> Individuals who have experiences such as "hallucinations" (e.g. hearing voices) or "delusions" (unusual beliefs).

research has been concerned with accounting for psychic belief and experience among the general population (see review by Irwin, 1993, 2009) or has distinguished certain personality characteristics of individuals scoring high in extrasensory perception (ESP)<sup>4</sup> experiments (see Irwin, 1999 for a general overview), very little is known about the psychological profile of mediums.

Before giving a detailed outline of the chapters within this thesis, Chapter one will give a brief background into the history of mediumship and explain the overriding tenets of Spiritualist philosophy. It is also necessary to position the research in relation to previous investigations undertaken with mediums and to be explicit about the stance taken regarding the authenticity of mediumistic phenomena. Reflections on participation in and observation of a mediumship training course and some of the practices involved will also help clarify what mediumship entails, as well as demonstrating how these activities and observations informed the empirical studies that comprise the thesis.

Belief in mediumistic phenomena can be traced back to Greek and Roman civilisations (Wooffitt, 2006), and there are reports of mediumistic phenomena in archaeological, anthropological, biblical and historical literature (T. J. Leonard, 2005). For instance, perhaps the most popularly cited is that of the shaman, who acts as medium, psychic, magician, and healer (Krippner, 2002). The first professional mediums date back to 1848 when three sisters from Hydesville, New York (known as the Fox sisters) claimed they could communicate with a spirit in their home by tapping out messages (cf. Weisberg, 2004). The Fox sisters received considerable interest, and although one of the sisters, Margaret Fox, admitted fraud in 1888 (cf. Fox-Kane, 1985), which, incidentally, she later retracted (Doyle, 1926/2006), they are often credited with influencing the birth of the Spiritualist movement, and as the source for the wave of interest in mediumship that swept across America and Europe (for a review of Spiritualism see Barbanell, 1959; Moore, 1977).

In 1853 the first Spiritualist Church was established in Britain (Spiritualist National Union,

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<sup>4</sup> ESP is defined as the acquisition of information via means other than through the known sensory channels.

2008). At this time physical mediumship prevailed, which allegedly involved communication with the deceased through physical events in the medium's vicinity, for example, raps and knocks (indicating "Yes" and "No") in response to questions from the medium (Gauld, 1983). This type of mediumship was usually demonstrated in séances where participants would sit around a table in a dimly-lit room, usually in the home of the medium or sitter, and try to make contact with the deceased. As mediumship became more popular it allegedly progressed from simple communication involving knocks and raps to include, for example, table-tilting (spirits moving a table), materialisation of objects, manipulation of objects in the room such as musical instruments, claimed physiognomic changes in the medium that resembled deceased persons, automatic writing (mediums claimed to write messages from spirits), direct voice phenomena (spirits using the vocal apparatus of mediums to communicate), ectoplasmic forms (fluidic substance emanating from the medium that was claimed to have come from a spirit), and even the appearance of spirits in tangible form (Gauld, 1983; Oppenheim, 1985).

Perhaps due to the detection of many cases of fraudulent mediumship, for example, the Boston medium "Margery" (cf. Houdini, 1924, 1924/2002; Lamont, 2004), physical mediumship was gradually replaced by mental mediumship (Gauld, 1983). Different types of mental mediumship include clairvoyance (the medium sees the spirit), clairaudience (the medium hears the spirit), and clairsentience (the medium senses the presence and thoughts of the spirit). Although not common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some mediums also enter a trance state, similar to an altered state of consciousness, in which the medium can take on the mannerisms and personality of the communicating spirit (Gauld, 1983). Braude (2003a) has noted that the level of trance or altered state varies amongst mediums and seems to run along a continuum, with some mediums appearing to be in a "normal" waking state, some experiencing a light trance and others experiencing a much deeper altered state of consciousness. The mediums that formed the focus of this research remained conscious during demonstrations<sup>5</sup> at spiritualist churches. It should also be noted that there are mediums not attached to Spiritualist churches. However, for

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<sup>5</sup> In spiritualist churches this involves mediums standing on a platform in front of an audience (members of the church or general public) and claiming to demonstrate proof of survival by giving messages from deceased spirits.

methodological reasons, as will be seen in Section 3.2.3, it was decided to focus the research on Spiritualist mental mediums who had won awards for demonstrating mediumship. Some mediums also claim to have a spirit control or guide that helps them to relay messages from the spirit world to their loved ones (Gauld, 1983). The following excerpt, taken from Troubridge (1922), gives a description of the variety of information one might have anticipated from a sitting with the spiritualist medium, Mrs. Leonard:

At one time Feda [spirit control] will devote herself to personal descriptions of the appearance of the departed, at another to peculiarities of temperament or character, which they are asserted to have possessed. Incidents in their past lives, places visited by them either in company with the sitter, alone, or otherwise accompanied, articles owned by them, associations grave or humorous shared with the sitter or with other relations or friends, names of communicators, names of their relations or friends living or deceased, nicknames used in bygone years, domestic pets formerly in their possession and names or characteristics pertaining to these, anything, weighty or trivial, tragic or humorous, that the sitter might be expected to recognise or to be able subsequently to verify, is considered by Feda as matter worth retailing (p. 368).

Today, one can see a demonstration or have a private one-to-one sitting with a medium at over 400 spiritualist churches attached to the Spiritualist National Union (SNU), a registered company and nationally recognised religious institution established to promote the philosophy of Spiritualism, which is based on Seven Principles (SNU, 2008):

- 1) The Fatherhood of God (existence of a creative force in the universe).
- 2) The Brotherhood of Man (we are all part of the universal creative force).
- 3) Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels (Spiritualism aims to prove life after death and encourages the development of mediums).
- 4) Continuous Existence of the Human Soul (belief in the spirit world).
- 5) Personal Responsibility (no one can interfere with our spiritual development).
- 6) Compensation and Retribution hereafter for all Good and Evil Deeds done on Earth ("as you sow, so shall you reap").

7) Eternal Progress open to very Human Soul (by doing our best in earth life and following our intuitions we shall find progress).

The emergence of Spiritualism paralleled the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, and whilst a considerable amount of research was undertaken by its members in the early nineteenth century that aimed to further understanding of mediumship, the majority of this research consisted of unsystematic observations, based on relatively intensive case study investigations of only a few eminent mediums, such as Leonora Piper (e.g., Sidgwick, 1915) and Gladys Osborne Leonard (e.g., Salter, 1930). This approach does not allow nomothetic hypotheses about mediumship phenomena to be tested, such as whether mediums differ in some way to individuals who do not practise mediumship or whether there are any personality correlates that define a medium. Such unanswered questions need an approach that enables systematic measurement of psychological characteristics with valid and reliable instruments, where two groups can be compared for differences. Moreover, this approach does not map the range and incidence of mediumship experiences or give us insight into how mediums' claimed abilities to communicate with spirits may be developed; questions that can only be answered by asking mediums themselves.

Furthermore, there have been recent investigations into mediumship that have focused on a proof-oriented approach, intended to demonstrate whether or not an explanation of mediumship in terms of discarnate survival is tenable (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007; Gaden-Jensen, Cardeña, & Terhune, 2008; O'Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005; Robertson & Roy, 2001; Schwartz, Geoffrion, Jain, Lewis, & Russek, 2003). However, a fundamental problem that has beset proof-oriented research is that even where information may seem subjectively impressive to the client, the conditions under which information is generated make it difficult to distinguish between explanations in terms of fraud (cf. Hyman, 1977), unintentional self-deception (cf. Roe, 1991), some as-yet poorly understood form of extrasensory perception (cf. Braude, 2003b), actual contact with discarnate spirits (survival theory) (cf. Gauld, 1983), or some combination of these.

Such work has proven equivocal, with some researchers favouring a survival explanation (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2003) while others have rejected it (e.g., O'Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005), and there seems little prospect of a consensus while positions remain polarised. In addition, these approaches have also tended to neglect important process-oriented questions regarding mediumship such as the subjective meanings attributed by mediums for their claimed abilities and whether there are any necessary or sufficient attributes that appear to define the role of a medium or characterise the mediumistic experience.

Therefore, the current research is innovative in that it intends to redress these issues by putting to one side the issue of the authenticity of mediumship (taking the stance that further proof-oriented research would not make a significant contribution to that debate), focusing instead on mediums' firsthand experiences and insights into the mediumship process, and whether it is possible to generate a character profile of those likely to report such experiences. Such an approach is neutral with respect to the actual ontology of mediumship phenomena, since it is more concerned with mediums' own perceptions and experiences, thus, it will not be necessary to review proof-oriented work in this thesis.

One further point is that it should be evident that the research in this thesis is concerned solely with mediumistic experiences; however, the reader may note reference to psychics and channellers<sup>6</sup>, particularly in the literature review chapters. Given that research into the psychology and phenomenology of mediumship from the process-oriented approach is a relatively new area, it was considered useful at times to draw from the wider field and examine research undertaken with these populations.

Based on the above rationale, specific aims of the research are: a) to investigate if any personality variables are characteristic of mental mediums. Do spiritualist mediums differ to non-medium spiritualists on a range of psychological measures? b) To assess whether mediumship is associated with mental wellbeing or pathology. Is the mediumship role functional? Do mediums differ in psychological adjustment? c) To explore the process and nature of mediumship. What are its necessary conditions perceived to be? What are the

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<sup>6</sup> Individuals who believe they are conduits for some sort of intelligence, not necessarily deceased spirits.

range and incidence of mediumship experiences? d) To map mediums' own understanding of their experiences. How do they perceive their abilities to have originated and developed? What is the nature and role of spirit guides? What does the experience of mediumship mean to them? An essential means of achieving these aims is to adopt a qualitative approach to some of the research questions; an approach that emphasizes the importance of establishing good rapport with participants, empathy and personal reflection (Yardley, 2000). With this in mind I decided to attend a week long mediumship training course (for a review of the course see Roxburgh, 2006) in an attempt to gain experiential understanding of the mediumship phenomenon, and as a precursor to designing more formal studies.

## **1.2 Reflections of a mediumship training course**

In May, 2006, I attended a mediumship training course, organised by the Spiritualist National Union (SNU), designed for individuals who were already involved in mediumship to practise giving private readings and platform demonstrations. In addition, the course provided an opportunity for individuals to serve as clients for others, so as to be able to share insights and benefit from mentoring by more senior members of the SNU who acted as tutors on the course. The venue for the course was The Arthur Findlay College at Stansted Hall, which was bequeathed to the SNU by the esteemed writer and researcher, Arthur Findlay MBE, in 1964. My Director of Studies, Dr Chris Roe, had been invited to present two lectures on the role that parapsychology plays in the scientific study of mediumistic phenomena, and it was agreed that this would be an ideal opportunity to become an informal ethnographic researcher and to experience personally what training and practising as a medium involves.

In light of previous attempts by some scientists to "debunk" mediumistic claims it was stressed from the very beginning that our purpose for attending was not to obtain proof of mediumship abilities but to gain a better understanding of the process and nature of mediumship. By taking part in the group sessions, workshops and lecture seminars that

encompassed the training programme, I was able to act as a participant observer and be accepted by other individuals on the course.

Workshops often involved being put into pairs or small groups, taking turns to be medium and client (or "sitter"). Generally, instructions were to relax and to explore one's own awareness, not being afraid to say whatever comes into one's mind. During one session, I was particularly impressed when a man who had taken on the medium role told me the name of my brother (Daniel). When it came to my turn to be medium I found it difficult not to try and obtain information about the person by picking up on observable factors, such as body language, age, fashion or gender. But then I found that, if I closed my eyes, images or symbols would "pop" into my mind that my sitter later said related to his life. For example, the first impression I received was of a grandfather clock that had stopped at 4 o'clock and he said that his father used to make clocks and had given him a grandfather clock that kept stopping. I'm not sure at what time though! These firsthand experiences are in accord with interviews conducted by Emmons and Emmons (2003) who found mediums to report visual imagery and symbols (that when interpreted represent certain information) as important in the communication process.

In seminars mediums emphasized the importance of sitting and relaxing and allowing the mediumship process to unfold (develop) naturally, without feeling under pressure to get results. It was suggested that a development circle (held at a Spiritualist Church or in the home) was the best place to start to train and practise, and that it was important to try to get the mind in a state of "non-interference" through meditation and concentrating the mind on breathing. The importance of meditation and controlled breathing before practising mediumistic activities has also been emphasized in mediums' biographies (e.g. Garrett, 1949).

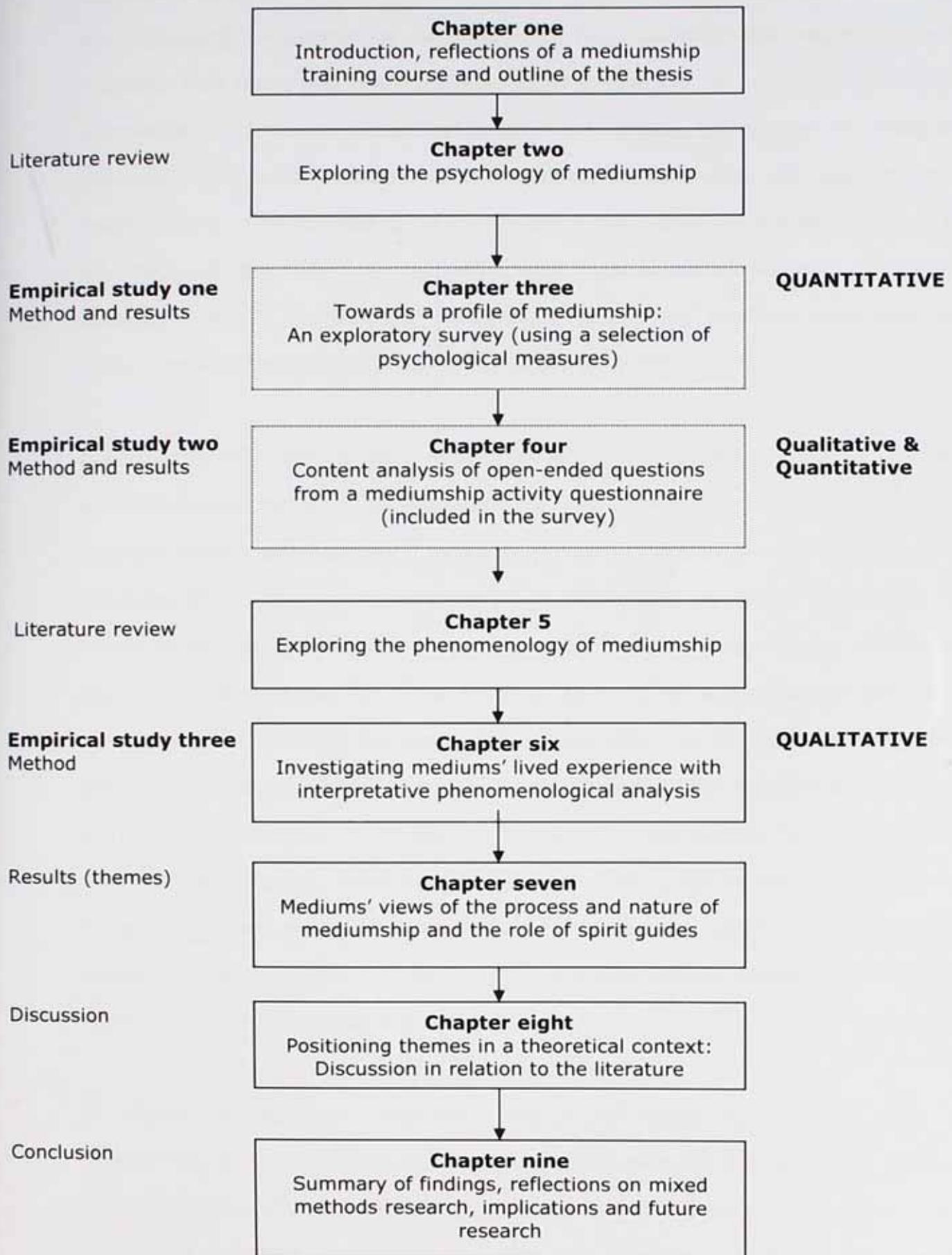
On reflection, this opportunity shaped my approach to the research in several ways. Firstly, on sharing the experience with lots of different people from diverse backgrounds who all genuinely believed they had mediumship ability, it struck me that an

epistemological position would be needed that valued the nuances and idiosyncrasies of individual experience, for example, in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996). However, I was also inspired to explore whether people who practise mediumship have anything in common; by using standardized psychological measures in a nationwide survey. Secondly, it increased my knowledge of the culture surrounding mediumship, and the language used, which I think helped to build rapport with participants when conducting interviews, not only because I did not have to stop and ask mediums to explain mediumistic or Spiritualist terms, but because, to some extent, I had gained an "insider status". I believe this helped the interview situation lose some of the power differentials that can sometimes be present between researcher and participant. Lastly, as I became aware of some of the activities that mediums do when training (for example, meditation) I was in a better position when designing a mediumship activity questionnaire, (as will be discussed in Section 4.1.1) to be included in the survey study.

### **1.3 Outline of the thesis**

As can be seen in Figure 1, the thesis is divided into nine chapters and comprises three empirical studies. These studies use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and as such the research adopts a mixed methods approach (O'Cathain, 2009).

Figure .1. Structure of the thesis



The aim of Chapter two is to review and critically evaluate the existing literature on the psychology of mediumship. More specifically, the purpose of this review was to establish if any personality or experiential variables have been identified that might distinguish mediums from those who share a similar belief system but do not report mediumistic experiences. In this sense, the review provided a foundation and rationale for Study one which comprised a nationwide survey to investigate the personality and mental health of mediums. In part, an impetus for this study was a pilot survey by Reinsel (2003), in the US, who tested the suggestion that mediumship might be pathological and analogous to dissociative identity disorder (DID) by asking whether or not mediums score within the normal range on measures of dissociation and mental health.

In conducting the review, a range of sources were drawn on from psychological, medical and socio-cultural literature, and from research using different investigative methods with mediums in Brazil and Cuba (e.g., Laria, 1998; Moreira-Almeida, Neto, & Greyson, 2007; Seligman, 2005a, 2005b). These studies found that dissociation is high in mediums but that levels of psychopathology are low, suggesting mediums use dissociation in a positive way or have learnt to use it as a skill. Moreover, these studies suggested that the process of redefining one's identity and social support associated with the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function. Thus, the review concluded that although mediums may score high on measures of dissociation, mediumship may actually be associated with psychological wellbeing. However, since this conclusion was based on findings from research with mediums in the US and South America, and the review highlighted the dearth of UK-based work on this question, it remained to be seen whether this would be a reasonable account of mediumship in the UK.

In addition to identifying dissociation and mental health as promising areas for investigation in the survey, the literature review also identified the personality construct "boundary-thinness" (Hartmann, 1991), characterized by openness, sensitivity and ease of entering an altered state of consciousness, as a potential psychological characteristic that may be prominent in the profiles of Western mediums. In attempting to identify other variables that might be associated with mediumship, the literature review identified the

personality construct "fantasy-proneness" (Wilson & Barber, 1982), which has been correlated with dissociation and is characterized by experiences that may resemble mediumistic experiences, such as vivid sensory imagery and a profound involvement with fantasy and imagination. Lastly, the review revealed that no previous studies with mediums had included a general measure of personality. For example, the "Big Five" traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism provide a common framework for understanding individual differences (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Chapter three reports the methodology and empirical findings from Study one. The aim of this study was to conduct a nationwide survey designed, in part, to test the hypotheses that spiritualist mediums and non-mediums would differ on a selection of psychological variables identified from the review in Chapter two. As such, the chapter begins by reviewing the methodological issues in survey design, concluding that the postal method has the advantage of allowing respondents time to reflect on questions, thus increasing the informativeness and validity of answers. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion of how the population universe was identified for the medium sample and how it was possible to target a list of mediums operationally defined in terms of their membership of a recognized national spiritualist organization from which they had won awards for demonstrating mediumship. Non-mediums were targeted via random sampling of the organization's network of spiritualist churches, stratified by geographical region. This systematic sample provided a control for spiritual belief, so that any differences in results on psychological measures could be attributed to the mediumship role, rather than factors associated with belief in survival or religious affiliation, such as group membership and social support.

Following this, the chapter continues by outlining the method taken in conducting the survey and reports the validity and reliability of the measures included: Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES; Carlson & Putman, 1993), Boundary Questionnaire short-form (BQ-18; Kunzendorf, Hartmann, Cohen, & Cutler, 1997), Creative Experiences Scale (CEQ; Merckelbach, Horselenberg, & Muris, 2001), Mental Health Inventory (MHI-17;

Stewart, Ware, Sherbourne, & Wells, 1992), and the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Results from statistical analyses of these measures found that mediums had better psychological wellbeing and had higher levels of extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience than non-mediums. No differences were found on dissociation, fantasy-proneness, conscientiousness or agreeableness. Findings suggest that mediumship is not associated with a high level of dissociative experiences or pathology. The results are discussed in relation to previous research within the extant literature which proposes that the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function.

The survey also included an open-ended mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ), which was designed to map mediums' own understanding of their experiences (with a national representative sample). Chapter four reports findings from a content analysis of this part of the survey which comprises empirical Study two. The chapter begins by describing how the MAQ was constructed. In particular, it focuses on the different sections (and specific questions) included in the questionnaire, which centred around five main areas of interest: 1) how mediums perceive their abilities to have been discovered and developed, 2) whether mediums feel in control of preparation to receive spirit communication, 3) whether mediums perceive their communication with spirit to be internally or externally manifested, 4) to gather more information on the nature of spirit guides, and 5) to gather more information on what is communicated and what mediums consider to be the most important aspects regarding the purpose of mediumship.

Chapter four then discusses the development of coding agendas used in the content analysis, which were either deduced from existing theories about mediumship or induced from the MAQ responses. This allowed text material (from responses on the MAQ) to be coded into content-related categories and for frequencies to be established for each category (such as how many mediums report having a spirit guide). In addition, original quotations from respondents are also reported to retain a qualitative/thematic aspect to the analysis and to allow the experiences of mediums to be represented in their own words. A majority of participants reported that they first came to realise they had mediumistic abilities through particular spontaneous anomalous experiences they had and

often described a process of socialization (either within the family or through spiritualist organisations) through which they became a medium. Findings also increased our understanding of the spirit guide phenomenon as it was revealed that some participants seemed to have created their spirit guides through a mythopoeic process. In other words, spirit guides appeared to be cultural representations that were created from myths, cultural stereotypes or memories.

In addition to exploring mediums' experiences and what they think is involved in mediumship, the MAQ also helped to inform a later interview study with a sample of mediums who participated in the survey as responses contributed to the design of an interview schedule. Given that the content analysis approach involves both inductive and deductive techniques, Chapter four could also be seen as representing a transition from positivist epistemology to phenomenological inquiry, from quantitative to qualitative methods, as it became apparent that to explore the process and nature of mediumship in more depth, a qualitative method that enabled more elaborate, richer and detailed responses, such as semi-structured interviews, would be required.

In order to inform planned semi-structured interviews that were concerned with the subjective experiences of mediumship it was important to review material that considered the phenomenology of mental mediumship. This work is reviewed in Chapter five and took a number of different forms, including biographical accounts of prominent mediums (e.g., Garrett, 1949, 1968; G. O. Leonard, 1931; Piper, 1929) and previous qualitative studies involving interviews with mediums (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; Steiger, 1982). This review enabled me to construct an interview schedule, to be used in Study three, that reflected current understanding of the nature of mediumship as well as being shaped by my own empirical findings.

When conducting the review it became apparent that the relatively few studies that have gathered qualitative data by interviewing mediums (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; T. J. Leonard, 2005), have been unsystematic in their design or have not adhered rigorously to formal methods of qualitative analysis, particularly in reducing their findings to

quantitative summaries in the form of percentages. Thus, they have been unable to provide any deep phenomenological insight into mediums' lived experience, and only serve to highlight the need for a more in-depth exploration of mediums' own accounts of their path to becoming a medium and their understanding of the mediumship process as they experience it. Furthermore, a methodological critique of a study that used thematic analysis to explore mediums' experiences of communication with the deceased (Rock, Beischel, & Schwartz, 2008) identified pertinent issues to address in qualitative research with mediums, which were subsequently adhered to in Study three, such as the importance of establishing rapport, asking non-leading questions, and encouraging participants to express their views in their own words and on their own terms (cf. Roxburgh & Roe, 2009).

Chapter six focuses on the approach taken to gain an "insider's perspective" on the lived experience of spiritualist mental mediums. It begins by reflecting on the shift in methodology from quantitative to qualitative approaches and discusses the advantages of adopting a mixed method approach. It also considers the current position of qualitative research within the field of parapsychology. Given that the aims of Study three were to explore, in-depth, the process and nature of mediumship and to map mediums' own understanding of their experiences, the chapter then proceeds to describe and defend the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) as the chosen methodology. Following guidelines for IPA (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003), a semi-structured interview schedule was designed and piloted with a participating medium. This is discussed alongside a description of the interview procedure, the data analysis approach and ethical considerations.

The main aim of Chapter seven was to report the empirical findings from in-depth interviews with ten spiritualist mediums. In keeping with IPA tradition the analysis consisted of close textual readings of participants' transcripts and a critical understanding based on interpretative activity. A key part of the analysis was to be mindful of how participants' accounts were similar but also different and to acknowledge these convergences and divergences when identifying and constructing themes (J. A. Smith,

2003). Six superordinate (primary) themes, which all have additional sub-themes, emerged from the analysis and have increased our understanding of how mediums make sense of and interpret their experiences. These themes are discussed consecutively and illustrated by interview extracts to identify ways in which the themes are grounded in the data. This also allows readers to gauge the credibility of the analysis for themselves (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

In the first theme participants reported experiences that normalised mediumship, such as growing up with mediumship in the family network and anomalous experiences in childhood that they described as influential in their later becoming a medium. In the second theme participants spoke about how mediumship is developed, and reflected on how ability could be developed with various practices, but that spontaneous ability (for example, after a traumatic event) was also possible. In the third theme insight was gained into the spirit communication process and found that participants either internalized or externalized responsibility. Furthermore, some participants felt they could regulate when communication happens, but others found it difficult to control. In the fourth theme participants discussed explanatory systems of mediumship, such as prominent modes of communication and how they believe mediumship operates. In the fifth theme participants discussed their spirit guides and described them as more advanced, wiser entities with special skills and abilities. Finally, the sixth theme represented mediumship as evidence-based counselling and participants discussed the purpose of mediumship as therapeutic support for both the living (to cope with bereavement) and the deceased (to help trapped or confused spirit through spirit rescue).

Whereas Chapter seven reported findings from the analysis of interviews with mediums by focusing on the exposition and organization of themes, Chapter eight focuses on integrating these findings with the wider literature and positioning the themes in theoretical context. This way of separating results and discussion is common practice in IPA studies (cf. J. A. Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Consequently, the sections in Chapter eight mirror the same structure as Chapter seven by discussing each superordinate theme (in relation to the literature) consecutively. One of the key outcomes

from this discussion was that IPA helped to illuminate the various pathways to mediumship and how mediumistic experiences are interpreted and incorporated into a personal experiential framework.

When discussing the implications of the study, findings were related to a growing area of anomalistic psychology, which is at present tentatively termed "clinical parapsychology" (Belz, 2009a). This approach suggests that mental health services should have an awareness of exceptional human experiences research, which would help to integrate clinical, spiritual, transpersonal and parapsychological viewpoints to provide an eclectic approach to supporting individuals who are distressed by unusual experiences. Chapter eight concludes by suggesting areas for future research and discusses personal reflections on the research process, such as how my own experiences may have impacted on the interviews and analysis.

Finally, Chapter nine concludes by bringing the research together and summarises the main findings in relation to the different qualitative and quantitative studies, alongside limitations of the research and issues for further consideration. The benefits of conducting mixed methods work are discussed, and particular emphasis is placed on the value of conducting good quality qualitative research. Given the new insights that were gained from the use of qualitative methods in this area, future qualitative research is encouraged and will hopefully make an important contribution to the field of parapsychology and psychical research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MEDIUMSHIP: A REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

#### 2.1 Introduction

The objective of Chapter two is to review and critically evaluate the literature on the psychology of mediumship. More specifically, the purpose of this review is to establish if any personality or experiential variables can be identified that might distinguish mediums from those who share a similar belief system but do not report mediumistic experiences. In this sense, the review provides a foundation and rationale for Study one which comprises a nationwide survey to investigate the personality and mental health of mediums. In addition, the literature reviewed in this chapter will help to inform the construction and content analysis of a self-designed mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ), which is also included in the survey (discussed in detail in Chapter four). This chapter will also report any methodological lessons that can be drawn from previous studies that also used the survey method to investigate mediumship.

As will be seen in the following sections, there have been few systematic attempts to explore the psychology of self-labelled mediums in the UK. In part, an impetus for this study was a pilot survey conducted by Reinsel (2003), in the US, who tested the suggestion that mediumship might be analogous to "dissociative identity disorder" (DID)<sup>7</sup> (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) by asking whether mediums score within the normal range on personality measures or show signs of psychopathology. Similarly, investigations of mediumship in Brazil and Cuba (e.g., Laria, 2000; Moreira-Almeida, Neto, & Greyson, 2007; Seligman, 2005b) have also been interested in the psychological characteristics and mental health of mediums, and a review of this research may identify potential variables that could also be prominent in the profiles of western mediums. In addition, the broader and more general area of paranormal belief and

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the validity of DID as a "mental disorder" is debated (e.g. Spanos, 1994)

experience (e.g. Irwin, 1993) will be explored to see whether any personality variables can be identified as promising prerequisites to mediumship or are possible characteristic traits of mediums.

## **2.2 Mediumship, dissociation and mental health**

One of the few recent attempts to explore the psychology of self-labelled mediums, and a study which has partly inspired the current research, is a pilot survey conducted by Reinsel (2003) focusing on dissociation (experiences or behaviours that seem disconnected from conscious awareness), absorption (the capacity to immerse oneself in experiences), temporal lobe epilepsy symptoms (strange sensations and changes in body image and perceptions), and mental health in mediums. Reinsel tested the idea that mediumship is similar to DID by asking whether mediums score within the normal range on personality measures or show signs of psychopathology. Participants were sampled from a conference on mediumship and classified as either mediums or controls depending on how they answered the question: "Do you consider yourself a medium? Yes/No", however, this binary classification could not be applied to the sample as some respondents felt they had contact with spirits but did not describe themselves as mediums. To overcome this problem Reinsel decided to have a category labelled "sensitives" to accommodate respondents who believed they could communicate with spirits, but did not offer their services publicly.

Reinsel (2003) found that mediums and sensitives scored higher than controls ( $p < .05$  for both groups) on the Depersonalization Severity Scale (DSS), which measures the intensity and frequency of depersonalization experiences, such as feeling detached or unreal. High scores on this measure are characteristic of DID (Simeon et al., 1997). There were no differences on the Somatoform Dissociation Questionnaire (SDQ-20), which measures physical symptoms that are reported more frequently in patients with DID compared to other psychiatric diagnoses (Nijenhuis, Spinhoven, Van Dyck, Van der Hart, & Vanderlinden, 1996). High scores are characteristic of individuals with a history of physical or sexual abuse during childhood (Nijenhuis, 2000). Mediums scored significantly higher

than controls on a measure of absorption ( $p < .01$ ) and temporal lobe symptoms ( $p < .05$ ). There were no significant differences on measures of mental health, although a slight trend was detected for higher total scores in the medium sample on the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-17). Reinsel (2003, p. 215) suggests that the lack of high scores on the SDQ-20 for mediums could be interpreted as: a) dissociation among mediums is not clinically severe and/or b) the aetiology of mediumship is not related to childhood trauma. Additionally, no age norms or "cut-off" scores were available for the SDQ-20; therefore, it is possible that age could have obscured differences between groups, as there was a significant negative relationship with age.

Given that Reinsel's (2003) survey was an exploratory pilot study the sample size was very small (mediums  $N=18$ , sensitives  $N=14$ , controls  $N=11$ ), and subsequently it is difficult to generalize from the results. Furthermore, there is a concern with the actual control group, which consisted of individuals attending a conference on mediumship (the same conference mediums and sensitives attended). Reinsel states that "those who did not consider themselves mediums, by virtue of their attendance at the conference, would presumably share certain attitudes and characteristics in common with the self-styled mediums, which would make them a useful control group" (p. 204). It seems that Reinsel was attempting to match the control group to allow for a belief in mediumship or survival after death; a similar design employed by Fenwick, Galliano, Coate, Rippere, and Brown (1985) who compared seventeen student sensitives from the College of Psychic Studies with seventeen church-going control subjects, and matched for age, sex, intellectual functioning and spirituality. However, Reinsel later admitted that she thought the sample group may not have been representative of the larger population of mediums, channelers and psychics and that the control group may not have differed that much from the sample group, given their attendance at the conference, presumable interest in paranormal phenomena, and high education. It is apparent that any future research involving mediums might obtain a more representative comparison group of non-mediums with a similar spiritual belief system if they were sampled from a context other than a formal conference. Comparing mediums with non-mediums who have a similar belief system

would ensure any differences on psychological measures were the result of mediumship involvement, rather than a belief in life after death or religious involvement.

Findings suggest that dissociation is highlighted as a promising area for further exploration. It is interesting that mediums scored higher on one measure of dissociation, but not another, and it would seem appropriate for any future research to explore the relationship of mediumship to dissociation with a measure that can assess more types of dissociative experiences than simply depersonalisation. Results were also indicative of more positive mental health in the medium sample, contrary to the claim that mediums might be characterised as experiencing pathological dissociative symptoms.

### **2.2.1. Is the mediumship role "pathological"?**

The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders considers dissociative experiences such as depersonalization, periods of amnesia, and multiple identities as psychiatric disorders (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000)<sup>8</sup>. However, Waller, Putman and Carlson (1996) have differentiated between pathological and non-pathological dissociation. They acknowledge that experiences such as hypnotic states, altered states of consciousness and trance phenomena that presumably involve dissociation are often not pathological experiences. Similarly, Rowan (1989) supports the idea of a continuum of dissociative experiences, with healthy dissociation at one end of the spectrum and unhealthy dissociation at the other end. He believes that there is a "semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person" (p. 8), which he calls a "subpersonality". According to Rowan, the subpersonality phenomenon falls within the healthy dissociation range and is similar to spirit possession and altered states of consciousness. Indeed, in shamanic cultures dissociative states are considered "normal" and an essential ethnomedical tool for healing (cf. Krippner, 2002). Moreover, some religions within western culture allow for dissociative states and associated phenomena (e.g. spirits of the deceased) to be interpreted within a religious model rather than a purely medical framework.

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the validity of this system is debated (Boyle, 1999)

In an unpublished dissertation, Laria (1998) used the Dissociative Experience Scale (DES) to compare Cuban Spiritist mediums with individuals who had mental health problems and controls, and found that normal dissociative experiences could occur at high levels of intensity and frequency without any associated psychopathology. Individuals with mental health problems reported significantly higher levels of dissociation than both mediums and controls. Moreover, although non-significant, mediums reported higher levels of dissociation than controls, but had better health status and fewer traumatic experiences than individuals with mental health problems. Laria also explored the personality trait "boundary-thinness" which is characterised by openness, sensitivity and ease of entering an altered state of consciousness (Hartmann, 1991) and found both individuals with mental health problems and mediums scored at significantly higher ("thinner") levels than controls. There were no significant differences between individuals with mental health problems and mediums, although individuals with mental health problems scored at thinner levels than mediums (see Table 2.1).

In addition, Laria used the Childhood Experiences Inventory (CEI; Ring & Rosling, 1992), which measures the incidence of unusual experiences in childhood by assessing three factors: 1) fantasy proneness, 2) psychic sensitivity, and 3) susceptibility to alternate realities. Laria found both mediums and individuals with mental health problems reported a significantly higher frequency of childhood experiences than the control group. Furthermore, mediums and individuals with mental health problems scored significantly higher than controls on the psychic sensitivity and openness to alternate realities factors, but not on the fantasy proneness factor, although mediums did score higher than individuals with mental health problems and controls. It should be noted that there is limited data on the psychometric properties of the CEI (Ring & Rosling, 1992), which make reliability and validity difficult to assess.

Table 2.1. Summary of results for studies exploring the psychology of mediumship

Study	Participant type/ comparison	Psychological measures/ variable	Results
Hughes (1992)	Trance channels (N=10) DID (MPD) (N=20)	Trance channels scored significantly lower (DES median=4.38; mean = 6.28) than DID comparison (DES median= 57.06; mean=38.3)	$p = .01$
	Healthy group (N=34)	No differences between trance channels and healthy group comparison (DES median=4.38)	<i>ns</i>
Laria (1998)	Individuals with mental health problems (N =51)	DES mean score for individuals with mental health problems (33.45) was significantly higher than mediums (20.03) & controls (16.04).	$p < .0001$
	Mediums (N =46) Controls (N =42)	DES mean score did not differ between mediums and controls	<i>ns</i>
		BQ-18 mean score for individuals with mental health problems (39.31) and mediums (37.23) was significantly "thinner" than controls (32.16)	$p < .01$
		Mediums and patients scored significantly higher than controls on the CEI	$p < .0001$
Negro, Palladino- Negro & Louza (2002)	Kardecist Spiritism members (N =115)	Mainstream DES mean=15.03 High Dissociators DES mean= 35.20 Active Mediumship DES mean= 20.14	Analysis identified 3 clusters
Reinsel (2003)	Mediums (N=18) Sensitives (N=14) Controls (N=110)	MHI-17 Total Score (mediums showed a trend towards better overall mental health)	$p < .06$
Seligman (2005)	Initiated mediums (N=11) Non-initiated mediums (N =10)	Mean DES scores for three religious comparison groups were significantly higher than two control groups.	$p < .05$
	Uninitiated religious frequenters (N=20) Controls/outside religion (N=20) Controls higher SES/ outside religion (N=10)	However, no association was found between mediumship and DES score.	<i>ns</i>

Findings from the Laria (1998) study suggest that 1) trauma is not necessarily a factor in mediumship experiences, 2) high levels of dissociation are correlated with mediumship activity, 3) mediums have had more childhood experiences that promote dissociative experiences, 4) mediums have "thinner boundaries" than controls, and 5) mediums have

better mental health status than individuals diagnosed with mental health problems. However, these conclusions, in particular the latter, need to be taken lightly as it could be argued that by comparing mediums with individuals who are having mental health problems guarantees that results will confirm a lack of psychopathology in the medium sample. Additionally, there may be differences between individuals with mental health problems, mediums and controls in their openness to answer certain questions. Similarly, their motivation could have differed as a rather lengthy total of ten questionnaires were included, which took between 90-120 minutes to complete.

### 2.2.2 The interface between "Dissociative Identity Disorder" (DID) and mediumship

Moreira-Almeida, Neto, and Greyson (2007) investigated 111 mediums randomly selected from different Kardecist Spiritist centers in Brazil, and found that average scores on the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) were similar to those found in the general population and better than individuals with mental health problems (e.g. Gorenstein et al., 2002), and that scores on the Self-Report Psychiatric Screening Questionnaire (SRQ) indicated a low prevalence of mental health problems. Additionally, correlations were identified between frequency of mediumship experiences and better scores on the SAS and SRQ (see Table 2.2). Moreira-Almeida, Neto, and Cardeña (2008) then compared 24 mediums, from the original 111, with individuals who had a diagnosis of DID, using the Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS), and found mediums differed in having lower prevalence of physical or sexual abuse, lower prevalence of mental disorders, lower use of mental health services, and better social adjustment.

*Table 2.2. Correlations between frequency of mediumship experiences and better scores on the SAS and SRQ*

Variable	Correlations
SRQ & SAS	0.38 ( $p < 0.001$ )
SRQ & frequency of incorporation	-0.19 ( $p < 0.05$ )
SAS & frequency of incorporation	-0.22 ( $p < 0.05$ )
SAS & frequency of hearing	-0.21 ( $p < 0.05$ )
SAS & frequency of psychography	-0.18 ( $p = 0.06$ )

However, better results could have been a consequence of spiritist group membership as Moreira-Almeida et al. note that higher levels of education and religious involvement have been associated with better mental health, so one cannot be sure that the results are due to mediumship experiences *per se*. Secondly, it might be speculated that since mediums at Spiritist centers in Brazil have to attend a 2-year course this may serve to screen out unstable individuals or provide social support that could give rise to a sample that presents as healthier. These concerns draw attention to the need to control for spiritual belief by including a comparison group of persons who share the mediums' cultural beliefs and community support but report no mediumistic experiences; such a comparison would enable assessment of psychological correlates or the impact of mediumistic experiences *per se*.

Trance channelling is another phenomenon that has parallels with dissociative experiences and is characterised by individuals claiming to have direct experience (whilst in a trance state) of an independent intelligence whose purpose is to promote spiritual teachings (Klimo, 1987). Differences between DID and trance channelling have been investigated by Hughes (1992). Using the Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS) and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) Hughes compared trance channellers, DID diagnosed individuals and a healthy group. Results indicated that trance channellers gave DES scores that were significantly lower (median DES= 5.66) than those for the DID group (median DES=57.06) and more in line with scores obtained by the healthy group (median DES= 4.38) (see Table 2.1). Scores on the DDIS for trance channellers did not suggest psychopathology. These results suggest that dissociative experiences in trance channellers do not reach pathological levels as assessed by the DES. It remains to be seen whether this generalises to other forms of mediumship.

### **2.2.3 Similarities between "spirit guides" and "alters" of "DID" individuals**

Although there is some debate with regards the validity of DID (e.g. Spanos, 1994), Braude (1988) has asked whether the alter personalities of individuals diagnosed with multiple personality disorder (now labelled DID) are similar (or dissimilar) to the spirit entities that are reported by mediums. In an attempt to answer this question, he

discusses three hypotheses 1) discarnate entities are ordinary alternate personalities parading as post-mortem entities (dissociation hypothesis), 2) post-mortem entities are what they claim to be (survival hypothesis), and 3) alternate personalities are really discarnate entities parading as elements of a person's psyche (intrusion hypothesis) (discussed in detail in Braude, 1988). Braude concludes that the comparison of mediumship to DID does not offer support for any of these hypotheses. However, he adds that mediums may prefer to see spirit entities as genuinely discarnate rather than personalities that have been created by their own psyche, due to the psychological value or social utility this belief may provide. In other words, an external control may protect the ego or self-esteem of the medium by displacing blame so that failures are regarded as the responsibility of the spirit and the medium avoids accountability.

Controversially, other researchers have suggested that psi manifestations can occur in DID (e.g. Van de Castle, 1993) and have cited work that has introduced the concept of an "Inner Self Helper" (ISH); a supposedly higher part of the personality that utilizes paranormal abilities and often acts as an alter co-therapist. ISHs are described as being separate, more powerful, and different from alter personalities, and often refer to themselves in mystical terms.

Given that DID is a phenomenon/diagnosis that appears to be confined to the US (Spanos, 1994), a comparison of DID and mediumship will not be explored in detail in this thesis. However, it would appear relevant to enquire in the MAQ about the spirit guides that mediums have. Do mediums share spirit guides that have similar or dissimilar characteristics? Do spirit guides match types of alters found in people with a diagnosis of DID? Ross, Norton, and Wozney (1989) found the most prevalent types of alters to be; the child (outlet for repressed inner child?), the protector (need for security/control?), the persecutor (paranoia?), the opposite sex (sexuality?), the demon (guilt?), another living person (actual self versus ideal self discrepancy?), a different race (identity?), and a dead relative (grief?). In brackets, I have added possible psychodynamic conflicts that could have contributed to the existence of these alter personalities, which may or may not be apparent in the experiences of mediums (if spirit communicators were to be regarded as

impersonations). Putman, Guroff, Silberman, Barban, and Post (1986) have also found that 75% of alters are personalities under the age of 12, which may result from the high percentage of childhood abuse reported by individuals with a diagnosis of DID. It would be interesting to see if there are any common themes in the characteristics of mediums' controls that relate to their life experiences.

#### **2.2.4 Do mediumship experiences conform to the socio-cognitive theory of dissociation?**

Multiple identity enactments, such as co-consciousness in DID have generally been interpreted as dissociative processes, which are classed as defence reactions to traumatic experiences (Ross, Norton, & Wozney, 1989). However, an alternative viewpoint is the socio-cognitive theory, which proposes that forms of multiplicity, including DID and mediumship are socially constructed (Negro et al., 2002; Spanos, 1994). Histories of trauma and abuse are not considered necessary in the development of a multiple identity. It is believed that "multiple identities are established, legitimated, maintained, and altered through social interaction" (Spanos 1994 p. 143). It is suggested that in the case of DID, multiplicity is explicitly suggested to the patient through use of hypnotic procedures. During an interview with a therapist, the patient is asked to "look into her mind to see if there is anyone or anything there" (Bliss 1986, cited in Spanos 1994 p. 153) and asked leading questions about whether the alter personality has a name and how old they are. Similar suggestions have been put forward about mediumship development groups by Biscop (1981) who undertook a participation observation study of a spiritist church in Canada. Biscop found apprentices were socialised into the role of medium through teaching, encouragement in small groups and learning from more experienced mediums.

Negro, Palladino-Negro, and Louza (2002) explored whether mediumship experiences conform to the sociocognitive theory of dissociation. They distributed 190 self-report questionnaire packs, including the DES, TPQ (Tridimensional Personality Questionnaire), and a visual analogue scale (VAS) of happiness, to students enrolled in mediumship training courses at a Kardecist Spiritist Center in Brazil. It was hypothesized that social

modelling would play a role in the performance and social control of religious dissociative behaviour.

*Table 2.3. Cluster analysis data for different variables assessed*

Variable	Cluster 1 Mainstream N=90	Cluster 2 High Dissociators N=14	Cluster 3 Active Mediumship N=6
Age	51.2	39.6	42
Mean DES Score	15	35.2	20.1
Mean VAS Happiness Score	71.2	65.9	54
Mediumship frequency in the previous 30 days	7.7	14.1	179
Years of Spiritism	23.2	15.2	14.8
Formalized mediumship training score	23.2	15.2	14.8

K means cluster analysis identified three main clusters of mediums. The majority of participants ( $N=90$ ) were categorised as "Mainstream". These individuals had the lowest DES scores, the highest happiness scores, were older, had the most years training, had attended the most courses and had been Spiritists for longer. The second group were classed as "High Dissociators" ( $N=14$ ). They were younger, had intermediate results of mediumship activity, happiness, years of training and number of courses, and had higher DES scores (above 30, which is considered the cut off point for pathological dissociation) and reported more psychiatric symptomatology. The last group were classed as "Active Mediumship" ( $N=6$ ). They had the most mediumship activity, intermediate DES scores, and lowest happiness scores, lowest amount of training and courses and considered themselves Spiritists for the least amount of time.

Negro et al. concluded that increased pathological dissociation was related to younger age, less control of mediumship activity, and poorer social support, and that years of formal training is associated with control of mediumship, but not production of mediumship. Therefore, results argue against the socio-cognitive model for causation of pathological dissociation in mediums, but identify social modelling of non-pathological religious dissociative experiences. In other words, findings identified a positive association

between years of formal mediumship training and control of dissociative experiences (94.4% reported good control), but no evidence that training increases the production of mediumship. Results also showed that participants who had the most years of training had the lowest DES score. Negro et al. suggested that gains in control of dissociative experiences might also come from cohesive social interaction. This highlights the importance of comparing spiritualist mediums with non-medium spiritualists to control for the protective effects that group membership in social and religious communities could have on wellbeing (Silberman, 2005).

Advantages and disadvantages of the survey method are also highlighted by this study. To protect students' anonymity, the investigators introduced themselves, explained that the study was exploring the nature of dissociative religious experiences and left questionnaires in different classrooms for students to choose whether they wanted to take part. This method has the advantage of reducing survey costs. However, probability sampling was not employed and this could have produced biases in the sample (F. J. Fowler, Jr., 2002). Given that there were 10,000 students at the Center enrolled in general religious classes and mediumship training courses, it is not clear who constituted the sampling frame; it is only reported that 190 of these students had a chance of taking part in the study. It should also be noted that this method does not allow for follow up as researchers cannot attempt to improve response rates by contacting individuals who have not responded. However, an impressive response rate of 57.9% was achieved as 110 packs were returned (out of 190). It could also be argued that by virtue of their reason for attending the Center (to take part in religious or mediumship courses), individuals will share similar characteristics, and therefore sample estimates are representative. To increase the accuracy of survey estimates and optimise use of resources, these are considerations to bear in mind when designing features of future studies.

It is clear from the studies above that there is a distinct relationship between dissociation and mediumistic experiences, which warrants further investigation. Furthermore, from what has been discussed, we can begin to see that the relationship of dissociation to mediumship need not be one of psychopathology, and that mediumship training and

Spiritist involvement may contribute to psychological adjustment in mediums. It also highlights the necessity of any future research involving mediums, using a measure that can differentiate between pathological and non-pathological dissociation, to see if the distinction can be confirmed. Taken together these studies also suggest that individuals who have high levels of dissociative experience may be able to remain functional where they can draw on a supportive community. The following section expands on this claim and argues that mediumship can be therapeutic, especially when there is a cultural belief system and available resources, such as social support, that enables mediums to normalise their experiences.

### **2.3 Mediumship and mental health: Therapeutic role of the medium**

Seligman (2005a) suggests that the process of redefining one's identity and social support associated with the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function. The model in Figure 2.1, taken from Seligman (2005a), reflects on the personal attributes and life experiences of individuals in the context of their cultural belief system<sup>9</sup>. Seligman hypothesizes that social conditions and somatic susceptibilities (symptoms involving bodily distress, such as headaches and burning of the stomach) cause individuals to identify with the mediumship role and makes them vulnerable to dissociation. However, dissociation is not viewed as pathological. Mediumship is seen as an expression of, and therapy for, emotional distress.

Seligman undertook a year long field study with 71 individuals in Brazil in an attempt to discover what the necessary conditions are for the development and maintenance of the mediumship role. Her study consisted of semi-structured interviews exploring life history and social ethnography of mediums and non-mediums from the Candomblé mediumship, together with psychological measures assessing dissociation (DES), emotional distress (Questionario Morbidade Psiquiatrica dos Adultos [QMPA]) and anxiety (State Trait Anxiety Inventory [STAI]). There were five comparison groups: 1) 11 initiated mediums, 2) 10

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<sup>9</sup> Cultural belief system is defined as a system of knowledge or way of perceiving and interacting in society, which is shared by a relatively large group of people who are guided by a set of values (e.g., religious or philosophical values, beliefs, customs, symbols, ceremonies).

non-medium initiates, 3) 20 uninitiated religious frequenters, 4) 20 controls (from outside of the religion), and 5) 10 controls with a high socio-economic status (SES) (from outside the religion). Comparisons were made between groups using t-tests and ANOVA, which identified no significant differences on the measure of anxiety, although the higher SES control group scored closer to US norms. Similarly, no significant differences were found for emotional distress as measured by the QMPA. However, somatic symptoms were higher for mediums ( $p < .05$ ). On the DES the mean scores for the three religious comparison groups were significantly higher than the two control groups ( $p < .05$ ). However, there were no differences between the medium group and the religious groups, suggesting no association between mediumship and dissociation. Additionally, none of the groups scored above clinical cut-off points, suggesting dissociation experienced was not pathological, which supports previous research mentioned earlier on mediumship and dissociation.

Figure 2.1. A model of the pathways to mediumship and mental health (Seligman, 2005a, p. 73)

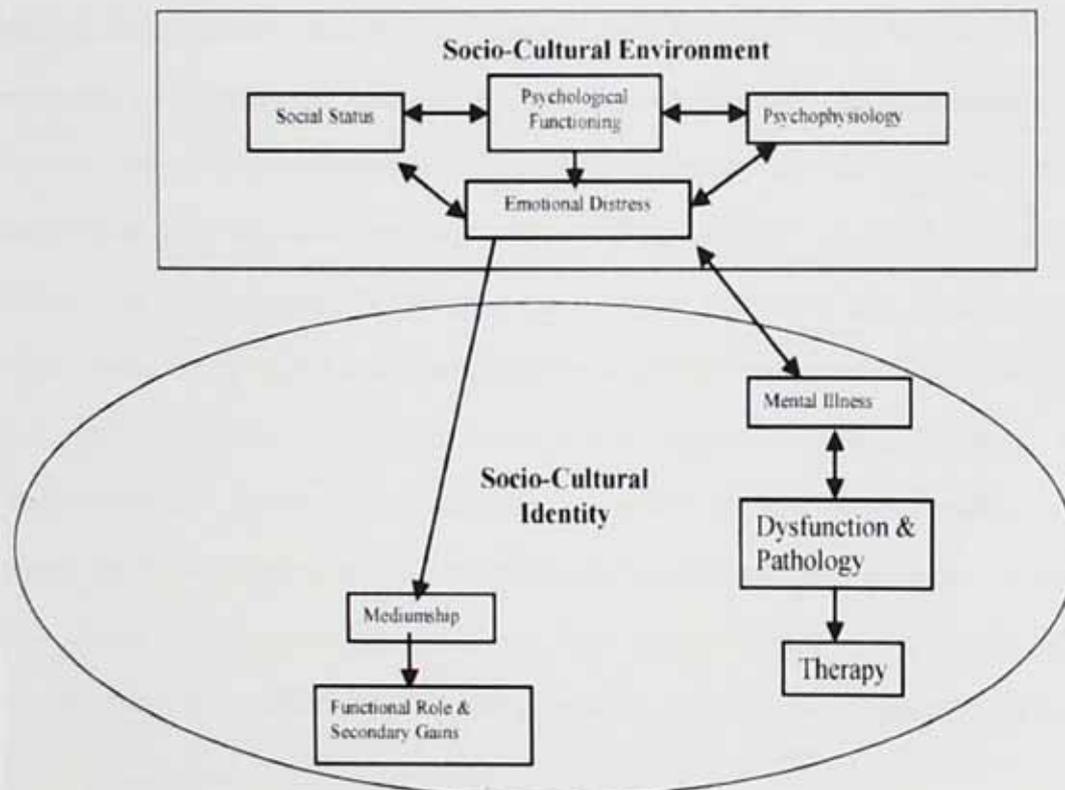


Figure 1. A model of the dynamic interactions between individual and social characteristics, and cultural environment, in defining the pathways to mediumship and mental health in the Candomblé religion.

Given that mediums scored higher on somatic symptoms, but not on emotional distress or dissociation, Seligman proposes that mediums may be able to channel their somatic tendencies into the experience of possession trance. Additionally, during the interviews, most mediums reported high levels of psychosocial stress, together with various illnesses prior to becoming involved with Candomblé. Seligman suggests that exposure to the cultural belief system<sup>10</sup> surrounding mediumship becomes personified, so that mediums reinterpret their past experiences in terms of culturally defined characteristics of the mediumship role, which is defined, to some extent, by affliction. Seligman (2005b) later expands on this idea in a study describing narratives obtained from in-depth interviews with mediums, who were asked to tell their story of how they became involved with Candomblé mediumship. The most common criteria reported were communication from deities, entering a trance state and possession by a spirit, and "suffering" (e.g., mental health problems, family problems, illness, and financial crisis).

Seligman (2005b) suggests that the distress experienced by individuals, prior to their involvement with mediumship, is given a new positive meaning by the criterion that is expected to be associated with initiation into the mediumship role, together with the accompanied status, power and respect that is linked with the role; Candomblé views suffering as a calling to become a medium, which gives the individual an opportunity to become spiritually empowered rather than afflicted, and to "reconstruct their identities, reinterpret their experiences, and redirect their actions" (p. 273) in line with the cultural model<sup>11</sup> of mediumship. Seligman cites work by Schwartz and Merten (1968) to support these ideas; they argue that the transformation of individual identity during initiation into the mediumship role is achieved through a process of "identity diffusion", and subsequent "reconstitution". Identity diffusion occurs when an individual's sense of self is broken down, perhaps by stressful life events or an awareness that one can or needs to change; this leads to reconstitution whereby the medium role is modelled, resulting in the socialisation of a transformed identity, which has internalized the socially accepted cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Within the belief system of the Candomblé religion individuals who become mediums will have experienced affliction at some point in their lives. Candomblé considers this affliction to be a calling to become a medium and thus gives individuals an opportunity to reinterpret their past suffering more positively.

<sup>11</sup> Cultural models represent the way in which individuals attempt to gain meaning and a system of interacting in society, based on the philosophy and beliefs of the cultural climate.

model of a medium. Additional support is noted by Seligman in reference to Lambek's (1981, as cited in Seligman, 2005b) study of mediumship in Mayotte that illustrates how becoming a medium facilitates personal growth, and Finkler (1985, as cited in Seligman, 2005b) who has shown that spiritist mediums in Mexico have more emotional distress and negative life experiences, but becoming a medium increases wellbeing.

Implicit in the above work, is the notion that validation and normalisation of distressing or unusual experiences contributes to positive wellbeing. This is something that has been identified by Western clinical psychology in relation to individuals who "hear voices", have "unusual beliefs" and "visual imagery", which closely resembles the reported experiences of mediums. These experiences are often pathologised and labelled as symptoms of a mental disorder, however when experiences are shared with others in a supportive, non-judgemental environment, individuals are more likely to cope with their experiences and avoid entering the mental health system (Romme & Escher, 1993, 2000). Also, an assurance of meaning and order in the world is thought to aid emotional stability (Irwin, 1993) and an external locus of control (for example, belief in spirits) may protect the ego by displacing blame for behaviour (Braude, 1988). Similarly, Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer (1994) found a significant positive correlation ( $r = .27, p < .005$ ) between overall meaning in life and psychic and/or transcendent experiences.

Consequently, there seems sufficient support for exploring the concept of wellbeing and the possibility that the mediumship role, together with the social support provided by an affiliation with Spiritualism, provides a means of recasting experiences that could potentially be pathologised as symptomatic of mental health problems.

#### **2.4 Mediumship, dissociation, and creative abilities**

In the following section, literature is reviewed on mediumship and dissociative experiences, which argues that dissociation can be a positive and creative process (Braude, 2000; Grosso, 1997; Raikov, 1976). Grosso (1997) believes that dissociation can become a tool for creativity and when a person is in a dissociated state they are able to associate with a "supernormal, creative self" (p. 188) that can produce remarkable

imaginative, artistic, and inspirational abilities or compositions that go beyond the boundaries of everyday reality. Grosso (1997) and Braude (2000) both explore the possibility that mediumship involves a dissociative process that can facilitate, and may even increase, creative ability. They examine the case of Patience Worth, who ostensibly served as a spirit control for Pearl Curran, a St Louis homemaker, who allegedly channelled thousands of poems and literary pieces of work between the periods 1913 to 1937, which apparently transcended her ability in waking state.

