

ANOMALOUS INFORMATION RECEPTION BY RESEARCH MEDIUMS DEMONSTRATED USING A NOVEL TRIPLE-BLIND PROTOCOL

Julie Beischel, PhD,^{1#} and Gary E. Schwartz, PhD¹

Context: Investigating the information reported by mediums is ultimately important in determining the relationship between brain and consciousness in addition to being of deep concern to the public.

Objective: This triple-blind study was designed to examine the anomalous reception of information about deceased individuals by research mediums under experimental conditions that eliminate conventional explanations.

Participants: Eight University of Arizona students served as sitters: four had experienced the death of a parent; four, a peer. Eight mediums who had previously demonstrated an ability to report accurate information in a laboratory setting performed the readings.

Methodology: To optimize potential identifiable differences between readings, each deceased parent was paired with a same-gender deceased peer. Sitters were not present at the readings; an experimenter blind to information about the sitters and deceased served as a proxy sitter. The mediums, blind to the sitters' and deceased's identities, each read two absent sitters and their paired deceased; each pair of sitters was read by two mediums.

Each blinded sitter then scored a pair of itemized transcripts (one was the reading intended for him/her; the other, the paired control reading) and chose the reading more applicable to him/her.

Results: The findings included significantly higher ratings for intended versus control readings ($p = 0.007$, effect size = 0.5) and significant reading-choice results ($p = 0.01$).

Conclusions: The results suggest that certain mediums can anomalously receive accurate information about deceased individuals. The study design effectively eliminates conventional mechanisms as well as telepathy as explanations for the information reception, but the results cannot distinguish among alternative paranormal hypotheses, such as survival of consciousness (the continued existence, separate from the body, of an individual's consciousness or personality after physical death) and super-psi (or super-ESP; retrieval of information via a psychic channel or quantum field).

Key words: anomalous information reception, survival of consciousness, mediumship, mind-brain relationship
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INTRODUCTION

Public interest in parapsychological phenomena, clearly evident in popular culture, is at an all-time high. For the first time in television history, multiple parapsychology-based network series including *Medium* (NBC), *Ghost Whisperer* (CBS), and *Supernatural* (WB) as well as several cable series including *Psychic Detectives* (Court TV) and *Ghost Hunters* (SciFi), all appeared simultaneously in a single (2005) season. Books by highly visible mediums such as John Edward, James Van Praagh, and Sylvia Browne have regularly appeared on the *New York Times* Best Seller List. Popular TV personalities including Larry King and Oprah Winfrey have featured mediums and psychics on their shows. Hit movies like *The Sixth Sense* and *White Noise* further speak to the public's fascination with these paranormal subjects.

For the most part, however, parapsychological investigations, including studies of extra-sensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis (PK), and the survival of consciousness/mediumship, have not historically been part of mainstream science. This is especially true of mediumship research. In the past, reports of experimental research on this topic were almost exclusively restricted to specialty journals such as the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* and the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, or to non-fiction books intended for the general reader. Consequently, the findings are essentially unknown to the majority of mainstream scientists. Moreover, given the controversial nature of mediumship and the survival of consciousness hypothesis as well as the unexplored biases of most traditional scientists regarding concepts that do not adhere to conventional theories, it is understandable why such studies are rarely reported in conventional journals.

This report illustrates how rigorous and credible research can be conducted in the laboratory on a topic that (a) addresses a core subject in consciousness science, that is, the relationship between brain and consciousness (i.e., consciousness as a product of the brain as theorized by contemporary neuroscience vs. the brain as an antenna-receiver for consciousness as hypothesized by William James), and (b) is of deep concern to the public (i.e., the possibility of the continuity of consciousness after physical death). We carefully employ the phrase "anomalous information reception" in a

¹ Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health, Department of Psychology, The University of Arizona

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Corresponding author. Address:

Department of Psychology, PO Box 210068, Tucson, AZ 85721-0068; e-mail: beischel@email.arizona.edu

descriptive (i.e., cognitive behavioral) sense here to describe conservatively what research mediums do empirically during experiments.

