

# CONTEMPORARY METHODS USED IN LABORATORY-BASED MEDIUMSHIP RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** As with the study of any natural phenomenon, bringing mediumship into the regulated environment of the laboratory allows for the controlled and repeated examination of anomalous information reception by mediums. It also lends statistically analyzed evidence regarding the survival of consciousness hypothesis and addresses the relationship between consciousness and brain. Ideally, laboratory-based mediumship research includes 2 equally important factors: (a) a research environment that optimizes the mediumship process for both the medium and the hypothesized discarnate and (b) research methods that maximize the experimental blinding of the medium, the rater, and the experimenter in order to eliminate all conventional explanations for the information and its accuracy and specificity. The Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential utilizes several methods that build upon historical as well as modern mediumship investigations in order to meet these 2 research goals. The research methods discussed include: detailed research reading protocols; the pairing and formatting of readings; experimental blinding; the thorough screening of all research participants; and a specific scoring system used by raters.

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The analysis of information conveyed by mediums (individuals who report experiencing regular communication with the deceased) is important for several reasons:

- The survival of consciousness (i.e., the continued existence, separate from the body, of an individual's consciousness, personality, identity, or self after physical death) is a vital issue to many people. The general public's deep concern with survival and mediumship is illustrated by the recent rise of these topics in popular television shows, books, and movies.
- Investigating the phenomenon of anomalous information reception (AIR) by mediums is essential in understanding the mind's perception and processing of nonlocal, nonsensory information.
- An extensive understanding of the information mediums report and the process by which they report it is necessary in order for such information to be sensibly utilized by society. For example, mediums may be able to regularly and consistently find missing persons and contribute to criminal investigations if parameters such as error rates can be identified. Furthermore, because the source of the information anomalously reported by mediums has

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not been determined, it is possible that in the future, when the process is better understood, the knowledge acquired through AIR may benefit scientific, technological, and social progress.

- Providing empirical evidence on a topic historically linked with religion (i.e., the afterlife) may greatly impact modern society as well as contemporary western healthcare. For example, research in Terror Management Theory has found that belief in an afterlife may liberate people from “the compulsion to continually prove our value and the correctness of our beliefs” (Dechesne et al., 2003), an impulse that can manifest in the extreme as radical nationalism (which provides the individual with the psychological comfort of symbolic immortality). Additionally, empirical evidence for the survival of consciousness may alleviate the fear and anxiety commonly experienced by hospice patients and their families, and mediumship readings may even be beneficial in grief recovery. However, evidence for survival of consciousness may also have socially negative consequences (e.g., possible increased justification for terrorism or suicide).
- Finally, survival and mediumship studies provide unique evidence for an issue central to consciousness science: the relationship between the mind/consciousness and the brain. That is, is consciousness (a) a product of the brain as theorized by materialist neuroscientists such as Francis Crick and Christof Koch (e.g., Crick & Koch, 2003) or is consciousness (b) mediated, transmitted, transformed, guided, arbitrated, or canalized (Forman, 1998) by the brain as hypothesized by such scientists as Max Plank and William James? (This second theory is discussed, for example, by Clarke, 1995.) In addition, research investigating the survival of nonhuman consciousness (i.e., deceased companion animals) may help us better define exactly what consciousness is.

As with the study of any natural phenomenon, bringing mediumship into the regulated environment of the laboratory allows for the controlled and repeated examination of AIR by mediums.

## HISTORY

Several comprehensive reviews of more than a century of mediumship research findings exist (Braude, 2003; Fontana, 2005; Gauld, 1984). In addition, the methods used during this time to evaluate the information reported by mediums (and psychics) have also been reviewed (Burdick & Kelly, 1977; Fontana, 2005; Schouten, 1994; Scott, 1972), though only Fontana’s review includes research performed since 2001, albeit briefly (p. 221). The contemporary findings generally confirm and extend early observations (e.g., the systematic assessment of individual

mediums or the examination of spontaneous cases) that certain mediums can report accurate and specific information about the deceased loved ones (termed *discarnates*) of living people (termed *sitters*) even without any prior knowledge about the sitters or the discarnates and in the complete absence of any sensory sitter feedback. Moreover, the information reported by these mediums cannot be explained as a result of fraud or “cold reading” (a set of techniques in which visual and auditory cues from the sitter are used to fabricate “accurate” readings; described extensively by Rowland, 2001, and Hyman, 1989, p. 404) on the part of the mediums or rater bias on the part of the sitters.

However, although “the concept of survival was basic for the beginning and development of such key moments in the history of parapsychology as the early work of the Society for Psychical Research and the work of J. B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University” (Alvarado, 2003, p. 68), progress in the quantitative evaluation of the information provided by mediums “has been slow compared to developments in other areas of parapsychological research” (Schouten, 1994, p. 223). “Since interest shifted towards psychic abilities such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition in the 1930s, scientific research into mediumship has steadily declined” (Fontana, 2005, p. 226). Furthermore, several authors have noted that historical mediumship research lacked the proper research design, statistical power, and elimination of potential sources of error for current researchers to value even “positive” studies (Lester, 2005, p. 210; Schouten, 1994, p. 245; Scott, 1972, p. 88).

#### CURRENT RESEARCH

The methods employed by the Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential were developed through the integration of previously published protocols (Russek et al., 1999; Schwartz et al., 1999) and observations and build upon historical studies (reviewed by Schouten, 1994) as well as modern single-blind (Robertson & Roy, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2001; Schwartz & Russek, 2001b), double-blind (O’Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005; Roy & Robertson, 2001, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2002) and triple-blind (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007) mediumship investigations. Our research also involves protocols that are palatable to modern, American participants who practice mental mediumship<sup>2</sup> and methods of a technological nature that were not readily available during prior studies (e.g., e-mail readings, Internet-based participant recruitment, and digitally recorded three-way phone readings).

It is important to note that these investigations were designed to take into account the grieving nature of the sitter participants and that this issue as well as the processes of the mediums, sitters, and ostensible

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<sup>2</sup> Mental mediumship “occurs in a conscious and focused waking state” (Buhrman, 1997, p. 13). In contrast, trance mediumship occurs in a “sleep-like state” and involves amnesia (Sher, 1981, p. 108).

discarnates during the readings are continuously contemplated as part of protocol design. For example, we intentionally refer to the phenomenon as anomalous information *reception* (versus *retrieval*) to better describe the medium's experience. Furthermore, we generally strive to include research methods that represent the best of both traditional empirical analyses and a postmodern worldview (Krippner, 1995).

Ideally, contemporary laboratory-based mediumship research should include two equally important factors: (a) a research environment that optimizes the mediumship process for both the medium and the hypothesized discarnate in order to increase the probability of capturing the phenomenon, if it exists, in a laboratory setting, and (b) research methods that maximize the experimental blinding of the medium, the rater, and the experimenter in order to eliminate all conventional explanations for the reported information and its accuracy and specificity. Together, these two factors optimize the possibility of achieving positive results while also controlling for experimental artifacts.<sup>3</sup>

In order to meet these two research goals, the Windbridge Institute employs the following research methods:

1. specific research reading protocols including deceased-directed and asking questions sections;
2. the pairing and formatting of research readings;
3. experimental blinding including five levels of blinding;
4. the thorough screening of all research participants including mediums, sitter-raters, and discarnates; and
5. a specific scoring method used by raters that includes both item-by-item and whole reading scores.

These methods are discussed in turn below.

