

A Feminist Anthropological Study on Women's Mediumship in Florida

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Experience

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed Sarah Porch-Lee (candidate)

Date 6/29/2022

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

Throughout history women have faced (and continue to face) marginalization in religious settings, exhibited through such power plays as control over their bodies (rules for dress and behavior in church and home) and prohibitions from formal leadership positions. It is now the role of feminist scholars to undertake research into religious movements and activities to consider how religious marginalization affects practitioners. Historically, American mediumship (through the religion of Spiritualism) provided an outlet for women to take autonomy of their religious goals and step into leadership positions as mediums. Through an anthropological lens (and in conjunction with the burgeoning field of paranthropology), this research approaches the experience of mediumship through a feminist analysis of the practice of mediumship as it exists today. This study further explores how women's mediumship experience differs from men's mediumship, and explains how location in Florida is beneficial to many mediums. Surveys and interviews were conducted with mediums who are either currently practicing in or had previously practiced in Florida. These methods embrace an empathetic approach which is especially helpful in feminist research, and provide a safe, positive environment for research. This study reveals that mediumship is an activity in which practitioners retain their overall autonomy while practicing. Ultimately, this research concludes that mediums in Florida enjoy good reputations, and while mediumship institutions may skew towards male leadership, women mediums experience a level of spiritual autonomy within their practice that has yet to be discovered in wider religious circles.

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Introduction

Mediumship, Spiritualism, and women's religious experience are closely intertwined topics in the United States. As discussed throughout this thesis, Spiritualism has been a breath of fresh air for religious women. "Presenting a distinctive theology and religious practice, Spiritualism takes its place along side [sic] Mormonism and Christian Science and other American additions to the world's religions" (Braude, 2000, p. xi). Its contributions to women's religious experiences are described throughout this study. In Spiritualism, women's historical experience stood in opposition to the patriarchal notions of the Victorian culture in which it was formed. This was possible because women were not only equal participants in Spiritualist mediumship circles, but were often the focus or leaders of the circles. The Spiritualist "rebellion" against religious patriarchal control continues into the present day and provides a foundational research interest in this thesis. The main religious ideology where this study occurs is westernized Christianity (as practiced in white American subcultures). In this context, religious leadership has been (and continues to be) dominated by men; therefore, Spiritualism's divergent religious ideology is a valuable subject for feminist religious study due to its opportunities for women.

Several factors were instrumental in my decision to study religious experience with a focus on women in mediumship and situated me within my research topic. Upon completion of my undergraduate work in Cultural Anthropology, I wanted to continue my academic studies in post-graduate research. The most instrumental reason I chose this subject area was finding *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal* (2010 - 2017). This journal shows how academic approaches and discussions can center around an important and unique aspect of human life; an aspect that has been marginalized by society and academia. *Paranthropology* utilized the anthropological framework to cover anomalous experience and ideas. I was intrigued because I spent quite a bit of time focusing on religion in my undergraduate work. Anomalous and paranormal experience is often connected to religion, so it felt natural to progress into the study of paranthropology.

Personally, I had the desire to tackle religious and anomalous experience. Having been raised in a fundamentalist religion (Independent Fundamental Baptist), I experienced the stigma and frustration that comes from being a woman in that world. Women's behavior and dress are policed by others, and women are subject to sexist teachings about their roles within their homes and churches. Specifically, women are prohibited from formal spiritual leadership positions. There is an appalling lack of equality that is still common in conservative American churches. While I no longer participate in churches of inequality, I wish to research religious groups that have acted in more equitable ways towards women and their experiences. Having been on the receiving end of religious marginalization and male power plays, I am also now inspired to look at religious experience through a feminist approach and to look at religious spaces that offer equality to women (and their work).

This feminist religious approach is covered throughout the thesis and is discussed by focusing on women's experience through the subject matter, surveys, and interview questions. Because real feminism labors towards equality for all, men's experiences were also welcomed in the study (non-binary experience was welcomed, but participants did not provide this type of data). The men who participated provided valuable comparative information (especially by describing perceptions of their religious circle which are covered in Chapter 4: Results). It is also important to point out the necessity of intersectionality when discussing women's lives, especially when attempting a feminist analysis. As discussed below, intersectionality addresses many aspects of women's lives including race and ethnicity. I am a white woman undertaking this research; my questions and conclusions are influenced by my identity. The intersectional identities of my participants reveal data associated to their own lived experiences.

The somewhat more recent feminist approach of embodiment was also considered during the research. Throughout history, the bodies of women have been a focus of external control, especially in relation to religious experience (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 92). Drawing attention to the experience of women's bodies in the religious setting is relevant to feminist research and

needs further exploration in academia. In this study, my own embodied experience as a researcher and my participants' embodied experiences as mediums are analyzed in Chapter 2: Methodology.

My interest in paranthropology is also served here because mediumship is typically considered to be paranormal (by western society, but not necessarily mediums). Therefore, studying women in mediumship covered all my main research interests: anthropology, paranthropology, women's experience, and religious experience. The academic record offers some analysis on women in *historical* Spiritualism, but there are gaps in modern, anthropological analysis on women currently practicing Spiritualism or mediumship. This study seeks to address this void in the academic anthropological record.

The term "medium" is used throughout this paper: in review of the academic literature on the topic and in analysis of field work conducted for this study. Two definitions of the word "medium" follow; each is from a major Spiritualist organization in the U.S. The Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp (SCSC) states a medium is:

One with proven capabilities of communicating with Spirit through various forms of phenomena and who acts as a channel for information between the Spirit and Earth Planes.

(SCSC, n.d.)

The National Spiritualist Association of Churches (NSAC) defines mediums in this way:

A Medium is one whose organism is sensitive to vibrations from the Spirit World and through whose instrumentality, intelligences in that world are able to convey messages and produce the phenomena of Spiritualism.

(NSAC, n.d.)

The aforementioned research gap in women's mediumship can be approached by paranthropology – a still understudied field. It is my hope that the field of paranthropology will continue to grow, and that this project can help it do so. As stated above, the *Paranthropology* journal drew my interest, and it seemed to do so for quite a few other academics who brought

their research together within its pages. Hansen (2018, loc. 230) points out *Paranthropology* was started during a time when academic paranormal discourse was waning and being given the cold shoulder within the field of anthropology. Hunter took interest in the field and launched the journal (Hansen, 2018, loc. 230). Because *Paranthropology* is not currently publishing, it is up to individual academics who hope to keep paranthropology in the public eye to carry out the research and encourage discourse via other forums.

So, what is “paranthropology” and what does it do? At its most basic form it is anthropological analysis of experiences deemed paranormal (as opposed to “normal” experiences). Yet, as Bowie (2010, p. 4) reminds us, “there is no single social scientific way of understanding and studying the world...” Therefore, how can we assign the category of “normal” to one experience and not another? It is tempting to categorize one experience as “normal” while marginalizing another experience as “abnormal.” Schmidt (2021, p. 150) points out, “mediumship is an ordinary experience for the people experiencing it. It is part of their daily practice like the spirits ... are part of their ordinary environment.” Turner (1993, p. 10) cautions against intellectual imperialism which may occur when researchers refuse to accept their participants’ experiences at face value. Paranthropology provides the academic space to consider experiences that western academics still marginalize. Hunter (2020, p. 95) puts it plainly, “Paranthropology, therefore, takes a bold step in attempting to interpret supernatural systems of belief from the perspective of those who subscribe to them.” This echoes the methodology of the engaged empathetic approach which will be further outlined and utilized in this study.

Care was taken to approach mediumship as a medium would approach it. This thesis does not teach mediumship theology or skepticism. Rather, an engaged empathetic approach allowed me to respectfully consider women’s mediumship experience in the southern U.S. This topic would be difficult to analyze if I was caught up in a debate on the reality of their experiences. In fact, Hunter (2016, p. 55) covers this potential conflict by stating, “this does not mean that we have to become believers in ‘the supernatural’ ... but just that we need to be aware of the fact

that our models are more than likely incomplete.” According to Schmidt (2021, p. 151) the anthropology of experience does not engage in debate over the reality of mediumship and spirits. I make no statement of belief in mediumship, yet I accept the possibility that commonly held beliefs may not provide all the answers to what happens to the human spirit upon death (while remembering that those commonly held beliefs are typically supernatural in reasoning – i.e. belief in heaven / hell).

A brief acknowledgement of academia’s suspicion of paranormal research is important. The fact that there simply is not much research in the existing body of literature is the most obvious display of this suspicion. The need (or desire) to explain *why* I want to undertake a study in paranthropology is indicative of the doubt academia still tends to shower on anomalous research. Bowie recognizes this situation and states:

The field of afterlife studies and paranormal research probably includes more ‘independent scholars’ and postgraduate students than established university post-holders, and the dominant academic culture is more than not hostile to such research, but the networks between researchers and active institutions are growing nonetheless.
(Bowie, 2013a, p. 81)

This certainly seemed true with the advent of the *Paranthropology* journal; however, that journal has not published recently, and interested researchers must seek publication elsewhere. The doubt cast on paranormal experience certainly stems from the scientific community’s focus on method, lab reproduction, and “a Western cultural context that privileges science as a way of knowing” (Emmons and Emmons, 2013, p. 9). Science *is* a way of knowing, yet it is not the only way of experiencing life (which is of interest to anthropologists). Anthropological and ethnographic studies must acknowledge this, because research participants believe in and offer up their experiences as evidence. The methodologies employed in these kinds of studies are sometimes reduced in validity by other fields (Schmidt, 2016, p. 94). Voss (2011, p. 41) advocates this type of experience of the senses be accepted as part of “a deeper mode of knowing” and goes on to say, “Objective proof belongs in the realm of empiricism and is therefore an impossible goal for the assessment of invisible qualities from the realm of spirit.” This was the attitude adopted for this project, since I accepted the

mediums' experiences at face value and did not seek to debate the truth of their understanding of spirit communication. Schmidt appropriately states:

And our respect for other religions should prevent us from dismissing their feelings as wrong (as little as we may be able to participate in them), but on the contrary lead us to ask, at least, what is their system?

(Schmidt, 2016, p. 94)

In keeping with this approach, this paper analyzes mediums' *experiences* and has no justification to deny their experiences.

Connections Between the "Paranormal" and Religious Studies

The field of religious studies is the perfect umbrella for analysis of paranormal or anomalous experience. Religious studies has long been interested in the academic approach to "the anomalous and extraordinary experiences and capacities of human kind..." (Hunter, 2016, p. 54). Bowie (2020, p. xii) notes that in its beginning stages anthropology covered paranormal work, and that lately paranormal topics are coming back into focus in religious anthropology and similar fields. Religious studies provides the academic space for research into these topics and a myriad of others (Hunter, 2016, p. 54). In keeping with William James's (2011) position on the importance of individual experience: it is just as valid as formal group behavior and activity. In fact, as individualized religious behavior becomes more common in the twenty-first century, religious studies projects may need to be more inclusive of individual activity. This study seeks to show that individual experience is worthy of analysis – whether it be religious, paranormal, or non-categorical.

While society labels mediumship as paranormal, this is not a term American mediums use to describe their work. This does not complicate the research. Participants in anthropological studies do not choose which framework their experiences are considered under; however, in this thesis they have the power to refuse participation and to state their own categories of

knowledge. This research is categorized under religious studies with a paranthropological approach, because this was the approach with which I hoped to analyze mediumship. Experience is a relevant piece of mediumship whether it is in a religion or outside it, therefore my combined inquiries of paranormal experience in religious studies can reveal a unique perspective on the activity even if the participants utilize different definitions (Schmidt, 2021, p. 150). However, as this study's fieldwork shows, participants acted on their innate power to name their experience as they see it. This is an action I view as also instrumental to the feminist research approach. Humans must have the power to name their own experience. Anthropology has the space to cover experience and participants' understanding of it – while using scientific parameters for analysis.

Research Aims and Questions

The questions that built this thesis came from my aim to study women's religious experience as mediums in Florida. My goal was to create a project that answered several relevant research questions:

1). *How is the mediumship experience interpreted by (or changed by) feminist perspectives?*

Because women's experience has typically been marginalized throughout history, a feminist perspective was adopted for this analysis. This perspective can offer helpful reflections and highlight troublesome areas that may otherwise go unnoticed.

2). *How do women's mediumship experiences and work differ from men's and how do non-gender conforming individuals experience mediumship sittings?* A clear-cut way to discern the differences of experience between people is to analyze the work they do, then consider and compare the experiences they describe. This was covered in my ethnographic research and is discussed in detail in the Results chapter.

3). *Are there any outlying religious factors in central Florida that influence the work and experience of female mediums?* Focusing on Floridian mediums provided extra specificity for this study. Not only is Florida home to one of the largest remaining Spiritualist groups in the U.S. (and therefore a potential abundance of mediums), it is also a geographically interesting location. It is located in the southern U.S.: a typically conservative area of the country. The rise of Trumpism and the extreme politicization this area has experienced over the Covid-19 pandemic has only cemented the conservative identity of Florida. This is relevant, because usually women can only achieve religious equality in progressive movements (which includes Spiritualism and mediumship); yet “progressive” does not describe Florida in any real, social way.

These questions are first addressed by establishing the context of the area being studied, then by analyzing the fieldwork data gathered over the course of the research. Chapter 1 lays out the details of women’s religious authority and the connection to evangelicalism. This discussion was important for me to include, because it highlights the problems women have experienced in their lack of authority in religion – especially in conservative religious movements in the U.S. (such as evangelical Christianity in white American circles). The distinction between conservative religion and the progressive nature of Spiritualism is important background to this study. This chapter also delves into feminist research – specifically in the religious field. Chapter 2 then moves into descriptions of the methodology and approaches utilized for this project. The ethical concerns and guidelines implemented are also included.

The following chapters really get to the point of modern day mediumship. Chapter 3 lays out the details of what mediumship is and offers an academic review of the experience. Then, Chapter 4 covers fieldwork results and the majority of data analysis. (Some fieldwork is also included in Chapter 3; however, most of it is discussed in Chapter 4.) This final chapter wraps up the research conducted for this study. In the Conclusion, some final reflexive thoughts are recorded along with descriptions of opportunities for future research that I uncovered along the way.

Chapter 1: Women, Religion, and Feminist Religious Studies

Noting the complications that women have experienced within religion and the limitations they have faced within those experiences is an important revelation of women's lives. Chapter 1 looks at women's connection to religion, their marginalized identity within the prominent American religious, white sub-culture of evangelicalism, and the responsibility of feminist studies to embrace religious research. Throughout this chapter, Spiritualism is used as an example of a religion which offers opportunities for women and which includes mediumship as a regular experience in its religious structure. Appendix 1 goes into detail on Spiritualism as a religion (its origins and connections to the women's rights movement and religious experience).

Religious Women

This first section will review some of the specific ideas and issues that have arisen for women who take part in religious activity. According to the Pew Research Center National Public Opinion Reference Surveys gathered in 2020-2021, 63% of Americans identify as Christians – a notable majority (Smith, 2021, para. 3). Of interest to feminist scholars is the fact that “group oppression, sexism, racism ... formed the basis of Judeo-Christian belief systems” (hooks [sic], 2015a, p. 106). Because religions are an effective conduit for social ideas within entire cultures, the ideas taught in religions on gender and sexuality can have long-lasting effects on society (not just church members) (Winkel, 2019, pp. 244-245). These results seem to be weighted in favor of men. Institutional westernized Christian experience naturally uplifts the male identity because it participates in the social belief which “assumes male dominance to be both ‘natural’ and ‘god-given’; which defines women according to their relationship with a man...” (Maitland, 1987, p. 132). Categorizing individuals into binaries of expected behavior can have long-term negative results for those who desire religious experience, but are uninterested in conforming to others' sex / gender ideologies.

Church Reflects Society

Winkel (2019, p. 247) discusses the view of religion “as a social ‘variable’ that is contingent on ‘culture’” – that a religion offers a social setting that reflects the surrounding views of its culture (including gender roles). Although Christianity cites theological reasons for female subordination, a social perspective would lean towards a more cultural / functional reason for keeping women out of leadership. This can be extended into women’s general behavior in religious situations, as well. Sered (2011, p. 66) states, “Women’s religious behavior has traditionally been treated as especially rooted in social structure (rather than in abstract thinking)”, although she believes there is a more nuanced response that considers religion and experience. Ultimately, American women’s religious work has reflected the expectations society also placed on them at home. These expectations have been less than optimal for a well-rounded life experience.

Hierarchy of Experience

Considering the abilities of women to obtain positions of authority within religious institutions can show levels of equality or subjugation within those religions. Rosado-Nunes (2003, p. 85) points out, “What strikes me is the high investment women have in religion and the lack of real religious authority and power they – we – have.” Not only are women trained into this “obligatory” religious commitment, they are then limited within their commitment by church authority. Authority in religious institutions can be a mechanism used by those who desire authoritarianism; feminist studies have revealed “religions have used their moral and social authority to legitimate situations of domination and exploitation based on class, gender, and ethnicity” (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 88). Typically, woman have been left out of the creation of religious traditions (including ritual-making and text interpretation) (Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 60). This reaffirms a complimentary system that societies and religion make for themselves. Within Christianity, women experience equality in their need for spiritual salvation and in their ability

to obtain it; however, equality expires outside of this basic requirement for entry as women are not granted authority with what they *do* with their salvation (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 90).

Women have been locked out of authoritative positions within religions to such a great extent that it can be labeled as a “betrayal” in consideration of how hard religious institutions work to train them into commitment (Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 60). Women have been eliminated from “religious power” in all major world religions (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 88). The exclusion of a person from any area of life based on their sex or gender is a violation of their human rights; yet churches continue to violate this standard while proclaiming themselves to be examples of divine love and care.

Religious institutions usually explain their behavior based on theology and interpretations of sacred texts. Voss Roberts states:

All theology is metaphorical, and the metaphors we employ speak volumes about what (and who) we value. Feminist and liberation theologians observe that basic theological metaphors such as God as Father and King prop up the rule of dominant males over women and subjugated men.

(Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 58)

With metaphors such as these, Christian leaders with tendencies towards authoritarianism are easily able to non-critically translate biblical male tropes into theological requirements that have unfortunate consequences for others. Truly, the majority of religions have reduced women’s roles and institutional leadership value to such an extent that women cannot “belong” to their religion in the same way that men can (Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 60). This results in an “othered” identity that keeps women at arm’s length within their churches and from their leaders.

Spiritualism stands as a foil to the socially patriarchal religious institutions that have existed in the U.S. Haywood (1983) engages this anomaly with some interesting analysis that will be considered here. First, she affirms the logic of religious style determining the treatment of sexes, which she then shows to work for the benefit of women in Spiritualism (Haywood, 1983, pp. 157-158). Because she sees many Spiritualist women in authority, the religion, itself, “must

embody some patterns friendly to women's authority" (Haywood, 1983, p. 158). (Inversely, evangelical Christianity is friendly to men, but at the expense of women.) Second, she discusses the idea of "occult reality" – that which separates experienced reality from "general social attitudes and practices" (Haywood, 1983, p. 175). This occult reality frees women to be leaders (even if general society restricts this), and is built around experiences not typically engaged with in cultural norms (such as meditation and altered states of consciousness) (Haywood, 1983, p. 165). Within certain situations this occult reality provides opportunities for women; however, the women may experience marginalization or reductionism in their larger social circles. Third, Haywood (1983, p. 166) ultimately states, "Spiritualism makes an interesting case for the study of religious authority in relation to gender issues." Spiritualism employs a theology that empowers people equally, and women can receive full acceptance (even when their general society restricts them) (Haywood, 1983, p. 166). This stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal expectations of many religions in the U.S. That which is valued in a religion will be treated with equity; and in matters of equity, Spiritualism provides an example that Christianity would benefit from following.

Women's Religious Troubles

The religious experience of women has been, and continues to be a relevant topic of interest for feminist scholars (although in limited quantity). Voss Roberts (2010, p. 44) measures the ability of women to thrive in a religion as a guide about that religion. She does not just look at the positive effects for women; she also considers a religion's effect on the earth, "bodies", and its community impact (Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 44). This could be a formula for how intersectionality can be applied in feminist religious study to analyze institutional effects on people and places. She believes:

Feminism and religion are bound together in complex ways: each religion has at various moments failed women and other marginalized subjects, and each religion possesses legacies and resources that can be mobilized toward their well-being.

(Voss Roberts, 2010, p. 60)

This hopeful statement acknowledges the difficulties women have faced in religions, while still looking towards the positive effects religions can deliver if they are led with true equality.

Perhaps the negative effects on women can be addressed by feminist religious leaders when there is a better understanding about how women are connected to religion and what they experience. Rosado-Nunes questions women's connection to religion, because she has found a lack of answers to several key questions:

What do women want to get from religion? To what extent does religion contribute to the desires, needs, and practical interests of women? If religions are so oppressive for women, why are women their most faithful adherents?

(Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 86)

The first two questions may also be relevant to ask about each human body that enters a church. Why people are so attracted to religious ritual and behavior seems to be a question that scientists and anthropologists continue to tackle. The third question is applicable to many areas of women's lived experiences. Connection to religion is covered in my interviews with participating mediums and illustrates the variety of religious interest and meaning placed in ritual (see Chapter 4). Women's resilience is often showcased not only in religious institutions, but also in the workplace, in political settings, and in family life. Religion is just one more area in which oppressed groups struggle to find place. Despite this struggle, Rosado-Nunes (2003, p. 90) found because religion is managed in "the private sphere"; it remains "a women's issue." This may explain why women feel comfortable in religious situations even when they are limited in their growth opportunities (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 90). Religious institutions continue to benefit from women's participation while limiting their experience.

One technique for analyzing the difference between women's and men's experiences is using simple data reports, yet Sjørup (2001, p. 6) finds reporting differs between men and women. No data on inter-sex or trans individuals were reported in Sjørup's (2001) study. Sjørup (2001, p. 6) conducted research on religious experience at the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre (AHRERC) and compiled the following:

- Out of the original 3,000 people who submitted reports of religious experience: 2,080 were from women and 895 were from men. Twenty-five people did not confirm sex identity.
- “Although both women and men reported experiences of unity with the holy, the differences between women’s and men’s religious experiences tend to surface first, in the narrative structure; second, in the imagery of the divine; and third, in the settings they reported for their experiences” (Sjørup, 2001, p. 6).

Sjørup also conducted interviews of her own and found that her data shows fewer men have religious experiences, that men and women describe their experiences differently (this echoes the data she pulled from the AHRERC), and that the places in which men and women are launched into religious experiences differ by the sexes (also found in the AHRERC archive data) (Sjørup, 2001, p. 9). Her first point is the most interesting to this study: if fewer men have religious experiences, why are they nearly always the leaders of religions? Schmidt (2010, p. 98) also notes the imbalance between women participants and male leaders; she states there has been no clear reason found within academic studies to explain why (echoed in this study in Chapter 4).

Woman as Sacred Nurturer

The complicated link between the experience of women at home and in church has historical roots. Through the nineteenth-century, Protestants began to change their ideas about God; they moved away from considering him an “autonomous” being and into thinking of him as “nurturing” (Taves, 1987, pp. 207-208). Religious songs and theologians began to make “increasingly explicit connections ... between a nurturing conception of God and idealized images of nurturing and self-sacrificing mothers” (Taves, 1987, p. 208). This would serve to strengthen women’s duties at home, and likely put moral pressure on women to behave in these ways. The limitation of women to the home continues to be a form of social oppression propagated by religious institutions which is served through teachings of “female inferiority”

while “exalting motherhood as a natural calling that defines women’s very identity” (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 88). (This does not imply that reproductive and domestic labor is innately less valuable than for-profit labor; rather, lack of informed choice is oppressive.) The unfortunate combination of body devaluation with motherhood glorification has encouraged religions to control women’s bodies and sexuality (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 88). This is largely witnessed in conservative Christianity which continues to have strict dress codes for women (sometimes even extending into rules about hair-cutting and the use of beauty products) and the expectation that women follow uncritical literal interpretations of western Biblical translations (remaining passive in church services, no access to decision-making leadership positions, and subjection to male authority).

But what about men? Women were now considered to be commanding within the home setting and became viewed as “psychologically threatening” to men (Taves, 1987, p. 219). The bond women were socialized towards relating to home / religion / children did not connect men to religion; rather it caused men to feel threatened and to attempt to marginalize women’s influence on the home life, only (Taves, 1987, p. 219). This further highlights the lack of religious interest that men have, especially when compared to women. Women were socialized into religious work and expectations (although they might have had those tendencies naturally), while men were free to make a choice about religion (and responded with limited zeal). Schmidt (2010, p. 111) notes this “gender-orientation and sex-role socialization” still exists in modern society and affects how people operate within their religious environments.

The role of women in the home life also included specific duties that may be part of the reason why Spiritualism was so initially accessible to them. The duties of (non-professional) healer work typically fell to women who were expected to take care of sick husbands and children (Haywood, 1983, p. 162). Healer expectations could also extend to any unmarried woman in the family, as well (Haywood, 1983, p. 162). Spiritualist healers have also typically been women, and this phenomenon is more easily understood with the knowledge that domestic / non-professional healers have historically been women (Haywood, 1983, p. 162).