Braude (2000) comments that the case of Patience Worth is particularly insightful for four main reasons: 1) the phenomena occurred without prior notice of any literary talent; 2) likewise, the personality of Patience Worth emerged fully formed; 3) the scripts produced required knowledge of expressions and dialects no longer in use and probably never used in the United States; and 4) the unusual fact that the poetry and fiction compositions did not require any revisions. Braude proposes that dissociation uncovered "prodigious latent capacities" (p. 34) within Curran that perhaps did not have the opportunity to find an outlet in her early life. From an examination of Pearl's biography, it is apparent that she had problems at school, which Braude conjectures could have been the result of under stimulation of an intellectual mind. He wonders whether her creative talents existed throughout her life, but were suppressed, due to lack of family encouragement and pressure to conform, only to be expressed later in life by using the acceptable role of mediumship - which had been gradually gaining prominence in society - to break down the barriers.

Similarly, *From India to Planet Mars* describes the work conducted by Flournoy (1899) with the medium Hélène Smith whose mediumistic phenomena included visual and auditory messages, automatic writing, and table tipping, as well as demonstrating exceptional linguistic ability, particularly for a Martian language; hence the title of the book. Flournoy believed that the existence of her many spirit controls represented romantic periods, which were the result of "subconscious constructions", the first of which he named the Royal Cycle (whilst in trance she was the reincarnation of Marie Antoinette), the second, the Hindu Cycle (she was a fifteenth century Indian princess) and the third

phase was a Martian Cycle (in which she spoke a Martian language). There was also a control called Leopold, who Flournoy believed was a persona resulting from a traumatic experience whereby H el ene was rescued by a mysterious figure when she was attacked by a dog as a young child. He believed that H el ene remembered this encounter and later built up a picture of Leopold as someone who had been sent to protect her throughout life. Although the Martian language was found to be based on H el ene's native French, Flournoy (1889) considered it do be an impressive example of subconscious creativity.

In reflecting on how these capacities may manifest in individuals, the literature on paranormal belief and experience may have some relevant theories. Irwin (1985a) identified absorption (the ability to immerse oneself in experiences), which is correlated with dissociation, as a key process involved in the occurrence of paranormal experiences, and suggests that it consists of three separate aspects. Firstly, he believes that an individual's *capacity* for absorption is important; meaning persons who are more open or able to enter an "absorbed state of consciousness" will be more prone to psi experiences (e.g. telepathy, precognitive dreams, ESP). Secondly, he believes that an *opportunity* for absorption is necessary for increased psi experiences. In other words, certain contexts or practices, such as hypnotic induction and meditation exercises, could contribute to psi experiences. Thirdly, he recommends that a *motivational aspect* or a "need for absorption" is also a component that could influence the incidence of psi experiences. An individual who satisfies all three conditions would presumably be more prone to experience paranormal phenomena.

With regards to mediumship phenomena, it may be that a medium has 1) a high *capacity* for these states; 2) an *opportunity* to exhibit capacities in a pro-mediumship context, for example, many mediums do not demonstrate their ability to experience mediumistic phenomena until they go to a development group at a Spiritualist Church, which often involves practices such as meditation; and 3) a high *motivation* to enter a mediumistic state, for example, as a therapeutic function, to prove life after death, or to provide meaning in life.

## 2.5 Mediumship, fantasy, and creativity

Is it possible that mediums exhibit a tendency towards fantasy and "create" the character of a communicating spirit in the context of mediumship training at a spiritualist church? This idea was partly expounded in a Channel 4 television documentary entitled *Voices in my Head* which was aired on June 18, 2006, and included a commentary by author Hilary Mantel, who incidentally wrote a novel about a medium entitled *Beyond Black*. Mantel spoke about hearing voices, which helped her write a book called *The Giant O'Brien*. She stated that characters are created from a "deep place", and that a writer is "trying to create the illusion the character has free will". Eventually the character comes to life and it is like "allowing a new consciousness to emerge".

Although highly speculative, this could be applicable to what happens in mediumship experiences. Is it possible that the spirit controls of mediums epitomize a character, not dissimilar to a character in a novel, which is created by the medium, and which takes on a life of its own when the medium is in a dissociated or altered state and/or continues to be created in the subconscious whilst in a "normal" (waking) state? The medium would then "hear" or "see" the spirit control passing on information. This would be similar to a "dispositional model" (for example, of a friend or relative) where one might hear a friend or family member say things inside one's head from past conversations, but also hear what they *might* say in certain contexts. Altered states, presumably involved in mediumship, could give the imagination full rein to create characters that claim to be deceased individuals and spirit controls, which also have free will, and may even have access to paranormal information and exceptional ability, as in the cases discussed above (e.g. Patience Worth).

Research supportive of this conjecture is cited in Braud (1999), who reports a study involving hypnotic states conducted by Raikov (1976). Raikov suggested to participants, whilst they were under hypnosis, that they were famous individuals who had specific talents, such as drawing, playing musical instruments, and playing chess. High hypnotic participants took on the skills of these talented figures, whereas low hypnotic participants

and control groups did not show improvements in the tasks. However, we are not informed of any other way the groups were distinguished other than "hypnotisability"; therefore, it is not known whether the high hypnotisers were also more creative naturally, had a better capacity to learn, or were more highly motivated.

### **2.5.1 Mediumship and fantasy proneness**

Fantasy-proneness is a personality construct that involves utilising creative imagination and has been correlated with the related construct of dissociation (Merckelbach et al., 2001), which has found to be prevalent in mediums. Wilson and Barber (1982) derived the concept of a fantasy-prone personality in a study comparing 25 poor hypnotic subjects with 27 good hypnotic subjects, finding the latter also experienced vivid sensory imagery and memories, telepathic, precognitive, and other psychic experiences. Rhue and Lynn (1987) later support the construct validity of fantasy proneness in their studies that show fantasizers score higher on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and Rorschach measures that would be expected to distinguish fantasy prone persons. In essence, the term fantasy-proneness encapsulates the central characteristic of the personality trait, which is a profound involvement with fantasy and imagination. Fantasy proneness includes the tendency to daydream, and live life in a make-believe world, where the difference between reality and imagined experiences are often blurred. For example, in the Wilson and Barber study, high fantasy-prone subjects reported playing with imaginary friends when children, stating that they clearly saw, heard and felt them in the same way they perceived living people.

Autobiographies of mediums contain reports of imaginary friends, a sense of alienation, and mental impressions (Garrett, 1968; Williamson, 1992, 2001), which allude to the notion that fantasy proneness may be a necessary condition for mediumship. In the Wilson and Barber (1982) study, 92% of the fantasy prone individuals classed themselves as psychic or sensitive and reported involvement in one of the following; psychic readings, past life readings, entering a mediumistic trance, or seeing auras. Additionally, a survey by S. A. Myers, Austrin, Grisso and Nickeson (1983) discovered fantasy-proneness

correlated with apparitional experiences, telepathy, and mystical or religious beliefs, which are similar phenomena to mediumship experiences.

Wilson and Barber (1982) suggest that fantasy-prone individuals might have been "over-represented among famous mediums, psychics, and religious visionaries of the past". In reference to Gladys Osborne Leonard and Eileen Garrett they state:

As children, both lived a great part of the time in a make-believe world, had imaginary playmates who looked and felt like ordinary children, had "visitations" from dead relatives, and had difficulty distinguishing fantasized from non-fantasized events and persons. As adults they were excellent hypnotic subjects who became trance mediums, continued to spend much time fantasizing at hallucinatory intensities, and had many psychic experiences (p. 109).

They also suggest that individuals who are prone to fantasy have vivid memories, which they use to extract raw material to "creatively construct their fantasies". To support this, they cite the book entitled *The Story of Ruth* by Dr Schatzman (1980, as cited in Wilson & Barber, 1982), which portrays a woman called Ruth who unconsciously creates an apparition of her father, who was in fact alive at the time. Dr Schatzman suggests to Ruth that she tries to produce the apparition, which she does successfully. He then asks her to make the apparition of her father disappear, which it proceeds to do, and she realizes that she can make "the apparition" come and go, and that she had been so absorbed in an fantasized event that she had created a "hallucination".

If fantasy proneness is a trait common in mediums, it is appropriate to ask how this characteristic could have developed and whether it is pathological or associated with psychological adjustment. It is also pertinent to point out that a tendency to fantasise does not necessarily mean mediumistic phenomena are "subconscious constructions" (i.e. spirit controls or communicators are imagined creations), as it could equally suggest that mediumship experiences encouraged fantasy or a proneness to fantasize encouraged the

development of mediumistic states. Lynn and Rhue (1988) suggest two routes to fantasy-proneness 1) encouragement of fantasy-type activities in childhood, such as art, music or acting lessons, by caregivers and 2) as a defence mechanism to cope with a traumatic or isolated life environment. Lawrence et al. (1995) have also found a small correlation between childhood fantasy and paranormal experience ( $r = .31, p = .01$ ). Rhue and Lynn (1987, p. 335) report high fantasy prone individuals to use fantasy "as an outlet for anger, and as a method of producing a more controllable and stable internal environment". This is considered to be an adaptive function, rather than a sign of psychopathology, and one that creates a positive self-concept. However, they acknowledge that an estimated 10-20% of fantasiers appear to have poor psychological adjustment. On the other hand, results by Irwin (1991) identify high fantasiers to show more psychopathology than people with low fantasy proneness.

Something to bear in mind for the survey of mediums from these investigations is that if fantasy-proneness is to be measured, it would also be appropriate to use a measure of mental health. If mediums did score high on fantasy-proneness, we could see whether this was accompanied by better or worse psychological adjustment. Additionally, Merckelbach (2001) has stated that on a theoretical level, it would be useful to explore how fantasy proneness relates to personality traits. For example, it has been suggested that fantasy proneness is consistent with the openness to experience trait on the Big Five classification (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Additionally, as trauma and abuse have not been reported in previous studies of mediumship, it may be that the alternative route of "fantasy encouragement" is prominent in the lives of mediums.

## **2.6 Mediumship and repression**

In the above studies "subconscious constructions" were noted as something that may be apparent in the mediumship process; referring to the concept that spirit controls of mediums could be created from material in the subconscious. This is a view that was proposed by Frederic Myers, a leading influential figure prominent in mediumship research at the turn of the twentieth century. In his seminal work, *Human Personality and Its*

*Survival of Bodily Death*, F. W. H. Myers (1903) proposed that the communicator a medium claims to be in contact with, whilst in a trance or altered state, is actually a secondary personality. Furthermore, he believed this secondary personality represented an expression of repressed material that had been stagnant in the subliminal or subconscious mind. Flournoy (1911), another prominent psychologist of the era, also focused on the idea of repressed tendencies and introduced the concept of "cryptomnesia" – information acquired from the past, which has been stored in the subconscious, is presented by the medium as deriving from the Spirit world. The following sections will review studies that have investigated mediumship from the perspective that experiences, such as the spirit guide phenomena, represent repressed material and/or are an opportunity to express repressed emotions.

### **2.6.1 Secondary personalities as representations of repressed material?**

Carrington (1934) was one of the first researchers to utilize psychological tests with a medium to explore the theory that mediumistic phenomena, or more specifically a supposed spirit control, is a representation of repressed tendencies. Carrington gave the Word Association Test devised by C. G. Jung to the medium Mrs Osborne Leonard in her normal waking state, and also when she was in trance to her control called Feda, to see how similar or dissimilar they were from each other. The procedure for the Word Association test involved a list of seventy-five stimulus words being read out to Mrs. Leonard whilst in her waking state. She then had to give the first word that came into her mind in response to a stimulus word. The time taken to respond is recorded and known as the "response time". If this time period is quite long, it is taken to mean that the word has some special significance for the person. The list of words is then repeated again in what is known as the "reproduction condition", to see if previous response words are repeated. The procedure was then repeated to the control Feda whilst Mrs Leonard was in trance and to alleged communicating spirits named John and Etta (S. Smith, 1964).

S. Smith (1964) has reviewed this work and states that Carrington concluded that the scores of Mrs Leonard and Feda were negatively correlated and "showed an inverse, 'mirror' relationship to those of the medium in her non-trance state" (p. 2). Carrington

believed they were not what would be expected from testing the same person twice or from testing two different persons, which, to him, suggested Fedra was a secondary personality created from repressed material in the subconscious (for a detailed review of this work see Thouless, 1937). However, S. Smith has pointed out that there were some flaws in his methodological techniques and statistical analyses, which prevented definitive conclusions. Firstly, researcher Oliver Gatty produced different reaction times, whilst *pretending* to be different personalities during administration of the Word Association Test. Secondly, it could be argued that a reproduction of the first response word could not only be taken as a mental or emotional association with that word, but also a retentive memory. Incidentally, Roll and Litt (1966) have noted that Mrs Leonard was found to have an excellent memory whilst in trance state; something William James and Sir Oliver Lodge also observed in the medium Mrs Piper.

### **2.6.2 Repressed emotions and escapism: A psychoanalytical framework for understanding mediumship**

Lawton (1932) and Lay (1921) are illustrations of early psychological studies that focus on a psychoanalytical framework in their explorations of mediumship with reference to mediumship as an outlet for repressed emotions. Lay (1921) believed that the information acquired during trance states is displaced buried emotions "finding ventilation". In traditional psychoanalytical fashion, he puts forward the interesting view that belief in spirit existence is related to a "sadistic death-wish" (p. 261). Lay proposes that some children take pleasure in pain and if this inclination is acted out, it would result in them killing the object they wish to inflict injury upon. These desires are normally repressed into the unconscious, which cause tensions seeking attenuation. This is achieved "through the compensatory wish for the continuance of the life of the person wished dead" (p. 261); hence the belief in spirit communication is borne and atonement is given for their previous hostilities. The idea of a "sadistic death-wish" seems to be slightly far-fetched, and there does not appear to be any evidence of this trait anywhere else in the literature or in the autobiographies of mediums; though, it is doubtful that this is something that they would acknowledge!

Lawton (1932) describes mediumship as a "safety valve" (p.420). He argues that the act of mediumship, represented by dissociation, aids an individual by reducing tension that has its aetiology in psychodynamic conflict. In explaining visions, he asserts that "hallucinations are picturizations, usually symbolical, of wishes and desires which have been repressed, or which have been frustrated" (p.429). Material claimed to have its origin in communication with spirits is therefore believed to be imaginative information derived from latent memories or desires, which have been inhibited. Lawton, in addition to describing mediumship as a "safety valve", also claimed mediumship had a "twofold basis" – a neurological tendency to dissociate and a desire to use this to satisfy personality needs. These included: a) the protective ability to withdraw from life conflicts and enter the field of fantasy; he believed trance states were a magnified form of the day dream, and were pronounced in children who were isolated or suffering from illness. To Lawton, trance served a function, and its purpose was escapism to a place where suppressed needs and wants were seemingly fulfilled, b) preoccupation with self and an opportunity to perform, and c) an increased status in the community; he believed spiritualists helped to reinforce the mediumship role in society, by providing an audience and a demand for mediumship. This proposal seems entirely plausible, given that there are now over 400 spiritualist churches in Great Britain (Walsh, 2007), with most of them having a development group or "open circle", whereby an existing medium instructs potential mediums, together with a weekly demonstration of mediumship to the general public.

### **2.6.3 Psychodynamic case study of a medium**

In the more recent literature, de Carvalho and do Amaral (1994) report a fascinating case study of a medium called Cristina that further explores the concept of repression and the psychodynamics involved in her experiences. When Cristina was aged thirty-eight, her father passed away, and she subsequently became depressed and suffered with psychosomatic symptoms. She then met several people from Candomblé and Umbanda mediumship groups who told her they could see spirits around her. Most of her friends were also psychics or believed in spiritualism and her status as a medium helped her to interact socially. Although it could be argued that this lends support for the argument that mediumship is socially constructed, de Carvalho and do Amaral suggest the existence of a

"Paranormal Defence Mechanism", which is considered an extension of normal defence processes and which manifests to protect "personality disruption" (p. 29). They believe Cristina exhibited psi information to reinforce her cultural and religious beliefs, to reduce anxiety, and to "sustain her defensive behaviour during situations that are need-relevant but in which she cannot exert her usual control" (p. 36). Results from the Rorschach Ink-Blot and House-Tree-Person psychological test (both projective personality tests) identified Cristina to be of introspective personality, as having strong sexual impulses, as communicating socially in a superficial way, as having little ability to cope with frustration, and as using fantasy as a defence mechanism.

Although, the De Carvalho and Do Amaral study is very interesting, by virtue of it being one of the few studies in the recent literature on the psychology of mediumship, and for its novel psychological analysis, we should be aware that it is an isolated case, and thus may not be representative of other mediums. Nevertheless, personality studies seem promising and worth pursuing in future work. However, projective personality tests like the ones used here, require a trained administrator and have attracted a significant amount of criticism regarding their reliability and validity (Wood, Nezworski, Lillienfeld, & Garb, 2003). For instance, Wood et al. argue that they rely on individual interpretation and are based on the controversial concept of projecting one's own personality attributes onto a neutral stimulus; a Freudian concept that could be seen by psychologists as outdated. Furthermore, with the survey being exploratory and self-report, it would seem more appropriate to choose a personality test that would cover a broader range of traits and was simple to complete. The "Big Five" model of personality, for example, is a general taxonomy of personality traits (Openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) that provides a common framework for understanding individual differences (John & Srivastava, 1999).

## **2.7 Boundary permeability and its relationship to the subliminal and supraliminal**

In Section 2.6 it was suggested that the medium symbolized an individual who could easily cross the threshold between the subliminal and the supraliminal, given that information obtained during communication with a spirit was assumed to have entered consciousness from repressed material in the subconscious. A useful concept for understanding this process is proposed by Hartmann's (1991) personality dimension "boundary thinness"; characterised by openness, sensitivity and ease of entering an altered state of consciousness. Hartmann (1989) developed the idea from his research on sleep and dreaming, in which he undertook interviews and the Rorschach test with a group of nightmare sufferers and a control group. Certain distinguishable personality characteristics in the people suffering with nightmares were highlighted, including openness and thin interpersonal boundaries. Twelve factors were subsequently identified, which formed 12 subscales on the original full-length Boundary Questionnaire: primary process thinking (e.g., vivid imagery, fluctuating identity); preference for explicit and clear boundaries; identification with children (e.g. close to childhood feelings); fragility; percipience/clairvoyance; trustful openness; organised playfulness; belief in impenetrable intergroup boundaries (e.g., boundaries of race, age, nationality); flexibility; over involvement in fantasy; preference for simple geometric forms; and isolation of affect (e.g. favours rationality over emotion).

Boundaries can be seen in many areas of our life, including interpersonal boundaries, sleep-wake boundaries, and group boundaries. Hartmann, Harrison, and Zborowski (2001) describe a thin boundaried person as someone who "will become deeply immersed in daydreaming or in reverie, so that sometimes the boundary between real life and fantasy may be unclear" (p. 3). A thick boundaried person is described as someone who has a "black or white" thinking style and tends to be closed and defended. Hartmann et al. have related the construct of boundaries in the mind to previous constructs in the literature, such as the work of William James (1918) who classified people as either "tough minded empiricists" or "tender minded rationalists" and the work of Kurt Lewin, who, in the

1930s, proposed that the mind was divided into different regions that were separated by boundaries of diverse thickness. Recent research using the Boundary Questionnaire, designed by Hartmann, has revealed thicker boundaries in persons who are naval officers, salespersons or lawyers (Hartmann, 1991). Significantly thinner boundaries have been identified in women (Hartmann, 1991), artists (Beal, 1988 as cited in Hartmann, 1991; Hartmann, 1991), music students and creative persons (Beal, 1988 as cited in Hartmann, 1991), frequent dream recallers (Hartmann, 1991), adults with nightmares (Hartmann, 1991), and persons with unusual mystical experiences (Krippner, Wickramasekera, Wickramasekera, & Winstead, 1998). This suggests thin boundaries can be adaptive, appearing in groups of individuals that could be considered creative and sensitive to reporting experiences of psi. It also suggests that thin boundaries can be maladaptive, resulting in nightmares that could be perceived as stemming from anxiety or negative over-fantasising.

### **2.7.1 Is boundary-thinness related to mediumship experiences?**

Richards (1996) found an association between subjectively perceived success on a psychic training program and thin boundary scores. Richards identified thin boundary individuals as lacking the defence mechanisms that people with thick boundaries have, stating that they had difficulty keeping "uncomfortable material out of conscious awareness" (p. 229). This relates to the speculative supposition that mediums may use spirit communication as a way of expressing emotional thoughts and feelings that they have unsuccessfully attempted to repress. If we imagine that a person with thin boundaries finds repression difficult (i.e. it is not easy for them to keep unwanted material *out of* consciousness or keep *it in* their subconscious) then we might expect information to "leak out". Contents from dreams, memories, conversations and literary work that have passed into the subconscious and remained for a period of time could quite possibly pass back into consciousness in a person who has thin boundaries, and subsequently become distorted and blurred, or perhaps, in the case of a medium in the process of giving a reading, be mistaken as information from a spirit. On the other hand, thin boundaries could help mediums access information from a spirit. The process of communication described by mediums often includes a telepathic one, where the spirit imprints a mental impression

onto or into the mind of a medium (Edwards, 2003). Additionally, researchers have theorized that ESP experiences, such as telepathy, could stem from the unconscious (Rhine, 1962, 1978). One of the characteristics of thin boundaries, the capacity to enter an altered state of consciousness, could resemble the trance states of mediums and assist this process by making it easier for a spirit to transmit or transport information *into* the mind of the medium.

## **2.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter literature on the psychology of mediumship has been reviewed and this has allowed a collection of variables to be identified that have been associated with mediumship. Firstly, the concept of dissociation stands out as an area to pursue in the survey of mediumship, together with whether mediums report pathological or non-pathological dissociation. Secondly, the literature revealed that the mediumship role is attached to a spiritualist church network that can offer social support, and it was suggested that the role of a medium may provide an outlet for feelings that are not easy to express because of societal or cultural expectations. Similarly, the mediumship role may provide an opportunity for personal growth through the process of identity transformation, which manifests through an identification with the cultural model in a given society. This latter hypothesis is accompanied by the proposal that mediumistic experiences can be positive, and can contribute to wellbeing. Indeed, a number of studies have identified a correlation between religious involvement and positive mental health (cf. Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Thirdly, previous research proposed that fantasy-proneness or escapism may be associated with mediumistic experiences, which may or may not be used as a defence mechanism or strategy to cope with conflict or trauma. There does exist in the literature a considerable amount of research on the relationship between childhood trauma, paranormal belief and dissociative experiences (Irwin, 1992, 1996; Lawrence, Edwards, Barraclough, Church, & Hetherington, 1995). However, trauma and abuse have not been reported in previous research with mediums. Fourthly, it was theorised that repressed material from the subconscious may be used by mediums to provide information for alleged spirit communication, and that the personality trait boundary

thinness may be implicated in the process in some way. Finally, the literature review identified that no previous studies had used a general measure of personality (including the "Big Five" traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) to assess whether any personality traits were characteristic of mediums.

In conclusion, the literature review identified five areas to assess in the survey with mediums: dissociation, mental health (psychological wellbeing and psychological distress), fantasy-proneness, boundary-thinness, and personality. In the next chapter, an empirical study designed to explore these characteristics will be reported. This consists of a review of relevant psychological measures to include in a nationwide postal survey, which investigates whether individuals who have mediumistic experiences can be differentiated from those who do not. In addition, a mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ) will also be included in the survey to explore mediums' early experiences, their reasons for becoming a medium, and the way they interpret their ability. With this information we will be in a better position to understand the process of mediumship and the range of different experiences encountered.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TOWARDS A PROFILE OF MEDIUMSHIP: AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises an empirical study exploring the psychological characteristics of spiritualist mediums. It reports the methodology and results for a nationwide postal survey, which investigates whether individuals who have mediumistic experiences can be differentiated by personality or experiential measures from those who do not. Individuals who attend spiritualist church services and/or demonstrations comprised the comparison group, providing a control for spiritual belief and experience. This meant any differences in results on psychological measures could be attributed to the mediumship role, rather than factors associated with belief in survival or religious affiliation, such as group membership and social support. After reviewing methodological issues in survey design the chapter focuses on identifying the population universe, which was based on a much more stringent selection criterion than the pilot survey of mediumship conducted by Reinsel (2003) (reviewed in Section 2.2). The chapter then discusses the reliability and validity of measures selected for inclusion in the survey before reporting a detailed description of the study procedure and results from statistical analysis.

A review of the literature on mediumship in Chapter two outlined the rationale for the current study and identified potential personality and experiential variables that may be characteristic of mediums. Previous research has asked whether the mediumship role is pathological, or alternatively, whether it is associated with psychological adjustment. It was noted that individuals who have experiences similar to mediumistic experiences could be pathologised by Western psychiatry and labelled with medical diagnoses such as dissociative identity disorder (DID). An aim of the present study therefore is to explore whether mediumistic experiences are linked with dissociative experiences and whether mediumship is associated with positive or negative mental health. In addition, the literature review revealed fantasy-proneness and boundary permeability as potential

personality traits that could be prominent in the profile of mediums. Furthermore, research into the psychology of mediumship has not yet ventured into exploring the personality of mediumship with the "Big-Five" traits of extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Therefore, this study planned to test the two-tailed hypotheses that mediums and non-mediums will differ on measures of dissociative experiences, psychological distress and well-being, boundary-permeability, fantasy-proneness, extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Thus, the study reported here not only expands the current understanding of mediumship, it also contributes to our understanding of mental and behavioural processes such as identity and personality, as well as our conception of mental health.

Given that another aim of the survey was to ask mediums for their views on the process and nature of mediumship, from an agnostic position, a mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ) was designed to be included in the survey. In addition to exploring mediums' experiences and what they think is involved in mediumship, the MAQ also helped to inform a later interview study with a sample of mediums who participated in the survey as responses contributed to the design of an interview schedule (see Chapter six). However, for clarity, the design of the MAQ will be described in more detail in the proceeding chapter alongside the approach taken to analyse the open-ended responses obtained. Although the MAQ will be discussed in the next chapter, it is worthy of brief note here considering the next sections provide an overview of the general issues in survey designs. In designing the optimal survey method it was important to bear in mind that the survey contained both open (MAQ) and closed questions (psychological measures).

## **3.2 Methodology**

### **3.2.1 Choosing a data collection method: Survey designs**

Goddard and Villanova (1996) argue that surveys are a suitable way of collecting data when the aim of the research is to acquire individual's opinions and beliefs about a specific topic. Surveys are also typically used to look for differences between certain groups of

individuals. Decisions about which mode of administration to adopt will depend upon the research objectives and purpose, what is known about the target population, and optimal use of resources available. In this survey, the aim was to explore, on a national level, potential psychological characteristics of mediums, together with the process and nature of mediumship and to establish mediums' perspectives and insights about their experiences. Specifically, "the what" being investigated was the phenomenology and psychology of mental mediumship, "the who" participating being spiritualist mediums, and "the where" being surveyed including England, Scotland and Wales. It was considered important to undertake the research on a national level as mediums may differ according to rural and urban areas: this would seem particularly pertinent for the aim of measuring wellbeing, as disparities in mental health in relation to geographical area have been noted (Paykel, Abbott, Jenkins, Brugha, & Meltzer, 2000). Vaux (1996) argues that surveys are particularly useful in large scale field studies, where data is to be obtained from a geographically wide area. Similarly, Salant and Dillman (1994, p. 13) have stated that "surveys can produce close *estimates* of what people think or do", meaning a survey should aim to establish a broad picture of the area under investigation, rather than aim to explore in depth.

A range of survey methods are available in order to obtain data from a representative national sample. These include personal interviews, telephone interviews, world-wide-web (WWW) or email surveys, and postal surveys. Although interview methods enable the researcher to communicate with respondents so that follow-up questions can be asked or ambiguous questions clarified, they pose several difficulties when a goal of the research is to collect a large amount of data from a number of different geographical areas (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Personal interviews have the disadvantage of being sensitive to bias introduced by the presence of an interviewer and are time-consuming when the aim, as in this study, is to administer several instruments to a wide number of people. Likewise, it would be extremely laborious to telephone each potential medium that might take part in the study and read out over one hundred questions. Furthermore, these methods do not allow participants to remain anonymous which is an important consideration when asking individuals about their personal views and beliefs. In addition, the number of people with

unlisted telephone numbers is increasing and people are more likely to use call monitoring to filter unwanted calls (Dillman, 1999). On the other hand, using the internet to email surveys to individuals has the advantage of being able to reach a large sample in a short space of time and requires the least amount of resources. However, this method will only be appropriate when a list of email addresses is available for the target population and when the researcher can be sure the target population has access to the internet on a regular basis. Given that no such list was available for mediums using the internet to distribute the survey could not be justified as a valid means of data collection.

As the survey aimed to use personality and experiential measures to explore the phenomenology and psychology of mediumship it was necessary to choose a method that would allow respondents time to reflect on questions, thus increasing informativeness and validity of answers. The most commonly used method of distributing self-report questionnaires is a postal survey (Mangione, 1998). Specific advantages of postal surveys, in comparison to the other methods, are that they can be anonymous, they allow individuals to view the full context of the questions and to take their time responding, they allow individuals privacy and the ability to choose the most convenient time for responding, and they are relatively quick to conduct and process (Mangione, 1998). Therefore, it was decided that the postal survey was the optimal method for this study as it would give mediums the opportunity to complete the questionnaires in their own time, at their own pace, and in a place suitable for them. However, as with the internet based survey method, a list of names and addresses of mediums was required. This was discovered on the Spiritualist National Union website and is discussed in the section on identifying the target population (Section 3.2.3).

Disadvantages associated with postal surveys have been noted, including the possibility of a poor response rate, sampling bias, the tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable manner, and the need for instructions on how to complete the survey to be straightforward and clear. Fortunately there are various strategies available to design postal surveys more effectively and overcome most of the obstacles encountered (Fowler, 2002).

### 3.2.2 Designing the optimal postal survey

In attempting to overcome the possibility of a poor response rate, Fowler (2002) points out that perhaps the most obvious way is to include a stamped addressed or pre-paid envelope for the participant to return the survey, so that there is no financial expense for the individual if they want to take part in the research. Additional factors that might help to boost the response rate include making the response tasks easy to do, making the survey layout clear with easy to read questions that are well spaced, and making the design of the survey look professional and personalized (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 2000). Roe (1998) has argued that it is important to control questionnaire format so that answers gained are informative. Ensuring questionnaires are not too long and are understandable will help to reduce any boredom the respondent may experience and increases the possibility of obtaining good quality information, the researcher can make sense of.

In light of these assertions it was vital to select questionnaires to be included in the survey that consisted of easy to answer questions that were relatively quick to complete, and showed respect for respondents by ensuring instructions were understandable. Given that postal surveys rely on being visual it was also important to make the survey attractive and professional, and worth spending time filling-in. In addition, providing contact details for the researcher, in case further information is required, and ensuring confidentiality may also encourage participation by reducing anxiety. Similarly, offering to give feedback regarding the outcomes of the survey gives the message that the researcher appreciates respondents' views and acknowledges that they may be curious about the implications of the research.

In a further attempt to boost returns, it has been recommended that repeat contact is made with individuals who do not return the survey (Fowler, 2002). This can be achieved in two stages: Firstly, a reminder postcard can be sent a couple of weeks after the initial posting of the survey, and secondly, the survey can be re-mailed a week after sending the postcard. An additional reason for making repeated contact is that it allows the researcher

to assess response bias by comparing mediums who reply initially to those who reply following re-mailing of the survey. Roe (1998) suggests that if individuals who respond at these two stages do not differ, then it is more likely that non-respondents do not differ meaningfully from respondents. In his survey of belief in the paranormal, there was no difference between first- and second-mail respondents. Similarly, in a survey of attitudes towards extra-sensory perception (ESP), McClenon (1982) found no difference in levels of belief between individuals who responded straight away, those who were sent a reminder postcard and those who were sent another survey pack to complete. It is also relevant to highlight the probability that interest in the particular topic of the research is likely to influence the level of response in a positive way. It is therefore hoped that mediums and spiritualists are more likely to return the survey given that it focuses on a topic of particular relevance to them.

Another key consideration in the current survey was to reduce non-response and measurement errors that come from difficult to complete questionnaires by pre-empting any confusions or concerns with the research. It was noted in Chapter one that mediumship research has commonly attempted to prove mediumship ability and there was a concern in the current study that mediums may be suspicious about the research and perhaps worry that their ability is being tested in some way. Therefore, it was deemed of paramount importance to include information in the survey that helped to dispel any concerns respondents may have about completing questions. Moser and Kalton (1971) suggest the survey should include a cover letter that replaces the introductory opening that would usually take place during alternative methods, such as the interview, and clearly states the following: why the researcher is undertaking the research, how the individual came to be selected, why the individual should reply (i.e., what are the implications of the research), ensures anonymity and confidentiality of information given, and explains what participation will involve and how long it is likely to take. Similarly, it is expected that the tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable manner can be reduced by reinforcing the fact that answers will be treated confidentially and by reducing the possibility of embarrassment for the participant, by excluding any questions that are deemed too personal or offensive. This process can be aided by conducting a pilot of the

questionnaires to be used with a small sample of individuals from the population of interest (Moser & Kalton, 1971).

### **3.2.3 Identifying the population universe**

A main consideration for any research is to generalise about entire populations of interest (Henry, 1998). Ideally, the researcher would wish to include all the target population in the study, and for all participants to be enthusiastic and willing to take part. Unfortunately, this is rarely possible, given resources, time, and access to participant issues. In reality, the researcher is faced with the prospect of selecting a sample of the target population, otherwise known as the sampling frame, so that estimates can be generated of the entity to be surveyed. These individuals to be included in a sample are usually obtained from either a complete list of individuals in the population to be studied or from a set of individuals who share something in common that enables them to be sampled (Fowler, 2002). It is important to consider what specific criteria are going to be used for choosing the target population, and what method will be selected to obtain a sample, so that it reflects the whole population, as research is rarely able to view the whole reality in a single glance (McCready, 1996). The goodness of fit of the sample and the ability to make generalisations about the population will therefore depend on many factors, such as sampling, sample size, and sample design.

When trying to establish the target population for the current study it became apparent that there was no one source that was available to determine the total number of spiritualist mediums, as there was no central database that could provide names and addresses of individuals who were practicing as spiritualist mediums. In examining the sampling method used by Reinsel (2003) in a recent pilot survey of mediums, it is apparent that she took the opportunity of distributing questionnaires at a conference on mediumship in the US, held by the Academy of Religion and Psychical Research (ARPR). This method of going *in person* to distribute the survey has advantages in that the study can be explained and clarified, and the researcher can be confident that the survey packs will reach potential participants. However, although the conference was on the subject of mediumship, there was no guarantee there would be mediums in the audience, as the

ARPR was set up to encourage communication on psychical research between clergy, educators, philosophers, and scientists. Furthermore, this sampling method makes it difficult for future research to replicate as it is not usual for conferences to specifically focus on mediumship. In order to establish whether a sample of mediums was obtained, Reinsel (2003) asked the question "Do you consider yourself a Medium?" As two respondents answered with a question mark, Reinsel chose to devise the "tripartite classification scheme" to include controls, mediums and sensitives. This highlights the importance of giving careful consideration to definitions of terms used in a survey. Additionally, it would seem reasonable to target a sample of mediums that already classify themselves as spiritualist mediums, which may serve a more representative group than people who attend a formal conference on mediumship where high education is a prerequisite for membership.

Names and addresses of 233 mediums who had gained awards for demonstrating their mediumship at spiritualist churches within 14 districts in England, Scotland and Wales were available in the public domain and obtainable via the Spiritualist National Union (SNU) website. A major advantage of this sample was that these mediums, by virtue of achieving the SNU award for demonstrating, were self-classified mediums that had reached a certain level of competence and had been practising mediumship for at least a year. After communicating with the Public Relations officer for the SNU, it was established that in order to achieve the award they had to complete a rigorous training program and pass at grade A or B, undertake an interview and a practical assessment, and list dates and venues where they would be working at over a 12-month period. Given that a list was readily available, easily accessible, and defined a universe, it was decided that this would provide an excellent sample of spiritualist mediums. This is a much more stringent selection criterion than was used by Reinsel (2003) in her survey of mediumship, where the sample of mediums was obtained purely on the basis of whether participants at a conference on mediumship considered themselves a medium or not. There was also an additional list of approximately 80 mediums that were registered for private sittings. However, addresses were not available in the public domain, and it had to be accepted

that the SNU, for confidentiality and privacy reasons, could not divulge contact details for these individuals.

Sampling error can occur when research is conducted with some, but not all of the population under investigation (Dillman, 1999). In this study, it was evident that the sample could not claim to be representative of *all* spiritualist mediums, as some would be excluded who did not achieve awards. However, this was not considered to be a setback, as all that was necessary was to redefine the population as spiritualist mediums who had reached a certain level of competency. This was deemed to be a major advantage of the sample, as it ensured mediums were targeted who took their profession seriously and were demonstrating mediumship to the public.

#### **3.2.4 Gaining access to the comparison group: Sampling method**

For the comparison group, it would have been ideal to have gained access to a similar list of SNU individuals who are spiritualists, but do not consider themselves mediums. These individuals could provide a control for spiritual belief, so that any differences in results on psychological measures could be attributed to the mediumship role, rather than factors associated with belief in survival or religious affiliation, such as group membership and social support. Unfortunately, a list of spiritualist members was not available. However, addresses of 343 spiritualist churches were available on the SNU website and were divided into 14 geographical districts: East Midlands, West Midlands, East London, West London, Southern, Northern, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Manchester, Merseyside and North Wales, South Wales, South Western, North Lancashire and Cumbria, and Scottish.

Survey research has been criticized for failing to use random sampling and for relying on student samples (Blackmore, 1985). By selecting a random sample of spiritualist churches to target for the comparison group of non-medium spiritualists, sampling error can be controlled to some extent. In this case, the sampling frame constituted spiritualist non-mediums who attend church services or demonstrations of mediumship. Given that the churches are already divided into geographical districts it seemed appropriate and justified to use the method known as area probability sampling or cluster sampling (Fowler, 2002).

This is where small geographical areas or clusters are randomly sampled from within the larger sampling frame and ensures participants will be represented from both rural and urban areas. Once the researcher had contacted either the secretary or president of the randomly selected churches and obtained cooperation for the survey packs to be left in the church reception, a number of packs could be posted.

An alternative method to distributing the survey packs by post is to visit the churches *in person*, which is adapted from the method used by Reinsel (2003) mentioned above. This would involve meeting with the president or secretary, explaining the research and then leaving survey packs in the church for potential non-medium participants to take and complete. An advantage to visiting the churches in person is that any concerns about the research can be clarified and it can be ensured that packs are left for distribution. It was decided that if after posting the packs – which is a more cost-effective method of using resources than visiting the churches – the response was low, then an attempt would be made to increase the budget allocated to survey costs, so that the researcher could travel to a random selection of churches.

### **3.3 Method**

#### **3.3.1 Hypotheses**

Pre-planned two-tailed hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. There will be a significant difference in the scores of spiritualist mediums and the scores of non-medium spiritualists on a measure of dissociation.

Hypothesis 2. There will be a significant difference in the scores of spiritualist mediums and the scores of non-medium spiritualists on a measure of mental health (assessing psychological wellbeing and psychological distress).

Hypothesis 3. There will be a significant difference in the scores of spiritualist mediums and the scores of non-medium spiritualists on a measure of boundary-thinness.

Hypothesis 4. There will be a significant difference in the scores of spiritualist mediums and the scores of non-medium spiritualists on a measure of fantasy-proneness.

Hypothesis 5. There will be a significant difference in the scores of spiritualist mediums and the scores of non-medium spiritualists on a personality measure (assessing the traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism).

### **3.3.2 Design**

The study reported here employed an independent measures design and involved a nationwide cross-sectional survey. The grouping variable was mediumship and had two levels: spiritualist mediums and non-medium spiritualists. There were ten dependent variables (DVs): scoring on dissociative experiences (as measured by the Dissociative Experiences Scale), scoring on psychological distress and psychological wellbeing (as measured by the subscales of the Mental Health Inventory), scoring on fantasy-proneness (as measured by the Creative Experiences Scale), scoring on boundary-thinness (as measured by the short-form of the Boundary Questionnaire), and scoring on extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (as measured by subscales of the Big Five Inventory).

### **3.3.3 Materials**

The survey package included: a covering letter (see Appendix 3.1) containing a brief introduction to the research; information on ethical issues and details of how to complete the survey; a pre-paid return envelope; a separate envelope to place personal details in; contact details of the researcher; and a questionnaire consisting of two parts: a) Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (see Appendix 3.2), and b) five psychological measures (see Appendices 3.3 – 3.7). An ID number was placed on the cover letter and the survey itself. This meant that participants could enquire about the results of the survey anonymously, and the researcher could check from which mediums and churches the returned surveys were from without needing personal details.

### **3.3.4 Questionnaire reliability and validity**

*3.3.4.1 The Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)* (Carlson & Putman, 1993) has been identified as a useful instrument in assessing whether dissociation is experienced by

mediums, and mediums and non-mediums have previously been found to be discriminable on this measure (Hughes, 1992; Krippner, Wickramasekera, Wickramasekera, & Winstead, 1998; Laria, 2000; Negro, Palladino-Negro, & Louza, 2002; Seligman, 2005a). The Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS; Ross, Heber, & Anderson, 1990) has also been used in mediumship research. However, this measure involves a structured interview and would not be appropriate for a postal survey. Reinsel (2003) used the Somatoform Dissociation Questionnaire (SDQ-20; Nijenhuis, Spinhoven, Van Dyck, Van der Hart, & Vanderlinden, 1996) and the Depersonalization Severity Scale (DSS; Simeon, Guralnik, & Schmeidler, 2001) in a pilot survey of mediums. However, the latter measure was intended for use in clinical trials of depersonalization disorder, and a more general measure of dissociation was required for this study that could measure different types of dissociative experiences. Furthermore, internal consistency for this scale as measured by Cronbach's alpha, which indicates the extent to which a set of questionnaire items can be considered as measuring a single latent variable, was .59. This is considered poor by Kline (2000), who suggests that alphas should never drop below .7.

Other measures of dissociation, which have not been used with mediums, include the Questionnaire on Experiences of Dissociation (QED; Riley, 1988) and the Perceptual Alterations Scale (PAS; Sanders, 1986). Only the QED has shown good convergent validity with the DES (PAS  $r=.63$ ; QED  $r=.80$ ). Correlations above .75 are usually regarded as good support for the convergent validity of a test, which assesses how similar a questionnaire is to other tests that purportedly measure the same construct. However, the internal consistency, which calculates the extent to which tests assess the same characteristic, skill or quality, was found to be .77 for a non-clinical sample on the QED (Gleaves, Eberenz, Warner, & Fine, 1995), compared to .92 for the DES.

According to Ross (1997) the DES is the most widely used self-report measure of dissociative experiences and is the only dissociative instrument that has been subjected to a number of replication studies by independent investigators. From the discussion of possible dissociative measures that could be included in the survey, it is apparent that the DES stands out as the most favourable. It is a 28-item standardised measure of

dissociation, which can distinguish between pathological and non-pathological dissociation. Additionally, it may also distinguish between the three subscales of absorption, amnesia and depersonalization (Bernstein & Putman, 1986). However, later studies by Fischer and Elnitsky (1990) argue that only the one factor of dissociation exists. It has demonstrated good Cronbach's alpha (.93 to .95) and test-retest reliability ( $r = .84$  to  $.93$ ) (Dubester & Braun, 1995). A reliable test produces similar scores when it is administered at separate times to the same group of respondents. If respondents scored the same on the first occasion and the second occasion this would mean the test was highly reliable and the correlation between the scores would be 1. If the correlation were 0, the test would have very poor reliability. Thus, all tests have test-retest reliability somewhere between 0 and 1, as recommended by Rust and Golombok (1989). For example, a correlation of .7 shows an agreement between the sets of scores of 49 per cent (Kline, 2000). Kline (2000) suggests a correlation of .8 should be set as a minimum figure. It has also demonstrated good split-half reliability ( $r = .71$  to  $.96$ ), which is a measure of consistency where a test is split in two and the scores for each half of the test are compared with one another for similarity and internal consistency.

The DES is a 28-item questionnaire, which is available in the public domain copyright free, and can be completed in 10 minutes, which is ideal for a postal survey. It is easy to understand, and the questions are framed in a normative way that does not stigmatize the respondent for positive responses. An example of a question is "Some people have the experience of driving a car and suddenly realizing that they don't remember what has happened during all or part of the trip. Indicate what percentage of the time this happened to you." The respondent then circles a percentage ranging from 0% to 100% at 10% intervals. The overall DES score is obtained by adding up the 28 item scores and dividing by 28: this yields an overall score ranging from 0 to 100. Individuals scoring over 20 are considered to be experiencing high dissociation and scores of more than 30 are classed as the clinical cut-off for severe dissociation (see guidelines for scoring in Carlson & Putman, 1993) (See Appendix 3.3). Means reported for the overall DES score in general population studies range between 3.7 to 11.05 ( $M = 7.8$ , Bernstein & Putman, 1986;  $M = 3.7$ , Carlson & Putman, 1993;  $M = 11.05$ , van Ijzendoorn & Schuengel, 1996).

3.3.4.2 *Mental Health Inventory (MHI-17)* is a 17-item scale developed by Stewart, Ware, Sherbourne and Wells (1992) which produces overall scores for psychological well-being (happiness, emotional ties) and psychological distress (anxiety, depression, loss of behavioural or emotional control). It was developed for use with the general population and was based on the General Well-Being Schedule designed by Dupuy (1972). Reinsel (2003) used this measure in the pilot survey of mediums and it was also the primary mental health outcome measure used in the RAND Health Insurance Experiment. It has demonstrated good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alphas ranging between .94 and .97 (Hays, Sherbourne, & Mazel, 1995; Stewart, Ware, Sherbourne, & Wells, 1992) and a correlation of .99 with the overall 32-item index (MHI-32) (Stewart, Ware, Sherbourne, & Wells, 1992). It is ideal for use in a postal survey as it is considerably shorter and quicker to complete than other psychological scales of wellbeing, for example, Ryff (1989) discusses a measure that has six 14-item scales of psychological wellbeing.

Respondents are asked questions about how they have felt over the past two weeks. Examples of questions on the MHI-17 are "Have you been anxious or worried", and "Have you felt loved and wanted". Respondents are asked to circle a number between 1 and 6, where 1 refers to "All of the time" and 6 refers to "None of the time" (see Appendix 3.4). An overall total score is obtained for mental health, together with scores for the subscales of wellbeing (5 items) and psychological distress (12 items). The MHI subscales have reversed scoring for some of the questions so that high scores indicate better mental health (see user manual in Hays, Sherbourne, & Mazel, 1995). To obtain norms for the psychological wellbeing and psychological distress subscales scores are transformed to a 0-100 range by converting the original item response (1-6) to a recoded value (1 → 0; 2 → 25; 3 → 40; 4 → 60; 5 → 80; 6 → 100). Mean scores for the subscales are then calculated by summing the total recoded value (for the items) and dividing by the number of items. In the user manual population norms are available for different age groups, illness severity, and gender (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Population norms for Psychological distress and Psychological wellbeing subscales of the MHI-17 by age group, gender, and illness severity (Hays, Sherbourne, & Mazel, 1995).

<i>N</i> = 2471 <sup>1</sup>	18-44	45-64	65-74	75+	Female	Male	Severe illness	Not severe
Psychological wellbeing	49	61	72	73	59	66	64	70
Psychological distress	65	76	81	83	73	79	78	83

<sup>1</sup>Sample based on patients (hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, depression) enrolled in a two-year longitudinal study.

3.3.4.3 *Boundary Questionnaire (BQ-18), Short-Form*<sup>12</sup> has been used previously in research investigating mediumistic phenomena (Krippner, Wickramasekera, Wickramasekera, & Winstead, 1998; Laria, 2000). To the researcher's knowledge, no alternative questionnaire that specifically measures boundary-permeability exists. The original Boundary Questionnaire has 138-items, which are divided into 12 categories as follows: primary process thinking; preference for explicit boundaries; identification with children; fragility; percipience/clairvoyance; trustful openness; organised planfulness; belief in impenetrable intergroup boundaries; flexibility; over-involvement in fantasy; preference for simple geometric forms; and isolation of affect (Hartman, 1991). Although scores can be obtained for each of these individual categories, the most popular score has been the Sumbound total score, in which high numbers signify thinness (Hartmann et al, 2001). Kunzendorf, Hartmann, Cohen & Cutler (1997) developed a shorter version of the BQ with 18-items, by selecting those items from each of the twelve subscales showing the highest correlations with the full 138-item Boundary Questionnaire, which may be more appropriate for a postal survey. This shorter version has demonstrated an alpha reliability of .93 and test-retest reliability of .77 (Hartmann, Kunzendorf, Rosen & Grace, 2001). Participants are asked to rate each of the 18 item statements from 0 to 4 (0 indicates "not

<sup>12</sup> Permission to use was obtained from Ernest Hartmann on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2007.

at all true of me"; 4 indicates "very true of me"). An example of a thick boundaried statement is: "A good organization is one in which all the lines of responsibility are precise and clearly established". An example of a thin boundaried statement is: "My feelings blend into one another" (see Appendix 3.5). The BQ-18 total score equals the sum of all the items, with higher scores indicating boundary thinness. No norms are available for the BQ-18.

*3.3.4.4 Creative Experiences Scale (CES)*<sup>13</sup> (Merckelbach, Horselenberg, & Muris, 2001) is a brief measure of fantasy proneness, which is ideal for a postal survey and contains twenty-five questions, to which the respondent answers "Yes" or "No". It has demonstrated good test-retest stability ( $r = .95$ ) in a sample of 17 undergraduate students and good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .72) in a sample of 99 undergraduate students (Merckelbach, Horselenberg, & Muris, 2001). Although these studies used student samples to assess reliability levels, Merckelbach, Horselenberg, and Muris argue that most research on fantasy proneness has thus far relied on the Inventory of Childhood Memories and Imaginings (ICMI), originally developed by Wilson & Barber (1981), for which psychometric information has been difficult to obtain. They also argue that the CEQ has good construct validity, in that it has been correlated with the ICMI (Pearson product-moment correlations of 0.77). Examples of questions include: "As a child, I could very easily identify with the main character of a story and/or movie" and "Sometimes I act as if I am somebody else and I completely identify myself with that role" (see Appendix 3.6). The CEQ total score ranges from 0 to 25, with higher scores indicating higher levels of fantasy-proneness. The CEQ has been used effectively in other research including studies examining fantasy proneness and fabricated memories (Merckelbach, 2004), psychiatric patients (Merckelbach, Campo, Hardy, & Giesbrecht, 2005), and the false fame illusion in people with memories about a previous life (Peters, Horselenberg, Jelacic, & Merckelbach, 2007). Although there is no normative data for this measure, it is suggested that scores within the 7 – 10 range are normal, while those within the 12 – 16 range are high (for example, fantasy role players score in this range) (H. Merckelbach, personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Permission to use was obtained from Professor Merckelbach on 11 January 2006.

3.3.4.5 *Big Five Inventory (BFI)*<sup>14</sup> (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) is a 44-item questionnaire, which measures the five personality traits of Openness to experience (e.g. intellectual curiosity, active imagination, attentiveness to inner feelings), Conscientiousness (e.g., responsible, dependable), Extraversion (e.g., talkative, assertive, energetic), Agreeableness (e.g., good-natured, cooperative, trustful), and Neuroticism (e.g., shy, self-conscious, poor emotional stability) (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Goldberg, 1992; John & Pervin, 2001). In US and Canadian samples it has demonstrated good alpha reliabilities, which average above .80 and good three-month test-retest reliabilities ranging from .80 to .90. It has also demonstrated convergent validity (mean  $r = .73$ ) with other Big Five measures, such as the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985), and (mean  $r = .81$ ) with the Trait Descriptive Adjective (TDA; John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five Inventory was considered more favourable than three-dimensional measures, such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), given that the Five Factor Model (FFM) is widely accepted as a general taxonomy of personality traits (cf. John & Srivastava, 1999). Furthermore, the additional trait of openness to experience, which the FFM measures, has previously been correlated with paranormal belief and engagement in diverse esoteric practices (cf. Irwin, 2009). Thus, it was felt important to also include this trait when investigating if any personality traits are associated with mediumistic experiences.

Advantages of the BFI are that it is more cost effective than the NEO-FFI, as it is available in the public domain, and it is easy to administer, taking only about 5 minutes to complete. Additionally, items on the BFI are shorter and easier to understand than the NEO-FFI items (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). Each of the 44 items of the BFI begins with "I see myself as someone who..." and is rated between 1 (Disagree strongly) and 5 (Agree strongly). Examples of items are: Extraversion (8 items) "has an assertive personality", Agreeableness (9 items) "is helpful and unselfish with others, Conscientiousness (9 items) "is a reliable worker", Neuroticism (8 items) "worries a lot", and Openness (10 items) "is original, comes up with new ideas" (see Appendix 3.7). Total mean item scores range

<sup>14</sup> Permission to use the BFI was obtained on 10 January 2007 from Professor Oliver John.

from 1 to 5 (higher score equals higher amount of trait), and is derived from the sum of the items in the scale divided by the number of items in the scale (i.e. the average). General population norms based on mean item scores are available for each of the 5 subscales: Extraversion ( $M = 3.2$ ); Agreeableness ( $M = 3.8$ ); Conscientiousness ( $M = 3.6$ ); Neuroticism ( $M = 3.0$ ); and Openness ( $M = 3.7$ ) (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998).

### **3.3.5 Respondents**

A total of 159 participants were included in the sample for this study: 80 "spiritualist mediums" (67.5% females; mean age = 62.50; ranging from 35 to 90) and 79 "spiritualist non-mediums" (78.5% females; mean age = 60.96; ranging from 27 to 84 years). There were no significant differences between the groups according to age ( $t = .805$ ,  $p = .42$ , two-tailed) or educational level ( $z = -1.294$ ,  $p = .20$ , two-tailed).

### **3.3.6 Procedure**

The survey pack was piloted with three spiritualist mediums to assess whether any of the questions or instructions were ambiguous, unclear or offensive. One medium was known to the researcher via membership of an awareness group at a Spiritualist Church, and another medium was a friend of the researcher's family. The other medium was known indirectly by the researcher, having attended one of their lectures on mediumship, and having also been introduced to them by a student at the University of Northampton, who knew them as a friend. Two of the mediums did not report any difficulties. However, one of the mediums who had authored books on the process of mediumship gave useful feedback for suggestions of additional questions to be included.

To encourage responses there were four stages involved in distribution of the survey to mediums: Firstly, 233 packs were posted to the mediums whose names and addresses were available from the SNU website; secondly, a postcard reminder was sent approximately two weeks later; thirdly, another survey pack was redistributed to non-responders approximately two weeks after sending the postcard; fourthly, mediums were telephoned to ensure they had received a survey, and if not, they were asked if they

would like another sent. This latter stage also enabled reasons for different types of non-response to be established.

For the sample of non-mediums, a total of 410 surveys were initially posted to 26 randomly selected churches. In order to select the churches that would be sent survey packs, all the churches in each of the 14 districts were assigned a number (i.e. if there were 10 churches in a district, each church would be given a number between 1 to 10), then one or more of the churches were chosen at random using a random number generator (available via the Internet). In some districts (e.g. East London and West London), there were more churches than others (e.g. South Wales). Therefore, to ensure, as best as possible, sample sizes were proportionate to national statistics (i.e. more participants were sampled from larger districts) more churches were selected in that district to send packs to.

Prior to posting the surveys, permission was gained from the Church Secretary or Church President via telephone to exhibit the survey packs in the reception area of the churches. All churches were later telephoned to ensure they had received packs and to ask if they could encourage members to complete. To increase response, and after receiving a research grant from the Society of Psychical Research, a further 101 surveys were delivered in person to churches from districts where there had been a lower response. The research was explained to the Church president and survey packs were left in the Church for potential non-medium spiritualists to take and complete. It was believed that an advantage to visiting the Churches in person was that any concerns about the research could be clarified and it ensured that packs would be left for distribution. Although this was the case, the number of surveys returned did not differ from the postal method, therefore, a further 115 surveys were posted. The number of packs posted to non-mediums was decided by the amount of resources available for conducting the survey.

Whilst distributing survey packs to the random selection of churches for non-mediums to complete, the postal service experienced two strikes. This resulted in several packs being returned undelivered, or in churches not receiving the packs. To overcome this obstacle,

survey packs were reposted to the churches. However, there remains the possibility that completed surveys could have gone missing during the strike process.

### **3.3.7 Ethical considerations**

Prior to commencement, the study was approved by the University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee and ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (2006) were strictly adhered to. Participants were asked to take part in the survey voluntarily and were not deceived about the nature of the research. To allay any suspicion or fears about the nature of the research they were informed about the aims of the study and its potential use. In order to ensure confidentiality of information obtained from individuals to encourage openness and honesty, the research did not require participants to disclose personally identifying information. Those who decided to return the survey questionnaire were given an opportunity to withdraw their data at any time within one month of the study's completion without having to state a reason. It was explained to the participants that if they wished to retract their data, they should contact the researcher via phone, mail, or email and provide the researcher with their personal ID number, which was attached to the cover letter sent with the survey pack.

Contact details for the researcher and the researcher's supervisors were also provided for participants to obtain further information or in case they required help clarifying any of the questions or instructions to complete. All participants were given the opportunity to receive feedback on the results of the studies by including their name and contact details on a tear-off form that could be placed in a small sealed envelope that was sent with the survey pack. Personal details were kept confidential and separate from data, and stored in a locked filing cabinet or password-protected computer.

## **3.4 Results**

### **3.4.1 Response rates**

Out of the 233 mediums selected, 15 were deceased, no longer practising, or no longer at address, reducing the actual target population to 218. One hundred and fifteen mediums

responded (response rate = 53%), however the actual completion rate of the psychological measures was 82 (37%), and 91 (42%) for the mediumship activity questionnaire. Reasons for non-responding were established via telephone conversation, and included "being too busy" ( $n = 2$ ), "too ill" ( $n = 9$ ), "said survey had been returned" ( $n = 4$ ), and "did not want to take part" ( $n = 9$ ). Three of mediums who gave the latter response stated that they did not want to take part because they were concerned the questions were enquiring about mental health issues.