#### RESEARCH READINGS

The research reading protocols currently used at the Windbridge Institute began their evolution at the University of Arizona where the author served as codirector of the VERITAS Research Program with Gary

<sup>3</sup> To address this two-fold methodological model, we use the metaphor "one cannot study football on a basketball court using baseball players and the rules for hockey." If negative results are achieved in this situation, it is not appropriate to conclude that the phenomenon of football has been disproven. In turn, it is not appropriate to claim that a quarterback has exceeded passing records if all (or even some) of his passes occurred in the absence of a defense or using a nonregulation ball. In order to study football appropriately, only trained, skilled participants and the established equipment, environment, and regulations should be used. The same is true for mediumship. Thus, negative results from a study using methods that did not appropriately optimize the experimental environment and positive results from a study that did not maximize all possible controls are equally ineffective in establishing new scientific knowledge.

E. Schwartz. The reading formats were developed based on the knowledge about the discarnate communication process that was gained during the use of each consecutive protocol. In order to obtain the most objective and replicable information, protocols were attempted that were more and more specific at each step. It is important to note that although several of these reading formats were used throughout the history of mediumship research, it was necessary to examine their practicality with present-day mental mediums using contemporary technology.

The first methodological question asked if the sitter was a necessary component of an accurate reading. During these readings, an experimenter acted as a proxy sitter who sat in for the actual absent sitter during in-person readings with a medium. The use of proxy sitters during mediumship readings is nearly as old as mediumship research itself; the work of C. Drayton Thomas in the 1930s (1932–33, 1935, 1938–39, 1939) and of D. J. West (1949) and Gertrude Schmeidler (1958) in the following decades serve as important examples (also reviewed by Kelly, in press).

Proxy sitters are used to (a) mimic the reading practices with which mediums feel comfortable (i.e., with a sitter present or on the phone) in order to optimize the reading conditions while (b) blinding the medium to cues from the sitter and, in some cases, (c) blinding the absent sitter to the reading until scoring. Based on initial pilot work, it was concluded that skilled present-day mediums could report accurate information about a discarnate without a sitter associated with the discarnate present, a replication and extension of the historical research.

The next step tested the hypothesis that a specific discarnate could be “asked for” during a reading as this (a) mimics what is often the format of a “natural” reading between a client and a medium, (b) serves to focus the medium, and (c) allows for the production of similar one-discarnate readings across a study. When the mediums were given the first name of the discarnate the sitter most wished to hear from (i.e., the “target discarnate”) and sometimes his or her relationship to the absent sitter, they were again able to provide accurate information during these “Discarnate-Directed” sections. The obvious criticism of this method is that the names themselves provide information to the medium that can be used for a type of cold reading. This does not appear to be the case. Actual names of discarnate pairs chosen for recent studies (described in the Pairing section) include: Ron and Brandon, Cindy and Joan, Daniel and Larry, Vicki and Eleanor, Cliff and Harry, Nick and David, Jennifer and Anna, James and Michael, Matthew and Frank, and Barbara and Linda. Because the mediums are asked to provide specific information about the physical lives of each discarnate (described below), it seems unlikely that they could obtain the necessary information solely from these names. In cases in which the names provide overt evidence about the discarnates’ ethnicities and in turn their probable physical descriptions (e.g., Scandinavian: Lars or Signild, African: Naeem or Kianga, Irish: Seamus or Siobhan, Hispanic: José or Manuela, Japanese:

Mamoru or Kiyoshi, and so on) or provide other identifying information (e.g., religion), either a pair is chosen to include two discarnates of the same ethnicity or religion or the discarnates are chosen only for studies in which blinding is not necessary.<sup>4</sup>

The ability to obtain information about a specific discarnate led to the hypothesis that specific pieces of information about the discarnate could be obtained through the asking of specific questions. The use of questions during a reading (a) increases the probability of obtaining information related to the identification of the discarnate, (b) further focuses the medium, and perhaps most importantly, (c) emulates normal human communication. The asking questions paradigm is also important during data analysis: Instead of estimating the probability of the medium's potentially general statements being accurate (for example, Saltmarsh & Soal, 1930), the medium is simply asked to provide specific information.

The exploratory "Asking Questions" readings contained three sections: "Life Questions," "Afterlife Questions," and a "Reverse Question." The Life Questions included items about the discarnates' physical lives and contained questions asking for information often found in nonlaboratory mediumship readings (e.g., physical and personality descriptions and causes of death) as well as questions requesting information that most mediums and/or discarnates are unable to provide (e.g., specific dates of birth and death, names of family members, and so on). We found that several of the questions were repeatedly answered accurately and, at Windbridge, we continue to use the Life Questions format in our current research and during the test readings used to screen prospective research mediums.

If a medium can report information about a discarnate's physical life, the next logical question asks if she<sup>5</sup> can also report information about the discarnate's current life: that is, what is it like to be dead? Due to the observation that the answers to the Afterlife Questions may be linked to the mediums' own ideas and beliefs about the afterlife, these questions are not used in our current protocols.

The Reverse Question section is included in all question-based protocols to ensure discarnate and sitter motivation and to show respect and compassion for the sitter and the hypothesized discarnate. The Reverse Question asks, "Does the discarnate have any questions, comments, or requests for the sitter?" This allows for information and messages ubiquitous

<sup>4</sup> Examples of studies in which blinding is not necessary are those investigating the effect mediumship readings have on grief recovery or those specifically examining the mediums' experiences during discarnate communication.

<sup>5</sup> For ease of reading, when a single medium is referred to in this text, the female pronouns (i.e., she, her) rather than the terms using both genders (i.e., he/she, his/her) are used. This does not, of course, denote that all mediums are female (however, the group of research mediums that the author has worked with over the last several years is roughly 90% female). In addition, when a singular sitter is referenced, the male tenses are used (though the majority of research sitters are female) in order to simplify the text.

in nonlaboratory mediumship readings to be conveyed to the sitter during highly controlled laboratory experiments. Discarnate-Directed, Life Questions, and Reverse Question sections are all included in the readings used to test prospective research mediums. Additionally, a formal study containing these reading formats and achieving positive results was recently published (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007).

The conditions for research readings have also evolved beyond historical mediumship studies due to modern technological advances such as digital recording devices and the Internet. As stated above, the proxy-sitter question was initially answered during in-person readings, as were some preliminary asking questions sections. However, the current research readings performed at Windbridge take place over the phone with a blinded experimenter acting as a proxy for the absent, blinded sitter. This optimizes the mediumship process by allowing the medium to perform the readings in a comfortable location of her choice, an issue Dutch parapsychologist Hendricus Boerenkamp also found important while investigating psychics (reviewed by Schouten, 1994, pp. 242–244).

The research reading protocols used in Windbridge studies (a) mimic the reading practices with which mediums feel comfortable and the format of “regular” medium-client readings, (b) focus the medium and blind her to cues from the sitter, (c) blind the absent sitter to the reading until scoring, (d) allow for the production of similar one-discarnate readings across a study, (e) increase the probability of identifying the discarnate, and (f) emulate normal human communication.