Religious Agency

Another concerning matter within women's religious experience is that of agency. Analysis has been done on women's religious experience in connection to her socialization at home and her prohibition from leadership. A loss of agency has contributed in diminishing religious experience, as well. Women's agency in religious institutions has suffered, in part, due to the male-centric positioning of theology and leadership behavior (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 85). There is little place for women in an institution run by men who have a theology focused on men's power-positioning. It is interesting to note that women's responses to religious subjugation is varied: some consent to it and others deny it (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 91). Some women seek to change their institutions, and others leave them eventually (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 91). Women have the right to give up their autonomy, if they desire, but the real concern is for women who are in vulnerable positions of subjugation by their church or family members. Feminists have historically denounced the tendencies of religions "to control and homogenize behavior" (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 86). The question remains why should any person or institution be part of a woman's choices? At a time in the U.S. where women's bodies are undergoing the strongest and most volatile attack on their human rights in decades – under the guise of moral and religious reasoning, the following statement from Rosado-Nunes is especially poignant:

Women demand recognition of their moral capability to make decisions that are acceptable from ethical and religious standpoints, their right to decide matters affecting their own lives and bodies, and their experiences as being appropriate for religious reflection in the sphere of sexual morality.

(Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 92)

Until equality and personal autonomy are accepted by those in religious and political power, women will remain under the thumb of men who seek power and control for their own reasons – at the expense of women. This is an expense women are no longer willing to pay religiously, socially, or politically. In the U.S. these worlds are currently bound together and have to be

considered together in order to find positive results for women in the future. According to Rosado-Nunes (2003, p. 92), “Women’s bodies have been the privileged locus of social and religious control by men.” Feminists have attempted to create awareness about the link created between the control men have over women’s bodies and the vacuum of rights women experience because of it (Rosado-Nunes, 2003, p. 92). The control wielded by religious expectations on women has had life-altering effects on generations of women in the U.S.

Marginalization through Religion

The connections between evangelicalism and Spiritualism are worth exploring, because evangelicalism is prevalent in the American South where this project is placed, and Spiritualism is connected to American mediumship. From the mid-century 1900s, differences between denominations have blurred and evangelicals have taken a step back from denominational identity, or have very little knowledge of the specific doctrines of various denominations (McGuire, 2008, p. 73). This does not mean current evangelicals have stepped back from religious activity or culture, though. McGuire finds they are interested in:

...[P]opular religious elements that are proffered through the mass media and commercial marketing, as well as by various entrepreneurial preachers and informal advice networks. These evangelical popular traditions are also inextricably intertwined with cultural features of the South, before and in the aftermath of the Civil War.
(McGuire, 2008, p. 73)

This became extremely obvious during Donald Trump’s political campaigns and administration. The Pew Research Center conducted surveys which show 77% of White evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016, and 84% of White evangelicals voted for Trump in 2020 (Igielnik, Ketter, and Hartig, 2021, fig. 7). White evangelicals make up 19% of voters and represented 34% of Trump’s voters (Igielnik, Ketter, and Hartig, 2021, paras. 24, 26). American evangelicals have culturally merged into conservative political ideologists.

Gendered Expectations Based on Sex Division

Current conservative cultural and religious behavior often has gendered expectations based on sex (as assigned at birth). These expectations also began forming and growing as a cultural trend in the 1800s (Taves, 1987, p. 211). During this time period, men began more often to work outside the home, and women stayed in the home to manage housekeeping and children; even this division of labor was brought about based on “certain assumptions about the nature of men, women, and children” (Taves, 1987, p. 211). Previous to this era, children were expected to work and add economic value to the home, but the nineteenth century brought new ideas of childhood development which implied additional parental activity – specifically the concept of “nurture” which is usually expected of women (Taves, 1987, p. 211). Ultimately, these new social expectations that men should work outside the home, and women must bond with their children resulted in long-lasting gendered expectations (Taves, 1987 p. 211). (These sex/gender based expectations still exist today in conservative areas of the U.S.) As these socialized expectations settled in American culture, they were reinforced in women’s reading materials and in churches by specifically assigning the religious teaching of children to their mothers (Taves, 1987, p. 211). Therein begins the thread of gendered religious expectations on women.

These gendered expectations did not stop there; in fact, they held limitations. In general, Christians in the middle to late 1800s embraced the connection between “femininity and religiosity”, which resulted in disagreements about the specific work women and men were allowed to conduct within the church (Taves, 1987, p. 214). Women were not permitted to hold authoritative roles in churches, but were permitted to conduct missionary work in other countries (Taves, 1987, p. 216). (This is not only historical, but still exists in American evangelical churches. Women are typically denied spiritual authority, but may be found running religious works in foreign countries as missionaries.) At this time, women also used their perceived image of “religious feminine” to begin fighting for social changes (Taves, 1987,

p. 217). This new image – in combination with American Spiritualism - connected the women’s rights movement and female religious empowerment.

Spiritualism promoted several ways of thought that made it attractive to women hoping for religious empowerment. First, Spiritualism gave women equality in authoritative roles, in leadership positions, and in religious opportunity (Braude, 2001, p. 3). Next, the majority of religious organizations viewed social rankings to be “ordained by God” (such as existing ranked norms of “gender, race, and class”), but Spiritualists consistently advocated within the movement for women’s rights and the majority of other “radical reform movements” (Braude, 2001, p. 3). Third, because Spiritualists held to an individualistic religious experience not related to gender/sex, this caused a natural upheaval to the common idea that ranked men over women (Braude, 2001, p. 6). Spiritualism would naturally have been an appealing religious alternative for women who desired a setting of equality and respect.

Spiritualism was a timely thwart against evangelical Christianity. It fought against church “formalism” and encouraged participation in fringe religious practices (such as camp meetings, circle gatherings, and their own Sunday lessons) (Taves, 1999, p. 167). Spiritualists typically existed in the liberal religious denominations of Universalists, Quakers, and Unitarians; as their religion grew, the debate over separating into their own churches also began to spread (Taves, 1999, p. 167). Now Spiritualist churches can be found throughout the U.S., but they are typically very small. As this study covers, mediums also exist outside of Spiritualism; in fact, it is quite common.

Feminist Religious Studies

Having considered women’s marginalization at the hands of conservative Christian ideology, the value of feminist religious studies will now be covered. The divide between feminism and religious studies has been to the detriment of both fields because feminist study has not previously centered on religious life, and religious studies has not kept pace with modern

gender theories (Llewellyn, 2015, p. 4). Both women's religious experience and gender theory are key components for researchers attempting to analyze how religious cultures and systems affect those within them. Llewellyn (2015, p. 64) issues a call to researchers to improve their feminist study by looking for feminist religious activity in places outside the norm. First, a brief explanation of terms will be addressed.

Feminist study is discussed here as a research approach through the lens of feminism (intersectional equality). Feminist religious study falls in line with this approach, as it undertakes religious studies within a feminist framework. Butler states:

For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.

(Butler, 2006, p.2)

This project adopts this type of feminist theory and understanding, especially in connection to women's religious experience in western evangelicalism. This brings up an important critique of existing feminist theory: that it attempts "to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression..." (Butler, 2006, p. 5). To that point, this paper does not utilize sweeping conversation about global identities and activities. Instead, the activities of Americans in the U.S and in conjunction with westernized interpretations of Christianity are the focus of this paper.

Religious studies works well with feminist thought and theory. According to Christ (1976, pp. 320-321) the field of religious studies should advance feminist research because it can highlight "the spiritual dimension" of female life. Men and women have had different culture conditioning which results in cultural tendencies reflected in actions and viewpoints held differently between men and women (Christ, 1976, p. 324). McGuire (2008, p. 159) succinctly connects gender, culture, and religion by stating, "Gender profoundly affects people's religion-as-lived, because gender differentiation permeates so many aspects of life in most cultures."

Viewed in this light, feminist study has the responsibility to inquire into these dissimilarities and analyze any implications for women (Christ, 1976, p. 324). In consequence of this academic need for feminist study to connect more fully with religious study, there is a research void waiting for feminist researchers who are willing to engage more fully with women's religious work (Christ, 1976, p. 324). Some specific areas of women's religious life which need feminist theory are discussed in more detail below.

First, the matter of "religious choice" is of interest to feminist study. Wilcox (2002, p. 498) asks the question, "what factors influence a person's choice of religion or spirituality, and how does that choice affect her?" She bases this question on the matter of religious individualism (Wilcox, 2002, p. 498). As of the time of her study, there had been little work completed on those who had limited religious choices (Wilcox, 2002, p. 498). The question is historically important because women have been limited within religious settings and even subjugated within their own homes in order to allow men to have decision making power. Wilcox's (2002) study on religious individualism extends outward to other marginalized groups, as well. She suggests religious individualism is responsible for facilitating a way for "LGBT [sic] Christians" to stay in traditions that would otherwise condemn or exclude them (Wilcox, 2002, pp. 511-512). In this way, individualism informs religious choice where loyalty may be surprising.

Next, the issue of "spirituality" is an important distinction to feminist concerns and feminist religious studies. Feminist spirituality exists apart from its connection to theoretical or research questions. The ability for women to have the freedom to choose their own spiritual direction has allowed them to keep spiritual lives in a world where religion is controlled by patriarchal mindsets (hooks, 2015a, p. 108). Specifically, fundamentalist religions are active participants in the teaching that men and women are not equals – that women must be controlled (hooks, 2015a, pp. 108 -109). Systemically, westernized religion teaches that abuse is an acceptable form of authority reinforcement (hooks, 2015b, p. 124). This is an unacceptable standpoint for a feminist working for autonomy and equal opportunities within religious settings. Not only has women's autonomy been threatened or denied within religious structures, but the religious

work that women have done has been degraded or deemed “dangerous” (McGuire, 2008, p. 106). For example, in conservative / fundamentalist religious circles women are often given work related to the kitchen or cooking (both in the home and in their religious system) (McGuire, 2008, pp. 106-107). Evangelical religious systems put little to no monetary value on kitchen work or cooking as compared to religious public speaking or leadership (typically paid and competitive male positions).

Women have also had to bear the burden of behavioral policing, as well. They should meet expectations from their religious groups to be pure and polite (McGuire, 2008, p. 168). Therefore, conservative patriarchal religion cannot be women’s only option – there must be “[a]lternative spiritual paths” for women to take in order to resist patriarchal religious work (hooks, 2015a, p. 109). Specifically, feminism can participate in the spiritual activity of acknowledging “any form of domination and oppression” and seek to bring people out of such systems; bell [sic] hooks (2015a, p. 109) even says, “A feminist vision of spiritual fulfillment is naturally the foundation of authentic spiritual life.” Feminists have been able to find solutions for their spiritual goals; however, these solutions lie outside fundamentalist Christianity, and within new age spiritual practice (hooks, 2015a, p. 106). Again, the discussion centers around women taking individualized action to exercise religious choice in their pursuit of equal religious treatment and bodily autonomy.

Working towards including spirituality in feminist activity has been a process occurring over a period of time; it was not always considered important to the feminist movement. hooks (2015a, p. 106) states a large number of radical feminists were originally atheist, and they seemed unable to find value in feminist spiritual quest. Llewellyn (2015, p. 4) also discusses this breach between religion and “the women’s movement.” While the women’s movement in the U.S. was originally driven by religious quest, over time religious activity and feminism were viewed as distinct entities and feminism came to be viewed as “secular” (Llewellyn, 2015, p. 4). The disconnect between religion and feminism became academic, as well: feminist study and religious study were separate fields which did not engage with each other (Llewellyn, 2015, p.

4). Yet, eventually feminists began to see that women needed spiritual freedom, which could not be obtained while religion continued to be patriarchal (hooks, 2015a, p. 106). In fact, hooks (2015a, p. 106) puts so much value on reforming harmful patriarchal religious beliefs she states, “Truly, there can be no feminist transformation of our culture without a transformation in our religious beliefs.” This is illustrated in southern American culture, where conservative religious beliefs are still woven into everyday politics. Women cannot obtain full autonomy and equality while conservative patriarchal religious beliefs are accepted as the norm. Feminism specifically is attacked by fundamentalists who have even promoted killing feminists (hooks, 2015a, p. 107). Even still, it is a common belief that feminists are “anti-religion”; however, feminism should be credited with creating opportunities for women to more fully engage with their own spirituality (and possibly religion, by extension) (hooks, 2015a, p. 108). It is easy to imagine why institutional religious patriarchy would vilify a movement which destabilized or removed a large majority of its participants.

Because this research takes the feminist approach to religious experience, a brief review of feminist history is included here. In doing so, two key themes emerge. First, the feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960’s, yet there has been no clear, organized progression with solid, permanent changes (hooks, 2015b, locs. 72, 136). (Even landmark legal protection for women’s rights in the U.S. secured in 1973 in *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022.) Feminist studies are still a necessary part of women’s movements in any social setting and there is still much work to do. Sexism and patriarchy were not stopped by prior feminist movements and are still active (hooks, 2015b, loc. 136). Patriarchal behavior is often seen at home (hooks, 2015b, pp. 118-119). Men practice domineering and controlling households through abuse of women; and women have been taught that authority figures have “the right to use force to maintain authority” (hooks, 2015b, pp. 118-119). This broken patriarchal pattern is rooted in sexist thought. In fact, hooks (2015a, p. 19) states that the objective of original feminist theory was education on sexism and what could be done about it.

Feminist work cannot end at discussing sexism, though. Which leads to the second key historical theme (and feminism's weak link in overall effectiveness): white feminists refused to absorb the input of intersectional concerns, and left out wide-sweeping effects of racism and poverty (hooks, 2015a, pp. 54 and 57). The intent for this single objective (addressing only one aspect of white women's lives) seems to have been lumped into the goal of "female solidarity" (Llewellyn, 2015, p. 53). This excluded many valuable feminists and their work, and fragmented what could have been a comprehensive move for people to address inequalities throughout society (i.e. religious institutions). Llewellyn (2015, p. 44) addresses an additional area that has been overlooked by feminist works: the religious / spiritual side of the feminist movement. Llewellyn (2015, p. 44) posits the feminist movement has not interacted with religion, but this does not mean that feminism is "a predominantly secular movement." According to Llewellyn (2015, p. 44), religious women have been influential within the feminist movement. Individually, feminist researchers have utilized gender theory and sporadically engaged feminist study in religion (Llewellyn, 2015, p. 44). A literature gap remains in feminist religious studies, though. Moving forward, feminist religious studies should work towards better intersectionality. For example, a feminist religious study should not only address women's religious experiences, but should consider any other identifying characteristics and concerns that may be addressed by those participating in the study. Butler (2006, p. 196) expands on a critique of feminist theory by validating the necessity and multiplicity of intersectional identities, while acknowledging "the illimitable process of signification itself the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all." This critique does not call for the end of intersectional attempts, but is a caution against the assumption that identities are easily categorized.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Methodology and Ethical Considerations

While this thesis started out with a focus on Spiritualist mediums, mediumship was found to be uncontained within that religious structure. In practice, mediumship is a unique activity of individual experience (which is not always religious). The methods used in this research were able to capture individual mediums' understanding of their own experiences and to bring attention to aspects of those experiences which were important to them. A feminist ethnographic approach was adopted for this work; the application of those approaches into the research is described in this chapter.

Anthropological Approach

The methodology for this study was developed in conjunction with the anthropological approaches used by several anthropologists of the anomalous: Edith Turner, Fiona Bowie, and Jack Hunter. Turner, most famous for taking a "going native" approach, broke through standard anthropological methods of her time by refusing to reduce experiences of her informants into sterile, scientific boxes (Turner, 1993, pp. 9- 10). She believed, "To reach a peak experience in a ritual it really is necessary to sink oneself fully in it" (Turner, 1993, p. 9). Although that style was not a possibility for this study, Bowie's expanded method of practice creates space for connecting with research participants from anywhere. She advocated researchers take a "cognitive, empathetic engagement" approach in which one attempts to work past one's own understanding of "the 'reality' of the situation" (Bowie, 2010, p. 5). In fact, she presents this approach as vital to properly representing topics like mediumship (Bowie, 2013b, p. 723). This approach was the ultimate building block on which the fieldwork for this paper was begun. Last, but most relevant to the context of this paper, is Hunter's promotion of the field of paranthropology. He writes that anthropology brings appropriate methods for studying the paranormal, and that the paranormal likewise challenges the field of anthropology to grow

(Hunter, 2010, p. 2). It is the position of this paper that Turner encouraged modern academic space for studies on mediumship, Bowie provided specific methodological approaches that are easily applied for academic papers on mediumship, and Hunter has uplifted the specific field of paranthropology in which methods and theories of mediumship in culture can be considered.

Feminist Approach

Not only is an anthropological approach used here, a feminist research methodology was also applied. Third wave feminism has been criticized over its lack of inclusion of religious studies and a lack of interest in women's religious lives (Llewellyn, 2015, p. 4). Moving forward, feminist studies like this thesis should be focused on this important feature of women's everyday lives. In doing so, a careful approach is recommended. As Spivak (1988, p. 287) outlined in work on subalterns: female experience has always existed, yet has been overlooked; this reveals a lack of history on which to build future research – therefore how can the subaltern's current experience be properly heard and represented? Ethical requirements for these feminist studies should be strictly followed. Women have long been victims of male dominance and abuse; the stories of which inevitably are revealed and useful in feminist research (Skeggs, 1994, p. 81). The answer for how to work with a "subaltern" on personal experience (which has been previously ostracized and ignored) lies within a compassionate and ethical methodology.

Feminist methodology must consider power dynamics and terminology. As Tebbe and Budge (2016, p. 997) state, "Furthermore, we believe it is important to situate ourselves within the body of this work and, as such, discuss the ways in which our own identities, particularly in light of our positions of power and privilege, affect our work in this area." Shaw (1999, p. 112) points out even women doing research on women must acknowledge there is still a power differential. I am a woman researching other women: I had the power to contact them, ask questions that may or may not trigger painful memories, reveal their identities (this paper uses pseudonyms), and ultimately ask them to participate in unpaid labor for my project. Acknowledging these issues allowed me to construct protective boundaries shown in my application to the

university's Ethics Committee (for example, protecting identities, keeping questions and conversations focused on previously approved research objects, and allowing participants to call the shots on scheduling and time commitments).

Additionally, a feminist terminology must also clearly serve to move the research forward. First, hooks defines feminism at its best, "Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (2015a, p. 1). This type of feminism is inclusive – not exclusive, and it is the type considered in this paper (which also includes men's experiences). More specifically, this feminist paper affirms the concept that "gender" is not the final answer to a person's experience – there are countless other elements that affect a person's day to day reality (race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) (hooks, 2015b, loc. 94). Second, this paper utilizes a fully inclusive definition of woman and female. Trans women are women, and any reference to "female" is inclusive of the trans experience (Hines, 2019, p. 154). While this definitional statement is not clearly applicable in my surveys and interviews, it is reasoning for not including observations of Spiritualist meetings (which would have been interested in the breakdown in numbers between "men and women"). A working methodology that is inclusive of queer theory can no longer make unconfirmed observations of a person's sex or gender (Rumens, 2016, p. 44). Sex and gender may not be clearly represented according to an observer's perception of sex and gender social norms, and therefore data gathered about how a person visually represents themselves may not be accurate (Rumens, 2016, p. 44). For example, when observing a religious meeting it cannot be rigorous to say "there are "x" number of men and "y" number of women." That data would need to be confirmed on an individual basis, which yields further ethical concern.

Qualitative Methods

The academic standard for this kind of anthropological study is that of ethnography created from qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are especially useful in the study of anomalous activity like mediumship, due to their ability to highlight the special experience within the activities (Hunter, 2020, p. 71). Anthropological ethnography is able to describe the reality of

anomalous activity “without a highly reduced set and setting” (Hunter, 2010, p. 3). Through the rich description of ethnography, experience can be considered, as well as theorization on implications (Hunter, 2010, p. 3). In fact, for research into a topic such as mediumship, ethnography provides the structure for approaching such experience in what may be the only possible method: direct communication with practitioners (Martins, 2013, p. 21). “Experienter testimony is the primary means to access many of these [anomalous] experiences due to the inherent difficulties in predicting and/or monitoring their occurrence” (Martins, 2013, p. 21). Ethnography created from qualitative methods allows for scientific rigor to be achieved, while not being limited by what Turner (2010, p. 218) labels the ethnocentric and cognocentric traps of western scientific methods. She goes on to explain:

Science, as such, then, has no real ethnography because human beings, the subjects of ethnography, cannot be controlled as in a controlled experiment. Humans differ continually, having no aspects that can be simple and pure, and are irredeemably complex. The human being is unfit for repeatable scientific experiments – being alive. We see that analysis presupposes a corpse.

(Turner, 2010, p. 218)

Although it may not satisfy Western science’s desire for control groups and repeatability (as described by Turner), ethnography is a valuable tool within qualitative research measures (see Hunter and Martins above).

Specifically, ethnographical research in anomalous experience is still in its beginning stages – an exciting prospect for researchers who are both interested in this field and have the desire to be part of pushing a field into uncomfortable and new territory (Cooper, 2010, p. 19). The research responsibility of this situation is clear: data gathered during this time “must be grounded in investigative skills such as survey designs, interviewing techniques, laboratory research and field investigations (Cooper, 2010, p. 19). The methodology outlined in this paper align with such responsibility through careful survey creation and interview designs. Practically, this study resembles the field work choices of Emmons’s 2000 study on mediums, which utilized interviews and library sources (his study also included observations which this

study does not undertake) (p. 71). Emmons's (2000) study differs from this one in two main ways: this study focuses on mediums connected to the southern U.S. (a socially and religiously conservative area), and takes a feminist approach to the research. Yet, his study serves as an example that such ethnographic field methods have been successfully applied within academia.

This project also undertakes an engaged-empathetic approach which is applied with academic reason. As Emmons and Emmons (2003, loc. 352) showed in their participatory study of mediumship, "we emphasize that our main purpose is not to 'prove' anything about mediumship [sic] but to show how it looks and feels from the inside." In a similar vein, this study attempts to show how mediums feel by engaging with them as insiders to their world. This paper is positioned from the "outside" looking into the world of insiders. Yet, as Jensen (2011, p. 42) points out, the inside-outside positioning is not a true dichotomy, rather it is a "gradient" 'Insider' or 'outsider' is simply 'something' that there is more or less of." Nabhan-Warran (2011, p. 403) adds some clarity with a reminder that ethnographers are also participants to the research activity. She says, "At times we are outsiders, yet at others, we are insiders. We are never fully "outside" / etic nor are we fully "inside" / emic – ethnographic reality is more of a hybrid of the two" (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 403). In this research, I am an outsider to mediumship and Spiritualism, but I am an insider to women's experience, religious experience, and women's religious experience. I am also a participant in the creation of the survey, in each interview, and in data analysis. There may be a tendency to honor the insider's perspective as the most relevant, but the outsider's perception and discussion of that perspective is also relevant. "For it is precisely this – the etic agenda - that makes a difference – the difference between a realistic study of religions and a theology of the same" (Sutcliffe, 1998, p. 273). So too, this paper seeks to provide understanding of women's lived mediumship experience through honoring the emic data by undertaking an engaged, empathetic approach. This paper does not attempt to prove or disprove mediumship, nor does it preach Spiritualist theology and individual religious practices.

This study also attempts to be non-reductive when applying methodology to participant data. As Hunter (2018, loc. 251) describes it, “By ‘non-reductive’ I mean an approach to investigating the paranormal that does not seek easy explanations, and that emphasizes complexity over simplicity.” Women’s lived mediumship experience is not denied here, nor does this paper attempt to explain their experiences in any language outside their own. For example, this project lies within the framework of religious studies, but one participant (Riley [pseudonym]) was adamant that her mediumship was not religious. Her explanation for her experience lies within her understanding of science and the physical senses (Riley, 2021, personal communication, 28 September). Her experience and understanding of it is valid and relevant to the anthropological record of mediumship. This study does not need to prove whether she is correct or not, because it records her understood experience and not the scientific possibility of mediumship. Schmidt (2021, p. 146) found similar understandings in her work with Spiritists (mediums who follow Allan Kardec’s teachings and are different from Spiritualists): “They reject the definition of their experience as non-ordinary, most even decline to link it to any religious or spiritual realm...” Graham states the importance of this type of approach:

If paranormal phenomena are only researched within the confines of belief systems or under the influence of mind altering substances, this deprives the phenomena themselves of recognition of possessing an independent existence, and once again, becomes the study of socially constructed belief systems or psychological reactions to artificial stimuli, both falling under the umbrella of the anthropology of religion or parapsychology. However, by removing the term ‘belief’ and assuming that the paranormal phenomena exist as realities irrelevant of chemicals or constructed belief systems, the field of paranthropology begins to define itself in relation to the phenomena themselves, and not to the belief systems, scientific and religious, that have evolved to support the phenomena.

(Graham, 2011, p. 21)

The methodology laid out for this project showcased several fieldwork options. The growing western trend of individualized religious experience in combination with a worldwide pandemic meant that group observations and personal training were not to be realized for this research. Further, the only safe way to gather data in 2020 was remotely (via survey or phone call). Indeed, I had participants reveal they had / were recovering from Covid-19. First, instead of

giving in to the depressed reality of local, decimated Spiritualist groups that had little to no capacity of responding during a pandemic, I began contacting individual mediums throughout Florida. I gaged their interest in participating in my study by sending them a survey which included space for them to contact me if they were interested in further discussion for my paper. Fifty potential respondents were selected from public contact information available on the internet. For examples of Florida institutions that use mediumship see Appendix 2; for an example of the respondent pool available for contact see Appendix 3 which shows a sample of Florida mediums, including sex / gender description via pronouns used on their websites and the types of services offered.

