

# **A Study of Modern Mediumship in America—An Analysis of the Research Methodology, Procedures, Design, and Data Collection Used in an Empirical Investigation on Spiritualist Mediums and their Work**

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Since its birth in 1848, Spiritualism as a religion, science, and philosophy has experienced great highs and lows. At the center of this modern-religious movement are the “mediums”—the people who are able to communicate, in some way, with spirit entities that are no longer on the earth plane. As discovered through empirical research, mediums that purportedly have this gift were raised in a wide range of Christian-based religious backgrounds, and held a variety of belief systems before embracing Spiritualism as a religion. As well, it was found that in their mediumship, these mediums incorporated a variety of methods in their work that assisted them in connecting with those on the other side. Based on three years of fieldwork, and a plethora of data and research collected on the modern Spiritualist movement in America—both primary and secondary—this paper’s focus is solely upon the methodology, procedures, design and data collection aspects of the study. Although there are numerous sources of literature on Spiritualism and mediumship as a vocation, the amount of published works and academic studies on the mediums themselves is severely limited.

From the very beginning of my investigation, the purpose of my research was undertaken in part to determine whether Spiritualist mediums were raised in the Spiritualist religion or if they converted from another religion; in addition, another aim was to discover what reasons or motives they had to pursue Spiritualism and mediumship if, indeed, they had converted to the religion. Also, this study endeavored to find out what formal training the Spiritualist mediums were required to fulfill before becoming certified, and what, if any, ritual they used in their mediumship work and daily life. Four research questions were examined as sub-hypotheses to offer more in-depth analysis on the factors that relate to the mediums and their mediumship. All four sub-hypotheses consisted of a content analysis approach using a questionnaire. The analysis of the data supported the stated sub-hypotheses.

### ***Background Data of the Research Study***

The first research question that was posed and answered was—What types of religious backgrounds and upbringings did persons who converted to Spiritualism have (and the effects on them); and what type of person trains to become a certified medium? The answers were more complex than anticipated, but basically corroborated the stated sub-hypotheses: Mediums who converted to Spiritualism were predominantly raised in or came from Christian backgrounds; and mediums were drawn to Spiritualism due to a lack of understanding and flexibility by their former churches. The majority of the subjects in the study were in fact converts to the religion; nearly all of the subjects had been raised, or at least exposed to, some type of religion while growing up. Of those, a high percentage of the respondents had practiced Christianity or had been exposed to some type of religious upbringing that followed a Christian denomination of a Catholic or Protestant tradition.

Interestingly, it was discovered that the majority of Spiritualist mediums—both men and women—had engaged in a phenomenon I labeled “religion hopping” before settling on Spiritualism as a religion. A number of the subjects experienced multiple belief systems, religions, and spiritual practices (throughout their lives) before decisively converting to Spiritualism. This phenomenon is a process related to an individual’s desire to “find himself/herself;” hoping to experience a spiritual epiphany, of sorts, that would ultimately be a spiritual self-awakening that the individual would intuitively know to be “the one” religion he/she must follow.

These assumptions are derived from the theory that these people felt they lacked the necessary elements they wanted or needed on a spiritual level from the religious traditions and belief systems they adhered to during the formative years of their lives. This created a profound need from within to search for a spiritual path by dabbling in a wide variety of traditions, practices, and belief systems, searching for the one spiritual path that afforded them the essentials of a spiritual life that were flexible and tolerant enough to allow them the freedom to worship in a way that was fulfilling and comfortable to them. Many of the subjects commented on the rigidity of mainstream, fundamentalist-based religions, which ultimately impelled them to search elsewhere. Spiritualism was attractive to these subjects because it allowed a mixing of traditions,

practices, and belief systems, as well as combining, adapting, and incorporating those they liked and felt contented in pursuing.

A striking discovery was made regarding the ratio between men and women who are certified Spiritualist mediums—overwhelmingly, women outnumbered men (5 to 1). In addition, the majority of the women subjects were ordained ministers; this is in stark contrast to mainstream religions where church elders are predominantly men, and where many fundamentalist religions prohibit women from holding any leadership positions and bar them from becoming ordained ministers, basing this prohibition on biblical teachings.