#### PAIRING AND FORMATTING RESEARCH READINGS

##### *Pairing*

In order to maximize sitter-rater blinding, research readings performed at the Windbridge Institute are paired and each associated paired rater scores two readings—one that was intended for him and one that was intended for the other rater—without knowing which is which, that is, blinded to the origin of the readings. The paired readings are for discarnates of the same gender to prevent any obvious gender-based clues to the blinded rater during scoring. Having control raters evaluate the information in a reading intended for someone else is a useful test of the generality/specificity of the statements and has been used throughout the history of mediumship research; two temporally extreme examples are the work of Saltmarsh (1929) and that of O’Keeffe and Wiseman (2005). After item-by-item and whole-reading scoring (described in the Scoring section), each rater is asked to choose which reading he believes was intended for him, that is, “which of the two readings was for your discarnate?” This forced-choice method is a common end point in mediumship studies as well as other parapsychological tests (discussed in Burdick & Kelly, 1977).

However, to maximize each rater's ability to discriminate between the two readings and increase the probability of obtaining positive findings (see the Current Research section), the gender-matched discarnates in our studies are paired before the readings to optimize their recognizable differences while still maintaining rater blinding. This is in stark contrast to studies such as those performed by Saltmarsh (1929) in which discarnates who are similar (in age and cause of death in this example) are paired, but it is similar in principle to choosing specifically varied target sets in telepathy research (e.g., Honorton, 1975). Therefore, in our studies, when a medium describes a blonde, humorous, outgoing father who passed from a sudden heart attack in one reading and a dark-haired, serious, quiet son who was the victim of a drunk driver in the other, having each associated sitter choose which reading was intended for him is a much more objective and revealing process than giving randomly-paired raters a number of readings all describing short, plump grandmothers who enjoyed baking and sewing, and asking each rater to choose which reading was intended for him. The latter scenario does not optimally test a medium's ability to report specific information using a forced-choice end point.

In their review of statistical methods used in parapsychology, Burdick and Kelly (1977) describe, in reference to the forced-choice method, how "unless the correspondences between responses and their targets were very striking (which they often were not), all-or-none judgments would tend to become insensitive" (p. 111). Historically, preferential ranking of the readings was often used to avoid this issue. However, the pairing of optimally dissimilar discarnates prior to the readings allows for the appearance of the "very striking correspondence" between responses (i.e., readings) and their targets (i.e., discarnates).

Pairing begins during sitter screening (described in the Participant Screening section). The sitter is asked several questions about the physical life of the target discarnate. Using the sitter's descriptions, an experimenter assigns codes to the discarnate. There are five main categories (age at passing, physical description, personality, hobbies, and cause of death), the latter four each having subcategories (build, height, and hair color when young; introverted/extroverted, serious/playful, and rational/emotional; outdoors/indoors, solitary/social, and athletic/nonathletic; and primary body part affected, natural/unnatural, and quick/slow, respectively). Once the discarnates are coded in each category, they are paired to optimize their differences in the five categories. Pairing decisions also include a final subjective step in which the sitters' original answers are reviewed to ensure proper pairing in all categories and review the practicality of the pair.<sup>6</sup> Only pairs that follow all of the criteria are used even if this limits the possible study size. The criteria used are the most stringent collection attempted that still allowed for a practical study size. We have found that it is usually

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<sup>6</sup> For example, we once found and had to reject a pair meeting all the pairing criteria because both discarnates shared the same first name.



necessary to gather the screening information from four to seven sitters in order to find one study pair. Gender-matched paired discarnates are read by the same medium and each reading is formatted as described in the next section in order to obtain similar readings across studies.

### *Formatting*

Just as pairing optimizes a rater's ability to discriminate between readings, formatting the readings optimizes the rater's capacity to score the items objectively. During formatting, a blinded experimenter removes all references to the discarnate's name and assigns a number to each reading in order to ensure rater blinding; she then organizes the items into single, direct statements. Specifically, the formatting experimenter:

- Creates a numbered list in which every item is a single, scorable statement.
- Inserts headings describing the section of the reading to the rater.
- Replaces any weak or uncertain associations with clear statements. For example, phrases such as "I think . . ." and "which might mean . . ." are removed. Thus, "I think she might have had red hair but I'm not sure" is replaced with "she had red hair."
- Removes phrases referencing the manner in which the discarnate provides the information to the medium (e.g., "He is saying..." or "She is showing..."). The exception is any direct quote from the discarnate.
- Replaces statements referring to the medium's sensory experience of the items (e.g., "I'm seeing a red rose" to "The image of a red rose" or "I smell cigarettes" to "the smell of cigarettes").
- Replaces specifics about the discarnate that would jeopardize blinding but must be included for proper scoring with "[the deceased]" or "[s/he]" in the item list.
- Removes any reference to the medium's history or opinions (e.g., "She looks like my sister...").
- Inserts explanations for "medium-speak." For example, "there are a boy and girl below her" would be listed as "there are a boy and girl below her [i.e., in a younger generation]" and "in the physical" would be listed as "in the physical [i.e., living]."
- Groups information that is repeated into one item containing the different ways the item was stated and in the most appropriate section of the reading, taking care not to disrupt the meaning of the information.
- Removes any items that are obviously or overtly emotionally or psychologically painful for a sitter to read. This includes detailed descriptions of a physically painful manner of passing (in this case, verifiable items such as body parts affected and the existence of

pain are included while pain descriptors are removed) and negative emotions attributed to the discarnate directed at the sitter. Though the readings are performed for the purpose of data collection and the sitters are notified during consent about potential risks of emotionally painful reactions, mediums are not 100% accurate and the inclusion of potentially traumatic information is neither statistically necessary nor ethically responsible.

Below is a comparison of the formatting of a specific reading by O’Keeffe and Wiseman (2005) and how the same reading would have been formatted at Windbridge.

Original reading by the medium:

I think there is a lady in the room. Who are you? Mother?  
 Yes, mother. About 5 foot 4. I can see a pot, a cooking pot, a brass cooking pot. That’s a rather large pot, isn’t it? It’s got a lid. You [*spirit*] worked in cooking, dinner cooking. You [*spirit*] worked in a shop selling pots and pans. You had something to do with a shop, pots and pans. Did you have a favourite piece in your shop? Ah, yes, I can see it now. Is it a long pan for cooking fish or something? That’s very nice indeed. It looks like a fish cooker to me. You’re English, aren’t you? Yes (*refers to Mother*).

O’Keeffe and Wiseman formatting:

- S1: I think there is a lady in the room. Who are you? Mother? Yes, mother. About 5 foot 4.  
 S2: I can see a pot, a cooking pot, a brass cooking pot. That’s a rather large pot, isn’t it? It’s got a lid.  
 S3: You [*spirit*] worked in cooking, dinner cooking.  
 S4: You [*spirit*] worked in a shop selling pots and pans. You had something to do with a shop, pots and pans.  
 S5: Did you have a favourite piece in your shop? Ah, yes, I can see it now. Is it a long pan for cooking fish or something? That’s very nice indeed. It looks like a fish cooker to me.  
 S6: You’re English, aren’t you? Yes (*refers to Mother*).

Windbridge formatting:

1. The discarnate is female.
2. She is a mother.
3. She is about 5’4.”

4. The image of a large brass cooking pot with a lid.
5. The discarnate worked in dinner cooking.
6. The discarnate worked in or had something to do with a shop selling pots and pans.
7. The discarnate's favorite piece was a long pan, perhaps for cooking fish.
8. The discarnate was English.

It is important to note that the items are in no way randomized during formatting in our laboratory. The interdependence of scorable statements in a reading is a commonly referenced "limitation" of the scoring of mediums' statements (Scott, 1972; Schouten, 1994). However, the context and the flow of the content during a reading contain information potentially relevant to the rater that would be removed were the statements to be randomized. The interdependence of statements is a necessary component of the processing of information that occurs during—and not a limitation of—normal human communication.