For the non-medium comparison group, 130 surveys were returned out of the 626 that were distributed (response rate = 20%), however the total number of surveys completed correctly was 87 (14%). Although this figure is small, in comparison to the percentage of mediums that responded, precautions were put in place to ensure each non-medium spiritualist had an equal chance of taking part in the survey through random cluster sampling. Through this procedure, both sampling and coverage error were reduced. Furthermore, as it was not possible to establish exactly how many individuals actually took the survey pack, response rates may be an underestimation. In addition, it was only possible to estimate the number of non-medium spiritualists that would consist of the target population for the comparison group; therefore, the response rate could not be accurately calculated.

A United Kingdom (UK) Health Technology Assessment (HTA) review of questionnaires in research (McColl et al., 2001) noted that estimates differ as to what constitutes an adequate return rate, and that there are no overall recommendations about desirable rates in order to be satisfied that the data obtained is valid. Fowler (2002) suggests a minimum 75% response rate for surveys, while May (2001) points out that a 40% response is common for self-completion and postal questionnaires. A meta-analysis of postal survey research has reported response rates of 20-40% (Yammarino, Skinner, & Childers, 1991), and returns as low as 15-30% have been reported in some social science publications (e.g., Burns & Grove, 1993; Skodol-Wilson, 1989). Moser and Kalton (1971) also note that that response rates of as low as 10% are not unheard of.

It is apparent that response rates obtained in the current survey parallel those found in other studies. This finding is reassuring, given the survey was conducted at a time when the Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951 was under repeal to be replaced by the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2007. There was a concern that the risk of prosecution for practising as a medium would deter participants from responding to the survey.

### **3.4.2 Comparisons between responders for the medium sample**

Some researchers have argued that concerns about non-response may be inflated, and have shown that surveys with low response rates can be more accurate than surveys with higher response rates (Krosnick, 1999). Krosnick reports a study in which mail surveys with response rates of about 20% predicted election outcomes much more accurately (average error = 1.6%) than did telephone surveys with response rates of about 60% (average error = 5.2%). In addition, voter demographics were more accurate in the mail surveys. However, other researchers are apprehensive about low response rates and whether there is potential bias to representativeness. An indirect way of assessing whether there are any differences between respondents and non-respondents is to investigate if there are any differences between initial respondents, those requiring a reminder postcard, and those needing a replacement survey.

As there were an unequal number of respondents in each of the response groups: initial responders ( $n = 59$ ), reminder postcard responders ( $n = 8$ ), and replacement survey responders ( $n = 13$ ), the decision was made to perform a Kruskal-Wallis test on the three groups. Results did not reveal any significant differences between groups according to the number of years as a spiritualist ( $X^2 = 1.75$ ;  $p = .42$ ); number of years as a medium ( $X^2 = 3.01$ ;  $p = .22$ ); or age ( $X^2 = .592$ ;  $p = .74$ ).

Perhaps, more importantly, no significant differences were found between responders on the dependent variables of interest: fantasy-proneness ( $X^2 = 3.26$ ;  $p = .20$ ); boundary-thinness/thickness ( $X^2 = .389$ ;  $p = .82$ ); psychological distress ( $X^2 = .239$ ;  $p = .89$ ); psychological well-being ( $X^2 = 1.079$ ;  $p = .58$ ); dissociation ( $X^2 = .322$ ;  $p = .85$ );

extraversion ( $X^2 = .311$ ;  $p = .86$ ); neuroticism ( $X^2 = .124$ ;  $p = .94$ ); agreeableness ( $X^2 = .054$ ;  $p = .97$ ); openness to experience ( $X^2 = 1.683$ ;  $p = .43$ ). However, there was an exception, as responders did significantly differ on conscientiousness ( $X^2 = 10.70$ ;  $p < .01$ ). As would be expected immediate responders scored highest on the conscientiousness measure (median = 45.5), followed by those respondents who returned the survey after the postcard reminder had been sent (median = 29.8), and those responders who returned the survey after having been sent another one, having the least conscientiousness (median = 24.5).

In summary, we can be satisfied with the sample size and representativeness of mediums for this study as the ability to make generalizable conclusions regarding population characteristics is increased by the knowledge that non-response bias has been minimized. In addition, the interesting finding that the conscientiousness trait scores were affected by different types of responders lends unexpected support for the validity of the Big Five Inventory (BFI).

### **3.4.3 Data screening**

Competing views of how to treat missing data have not been definitively resolved. In survey research using Likert-type scale scores the main cause of missing data tends to be the result of one or more items on the scale being omitted, and some researchers believe it is more accurate and appropriate to address this by mean substitution (Raaijmakers, 1999). In both samples occasional missing data (<5%) were observed, however no patterns were detected using Missing Value Analysis on SPSS, therefore the missing values were replaced with the item mean.

Similarly, there is a lack of consensus among researchers as to the most appropriate way to treat outliers, although greater use of visual examination of data for outlier detection has been reported (Orr, Sackett, & Dubois, 1991). In the case of univariate statistics, an outlier is a case with such an extreme value on one variable that it is different from the majority of the sample thus having the potential to distort statistics (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). When sample sizes are very large, cases with standardized scores greater than

3.29 are considered as potential outliers. However, in samples with 80 or fewer observations, as is the case here, the guidelines suggest those cases with standardized scores of 2.5 or greater as outliers (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Potential outliers were sought by checking whether data had been entered correctly or whether there was anything unusual and by looking at box plots, histograms, and standard z-scores for each variable. For the psychological distress variable eight outliers in the non-medium sample and one outlier in the medium sample were identified as having a diagnosis of mental health problems and in the majority of cases this was accompanied by a standard score greater than the guideline of 2.5. On examination of their health status, these participants reported psychological distress, such as depression, manic depression or anxiety and were subsequently removed from the sample. These were cases: 53 (z-score = 2.52), 609, (z-score = 2.43), 664 (z-score = 3.79), 693 (z-score = 2.62), 834 (z-score = 4.76), 912 (z-score = 3.98), 916 (z-score = 2.23), 920 (z-score = 3.01), and 925 (z-score = 2.13). A Mann-Whitney analysis was performed before removal of these outliers and identified a significant difference between mediums and non-mediums on psychological distress ( $z = -3.717, p < .001$ , two-tailed). This satisfied the use of parametric testing after removal of outliers, which also identified a significant difference ( $t(157) = 3.26, p < .001$ , two-tailed). Another participant was filtered from the medium sample due to suspected acquiescence, as they had ticked the same number on measures regardless of item meaning. Three potential outliers were also detected for the dissociative experiences variable. However, as dissociation is not normally distributed in the population these cases were retained as they were considered to have been sampled from the target population.

#### **3.4.4 Rationale for use of parametric statistics**

To satisfy the use of parametric statistics when examining whether there are any significant differences between the means of two independent groups, it is suggested that data needs to be normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Inspection of histograms for the data revealed a slight positive skew for the DES in both the non-medium (see Figure 3.1) and medium samples (see Figure 3.2). This was confirmed using the ratio of standard error with variable skewness and kurtosis (standard error ratio >3)

and by the finding that the DES standard error for mediums = 6.54 and 4.13 for non-mediums. However, all other dependent variables exhibited a normal distribution shape and fell within the acceptable boundaries of  $-1/+1$  for skewness and within the boundaries of  $-3/+3$  for kurtosis (see Table 3.1). Given that dissociation may not be normally distributed in the sample populations the DES variable was not transformed.

In the statistical analyses that follow, scores on Likert-type scales were treated as interval data. This practice is commonplace within social sciences, and it has been argued that severe departures (from intervalness) do not affect Type I and Type II errors dramatically (Jaccard & Wan, 1996).

Figure 3.1 Frequency distribution histogram of the DES measure for the non-medium sample ( $N = 79$ )

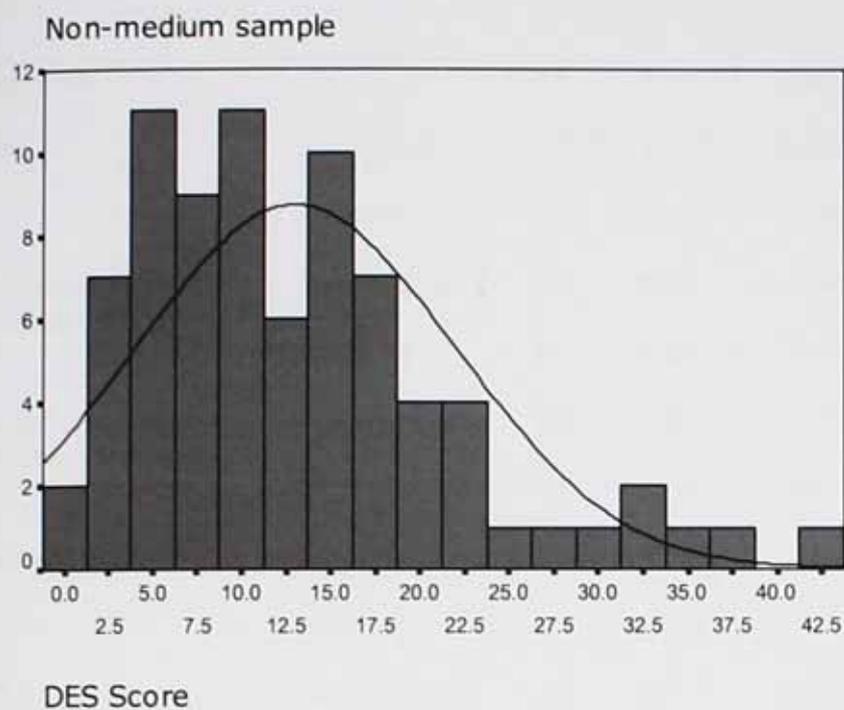
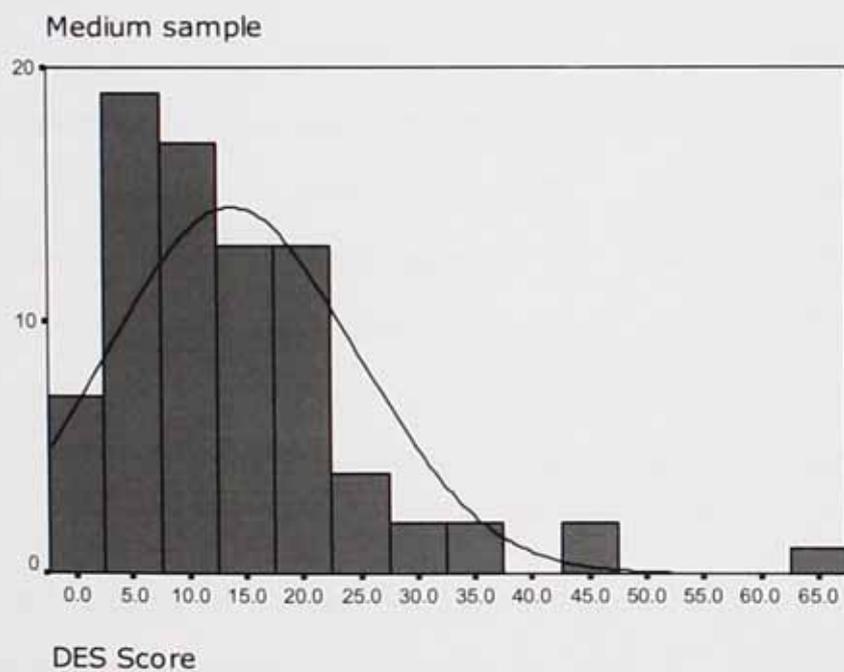


Figure 3.2 Frequency distribution of the DES measure for the medium sample ( $N = 81$ )



*Table 3.2 Descriptive statistics of mediums and non-mediums for the psychological measures*

Measure		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
DES	Non-medium	79	12.9	9.00	1.14	1.26
	Medium	81	13.8	10.9	1.78	4.92
Psychological Wellbeing <sup>a</sup>	Non-medium	79	4.11	.994	-.550	.123
	Medium	81	4.65	.784	-.640	.035
Psychological Distress <sup>a</sup>	Non-medium	79	5.07	.625	-.916	1.07
	Medium	81	5.36	.486	-.839	.260
BQ-18	Non-medium	79	36.6	8.92	-.364	-.084
	Medium	81	34.5	10.5	-.346	.254
CEQ	Non-medium	79	8.54	4.83	.517	-.561
	Medium	81	9.75	4.35	.076	-.375
Openness	Non-medium	79	3.46	.574	-.007	-.616
	Medium	81	3.75	.561	-.030	-.317
Conscientiousness	Non-medium	79	3.68	.522	-.602	.021
	Medium	81	3.75	.508	-.537	-.646
Extraversion	Non-medium	79	3.25	.777	.263	-.613
	Medium	81	3.49	.721	-.415	-.336
Agreeableness	Non-medium	79	4.18	.499	-.314	-.637
	Medium	81	4.18	.558	-.570	-.394
Neuroticism	Non-medium	79	3.19	.755	.116	-.525
	Medium	81	3.61	.716	-.449	.129

<sup>a</sup> High scores on wellbeing and psychological distress subscales of the MHI-17 indicate better mental health

### **3.4.5 Hypotheses testing**

T-tests were used to explore whether there were any differences between mediums and non-mediums on scores obtained from psychological measures used in the survey study.

Given that previous studies identified in the literature review (Chapter two) were conducted with mediums in USA, Brazil and Cuba, the present study with UK mediums was considered exploratory. Thus, a 2-tailed  $p < 0.05$  was chosen as a significance value for the analyses. Summary statistics from these analyses are reported in Table 3.2.

### *Dissociative Experiences*

The hypothesis was not supported as there were no significant differences between groups for scores on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) ( $t(157) = .514, p = .61$ , two-tailed). As the DES was positively skewed, a Mann-Whitney was also performed which confirmed the lack of significance ( $z = -.200, p = .84$ , two-tailed). As seen in Table 3.1 mean scores for the medium sample were slightly higher than the non-medium sample (mean = 13.81 vs. mean = 12.99). Both groups scored higher than means reported in general population studies ( $M = 7.8$ , Bernstein & Putman, 1986;  $M = 3.7$ , Carlson & Putman, 1993;  $M = 11.05$ , van Ijzendoorn & Schuengel, 1996), but lower than means reported for individuals with a diagnosis of DID ( $M=40.7 - 57.1$ ; cf. Cardeña, 2008).

### *Mental health*

As seen in Table 3.1, mean scores for the medium sample were higher than the non-medium sample on the Psychological Wellbeing<sup>a</sup> subscale (mean = 4.65 vs. mean = 4.11) and the Psychological Distress subscale<sup>a</sup> (mean = 5.36 vs. mean = 5.07). As illustrated in Table 3.2, mediums scored significantly better than non-mediums on the Psychological Wellbeing<sup>a</sup> subscale ( $t(157) = 3.80, p < .001$ , two-tailed) and the Psychological Distress<sup>a</sup> subscale of the MHI-17 ( $t(157) = 3.26, p < .001$ , two-tailed). Thus, the hypothesis that mediums and non-mediums would score significantly different on a measure of mental health was supported. It was noted that mean number of years as a spiritualist for mediums (mean = 34.54; ranging from 9 to 78 years;  $SD = 15.86$ ) was higher than for non-mediums (mean = 19.01; ranging from 1 to 70 years;  $SD = 17.75$ ). As a way to explore whether this difference contributed to the significant findings, Pearson correlations were performed between the measures, number years as a spiritualist and number of years practising as a medium. When controlling for age, these correlations indicate little evidence for a direct relationship between wellbeing ( $r = .180, p = .13$ ) or psychological

distress ( $r = -.009, p = .94$ ) and number years as a spiritualist; or between wellbeing ( $r = .076, p = .53$ ) or psychological distress ( $r = .053, p = .66$ ) and number of years practising as a medium. Interestingly, when controlling for age, number of years as a spiritualist did not significantly correlate with psychological distress<sup>a</sup> ( $r = .472, p = .16$ ) or wellbeing<sup>a</sup> ( $r = .225, p = .09$ ) in the non-medium sample. However, the latter result suggests that the longer non-mediums are involved with spiritualism, the better wellbeing they have.

### *Boundary-Thinness*

The hypothesis was not supported as there were no significant differences between groups for scores on the Boundary Questionnaire (BQ-18) ( $t(157) = -1.345, p = .18$ , two-tailed). However, it is interesting to note that mean scores for the non-medium group were higher ("thinner") than the medium group (mean = 36.59 vs. mean = 34.51). Mean scores for both groups were lower than those found by Laria (1998) in his medium group (mean = 37.23) and patient group (39.31), but higher than his control group (32.16).

*Table 3.3 Results from t-tests comparing mediums and non-mediums on the psychological measures*

Measure	Unrelated t-test	Signif. (two-tailed)	Effect size
DES	0.51	$p = .61$	$r = .04$
Wellbeing	3.80	$p < .001$	$r = .29$
Psychological Distress	3.26	$p < .001$	$r = .25$
BQ-18	-1.34	$p = .18$	$r = .10$
CEQ	1.65	$p = .10$	$r = .13$
Openness	3.21	$p < .01$	$r = .24$
Conscientiousness	0.92	$p = .36$	$r = .07$
Extraversion	2.01	$p < .05$	$r = .15$
Agreeableness	0.01	$p = .99$	$r = .00048$
Neuroticism	3.59	$p < .001$	$r = .27$

### *Fantasy-Proneness*

The hypothesis was not supported as there were no significant differences between groups on the Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ) ( $t(157) = 1.65, p = .10$ , two-tailed). Although there is no normative data for this measure, it is suggested that scores within the 7 – 10 range are normal, while those within the 12 – 16 range are high (for example, fantasy role players score in this range) (H. Merckelbach, personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2007). Therefore, mean scores for both groups fall within the normal range (medium = 9.75 vs. non-medium 8.54), with mediums scoring slightly higher than non-mediums.

### *Big Five Personality Traits*

Some, but not all hypotheses were supported on the personality measure as mediums scored significantly higher than non-mediums on Openness to Experience ( $t(157) = 3.21, p < .01$ , two-tailed), Neuroticism ( $t(157) = 3.59, p < .001$ , two-tailed) and Extraversion ( $t(157) = 2.01, p < .05$ , two-tailed), but not for Agreeableness ( $t(157) = .006, p = .99$ , two-tailed) or Conscientiousness ( $t(157) = .924, p = .36$ , two-tailed). When controlling for age, Pearson correlations did not show any relationship between the significant variables and number of years as a spiritualist (Openness;  $r = -.076, p = .52$ ; Neuroticism;  $r = .009, p = .94$ ; Extraversion;  $r = -.056, p = .64$ ) or number of years practicing (Openness;  $r = -.088, p = .46$ ; Neuroticism;  $r = -.013, p = .91$ ; Extraversion;  $r = .138, p = .25$ ).

## **3.5 Discussion**

An exploration of differences between a sample of spiritualist mediums and non-medium spiritualists revealed no differences on the DES, suggesting that there is no generalised susceptibility to dissociative experience in mediums, despite the dissociative character of specific experiences that are reported by mediums (for example, hearing voices and having visions). However, mean scores for both groups were slightly higher than those in general population studies (Bernstein & Putman, 1986; Carlson & Putman, 1993), suggesting that spiritualists, as a group, may be more likely to have dissociative experiences, but that levels do not reach those regarded as pathological. This is consistent

with the findings of Laria (2000) and Reinsel (2003) who also found a lack of psychopathology in mediums but higher than average levels of dissociation.

Interestingly, a significant difference (with a small to medium effect size) was found between mediums and non-mediums on the measure of mental health, with mediums scoring significantly higher on psychological wellbeing and lower on psychological distress. Furthermore, when controlling for age, correlations confirmed that number of years as a spiritualist did not identify a relationship with better mental health. In speculation, it could mean that mediums have entered the profession with a predisposition for positive wellbeing and low psychological distress, and increased age and involvement with spiritualism had no impact on this. Alternatively, adoption of the mediumship role and associated status could have affected wellbeing in a positive way and remained a "buffer" throughout their career. Seligman (2005b) has similarly argued that distress is experienced by individuals prior to their involvement with Candomblé mediumship but is given a new positive meaning by their initiation into mediumship, together with the accompanying change in status, power and respect that is associated with the role. Seligman suggests that the process of redefining one's identity and social support associated with the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function. Implicit in this notion is the view that normalization of distressing or unusual experiences contributes to positive wellbeing or better ability to cope. This model implies that a) the act of mediumship reframes experiences and b) that improvement of psychological wellbeing increases with time spent as a medium.

While findings from this study might be consistent with the first prediction of the model they could not be claimed to support it since there is no information about the mediums' wellbeing or understanding of their experiences prior to their involvement with a formal system of mediumship; what would be required is a longitudinal study that tracks individuals as they progress from neophyte to qualified practitioner. The current research findings are not consistent with the second prediction of this model. However, our sample of mediums is relatively expert, having completed training programmes and won awards

so that any primary effect of immersion in this subculture would already have occurred. It could be informative to replicate this study with less experienced members of mediumship organizations.

The finding that mediums scored higher on neuroticism when compared with non-mediums presents as somewhat contradictory given the possible connection of mediumship with positive mental health. However, as mediums also scored higher on extraversion, it could be that the mediumship (demonstration) role acts as a defence mechanism or outlet for unpleasant emotions, and/or that mediums are characterized by a dual facet personality: in one respect they are sociable and assertive, identified by their willingness to publicly demonstrate mediumship but, on the other hand, they also experience negative emotional states and are vulnerable to stress. A limitation of this study, in relation to the extraversion finding, is that participants were mediums who demonstrate their mediumship at spiritualist churches and give private readings, which may not be representative of the population of mediums as a whole. It may be that only the more extraverted are drawn to platform demonstration and thus go through the process of having their experiences validated. There is some evidence for the speculation that the medium sample is more extraverted, as mediums scored higher ( $M = 3.49$ ) than norms ( $M = 3.2$ ) for the BFI (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). However, these norms should be used with caution as they are based on a sample of 711 undergraduate students from the US and may not be representative of a UK sample. It would be interesting, therefore, to explore whether mediums that only conduct private readings score similar to platform mediums.

Although no significant differences were found between mediums and non-mediums on the fantasy-proneness measure, mediums did score significantly higher on openness to experience, suggesting an active imagination and attentiveness to inner feelings. Intriguingly, openness to experience has been correlated with creativity (McCrae, 1987). No differences were found on the Boundary Questionnaire; however, it was interesting to note that mean scores for the non-medium group were slightly higher ("thinner") than the

medium group. Given that Laria (2000) found individuals with mental health problems to score at thinner levels than mediums, it may be useful to examine the comparison group in more detail. Individuals with thinner boundaries are characterised as lacking defence mechanisms that can be used to keep uncomfortable material out of conscious awareness and as having a greater capacity to enter an altered state of consciousness (Hartmann, 1991). Given that mediums claim to communicate with the deceased then non-medium spiritualists may be drawn to attend mediumship demonstrations as a means of dealing with overwhelming distressing emotions experienced after bereavement — or perhaps because they have had mediumistic experiences themselves. Similarly, it would be useful to investigate the psychological wellbeing of non-medium spiritualists in relation to the general population.

What has emerged from this study is that there are clear differences between spiritualist mediums and non-mediums that seem deserving of further exploration. The findings confirm previous research which has consistently demonstrated that mediums do not present as being more prone to generalised dissociation symptoms. In light of these data it does not seem tenable to characterise mediums as psychologically unhealthy or dysfunctional. In addition, the finding that mediums did not score high on a measure of fantasy-proneness suggests that their reported experiences cannot easily be explained in terms of an over-active imagination. This certainly does not lead by default to a supernatural explanation for these experiences, but does suggest that our accounts of the mediumship experience need to be more sophisticated than hitherto.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the survey method enabled us to generate and confirm some of the hypotheses about the mediumship phenomenon. Results showed that mediums scored significantly higher than non-mediums on psychological wellbeing, had lower psychological distress, higher levels of extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience. No significant differences were found on dissociation, boundary-thinness, fantasy-proneness, conscientiousness or agreeableness. However, there remain unanswered questions

regarding the process and nature of mediumship, such as the pathways to mediumship and the context within which mediums define themselves as a medium. This highlights the need for future research to consider more personal or idiosyncratic perspectives and to gain insight from mediums themselves; thus providing a more detailed and richer understanding of the mediumship phenomenon.

The following chapter represents a step towards gaining more understanding of the mediumship phenomenon by reporting findings from the mediumship activity questionnaire part of the survey.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **CONTENT ANALYSIS OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FROM A MEDIUMSHIP ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE (MAQ)**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter three data were presented from a nationwide postal survey of spiritualist mediums. That survey can be thought of as encompassing two distinct parts. The first part of the survey aimed to explore the psychological characteristics of spiritualist mediums and whether they differentiated from spiritualists who do not consider themselves mediums. The other part of the survey consisted of a mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ), which was designed for the purposes of the survey and aimed to explore mediums' own understanding of their experiences and the process and nature of mediumship. For completeness, the MAQ was briefly described in Chapter three, however, the context in which it was designed was not discussed, nor were the specific wordings of items or the approach taken to analyse open-ended responses. Therefore, the purpose of the current chapter is to describe the MAQ in more detail and to provide a rationale for the choice of content analysis approach taken to analyse the open-ended responses. As such, the empirical data presented in this chapter are focused more on broadening our understanding of the phenomenology of mediumship together with the range and incidence of mediumistic experience, rather than investigating the psychological characteristics of mediums. Thus, the content analysis approach taken here will report original quotations from participants alongside frequency scores to give an indication of how common particular responses were.

#### **4.1.1 Constructing the Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

In designing the MAQ, two considerations were paramount. Firstly, the main aim was to obtain valid and informative answers that would increase our knowledge about the process and nature of mediumship. Therefore, open-ended questions were used in the MAQ with the intention of encouraging mediums to be original in their answers and openly express

their insights and perspectives on the mediumship process and what they think is involved in mediumship. Open-ended questions allow for greater depth or novelty of responses while still valuing quantitative attributes of representativeness and pattern across respondents. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questions is considered best for exploratory questioning (Salant & Dillman, 1994). In addition, the layout was made clear and well-structured so that mediums found the MAQ easy to complete (F. J. Fowler, 1995). Secondly, as it was not expected that the open-ended responses would guarantee the richness of response that would be necessary to allow for a more formal qualitative analysis, responses to the MAQ were intended to inform a later stage of research involving in-depth interviews with mediums. In this respect, open-ended questions were considered most appropriate as they could identify a range of answers that could be offered as topics to explore in more detail later in the research process. Therefore, as seen in Chapter five, responses to the MAQ also contributed to the design of an interview schedule and placed the researcher in a more informed position to make empathic insights, increasing rapport during the interview study.

A number of activities were influential in the choice of specific questions to include in the MAQ. In Chapter one the planning phase of the research was discussed, which included a reflective account of participation in and observation of a week-long residential training course held at the Arthur Findlay College entitled "Mediumship, Spirit Awareness and Developing Your Potential". I also observed demonstrations of mediumship and attended a monthly mediumship awareness group for a year at my local spiritualist church. These activities were similar to ethnographic research "fieldwork" (Brewer, 2000) and were an opportunity to stimulate thinking and elicit ideas for the survey, providing inspiration for questions to ask on the MAQ, and increasing awareness of the language used by mediums. Furthermore, the importance of a conceptual or planning phase, when designing research studies, has been discussed, as it helps the researcher to define the "problem" and devise relevant research questions (Creswell, 1998).

The MAQ consists of a combination of fourteen open and closed items (see Appendix 3.2) which were separated into sections on life history and background, the process and nature

of mediumship, and the content of mediumship readings or demonstrations. The purpose of these questions was to provide a number of narrower focus questions within the broader overarching research question: How do mediums understand and explain their mediumship experiences? Examples of questions in the life history section are: "How did you first discover you had the ability to be a medium?" and "Please describe any childhood experiences, events or family influences you think may have contributed to the development of your mediumship ability". Examples of questions enquiring about the process and nature of mediumship include: "Are there any procedures, rituals or mental actions you follow in order to receive spirit communications?" and "Do you have a spirit control or guide(s)? If you do, please describe their role in your mediumship. For example, how you discovered them, what is their purpose, how and when they communicate, what are they called?" It was anticipated that this structure would encourage participants to reflect on the biography of their mediumship, with sections broadly representing a linear story of how they became involved in mediumship, how mediumship "works", and what its purpose is.

As will be seen in the course of the chapter, the questions centred around five main areas of interest which are reflected in the way responses were subsequently categorised and analysed: 1) to determine how mediums perceive their abilities to have been discovered and developed, 2) to establish whether mediums feel in control of preparation to receive spirit communication or whether communication "just happens", 3) to gauge the extent to which mediums perceive their communication with spirit to be internally or externally manifested, 4) to gather more information on the nature of spirit guides, and 5) to gather more information on what is communicated and what mediums consider to be the most important aspects regarding the purpose of mediumship.

As discussed in the next section, content analysis was chosen as an ideal technique to apply to the text gained from the open-ended responses to the MAQ as it allows for both qualitative and quantitative approaches to be combined (Cavanagh, 1997). Section 4.2 focuses on a methodological discussion of the content analysis approach adopted in this study and describes how existing theory and research helped to determine a coding

scheme and operationalised a category system. Frequencies will be reported in the remaining sections alongside original quotations, which emphasises the flexible nature of the content analysis approach as original qualitative responses help to both reflect the essence of the content analysis categories and allow for new themes to develop.

## **4.2 Content analysis approach**

Content analysis is a tool to provide knowledge, new insights, and a representation of "facts" (Weber, 1990). By reducing textual material into fewer content-related categories the data becomes more manageable and the researcher is able to identify themes and patterns in the data in order to describe and quantify the phenomena under investigation (Carney, 1972). Content analysis is defined succinctly by Krippendorff (1980, p. 21) as "a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences from data to their context." According to Weber (1990, p. 10) content analysis has many uses and advantages over other approaches. Firstly, content analytic procedures operate directly on text or transcripts of human communication; secondly, content analysis methods combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches, which are commonly viewed as antithetical; and thirdly, content analysis is relatively unobtrusive.

This second point is extremely useful for the purpose of this research. A major advantage of content analysis over an exclusively quantitative or qualitative method is that it allows for a synthesis of methods. The content analysis approach will allow for the quantification of initially qualitative data (open-ended responses of the MAQ) and will also permit exploration of the qualitative data for additional themes and patterns. Not only can one tally the occurrence of content by establishing frequencies (such as how many mediums report having a spirit guide), but one can also explore the content of the data, immerse oneself in the narrative, explore its deeper meaning, and report original quotations from mediums. In this respect, content analysis goes beyond counting words or describing the data, by allowing both the testing of theories and hypotheses, and also the emergence of new insights (Cavanagh, 1997; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus knowledge gained from a

content analysis approach will be founded on empirical evidence and be based on mediums' unique perspectives.

In summary, the content analysis approach has certain advantages for the purpose of this research over other research methods. It retains the representativeness, replicability and generalisability of quantitative approaches, such as surveys and experimental modes of inquiry, but can also provide direct information, insights and perspectives from participants that are emphasized in formal qualitative methods, such as, thematic analysis, grounded theory and phenomenology. Content analysis should not, however, be confused with these methods, for although they share a similar analytical approach they go a step further in their analysis to develop theory or a nuanced understanding of the "lived experience" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Phenomenological approaches are considered in more detail in Chapter seven involving in-depth interviews with a selection of mediums.

#### **4.2.1 Form of content analysis: Inductive versus deductive**

In order for informed decisions to be made regarding the appropriate content analysis approach to take in the current research, it is important to recognise the different forms of category development. It should be noted that "categories", refers to the distillation of the content, whereby operational codes that define the category variable help to decide which category certain text material should "fall in". Essentially, groups of categories are developed so that frequency (or statistical) analysis can be performed (Schilling, 2006). Two different approaches to the way content analysis is conducted, and categories developed, are often discussed in the literature. The inductive method or "bottom-up" approach adopts as its starting point the act of making empirical observations about the world, which lead to emerging post hoc hypotheses and postulations. It is aimed at *developing*, rather than *testing* theory (Spens & Kovacs, 2006). It is data-driven: It develops its categories from a step by step formulation of inductive categories out of the material, and is more iterative in that it allows for a revision of categories depending on the themes and patterns uncovered in the text (Mayring, 2000). In this sense the inductive method is concerned with theory generation and the exploration of meanings (Kidder & Fine, 1987).

On the other hand, the deductive method or "top-down" approach starts by scanning theory and uses an existing theoretical framework to test a priori hypotheses or postulations so that new knowledge is set in a broader empirical context. Categories are therefore based on existing knowledge about what is known, or hypothesised, about the phenomena (in this case mediumship), and it is important to have specific questions beforehand that will relate to prior theory (Spens & Kovacs, 2006). In this sense, the deductive method refers to the "incorporation of non-numerical data collection techniques into hypothetico-deductive research designs" (Willig, 2001, p. 11). In essence, the major difference between the inductive and deductive approach is the manner in which initial categories and codes are developed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Categories can be derived from the data, from previous related research, or from relevant theories.

Although content analysis approaches have generally been presented as either deductive or inductive, this dichotomy has been challenged by the view that a combined approach is possible and may even be more constructive. Weber (1990) has proposed that the most effective research involving content analysis uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Additionally, it has been pointed out that content analysis often uses a mixture of both inductive and deductive reasoning (Strauss, 1987). Schilling (2006) has also suggested that a combination of inductive and deductive approaches may be appropriate when developing coding categories and conducting content analysis. She states:

Often, the researcher does not start from scratch but rather has a rough category system (derived from theory and/or prior research on the topic) that he wants to test and refine (e.g., by building subcategories) in confrontation with the text material. In this way, deductive and inductive strategies in the development of a category system are often combined (p. 33).

Similarly, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) have outlined three approaches to content analysis consisting of: 1) conventional content analysis, where coding categories are derived from the text to build theories; 2) directed content analysis, where initial coding starts with

relevant research findings or theories; and 3) summative content analysis which starts with frequencies and then extends to look at themes and latent content.

Given that the present study is exploring a relatively under-researched area within psychology, but has research questions based on relevant research findings in the literature, it seems pertinent to employ a combined approach. It seems appropriate to be open to the fact that new categories may emerge from the data, and to retain a qualitative aspect to the content analysis by including original quotations and any themes or patterns that transpire throughout the course of the analysis. Although there is no handbook or set of universal rules on how to conduct content analysis using a combined approach (cf. Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Weber, 1990), the process by which categories and coding schemes are generated is a fundamental aspect of the content analysis approach (Schilling, 2006) which will be considered in more detail in the following section.

#### **4.2.2 Developing the codes: Component techniques**

Detailed and specific procedures have been outlined in numerous publications describing a step by step process for conducting content analysis (Berg, 2001; Carney, 1972; Cavanagh, 1997; Mayring, 2000; Neuendorf, 2002; Schilling, 2006; Weber, 1990), which have been broadly followed in this study. As a starting point the data are usually arranged for analysis and, if necessary, transformed into written text format. Next, decisions are made regarding the coding rules and what criterion is going to be used to place text in a certain category. For example, is the researcher to look for specific words in the text, for concepts or for themes? The decision was made in this research to code a text passage as a particular category if it captured the essence of the coding definition. In other words, the criterion for placing text in a certain category was semantic rather than syntactic and the unit of text was regarded as an "idea unit". It should be noted that no text was allocated to more than one category, so producing mutually exclusive groups within each research question. This process is further clarified in the next step which involves reading through a sample of responses and then reducing the material, by deleting words that are not necessary to understand the statement or are replicated, and deleting statements that do not tell the researcher anything about the research question. Then, the text is worked

through to identify the themes or idea units in the condensed context so that the text can be placed in an appropriate category. Table 4.1 outlines an example of text reduction from the current research taken from a response to the question "How did you discover you had the ability to be a medium?"

*Table 4.1. Example of Reducing Text*

Original	Reduction	Themes
On attending a Spiritualist Church it was pointed out to me that I had been seeing "Spirit" all my life without realizing this. I had to be taught to switch this off and suddenly the world was a less crowded place. At that time the voices I occasionally heard became stronger and were more frequent	On attending a Spiritualist Church it was pointed out to me that I had been seeing "Spirit"  Taught to switch off	Socialization

Next, preliminary models or category systems should be made explicit to improve the transparency of the analysis (Schilling, 2006), and a coding agenda or guidebook is created to give definitions, examples, and coding rules for each category (Mayring, 2000). Categories should be mutually exclusive, exhaustive and reflect the purpose of the research (Holsti, 1969). Mutually exclusive categories exist when a body of text cannot belong simultaneously to more than one category. This has the advantage of aiding conceptual clarity and minimises statistical problems of confounding variables (Cavanagh, 1997). The final step in the process involves actually placing each statement or unit of analysis into the appropriate category and conducting analyses and interpretation.

#### **4.2.3 Developing coding agendas**

Before content analyses can be conducted one must first define the category systems and subsequent coding agendas – formal definitions of the working category and rules for assigning codes. As can be seen in Tables 4.2 – 4.6 category variables were formulated for each of the main areas of interest, which were how mediums believed they discovered and developed their claimed ability, the process and nature of spirit communication, preparation to receive communication, the purpose of mediumship and the nature of spirit guides. In cases where previous research and theory existed category development was based on a combined approach as categories could be deduced from previous research in

the literature and induced from the text material. In other cases, where the aim was to develop the categories purely out of the material, to establish the relative importance of different variables for mediums, category formulation was based on an inductive approach only. In developing a coding agenda it is crucial to be as explicit, consistent, and transparent as possible (Schilling, 2006). Therefore in both cases, explicit definitions of the categories, examples, and coding rules were delineated to determine how participants' narratives were to be assigned to a category; these were also supplemented with coding agenda tables. Cavanagh (1997) has suggested that precise coding instructions enhance stability over time and reproducibility: two important forms of reliability that are important to consider when conducting content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980).

The following sections further explain the development of the categories and report the frequency results for each category: the number of respondents that have been assigned to each category variable depending on their answers to the open ended questions of the mediumship activity questionnaire. In addition, original quotations from respondents are also reported to retain a qualitative/thematic aspect to the analysis and to allow the experiences of mediums to be represented in their own words. Furthermore, actual examples of statements will help readers to understand how individual responses were recognised as a particular category.

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
Trauma	Mediumship was discovered or developed through, or after, having experiences that were traumatic, such as personal illness, crisis, bereavement, abuse, isolation, and alienation.	<p>"This was brought about by illness"</p> <p>"Premonitions when going through an emotional crisis"</p>	If mention that mediumship was brought on by, or developed after any of the defined traumatic experiences.
Socialization	Mediumship ability was discovered or developed through socialization into the role via Spiritualist activities, such as training courses, development groups, open circles, attendance at mediumship demonstrations, teaching by mediums, or being told by a medium they had abilities.	<p>"I was told in Church"</p> <p>"I was introduced into Spiritualism at the age of 8 through my friend whose mother was a medium"</p>	If mention events such as, attendance at a Spiritualist Church, sitting in a development or open circle, training, being told by another medium they were a medium.
Family influences	Mediumship ability was discovered or developed by having family members who were involved with similar activities, there was encouragement by family members of the role or Spiritualism was in the family	<p>"My mother admitted to me that I come from a long line of naturally gifted mediums from my maternal grandmother's line"</p> <p>"My grandmother was a strong believer in spiritualism and talked about it to me often"</p>	If mention family influences encouraged mediumship ability, family members were also mediums or psychics, healers, seers, clairvoyant, or Spiritualism was in family.
Born with a natural ability	Mediumship ability was inherent	<p>"I have been mediumistic all my life"</p> <p>"Born with natural awareness of worlds within worlds"</p>	If mention that mediumship was always present, they were born with the ability, there was a natural awareness or inner knowing
Personal experiences	Sensing spirits, having anomalous, psychic, or spiritual experiences	<p>"Seeing and feeling spirit around me as a child"</p> <p>"When I was very young I had experiences of looking down on myself as I walked outside"</p>	If mention seeing, hearing, sensing or having an awareness of spirits, or a presence, having strong intuition, having anomalous, psychic, spiritual or OBEs

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
In control	Medium plays an active role in preparation, has an internal locus of control in that they accept the preparation has something to do with them and has strategies or practices in place that they carry out.	"I attune to spirit, taking my mind on to a higher level of consciousness"	Code if medium mentions practices such as altering state of mind or consciousness, meditation, relaxation, "tune-in", "attunement", "blending", calming self, listening to music, expanding energy, dressing smartly
Just happens or externalizes control	Takes a passive role, does not take responsibility, externalizes control; volition is with spirit as they decide whether to help, spirit communication is something that "happens to them" or is to do with outside forces.	"Put to one side any problems. I then ask to communicate or for guides to help or there is a theme of passivity or needs permission from others"	Code if mentions asking spirits or God to communicate or for guides to help or there is a theme of passivity or needs permission from others

Table 4.4. Coding agenda for mediumship process: How a spirit communicates

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
Internal mental imagery or impressions	Medium receives mental pictures, thoughts, memories, impressions, intuitions from spirit; spirit uses telepathy, mind to mind contact, thought-transference. Does not mention spirit has an independent existence.	"Spirit people communicate through telepathy" "Spirit communication works through the subconscious mind of the medium"	Code if the medium receives information through the mind, they receive mental pictures, ideas and symbols, or describe the process as a telepathic one. They see spirit within the mind.
External manifestation	Medium hears, smells, sees, touches, or feels spirit as if it were "real" or an "apparition". Can have internal /subjective expression too, but spirits are considered to have an "independent existence"; they are observable or have physical effects.	"I first sense, feel, or see their loved ones in spirit body so they know where the information is coming from, unlike tarot card readers and psychics"	Code if medium describes the process as an external sensory experience; they see or hear or feel spirit as something external to themselves.

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rule
Prove survival	To give proof of life after death	<p>"To bring evidence of our life everlasting in the spirit realms"</p> <p>"To bring awareness of the continuous existence of the human soul"</p>	Code if text mentions the purpose of mediumship is to prove the continual existence of the human soul or spirit, prove survival after death, to give evidence
Comfort	To give comfort and reassurance	<p>"To give support, reassurance, comfort"</p> <p>"To give comfort. To take away the fear of dying"</p>	Code if mention purpose is to give comfort, reassurance, to console, to allay fears of dying
Guidance	To help people and give advice	<p>"To provide fuel and guidance for the soul"</p> <p>"Advice can be given to overcome difficulties in our everyday lives"</p>	Code if mention purpose is give advice, solve problems, give guidance and to help with life issues
Communicate	To communicate with deceased friends and family members	<p>"Bring together souls so that communication can take place"</p> <p>"To communicate"</p>	Code if consider mediumship to be an opportunity to talk to loved ones who passed over
Spiritualize	To encourage a more spiritual or philosophical outlook on life	<p>"To encourage a more philosophical outlook on life"</p> <p>"We should try to live a better more considerate life here on the earth plane"</p>	Code if purpose is to encourage a more spiritual or philosophical outlook, or to encourage people to lead a better life
Healing	To give healing to individuals	"Should serve some useful purpose. For healing"	Code if mention purpose of mediumship is to give healing

Table 4.6. Coding agenda for nature of spirit guides

Category	Definition	Examples	Coding Rules
Has spirit guide	Medium has a spirit guide that helps with mediumship	"Yes, I have a spirit guide"	Code if medium states they do have a spirit guide, helper or control or they are aware of them
Does not have spirit guide	Medium does not have a spirit guide	"No, I do not have a control"	Medium states that they do not have a spirit guide, helper or control

### 4.3 Discovery and development of mediumship ability

Table 4.2 identifies the category system and coding agenda for the research question: "How do mediums perceive their ability to have originated and developed?" which formed question 5: "How did you first discover you had the ability to be a medium?" and question 6: "Please describe any childhood experiences, events or family influences you think may have contributed to the development of your mediumship ability" on the MAQ. Tables 4.6 and 4.7 identify the frequencies for the categories for each respective question. As can be seen from these tables, *socialization* was reported as the most common means by which mediums first *discovered* they were a medium, followed by *personal experiences*. In other words, it was only when they came into contact with spiritualism, already practising mediums or had anomalous experiences that they realised they too were a medium or started to consider themselves mediumistic. Similarly, the most common means by which mediums perceived their ability to have *developed* was through *personal experiences*, followed by *family influences* and *socialization*. In other words, according to the majority of respondents, having anomalous experiences or being encouraged to develop mediumship abilities by family or spiritualist church members was influential in the development of mediumistic experiences. What is apparent from these results is that traumatic experiences were not common in mediums' explanations for how they discovered or developed mediumship ability. Likewise, respondents who considered themselves to be born a medium were in the minority.

Table 4.7. How respondents first discovered the ability to be a medium (frequencies and percentages)

Category variable	Frequency	Percent
Socialization	42	46.2
Personal experiences	30	33
Born with ability/ natural awareness	9	9.9
Traumatic experiences	4	4.4
Family influences	4	4.4
No comment	2	2.2
Total N	91	100

Table 4.8. Variables respondents believe contributed to the development of their ability (frequencies and percentages)

Category variable	Frequency	Percent
Personal experiences	63	69.2
Family influences	43	47.3
Socialization	29	31.9
Traumatic experiences	10	11
No comment	4	4.4
Total N	91	

#### 4.3.1 Socialization into the role

In Section 2.2.4, it was described how Biscop (1981) found mediums were socialised into the role of medium through teaching, encouragement in small groups, and learning from more experienced mediums. *Socialisation* was therefore formulated as a category. Mediums' responses were coded as this category if a text passage contained a theme of socialisation into mediumship: the idea that mediums adopted or internalized the role of a medium through Spiritualist activities or associations with other mediums. Key referents that form the coding rules for assignment to this category consisted of attendance at "Spiritualist church demonstrations", "development groups", "open-circles", "mediumship training courses", or the suggestion in responses that mediumship was discovered or developed in collaboration with other experienced mediums (see Table 4.2). For example, if a medium stated "Mediumship was developed under the guidance of other mediums at

my local church", or "Communication of discarnate people didn't really come into my understanding until I had a reading at the college when I was told I was clairvoyant" they would be coded under the socialization category. These text passages illustrate how other mediums or spiritual activities might have contributed to the discovery or development of mediumship ability through either teaching mediumship or suggesting to the individual they were a medium.

It should be noted that the text passage could be drawn from the responses to either question 5 ("How did you first discover you had the ability to be a medium?"), or question 6 ("Please describe any childhood experiences, events or family influences you think may have contributed to the development of your mediumship ability?") of the mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ). Although the questions were treated as different enquiries for the purposes of the research i.e. how did you *discover* your ability and how did you *develop* your ability, mediums sometimes tended to combine their responses into one answer and write "as above" or "as below". Additionally, responses to one answer seemed to cover another i.e. a medium would give descriptions for how they *developed* their ability in response to the *discovered* question, and vice versa. It was up to the researcher to filter through the responses and use judgment to decide which discourse responded to which question. It was decided that the same categories would be used for each question, considering that they were both interested in how mediumistic experiences unfolded in respondents' lives. However, responses for how mediums first discovered their mediumship could only be placed in one of the five categories, as the *first* experience or situation in which their ability was realised was categorised. For the development of mediumship, several variables may have contributed, so there could be more than one category responsible for mediums *developing* their ability.

Nearly half of the respondents (42 cases, 46.2%) reported first discovering they had the ability to be a medium through socialization: individuals attended a spiritualist church and realized they had mediumship ability or were told they were a medium by an already practising medium. For example, respondents stated the following:

*On attending a spiritualist church for the first time, the guest medium described a similar scenario to my own. It was then that I realised I had always been able to communicate with spirit.*

*I realised I could be a medium when I attended classes at a Spiritualist Church.*

*I started to sit in a circle to accompany my husband who had been told many times that he is a healer and should sit for development. After sitting every week for four months my husband and I went to the Arthur Findlay College and during the course I realised that what I was seeing was the spirit world. I had previously thought it was all my imagination. Once I had come to this realisation I began to get more communication, more information from the spirit people. Within 18 months of sitting in circle, we took our first service in a church. By attending more courses at the college my mediumship developed even more.*

Note that in the last extract, the participant cited socialisation (training courses, circles) as contributing to both the discovery and the development of their mediumship. Twenty-nine (31.9%) respondents reported socialization as contributing to the development of their ability. The following quotes represent the essence of the socialization category and what was cited by respondents:

*My ability as a medium increased as becoming involved with Spiritualism and it also helped me to develop a greater awareness and test my own capabilities.*

*I went to see a medium who invited me to sit in her home circle, which I did for approximately six months. In this time I sat in meditation and became aware of myself and spirit energy. I am a very sceptical person so I had to understand how spirit was able to speak to us and how the process worked, so it was a slow process and took a number of years before I became comfortable with my ability as a medium.*

*I was investigated by family and friends and spiritualists to what was happening to me. In the spiritualist church environment it was pointed out that I was a natural medium and advised that I was to join the spiritualist movement to ensure that future development was supervised correctly, also to ensure that I was safe and to maximise my development.*

In summary, it is clear from the frequency results that the majority of mediums reported socialisation as how they first discovered their ability, and a number of mediums also reported socialisation as a contributing factor in the development of their ability. In other words, it seems that it was not until they went to a spiritualist church, joined an open circle or made contact with other mediums that they realised (or were told) they were a medium.

#### **4.3.2 Personal experiences**

*Personal experiences* was added as a coding category to allow us to explore the idea that mediums might report spontaneous or unsolicited anomalous experiences and mention "seeing", "sensing", "hearing" or "communicating" with spirits as how they first discovered they had mediumship ability. Similarly, they may have experienced anomalous phenomena which initiated their interest and experimentation with mediumship (Gauld, 1983) and developed their belief in survival after death. Not surprisingly, a link has been revealed between anomalous experience and belief (Irwin, 1985b; Pekala, Kumar, & Cummings, 1992; Schmeidler, 1985). Moreover, spontaneous experiences, in particular, precognitive dreams, intuitive experiences, and waking hallucinations are commonly reported in case collections (cf. Rhine, 1953; Rhine, 1978; Stokes, 1997). Any direct experience of anomalous phenomena that led to the discovery or development of mediumship would therefore lead to a text passage being classified under this category. Key words or statements would refer to direct experience in the form of "psychic experiences", "out of body experiences", "seeing spirits", "sensing a presence", or "spiritual experiences". For example, mediums might respond with the following: "I could sense and feel and see spirits of deceased patients" or "As a child I played with spirit children".

As a reason for respondents first discovering their mediumship, personal experiences accounted for 30 cases (33%). For example, statements including the following:

*Many years ago when retiring to my bed, and lying there for some time I turned over and at the side of my dear late wife was a child. The light in the bedroom was OFF but the lights from the street gave enough light to see that this was a full materialization. This was before I came into Spiritualism for seeing is believing with one's own eyes. At that time it did shake me up for it was quite unexpected. Also I used to see dark shapes like feet beneath the bedroom door for the light in passage was on.*

*Had intuition as a child – knew certain things would occur – saw spirit physically appear at the age of 18, described the spirit to the recipient with other pieces of information which was accepted.*

*At the early age of four I was aware of spiritual beings. Always been aware of my perception and 'feelings', after schooldays made conscious efforts to develop my gifts.*

As a factor contributing to the development of mediumship ability, 63 respondents (69.2%) specifically made a statement suggesting personal experiences were responsible:

*At the age of four and a half (1941 I think), I was 'playing shops' on my own. I heard a droning noise and looking up in the direction from which it came was blinded by an intense brightness which caused me to fall to the ground. It seemed to be some kind of craft. This of course was long before there was any mention in society of spaceships, UFOs etc. I sometimes wonder although have no way of knowing if there is some kind of link between this experience and the ongoing unfoldment of my mediumship.*

*During wartime my mother and aunts would try the tumbler and letters technique for communication. I got invited to put my finger on the glass, it shot off the table and anyway I knew the answer to the question before the glass could answer.*

*Apart from being a 'religious' child and enjoying going to church I cannot recall any experiences or events as a child. From the late 1980s, just before joining a circle, we became aware of things happening in our home. Seeing someone approaching the door when there was apparently no-one there, things moving and flying through the air, things going missing and returning after many months and being in a place where they would have been easily seen – like the front seat of our car!*

These findings suggest that personal experiences play a large part in the discovery of mediumship ability and ongoing development. To some extent, the phrase "Seeing is believing" in one of the above quotes succinctly summarises the link between anomalous experiences and belief in mediumship.

#### **4.3.3 Family members were mediums or encouraged mediumship**

*Family influences* were devised as a category to include parental encouragement of imagination. Hearne (1989) found that 64% from his sample of 50 psychics and mediums reported other family members to have experienced psychic/mediumistic abilities, and this could potentially influence an individual's development of mediumship by providing a supportive context for their own experiences. Furthermore, on reading a sample of responses it was noted that mediums were reporting mediumship or psychic ability within their immediate family and had family members that were sympathetic to or nurturing of paranormal experiences. Coding rules that helped to decide whether a text passage should be placed in this category were if the mediums reported that they had family members who were involved in mediumistic or psychic activities, or there was parental or familial encouragement of mediumship that could have contributed to the discovery or development of mediumship ability. Respondents were coded as describing family members who had had psychic experiences if they used terms such as "premonitions" "clairvoyant", "clairaudient", "clairsentient", "seer", "trance", "telepathic", "fortune-teller" or "healer". For example, mediums could respond with a statement such as: "My grandmother could read tea cups and her grandmother was a Romany gypsy, so she encouraged me to pay attention to what I was feeling", or "My mother admitted to me that I come from a long line of naturally gifted mediums from my maternal grandmother's

line". These text passages contain the idea that mediums could have discovered or developed their mediumship ability through having mediumship within the family or through someone in the family encouraging them to develop their ability.

Only four (4.4%) respondents specifically answered question 5 about how they first discovered they had the ability to be a medium with the reason being because of family influences:

*I came from a mediumistic family*

*Mediumship runs in the family from my father's side.*

*Brought up from an early age to understand spiritualism and mediumship. Sat in a family circle.*

*My family believed in the spirit living on, so I was brought up with this knowledge.*

Forty-three respondents (47.3%) mentioned family influences contributed to the development of their mediumship ability as reflected in the quotes below. Notice that respondents also mention other reasons that contributed to development, such as personal experiences.

*I have always been aware of spirit, so in fact not being able to see and hear spirits would be abnormal for me. My parents have mediums in their families, so I was free to be psychic and mediumistic, this certainly helped my development [family experiences]. Poltergeist activity from age 7 to 18 contributed to my awareness [personal experiences]. You can't really not notice it!*

*It was my Grandmother who began to make me aware of the 'extraordinary' experiences as she was sensitive and she would discuss with me her experiences and visitations from those unseen people. She sometimes called them 'Misty people' and*

*this was a tremendous help to me. Through talking with my grandmother it appears that the gift of sight may be inherited, as my great grandmother also had similar experiences.*

*I used to see spirit people sitting on my bed. I always knew something was going to happen before it did. Mother, Grandmother and Aunt all saw spirit. As a child my mother understood that I was seeing spirit. She never told me off for saying I saw spirit and always encouraged me.*

Reviewing these findings, it is apparent that not many mediums considered family influences as being responsible for how they first discovered their ability. However, there are a considerable amount of mediums who report family influences as contributing to the development of their ability. This implies that, perhaps, once mediums discovered their ability through involvement with spiritualism or through personal anomalous experiences, family members helped them to develop their ability further. As the quotes suggest, family members encouraged respondents to be aware of mediumship abilities and normalised experiences, rather than thwarting development or interpreting as abnormal.

#### **4.3.4 Traumatic experiences**

On reading a sample of responses it was noted that there were some respondents who reported traumatic experiences as instigating or triggering mediumship. However, findings from research with spiritist mediums in Cuba (Laria, 2000) and Brazil (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2007) did not identify a relationship between traumatic experiences and mediumship (see Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). In an attempt to resolve this issue *Trauma* was formulated as a category in which mediums could, or conversely not, associate traumatic experiences with the discovery and/or development of their ability. It was decided that if the text passage in a case (individual mediums' responses) contained the word or theme of "trauma", "illness", "crisis", "isolation", "alienation", "abuse" or "bereavement", it was assigned to the trauma category. For example, if a medium's response included a sentence such as: "My mediumship ability was brought about by illness" or "I had

premonitions when going through an emotional crisis", it would be placed in the trauma category

Out of the 91 respondents only four (4.4%) said that a traumatic experience was primarily responsible for them first discovering they had the ability to be a medium. Respondents made the following statements:

*I had premonitions when going through an emotional crisis and I reached the conclusion that I was getting information from another worldly source.*

*This was brought about through illness or probably a disability. What I experienced alone encouraged me to investigate the possibility of becoming a medium.*

*After losing three close members of family in a very short while (within six months of each other) I began to have experiences that I didn't understand. Seeing and sensing people.*

*I was seriously ill and given only months to live when I saw a spirit build up in my lounge, a man, who looked totally real. He told me to find a healer or I would not hear the New Year bells.*

For experiences, events or influences that mediums believed contributed to the development of their mediumship ability, although 10 respondents (11%) said that a traumatic experience contributed to the development of mediumship, they also mentioned one or more other factors that could be placed in other categories. For example, respondents stated the following:

*I was born into a traumatic household where there was quite a lot of abuse. Quite a dysfunctional household [trauma]. My maternal grandfather was a very strict domineering Catholic. My paternal grandmother was a medium [family experiences]. Because of the amount of people in the home it was easy to be overlooked. My*

*granddad referred to me as peculiar and that there was a 'wanton' in me that should be beaten out of me which mum obliged. I think the trauma of this contributed to my abilities.*

Note that part of the statement above (my paternal grandmother was a medium) would be coded under the family influences category. For this respondent there would be two variables that could have contributed to them developing their mediumship ability.

*I grew up realising that I had some psychic ability [personal experiences] but did not consider it mediumship and took little notice of it. When I was in my late 40s my husband became disabled with a very bad back condition and also about that time some dear friends lost their 6 month old baby son with cot death. These events seem to 'kick' my abilities off [trauma]\_and at their request I went to our local spiritual church and found a medium to give me a reading [socialization]. From that day I have developed my 'gift'.*

Similarly, for this respondent there also seems to be more than one factor in developing mediumship; they had a realization in childhood of psychic ability, traumatic experiences that seemed trigger mediumship ability, and they also went to a spiritualist church and developed their ability.