Spiritualism is certainly a religion that offers women complete equality in all facets of the movement. This trend has clear historical roots that date back to the beginning of the movement where women were at the forefront of the religion holding leadership and ministerial positions. Spiritualism attracted women then, as it does today, due to its egalitarian policies. Women are, and always have been, allowed to be full and equal members to men, and enjoy any and all facets of the religion on equal footing.

Also revealed in the fieldwork data was the finding that Spiritualism is a rapidly “graying religion.” This term is used to describe the current phenomenon of the statistics on aging within the religion. The majority of the participants were elderly, with the youngest respondent being middle-aged. This is a troubling prospect for the religion as it is in danger of literally “dying out” within the next couple of decades unless an influx of young blood is infused into the movement to serve as the new torchbearers to carry the religion’s banner on, and into, the next century.

One possible reason for the recent decline in membership and lack of dedicated interest in the religion by more young people has to do with “choice”—there are so many more spiritually based movements today than there were in the past that competition has become quite keen in attracting new members searching for a belief system outside the confines of mainstream religions. This influx of “choice” between religions has also taken its toll on the mainstream religions; people are following a number of belief systems that do not necessarily precipitate becoming a member of or attending a church on a regular basis. So, in many ways, Spiritualism has become a part of the “mainstream” over the years, adopting a system that is still on the fringes of the more traditional belief systems but “churchified” enough to be considered somewhat

mainstream. Many younger people currently prefer more freedom of choice and flexibility in their religious proclivities, choosing belief systems that offer even less structure and dogma than Spiritualism.

The New Age movement has gained in popularity in recent years, attracting many younger people, because of this lack of structure and dogma; although Spiritualism maintains that it is a creedless religion, it still requires a certain amount of time and dedication to be an adherent (*i.e.* attending church/message services, volunteering, contributing monetarily, *etc*). The main difference between the New Age movement and the Spiritualist movement is that “Spiritualism” is a religion, and the “New Age” movement is still but a trend. Spiritualists are very quick to point out that Spiritualism is not “New Age” but “Old Age,” and generally they do not appreciate being categorized as a “New Age” religion. Although similar in their teachings and philosophies, allowing a mixing of traditions, practices and belief systems and “free thinking,” the New Age movement does not have a centralized or organized belief system, incorporating a system with regulations and principles. It is all encompassing of anything that is not “mainstream,” and is more culturally than religiously based, focusing on spirituality as it pertains to various peoples and traditions, rather than to a singular belief system.

Spiritualism requires a certain degree of dedication and perseverance, and not mere dabbling. Ironically, it was for the same reasons that people initially developed Spiritualism as a religion that people today follow New Age ideas and practices—a desire for a less regimented, more flexible and open attitude toward spirituality. Because Spiritualism is organized and maintains principles and a specified set of beliefs and practices, perhaps young people today find it too constricting and prefer to have more spiritual freedom, even though many of the practices and beliefs overlap, and in essence, are the same. Spiritualist churches must work to devise a way to attract these “spirituality searchers” if they are to survive the current crisis of being a “graying religion.”

The research question, “what types of mediumship are most common among Spiritualist mediums?” was hypothesized as: Spiritualist mediums are trained similarly and predominantly employ similar techniques and tools in their work. This was found to be true because the certification process, although varying slightly between the

Spiritualist associations, generally follow similar curriculums and training periods that lead to certification.

The subjects were largely certified more than twenty years ago. Over 50% of all the subjects realized their mediumship gifts as a child and had their first encounter with spirit communication at that time. Once a decision was made to convert to Spiritualism, these aspiring mediums then trained formally through a Spiritualist association to receive certification. The vast majority of the subjects continued on past the level of “certified medium” to become an ordained minister. Very few Spiritualist ministers maintain their own church, but do work and minister at special functions, Spiritualist camps, and privately.