We have found that formatting mediumship readings using the tasks listed above ensures rater blinding, optimizes the clarity of the items for scoring, and unifies the quality of the information across readings and between mediums.

#### BLINDING

Numerous nonparanormal psychological processes are at work during readings in which a medium or psychic can receive immediate and nonregulated feedback from the client or sitter (reviewed by Schouten, 1994). These normal processes can be solely responsible for a "successful" reading. Therefore, the blinding of the medium to feedback from the sitter was one of the first controls imposed on the mediumship process during investigation of the phenomenon (e.g., Saltmarsh, 1929). In addition, blinding the rater to the origin of the readings (i.e., "mine" or "not mine") is important in limiting bias on the part of the rater during scoring.

Although some elements of rater blinding occur during reading pairing and formatting, the majority of experimental blinding at Windbridge is established during protocol design. It is important to note that the blinding terms used here are not directly correlated with the similar terms used in medical treatment testing. The blinding described refers to the number of blinded individuals participating in the mediumship reading procedure and, thus, the levels of blinding ensuring the controlled environment of the reading. Blinding is essential in order to eliminate conventional factors (e.g., fraud, cold-reading, rater bias, unintentional cuing by the experimenter) as explanations for the accuracy of the information a medium provides. The blinding may also begin to control for telepathy (Bem & Honorton, 1994) with the sitter or experimenter by the medium, but because the mechanisms

and limits of telepathy as well as other parapsychological phenomena such as precognition and clairvoyance are unknown at this time, definitive controls for them are not possible.

During single-blind readings, only the medium is blinded: All information about the sitter and the discarnate (save for the discarnate's first name) is kept from her before and during the reading to eliminate cold-reading and fraud as explanations for the accuracy of the information. In a single-blind scenario, the sitter-rater is given just one reading to score and is aware that the reading was intended for him; in addition, the rater may or may not provide the medium with feedback through a proxy during the reading and may or may not have heard the reading as it took place.

During double-blind conditions, the medium is blind to information and feedback before and during the reading and the rater is blind to the origin of the readings during scoring to prevent rater bias. Because more than one reading is necessary to blind the rater, the pairing of discarnates/readings discussed above is tremendously beneficial in this scenario.

A previously published triple-blind study (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007) led to the current quintuple-blind protocol in use at Windbridge. In a triple-blind setting, the medium and the rater are blinded as in the previous conditions, but additionally, the experimenter interacting with the rater during scoring and with the medium during the readings is blinded to information about the rater and his associated discarnate to further remove fraud as well as eliminating experimenter cuing (and possibly telepathy with the experimenter/proxy at the time the reading takes place) as explanations for the results.

In the quintuple-blind protocol currently used by the Windbridge Institute, (1) the medium is blinded to information about the sitter and the discarnate before and during the reading; (2) the raters are blinded to the origin of the readings during scoring, (3) the experimenter who consents, screens, pairs, and trains the sitter-raters (Experimenter 1) is blinded to which mediums read which sitter pairs and which blinded readings were intended for which discarnates; (4) the experimenter who interacts with the mediums during the phone readings and formats the readings into item lists (Experimenter 2) is blinded to any information about the sitters and the discarnates beyond the discarnates' first names; and (5) the experimenter who interacts with the sitters during scoring (i.e., sends and receives the blinded and paired readings during scoring) (Experimenter 3) is blinded to all information about the discarnates, to which medium performed which readings, and to which readings were intended for which discarnates/sitters.

As a further precaution, the order in which the pairs of sitters participate, which pairs are read by which medium, and the order in which the discarnate names are provided to the medium are all randomized. In addition, one rater in each pair receives his own reading to score first and one rater receives the control reading to score first. Furthermore,

neither sitters nor mediums receive any feedback about the study until all experimental trials are complete. This entire scenario eliminates fraud, cold-reading, rater bias, experimenter cuing, and perhaps even telepathy of the experimenter and/or absent sitter as plausible explanations for the accuracy and specificity of the information provided during the readings.

## PARTICIPANT SCREENING

### *Sitters*

In order to optimize sitter-rater motivation and, thus, accurate and reliable scoring and discernate participation, sitter participants are chosen from a volunteer sitter pool. Participants from all over the country sign up to participate through the Windbridge website ([www.windbridge.org](http://www.windbridge.org)). Sitter participants are initially chosen based on their affirmative answers to questions regarding their beliefs about mediumship, their knowledge about the discernates they have lost, and their willingness and ability to participate in readings and scoring as well as their reasons for wanting to participate. The motivation of the sitter and, in turn, the hypothesized discernate is considered during this initial screening. For example, the motivation for a discernate to communicate during a reading with a sitter who strongly believes that all mediums are charlatans or frauds may be low; thus, choosing this sitter would not optimize the mediumship process. The issue of sitter/discernate motivation during initial screening is often moot because individuals who do not entertain mediumship as a realistic possibility rarely volunteer to participate in studies.

Further information is then collected from sitters passing the initial screening. At this time, the first name of the target discernate and his/her relationship to the sitter is noted. Sitters are also screened using questions about their beliefs, the nature of their relationship with the target discernate, the likelihood the discernate will participate in a research reading, and the estimated risk that other discernates known to the sitter will attempt to “drop in” during an experiment.

Additionally, data are collected during the screening steps about the sitters’ gender, prior readings with mediums and/or psychics, religious affiliations, and the effect religion has on their beliefs about mediumship. The sitter’s age and the time that has passed since the target discernate died is also noted; it is our policy to work only with sitters over 25 years of age<sup>7</sup> and who have been grieving for more than 1 year in all studies not specifically

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<sup>7</sup> When working with undergraduate student sitter participants, we found it difficult to obtain large sample sizes due to the small percentage of students who had experienced the death of someone close to them. We also noted that some students had difficulty with objectivity during scoring. For example, for a pair of readings in which the medium described one discernate as a “man” and one discernate as a “kid,” one student sitter chose the “man” reading, even though other descriptions in the “kid” reading were accurate, because he did not view his deceased 17-year-old friend as a “kid.”

investigating grief. Prospective sitters are also asked about their prior experiences with any personal after-death communication. Finally, sitters are asked about their computer proficiency in order to optimize the rater training and scoring, which take place over e-mail. Based on the answers to these questions as well as the discarnate pairing method described above, sitters are chosen to participate in research readings.

For current research, each adult sitter chosen to participate had a close relationship with at least one deceased person who passed more than 1 year ago and whose personality was consistent with wanting to volunteer for mediumship research. Additionally, each sitter values discovering the truth about mediumship and the survival-of-consciousness hypothesis and has experienced some form of after-death communication from the target discarnate. Before the research readings take place, each sitter is trained in the scoring method described below.

### *Discarnates*

In order to optimize the mediumship process during experiments, it is important to keep in mind throughout protocol development that there are potentially three people participating in a reading: medium, sitter, and discarnate. And, although the Office for Human Research Protections federal regulations do not require informed consent from hypothesized discarnate participants (for obvious theoretical and practical reasons), Windbridge investigators take into account factors such as motivation, fatigue, and communication abilities when choosing hypothesized discarnate participants and designing research protocols. For example, to honor their participation, we write instructions for each experiment directed to the discarnates along with those for the mediums and sitters.

