

Analysis of Spiritualist Mediums Experiences during their Attunement Process

CHRIS CONNELLY

Abstract

Using thematic analysis techniques two themes were identified from the 'attunement' experiences reported from thirty-eight UK Spiritualist mediums. Analysis revealed unique and shared somatic and imagery experiences between mediums and a common schema consisting of three distinct phases to the attunement routines performed by each medium considered necessary to facilitate appropriate communication with alleged deceased entities.

Introduction

The claims of mediums to allegedly communicate with the deceased have been a topic of research and debate for over 133 years, notably commencing with the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Investigation and research until now, has been focussed upon the accuracy of the information received (O'Keefe & Wiseman, 2005; Robertson & Roy, 2001; Schwartz, 2001) or the experience of the medium gaining the information relating to the deceased (Rock, Beischel & Schwartz, 2008). As yet no qualitative study has been done investigating the process and experience of the medium in preparation to obtaining information from an alleged discarnate entity, a process referred to by mediums as 'attunement'.

The 'attunement' process may be seen being performed by mediums within Spiritualist churches that use a short period of time before the demonstration to sit quietly and mentally converse with those regarded to be discarnate spirits. This preparation or attunement can also be observed frequently in development circles and groups that function as the training schools for individuals looking to develop their untapped mediumistic ability for the purpose of conversing with discarnate entities.

The prevalence and reliance of such experiences led the research to investigate three main themes:

- (i) What do mediums experience during this attunement?
- (ii) Are there specific stages or routine to the attunement?
- (iii) Are there any consequences of not performing the attunement?

Method

Two focus groups containing in total 38 Spiritualist mediums (6 males, 32 females) were given an exercise to perform their 'attunement' routine and record the process they followed along with any sensory experiences they felt using the supplied notebook and pen. The first group event was held over 20th to 22nd Feb 2015 at the Arthur Findlay Centre based in Stafford UK and consisted of eighteen Spiritualist mediums. The second group was hosted at a Spiritualists' National Union affiliated church in Eltham, South London, UK on the 16th May 2015 and consisted of twenty Spiritualist mediums. All participating mediums

attended so to take part in a series of experimental workshops and lectures being hosted on that day.

To normalise the experience for the participating mediums and so to reduce the introduction of confounding error, the mediums were grouped together in pairs. Once in pairs they were asked to perform their attunement routine, as they would normally do so to facilitate communication from an alleged deceased entity. It was hoped that the medium having a recipient would facilitate a realistic purpose for performing the attunement routine and from which information could be provided to the recipient and the accuracy of the information given, be indicative of a successful attunement routine. Each participant was told they had no time limit imposed to perform their routine. Once the first half of the pair had completed their attunement process and recorded their experience the pair were asked to swap roles and repeat the exercise.

During the exercise it was noted in some instances the participating medium would dictate to the recipient the process and any sensory experiences they were aware of during performing the attunement; whilst the remaining participating mediums would record their experiences directly themselves.

On completion of the exercise each participating medium was asked to share their experience with the rest of the group and each experience was tabulated on a white-board in an ad-hoc order so to not to accidentally infer a particular analysis of the information at this stage.

Analysis

The experiences reported by each medium was tabulated for each group and thematic analysis performed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and resulted in two particular themes being identified.

(1) Somatic and Imagery Experience

Analysis of the data revealed that mediums encounter a wide array of somatic experiences (see Appendix A) and internal imagery (see Appendix B) experiences whilst performing the attunement process. Some of the experiences reported were common with other mediums but the majority were unique to the particular medium sharing that experience. This uniqueness could be due to the mediums own particular expectations, beliefs and previous experience of what the attunement process should entail.

The imagery used consisted of a combination of differing visualisation techniques representing symbolically the need for the medium to increase their cognitive awareness beyond the physical realms and into the spirit realms. Also it was found that these images could be used as confirmation of a successful attunement routine. Whereas the majority of the somatic experiences encountered could be considered to be a symptomatic from the visualisation being performed by the medium. For example one medium reported, "*I imagine my energy expanding and after a short while I get a tingling in both of my hands*". Another said "*when I open all my chakras I hear a buzzing getting louder and louder*".