The results of this study, however, indicate that the years of being a certified medium is not a significant factor in predicting the types of mediumship performed. Almost all mediums use clairvoyance in their work, as well as clairaudience, and clairsentience. The majority indicated that “mental” mediumship was their primary forte, with a small number relating experiential events involving “physical” phenomenon and mediumship.

It was found that some of the certifying organizations (*i.e.* Spiritualist churches and associations that certify mediums formally) frown upon “physical” mediumship in the form of materializations due to a questionable past where unscrupulous mediums would manufacture such phenomena. Also, a number of mediums indicated that the association to which they were connected did not allow them to use any outside tools in their mediumship work. A number of mediums, however, did admit using astrology, numerology, and tarot to assist in connecting with the spirit world.

The data dictated that, in general terms, the Spiritualist movement is quite uniform in its basic policies, rules, beliefs and practices. Even though each association is largely independent of the other, they all tend to maintain a semblance of regularity and constancy.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

A number of limitations affected the ability of general conclusions to be drawn from this study. The participants who participated were all certified Spiritualist mediums, but

were mostly limited to those who resided in Spiritualist camps<sup>1</sup>; therefore, the results cannot necessarily be generalized to draw inferences about other certified Spiritualist mediums who may be working as ministers and mediums in their own communities.

The number of participants in this study also could have been increased. Although the years as a medium indicated an aging population, it is mildly suspected that an increase in the number of participants could alter the results of the analysis slightly. It is not known, then, if a significant number of Spiritualists are younger in age as the subjects used in this study indicated the opposite.

### ***Research Design and Procedures***

With regards to methodology and the research design, after careful deliberation, a decision was made to use a combination of “quantitative” and “qualitative” techniques of data collection in order to garner more extensive and comprehensive research as a way to proceed confidently forward in this study. For the historical aspects of this study, I used a more *qualitative* technique. A “grounded theory” study was employed with the primary data collected in the field (as it was not available in published research literature on the subject). This technique was useful in the social science aspect of the study as it allowed a more practical observation of the mediums’ behaviors and interactions in their mediumship work which was more open and free.

In addition, “content analysis” of portions of the data was done to be more objective and systematic in some of the research material gathered in the form of surveys. A combination of case studies, ethnography, phenomenological studies, as well as the already mentioned grounded theory and content analysis style of research, was employed depending upon the specific aspect of the data gathered (*i.e.* case studies = observing mediums doing their work at Spiritualist camps and churches and interviewing them in their homes where they do readings and have séances; ethnography = visiting Spiritualist church services, message services, séances, and healing circles, as well as attending Spiritualist sponsored symposiums, museums, and libraries to understand more deeply how their work in mediumship was reflected in their church and camp culture;

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, Spiritualist associations were originally centered around “camps” which had cottages for the mediums to live-in during the high season, usually from early summer until autumn.

phenomenological study = sampling a representative portion of the population (Spiritualist mediums) to research their lives, work, and attitudes toward Spiritualism more deeply; grounded theory study = interviewing in person and by telephone Spiritualist mediums to get a clearer understanding of their lives and work in a natural setting that is comfortable for them; and content analysis = researching descriptive statistical analysis in the form of specific characteristics of Spiritualist mediums in general.

Also, for the social science aspects of the study, a *quantitative* approach was used, more specifically, a “descriptive research design” was employed which included survey generated data in the form of questionnaires, as well as telephone and personal interviews. Simultaneously, and in conjunction with the descriptive research design technique, observational study techniques were also employed through participation in séances, healing circles, message services, symposiums, and seminars which dealt directly with the area of research being pursued.

### ***Population Sample of Subjects and the Selection Process***

As pointed out by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) and Fetterman (1989) in Parmenter (1997), access to the target group focusing on ethnographic research can be troublesome; this was partially the experience I encountered. Initially, the Spiritualist mediums were somewhat hesitant (and even unwilling in some cases) to assist in the fieldwork study. In part, this was most likely due to long held suspicions of non-mediums wishing unfettered access to their work only to publish an unflattering exposé about their religion, belief system and mediumship work. It seems that in past experience when an outside researcher wished access and it was granted, it was only to portray the mediums negatively in an effort to debunk their work publicly.