Method Synopsis: Survey

The survey I created and sent to Florida mediums was a combination of closed and open-ended questions. This allowed for some useful quantitative data to be pulled and utilized in graph form (from survey host Google), yet still provided room for comment. The survey questions are shown and analyzed throughout Chapters 3 and 4. Each medium's situation is unique, and the open-ended comment sections allowed for full variation within answer profiles. The survey was created in Google Forms which provides a link to be sent to respondents. I sent out survey emails to fifty mediums throughout / previously connected to Florida, and fifteen mediums completed the survey. Responses were able to be kept anonymous, as elected by the participant. If survey respondents were open to engaging in further discussion, there was space for them to include contact information. There were nineteen questions / comment sections. Any question could be skipped, and the survey was still able to be submitted. This allowed a medium to skip any question they preferred and to spend as much (or as little) time on the survey as they wanted.

This free-handed approach to survey creation was deemed preferential because of the initial suspicion and unresponsiveness this study raised with those I approached. Originally, I had hoped to concentrate on the SCSC, but their public relations person refused their institutional participation (although many of the survey respondents practice there). I contacted eleven

other organizations that featured mediumship, but received limited or no response. I was informed by one of these organizations that in the past researchers have made them look bad; there seemed to be a lack of trust between mediums and researchers here. I modified my approach to the simple survey design and explained my goal was not to debunk mediumship. The response was positive and much data was gathered as a result. Many of the survey respondents were willing to engage in interviews and follow-up interviews. One of the most important observations from my study is confirmed through this process: mediumship is going strong on an individual level, while religious mediumship institutions (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic) are struggling.

Method Synopsis: Interview

Next, I planned to conduct ethnographic interviews with mediums. Ultimately, I conducted three introductory interviews (two later took the survey) and eleven follow-up interviews (from the surveys). The introductory interviews with Fran and Arin (pseudonyms) were unstructured, because they were conversations in which I met them and gathered useful data; both subsequently took the survey. Alex did not take the survey, rather his responses were captured in interviews. The follow-up interviews were much more structured, and I drew from a standard set of questions I created. The interviews were documented via electronic note-taking during the conversations. The documented interviews and survey responses were then parsed into a spreadsheet organized by medium and question; this allowed for efficient data analysis. The data gathered in these field methods is mostly analyzed below, and some analysis is spread throughout the paper, as indicated.

Methodology During a Pandemic

One field method approach was discarded, though. The observation method was neither appropriate, nor possible for a study conducted during a global pandemic. Specifically, Florida was operated as a “free state” with almost no Covid-19 precautions. It was a hotbed of cases throughout the time research was conducted for this thesis. Public indoor spaces in Florida

were typically full of un-masked people with no confirmed vaccine information. Extended time indoors was not safe. As mentioned above, the small, local religious institutions did not have the capacity to host observations during a pandemic (or no interest). Most of them did not even have the staff to answer the phone or respond to inquiry. It simply was not possible to organize with them. Gayle (a pseudonym for a participant medium) offered to sell one of her beginner mediumship classes to me; however, this was not the type of observation that would have been helpful to this study. Virtual observations of SCSC services were possible; however, they did not practice much or any mediumship during those public services. Additionally, the data I would need to gather on women's experiences is not properly gathered from visual cues on presented sex or gender (as noted in my discussion on queer theory, above). Ultimately, because this study found individual experience to be the most relevant to women's mediumship; observations at religious institutions would not have yielded much more helpful data than what was found in the interviews. Further research can address the individual nature of training and independently-run workshops, but these topics are not within the range of this study.

Ethical Standards

A project like this requires high ethical standards, which are guided by the university and anthropological research groups. In addition to formal application requirements and approval by the University's Ethics Committee, anthropological work must come from a place of appropriate intentions and considerations for those working on the project (including the university and researcher). Anthropological research covers human behavior; the people in these studies must be kept at the forefront of the project's interests. Wolf points out some major ethical considerations for qualitative research by stating there is a:

dual responsibility to our audiences and our informants. If there is a conflict, which should be privileged? At first glance, that seems obvious – of course, we must protect our informants above all else. Those are the ethics of our profession.

(Wolf, 1992, p. 360)

This project has an ethical obligation to its readers to provide an honest description of women's mediumship experience; it also has an ethical obligation to mitigate any harm that could come to those who participate in the project. Wolf (1992, p. 36) goes on to describe the modern ethical dilemma encountered by anthropologists now that participants easily access the studies written about them. This is not only their right, but it also adds a layer of accountability for the researcher. Several participants have shown interest in reading my project and were assured they will receive the completed work. As I write about their experience, I am conscious of the fact they will be reading my interpretation of the data they provided.

Ultimately, the ethical standards that guided this project are categorized in four practicable ways. 1) Only adults were considered for this project. No vulnerable participants were approached or engaged with for this study. 2) The participants were kept informed of the project's intentions. 3) Participant identities and data have been protected. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (and only pseudonyms are used in this paper). Notes with participant information are secured in a password protected account under a "Confidential" label. 4) The university's and my risks have been mitigated through these efforts. These standards are measured in the university's Ethics Committee application and received university approval prior to the start of research.

Research difficulties may arise within qualitative methods where people attempt to work together. Martins (2013 p. 18) discusses the ethical dilemma that could arise if participants have different goals than the research can allow, by advising: "...combine the interests of the researcher and the participants, which includes a flexible research design that encompasses situational changes during the interview." The cognitive, empathetic engagement used in this study accomplishes that by approaching mediumship in a similar manner to the participant, while insisting on ethical standards of confidentiality in the final product. This approach created a safe research space and allowed mediums, as experts, to share their experience in an understudied field in a comfortable environment. The flexible nature of my research design (as posited by Martins [2013] above) was instrumental in building an ethical study that encouraged

participation with a group of people who were initially difficult to engage. Martins (2013, pp. 21-22) also mentions the lack of literature on ethical work in anomalous studies and the lack of explanation about how ethical procedures can be applied. This thesis responds to that research cavity and provides specific detail on helpful ethical steps that mitigate potential effects on participating mediums.

Feminist Research

Because this project applies feminist research practices, it is helpful to explain the concepts connected to the idea of feminist research. Most methods used by feminists in their research were not made within the feminist movement (such as interviews and ethnography) (Kelly, Burton, and Regan, 1994, p. 46). In fact, feminists do not have their own unique methodology (Sampson, 2008, p. 921). This is not to say that feminist research is un-academic, non-rigorous, or un-original. The experiences that feminism addresses are worthy of research and are typically connected to powerful social dilemmas and inequalities (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 146). Nor are the experiences addressed by feminism simple; they are nuanced and dependent on other factors of difference (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 146). Maynard (1994, p. 23) reinforces this point further and more explicitly by laying out three foci of feminist “social research,” which are: “the role of experience, the importance of ‘race’ and other forms of diversity, and the question of objectivity.” None of these issues should be considered on their own, but really should be considered in connection with each other as they are brought up within the research. This implies the necessity of a careful research approach. The following paragraphs discuss important matters in feminist research such as access to space and feminist application of standard research methods (ethnography, interview, analysis, and interpretation).

Data mining is not the only concern valid of a thoughtfully constructed approach. Feminist research must be attuned with the people, themselves. This includes how the research affects the researcher, as well. Women often take precautions for their safety in daily activities (this need does not magically disappear during academic research); researchers may experience

insistent and unpleasant sexual advances in the space of their research (Skeggs, 1994, p. 81). Sometimes women will find “access to space is gendered”, and will need to invest extra time and energy to find an appropriate or safe way to engage with their participants (Skeggs, 1994, p. 81). In fact, while building ethnographies, women may have to purposely place themselves in settings with which they typically never engage (Skeggs, 1994, pp. 81-82). In general, the implications of atypical research (or research not conducted surrounding established, white, male expectations) may have severe consequences for the mental health of the researcher (Marshall, 1994, p. 121). This may include feminist researchers. Marshall found her research particularly harmful to herself and taxing:

I really believe that doing research can seriously damage your health. I'm not sure whether this is a widespread tendency or one that is restricted to anti-establishment/pro-Black/women's studies. All I know is that my bouts of fear, nervousness and anxiety seem to be linked to my 'status' on the margins of intellectual life. I persevere despite my misgivings about my potential to complete my thesis.
(Marshall, 1994, p. 121)

For the sake of the researcher and the ability to bring research to a productive conclusion, the feminist researcher should be tuned in to her body and mental health. Some form of embodied research practice may be helpful for the feminist researcher to manage her health and work.

Embodiment in research is covered in the next section. For now, a short application into feminist research will be addressed. Fonow and Cook (2005, p. 2216) mention four views of the body taken by feminist academics: “the embodied knower and the body as object of inquiry ... the body as a category of analysis and the body in relationship to the material.” Taking bodies seriously within the research setting can allow feminist researchers to listen to their bodies as a source of research data (how the researcher herself experiences the process) (Maynard, 1994, p. 21). This embodied connection can also be a source of safety if a situation feels unsafe or if her mental health is at risk. McGuire (2008, pp. 91-92, 104) also includes the body and embodiment in her approach to religious study, as she considers that people's bodies are closely connected with their religious and spiritual practices and experiences. Because women

often experience religion and spirituality different than men (and female researchers may experience reduced research opportunities because access to some religious spaces may be denied to women), it may be impossible for a feminist researcher to remain out of touch with her physical body. An embodied awareness is nearly impossible for female researchers to avoid; therefore, allowing it to become a standard part of feminist research can be helpful to the field and healthy for future researchers. It is this understanding of embodiment that is applied to the discussion within the “Embodiment” section below.

Bringing a feminist approach to specific methodological activities is also beneficial to the research process. Over time, feminist researchers have been instrumental in evolving methodologies which are “more reflexive” and consider power dynamics in research, as well as taking care in discussions of knowledge creation (Sampson, 2008, p. 921). Each of these considerations brings a more well-rounded researcher to the table and can provide a more inclusive conclusion at the end of the research process. Skeggs (1994, p. 88) gets more specific in her consideration of feminist ethnography and knowledge creation, “Feminist ethnography can contribute to a wider feminist project by giving knowledge a practical relevance and by exposing the constructions of knowledge as a form of control and categorization.” The validity of this claim becomes more clear, as consideration is given to who has been building knowledge in the West for the vast majority of academia over time (typically men – in recent centuries it has been white men). White male perspectives can be effective and productive, but they must not be the only (or even the majority) of perspectives in a body of literature. The research and methods in this thesis address this lack of diversity by analyzing the experiences of women by a woman; the foundations of this research are built on basic feminist actions. Intersectional feminist ethnography provides a powerful answer to close the gap in literature diversity. Skeggs states,

Feminist ethnography can account for the practice of different women, at different times, in different places. It can increase the specificity of analysis by providing an economic, institutional, social and discursive context.

(Skeggs, 1994, p. 88)

Diversity is the key to feminist methodology. It is the reason why it has value and why it should be taken seriously in the future.

One of the key components to this feminist methodology is the interview. Interviewing is a generally used methodology, but feminist interviewing can have specific implications. Having discussed above the feminist work in knowledge production, a critique of the same can be held. Holland and Ramazanoglu temper the excitement that may be received through interview data by reminding researchers:

At the other extreme, the assumption that there is a reality which is knowable through interview is rejected. In this view, interview transcripts and comparable texts cannot reflect reality since we have no way of knowing the relationships between truth and the interview text.

(Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 144)

This does not mean the interview is worthless, rather that it may be criticized (perhaps appropriately) as only being one piece in a larger picture. Over the course of this section, a feminist approach has been built up: one that is in tune with the researcher's body and encourages reflective engagement with participants. This can sideline the feminist researcher's goals for the interview, as valuable time may be spent in "counseling" interviewees as they speak of difficult circumstances (Skeggs, 1994, p. 81). The circumstances of the interviewee may come into play during the course of the interview (such as gender, class and race), and there is no guarantee of when, how, or if these forces will factor (Phoenix, 1994, p. 55). Since diversity should be a key component of feminist research, it would behoove a feminist researcher to prepare for these eventualities and to include as much diverse content as possible as it is revealed.

My feminist approach was practically applied in my survey questions and discussed in Chapter 4: Results. Respondents were asked if they identified as a woman (Figure 4.1). While feminism seeks equality between sexes, as discussed throughout this thesis, it is the perspective of women that is needed to broaden academic literature. Since the majority of mediums in this

study are women, each response adds generally to the feminist anthropological record within religious experience.

Specifically, the feminist perspective of the thesis is further strengthened through questioning the mediums about how their mediumship skill was launched (Table 4.3). Experiences common to women's lives were revealed as key indicators (see Table 4.3). Also, the mediums were questioned about how they perceive their reputation (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), an important part of women's experiences (and therefore important to feminist research). Respondents were also questioned about their experience in connection to their gender / sex, which yielded helpful data to this feminist analysis. This discussion is included in Chapter 4.

Content diversity would typically come alive in the analysis stage. Feminist analysis is shown to have interesting characteristics. Feminist researchers must differentiate between their academic goals and "feminist politics," and connect their theories to social change (Glucksmann, 1994, p. 164). A feminist researcher conducting work in anthropology may face criticisms if her work is solely focused on changing her object of study, no matter how necessary the social change may be (typically considered an inappropriate goal of anthropology). However, even a feminist anthropologist can take part in the larger action of social change in an academically acceptable way. This piece of the research conclusion can be developed in the interpretation stage of analysis. Interpretation is considered a vital activity as connections are built between data and social issues (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 145). Interpretations will not (and should not) be taken at face value, however. Holland and Ramazanoglu state the interpretation of feminist researchers

depends on the integrity of the interaction of our personal experiences with the power of feminist theory and the power, or lack of power, of the researched. Our conclusions should always be open to criticism.

(Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 146)

Therefore, the feminist researcher must have a clear grasp of her theory and her participants when she is interpreting her data.

If feminist interpretation seems unruly at this point, the literature goes on to make it more so. Feminists have largely been critical of “hygienic research” or that which is seen to be “censoring out of the mess, confusion and complexity of doing research, so that the accounts bear little or no relation to the real events” (Kelly, Burton, and Regan, 1994, p. 46). Again, this brings the research back to diversity and rejects any establishment’s goal of perfectly controlled data gathering and outcomes. There should be an understanding that to merely reiterate the data received from women is not enough; Maynard says this

can lead to individuation and fragmentation Feminism has an obligation to go beyond citing experiences in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone.

(Maynard, 1994, pp. 23-24)

The need for this interpretation is made more clear when the researcher considers that the interviewees’ experiences are engrained within their own cultural experiences and interpretations (Maynard, 1994, p. 23). Feminist research data cannot simply be put on paper and regurgitated in a study. This does not mean women’s interpretations of their own experiences are invalid. Maynard (1994, p. 23) succinctly states, “the legitimacy of women’s own understanding of their experiences is one of the hallmarks of feminism.” Ultimately, a feminist must be aware of the complexities of the interview process. The participants’ own interpretations of their experiences must be treated as valid and not forced into a neat box by the researcher. The diversity revealed will not be clean cut, but is valid.

Embodiment

The positioning of the researcher is a key element of the research process, which can affect the outcome of the research. Typically, researchers are placed as either insiders or outsiders. Nabhan-Warren (2011, p. 403) believes these categories can be complicated; that the reality is slightly different than clear-cut dualistic categorization as researchers may actually be participants within an observed activity or may actually behave as insiders. She wanted to cross

the divide of “insider / outsider” in her research, and she believed her body would allow her to do this by engaging with the lived experiences of her setting (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 380). Acknowledging our own physical bodies as researchers and participants’ bodies can provide information more closely connected to reality and lived experience (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 403). This awareness is part of an embodied research methodology which not only awakens the researcher to a clearer view of participants’ realities, but invites the researcher into reflectiveness over her own ideas and goals of the research (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 403).

Embodied research is a valuable tool that can yield rich results. Through her embodied research, Nabhan-Warren discusses her own complicated positioning:

in the beginning of my fieldwork, my own self-conscious compoment revealed my liminal status as a curious anomaly. I was a non-believer among believers, a person with a distinct cultural background indelibly recorded in my body language.

(Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 380)

It is worth noting this is a valid method of obtaining data. Pierini (2016, p. 310) states, “Knowledge transmission is not merely oral, but is experiential, with embodiment at the core of this process. For notions, before being accepted, are experienced, sensed, and felt.” This research method might not be always useful; however, embodied research can be particularly helpful to anthropologists who are utilizing ethnography in their research, as it can assist in gaining higher awareness of participants’ experiences (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 381). This method can prove especially helpful in the field of religious studies, as scholars reflect how their bodies can be used to assist in navigating insider / outsider relationships (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 382). For the researcher to use her body in shared experience with participants is to acknowledge the existence of insider / outsider categorization and to engage with insiders in a meaningful way for realistic, ethnographic outcomes. As beneficial as it sounds, it also comes with its own set of risks.

While the embodied approach does not assume an “insider’s position,” it may include participation which looks like an attempt at insider behavior. Emmons and Emmons (2003,

locs. 1730, 1733) address the risk of criticism that engaged researchers may receive: that they are not supposed to go “native”, and they are only to study their setting and participants. Emmons (2003) became a medium in his study of mediumship, so he became more fully an insider than embodied research requires. Because embodied research might encourage participation, it is worth mentioning Emmons’s and Emmons’s (2003, locs. 1730, 1733) reflective critique: becoming what you are studying is unacceptable to some academics.

There is also some personal risk to the researcher, as well. Engaging as an embodied researcher requires a lot from a person; it can include much emotional labor while the researcher builds relationships with participants and participates in activities which are not natural to her own every day experience (Knibbe and Droogers, 2011, p. 294). At the end of a session of embodied research, the researcher switches codes back into her own daily life; forgetting the work of the day is not a possibility – it has affected the researcher’s life, itself (Knibbe and Droogers, 2011, p. 294). This will likely involve personal growth and deeper mental engagement with participants than a study conducted from emotional and physical distance. The extent of embodied application is also relevant, as it seems there may be degrees of acceptance and application of the scholar’s body as a research tool during the process (Knibbe and Droogers, 2011, p. 301). As is common in anthropology, in general, the first attempt during fieldwork may be quite difficult on the researcher (specifically in the case of using the body as a tool); however, it is a valuable experience that can inform the next session of fieldwork (Knibbe and Droogers, 2011, p. 301). These risks are not necessarily dangerous, but rather cover the complicated nature of becoming involved in the religious activities one is studying. It is important for a researcher to be in tune with her own body to ensure she feels mentally healthy and stable throughout embodied participation (and afterwards).

Pierini (2016, pp. 290, 310-311) undertook mediumship training with the Brazilian Vale do Amanhecer religion, while considering embodiment to be a key element of learning this process. Within her progression, she obtained experiential knowledge of how mediums connect with and learn from spirits (Pierini, 2016, p. 311). Hunter (2018, loc. 1183) also relates

his participatory study of mediumship; in accordance with his phenomenological approach, he wanted to be immersed in the experience he was studying in the U.K.. His goals were met with success as he sat in séances and undertook mediumship development (Hunter, 2018, loc. 1183). Although he did not explicitly undertake an “embodied approach”, he used his body as a research tool, and his research outcomes are relevant here. While participating in mediumship activity at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, he took note of the reactions his body was experiencing, such as: feeling loss of control over his hand, increased heart rate, and “a detached perspective” (Hunter, 2018, loc. 1194). Experience must be a part of academia, and it is attainable through embodied methodology.

Not only does the embodied method have the potential to deliver high quality experiential data, but it is particularly useful for the field of religious studies. Nabhan-Warren (2011, p. 380) understood that using her body as an observation tool for her ethnography would allow her to experience not only the rituals of her intended subject, but also the belief, itself. She states, “Religion is something that is made and experienced and to ignore the embodied nature of religious praxis is to miss the point of ritual, beliefs, and praxis” (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 385). The point being religious practice is typically an embodied experience, therefore it is highly relevant to use an embodied method to explore its wider academic and cultural implications within the fields of religious studies and anthropology. This is not to say that a scholar’s embodied research experience will be the same as a participant’s (insider’s) religious experience; however, the shared activity may prove to be highly beneficial to the research process (at the very least in building bonds with the participants) (Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 393). Pierini (2016, p. 311) expands on the benefits to the religious studies field from an embodied approach to mediumship ethnographies. These ethnographies highlight the connection of the body to the divine and underscore a growing methodology movement to focus on experience (Pierini, 2016, p. 311). Utilization of the embodied approach does not appear to have snowballed into common practice, yet; however, its benefits seem clear and merit inclusion in future academic works. Using embodiment as a research tool in the ways

shown above were not undertaken for this study. Rather, they exemplify the types of experiences that may be common in mediumship, but rare in academic literature.

As described in the “Methodology and Ethical Considerations” section of this chapter, two major research activities were deemed unsafe due to the Covid-19 pandemic which occurred during the research phase of this thesis. In-person observations and training were not advisable, although they would have yielded more data on embodied research into mediumship. Phone interviews and surveys were useful methods which obtained solid information, yet they were limited in capacity for utilizing embodiment. Instead, I focused on a more general understanding of embodiment as described above by Maynard (1994) and McGuire (2008) in the discussion on feminist research and Nabhan-Warren (2011) (above). In this fashion, embodiment is considered below in two ways. First, my own experience as a bodied researcher was recorded in reflexive analytical memos. These were written in my field journal about my fieldwork experience. These records are relevant here because they show how embodied work can be practiced in research during day-to-day analysis and not only in major research events like observation and participation (see Nabhan-Warren, 2011, p. 403). Second, the embodied experience in mediumship was inquired about in the interviews, because mediums are aware of and use their bodies during mediumship. Analysis of both applications follows.

Reflexive Memos

Three interviews stand out as particularly relevant to my analytical process as a bodied researcher. Fran’s follow-up interview was scheduled for September 2, 2021, at 9:00 pm. As we moved through our greetings to begin the phone interview, it was revealed she was sick and experiencing many hardships. I offered to postpone the interview, which she agreed she wanted to do; the interview was rescheduled. Upon reflection of this simple interaction, I realized embodiment allowed me to be aware not only of my participant’s reality and experience, but also my own experience. Forcing the original plan would have created a

negative scenario, because Fran was sick, and a late night interview was not optimal for me, either.

A similar event occurred with Sloan's follow-up interview. Her interview was scheduled for September 9, 2021, at 10:30 am. When the time arrived, she was not ready and sent me a text to inform that she was dealing with an incident. She would call when she was ready. While desirous to provide optimized interview experiences, I also had my own goals and deadlines which were affected by postponed interviews. Sloan called about an hour later and informed me she was recovering from Covid-19 and was experiencing car troubles. Again, I offered to postpone her interview, which she accepted. This experience was noted in my field journal as being an important part of feminist embodied research: willingness to listen to a participant and make a decision to do what is best for them – especially when they are physically recovering, busy, or stressed. Sloan's interview was rescheduled for September 24, 2021, at 5:00 pm. Again, at the time appointed she was not ready for an additional half hour. When she indicated she was available, it was nearly too late for my schedule. I decided to conduct a fast interview, regardless, and the interview ultimately yielded wonderful results. Body awareness provided an opportunity for the participant and the researcher to have a better fieldwork experience. This is relevant practice for anthropologists interested in encouraging an optimal experience for participants.

The downside of being embodied ironically lies within its strength: cooperative measures. This cooperation is best for participants; however, it can be inconvenient and may result in postponed deadlines. The ability to reschedule was aided by the pandemic-inspired switch to remote interviews. If interviews were in-person, postponement would have been much more difficult to accept. As the world and academia moves into more technology-based work, anthropologists will likely find that phone interviews and video-based methodologies become more normalized within their studies.

The last research note worth commenting on in this section regarded Riley's interview. Riley has an assistant who is in charge of her schedule, and it took quite some time for them to find availability for an interview (for which I am grateful). Additionally, Riley only provides fifteen minutes of complimentary discussion in these cases. Therefore, only a few questions could be attempted for her follow-up interview. These strict guidelines caused me to feel doubt about the interview success. Riley was helpful and concise; we finished the selected questions in about fourteen minutes. Yet, during the course of the interview she was argumentative that mediumship – in general - was not religious; it should be considered scientific. It was disconcerting to face a participant that was directly opposed to my subject. Although the majority of the mediums I interviewed provided supporting data to the thesis of this paper, Riley often provided opposing viewpoints and statements – a valuable and necessary piece of the ethnographical process (albeit personally challenging).

Embodiment in Mediumship

The embodied experience in mediumship was also covered during follow-up interviews. Descriptions were diverse about the feeling of mediumship. Fran indicated, "For me, it's a constant flow. If I let it go too far, I have to find a balance between my mundane life..." She used to need people to remind her to shower and eat properly (2021, personal communication, 4 September). Several mediums indicated how exhausting mediumship can be. Arin advised that when she was a beginner medium she slept often, but now she does not get tired from mediumship. Instead, she gets energy from practicing mediumship; she said that now, "...it acts like a high" (Arin, 2021, personal communication, 16 September). In Madison's case, she has "enough energy for the event, but the next day you just want to sleep" (2021, personal communication, 22 September). Riley described her experienced to be, "like a caffeine rush" and afterwards it is "kind of draining"; she said, "This is not a forty hour a week type of job." (2021, personal communication, 28 September).

