



Mediumship and Survival



Mediumship started with the Fox Sisters (discussed previously) and the rise of the spiritualism movement. However, many professed mediums over the years have been proven fraudulent as skeptics, and parapsychologists have investigated their claims to produce proof of survival (i.e., proof of life after death). Famous mediums such as D.D. Home, on the other hand, have never been successfully proven as frauds, and to the contrary, show a strong body of paranormal evidence (Braude, 1997). Parapsychologists often debate if medium-produced information or phenomena are in fact proof of the dead, or rather ESP manifesting under the guise of mediumship.

Accounting for Chance Correspondence in Mediumship

One of the more difficult scientific issues in assessing the validity of medium-produced claims is the extent to which a general claim might apply to a wide body of people. Several techniques have been developed over the decades to examine if mediums

produce genuinely psychic information (i.e., information obtained by spirits or psychic powers without other obvious means of getting said information) versus producing statements that, by simple chance, would apply to many people. Two notable methods include (from Watt, 2016):

- Hyslop, who would take predictive statements provided by mediums and then distribute them to participants in order to determine the basic probability of the statements being correct by chance
- Pratt and Birge (the Pratt-Birge technique) was a technique where real statements by mediums were paired with decoy statements. Participants then rated the correctness of both. The assumption in this case is that medium statements should be more accurate than decoy statements in analysis.

The Best Evidence of Mediumship So Far



The most recent research, conducted by Julie Beischel at the Windbridge Institute along with other studies, have demonstrated significant findings under highly controlled conditions. Beischel has focused more on proof-oriented studies, where mediums can produce anomalous information about a sitter (the target) and information about either the sitter or a deceased loved one. The most recent studies have employed what has been called quintuple masking. This involves:



- The mediums being unaware of either the identities of the sitter or the target deceased individual
- The sitters who evaluate content being unaware of actual medium reports versus decoy reports
- Research assistants being unaware of any relevant information regarding the study, sitter, medium, or nature of the report
- The principal researchers being unaware of any of the conditions of materials or content

Interestingly, under these conditions, sitters have significantly identified content from mediums as more accurate or containing more relevant content information than decoy accounts across several studies. This work is very promising toward establishing that mediums in controlled conditions are collecting information by some type of psychic means. The root of this information as PSI or genuine contact with the deceased is yet to be determined (Beischel & Zingrone, 2015)



Two other recent studies provide some context to séance-like phenomena. First, Wilson et al. (2010) examined a modernday series of séances conducted with 15 participants. In this peer-reviewed work, table tipping, table levitation, as well as unaccounted for knocks and raps occurred. It was also the case that notable increases in the EM-field occurred when measured during a particular session.

Second, and in partial replication of the above, Laythe and colleagues (2017) examined possible relationships between electromagnetic fields and séance phenomena by conducting two ten-session series of mock séances with students. Whereas no observable phenomena was created (a) participants reported a strong variety of psychosomatic symptoms (chills, nausea, feeling watched, hot flashes, vertigo, and visions of apparitions); (b) contagion was observed by people reporting similar feelings when verbally sharing them with the séance group; (c) EMF fields significantly dampened around periods where participants would report sensing or feeling phenomena.

Reincarnation



Stevenson has spent decades examining the evidence and accounts of reincarnation. One of his more famous cases was Gnanatilleka, a girl who remembers being a boy. Having never been to the city she claims to remember, she was able to successfully identify specific people she knew, providing detailed information about both the people and location. Most of these cases are investigated with acceptable forms of field research, and, similar to poltergeist or



haunting cases, do not provide definitive proof. However, Severson, as well as Mills Haraldson and Keil, have now investigated well over 2,500 cases of children reporting information about having previous lives. Whereas fraud has been detected in some cases, 68% of these cases have been verifiable people, with historical records indicating their existence. Generally, many of these reports involve people who are relatively distant and completely unknown to the child or their families. As such, simple trickery or outright fraud would be a difficult explanation for all these accounts. However, experimental designs have yet to be applied to this field (Mills & Tucker, 2015; Watt, 2016).