From the beginning, it was made clear that the purpose of this study had nothing to do with trying to “prove” or “disprove” the mediumship abilities of the Spiritualist medium; instead this study wished to approach the subject matter as objectively as possible from a historical perspective that was based in the study of social science. The purpose of this study was not to make value judgments on their belief system or to criticize their

activities, but solely to garner research about the religion of Spiritualism and the mediumship of Spiritualist mediums on an individual, personal level.

When approaching the mediums, at no time did I refer to them personally as “subjects,” “informants,” or “respondents.” These terms tend to suggest a formalized relationship between the participants and the researcher, sometimes disallowing a free flow of information to occur. In no way did I want to have any tension with the mediums (who were so crucial and integral to my study); I wanted to avoid the potential uneasiness that can sometimes arise unwittingly between a researcher and a subject because of a perceived power struggle where the researcher is in the “power” position and the subject is relegated to a weak position (or worse, the subject feels the researcher is superior, and he/she is inferior). As noted by Spindler (1982) in Parmenter (1997):

Too often social scientists have assumed (though usually unintentionally) a superior stance in relation to their “subjects.” In ethnography, people are not subjects; they are experts on what the ethnographer wants to find out about and accordingly are treated with great respect and always in good faith (490).

Indeed, the mediums that graciously agreed to assist me in gathering the needed data for this study were definitely the “experts” and without their participation and involvement, there would have been no study. It was imperative, in my estimation, to ensure that they felt comfortable, at ease, and uninhibited in offering to me their honest and sincere opinions and views on Spiritualism and on their lives as mediums.

As a “descriptive study,” I determined that attempting to survey *every* practicing Spiritualist medium would be a Herculean, if not impossible, task to achieve. Considering the sheer demographic numbers of potential subjects, not to mention the logistics of reaching each and every one, made this unfeasible. So, instead of studying the entire Spiritualist medium population, I decided to select a subset, or sample, of the subject population to survey. By employing this data collection technique, I could make representative generalizations about the entire population with confidence. Hence, a cross-section of selected practicing Spiritualist mediums was made.

The representative group consisted of mediums that are certified and practicing, residing in a Spiritualist camp or are members in good standing of a Spiritualist association. This microcosm of the whole of practicing mediums was carefully and



deliberately chosen in order to allow for the general characteristics of the total population to be observed in their responses. It is hoped that enough care and planning was taken to allow the conclusions of the study to be free of bias and distortion. By having a representative sampling of the total population in real-life settings, it is hoped that the external validity of the research is indeed sound and well-grounded.

The participants were all Spiritualist mediums who were duly certified by a functioning and legitimate Spiritualist association. The majority of the subjects were ordained ministers, in addition to being practicing mediums. The population sample was selected using two main criteria: 1) the medium had to be a Spiritualist and/or a resident of a Spiritualist camp; or 2) the medium had to be a member in good standing of a Spiritualist organization. The list of participants were generated from official mailing lists for Spiritualist camps (Camp Lily Dale, Camp Cassadaga, and Camp Chesterfield); a National Spiritualist Association of Churches list of ministers and mediums published on the internet; and a contact list of mediums associated with the Universal Spiritualist Association distributed at a yearly symposium sponsored by the said association.

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

The subjects, once onboard with the study, were generally very forthcoming with information and materials, assisting greatly in my research task. Oftentimes they offered much more detail than was originally sought. The survey was medium-sized in length with 20 questions in order not to be too tedious in scope for the respondents. As it was, in hindsight, perhaps a shorter questionnaire might have elicited more people's responses. The interviews generally lasted an hour (for the formal taped interviews) and sometimes longer for the conversational-style interviews that were done in the form of casual discussions.

Although the fieldwork questionnaire (the primary instrument) consisted of 20 questions, these were actually subdivided into several smaller sections in the original design of the study, unbeknownst to the subjects: personal background, including age, sex, religion, years as a Spiritualist; certification and qualifications; mediumship experience; outside tools; personal ritual; client or reader related requests; and response to criticism and general comments. The questionnaire did not incorporate rating scales

(*i.e.* a checklist scale—“please check the items that pertain to you” ; or a Likert scale—“please mark accordingly: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree”). Instead, an open-ended questionnaire was utilized in this study.