Haven described the emotional quality of the experience. She said, “I’m uplifted every time I have a meeting.” Yet, she will experience sadness if the sitting is sad (Haven, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Alex also provided an emotion-based description of his mediumship experience. He said, “The attunement is similar to fear or a sexual experience. You hear people say, “they were afraid.” You become very sensitive” (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 19 July). Gayle describes her mediumship experience as “bliss.” After a bad car accident, her pain would disappear when she practiced mediumship, but then it would come back after the session ended (Gayle, 2021, personal communication, 25 August).

Physically, Madison described it as, “a sensation on my left side. It’s like my guardian angel is there. I can only describe it as a feeling like they’re applauding me” (2021, personal communication, 22 September). While this sounds positive, she can also feel painful experiences. She noted feeling strangled when conducting mediumship with a strangled person (spirit). Vivian also described “chills” and the feeling of “heat” during mediumship sessions (2021, personal communication, 6 September). Riley’s mediumship abilities include clairsentience which causes her to feel physical sensations connected to the spirit she communicates with. She states she can recognize drugs from the spirit’s life due to the physical sensations she receives (Riley, 2021, personal communication, 28 September). Sloan describes herself as being “semi in a trance – kinda asleep – and semi-conscious, too. I’m teetering between...worlds.” She is, “listening to what people are saying...one ear here and one ear somewhere else” (Sloan, 2021, personal communication, 24 September). Schuyler provided some of the most unique physical symptoms: her nose itches when the spirit is a male, and she yawns when the spirit is a female. She feels hot and sweaty, and has experienced temporary paralysis in her limbs. Pain exhibits in various parts of her body, her eyes can have trouble focusing, her throat tickles, and her heart races. Ultimately, she cannot confirm how it works. But the spirits use bodily sensations to get her to understand their message. Understandably, she says, “I call it my occupational hazard.” Sometimes she is so tired after a reading she takes a nap, but other times she is energized through the reading” (Schuyler, 2021, personal communication, 25 August).

The embodied descriptions laid out above continue to show the individual nature of mediumship at its most personal level. Their feelings were not dictated by an authority figure, and no one indicated their feelings were subject to moral judgement – which may otherwise be expected from a practice often considered to be spiritual or religious. Although the outcome on the medium's bodies were sometimes severe, they also indicate empowerment. Each medium has full autonomy on their decision to practice and continues to come back to the practice in spite of sometimes exhausting emotional and physical symptoms.

Chapter 3: Mediumship and Mediums

Because this study focuses on mediumistic activity, this section will go into detail on the experience to provide a clear understanding of the topic. While the academic literature on mediumship is referenced throughout this paper, this section focuses more on the experience described by Spiritualist churches and practitioners of mediumship. However, the Emmons and Emmons (2003) study on mediumship will be heavily relied on here, because they are academics who have produced literature on modern American Spiritualism from the inside. Wilson (2015, p. 72) also conducted insider positioned research into Spiritualism in the U.K.; he states, “Insider understandings of mediumship raise important points in relation to psychological analysis of the processes involved in mediumship.” This segment will differentiate between individual practice versus group practice, discuss various types of mediumship, and the experience of training. Then it will move into a participatory description of the experience, the reputation of mediums, and the implications of sex and gender in mediumship.

It is helpful to remember mediums exist in groups outside of Spiritualism. In Florida, mediums may have a group identity under a business formed around their work (see Appendix 2). For example, Hotel Cassadaga in Lake Helen, Florida employs many mediums at their hotel. Their mediums can only be contacted or hired by going through the hotel. Similarly, Alchemy & Ashes in Lutz, Florida is a store which sells products commonly understood to be connected to the occult. They also offer mediumship sessions through mediums who may be hired in connection to the store. For mediums who wish to earn wages from their skills, forming or working with groups seems beneficial. Mediums also practice individually, as well. Individual experience is just as relevant to this thesis as group experience.

The definitions of mediumship previously given in the Introduction lean into a formalized approach. According to those statements, a medium has taken time to prove her abilities or is doing so according to the beliefs of the church. Alternatively, Schmidt (2015, p. 41) states, “People with developed mediumship abilities are usually referred to as mediums. The most

common mediumship abilities are feeling the presence of spirits, seeing them or hearing them.” Organizationally, the Spiritualist churches focused their definitions of mediumship on the exhibition of outward signs. Individually, Schmidt shows it is enough for mediumship to be privately experienced by the medium. It is interesting to note the belief that mediums are born with their skill (even “have a genetic disposition to it”); however, years of training is still undertaken to become certified as a medium (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 19 July). In his case, Alex undertook training at the Arthur Findlay College in Stansted, UK, as well as intensive years long training at SCSC (where he currently practices mediumship) (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 19 July). Ultimately, mediumship is individualistic in nature (meaning it is individuals who act as mediums) and is not totally regulated by any church or institution.

Individual Practice vs. Spiritualism

Certainly there are differences between individual practices and corporate practices. Emmons and Emmons (2003) highlight some differences between private mediumship and the corporate expectations of Spiritualism. They make a basic distinction between practicing mediumship in home circles or séances in which a medium gives messages to “sitters” and “platform” work that takes place in public settings in which a medium provides messages to attendees (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 280-283). Penelope Emmons believed her mediumship work both inside and outside of Spiritualism was for healing; that it can be used to show love and serve others (2003, loc. 2495). This is echoed in Richard and Adato’s (1980, p. 190) study in Lily Dale; they found that the mediums’ ultimate goal was to help other people. Although these goals are of a spiritual nature, this may not be true for other mediums; they state that mediums who are outside of Spiritualism may have “more of an issue” with spiritual growth (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2878). They acknowledge that mediums exist outside of Spiritualism, and that a potential influencer of mediumship is religion (in general) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 3282).

Institutional mediumship work in Spiritualist churches looks different than that described above by Penelope. Regarding her work in Spiritualist churches, she states:

I have found the “public work, giving two or three-minute messages from the platform to be the least satisfying and most challenging aspect of mediumship. I think this is because I view my work as healing work, and the platform’s intention is to prove the continuity of life beyond death, quickly, to as many people as possible.

(Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1539)

She goes on to provide valuable insight into her experience as a public medium during which she not only requests a message from Spirit, but also for identifying information of the spirit that will be understood by the receiver (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2571). She confirms there is an “elitism that judges mediumship” within Spiritualist settings which results in preference of one type of work over another or which places negative value judgments on the work of modern mediums (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2571). This sentiment is also true in Spiritualist churches in the U.K.; church attendees have experienced so many mediumship sessions that they feel free to critique the medium’s correct or incorrect statements (Bartolini, *et al.*, 2018, p. 176). In fact, some Spiritualists will not accept a message until two separate mediums provide the same message (Bartolini, *et al.*, 2018, p. 176). Indeed, the preference of one type of work over another is evidenced by both SCSC and the NSAC. SCSC (n.d.) specifically states their method utilizes “the medium’s mind to receive, process and deliver messages from the Higher Spirit Plane, and is a demonstration of Spiritualism. This is known as mental mediumship.” Wilson offers an insider’s description of mental mediumship:

Spiritualist insider understandings of mediumship inevitably vary but routinely include the possibility that a spirit might communicate by prompting or stimulating the contents of a medium’s personal unconscious. An example might be as follows: a medium giving a public demonstration or private consultation might suddenly have in mind an image of their own grandfather, or might simply find themselves thinking of their grandfather; a self-observant medium might interpret this as an indication that the recipient or client’s grandfather is ‘with’ the medium, and beginning to communicate. The idea or concept of ‘grandfather’ has been conveyed while working.

(Wilson, 2015, p. 70)

The SCSC (n.d.) goes on to advise they do not use “psychic science tools.” These statements evidence full appropriation of mental mediumship work as exclusive to Spiritualism, while rejecting the use of other methods. NSAC states,

Mediums produce phenomena and convey messages from the Spirit World, while psychics are picking up directly from objects, events, and people, not through the intervention of intelligences in the Spirit World.

(NSAC, n.d.)

Here again, NSAC privileges the work of mediums, while denying that psychics communicate with Spirit.

Another interesting question for Spiritualist mediums concerns payment. The Emmons and Emmons (2003, loc. 2908) study covered the ethical nature of charging for medium work. They found that all the mediums they spoke to had no ethical qualm over charging for their work; however, they found several non-Spiritualist mediums in their archive research who found it inappropriate (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2908). Charles Emmons never charged for his work; he qualifies himself as a “student” medium, states he never became registered, but that he did join a Spiritualist church (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 4861). Charging for religious work is not common in the U.S. While most traditional churches take offerings during their services to pay employees (and for other endeavors), most activities and meetings with religious leaders are offered to all – regardless of an ability to pay for it. This is not always the case with Spiritualist churches or companies that utilize mediumship services (see Appendix 2).

This matter of charging for mediumship work was also discussed in interviews with some who participated in this study. Table 3.1 shares the mediums’ thoughts on charging for their work.

Name	Thoughts on charging for mediumship
Fran	She does not believe charging is right; however, she understands mediums need to earn money to support themselves.
Arin	“Understanding the times you’re living in determines how you can charge.” She advocated use of a sliding scale charging system during difficult times.
Madison	“I personally don’t need the money, so I never really wanted to charge that much...but people have told me I need to charge more.” She advised that she doesn’t have a problem with not charging for mediumship, but that charging weeds out some people (this was a positive effect for her).
Haven	She charges \$100 per forty-five minutes; however, she allows people to pay what they can. She also utilizes a sliding scale method and does pro bono mediumship for cancer patients. “Everybody just has to go with their conscience and the market.”
Alex	“The worst thing that ever happened to mediumship and healing is it became a business.” He advised he does not want to be dependent on mediumship for his livelihood.
Syd	She referenced her Bachelor’s degree and the twelve years of classes she has taken for her mediumship practice, and asked, “Does that mean I should not be paid for my mediumship, and that I should not be paid for my writing, as well?” (She is also a writer.)
Sloan	This is her full time work, and she charges a competitive fee for her mediumship. She will make exceptions for people who do not have enough money, and she has done pro bono work.
Schuyler	“I don’t believe in charging too much.” She does free readings on Facebook, free grief readings, and speaks to children for free. She advocated for a balance between charging and free work. Ultimately, she sets her price based on other self-care procedures (like massages).
Gayle	“...if I give up my career to give you a reading, what am I supposed to do? Go beg on a street corner?” She believes in charging an honest fee for the work.
Vivian	“I agree with it. We’re working. We’re helping. We’re doing counseling.”

Table 3.1

From a feminist perspective, it is worth noting how people (especially women) feel about their ability to charge for their labor. This data shows some hesitancy exists relating to charging for mediumship work. Some of the hesitancy was outright (as with Fran and Alex). Some mediums have decided to charge less in certain circumstances or to do pro bono work for those in need. Ultimately, the interviews highlight that each medium has the freedom to charge as they see fit and has the autonomy to change their fees as they like. Appendix 3 shows the types of fees that are charged for mediumship as of the timeframe of this project.

Although charging for individualized spiritual work is not part of the religious norm in the U.S., this is one more example that shows how mediumship can be different from other spiritual practices. Mediumship work is usually conducted in individual sessions by those who do not

have a large tithing audience. Individual fee requirements are necessary for those who do this work for their living.

Types of Mediumship

There are many different ways in which a medium can operate. Hunter (2018, loc. 1340) finds there are two basic factors that commonly exist in spirit mediumship: belief in spirits and utilizing altered states of consciousness for communication with the spirits. The term “altered state of consciousness” (“ASC”) may be controversial for some; however, Hunter seems to apply it in a general sense (rather than in reference to drugs or substance use). Ultimately, spirit mediums are people who offer communications from spirits, although many other phenomena are associated with mediumship: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and ghost sightings (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 370). The specific types of mediumship represented by the mediums in this study is included in the Results chapter. At times, experiences may blend together, and it can be difficult to differentiate the various experiences or to verify their reality (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 370).

Physical mediumship uses matter / objects during mediumship. Historically, it included table tipping and the manifestation of ectoplasm (a kind of substance issued by a medium during a session) (Hunter, 2018, loc. 1047). Physical mediumship is not as popular today as it was historically; and now suffers from a bad reputation (Hunter, 2018, loc. 1062). This matches the rejection of psychical objects by both NSAC and SCSC (as discussed above). However, Leonard (n.d., p. 52) found that although mediums understood their groups prohibited “outside tools”, in practice, many of them still used tarot, numerology, or astrology. In addition to phasing out physical mediumship, the Lily Dale Spiritualist community also preferred to phase out trance mediumship (not to be conflated into the above general discussion on ASC), because they accused mediums of using it “as an ‘excuse for objectionable behavior’” (Richard and Adato, 1980, p. 194). In the cases of physical and trance mediumship, it seems the larger mediumship communities are taking steps away from these methods.

The use of devices (or tools) during mediumship became a topic that was covered in interviews with participants in this study. Most mediums who partook in these interviews indicated they had used a tool in mediumship at some point, but the tools are not a vital part of their practice. Table 3.2 gives a summary of the objects discussed with the mediums.

Medium	Object / method used	Comments
Fran	Cards	Learning about tarot cards gave her permission, "to explore and learn."
Arin	Psychometry	She will use tools or methods as requested by her clients. It is important for the medium to know how to safely work with objects. In speaking about Ouija boards she said "you have to follow the rules, more or less, so you don't get in trouble."
Madison	Tarot cards, spirit candle writing	She said, "I think that they're great. It depends on what works for you." She explained that the tarot cards "can help calm" her clients and "break the ice."
Haven	Tarot cards	She indicated, "tarot cards are fun." They assisted her in developing psychic abilities when she was in college. Because she is certified through the SCSC, she is not permitted to use tarot cards professionally, though.
Alex	Tarot cards	"Within Spiritualism we are not permitted to use outer apparatus in...discernment." He added, "...other sciences are very valid or useful, but are easier to be manipulated." He mentioned he will use tarot cards at Christmas parties, "But again, they're valid science, but they're not in keeping with our religious beliefs..."
Syd	Tarot cards	"We don't use anything when we do our readings here, other than our gifts..." (She is a medium at the SCSC.) However, she has learned how to do tarot cards and says, "it's something to look at." She added logically, "If you want to see a tarot card reader, you go see a tarot card reader."
Riley	Unspecified tools	She taught herself how to use tools, because there were no schools available when she was learning. Although she never uses tools with clients, she will use objects in her personal mediumship work. She describes them to be, "like a musical instrument...different tools work with different abilities."
Sloan	Oracle cards	She has tarot cards, but said, "I'm honestly way too lazy to figure out how to use them." Instead, she will occasionally use oracle cards, but "Ninety-nine percent just me...I'm not a tool person. If you have all the gifts inside of you, then why would you need tools?" She added, "...the whole thing about using a psychic or a medium was to use their gifts."
Schuyler	Crystals, oils	

Gayle	Tarot cards	To her, tools are enjoyable, yet “unnecessary.” She said, “I’ve no opposition to it – why do something unnecessary?” She uses tarot cards as an elementary training object to teach others. They help settle people’s minds (her students or a sitter). She explained it is not a good sign if a medium can only receive information with tarot cards.
Vivian	Angel Cards, tarot cards	“I don’t use the cards when I’m out of the house for readings at different places. I don’t use the cards; I was told not to.” She will use angel cards in phone readings, and she uses tarot cards sometimes (but at unspecified intervals).

Table 3.2

As indicated throughout the table, some mediums enjoy using cards in their readings. However, they are deemed unnecessary objects in their work. It also seems important for mediums not to be found reliant on any tools (see Gayle’s and Alex’s responses), and this shines a better light on why the Spiritualist camps prohibit tool usage by mediums acting in official capacities.

Training

There seem to be different schools of thought on mediumship training and behavior. Emmons and Emmons (2003, loc. 2208) found through their experience in Spiritualist discussions, interviews, and classwork that there are strong opinions about correct and incorrect mediumship methods. Although they desired to learn about the “mental processes” and meaning-making of mediums, they were confronted with strict rules and political complexities (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2208). Their experience seems to stand in stark contrast to the idea Spiritualists put forth that mediumship may be practiced by all (while gatekeeping the experience of training which can go on for years) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2267).

Regardless of Spiritualism’s formal politics, mediums encourage beginners to have “a system”; after they get used to the basics it becomes easier to do (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 4310). The following actions have been found to assist in achieving “an altered state...:

- Centering,
- “raising vibrations,”
- clearing the mind,
- meditating shortly beforehand,
- singing, and
- “stepping aside” or looking into space” (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 4333-4334).

A medium may also ask for guidance from spirit guides, through prayer, “asking for a white light of protection, and setting an intention or desire” (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 4333-4334). Not only do mediums have these activities to encourage their work, NSAC gives a list of “Dos” and “Don’ts” for their mediums. While it is a lengthy list, it is relevant to the mediumship experience for mediums operating within NSAC. These items (in Table 3.3) are quoted from a “NSAC Publication” (n.d.).

“Mediums Do	Mediums Don’t
Do come prepared – properly dressed, on time for the service, etc.	Don’t think you are a full-fledged medium just because you feel Spirit energy – study, learn the laws, learn decorum first
Do meditate and prepare yourself to receive communications prior to serving	Don’t ask questions when giving a message
Do indicate the individual to be addressed – names are not necessary	Don’t keep asking “Do you understand?”
Do speak directly and loud enough to be heard by all present	Don’t forget that neither you nor your Spirit helpers are infallible
Do remember that the message is from Spirit and is uplifting	Don’t forget that Spirit energies also depend on the sitters present at that service
Do remember that you are a message minister and represent Spiritualism	Don’t forget that Mediums work differently; be tolerant – there is no one right way
Do prove the continuity of life by bringing evidential greetings from the Spirit World	Don’t get the idea that Spirit helpers will do all of the work – continue to unfold
Do remember that during the church service, messages are “a greeting and not a reading”	Don’t ever use obscene or crude language
Do be polite to other workers	Don’t ever blame Spirit for a negative thought or a poorly spoken message
Do be enthusiastic and positive as you are communing with the higher spheres	Don’t forget that you must be spiritual to attract spiritual helpers from the other side
Do silently thank your Spirit helpers for sharing when you are finished	Don’t say that you are a Spiritualist medium if you use cards, crystals, or tell fortunes
	Don’t diagnose, prescribe, or suggest”

Table 3.3

The SCSC provides an insider's account of their training methods. They have a formalized program for mediums and healers; both take a minimum of four years to finish (SCSC, 2019). The first step for mediums is to join the Camp at SCSC; the medium must be or become a Spiritualist to do this (SCSC, 2019). To join the Camp, they must be fairly active in the Camp for at least one year (in classes or services), take a New Member Orientation class, submit an application, and obtain three letters of recommendation from current members (SCSC, 2019). Then, the Board of Trustees votes on the requested membership (SCSC, 2019). After the Camp membership approval, the medium is required to locate a "certifying evaluator" (a Camp member who will help the medium on their ensuing four-year training path) (SCSC, 2019).

At this point, the training program will launch for the medium, who will be placed in one of four levels (likely level one or two for new members) (SCSC, 2019). The medium will need to take classes such as "Ancient Spiritualism", "History of Spiritualism," Ethics", "Platform", "Comparative Religions", and classes on mediumship, itself (SCSC, 2019). Upon moving to Level II, the medium must conduct public demonstrations at the SCSC services and receive critiques on their messages regarding accuracy; then the medium must give short readings at monthly events called "Medium's Night" (SCSC, 2019). After all classes have been taken and student readings given, the certification process begins; this is a test (oral or written) and includes additional mediumship reading requirements (SCSC, 2019).

Preparation for Mediumship and Felt Experience

Literature on mediumship already describes procedural information on how mediums may prepare for a session. For example, Charles and Penelope Emmons (2003) both worked as Spiritualist mediums and provided first-hand accounts of mediums' processes and feelings about their work. Penelope discusses the unstable feeling she has about her mediumship abilities:

I just figure that there is a message for everyone or that that [sic] my other-than-conscious self directs my attention to the right person. Is it any wonder I question my capacity? It is strictly intuitive, not at all rational.

(Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1563)

In her case there is no clear path or method to a guaranteed outcome. She was trained “to go to the one mind for information” – a mental activity wherein the medium will access “one presence where all truth is known” (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2550). Penelope believes she can provide valuable “spiritual service” to others when she communicates with Jesus, “some other Master teacher”, or “the Universal intelligence” (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2550). Yet, regardless of her own training and goals for service through mediumship, her experience has been controlled by Spiritualist church leaders who told her how many exercises to conduct and to keep them short (when working at a church service) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1574). She feels uncomfortable with these restrictions, which may limit the quality of her mediumship in that moment; in fact, she believes public American mediumship (limited to two or three minutes per person) does not provide sufficient time to understand the spirit communicators (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 1574, 2517). Referencing the above list of expectations from NSAC churches, mediums are reminded not to give readings in public services – they give “greetings”, only, during that time (NSAC, n.d.).

Charles’s experience also provides an interesting case study in learned mediumship experience within Spiritualism. He participated in mediumship classes and practiced giving readings and messages in Spiritualist churches (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1953). He noted that it can be very hard to understand if the person he is speaking with is connecting with his message, and feedback is usually negative (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1992). This does not mean he usually gives bad readings – just that feedback more often comes from those who have a negative experience. There is no method that allows him to keep track of how many communications were positive, negative, etc... (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 1999). Again, this is consistent with NSAC’s (n.d.) above instruction that mediums do not ask questions and do not ask for confirmation. This experience is different from that observed by Bartolini, *et al.* (2018). In their study based out of Stoke-on-Trent, U.K., they found mediums desired audience

participants to give “yes” or “no” confirmations during public demonstrations so the medium can understand if they are communicating the connection properly (Bartolini, *et al.*, 2018, p. 175).

Charles reinforces Penelope’s experience of feeling unsteady in mediumship; he states,

...how easy it is to doubt one’s own mediumship. No matter how well you may have done an hour earlier, who knows if you’ll ever be able to do this slippery thing again?
(Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 2062)

He is another example of a medium who feels they do not have a consistent method to guaranteed success. This is not a critique of his method or the activity; rather, it serves to state the difficulty of mediumship and highlight a potential personal cost that mediums must endure. It is not easy to pursue something that has no guaranteed end. Other mediums may show different experiences – especially outside the confines of Spiritualist church requirements (see NSAC rules above). In spite of his personal doubts, Charles looks back on his Spiritualist mediumship experience thusly,

It had been my year for confirmation that mediumship frequently does happen (whatever it is exactly) and that I could really do it (often enough to challenge the skeptic in me).

(Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 2062, 2186)

This paper does not analyze the reality of mediumship, only the reality of the medium’s experience, which in Charles’s case ultimately seems to have been positive.

Apart from their own experiences, Emmons and Emmons (2003) also address mediumship in general. Like Penelope’s experience above, some mediums are unable to articulate their methods for mediumship; however, some mediums “do have a system they can describe almost like a manual” (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 3813). Respondents in their study revealed the following data on a “conditioning regimen”: 75% prepared for mediumship by meditation, 61% prepared with prayer, and 50% used a particular diet (these activities are not

exclusive to each other and can be used in combination) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 4267). Ultimately, Emmons and Emmons concluded that mediums do not utilize much in the way of preparation for their work, they are not conscious about a lot of it, and there is a struggle to get mediums to explain how they receive their communications once they have started (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 4303, 4306, 4339). This illustrates the complexity of building an analysis of mediumship experience since the mediums themselves may be able to provide only limited descriptions.

Reputation of Mediums

Mediums seem to also endure some trauma throughout their experience (in their life and work). Mediumship capacity frequently begins when the medium experiences a health problem or after a trauma event (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 694). According to the literature, mediumship does not get easier from there. The U.S. (and western culture in general) not only places little value on mediumship, but also tends to question whether it is mental illness or insanity (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 667). Wilson (2015, p. 70) comments that while mediums are no longer reductively explained as experiencing epilepsy, they may still be connected to “psychological dissociation”, which is still connected to historical religious accusations about mediumship that it is “dangerous or pathological.”

Perhaps even more difficult for some mediums is the possibility that they will be labeled “deviant” - a common mode of thought in the U.S. (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 3577). Mediums may find themselves on an “othered” side of culture in the U.S. Professional mediums who experienced paranormal events in childhood state they were “labeled as odd or evil” by their communities or families (Emmons, 2000, p. 73). Children who exhibit mediumship skills are often not encouraged to use them, or the experience reduced or renamed (the “imaginary friend” concept) (Emmons, 2000, p. 73). In North America, even those who receive messages from mediums or enjoy consuming mediumship related content understand they can get labeled as “strange” (White, 2019, p. 107). Combining this negative reputation with the

above described difficulties of getting affirmations in practice, can cause mediums to desire approval in their work (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 4425). Participants of mediumship are not immune to desiring social acceptance, and mediumship has not achieved mainstream status. White (2019, p.107) states, “embodied notions of culturally appropriate ways of talking about religious experiences may result in both perceived and enacted forms of stigma.” Additionally, negative feedback they receive from their community causes them to shy away from participation in academic studies or reports (Cassadaga Spiritualist Psychic Center, 2021, personal communication, 10 June; Leonard, n.d., p. 54). This thesis has been affected by a hesitancy from mediums and their gatekeepers to respond to requests for interviews (and even anonymous observation of free public events).