For official experiments, Windbridge chooses discarnates based on the discarnate pairing method described above. However, as data cannot be collected about the accuracy of a mediumship reading without a sitter-rater, the sitters associated with the discarnates must also fulfill the sitter qualifications described above. In addition, during test readings used to screen prospective research mediums (described below), discarnates are chosen only if the sitters indicate that, in their opinion, the hypothesized discarnate has successfully communicated with a medium before. This ensures that during test readings, any failure to produce accurate information can be potentially attributed to the prospective medium rather than to a hypothesized “naïve” discarnate not familiar with communicating with a medium.

### *Mediums*

In addition to optimal experimental conditions and well chosen sitter and purported discarnate participants, the quality of the medium

participants is of paramount importance for a successful mediumship study. Fontana (2005) emphasizes the “obvious necessity to have trial runs with mediums when developing experimental methodologies” and then to “work only with those mediums who appear to perform well under these methodologies” (p. 224). (This issue is addressed here in Footnote 3.) Also, this is one factor that may have been responsible for the negative results of one recent mediumship study (O’Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005). The medium participants in that study “were recruited via a list of certified mediums provided by the Spiritualists Nationalist Union” with no apparent trial runs to ensure that the mediums could perform under the stringent conditions of the experiment. To ensure that this is not an issue in our studies, we have developed a rigorous screening protocol for medium participants. In addition, we prefer to replicate results across numerous skilled mediums rather than to use repeated trials with one “star” medium as was often the case in historical research (e.g., Thomas, 1928; Saltmarsh, 1929).

Before participating in mediumship research at Windbridge, each prospective medium is screened over several months using an intensive eight-step screening procedure based on a similar system previously used to screen Integrative Research Mediums (IRMs) at the University of Arizona. Upon successful completion of the eight steps, the medium is termed a Level 1 Windbridge Certified Research Medium (WCRM–1). [Previous IRM certification from the UA may serve in lieu of the Windbridge screening steps.] The mediums’ certification levels increase as they participate in additional research studies. Each WCRM agrees to donate a minimum of four hours per month to assist in various aspects of the research, uphold a code of spiritual ethics, embrace a strong commitment to the values of scientific mediumship research, and abide by specific Windbridge standards of conduct.

The eight steps are listed here and described in detail below:

- Step 1: Written questionnaire
- Step 2: Personality/psychological tests
- Step 3: Phone interview (with an existing WCRM)
- Step 4: Phone interview (with a Windbridge investigator)
- Step 5: Two blinded phone readings
- Step 6: Mediumship research training
- Step 7: Human research participants training
- Step 8: Grief training

To begin, each prospective medium completes a brief, written questionnaire about factors including family history, medical history, culture, education, personal experiences, and training (Step 1). It has been suggested that mediums (and psychics) may share common life experiences such as a difficult youth (Schouten, 1994, p. 248) and this step aims to address these possible similarities.

After finishing the questionnaire, prospective WCRMs then complete three standard personality tests (Step 2): the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the Tellegen Absorption Scale. By collecting detailed historical data during Step 1 and personality data during Step 2 from all mediums and comparing them to test reading data (Step 5), the specific characteristics correlated with exceptional mediumship skill can be determined. This examination of possible predictors of mediumship ability is similar in principle to research involving predictors of psi performance (reviewed by Palmer, 1977). Like studies examining the predictors of psi, this analysis of potential predictors of mediumship ability increases the yield of information gained during the experiments/screening without requiring any disturbance “of the delicate interface with the respondent” (Burdick & Kelly, 1977).

A prospective medium then participates in a phone interview with one or more existing Windbridge Certified Research Mediums (Step 3) in which she is asked about her mediumship history, process, and goals. This step facilitates a noncompetitive team dynamic between mediums, provides mentor relationships for the new mediums with the interviewer WCRMs, and supplies the researchers with a noninvestigator opinion of the prospective mediums’ motivations, cooperativeness, and values. A second interview (Step 4) then takes place with a Windbridge researcher about the prospective research medium’s experiences and any factors that affect discarnate communication.

The test-reading portion of the screening process (Step 5) is completed to ensure that each prospective medium is able to report relatively specific, accurate, consistent, and scorable information under various experimental conditions. The test readings also ensure that a medium is able to convey accurate information while following specific experimental instructions and that she accurately conveys her experiences during the reading with little editing or under- or over-statement.

The test readings consist of two identically formatted, scheduled phone readings (each with two parts) with two different sitters chosen from the prospective sitter pool and paired as described in the Pairing section. For each of the two paired sitters, the test readings contain two sections completed on two different days. Thus, each medium performs four readings, each with multiple sections (see Table 1). This tests the mediums’ abilities in several different reading formats.

The first double-blind portion of the test reading is an audio-recorded phone reading that takes place at a scheduled time between a Windbridge investigator and the prospective medium (“Sitter-Absent”). The sitter does not hear or participate in this portion of the reading and the experimenter serves as a proxy for the absent sitter.



TABLE 1  
 TEST READING FORMATS\* FOR THE SCREENING OF  
 PROSPECTIVE WINDBRIDGE CERTIFIED RESEARCH MEDIUMS

Day	Sitter	Section	Subsection	Blinding	Scored	Scores given
1	A	Sitter-Absent	(all)	Double	After reading	Global, Choice
1	A	Sitter-Absent	Discarnate-Directed	Double	After reading	Estimated %
1	A	Sitter-Absent	Questions	Double	After reading	Estimated %
2	B	Sitter-Absent	(all)	Double	After reading	Global, Choice
2	B	Sitter-Absent	Discarnate-Directed	Double	After reading	Estimated %
2	B	Sitter-Absent	Questions	Double	After reading	Estimated %
3	A	Sitter-Present	Sitter-Silent	Single	During reading	Global, Estimated %
3	A	Sitter-Present	Interaction	Non-blinded	During reading	Global, Estimated %
4	B	Sitter-Present	Sitter-Silent	Single	During reading	Global, Estimated %
4	B	Sitter-Present	Interaction	Non-blinded	During reading	Global, Estimated %

\*Each medium performs readings for two paired sitters, A and B; each sitter’s reading has two sections, each with two subsections (see text for details). Note: Although the days are numbered consecutively here, the readings do not take place on four consecutive days; the Sitter-Present readings do not take place until the scoring of all of the Sitter-Absent sections is complete. Key: Double = medium is blinded to information and feedback and sitter is blinded to the origin of readings during scoring; Single = medium is blinded as above but sitter hears reading; Nonblinded = medium receives controlled feedback from sitter; Global = rater gives numerical score (0-6, see Scoring section for details) to the reading or section; Choice = blinded rater chooses the more applicable of two paired readings; Estimated % = rater estimates the percent of accurate items.

During the Sitter-Absent readings, the medium is provided with the first name of the target discarnate and asked to provide information about the named discarnate (“Discarnate-Directed” subsection) as well as the answers to five questions about the discarnate’s physical and personality traits, hobbies or activities, cause of death, and comments for the sitter

(“Questions” subsection). Each subsection of the two paired Sitter-Absent phone readings is transcribed and formatted and then each sitter estimates the percent of accurate items for each subsection, gives each whole reading a global score from 0–6, and chooses which reading he believes was intended for him (described in the Scoring section). Because these readings are used for screening prospective mediums and not for data collection and due to time and personnel limitations, individual item scoring is not used in WCRM screening test readings. Both sitters are provided with subsections from both paired readings for scoring and blinded to which sections were intended for which discarnate; thus, each reading acts as a control for the other reading during scoring.