In summary, not many respondents stated they had traumatic experiences that instigated the discovery or development of their ability. This confirms previous research by Laria (1998) and Moreira-Almeida, Neto, and Greyson (2007) who similarly did not find a relationship between trauma and mediumship experiences. However, this does not necessarily conclude that trauma was absent in the lives of mediums as, although the survey was anonymous, respondents might not have been willing to share such personal information. Additionally, mediums may experience trauma but not link this with the discovery or development of their mediumship ability and therefore not feel it necessary to report.

#### **4.3.5 Born with a natural ability or awareness**

*Born with a natural ability or awareness* was included as a category in "discovery of mediumship" (but not development) to allow for the prediction that mediums may consider themselves to have been "born with the gift" (e.g. Holland, 2003). This category includes participants whose responses give an impression that their mediumship ability was "inherent"; they had a "natural awareness of spirit" and an "inner knowing" or felt they had always been mediumistic. For example, participants stated:

*I was born with a natural awareness of worlds within worlds.*

*I don't know how I discovered it, it was just always there.*

Only nine respondents (9.9%) reported that they first discovered they had mediumship ability because they believed they were born with the ability. The finding that not many mediums considered themselves to have been born a medium or to have discovered their ability through having some sort of natural awareness is interesting given the large majority of respondents who reported family influences as contributing to the development of mediumship. This suggests that mediums consider family members who are also mediums to have more of a social learning influence on the development of their ability rather than ability being linked with genetic disposition.

#### **4.4 Preparation to receive spirit communication**

Table 4.3 outlined the coding protocol for question 7: "Are there any procedures, rituals or mental actions you follow in order to receive spirit communications?" Personal observations of mediumship training and demonstrations identified that mediums take active steps to adopt a state of mind that is conducive to mediumistic communications, for example, in spending a period of time meditating or, in their words, "attuning" or "altering consciousness" to a level conducive to receive spirit communication. Preparatory methods have also been noted in ESP experiments (White, 1964). White describes a "somewhat ritualistic technique" involving stages such as relaxation, engaging the conscious mind and

making a conscious demand for the correct response to targets. Altered states of consciousness have also been associated with psi-conducive states (e.g., Braud, 1975; Roe, Jones, & Maddern, 2007b). Similarly, Sidgwick (1915) described the process of entering a trance state as one where the medium Mrs Piper *voluntarily* seemed to lose consciousness for her surroundings.

#### **4.4.1 In control of preparation or just happens?**

The category of *In Control* was developed to explore the idea that mediums will report specific practices (such as "meditation", "attunement", "altering consciousness", "blending", or "expanding energy") that imply they are in control of preparation for spirit communication, and that the process of mediumship is dependent on their own personal efforts. This would include having strategies that they accept as being internal to them or that they accept responsibility for. If preparatory rituals include such processes as altering consciousness, meditation or entering trance voluntarily, it could be argued that mediums consciously make the decision to communicate with spirit and are in control of the process. In order for a text passage to be coded as this category it had to give the impression that the medium felt spirit communication was something to do with them and they took an active role in initiating communication.

The category *Just happens to them or externalizes control* was included to account for mediums' responses that suggested they did not feel in control of preparation for spirit communication; instead they were a passive participant and they asked spirits to work with them or were "controlled" by guides. In Section 2.2.3, it was contended that belief in the existence of spirits and spirit controls, could protect mediums' egos by displacing responsibility for behaviour (Braude, 1988), which would be classed as an external locus of control. Similarly, volition is a significant theme in automatism, such as automatic writing, where mediums do not believe material is derived from their own consciousness, rather it is something that seems to "happen to" them (Crabtree, 2007).

Table 4.9. Do mediums report being in control of preparation to receive spirit communication? (frequencies and percentages)

Category variable	Frequency	Percentage
In Control	44	48.4
Just happens/ externalizes control	11	12
Stated both	26	28.6
No comment or no preparation	10	11
Total N	91	100

A large majority of respondents (N=70, 76.9%) gave answers that suggested they had procedures or practices to prepare for spirit communication that they were in control of. However, 26 of those respondents also made statements that suggested that volition to communicate was with spirits and that they needed their permission or help to prepare for communication, suggesting it was a mutual decision or responsibility. The real number of respondents therefore that fell solely in the *In Control* category was 44 (48.4%). In the following examples of statements, especially the parts underlined, we can see evidence that the mediums feel in control of the process, and the preparations they conduct in order to receive spirit communication are something they feel they have to do. These are examples from respondents who fell solely in this category:

*Through meditation and learning to still the mind helps me to link with the Spirit world. After all, if we are continually surrounded by noise and distractions we will be unable to calm the mind. It's about being comfortable with yourself and having trust in your ability to 'link' with the Spirit world. Having 'quite time' and arranging for this to take place is very important as it helps us to relax and make a connection to our own inner world or sanctum. As a Spiritualist medium preparation before a service are essential and an important act of respect. Bathing and careful preparation such as wearing appropriate dress is another way of connecting with myself. I meditate and settle my own thoughts. It is about learning to raise your conscious thoughts to a higher*

vibrational level and leaving the physical plane to one side. It's about learning the art of attunement...

*In order to communicate with spirit I heighten my sensitivity and awareness, expand my aura and attune to the spirit. It is a purely mental process and takes just a few moments of my time.*

*I consciously 'turn on' my mediumship by visualising an open door in my mind. I take two or three deep breaths during which I feel a lifting of the top of my head (that sounds silly!) and then I feel an energy step into my right hand side and I'm ready to go.*

In contrast, 37 respondents (40.6%) reported volition to be with the spirits, rather than themselves, or externalized control of the preparatory process to receive spirit communication. However, the number of respondents that were solely placed in this category; those who did not mention being in control at all, was 11 (12%). For example respondents stated:

*I try to put to one side any problems that I have on a personal level. I then ask that I be the best instrument possible in the work that I do for the Great Spirit.*

*Trust in the Spirit world. Knowing that whilst you work for them they will not let you down.*

*I always prepare by saying a short prayer offering myself as a channel and promising to hand back all I have been privileged to receive. A shiver is confirmation for me that I will be used.*

The following quotes are from respondents who report both categories<sup>15</sup>; they have procedures or practices to prepare for spirit communication that they are in control of but also seem to externalise control by asking for help or being used by others.

*I send my prayer/thoughts out asking for help and guidance so that I may attune to those who may need to contact me to relay a message (or evidence of their survival) for them from the spirit world.*

*I calm myself by relaxing physically, mentally and emotionally - seeking to put aside earthly personal matters. I alter my consciousness by a brief prayer asking that I be used to help others by being a channel for what they need, rather than what they want.*

*As both my husband and I are spiritualists, spirit is very much part of our everyday lives. We 'sit with spirit' as much as we can depending on what is going on in our everyday lives but 'link mentally daily in various situations. Before working spiritually I personally 'sit in the quiet' - and this can be in the car going to a venue asking spirit to use me as an instrument to connect the two worlds and give comfort and proof of an 'afterlife' to the people we will meet that evening - or day, whatever, then go into 'working mode' and do my best!*

By evaluating coding responses to the question regards preparation to receive spirit communication as either "in control" or "just happens", it was established from frequency results that this appears to involve a process whereby mediums internalise control. In essence, volition to receive spirit communication seems to lie with the medium. Rather than simply waiting for spirits to communicate or believing they have no control over when or where communication takes place, mediums believe they have to do something; they are responsible for initiating the process.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the broken underline represents the category 'In control' whereas the unbroken line represents the category 'Just happens/externalises control'

#### 4.5 Can mediums "Switch on" and "Switch off" their ability at will?

An additional category under the section interested in the process of mediumship was whether mediums stated they could "switch" their ability "on" or "off". This specific question was asked on the mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ) to establish whether mediumship is a voluntary process or whether mediums felt they had no control when or where spirits communicated. As we can see in Table 4.10, over half of respondents (N=53, 58.2%) reported being able to "switch on/off" their ability at will, and only 4 (4.4%) respondents explicitly stated they could not.

Table 4.10. Can mediums "Switch on/off" their ability at will (frequencies and percentages)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Can "switch on/off"	53	58.2
Can't "switch on/off"	4	4.4
Can "switch off" sometimes	4	4.4
No comment	30	33
Total N	91	100

#### 4.6 Process and nature of spirit communication: Internal mental imagery or external manifestation?

*Internal mental imagery* was developed as a category for question 12: "What happens during the course of a reading? What is your understanding of the mediumship process? For example, how do you think a spirit communicates? In this respect, internal applies to *internal mental imagery or impressions*, which were identified nearly a century ago as "ideas and mental pictures" involved in the process of "thought-transference" or telepathy (Sidgwick, Gurney, F. W. H. Myers, & Podmore, 1918). Honorton, Tierney, and Torres (1974) have found that individuals who had a "strong" mental imagery capacity produced significant psi-hitting. This is consistent with phenomenological accounts from individuals attempting to receive an ESP target who have stressed the importance of the development and utilization of novel mental images (White, 1964). A key aspect in whether a text

passage was coded under this category was whether mediumship phenomena are realised within the participant; for example, hearing voices that have the participants' own voice but that they did not "own", or is perceived as having an independent existence. In Table 4.4 this category was defined as a process whereby mediums experienced imagery internal to themselves, or within their mind, which could be in the form of "mental pictures", "visualisations", "ideas", "symbols", "voices", or "thoughts"; which could also be considered a "telepathic" process.

The alternate category of *external manifestation* is defined as experiencing the spirit communication process as something outside the medium. A key aspect of this category is that the participant reports experiencing spirit as distinct from (or outside of) themselves.

Table 4.11. *How mediums experience spirit communication (frequencies and percentages)*

Category	Frequency (no. actually report external manifestation)	Percentage
Internal mental imagery	78	85.7
External manifestation	2 (12)	2.2 (13.2)
No comment	11	12.1
<i>Total N</i>	91	100

The large majority of respondents did report spirit communication to be a process solely involving internal mental imagery (N=78, 85.7%). These respondents made statements such as:

*Spirit communication works through the subconscious mind of the medium.*

*Spirit people communicate through thought transference, but in their own voice, through feelings and conditions and pictures shown in my mind.*

*My mind is the first port of call for those wishing to communicate with a loved one. Some would call it telepathy or mind to mind communication. The differing levels of energy generates feelings, emotions or memories and the words that are used to transmit the messages is contained within my consciousness. We have no control over the amount of words contained within our minds. The memories and experiences that are stored within my own database can be harnessed in order to help the communicator*

Although 12 respondents (13.2%) reported experiencing spirits as an external manifestation; as having an independent existence, as being "real-like" or in "body form", only two of these (2.2%) reported experiencing spirits only as an external manifestation.

These two respondents stated the following:

*I first sense, feel, or see their loved ones in spirit body so they know where the information is coming from, unlike tarot card readers and psychics.*

*I am fortunate in that I am able to see spirit in an objective way: as such I can describe them in full detail, which at times is too much for the person having a sitting, so I have to cut back a little on some of the detail I provide of a person's likeness. The spirit communicator as they are called will initiate the communication process, and I generally allow them to talk and take regular stops to enable the person having the reading to confirm their understanding or not. The spirit communicator will be aware of how the medium they are conversing with works, if a person has more visual acuity then they will be shown more, those who are verbally responsive will most likely be strongly clairaudient.*

The other 10 respondents made statements that suggested the process of spirit communication involved both internal mental imagery (broken underline) and being able to experience the spirit as having an independent existence (solid underline). For example, respondents stated the following:

*I become aware of a spirit person standing beside me, very closely. I am aware of their build, their height, their clothing, hair colouring etc. I then become aware of their personality. This, I sense and almost feel I am that person. They often show me around their earthly home and it's as though I see their home through their eyes. They give me pictures of personal objects, photos etc. They also give me words, names, dates etc. All this communication is a mental process. It is mind to mind communication. No words are spoken. The spirit person and I need to be attuned to each other for this communication. The better the attunement, the better the mediumship and the evidence given.*

*Spirit can communicate in various ways. Touch, smell, ~~thought~~, and apparition. Communications is a three-way process from spirit, through spirit, to spirit.*

*'Conditions' always matter when some kind of communication is to take place. Communication is mind to mind although it seems like one is speaking and answering questions. Depending upon the energy available and knowledge of course that the spirit has acquired, they can and do show themselves but it is not a regular event. I am fortunate to have seen two helpers in the clothing they had previously described to me. It was beautiful. One receives pictures of animals (pets) also with people. A dog barked once when a friend came the other day. No dog was anywhere, neither in or outside, we both looked all around inside and outside.*

In summary, mediums reported their communication with spirit to be internally driven rather than in the form of a spirit that could be identified as having an independent existence. As seen from the quotes above, respondents tended to describe the process by which they received information as telepathic or involving the mind of the medium. This emphasises the difficulties faced by researchers who have attempted to prove mediumship rather than understand the process. As discussed in Chapter one, information mediums claim to receive could as easily be emanating from the minds of the living or their own subconscious. However, there were respondents who reported experiencing spirits as externally manifested: they saw spirit as "real like" or in "spirit body".

## **4.7 Nature of spirit guides**

For question 11 of the mediumship activity questionnaire: "Do you have a spirit control or guide(s)? If you do, please describe their role in your mediumship? For example, how you discovered them, what is their purpose, how and when they communicate, what are they called?", it was predicted that the majority of participants would have a "spirit guide" or "helper", therefore the categories "Has spirit guide" and "Does not have spirit guide" were developed (see Table 4.6). Out of the 91 respondents, 79 (79%) stated that they did have a spirit guide. In addition to establishing the percentage of participants who had a spirit guide, the researcher also immersed themselves in the material to explore the range of actual guides reported. Of particular interest was whether there were any differences in the types of guides reported and whether the role of the guides seemed to provide a specific function or role for the medium.

### **4.7.1 Types of guides: Similarities and differences to DID alters**

In discussing the interface between dissociative identity disorder (DID) and mediumship in Section 2.2.3, the conclusion was reached that it would be relevant to see whether mediums' spirit guides matched the types of alters found in people with a diagnosis of DID. In an analysis of 236 cases of DID, Ross, Norton and Wozney (1989) found that these individuals had experienced extensive sexual abuse (79%) and physical abuse (74%) as children. The most prevalent alters were found to be a child personality (86%), protector personality (84%), and a persecutor personality (84%), which Ross et al. believe would have developed as defence reactions to an abusive history. Similarly, in an NIMH survey of 100 MPD cases, Putman, Guroff, Silberman, Barban, and Post (1986) found 75% of cases reported at least one personality under the age of 12 years of age. Other prevalent alters included the opposite sex, demon, another living person, different race, and a dead relative.

Table 4.12. *The range of different spirit guides that were reported*

Type of spirit guide	Frequency
Native American Indian	14
Chinese	14
Relatives	8
Nuns	6
Doctors	4
Monks	4
Western	4
Egyptian	3
French	3
Indian	2
Children	2
Gypsy	2
Asian	1
Zulu	1
Arabian	1
Eskimo	1
German	1
Tibetan	1
Miner	1
God	1
Angel	1
Japanese	1
Spanish	1
Rabbi	1
Geisha	1
Belgian	1

As not all participants gave detailed responses to the question, it was not possible to compute the most prevalent personalities for spirit guides. However, Table 4.14 identifies the range of guides reported by those who did respond and it is possible to observe similar and dissimilar patterns between alters and spirit guides. We can see that no mediums reported spirit guides of another living person or guides that had a negative connotation, such as the "demon" and "persecutor" alters of the individuals with DID. This is what one might expect given that the reason of a spirit guide is "to guide" rather than "to

persecute". Two cases reported having children as guides although, similarly, this was not as common as individuals with DID. However, it is worth noting that one of these cases also reported traumatic experiences in the form of hearing voices after the death of her father. Given this, it could be theorised that the type of spirit guide a medium has depends on their life experiences or reactions to them, which will be explored in the interview study.

#### **4.7.2 Types of guides: Mythopoeic cultural representations**

In Section 2.2.4 it was revealed that some researchers suspect that DID alters are suggested to patients by their therapists (Spanos, 1994) through use of hypnotic procedures or an iatrogenic process (symptoms or illness are brought on unintentionally by something a doctor does or says). A similar theme that emerged in the responses of participants was that spirit guides seemed to have been created through a mythopoeic process. In other words they appear to have been created from myths, cultural stereotypes, or memories. For example, some respondents seem to have guides who are culturally represented as being more spiritually advanced, as having healing abilities or as being gifted clairvoyantly. This was particularly evident in participants who reported having Native American Indians or Chinese guides. Although most participants did not elaborate on the role of guides beyond type, out of the 14 participants who reported having Native American Indians as guides, one stated that their purpose was to protect, three stated to help with healing, and two stated to teach. Similarly, out of the 14 participants who reported having Chinese guides, three stated their purpose was to protect, two stated to give philosophical teachings, and two stated to help with healing. This suggests that particular qualities, such as the ability to heal, teach or protect are attributed to guides through a process of stereotypical construction. The following quotes from respondents highlight how the cultural stereotypes seem to have been incorporated into the qualities of the guides:

*Yes, Sister of Mercy - told of her presence - given picture of her - learnt to feel her calming presence. Believe with her energy she helps to adjust my every day vibrations, to being prepared to work with the spirit. With communications I am also aware of a*

*young girl and gypsy couple. I've often thought some people will talk to a child more easily than to an adult, possibly hence her presence and the love of the children. The gypsies have an inherent ability of perception. See them clairvoyantly – not always, before/when I prepare to give communication. An oriental personality is often around when preparing to give a talk/inspiration. Also have a drawing of him and many times other mediums have 'seen' him. I'm aware of several Native Americans at varying times for healing etc., all cultures having their own shamans going back in history, medicine men/women who knew far more than we do today in how to transform energy.*

*I have several guides. I discovered them whilst sitting in a development circle. There is a nun whose name is Sister Clara. She helps me with prayers and any spiritual matters that other people consult me about. Then I have 'Apple Blossom', the Japanese girl who works with me for clairvoyance. The Chinese gentleman (Wan Lou) who is my guardian or doorkeeper, who protects me and inspires me when I am training others.*

It will be interesting to find out from the interview study what relevance these findings have for mediums and to enquire in more depth about the nature and purpose of guides. For example, why are Native American and Chinese guides reported more frequently? Do mediums believe it is because they are more likely to become a spirit guide or does it have something to do with stereotypical views about "exotic wisdom" and which nationalities are considered wise?

Another interesting finding was that one participant related her spirit guide's name synchronistically to a memory from childhood. Although she did not seem aware of it, her guide appeared to have been constructed from past events, as she states:

*There is a sister of Mercy whom I call Anna. This name was given by a medium during a transfiguration session, when Anna showed herself. She is a French lady and passed relatively young. (When I was at Grammar School during French lessons, we were given a French name. The name I was given was Anna. It was several years after being*

*given this guide that I realised her name was the same as my 'French' name. I felt this was significant and that she had probably been around me for many years).*

Another participant explicitly stated they had *created* their spirit guide's name:

*They tell me I can call them whatever I like – to create a name for them. A Red Indian teacher that I'm very fond of has been named 'Mr Gucci' inspired by Mel Brookes' film 'Blazing Saddles'.*

Some participants stated that they felt their guides were part of their higher self or personality:

*I feel that guides for the most part are a part of your own soul. I used to feel I had a guide for this, a guide for that, now I am aware of a force or power helping me and I don't need to make them physical. I feel they may be aspects of my own soul group. My own soul can and does give me everything that is required. We are our own guides and the higher self can and does share itself and acts as a go between to allow spirit communication to take place.*

*There are many influences, some of which are aspects of higher self. All discovered in the meditative state and confirmed by research and other mediums. Their role is to teach and inspire.*

*When I first started working I was aware of three influences. In time I realised that all three had characteristics in common. I came to the conclusion that those who work with me are part of my eternal personality.*

The responses above seem to infer that spirit guides are not actual separate entities as distinct from the mediums' personality but are characters that have been conceived through a creative or imaginative process. The view that spirit guides could be the creation of the subconscious mind, was one that was shared by Sidgwick (1915), who, in

observation of Mrs Piper's mediumship, concluded that the "controls" were probably the result of a self-induced hypnosis in which her hypnotic self personates a number of different characters. This also resembles the theory proposed by Merckelbach, Devilly and Rassin (2002), in reference to alters in DID, whereby alters represent metaphors for emotional states and are not considered to be separate entities.

#### **4.7.3 The gatekeeper and the Inner Self Helper**

Controversially, it was noted in Section 2.2.3 that some researchers believe psi manifestations can occur in DID (Van de Castle, 1993) and have introduced the concept of an "Inner Self Helper" (ISH); a supposedly higher part of the personality that utilizes paranormal abilities and often acts as an alter co-therapist to help the patient with life enhancement (Allison, 1980). ISHs are described as being separate, more powerful and different from alter personalities, and often refer to themselves in mystical terms. It has been proposed that there can be more than one ISH, but only one is the core or central self helper (Van de Castle, 1993). A similar theme was apparent in the responses of participants in that not only was a main guide often reported, referred to as a "Doorkeeper" or "Gatekeeper", but also a team of helpers. It could be speculated that a medium's main guide serves a similar role to the concept of an ISH, given that they often have a higher spiritual status than communicator spirits, and their main function seems to be to protect or help the medium.

For example, participants' responses included the following:

*Everyone has more than one guide; one of the most important is the guardian or gatekeeper. Their role is to keep 'undesirable' spirit communications away. I have communicated with my gatekeeper and he understands which spirits to let communicate with me and which ones to keep away.*

*My main friend is what I would call my gatekeeper or controller. He protects me at all times. I have one who helps me with my speaking on the philosophy of spiritualism*

*while I am on the rostrum. I also have a friend who helps with healing but there are many others who come and help us at times during our lives.*

*Everyone whether they know it or not has a spirit guide or helper. They often protect and see much further than we can possibly see. Some of them never say who they are.*

*I have several friends in spirit who have made themselves known to me over the years. One is my 'doorkeeper' – he will not allow unpleasant entities near me. The others come for particular reasons, which depend on what is required. I am not at liberty to tell you their names.*

As can be seen in the last quote, in addition to a main helper, participants also described having different helpers with different skills and qualities that can assist with different problems. Another theme that transpired was that this main guide was believed to be a constant in the medium's life whereas the other spirit helpers seemed to come and go or change depending on what the medium is doing. For example, participants stated:

*One main guide and teacher called White Wing an American Indian. He brings other spirits as helpers when necessary, that is when my development takes another phase of mediumship. Helpers have come and stayed for years, and then they tell me that their work with me is done. Sometimes they come back again when a further step in my progress in mediumship is due.*

*Each medium has many controls or helpers, but only one main guide who has been with us for life. We have known that guide since before coming to the earth and with their help decided on our chosen life's path. Grey Owl is my guide. I believe he has pointed me in the right direction many times, not forcefully but simply by influencing me directly and indirectly. Although the spirit people cannot live our lives for us and may not interfere with our free will, they can offer us their help and advice should we ask for it when we choose to work with them we open up our hearts, minds and spirits to their beneficent influence.*

*My main one is the one I have known since I was very young, I have complete faith in him and as long as I feel him there I will do whatever is asked of me. Over the years, others have helped me, in my addresses, in my public demonstrations, private readings and also in my healing work. I only know the name of my main guide, but as I don't tell anyone that, I am not prepared to say. I feel that the others change according to my development, and also the needs of the people I am working for.*

*Although I believe we have one who is with us from before we came into this life and will be with us when we leave it, others are with us dependent on what work we are undertaking.*

It is likely that the medium's main guide is seen as a higher transcendent being, as is suggested in one of above quotes: "They often protect and see much further than we can possibly see". Similarly, in reference to MPD patients and ISHs, Braude (1988, p. 193) has proposed that "the patient might feel as if his guidance and cure is directed by something transcendent, something inevitably more powerful or wise than the patient feels himself (or his therapist) to be". At this juncture, the following questions seem important to enquire about when asking mediums about their spirit guides: How is this main guide selected by the medium or become attached to the medium and what do mediums consider the role of this main spirit guide to be? Do they also feel their guides to be more powerful and wise? In Study three the phenomenological experience of mediums is explored in more detail and sheds light on these questions from the perspective of the medium.

#### **4.8 Purpose of mediumship**

Coding categories for what mediums consider to be the most important aspects regarding the purpose of mediumship, and what information is actually communicated, were developed through an inductive process. These categories were not based on prior theory; instead the researcher immersed themselves in the responses to question 14: "In your view, what is the purpose(s) of a mediumship reading?" of the mediumship activity

questionnaire (MAQ), to establish what mediums considered important, and to let categories emerge from the data that epitomized the purpose of mediumship. Six categories were developed from this process based on manifest content (keywords) and are described in Table 4.5. One may note a lack of quotations from respondents in this section as they tended to give very short answers to the question generally listing words to describe what they thought the purpose of mediumship was.

*Table 4.13. What mediums report to be the purpose of mediumship (frequencies and percentages) (N=91)*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
To prove survival	77	84.6
To give comfort	56	61.5
To give guidance	22	24.2
To spiritualize	10	11
To communicate	6	6.6
To heal	4	4.4

Note. Participants can be allocated to more than one category so % > 100

Given that one of the seven principles of Spiritualism is "Continuous existence of the human soul", it is not surprising that *proof of survival* was identified by 77 (84.6%) respondents as a purpose of mediumship and was therefore developed as a category. For example, respondents stated:

*I consider that a mediumship reading can prove invaluable in many circumstances. Many people are not aware that the purpose of a reading is to receive proof of personal survival through a spiritual message. It is not fortune-telling – which is primarily psychic messages – asking and answering questions relating to the future. They are very popular and often build up hopes and aspirations which cannot be achieved.*

*To prove that life is eternal and the spirit body survives death.*

*To prove that we do live here on after death. That physical death is not the end of life.*

*To let the people who come to the church or for a sitting know that their loved ones are still with them and that life continues after physical death.*

Out of the 91 respondents, 56 (61.5%) stated the purpose of mediumship was to give comfort. *Comfort* was therefore identified as a category to code any response that stated the word or theme of giving comfort, "support" or "reassurance" in times of difficulty, stress, bereavement or loss.

*A good reading provides evidence to prove life after physical death. Comforts those who mourn and gives hope of the continuous existence of the human soul. The recipient can 'move on' in the certain knowledge that their loved ones live on and it is only a matter of time before they will all be together again.*

*To give comfort that our loved ones are well and continue to enjoy their new life and still take an interest in ours. The very knowledge or the evidence of it brings us comfort and something to look forward to and should change our attitudes and views on life.*

*You can comfort the bereaved. You cannot tell them what to do; they have their own common sense for that. I am not a fortune teller. By comforting them they "know" they are not on their own and it reassures them and they then make the best decisions for themselves. You are also making them aware of what happened at their transition and that the physical or mental trauma does not continue.*

*Guidance* was identified as a category to code the 22 (24.2%) respondents that included the word *guidance*, or mentioned that the purpose of mediumship was to "solve problems" or "to give advice". For example, one participant stated:

*Advice can be given to overcome difficulties in our everyday lives.*

*To provide fuel and guidance for the soul at every stage of the eternal journey.*

*To give evidence of survival, fresh hope and comfort, and guidance in spiritual and material matters.*

Six (6.6%) respondents stated that the purpose of mediumship was to *Communicate* with loved ones or "have a chat" and four (4.4%) respondents stated that the purpose was to give *Healing*.

*The purpose of a mediumship reading is to bring together souls so that communication can take place. From this messages of love can be given, which can help the bereaved in a way that no other way can.*

*Spiritualize* was developed as a category to code the ten (11%) responses that considered mediumship should encourage a more spiritual outlook. For example, respondents stated:

*On a more Spiritual level once this realisation of continuous life is recognised we should try to live a better, more considerate life here on the earth plane. It should give us an understanding that makes us strive for a better world to live in, as well as an understanding of what is to come.*

*To give meaning to life and death, to comfort the bereaved, and to impart the teachings and philosophy of Spiritualism. You may perhaps be aware of our Seven Principles which were imparted by Robert Owen through the mediumship of Emma Hardinge Britten, for me they are the foundation of my mediumship though of course it would function without them. Mediumship of itself is not dependent on any philosophy or religious belief. Spiritualism is simply the pathway that I have chosen to follow.*

In summary, mediums reported the main purpose of mediumship to be "to prove survival", followed by "to comfort" and "to give guidance". This implies that mediumship is intended to provide a therapeutic or bereavement counselling role to those who go to see a medium. The less important aspects of the purpose of mediumship are reported as "to spiritualise" and "to communicate". In the following section information that is

communicated during a mediumship reading (that helps to fulfil the purpose of mediumship) is discussed.

#### **4.9 Information communicated during mediumship**

Given responses to question 13: "Can you tell me what kind of information is typically communicated during a mediumship reading?" were so numerous and similar and tended to be in word list format, the decision was made to report the variety of information in a table (see Table 4.13). An interesting theme that frequently arose from responses to this question was the acronym "CERT", which was coined by the Welsh medium Stephen O'Brien (O'Brien, 1989), meaning mediums should describe the "Contact" they are communicating with, give "Evidence" that it is them (which could be anything in Table 4.13), give the "Reason" they are communicating, and then "Tie-up" the communication. Participants either explicitly stated CERT as the type of information produced during a sitting or for the purpose of mediumship or their responses covered some or all aspects of the theme. As can be observed in the table, most of the information that is communicated during mediumship seems to be focused on describing the communicator and factual information, presumably in an effort to prove the medium is actually in communication with them. It is also apparent that if one accepts the information to have veridical value, then it could be argued by psi proponents that much of the information claimed to be communicated during mediumship could be obtained through a telepathic process.

Table 4.14. List and frequencies of different types of information communicated during mediumship

Information communicated	Frequency (N=91)	Percentage
Description of the communicator	35	38.5
Shared memories	34	37.4
Names	32	35.2
Past and present events	30	33
Way the communicator passed away	29	31.9
Personality of the communicator	26	28.6
Relationships	25	27.5
Illnesses	18	19.8
CERT	18	19.8
Advice for the living	15	16.5
Dates and anniversaries	14	15.4
A message	10	11
Role the communicator played on earth i.e. job	9	9.9
Addresses	7	7.7
Information only known by the sitter	7	7.7
Comforting words	6	6.6
Interests and hobbies while on earth plane	6	6.6
Apologies	4	4.4
Hope for the future	2	2.2
Reason for being (material journey)	1	1.1
Dispel fear and superstition	1	1.1

Note. Participants can be allocated to more than one category so % > 100

#### 4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented findings from a mediumship activity questionnaire which has increased our knowledge about the process and nature of mediumship. In Section 4.3 the majority of respondents reported socialisation or anomalous experiences for how they first discovered they were a medium. Similarly, anomalous experiences, family influences, and socialization were reported as contributing factors for how mediums developed their ability. Given that traumatic experiences have been reported in the autobiographies of

well known mediums it is perhaps somewhat surprising to find that this was rarely reported in this sample of mediums. Findings in Sections 4.4 and 4.5 suggested that mediums are in control of their mediumistic experiences as the majority of respondents reported the ability to "switch off" their mediumship and also considered themselves "in control" of the spirit communication process. Section 4.6 discussed the styles of preparation mediums adopt in order to communicate and findings highlighted that internal imagery was most commonly employed by mediums. In Section 4.7, the findings contributed to our understanding of the nature of spirit guides. By retaining a qualitative aspect to the content analysis approach it was possible to identify themes in the types of spirit guides reported. Discussions focused around the similarities and differences between alters in DID individuals and the spirit guides of mediums. The purpose of mediumship and the variety of information that is communicated during mediumship was elaborated on in Sections 4.8 and 4.9.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

To conclude, the content analysis reported in this chapter had the advantage of taking a national sample of mediums' views and quantifying them to make broad generalisations regarding their experiences of mediumship. The finding that socialisation was an important factor for how mediums discovered and developed their ability suggests that future research may find it fruitful to explore mediumship training courses and development groups at spiritualist churches in more detail. Similarly, given the finding that influential others may suggest to individuals that they have spirit guides whilst in development groups, it may be interesting for any future quantitative research to use a measure of suggestibility or hypnotisability.

Reporting original quotations from mediums' responses on the MAQ was also considered a major advantage of the content analysis as it allowed the properties of different categories to be illustrated and for experiences of mediums to be represented in their own words, which would not have been possible with a forced choice questionnaire. However, although mediums had a voice in the MAQ, the analysis was embedded in the nomothetic

approach that prioritises consistency and eschews any consideration of more personal or idiosyncratic perspectives (J. A. Smith, 2008), which would hitherto go unexplored. In essence, this primarily quantitative approach to data analysis did not explore what it means to be a medium beyond a relatively superficial level or gain an insight into the unique relationships mediums have with their spirit guides. Accordingly, unanswered questions remained regarding the phenomenology of mediumship and an approach was needed that could gain insight from mediums on their own terms. Thus, it was decided that a qualitative study with mediums would be the most appropriate to explore the process and nature of mediumship, the role of spirit guides, and the lived experience of mediums. The next chapter reports a literature review on the phenomenology of mediumship that was conducted to inform the design of an interview schedule to be used in Study three.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXPLORING THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MEDIUMSHIP

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by recapping on some of the issues arising from content analysis of the open-ended survey questions in Study one, and then considers the literature on the phenomenology of spiritualist mental mediumship, as reported by mediums themselves, to identify topics to explore in-depth in an interview study with mediums. In Chapter four a content analysis approach was used to analyse the open-ended questions of the mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ). A qualitative approach was not planned at this point because the responses obtained were not expected to be rich or descriptively detailed enough to undertake meaningful analysis. Furthermore, the content analysis had the advantage of taking a national sample of mediums' current views and quantifying them to make broad generalisations regarding their experiences of mediumship. Frequencies were established to give an overview of the categories that mediums reported as contributing to the development of their mediumship, the process, nature and purpose of mediumship, and the range of different spirit guides reported. Original quotations from respondents were also reported to allow the experiences of mediums to be represented in their own words and to illustrate the properties of different categories.

In summary, this primarily quantitative approach to data collection and data analysis had its advantages; however, such a method did not allow us to explore what it means to be a medium beyond a relatively superficial level or gain an insight into the unique relationships mediums have with their spirit guides. Although participants had a voice in the MAQ, the analysis was embedded in the nomothetic approach that prioritises consistency and eschews any consideration of more personal or idiosyncratic perspectives (J. A. Smith, 2008), which would hitherto go unexplored. Accordingly, unanswered questions remained regarding the phenomenology of mediumship and an approach was needed that could gain insight from mediums on their own terms. This valuable

information would be useful in our understanding of how an individual comes to classify themselves as a medium, which may also impact on our understanding of identity and reality. It was decided that the semi-structured interview method was the most appropriate for this purpose as it would allow the mediums' agenda to be given priority, thus exploring the mediumship phenomena in more depth and in mediums' own words, which may shed light on the pathways to mediumship and the context within which mediums define themselves as a medium. The content analysis findings and original quotations from the MAQ are important in suggesting potential topics to explore in more detail. However, this needs to be complemented by findings from a review of the literature on the subjective experiences of mediums to inform the foci of the interviews.

### **5.1 Sources of review**

Although there was a considerable amount of research undertaken by members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that aimed to further understanding of mediumship, the majority of this research consisted of unsystematic observations, based on relatively intensive case study investigations of only a few eminent mediums, such as Leonora Piper (e.g., Sidgwick, 1915) and Gladys Osborne Leonard (e.g., Salter, 1930). Furthermore, this early research tended to neglect mental mediumship in favour of physical mediumship (Besterman, 1932) or trance phenomena (e.g., Hodgson, 1892; F. W. H. Myers, Lodge, Leaf, & James, 1889-1890; Piddington, 1903-1904; Podmore, 1898-1899; Thomas, 1928-1929; Thouless, 1937; Troubridge, 1922). Rather fewer investigations were conducted with mental mediums who claim to communicate with deceased spirits whilst in a focused and conscious state (e.g., Balfour, 1935); the type of mediumship phenomena that is the source of interest for this study. Therefore, despite much early interest in mediumship, very little of this research is of particular relevance when the aim is to further understanding of the phenomenology of mental mediumship. Nevertheless, this early research by the SPR may indicate areas to explore in the interviews with mediums. Likewise, studies involving the phenomenon of channelling will also be touched upon in this review as channeling has sometimes been coupled with mediumship, due to the claim that both involve receiving information from a disembodied source (Klimo, 1987). In addition,

although not explored in detail, literature that discusses psi experiences in general may hint at prospective themes in the phenomenology of mediumship.

Little is yet known about mediums' own reflections on their experience; however, there have been recent attempts in the US to redress this by interviewing mental mediums to explore how their claimed abilities to communicate with spirits may have developed and how mediumship may function (Emmons & Emmons, 2003; T. J. Leonard, 2005; Rock, Beischel, & Schwartz, 2008; Steiger, 1982). Similarly, channellers and their source have been interviewed to explore the subjective experience of channelling (Barrett, 1996). However, to date there has been no research in the UK that has explored, in detail, spiritualist mediums' personal views and experiences. What is available, and which may give clues to the kinds of areas to pursue in interviews, are several biographies of prominent mediums who have been involved in research undertaken by the Society for Psychical Research. These sources of information have been written by mediums themselves or close relatives and include reflections on their mediumship experiences and ability, providing excellent accounts of the mediumship phenomena (Garrett, 1949/2002, 1968; G. O. Leonard, 1931, Piper, 1929, Williamson, 1992, 2001).

Therefore, this chapter will outline our current understanding of mediums' own reflections based on previous published research. Chapter six discusses the advantages of conducting mixed methods research (using both quantitative and qualitative approaches) to explore the mediumship phenomena and looks at the particular qualitative approach used to analyze interviews with mediums (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; J. A. Smith, 2004). Chapter seven reports the findings (themes) from analysis of the interviews, and Chapter eight discusses findings in relation to relevant literature.

## **5.2 Biographies of mediums**

In exploring how someone becomes a medium, biographies of mediums provide a useful resource to investigate how their claimed abilities to communicate with spirits may have developed. One of the most prominent mediums of the twentieth century, Eileen Garrett,

questioned how her mediumship ability manifested and explored the process and nature of mediumistic phenomena by participating in investigations to increase understanding. Garrett founded the Parapsychology Foundation in 1951 to support scientific exploration of psychic phenomena, and she was also an author, lecturer, and publisher. In her autobiography (Garrett, 1968) she reflects on how a mystical Celtic upbringing in Ireland, where the fairy faith still existed, had an impact on her later becoming a medium. She states, "I believe that my early indoctrination – where the country people were truly clairvoyant and gifted – had prepared the ground for mediumship. Those social and religious customs helped to create an individuality that was highly imaginative and surely animistic" (p. 22). From this extract, it is apparent that Garrett considers the environment she grew up in to play a major role in the development of her mediumship and that clairvoyance and the belief in spirits or a supernatural force were accepted as a normal part of existence. Garrett (2002) also remembered befriending a Romany gypsy woman who validated her experiences by saying to her:

Do not be unhappy if others do not believe you. It is not given to everyone to know and see such things...Ever since I could walk and talk, I have seen and heard things beyond man's understanding, for I was born with the 'seeing eye' and have the power to work charms and to heal (p. 34)

However, Garrett (1968) describes being punished by her strict aunt for talking about seeing her deceased uncle, which somewhat contradicts the validation and universal acceptance of spirits that was evident in the community where she grew up:

One evening my dead uncle 'appeared' to me in a vision, younger and more alert than I had known him; his Vandyke beard was well clipped, and he stood strong and straight...I knew from past experiences that I could not share this moment with my aunt, for on previous occasions my flesh and spirit had suffered when I talked of such 'visitations' (p. 28).

Garrett (1949) recalls having two other visions in addition to seeing her deceased uncle:

I thus had three visions of incorporeal personalities. Forgotten until this moment, I now remembered my uncle coming to me after his death and his promise that within two years I should leave Ireland. This prophecy had come true. Then I recalled the appearance of my Aunt Leone holding her tiny baby and that I had known that she was 'going away' and would take the baby with her. Now I had seen the unknown one who had come to save my daughter's life. I could no longer doubt that these visions were real (p. 83).

From this extract, it seems that Garrett had reservations concerning the reality of her first two visions, but that the third vision, which she describes as a "figure leaning against the bed – a short, lithe, ageless individual – his face turned from me" (p. 83), gave her more certainty that her experiences were genuine. Thus, when reflecting on how she became a medium, an important feature for Garrett was the spontaneous occurrences of paranormal experience, in the form of visions or apparitions, which confirmed an alternate deeper reality. It seems that these experiences, that came unbidden, triggered the sense that more could be going on than what was perceived in the material world.

She later states how these experiences, coupled with observations of a Spiritualist mediumship demonstration, ignited a desire to investigate the workings of mediumship phenomena:

As far as I knew these visions of the dead which I had experienced had come by chance. Now I wanted to know how the clairvoyant functioned and whether she saw her visions of the dead objectively. I was also interested to know more about the 'mechanism' of the phenomenon which was so readily accepted by the group (p. 85).

Reflecting on the biography of another prominent medium from the twentieth century, Mrs Piper, it is apparent that she too had a spontaneous vision of a deceased relative, when she heard a voice talk of her Aunt saying 'Aunt Sara, not dead, but with you still' (Piper,

1929). It was revealed a few days later that Mrs Piper's Aunt had passed away at the exact time of her experience. The following extract from her biography describes the incident:

One afternoon, after school, when my mother was about eight years old, she was playing by herself in the garden...Suddenly, she felt a sharp blow on her right ear accompanied by a prolonged sibilant sound. This gradually resolved itself into the letter S. which was then followed by the words, 'Aunt Sara, not dead, but with you still (p. 12).

Mrs Leonard also describes having visions as a child, however, they seem to differ from that of Mrs Piper and Eileen Garrett, in that they appear to be everyday occurrences rather than sudden, isolated events. In addition, although Mrs Leonard's visions include people, they tend to illustrate scenes of beautiful nature and landscapes, believed to be representative of a spirit plane she called "The Happy Valley" (G. O. Leonard, 1931). In recollecting these visions she states:

Every morning, soon after waking, even while dressing or having my nursery breakfast, I saw visions of most beautiful places. In whatever direction I happened to be looking, the physical view of wall, door, ceiling, or whatever it was, would disappear, and in its place would gradually come valleys, gentle slopes, lovely trees and banks covered with flowers of every shape and hue. The scene seemed to extend for many miles, and I was conscious that I could see much farther than was possible with the ordinary physical scenery around me...Walking about in couples usually and sometimes groups, were people who looked radiantly happy (p. 11)

In reviewing the autobiographies of these prominent mediums, it is evident that they all shared similar experiences of paranormal phenomena from an early age, which seemed to reveal a hidden, deeper reality. Subsequently, it may be fruitful to explore whether modern mediums in the current study also experienced unusual childhood phenomena, by prompting them to reflect on any incidences they may have had.

Other significant aspects of Garrett's personal life, that she reflects on in her autobiography as contributing to her becoming a medium, include her tragic experience of loss at a very young age, as both her parents committed suicide shortly after her birth, and her uncle, who she was particularly close to, passed away when she was a child. Bereavement was something that later re-occurred in her life, as she lost two sons in a serious epidemic of meningitis and a third son a few hours after giving birth (Garrett, 1968). Garrett also reflects on her own ill health as a child, stating "I often had to remain in bed for weeks at a time, for I had been born of a family whose lives were marred by tuberculosis, and I early suffered from bronchial asthma" (p. 23). Garrett's poor health as a child was deemed to be the result of spirit possession that had taken over her body, as she states:

Many primitive peoples have held the belief that ghosts may steal the soul and, in the vacated body, cause illnesses that radically alter the personality, thoughts, language, and actions. Often ill as child, I was solemnly assured that this had happened to me. It was alleged to have been brought about by the fairies. All such changes take place during sleep and demand some kind of magical ceremony to expel the possessing entity, but no such ceremony had been held on my account. The fairy faith which existed in Ireland in my childhood days, and perhaps still exists, was regarded by the country people as being more potent than their religious practices (p. 21).

Williamson (1992) – who, in giving lectures for the Society for Psychical Research (cf. Roxburgh, 2006) and writing several books on mediumship, is considered a prominent modern-day medium – also talks of her early childhood. Although Williamson describes feeling a sense of alienation and there being signs of mediumship when she was a child, she also adds that "the ability does not always show itself in childhood" (p. 68). Williamson describes being constantly surrounded by presences, which sometimes spoke to her, and states that she came to regard them as fantasy and that she "never asked who they were, considered them strange, or found them frightening" (p. 67). However, it is interesting to note that when she was in her teens, these voices started to tell her information she did not know, which led her to think she was going "insane". She reflects

on how it was not until she discovered a book on mediumship in the library that she realised this was what her experiences resembled:

I went to the library and read all the psychic books I could find, hoping they would shed some light on the matter. One day I picked up a book; in fact, it just seemed to fall into my hands as I was taking another book off the shelf. It was a revelation...At last I knew what was happening to me (p. 68)

This could suggest a significant point in the development of her mediumship, when her unusual experiences are given a new positive meaning via a Spiritual framework. Implicit in this hypothetical situation, is that an individual's cultural and societal experiences could influence the way they or others interpret unusual or anomalous experiences. It will be interesting to see whether these experiences are considered important by mediums when they discuss the reasons for becoming a medium in the interview study. Furthermore, the finding that Williamson regarded her experiences as distressing and challenging her sanity, poses the question as to how common it is for mediums to reflect on their experiences as poorly understood or troubling. Williamson (1990, p. 41) points out that there is evidence of at least one other modern-day medium, Doris Collins, being disturbed by a vision she had of her deceased sister:

Doris Collins in her book *Woman of Spirit* recounts how, when she was sixteen, she was walking home after visiting some friends and 'saw' her sister Emmie, who had died three years before. She was so terrified that she ran all the way home and told her father, who thought she was hallucinating and called in the doctor to examine her.

On the other hand, Williamson (1990, p. 43) reflects on the background of Danish-born medium, Marion Dampier-Jeans, who grew up thinking it was normal to see deceased spirits and was not troubled by these visions:

Her family were Lutherans. As a child she was naturally psychic and used to frighten her mother by describing people who were dead. To her, there was nothing alarming

about them. They were as real and solid as earthly people. When she was lonely she used to go for walks in the nearby cemetery and chat to the people she saw there.

An investigation of the autobiographies of several prominent mediums has uncovered several insights into their backgrounds that could be explored in interviews with modern day spiritualist mediums. Firstly, when reflecting upon how they became a medium, Eileen Garrett, Mrs Piper, and Mrs Leonard all described experiencing spontaneous paranormal occurrences, in the form of visions, when they were children. This feature seemed to stand out as triggering an interest in mediumship, and in opening their minds to the possibility of an alternate reality, where spirit phenomena were possible. Secondly, Garrett seems to have been subject to conflicting views with regards mediumistic phenomena. In one respect these experiences were validated and acknowledged as usual occurrences, in a country that was rich in superstition and folklore; however, at the same time, she was also reprimanded by her closest relative for discussing such matters. Thus, it seems likely that mediums in this study may also discuss how their families or community reacted to their mediumistic ability. Thirdly, it is apparent that Garrett suffered traumatic experiences as a child; being orphaned at an early age after the suicide of both her parents and suffering from poor health which was interpreted by some as spirit possession. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if traumatic experiences also feature as a prominent theme in the backgrounds of mediums in the current study.

### **5.3 Interviews with mediums**

Steiger (1982) discusses selected excerpts from interviews with mediums (and others) he conducted over 25 years that centred around the survival question. He asks the pertinent question "What kind of a person becomes a medium?" and reports that nearly every medium he interviewed has "undergone a series of personal crises in his childhood or youth", but are well-adjusted socially, enthusiastic extroverts, and of at least average intelligence (pp. 128-129). However, the findings do not provide any in-depth insight into mediums' experiences or perspectives on how they developed their ability or what mediumship means to them, which may reflect the unsystematic nature of the research;

Steiger does not offer any methodological information on how his research was conducted, so it is unclear under what circumstances mediums were interviewed or who his sample consisted of. Furthermore, Steiger's aim was to "accumulate as much information as possible" about mediums (p. 128), therefore his work did not focus on a nuanced detailed analysis of interviews with mediums; subsequently any qualitative information provided in the form of quotes are limited in expression and have not been subjected to any formal qualitative analysis. Thus, it would be useful for any future study involving interviews with mediums to obtain rich data from a small sample of individuals who can be explored in detail, with findings being represented by insightful extracts from their personal accounts.

In the wider paranormal literature, informal interviews have also been conducted with 61 people who were not self-labelled mediums, but had spontaneously sensed contact with the dead (Wright, 1999). When interviewees were describing their experiences, Wright noticed a large proportion reported difficult childhoods; in particular, over a third of respondents said they had a relative who was an alcoholic and several mentioned living with an angry or abusive parent. For example, one interviewee stated "It's sort of the Jekyll and Hyde story. You become ultra sensitive in order to judge the current state of affairs with one or the other parent" (p. 188). Wright (1999, 2002) also claims to have found an association between psi experiences and growing up in an environment where psi is acknowledged. In a later paper, Wright (2006) specifically asks individuals who have sensed contact with the dead about the homes in which they spent their early life, and concludes that there are three childhood influences that contribute to sensitivity to psi experiences: coming from a home where there is a history of psi or a strong belief in its reality, being a child of a multiple birth, and suffering trauma in one's first 10-12 years of life. The first finding is echoed by Richard and Adato (1980) who interviewed mediums about their interest in Spiritualism and discovered that several participants mentioned encouragement by parents or other relatives as being significant in their entry into Spiritualism.

In contrast, Emmons (2001) conducted 29 ethnographic interviews with mediums in the US to investigate the experiential and social factors that contribute to the socialisation and

recruitment of mediums and found only six had positive family reactions to their mediumistic tendencies. Although the mediums also reported having had paranormal experiences in childhood (e.g., apparitions and "imaginary playmates") they added that they were labelled as odd or evil by some family or community members. Emmons and Emmons (2003) later expand on this theme by pointing out that British medium, Estelle Roberts, was physically punished by her father when she said she heard voices and, having no awareness of Spiritualism to normalise her experiences, feared she was going "crazy". In addition they mention how an interviewee was labelled as "weird" by family and community members and spent her childhood being "baffled" by her experiences, until she met a Spiritualist who reframed her unusual experiences as psychic. Emmons (2001) concluded that, as well as childhood psychic experiences or spiritual tendencies, individuals who adopted the mediumship role also had some formal training in mediumship (e.g., development classes), were influenced by a non-familial significant other (e.g., told that they were to become mediums by other mediums or introduced to mediums) or had experienced a personal crisis, such as a near death experience. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for most of the information that is gained from the interviews to be reported quantitatively in the form of percentages, which seems to be at variance with the epistemology of qualitative research. As a result the rhetoric reads more like a survey of mediumship experiences and is lacking in any in-depth insight or evaluation of the phenomenology of mediumship.

In summary, it is apparent that previous studies involving interviews with mediums have highlighted a number of key features in the backgrounds of mediums when discussing how they became involved in mediumship (and Spiritualism). It is evident that traumatic experiences, such as near death experiences or abuse, and paranormal experiences in childhood have been cited by a number of authors as contributing to individuals later becoming a medium. Although there is some evidence to suggest that an environment where psi is acknowledged is quite common in the backgrounds of individuals who have mediumistic experiences, there are also findings to the contrary, which report a lack of positive family reactions. In addition, mediumship training, such as development circles,

has also been emphasised as a defining characteristic in how someone identifies with the medium role.

However, in reviewing the studies that have conducted interviews, thus far, it has also been revealed that there is a distinct lack of any deep phenomenological insight into mediums' lived experience, highlighting the need for a more in-depth exploration into the reasons mediums give for becoming a medium. In addition, none of the studies cited have used any formal qualitative methods to analyse information gained, and, thus, are unable to benefit from the advantages of such methods, for example, the ability to generate themes that are common to all individuals, and the ability to explore similarities and differences in personal accounts (J. A. Smith, 2008). Furthermore, they have failed to report substantive extracts from participants' accounts. Therefore, the reader has no opportunity to delve into the participants' life world and share their stories; subsequently it is difficult for the reader to understand what key features in participants' biographies may stand out as meaningful in their explanations of why they became mediums. To conclude, any future research involving interviews with mediums, especially where the aim is to learn about how they make sense of their experience of a phenomenon, would benefit from using a formal qualitative approach, which gains an "insider's view" and reports extracts that are rich, detailed, and insightful, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (J. A. Smith, 1996, 2004; J. A. Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). The following section follows on from an exploration of *why* individuals may become a medium by reviewing the literature that investigates *how* mediumship may work or is experienced.

#### **5.4 Preparation and altered states**

The following section is interested in finding out how mediumship is experienced. Of particular interest is whether mediums do anything to prepare for ostensible discarnate communication in order to access information and whether an entranced or altered state of consciousness is necessary to instigate the mediumship process. In an investigation of Mrs Leonard's mediumship, Troubridge (1922) observed four states of consciousness

ranging on a continuum between "normal consciousness", "a slight drowsiness" (productive of automatic writing), "a partially analgesic trance" (followed by almost total amnesia on waking), and "trance" (where Mrs Leonard took on the mannerisms of the deceased). Sidgwick (1915) also noted that the medium, Mrs Piper, seemed to voluntarily enter a deep trance state during which she lost conscious awareness of her environment:

Mrs Piper wills to go into trance with a definite idea...that her own personality is to disappear and its place to be taken by various other spirits whose function is to converse with the sitter, advise him, and put him into communication with the spirit world. Accordingly, in a typical sitting of, say, 1907, she conceives herself during the going-into-trance-stage as gradually withdrawing and consequently losing her awareness of the actual surroundings. When she conceives herself as quite gone, a brief interval of deep sleep occurs during which no consciousness at all seems to be present so far as external manifestation goes, but during which nevertheless there is reason to think that the ideas may be received through the senses by some element of consciousness, and may act suggestively in the subsequent trance proper (p. 327).

However, in reference to mental mediumship, Gauld (1983, p. 25) states that "the medium or sensitive may be in a slightly dissociated state, but is usually not entranced". Therefore in the type of mediumship of interest in this study, fully entranced states, like those that Mrs Piper and Mrs Leonard reached, need not be involved. In the following extract, Garrett (1983) describes a state of consciousness that does not seem to involve a complete trance state, but is alert yet detached, and seems to go beyond ordinary perceptual awareness:

I remember that it was required of me in the early days of my experimental work that I should spend some quiet time in concentration and meditation. This I was never able to do. Contrary to all that I had been told, it was necessary for me to be in a state of nonchalance - in fact, an attitude of high carelessness...to my sense clairvoyance occurs in states of consciousness whose relations exist as a fact in nature, on levels of being that transcend the present perceptive capacities of our sensory faculties. I have

referred to an inner condition of 'alertness' which is the essential factor in many of these activities (p. 129).

Garrett (1949) also seems to have taught herself breathing techniques to help her mediumship and mentions that it is important, for her, to control her breathing before practising mediumistic activities as it seems to prepare her both physically and mentally:

From earliest childhood I have been aware of the nebulous surrounds or auras of all plants, animals and men, and have observed how they expand and contract, as though the bodies within breathed by means of this outer lung. From these sources came the first discoveries about my own breathing. I can now consciously shift my breathing when I choose, and by doing so I can constantly change my activity from one phase to another. Control of the breathing plays a most important part in all of my supernormal work. It develops a sense of excitement and eagerness, such as one feels on entering some unknown or forbidden territory. Without this 'acceleration', I can make no claim to working supernormally (p. 122).

According to these accounts by Garrett, it seems that preparation for mediumship involves a control of bodily processes through control of breathing, which results in an altered state of consciousness. This feature of mediumship is later expanded upon by Garrett when she talks about her perception of the environment changing and losing awareness of external events or time:

These warm and pleasant sensations lead to a clearing and an expansion at the back of the brain – sensation which continues to grow until the area of oneself would appear to be suffused with soft light, and one enters into a condition or dimension which might be described as one of color. Peace is the quality of this stage, bringing with it freedom from any connection with time, space and external events. Thus does clairvoyance function (p. 122)

These extracts seem to suggest that Garrett had learnt to automatically enter a state of consciousness that is conducive to mediumship ability. Similarly, when Emmons and Emmons (2002) interviewed modern mediums on their views of the communication process to explore whether there were any practices that triggered a mediumistic state they found 40% of mediums mentioned entering an altered state before demonstrating mediumship. In addition, mediums also reported meditation, prayer, and diet as important factors in their preparation to communicate with spirits. Likewise, T. J. Leonard (2005) found 89% of mediums have some form of preparatory ritual they undertake before embarking on their mediumship, of which 52% reported meditating before giving a reading and 52% reported using prayer to connect to the spirit world.

Whilst it is interesting to discover the variety of practices mediums undertake to trigger the communication process, we do not really learn anything about what these practices mean to mediums and how they personally experience the process. It is disappointing that Emmons and Emmons (2003) do not include any extracts from their interviews; as a consequence, there is a gap in our understanding of whether mediums feel it is necessary to prepare for communication with spirits or whether there are any commonalities in the accounts of mediums. Indeed, T. J. Leonard (2005) recognises this by acknowledging that, in retrospect, he would have conducted more in-depth interviews, which have the potential to uncover important insights into the phenomenology of mediumship and richer, more detailed first hand accounts. Therefore, there is a clear and justified need for good quality qualitative research with mediums using in-depth interviews.

## **5.5 Modes of communicating (with spirits)**

The purpose of this section is to gain a more detailed understanding of what is already known about mediums' experiences of communicating with spirit. This will help to set the background for the interviews and will be useful in framing the development of an interview schedule. For example, do they report the form of communications as vague impressions or intuitions, or do they have the richness and detail of more mundane perceptions? Given that mediums claim to "see" and "hear" spirits, researchers have

asked which sensory modalities are used by the medium when communicating with spirits and whether mediumship is experienced via certain sensory channels.