Comprehensive reviews of mediumship research methods and findings over the past 100 years are available.^{1,2,3} In sum, contemporary findings generally replicate and extend the early observations of William James and others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,³ indicating that certain individuals (termed mediums) can report accurate and specific information about the deceased loved ones of living people (termed sitters) even without any prior knowledge about the sitters or the deceased 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 used by psychic entertainers in which visual and auditory cues from the sitter are used to fabricate “accurate” readings) on the part of the mediums or rater bias on the part of the sitters.¹

The primary purpose of this study was to acquire novel evidence concerning the possibility that accurate information about a sitter’s deceased loved ones could be reliably obtained from research mediums under highly controlled experimental conditions that effectively eliminated conventional (classical) explanations. The triple-blind design reflects significant methodological and conceptual innovations beyond previous single-blind^{4,5,6} and double-blind^{7,8,9,10} mediumship experiments (reviewed^{11,12}). Specifically, (a) the use of a blind proxy sitter condition eliminates telepathy (i.e., mind reading of the sitter) as a plausible explanation for the findings, (b) pairing two readings for scoring optimizes rater blinding as well as the ability of raters to recognize identifying descriptions in each transcript, (c) asking specific questions about the deceased during the readings provides similar types of information in each reading for a more objective rating procedure, and (d) the use of a global rating scale provides new evidence supporting the reality of certain mediums’ abilities.

The triple-blind design employed blinding at three levels: (a) the research mediums were blind to the identities of the sitters and their deceased, (b) the experimenter/proxy sitter interacting with the mediums was blind to the identities of the sitters and their deceased, and (c) the sitters rating the transcripts were blind to the origin of the readings (intended for the sitter vs. a matched control) during scoring. This triple-blind scenario addresses the research question: Can research mediums obtain and report accurate and specific information about targeted deceased individuals (discarnates) when both the mediums and the experimenter/proxy sitter are blind to information about the sitter and discarnate during the reading and the raters are blind to the origin of the transcripts during scoring?

METHODS

Participants

Eight adult mental (vs. trance) mediums (one male, seven females) who had in the past demonstrated an ability to report accurate information under “normal” mediumistic conditions (i.e., with sitter feedback) were chosen for the study. Undergraduate students at the University of Arizona acted as volunteer sitters. Each sitter was chosen, in order to optimize testing con-

ditions, from a pool of approximately 1,600 students based on answers of “yes” or “unsure” to survey questions about his/her beliefs about “an afterlife” and mediums, as well as his/her interest in participating in mediumship research. Each sitter participant also rated his/her relationship with a specific discarnate as “very close.” The final selection of eight undergraduate students (three males, five females) for inclusion in the study was based on these criteria as well as the pairing of discarnates described below.

Triple-Blind Procedure

Information about each discarnate and his/her relationship with the associated sitter was collected from the sitter participants by a research assistant who did not interact with the mediums. Discarnate descriptions were then paired to optimize differences in age, physical description, personality description, cause of death, and hobbies/activities of the discarnate. Four deceased parents were paired with four deceased peers of the same gender for a total of four pairs of sitters. It is important to note that this procedure (a) maintained rater blindness by pairing discarnates of the same gender, while (b) optimizing the ability of blinded raters to differentiate between two gender-matched readings during scoring.

Research Readings

Each of the eight mediums performed two readings: one for each sitter in a pair. Each of the four pairs of sitters was read by two different mediums for a total of eight pairs of readings. The mediums were given no information about the sitter or his/her relationship to the discarnate. However, to increase the capacity of the medium to receive accurate information about a targeted discarnate, the first name of the discarnate was given to the medium at the start of the reading.

For each reading, an experimenter blinded to the identity of the sitters and to any information about the discarnates beyond their first names acted as a proxy sitter for the students. 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 (c) blinding the absent sitter to the reading until scoring. In this study, the proxy sitter also asked questions of the mediums during those sections of the reading protocol (see below). The absent student sitters did not hear the readings and were not aware of the origin of any reading during scoring.