The second portion of each test reading consists of an audio-recorded three-way phone reading with an experimenter, the prospective medium, and the sitter (“Sitter-Present”). These second phone readings take place after each of the two blinded sitters score the first Sitter-Absent phone reading sections. The Sitter-Present reading contains two subsections: a single-blind “Sitter-Silent” section and a nonblinded but controlled “Interaction” section.

In the first Sitter-Silent section, the sitter can hear the reading and takes notes but gives no feedback and the medium reports any new information about the named discarnate that she is receiving. During the Interaction section, the medium is introduced to the sitter by first name and can ask the sitter yes-or-no questions to which the sitter can respond “yes,” “no,” “maybe,” “sort of,” or “I don’t know.” During short breaks in the Sitter-Present reading, the sitter records both a global score and an estimated percent accuracy score for each of the two subsections. This second Sitter-Present phone reading is hypothesized to provide motivation for the discarnate to participate in the first Sitter-Absent portion of the test reading as well as to provide motivation for the sitter to complete the scoring of those readings accurately and in a timely fashion.

To be considered for research, a medium must:

- be given an average global score of 3.5 or higher (on the 0–6 scale described in the Scoring section) over the two double-blind Sitter-Absent sections by the intended sitter for his own reading with an average difference of 1.5 or more over the score given to that section by the other control sitter,
- be given an average estimated percent accuracy of 60% or higher over the two Discarnate-Directed subsections of the Sitter-Absent reading by the intended sitters for their own readings with a difference of 25% or more over the estimated percent accuracy given to those sections by the other sitter,
- be given an average estimated percent accuracy of 55% or higher over the two Questions subsections of the Sitter-Absent reading by the intended sitters for their own readings with a

difference of 20% or more over the estimated percent accuracy given to those sections by the other sitter,

- provide at least one Sitter-Absent reading that the intended sitter chooses as his own,
- be given an average global score of 3.5 or higher over the two Sitter-Silent subsections of the single-blind Sitter-Present phone readings,
- be given an average estimated percent accuracy of 60% or higher over the two Sitter-Silent subsections of the phone readings,
- be given an average global score of 4.25 or higher over the two nonblinded but controlled Interaction subsections of the phone readings, and
- be given an average estimated percent accuracy of 75% or higher over the two Interaction subsections of the phone readings.

These criteria are based on the results of a pilot study utilizing triple-blind phone readings completed by claimant mediums (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007) and the results to date of two studies utilizing certified research mediums.

During analysis of a prospective medium's test reading scores, differences in individual mediumship processes, the ability of different deceased individuals to communicate, and the ability of different raters to accurately score the readings are examined before final decisions are made about the medium's performance. For example, an experimenter may note the following: discrepancies in either direction between the estimated percentage of statements scored as accurate by the sitter and the global score given by that sitter to the reading, a sitter's tendency during the phone reading to accept statements that are not true or to reject statements that are, and/or scores for the intended readings that may not reach the passing criteria but that are considerably higher than the associated control scores. This subjective yet process-focused analysis step is necessary to help ensure that truly talented mediums are not erroneously rejected based on the limited data from two rigorously controlled readings scored by first-time raters. It also helps ensure that mediums who are unable to perform under the controlled portions of the readings but who receive high scores from sitters during the portions in which they receive sitter feedback (i.e., those who may be using cold reading) are not erroneously accepted based on skewed scoring averages. In addition, scoring criteria may change as more mediumship reading scoring data is collected.

To continue the next portion of the screening process, prospective WCRMs are required to read a lay-person overview of historic mediumship research, the currently used methods of investigation, and the implications

of evidence for survival of consciousness after death. They then complete a simple but thoughtful take-home examination on the material (Step 6). The purpose of this step is to educate mediums about the early history of the research, some of the key research questions, and the possibilities for the future. In the process, prospective mediums are invited to provide feedback and ask the researchers questions that might lead to future hypotheses and experiments. WCRMs then sustain their awareness of mediumship research by reading current research reports as they are published. This continuing process helps ensure WCRMs maintain their unique status as research mediums. The training differentiates WCRMs from anonymous study participants; as certified research mediums, they are knowledgeable about the research in which they participate.

Before becoming official WCRMs, prospective mediums complete the National Institutes of Health (NIH) online course "Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams" (Step 7), a free, Web-based course designed to provide appropriate education for researchers whose work involves human participants (<http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp>). Because WCRMs work with human participants (i.e., sitters) during research experiments and are themselves research participants, gaining an awareness of and appreciation for the legal and ethical constraints of doing research with human participants is essential training. Additionally, the credibility and evolution of mediumship research is enhanced by WCRMs becoming credentialed in this arena.

Along these lines, it is also beneficial for Windbridge Certified Research Mediums to be aware of the psychological aspects of the grieving process that each sitter is experiencing. To gain some basic understanding on this topic, prospective mediums are required to read one of the following texts: *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (James & Friedman, 1998); *The Journey Through Grief* (Wolfelt, 2003); *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* (Worden, 2001); or *Life After Loss* (Moody & Arcangel, 2002). Mediums can also recommend that a book not listed be added to the list and can read that text for completion of this step. The prospective medium then writes a brief (1–2 page) summary of her chosen text and a description of what she found most interesting and helpful about it (Step 8). Upon completing all eight screening steps, and with his or her permission, each WCRM is listed on the Windbridge website (<http://www.windbridge.org/mediums.htm>).

The extensive screening of prospective mediums helps ensure a participant population that is reliable, skilled, trained, dedicated, ethical, and professional. This brings a new level of credibility to the field of mediumship research as well as to laboratory mediums themselves.

#### SCORING

One of the major challenges facing research regarding information obtained from mediums concerns the scoring of transcripts obtained

during the readings. It is essential to recognize that the requirements for scoring are more advanced and sophisticated when the research focuses on the *process* of mediumship compared with research that focuses on *proving* the reality of mediumship. *Process-focused* research is more comprehensive, inclusive, and detailed; *proof-focused* research is more conservative, exclusive, and limiting.

As with the other methods described here, the scoring method currently used by the Windbridge Institute had its beginnings at the University of Arizona. The current scoring system was designed to examine and quantify the process of mediumship. However, when employed in a more restrictive manner, it can be used to examine and quantify proof-focused data as well.

Challenges involved in scoring a medium's reading come from two sources: (a) the process(es) by which the information comes to and is reported by the medium and (b) the process(es) by which the rater perceives and judges the information. Scoring challenges concerning the mediums' process include the following issues:

- The information is often complex.
- The utterances from the mediums are often incomplete: subjects, verbs, and/or objects may be missing.
- The information comes through in uncontrolled "packets" of different lengths and does not always express a discernable logic or flow.
- The information is often indirect if not symbolic.
- The information includes perceptions and experiences of the mediums as well as interpretations of the impressions they receive.
- The information often comes in quick bursts that may be transient, unclear, and/or incomplete to the medium.

Some of these issues are addressed during reading formatting.

Scoring challenges concerning the process of the rater are also intricate:

- The rater's knowledge and memory of the deceased is limited.
- The rater's understanding of the scoring instructions may be limited.
- The rater's personal biases (e.g., belief or disbelief in survival; liberal or conservative in making judgments) will influence the judging.
- The rater's expectations and emotions will color the judging.
- The rater's ability to derive rational interpretations and draw connections within complex information may be limited.

Although the scoring of the mediumship readings is the last event to take place during a study, it is obviously the most important step from a data-collection viewpoint. However, the scoring collected is meaningless unless the other issues discussed above have been designed and carried out thoroughly and accurately. As with those other issues, the scoring procedure used by the Windbridge Institute underwent numerous revisions.

