

Book of Abstracts
44th International Annual Conference of the
Society for Psychical Research

On-line via Zoom - 18th and 19th September 2021

Programme Committee: Bernard Carr, Alan Gauld, Alan Murdie, Nemo Mörck, Adrian Parker (Programme Chair), Chris Roe

Programme

Saturday 18th September 2021

<i>Opening remarks:</i> <i>Chair of the Programme Committee</i>	Prof. Adrian Parker
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<i>Parapsychology and Transpersonal Psychology in Clinical Practice</i>	Christian Grönvall
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Panel discussion	Prof. Adrian Parker, Dr Jim Tucker, Prof. Bruce Greyson, Prof. Bernard Carr

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<i>Becoming a Spiritualist Medium: Process and Phenomenology</i>	Fil Kinnersley
<i>Pathways to Mediumship Experiences</i>	Ewen MacLean
<i>The Role of Cognitive Executive in Individuals with Mediumistic Abilities</i>	Chris Connelly & Dr David Vernon

Psychic Personality

"I can feel a presence". Extraordinary experiences and meaning-making

Sender-Receiver Relationship in the Ganzfeld

Towards an Optimal Psychic Nutrition

*Mystical Experiences During Meditation, Psilocybin and NDEs:
Are There Recognizable Neural Correlates?*

What I have learned about psi and what continues to fascinate me

Panel discussion

Prof. Christine
Simmonds-Moore

Sara Duppils

Abby Pooley

Michael Daw, Prof.
Chris Roe & Dr Callum
Cooper

Dr Marjorie Woollacott

Dr Stanley Krippner

Prof. Adrian Parker, Dr
Marjorie Woollacott, Dr
Stanley Krippner, Dr
David Luke

Abstracts of Presented Papers

Parapsychology and Public perceptions of Post-materialist Science: A case study in YouTube commentary.
Claire Murphy-Morgan, Northumbria University

For all of its scientific and methodological rigour, parapsychology is still all too often presented as a 'deviant' science in cyberspace and on social media. This presentation will focus on a qualitative study exploring public perspectives of research into anomalous phenomena through utilising Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyse the comment thread for two comparative films posted on YouTube by two leading academics with opposing views on the subject of anomalous phenomena. The study has analysed how commentary and conversation formulated on YouTube as an online platform. Three central themes have emerged from this case study: (i) Confirmation Bias; (ii) Laws of Nature, and (iii) Trashing the Holy Altars. The study has revealed a polarised discussion between commentators whose beliefs upheld a currently accepted 'materialist' scientific paradigms and those with 'post-materialist' viewpoints who argue for the potential existence of various anomalous phenomena. This presentation will explore the thematic analysis findings in more depth, and will consider some wider challenges and implications for how parapsychology is presented in cyberspace.

Parapsychology and Transpersonal Psychology in Clinical Practice
Christian Grönvall, University of Gothenburg

This presentation aims to illuminate certain links between the fields of Parapsychology and Transpersonal psychology as both are related to the study of the higher potential human beings. It also presents a study that was done at in clinical psychology Gothenburg University, Sweden, with the purpose to gaining a greater understanding of how people with mental illness experience taking part in what we called therapeutic methods with spiritual contexts in relation to conventional care. There has recently been an increase of popularity in such alternative ways of working therapeutically yet very little research has been done on investigating people's experiences of these. Eight openly structured interviews were conducted with a descriptive phenomenological approach and were analysed with an inductive thematic analysis to explore this. Participants described experiences of these methods as psychological healing but also as challenging. Some were also mentioning telepathic experiences as significant for therapeutic results. They also described periods of existential crisis, experiences of contact with a larger reality, experiences of being limited as well as supported by conventional care as well as experiences of exclusion in relation to society. The results indicate a greater need for knowledge for the significance that non-ordinary states of consciousness might have for curing mental illness, as well as for existential crises in relation to these. The limitations in psychiatric care and a need for understanding in clinical contexts for these types of experiences as well as for the care recipients who report these were also discussed, as well as ethical considerations for practitioners and participants involved in such methods.

A Brief Account of Some Historical Cases Investigated by the SPR - or Why We Need the Ghosthunters
Ann Winsper, Society for Psychical Research

Since its founding in 1882 members of the SPR have spent considerable time and effort investigating causes of the paranormal, despite the reluctance of mainstream academia to accept the research as valid. Most academic departments that have any interest concentrate in the psychology of anomalous phenomena, rather than on paranormal events themselves. There has been a reluctance over the years to investigate spontaneous cases, with most being undertaken by members who have been slightly on the fringe, possibly due to ghosthunting being seen as a fringe endeavour rather than the more academic pursuits of testing telekinesis, telepathy, mediums etc. The members who had experience in the field of

ghosthunting and undertook investigations, such as Playfair, Grosse and Cornell have produced a solid base of techniques that have been built on to produce current guidelines for investigating, for example the techniques used to investigate the Enfield poltergeist. "Ghost Hunting" requires a skill set all of its own, it is not something that someone can do just because they have an interest, or because they have an academic qualification. The SPR is renowned throughout the world for its research, we need to ensure that this extends to investigating hauntings and poltergeists as well, and this requires the input of experienced investigators and not just people who think an interest in a case is enough to provide them with the tools to investigate it.