Implications of Gender, Sex, and Spirit Identity in Mediumship

Review of Emmons and Emmons (2003) study provides some important data on sex / gender in mediumship. Considering the difficulties that mediums experience (described above), it would naturally feel vital for them to have some form of community. Emmons and Emmons (2003, locs. 3372-3373) checked for this support among their mediums and pieced the data by sex (classified only as male or female; no comments were made on intersex or trans data); they found equal amounts of support for mediums regardless of sex. Bartolini, *et al.* (2018, p. 174) confirm they also found equality “in terms of gender” in their U.K. based study on mediums, and note inclusion of gay and lesbian mediums; however, they found Spiritualist churches and mediums were typically white and “working class.” At face value, commenting on “no difference” in support seems unhelpful; however, taken in comparison with other religions it is more impressive. Christian religions in the U.S. often exclude women from active religious leadership positions. Indeed, Leonard makes note of this dramatic difference for women in Spiritualism:

In addition, the majority of the women subjects were ordained ministers; this is in stark contrast to mainstream religions where church elders are predominantly men, and where many fundamentalist religions prohibit women from holding any leadership

positions and bar them from becoming ordained ministers, basing this prohibition on biblical teachings.

(Leonard, n.d., p. 50)

While some mediums may not be considered leaders in their religious circles, it is certainly an activity which requires the medium to be the focus of communicating important lessons or privileged information (from the spirit world). For women and men to receive equal levels of community support in this activity is noteworthy in this regard.

There were, however, some differentials between the sex of the medium and the sex of the spirit guides who communicated with them. (Note: Emmons and Emmons [2003] appeared to use the word “gender” for “sex” in their portrayal of this data.) They found that 76% of spirit guides were male, while 24% of the guides were women (61% of the mediums analyzed were women) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 3969, 3970). Additionally, female mediums showed a greater propensity for working with male spirit guides who were classified as “authority figures” (with titles like “Master” or “Doctor”) (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 4006- 4011). Specifically, 26% of male spirit guides working with female mediums were authority figures, and only 18% of male spirit guides working with male mediums were authority figures; neither male nor female mediums worked with any female authority figure spirit guides (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, locs. 4007, 4011). Relevant here: generally, mediums do not believe *they* choose the spirit guides; rather, the *guides* choose *them*, and both parties need to consent to the partnership (Emmons and Emmons, 2003, loc. 4016). The Emmons and Emmons (2003) study included archival research and data from modern mediums; however, their publication is nearly twenty years old. It is possible these statistics between sexes has changed as a new generation of mediums has come of age and begun practicing since that time.

Because “spirit guides” are commonly associated with Native American culture in the U.S. a brief note on potential appropriation is included here. During the course of my fieldwork I queried some mediums to gauge their use of Native American culture in their mediumship

work. In its origins, Spiritualism appropriated the culture of indigenous people (see Appendix 1; Taves, 1999, p. 196). Now, on an individual level the use of Native culture seems less influential in day-to-day mediumship; however, several mediums indicated their family or work has been connected to indigenous people or ideas. The relevant data is included below in Table 3.4.

Name	Connection to and use of Native / Indigenous people
Arin	Taught psychometry by a Cherokee woman. Arin’s family heritage includes Cherokee people.
Madison	“My spirit guide, the one I get the most information from, the most comfort from, is Chief White Cloud (Sioux Nation).”
Haven	She would only be connected to indigenous culture if her client had an indigenous guide.
Alex	He has never utilized indigenous people on his own, but he has connected to indigenous personage in work with other people.
Syd	She believes everybody has at least one Native American guide; however, she does not focus on connecting to guides and has no specific information on her own Native American guide.
Schuyler	She does not have a Native American guide, but she works with her client’s guides. The implication is that if her client has a Native American guide, she would work with that person.
Gayle	“My main spirit guide is a Native American.” She connected with this guide while previously working with a Native American.
Vivian	She works with a Cherokee guide who she understands was her father during a past life. Vivian’s family heritage includes Cherokee people through her grandmother.

Table 3.4

Madison and Gayle were the only mediums who indicated they both 1). actively worked with Native guides and 2). did not comment on having Native family heritage. When asked if she had spoken to the Sioux Nation about her work with Chief White Cloud, Madison answered, “No, because I don’t care what they think about it.” She added, “It doesn’t matter what other people say” (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 22 September). I also asked Gayle how her guide’s people felt about her work with him, but she had no information on his background because he had never shared it with her (2021, personal communication, 25 August). These examples show how, at times, indigenous culture may still be utilized outside tribal boundaries and without permission of the tribe.

Another question regarding spirit identity concerned whether the sex of the spirit could affect a medium’s experience, and this was a question included in my survey (Figure 3.1 below).

Because the results were so unified and there was no reason to cover it further in this study,

this part of the fieldwork is presented here instead of giving it additional space in the Results chapter.

Does the sex or gender of the discarnate person / spirit with whom you communicate have an effect on your mediumship experience / outcome?

15 responses

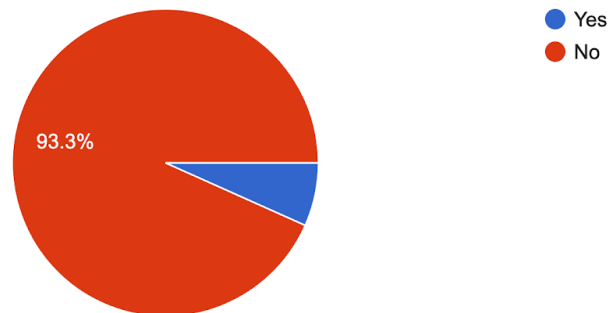


Figure 3.1

Only Vivian indicated the sex of the spirit affects her mediumship, so this question was addressed in a follow-up interview with her. She specified, "I could just say to you that the male is much stronger than the female energy is - both very strong, but sometimes the male is more dominant." She added, "It's just a different feeling." When asked to describe the feeling she responded, "Oh, just chills." She provided an example of her communication with the Archangel Michael: "That means the chills, themselves, are stronger" (Vivian, 2021, personal communication, 6 September). The concept of male and female energy (and energy use, in general) was echoed throughout the experiential descriptions from the mediums who participated in this study.

Ultimately, this chapter described mediumship as an experience that occurs in both institutional settings and on an individual level. This experience occurs in various ways which are further covered below in the Results chapter. Having now introduced several categories of

mediumship experience here in Chapter 3, they will now be analyzed in Chapter 4 in conjunction with the mediums who participated in this study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter covers the themes found in my fieldwork. The first section looks into the demographics of my participants (like sex identity and age). Then there is a discourse on the development of mediumship abilities followed by a discussion of the religious nature of mediumship. Subsequent themes turn more personal: reputation perceptions, group work preferences, and experiences connected to gender / sex.

Demographics

The demographics for this study are included below in graph and table form. While informative, the demographical data is limited due to a smaller number of participants. Also, as noted in the above discussion on ethics, participant identities are kept anonymous (participant “names” are pseudonyms).

Sex Identity Comments

Do you identify as a woman?

15 responses

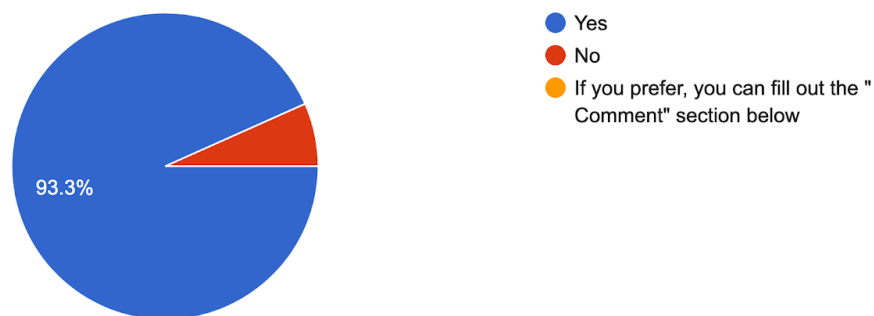


Figure 4.1

The majority of my survey recipients (and therefore respondents) were women. This was expected since mediumship has been a platform for women throughout American history, (see Appendix 1). One additional participant (Alex) did not complete the survey, but did participate in two interviews in which he confirmed he identifies as a man (2021, personal communication, 19 July). Appendix 3 provides a sample of mediums that are available in Florida and a description of the pool for potential participants (see the column labeled “Pronoun Used” for a sample of sex identity among Florida mediums). Additionally, Vivian commented in her survey response that, “I am a woman but we have male and female sides” (2021, personal communication, 10 August). This concept of masculine and feminine natures came up repeatedly throughout my interviews with the mediums and is covered later in this chapter (see “Mediumship Experience Connected to Gender / Sex” section). It is important to keep that discussion distinct from sex demographics, since male / female categories hold space for a plurality of gender expressions. The mediums’ experiences connected to their sex and gender are covered later in this chapter.

Age of Mediums

Will you please state your age?

15 responses

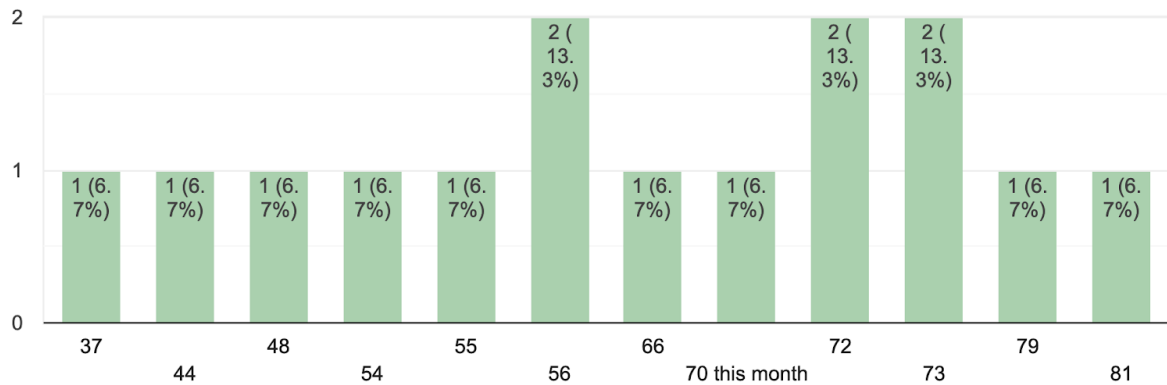


Figure 4.2

The mediums who participated in this study differ in a forty-four year range. No one under thirty years old participated. In addition to Figure 4.2 (above), Alex stated he is 69 years old (2021, personal communication, 19 July). The reason why this study skewed toward the Baby Boomer generation was not a planned part of the research conducted here; however, it is unsurprising because Florida is a retirement state. It is possible that some of the cultural questions relating to religious connections and sex / gender identity would differ from those in this study if younger generations were included.

Years of Practice

Medium	Years practicing
Schuyler	6
Fran	10
Madison	11
Bailey	14
Syd	17
Vivian	20
Joss	24
Alex	29
Shae	30
Sloan	31
Haven	34
Riley	35
Gayle	40
Arin	48
Berny	55
Palmer	“since childhood” (she is 70 years old)

Table 4.1

The time length of mediumship practice is not quite as simple as Table 4.1 indicates. Some mediums provided simple answers in years; however, others added in relevant context clues. For example, Haven indicated that she has been practicing mediumship for thirty-four years, but only twenty-three years with the SCSC (2021, personal communication, 14 July). This is relevant, because the SCSC has a demanding certification process that its mediums must

complete and pass prior to official work under its name - regardless of mediumship work done prior to its certification (Haven, 2021, personal communication, 14 July; Syd, 2021, personal communication, 6 September). Also, it can be difficult to quantify years of practice for some mediums, like Palmer, who experienced mediumship when they were children (2021, personal communication, 17 July). They themselves may not remember when they noticed their skill, or they may not deem it relevant enough to quantify to the public. Syd indicated she has been practicing, “Technically since 2004. However, we all have these gifts. I’ve always been knower (omnipresence [sic] or claircognizant). Plus, I’ve always had gut feelings (clairsentient)” (2021, personal communication, 23 July). This answer implies that her skill is natural and she may have been using it her whole life; she may be unable (or unwilling) to quantify it.

Vivian and Bailey also qualified their years of practice with some helpful description. Vivian indicated that she has been studying mediumship for more than thirty years, but she has been “working” as a medium for more than twenty years (2021, personal communication, 10 August). This raises an interesting question that many professionals ponder: when do you claim your identity in your field – when you begin learning or when you begin earning? Apparently this dilemma extends outside of academia /business and into the spiritual / religious realm. Bailey similarly commented she has practiced “14 years that I was fully aware of this ability and took time to develop it” (2021, personal communication, 10 August). There is indication here that she had been partially aware of an undeveloped skill. The experiences of undeveloped mediumship are an interesting topic for future research.

Religious Background

Do you have a religious background (of any kind) that led to you becoming a medium?

14 responses

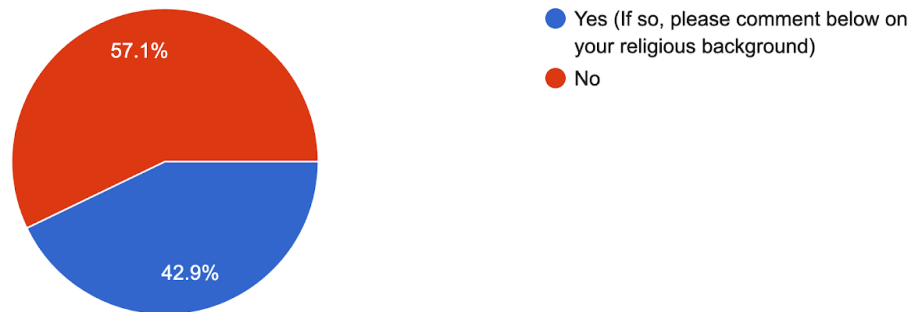


Figure 4.3

The religious background of Florida mediums is relevant to address in building a contextual picture of the potential religious experience of the mediums. As mentioned throughout this paper, mediumship work is often rejected or vilified by religious communities in the U.S. Yet, it is a practice that is embraced as a religious act by Spiritualism, a popular historical American religion. My “Mediumship Experience” survey queried respondents on their religious background, and if it had effected the start of their mediumship. The responses were as unique as the number of participants. Figure 4.3 is a result of a “yes” or “no” question on the survey. A comment section below the survey question yielded a colorful context; those details are conveyed below in Table 4.2. Additional examples of mediums connected to religious ideology is included in Appendix 3.

Medium	Do you have a religious background (of any kind) that led to you becoming a medium?	Comment (on your religious background)
Fran	No	"Actually it was in reverse. I first discovered my mediumship and asked for guidance and wisdom. I was directed to the path of Catholicism and believe with all my heart in the trinity and acknowledge all of Gods [sic] creations.

		There is nessecary [sic] balance that is required in order for us to exist here on earth..[sic]"
Arin	No	
Joss	No	
Shae	No	"One can't become a medium. Mediumship is a gift some people are born with"
Syd	No	
Sloan	No	"Buddhist"
Gayle	No	"I found this in spite of being raised Catholic"
Bailey	No	"No, it wasn't a religion for me. It was the death of my boyfriend that passed away."
Riley	Yes (<i>see below</i>)	"It did NOT lead me to become a medium. Religion had nothing to do with it, however I was raised in a Christian family."
Madison	Yes	"My gift was revealed while attending the Temple of Love and Healing in Florida."
Haven	Yes	"I was raised a Methodist. I entered an ashram in my early 30s and became a yoga and meditation teacher. I was awarded the title Acharya, translated as spiritual anger for incoming spiritual lifestyle residents. I have also studied Buddhist meditation in Nepal, Thailand, and Burma. I have been on pilgrimages to India on five occasions and studied scripture with spiritual teachers throughout the world."
Berny	Yes	"Raised Catholic"
Schuyler	Yes	"I was raised non-denominational Christian"
Vivian	Yes	"non practicing catholice [sic]"
Alex	<i>No survey response</i>	He was raised in Roman Catholicism. Eventually, he moved through other paths: Kundalini yoga (Sikh), Alcoholics Anonymous, and then SCSC.

Table 4.2

Riley selected “Yes”, but then wrote that her religious background did not lead to her mediumship; this would skew the percentage of the results in a different direction than that reflected above. It is unclear why she chose “Yes” when her answer seems to have been “No.” It is possible to answer “No” and still add comments on religious background. (Her follow-up interview further confirmed her staunch opposition to referring to mediumship as religious.)

It is also noteworthy that some mediums shared very similar religious upbringings, but marked them as having different results on their mediumship choices. Gayle states she found mediumship “in spite of being raised Catholic.” While both Berny and Vivian credit Catholicism

in leading them to mediumship. Fran found Catholicism because of mediumship. Similarly, Sloan has a Buddhist background that did not result in her mediumship, but Haven credits Buddhism as being part of her path to mediumship. Both Riley and Schuyler noted Christian backgrounds, yet neither felt that experience held them back from mediumship (which is generally at odds with the current literature on Christianity and mediumship). This further reinforces the individual nature of the mediumship experience. Some felt their religious background was encouraging, some felt the opposite. Fran was led into further religious experience because of it, while Riley denies its religious capacity at all.

Launch and Development of Mediumship Skills

Because the research focused on women’s experiences, information was collected on what brought women to mediumship and how they chose / were able to grow within the experience. Numerous themes became evident from our discussions. Many mediums stated traumatic events began their experience. Others referenced natural childhood skills which involved family struggles. Still others referred to religious or spiritual journeys which resulted in mediumship experiences. It would not be reasonable or fair to reduce entire experiences to one simple launching point; however, for purposes of this thesis a table is included below to concisely highlight key words and indicators that the mediums advised were influential in the beginning of their practice and skill.

Launch of Skill

Medium	Key words / indicators on starting mediumship
Fran	Natural skill in childhood. Her father tried to stifle it.
Arin	Natural skill in childhood. Started as a trauma response to abuse. Her father punished her for the initial signs of mediumship, but then became her mentor after he understood what was happening.
Madison	Discovered in a religious setting (The Temple of Love and Healing).
Haven	Discovered through a progression of a spiritual journey (she was at a yoga center teaching meditation and yoga). She then found she had mediumship skills and began training and developing them.

Alex	Discovered through a progression of a spiritual journey. He went from Roman Catholicism to hedonism to Kundalini yoga to Alcoholics Anonymous to the SCSC.
Syd	Brought to mediumship through her daughter who exhibited natural childhood mediumship skills.
Sloan	Trauma via brain injury started her mediumship abilities.
Schuyler	Natural skill in childhood, but it was not fully welcomed by her family. She developed it as an adult.
Gayle	The mother of an ex-boyfriend (who was a drug user) took her to SCSC. This launched her initial interest, although she did not specify if this is when her ability exhibited.
Vivian	Taught about psychic abilities by her grandmother (a Native American); however, she indicated her abilities exhibited later.
Bailey	Trauma via death of her boyfriend.

Table 4.3

Table 4.3 indicates key aspects of women's lives that contribute to the feminist analysis of this thesis: abuse by men (Arin), the stifling of culturally-anomalous religious activities (Fran and Schuyler), and trauma and death (Bailey and Sloan). The theme here is these individuals experienced an introduction to mediumship through heart-break or familial inconvenience. They eventually could not stop the skill from becoming evident and have now embraced mediumship as an important part of their identities.

Type of Skill

The mediums in this study exhibit a fairly wide range of skills. Although not all the mediums clarified which style of mediumship they use, some provided fascinating descriptions of their experiences. Table 4.4 below offers a summary of the range of skills represented in this study. Additional range of mediumship skills exhibited in Florida is included in Appendix 3.

Medium	Type of mediumship	Description
Fran	Clairsentience	She does not hear voices, rather she experiences mediumship through her thoughts (like "lyric segments")
Arin		"It all depends on the spirit that I'm talking to.... if they're excited or loud then they will take over my body, and I'll start having a personality like them. I hear them, I feel them, I see them, but it's not like on "Ghost Whisperer" [a television series] where she actually sees a spirit. When I see a spirit, when I'm communicating with them, I'm not actually seeing what they used to look like ... how would I say this... I am feeling the energetic properties of their soul." She describes it as being "in like a heavy, dense fog" when she communicates with a

		spirit. What she hears: "It's like a very low tone." What she feels: "And of course depending on how they died, I'll feel it in my body." She also learned psychometry in Washington state, USA.
Madison	"Just about all of them."	She has also learned numerology and the use of dowsing rods.
Haven	Clairsentience	She says, "there's three of us" and she's "like a flute...letting the information flow through me." The three beings in her sittings are herself, a client, and a guide or deceased relative. She adds, "Very often another relative might step in...one relative might break the ice." Some spirits may not be interested in speaking with a medium, but want the sitter to know they are there.
Alex	Clairsentience, Clairvoyance	
Syd	Clairsentience, Claircognizance	
Sloan	"Does it all."	In addition to mediumship capacities, she has practiced remote viewing, automatic writing, and telekinesis.
Schuyler	Clairsentience, Clairvoyance, Clairaudience	She uses essential oils and crystals in her practice.
Gayle	Evidential mediumship	
Vivian	Clairsentience, Clairvoyance, Clairaudience	

Table 4.4

Development of Skill

Florida mediums develop their abilities through any means they decide best for them. There does not seem to be one correct path that is represented for mediumship training. Several mediums undertook formalized institution-based training. Madison, who discovered her skills at The Temple of Love Healing, took classes at the church, but also studied on her own (learning numerology along the way). Eventually, she became certified by her mediumship instructor (2021, personal communication, 22 September). Haven also learned from a teacher, but still had to undergo SCSC's four-level training and certification process years later in order to practice with them (2021, personal communication, 25 August). Alex had a range of formal, institutionalized training: undergoing mediumship education at the world-renowned Arthur Findlay College in Essex, England and the additional certification process at SCSC (2021,

personal communication, 19 July). Syd also holds multiple institutional certifications in mediumship, including SCSC (2021, personal communication, 6 September). Gayle had a rocky road to her institutional involvement. Originally, she participated in classes at her Spiritualist church and worked her way up in the church, but was eventually kicked out after the pastor died. She was then involved in starting a new church, but was eventually removed from that one, as well. Now, she has her own mediumship training center and is pleased to be certifying mediums, herself (Gayle, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Vivian also received training in the U.K. at the Arthur Findlay College, as well as at Lily Dale (a major Spiritualist center in the U.S.), and from teacher Beverly Field (2021, personal communication, 6 September).

The paths above are not the only approved paths, though. Several mediums also indicated that they were self-trained. Schuyler stated she is “largely self-taught” although she did undertake some training and mentorship over time (2021, personal communication, 25 August). Sloan stated, “I did a lot of self-training. I am basically self-taught for what worked for me” (2021, personal communication, 24 September). She had tried to attend a mediumship class, but did not really learn anything. She then attempted to learn from books, but found little that could help her (Sloan, 2021, personal communication, 24 September). Arin also did not indicate formal training; however, she received guidance from her father and a Cherokee woman who taught her psychometry (2021, personal communication, 22 June and 16 September). Fran also confirmed she has a natural skill, and it was self-developed. She researched information on the internet, visited psychics, and conducted her own reading on the subject (Fran, 2021, personal communication, 18 June and 4 September). The mediums each found their own developmental path. Because mediumship exists on the fringe of western religious practices, it may be more complicated for practitioners to experience institutional development. By comparison: large Christian institutions exist throughout the U.S. and routinely educate large numbers of adherents within each generation. Yet the people represented here either decided to train themselves or had to travel long distances to find the expertise for which they were looking.

Geographical Location of Skill

This study aimed to research the experience of mediums in Florida, U.S.; however, two mediums who participated in this study now live in other geographical locations (Arin and Madison). Their mediumship skills were both realized and developed in Florida, though. Madison was able to provide a relevant environmental comparison between her current location (Ohio) and Florida. She said, “Floridians are so much more open to belief in the ability to communicate with the spirit world” (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 14 July). She provided a bit more description in her follow-up interview, “People up here [in Ohio], it’s almost like they’re ashamed of getting a reading or seeing a psychic. Down in Florida, everybody’s getting a reading....and if they mock you: who cares?” (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 22 September). When asked why that might be, she theorized, “I think it’s freedom of the lifestyle down in Florida.” She further explained that people in Ohio are either farmers or service workers who have stringent religious histories [which are apparently not compatible with psychic beliefs] (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 22 September). Several other mediums found work in Florida to be unique or better for them. Fran advised, “There is a lot of concentrated energy in the region. There is strength in numbers and sharing in the light” (2021, personal communication, 10 July). This is not surprising considering that central Florida is home one to one of the largest Spiritualist communities in the U.S. (the SCSC – which Fran is not connected to, ironically). Schuyler also feels that being a medium in Florida made her experience stronger (“perhaps of the opportunities opened to me by the community as a whole”) (2021, personal communication, 9 August).