Edwards (2003, p. 20) uses the term "mirror of the mind" to define the process of communication whereby impressions, experiences and thought-pictures from a spirit source can be projected to the consciousness of a medium. Out of 98 mediums for which Emmons and Emmons (2003) have information, 72% were clairvoyant, which means they received information either as an internal or external image; 66 percent were clairaudient, meaning they got information by hearing a direct voice or as if they were imagining someone's voice; and 42% were clairsentient, which meant that they physically or emotionally felt information. Emmons and Emmons add that mediums who receive communication as a visual image often have "psychic dictionaries" in which various symbols represent certain information, for example, to one medium, a wall meant protection and the Statue of Liberty meant strength. For another medium, visuals to the left represented the past, the right represented the future and the centre represented the present. Similarly, Garrett (1949) describes the process of communication as one involving images and symbols that need interpretation:

It is true that I do clairvoyantly see the alleged dead and clairaudiently receive impressions of the messages they wish to transmit. These I receive in a process of light in which images and symbols change so rapidly that the transmission of the experience can only be sketchy, and also these symbols and experiences have to depend upon my limited interpretation. I can only compare the experience to visiting for a brief moment a country of great beauty where the habits and language are entirely foreign. One would be able to communicate only a hazy and confused impression of the experience (p. 111)

However, this is not a new finding as symbols have been noted in the mentations of mediums early in the twentieth century; for example, black has been used as a symbol for worry or sorrow (Saltmarsh, 1929 p. 123). Likewise, "mental pictures", "visual impressions" and the "pictographic process" were referred to by Hsylop (1919) to account

for transmission of communication, whereby "memories, interpretation and language determine the form of the message" (p. 107). More recently, Broughton (2006a) has reviewed memory models of psi (Roll, 1966; Irwin, 1979) which proposed that ESP responses consisted of revived images from the percipient's memories. In cases of spontaneous ESP dream experiences he points out that dream experiences have been divided into two categories: realistic and symbolic. Realistic dreams make use of well-established memories and seem similar to the future predicted event and are more descriptive; whereas, symbolic dreams are memory images that seem far removed from the related event and need interpretation. This distinction may also be evident in accounts of mediums. In explaining the distinction, it has been suggested that the symbolic nature might be a way of "cushioning bad news or be a result of repression mechanisms" or because images needed to reconstruct the future event are simply not available (Broughton, 2006, p. 262). In relation to the current study, it will be interesting to see if mediums discuss experiencing symbols in the communication process and what meaning they assign to them.

Although Emmons and Emmons (2003) do not provide direct quotes from mediums, they do discuss some subjective descriptions of the mediumship process and we learn a little about what the experience is personally like for the mediums. For example, they mention that "One medium said it is as if a black curtain opens in her mind, and she sees colors and faces. Another medium said that he sees snapshots (stills) in his mind...Another medium says that he can see things both with his eyes open and closed. However, if he closes his eyes it improves the image, like turning the lights down in a theatre." (p. 244). Despite these accounts, it feels as though we are only getting a glimpse into the experiences of mediums and it highlights the need for any future research to explore how information is received in more detail, perhaps comparing and contrasting mediums responses to see if there are any similar or dissimilar themes in the way they describe their experiences and assign meaning to them.

In a recent qualitative study, Rock, Beischel, and Schwartz (2008) go some way towards filling this gap in the current literature with a thematic analysis of mediums' experiences

of discarnate communication, using the principles of phenomenological methodology. They asked eight "research mediums" to describe how they experience receiving communication from a discarnate spirit and found seven constituent themes which include "multi-modal 'sensory' impressions", "visual images", "hearing" and "feeling discarnates' ailments/causes of death". Rock et al. should be praised for recruiting practising mediums, and for adhering to guidelines for good qualitative research (cf. Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), such as providing quotes to ground their themes in participants' accounts, and conducting checks of the credibility of their themes with participants. However, there are a number of shortcomings to the study design they adopted which severely constrain the validity of the claims they make concerning their data.

Firstly, an important step in qualitative data collection is to ensure that participants feel empowered to give a full and candid account of their experience safe in the knowledge that theirs is a privileged perspective relative to the researcher's and that their personal impressions rather than some abstract "right" or "wrong" answers are of most interest. In order to fulfil this, interviews are often considered to be the most exemplary method of data collection as the researcher has the opportunity to establish rapport with participants (cf. Kvale, 1996; Morse, 1994; J. A. Smith, 1995; Willig, 2001). Unfortunately, by conducting their data collection in the form of an email, which was essentially an internet questionnaire survey, Rock et al. have eschewed these important checks and balances and so undermine their claim to validity for their data. It is acknowledged that other methods of data collection are increasingly being used in qualitative research due to the increase in internet mediated communication; for example, Mulveen and Hepworth (2006) explored individuals' experiences of participating in a pro-anorexia Internet site and C. D. Murray (2004) used semi-structured email interviews and email discussion groups to investigate the embodiment of artificial limbs. However, there is every possibility that participants in the Rock et al. study felt encouraged to give "appropriate" responses given the heavy emphasis on "qualifying" as an "integrated research medium" by virtue of achieving certain targets, including giving two email and two phone readings and in particular requiring participants to have read Schwartz's own book on mediumship, *The Afterlife Experiments*. This seems likely to have imposed upon the participants clear definitions of

what can and what cannot be considered legitimate in the context of describing authentic mediumistic experiences and *modus operandi*. In this respect, they could be regarded as anathema to qualitative approaches that have their roots in phenomenological inquiry, which aims to gain insight into the psychological and social world of the individuals of interest, and rightly values participants as experts on their own life experiences (cf. Giorgi, 1995; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003), unfettered by the researcher's own beliefs or expectations.

Another advantage of direct interactions with participants is that it allows the researcher to tailor the interview to reflect the participants' values and emphases (J. A. Smith, 1995) – it is common with semi-structured or unstructured interviews for the interviewer to reorganise the set of questions, adding or removing elements in response to the participants. This was not possible with Rock et al.'s (2008) favoured method of data collection, which severely constrains the range of topics that the participant could consider to be legitimate in that context.

In coming to the specific questions asked of participants in Rock et al.'s study, it is disappointing to note that much of their analysis seems to be derived from straightforward answers to just one fairly direct question. With thematic analysis it is more likely that valid themes will emerge if questions are framed in a non-leading, open manner, following a "funnelling" format in which participants are encouraged to share their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences with as little prompting as possible before probing more specific queries (cf. J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). Furthermore, it is essential in qualitative research to include detailed excerpts from participants' accounts that allow the reader to appraise how the themes have been developed and to allow the experiences of participants to be represented in their own words. Although Rock et al. include original quotations from participants, the majority are merely "sound-bites" of one sentence or less, which do not provide any context for the mediums' experiences or allow the reader to conceptualize their own interpretations.

In contrast, Steiger (1982) provides an account of how one medium experiences the communication process, which gives a more contextual orientation to the process. It is apparent that, for this medium, communication with spirit could happen at any time, providing she is in a relaxed state, and is a highly physiological experience:

Here is a highly simplified description of how it happens: I am quiet, completely relaxed, deep in meditation. I may be alone at home or among friends in a prayer circle. A tingling sensation, similar to a chill, begins on my right ankle, then on my left. Slowly the tingling spreads to cover my entire body. It is as though a soft silken skin has been pulled over me, glove-tight – even over my face, changing its features – yet comfortable and protective. It is soothing, yet thrilling, and ethereally light. At this point, I am on my way to that golden flow of consciousness that we earthlings term the Spirit Plane (p. 77).

Similarly, Muriel Williams (2002), who is a medium and a member of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, describes the process by which she becomes aware of communicating with her spirit guide as follows:

When I am ready to communicate with Ian I sense his presence, then see him clearly in front of me. I can describe what he's wearing and sense his mood. At this point, I am aware that I have reached the level of thought in my consciousness that will allow me to connect with, and transmit his thought. That is how I make my connection to Ian (p. 81).

In this account, it is apparent that the medium has some level of control over when she communicates and that she sees spirits as an external presence. In Balfour's (1935) study of the psychological aspects of Mrs. Willett's mediumship, there is a section devoted to a discussion of the externalisation of presences. We are told that the way Mrs Willett experiences the spirits she communicates with seems to lie on a continuum, ranging "from bare awareness of a 'presence' void of all sensory content to complete sensory

hallucination...and are independent of the percipient's volition" (p. 78). The following quote reflects how spirits can appear as real entities to some mediums:

It gives me no more sense of oddness to be talking to these invisible people than it does to be talking to my son for instance. But I don't think I mentally visualise any sort of 'appearance' with regard to them – it is as 'minds' and 'characters' that they are to me, and yet not at all intangible or not-solid realities (p. 80).

From these accounts, it is evident that, for some mediums, spirit communication is experienced and recognised as a subjective process, whereas others describe being aware of the physical presence of a communicating spirit as if it is a real entity. It is also apparent that symbols have been cited in mediums' account when describing the form in which communications are experienced. Perhaps more importantly, we have learnt that the relatively few studies that have gathered qualitative data (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; Rock, Beischel & Schwartz, 2008), for example, by interviewing practising mediums, have either been unsystematic in their design or have not adhered rigorously to formal methods of qualitative analysis, particularly in reducing their findings to quantitative summaries in the form of percentages. Thus, they have been unable to provide any deep phenomenological insight into mediums' lived experience, and only serve to highlight the need for a more in-depth exploration of medium's own accounts of their path to becoming a medium and their understanding of the mediumship process as they experience it.

## **5.6 The phenomenology of spirit guides**

The following section will focus on reviewing literature on the phenomenology of spirit guides to anticipate what may be revealed by mediums when interviewing them about the role and function of their guides. As seen in Section 2.4, previous research has questioned whether spirit guides really exist as separate entities or whether, instead, they are characters created in the subconscious mind of the medium or are secondary personalities (e.g., Flournoy, 1911; F. W. H. Myers, 1902; Sidgwick, 1915). Similarly, the idea of a

"supernormal creative self" (Grosso, 1997, p. 188) was discovered in the proposition that mediumship may involve a dissociative process that can facilitate, and may even increase, creative ability (Braude, 2000; Grosso, 1997). Both Braude and Grosso investigate the case of Patience Worth, who claimed to serve as a spirit control for Pearl Curran; a St Louis homemaker who seemed to channel thousands of poems and literary pieces of work between the periods 1913 to 1937, which apparently transcended her ability in waking state. This literature will not be repeated here (see Section 2.4 for a discussion of the Patience Worth case); it simply serves to remind us that most researchers view spirit guides as a construct or dramatization of the (un)conscious mind. In contrast, the spiritualist explanation prefers to view spirit guides as deceased individuals now in spirit form (e.g., Beard, 1992). Research undertaken on channelling in the US has obtained statements from spirit guides themselves, and has highlighted how some channellers consider spirit guides to be autonomous beings with their own identities and history (Barrett, 1996). However, there have been no attempts to explore the phenomenology of spirit guides by directly asking modern mediums about the lived experience of having a spirit guide and what they mean to them.

Although autobiographies of prominent mediums do not specifically set out to explore the phenomenology of spirit guides, they may provide an insight into their identity. For example, Mrs Leonard talks about how she first discovered her guide called "Feda".

After our respective mothers had given several messages, a Communicator came who gave her name as Feda, and explained that she was an ancestress of mine. She had married my great-great-grandfather. My mother had often told me about an Indian girl who married this ancestor...Feda told me (by spelling out the words with the aid of the table) that she had been watching over me since I was born, waiting for me to develop my psychic power so that she could put me in a trance and give messages through me. I must confess that the idea of going into a trance did not appeal to me. I had hoped I might develop normal clairvoyance, and see or hear the spirits on the Other Side, as I had seen my mother in that brief vision, and the places that I had called the Happy Valleys (pp. 29-30).

From this extract, it is clear that Mrs Leonard believed her spirit guide to be a deceased relative. Similarly, when investigating the mediumship of Mrs Piper, SPR researcher, Hodgson, became convinced spirit guides were surviving spirits and were distinct entities rather than an aspect of Mrs Piper's own consciousness (as cited in Gauld, 1983). However, it is interesting to note that there are inconsistencies in such a view as some guides appear to be fictitious and have no history, whereas others have had quite distinct personalities, and whose previous existence is verifiable. For example, one of Mrs Piper's spirit guides claimed to be a French doctor called "Dr Phinuit", but there was no trace of him in French medical records, he spoke very little French, and his knowledge of medicine was superficial; whereas, there is evidence that the spirit guide, GP, was a young man who had been killed a few weeks before Mrs Piper claimed he was her new spirit guide, and showed "an intimate knowledge of their [sitters] concerns, and of his own supposed past relationships with them" (Gauld, 1983, p. 34). Similar distinct personalities were also observed in the Doris Fischer case (an individual with a diagnosis of "multiple personality disorder") by Prince (1915/1916), who points out that the different alters were all aware of each other's mental states (as cited in Braude, 1995). However, it is interesting to note that the personalities seemed to change as Doris's psychological wellbeing improved, alongside her becoming a medium, and both Braude (1995) and Gauld (1983) have taken this to indicate spirit guides are alternate personalities rather than spirit entities.

In addition, some mediums have questioned the reality of their spirit guides, such as Eileen Garrett (1968), who seems to have given considerable thought to the nature of her spirit guides. In her autobiography, she states:

My own lack of a true belief in the identity of the controls troubled me. I had never been certain of their reality or that the messages they conveyed from their 'universe' about those who had departed this life were truly evidence of life after death...I argued that the control personalities could be part of my own subconscious being, and set out to gather evidence on my account by sitting with other sensitives...I prefer to think of the controls as principals of the subconscious (pp. 91-92)

The view that spirit guides could be the creation of the subconscious mind, was one that was shared by Sidgwick (1915), who, in observation of Mrs Piper's mediumship, concluded that the "controls" were probably the result of a self-induced hypnosis in which her hypnotic self personates a number of different characters. Reflecting on her work with a psychiatrist called Dr Muhl, who used automatic writing to reach problems in her clients that had been repressed in early life, Garrett (1968) further states:

Dr Muhl believed that in my own case, where youthful conflicts may have been severe, the confused part of individual consciousness could have been split off, leaving in its wake the secondary personalities or a dual alternating personality with possible fragmentations...She believed that the subconscious held the deep yearnings and fantasies of the life that one might have wanted to achieve, but because of some instability or even timidity within the personality had to be pushed away (p. 111)

It appears that Dr Muhl perceived the spirit guides as secondary personalities that had resulted from Garrett repressing desires and dreams about what she would like to achieve in her life. Similarly, Progoff (1971) theorised that the spirit guide phenomenon represented symbolic expression of underlying psychological conflict in Garrett, brought about by not being able to express *internal* needs and potentials (such as mediumship qualities) because of the pressure to fulfil *external* social expectations of what a woman should be like within the Protestant Irish community she grew up in. Note that this theory appears to be in contrast to Garrett's own claim that the community normalised mediumship for her (as discussed in Section 5.2). However, one possibility is that Garrett picked up on the acceptance of mediumship by her "proximal" community at the same time as being aware of gender expectations that were present in the wider society.

Progoff made reference to "dynatypes", which he believed were dramatizations of needs that would normally have to be repressed, but were able to be constructively expressed in the form of different personalities (spirit guides) that are separate to the individual (medium). Thus, in the following extract, Progoff (1971) mentions three dynatypes, which represent personification of Garrett's different spirit guides:

The essence of this arrangement is the spontaneous separation of segments of personality, each of whom acts like and speaks like a separate person. Thus, Ouvani, as the *keeper of the door*, acts as the person who regulates the income and the outgo of the psyche...He displays the qualities of the Executive dynatype, for he organizes the psyche and regulates it. The second figure, Abdul Latif, personifies the Medium dynatype, for he expresses the capacity to be physically sensitive to the subjective conditions of other persons, to reflect their needs and to diagnose their difficulties through the clairvoyant connections of the unconscious. The Oracle dynatype is personified by two figures. Both Tahoteh and Ramah express the need in Mrs Garrett's psyche to reach into the depths of being and come forth with an articulate statement of the underling truths of human existence (p. 10).

In contrast to the theory that spirit guides are creative constructions or alternate personalities, Barrett (1996) interviewed nine channellers about their subjective experience and, using phenomenological analysis, uncovered the theme that channellers perceive the "source" they claim to communicate with as a separate, autonomous being; talking about them as (spirit) entities existing independently of the channel and possessing capabilities that exceeded those of the channel. For example, one participant stated:

One of the things I've learned as a channel is that the sources have a different perspective, a wider view. And may be they're wiser in some ways. But they are people; they've been human. They are people with very strong personalities and their own issues to work through (p. 113)

In addition, the channellers also spoke about co-operating with the source in a working partnership and as having a choice in how information is transmitted. For example:

And I'm intervening; if spirit says to tell you something and I don't, like, think it's appropriate, given my therapeutic skills, I don't say it. So I'm in partnership now, much more than I ever was before (p. 121)

Whilst it is interesting to gain insight into the subjective views of channellers, there are limitations of the interview study by Barrett. In particular, she does not look for divergences and convergences in the information provided by participants, nor does she discuss the themes in relation to psychological literature. Instead she proceeds to interview the "sources" about their experiences of the channelling process, and then lists several further themes. Subsequently, there is an abundance of extracts from participants' accounts to support themes, but no interpretation of what these might represent or reflect in psychological terms. Moreover, Barrett's study explored the subjective experience of spirit guides from the perspective of channellers, therefore, it remains to be seen whether mental mediums also report similar themes.

Although Emmons and Emmons (2003) provide one of the relatively few studies to interview modern mediums about their experiences of the spirit guide phenomenon, their analysis does not go into sufficient depth about what guides may mean to mediums. Their findings seem limited to superficial reporting of percentages regarding gender and cultural differences of guides and, in contrast to the study by Barrett, no extracts are provided by those who experience the phenomena. Consequently, there is a distinct lack of systematic qualitative research investigating the subjective experience of spirit guides as reported by modern mediums.

## **5.7 Chapter summary**

In reviewing the literature on the phenomenology of mediumship, it is apparent that our understanding of the process and nature of mediumship, and the role of spirit guides, is based on relatively few investigations. However, to some extent, it has been possible to share the life world of the medium by delving into biographies of prominent mediums from the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Garrett, 1968; G. O. Leonard, 1931; Piper, 1929). Overall, this literature combined has highlighted specific commonalities of experience in the backgrounds of mediums that seem to be reported when they try to make sense of how they became involved in mediumship. As seen in Section 5.2, it is apparent that unusual experiences, such as visions or voices of the deceased, are often present in the childhoods of mediums.

When mediums describe the reactions of family members or the community, towards these unusual experiences, accounts seem to vary between acceptance and encouragement on one hand, to disapproval and opposition on the other. Thus, when interviewing participants about how they became a medium, it may be fruitful to probe for biographical information to explore the importance of family and childhood experiences in further detail. It may be that participants feel their mediumship was inevitable, regardless of family background or approval.

One interview study in Section 5.3 reported crises to be common in mediums' backgrounds (Steiger, 1982). However, no methodological information was provided for the research, therefore, it is unclear how the interviews were conducted or analysed. In addition, despite the research involving interviews, there was a distinct lack of qualitative data in the form of extracts from participants. Subsequently, not only was it difficult to ascertain what questions were asked in the interviews, it was, likewise, not possible to uncover the personal perspective of the mediums; how they made sense of their experiences and what meanings they assigned to the crises in the development of their mediumship. It is apparent that any future studies intending to explore the phenomenology of mediumship should aim to gain rich experiential descriptions that help to increase our understanding of what the phenomenon means to mediums. Based on a review of the literature conducted in this chapter, it is anticipated that more in-depth exploration into mediums' explanations, for how they become involved in mediumship, may reveal reflections on unusual experiences in childhood, traumatic events, or the reactions of family members.

Section 5.4 reviewed the literature and biographical information on the process and nature of mediumship to identify whether there were any practices that mediums perform to trigger a mediumistic conducive state. Similarly, Section 5.5 attempted to gain a more detailed understanding of the form in which communications are experienced by the medium, with the hope of discovering themes that may be revealed when interviewing mediums about their experiences. It became apparent that modern mediums sometimes use prayer, meditation and breathing techniques to prepare for a mediumship

demonstration or reading (Emmons & Emmons, 2003; T. J. Leonard, 2005), and that altered states may be a feature of mediumship. However, these findings do not go beyond the information gained from content analysis of the Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ) in Study one, as reported in Chapter four. Therefore, a gap remains in our knowledge as to what importance these practices mean to mediums and how they personally experience the process. Moreover, a methodological critique of the study by Rock, Beischel, and Schwartz (2008) has identified pertinent issues to address in any future research with mediums, where the focus is on the phenomenology of their experiences, such as the importance of establishing rapport, asking non-leading questions, and encouraging participants to express their views in their own words and on their own terms.

Similarly, this chapter has highlighted a lack of insight into the phenomenology of spirit guides. Although theories have been put forward to suggest that spirit guides may represent secondary personalities or a symbolic dramatization of psychological conflict within the psyche of the medium, more in-depth qualitative studies are required to provide a deeper understanding of what guides mean to individuals who personally experience the phenomenon. Therefore, questions remain regarding how mediums discover their guides, the role they play in their mediumship and how they communicate. Furthermore, no study to date has explored the similarities and differences between mediums; this will be the first systematic study to give mediums a voice, and the opportunity to tell their story. In the next chapter the methodological approach taken to hear these stories will be discussed, alongside a consideration of the shift in methodology from quantitative to qualitative and the advantages of adopting a mixed methods approach.

## CHAPTER 6

# INVESTIGATING MEDIUMS' LIVED EXPERIENCE WITH INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Introduction

Given that the overall aims of Study three include exploring the phenomenology of mediumship and mapping mediums' own understanding of their experiences, it was decided that qualitative analysis of interviews using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was the most appropriate for the research. As J. A. Smith (1996, p. 263) states: "quantitative studies in the discipline could be usefully supplemented by projects employing qualitative methods which attempt to examine a smaller sample of respondents in greater detail using, for example, semi-structured interviews". Moreover, as revealed in Chapter five, there is currently no research in the UK that has explored, in detail, mediums' personal views and experiences. This is the first systematic study to give mediums a voice, and the opportunity to tell their story<sup>16</sup>. This chapter discusses the approach taken to gain an "insider's perspective" (Conrad, 1987) on the lived experience of spiritualist mediums. It begins by reflecting upon the shift in methodology from quantitative to qualitative approaches, and the advantages of adopting a mixed method approach, and then considers the current position of qualitative research within parapsychology. The decision to use IPA will be defended, alongside a consideration of its theoretical roots, and methodological criticisms. The chapter then proceeds with a detailed description of the data collection method, consisting of semi-structured interviews, sampling strategies, and ethical responsibilities. Analysis and discussion of the findings, in relation to the extant literature, will be presented in Chapters seven and eight.

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the approach taken here is distinguished from narrative analysis which explores ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world (M. Murray, 2008)

## 6.2 Mixed methods: Reflecting on the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches

There appears to be an attempt in the social and behavioural sciences to introduce a new research method paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), with studies combining qualitative and quantitative methods now labelled as "mixed methods research" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Over the last 15 years, at least ten mixed methods textbooks have been published (W. E. Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). In addition, the last three years has seen the launch of two journals specifically focusing on this type of research – the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, and the *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. However, proponents admit that mixed methods research is still in its infancy, and much remains to be resolved regarding its philosophical positions, appropriate designs, and validity of data analysis strategies, mixing and integration procedures, and rationales, among other things (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, it is apparent that there is some inconsistency in classifying what constitutes mixed methods research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007); Based on their analysis of 19 definitions reported by leading researchers in the field, Johnson et al. nevertheless were able to define mixed methods research rather loosely as:

The type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (p. 123)

This definition suggests that mixed methods research encourages an eclectic approach to research whereby any combination of quantitative and qualitative methods as appropriate to the research questions posed, might qualify as a mixed methods approach. It is evident that this needs-based approach to research serves the function of expanding or elaborating one's understanding of a particular research inquiry as well as providing verification for findings from previous inquiries. This enables researchers to draw from the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in single

research studies and across studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More specifically, Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) have identified different rationales for using mixed methods designs: (a) triangulation (i.e., seeking convergence of results from different methods investigating the same phenomenon), (b) complementarity (i.e., using results from one method to elaborate on results from the other method), (c) development (i.e., using results from one method to help inform or develop the other method), (d) initiation (i.e., finding contradictions that results in re-framing the research question, and (e) expansion (i.e., using different methods for different inquiry components to extend the range and breadth of inquiry).

In addition a number of considerations have been recognized when designing a mixed methods study, such as how data collection will be implemented (i.e., whether concurrent or sequentially) and prioritized (i.e., whether qualitative and quantitative aspects will have equal or unequal emphasis), and when data analysis and integration will occur (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For example, Palmer and Cochran (1988) used a sequential mixed methods research design and prioritized the data equally. They tested the effectiveness of a program for parents to help their adolescent children in career planning. In addition to collecting quantitative data in the form of scores on three different measures before and after the program, parents were interviewed to see if qualitative data supported improvements shown on quantitative measures. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie stress that the researcher should create designs that effectively answer research questions and that this could include both mixed-model designs (mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within or across stages of the research process) and mixed-method design features (the inclusion of a quantitative *phase* and a qualitative *phase*).

In this respect, using a combination of the survey method and interviews to investigate the psychological and phenomenological components of spiritualist mediumship would incorporate both a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. In addition, the use of standardized measures and open-ended questions within the survey itself constitutes a within-stage mixed-model design. A number of points will now be reflected upon, which places further individual aspects of this research within the mixed methods perspective.

Firstly, qualitative methods can facilitate the design of a good survey instrument (Sieber, 1973). Chapter one showed that observation of a mediumship training course and participation in a mediumship awareness group, which are essentially qualitative in nature, informed the design of the mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ) to be included in the survey study, which used a quantitative research method. In loose terms, this would follow the definition of sequential development, where findings of one approach influence the planning of the next method (Morse, 1991). Secondly, as discussed in Chapter four, textual responses to open-ended questions on the MAQ were converted to quantitative categories using a content analysis approach and examples of original quotations were reported to clarify, describe, and validate quantitative results. In addition, the content analysis approach itself amalgamated inductive and deductive components. Thirdly, mixed methods sampling is an established practice (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) and quantitative research can assist the sampling strategy for a qualitative study (Bryman, 1992). In the current IPA study, participants were recruited using purposive sampling following initial registration of interest in the quantitative survey. Furthermore, the purpose of the IPA study is to expand one's understanding of issues arising from the content analysis and to gain richer data than the MAQ allowed, with the aim of extending the scope and breadth of inquiry to "tell the full story" of spiritualist mediumship.

It is evident that when deciding to mix and match approaches, what is of fundamental importance is the research question and what the researcher wants to find out. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative design components is likely to result in "complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). In essence, the researcher who has knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches is in a better position to answer specific research questions and produce a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. With this in mind, different qualitative methodologies were researched to decide the best approach that would elaborate and enrich findings from the MAQ. A brief overview of the position of qualitative research within psychology was also reviewed.

### 6.3 Contemplating qualitative research in psychology and parapsychology

In 1991, a report commissioned by the Scientific Affairs Board of the British Psychological Society recognised that there was a growing acknowledgement in the value of qualitative research methods in psychology (Richardson, 1996). Views of the current position of qualitative research in Western psychology seem to vary between the US, Canada, and Europe. Analysing publication trends in 57 journals affiliated to the American Psychological Association (APA), Marchel and Owens (2007) found only 1,248 out of 96,379 articles (1.3%) involved qualitative work. Similarly, Canadian researcher, Bodner (2006) surveyed a random sample of 200 journal articles in the PsycINFO database and found only 8% ( $N=16$ ) had a qualitative research design, compared to 41% ( $N=79$ ) that were experimental. However, other Canadian and UK researchers have argued that qualitative research has been on the rise and is now a major movement (O'Neill, 2002; J. A. Smith, 2004) and have emphasised the increase in the publication of qualitative research articles in mainstream journals and research methods books over the past 30 years, suggesting it is becoming increasingly accepted as a useful research tool (Loseke & Cahil, 2007; Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002).

The field of parapsychology has seemed to respond to this growing acceptance of qualitative research, with both US and UK researchers incorporating a range of formal qualitative methods and analyses into their work. For example, phenomenological research methodology (Giorgi, 1985; J. A. Smith, 1996) has been used to explore process oriented aspects of allegedly performing psi (Heath, 2000), synchronicity experiences (D. Hanson & Klimo, 1998), near-death experiences (Wilde & C. D. Murray, 2009), energy healing (C. Williams & Dutton, 2009), and the experience of having a presumed precognitive dream (Stowell, 1997a, 1997b). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has also been used to investigate the nature of self-reported peak and other exceptional experiences (Masluk, 2003), and conversational strategies have been examined in reports of paranormal experiences (Wooffitt, 1992). In addition, interviews have commonly been used in parapsychological research, for example: to examine metaphors and lay theories

of psi (C. Williams & Dutton, 1998); to compare energy metaphors in the discourses of two psychics, a healer, and an aura reader (C. Williams, Evans, & Skinner, 2003); to investigate childhood influences that heighten claimed psychic powers (Wright, 2006); and to explore spontaneous psychokinetic phenomena (Simmonds-Moore, Rhine-Feather, & Hamilton, 2008).

This trend towards conducting qualitative research has also become increasingly evident in mediumship research, and it seems that the tendency to focus on an experimental approach is being replaced by a qualitative and/or process-oriented approach. For example, Barrett (1996) studied the phenomenology of channelling for her US doctoral research; Wooffitt (2006) used conversation analysis to explore the structure and sequential patterns of interaction in the language of mediums and psychics; Wrightson (2007) used semi-structured interviews to investigate the relationship between mediumistic and mystical experience in the context of transpersonal psychology for his MSc research thesis; Gilbert (2007) has used semi-structured interviews to look at the experiences and communicative practices of contemporary British spirit mediums for her doctoral research; and, most recently, Rock, Beischel, and Schwartz (2008) used thematic analysis to explore how research mediums experience claimed discarnate communication.

In essence, it is apparent that qualitative methodology is becoming increasingly popular in the field of psychology. Furthermore, there has been recent interest in using qualitative approaches to explore the mediumship phenomenon. However, no studies have used a qualitative approach that is concerned with how mediums make sense of their experiences. In an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the mediumship phenomenon, an approach is needed that allows the researcher to enter into the life world of the medium, eliciting material that is both rich and insightful.

#### **6.4 Choosing the data collection method: Semi-structured interviews**

When the aims of the research are to enter the psychological and social world of the individuals of interest, a range of methods are available to collect data. Verbatim data can

be obtained through the use of different types of interviews (e.g. structured interview, unstructured interview, semi-structured interview and group interviews); narrative text can be found in personal accounts, such as diaries or biographies; and focus groups can be organised to inspire group discussion on the phenomenon under investigation. However, it has been argued that the latter may not provide a detailed exploration of personal experiences (J. A. Smith, 2004) with the concern that group dynamics may take precedence over the discussion topic (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Interviews, in general, have the advantage, over other methods listed above, of facilitating empathy and rapport with individuals and, for this study in particular, fulfil the goal of obtaining meaningful information on mediums' experiences and in-depth insights into the mediumship process. J. A. Smith and Osborn (2003) consider semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for generating material of a qualitative nature, because they are much more flexible and allow for interesting issues to be followed up in "real time". Although an interview schedule is referred to during the interview, the researcher is less concerned with the ordering of questions and more interested in enabling the respondent to have a voice and share their story. In this respect, the respondent is rightly considered as expert on their life experiences and perceptions, and the interview process is seen as a collaborative dialogue with the interview schedule mapping possible ways this discussion may proceed but not being restricted or bound by it.

#### **6.4.1 Choosing the qualitative analysis**

In making a decision about what method of data analysis would be more likely to increase our understanding of how mediums make sense of their experiences, a range of qualitative approaches were considered (e.g. Grounded Theory; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Discourse Analysis; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis and conversational analysis were not considered appropriate as they are more concerned with the role of language in the construction of social reality, rather than the nature of the phenomenon (Willig, 2001). In addition, analysis usually takes place with naturally occurring talk and text, outside the interview context, and in this study the researcher wanted to be able to inquire about specific topics of interest with the participants, using semi-structured interviews. Although grounded theory has the advantage of synthesizing and

conceptualizing qualitative data to construct theory, it is an approach that has more commonly been adopted in sociological research as it is interested in basic social processes, rather than gaining insight into individual's psychological world, as is the aim in this study (Charmaz, 2008; Willig, 2001). Whilst the researcher was interested in hearing the biographical accounts of mediums to gain insight into their life stories and how they became a medium, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) was identified as more appropriate and fitting than narrative analysis (M. Murray, 2008). Like IPA, narrative analysis focuses on obtaining a detailed account of a particular experience, however it approaches this goal by asking the participant to give a chronological sequence of events, which is interested in the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Alternatively, IPA allows for responses to be given to more specific concerns, which would allow the researcher to be flexible, and to inquire about, and expand on, experiences of mediums that manifested in the MAQ and subsequent content analysis. As J. A. Smith (2004, p. 48) states: "If a researcher is interested in exploring participants' personal and lived experiences, then IPA is a likely candidate for consideration as a research approach". Moreover, IPA can search for divergences and convergences across and within individual data rather than just the latter (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

#### **6.4.2 Intellectual connections: Theoretical roots of IPA**

Developed by J. A. Smith (1996) in the last 15 years as a distinct approach to performing empirical research in psychology, IPA is influenced by a number of epistemological positions. Taking a deeper look at the background of IPA and the philosophies informing this approach, it is clear that the main underpinnings are phenomenological psychology and philosophy (Giorgi, 1995; Husserl, 1970), and hermeneutics; the interpretative analysis of text. The phenomenological method to gaining an understanding of how people experience their world comprises of three specific stages: epoche, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Willig, 2001). The epoche involves the suspension of assumptions, beliefs and judgements about how we make sense of the world so that we can become more aware of the phenomenon under investigation. In the stage of phenomenological reduction, the researcher describes the phenomenon so we become aware of *what* makes the experience what it is. Imaginative variation examines *how* this

experience is made possible, and identifies what conditions are required for its existence. Finally, these stages are all integrated to understand "the essence of the phenomenon" (Willig, 2001, p. 52). IPA is a version of the phenomenological method which accepts that it is impossible to "bracket out" or suspend presuppositions, and acknowledges that in order to gain access to participants' life worlds the researcher is the "primary analytical instrument" (Fade, 2004, p. 2). This represents the dual nature of IPA whereby *phenomenology* seeks an insider's perspective and stresses the importance of the individual's personal perception, and the *interpretative* facet acknowledges that analysis does not aim to be objective, instead the researcher's involvement is a necessary feature and helps to make sense of participants' experiences and illuminate them in a way that answers a research question (J. A. Smith, 2004).

The interpretative aspect connects IPA to symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1995) which argues that meanings individuals ascribe to events are negotiated within a cultural context, are a result of social interaction, and obtained through a process of interpretation. IPA is also related to the social cognition paradigm (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) that proposes human speech and behaviour *can* reflect differences in meaning. In this respect, it assumes a chain of connection between talk, thinking, and inner mental states. For this to be feasible, IPA adopts a broad realist ontology by suggesting that what people say has some significance and represents their psychological world. This is in contrast to other approaches, such as discourse analysis (DA) that supports a textual ontology where the real world can only be understood as a construction. Whereas DA is sceptical of mapping verbal reports onto underlying cognitions, IPA is concerned with understanding what people think or believe and accepts that there are stable and enduring features of reality.

#### **6.4.3 Responding to criticisms of IPA**

IPA has not been immune to criticism. Collins and Nicolson (as cited in Brocki & Wearden, 2006) question whether IPA is any different from thematic analysis, which also identifies, analyses, and reports patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, IPA may identify themes that are overlooked in thematic analysis; for example, a study by

Warwick, Joseph, Cordle and Ashworth (2004) investigated what was helpful in terms of social support for women with chronic pelvic pain using both thematic analysis and IPA to analyse their interview data and found IPA was more informative in terms of clinical implications. Employing a pre-defined social support category system, their thematic analysis revealed that participants preferred particular forms of tangible support from specific support providers (e.g. medical skills for doctors and nurses) but emotional and informational support was appreciated from the whole support network (i.e., friends, family, partners, nurses). However, in also using IPA, a further three themes were identified that would not have been revealed with just the thematic analysis. These additional themes, which were "pain and suffering", "ideal social support", and "shortfalls in social support", looked more in-depth at the experiences of participants, which provided a richer description of what had been helpful or unhelpful in terms of social support and indicated ways in which services might improve. This highlights the advantages of interpretative activity on the part of the researcher in IPA, which is fundamental to its methodology, enabling a more deeper and critical understanding (Eatough & J. A. Smith, 2006) that one would not find, to the same extent, in a thematic analysis.

Collins and Nicolson (as cited in Brocki & Wearden, 2006) also wonder whether the focus of analysis should concentrate on the individual case and claim that there is potential for the data to become diluted by separating it into component parts. However, as Brocki and Wearden point out, case studies are increasingly being used in IPA; IPA involves idiographic presentation, and there is opportunity at the writing up stage for "the unique nature of each participant's experience (to) re-emerge" (J. A. Smith et al., 1999, p. 235).

Similarly, Willig (2001) has examined the similarities and differences between IPA and grounded theory to answer why researchers should choose IPA over grounded theory. She argues that IPA is more concerned with understanding personal experiences as opposed to social processes, as is the case in grounded theory, and that the latter seeks to establish claims for a broader population, rather than exploring the divergence and convergence in smaller IPA samples. In a different vein, Willig also points out that a limitation of IPA is that it describes the lived experience of participants, but does not attempt to explain why

such experiences take place. This could be seen as further support for mixed methods design in relation to the current research, given quantitative methods employed in a previous study examined the psychological characteristics of mediums; with the aim of attempting to look for explanations of mediumship ability.

#### **6.4.4 Reflecting on the rationale for IPA**

IPA has several advantages over other approaches. Firstly, it is person-centred (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; J. A. Smith, 2004). This was considered an essential requirement for two reasons: 1) there has been a trend in previous research to attempt to prove or disprove the ability of mediums, neglecting the subjective meaning they attach to their experiences. In selecting IPA I hope to be able to move away from this approach and provide an opportunity for the participants to express their voice, be listened to and heard 2) Having a background in clinical psychology, and having previously worked with individuals who had mental health problems, I became aware of the tendency of Western psychiatry to pathologise unusual experiences, and for service-users to be disempowered within the mental health system. Therefore, I felt it was important, given that mediumship could be compared to dissociative identity disorder by Western psychiatry, to use an approach that considered the medium as expert on their experiences, acknowledged these within a cultural context, and addressed reflexivity (personal reflections of how my preconceptions could have affected the study are discussed later in the chapter). Secondly, it is useful in a domain where issues are novel or controversial (Chapman & J. A. Smith, 2002) and it could be argued that mediumship fits these criteria. Thirdly, it recognises that the researcher's own conceptions are needed to make sense of the participants' accounts through interpretative activity, and subsequently contributes to psychology through interrogating or illuminating existing research by discussing findings in relation to the literature. However, the analysis is always an interpretation of the participants' experiences and is grounded in the text; it does not go beyond the text by importing a theoretical position (J. A. Smith, 2004). Fourthly, it allows for creativity and freedom, as although there is a basic process to IPA, it is a flexible approach and does not adhere to strict formulaic procedures (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Furthermore, it allows for

unanticipated themes or topics to be revealed during analysis (Shaw, 2001; J. A. Smith, 2004).

## **6.5 Method**

Thus far, the focus within this chapter has been on providing a rationale for the transition between a primarily quantitative method to data collection and analysis, as seen in the psychological questionnaires part of the survey, to a more combined quantitative-qualitative approach, as seen in the content analysis of the MAQ, to the now purely qualitative approach of interviewing and IPA. In section 6.4.2, IPA has been understood and placed in theoretical context, setting the scene before a shift towards more practically oriented concerns. The following sections will now discuss the design of the interview schedule, the selection and recruitment of participants in the study, how the study was conducted, and issues considered at the analysis stage, including validity and reflexivity.

### **6.5.1 Constructing the Interview schedule**

Within the IPA literature, various strategies have been employed to construct the interview schedule, such as basing the design of the questions on theory (e.g., Michie, Hendy, J. A. Smith, & Adshead, 2004), using already existing schedules (e.g., Turner, Barlow, & Ilbery, 2002), and using both previous exploratory qualitative work and empirical quantitative work (e.g., Turner & Coyle, 2000). The latter most closely resembles the approach taken for this study, with the topics of the schedule stemming, in part, from a desire to illuminate findings from Study two. More broadly, the topics were influenced by the project as a whole: to explore the process and nature of mediumship and to map mediums' own understanding of their experiences. As revealed in Chapter five, there has been no in-depth exploration of the lived experience of mediums and what it means to have a spirit guide. Guidelines proposed by J. A. Smith and Osburn (2003) for structuring of the schedule and wording of questions informed the following.

Questions were framed in an open, neutral manner and participants were encouraged to share their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences with as little prompting as possible.

Jargon was avoided and with the help of observations made in the field I was able to design questions in language mediums would be familiar with. The introduction included general questions enquiring about their length of time as a medium and asking if they wanted to know anything about the research, and was aimed at making the participant feel comfortable and relaxed. The schedule was divided into four main topic areas: mediumship background, the process and nature of mediumship, the role of spirit guides, and the purpose of mediumship (see Appendix 6.1). Questions followed a "funnelling" format whereby the first broad question (i.e., Can you tell me how you became a medium?) gave participants the opportunity to express their own views before probing more specific queries with prompting questions. A draft copy of the interview schedule was discussed with research supervisors before being piloted, which resulted in minor amendments and a question being added to the final schedule (Question 17 – In your opinion can spirits attach themselves to people?)

### **6.5.2 Participants**

Brocki and Wearden (2006) found studies using IPA have varied in sample size, with participant numbers ranging from one to thirty. J. A. Smith and Osborn (2003) argue that there is no definite answer to the question of sample size. However, J. A. Smith (2004, p. 42) has also stated, "It is only possible to do a detailed nuanced analysis associated with IPA on a small sample. Many studies have samples of 5-10." Given the iterative nature of IPA and the potential, in theory, for the analytic process to continue *ad infinitum*, it has been suggested that qualitative research should attempt to gain "understanding represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration while preserving nuances" (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999, pp. 222-223). Therefore, it was decided that a sample size not exceeding 10 participants would be sufficient to allow for the comparison of similarities and the exploration of differences across cases.

Sampling strategy was purposive and relatively straightforward as there was a question on the survey study asking whether respondents would be interested in taking part in a later interview study. Out of the forty-seven respondents that initially expressed an interest ten were selected to take part, which included one participant to conduct the pilot

study. These participants were recruited because of their expertise on the mediumship phenomenon and their willingness to discuss their experiences. Selection for deeper interviewing was also based on participants' responses to the MAQ, and of particular interest was whether they had a spirit guide or not. Participants were chosen who did report a spirit guide, as an aim of the study was to explore this phenomenon in more detail, specifically the role that the spirit guide took in participants' mediumship and how they discovered they had a guide. The sample consisted of five males and five females of British/European descent, with ages ranging between 46 years and 76 years, and length of time practising as a medium ranging between 9 years to 55 years (see Table 6.1). Educational level ranged between no qualifications and postgraduate qualifications. Five of the participants were married, four had partners, and one was single. All of the participants were SNU registered mediums who had won awards for demonstrating their mediumship and had also taken part in the survey study.

Table 6.1. *Participants' details*

<b>Name (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Length of time as a medium (years)</b>
Christopher	46	Male	9
Graham	61	Male	12
James	46	Male	17
Mary	59	Female	15
Melissa	46	Female	27
Penny	60	Female	25
Rachel	76	Female	55
Sarah	54	Female	16
Samuel	50	Male	14
Tom	62	Male	40

### 6.5.3 Procedure

After the interview schedule had been constructed, a pilot study<sup>17</sup> was conducted with a participant at the College for Psychic Studies in London, who was also a Spiritualist National Union recognised medium and had taken part in the survey study. Following this an additional question was included on the topic of spirit possession. Potential participants were then contacted by their preferred method, either by email or in writing thanking them for taking part in the survey study and asking them if they would still be interested

<sup>17</sup> This was included in the main data sample

in taking part in an interview. It was emphasised that the interview would be an opportunity to tell their story and express their personal views about mediumship and that I would not be asking them to demonstrate or prove their claimed ability. It was also explained that in order for me to remember what had been said I would use a Dictaphone (tape-recorder) to record the interview. Participants were reassured that any information provided would be used for research purposes only and their identity would remain anonymous.

It was important that the participants felt at ease; therefore, interviews were offered at a place and time convenient to them and were conducted at either the University of Northampton, the participant's home or a spiritualist church. They were reimbursed for any travelling expenses incurred and offered lunch and refreshments. If being interviewed at the university, participants were greeted by the researcher and given the choice of going to the university restaurant for refreshments and an informal chat, to increase rapport. Discussing my own personal experiences – in particular, attendance on a mediumship training course at the Arthur Findlay College, headquarters of the Spiritualist National Union – helped to develop trust and seemed to make participants feel at ease. Likewise, if the interview was being conducted at the participant's home, a few minutes were spent having a general conversation before the actual interview took place. Participants were then thanked for their participation in the previous survey study, informed of their rights as a participant and asked to sign a consent form agreeing to take part in the interview study. Before starting the interview, the researcher read the following instructions and gave a copy to the participant:

*In a moment I will be asking you about your experiences of mediumship and what it means to you to be a medium. Please take as much time as you need to answer each question. It is important to me that you are able to express your feelings, experiences, thoughts and beliefs in your own words and as accurately as possible. If you find there are any questions you would rather not answer (for example, because they are too personal) please feel free to do so. If any questions in the interview are unclear, please*

*let me know and hopefully I will be able to clarify them. Also, please feel free to share any other additional information with me that I might not ask about.*

The semi-structured interview schedule was used as a guide rather than a strict set of questions, which allowed participants to talk about their experiences in their own words and on their own terms. Consequently, it should be noted that not all questions on the interview schedule were asked as the researcher often found participants discussed most of the topics on the interview schedule without the need for the prompting questions. All interviews were tape recorded with the participants' permission, with the recorder being placed in a discreet position but where it would pick up the voice of both participant and researcher. No microphones were used as it was felt this could make the interview appear too formal. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 75 minutes and participants were given the opportunity to ask any further questions about the research at the end of the interview process.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim using standard transcription principles (Willig, 2001, p. 25) in order to produce a typed document that captured an accurate account of what had been reported. Words in angular brackets < > represented my best estimate at what the participant said, whereas parentheses and question marks (???) were used when I was unsure of what had been said. Short pauses (between 2-3 seconds) were represented by three full stops (...) and longer pauses were indicated by a series of full stops (.....). A plus sign (+) was used to indicate places in the transcript where the participant and I spoke at the same time. Participants' identities were protected by assigning a pseudonym and by changing any potential identifying information within the transcript. Initials were used at the start of each line of the transcript to indicate whether it was the researcher or the participant that was speaking. All lines were numbered so that quotes could be identified within the transcript.

#### **6.5.4 Ethical considerations**

Similar to the survey study, this study followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (2006), and ethical approval was sought from the University

of Northampton Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the research. Participants were asked to complete a consent form before starting the interview and were reassured that their identity would be protected. They were informed that data would be used for research purposes only, meaning selected quotes could be used anonymously in my PhD thesis, and information could be shared with university supervisors or colleagues at professional conferences and could potentially be published in academic journals. Tapes of the interview were returned to participants after transcription, on request, otherwise they were destroyed. Participants were also reminded that their contribution was completely voluntary and that they were free to stop the interview at anytime, could refuse to answer a question, and would also be free to withdraw information within one month of the interview.

Risk issues for the interviewer were also taken into account and I always informed a colleague of my arrival at an interview destination and the address of where it was being conducted, and then telephoned when I finished the interview and left the participant.

### 6.5.5 Data analysis approach

The flexible guidelines to IPA analysis, as outlined in a number of sources (e.g., J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2001) were followed (see Table 6.2 for the step-by-step analytic procedure).

*Table 6.2. Step-by-step guide to the analytical process*

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Analysis process</b>
Stage 1	A record was kept of initial thoughts and ideas from the interviews (e.g., participant's non-verbal communication, openness, attitude, potential themes)
Stage 2	An A4 copy of the transcript was printed and attached to A3 paper to provide two spacious margins (left and right of the transcript).
Stage 3	The first transcript was read several times. Comments were made in the left margin of interesting points, ideas, and assumptions.
Stage 4	Emerging themes were then identified on the right side margin
Stage 5	Initial themes from the first participant were then listed on a separate piece of paper, examined for connections, organized into clusters and

checked against the data.

Stage 6	A main table of super-ordinate themes (cluster themes) and sub-themes (themes within the cluster) was developed. A directory of examples for each theme was compiled represented by page number and line number.
Stage 7	The remaining transcripts were then also read several times and subject to Stages 2-4. The initial table of themes was used to identify repeating themes generated from the first transcript and to acknowledge emerging new ideas.
Stage 8	A cyclical approach to reviewing each transcript was taken, moving between each case to check for the existence of new emerging themes.
Stage 9	A master table of superordinate themes and corresponding subthemes was constructed

The first stages of the process involved keeping a record of initial ideas after each interview and then reading the first transcript several times. Comments were then made in the left side margin with reference to initial representations, interesting points, ideas, and assumptions. The central premise in this process is to understand the content and complexity of meaning about participants' experience, within what is spoken, rather than measure frequencies. Emerging themes are then identified from these comments on the right side margin (see below).

Table 6.3. Example of coding within an individual transcript

<b>Ideas</b>		<b>Themes</b>
Family influences Normalisation Natural ability	<i>Well, my family were mediumistic as well so it was quite natural.</i>	Normalisation of mediumship

The next step involved listing these themes from the first participant on a separate piece of paper and initial connections and relationships were identified. These themes were then clustered together according to associations. A main table of themes (Cluster themes) and sub-themes (themes within the cluster) was developed from the clusters and a directory of phrases that supported the themes was compiled, including identifiers that highlighted the page and line numbers of where the phrase could be found. Analysis of the remaining cases involved reading the transcripts several times and then using this initial table of

themes to identify similarities and differences, amplifications, echoes, and contradictions within the responses. Thus, a cyclical approach to reviewing each of the transcripts was implemented, allowing for new themes to emerge together with additional responses which further articulated the existing themes.

After each transcript had been analysed, a final table of superordinate themes and corresponding subthemes was constructed. This involved consolidating the initial table of themes from the first transcript with any new themes that emerged from the other transcripts. During the course of analysis it is fundamental to acknowledge the process as both "emic" and "etic" (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005), with the former consisting of inductive and iterative procedures which are aimed at helping the researcher gain an insider's perspective, and the latter referring to the interpretative aspect which requires the researcher to develop an outsider's perspective; clarifying experiences and illuminating them in order to broaden our understanding of a phenomenon. This necessitated close interaction between analysis and text, looking for convergences and divergences, but not going beyond what was said by participants. Furthermore, themes were not selected on the basis of how frequently they occurred in the transcripts but instead on the basis of how well they helped to elucidate other parts of the account and on the "richness of the particular passages that highlight the themes" (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 75).

The final writing up stage consists of producing the results section containing the emergent themes (see Chapter seven). To ensure that the analysis reflects participants' own understandings, the integration with wider literature is postponed to a later stage and, thus, entails a separate discussion (see Chapter eight). Making a distinction in this way between a results section and a separate discussion session is a common practice in IPA research (e.g., Jordan, Eccleston, & Osborn, 2007; Knight, Wykes, & Hayward, 2003; C. D. Murray, 2004; e.g., J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003). The power of the study is reflected in the extent to which it elucidates knowledge within the broader research context (J. A. Smith, 2003).

### **6.5.6 Validation checks**

In an attempt to ensure that my analysis of the transcripts remained valid and credible, the annotations and table of themes were reviewed by my research supervisor and an independent researcher familiar with the IPA process. Perhaps more importantly, participants were offered the opportunity to appraise preliminary interpretations and provide suggestions for changes, although no participants chose to take this opportunity.

### **6.5.7 Reflexivity: Owning one's perspective**

Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) suggest that it is good practice when conducting qualitative research to disclose theoretical orientations, beliefs or personal anticipations prior to the analysis stage. This guideline is also echoed by Brocki and Wearden (2006), with specific reference to IPA, in their suggestion for researchers to acknowledge preconceptions and reflect upon the role they may play on the interpretation of participants' transcripts. With this in mind I kept a reflective diary of the research process and made notes after each interview on the language used by participants (both verbal and non-verbal); commenting also on the initial impression of the person which I felt came across in the interview. Given that I had also made reflections at the start of the research process – on my observations of, and participation in, a mediumship training course – I was able to track any changes in thinking throughout the process and was aware of the social context in which some individuals developed as a medium. Additionally, as I was aware of previous literature before I conducted the interviews this could have influenced my approach to questioning during the interviews and subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data. However, in acknowledgement of this awareness I was able to make a conscious effort to focus on the "present" during the interviews and to try to "see" the world as experienced by the respondent. When reflecting upon my participation in the mediumship training course, I remembered how important it was to be open and non-judgemental when interacting with other individuals on the course in order for me to gain a true picture of what is involved, and this attitude remained throughout the interview process. Participation in the course also helped me to identify with mediums

and enabled me to understand the terms used by mediums, which increased clarity in the interviews.

Moreover, it is generally accepted in qualitative research that it is difficult to have "neutral" access to subject matter as "it seems unlikely that researchers could embark upon a project without having at least some awareness of the current literature and issues surrounding the area" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 92). In addition, although researchers may try to suspend their prior knowledge, they may still be influenced by unconscious dimensions. Thus, what is important in qualitative research is transparency about the research process, in particular providing a track record of how raw data is transformed into themes so the analysis process is accessible and visible and by being open to reframing by trying out alternate interpretations (J. A. Smith, 2008). These checks and balances were achieved in this thesis by grounding the themes with examples (extracts from participant transcripts) and by having a dialogue with other IPA researchers in order to assess the validity of themes that emerged. The following chapter presents the six superordinate themes (and corresponding sub-themes) that emerged from the analysis, which illuminates our understanding of the role of a spirit guide and what it means to be a medium.

## CHAPTER 7

# MEDIUMS' VIEWS ON THE PROCESS AND NATURE OF MEDIUMSHIP AND THE ROLE OF SPIRIT GUIDES

### 7.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings from analysis of ten interview transcripts with mediums. As discussed in Chapter six, an idiographic approach has been taken to investigate the personal experiences of mediums in depth. Consistent with the aims of the research, and phenomenology in general, this study attempts to capture the meaning that mediums attribute to their experiences by exploring the role of spirit guides and the process and nature of mediumship, such as how mediums come to classify themselves as mediums and how communication takes place. A key part of IPA analysis is to be mindful of how participants' accounts are similar but also different and to acknowledge these convergences and divergences when identifying and constructing themes (J. A. Smith, 2003). A number of superordinate themes and constituent sub themes emerged from participant accounts which are identified in Table 7.1. This way of presenting a set of sub themes nested within higher order categories (entitled superordinate themes), is common in the IPA literature (e.g., Jordan, Eccleston, & Osborn, 2007; Knight, Wykes, & Hayward, 2003; J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006). In this chapter, these themes are discussed consecutively and illustrated by interview extracts to identify ways in which the themes are grounded in the data. This also allows readers to gauge the credibility of the analysis for themselves (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). In keeping with IPA tradition the analysis consists of close textual readings of participants' words and a critical understanding based on interpretative activity. Therefore, this chapter will give full attention to the exposition and organisation of data, and integration of these findings with the wider literature will be the focus of Chapter eight. This way of separating results and discussion has been standard practice in recent IPA studies (e.g., Eatough & J. A. Smith, 2006; Jordan et al., 2007; Osborn & J. A. Smith, 2006; Wilde & C. D. Murray, 2009)

Participants' names and identifying features (e.g. address locality) have been changed or replaced with a parenthesis and an asterisk (\*) to protect their anonymity. Ellipsis points are used to indicate where parts of the quote have been omitted and parenthesis and full stops (...) represent pauses. I have put the page reference and line numbers in a ratio format after each quote to identify where it can be found in the full transcript (e.g. 1:3-7 equals page one, lines three to seven). Three question marks in parentheses (???) indicate points where it was difficult to comprehend what the participant said, and a sentence or word within directional arrows < > represented my best estimate.

### 7.1.1 Introducing the themes

In the analysis six primary themes were identified that were concerned with: "A search for meaning: The normalisation of mediumship", "progression of mediumship", "relationship with spirit", "spirit guides as transcendental", "explanatory systems of mediumship", and "mediumship as evidence-based counselling". These themes, together with their associated sub-themes, are presented in Table 7.1. No one theme is taken as being more important than any other and in this respect the themes are not given a hierarchical status, but should be regarded as complementary. In harmony with IPA philosophy, the themes are structured in such a way that helps to "tell a story" and thus illuminates our understanding of participants' shared experiences as well as the essence of the phenomenon. Therefore, the first theme represents what emerged from participants' accounts when they were describing how they felt their mediumship *originated*. The second theme is more concerned with the *development of mediumship* and the third theme with the *process of mediumship* and the relationship mediums have with spirit phenomena. In the fourth theme participants reflect on the *role of their spirit guides* in the mediumship process and what they mean to them. The fifth theme focuses on the *procedural components*; how mediumship works or is actually experienced by the participants, and the last theme embodies how participants see the *role of mediumship*. Each of these will be considered in more detail in the following sections.

Table 7.1. Master table of themes

<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
7.2 A search for meaning: Normalisation of mediumship	7.2.1 "My family were mediumistic" 7.2.2 Childhood anomalous experiences 7.2.3 "I thought I was going mad": Reframing distressing experiences using a spiritual model
7.3 Progression of mediumship	7.3.1 Continuum of ability: Innate vs. Developed 7.3.2 Spontaneous development/awareness
7.4 Relationship With Spirit	7.4.1 Responsibility for communication: Internalized vs. Externalized 7.4.2 Regulation of communication 7.4.3 Guides: Autonomous beings vs. Aspects of self 7.4.4 Spirit Influence
7.5 Spirit guides as transcendental	7.5.1 Highly evolved 7.5.2 Specialists 7.5.3 Protector status
7.6 Explanatory systems of mediumship	7.6.1 Ritualistic preparation 7.6.2 Prominent modes of spirit communication 7.6.3 Objective spirit representation 7.6.4 Making associations
7.7 Mediumship as counselling	7.7.1 Support for the living 7.7.2 Evidential information 7.7.3 To help the deceased: Spirit release/rescue

## **7.2 A search for meaning: Normalisation of mediumship**

When asked to talk about how they became a medium, the majority of participants reported experiences that had normalised mediumship for them. Explanations focused on how mediumship had always been an ordinary occurrence in their lives or how mediumship and Spiritualism helped to construct a personal experiential framework for making sense of reality as they experienced it, whereby unusual or distressing

experiences were interpreted as "normal" via a mediumistic model. Several sub themes emerged from this superordinate theme which will now be discussed.