In order to facilitate the accurate scoring of various types of mediumship readings by diverse types of raters and for different types of scoring information, four scoring systems were developed for the scoring of accuracy and emotional significance. It is important to note that each system was developed by upgrading and/or reformatting the previous version based on what was learned during each version's use.

Two of the versions implement a whole reading and choice system to test for specificity. In addition, a fifth experimenter version was developed for use in characterizing the information provided by the medium which is similar to the method used by Boerenkamp (reviewed by Schouten, 1994). In that system, an experimenter rates the type (e.g., place, name, date, etc.) and form (e.g., complete or incomplete statement) of the information as well as how the medium conveyed it (e.g., experience, interpretation, etc.) for each item in a reading. The experimenter also notes any items by which the medium seemed confused or surprised. It is important to note that the experimenter scoring system can only be used during in-person or phone readings because several of the ratings are dependent on the manner in which the information was reported by the medium.

A set of instructions, plus scoring forms or worksheets, are used to implement the various rater versions of the scoring systems. An on-line scoring form in which the rater scores each item in a Web-based format is planned for use in the future. This version would also provide immediate electronic storage and organization of the data from each rater. Currently, paper forms for in-person scoring and electronic forms for e-mail scoring are used.

The scope of this paper will only discuss the version of the scoring method used by current raters. Each rater scores each item in two gender-matched and blinded readings for accuracy, scores each whole reading, and chooses the more applicable reading (details below). This method is used during the current ongoing quintuple-blind phone study and portions are used in the current Step 5 prospective medium screening test readings.

Before scoring, each reading is blinded and formatted as described above. Prior to the readings, each rater is provided with extensive instructions including examples and "hints for understanding mediumship readings" and is trained using the scoring system with short "practice" readings. During scoring, each sitter in a pair acts as a matched control for the other sitter in the pair: each sitter scores the reading intended for him as well as the reading of the control sitter while remaining blinded to the origin of the readings. Sitters score each item for accuracy by contemplating the

question “How well does the piece of information fit?” and choosing one of the following six options:

- 5: Obvious fit (used if the item is a direct or concrete hit that does not require interpretation to fit)
- 4: Fit requiring minimal interpretation (used if the item indirectly applies and needs minimal interpretation or symbolism to fit)
- 3: Fit requiring more than minimal interpretation (used if the item indirectly applies and needs a greater degree of interpretation or symbolism to fit)
- 2: Other fit (used if the item does not fit the named discarnate or the rater, but does fit someone else that the rater is/was close to and that is likely to be the subject of the statement)
- 1: No fit (used if the information is a concrete miss—is clearly wrong—or if it is information for which there is no reasonable interpretation)
- 0: Don’t know (used if the rater does not understand the item or does not have enough information to judge its accuracy).

For scores of 2, 3, and 4, the rater also provides a written explanation. It is important to note that although these scores appear to have numerical value, they are not weighted and are simply tallied individually during analysis. Weighted scores, such as those used by Saltmarsh (1929), Schmeidler (1958), or Roy and Robertson (2004), are not used because they presuppose a scale of importance based on specificity that may not reflect the “scale” of importance used by the sitter—the individual for whom the information was intended.

Sitters also give each full list of items a global numerical score (0–6) based on scoring scales developed for remote viewing studies (Targ et al., 1995):

- 6: Excellent reading, including strong aspects of communication, and with essentially no incorrect information.
- 5: Good reading with relatively little incorrect information.
- 4: Good reading with some incorrect information.
- 3: Mixture of correct and incorrect information, but enough correct information to indicate that communication with the deceased occurred.
- 2: Some correct information, but not enough to suggest beyond chance that communication occurred.
- 1: Little correct information or communication.
- 0: No correct information or communication.

After summary scoring is complete for both readings in a pair, the sitters are asked to “Pick the reading which seems to be more applicable to

you. Even if they both seem equally applicable or nonapplicable, pick one.” They are then asked to rate their choice compared to the other reading according to the following scale:

- a. clearly more applicable to me
- b. moderately more applicable to me
- c. only slightly more applicable to me
- d. both seemed applicable to me and to the same extent
- e. neither seemed applicable to me

Finally, raters are asked, “Please explain what led you to pick the reading you did, and any problems you had in making the decision, giving references to the relevant items.”

Once scored, data from raters for whom the reading was intended can be compared with data from control raters using a *t*-test analysis as well as higher level statistical analyses. The statistic  $p_{rep}$  is used in addition to traditional null-hypothesis testing to determine replicability (Killeen, 2005). For proof-focused research, only the highest category of accuracy scores (“obvious fit”) are counted as hits and described in relation to the total number of items scored. For process-focused research, the upper two categories (“obvious fit” and “fit requiring minimal interpretation”) are counted as hits in relation to the total items minus the items scored as “don’t know.” Further analysis using correlation and regression statistics can be done concerning the effect of classification or form of the items on the scoring of fit as well as the effect of the emotional significance of an item on this scoring if the more extensive and experimenter scoring systems are used. In summary, we believe that these scoring systems bring clarity, reliability, and validity to the scoring of information obtained during the process of mediumship.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The current use of the reading protocol, pairing, formatting, blinding, and scoring practices and the specific participant screening techniques employed by The Windbridge Institute during its investigation of the anomalous information reception experienced by mediums reflects significant methodological and conceptual innovations beyond both historical mediumship research and modern published studies (e.g., O’Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005; Robertson & Roy, 2001; Roy & Robertson, 2001, 2004; Schwartz & Russek, 2001a, 2001b; Schwartz et al., 2001). Specifically:

- Using reading protocols that focus the medium on one discarnate and then ask specific questions about that discarnate provides similar types of information in each reading for a more objective rating procedure.



- The pairing of readings for discarnates that are optimally different but gender-matched optimizes rater blinding as well as the ability of raters to recognize identifying descriptions in each transcript during scoring.
- The formatting of the readings into lists of single items allows for the objective and repeatable scoring of clear, concise statements.
- The use of quintuple-blind conditions eliminates all conventional rationalizations as plausible explanations for the findings.
- The screening of sitters and discarnates helps ensure a motivated and skilled group of raters.
- The extensive screening of mediums helps ensure that suitable participants are used during hypothesis testing and also provides a reliable and ethical participant pool with which to work.
- The use of item-by-item scores in addition to a global rating scale provides an additional measure of data quality regarding the hypothesis of anomalous information reception by mediums.

A recently published study illustrates how these or similar methods can come together and provide positive and significant data (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007). Specifically, in that triple-blind phone study, the findings included significantly higher whole-reading scores for readings intended for the sitter versus readings intended for the paired control rater ( $p = .007$ , effect size = 0.5,  $p_{\text{rep}} = .96$ ) and significant forced-choice results when the raters were asked to choose which readings were intended for them ( $p = .01$ ). The resulting medium effect size (the magnitude of the effect independent of sample size) and high  $p_{\text{rep}}$  value (the probability of replicating the effect) indicate that under stringent triple-blind conditions, utilizing a global rating scale used by blind raters, evidence for anomalous information reception can be obtained.

Through these methods, we are attempting to bridge the gap between the qualitative aspects of a more postmodern, feminist, and human science (Krippner, 1995; White, 1991; reviewed by White, 1990; Irwin, 1999) and more traditional quantitative parapsychological methods. Historically, “holistic” methods (e.g., assigning a global or summary score to a reading) and “atomistic” methods (e.g., item-by-item scoring) evolved somewhat independently over the course of research regarding the objective analysis of verbal statements (Burdick & Kelly, 1977, p. 110). We find it important to include both methods during the analysis of each reading.