In retrospect, some sort of rating method for gathering research might have made it easier to collocate and analyze the data generated, but ultimately I decided to use an open-ended configuration in the question design in order not to limit the subjects in their responses and not to assume to know what possibilities exist. It was hoped the questionnaire would elicit more detailed and complete results that were accurate, honest, and sincere. This certainly was the case, because the responses in many instances covered areas and activities that I would never have thought to have included in a checklist or Likert format. The responses tended to be lengthy and complex, making the interpretation of the data tedious and difficult, but rich with research. The “thick description”<sup>2</sup> aspect of designing the study, in this case, proved to be invaluable.

The instrument was sent by regular post to a total of 170 participants who primarily resided in Spiritualist camps. A nominal number of questionnaires were requested by subjects to give to friends with whom they were acquainted. This pleased me greatly, as several mediums took the initiative to assist me above and beyond my initial request. Written instructions were included with the questionnaire, as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return the survey. A total of 55 surveys were received back (roughly 34%); of these, 7 had to be discarded because the subjects did not fit the study’s criteria (mostly because they were not certified Spiritualist mediums).

Initially, I had contemplated generating a survey via the internet using e-mail to gather the research data. This idea was quickly abandoned as a higher than average number of practicing Spiritualist mediums (many quite elderly) was not computer literate or internet savvy. Hence, I felt that the best way to get an accurate sampling of the target group was to generate the research using the regular postal system. In the end, the questionnaires proved to be a valuable source of information exploring mediumship and the mediums’ opinions and thoughts which would have been nearly impossible to acquire solely by observation or in casual conversational interviews. The anonymity of the survey allowed

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<sup>2</sup> This is where “the situation is described in sufficiently rich, ‘thick,’ detail that readers can draw their own conclusions from the data presented.” (Leedy, 106)

the mediums to be completely candid in their answers without fear of recrimination or criticism.

The second instrument used was personal interviews, both in person and by telephone. One interview, in particular, was with an ordained minister (male) who had been a practicing Spiritualist for over 20 years (but in fact felt he had been a Spiritualist since childhood due to his experiences with phenomena). This interview largely concentrated on the aspects of mediumship that included mental and physical phenomena, primarily experiential in content. Another interview was with an ordained minister (female) who also had been involved with Spiritualism for over 20 years, but had been exposed to similar beliefs as Spiritualism since childhood. This interview consisted mainly of the history, belief system, and philosophy of Spiritualism as a religion and science.

Often the formal interviews did not offer the subjects a comfortable forum in which to discuss openly their mediumship and Spiritualist experiences. The tape recorder on the table, the notepad of questions, and the atmosphere made these types of interviews somewhat strained. Even though the interviews were usually conducted in locations that offered a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere, the subjects appeared to be nervous and tense (sometimes asking me to turn off the tape recorder so they could gather their thoughts more coherently).

Many of the interviews, then, took the form of casual conversations where the subjects felt totally at ease and non-threatened (without the pressure of a tape-recorder and fixed list of questions). This configuration allowed for more dialogue and more in-depth information being provided. Through these “mini-interviews” I was able to further clarify areas of my research that I had observed prior but did not completely understand. Also, it allowed me to receive alternate opinions and interpretations of Spiritualist practices which were relevant to mediumship. As Parmenter (1997) notes, quoting Fetterman (1989), “...informal interviewing feels like natural dialogue but answers the fieldworker’s often unasked questions (49).” On numerous occasions I engaged Spiritualist mediums in discussions that served to further assist me in my fieldwork, garnering much needed information and understanding from these informal, but very important interviews which ultimately became integral parts of my research.