Philosophical Aspects of the OBE Arising from that of Plotinus Jakob Henningson, University of Gothenburg

The project compares the experience of the Greek philosopher Plotinus to those documented in our data base of contemporary accounts and research. Plotinus recounts a mystical experience of waking up outside of his body in *Enneads IV.8.1*. The apparent OBE then forms an important place in his philosophy since he uses this to initiate a discussion of the descent of the soul into the human body, i.e. why there are embodied human beings at all, as our souls actually belong to a higher metaphysical type or hypostasis.

The SPR's Equipment Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases Steve Parsons, Society for Psychical Research

The presentation will provide a launch platform for the new Equipment Guidance Notes for Spontaneous Case Investigators publication. The SPR has a long-standing interest in spontaneous anomalous experiences and phenomena and that it continues to provide a significant resource for those who investigate and study them. Our plans will re-vitalise the consideration of spontaneous cases in the society and that the society can reclaim its place as the pre-eminent organisation to investigate and comment upon such phenomena.

Becoming a Spiritualist Medium: Process and Phenomenology Fil Kinnersley, Northampton University

Despite having ongoing anomalous experiences, Spiritualist Mediums have been shown to score above average on measures of mental health and wellbeing (Roxburgh, 2010). While various factors may account for this (Roxburgh and Roe, 2014), there are no studies that focus specifically on the development processes and experiences of Spiritualist mediums.

This research aims to further our understanding of these experiences, using a combination of quantitative measures and qualitative research, in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted over a period of time during the development process. I will report here on the first phase of the research: an ethnographic study, in which I join a Spiritualist mediumship development circle in order to gain insider understanding of the processes experienced by developing Spiritualist mediums, with the aim of facilitating the interview element of the research.

Pathways to Mediumship Experiences: Clients' participation with mediumship in contemporary Britain Ewen Maclean, University of Northampton

Within parapsychological and other social scientific investigation of mediumship, there is little research on the mediumistic interaction from the perspective of the client. Commonly, this research makes assumptions about the needs and expectations of the client. This research constitutes an extended

replication of Roe's (1998) survey of the experiences of clients with mediums and psychics. To facilitate this, in phase one of the research a commissioned representative survey of the UK population was conducted through YouGov, to provide a greater understanding of how clients use and experience mediums with the UK, to better map clients' expectations and if their needs are met. Building upon the findings from this survey, further qualitative field work using interviews and ethnography will be used in phase 2 and 3 of the PhD research project to provide a more holistic understanding of the contemporary clients' experiences within the UK.

The Role of Cognitive Executive Functions in Individuals with Mediumistic Abilities. Results from a Thematic Study

Chris Connelly & David Vernon, Canterbury Christ Church University

The claims of Spiritualist mediums to ostensibly communicate with the deceased have been a topic of research and debate for over 128 years, notably leading to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882 and followed by the formation of other leading parapsychological societies (e.g. Parapsychological Association and Society for Scientific Exploration) around the world to examine and explore this issue (Alvarado, 2002; Irwin, 2014). Historically, most investigations with Spiritualist mediums have been proof-focused (Rock & Beischel, 2008) exploring whether the claims of discarnate survival by mediums is tenable. With a growing body of evidence suggesting that the accuracy of the information received by mediums from an alleged discarnate personality is often considered highly relevant by the intended recipient of the communication (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007; Roy & Robertson, 2001; Sarraf et al., 2020; Schwartz, Geoffrion, Jain, Lewis, & Russek, 2003). A second approach is that of process-focused research (Rock & Beischel, 2008) which is an area gaining more attention and involves the researcher shifting the emphasis away from the direct evidential approach of 'can' discarnate information be obtained to ask 'how' this information is obtained and what cognitive processes are involved?