To optimize testing conditions, the mediums performed the study readings over the phone at scheduled times in their homes. The digitally audio-recorded phone readings took place long-distance; the medium was in a different city (if not state) than both the blinded absent sitter and the experimenter acting as the proxy sitter.

Each reading included three parts: a) Deceased-Directed, in which the experimenter gave the medium the first name of the discarnate and asked the medium to receive and report any information from the discarnate; b) a Life Questions procedure, in which the medium was asked four specific questions about the named discarnate’s physical appearance, personality, hobbies, and cause of death; and c) a Reverse Question condition, in

which the experimenter asked, “Does the discarnate have any comments, questions, or requests for the sitter?”

Scoring

Each reading was transcribed and a corresponding numbered list of individual items (i.e., separate, stand-alone pieces of information) was created by an experimenter blind to details about the sitters or discarnates. Each sitter in a pair acted as a matched control for the other sitter in the pair: each sitter scored the reading intended for him/her as well as the reading of the control sitter while remaining blinded to the origin of the readings. In each pair, one sitter was given his/her intended reading to score first, and one was given the control reading to score first. Sitters were trained in the scoring procedure and scored the lists of items for accuracy [Obvious Fit; Fit with mild, moderate, or a stretch in Interpretation; No Fit; Other Fit (“This item does not fit the named discarnate or myself, but does fit someone else I am/was close to.”); or “I don’t know”] and emotional significance (No significance or Mild, Moderate, or Extreme significance) using the Arizona Mediumship Process Scoring System (AMPSS) rating system. Raters who chose “Fit with Interpretation” or “Other Fit” were asked to write in an explanation. Sitters also gave each list of items a summary/global numerical score (0-6) using the Arizona Whole Reading Rating System (AWRRS; based on remote viewing scoring scales¹³):

- 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 was complete for both readings in a pair, the sitters were asked to “Pick the reading which seems to be more applicable to you. Even if they both seem equally applicable or non-applicable, pick one.” They were 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

It was expected that a forced-choice binary rating would be a less sensitive indicator than the matched-pair summary rating scores.

A schematic diagram illustrating the experimental design can be seen in Figure 1.

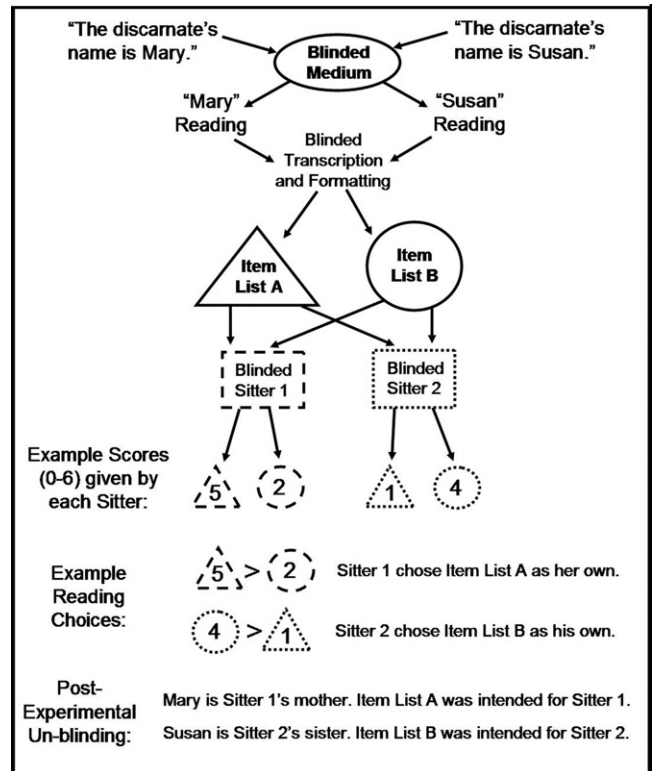


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of experimental methodology and example results.