Several SCSC mediums participated in this research and gave conflicting responses **to** whether the Camp assists in their skills or work. Haven feels that working for SCSC gives her credibility that may not otherwise exist elsewhere (2021, personal communication, 14 July). In her case, Florida is not a special spiritual vortex, but rather (as Madison indicated above) it is a place that has a mix of willing clientele in combination with a credible mediumship center (Haven, 2021, personal communication, 14 July). Joss echoed this concept in his survey response saying that

being in Florida does not affect his mediumship experience, but he stated, “I live in a community of spiritualists [sic]. The bias against us is mostly a thing of the past” (2021, personal communication, 17 July). Berny believes that conducting mediumship in Florida is “Enlightening” (2021, personal communication, 17 July). Palmer referenced her mediumship work that she engaged with prior to learning of SCSC; she believes her skills were stronger in South Florida than they are at the SCSC and she ponders, “I’ve wondered if abilities strengthen for what is needed” (2021, personal communication, 17 July). Syd advised that working in central Florida does not affect her mediumship experience, yet countered with, “...although [mediums] have been working in this Camp since 1894, which I believe makes a difference” (2021, personal communication, 23 July).

A few mediums feel there is no difference in their experience by working in Florida. Arin, who currently works in Washington, U.S., did not feel Florida affected her experience (2021, personal communication, 29 June). Riley, who also works in Japan, commented, “It’s the same wherever I work.... People die in all countries, the experience is the same wherever I work” (2021, personal communication, 9 August). Bailey also feels “There is no difference in any area that I give Mediumship readings” (2021, personal communication, 10 August). This research question continues to align with the individual nature of experience (whether it be religious, spiritual, and / or physical).

Although this paper focused on Floridian mediums in the U.S., Americans are not static. It is easy to move from one U.S. state to another. People who were raised in Florida (and practiced mediumship in Florida) may have relocated to another state (and this was the case with Arin and Madison). Fran moves around in her location, but seems based in Florida. In Sloan’s case, her mediumship began in California, but now she practices in Florida. As discussed above, some mediums trained in the U.K., although they live in Florida, and some participate in remote or online training / mentorships. This is the nature of mediumship training and community.

Origin of Skill

As I started reviewing the survey data I received and processing some initial interviews that were completed, I noticed some conflicting ideas were represented. Some mediums seemed to believe mediumship was a natural part of human life, while others viewed it as a gift or special skill they were developing. My follow-up interviews addressed this to try to see if I could gain more clarity on how mediums viewed their skill. Is it a universal skill represented throughout humanity, or is it a gift only given to some? Some clarity on the question is revealed through Kardecist beliefs: “everyone is born with mediumship abilities.... However, these abilities often remain undiscovered or underdeveloped.... People with developed mediumship abilities are usually referred to as mediums” (Schmidt, 2015, p. 41). These beliefs were echoed by the mediums in this study, as well. Naturally, there was not one clear answer, but the responses certainly fell in similar patterns. Table 4.5 offers the mediums’ thoughts on this question and is a result of original survey responses and some follow-up interviews that focused on this question, specifically.

Medium	Belief that mediumship is a universal skill?	Relevant Notes
Fran	No	She sees some individuals try to stop their abilities; however, this is like any other field: some can do it and others cannot.
Shae	No	"One can't become a medium. Mediumship is a gift some people are born with."
Arin	Unclear	She says, "People who don't live in a psychic family don't understand how [normal] it is they think it's magical."
Madison	Unclear	- "Everyone has the ability to be clairvoyant in a way. It's called listening to your gut instincts." - "I'm not saying everybody can be a light worker." - "A lot of people are misled...into thinking they are psychics." - "There is an overabundance of people who think they have the gifts and don't."
Alex	Unclear	- "You have to have a genetic disposition to it - like athletes, sculptors." - He noted that mediumship cannot be taught to a person without a biological tendency for it.
Schuyler	Unclear	- "I would say everyone has the gifts.... All of us have the ability to connect."

		- However, she did qualify this statement by confirming that not everyone is able to communicate with deceased people.
Syd	Yes	"I absolutely believe that everyone is a psychic medium. It's just a matter of practicing the things that help you to connect."
Sloan	Yes	- "Well it is true we all have the gift." - She went on to qualify this statement by referring to children who have this gift, but who may be discouraged by family. These individuals would have to take care to "nourish it" (the gift) in order for it to be used later in life.
Gayle	Yes	- "When people learn mediumship, it's sort of like learning the piano. If you don't take lessons and you don't practice, you're never gonna learn your skill." - "Some will be virtuosos, some will learn for fun, some will never learn."
Vivian	Yes	"Everyone is psychic, everyone is intuitive. And you enhance the abilities. That's what I did..."

Table 4.5

It is worth pointing out the vague terminology for psychic abilities. Psychic abilities are widespread and encompass other activities outside of mediumship. Schuyler stated, "All mediums are psychic, but not all psychics are mediums" (2021, personal communication, 25 August). It is possible that some of the gifts generally referred to above could apply to other abilities, although their responses were in answer to questioning about mediumship. Another revelatory pattern is the idea that people may have psychic abilities (in general), but that they might be weak or completely undeveloped. Psychic abilities seem to need attention and practice in order to be noticed or used further.

The Religious Nature of Mediumship

Regarding your experience as a medium: do you consider it to be religious or non-religious?

15 responses

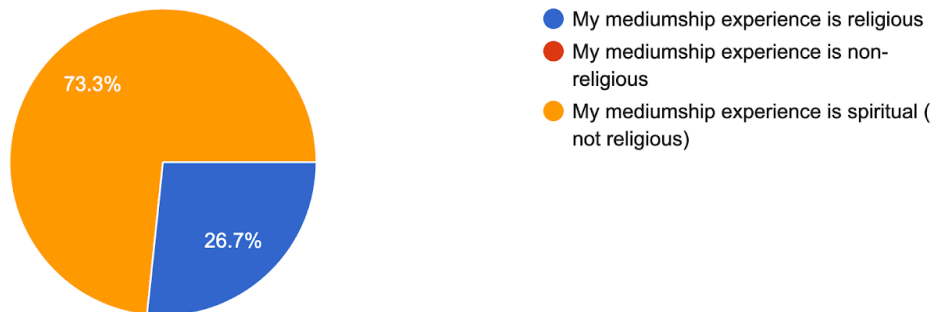


Figure 4.4

Because one's understanding of religion, spiritual identity, and experience is highly individualized (even the definition of "religion" continues to be debated in academic circles), it was important to gauge if the mediums themselves felt mediumship was religious. Several mediums felt their mediumship was religious, but the majority felt it was spiritual (not religious). That data is divided out below by person in Table 4.6.

Name	Mediumship experience is religious	Mediumship experience is spiritual (not religious)	Mediumship experience is non-religious	Relevant details
Fran	Yes			"With meditation, visualization, prayer, and gratitude, you learn how to open your heart to God."
Madison	Yes			"I identify my Source as Christian Spiritual Metaphysical. I believe my gifts are a gift from God."
Shae	Yes			"Mediumship is the proof of life after death It is expressed through the philosophy of Spiritualism""
Joss	Yes			"Better answer: religious and spiritual."

Arin		Yes		"I believe in a Divine energy connecting things that are alive and was [sic] alive."
Haven		Yes		"Working with the non-physical dimension has no dogma. It is attuning to consciousness without interpretation."
Berny		Yes		
Palmer		Yes		"Although I am a member of Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp which is a religion, philosophy and a science, I personally have always felt my abilities to be a spiritual experience."
Syd		Yes		
Riley (<i>see notes</i>)		Yes		"Because I am dealing with "spirits" it is spiritual. Although I've studied many religions in college, I do not subscribe to any one or multiple religions. They all hold a piece of the truth, none contains all truths. I see religion as a "school of thought and ideas" which are not necessarily relevant to the spiritual reality."
Sloan		Yes		
Schuyler		Yes		
Gayle		Yes		"Conventional Religious groups require adherence to tenants as a way to experience a positive after life. Spiritualism / mediumship teaches life is what we make it here and hereafter."
Vivian		Yes		"I do have a strong belief system. I do believe in God but I do not make judgements."
Bailey		Yes		"I was raised Catholic and still pray to the blessed mother, the saints, and Jesus. At times I attend Catholic church, but I don't believe in everything it states. I feel as though I have more of a spiritual connection that's filled with unconditional love. There were times previously that I feared sinning and I don't believe in that anymore."
Alex (<i>did not take survey</i>)				"It is not a religious experience. It is a spiritual experience."

Table 4.6

Although there was an option to select that one's mediumship is not religious, no one selected that option. Riley selected "Yes", but her comments provide additional context. She does not view it as a transcendent, spiritual practice; it is spiritual only because she deals with "spirits." In her follow-up interview she was firm on her stance that mediumship is scientific and like any of her other senses (like sight or smell) (Riley, 2021, personal communication, 28 September).

This section highlights the individual understanding of religious experience. For example, Fran provided this further statement in her follow-up interview to whether mediumship is religious, “Absolutely. Because of my personal path.” She added, “Having a higher power to me indicates a religion” (Fran, 2021, personal communication, 4 September). By contrast, in her follow-up interview Madison answered by discussing the classes she took, a dream she had, and confirmed that with all the things she has seen and been through: “It’s a religious experience” (2021, personal communication, 22 September). There is further division of thought over Spiritualism, itself. Palmer believes her experience is spiritual even though she is a member of the SCSC (2021, personal communication, 17 July). On the other hand, Shae believes her experience is religious, as “expressed” by Spiritualism (2021, personal communication, 19 July). Because there is not one correct answer regarding what is spiritual or religious, each of these answers shows examples of the complexity of individual religious experience and spiritual experience. Even, as Riley serves to illustrate, what some deem to be religious or spiritual is completely outside that category to non-religious / non-spiritual people. The same actions and skills that some view to be religious can be experienced as platonic by others.

Reputation

A continued theme found throughout this thesis has been the reputation of mediums within their surrounding community. Since the felt reputation of women is of interest to a feminist research approach it was also included in my discussions with the mediums. Ultimately, the common feeling among Florida mediums is that their reputation is good and has improved quite a bit over the years. Many mediums credited television shows as being instrumental in changing the public’s perception about mediumship. Haven referenced *Long Island Medium* with bringing “a lot of credibility” to mediumship (2021, personal communication, 25 August). Sloan echoed this credit to *Long Island Medium* for helping people be interested in mediumship, even if they do not believe in it (2021, personal communication, 24 September). Riley mentioned the series *Ghost Whisperer* as responsible for changing minds of the younger generation (2021, personal communication, 28 September).

A couple mediums are still concerned about mediumship's reputation due to scammers in the field. For example, Schuyler is skeptical to receive readings from other mediums because she knows there are scammers; however, television and social media have assisted the overall reputation of mediums. She qualified this by adding, "In the religious sector there is still a stigma" (Schuyler, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Gayle also sees this qualification on the religious world. She does not believe religious people are receptive to mediumship, and she is concerned with unethical and under-trained mediums who attempt to give readings (Gayle, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Arin also noted scammers in the field who lure clients with low prices and then scare them into giving large payments to remove curses (2021, personal communication, 16 September). Ultimately, these mediums are noting their preference for some gate-keeping within their field to continually improve their reputation in their communities. This research question revealed the belief that some people should not hire themselves out as mediums, some standards are expected within the mediumistic community, and scams are unethical and harmful to their community.

Although discussion of mediumship's connection to geography occurred earlier in this chapter, there were some responses that were more relevant to reputational experience. When asked how conducting mediumship in central Florida affected their experience as mediums, both male participants seemed to interpret the question to be about their reputation as individuals. Alex indicated it did not affect mediumship for him, rather his social opportunities have been limited when his mediumship work is discovered (2021, personal communication, 19 July). Joss interpreted the question similarly, but answered in the opposite direction. He stated on his survey, "not [sic] at all. I live in a community of spiritualists [sic]. The bias against us is mostly a thing of the past" (Joss, 2021, personal communication, 17 July).

Haven's response may provide more detail on Alex's and Joss's answers (all three of these mediums operate at the SCSC). She discussed her training at SCSC, and the fact that their customers have good faith in SCSC mediums. She wrote, "People find me by going to the

organization website frequently and then being redirected to my personal website. So there is some quality control that affects the tone of people who come to see me” (Haven, 2021, personal communication, 14 July). When considering Haven’s answer, it becomes clearer that a medium’s experience is affected by how they believe they are perceived. Haven’s experience is affected by having customers who are confident in the SCSC. Alex’s life experience has been affected through community social judgments. Joss considers his experience is directly tied to being in a Spiritualist community and does not feel any bias against him. According to these answers, their interpretation of Floridian experience looks connected to their desire to have an accepting community.

Group Work and Experience

The consistently individual experience of Florida mediums has been revealed throughout the themes represented above and was further reinforced by exploring the group work undertaken by the mediums (although the below Figures 4.5 and 4.6 do not initially seem to support this position).

Are you connected to a Spiritualist church or Spiritualist community?

15 responses

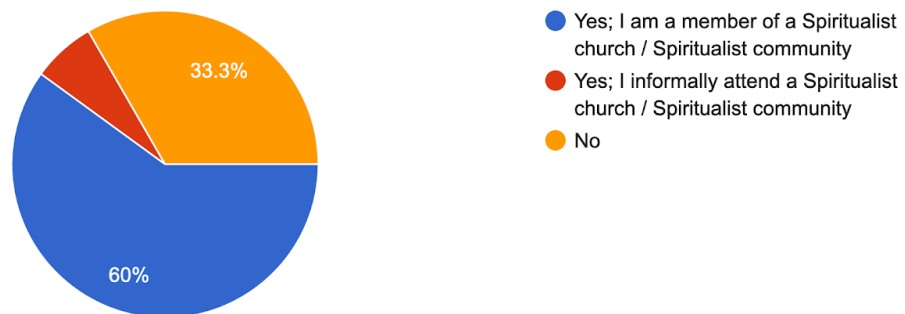


Figure 4.5

Are you connected to a group of mediums?

14 responses

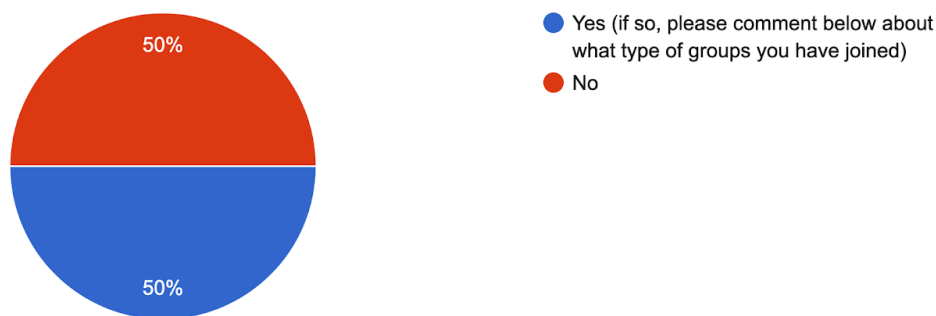


Figure 4.6

First, it was intriguing to see that although nearly 67% of respondents said they were connected to a Spiritualist community, only around 50% of respondents said they were connected to a group of mediums. Therefore, although one may be connected to a Spiritualist community, that does *not* imply connection to other mediums. Most participating mediums at the SCSC (Haven, Alex [not a survey respondent], Berny, and Syd) consider this connection to be with other mediums. However, Joss and Shae indicated they were members of a Spiritualist group, but were not connected to a group of mediums (Joss, 2021, personal communication, 17 July; Shae, 2021, personal communication, 19 July). Palmer also confirmed she was in a Spiritualist group, but she did not understand the question about being in a group of mediums (2021, personal communication, 17 July).

Next, although Fran indicated on her survey that she was a member of a Spiritualist group, her follow up comments indicate an alternate understanding of the world “spiritualist”: she indicated only attending “unofficial groups” or a group with the word “Spiritual” in its name (2021, personal communication, 18 June and 10 July). This is an example of conflation between words in the mediumship world. In this project, “spiritual” is used in reference to an inner quality relating to a non-physical, emotional experience. “Spiritualism” means the official religion of that name, and “Spiritualists” are practitioners or adherents of that religion. It is

possible that participants in this study had their own personal definitions that advised the answers they gave on surveys or interviews; conflation of these similar terms can easily occur. This paper's use of "Spiritualism" and "Spiritualist" are clearly defined and may have been more easily understood if a definition had been included in the initial survey. However, it is unlikely to have changed much in the overall analysis found here.

Others, like Arin, indicated on the survey they are not part of a Spiritualist group; however, they have trained other mediums in classes (2021, personal communication, 16 September). This applied to Bailey, as well. She is connected to other mediums through "mentorships", "workshops and networks" (2021, personal communication, 10 August). Alternatively, Gayle indicated she was connected to a Spiritualist group which she specified was the mediumship training center she operates (2021, personal communication, 10 August).

In follow-up interviews, the question of group mediumship work was addressed further. Ultimately, to me (an outsider) the group work sounded thrilling, but nearly all the mediums seemed apathetic about it or only participated in groups as instructors. Fran indicated participating in an online group recently, but she was not impressed (2021, personal communication, 4 September). Vivian has previously practiced in groups, but not anymore; when describing her group experience, she said, "Well, in a group the energy is high. Everybody's on the same wavelength." She added, "That energy is gonna bring in the spirits. The energy is very important when you're in a big group" (Vivian, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Arin usually practices mediumship on her own, but sometimes she holds classes in which her students want to practice in group format. In a group setting, the energy increases the activity they will experience. She views herself as "the anchor" of the group and allows the spirit to "channel through" her; she refers to it as a trance after which she does not remember what happened (Arin, 2021, personal communication, 16 September). Gayle, a teacher at her own mediumship center, also discussed the energy output of a group. She says her students are growing their mediumship energy, so working in a group is "easier" for them (2021, personal communication, 25 August).

Madison also indicated that she has done both group work and individual work, and she does not like the group work. She likes to make “that emotional connection” in a mediumship reading, and it is difficult to work for an audience (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 22 September). Alex added some clarification on how group readings work. Currently, he does not practice in a group, but thought he might have when he was starting out. He noted that in a group reading each medium has their own skill that they bring to the group. Some mediums “are batteries” for the group, while others help with the spirit communications (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 8 September). This was echoed in Schuyler’s follow-up interview, as well. Each person brings their skill to the group and they work together with the spirit. For example, she cannot see spirits, but another medium she knows can do that and brings that option to their group readings. She also brought up the possibility of using other mediums to help with clients who need special attention (some of her clients have “dark attachments”, so she brings in “other spirit workers” when necessary) (Schuyler, 2021, personal communication, 25 August). Although these Florida mediums may have connections to other mediums (as indicated in the above graphs), these connections are not typically utilized in a group practice (even for those in formal Spiritualist groups). Again, the individual experience of the medium prevails over other options.

Mediumship Experience Connected to Gender / Sex

The foundational component in my research questions was the experience of women in mediumship activities. The behavior of male mediums towards others was covered in both the initial survey and follow-up questions as deemed appropriate by survey responses. This question was vital to my study, because of the general behavior of men in spiritual / religious circles (generally domineering and controlling in western evangelicalism). The respondents to this study indicated several perceived behaviors of men towards women in the field of mediumship.

Fran provided an anecdote of her work with a male psychic who attempted to conduct a Reiki healing session on her; however, she felt it was dangerous because of his ability to alter her consciousness and attempts to wipe her memory. She believed it was an endeavor to abuse her (2021, personal communication, 4 September). This type of anecdote is of particular interest for feminist research, because it notes the danger people are exposed to when dealing with others who have ill intent or try domination through physical or mental manipulation.

Because mediums are often women engaging in psychic or mental work, they are placed in vulnerable positions while training or working with others. For the survey question about men's behavior toward women in mediumship circles, Riley answered, "I have NEVER found being a woman a disadvantage in any way in [my life] as a whole" (2021, personal communication, 9 August). Later, her follow-up interview revealed a different story, "I don't care about what men think or do...but I do notice ...over the course of forty years, I've had run-ins with other mediums and they're almost always men. I've had them sabotage my work [via plagiarism of her writing]." However, she re-iterated her refusal to dwell on this reality by adding, "I think it's a huge disservice to women to worry about men's work.... So, I don't think that way. I'm not on board with any of that. Nothing's ever stood in my way" (Riley, 2021, personal communication, 28 September). Riley and Fran both indicated abuse by men in their field, and a perseverance to continue their practice in spite of it.

Haven, a medium at SCSC, indicated on her survey that, "What I see, is that men In [sic] this particular Spiritualist community, can be very demeaning to women. I have not seen that with women towards other women" (2021, personal communication, 14 July). On the other hand, Joss and Alex are male mediums at the SCSC and both of them indicated men treat women well at the Camp (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 8 September; Joss, 2021, personal communication, 17 July). These conflicting reports are probably best summed up by Palmer's response (also based from SCSC): "As anywhere else, it's individual. People are compassionate and kind, or not" (2021, personal communication, 17 July). The subjectivity of consideration

regarding “good treatment” or “bad treatment” within mediumship circles and between sexes and genders provides a base for additional questioning and research in the future.

This thesis also questions whether men have a different mediumship experience than women. The survey responses are included below in graph form.

Do you think men have different mediumship experience than women?

15 responses

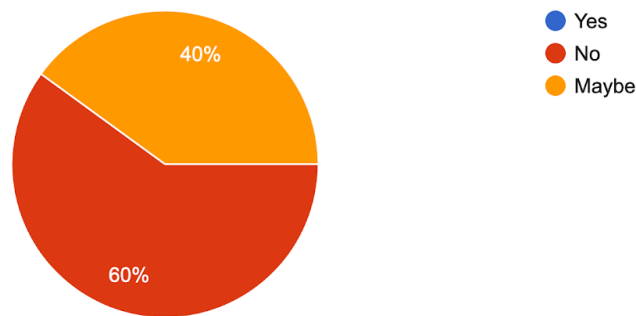


Figure 4.7

Context was gathered in the follow-up interviews. Fran responded “no” in her survey, but indicated men’s experience *was* different in her follow-up interview. In response to this query, she expressed her understanding that people can have both masculine and feminine sides, and that women have a certain [unexplained] quality in them that lets them experience certain activities. She believes men can have this quality, too (Fran, 2021, personal communication, 4 September). This idea that mediumship is evidenced by some inner characteristic that is feminine continued to be echoed throughout my fieldwork. Arin (part of the 40% “Maybe” responses), explained, “The majority of men that I know that are intuitive have a feminine side to them” (2021, personal communication, 16 September). Haven (also a part of the 40% “Maybe” survey responses) provided the most unique response of all, “Women are very intuitive, and I believe can work with guides more effectively. Men are more objective, and I believe they can work with deceased relatives better.” This answer was given in our follow-up

phone interview, after which our call dropped. When we re-established our call, she admitted the response she gave was not previously known by her, and she believes her spirit guides provided that answer (Haven, 2021, personal communication, 25 August).

Women continue to seek equality and respect in their religious work and experiences, and the above responses indicate two important themes. Experience in mediumship is perceived by practitioners to be the same regardless of sex (something that cannot be said for other western religions, in general). Yet, there are still perceived gender-based privileges within that experience (that intuition is “feminine” or natural to women), which may be troubling to mediums who do not identify their inner natures in that way.

In addition to questioning whether men had a different experience from women, this study also inquired whether a medium’s work or experience was affected by being a woman. The survey received thirteen responses to this question (Figure 4.8). Only Fran indicated on the survey that her mediumship is affected by being a woman.

Is your work or experience as a medium affected by being a woman?
13 responses

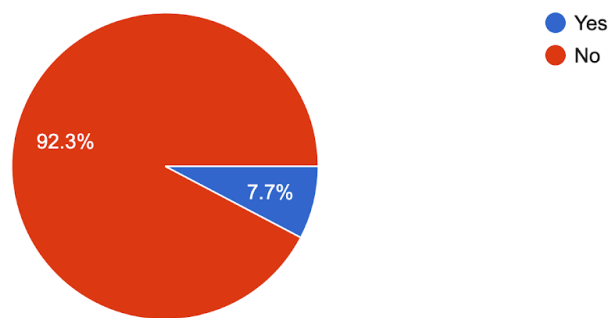


Figure 4.8

Although she indicated “No” on the survey, Arin had previously indicated in an interview that her experience as a women was relevant to her mediumship. Her reasoning was connected to

abuse she had experienced from a now-deceased family member many years ago, and the helplessness she had felt at that time. Her life experiences all worked together to lead her into her mediumship work and the capacity to be of help to others (Arin, 2021, personal communication, 22 June). Looking at this response from a feminist research approach highlights the difficulty of women’s experience which can begin in childhood and may be triggered by abuse from men. The experiences Arin communicated over the course of our time together were generous in their candid nature and in her willingness to share difficult memories that were connected to her mediumship work.

One way of gaging equality is measuring how leadership positions are spread over various demographics. The survey queried mediums on whether leadership within their group of mediums or Spiritualist church was equally distributed among sexes and genders. The results are below in Figure 4.9.

Is leadership within your group of mediums or Spiritualist church equally distributed among sexes and genders?