(2) Three Phases

Exploring the methods used by the medium to attune, a schema consisting of three distinct phases was identified, referred herein as Intention, Action and Confirmation. It was found that each phase consisted of a specific set of behaviours and sensory experiences, and that they ran in sequence.

The Intention phase consisted of the mediums preparation and confirming the intention of the attunement often through the means of an internal dialogue with alleged spirit entities. This dialogue ranged from encouraging the spirit entities to give their co-operation to reciting a mantra to induce a level of clarity and focus, from which the communication could commence (see Appendix C).

Once the mediums were satisfied that the intention phase had been completed the mediums would then use a visualisation technique (see Appendix B) to Action the intention of the attunement and then wait for some somatic or imagery confirmatory encounter (see Appendix A and B) to signify successful completion of the attunement process.

In some cases the mediums noted that during attunement they would occasionally experience mystical feelings of *oneness* and *unity* (see Appendix D). But this was considered a rare occurrence and so this line of investigation was not progressed.

These behaviours can be considered a ritualised behaviour with the attunement schema "*representing a organised flow of action, characterized by stereotypy, rigidity in performance, a feeling of compulsion, and specific themes*" (Lienard & Boyer, 2006). The participant mediums, when questioned, insisting that they would be unable to proceed to the next phase without first completing the current phase i.e. rigidity. Likewise it was also found that some mediums felt that unless Confirmation phase was achieved they would either not be able to provide information to the recipient from the alleged deceased. Or the clarity of the information being presented would be distorted leading to a poor communication.

However none of the participants felt that an unfavourable experience would be bestowed upon them or the compulsion to appease the alleged spirit entities by completing the process. This suggests though the behaviour may be ritualistic the attunement is not performed on the basis of unwavering necessity to appease a higher force as can be seen evident in cases of individuals diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (Williams et al, 2014) and other neurotic disorders. Rather the analysis suggests that Spiritualist mediums develop a unique and distinct schema to solely and freely facilitate alleged communication with the deceased.

Discussion

Through careful analysis of the mediums experience of attunement it has been possible to identify three main themes, each providing an insight into the psychological processes being experienced by medium.

The first theme identified that mediums reported experiencing physical sensations during attunement, and though it wasn't possible to determine whether these sensations were subjective or objective in nature. It is clear that the sensations were sufficiently present for the medium to be aware of them for the sensation to be reported. Also noted is the similarity of the experiences reported by the participating mediums and those typically reported by individuals who have had a 'Mystical Experience' is also evident. With

experiences such as dissociation, oneness and passivity being shared characteristics (Shrader, 2008). This raises the question, are the participating mediums having mystical experiences? If so by what corporeal or non-corporeal mechanism are these experiences being induced? Further research would be required to determine the validity of the mystical experience and the extent at which mediums are able to self-induce a mystical experience.

Secondly the data revealed that all the participating mediums follow a defined set of steps to 'arrive' at the point to where a confirmatory experience would be encountered. This confirmatory point symbolising that alleged communication with the deceased was now possible. The development of this schema is of particular interest and an area for further research. In this study the participating mediums were all UK nationals who developed their mediumship within churches, centre and home circles in the UK. This therefore potentially limits this study to UK based mediums as it is not yet determined if the development of the attunement schemas are culturally dependent? Would mediums from the United States or Brazil with its large Spiritist population develop the same schemas relating to attunement? We can only at this time speculate that perhaps a combination of observation of other mediums and that of past experience has led to the unique schema that affords the medium with a degree of confidence that the attunement process once complete facilitates communication with the world unseen.