### 7.2.1 "My family were mediumistic"

The majority of participants placed their mediumship in the context of normal family life and reported growing up with mediumship within the family network. They talked about having relatives involved in mediumship or Spiritualism. This seemed to be most evident in Melissa's account of her family background:

**Melissa:** *How did I become a medium, well (...) I grew up in a home where Spiritualism and self-awareness was normal. My mother's mother was a spiritualist medium and a famous medium and my father's mother was also a spiritualist, so both my mum and dad had spiritual mediums in the family. My mother was a natural healer, her sister was a healer in the Christian Scientist Church, I have various relatives who are involved with Spiritualism and allied religions, so when I was a kid seeing spirit people was normal and I was very lucky that it wasn't just me, I had spirit friends that my parents acknowledged as being real...so actually I can't really say when I became a medium because I have always been one (1:4-14).*

In this extract we can see evidence of a strong normalising influence from Melissa's family. Most of her family seemed to be involved in the practice of mediumship to the extent that she would have been in the minority if she had not reported mediumistic experiences. When Melissa states that she was "very lucky", she also appears to be reflecting on how her experience of mediumship could have been viewed differently if her parents had not accepted, believed and named her experiences, thus validating her experience of seeing spirits as "reality".

The following extract from Tom also demonstrates how mediumship was talked about as a natural phenomenon due to growing up with it within the family:

**Tom:** *Well, my family were mediumistic as well so it was quite natural.*

**Researcher:** *Was that both your parents?*

**Tom:** *Father's dead and I knew that he was dying; I knew he was going to be dead a few days before he actually died (....) but no it's just something I've grown up with (2:39-43).*

Similarly, James, Samuel, Rachel, Graham, and Christopher all commented on their family having an interest in Spiritualism and pointed out that they had family members who had mediumistic ability:

**Samuel:** *My grandfather, my mother's father, he was told that he had healing abilities and the story I've been told about him is that my Nan had a clot in her foot and he gave her healing and the clot came out of her toe (6:208-212).*

**Graham:** *He [grandfather on father's side] used to be a transfiguration medium and I didn't know, and she [Aunt] was around him as a girl and he used to take on whatever was coming through, whether it was a young boy, an old man...now I knew my Granny Jane on my mother's side, I knew she had been a clairvoyant type of medium because people used to come to her...people used to come to her and have their tea cups read and cards read, my mother said she didn't need them, they were just props, she could tell people everything about themselves just by being in their presence (6:212-223).*

In Graham's extract it is clear that there were several elder members of the family who had a significant involvement with mediumistic activities and whose abilities are a source of pride for the family. In this respect, there is a real sense of value being placed on mediumship by Graham and his relatives. Similarly, in the extract below, it is apparent that Christopher also had an elder relative who was involved in mediumistic activity and perhaps acted as a role model for his own development. In the act of reading tea leaves it seems as though his Grandma was giving implicit encouragement of mediumship, and there is a sense of inevitability about him developing mediumship, which is also shared by Rachel:

**Christopher:** *Well it's always been in my family, my Grandma, she sort of read tea leaves, she used to read tea leaves, she'd say leave a little bit in your cup, swirl it round and then put it upside down, and she'd sort of tell us things (1:3-6)*

**Rachel:** *Well, my mum was a medium and so mediumship came automatically because I would sit with my mum, and I was two, in circle, and I used to do collection in churches (1:3-5).*

In addition to the tacit encouragement given by family members of participants in the extracts already presented, there was also a report of overt encouragement by the family. In the following extract James mentions that he was encouraged to attend a spiritualist church and develop healing abilities by his mother and aunt, signifying that James was raised within a family that reinforced mediumistic ability:

**James:** *I guess it was because of family interest in Spiritualism and an Aunt of mine, my mother's sister was a spiritualist who through her own personal story became involved in Spiritualism, and my mother who had or has polio...I was interested in healing so my Aunt encouraged me and I wasn't very old at the time, between 12, 14, 15 and I used to go to the Spiritualist church with my mother and my Aunt and that was how I first started to be interested in Spiritualism (1: 3-10).*

In addition, James introduced the idea that mediumship could be inherited, thereby normalising the experience as a genetic predisposition. This theme is discussed later in section 7.3 under the superordinate theme *progression of mediumship*, which contrasts mediumship as being a gift everyone is born with, with a skill that has to be developed with patience and perseverance.

**James:** *My grandmother, my maternal grandmother was extremely psychic and she always seemed to know if my mum was trying to hide something from her...she would also read tea leaves, she was very good at reading tea leaves ... and in fact recently my great Auntie in America has been saying that she saw spirit from a child, so it*

*seems to be that there is an inheritance as well with this ability, and similarly, my grandmother said that her grandmother, that would be my great, great grandmother also used to read tea leaves (2:34-44).*

In this section we have seen how the family provides a context for normalising mediumship, whereby participants are positioned in a spiritual network consisting of relatives who practise, perform and encourage mediumship – either implicitly or explicitly. The next sub-theme to be discussed is also nested in the super-ordinate theme of “normalisation”, whereby participants describe having childhood anomalous experiences that resulted in them considering mediumistic experiences as normal occurrences.

### **7.2.2 Childhood anomalous experiences**

In addition to the participants’ family members having mediumistic experiences, all of the participants, except one, described anomalous experiences in childhood as influential in their later becoming a medium. Reflecting on these experiences later in life and interpreting them as signalling sensitivity to the mediumistic or spiritual, in a search for subjective meaning, could explain how participants came to consider themselves as mediums. We might conjecture that, the family context could provide the opportunity for mediumship, but the (spontaneous) anomalous experiences provide the impetus. Penny seemed to reflect on her childhood experience as an extremely positive event, where, for one brief moment in time, her whole perception of life and consciousness seemed to alter and she understood the meaning of life. The extract below also shows how Penny’s experience seemed to be a spontaneous event, with no apparent triggers or preparation to what could be referred to as an altered state of consciousness:

**Researcher:** *When you say you had an experience when you were seven and you saw everything, can you tell me a little bit more about what that involved?*

**Penny:** *Err, yes I can, because it was one of those William Blake moments...At the time I remember we were on the cliffs at (\*) where I was dragged up, a little remote village in the middle of nowhere...and we were sitting on the cliff quite peacefully, and then suddenly everything became alive, the sea was just alive and throbbing and I*

*could see little creatures swimming in it, the air and the land, and I looked down at this little flower, I remember it was a harebell, a little blue harebell, they grow on the cliffs, and I could actually see a little, a little being in the flower, and it's like everything is pulsating, radiating, alive, but not in the way that you would normally see it, and that was just for one moment, but in that moment, even though I was only seven years old, I understood (...) may be the meaning of (...) life, in that everything is living, everything is the same, and that is where divinity is, if you like (2-3:49-71).*

In contrast, Melissa describes having a very negative childhood experience as the result of growing up in a house that was considered to be haunted by the memory of several murders, in addition to the house being occupied by a poltergeist.

**Melissa:** *As a child part of my spiritual development was as a result of living in a haunted house...we lived in a very, very haunted (\*) farm house and we had a poltergeist, that was awful, it was dreadful, do you want me to tell you about that?*

**Researcher:** Yes

**Melissa:** *We found out through looking into the history of the place that a whole family had been killed in the civil war and every year on the same day, the same time, and it was not spirit, it was within the memory of the building, the day of that attack and death was re-lived by the house, doors would open that weren't there any more, people climbing up the stairs... bedroom doors would be flung open and my bedroom, and of course I had to be in the bedroom where most of the deaths occurred, and my bedroom... shouting and screaming, you could hear it and we would have to sit there and go through it, and the poltergeist, we called him (\*), one way or the other, every morning when we went down stairs he would have opened every single cupboard and all bottles...and because of my parent's background they knew that it was a spirit person, they knew what he was (14-15:524-562).*

In Melissa's account there is an overwhelming sense of foreboding and lack of control. It seems as though the family resigned themselves to the fact that there was nothing they could do to prevent these experiences (other than move house). They appeared to explain

anomalous events using an external locus of control, in the form of a memory being replayed and a spirit that could interact with the environment. As a consequence, phenomena that others would find incredible were very familiar and self-evidently real to her.

Like Melissa, Mary reflected on having childhood experiences that were distressing, however, these seemed to be less tangible, as she describes being aware of an elusive presence and seeing shadows. Unlike Mary she did not have a spiritual frame of reference to explain her experiences:

**Mary:** *As a child I was always aware there was something there but I never knew what it was, I was very afraid of the dark as most mediums are surprisingly, you know for people who talk to the dead, I'd hide under the pillows, so as a child I was a little bit negative because I could feel things behind me, turn round and look and there was nothing there, I could see shadows, you know in the room and not understand why it was there (1:3-8).*

Christopher also describes having childhood anomalous experiences, such as vivid dreams and visions of animals, which he found difficult to explain at the time, and was distressed by not being able to understand them:

**Christopher:** *I had some experiences when I was a child, I remember really vivid dreams, you know, I can remember even as small as, I must have been in a cot, because I can remember standing up in my cot and screaming because I could see animals, you know I could see animals in my bedroom walking through the wall, and I can remember banging, I must have only been a few years old (1:6-12).*

In contrast, Tom talked about an experience with spirit which he did not consider distressing. The theory that spirits can be either a good or bad influence in an individual's life emerged as a theme as will be seen in Section 7.4.4. Tom mentioned seeing and playing with spirit children as a child and interpreted this as a natural experience. For him,

these experiences were normalised within a spiritual framework and were not considered unusual.

**Tom:** *I mean I used to see spirit, and as a child play with people and when I fell asleep they were the people I played with, and that was quite natural, so it was always quite natural to me (1:9-12).*

Given that childhood anomalous experiences were brought up by participants when asked how they came to be a medium, it is possible that they proceeded through life in search of an explanation, which was later found in mediumship and Spiritualism. This interpretation is related to the previous theme whereby family experiences and an interest in Spiritualism normalised mediumship, and is reinforced further in the next theme that emerged from the transcripts.

### **7.2.3 "I thought I was going mad": Reframing distressing experiences using a spiritual model**

Several of the participants spoke about having distressing experiences such as hearing voices after the death of a loved one, bereavement of a child and seeing spirits. They talked about having an overwhelming fear that what they were experiencing was mental health problems. These experiences were then later normalised within a spiritual framework and no support was sought from mental health services. The richness of this theme is best represented in the account by Sarah who describes her experience in detail:

**Sarah:** *The first memory that I actually have was hearing voices after my father died...and I did actually get in quite a state when I think back, even to the extent that one day (...) and I lived about 7 miles away from where my dad's ashes had been buried and one day I just found myself sat at the side of the graveyard - I can't remember how I got there, I don't remember ever having any intention of driving there, I was just suddenly aware I was sat outside in the car and I thought I'm really, really struggling with this because I must have just gone onto automatic pilot and drove there, so that's the state I was obviously in at that stage and then one night I*

went to bed and I woke up and I'd had these voices talking to me saying that my dad was fine, he was living, there wasn't a problem, he wouldn't want me to be upset and I thought I was dreaming, so I thought "pull yourself together" and as I turned over to go back to sleep the voices were still there, so I thought "sit up in bed, sort myself out" because I really thought this was still all to do with a dream I was having, so I sat up and these voices were still there in my head, still talking to me, so I thought "I'm losing it, I'll go down and make a cup of tea" so I went down and all the while I was making this cup of tea these voices were still talking to me, so the next day I said to my husband "You know, I really must be having a nervous breakdown, I need to go to the Doctor's" so I went to the Doctor's and I told him what had happened, I said I must be having a nervous breakdown, so he gave me some pills, as they do, told me to go away for a few days and just try and chill and relax, so my husband at that stage worked away quite often, and he was going to Scotland, so I said to him "I'll come with you and we'll have a few days", never took the pills because I don't take tablets, I don't believe in that sort of thing, I never even got them but all the while that I was on holiday I'd still got these voices talking to me, so at that stage when I got back I thought "Right this is me and now I need to cure myself to get better" so I just pulled myself together, blocked absolutely everything out, thought I've just really got to get back on track and I did that, I did that probably for about 6-7 years and we moved to (\*) and my husband and I owned a company and it was really, really quite odd because I had advertised for somebody in the office and interviewed everybody that had applied for the job and thought "None of these are suitable" and then just as I was saying to my husband "You know none of these are going to be any good but there isn't anybody else" then someone walked through the door and said "I've seen this advert and I know it's been a week since the advert was in the paper but is the job still vacant?" and I interviewed her there on the spot and gave her the job and it just felt right and then after a couple of months she started talking about spiritual stuff and she turned out to be a spiritualist and I was absolutely fascinated with some of the things that she was saying although I thought she was rather odd and strange, I was fascinated, so slowly I started to talk to her about what happened with my dad and different things and her sister was a medium but not local and I went with her one day to meet her sister who

*was lovely and we sat just chatting about things and that is when my interest started because they were explaining things to me because that was my first real knowledge that somebody was talking to me but forever I'd heard voices in the distances and I would wake in the middle of the night and shake my husband and say you know "there is somebody outside" and it got to the stage where he would say "Oh for God sake shut up, there is nobody there just turn around and go back to sleep" but it was never that strong that you thought it would be anything but somebody outside the house and of course Steph and her sister were starting to explain all these things to me and all the little things that had happened over the years which you just put down as "Oh that must be that and that must be that" so you know, things just started making sense (1-2:3-36).*

There are several points of interest in the extract above. Firstly, Sarah seems to have experienced dissociative amnesia and hearing voices after a traumatic bereavement, which could be interpreted as symptoms of a biological mental health disorder, such as psychosis or schizophrenia within the Western medical model. This is emphasized in her own fear that she was having a "nervous breakdown", and in the behaviour of the medical professional she went to see for help through the act of prescribing medication rather than offering alternative support, such as bereavement counselling. Subsequently, Sarah seems to have taken control of her own mental health and coped with her experiences by what seems to be repression or dissociation as she talks about "blocking everything out". It wasn't until seven years later, when she was introduced to Spiritualism that she made sense of her experiences by interpreting them within a spiritual model. The voices she experienced were then normalised as being spirits communicating with her via a mediumistic process. This is an interesting deviation from earlier excerpts in that she did not already have the spiritual interpretative framework available to her from the family and so she defaulted to a clinical (or medical) model that needed her to "pull herself together". It was only when she employed someone with an interest in Spiritualism that the Spiritualist discourse was made available to her.

Penny, Graham, and Mary all seem to have had parallel experiences, whereby distressing incidents have been understood within a spiritual model rather than a medical model, which has resulted in a belief in mediumistic experiences.

**Penny:** *I had a very extraordinary dream, to such an extent, and it disturbed me so much that my partner was suggesting that I go for psychological treatment, but fortunately he had already been to the SAGB [Spiritualist Association of Great Britain], at 32 Belgrave Square when a friend of his lost their mother, and he said "why don't we go there, perhaps they will be able to sort out what's going on with you", so that's precisely what we did, and I went to see a demonstration with my partner...and afterwards I was just totally fascinated so my next step was to book a sitting with a medium for a private sitting...during the course of the sitting a lot of people came through that I know... and then at the end of the sitting, she said "where are you two young people going now?" and we said "well we're going home". So she said "well, this young lady is very psychic and I would like you to join my class". So, talk about into the firing flames immediately, that's how it happened (1:5-30).*

The extract above seems to reflect a critical point in time when a decision is made regarding what to do about a distressing experience. It is apparent that Penny and her partner felt there were two options available: to seek "psychological treatment" or to go to the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (SAGB). Although they chose to seek support from the spiritual network, there is still a sense that Penny's partner considered the disturbing dream to be a symptom of some underlying problem that needed to be "sorted out", thus assuming a medical model. During the course of consulting with the medium at the SAGB, Penny had messages from deceased relatives, and it seems that this gave her an opportunity to interpret her unusual experiences from a different perspective.

Like Sarah, Graham's initial perception of his experiences is that they are a sign of dysfunction. However, after a visit to the Spiritualist church, this is then replaced with an understanding that he had been "chosen" and that these experiences were in fact a gift to be developed.

**Graham:** *I know it's a long story but that was like bang one day that was the beginning of it all. I thought I was going mad by the way Elizabeth, I thought I had lost the plot, I really did.*

**Researcher:** *How did you cope with it?*

**Graham:** *Well, I'm quite strong – I was trying to rationalise it and there was a girl doing psychic studies at the Tech and she would come round and we used to sit and do meditation, where the spirit would come in and talk through me and we used to record it, and we recorded it all, but the instant we started with the meditation it all fizzled and crackled, we could hardly hear it, but she used to come and talk to me and spirit, after about 6 weeks, advised me go to the local spiritualist church.*

**Researcher:** *Had you ever been before?*

**Graham:** *I'd been in my twenties with my parents... So I went in and I spoke to a guy who was a bit snooty with me and then he says "I will go and get the president of the church" and she came and I said "I'm Graham Booth [pseudonym], I've been directed to your church" and I told her virtually what I've told you now and she says "Ah love"... "Ah love" she says, "they've made contact with you that's all", "What do you mean they have made contact with me?" "Come in back, let's have a cup of tea and chat about it" and she said "what do you want to do now then?" so I said "I don't know what to do". She told me they ran a development circle at the church and I would be welcome to join that and I thought "well I have come this far, yes I will" (3-4:88-113).*

**Mary:** *When my grandmother died I carried on talking to her and knew that she was still around, because I'd be talking to her and asking her for help, but it wasn't until I was in my late 30s, about 39 I think, I lost a child and a friend of mine brought me to the spiritualist church and said you'll get evidence of that child and so I was brought along to the spiritualist church and I was indeed given absolutely superb evidence that this child, another dimension, another intelligence knew about this child (1:15-21).*

#### **7.2.4 Section summary**

In the above accounts it is evident that a significant other helped Penny, Graham, Mary, and Sarah by introducing them to a system of beliefs and practices at the Spiritualist

Church that could recast their distressing experiences as part of the natural world. It is interesting to reflect on the first sub-theme of "family experiences" at this point as Penny, Mary, and Sarah differ from other participants in that they did not report having a family background that was embedded in mediumistic experiences. Subsequently, they were all initially disturbed and confused by their experiences, and it was not until they familiarized themselves with a spiritual model that they then interpreted their experiences as mediumship. In addition, Sarah did not have any "childhood anomalous experiences", as seen in section 7.2.2, that desensitized her to mediumship phenomena like some of the other participants did. As a result, it appears that she did not immediately construe her experiences as mediumistic, in contrast to Tom or Melissa who grew up in an environment embedded with both anomalous childhood experiences and mediumistic family members. Similarly, Mary had anomalous experiences as a child but did not have the family context in which these experiences were accounted for by a spiritual explanation, and was subsequently distressed by not being able to understand what they meant. Therefore, the sociocultural context in which individuals have mediumistic experiences seems to be an important factor in whether these experiences result in psychological distress.

### **7.3 Progression of mediumship**

In this theme we see a shift from discussions of the origins of mediumship in the previous sections to discussions focusing on the process of mediumship development. Progression of mediumship emerged as a superordinate theme from the transcripts to symbolize material that represented how mediums perceived their ability to advance. The majority of participants commented on how mediumship ability was latent within everyone; however, they also referred to the need to develop this through, what sounded like, a slow, gradual process. This was also apparent in the importance that participants placed on development circles and groups with some participants' mentioning that they had sat in a circle for over ten years. However, participants seemed either reluctant or unable to describe actually what development consisted of, perhaps reflecting the abstract or intangible nature of mediumship experiences. When participants were asked what practices they found helpful in development circles they made vague references to

meditation, "attunement", "linking" or "blending" with someone, and "stilling the mind" but were unable to elaborate on these concepts.

Many of the participants described mediumship development as an apprenticeship, using words such as "fledgling" or "on the circuit" to represent training taking place at different spiritualist churches. They also remarked on how this training increased their confidence. In listening to the accounts I also got the sense that there was an element of suggestibility or self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, Samuel talked about going to see a medium before joining a development group who told him he had mediumistic ability: "...I had messages for those six meetings telling me that I could do healing, that I should develop my mediumship, I could do work in trance..." (2:40-42).

### **7.3.1 Continuum of ability: Innate vs. developed**

Participants spoke about mediumship as an ability that is inherent in most people. However, at the same time their accounts also gave the impression that ability was on a continuum and, given time and dedication, individuals could move along a notional sliding scale of development to become outstanding mediums. Alternatively, individuals could fall at the other end of the spectrum and either find it difficult to develop, no matter how hard they try, or not have the inclination to develop. This was best represented in the accounts of Christopher and Samuel. Christopher thought that anyone could develop mediumship, although for it to be of good quality he reflected on the idea that it had to be an inherent trait or an individual's destiny. In using the analogy of learning to play the piano, Christopher proposes that mediumship is something that is perhaps a skill or a talent that can be learnt by all:

**Christopher:** *I think anybody on the planet can develop mediumship, but I think it needs to be in people to be able to develop it to an amazing level, you know like some people...people can start playing the piano and some people will develop to be a fantastic pianist, but there will only be certain people that become a master pianist, because it's like their dharma isn't it, it's like their path...that's what they came here to do...(5-6: 137-143)*

James reiterates this with the analogy of cooking or being artistic: *"My theory on that is that again maybe it's an inherited thing...I mean some people are good at cooking, others aren't, some people are great artists...so I think it's talents"* (3:84-92).

Christopher also suggests that only those that are predestined to become mediums or have an innate ability will do so to an exceptional level. However, he continues to say that under certain conditions individuals can develop to a remarkable level. In this extract he expands on the development theme to point out that there are practises that can be followed if individuals wanted to develop mediumship ability:

**Christopher:**...but having said that I still think you know people can develop mediumship to a great standard, by knowing what they want, knowing how to achieve it, education, sitting in meditation, having a good heart, and doing it for the right reason and going to Churches and developing it (6:151-155).

These extracts explicitly reflect upon the need for development of mediumship. Previous sections emphasized mediumistic experiences within the family and childhood anomalous experiences within the individual as common occurrences, pointing to the suggestion that mediumship ability was an inevitable process for participants. Therefore, it is possible that spontaneous anomalous experiences may be the spur for mediumship and may indicate a natural propensity, but that this ability still needs to be nurtured and refined through development.

Samuel also believes that everybody has the ability to develop mediumship and reflects on how his own ability has progressed since childhood. This quote also indicates that mediumship is on a continuum and that the ability to move up the scale is dependent on the individual's commitment and dedication. Implicit in this perception is the belief that mediumship could be learnt via slow development:

**Samuel:** *I would say that as that ability has gone further as a child then that proves to me if you're willing to dedicate the time then you can develop it, as to what degree*

*then that depends on you and whether you want to put the effort in, because I know a lot of mediums that have developed their mediumship ability and then don't push it any further, so their mediumship is not as good as it could be (7:225-232).*

Like Christopher and James, the use of analogy is evident in the discourse of Graham who agrees that mediumship ability is inherent in everyone and could be lying dormant waiting to be developed: "... it's like saying everybody has got a television, but...it's still in the box, some have got it plugged in but they haven't got it tuned in...everybody has got the ability, it's just a matter of developing it" (6:191-195). In contrast, although James also considered ability to be within everyone and more pronounced in some, he, at the same time "...noticed that sometimes you get some people that sit in development circle, they could sit there forever" (3:74-75).

As demonstrated in three of the participants' accounts above, the use of analogy is interesting in that it seemed to represent the participants' attempt to explain mediumship ability in everyday tangible terms. Referring to popular consumer objects, such as the television, and everyday activities, such as cooking, participants appear to be using metaphorical representation in a way to structure the more abstract experience of mediumship. This perhaps also relates to the first theme of normalisation, indicating participants' way of normalising a phenomenon which is often seen as unusual, strange or abnormal.

### **7.3.2 Spontaneous development/awareness**

In contrast to discussions highlighting that mediumship ability could be learnt, if one was prepared to put effort into developing it, Rachel and Melissa talked about the possibility of spontaneous mediumship ability. They commented on how traumatic events, such as bereavement, near death experiences (NDEs) or head injuries could bring about sudden mediumistic abilities:

**Rachel:** *I think everybody is born with it, it depends whether they want to go forward with it or a person that has an accident, not to them, but deaths, all sorts of things*

*happen to people, I can't really describe, it could be a bad marriage, it could be a death in the family, it could be somebody talking to you and then all of a sudden it opens up to each and everyone but you don't come into spiritualism until you're ready (2:36-41).*

Melissa said that she was aware of theories proposing that there were differences in the brains of mediums, such as them having a larger than normal pituitary gland and hypothalamus:

**Melissa:** *People who have had near death experiences or had blows to the head also seem to develop mediumistic abilities and there have been numerous people that I have read about and that I have met who developed spontaneous psychic and/or mediumistic awareness as a result of head injuries...I've also heard and read bits and pieces about people having larger than normal pituitary glands, hypothalamus and things like that and that mediums' brains work differently (2:52-64).*

### 7.3.3 Section summary

In Section 7.3 greater insight was gained into the development of mediumship; it seems that spontaneous anomalous experiences and family experiences of mediumship may provide the spur or natural propensity for mediumship ability, but that this ability still needs to be refined with practise in development groups. Similarly, there is a clear sense from the themes discussed that some participants came into mediumship from childhood, such as Melissa who believes that her mediumship ability was inevitable: *"I'm very, very conscious that I was born to be a medium, and I could not have escaped it if I had tried* (10:370-372) and others, such as Sarah, who we saw in Section 7.2.3, came to mediumship much later in life after a traumatic bereavement. It seems as though there is often an experience that serves as a prompt for mediumship, but also acts as a transformation in the individual. This is evident in the above extract by Rachel who refers to a spontaneous event which "opens individuals up" and readies them for what seems like a spiritual awakening whereby their ability is developed to a stage where mediumship can happen. This has links to the next subthemes which represent how some participants

feel they are responsible for the communication process and again use the metaphor of "opening up" to describe how they obtain information.

## 7.4 Relationship with spirit

The previous section suggested that development is more about developing the person, and opening them up to mediumship, rather than developing particular mediumistic practises, which were hardly mentioned by participants. The following themes move on to explore the meaning participants place on their relationship with spirit, and what it is that actually develops.

### 7.4.1 Responsibility: Internalized vs. externalized

Participants described how responsibility for the communication process resided with either the spirit communicator or themselves. Graham felt that the communication process was initiated by the spirit communicator rather than himself, *"I have to wait till somebody wants to communicate, see I don't think I communicate with them, I think they communicate with me"* (9:300-302). This externalization of responsibility seemed to be most evident in the account of Tom who stated on several occasions that *"if it goes pear-shaped the helper gets into trouble, because it is their job to sort it out on that side ready for me"* (6:213-215). In listening to Tom talk about the communication process there was an overwhelming feeling that if he misinterpreted messages from spirit communicators then the blame was with them, *"if they don't make sense then it's the communicator's fault"* (10:362-363). It seemed as though Tom was protecting his self-esteem and reputation as a medium by putting the onus on the communicator to clarify information if the recipient did not understand it (3:97-105). At one point he spoke quite angrily when reflecting on an experience he had whilst demonstrating mediumship at a spiritualist church:

**Tom:** *I did a service years and years ago and it all went pear-shaped... and I came off the rostrum... and I said "Don't you ever, ever, ever do that again to me, because I was on that platform to allow people from spirit to communicate, you [spirit guide]*

*were there to make sure the information I got was as accurate as it could be from the people, you were there to sort them out before they got to me and you didn't do it, so I'm not going to do it anymore...I'm on strike (8:286-293).*

Although this demonstrates how Tom externalized responsibility for experiencing a difficulty in the communication process, it also represents how he feels let down by his spirit guide. This emphasises Tom's belief that his spirit guide is a real person who also has flaws. By viewing his guide as someone he can argue with he is perhaps exerting mastery over the situation and using him as a scapegoat to take a break from demonstrating mediumship when he does not trust his own ability. The belief that spirit guides are real people emerged as a separate theme as identified in Section 7.4.3.

Penny described how she also externalized the communication process; however she seemed to do this within the context of success rather than failure as was evident in Tom's account:

**Penny:** *I haven't ever heard a name, but sometimes, in a sitting normally, it will be trying to come out of my mouth and it will be not quite correct but nearly, and that's quite interesting too isn't it, and clever, but that's nothing to do with me I can assure you, that's much to do with them (13:366-370).*

It seemed that Penny did not feel as if she should take credit when communication went well. When listening to her reflect on a conversation she had with her guide it felt as though she was being somewhat self-depreciative, "I'm saying... 'how can we do our work more efficiently, do you have any hints for me here, I'm doing my best, I know I'm useless, but you know, anything to tell me?'" (11:287-290). Penny was also mindful that if the communication process did not go well then that would cause embarrassment. However, she also seemed to acknowledge that if she internalized responsibility and accepted her own role in the process then communication could go well. In the following extract she refers to "taking risks" and "taking chances" when giving information, meaning

even if the information seems unlikely, for example a strange sounding name, to still communicate this as it could be relevant in a reading:

**Penny:** *But with mediumship and public work if you are willing to take risks, if you are willing to take chances and then if it's not correct you are going to look a right prat in public, if you don't care about that anymore, if you take a few chances you get back results (13:357-361).*

Christopher also acknowledged that he had a part to play in the communication process and seemed to internalize responsibility. In the extract below he talks about how he believes his own thoughts and actions were important when developing mediumship, in particular, he felt it was necessary to control negative thoughts:

**Christopher:** *I think your thoughts and your words and your actions create lots of things, because if you are a good person deep down and you've got a good heart, and you're doing it for the right reasons, if your words are good and your thoughts are good and your actions are good, I mean I'm no angel, but I understand how it works...you know to be sort of in control of your thoughts, to sort of keep dead negative thoughts out is a good tip to anybody on progression (4-5:108-114).*

The concept of control in the mediumship process is evident in the next theme whereby participants talked about the importance of regulating communication and having disciplined control over when spirit communication took place.

#### **7.4.2 Regulation of communication**

As well as attributing the communication process to either a source external to themselves or to internal processes, some participants spoke about having disciplined control over when communication took place and were able to compartmentalise mediumship with other aspects of living. In contrast, other participants talked about allowing spirits to have control or allowing communication to take place all the time. Rachel spoke about a time when she decided she had to control when she communicated with spirits:

**Rachel:** *That was the time that I shut off spirit, for a time, because I felt as though I'd got to learn how to control the spirit and not use it when it wasn't necessary (1:17-19).*

In this quote, there is also reference to the metaphor of openness which was referred to in Section 8.3.3. Rachel expands on this here by talking about how important it is for the medium to learn a degree of control and not to be open all the time. In the quote below, Sarah explains why it is essential to develop this control so as not to be overwhelmed by spirits communicating all the time. Comparing it to an employment situation, Sarah describes how she has total control and is fairly strict about when communication occurs:

**Sarah:** *For me I am working or I am not, you know, so it would be absolutely no point spirit talking to me unless I'm working...so I am not aware of spirit unless I want to be... and that depends on the person, if you are an open book all of the time then you are going to feel spirit because our families are around us, so you are going to feel them but for me that feels unhealthy, you know we live in a physical world, we all have a physical life to live, if we are all going to be able to see spirit 100 per cent of the time we may as well as stayed up there (11:384-391).*

In using the term "open book" Sarah seems to be suggesting that there is something mediums can do to prevent or assist spirits to communicate. This theme is also reflected by Samuel who said "the door is ajar, I know I've pulled it closed, but it's unlocked so if they [spirit] need to come through they can sort of knock on that door and push it open and say 'We're here'" (14: 491-497).

In listening to the accounts of the participants it felt as if they were describing some sort of controllable permeable boundary that existed between them and the spirit communicators. This is exemplified in the following quote:

**Graham:** *Although I do believe I'm receptive to spirit communication all the time you can't really let it interfere with your life, so there is like a barrier that says don't communicate now (9:306-308).*

For Sarah, Samuel, and Graham the communication process seemed to be something that could be controlled but at the same time involved a process that appeared quite precarious. Although "barriers" could be put up or "doors closed" to regulate spirits communicating all the time, spirits could also permeate through if, presumably, they were persistent enough as Graham goes on to say: "*I've had spirits communicate with me because it has been urgent they have to get a message to someone*" (9:306-309). Graham later gave an example of when this actually happened to him:

**Graham:** *In the SNU you are taught when your service is over cut it, no further communication with spirit, protect yourself, seal yourself, make sure, right, that is all very well, but several years ago now I was doing psychic art demonstration and an agitated spirit was walking up and down the centre aisle, it was a mother spirit...her message was for this guy at the back "Get in touch with your brother...you must get in touch with your brother..." so I told him and he said "Never, I will never, ever speak to him, we haven't spoke for 20 years, I will never speak with him ever"...all night long she was at my bedside pleading...the following day she was there all the time...About 6 months later I went back to the church to do a demonstration and after the service he said "I did go and see my brother" he says "and he had had a stroke and he was in a nursing home and he couldn't talk but we hugged and we cried and we shook hands and we made friends and two days later he passed to spirit", so this closing down and cutting spirit off it's a good idea but it's not cast in stone, there are times when you need to give that extra time and help them out, you have to be flexible (15-16:563-589).*

In this section we have seen how participants stress the need to control when spirit communication takes place, so as not to allow it to encroach on everyday life. In listening to participants talk about this it felt as though the majority could decide when and where they communicated with spirits rather than it being forced upon them. In the next section the concept of a spirit guide is introduced, which is one way respondents described to regulate communication. However, in the next section, we will see that some participants

feel that regardless of how much control a medium has over the communication process, spirits can have a negative influence.

#### **7.4.3 Spirit guides: Autonomous beings vs. Aspects of self**

Another sub-theme that emerged from the transcripts was the relationship that mediums had with their spirit guides and the role of spirit guides in regulating spirit communication. When asked if they could tell me about their guides, participants seemed to talk about them as though they were real people, as "entities" or "beings" with separate personalities, identities, and feelings. This is best represented by James, Penny, and Melissa:

**James:** *Our guides are real people, there is a tendency, I think, to put them aside once we finish our work and I have been guilty of that myself and not realised that they are living, they are still living and not taking them for granted...I mean I've done it and I do believe they get very upset if they are taken for granted (9:303-308).*

**Penny:** *I do look upon them as people, and people who have gone into the next life, and it could be that they have had a lot of experience in physical lives in this world trying to teach people, they might actually have been teachers themselves, or they might have been healers, or therapists (8-8:226-231).*

**Melissa:** *She [spirit guide] passed over with TB [tuberculosis], I can't remember off the top of my head, early nineteen hundreds I think...her mother was a servant in a spiritualist gentleman's home in London and so she grew up watching other people and she talks about people like Oliver Lodge and Arthur Conan Doyle...and she works with me with physical phenomena, so she produces bangs and wraps, lifts things, moves things around, that kind of stuff (9:317-326).*

In these accounts it is evident that participants, such as James, Penny, and Melissa consider their guides to have a completely separate personality from themselves and also describe a quite detailed previous earthly life for their guides. In contrast, participants

who question the existence and identity of their guides do not seem to report any biographical information when they talk about their guides. Additionally, although Graham describes his spirit guides as having qualities of autonomous beings, he does not mention any background information regarding their previous life. Instead, when I was listening to his account, I got the overwhelming sense that he was unconsciously communicating psychological conflict in relation to his sexuality:

**Graham:** *I'm homophobic you know, right, these twins (....) Charles and Joe they were called, they were gorgeous and I said "I can't do this, you're too lovely", you know they were dressed like the ancient Greek would be dressed and they were all golden and shiny and loving really, not like men at all, and I said "I can't be doing with this really, it is too much for me", I didn't know I was that homophobic so they said "What is the problem?", "Well you're too beautiful, you're too pretty, you're too good, if you like", the amount of goodness that they brought with them was heart-melting, so this is what they did, they appeared as two energies, they didn't appear in human form (....) when they appeared together, they disguised themselves but still brought this beautiful feeling of peace and joy (10-11:374-383).*

Graham's account seemed to illustrate both the inclination to conceal and the desire to reveal. In other words his discourse represented the tension between sexual feelings he was trying to repress and sexual feelings he was trying to express. It seemed to me that in recounting how the spirit guides "disguised" themselves, Graham was possibly talking about how he himself disguised his own feelings by masking an underlying suppression. An alternative interpretation was subsequently put forward by a research colleague familiar with IPA who suggested that Graham's account could also represent a challenge to his beliefs. Given that Graham regards himself as homophobic at the same time as recognising other men as being attractive entities it may mean that he is having to confront the notion of homophobia.

In contrast, Mary considers her guides to be aspects of herself and her own consciousness. One way of interpreting her belief that time is cyclical, with no beginning

and ending, could be in relation to reincarnation. Mary may perceive spirit guides to be parts of her self that have lived before:

**Mary:** *I know some of the helpers are aspects of my own mind and aspects of my higher mind...because I don't believe that time is linear, it is cyclical, so you are who you have always been, you are who you are now, so some aspects of me are there in my consciousness, but some are not even separate...it's a very complex subject this, a very complex subject (7:249-254).*

Christopher also questions the source of his guides and wonders "*Whether spirit guides are a completely different entity to yourself or whether they are just an aspect of your own soul, which I have read quite a bit about and I can't actually decide (14:376-379).*

In summary, this section has emphasised how most respondents described spirit guides as having a separate personality and a previous existence as a physical being. However, other respondents did not mention biographical information for their spirit guides and questioned whether they are in fact aspects of their own consciousness. However, it is not clear whether the belief in spirit guides as real entities preceded the information they received about their guides or whether information about their spirit guides resulted in a belief in their reality. The possible psychodynamic function of spirit guides arose from one respondent's account and will be discussed in Chapter eight.

#### **7.4.4 Spirit influence: Negative vs. positive**

As seen in section 7.4.3, most of the respondents considered spirit guides to have an independent existence. In this section, respondents seem to describe consequences of the autonomous nature of spirits, as the majority of them spoke about spirits being able to influence individuals in a negative and/or positive way. The phrase "like attracts like" was commonly used to express the belief that if you were a good person and had positive intentions then you would attract positive spirits. However, if you were a negative person or were in a vulnerable state of mind then negative or mischievous spirits could affect you. Graham conveyed his conviction that bad spirits existed and that they could exert an

influence on people's lives, "there are bad spirits you know, I'll not use the word evil spirits, but certainly very, very mischievous spirits who will try to lead you off the path that you have chosen, even by impersonating the guides (9:332-334).

Graham proceeds to recount an experience where he believed he was personally attacked by a negative spirit which resulted in him being sick for a week. When asked why a spirit would do this he replied:

**Graham:** *I thought it was doing it because it wanted to harm me, I thought it was really after me, just me, because (....) I don't know what reason, I felt it was after me because I was being good (....) I don't know, now maybe when I've gone to the spirit realms I will find out why, because in one meditation they said I was going to be a defender of the spirit realms (10:358-362).*

In listening to Graham reflect on this negative experience I got a real sense of helplessness, in that he believed a spirit harmed him despite the fact that he was being "good". He seems resigned to not knowing the reason for this attack and copes by holding the belief that he will find out one day, when in the "spirit realm". Additionally, his belief that he will be "defender of the spirit realms", suggests his way of regaining control over the situation.

In the extract below, Samuel talks about how he believes spirits can influence us in a positive way by influencing our thoughts or creating events to steer us in a certain direction. In this respect, spirits are perceived as being concerned with the personal development of the medium, rather than facilitating communication as is often the discourse presented when describing the role of spirit guides:

**Samuel:** *We set ourselves a goal we wish to achieve while we are here on the earth plane and as we move away from that goal, they try to give us a nudge or a knock...to try to point us back in the right direction, it might be a thought, it might be an event that takes place (21-22:788-793).*

In his second comment, Samuel discussed how spirits can also influence in a negative way, particularly if individuals "open" themselves to spirit and do not learn how to control mediumistic ability. This links to the previous theme of *regulation of communication* as discussed in Section 7.4.2.

**Samuel:** *If spirits can come close and do that then it also makes sense that, if...you open yourself up to spirit, and are not aware of it and you don't learn how to control things you can get negative energies, negative spirit ghosts, you know that have gone over, they don't want to leave the earth plane, they can draw close to you...and if you are happy to have them then they can influence...I know I've been to a couple of people that are aware of spirit and they've got negative spirits with them, but they don't want to let them go, because they get the attention (22-809-819).*

Samuel continues to discuss his belief that an individual's negative emotional state or being sensitive to spirit can attract similar spirits or "energies" and, again, emphasises the importance of control:

**Samuel:** *As like attracts like...if you're depressed and you're low or you've got a mental problem...you're sensitive and you've opened that doorway up then you can attract similar energies and until you learn to say "No, I don't want those similar energies, I only want to work with those who can give me some assistance and be uplifting and positive" then you can be stuck with those negative energies (22-23:827-833).*

Mary also uses the phrase "like attracts like" and believes "the medium will attract to a soul a mind that is attuned as the same level as themselves" (3:96-97) which reflects, to some extent, equity of power in the spirit-medium relationship. However, she later states that "sometimes it doesn't work like that...it's all to do with the intent behind it" (3:97-98). Like Samuel, Mary suggests that individuals who are in a vulnerable emotional state can attract negative spirits to them. Furthermore, she proposes that individuals should

take responsibility for this. As underlined below, Mary suggests that negative spirits can only influence individuals if they have "permission" to do so; placing blame on individuals who had been affected by negative spirits:

**Mary:** *It's usually the people's emotional state that attracts negativity to them...but they can't (...) the spirit world cannot do anything in the material world without at some level being given permission to do so, if somebody is saying to you that they are haunted or that they have been taken over or influenced by the spirit world, by a spirit person or they are being attacked by spirits (...) on some level of consciousness they have allowed that to happen, so you usually find they are very emotionally disturbed and like when you've got children that are very emotionally highly charged then they attract spirit activity within the home, if you've got somebody that has got divorced, they are in a deeply emotional state they may attract activity to them by the nature of the state of their mind, if you've got somebody that is deeply bereaved then they can attract (...) the negative stuff, it may be attracted to you if you at some level allow it (9-10:326-342).*

Christopher also seems to place responsibility with the individual for what types of spirits they encourage or attract in the communication process:

**Christopher:** *I'm going to attract the same vibration as what I am, because that's a universal law, so if I attract the same vibrations that I am, then I'm not bothered because it is a similar vibration, whereas if you get people that are negative...then they can attract negative, negative minds and negative entities (19: 539-543).*

Within the above accounts there seemed to be an overwhelming sense that participants believed spirits could influence in a positive or negative way. This seemed to reflect how good and bad forces have been a consistent theme within orthodox religion over the centuries. In addition, participants described the hypothesis "like attracts like" as if it were a universal law, at the same time as accepting internal responsibility for spirit influence, suggesting how control of mediumship can be exercised. Respondents spoke about how

"having positive intentions for others" will attract the "right" kind of support, whereas individuals who allow themselves to be negative or have negative thoughts will be affected negatively by spirits. For example, Christopher stated *"when people take drugs or alcoholics, you know these lower elementals; they attach themselves to them (20:550-551).*

Christopher expands on the suggestion that substance abuse and negativity can have an effect on the mediumship process. In the extract below it also seems as though Christopher is reflecting on the theme of normalisation and the sub-theme of the family unit, as discussed in Section 7.2.2, as he talks about needing a "good foundation" and mentions his "dad talking about it" and how it is all "natural" to him now. Christopher seems to imply that without this familiar context, anomalous experiences instigated through substance misuse can happen suddenly and may disturb the individual:

**Christopher:** *Because drinking and taking drugs and getting involved with all sorts of negative stuff, especially when these insulating webs start to thin, they can start to feel things and sense things and unless you've got a really good sort of foundation of what it is, you see it's so natural to me now, really because I've been understanding this since I were eleven, you know because I used to sit in home circles, my dad used to talk to us about it...and you know, I've read constantly for the last, since I were in my early twenties, and I've got a pretty good understanding, but anybody that comes into contact, that suddenly has got no idea that there is a spirit world, and then all of a sudden they are getting talked to, or they are getting, they can feel things, or they can see things, or they can hear things or they can smell things, because that insulating web has thinned or through drugs things open, you know like taking certain drugs can open your third eye can't it, like Haile Selassie is it and Peyote and Mescaline...certain mushrooms (20:555-570)*

This extract reinforces the theme of normalisation as discussed in section 7.2 as Christopher talks about mediumship being natural to him as a result of his father's influence, and because he sat in home circles. In addition, it also emphasises the theme of

"progression of mediumship", as seen in section 7.3, and the importance of preparing yourself for mediumship, stressing that development is as much about the person as well as the practises, and that this serves to open you up, attract the right energies, and control subsequent access.

#### **7.4.5 Section summary**

In summary, the superordinate theme "relationship with spirit" reflects the divergence of responses from participants in their narrative of the process of mediumship. It is through these different perspectives and experiences that we learn about the lived experience of mediumship and the essence of the phenomenon itself. It was interesting to hear participants talk about their locus of control with regards the communication process in Section 7.4.1 and how some participants placed responsibility with spirits rather than themselves when communication did not go well. Similarly, we realised in Section 7.4.2 how participants feel it is important to have control over when communication takes place, so as not to let their mediumship ability interfere with other aspects of living. However, it also became apparent that some participants were flexible about this and felt that they could never have complete control if a spirit was persistent and determined to communicate. In addition, some participants stressed the importance of having positive thoughts and controlling negative thoughts in mediumship, so as not to attract negative spirits. We also increased our awareness of the nature of spirit guides in Section 7.4.4 and saw how some participants considered their guides to be aspects of themselves, whereas others talked about their guides as having an independent personality and a previous earthly existence. The role of spirit guides is illuminated further in the following section.

#### **7.5 Spirit guides as transcendental**

Most of the participants reflected on their spirit guides as being more advanced than themselves and considered them to exist beyond the material world. It seemed as though they represented mystical entities to the participants that were omnipotent and as having infinite benevolence.

### 7.5.1 Highly evolved

Melissa and Penny both describe their spirit guides as being more highly evolved. They talk about guides being wiser and as people who were more spiritually developed when alive; giving this as an explanation for why so many of them appear to be Native American or religious figures:

**Melissa:** *I think that they are more people who, this is what they tell us anyway, people who have learnt a lot more, more progressed people, to use religious terminology, probably people who have gone a little bit further along the path...more evolved, nicer, people, more knowledgeable...they do tend to be people who certainly in their last incarnation to this one, which tends to be how they present themselves, they do tend to be people who were on a spiritual path, which is why you get Native Americans, nuns, priests, that sort of thing (11:383-401).*

**Penny:** *I look upon them as being a little bit wiser than me, a little bit more involved than I could possibly be, otherwise why would they choose to do a job like that which must be incredibly difficult, where they have to exert so much patience and understanding (9:232-236).*

James also reflects on the belief that spirit guides are more advanced, however, he talks about them being "ordinary people" who have developed spiritually after passing over:

**James:** *It's to do with their own spiritual development and the fact they are, if you like, more advanced, that they had trained in spirit and that they have become more advanced souls and they have moved on, people like to say from the realms that are nearer to us into higher realms and they have a knowledge and an ability that they can give to us, so that really makes a difference, they were ordinary people, many of them are, but they have gone to develop these abilities in spirit (9: 323-328).*

Similarly, Samuel talks about how his spirit guide made mistakes when living as he was the ruler of a village who treated his people badly and for his own gains. Samuel discussed how he thought his guide had made amends for his mistakes through years of evolving whilst in spirit form:

**Samuel:** *I would say that they are more evolved, but then if he'd been in spirit for hundreds and thousands of years, then obviously he'd sorted himself out, he might have done whatever he did here and not looked after everybody but he's made recompense or whatever in spirit and he has now evolved, you know because I believe we evolve while you are in spirit as well, so he has learnt from his mistakes, he has done whatever he needs to do to put them right and evolved to that stage where he can come back and communicate and be an inspirational guide (20:736-744).*

Thus, in the accounts by Melissa and Penny we see evidence of guides who were spiritual in their earthly life, but in the accounts of James and Samuel we now have explanations for guides who were not. In contrast, Tom seemed reluctant to talk about his guides as highly evolved and when asked about them stated: *"Not bothered, no not bothered, not bothered at all, I don't guide worship (8:263-264)*. I got the feeling that he was hesitant to talk about his guides and was concerned about giving the impression that they were there to do anything other than help him during a demonstration of mediumship as he later states: *"What they do when I'm not doing the services is up to them" (9:327)*. Tom also said *"No idea" or "I'm not bothered"* quite a lot in response to questions about his guides and I got the sense that his indifference reflected an attempt to compartmentalise his mediumship as a job, perhaps demonstrating control of mediumship, as seen in section 7.4.2. Thus, he seemed to describe having quite a formal relationship with his guides, which was task-orientated and he believed they were only there to do a job. This is reflected further when Tom later describes his guides using employment terminology:

**Tom:** *We've got supervisors, we've got staff up there, it's like a conveyor belt, and then we've got the supervisor at the end of the line saying "Yes, right, you're on now" or they might say "Yes, right, hang on a minute, you're on in a minute" I become*

*aware of the communicator, but the helper might say "Right Tom, the next one is going to be difficult", "you're going to have trouble with them" or you know, and they only give me the nod if it's going to be like that (6-7:205-226).*

In describing the nature of spirit guides, participants referred to them as being more spiritually evolved. This seemed to involve individuals who had lived a spiritual life or individuals who had evolved in the spirit realm to be more "wiser", "nicer", "knowledgeable" and "patient".

### **7.5.2 Specialists**

As well as speaking about how spirit guides were highly evolved, participants also mentioned that their guides had specialised skills and abilities. As one participant stated: *"I personally think there are different teachers for different purposes, you know like specialists, like we have here in the living world, I think there are specialists; there are probably specialists on communicating information on certain subjects"* (Penny, 9:237-240). This is best represented in the following account by Sarah who talks about a guide that came to help her whilst she was studying:

**Sarah:** *I know when I was doing a course I asked somebody to help me do that course because I know I would personally find it difficult and I sailed through the course and after the course I said thanks very much, because in my mind they had come in to help me but they were going to go because I wouldn't need that support anymore (12:-432-438).*

In Sarah's second comment, it became apparent to me that, perhaps, she was lacking in confidence with regards her own ability. As Sarah had been in an accounting job for a considerable amount of time, it seemed to me that her belief in the omniscient nature of spirit guides enabled her to draw upon skills and abilities of her own that she attributed to an external source rather than herself:

**Sarah:** *I know the times that I have asked for help it's been specific stuff, you know, I'm hopeless at maths, I'm going to need to do this, somebody from the spirit world that is good with figures come and help me with this and I used to do, in my material everyday job, for 27 years, I used to do accounts and I was rubbish at it so at the end of the year when I was doing all the end of year stuff I used to have to say, you know, hopefully somebody would come along that maybe was an accountant and then I used to look at all the forms and think "Oh yeah, that's that and that's that and that's that" and it would all come together (12-13:447-455).*

Similarly, Samuel talks about having different guides who have specialised knowledge in various aspects of healing. However, Sarah seemed to attribute legitimate skills acquired through work experience to an external source, whereas Samuel seems to attribute his claimed healing ability to external sources in the absence of formal experience or qualifications. In this respect I got the sense that Samuel's spirit guides served a purpose of justification for his healing practices:

**Samuel:** *When I do healing there is a German doctor...the Oriental gentleman also draws close on that vibration, and he's into some of the complementary therapies and I had a friend that did acupuncture and...when I was working with him he would give me acupuncture points for various conditions, and I would say to him this is for this and he would say that's right, and I haven't studied that at all...it depends on what I'm doing...I know the Chinese man comes in close when I do healing, but so does the North American Indian, with the healing side of it I just ask for them to, whoever, whatever the patient is suffering with, I'm quite happy for the energy to come through, but if there is somebody for that condition (...) North American Indian, a Chinese man, a German doctor or anybody else (...) send me a specialist basically(...) if I've got somebody that is suffering with arthritis I'm not going to deal with a North American Indian who doesn't deal with those conditions (15-16: 561-585).*

Given that participants described spirit guides as possessing skills that they themselves did not have, this theme seemed to conflict with the "like attracts like" idea in section

7.4.4, which suggested that spirits are attracted to individuals who have complementary qualities.

### 7.5.3 Protector status

Another theme emerging from participants' transcripts was that mediums had a spirit guide who held the position of protector. Whereas the guides who were specialists seem to come and go, the protector guides appeared to be a constant in the mediums' lives. Participants spoke about being aware of these guides since birth and that their role was to ensure no harm came to the medium. Samuel described his protector guide as a "doorkeeper" or "guardian angel":

**Samuel:** *I've been given a Zulu as doorkeeper.....are you aware of doorkeepers?*

**Researcher:** *I've heard the term*

**Samuel:** *They're like Guardian angels, they are there from birth to death, and they are the ones who allow everyone into your energy field or your vibration (16: 585-590).*

Sarah reflected on an experience where her guide intervened to prevent an accident. It is reminiscent of accounts by individuals, usually in danger, who have heard an "inner voice" telling them not to do something or altering their path in some way:

**Sarah:** *I have been aware at times that when I haven't been working he's been there, on one occasion I can remember my husband was driving down the road and I just heard my guide's voice say "Pull in" and my husband immediately pulled in and as he pulled in this big lorry came round the bend and if he hadn't had pulled in we would have been hurt, so at that stage I know my guide was aware of what was happening and came and stood in to protect us and that has happened a couple of times, so I do think they are there to protect us (12:413-419).*

Graham talks about having a Maori guide who acts as a protector from negative spirits:

**Graham:** *I had a protective guide from New Zealand as well, a very huge Maori... "He Who Strides Over Water" or something like that, anyway he really was big and he said he would watch my back, which he said I would need, which I didn't understand but...there are bad spirits you know (9:328-332).*

#### **7.5.4 Section summary**

In listening to participants talk about their experiences of having a spirit guide, we have been able to enter the life world of the medium and gain insight into how they perceive the nature of guides. In particular, we have discovered that guides seem to have characteristics that fit with their role or purpose and compensate for limitations we might have, for example they are described as being more advanced than us, as having particular skill sets we don't have, and as being able to see dangers we don't see. It was interesting to hear one participant talk about his spirit guide using employment metaphor, which perhaps reflects his attempts to describe the mediumship process in everyday language, thus normalising mediumship as seen in Section 7.2. There also seems to be a locus of control thread running through Section 7.5.2, when participants talk about their spirit guides being specialists in particular areas and helping them through difficult situations, which was also apparent in Section 7.4.1 when participants made reference to internalizing or externalizing responsibility for the communication process.

### **7.6 Explanatory systems of mediumship**

Several sub-themes emerged from the participants' transcripts that illuminated the practical aspects of mediumship. These themes focus on mediums' descriptions of how mediumship actually operates and the explanatory systems or necessary features that are involved when demonstrating mediumship.

#### **7.6.1 Ritualistic preparation**

The majority of participants described how they engaged in a preparation process, prior to demonstrating their mediumship, which seemed somewhat ritualistic. Preparatory practises included such things as meditation, avoiding alcohol, remaining calm, detaching

oneself from everyday concerns, and cleansing the body. Penny, Graham, and Samuel all described how their preparation starts internally through a process of pacification and mental detachment:

**Penny:** *Step number one you need to be as calm as you possibly can, despite what maybe happening to you in your own life. You need to be distanced emotionally from what might happen. So you need to be calm, collected, and you need to have sent out your mental request, which is saying: "I am not interested in any information except what this person needs and can use" and then I do rely on spirit teachers or spirit guides, whatever you like to call them (8:214-221).*

**Graham:** *I meditate for 35 minutes to relax me and put me into a deep state, a very aware state but relaxed, and then I have a shower and I get dressed and then I drive to the church (8:291-293).*

**Samuel:** *When I first started I would just spend some time to relax, quieten myself down and try and sort of put everything that had been going on in the day to one side (9:301-303).*

James and Melissa accentuate the ritualistic aspect to their preparatory practises in their accounts. James begins by talking about his modus operandi which consists of visualization, opening chakras, meditation and avoiding alcohol:

**James:** *I work on visualizing the main chakras...and I'll try to be as calm as I can and I will avoid drinking alcohol...and eat light meals and then before I go to a service I might meditate, I might meditate for 15-20 minutes and then I would get to the church or the centre and I'll go through a process of opening up all my main chakras ready to work and drink plenty of water and then I just go from there really (4:120-127).*

Penny, Graham, Samuel, and James all seem to highlight the importance of preparing oneself for mediumship in their use of similar rituals, for instance, meditating to get into

an aware but relaxed and calm state, being emotionally detached and sending out a mental request.

Reflecting on his preparatory practises, James supplements his account and talks about being aware that they could just be superstition:

**James:** *What I meant to say to you as well is it's almost like a superstition, I have noticed sometimes that if I have been in a rush I haven't been able to do these things...I can still work as well, so I don't know whether it is true, I think I work as well and sometimes I can do all this preparation and have a mediocre service, whereas sometimes I'm rushed, I get in there, do it and it's better than it would be if I prepared, so that's why I say I'm not sure whether these things are superstition (4:130-138).*

Similarly, Melissa acknowledges that her preparation is not necessarily an essential part of her mediumship; rather it is something she prefers to undertake in appreciation of the sacredness of her ability:

**Melissa:** *My preparation is quite long-winded, it doesn't have to be, because it can just be switched on and off just like that, but I prefer to prepare myself because I think of what I'm doing as special...it is something that is pure and beautiful...so if I was going to do a public demonstration...I meditate, and I meditate daily...so I would meditate beforehand, I would have a bit of a wash, you know, the cleansing of the body really (4:129-140).*

Sarah also talks about a set of actions she follows before demonstrating her mediumship:

**Sarah:** *I suppose my preparation is actually getting ready, it seems to be part of building me up, you know to go and have a bath, wash my hair and get dressed, I don't meditate, I don't do anything like that (8:263-266).*

In contrast, Mary spoke about being aware that there were suggested practises to undertake before demonstrating, but admits that she never had time to apply them herself:

**Mary:** *We used to be told that we had to bathe and wear nice loose clothing and if you really wanted a strong link you wear something red, but I don't do red, I don't do red at all, and I never had time...so I had a pact with my people that I work with, "Look I haven't got time to sit and get bathed and put a kaftan on and say my mantras and do my prayers, I haven't got time" and I used to link in...so I've never done a lot of rituals to prepare (4-5:133-152).*

One way of interpreting the way participants talk about preparatory practices is that preparation achieved two objectives. Firstly, the ritualistic aspect could provide an illusion of control over the uncertain phenomenon of mediumship, thus reducing anxiety and increasing confidence. This component also resonates with the sub-theme in Section 7.4.2 in which internal and external locus of control was discussed in relation to responsibility for the communication process. Secondly, the meditative aspect of preparation could help induce an altered state of consciousness, which may serve to facilitate the mediumship process.