15 responses

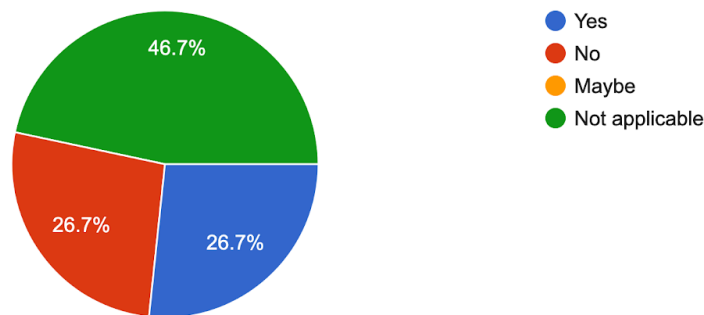


Figure 4.9

Alex, who did not take the survey, provided the most specific details about leadership at the SCSC in his initial interview. He confirmed the majority of mediums at the SCSC are women, but currently the leadership positions (a board of trustees) are filled by a majority of men (at the

time of our conversation). It was the same when he previously served on the board. The camp members hold elections to fill the board positions (Alex, 2021, personal communication, 19 July). It is worth noting that of the “No” responses in the above graph only one of them came from a fellow SCSC member (Syd); Joss and Palmer (also at the SCSC) answered “Not applicable” and were not available for additional comment. Therefore, most SCSC mediums in this study feel the leadership within the Camp reflects equal distribution. It may be unsurprising that the SCSC reflects the leadership trends of religious culture in the U.S.: the majority of practitioners are women, but the majority of elected leaders are men.

Conclusion

Much was attempted through this thesis, which had one key goal: the analysis of experience that responds to a research gap in women's mediumship in a socially conservative location. Chapter 1 introduced this study's combined foundation of women, religion, and feminist religious studies by discussing academic works in each of these areas. The methodology used for this research followed in Chapter 2, which also explained how a feminist approach was applied. Chapters 3 and 4 then moved into the specifics of mediumship and the results of fieldwork conducted for this project, which work together to illustrate a medium's experience in Florida.

Experience is impacted by the unique elements in a person's life; elements which are varied and colorful (as seen in categories in Chapter 4). Hunter emphasizes the value of these elements in a study like this one:

We need to take into account the wider social and cultural influences on paranormal experiences and phenomena – it is counter-productive to ignore these aspects – and we need to understand the role of participant and experience in the mediation of these phenomena.

(Hunter, 2011, p. 15)

The influences addressed in this study are those of religious experience, sex identity, religious background, and geographical location. These were covered through the research questions and in the Results chapter. Martins pointed out another scholastic necessity for this type of research:

...there is a gap in the literature on epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects of interviews applied in the context of anomalous experiences, and even on some specific nuances of the general use of such techniques.

(Martins, 2013, pp. 21-22)

The methods and analysis laid out here provide examples of how to conduct ethnographical research in anomalous experience in ways addressed above by Martins.

The value of women's mediumship experience was conveyed through this research, as well as the need to include ethnographical accounts of women's experiences within feminist religious studies. Bowie (2013c, p. 49) records, "...studies in this field of research need to incorporate the perspective or standpoint of both researcher/s and subjects, and be as inclusive as possible." As the researcher of this project, I included analysis of my own reflexivity as a component of my feminist approach. This added a layer of data which is of relevance to academic feminist work. Further, this research included a variety of experience types: that of men, women, spirit guide, various age groups, Spiritualist, non-religious, and spiritual. This level of variety colors the study and gives as much diversity in perspective as there were participants. Each table in the Results chapter shows the unique quality of personal experience. Patterns emerged, but overall the results highlighted how important individual experience was, because the individual mediums had unique experience within their mediumship practice.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to the research that worked either to change the results or to provide opportunities for future work. Either way, the limitations themselves ended up being a useful part of this study. A few of these were discussed in my Results chapter (such as terminology confusion and the static age of participants). Future discussions with mediums should take a clear stance on terminology such as "spiritual", "Spiritualism", "Spiritualist", and "Spirit." Asking each medium to give their own definition of "religion" would also prove helpful to future studies of mediumship.

As covered in the Results chapter, the static age of the participating mediums resulted in little data from younger mediums (in their twenties through forties). Some data was gathered for that age group, but most mediums were in their fifties through seventies). This is indicative of

who is readily accessible as a medium in Florida. Future research on mediums and new social media may reveal younger mediums.

A potential limitation to this study was the Covid-19 pandemic. My outreach to mediums began in 2020 as Covid-19 started to spread through Florida. While it certainly reads as problematic for research opportunities, it merely forced me to focus on individual experience rather than institutional religious experience. As covered in my Results chapter, mediumship groups are not preferable to most of the mediums in this study, and churches / camps that utilize mediumship are flailing / apathetic about academic research.

Additionally, I had hoped to undergo mediumship training as a key piece of embodied experience. In person training was not safe due to the pandemic, and the opportunity did not arise. However, the mediums often described their own training as personal (through reading books) and disjointed over time and space (different geographical areas of training at different times). This reinforced the individualistic nature of the mediums, their preferences, and personal skills. For future research I hope to try those training options, and they constitute a separate set of research questions and goals. Ultimately, the pandemic did not limit my study, rather it worked as a key part of the research to guide my focus directly where it should be: on individual experience.

Outcomes

Although the major accomplishments of this thesis were shown in the Results chapter, one final visitation to the research questions outlined in the Introduction will wrap up the outcomes of this project. My first research question asked how the mediumship experience is interpreted by (or changed by) feminist perspectives. The Feminist Religious Studies section noted the importance of undertaking a feminist approach to religious studies which furthers feminist research because women's lives can have an important spiritual component (Christ, 1976, pp. 320-321). The mediumship experience can be analyzed or interpreted through several key

elements of interest to feminist perspectives. First, several mediums described trauma in connection to their mediumship work or discussed their trauma during interviews for this study. Trauma inquiry was not a focus of this research, but women's trauma in connection to religious experience is a noteworthy and relevant response as deemed appropriate by the participant.

The next feminist perspective taken on mediumship experience is that of religious choice and background. This is particularly relevant because, as stated in the Feminist Religious Studies section, women have historically experienced limited autonomy in religious choices. This lack of autonomy is often played out in conservative religions when a male spouse controls the religious movements of a female spouse. None of the mediums advised their work revolved around a spouse's decision or in support of a spouse's choice, which highlights the autonomy of the participants in this study. Additionally, the mediums in this study noted diverse spiritual and religious backgrounds.

Another valuable feminist perspective of the mediumship experience is how the mediums described their embodied feelings about their work. The "Feminist Research" section described McGuire's (2008, pp. 91-92, 104) view that a person's body is very attached to religious / spiritual work. The mediums described full control over the majority of decisions in their work (including where they will be located and how their bodies will be used). This was discussed in the Results chapter and illustrated how individuals were empowered to do their work as they deemed appropriate – not how an authority figure dictated (exceptions were noted for Spiritualist institutions in Chapters 3 and 4).

Another key feminist perspective of mediumship lies within consideration of paid labor. This was covered in Chapter 3 and served to describe how mediums feel about requesting payment for their labor. Religious leadership in churches (commonly controlled by men) rarely exhibits inhibitions in requests for money. Yet, the mediums (mostly women) in this study exhibited hesitancy in their desire to ask for payment for mediumship labor. Regardless of how they feel

about it, the mediums do charge for their work and have the autonomy to set their own fees - a necessary outcome for those who rely on their mediumship skills for their livelihood.

Probably the most important feminist perspective undertaken in this study is the retention of the medium's understanding of their work. Maynard (1994, p. 23) says, "the legitimacy of women's own understanding of their experiences is one of the hallmarks of feminism." As described throughout the research, this study did not debate the reality of mediumship. The experience was accepted to be as the mediums stated it to be. This is also a hallmark of feminist research, because it is empowering to name your experience without invalidation from the outside.

The second research question posed for this study asked, "How do women's mediumship experiences and work differ from men's and how do non-gender conforming individuals experience mediumship sittings?" This was an important question to consider because of the marginalized status that women have been given in religious settings throughout time; this question was posed to consider whether mediumship offered something better for women. The section on Feminist Religious Studies explained how gender, religion, and culture are connected because gender dichotomies deeply influence people's day to day lives – including their religious experience (McGuire, 2008, p. 159). This question further builds the data set on feminist religious studies by considering women's experience (non-gender conforming data was not disclosed here). Christ (1976, p. 324) believes feminist studies bear responsibility to find differences and study repercussions that women experience from those differences. This question succinctly addresses this issue. Some mediums pushed back against these questions by stating that focusing on such concepts is pointless. Yet, the feminist academic record clearly supports the action of rooting out inequalities and analyzing them in order to affect change (hooks, 2015a, p. 109). This cannot be done while refusing to acknowledge others' experiences.

Ultimately, this research questioning found women's mediumship opportunities are similar to men's on an individual level. On an institutional level, men are still awarded positions of

power. This is made clear through the analysis explained in my Results chapter. A couple key points are reiterated here. Mediums are free to develop any skill they have, despite their sex or gender. Mediums also seem to have access to the same type of training programs, irrespective of their sex or gender. Both of these points stand in stark contrast to the conservative religious ideology that is prevalent in Florida.

Fran's anecdote is brought up again here: she was put in danger by a man who attempted a Reiki healing session on her (2021, personal communication, 4 September). Being in a position of physical danger in the presence of men is important to note in this study of women's mediumship experience, because of the isolated nature of most women's mediumship practice in connection with an often altered state of consciousness. Women's mediumship experience may cause them to feel unsafe at times.

The Results chapter covered women's institutional experiences, as well. Practically, most mediums felt their experience was not affected by their sex, nor did most perceive that men had a different experience than women. Yet, when asked, "Is leadership within your group of mediums or Spiritualist church equally distributed among sexes and genders?", the responses were much more divided. Half the mediums said the question was not applicable and 26.7% answered "Yes" and 26.7% answered "No". There looks to be a disconnect between divisions of power and perception of lived experience. Yet, a woman's religious experience can be considerably affected based on the sex of religious authority figures. Future research could address this disconnect in detail.

The final research question for this study on women's mediumship asked, "Are there any outlying religious factors in central Florida that influence the work and experience of female mediums?" This question provided important data for the background of the study, as well as building the academic context on the religious lives of women in the twenty-first century American south. This information is vital to the record as paranthropology continues to develop, and it adds to the feminist religious record, as well.

Quite simply, the answer to the above final question is “yes”, and this project found two supporting reasons for this response. My fieldwork analysis found that while most mediums do not view Florida as some kind of “energy vortex” that aids their skills, they do benefit from the community of mediums in the state (regardless of sex or gender). Keep in mind this does not mean they enjoy community-based mediumship (which they do not prefer as detailed in the Results chapter). Rather, several mediums described the advantages of being connected to institutions like the SCSC or just existing in a place that had the sheer numbers of mediums Florida has.

The second reason for the positive Florida experience is with the clientele. People in Florida are open to mediumship experiences, and there is a level of trust surrounding the SCSC (Madison, 2021, personal communication, 14 July; Haven, 2021, personal communication, 14 July). The interest the mediums exhibited regarding their comfort in community shows their experience is altered by their perception of how their community views them. This concern over their reputation was also covered in my Results chapter and seems connected to their geographical location. Concerns of reputation are valuable in a feminist study, and it is relevant to find many mediums feel comfortable because of their setting in Florida, which hosts many mediums of good reputation and an interested clientele.

Moving Forward

In his 1909 published work on mediumship analysis, William James discussed his hesitancy on the proof of mediumship (p. 499). He seemed open to accepting the reality of mediumship in the future, but felt he had not experienced sufficient data by that time to make a positive and conclusive pronouncement on spirit involvement (James, 1909, p. 499). He believed there was much more data to be gathered, and he proclaimed:

The facts are evidently complicated in the extreme, and we have as yet hardly scratched the surface of them. But methodical exploration has at last seriously begun and these earlier observations of ours will surely be interpreted one day in the light of future discoveries which it may well take a century to make....What we need is more and more observations. Quantity may have to supplement quality in the material. When we have the facts in sufficient number, we may be sure that they will cast plenty of explanatory backward light. We can therefore well afford to play a waiting game.

(James, 1909, p. 499)

How right he was in nearly every point of that thought. As discussed throughout this project, only limited and sporadic academic attention has been given to Spiritualism and mediumship since James made those notes. And now, little over the century he imagined it would take, academia begins to build up the rigorous methods needed to analyze the study of mediumship and related phenomena. Through the *Paranthropology* journal (2010–2017) and, as Bowie (2013a, p. 80) puts it, “a growing swell of serious academic interest in studying the afterlife and paranormal” we may be finally exiting the “waiting game” that James predicted and which took a century to move through.

Due to this ongoing construction phase of paranthropology and similar study, there continue to be many options for future research. My interest in continuing mediumship research is centered on expanding an embodied feminist application of the empathetic engaged approach. Specifically, my goals would be to build on the anthropological approaches presented here by participating with a medium over an extended time frame and undergoing mediumship training similar to Pierini’s (2016) research discussed in the “Embodiment” section. The data revealed in this project shows that many modern-day mediums are self-taught, but also offer mentorships (see Results); this is the likely path ahead for an expansion of research on Florida mediums. Personally undergoing training and work will also reveal data on who attends mediumship sessions and how the experience feels from other perspectives.

A future study focusing on young mediums might offer different perspectives of mediumship experience. Is there a greater percentage of young males participating in mediumship? Do they

go by a different name? What is the culture of young American / Floridian mediums? In my personal use of the viral social media application TikTok (typically used by Generation Z), I see mediums use that application in their work. Researching social media usage and young mediums would be helpful in recording changes in the mediumship experience by generation.

Above all, the standards for paranthropological research must continue to be considered. This thesis featured survey standards (both open and closed responses, and qualitative and quantitative data), interview guidelines, and measures for participant protection, and it laid out the empathetic engaged approach as a respectful path forward with unfamiliar experience. These are not the only methods or tools that can be used, though. Houran, *et al.* (2019, pp. 36–37) mention the “environmental conditions, general locations, topography, geology, and other non-psychological variables” as vital pieces of data that are easy to gather and may reveal important clues to how anomalous experience may work. Not only must the data standards continue to be clearly expressed by current researchers and replicated by future researchers, as James points out above, there must be large amounts of data gathered. “But to continue building a catalogue of data on paranormal events, researchers must be grounded in investigative skills such as survey designs, interviewing techniques, laboratory research and field investigations” (Cooper, 2010, p. 19). Cooper theorizes that future academics may be able to personally observe the experiences about which they have studied. This has already occurred through the published works of Edith Turner, Jack Hunter, and others. The foundation has been built for paranthropology to be a serious field, and it is now up to working researchers to continue building an academic paranthropological record.

Word Count (including tables): 32,749

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Appendix 1: The Religion of Spiritualism

Origins

The simplest and most well-known origin story of Spiritualism in the United States is: in the mid-1800s in New York, the Fox sisters began hearing rapping noises in their house. These raps were attributed to spirit communications and the Fox sisters became famous. Eventually, the Spiritualism religion was formed and grew to extreme popularity in Victorian America as women gathered to practice séances. As time passed, Spiritualism's popularity burned out, its mediums were debunked, and it now holds a charmed place in American religious history.

In reality, the literature brings much more depth to the Spiritualist religion and proves it earned its place as a religious and social organization woven into various aspects of Victorian American life. Taves (1999) goes into great depth describing Spiritualism's initial ties into the advent of popular psychology in the mid-1800s. As Americans' interest in psychology grew they began to consider ideas such as "animal magnetism" and its proponents were given to participate in new religious movements growing in the U.S. (such as Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy, and Seventh-day Adventism) (Taves, 1999, p. 124). The rise of Spiritualism came at a time when religious pluralism "diluted the authority of competing Christian sects while the natural sciences, professionalized medicine, and literary criticism of the Bible all began to challenge religious truth claims" (Nartonis, 2010, p. 362). These trends would allow people to have more freedom in their religious ideas and choices. Spiritualists also accepted the idea of mesmeric psychology (as explanations of phenomena such as rapping) and viewed trance mediums as icons of their group (Taves, 1999, pp. 163, 165). Spiritualists were not strictly focused on psychology and trance sessions, though. Like most western religions, they looked to the Bible for religious background, but also sought for "primitive" or "true Christianity" - a form of pure or original Christianity that was not marred by biased doctrine or leadership (Taves, 1999, p. 186). These Spiritualists believed that their current religious experience should reflect the religious experiences previously recorded (in the Bible, for example), and that animal magnetism and psychology could offer explanations for biblical miracles (Taves, 1999, p. 186).

It is worth noting here that this type of action can be attributed to toxic western tendencies to appropriate and explain cultural material found in global religious documents into western mindsets and religions.

Spiritualism's interest in primitive Christianity was also indicative of its iconic activity: spirit communication with humans (Nartonis, 2010, p. 363). The Bible is full of examples of angels speaking with humans. Taves (1999, p. 186) states that Spiritualists equated angels and spirits in the Bible. Spiritualists considered spirit communication to be natural (not supernatural); they believed "animal magnetism provided a natural doorway to the other world" (Taves, 1999, p. 166). In more common language: they posited that trance opened the door to the spirit world (Taves, 1999, p. 166). Herein lies the pull of Spiritualism for those who reject the idea that death must separate people from their loved ones (Braude, 2001, p. 202). This exciting idea exploded in popularity after the fame of the previously mentioned Fox family phenomena, and groups throughout the northern and eastern U.S. began meeting to attempt these "manifestations" (Braude, 2001, p. 19). Formal instructions began to circulate in print to aid people interested in spirit communication (Braude, 2001, p. 20). The American Spiritualist movement had truly taken off by this time.

Today, séances and spirit communication are commonly associated with anti-Christian practices; however, that was not the case at the time American Spiritualism came to popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. During its origins, Spiritualism was considered "a religious revival" among Protestants (Taves, 1999, p. 167). It sought to challenge the formal nature of existing churches, and instead promoted its own brand of gatherings: "circles, Sunday lectures, and camp meetings" (Taves, 1999, p. 167). These types of assemblies seem less formal and were possible outside a typical church building. In fact, it is noted that Spiritualists discussed separating from their original churches (Taves, 1999, p. 167). This indicates Spiritualists could be fully encapsulated within other churches, but there was such a sweeping movement within these churches that enough Spiritualist converts could afford to consider launching out on their own.

Spiritualists in the American South commonly considered themselves to be Christians; they kept their actions honed on spirit communication, rather than any sweeping religious or social changes that northern Spiritualists promoted (Braude, 2001, p. 30). Ultimately, Spiritualism was quite compatible with socially normalized Christian religions. Speaking with deceased loved ones did not break any rules of Christianity; it was only when Spiritualists attempted to apply lessons from spirit communications that they were challenged (Braude, 2001, p. 43).

Spiritualism was actively engaged with the religious ideas of its surrounding physical environment, as well. As mentioned above, Spiritualists considered their newly formulated concepts as adequate explanation for ancient religious experiences found in the Bible (Taves, 1999, p. 186). This extended into their desire to find one “essence of religion” that applied to all religions; indeed, they believed Spiritualism was the answer, and that it underpinned every other religion (Taves, 1999, pp. 195, 198). Spiritualism promoted a novel religious concept that there existed “a universal faith in spirit communication through “mediums,” which, in their view, characterized all religions” (Taves, 1999, p. 349). Taves (1999, p. 198) attributes this to be a specified religious theory developed by Spiritualists. Unfortunately, this encourages religious reductionism and appropriation of marginalized groups; nevertheless, this was part of the originating considerations of American Spiritualism. British Spiritualist James Burns believed “Indian spirits” had influenced American Spiritualism (Taves, 1999, p. 196). Spiritualism also found adherents in African slaves held captive in the southern U.S., because spirit possession and mediumship were already commonly held practices in their home cultures (Braude, 2001, p. 28). Although groups are always influenced by the people and environment surrounding them, it is important to acknowledge when a white social organization (like a religious group) takes from a marginalized and antagonized minority group without clear permission or cohesive inclusive measures.

Having looked at the environment and trends that fostered interest in Spiritualism, a look inside it will be undertaken. At its heart, Spiritualism was built as a religion whose goal was showing

the “immortality of the soul;” the proof of which was revealed through speaking with spirits of the deceased (Braude, 2001, p. 2). There were several types of interest in Spiritualism which all worked together to bring it to common culture by the mid-1800s. People came to Spiritualism because they found comfort after a loved one died, and still others came to it for entertainment (Braude, 2001, p. 2). Spiritualism seemed to offer evidence of immortality and introduced an appealing option in lieu of the existing religious institutions (Braude, 2001, p. 2). “It held two attractions that proved irresistible to thousands of Americans: rebellion against death and rebellion against authority” (Braude, 2001, p. 2). Spiritualism’s original popularity in America is credited to three causes: 1). interest in processing grief by speaking with the deceased, 2). an interest in empirical proof of the soul’s immortality, and 3). a dismissal of evangelicalism and Calvinism as interest grew in liberal religious teaching (Braude, 2001, pp. 33-34). Spiritualism gave fresh opportunities to people seeking religious teachings and communities who were open to these new ideas.

Spiritualism had a unique attraction for women, as well. Originally, people learned about Spiritualism in homes throughout their community, and the mediums were usually women (or girls) (Braude, 2001, p. 21). This came at a time when women were not typically allowed into leadership of anything (especially religious institutions). While this openness to female religious leadership seems revolutionary (and it was, in some ways), it was not quite as progressive as it seems on the surface. Women were (and still are) taught by western society to be caretakers; and this learned role was part of the reason why women were interested in Spiritualism (Scheitle, 2005, p. 239). Additionally, nineteenth century American ideals equated “the qualities of piety with the qualities of femininity”; therefore, it was quite natural for Spiritualists to view women as ideal candidates for mediumship (Braude, 2001, p. 24). More acutely, women were also conditioned into use of their emotions and “non-rational or intuitive forms of knowledge” (Scheitle, 2005, p. 239). All valuable skills for the mediumship role and the communicative trance experience.

Perhaps due in part to the new opportunity for women, Spiritualism drew in social activists who felt nineteenth-century society needed changes and called out the religious establishment as oppressive (Braude, 2001, p. 2). Mediums were known to speak on women's rights during trances (Braude, 2001, p. 79). The Spiritualists' calls for social change did not end with women's rights; they famously promoted abolition of slaves, as well (Braude, 2001, p. 29). Its abolitionist connections possibly reduced Spiritualism's popularity in the American South where slaveholding was incredibly lucrative for the white population (Braude, 2001, p. 30). Spiritualism's popularity either benefited or declined depending on its surrounding social structure. Nartonis (2010, p. 364) measured the growth of Spiritualism through a study of its periodicals and found its original ascent was over by 1873. Braude (2001, p. 192) states Spiritualism began to grow again in the 1880s, but it was no longer at the center of the women's rights movement. Spiritualism was no longer considered radical, as an institution (Braude, 2001, p. 192). Although it did not have a permanent place as a radical social tool, Spiritualism's effect on women's autonomous religious experience was tangible.

[Introductory Material on Spiritualism](#)

Spiritualism holds a special place in American religious history. It began in the U.S. in 1848 and thrived in a world that had begun resisting violent Protestant doctrines of judgement and eternal damnation (Braude, 2000, p. xi). Spiritualism's religious activities and theology were very unique at the time and provided a more encouraging view of death for religious seekers (Braude, 2000, p. xi). As a religion, Spiritualism is attributed to American origins and Spiritualist churches still exist throughout the U.S. (Braude, 2000, p. xi). Although it is credited as American, Spiritualism views itself as a kind of religious umbrella that uses and includes religious practices and beliefs from other religions around the globe (Braude, 2000, p. xii). In a (now twenty-year old) study on Cassadaga (a large Spiritualist group still existing in central Florida), Braude (2000, p. xii) found this group has focused its teachings on historical Spiritualist leanings: that of healing, relationships with deceased indigenous people, and utilizing "Asian wisdom." Because Cassadaga turned down participation in this study, it is not possible to confirm whether this appropriation of other cultural activities continues, or if they include

indigenous groups in their work. It is important for this study to acknowledge it is unethical for white Americans to non-consensually appropriate the identities / religious beliefs of minority groups and global religions especially in profit generating activities (which most local Spiritualist churches promote). This is especially relevant to modern-day institutional Spiritualism, wherein mediumship is gate kept behind paywalls. Most religious activities in local Florida Spiritualist churches are accessed via donation / registered fee access, which is a structural complexity of Spiritualism.

Institutional structure has long been a matter of contention for Spiritualism. This structural difficulty creates problems for scholars who wish to study Spiritualism, because there is ambiguity over who or what can be categorized as “Spiritualist” (Braude, 2001, p. 7). Historically, Spiritualists hosted conventions, but they did not initially form a denominational style church organization (Braude, 2001, p. 7). This made group promotion problematic, because they did not have official buildings and could not pay lecturers (Braude, 2001, p. 163). Over time, various Spiritualists (typically men who desired leadership roles) started calling for structure that would encourage unity (Braude, 2001, p. 163). The calls for structure resulted in the formation of the American Association of Spiritualists in 1865 (Braude, 2001, pp. 165-166). In spite of new organizational structure, a lot of Spiritualists (who had left rigid churches behind) were not interested in being a part of yet another restrictive and formalized religious group (Braude, 2000, p. xii). Another significant organization was founded in 1893: the National Spiritualist Association (NSA) (Carroll, 2000, p. 21). The NSA has faced internal conflict over the direction of the group; its members have critiqued its focus on proving scientific validity and séance activity to the detriment of spiritual and philosophical development (Carroll, 2000, p. 22). Braude (2000, p. xii) thusly sums up the internal Spiritualist struggle, “The conflict between the desire to protect spiritual freedom and individual conscience and the need to organize to promote the faith has plagued Spiritualism from its earliest days.” In addition, Spiritualism has struggled with fiscal viability, disagreements between adherents, accusations of fraud, and the desire to prove its scientific validity (Carroll, 2000, p. 22). Ultimately the division is between the experience of the individual versus the requirements of institutional survival. Interestingly, this

difference between individual and corporate religion is considered vital to the very essence of the study of religious experience.