Much data was collected by “participant observation.” Parmenter (1997) quotes Taft (1998) in defining the role of participant observation within ethnography in the following way:

The investigators’ involvement in the normal activities of the group may be treated as a case of partial acculturation in which they acquire an insider’s knowledge of the group through their direct experience of it. These experiences provide them with tacit knowledge which helps them to understand the significance to group members of their own behavior and that of others and enables them to integrate their observations about that behavior with information obtained from other sources such as interviews with informants and documentary material. (59)

— I had extensive opportunities to attend Spiritualist services, séances, healing circles and other activities throughout the fieldwork portion of this study over a period of nearly four years. Although not completely a “participant insider,” I was able to participate in the above mentioned areas as a Spiritualist which allowed me firsthand access to realms that non-Spiritualist outsiders rarely have the chance to see and experience. In this role as a quasi-participant, I was able to observe freely, ask any questions I wanted to, interview a number of people, and participate in many of the assemblies, conferences, and workshops held in Spiritualist churches and camps.

In general, I was quite fortunate in that I was able to develop and foster amicable relationships, and even friendships, with many of the subjects I used for this study. Their openness and willingness to help me made the task all that much easier. Had I been severely challenged in my research, denied access, or unduly obstructed by any of the mediums in positions of authority, I would not have been able to gain the insight into their lives and work that I did.

Even though I tried to break down any barriers that existed between myself and the subjects, I sometimes felt some reticence on the part of a few mediums initially to open up to me; I was told later that this was due to the fact that I had a professional title—professor—from my position as a university educator. I would have preferred that the subjects not know this, and if I were to do it all over again, I would take greater care in keeping this unrelated aspect private. Of course, I immediately attempted to play this fact down when introduced, emphasizing my “student” status as not to put any pressure on the medium “to perform for the visiting professor.” Fortunately, it was the pattern that

after a few minutes of conversation, the mediums would feel relaxed enough with me as a person to be themselves without consciously thinking about my professional status.

Finally, the other technique of collecting data I utilized actively was from Spiritualist generated documents in the form of printed material, magazines, books, and articles written by, and primarily for, Spiritualists. Although dated in many instances, this type of documentation still offered valuable insight into mediumship.

Regarding all of the research techniques employed for the fieldwork portion of this study, I am sure that more time and care could have been taken which would have made the study comparatively better. In retrospect, if I had collected better data, surveyed more mediums, as well as gathering the data in a more logical manner and conducting more in-depth interviews, having better informed observation, and utilizing a more succinctly designed questionnaire, the results would have been more absolute. Certainly, my data collection techniques, the data I collected, and the analysis are not perfect by any means, and if I were to do it again, I surely would improve upon these areas. However, these caveats aside, I do feel that the research gathered does offer sufficient depth and scope in which an informed analysis can be made about Spiritualism, Spiritualists, and mediumship.

### ***Ethical Decisions***

One of the ethical aspects of this study was the anonymity afforded the participants, since the questionnaires were filled out in their homes and sent to me via mail. To ensure honest and accurate answers, anonymity was strictly enforced; once the questionnaires arrived, letters from the alphabet (first single letters—1-26; and then double letters—27-48) were assigned to each questionnaire. If a name had been included on the questionnaire, it was promptly removed. All envelopes with the postmark were discarded before the questionnaire was closely examined. All of this was to insure complete anonymity.

Informed consent was gained by the subjects willing to participate; if they chose not to, they just ignored the written request. Since I had no position of power within the Spiritualist community, where one might feel compelled to participate because of my position, there was no duress, unfair inducement or manipulation of the subjects to

participate. Even for the interviews, since many of the subjects did not know me personally at that time, there was no element of pressure for them to participate. The participants, who agreed to assist me, participated on their own merit and volition.

All of the people who I interviewed and who I spoke to informally were aware that I was in the process of gathering research. Sometimes this fact was soon forgotten as the subjects let their guards down in the course of the conversation, and subsequent meetings, but initially, everyone I spoke to about mediumship and Spiritualism were well aware of my research and fieldwork.