### **7.6.2 Prominent modes of spirit communication**

When asked about how spirit communication takes place participants talked about sensing, seeing or hearing spirits. The majority of participants described how their mediumship depended on all three faculties, however, it seemed as though one or two of these modes were usually more pronounced. This was best represented in the account by Mary:

**Mary:** *I work with clairvoyance, clairaudience and clairsentience, sometimes I do see pictures on the screens in my mind, sometimes I do hear voices objectively...I hear my name called...but mostly I hear thoughts in my head that I know aren't mine, so you see pictures on the screen of your mind, I hear words in my mind that I know aren't*

*my words, sometimes, but not so often because it takes a lot more, sometimes I see things objectively and sometimes I hear things objectively, but mostly it's subjectively, and mostly it's on the screen of my mind and then the one that really works the best, which I feel brings the best evidence when I'm demonstrating on the rostrum is the clairsentience because I feel the personality of the person, I feel the changes in my own personality, I feel as if I've lost a leg, you know, or if I've got heart pains, chest pain, back pain, eye pain, I feel that personality as different to mine, it's either someone really quiet or well-spoken or somebody very loving or somebody very withdrawn (6:184-188).*

Although Mary talked about using all three senses to receive communication from spirits, it was apparent that she considered her ability to *feel* spirit as the more discernable. This was particularly noticeable, for her, when demonstrating mediumship on the platform as she deemed this mode as the "quickest and the best" (6:189). In listening to Mary I got the impression that the physiological nature of this mode made the experience more "real" for her. In addition to noticeable changes within her own body that she attributed to a spirit presence, Mary mentioned how other people observed and commented on these changes, in particular they would say her mannerisms were different, her facial features altered or her personality seemed different, perhaps suggesting that her experience is empathic.

In the following extract Sarah also talks about the physiological nature of mediumistic communication. She uses 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":

**Sarah:** *If we connect on that psychic level, it's a heavy feeling, it feels quite dense, but when spirits connect and you're working on that spiritual plane it's almost like there is a lightening from a...I suppose I can explain it more as a dizzy feeling, it's just all that much lighter, so to actually explain it it's that simple, but to understand it and follow that through you have to feel it to understand the difference, if you were to do an*

exercise and feel the energy of somebody sat next to you it's heavier and it's dense and it's weighty, where if then we took you on to communicate with the spirit world, you actually feel as though it is lighter, it's out here and it's vibrant, again if you're working on a psychic level you can feel very static, very grounded, very here, whereas if spirit communicates with you it's lively, it's vibrant, they're alive and the energy doesn't have the physical weightiness of it, so you know if I was doing a sitting I'm generally sort of like this, you know my hands are going, the spirit energy is there but if I was doing a psychic reading I'd probably sit back...and again if you see somebody working on the platform and they're a good medium, nine times out of ten they are going to be moving with it, you know because it is light, it is vibrant and it's beautiful and it's standing in this energy, you know when spirit's with you they just haven't got this heaviness that we have in the physical (10:347-364).

James and Samuel also spoke about how they use all three senses, however, like Mary clairsentience seemed to be the most pronounced:

**James:** *It very much depends on all three, I never used to, I sometimes would work more with clairsentience and also clairvoyance, it never, but recently, in recent years clairaudience has also arrived (4:142-145).*

**Samuel:** *I work all three, but mainly, mainly clairsentiently and clairaudiently, with the clairvoyance...coming in... afterwards, it just depends really, you know, I believe how spirit want to use me (4-5:145-148).*

In contrast, Melissa appeared to hear spirits more when communicating:

**Melissa:** *Because I'm more clairaudient, than clairvoyant they will then start to speak to me, if I can hear them well they can normally get the first name across (....) sometimes I manage to get the surname, I get utterings of information, so I might hear a whole sentence as clear as anything, but if I said to them "What is your surname" I can't hear that, now I tend to think that it's my confidence more than anything else*

*because I have delivered first and last names, I have had addresses, but it also seems to be that, it's kind of, the way I hear kind of comes in waves and as it reaches its peak I then hear it, so sometimes I get a "Garblegarblegarblegarble" and then it comes and goes, it's like a recording that is on a wonky tape, you know you hear, then you don't (6:205-215)*

In addition to talking about the modality of spirit communication, Melissa proceeds to give a description of how she actually recognizes that she is in communication with a spirit:

**Melissa:** *When I'm delivering proof of survival on the platform, what happens is I stand, I'm aware of my guides, I wait, then someone will come towards to me and I see them, I see them here in front of me to my left, and I can see exactly what they look like, so, but they don't look as solid as you do, it's like (...) it's like a, not a film (...) it's like a thought, a thought but it's not in my head, it's a thought that is in some way projected outside (6:191-197).*

Similarly, in the extract below, Rachel gives an indication of how spirit communication is actually experienced:

**Rachel:** *I can see, I can hear, I can sense, I can smell, I can see somebody build up with somebody and they look just as normal as what you are and then another time I can only feel it (1:24-27).*

Both of these extracts give the impression that participants identify they are communicating with spirits when they see some form of objective spirit that is independent of themselves. This is a theme which is expanded upon in the next section.

### **7.6.3 Objective spirit representation**

In addition to talking about the modes in which spirits communicate to the medium, participants also spoke about seeing spirits objectively, either as visions or solid manifestations that had an existence outside the mind (or senses). This is best

represented in an account by Mary who says that she sees spirits objectively when she is not expecting it, and that, in addition, it seems to require more effort, both on the part of the medium and the spirit communicator. This effort is described by Mary using the metaphor of energy, which was also apparent in accounts in section 7.6.2:

**Mary:** *I think with the objective it happens very quick and easy when you are not really expecting it maybe sat quietly in your lounge and suddenly you see someone peep their head round the door, you know, it's not something I've really developed specifically, because working from the rostrum you've got to work quickly and you work on a quicker energy, you haven't got time to do all that is necessary to build, and the spirit world hasn't got time to do all that is necessary and create the energy that is going to be an object of vision or a full manifestation of the different energies (6:203-210).*

Similarly, Sarah describes how seeing objectively requires more "energy":

**Sarah:** *Those people that are seeing objectively, there has to be a manifestation of energy, for that to happen the energy that is required is extreme, but sometimes people, clairvoyants are so good that it appears as though it is objective (10:369-372).*

James and Graham also spoke about the sudden nature of objective seeing:

**James:** *I have seen people objectively on occasion and I have perhaps, what you call, more like visions where I have woken up and suddenly I have seen someone standing in front of me or beside me or even floating towards me, so I have had those but not very often, but interestingly more with animals I would say than human beings (5-6:183-187).*

When reflecting on how he became a medium, Graham recounted a particular day when his ability to see spirits objectively seemed to suddenly unfold. In the morning he saw his deceased grandfather appear in front of him, "as plain as you are now but he looked kind of sad and grey" (1:7-8). Later in the day he then saw another spirit in the form of a

monk who also appeared objectively, "I could hit him in the shoulders and we hugged and it was like he was solid, he was mortal" (1:26-30). Then in the evening he saw a nun manifest whilst sat watching the television:

**Graham:** *Between me and the television I saw a red cross, then I saw that this red cross was on a white background then I saw this white background was actually a female with a white gown on and a red cross and she said she had come to work healing through me if I was prepared to do it (2:36-40).*

In summary, when participants described objective spirit representation, in the form of a solid manifestation and having an independent existence, they seemed to refer to this experience as a sudden occurrence, without any preparation. Additionally, they frequently used the metaphor of energy to distinguish between psychic and mediumistic experiences.

#### **7.6.4 Making associations**

In talking about how mediumship works I also got the sense that some of the participants tended to perceive meaning in (what appeared to be unrelated) events. This is best represented in the accounts of Mary and Rachel who both talked about seeing faces in either clouds or wax:

**Mary:** *I always used to see a face, one particular face, particularly in the clouds, if I was sitting under the clouds and there would be this face with a moustache and I never knew who it was this face, and then years later when I was an adult a cousin of mine did a family tree and there was a picture of my Great grandfather and this face was him and I'd never seen him in my life (1:8-13).*

**Rachel:** *It's wax paper and you've got wax, you put it on an iron and it runs, and you put it onto the wax paper and you mark it with the iron and you can see it change, and there is faces and birds and all sorts of things, and you can do a reading from that (5:181-184).*

Penny also expresses how she thinks memory and associations are used in spirit communication:

**Penny:** *Your memory and your associations are used, and that's an important point that most people do not understand, and that's how they communicate with you (....) but this question of memory and association is a big one, it's not really understood, but very often spirit will use my memory, a memory of my own will flash into my head, say for example, my little sister flashed (???) but then considering her situation that she is in at the moment, that would have some relevance to what they wanted to say, it works wonderfully well with spirit communication (11-12:306-321).*

Similarly, Christopher spoke about how spirits communicate with him using symbols and he describes how he associates certain events or objects with a particular meaning or message, such as snowdrops representing the winter months of January or February:

**Christopher:** *They work with symbols with me, so you get to know what these symbols mean, so...one of the little things they show me, if it's a grandma or a mother, I'll always see a little girl being pushed on a swing, because that's what grandparents and parents do with kids, they push them on swings in parks...I've got four flowers for all the way through the year, so you've got (....) I see snowdrops for January, sort of February, and then daffodils, and then bluebells, and then roses, and then other things come in, you know, I might see trees, that have got leaves, leaves start to go brown and then leaves falling off (8-9:215-231).*

### 7.6.5 Section summary

This section has presented four sub-themes under the super-ordinate theme "Explanatory systems of mediumship". In section 7.6.1 participants described ritualistic practises that they used to prepare for mediumship, and it was conjectured that these could act as precursors to an altered state, which facilitate the mediumship process. However, some participants disclosed that these practises might not actually be necessary and may represent superstitious beliefs. Thus, one interpretation was that these practises could

serve as illusions of control over the uncertain phenomena of mediumship. In section 7.6.2 participants described using their senses as modes of communicating with spirit, and reflected on how one mode seemed more prominent. For example, Melissa said that she received information mainly by hearing spirits talk to her and that information comes and goes in waves. Participants also used the metaphor of energy to describe how they distinguished between psychic and mediumistic material or, as in section 7.6.3, see solid manifestations of spirit. Lastly, in section 7.6.4, participants spoke about perceiving meaning in symbols, memories and associations that had significance in a mediumship reading.

## **7.7 Mediumship as evidence-based counselling**

The following sections move away from themes oriented around the process of mediumship to themes around the purpose of mediumship, which participants seem to describe as therapeutic support for both the living and the deceased. In addition participants also emphasised the discipline of giving specific evidential information as proof of survival and as a way to give hope to bereaved individuals.

### **7.7.1 Support for the living**

In response to a question regarding the purpose of mediumship, most of the participants talked about how they thought it helped individuals. This is evident in the following accounts which mention that mediumship and spirit communication can provide advice, comfort, and reassurance for the living who have loved ones that have passed over:

**Samuel:** *They've come through to encourage the person, to give direction or help or advice or upliftment, and then hopefully that's when it touches other people as well (11: 390-393).*

**James:** *Sometimes it can just be to let them know they are around or they might have a problem around them or just for comfort or whatever, so I think the purpose, I think it is also to reassure people, it can give great healing (11:390-393).*

**Graham:** *It does give a lot of comfort to people if they know that their mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles are alive and well in the spirit realm, and that they are also looking out for them while they are here on the Earth plane (15:523-526).*

Melissa expressed her belief that counselling is involved in mediumship and had studied bereavement counselling:

**Melissa:** *The next aspect of it of course is to bring comfort to the person, "Your mother is fine etc" so there is that support for that person, so a little bit of, if you like, bereavement counselling is involved in it, which is why I studied that (13: 463-466).*

Similarly, Christopher talks about how his caring nature brings forth spirits that have a "love connection" with the recipient:

**Christopher:** *I'm a very "heart-spaced" person so I generally want to help people, so when somebody comes into church I usually want somebody who loves them, because they are the people that we listen to aren't they, and it's very rarely really that I get bloke down the street or somebody they used to work with (9: 239-244).*

Penny talks about giving hope to people which, similarly, gives the impression that mediumship serves a therapeutic role:

**Penny:** *Yes, so quite often you know with a prediction like that, somebody can go away with such a lot of hope, feeling such a lot of hope, and I'm of an opinion that that's a good thing, because some people are just hopeless and negative about themselves, so I think to give somebody hope is a wonderful thing, as long as it is a real hope, and as long as it actually works out like that (16 523-525).*

In this section participants reflected on giving hope to individuals who go to see mediums as one of the purposes of mediumship. Participants mentioned wanting to help people and let them know deceased loved ones are still around in spirit form. The following theme

follows on from this to represent participants' descriptions of the kinds of communication that can give hope.

### 7.7.2 Evidential information

A theme that emerged from the interviews with mediums was the importance of evidence in mediumship. Participants reflected on how they had searched for evidence that would validate their own mediumship ability as well as seeking evidence that would prove they were communicating with spirits. James and Samuel talked about the importance of obtaining evidence that will establish who they are talking to in spirit. In this respect, evidential information seems to serve the purpose of giving hope to individuals by reinforcing the belief that the deceased are really still alive, and that they continue to love and watch over us:

**James:** *When I'm given a message...first of all I'll establish who I've got, I'll give some evidence for that person, a description, something about what they look like, something that was going on around them when they were on the earth, perhaps some birth dates or some names around and then something that is happening to that person they are giving the message to now (10-11: 372-376).*

**Samuel:** *I'm trying to prove that I'm with this person, so you know if I've got Uncle Tom and you've got Uncle Tom in spirit then it's fine, but let me have enough information to prove they're the Uncle Tom with this person and not that person, so I can build up information rather than, I don't like just giving names because everybody can take a name (11: 383-388).*

Sarah describes going to see a second medium, after being given evidence of her deceased relatives by a previous medium, in an attempt to confirm mediumship as valid and reliable:

**Sarah:** *I thought I'm going to go again to somebody else and if they can do it as well then all this I'm feeling that Steph and her sister are saying probably is right, so I went*

*to Benchwood a local medium and that was equally as good, she got different people (3: 86-90).*

Penny talked about the importance of evidence in distinguishing between psychic and mediumship information:

**Penny:** *With students I have to be careful when they start, you know on the beginner's course, and with people who attend Spiritualist Churches I have to be careful, because they may start off a sentence, for example, by saying they're telling me that, I could kill them..., and I say who is telling you that. How can you be sure it is coming from spirit? Who is it that is talking to you etc etc. and isn't it better to explain the procedure step by step, in simple terms, the public are entitled to know about this, and I'll say, this is coming from your psychic nature, you're using a psychic skill here, which is absolutely fine, it is not greater or lesser than mediumship (6: 143-152).*

The extracts above indicate the importance participants place on obtaining evidence about the deceased communicator before giving messages to the public. In particular they mention describing what they look like and what they did when they were alive.

### **7.7.3 To help the deceased: Spirit rescue/release**

In addition to providing support for the living, some participants also felt that mediumship signified giving support to the deceased. In this respect, participants spoke about spirit rescue circles and spirit release whereby mediums helped spirits who were not aware of their death, were trapped in the physical world or were afraid of leaving their loved ones. This is best represented in the accounts by Melissa and Graham who view spirit rescue as a positive aspect of mediumship:

**Melissa:** *Remember what I said earlier about people who know what they have done is wrong they don't want to go to the spirit world; they think they are going to go to hell. This poor man was absolutely terrified, so I removed him, I took him, and I invited him into my space...and then I took him away and I took him into the light (17:623-628).*

Graham reflected on his experiences of helping deceased spirits. On one occasion he had a spirit come to him and persisted to communicate until he passed on an urgent message to a loved one. On another occasion he believed that he helped rescue the spirits of miners who had been in a pit disaster and were disoriented and confused:

**Graham:** *So mediumship, I think, is also important in helping spirit, not only helping them in such instances as that, but in spirit rescue as well, it is a good thing is spirit rescue (16: 590-592).*

In contrast, Rachel and Sarah did not support the belief that a medium's role was to support the deceased. Rachel seemed intolerant of the idea of rescue circles, considering them as old fashioned mediumship and preferring to contemplate the proposal that mediumship was to counsel the living:

**Researcher:** *I'm aware of the Spirit Release Foundation where they believe that spirits can attach themselves to people (+)*

**Rachel:** *Oh yeah, I would disagree, it's the same as rescue circles, people sit for years and years "Oh his soul got knocked over, oh let's save this one" as far as I'm concerned the spirit world can look after them...let's work with the living people, not with the dead or should I say the doling, because we're doling, they are alive and I can't be doing with saving souls or rescue circles, that dates back to the old superstitions it really does (9: 321-328).*

Similarly, Sarah spoke about the lack of evidence for what happens in rescue circles:

**Sarah:** *People sit in what they call rescue circles, and you know in reality, for me, it's imagination and, for me, it's all proof, for me when I stand on the platform I either describe your dad or I don't, it's as simple as that, you know, if you go into a house that does actually have a true haunting or a true spirit person there, then you've got phenomena going on, the proof is the phenomena stops after you have done it, you know, in spirit rescue circles spirits come out of the sky, there is no proof and for me it*

*just doesn't happen, you know because I believe when we die, your family is going to be there waiting for you, there is not going to be these less souls walking around the Earth plane waiting for somebody to say "Come on I'll help you", that's my belief (916: 573-582).*

#### **7.7.4 Section summary**

In this theme some participants believe mediumship is to help the deceased who have not passed on to the spirit world. One participant also stressed how persistent the deceased could be in wanting to communicate, which relates back to the theme in Section 7.4.2 that stressed the importance of regulating communication and gaining control over when spirits communicate. Another participant reminded us of the importance of evidential mediumship, emphasising there is no proof in spirit rescue that the spirits are genuine as they do not have to be recognised by anyone; in contrast to a mediumship reading or demonstration which claims to give information from loved ones.

#### **7.8 Summary of chapter**

The main aim of this chapter was to report themes derived from interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of in-depth interviews with mediums. Accounts focused on explanations they gave for their ability, how they described the nature and process of mediumship and what meaning they attributed to the spirit guide phenomena. IPA acknowledges that gaining an insight into how phenomena are experienced and given meaning requires the researcher to interpret and probe the participants' accounts of their life-world and how they make sense of events (J.A. Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Thus, analysis consisted not only of generating themes from the data in a "bottom-up" fashion by an iterative process of close textual reading, but also involved different levels of interpretation, comprising an empathic engagement with the accounts and a "more critical and speculative reflection" (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006, p. 339).

Analysis revealed six main themes that capture key aspects of the mediumship experience. Firstly, in Section 7.2, explanations for how participants became involved in

mediumship focused on how mediumship had always been an ordinary occurrence in their lives. They emphasized mediumistic experiences within the family and childhood anomalous experiences within the individual, and spoke about how mediumship and Spiritualism helped them to construct a personal experiential framework for making sense of reality as they experienced it. Reflecting on these experiences later in life and interpreting them as signalling sensitivity to the mediumistic or spiritual, in a search for subjective meaning, could explain how participants came to consider themselves as mediums. We might conjecture that, the family context could provide the opportunity for mediumship, but the (spontaneous) anomalous experiences provide the impetus. Some participants did not report having a family background that was embedded in mediumistic experiences and were initially disturbed and confused by their experiences, and it was not until they familiarized themselves with a spiritual model that they then interpreted their experiences as mediumship.

In the theme "progression of mediumship", participants seemed to describe a continuum of ability in which it was possible to develop mediumship through practices and dedication. In addition participants' accounts reflected the importance of transformation in the individual and used the metaphor of "opening-up" to spirit. Therefore, it is possible that spontaneous anomalous experiences may be the spur for mediumship and may indicate a natural propensity, but that this ability still needs to be nurtured and refined through personal development. However, it was also revealed that mediumship ability could be spontaneous and develop suddenly in individuals following a traumatic event, such as bereavement or a head injury.

In listening to participants talk about their relationship with spirit in Section 7.4, we have been able to enter the life world of the medium and gain insight into how they perceive the communication process. In particular, there was a locus of control thread running through accounts, representing participants' tendency to either accept or externalise responsibility for communication. The importance of control also reappeared throughout accounts, relating to the theme "regulation of communication" and "spirit influence"; stressing the importance of controlling when spirits communicate and having positive

thoughts to prevent negative influences from spirit. Reflecting on the nature of spirit guides we discovered characteristics that fit with their role or purpose and compensate for limitations we might have. Similarly, it was speculated that one participant, in particular, may use the spirit guide phenomenon to cope with psychological conflict.

In the theme "explanatory systems of mediumship" participants talked about preparatory practises and these seemed to achieve two objectives. Firstly, the ritualistic aspect could be seen as providing an illusion of control over the uncertain phenomenon of mediumship. This component also resonates with the sub-theme in Section 7.4.2 in which internal and external locus of control was discussed in relation to responsibility for the communication process. Secondly, the meditative aspect of preparation could help induce an altered state of consciousness, which may serve to facilitate the mediumship process. Finally, the last theme discussed the purpose of mediumship and participants emphasised the importance of giving hope to individuals by obtaining evidential information to prove that deceased loved ones are still around.

In conclusion, by sharing the life-world of mediums through semi-structured interviews, it has been possible to fill in a gap in our knowledge about the phenomenology of mediumship that was highlighted in a review of the literature in Chapter five. Several themes emerged from the material that increase our understanding of what it means to be a medium, what it means to have a spirit guide, and what it means to experience mediumistic phenomena. In Chapter eight, a separate discussion will link findings to the wider literature, and in Chapter nine, findings will be integrated with those from the content analysis.

## **POSITIONING THEMES IN A THEORETICAL CONTEXT: DISCUSSION IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE**

### **8.1. Introduction**

The main aim of the qualitative study, described in Chapters six and seven, was to explore the lived experience of ten participants and to gain insight into their understanding of mediumship phenomena, such as how they come to classify themselves as mediums and the meaning that they assign to their spirit guides. In Chapter seven, six superordinate themes were revealed from participants' accounts that capture a number of phenomenological aspects relating to: (1) participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences and normalise mediumship, (2) the development of mediumship ability, (3) participants' relationship with spirit phenomena, (4) the significance of spirit guides, (5) explanatory systems of mediumship, and (6) the counselling function of mediumship. These themes were described and analysed using the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), which, by including detailed verbatim extracts, illuminated the many reflections and thoughts of the participants in their attempt to make sense of their experiences. In the following sections, these themes will be discussed in relation to the wider literature and positioned in a theoretical context. As noted in Chapter seven, it has been common practice in recent IPA studies to separate results and discussion in this way (e.g., Eatough & J. A. Smith, 2006; Jordan, Eccleston, & Osborn, 2007; Osborn & J. A. Smith, 2006; Wilde & C. D. Murray, 2009). Finally, the chapter will conclude by considering the implications and limitations of the study, suggest areas for future research and discuss personal reflections on the research process, such as how my own experiences may have impacted on the interviews and analysis.

## 8.2 Making sense of experiences: Normalising mediumship

The first superordinate theme that was identified in Chapter seven was "A search for meaning: Normalisation of mediumship". When discussing how they became a medium, the majority of participants talked about having a family background that was embedded in mediumistic experiences, giving rise to the sub-theme "My family were mediumistic". This finding is consistent with the work of Richard and Adato (1980) who interviewed mediums and found several participants mentioned encouragement by parents or other relatives as being significant in their entry into Spiritualism. Similar familial patterns have also been observed in the wider paranormal literature, for example, Wright (1999, 2002) found an environment in which psi is acknowledged to be common in the backgrounds of individuals who have psi experiences. These findings are in contrast to biographies of mediums that report being punished by family for discussing mediumistic experiences (e.g. Garrett, 1949) and interviews with mediums that found a lack of positive family reactions towards mediumistic experiences (Emmons, 2001). One explanation that seems probable for these contrasting findings is that mediums in this study came from families where a belief in mediumship or Spiritualism was the norm, reflecting how prior belief and experience influences the way unusual or anomalous experiences are interpreted. Throughout accounts, participants tended to normalise their mediumistic experiences in that their experiences were regarded as a natural and common occurrence in their own families.

In addition to growing up in families where mediumship is acknowledged as real, it was discussed in Section 7.2.2, under the sub-theme "Childhood anomalous experiences", that a number of participants mentioned having anomalous experiences in childhood, such as seeing visions or apparitions of spirits that gave rise to the belief that they may have mediumistic ability. LeShan (1974) has proposed that mediums have an altered epistemology that relates to their perception of alternate realities and their belief that there are ways of knowing and communicating information that transcends the usual barriers of time and space. LeShan referred to this way of conceptualising and experiencing reality as a "clairvoyant reality". In reviewing the broader literature on

paranormal belief and experience, it would seem that this echoes findings from previous studies which suggest a belief in psi correlates with psi performance (Palmer, 1971; Parker, Grams, & Pettersson, 1998; Schmeidler & McConnell, 1958; M. D. Smith, 2003).

Another aspect of LeShan's (1974) clairvoyant reality is the emphasis on the unity and interconnectedness of all living things. This has parallels to an anomalous childhood experience described by one participant (Penny) who stated, "everything is pulsating, radiating, alive, but not in the way that you would normally see it". It seemed that for one brief moment in time her whole perception of life and consciousness seemed to alter, and she understood the meaning of life. This type of experience has been referred to as an exceptional human experience (EHE), which is a global term for what have been called mystical, psychic, peak, and flow experiences (Maslow, 1964; White, 1997), such as out of body experiences (OBEs), angel encounters, and near death experiences (NDEs). White proposed that EHEs serve a transformative process in the experient, but that this depends on whether the individual responds to the experience in a neutral, negative or positive way, with only the latter leading to transformation.

It is interesting to point out that Penny reflected on this childhood experience as a positive event, however, she later recounts being disturbed by an intense distressing dream as an adult, to the extent that she considered seeking psychological treatment. It occurred to me that perhaps Penny had interpreted her adult experience negatively because, unlike the majority of the participants, she did not report a mediumistic or Spiritual family background that normalised her experiences and consequently had been conditioned by the dominant views of the medical model within Western culture. As seen in the sub-theme in Section 7.2.3, "I thought I was going mad': Reframing distressing experiences using a spiritual model", a number of participants reported being distressed by their experiences and worrying about their mental health, until they reframed their experiences using a spiritual model. For example, one participant (Sarah), who had neither childhood anomalous experiences nor family who were mediumistic, described being distressed by hearing voices after bereavement and it was not until years later when she was introduced

to Spiritualism that she made sense of her experiences by interpreting them as mediumistic within a spiritual model.

Current theories in psychology suggest that hearing voices is more likely to occur under periods of stress (cf. Bentall, 1990). Although not negating the spiritual hypothesis, this would seem to reflect the circumstances under which Sarah experienced hearing voices. Of more relevance to the findings in this study, Knudson and Coyle (2002) used interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand the experience of hearing voices and found a multiplicity of meanings emerged in one participant's account when attempting to understand the nature of her voices, which at times she attributed to either "hallucinations", "spirit guides" or aspects of her own personality; reflecting a lack of a definite frame of reference for her experience. Although some researchers have emphasised the importance of assigning meaning during the early stages of hearing voices to reduce anxiety (Romme & Escher, 1989), and have stressed the importance of considering the meaning of voices within the personal framework of the individual (Knudson & Coyle, 2002), others have suggested that invalid perceptions can occur when early meaning is given to ambiguous phenomena, such as hearing voices (Heilbrun & Blum, 1984 as cited in Houran & C. Williams, 1998). Reflecting on Sarah's account in this study, it is evident that Spiritualism helped her to make sense of her experiences and find meaning in what was initially a distressing and confusing experience. Support for this hypothesis is highlighted by Gault (1983) who stated:

Some mediums claim to have gone through a period of suffering and emotional disturbance due to early psychic experiences which they did not understand and which led them to fear they were going mad. As with shamans, these initial problems disappeared after contact with and training by other and more developed mediums (p. 21).

This quote also emphasises the importance of training in mediumship, which leads us to how participants described developing their ability in development circles and with various

practices, as well as how spontaneous and traumatic experiences, such as NDEs and bereavement could instigate mediumship ability.

### **8.3 Progression of mediumship ability**

In Section 7.3 the super-ordinate theme "Progression of mediumship" was generated from participants' transcripts to reflect accounts of how mediums perceived their ability to develop. In Section 7.3.1, the sub-theme "Continuum of ability: Innate vs. developed" found that the majority of participants spoke about mediumship as if it were a latent ability within everyone, but that it also needed to be developed. When participants were asked what practices they found helpful in developing mediumship ability they reported meditation and also used words such as "attunement", "linking" or "blending". These terms seemed to relate to an energy/physicalist model in which living beings operate on particular frequencies and deceased beings operate on another, but that certain practices can adjust the operating frequency or receptive range of mediums so that they are able to sense these discarnate energies. Similarly, participants used phrases such as "tuned in", "plugged in" and "on the circuit", which seemed to resemble metaphors that are more commonly used to describe electrical components or energy forces. In addition, participants referred to popular consumer objects, such as the television, and everyday activities, such as cooking, which appeared to represent the use of analogy to explain the more abstract or intangible experience of mediumship. These findings are in line with previous research that has explored the metaphorical constructions used by parapsychologists to classify anomalous phenomena (C. Williams, 1996), metaphor use in lay theories of psi (C. Williams & Dutton, 1998), and, more recently, the entanglement theory of psi experiences, whereby quantum states of objects are presumably "linked together" even though they may be spatially separated (Radin, 2006).

C. Williams (1996) proposes that three principal metaphors have been used to explain the way people understand psi: (1) the intrusion metaphor (ghosts and spirits are from another world), (2) the transmission metaphor (anomalous transmission of information and the idea of a psychic force or energy), and (3) the connections metaphor (reality is

interconnected). Reflecting on participants' accounts in this study and their use of language that resembled electrical or energy terminology, it is evident that transmission metaphors were the most frequently used in relation to their descriptions of mediumship development. This corresponds with the study by C. Williams and Dutton (1998) who also found transmission metaphors to be prominent in explanations of PK and ESP.

In Section 7.3.2 the sub-theme "Spontaneous development/awareness" was discussed, and some participants seemed to use the metaphor of "opening up" to mediumship, commenting on how traumatic events, such as bereavement, near death experiences (NDEs) or head injuries could bring about sudden mediumistic abilities. This spontaneous development was in contrast to the previous sub-theme, which emphasised that mediumship had to be developed with various practices. In reviewing the wider paranormal literature, it is apparent that there are similarities between the accounts of participants in this study and the accounts of non-mediums who report corresponding experiences. Groth-Marnat and Summers (1998) compared individuals who reported having a NDE with a control group who had described similar life threatening experiences but without a NDE and found the NDE group to report significantly more life changes, such as enhanced awareness or paranormal phenomena, belief in life after death, and increased transcendent experiences. This transformation in individuals is also reflected in a study by Bonenfant (2000) who highlighted the occurrence of psychic experiences following NDEs. In addition, the finding that mediumistic experiences may follow bereavement echoes previous studies with individuals in the general population that have also reported contact with the dead after bereavement (Grimby, 1983; Haraldsson, 1988; Rees, 1971, Steffen, 2009).

It is possible that these experiences serve as a prompt for mediumship but also act as a transformation in the individual. As identified in Chapter two, Seligman (2005b) proposes that distress experienced by individuals, prior to their involvement with mediumship, is given a new positive meaning by the mediumship role, which provides individuals with an opportunity to become spiritually empowered rather than afflicted and to "reconstruct their identities, reinterpret their experiences, and redirect their actions" (p. 273) in line

with the cultural model of mediumship. In relation to exceptional human experiences (EHE), White (1993) has also proposed that experiencers go through some form of transformation and "open inwardly" which predisposes them to have further experiences. Similarly, research undertaken by Wright (1999) suggested that sensing contact with the dead tended to open individuals' minds to the reality of psi thus making them more receptive to psychic impressions.

This seems to resonate with the work of Irwin (1985) in relation to absorption and paranormal experiences which was reviewed in Chapter two. Irwin proposed that individuals who had a greater *capacity*, *opportunity* and *motivation* for absorption would be more prone to psi experiences. In other words persons would experience more paranormal phenomena if they were open or able to enter an absorbed state of consciousness, had the opportunity to experience absorption, by perhaps being in an environment conducive or supportive of psi experience, and having a reason or need for absorption. However, one flaw in this premise is that it does not seem to account for spontaneous anomalous experiences which occur without the need for opportunity or in families where psi is not supported.

Given that participants in this study talked about having childhood anomalous experiences and family members who were also mediumistic, it is possible that this provided a natural propensity or *capacity* to experience mediumistic phenomena. Furthermore, as mediumship was normalised within the family and Spiritualist church, and participants spoke about needing to refine and develop mediumship it is possible that development groups provided an *opportunity* to demonstrate or practice this capacity in a pro-mediumship context. Alternatively, some participants mentioned mediumistic ability could occur after traumatic experiences, which could serve as an impetus for mediumship by providing capacity and/or opportunity. Similarly, traumatic experiences, such as bereavement or NDE may ignite a search for meaning in life or *motivation* to prove life after death.

#### 8.4 Relationship with spirit: Personal responsibility in the communication process

Throughout the accounts there is evidence to suggest that participants made causal attributions in relation to responsibility for the mediumship communication process. More specifically, as seen in Section 7.4.1, when the communication process seemed to "fail" (information given to sitters at a mediumship demonstration or reading was irrelevant or incorrect) some participants seemed to assign responsibility to the spirit communicator or spirit guide by blaming them for things going "pear-shaped", suggesting an external locus of control (Heider, 1958; Rotter, 1966). In contrast, other participants attributed responsibility to be with the spirit communicator when communication went well. Braude (1988, 1995) has suggested that an external control may protect the ego or self-esteem of the medium by displacing blame so that failures are regarded as the responsibility of the spirit and the medium avoids accountability. Similarly, successes are considered to be the responsibility of the spirit so that the medium does not have to fear the extent of her ability. Further variations for attributions of responsibility in relation to the communication process are seen in participants' accounts who believe that their own actions and thoughts played a role in mediumship, which, in comparison to other participants, suggests an internal locus of control (Heider, 1958; Rotter, 1966). In Section 7.4.2 some participants also emphasised the importance of regulating communication and having control over when this occurred, which has, similarly, been found in other interviews with mediums (Richard & Adato, 1980). Unfortunately, Richard and Adato do not expand on this finding and only provide a very short extract from one medium's account ("you shouldn't let the spirits in just anytime" p. 190).

In the wider paranormal literature external locus of control has frequently been associated with positive attitudes towards paranormal phenomena (e.g., Scheidt, 1973) and spiritual or precognitive beliefs (e.g., Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998). However, McGarry and Newbury (1981) compared four groups that varied in terms of their involvement with paranormal practices (psychic readers, subscribers to a psychic newsletter, attendees at a psychic fair, and students with no involvement) and found evidence to suggest that

external locus of control was linked to low involvement but that high and moderate involvement related to internal locus of control. Although the latter finding would seem to be consistent with some accounts of mediums in this study, the finding that low involvement in paranormal practices is connected to an external locus of control seems to be at variance with other participants in this study, as high involvement mediums will, at times, make external attributions. However, it is important to recognise that psychics and mediums are very different in their supposed mechanism for success. As spiritualist mediums believe in communicating with spirits, it is therefore expected that they would have to attribute the process externally, to some extent. On the other hand, as psychics do not necessarily have to believe in spirits, but, instead, that they themselves are "gifted" one might expect them to internalize the process the more experience or involvement they have. Furthermore, it shows that attribution cannot be broadly generalised but needs to be understood on an individual-by-individual and instance-by-instance basis.

### **8.5 Relationship with spirit: Guides as autonomous beings versus aspects of self**

In Section 7.4.3 most participants described spirit guides as having a separate personality and a previous existence as a physical being, a finding that is consistent with the spiritualist perspective (cf., Beard, 1992; Gault, 1983) and a phenomenological study of channelling (Barrett, 1996). In contrast, a number of participants doubted the identity of their spirit guides and questioned whether they were separate entities or aspects of their own consciousness. The idea that spirit guides are fictitious impersonations or a personality construction has been well documented in the literature on mediumship (Braude, 1995; Carrington, 1934; Flournoy, 1899; Gault, 1983; Sidgwick, 1915) and by a well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century medium herself (Garrett, 1968). Similarities have also been made in the clinical literature in relation to "alter personalities" of individuals with "dissociative identity disorder"; with the theory that alters are metaphors for emotional states rather than genuine entities (Merckelbach, Deville, & Rassin, 2002). More controversially, in his work with medium Eileen Garrett, Jungian psychologist Progoff (1971) theorised that spirit

guides represented symbolic expression of underlying psychological conflict that would normally be repressed. These postulations are echoed by Eisenbud (1983) who speculated that spirit guides may serve a psychodynamic function in the life of mediums; proposing that sexual repressions of medium Mrs Chenoweth (as well her sitters Doris Fischer and psychical researcher Dr Hyslop) were given an outlet in the Cagliostro-persona, who was characterised as a defender of sexual freedom. Communicating through Mrs Chenoweth, Cagliostro is claimed to have stated:

They lie who claim to love the life of the celibate. The starved, the burdened, the ignorant, they lie who say they love such lives for Jesus' sake. Imbeciles! They love it not. They fear to be happy, rich, because they fear they will damned...What makes a woman weep when she loses her virtue? Fear that those around her will condemn her, fear of opinion (Eisenbud, 1983, p. 229).

Although there had been stories that Cagliostro was a con man, there is no mention in his biographies up to the time of the sittings to suggest that he had strong views about women's rights and sexual morality, which were unheard of during his lifetime. Interestingly though, Eisenbud (1983) cites a biography that was written in the 1970s, after the sittings, by Robert Gervaso, that claims Cagliostro was accused of having had "carnal commerce with various spinsters" and as having been charged with various blasphemies; which Eisenbud suggests could imply paranormal acquisition of information on behalf of Mrs Chenoweth or that the Cagliostro character really was a discarnate intelligence. However, these claims are difficult to verify, given that Gervaso cites a document in the secret archives of the Vatican as one of his main sources. In addition, Eisenbud has reservations about the unidimensional nature of Cagliostro's character and why he never mentions the last 5-6 years of life in solitary confinement.

Regardless of these biographical or veridical concerns, what is interesting with regards to the phenomenology of spirit guides is the psychoanalytical argument that Eisenbud (1983) presents. It is noted that Hyslop is a spiritual man who frequently encounters "low sensuous" communicators at the séances he attends, that Doris is described as a "pure

guileless soul", lacking in sex-instinct, and that Doris' mother (who was also claimed to communicate through Mrs Chenoweth) was a rebellious adolescent who eloped to get married, and became cynical about religion. In addition, some of the statements that Mrs Chenoweth alleged to have come from Cagliostro appeared to hint at feminism, for example, "Who says that natural experiences are wrong? Men, men, men who stand up in cells" (p.235).

Thus, Eisenbud claims that there could be an internal dynamic connection between the amoral character of Cagliostro and the conventionally straight laced individuals involved (Mrs Chenoweth, Professor Hyslop, and Doris Fischer). Some evidence in support of this view is reflected in a participant's account in this study who, in spite of describing himself as homophobic, had two male twins as spirit guides who had to disguise their appearance because he found them too beautiful to work with. It must be remembered, however, that this is a purely speculative interpretation and is isolated to one individual case. Furthermore, we do not have a satisfactory theory that accounts for why these particular characters appear as opposed to other similar ones, for instance, Eisenbud asks why Cagliostro and not Casanova? Moreover, in the Cagliostro case, if it is to be accepted that the individuals involved all share the same sexually repressed longings, we still need to know the process by which they all seem to be drawn together, and how these unconscious feelings find expression in an ostensible discarnate spirit.

## **8.6 Relationship with spirit: Negative vs. positive influences**

In Section 7.4.5 the majority of participants used the phrase "like attracts like" to explain how individuals who have negative thoughts or are under the influence of drugs or alcohol can attract negative spirit energies. Participants also mentioned "vibrations" as being important, which is another example of the way transmission metaphors have been used to describe the mediumship process as these phrases suggest some sort of magnetic field or energy force (C. Williams, 1996, 1998). The distinction between positive and negative spirits that was evident in participants' accounts has been discussed by Richard and Adato (1980). They refer to the work of clinical psychologist Van Dusen (1973, as cited in

Richard & Adato, 1980) who observed parallels in the discourse of individuals with mental health problems when discussing their experience of being in contact with another world, and Swedenborg's classification of spirits into lower and higher orders. Van Dusen noted individuals to report lower-order spirits which correspond to disturbances of the unconscious (Freud's "id") and higher-order spirits which signify the supportive, healing, and symbolic nature of Jung's "collective unconscious". Reflecting on the transcript of the participant discussed above in relation to possible sexual conflict he was experiencing, I felt it was interesting that he also considered himself to have been personally attacked by a spirit. The belief that spirits can "attach" themselves to individuals or spiritually "attack" and cause distress is endorsed by The Spirit Release Foundation<sup>18</sup>, a group of medical and complementary practitioners based in London, UK. In contrast, the conceptualization of spirits as supportive and of a higher-order is highlighted in the following theme that was generated from participants' accounts of their spirit guides.

### **8.7 Spirit guides as transcendental**

In Section 7.5 the majority of participants described many supernatural and mystical features of spirit guides that suggested they perceived them as advanced transcendental beings. In particular, participants referred to their guides as being more highly evolved and as having a protector role. This may not be a particularly startling finding in itself given that the nature of the term "spirit guide" suggests a helping role. However, participants also reflected on characteristics of guides that seemed to compensate for limitations they saw in themselves; for example, in Section 7.5.2 they are described as having particular skill sets and the ability to intervene to prevent misfortune. It seemed that belief in the transcendental nature of spirit guides enabled some participants to draw upon skills and abilities of their own that they then attributed to an external source. For instance, one participant spoke about being unable to do accounts until her guide helped, even though she had been successfully doing accountancy work for over twenty years. This relates to the external locus of control theme that was common throughout

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<sup>18</sup> See [www.spiritrelease.com/home.htm](http://www.spiritrelease.com/home.htm) (accessed August, 11, 2009)

participants' accounts when talking about who was responsible for the communication process, as discussed in Section 7.2.

Moreover, in listening to participants describe their spirit guides as though they had special skills, I was reminded of the case of Patience Worth (reviewed in Section 2.3) who was the claimed spirit guide of Pearl Curran; a St Louis homemaker who appeared to channel thousands of poems and literary pieces of work between the periods 1913 to 1937 that apparently transcended her ability in waking state. In an examination of the case, Braude (2000) proposed that creative talents may have already existed in Pearl Curran, but were suppressed due to lack of family encouragement, only to be expressed later in life under the guise of the mediumship role. It is difficult to believe that a person with no prior education in literature or interest in writing could suddenly produce a wealth of literary compositions that received high critical praise from literary experts. However, Flournoy (1899) reports a similar case in which he suggests the Martian language exhibited by medium Hélène Smith demonstrates subconscious creativity (of linguistic ability). As reviewed in Section 2.3.1, there have also been studies proposing that highly hypnotisable individuals can take on specific skills of talented figures when suggested under hypnosis (Raikov, 1976). Thus, it may have been possible that Pearl Curran entered a heightened state whereby she tapped into latent talents. Similarly, given that Pearl Curran was musically talented (she was able to play the piano and took voice lessons), it is possible that her literary talent was a form of (prolonged) exceptional human experience (White, 1993) triggered by a creative disposition. On the other hand, given that her uncle was a spiritualist medium, it is also possible that Pearl herself had mediumistic ability. Alternatively, there is also the fraud explanation (Hansen, 2001).

In Section 7.5.3, participants reflected upon the protector role of their spirit guides, believing these types of guides to be with the participant from birth. One participant spoke about an occasion where she believed her spirit guide had intervened to prevent an accident. This description of spirit guides seems similar in nature to the concept of an "Inner Self Helper" (ISH); a term used by Allison (1980) to describe a supposedly higher (or dissociated) part of the personality that helps individuals with a diagnosis of "multiple

personality disorder" (MPD) and can supposedly utilize paranormal abilities (cf. Van de Castle, 1993). Comstock (1991) points out that Allison was influenced by the work of Milton Erickson, who perceived the unconscious as an inner source of wisdom, and Assagioli, the founder of the Psychosynthesis movement, who viewed individuals to have several sub-personalities, but only one true self known as the Higher Self. Thus, it is sometimes claimed that an ISH is present in all individuals (Allison, 1980; Comstock, 1991).

Reflecting on the characteristics of the ISH and the spirit guide, outlined in Table 8.1, there does seem to be many similarities that suggest they could be descriptions of the same phenomenon. For instance, neither have a date of origin as both claims to have been present from birth, and neither have the capacity for hate as both claim that they feel only love. This relates to the classification of spirits into "higher" and "lower" order as discussed in Section 8.6. On the other hand, Allison (1980) claims that the ISH possesses no sense of gender identity, whereas spirit guides seem to report gender (see Table 8.1. below). However, there are cases where mediums choose not to disclose the name of their guide or they are only aware of its presence, and therefore, the gender is unknown.

It should also be reiterated that the concept of multiple personality disorder (MPD) has been debated by Spanos (1994) who argues that the diagnosis is culturally-specific, with cases mainly confined to the United States, and that alter personalities are socially constructed in hypnotic and therapeutic settings. Furthermore, Van de Castle (1993) reports results of a survey which found some therapists viewed the ISH as iatrogenic (brought on by something someone says or does), whereas others viewed them as mystical entities, and that this depended on their own ideological orientation.

Table 8.1. Similarities and differences between the Inner Self Helper and the Spirit guide

<b>Inner Self Helper (MPD Alter) (Allison, 1980)</b>	<b>Spirit guide (content analysis and interviews with mediums)</b>
Prime directive of the ISH is to keep the patient alive until his/her Life Plan is completed	Can intervene to prevent accidents. Protector status
Has no date of origin; has always been present	Participants tend to report spirit guides as present from birth
Can only feel love; has no capacity for hate	Reported as having infinite benevolence
Has awareness of and belief in God	Can be religious figures or on a spiritual path
Teaches person how to live and move forward properly	Teaches and guides
Co-therapist	Not stated
Knows about the patient and can predict term future	Some participants stated the purpose of mediumship is to "prophesise"
No personal sense of gender identity	Often reports gender (but are cases when not)
Talks intellectually, prefers to answer questions, gives enigmatic instruction	Inspirational or philosophical speakers
Avoids using slang	Not stated
Is aware of patient's past lifetimes	Not stated

## 8.8 Explanatory systems of mediumship

Throughout accounts participants reflected on the practical aspects of mediumship and, in most cases, described preparing for mediumship demonstration with practices, such as meditation, "stilling the mind", mental detachment, mental requests, visualisation of chakras, putting daily concerns to one side, and pacification. There seemed to be similarities in these practices with methods that have been proposed to promote significant results in ESP tests (cf. White, 1964), such as relaxation, engaging the conscious mind, and making a demand for a positive outcome; and with psi-conductive states (cf. Braud, 1975; Honorton, 1977). Braud proposes that there are seven characteristics of a psi-conductive state: (1) being physically relaxed, (2) having reduced

physical arousal or activation, such as in meditative states, (3) reduced sensory input and processing (based on Honorton's noise reduction model), (4) increased awareness of internal processes, feelings, and images (including dreams and fantasy), (5) psi increases with ("receptive mode") right hemisphere functioning and decreases with ("action mode") left hemisphere functioning, (6) having an altered view of the nature of the world (e.g. belief in psi), and (7) psi must be momentarily important (e.g. psychic healing). Similarly, Honorton (1977) reviewed over 80 studies involving procedures for inducing internal attention states that enhanced psi functioning, concluding that meditation, hypnosis, relaxation, and sensory deprivation (e.g. ganzfeld stimulation) all helped to reduce internal and external "noise" that would ordinarily inhibit the detection of psi. Furthermore, Garrett (1949) has described using breathing techniques before practising mediumistic activities as it seemed to prepare her both physically and mentally, perhaps inducing a relaxed, meditative or altered state conducive to mediumship. In addition, these findings are in accord with interviews conducted by Emmons and Emmons (2002) who found modern mediums reported entering an altered state before demonstrating mediumship.

However, I also got the sense that there was some conflict in participants' accounts in relation to the necessity of these states; for example, as seen in Section 7.6.1, one participant stated "I'm not sure whether these things are superstition". The ritualistic aspect to the practices, such as cleansing the body and making a mental request for information from spirit guides, and reflections by some participants about the possible superstitious nature of their practices, suggested that there was an element of illusion of control (Irwin, 2000; Langer, 1975) or need for control (Roe, 2007a); it is conceivable that active involvement in these preparatory practices induced the belief that participants had control over the uncertain phenomenon of mediumship. The psychology of superstition has been widely discussed; for instance, superstitions and rituals that are believed to enhance performance are often found in the sports arena, students taking exams, and gamblers (Newton & Minutaglio, 1999; Vyse, 1997). In summary, it seemed as though some procedures may serve as aids to concentration or to direct attention to subtle sensations, while others could act as psychological support.

In addition to describing features that were involved in preparing for mediumship, in Section 7.6.2, participants also discussed the form in which ostensible discarnate communication was experienced. One participant used the metaphor of energy to make the distinction between psychic and mediumistic communication. C. Williams, Evans, and Skinner (2003) have explored energy metaphors in the discourses of two psychics, a healer, and an aura reader, and highlighted that energy could refer to physical sensations, entities or information. This was mirrored in the current study as the participant referred to psychic communication in relation to physical sensations (a feeling that was "static" and "dense") and to spirit entities in mediumship communication (using terms, such as "vibrant" and "lighter"). In addition, in Section 7.6.3, she also explained how energy was needed to produce a manifestation of spirit that could be seen objectively. Most participants explained that mediumship communication depended on multiple modes of communication (e.g., hearing, seeing, and sensing information), which echoes findings from a recent thematic analysis with "integrated research mediums" (Rock, Beischel, & Schwartz, 2008). However, it also seemed as though one or two of these modes were more pronounced; for example, one participant said that she was more clairaudient, stating that she could hear information come and go "like a recording that is on a wonky tape".

In Section 7.6.4, other transcripts highlighted the importance of making associations, memory imagery and symbolism in the communication process. For example, one participant described how a memory of a person or event would flash into her consciousness which she then interpreted as being significant in the life of the person she was giving a mediumship reading for. Similarly, Garrett (1949) described the process of communication as one involving images and symbols that needed interpretation, and Emmons and Emmons (2003) reported that mediums who receive communication as a visual image often have "psychic dictionaries" in which various symbols represent certain information. Thus, if one considered the mediumship process as involving anomalous information transfer, these findings may mean that mediums have learnt – perhaps through regular introspection and appraisal of their internal imagery – how to distinguish between mediumistic impressions and normal sensory input (or memory images), or how

to elaborate on minimal information. Such a belief fits with memory models of psi that suggest an individual's own memory traces play a role in the anomalous transmission of information (see Broughton, 2006a, for a recent review). Broughton (2006b) believes that the emotional system plays a fundamental role in the selection of images in cases of "psychic hallucinations", and argues that this could have an evolutionary purpose, helping individuals to detect potential threats to survival.

Support for the theory that the emotional system is involved in psi can be found in the concept of synchronicity, defined by Jung (1952) as a psychologically meaningful connection between an inner event (i.e., thought, dream, vision or feeling) and one or more external events occurring simultaneously or at a future point in time. Synchronicity experiences have been reported in the therapeutic setting, such as clients accurately describing their therapist before meeting them for the first time from details in a dream they have had or the therapist dreaming anomalous information about the patient (Ehrenwald, 1948). These experiences are often reported when emotional intensity is high, for example, when patients are withdrawn and need to maintain a sense of connectedness with the therapist (Ullman, 1949) or when a critical turning point has been reached in therapy (Hopcke, 2009). Thus, given that mediumship could also involve emotional situations whereby individuals seek contact with deceased loved ones, it may be that, similar to the therapeutic setting, the mediumship setting serves as a conduit for synchronistic or anomalous experiences to help the bereaved. As will be seen in the next section, the purpose of mediumship has been described as one of therapeutic support.

### **8.9 Mediumship as counselling**

In Section 7.7, several participants within the study seemed to describe the purpose of mediumship as therapeutic support for both the living and the deceased. They emphasised the importance of giving hope and comfort to individuals by obtaining evidential information to prove that deceased loved ones are still around. These findings confirm an ethnographic study of contemporary Spiritualism conducted by Walliss (2001), which found that mediumship demonstrations at Spiritualist churches consisted of advice,

support, and evidence of survival. In addition, Harwood (1977) has suggested that spiritualists operate as therapists to individuals who are going through periods of transition. Similarly, Torrey (1974) argues "spiritualists and shamans do the same thing as psychiatrists and psychologists do, using the same techniques, and getting about the same results" (p. 331). He believes there are common elements necessary for successful psychotherapy in all cultures; a shared world-view, patient expectations, personal qualities of the therapist, and techniques of therapy. Reflecting on this view, I wondered whether mediums fit the criteria. With respect to the first condition, it could easily be argued that mediums and individuals seeking contact with mediums share the same world-view, in that they support the idea of life after death and communication with discarnate entities. Secondly, individuals seeking contact with mediums can select which mediums they want to see, they have a choice of which personal qualities they prefer and value. Thirdly, individuals seeking mediumship contact have expectations that mediums will contact deceased loved ones, and certain mediums may have gained a reputation for being able to do it. Finally, the techniques used by mediums may not involve altering behaviour or requiring the individual to change, but acceptance, sympathy, hope, sharing of similar experiences, and validation of experiences.

A further point to make in relation to mediumship serving a counselling function corresponds to the theory by Irwin (1985) (as discussed in Section 8.3) who proposed that individuals who had a greater *capacity*, *opportunity* and *motivation* for absorption would be more prone to psi experiences. Thus, the counselling function of mediumship could serve as a motivation to receive spirit communication in those individuals wanting to help others who are bereaved. This coincides with models of psi that have suggested that spontaneous psi events occur when there is a personal need for the individual to have an experience (Stanford, 1990; Stanford & Thompson, 1974), and with the counselling benefits of attending a psychic reading (Roe, 1998).

Themes generated from participants' accounts have highlighted a number of phenomenological aspects to the lived experience of mediumship. Of particular interest in this section is the implication these findings may have for the mental health field and clinical practice. A key issue that seems prominent in mediums' search for an explanation of mediumship phenomena is the importance of finding a personal experiential framework or explanatory model in which experiences are understood. Most participants linked the onset of mediumistic experiences to spontaneous anomalous experiences that often occurred in childhood, which they seemed to interpret as signalling sensitivity to mediumistic or spiritual phenomena. In addition, participants stressed the family context as being a major factor in their development of, and identification with, the mediumship role. There seemed to be a sense that these anomalous experiences, together with family encouragement of mediumship, provided a normalising and validating function, which served to foster further development and give meaning. The relationship between social support, spiritual practice and wellbeing has been recently documented, with lack of spiritual practice being identified as a possible risk factor in mental distress (Kohls, Walach, & Wirtz, 2009). Similarly, when Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) investigated the effects of paranormal belief and experience on wellbeing, they found individuals reported increased wellbeing, happiness, optimism and meaning in life. In addition, Belz (2009a) has proposed that exceptional experiences (ExE) (of which mediumship is categorised) serve the needs of individuals by creating meaning in life, externalising problems, and enhancing self worth and control in life.

Furthermore, when participants in this study did not have the family context in which anomalous experiences were accounted for by a spiritual explanation, they were distressed and confused, defaulting to a clinical model of "madness". One participant decided to cope alone rather than take medication prescribed by her doctor, another decided to go to the Spiritualist Church rather than see a psychologist, and another talked to a friend who was studying psychic phenomena and later also went to the Spiritualist Church. For these participants, initially distressing experiences were later normalised,

validated and given meaning within a spiritual model. Of relevance to these findings is the work of Seligman (2005a), reviewed in Chapter two, who argued that distress is experienced by individuals prior to their involvement with Candomblé mediumship but is given a new positive meaning by their initiation into mediumship, together with the accompanying change in status, power and respect that is associated with the role. Seligman suggests that the process of redefining one's identity and social support associated with the mediumship role may serve a therapeutic function. Implicit in this notion is the view that normalization of distressing or unusual experiences contributes to positive wellbeing or better ability to cope. Moreover, Belz (2009a) has pointed out that although exceptional experiences are regarded positively by the majority of individuals, there are also individuals who are confused by their experiences and seek help. In addition, she adds that there is another group who report exceptional experiences that have a "mental disorder" and are looking for alternative approaches to understanding and treating their "symptoms".

This highlighted to me the need for mental health services to be accessible and appealing to individuals who are in distress, but who may worry about not being believed, stigmatised, and/or labelled with a "mental disorder". It may also be useful for services to have an awareness of anomalous psychological processes and exceptional human experiences research, and aim to integrate clinical, spiritual, transpersonal and parapsychological viewpoints to provide an eclectic approach. Such services have been established elsewhere in Europe, such as The Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health in Freiburg, Germany, which counsels individuals with "unusual experiences" by accepting their "subjective models of explanation"; acknowledging that such experiences are real for the individual, helping them cope with their experiences and integrate them into their self and world concepts (IGPP; Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene, 2007)<sup>19</sup>. A similar unit has also been set up in Paris, France called the Service for Orientation and Help of People with Exceptional Experiences (SOS-PSEE)<sup>20</sup>. Belz (2009a, 2009b), who is a clinical psychologist working in the

<sup>19</sup> Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP) (<http://www.igpp.de/english/welcome.htm>)

<sup>20</sup> Le Service d'Ecoute Psychologique de l'IMI (<http://www.metapsychique.org/Presentation-de-SOS-PSEE.html>)

counselling service of the IGPP, suggests that mental health practitioners need to develop a joint exploratory model, in collaboration with the individual seeking help, which takes empirical research findings from parapsychology and clinical psychology into consideration as well as the explanatory model, beliefs and culture of the individual. Belz points out that it is important to demystify and normalise unusual or exceptional experiences, but that practitioners need to be aware that this might be disappointing for some individuals who feel "special" as a result of having had the experience. To overcome this, practitioners can highlight that there are many experiences that still remain unexplained, and increase the self-esteem and coping strategies of the individual, alongside developing the exploratory model.