RESULTS

The scope of this report will only include a discussion of the whole reading scoring; item-by-item scoring analyses will be included in a future manuscript. Figure 2 displays the average summary rating scores comparing the sitters' intended readings with matched controls. The average summary rating (0-6) for the intended readings (mean = 3.56, SEM = 0.44) was significantly higher ($t = 3.105$, $df = 15$, $p = 0.007$, effect size = 0.5, $p_{rep} = 0.96$) than for the control readings (mean = 1.94, SEM = 0.32).

Figure 3 displays the average summary rating scores for intended versus control readings performed by each of the eight mediums. The data points are arranged by decreasing differences between intended and control scores. Six of the eight mediums produced positive results in the predicted direction (intended ratings higher than control ratings); the remaining two mediums were given intended scores equal to the control scores. It is noteworthy that three mediums produced dramatic findings in terms of the meaning of summary scores of 5.0 and 5.5 (see Methods section); two mediums produced moderate findings (summary scores of 3.5); and none of the mediums produced reversals (i.e., control ratings higher than intended ratings).

When asked to choose which reading was more applicable to them, sitters chose the readings intended for them 81% of the time (13/16, $p = 0.01$, one-tailed exact binomial). Of those 13, seven were rated “clearly more applicable” and three as “moderately more applicable”; one sitter each chose the other three options (see Methods). Of the three sitters that chose the control reading, one chose “clearly more applicable,” one chose “mod-

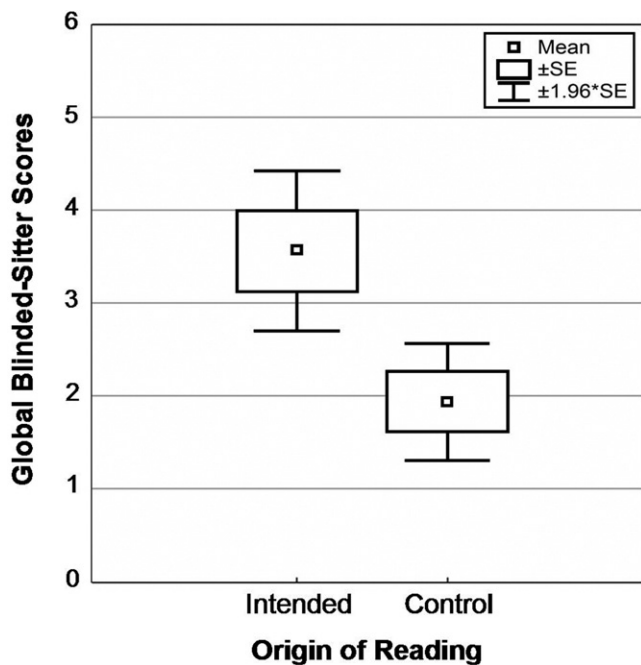


Figure 2. Summary rating scores (0-6) given by blinded sitters to mediumship readings that were intended for them (“intended”) and those intended for a matched control sitter (“control”). $t = 3.105$, $df = 15$, $p = 0.007$, effect size = 0.5, $p_{rep} = 0.96$

erately more applicable,” and one chose “neither seemed applicable.”

DISCUSSION

The significant summary score and reading choice findings as well as the medium effect size (the magnitude of the effect independent of sample size) and high p_{rep} value (the probability of replicating the effect) obtained in the present study indicate that under stringent triple-blind conditions, utilizing a novel summary/global rating scale used by blind raters, evidence for anomalous information reception can be obtained. The triple-blind design successfully eliminates all known potential sources of conventional sensory cues and conventional rater bias: (a) the mediums were not provided with any sensory cues from the absent sitters and were blind to information about the sitters or the discarnates (beyond the discarnate’s first name), (b) the experimenter could not provide cueing as she was blind to the identity of the sitters and the discarnates, and (c) the sitters were blind to which reading of the pair was intended for them during scoring insuring that their biases would equally influence the ratings of both readings. The experimental design also eliminates the possibility of fraud to the same extent as any study involving human subjects: (a) the mediums and sitters never interacted in any way, (b) the mediums were never in the laboratory, (c) the sitters were in the laboratory under supervision and only during scoring, (d) the experimenter who trained the sitters just prior to scoring was blind to the origin of the readings.