With this in mind a study was conducted to explore what, if any, cognitive executive functions mediums report using during the demonstration of alleged communication with a discarnate personality. Executive functions is a term used to encompass a set of higher-order cognitive processes considered necessary for the normal day to day functioning of individuals in their pursuit to achieve a desired goal (Cristofori et al., 2019) and are essential for healthy cognitive, social and psychological development (Lunt et al., 2012). Arguably, these higher-order functions may also be necessary for the task of 'mediumship' that necessitates a focused awareness by the medium of their internal sensory stimuli, ostensibly from a discarnate personality, while simultaneously inhibiting potentially distracting internal thoughts and external information (Stanford, 1993). This idea is supported by Braud (1975) who suggested the need for participants in studies exploring psi-conducive states to have significant executive functioning ability to intentionally reduce sensory noise processing while increasing awareness of their internal processes and feelings. However, at present there are no known studies that have specifically explored this area.

Understanding which components of executive functions may be important in mediumistic communication will help to shed light on the specific cognitive processes involved and in turn will lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, such information may be used to explore whether mediums exhibit distinct differences in such executive functions compared to non-mediums and then whether training to enhance such executive functions could improve and enhance the communicative bridge between the medium and the discarnate personality.

Methods: Seventeen internationally recognised mediums from across the UK, US, Australia, and Germany, each holding accreditation from Spiritualists' organisations such as the Spiritualists' National Union and the National Spiritualist Association of Churches were approached and agreed to participate in the study. In the first stage each medium was provided with information regarding the aims and objectives of the study and asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, before providing informed consent. At the

second stage each medium was invited to participate in a semi-structured interview which was recorded. During the interview the medium was given an opportunity to explain the mental processes they used to obtain a connection with a discarnate personality and their procedure for maintaining that connection so as to obtain evidential communication for a recipient. The audio from each interview was transcribed and imported into NVIVO software, where the content of the interview text was compared between mediums. Using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) relevant sections of the text was coded to allow themes to be generated and analysed relating to the possible role executive functions may play in the demonstration of mediumistic communication.

Results: Data is currently being analysed and results will be presented at conference.

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Interim Report of the Sender-Receiver Relationship in the Ganzfeld Abby L. Pooley, Koestler Parapsychology Unit, University of Edinburgh

There have been numerous claims of replicable evidence of psi in the ganzfeld, especially with selected participants (Storm, Tressoldi & Di Risio, 2010; Storm & Tressoldi, 2020) and that 'standard' protocols have the greatest impact on a ganzfeld study (Storm, Tressoldi & Di Risio, 2010; Baptista, Derakhshani & Tressoldi, 2014). Selected participants are often identified as those who've had a previous psi experience, belief in psi/paranormal, artistic/creative, participated in psi research, and practice of a mental discipline (e.g. meditation, yoga; Baptista, Derakhshani & Tressoldi, 2014; Storm, Tressoldi & Di Risio, 2014). To assess which 'standard' protocols may have the greatest impact on a telepathy ganzfeld study, the author has analysed telepathy ganzfeld studies from 1985 (post *Joint Communiqué* to the present day) to see which are the most useful to implement when performing a telepathy ganzfeld. This date range was decided due to Honorton and Hyman's (1985) detailed list of recommendations for future ganzfeld studies in the *Joint Communiqué*, which suggested studies before this were too lax in their methodologies. However, the definition of what is a 'standard ganzfeld' procedure remains unclear and open to debate (Bem, Palmer & Broughton, 2001; Milton, 1999).

Protocols assessed by the author included if a) participants saw the sender's room before the session, b) the sender could hear the receiver, c) the sender heard the receiver during the judging period, d) sender explicitly told to be silent, and e) the experimenter assisted in the judging with the receiver. These factors were analysed to help with planning protocols for future ganzfeld telepathy studies, as there is little systematic information currently available about their impact. Telepathy studies post- *Joint Communiqué*, which used selected participants, followed 'standard' protocols (e.g. used visual stimuli, had the participants judge, participants contributed to one session) were rated by the author (1 = factor present, 0 = not present).

The analysis, rationale, process and study selection procedure will be detailed, along with the reporting of findings and assessment of the result implications. Finally, a critique of previous literature defining the 'standard' ganzfeld protocol will feature in the presentation.

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Towards an Optimal Psychic Nutrition: How is fasting and vegetarianism perceived to support psi among adepts?

Michael Daw, Chris Roe & Callum Cooper, University of Northampton

Many spiritual traditions include accounts of supernormal psi-like powers that are sometimes associated with fasting and vegetarianism. For example, shamans may use fasting to support apparent abilities such as controlling the weather, and many yogis who are strict vegetarians are said to exhibit powers such as psychokinesis and telepathy. In more modern times, a number of authors such as Hereward Carrington and Rudolf Steiner have related fasting and vegetarianism to both spiritual and psychic development. However, there has so far been little empirical research into this potential relationship. My presentation will present a thematic analysis of interviews with seven 'psi adepts' (those who practise psi in a professional capacity) to examine their understanding of how fasting and vegetarianism affect their sensitivity to psi and how this work might form the basis of an optimal psychic nutrition.