In addition, future research may find it fruitful to use the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA; J.A. Smith, 1996) to expand our understanding of anomalous experiences; for example, to explore the life experiences of individuals who hear voices. Moreover, this study uncovered possible psychological conflict in one participant that was not induced from the mediumship activity questionnaire in Chapter four, highlighting not only the advantages of adopting an idiographic, phenomenological approach but also a mixed methods approach. Similarly, findings from the survey study, discussed in Chapter three, suggested practicing spiritualist mediums had better wellbeing than non-practicing spiritualists; however, the phenomenological study reported here suggests that mediumistic experiences are not always perceived as positive, and can be associated with psychological distress when first experienced.

However, it also highlights the possible gains to exploring mediumship phenomena in even more detail. In particular, future research could use IPA to explore the possible psychodynamic relevance of the spirit guide phenomenon in-depth with an individual case or focus the aim of the study solely on this aspect of mediumship phenomena. In addition, future research could extend the scope of IPA with different samples, with shared features of mediumship, such as psychics, healers or sitters. Given the emphasis on locus of control throughout the transcripts it may also be fruitful to focus on why some mediums believe they have control over mediumship phenomena, whereas others do not.

In the following section, limitations of conducting the study will be discussed alongside suggestions for future research. The interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) adopted in this study has been instrumental in mapping mediums' own understanding of their experiences and illuminating our understanding of the mediumship phenomenon. J. A. Smith and Osborn (2003) point out that IPA research seeks to explore in-depth the lived experience of individuals who are a homogeneous group rather than making generalisations that are applicable to all. Thus, this study fulfilled the aim of obtaining a sample of participants who share similar features (i.e. spiritualists from the Spiritualist National Union). However, future research could explore whether reported experiences differ for mediums who do not consider themselves spiritualists or at least are rather more secular (e.g., from the College of Psychic Studies).

As this study was part of a larger research project investigating the psychology and phenomenology of mediumship, the use of multiple methods was considered fundamental in being able to answer multi-dimensional research questions and to provide a more valid, robust picture. It may be noted that the research was confined to the views of mediums, and in this respect could be regarded as limited in terms of examining mediumship phenomena from multiple and varied perspectives; for example, the phenomenology of mediumship from the sitters' perspective may also provide useful insights. However, the decision to focus on mediums' experiences was intentional, as only through listening to their accounts would we be able to understand how they make sense of their experiences and achieve our aim of investigating the phenomenology of mediumistic experiences.

Lastly, it is possible that a different researcher with a different background and theoretical orientation would have interpreted participants' accounts differently. However, this does not render the analysis in this study invalid, incorrect or redundant. Instead, IPA emphasises that the interviews are a unique interaction, in time, between the researcher and the participants; there are no right or wrong answers, only unique opportunities to delve into the participants' life world and hear their stories (J. A. Smith, Jarman, &

Osborn, 1999). Furthermore, steps were taken throughout the analytical process to ground the themes in the data and to check their validity in supervision and with experienced IPA researchers. Thus, a conscious effort was made to include substantial quotes from participants' transcripts as a way of validating interpretations and so the reader could get a sense of the context surrounding the interpretations.

### **8.12 Reflections on the research process**

As the researcher plays a part in both generating and analysing data, I felt that the mediumship training course I attended and discussed in Chapter one was invaluable in enabling me to position myself as an "insider" as well as a "researcher". This increased my ability to use and understand mediumship terminology, build rapport, and be accepted by participants. Similarly, sharing a personal anomalous experience I had as a child seemed to encourage participants to be open about their own experiences and I was surprised how willing they were to talk about certain issues, such as experiences they had found distressing and experiences that would be pathologised by the medical model. This is something that has also been reported by Wright (1999), who, when researching spontaneous contact with the deceased, disclosed to participants that she had sensed the presence of her deceased husband. Subsequently, I felt that I was seen as both a researcher and an experiencer, and mediums often interpreted my reasons for studying mediumship as an indication that I may go on to develop mediumistic ability.

Reflecting on the fact that mediums genuinely believe they are communicating with deceased spirits, but also being aware that as a psychological researcher I would at some point question this in my interpretation of their experiences, I sometimes felt as though I was being "disloyal" to participants. In this respect, I have mixed views regarding some of the aspects of IPA. On one hand, I found the dual nature of IPA (J. A. Smith, 2004) a useful tool in the exploration of mediumship phenomena as I was able to represent the participants' voice with phenomenological extracts, but also draw on my own experience in clinical psychology to help make sense of participants' experience. However, I was disappointed that I did not feel I could share some of the analysis with participants given

it suggested that spirit guides may have a psychodynamic relevance for mediums. I feel this ethical dilemma is something that IPA literature needs to acknowledge and future researchers consider. This would seem particularly pertinent to research with individuals who are frequently disempowered, such as clinical populations, individuals with learning difficulties, ethnic minorities, and children. IPA claims to recognise participants as expert on their own experiences and the researcher is privileged to gain access to their stories. However, it seems to me that once these stories are gained, the sharing process comes to an end, as although credibility checks of data are often undertaken with participants, they are rarely undertaken after analysis.

### **8.13 Conclusion**

This chapter has placed the findings, derived from interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with mediums (discussed in Chapter seven), in a wider theoretical context by linking themes to the extant literature. An additional discussion was presented on the clinical implications of findings, in particular the importance of having a personal experiential framework or explanatory model in which anomalous experiences are understood. This chapter also highlighted some limitations of the study, which enabled suggestions to be made for future research, for example, extending the scope of IPA with different samples, such as psychics, healers or sitters. Finally, reflections on the research process were also discussed.

In conclusion, the findings presented in Chapters seven and eight, as a whole, represent the first systematic qualitative study to use an interpretative phenomenological perspective to explore mediumistic experiences. This differs to previous work that has emphasised a proof-oriented approach to mediumship research (e.g., O'Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005; Robertson & Roy, 2001), or has conducted interview studies that seem to be at variance with the epistemology of qualitative research; reporting information quantitatively in the form of percentages (e.g., Emmons & Emmons, 2003; T. J. Leonard, 2005), or that have serious methodological flaws (cf. Roxburgh & Roe, 2009). Instead, the current study has conducted phenomenological research with mediums that is the first, to

my knowledge, to adhere fully to published guidelines for qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), and has generated data that provide an insight into participants' accounts of mediumship. By encouraging mediums to talk about their experiences, in their own words, it is evident that findings discussed here will add to the existing literature by illuminating our understanding of the process of mediumship, as understood by those who experience it.

The final chapter will attempt to integrate the findings presented here with findings from the survey study and mediumship activity questionnaire.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE, REFLECTIONS ON USING MIXED METHODS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **9.1 Summary of main findings**

The overall aim of the research presented in this thesis was to explore the psychology and phenomenology of spiritualist mediumship. In light of previous research with mediums tending to adopt a proof-oriented approach (designed to test whether or not survival explanations are tenable), the current research was innovative in that it was the first to use qualitative methods, systematically and rigorously, to explore the experiences of mediums in the UK. In addition, although the psychological wellbeing of mediums had been investigated in the US and South America, the current research was regarded as an opportunity to explore the uncharted territory of UK mediums' psychological wellbeing. As such, the research embarked on investigating the personality and mental health of mediums with a selection of psychological measures, in addition to giving mediums a voice by documenting the views and experiences of practising mediums with a qualitative interview study. More specifically, in revisiting the research objectives outlined at the beginning of the thesis in Chapter one, the aims addressed the following:

- 1) To investigate if any personality variables are characteristic of mediums.
- 2) To assess whether mediumship is associated with psychological wellbeing or pathology.
- 3) To establish the range and incidence of mediumship experiences.
- 4) To map mediums' own understanding of their experiences.

The first two objectives were investigated in Study one, which used a UK nationwide postal survey to explore the hypothesis that spiritualist mediums and non-mediums would differ on a selection of standardized psychological measures. There were no differences on a measure of dissociation, suggesting that spiritualist mediums are not more prone to dissociative experiences. Furthermore, findings confirmed previous research conducted

with mediums in Brazil, Cuba, and the US in which mediums presented with better mental health (e.g., Laria, 2000; Moreira-Almeida, Neto, & Cardena, 2008; Moreira-Almeida, Neto, & Greyson, 2007; Seligman, 2005a). In addition, number of years as a spiritualist was not associated with better mental health, suggesting that mediums had a predisposition for positive wellbeing before they entered the profession or that adoption of the mediumship role (at the beginning of their career) had a positive effect on wellbeing. In consideration of these findings one might surmise that it is inappropriate to characterize mediums as psychologically unhealthy or dysfunctional. There was also no association with fantasy-proneness, contrary to Wilson and Barber's (1983) claims that mediums may be more fantasy-prone, which suggests that mediums' reported experiences cannot easily be explained in terms of an over-active imagination. Similarly, mediums did not present with thinner boundaries when compared to non-mediums, suggesting they are not more prone to transition between states of awareness, such as altered states of consciousness or dreaming states (Hartmann, 1991).

Study two comprised a content analysis of a self-designed mediumship activity questionnaire (MAQ) that was included in the survey to map the range and incidence of mediumship experiences. Findings suggested that the majority of mediums either discovered their ability through involvement with spiritualism or because they had personal anomalous experiences that instigated a belief in mediumship. Personal anomalous experiences were also cited as contributing to the development of mediumship, alongside encouragement by family members who normalised mediumistic experiences. Having traumatic experiences or a natural ability seemed to be less apparent in mediums' accounts of how they became a medium. The majority of mediums felt in control of their mediumistic experiences as they accepted responsibility for initiating the communication process and were able to decide when they communicated. Although there were mediums who experienced spirits as having an independent existence, the majority reported that the communication process involved internal imagery or telepathy. Another key finding was that spirit guides seemed to have been created by some mediums from myths, cultural stereotypes or memories; for example, the majority of guides reported were Native American Indians who had healing ability. With regard to the purpose of

mediumship, mediums emphasized how important it was to give factual information to prove survival and give comfort to others. Whilst the content analysis had the advantage of identifying features of mediumship that were relatively common across the sample, it was evident that a formal qualitative approach would allow mediums to talk in more depth about the importance of these features.

The main aim of Study three was to explore the phenomenology of mediumship with an in-depth qualitative study that would elaborate on some of the findings from the content analysis. Ten spiritualist mediums, who had taken part in the survey, participated in semi-structured interviews that aimed to capture the lived experience of mediums by giving them the opportunity to tell their story in their own words and on their own terms. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) revealed six superordinate themes and a number of corresponding sub-themes that illuminated key aspects of the mediumship experience.

Mediums emphasized the importance of childhood anomalous experiences and mediumistic experiences within the family context as explanations for how they became practising mediums and focused on how mediumship had always been an ordinary part of life. Some mediums also spoke about how important mediumship and Spiritualism was in helping them to construct a personal experiential framework for making sense of initially distressing experiences. In addition, mediums commented on how it was possible to develop mediumship through practices and dedication, but that ability could also develop spontaneously in individuals following a traumatic event or injury.

Particular importance seemed to be placed on controlling the communication process and not allowing mediumship to interfere with daily life, however, it was also apparent that some mediums felt this was not possible. Furthermore, some mediums placed responsibility with spirits rather than themselves when communication did not go well; suggesting locus of control was an important feature when reporting mediumistic experiences. The importance of control also reappeared when mediums stressed that positive thoughts were imperative in preventing negative influences from spirits. Mediums

also reflected on some of their preparatory practices, which seemed to have a somewhat ritualistic aspect, and it was speculated that this could provide an illusion of control over the uncertain phenomenon of mediumship. Additionally, the meditative aspect of preparation could also be seen as helping mediums to experience an altered state of consciousness, which may serve to facilitate the mediumship process.

The role of the spirit guide in mediumship was elaborated on in further detail, with findings suggesting that some mediums may use the spirit guide phenomenon to cope with psychological conflict or to compensate for perceived limitations in skills or knowledge. For example, one medium seemed to attribute his claimed healing ability to a spirit guide in the absence of formal experience or qualifications. In addition, the similarities and differences between the spirit guide and the concept of an Inner Self Helper were discussed. Finally, mediums pointed out that there was a counselling aspect to mediumship and emphasised the importance of giving hope to individuals by obtaining evidential information to prove that deceased loved ones are still around.

Overall, the knowledge gained from this study adds to our understanding of the nature of mediumship. In particular, that the pathways to mediumship are embedded in a cultural context that provides an important environment in which mediumistic experiences are normalised and validated. Similarly, the belief that there are negative spirits but that they can be guarded against by having positive thoughts and control over the communication process provides an informative contrast to the experiences of people who hear voices or have hallucination-like experiences in other contexts. We also learnt that some of the practices that mediums use to prepare for mediumship are similar to those found conducive to successful psi performance. Thus, not only does this study increase our broad understanding of mediumship and have potential implications for the mental health field, it may also influence our understanding of other areas of parapsychology.

## 9.2 Integration of findings, reflections on the mixed methods approach and issues for further consideration

As discussed in Chapter six, using a combination of the survey method and interviews to investigate the psychological and phenomenological inquiry components of mediumship phenomena represents both a quantitative and qualitative phase of research. As such, the thesis has taken a pragmatist (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) or needs-based approach to research by combining methods in order to *expand* our understanding of mediumship. When the main goal of research is to obtain a full picture of the phenomenon of interest, using both quantitative and qualitative methods "allows researchers to simultaneously generalize results from a sample to a population and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon" (Hanson et al., 2005, pg. 224). Thus, otherwise competing epistemologies, such as positivism, where the goal of research is to obtain objective knowledge (i.e. quantitative study), and phenomenology, where the aim of research is to make sense out of individuals' subjective experiences (i.e. qualitative study), are brought together for the purpose of answering different research questions.

In addition to expanding our understanding of mediumship with separate quantitative and qualitative studies addressing different research questions, there were other aspects of the research that could be viewed as having mixed methods. In reviewing the different rationales (discussed in Section 6.2) outlined by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), it is evident that initial observations "in the field" helped to *develop* the Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ), as well as facilitate the interview process. Furthermore, content analysis of the MAQ and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) of interview data with mediums were both methods of deepening our understanding of the process and nature of mediumship; whereby the interviews sought to *elaborate* findings from the content analysis in more depth. Therefore, although the content analysis identified some common features of mediumship that were likely to be considered important to respondents, given that responses were volunteered freely (rather than being

a set response to a set question), the qualitative data complements those features by allowing respondents to talk in more detail about what mattered to them personally.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn is that findings from the qualitative study using IPA do enhance findings from the content analysis study. For example, the link between personal experiences and realization of mediumship ability identified from the content analysis is expanded on in the IPA sub-theme "Childhood anomalous experiences". Similarly, the belief that family encouragement helped to normalise and develop mediumship is discussed in more depth in the sub-theme "My family were mediumistic". By including detailed extracts from participants' interview transcripts it is evident that data obtained from the IPA study enrich our understanding of the context in which mediumship phenomena are experienced and given meaning. Additionally, it is apparent that in-depth qualitative analysis has detected nuanced aspects of the mediumship experience that would hitherto have gone ignored with methods that are more concerned with establishing how common an experience is for a larger sample. This is best exemplified in the sub-theme "I thought I was going mad': Reframing distressing experiences using a spiritual model". Although trauma did not emerge as a common experience in the frequency results of the content analysis, and findings from the mental health measure (MHI-17; Stewart, Ware, Sherbourne & Wells, 1992) suggested mediums had positive wellbeing, in the IPA study some mediums had anomalous experiences they found distressing until they reframed their experiences using a spiritual model. Thus, the IPA study was able to identify the idiographic nature of mediums' experiences, and provided a greater sense of the spiritual, societal and familial milieus that seemed to have a crucial impact on how anomalous experiences were labelled and interpreted by participants.

The finding that childhood anomalous experiences were reported by participants as contributing to the development of mediumistic ability is interesting when considering the implementation of data collection in mixed methods research. In this thesis, the quantitative survey study, incorporating a selection of psychological measures and the MAQ, preceded the qualitative phenomenological study in a sequential implementation

design (Hanson et al., 2005). This had the practical advantage of assisting the sampling strategy, given that mediums who were interested in taking part in an in-depth interview were identified from their participation in the survey study, as well as the advantage of corroborating and expanding findings from the MAQ with in-depth interviews. However, if the quantitative survey study were to have proceeded after the qualitative study, it may have been useful to have included the Childhood Experience Inventory (CEI; Ring & Rosling, 1990). This psychological measure assesses the incidence of unusual experiences in childhood that could possibly sensitize individuals to anomalous experiences in adulthood. However, one of the factors of this measure, fantasy-proneness, was included in the survey as a stand-alone measure and did not show mediums to be more susceptible to this trait. It should also be noted that limited data exists on the psychometric properties of the CEI.

Similarly, as the MAQ found that the majority of mediums feel in control of initiating the communication process and can "switch off" from spirit, and that participants in the IPA study either internalized or externalized responsibility for communication, a measure of locus of control (e.g. Duttweiler, 1984) may have proven to be fruitful if the survey study had been conducted last. However, this only serves to highlight the advantages of conducting mixed methods research, as there is no reason why further quantitative or qualitative studies cannot take advantage of the insights gained from this phenomenological study and continue the QUANT (survey measures) → quant & qual (content analysis of MAQ) → QUAL (IPA of interviews) design sequence by adding further studies. For instance, the finding that mediums have a somewhat ritualistic aspect to preparing to communicate with spirits (e.g. cleansing the body), use different modes of communicating (e.g., sensing, hearing or seeing spirits) and find significance in symbols, memories and synchronistic events, would be interesting to explore further in future qualitative work (e.g. interviews or ethnographic observations of training courses/development groups); focusing on what these experiences mean and whether socio-cultural factors or mediumship training influence their interpretation.

The benefits of adopting a mixed methods approach is evident in the finding that although mediums as a group did not report experiences indicative of thinner boundaries, there was evidence of participants in the IPA study reflecting on the effects of having boundaries that are too thin. For example, participants spoke about spirits being able to have a negative affect on wellbeing if a medium weakened mental boundaries by abusing drugs or alcohol, or by having negative thoughts. In order to manage the negative influence from some spirits, participants in the IPA study also spoke about the importance of having control over when they allowed spirits to communicate. Spirit guides were also considered to play a vital role in protecting the medium and participants referred to their guides as protectors, as being more highly evolved, and as being gifted with specialist skills and knowledge. These strategies for controlling the perceived negative aspects of mediumship may explain why the medium sample do not present as thin boundaried, and provides an insight into why mediums having these sorts of experiences seem to remain psychologically healthy. Future research may find it fruitful to investigate individuals who score thin boundaried, but have good psychological wellbeing, as they may provide useful insights into how this permeability can be managed.

In both the content analysis and IPA studies, there was evidence that mediums question whether spirit guides are autonomous beings with an independent existence or whether they reflect aspects of themselves. However, a major advantage of the IPA study was being able to illuminate these divergences across individual data and use interpretative activity to make sense of participants' accounts. For instance, the finding that one participant's spirit guides may represent an outlet for repressed psychological conflict was not induced from the content analysis data. Indeed, future studies may find it fruitful to use the case study method to explore the possible psychodynamic relevance of spirit guides in more detail or undertake an additional qualitative study solely exploring the spirit guide phenomenon, for example, exploring the process by which mediums discover their guides. On the other hand, the range of different spirit guides that mediums reported in the content analysis of the MAQ would not have been found with the IPA study, which is further support for the advantages of conducting mixed methods research.

### **9.3 The value of qualitative research: Recommendations for parapsychology**

In Section 6.3 it was apparent that there is a growing interest in the value of qualitative research within mainstream psychology, which is also being recognised in the field of parapsychology. Advantages of the qualitative approach have been evidenced in this thesis. In particular, initial observations of mediumship demonstrations and training workshops enabled me to gain direct experience of mediumship phenomena and placed me in a more informed position to design more formal studies. White (1997) emphasized the importance of this for parapsychologists when she referred to symbolic interactionist Herbert Blumer's basic methodological premise:

In doing research on a particular aspect of human life you should begin, not with a research protocol or hypothesis but with exploratory investigations of the research population itself. Only when you have steeped yourself in their empirical world can you possibly be in a position to devise hypotheses and a research design (p. 101).

Furthermore, qualitative analysis of interview data, using the interpretative phenomenological approach, enabled the acquisition of new insights that contribute to wider understanding of the mediumship phenomenon. However, it is essential to recognise that these added insights were acquired through the benefits of a rigorous approach to data collection and a commitment to conducting good quality qualitative research. As discussed in Section 5.5, there are important considerations to take into account when carrying out qualitative research, which impact on the quality of the data, and which not all researchers seem to adhere to (cf. Roxburgh & Roe, 2009). For instance, how questions are framed (i.e. non-leading), establishing a good rapport with participants, empowering participants to share their story in their own words and on their own terms, and including detailed extracts from transcripts to ground the data and provide readers with a context which allows them to appraise how themes have been developed (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Kvale, 1996; J. A. Smith, 1995, 2003).

Given the useful insights that the qualitative approach has provided in this thesis, it is argued that qualitative methods should be more highly valued as a legitimate approach within parapsychology, and that in some ways its phenomena are well-suited to qualitative investigation. It is hoped that future work in the field will involve qualitative research being given as much attention as traditional experimental work, as investigators become more convinced of the insights that can be gained from directly asking people about their experiences. Indeed, there has been a recent upsurge in studies investigating anomalous experiences that have embraced a qualitative approach, for example, a thematic analysis of the experience of "sensing the presence of the deceased" (Steffen, 2009), the phenomenology of energy healing (C. Williams & Dutton, 2009), and the phenomenology of near death experiences (Wilde & C. D. Murray, 2009).

In addition, White (1997) has stressed the benefits for parapsychology of using methods that have been developed in other fields, such as Woofitt's (1992) application of conversational analysis to parapsychological data, to help legitimize the study of parapsychological topics within other disciplines. In a similar vein, the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis in this thesis, which has traditionally been used in health research, education and nursing, and recently used in sports psychology (cf. Arvinen-Barrow, Penny, Hemmings, & Corr, 2010), represents a way for parapsychological data to be accessed and accepted by researchers in other fields.

#### **9.4 Implications for the mental health field**

In the following section, the implications of findings for mental health that were discussed in Section 8.10 are summarised. Of significant importance for mediums who were distressed by anomalous experiences, such as hearing spirits, was a personal experiential framework or explanatory model in which experiences could be understood. In particular, emphasis was placed on the normalisation and validation of experiences by family, society, and the spiritualist church. This supports previous research, which has found social support, spiritual practice, and meaning in life to have a positive effect on wellbeing (e.g. Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995; Kohls, Walach, & Wirtz, 2009; Romme & Escher,

2000). In light of these findings, it was recommended that mental health professionals and services be aware of anomalous psychological beliefs, experiences and research in acknowledgment of alternative viewpoints and models, with the aim of providing an eclectic approach to mental health problems. Subsequently, it is proposed that future research could explore the idea of workshops to inform clinicians of the research literature and different ways of counselling individuals who are distressed by anomalous or exceptional experiences, such as the clinical practices of The Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, Friburg (Belz, 2009b), and the Spiritual Crisis Network (Clarke, 2009); both discussed at a recent conference on mental health and exceptional human experiences at Liverpool Hope University. Moreover, it may be worthwhile developing networks so that suitably informed people can be consulted when parapsychological cases present.

Additionally, given the finding that spiritualist mediums scored higher than non-medium spiritualists on a measure of wellbeing, together with the finding that social responses are crucial in how experiences are labelled and interpreted, it may also be fruitful for future research to explore the mediumship role in more detail. In particular, the suggestion that mediumship provides a socially valued role which has an impact on (re)defining one's identity and sense of self worth (Seligman, 2005a, 2005b). The finding that counselling is another aspect of the mediumship role also has important implications for mental health. Moreover, findings suggest that some mediums believe mental health problems can be influenced by negative spirits, and another aspect of their role involves spirit rescue for trapped or confused spirits that may be attached to weakened individuals. In this respect, it would be interesting to explore the beliefs, practices and philosophy of spiritualist mediums in the UK in more detail, but also to examine these practices in relation to spiritist healing centers in Brazil where mediums are involved in the treatment of individuals with mental health problems (Bragdon, 2005). Finally, given that "spirit release" is practiced as a therapy by some professionals (cf. Fiore, 1987; Anderson, 2009), it would seem necessary to review this approach in more detail, particularly from an ethical perspective.

## 9.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite the research presented in this thesis overcoming some of the shortcomings of previous research by using multiple methods to explore the essence of mediumship phenomena, there were limitations that were discussed in the respective chapters of each study. These limitations are briefly summarized here alongside suggestions for how future research could offset them with further studies. With regards to the research as a whole, the findings are limited in that they apply to spiritualist mental mediums that demonstrate mediumship at Spiritualist churches, and thus may not be representative of all mediums. For example, mediums who are not spiritualists may score differently on the psychological measures included in the survey. Thus, it is recommended that future research take advantage of the replicable nature of all studies and conduct further work with other samples of mediums, such as those not attached to a spiritual organisation (e.g. College of Psychic Studies) or those who only do private sittings. In addition, it would be interesting to explore whether trance mediums' scores are different on measures of fantasy-proneness, boundary-thinness and dissociation. However, practical issues with recruitment of trance mediums should be considered, given that this form of mediumship does not seem to be as common as mental mediumship.

In Study one, survey response rates for the medium sample are higher than the non-medium sample, however, it was not possible to calculate exact response rates for the non-medium sample as the number of persons that actually took a survey pack is unknown, thus response rates may in fact be under-estimated. Nevertheless, results should be treated with caution when generalizing to a wider population. It was apparent in Study one that more information was needed on the experiences and wellbeing of mediums prior to their involvement with a formal system of mediumship. Thus, a longitudinal study is suggested that would track individuals as they progress from neophyte to qualified practitioner. The finding that mediums scored higher on a measure of extraversion was speculated to have some connection with the fact that mediums in this study demonstrated their mediumship to an audience, and thus had to be comfortable at some level with the idea of public speaking. However, the finding that mediums scored

higher on a measure of neuroticism as well seemed to suggest that mediums also viewed themselves as self-conscious and shy. In acknowledgement of the state-trait approach to personality (Fleeson, 2004), one possibility for these somewhat conflicting findings is within-person variability, for example, mediums may act differently (more extraverted) when they are "performing" mediumship. Therefore, it is recommended that future research designs explore both trait and state models of personality. One way of exploring the state or situational model of personality is for participants to carry personal data assistants with them for a few weeks and record how well their behaviour is described by personality traits (Fleeson, 2004).

Whilst every effort was made in Study two to design coding agendas and category systems that were based on existing theoretical knowledge and research, a limitation could be that another researcher may have designed different coding agendas, and thus, different categories for assigning responses to the Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ). Nevertheless, given that these categories were also grounded with extracts from participants' responses, thus increasing validity, it would be interesting for future research to conduct further analyses of how one category might relate to another. For example, do the different categories participants report for discovering or developing mediumship ability (i.e., personal experiences, socialization, family experiences) have an influence on whether they internalize or externalize responsibility for the communication process, or how they experience spirit (i.e. external manifestation or internal imagery).

Lastly, as a literature review and content analysis of mediums' experiences was conducted before Study three, I was able to make some predictions as to what may emerge in the interviews, and as a consequence this could have influenced the analysis of interview data and interpretation of themes. However, the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) embraces subjectivity, and acknowledges the researcher's own conceptions and prior experiences are an important part of making sense of the participants' life world through the process of interpretative activity (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). Furthermore, a conscious effort was made throughout the analytical process to ground the themes in the data and to include substantial extracts from participants'

transcripts as a way of validating interpretations, and so the reader could get a sense of the context surrounding the interpretations.

To conclude, this thesis has made an important contribution to the literature by expanding our understanding of the psychology and phenomenology of spiritualist mediumship. One of the main findings is that mediums are not more prone to dissociation, fantasy-proneness or boundary-thinness, and have positive psychological wellbeing. In addition, the importance of a personal experiential framework to help make sense out of anomalistic experiences has been emphasised by mediums. Given that the research included both quantitative and qualitative studies, a significant contribution has also been made to the mixed methods approach. Moreover, the thesis has emphasized the added insights that can be gained from conducting good quality qualitative research, which will be of significant value when considering future research in parapsychology. Furthermore, one of the key outcomes of this thesis is highlighted in the clinical implications of the findings and the recommendation for clinician workshops to educate those who work with individuals who have similar experiences to mediums.

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### Appendix 3.1 – Cover letter sent to mediums in the survey



[University address]  
[My contact details]

[ID Number]  
[Participant Address]  
[Date]

Dear [Participant name]

My name is Elizabeth Roxburgh and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Northampton, based in the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP). I also regularly attend a Mediumship Awareness Group at the Northampton Spiritualist Church. Recently, I attended a mediumship training course at the Arthur Findlay College, and wrote a review of this, which was published in the October 2006 Paranormal Review, a quarterly magazine of the Society for Psychical Research.

I am carrying out a research project into the psychology of mediumship. The aim of my research is not to test ability or find evidence for the proof of survival; I am interested in learning about the experiences of mediums and your insights into the mediumship process. Additionally, the experiences of mediums will be compared to spiritualists who do not class themselves as mediums. So I need to hear from both mediums and non-mediums.

I got your contact details from the Spiritualist National Union website and because of your interest in mediumship, I am writing to ask for your help with this research.

There is no obligation to take part. However, I do hope you will help further our understanding of this important and fascinating topic by completing the enclosed survey. I hope to be able to share details of what I've learnt with those who have kindly participated, so please let me know on the questionnaire if you would like to be kept informed.

I have tried to give a clear and comprehensive account of my project in this cover letter and in the attached questionnaire. However, if you still have any concerns about the nature of my project or feel some aspects have not been described sufficiently clearly, please do not hesitate to contact me on 01604 892517 or contact my supervisors, Prof. Deborah Delanoy on 01604 892111 and Dr Chris Roe on 01604 892623, and we will do our best to answer all your questions.

Best Wishes

Elizabeth Roxburgh

**Please keep this letter. It has my contact details and your ID number; which you will need to quote if you want me to send you the results of this survey.**

### Appendix 3.1 (continued) – Cover letter sent to non-mediums



[University address]  
[My contact details]

[ID number]  
[Date]

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Elizabeth Roxburgh and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Northampton, based in the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP). I also regularly attend a Mediumship Awareness Group at the Northampton Spiritualist Church. Recently, I attended a mediumship training course at the Arthur Findlay College, and wrote a review of this, which was published in the October 2006 Paranormal Review, a quarterly magazine of the Society for Psychical Research.

I am carrying out a research project into the psychology of mediumship. The aim of my research is not to test ability or find evidence for the proof of survival; I am interested in learning about the experiences of mediums insights into the mediumship process. Additionally, the experiences of mediums will be compared to spiritualists who do not class themselves as mediums. So I need to hear from both spiritualist mediums and **on this occasion spiritualist non-mediums (church members who are not practicing or training to be a medium/individuals who attend a service or healing)**

There is no obligation to take part. However, I do hope you will help further our understanding of this important and fascinating topic by completing the enclosed survey. I hope to be able to share details of what I've learnt with those who have kindly participated, so please let me know on the questionnaire if you would like to be kept informed.

I have tried to give a clear and comprehensive account of my project in this cover letter and in the attached questionnaire. However, if you still have any concerns about the nature of my project or feel some aspects have not been described sufficiently clearly, please do not hesitate to contact me on 01604 892517 or contact my supervisors, Prof. Deborah Delanoy on 01604 892111 and Dr Chris Roe on 01604 892623, and we will do our best to answer all your questions.

**Please complete ASAP**

Best Wishes

Elizabeth Roxburgh

**Please keep this letter. It has my contact details and your ID number; which you will need to quote if you want me to send you the results of this survey.**

**Appendix 3.2 – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

SURVEY  
OF  
MEDIUMSHIP  
ACTIVITY

**Elizabeth Roxburgh  
Postgraduate Research Student**

**The University of Northampton**

**Tel. 01604 892517**

**Email: [elizabeth.roxburgh@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.roxburgh@northampton.ac.uk)**

## **Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

**Dear Sir/ Madam,**

I am working towards a PhD degree and part of my postgraduate research is to carry out a project into the psychology of mediumship. The aim of this research is not to test ability or find evidence for the proof of survival after death: I am really interested in understanding your experience of mediumship in your own terms and hope to learn from your insights into the mediumship process.

**This is the first survey in the UK to ask mediums and spiritualists about their own experiences and views. By completing this survey you will play a key part in increasing our understanding of mediumship.**

This survey consists of two parts:

- 1) A mediumship activity questionnaire that is interested in your experiences and what you think is involved in mediumship.
- 2) Five short questionnaires to see whether there are any personality traits that might be related to your mediumship.

**This should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.**

If you volunteer to take part in this research project, please indicate your agreement by completing and returning this questionnaire. All responses will be anonymous, as any personal data will be kept separate from questionnaire data. Data will be used for research purposes only. This means information given in the survey will be included in my PhD thesis, maybe shared with university colleagues/supervisors and could be published in academic journals. Please be reassured that information will be treated confidentially and people taking part will not be identifiable. Any potentially identifying information will be deleted or changed to help ensure anonymity. Please also be aware that you can withdraw your data within one month from it being obtained, without needing to give a reason, and your information will be destroyed. This can be done by sending me your ID number to the address given (these can be found on the attached covering letter I sent).

If you think you can assist me, please return the completed questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided (**no stamp needed**) by [insert date] to the following address:  
[insert university address]

**Thank you in advance for your co-operation and support. I look forward to receiving your responses!** If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Tel: 01604 892517 or Email: [elizabeth.roxburgh@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.roxburgh@northampton.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)

### Part 1: Mediumship Activity Questionnaire

This part of the survey gives you an opportunity to express your personal views. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Please try to answer all of the questions, but note you are free to skip a question or discontinue with the study if you wish. **NB. Your answers will be treated anonymously and confidentially.** Please feel free to continue on separate sheets of paper if needed and attach to the survey booklet.

#### Section A: Background

Please answer the following questions about your personal experiences as a medium, and any insights you have on how a person can become a medium.

1. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritualist?

yes       no

If yes, for how long? (number of years).....

If no, do you have any other religion?

2. Do you consider yourself to be any of the following: (please tick all that apply)

- a medium (go to question 3)  
 training to be a medium (go to question 3)  
 not a medium (skip to question 12)  
 a healer (skip to question 12, or question 3 if also a medium)  
 a psychic or sensitive (skip to question 12, or question 3 if also a medium)

3. How long have you practised as a medium? (number of years).....

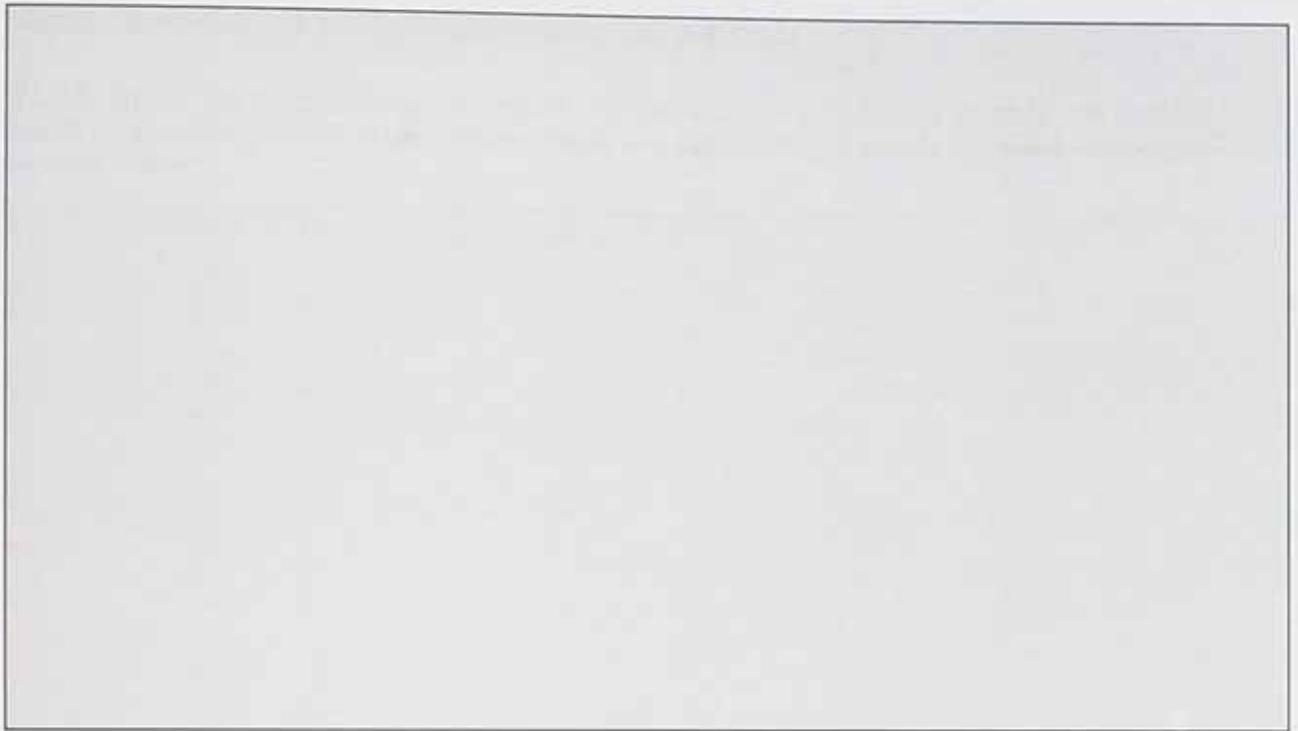
4. Have you attended any mediumship training courses/workshops or development groups/circles?

yes       no

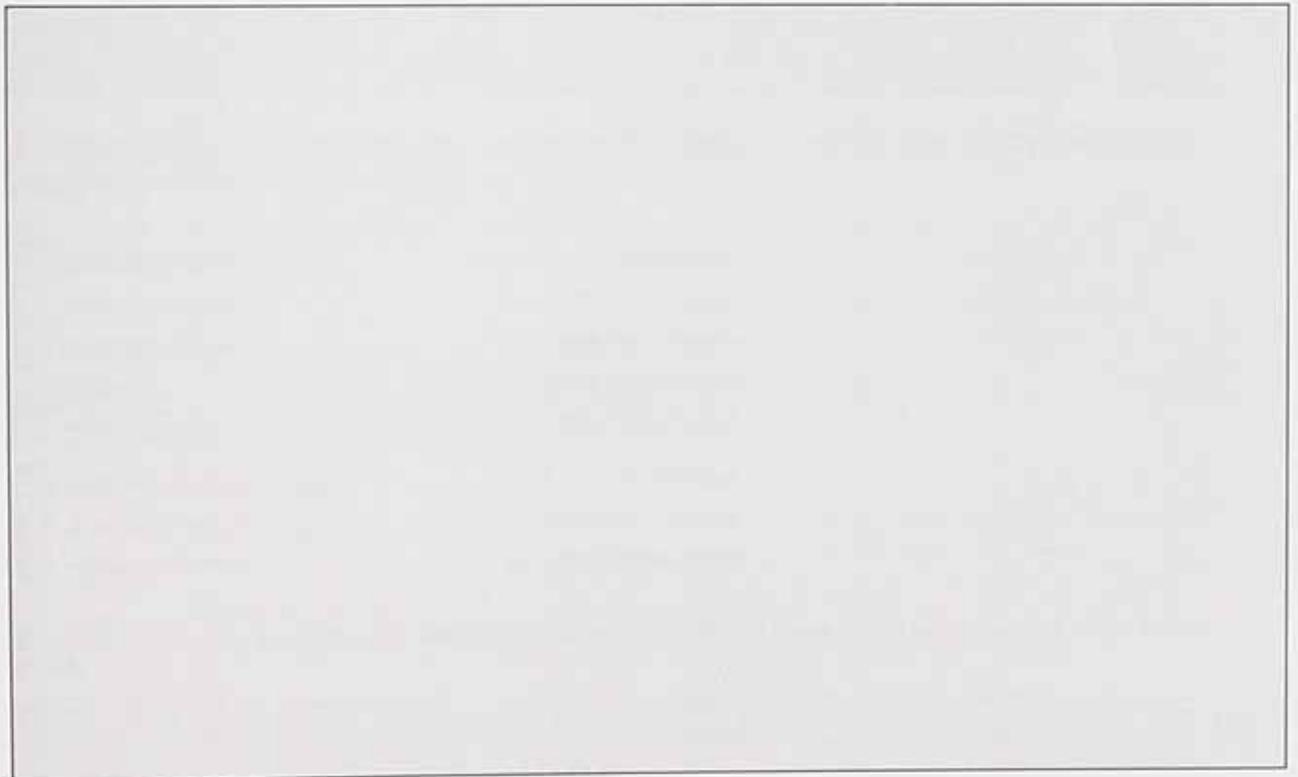
If yes, please can you describe them in the space below, including for how long you attended and what you gained from them (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

**5.** How did you first discover you had the ability to be a medium? Please describe in the space below (please feel free to continue on another sheet)



**6.** Please describe any childhood experiences, events or family influences you think may have contributed to the development of your mediumship ability (please feel free to continue on another sheet)



## Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)

### Section B: Process and nature of mediumship

Please answer the following questions about the things you do when you demonstrate mediumship and the type of mediumship you practise.

**7.** Are there any procedures, rituals or mental actions you follow in order to receive spirit communications? Please describe in the space below (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**8.** What type of mediumship do you practise? (please tick all that apply and circle whether private or platform)

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> clairvoyance      | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clairaudience     | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clairsentience    | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> trance            | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical          | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> automatic drawing | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> automatic writing | private/platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other.....        | private/platform |

**9.** How long does a session usually last on average? (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)**

**10.** Do you remember what has been communicated after a mediumship session/reading? (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

yes       no

**11.** Do you have a spirit control or guide(s)? If you do, please describe their role in your mediumship? For example, how you discovered them, what is their purpose, how and when they communicate, what are they called? (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**12.** What happens during the course of a reading? What is your understanding of the mediumship process? For example, how do you think a spirit communicates? Can you "switch on" and "switch off" your ability at will? (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**Appendix 3.2 (continued) – Mediumship Activity Questionnaire (MAQ)****Section C: Content of Mediumship Readings**

Please answer the following questions about the focus and content of a mediumship reading.

**13.** Can you tell me what kind of information is typically communicated during a mediumship reading?

(please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**14.** In your view, what is the purpose(s) of a mediumship reading? (please feel free to continue on another sheet)

**If there is anything you would like to add, please feel free to continue on additional sheets**

## Appendix 3.3 – Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)

### Dissociative Experiences Scale (Carlson & Putman, 1993)

(Dissociative experiences are experiences that seem different from our ordinary waking view of the world. They exist in our daily lives e.g. "getting lost" in a book, daydreaming or driving and not realising how you got somewhere. Although some people might only report a few of these experiences, others can be quite common, so we might expect a sample of 'normal' healthy people to vary considerably in how many of these experiences they have had)

This questionnaire consists of 28 questions about experiences that you may have in your daily life. We are interested in how often you have these experiences. It is important, however, that your answers show how often these experiences happen to you when you *are not* under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

To answer the questions, please determine to what degree the experience described in the question applies to you and indicate the percentage of the time you have the experience:

Example:

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

1. Some people have the experience of driving or riding in a car or bus or subway and suddenly realizing that they don't remember what has happened during all or part of the trip. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

2. Some people find that sometimes they are listening to someone talk and they suddenly realize that they did not hear part or all of what was said. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

3. Some people have the experience of finding themselves in a place and having no idea how they got there. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

4. Some people have the experience of finding themselves dressed in clothes that they don't remember buying. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

5. Some people have the experience of finding new things among their belongings that they do not remember buying. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

### Appendix 3.3 (continued) – Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)

6. Some people sometimes find that they are approached by people that they do not know who call them by another name or insist that they have met them before. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

7. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling as though they are standing next to themselves or watching themselves do something and they actually see themselves as if they were looking at another person. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

8. Some people are told that they sometimes do not recognize friends or family members. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

9. Some people find that they have no memory for some important events in their lives (for example, a wedding or graduation). Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

10. Some people have the experience of being accused of lying when they do not think that they have lied. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

11. Some people have the experience of looking in a mirror and not recognizing themselves. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

12. Some people have the experience of feeling that other people, objects, and the world around them are not real. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

13. Some people sometimes have the experience of feeling that their body does not seem to belong to them. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

14. Some people have the experience of sometimes remembering a past event so vividly that they feel as if they were reliving that event. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

### Appendix 3.3 (continued) – Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)

15. Some people have the experience of not being sure whether things that they remember happening really did happen or whether they just dreamed them. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

16. Some people have the experience of being in a familiar place but finding it strange and unfamiliar. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

17. Some people find that when they are watching television or a movie they become so absorbed in the story that they are unaware of other events happening around them. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

18. Some people sometimes find that they become so involved in a fantasy or daydream that it feels as though it were really happening to them. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

19. Some people find that they sometimes are able to ignore pain. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

20. Some people find that they sometimes sit staring off into space, thinking of nothing, and are not aware of the passage of time. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

21. Some people sometimes find that when they are alone they talk out loud to themselves. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

22. Some people find that in one situation they may act so differently compared with another situation that they feel almost as if they were two different people. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

23. Some people sometimes find that in certain situations they are able to do things with amazing ease and spontaneity that would usually be difficult for them (for example, sports, work, social situations, etc.). Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

### Appendix 3.3 (continued) – Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)

24. Some people sometimes find that they cannot remember whether they have done something or have just thought about doing that thing (for example, not knowing whether they have just mailed a letter or have just thought about mailing it). Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

25. Some people find evidence that they have done things that they do not remember doing. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

26. Some people sometimes find writings, drawings, or notes among their belongings that they must have done but cannot remember doing. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

27. Some people sometimes find that they hear voices inside their head that tell them to do things or comment on things that they are doing. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

28. Some people sometimes feel as if they are looking at the world through a fog so that people and objects appear far away or unclear. Indicate what percentage of the time this happens to you.

(Never) 0%----10----20----30----40----50----60----70----80----90----100% (Always)

### Appendix 3.4 – Mental Health Inventory (MHH-17)

The following inventory looks at well-being (Stewart & Ware, 1992)

These questions are about how you feel, and how things have been with you mostly within the *past two weeks*. Please circle the appropriate number that best corresponds to how you felt for each statement

How much of the time in the past two weeks:		All of the time	Most of the time	A good bit of the time	Some of the time	A little of the time	None of the time
1	Has your daily life been full of things that were interesting to you?	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Did you feel depressed?	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Have you felt loved and wanted?	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Have you been a very nervous person?	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Have you been in firm control of your behaviour, thoughts, emotions, feelings?	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Have you felt tense or high-strung?	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Have you felt calm and peaceful	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Have you felt emotionally stable?	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Have you felt downhearted and blue?	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Have you felt restless, fidgety, or impatient?	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Have you been moody, or brooded about things?	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Have you felt cheerful, light-hearted?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	Have you been in low or very low spirits?	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Were you a happy person?	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Appendix 3.4 (continued) – Mental Health Inventory (MHH-17)**

15	Did you feel you had nothing to look forward to?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	Have you been anxious or worried?	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Appendix 3.5 – Boundary Questionnaire

### Part 2: Questionnaires

This part of the survey contains five short questionnaires to see if any personality traits are associated with mediumship ability. Please try to answer all of the questions, but note you are free to skip a question or discontinue with the study if you wish. **NB. Your answers will be treated anonymously and confidentially.** Please complete each section as quickly and honestly as possible. Normally those answers that come freely and without thinking too much are most useful.

### Boundary Questionnaire (Kunzendorf & Hartmann, 1997)

(Examples of boundaries exist in daily life and are 'normal' occurrences e.g. Sleep-wake boundaries, interpersonal boundaries)

Please rate each of the statements from 0 to 4 (0 indicates "not at all true of me"; 4 indicates "very true of me"). Try to respond to all of the statements as quickly as you can.

0 = "not at all true of me"

4 = "very true of me"

1.	My feelings blend into one another	0	1	2	3	4
2.	I am very close to my childhood feelings	0	1	2	3	4
3.	I am easily hurt	0	1	2	3	4
4.	I spend a lot of time daydreaming, fantasizing or in reverie	0	1	2	3	4
5.	I like stories that have a definite beginning, middle and end	0	1	2	3	4
6.	A good organization is one in which all the lines of responsibility are precise and clearly established	0	1	2	3	4
7.	There is a place for everything, and everything should be in its place	0	1	2	3	4
8.	Sometimes its scary when one gets too involved with another person	0	1	2	3	4
9.	A good parent has to be a bit of a child too	0	1	2	3	4
10	I can easily imagine what it might be like to be an animal	0	1	2	3	4
11	When something happens to a friend of mine or to a lover, it is almost as if it happened to me	0	1	2	3	4
12	When I work on a project, I don't like to tie myself down to a definite outline. I rather like to let my mind wander.	0	1	2	3	4
13	In my dreams, people sometimes merge into each other or become other people	0	1	2	3	4
14	I believe I am influenced by forces that no one can understand	0	1	2	3	4
15	There are no sharp dividing lines between normal people, people with problems and people who are considered psychotic or crazy	0	1	2	3	4
16	I am a down-to-earth no-nonsense kind of person	0	1	2	3	4
17	I think I would enjoy being some kind of creative artist	0	1	2	3	4
18	I have had the experience of someone calling me or speaking my name and not being sure whether it was really happening to me or whether I was imagining it.	0	1	2	3	4

## Appendix 3.6 – Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ)

### Creative Experiences Scale (Merckelbach, 2001)

Please read the following statements and circle either "YES" or "NO" depending on your response:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| <b>1.</b> As a child, I thought that the dolls, teddy bears, and stuffed animals that I played with were living creatures.                         | YES/NO |
| <b>2.</b> As a child, I strongly believed in the existence of dwarfs, elves, and other fairy tale figures.   | YES/NO |
| <b>3.</b> As a child, I had my own make believe friend or animal.  | YES/NO |
| <b>4.</b> As a child, I could very easily identify with the main character of a story and/or movie.  | YES/NO |
| <b>5.</b> As a child, I sometimes had the feeling that I was someone else (e.g., a princess, an orphan, etc).                                      | YES/NO |
| <b>6.</b> As a child, I was encouraged by adults (parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters) to fully indulge myself in my fantasies and daydreams. | YES/NO |
| <b>7.</b> As a child, I often felt lonely.   | YES/NO |
| <b>8.</b> As a child, I devoted my time to playing a musical instrument, dancing, acting, and/or drawing.  | YES/NO |
| <b>9.</b> I spend more than half the day (daytime) fantasizing or daydreaming.   | YES/NO |
| <b>10.</b> Many of my friends and/or relatives do not know that I have such detailed fantasies.  | YES/NO |
| <b>11.</b> Many of my fantasies have a realistic intensity.  | YES/NO |
| <b>12.</b> Many of my fantasies are often just as lively as a good movie.  | YES/NO |
| <b>13.</b> I often confuse fantasies with real memories.   | YES/NO |
| <b>14.</b> I am never bored because I start fantasizing when things get boring.  | YES/NO |
| <b>15.</b> Sometimes I act as if I am somebody else and I completely identify myself with that role.   | YES/NO |
| <b>16.</b> When I recall my childhood, I have very vivid and lively memories.  | YES/NO |
| <b>17.</b> I can recall many occurrences before the age of three.  | YES/NO |
| <b>18.</b> When I perceive violence on television, I get so into it that I get really upset.   | YES/NO |
| <b>19.</b> When I think of something cold, I actually get cold.  | YES/NO |

**Appendix 3.6 (continued) – Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ)**

- 20.** When I imagine I have eaten rotten food, I really get nauseous. YES/NO
- 21.** I often have the feeling that I can predict things that are bound to happen in the future. YES/NO
- 22.** I often have the experience of thinking of someone and soon afterwards that particular person calls or shows up. YES/NO
- 23.** I sometimes feel that I have had an out of body experience. YES/NO
- 24.** When I sing or write something, I sometimes have the feeling that someone or something outside myself directs me. YES/NO
- 25.** During my life, I have had intense religious experiences which influenced me in a very strong manner. YES/NO

## Appendix 3.7 – Big Five Inventory (BFI)

### How I am in general

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others*? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which **you agree or disagree with that statement.**

1 Disagree Strongly	2 Disagree a little	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree a little	5 Agree strongly
---------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------

#### I am someone who...

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. _____ Is talkative                            | 23. _____ Tends to be lazy                              |
| 2. _____ Tends to find fault with others         | 24. _____ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset       |
| 3. _____ Does a thorough job                     | 25. _____ Is inventive                                  |
| 4. _____ Is depressed, blue                      | 26. _____ Has an assertive personality                  |
| 5. _____ Is original, comes up with new ideas    | 27. _____ Can be cold and aloof                         |
| 6. _____ Is reserved                             | 28. _____ Perseveres until the task is finished         |
| 7. _____ Is helpful and unselfish with others    | 29. _____ Can be moody                                  |
| 8. _____ Can be somewhat careless                | 30. _____ Values artistic, aesthetic experiences        |
| 9. _____ Is relaxed, handles stress well.        | 31. _____ Is sometimes shy, inhibited                   |
| 10. _____ Is curious about many different things | 32. _____ Is considerate and kind                       |
| 11. _____ Is full of energy                      | 33. _____ Does things efficiently                       |
| 12. _____ Starts quarrels with others            | 34. _____ Remains calm in tense situations              |
| 13. _____ Is a reliable worker                   | 35. _____ Prefers work that is routine                  |
| 14. _____ Can be tense                           | 36. _____ Is outgoing, sociable                         |
| 15. _____ Is ingenious, a deep thinker           | 37. _____ Is sometimes rude to others                   |
| 16. _____ Generates a lot of enthusiasm          | 38. _____ Makes plans and follows them through          |
| 17. _____ Has a forgiving nature                 | 39. _____ Gets nervous easily                           |
| 18. _____ Tends to be disorganized               | 40. _____ Likes to reflect, play with ideas             |
| 19. _____ Worries a lot                          | 41. _____ Has few artistic interests                    |
| 20. _____ Has an active imagination              | 42. _____ Likes to cooperate with others                |
| 21. _____ Tends to be quiet                      | 43. _____ Is easily distracted                          |
| 22. _____ Is generally trusting                  | 44. _____ Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature |

## Appendix 6.1 – Interview Schedule

### A: Introduction

- 1) Do you have any questions about the research I am doing?
- 2) How long have you been a medium?
- 3) Where do you demonstrate your mediumship now?

### B: Mediumship Background

- 4) Can you tell me how you became a medium?

*Prompts:*

- *How did you discover your ability?*
- *When did you know you were a medium?*
- *How do you think your ability developed?*
- *In your opinion who can become a medium?*

- 5) In your opinion were there any personal experiences that were happening in your life when you realised you were a medium?
- 6) How do you feel about the idea that mediumship is inherited?
- 7) In your opinion what is the role of the family in mediumship?

*Prompts:*

- *How did your family react to your mediumistic abilities?*
- *Is anyone in your family mediumistic?*

- 8) Can you tell me about your experiences of attending a Spiritualist Church?
  - *What are your experiences of Spiritualism in mediumship?*

### C: Process and Nature of Mediumship

- 9) In your own words can you talk me through what would happen at a typical mediumship session? (Demonstration/Sitting)

*Prompts:*

- *How do you prepare for mediumship?*
- *How do you prepare to communicate?*
- *Is there anything you do before you demonstrate? Physically? Mentally? Emotionally? Practically?*
- *How do you feel when you are demonstrating mediumship?*
- *Any changes in the way you feel?*

## Appendix 6.1 (continued) – Interview Schedule

- 10) In your own words could you describe how a spirit communicates with you?
- *How does mediumship work?*
  - *How do you know when a communication has finished?*
- 11) How do you decide when and who communicates?
- 12) Can you tell me how you know you are communicating with a spirit?
- *Do you experience the spirit as something internal or external to yourself?*

### D: Role of Spirit Guides

- 13) In your own words, could you tell me about your spirit guide(s)?

*Prompts:*

- *Can you tell me about how you discovered your guide?*
- *In your opinion what is their role in your mediumship?*
- *If more than one, why several?*
- *How do they communicate with you?*
- *What is it like to experience a spirit guide?*
- *In your opinion does a medium choose a spirit guide or does a spirit guide choose a medium?*

### E: Purpose of Mediumship

- 14) What do you think is the purpose of mediumship?
- 15) What kind of messages typically come through?
- 16) Can you tell me about your experiences of the clients' (sitter's) reactions to the information or messages received?

*Prompts:*

- *How does the client/sitter make sense of the messages/information?*
  - *How do they react?*
- 17) In your opinion can spirits attach themselves to people?
- *Do you think evil spirits can possess vulnerable people?*
  - *What is your opinion on the beliefs of the Spirit Release Foundation?*

## PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

The following are all outcomes from the research in this thesis:

### Publications

- Roxburgh, E. C., & Roe, C. A. (2009) *Dissociation in Spiritualist Mental Mediumship: A survey of psychological wellbeing*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Roxburgh, E. C., & Roe, C. A. (2009). Thematic analysis of mediums' experiences [Letter to the Editor]. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 23, 348-351.
- Roxburgh, E. C. (2007). Book review [Familiar voices: Corroborative evidence of life after death by Tom Cross]. *Paranormal Review*, 42, 33-34.
- Roxburgh, E. C. (2006a). Mediumship, spirit awareness and developing your potential: A personal view of Course 20 at the Arthur Findlay College. *Paranormal Review*, 40, 18-23.
- Roxburgh, E. C. (2006b). Gwen Tate Lecture: Mediumship and how it works. *Paranormal Review*, 3, 24-26.

### Published Conference Proceedings

- Roxburgh, E. C. (2008). The psychology of Spiritualist mental mediumship. *Proceedings of The Parapsychological Association 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention and The Incorporated Society for Psychical Research 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention*, 204-215.
- Roxburgh, E. C. (2007). The psychology and phenomenology of spiritualist mental mediums: An exploratory survey [Research brief]. *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention*, 202-205.

### Conference Presentations

- Roxburgh, E. C. (2008). *The personality correlates and wellbeing of Spiritualist mental mediums*. Paper presented at the University of Northampton Annual Postgraduate Research Degree Student and Contract Researcher Conference, 1 July.
- Roxburgh, E. C. (2007). *The psychology and phenomenology of Spiritualist mental mediums: An exploratory survey*. Paper presented at the Society for Psychical Research 31<sup>st</sup> International Conference, Cardiff University, 31 August-2 September.