References

1. Braude SE (2003) *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life After Death*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.
3. Hood, R. W., Jr. (1975). The construction and preliminary validation of a measure of reported mystical experience. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 14, 29-5.
4. Lienard, P., & Boyer, P. (2006). Whence collective rituals? A cultural selection model of ritualized behavior. *American Anthropologist*, 108(4), 814-827.
5. O'Keeffe, C., & Wiseman, R. (2005). Testing alleged mediumship: Methods and results. *British Journal of Psychology*, 96, 165-179.
6. Robertson, T. J., & Roy, A. E. (2001). A preliminary study of the acceptance by non-recipients of medium's statement to recipients. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 65, 91-106.
7. Robertson T. J, Roy A. E (2004) Results of the application of the Robertson-Roy protocol to a series of experiments with mediums and participants. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 68:18-34.
8. Rock, A. Beischel, J. Schwartz, G (2008) Thematic Analysis of Research Mediums' Experiences of Discarnate Communication. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 22, 179-192
9. Roy A. E, Robertson T. J (2001) A double-blind procedure for assessing the relevance of a medium's statements to a recipient. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 65:161- 174.
10. Schwartz GE, Geoffrion S, Jain S, Lewis S, Russek LG (2003) Evidence of anomalous information retrieval between two mediums: Replication in a

- double-blind design. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 67:115–130.
11. Schwartz G. E, Russek L. G (2001) Evidence of anomalous information retrieval between 2 mediums: Telepathy, network memory resonance and continuance of consciousness. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 65:257–275.
 12. Schwartz G. E, Russek L. G, Barentsen C (2002) Accuracy and replicability of anomalous information retrieval: Replication and extension. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 66:144 –156.
 13. Schwartz G. E, Russek L. G, Nelson L. A, Barentsen C (2001) Accuracy and replicability of anomalous after-death communication across highly skilled mediums. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. 65:1–25.
 14. Shrader, D. (2008). Seven Characteristics of Mystical Experiences. *Proceedings of the 6th Annual Hawaii International Conference on the Arts and Humanities*. Honolulu.
 15. Williams, M. T., Farris, S. G., Turkheimer, E. N., Franklin, M. E., Simpson, H. B., Liebowitz, M., & Foa, E. B. (2014). The Impact of Symptom Dimensions on Outcome for Exposure and Ritual Prevention Therapy in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 28(6), 553–558.

Appendix A – Somatic Experiences Reported

- (i) Feeling of dissociation, moving to the left or right side.
- (ii) Tingling.
- (iii) Head feeling lighter.
- (iv) Increasing heart rate.
- (v) Feeling of a physical presence.
- (vi) Feeling a breeze.
- (vii) Humming sounds being heard.
- (viii) Sensing of energy, buzzing.
- (ix) Physical comfort.
- (x) Shiver.
- (xi) Fuzzy head.
- (xii) Feeling of cobwebs over the face.
- (xiii) Feeling of warmth and heat.
- (xiv) Eyes rolling back, feeling of.
- (xv) Feeling of calmness.
- (xvi) Muscular twitching.
- (xvii) Bodily numbness.

Appendix B – Visualisations Used or Experienced

- (i) Expanding awareness.
- (ii) Grounding.
- (iii) Charging up the core.
- (iv) Sending awareness out to the left.
- (v) Going up/down stairs.
- (vi) Being encompassed in coloured light.
- (vii) Opening/closing of Chakras

- (viii) An encompassing white light.
- (ix) Book opening (confirmatory).
- (x) A symbol appearing (confirmatory).
- (xi) Third-eye opening (confirmatory).

Appendix C – Internal Dialogues

- (i) Mantra, reciting.
- (ii) Encouraging co-operation from their spirit guides.
- (iii) Acknowledging the assistance from their spirit guides.
- (iv) Affirming intention of the attunement.
- (v) Encouraging focus.

Appendix D – Transpersonal Experiences

- (i) Connection with God.
- (ii) Sense of oneness.
- (iii) Feeling of connection.
- (iv) Becoming a passive observer.