It could be argued, then, that each and every time I spoke to someone regarding Spiritualism I should have said that this potentially could be used in my research. In this sense, I did not gain informed consent, *per se*, but as mentioned before, each and every subject I spoke with was well aware of my research plan and study intent. Since I was not at all sure how the information would or could be used that was about to be given to me, made it impossible to actively seek informed consent for much of the information given in these “mini-interviews.”

Since I held no power position within the Spiritualist organizations in which the subjects were associated, my presence did not pose any problem of undue influence being exercised over the subjects in the study. It was my utmost concern during the entire fieldwork phase of this study that the subjects trust me and feel comfortable in telling me their honest opinions and feelings about Spiritualism and mediumship. My experience mirrors that of Parmenter (1997):

Trust is the basis of human relationships with people involved in research, and those relationships are essential to the development and completion of the study. Trust leads to its own ethical minefield, however. It is unlikely that people were always aware of my role as a researcher when speaking to me, and some things they said were undoubtedly intended to be heard as private opinions rather than to be made public knowledge. At the same time, it would have imposed a strain on the relationship for me to start asking “Excuse me, but did you say what you said as a friend, or can I use it for my study?” As far as possible, then, I used my own judgment, and did not record any comments which were obviously intended as private information. The basic principle of not causing any harm or betraying the trust of the people I was involved with guided this judgment.

Finally, confidentiality was a primary concern of mine as I gathered research for this study. I felt a keen responsibility to the subjects and Spiritualist associations that assisted me in my work. I employed the lettering system for specific references to mediums that completed the questionnaires, and only used names of those mediums who agreed to a tape-recorded interview. I did not have to resort to using pseudonyms as it was unnecessary, even though a large portion of this study is qualitative in nature.

### ***Recommendations for Further Research***

Several areas of potential research arose out of the need for continued studies of Spiritualist mediums and mediumship. The first area would expand the study of participants who do not live inside a Spiritualist camp more fully. A small number of respondents most likely lived outside of a recognized camp, but no specific data were gathered to ascertain the validity of this assumption definitively. This recommendation would provide a broader spectrum for evaluating Spiritualist mediums in more detail and with more conclusive evidence. Also, breaking down the subjects into more specific categories would generate more significant data regarding their personal lives and motivation; specifically, a study that included sexual orientation as a component would offer valuable insight into this area of the study.

A second area in need of study would be what percentage of Spiritualist mediums hail from countries other than the United States; how prevalent the Spiritualist movement in these countries is; and what religious backgrounds do these people have (if converts to Spiritualism). There are significant numbers of Spiritualists in Great Britain and Australia, so it would be interesting to investigate how their associations are faring in contemporary times in comparison to their American counterparts: Are they a religion mostly of “religion hoppers”? Is the religion “graying” as rapidly as it is in the United States? What type of training and certification process do they require to become licensed mediums? These questions were well beyond the scope of this study, but would be of value in future research studies on this topic.

Finally, the propensity of spiritualist mediums sometimes to feel the need to hide their religious affiliation and mediumship work from outsiders is an area in need of more in-depth investigation. What are the reasons behind this hesitation to be open and honest

about their religion? Is it related to embarrassment, shyness, a need for privacy, or is it out of a sense of fear? What percentage of Spiritualist mediums has actually experienced an overt form of “religion bashing” (either verbally or physically)? Future research could serve to uncover the answers to these questions, as well as generating further more relevant research data on Spiritualist mediums and their mediumship.

This ethno-religious study of Spiritualist mediums offers new insight into the movement, in general, and more so into the motivations and personal lives of the mediums themselves. Although Spiritualism is a rather new religion in comparison to its Christian-based cousins, it has a long and vibrant history that affords the researcher of religion a most fascinating area of exploration in which to pursue.

### ***Conclusion***

This paper dealt with the methodology and design of the study, the subjects as a sampling of the overall Spiritualist medium population, and the instruments used in the data collection phase of this study. The techniques employed in this pursuit encompassed a variety of methods, ensuring a wider selection of material and research generated. Although some aspects certainly could have been approached and implemented differently, much valuable data was generated from the study as a whole. I am confident, however, that the years of fieldwork spent on gathering this research, is valid enough to offer a contribution to the existing research in this area.

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