Though these findings point to some sort of anomalous (parapsychological) information reception mechanism(s) operating

during these readings, the core observations are not inherently unique; the present findings extend recent double-blind mediumship experiments that employ methods sensitive to the mediumship process.^{9,10} One double-blind mediumship experiment that failed to obtain significant results⁷ used (a) mediums who had not been previously tested to determine if they were able to perform accurately under normal mediumship or single-blind conditions, (b) sitters who were not selected to be highly motivated to receive information purportedly from their deceased loved ones and thus score the readings accurately, (c) a scoring system that did not foster detailed item-by-item analysis of the readings, followed by meaningful summary scoring, and (4) experimental conditions that did not optimize the mediums’ potential to receive information (the mediums performed five readings in 5.5 hours).

The present findings provide evidence for anomalous information reception but do not directly address what parapsychological mechanisms are involved in that reception. In and of themselves, the data cannot distinguish among hypotheses such as (a) survival of consciousness (the continued existence, separate from the body, of an individual’s consciousness or personality after physical death) and (b) mind reading (ESP or telepathy¹⁴) or super-psi¹ (retrieval of information via a generalized psychic information channel or physical quantum field, also called super-ESP). However, certain considerations are worth noting. The design of the present study essentially eliminates mind reading of the experimenter/proxy sitter by the medium as a plausible explanation due to the blinding of the proxy sitter to information about the sitter or deceased. Furthermore, in order to support the super-psi hypothesis, the information retrieval process as experienced by the medium would have to include the medium ignoring the mind of the experimenter, somehow “locating” the unidentified sitters and other associated friends and

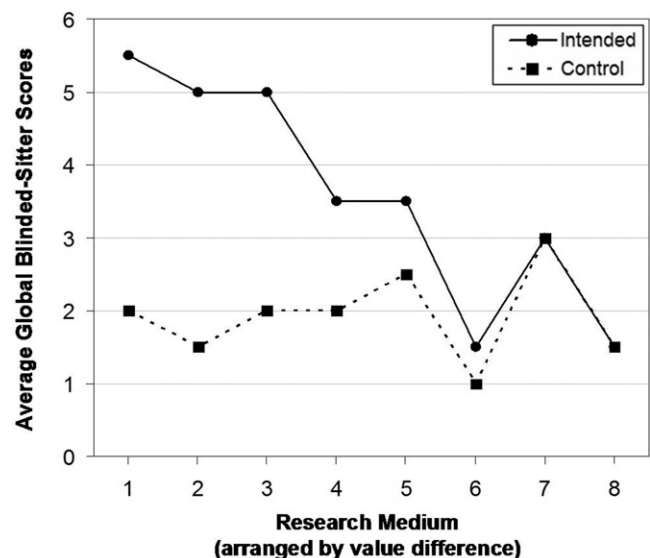


Figure 3. Average summary rating scores (0-6) given by blinded sitters to mediumship readings that were intended for them (“intended”) and those intended for a matched control sitter (“control”) for each of eight mediums.

family members where they were at the time of the reading, and reading their minds or “locating” physical objects containing relevant information (e.g., documents or photographs) and “reading” those data. Furthermore, the super-psi hypothesis attempts to explain one unknown variable (mediumship information) using another (telepathy) making it a scientifically unfalsifiable “hypothesis” (reviewed¹⁵).

Future research can potentially examine telepathy, super-psi, and survival of consciousness hypotheses – all three have seminal (if not paradigm-challenging) implications for contemporary theories of mind^{1,2} as well as models of mind-brain relationships (e.g., is consciousness mediated or modulated by the brain?), and, therefore, are important for the evolution of consciousness science. Furthermore, if future research continues to support the survival of consciousness hypothesis, the findings will be valuable in understanding the possible mechanisms involved in energy and spiritual healing as well as in medical intuition.

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