In addition, the future goals of our research attempt to address the survival of consciousness hypothesis as well as the determination of which conventional and/or paranormal factors are responsible for the information mediums provide. Because all of the research mediums certified to date claim to be able to differentiate between the processes

used during mediumship readings for the deceased and those used during psychic telepathy readings for the living (one of the Step 3 screening interview questions), the analysis of mediums' experiences is a logical first step in addressing the survival hypothesis. We recently published a qualitative phenomenology study regarding mediums' experiences (Rock et al., in press) and are in the process of completing a quantitative study utilizing the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (Pekala, 1991) to aid in our further understanding of the mediumship process (see Rock & Beischel, in preparation). However, the survival question and methods to address it were challenges in historical mediumship research and continue to be difficult today.

Furthermore, we believe it is important to address here the theoretical experiments that have historically been suggested as "ideal" in the testing of mediums. These include the retrieval of the combination to a lock (or other code) during a reading that only the discarnate knew; asking the medium to respond to a language (in that language) that the discarnate spoke but that the medium does not (xenoglossy); asking the medium to perform a complicated intellectual task using skills and expertise that the discarnate possessed but that the medium does not (e.g., solving a difficult mathematical proof); obtaining information during a reading from a discarnate unknown to the sitter, medium, or experimenter (i.e., drop-in communicators); and acquiring information that cannot be fully understood until information from another reading is obtained (i.e., cross-correspondence) (Irwin, 1999, pp. 175–9; Braude, 2003, pp. 283–8). These suggestions contain several serious errors.

First, several of the proposed experiments involve pervasive and unsupported assumptions about the capability and the motivation of the discarnate to communicate specific information and about the medium's ability to receive and convey it. For instance, perhaps the discarnate no longer wishes to speak French, play competitive chess, or write a concerto. Maybe without a body constrained by "earthly" physics, the combination to the lock holds no interest or has been forgotten. Perhaps not all types of stored memories are retained after death. Maybe the medium's consciousness filters out information for which she does not have a personal reference. An emotional aspect to the information and a motivation to convey items that will be important to the sitter appear to be the necessary components of mediumship communication based on the readings we have collected to date. There is no way, at this time, for us to know if the above examples represent the reality of being dead and basing experiments on unsupported assumptions is not, to say the least, ideal.

Second, several of the suggestions involve phenomena that usually only occur spontaneously, therefore creating difficulty in designing repeatable experiments addressing them. Although drop-in communicators can be "asked for" (e.g., "during this segment of the reading, we are open to drop-ins"), would their appearance then provide the support suggested

by this phenomenon? The same issue surrounds the appearance of cross-correspondence. Because these phenomena, although impressive and evidential, cannot be easily or repeatedly tested, they fail to meet the standard for ideal empirical research.

Finally, even if the suggested studies were possible and practical, the data that they would provide may still not differentiate between survival and, for example, super-psi (also called super-ESP; reviewed in Braude, 2003, p. 10 and Fontana, 2005, p. 103) or psychic reservoir explanations (reviewed in Fontana, 2005, p. 113) since the possible limits of psi are not fully understood at this time. Their conclusions may simply support what is already established: that certain mediums are capable of anomalous information reception. Through this discussion, it is evident that the search for the ideal survival study continues.

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#### ABSTRACTS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

##### *Spanish*

RESUMEN: De forma similar al estudio de otros fenómenos naturales, el estudio de la mediumnidad en el ambiente del laboratorio permite el estudio controlado y

repetido de la recepción de información anómala con médiums. También permite el análisis estadístico de la evidencia sobre la hipótesis de la sobrevivencia de la conciencia y es pertinente a la relación entre la conciencia y el cerebro. Idealmente la investigación de la mediumnidad en el laboratorio incluye dos factores importantes: (a) un ambiente de investigación que optimiza el proceso de la mediumnidad tanto para el médium como para el agente desencarnado hipotético; y (b) métodos de investigación que maximizan las condiciones ciegas del médium, el evaluador, y el experimentador para eliminar todas las explicaciones convencionales de la información, su exactitud, y especificidad. El Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential utiliza varios métodos que se basan en investigaciones históricas y modernas de médiums para poder lograr estas dos metas de la investigación. Los métodos de investigación discutidos incluyen: protocolos detallados, el emparejamiento de los registros, condiciones experimentales a ciegas, la separación minuciosa de todos los participantes en el experimento, y un sistema de puntuaciones específico usado por los evaluadores.

*German*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: So wie es mit jedem natürlich vorkommenden Phänomen der Fall ist, lässt sich die anomale Informationsaufnahme bei Medien kontrollieren und wiederholt überprüfen, wenn man die Medialität unter festgelegten Laboratoriumsbedingungen untersucht. Dadurch wird es auch möglich, das für die Annahme eines Fortlebens des Bewusstseins in Anspruch genommene Beweismaterial statistisch auszuwerten und den Zusammenhang zwischen Bewusstsein und Gehirn zu behandeln. Idealerweise berücksichtigt eine auf Laboratoriumsbedingungen beruhende Untersuchung von Medialität zwei gleichermaßen wichtige Faktoren: (a) eine Forschungsumgebung, die den medialen Prozess sowohl für das Medium wie für die hypothetische leibfreie Entität optimiert, und (b) Forschungsmethoden, mit deren Hilfe sich Medium, Beurteiler und Versuchsleiter maximal verblinden lassen, um jegliche konventionelle Erklärungen für die Informationsaufnahme, was ihre Genauigkeit und Spezifität betrifft, auszuschliessen. Um diesen beiden Forschungszielen gerecht zu werden, werden am Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential, verschiedene Methoden verwendet, die sowohl auf historischen wie auch modernen Untersuchungen zur Medialität beruhen. Die hier diskutierten Forschungsmethoden umfassen: eine detaillierte Auswertung von Protokollen nach Forschungsgesichtspunkten, der paarweise Vergleich und das Formatieren medialer Aufzeichnungen, das experimentelle Verblinden, die gründliche Abschirmung aller Versuchsteilnehmer und ein speziell entwickeltes Auswertungssystem seitens der Beurteiler.

*French*

RESUME: Tout comme l'étude de n'importe quel phénomène naturel, l'étude de la médiumnité dans l'environnement du laboratoire permet l'examen contrôlé et

répété de la réception anormale d'informations par des médiums. Cela apporte également des données analysables statistiquement concernant l'hypothèse de la survie de la conscience et la nature de la relation entre la conscience et le cerveau. Idéalement, la recherche sur la médiumnité en laboratoire inclue deux facteurs d'égale importance: (a) un environnement de recherche qui optimise les processus médiumniques à la fois pour le médium et pour l'hypothétique entité désincarnée et (b) des méthodes de recherche qui améliorent le contrôle de l'expérience pour le médium, le juge et l'expérimentateur, afin d'exclure des explications conventionnelles concernant l'acquisition de l'information, son exactitude et sa spécificité. Le Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential utilise plusieurs méthodes conçues à partir d'études historiques et modernes de la médiumnité afin d'améliorer ces deux facteurs essentiels pour la recherche. Les méthodes discutées incluent: des protocoles de recherches détaillés; l'association et la mise en forme des descriptions des médiums; l'utilisation du double et du triple aveugle; la sélection minutieuse de tous les participants et un système de jugement spécifique.