Apart from its organizational woes, the activities within Spiritualism are fascinating to consider. Hunter (2018, loc. 2688) notes they provide “a particularly interesting case study in the “domestication” of the supernatural” as the movement evolved from randomized rapping activity in New York to some form of organized mediumship services in churches throughout the U.S. and the U.K. Spiritualist churches now look very much like the surrounding Protestant churches in America: the authority of the Bible is touted and the service flows through hymn singing, prayers, and sermons (Carroll, 2000, p. 16). Yet, there is still a distinct Spiritualist activity included in its meetings: mediumship (Hunter, 2018, loc. 2702). Additionally, the sermon material itself is exclusive to Spiritualism because it cites their own doctrine and may be presented by a person in trance state (Carroll, 2000, p. 16). Although Spiritualism has prided itself on global religious commonalities, it still retains a special uniqueness in the U.S.

Not only is this uniqueness directly connected to the field of religious experience, but it is also relevant to the emerging field of supernatural or paranormal studies. Religious work like that produced by Spiritualism falls within the interests of an academic approach to the paranormal. In a discussion on physical mediumship, Hunter (2018, loc. 1078) discusses the downfall of the practice into ill repute; however, he posits that anthropology can act as a witness to document its recent return to the public interest. As an academic field, anthropology can provide proper documentation and analysis for mediumship activities (Hunter, 2018, loc. 1078). Supernatural and paranormal experience need not be avoided or criticized in academic settings (refer to Bowie, 2010, p. 4). Bowie further advises that there is not one standard by which to measure the idea of “normal” or “natural” (Bowie, 2010, p. 5). Using such an open-minded approach aids an anthropologist in her work with groups or people who may differ from a cultural majority.

The structural difficulties experienced by Spiritualism over the years has an interesting connection to experience. During its origins, “individual freedom in all things” was a primary concern for Spiritualism, and this had direct results on their inability to form group cohesion or cooperation (Braude, 2001, p. 163). However, this focus on individual experience is commonly considered to be a hallmark of both paranormal experience and religious experience (a theme which recurs throughout this paper). Hunter (2020, p. 70) discusses that paranormal phenomena is accessible to all, but encompassing participation is the key to this experience. He states, “This would appear to be a fundamental aspect of the paranormal in general, it requires our participation in the moment to be experienced, whether spontaneously or in a ritualized context” (Hunter, 2020, p. 70). Participation is enacted by individuals and occurs at an individual level. Even within corporate groups, like Spiritualist churches, it is individuals who have experiences. Mediumship may be promoted by Spiritualism, but ultimately it is experienced individually by the medium and the sitter. Spiritualism is an interesting corporate vehicle of mediumship, but mediumship is an individual experience. This study shows mediumship uplifts individuals, yet groups of mediums have organized to promote ideals and guarantee the success of mediumship for future practitioners.

[Involvement in Women’s Rights](#)

An integral theme to this study on mediumship is the connection of the formulation of women’s rights agitation to Spiritualism and American mediums. This connection fosters interest in feminist research on each of these topics individually: religious experience, women’s rights, mediumship, and Spiritualism. These interconnected topics each have a place in this research because of their impressive influences on each other (especially in the U.S.). This section will analyze Spiritualism’s effect on women’s rights in the U.S., and will then take a deeper investigation into women’s (typically discriminatory) experiences with religion, at large. Although women’s rights is considered a topic of historical significance, it is still an area that women are working to improve in the American religious scene. Again, the confluence of topics here illuminates connected areas of interest: historical activity with modern day work which remains somewhat understudied.

Social Move Towards Equality

Spiritualism not only provided women with religious opportunities, it also specifically worked to improve women's day-to-day existence. According to Braude (2001), Spiritualists worked to emancipate women in relation to restrictive dress codes, negative medical experiences, economic disparity, and the socially implied marriage obligations of the day. Nineteenth-century Spiritualists understood that women's fashions not only restricted bodily movements, but could also cause harm to internal organs, and they worked to change these dress expectations (Braude, 2001, p. 142). Spiritualists resisted medical ideas that women were "encouraged...to view themselves as weak" and restrictions that kept women out of paid healthcare work; they also worked with other agitators who sought to transform women's health treatment (Braude, 2001, p. 142).

Spiritualists were also involved in a "marriage revolution" which taught "marriage commonly resulted from parental or social pressure, women's lack of economic alternatives, and men's lust" (Braude, 2001, p. 119). While supporting marriages built on love, they "condemned the conditions imposed on such unions by a society that made women subservient to men" (Braude, 2001, p. 118). Mediumship provided a direct response to women's economic problems, as some women found financial success through it (Braude, 2001, p. 118). (On the other hand, Spiritualism grew in initial popularity at the hands of unpaid female mediums [Braude, 2001, p. 21]). Ultimately, Spiritualism played an active part in working for women's equality through many aspects of their lived, day-to-day experiences, and by the end of the nineteenth-century (when Spiritualism's popularity diminished), many women had found paying jobs and were part of a growing cultural revolution which provided "social and legal equality with men" (Sered, 2011, p. 44).

These issues discussed above contributed to the unequal status that women receive in the U.S. Some of these areas continue to plague women (restrictive dress codes that are expensive and

uncomfortable to maintain still exist in educational institutions and work places), unequal pay for women (risking economic dependence on others), and regressive health care complications relating to reproductive rights or inability to access affordable healthcare.

Spiritualism and Agitation

The connection that Spiritualism has to women's religious and daily empowerment has been discussed throughout this paper. It may now be interesting to consider why Spiritualism had these effects on women's lives and how it occurred. Women's rights agitators were closely aligned with Spiritualism when both movements started and grew (Braude, 2001, p. 3). Winkel (2019, p. 247) comments that, "religion is discernible as a social 'variable' that is contingent on 'culture'; in other words, "religion is a social sphere that mirrors socio-cultural beliefs and (gender) codes like any other social field." With this consideration, it is evident why most pre- and early nineteenth-century religions reflected subjugating roles for women just as wider cultural norms did. Yet, the mid-nineteenth century introduced some unique changes for women in both culture and religion; it seems both areas of change fed off of and encouraged the other to continue. Braude (2001, p. 57) credits Spiritualism as possibly being the most effective promoter of the original women's rights movement in the U.S. Specifically, Spiritualists clearly condemned established social hierarchies of the day (i.e. authority structures of slavery, church domination of members, males above females, and even that of government above citizenry) (Braude, 2001, p. 56). These condemnations were (and still are) quite radical for the time; Spiritualism easily delivered a "religious anarchism" that meshed well with extreme reformists (Braude, 2001, p. 62). As a religious movement, Spiritualism gave women's rights speakers a place to find an audience and an entire community that was ready to act (Braude, 2001, p. 80). These agitators fought for the end of slavery, the rights of children (who were used as laborers), marriage reform, and socialism (Braude, 2001, p. 3). Because they centered their beliefs on the relevancy of the individual as a receptor of truth, Spiritualists adopted an individualistic ideology which could not accept the domination of one person over another (in any realm: political, social, or religious) (Braude, 2001, p. 6). In agitation,

Spiritualism seemed to both work with a wider social movement (the fight for women's rights) and provided that movement with ideology and enough participants who would cause the movement to succeed.

This is not to say Spiritualists or women's rights advocates were anti-American. Patriotism has always been (and continues to be) a required quality in Americans and their movements. Julia Schlesinger, a prominent nineteenth-century author, has been credited with considering "that spiritualism [sic] is essentially more patriotic than typical nationalism, and that part of the patriotism of spiritualism [sic] is its commitment to women's rights" (Youngkin, 2010, p. 283). With such extreme positions being connected to their ranks, it would have been necessary to tie American patriotism closely to their identity. Spiritualism inspired so much empowerment for women, that Braude (2001, p. 192) identifies the women's suffrage movement as having "benefited more than any other movement" from this specific empowerment. It accomplished this by being the first to create large numbers of women who spoke publicly and who led in religious settings (Braude, 2001, p. 201). Although today women's religious options are still limited in the U.S., women's suffrage has continued to be honored as a majorly important moment in U.S. history.

The Threatening Feminine

Spiritualist women found liberation and opportunities both culturally and religiously during the exciting days of nineteenth-century America. Yet, this liberating wave of women's rights activity had its limits. A "national moral panic" had been moving across the U.S. which focused on Spiritualists and various of their activities; this social upset resulted in the Comstock Law – considered to be a landmark law in censorship (McGarry, 2000, p. 9). By the late 1800s, the Spiritualist desires to abolish slavery and engage with women's rights, free love, and dress reform had been demonized enough to create a kind of culture war that resulted in censorship so strict that it worked its way into U.S. law (McGarry, 2000, p. 10). Spiritualists, known to be prolific publishers of printed works, felt the brunt of the censorship law, which specifically

addressed and regulated printed material sent through U.S. mail (McGarry, 2000, p. 13). Women's interests have long been regulated in both public and private settings, and the creation of laws that allow prosecution and legal consequences continue to oppress women in the U.S.

At the same time legal struggles began to plague certain Spiritualists and their publications, female leaders within their ranks began to experience a loss of public reputation, as well. This loss of reputation seems to be connected to the social construct that women are emotionally unstable and to the religious idea that women are sexual temptresses. This was part of the loss Spiritualism felt in the religious scene of Victorian America, specifically through the leadership of Helena Blavatsky and Victoria Woodhull (Braude, 2001, p. 191; McGarry, 2000). These two women were famous Spiritualist leaders, but by the late 1800s their reputations were diminished so dramatically that it cast doubt that women, in general, had the capabilities to ever be religious leaders (Braude, 2001, p. 191). In Woodhull's case, her public disapproval resulted in the Comstock censorship law discussed above (McGarry, 2000). Both women displayed their sexuality to the public; while this is morally neutral today, it served to provide reason for public censure at the time (Braude, 2001, p. 191).

Blavatsky and Woodhull confirmed the public's worst fears about the dangers of exposing female sexuality to the amoral public sphere. In the popular mind, the passivity believed to be inherent in women's nature made Woodhull and Blavatsky pawns for the spread of licentiousness, not vehicles for revelation.

(Braude, 2001, p. 191)

The concept of woman as temptress was eating away at female religious empowerment that had begun to be publically embraced. Additionally, Braude (2001, p. 191) finds that Woodhull and Blavatsky were focused on their own, individual leadership opportunities, rather than working for general female leadership liberation. While this is not necessarily a shortcoming in either case, it does speak to the lack of intersectionality that has plague feminist work throughout its time in the American social and political scene. Ultimately, Braude (2001, p. 191) believes by that time, Spiritualism was no longer a central force for women in either the

political or religious realms. Some of its female leaders were being subjected to too much public censure, while these same leaders were not focused on the wider goals of women's rights agitation. This is not to say that Spiritualism, in general, fell away from its humanitarian work, though; Spiritualists remained consistent in their support of free love, racial equality, and rejection of Christianity's hierarchical divisions – which separated them from the larger group of American suffragettes who toned down their messages in order to be heard by society (Braude, 2001, p. 200). In conclusion, two major social complications contributed to a decline in Spiritualism's organizational effect on the women's rights movement (as cited above): public perception of woman as temptress, and its leaders' lack of cooperation with suffragette's specific goals.

[Spiritualism and the Study of Religious Experience](#)

At the heart of this study lies the field of religious experience. In this section, a review of academic discussion of religious experience connected to the world of mediumship will be undertaken. This study is generally unique to the fields of anthropology and religious experience, since, according to McGuire (2008, p. 94), "Thus far, only a few scholars have given serious research attention to religious experience." She continues to explain that anthropological studies, specifically, have only focused on a few types of phenomena experiences that typically fall within the category of "altered states of consciousness" (McGuire, 2008, p. 94). Therefore, anthropological analysis of religious experience in connection to mediumship and gendered issues is a unique and exciting opportunity with which to engage.

An Introduction to Religious Experience

Because this study is being conducted within the field of religious experience, it is helpful here to include a general discourse on the field itself. While the phrase "religious experience" is a generally understood and common term, the implications are somewhat more complicated on a micro level – especially when analyzed within an academic framework. Rankin (2005, p. 2) provides an excellent overview of the various threads of meaning that stem from the use of the

term “religious experience.” She describes the types of people who have been connected to religious experience: famous founders and teachers of the world’s religions, renowned adherents to these religions (Biblical characters, gurus, and saints), and every-day religious followers (Rankin, 2005, p. 2). Yet, these are not the only ones who have experiences that might be considered “religious.” Special experiences are also felt by “non-religious people who have mystical or spiritual intimations” (she offers artists, musicians, and poets as examples) (Rankin, 2005, p. 2). The individuals who have religious experiences are dynamic and deserve proper representation in analysis.

The way individuals feel about their experiences is also dynamic. Religious people who have special experiences within a church setting, during sacred text readings, or merely “in the context of a religious tradition” may tend to view their experiences as religious (Rankin, 2005, p. 4). In fact, they may view the event as validation of their religious beliefs (Rankin, 2005, p. 7). However, people of no religious category may also have unique experiences which they would never classify as “religious” (Rankin, 2005, p. 2). Some may categorize their experience to be “paranormal” or something out of the ordinary from everyday life (Rankin, 2005, p. 8). The complexities of the types of experiences and the beliefs of the people who have them can feel murky to a scholar attempting analysis of a potential religious experience. Rankin (2005, p. 9) offers the insightful suggestion that these experiences should be considered on “a continuum of experiences, a range of different types of awareness of something beyond, a transcendent reality or of the divine within.” This idea can be developed within this particular study to provide a clear analytical framework of mediumship experience among individuals.

In spite of a myriad of experience categories, Rankin (2005, p. 9) utilized the phrase “religious experience” for most of her descriptions within her paper. Adopting a consistent terminology at the outset of analysis can allow a range of experiences to be considered while not reducing or explaining away a practitioner’s own thoughts on an event. This terminological consistency is especially helpful to a study of mediumship, which has been adopted as an official practice of the Spiritualist religion while also existing as an individual practice outside of religious settings.

The Value of an Academic Analysis of Religious Experience

There is overarching value to undertaking academic analysis of religious experiences. Religious differences are among the most volatile on Earth, so perhaps learning from other religions' documented experiences will allow people to settle their religious arguments (Hardy, 1997, pp. 4-5). Places like the AHRERC provide opportunities for this type of harmonious religious future by offering an academic holding place for important experiential records (Hardy, 1997, p. 5). Scientific methodology is being utilized within the field of religious experience to document experiences and build a written record for the field; these records can be filled in with interviews from people who constitute as "more interesting cases" (Hardy, 1997, p. 5). Anthropologists have undertaken religious research for some time and have never found a people group without some record of religion in their culture (Rankin, 2005, p. 12). This illustrates how important record keeping is for religious studies (including experience study). There is much we do not understand about religion, its reality, or implication on our lives, and the existence of religious experience may point to a reality of which we are still learning (Rankin, 2005, p. 39). In this case, careful academic measures are imperative for the historical record. Taves (2009, pp. 139-140) concurs with the necessity of an academic approach to religious experience (but for less grandiose reasons); she hopes a record of experiences will be built through "careful empirical studies" that will reveal which events are consistent throughout different cultures. Whether it be for world peace, the historical record, or a future database that highlights experiential consistency, a formalized academic approach to religious experience is a valuable scholastic undertaking.

William James and the Development of the Field of Religious Experience

This academic approach to religious experience can be largely attributed to William James. He was influenced by his prior student's work *Psychology of Religion* (by Edwin Starbuck in 1899) of which he wrote its forward (Hardy, 1997, p. 2). Shortly after this influential encounter, James delivered a famous series of lectures which were published under the name *The Varieties of Religious Experience* ("VRE") in 1902, and which is considered to be a foundational work on religious experience (Hardy, 1997, p. 2). James worked to develop an academic approach to his religious study that would not only honor religious adherents, but also theologians and scientists, as well (Taves, 2003, p. 306). Upon publications of these works, anthropologists are credited as the only group to actually follow the lead of James and Starbuck, as they traveled out into other cultures (for better or for worse) to study others' "spiritual experiences" (Hardy, 1997, p. 2). It is important to note that James's work placed heavier weight on individual religious experience over corporate experience ("religious doctrine, practice, or institutions"), and this focus influenced the wider western concept of religious experience, as well (Taves, 2009, p. 5). This had related effects on western ideas of mysticism, too (Taves, 2009, p. 5). Spiritualism and the religious experience field would go on to have a symbiotic development in connection to their interest in mystical experience.

James was obvious in his preference towards individual experience. He stated in *VRE*, "In critically judging the value of religious phenomena, it is very important to insist on the distinction between religion as an individual function, and religion as an institutional, corporate, or tribal product (James, 2011, p. 278). On the one hand, he speaks of merely distinguishing one from the other, but on the other hand, he began his statement by opening a discussion of value judgements (James, 2011, p. 278). The temptation to move into value judgments of one experience over another seems to be a strong human impulse, but it is best for anthropologists to generally avoid value judgments. James (2011, p. 311) then clearly ties individual experience into mystical experience with this statement, "One may say truly, I think, that personal religious

experience has its roots and centre in mystical states of consciousness.” He takes this further by connecting the mystical to the divine (something that would be very attractive to religious Victorian Americans) by saying:

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed.

(James, 2011, p. 339)

Looking at religious experience with this lens certainly paints individual experience as an attractive and promising venture. However, we now understand that such broad generalizations of belief systems are not appropriate and may not always be true. In spite of his generalizations and value judgments, James’s work on individual experience was connected to Spiritualism and mediumship in some interesting ways that will be discussed below.

Religious Experience within Spiritualism

The idea of “authenticity” is also a key concept in the development of religious experience study. James famously referred to “the fruits of religious experience” as determinant factors of authenticity (Rankin, 2005, p. 32). The debate over authenticity of religious experience was woven into the origins of Spiritualism. In the nineteenth century, religious movements and groups disagreed “over the legitimacy of religious experience” – specifically within groups that engaged in “visionary” and mesmerist experiences versus formal church traditions, as various groups tried to explain away the experiences of other groups (Taves, 1999, p. 164). The latter activity is still a common practice among American religions (especially traditional evangelical groups). Spiritualists engaged in this legitimacy / proof debate, too. They attempted to prove their authenticity by appropriating biblical references into their doctrines (for example, they taught spirit communication was noted in the Bible) (Taves, 1999, p. 186). Not only did they attach authenticity of their religious experience to the Bible, they also showed that their form of “biblical” religious experience could still occur (during their trance sessions) and was not only

relegated to the Bible (Taves, 1999, p. 186). There was also a driving trend at the time to connect religion and science - a desire to prove their religious beliefs through a scientific framework (Taves, 1999, p. 349). Today, academics in religious experience generally no longer attempt to reduce religion or science into the same box. Yet, religions themselves may still attempt to do so. The SCSC (located in central Florida) still promotes its beliefs as scientifically proven (SCSC, n.d.). Still, McGuire (2008, p. 200) cautions her readers to be mindful that “religious traditions” are social constructions and no specific religions should be described as “unitary, unchanging, pure, or authentic.” The implications for religious experience are: keep an open mind and view the field broadly (through an interdisciplinary eye, if possible).

This fascination with combining science and religion tied Spiritualists into the very formation of the academic field of religious experience. Spiritualism’s explanation of “true religion” as inclusive of spirits and mediums, brought an original amalgamation between religion and historical works on magic and enthusiasm (as a particular action) (Taves, 1999, p. 180). This was considered to be a psychologically based understanding of religion (especially Christianity); this new psychologically religious approach set the stage for serious religious experience academics such as William James to expound upon in the future (Taves, 1999, p. 180). (Of relevance to anthropology, Spiritualism inspired famed anthropologist Edward B. Tylor’s materialist religious theory (Taves, 1999, p. 180).) Even today, learning about New Age spiritual concepts (which includes modern-day Spiritualism) takes the student back into the nineteenth-century where they must absorb the influence of James who was duly influenced by historical Spiritualism (Pearson, 2003, p. 418). It was the Spiritualists’ use of trance opening a path “to the other world” that encouraged them to claim empiricism within religious experience; an experience that they viewed psychologically, not theologically (Taves, 1999, p. 167). The popularity of Spiritualism was acutely responsible for the opportunities later undertaken to combine religious experience and psychology in academia.

Spiritualism was grounded in the idea that they were relevant to all other existing religions. A current lens may show this concept is rooted in appropriative, white, colonial language (and

this could be true). Spiritualists may have another belief at the heart of their internalized understanding of themselves, though. Spiritualists did not view themselves as exclusive or elite, rather they taught spirit communication (their identifying experience) “required no special knowledge, and that it was equally accessible to everybody” (Braude, 2001, pp. 178, 179). This open-handed approach to religious experience is reflected in McGuire’s (2008, p. 88) study of religious experience: she questions the validity of considering traditional religious experience norms as more religious than private, personal religious experiences. She critiques academia’s favoritism of formalized religions over other spiritual practices that may be found outside established religious institutions (McGuire, 2008, p. 96). Spiritualism does have formal church settings, yet mediumship is an experience that can be felt outside a formal religious building or gathering. The validity of these mediums is just as important as mediums working in a Spiritualist building. McGuire (2008, p. 186) does not accept that individual religious practice is “anomalous”, and she criticizes the belief that “definitional boundaries that distinguish religious practices of one religious group from another’s” causes them to be fundamentally oppositional. From this standpoint, Spiritualism’s religious inclusiveness both promotes their own ideas while allowing individuals to flourish within its wings.

The Individual Nature of Mediumship Experience

The power of individual experience is made evident in Spiritualism. It has been the driving force of Spiritualism through the years, which has also limited the ability of structural and organizing forces to unite it in a clear, doctrinal way (Carroll, 2000, p. 22). On an individual level, mediumship is open to everyone and anyone – with correct training; however, there is no cohesive and overriding method for mediumship training (Emmons, 2000, p. 76). This lack of structure and information will drastically affect individual experience.

This discord between individuals and corporate entity is made evident even in my search for fieldwork with Spiritualist mediums. Local corporate entities have either been dismissive of attempts for academic observation and discussion or have been too disorganized to respond in

a cohesive manner. However, individually, mediums are free to interact as they choose – while still being gate kept by disinterested individuals operating corporately. Systemically, Spiritualism in central Florida is not set up for longevity in a world where electronic organization and religious open-handedness are necessary for survival.

On the individual level, western mediums risk personal judgment and marginalization; they struggle to find environments that allow them to thrive (found to be untrue in Florida, as covered in my Results chapter) (Emmons, 2000, p. 80). Because of the unwelcoming nature of their surrounding social environment, mediums find encouragement by looking to the individual experiences of other mediums (Emmons, 2000, p. 80). On a micro level, it is the experience of the individual that allows mediums to thrive. McGuire (2008, p. 4) further stresses the importance of individual experience for religious study; she encourages research into the *individual* as opposed to the generic religious experience expected by a corporate *religious organization*. James (2011, p. 278) also stressed the importance of individual religious experience in his landmark book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, especially in lieu of corporate experience. According to these ideas, the experience of mediums as individuals (as opposed to the corporate expectations of a Spiritualist church) is worth analysis.

Appendix 2: Sample of Florida Institutions that Use Mediumship

Although no Florida institutions had the capacity to participate in this research, a list is included below which shows the type of organizations that currently use mediumship in their practices as of the timeframe of this project. The following institutions have a variety of goals, services, and fees.

Location	Date of Origin	Number of Services	Type of Services	Cost	Source
<i>Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp</i>					
"We believe in Infinite Intelligence. We believe that the phenomena of nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith constitute true religion. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death. We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: "Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them." We affirm the moral responsibility of the individual, and that he makes his own happiness or unhappiness as he obeys or disobeys Nature's physical and spiritual laws. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any human soul, here or hereafter. We affirm that the Precepts of Prophecy and Healing contained in the Bible are Divine attributes proven through Mediumship."					
Cassadaga, FL	1894	5	Lyceum, Church Service, Message Service, Healing Meditation	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/
<i>The People's Spiritualist Church</i>					
St Petersburg, FL	-	2 (when operating)	Healing and Service	-	https://www.facebook.com/ThePeoplesSpiritualistChurch.St.PeteFL/photos/?ref=page_internal
<i>Hotel Cassadaga</i>					
Cassadaga, FL	1927	-	Séances, meditation circles, lectures, mediumship development classes, energy healing seminars	-	http://www.hotelcassadaga.com/about.htm
<i>Open Arms Spiritual Church</i>					
"Welcome to Open Arms Spiritual Church. Welcome to love. We allow you to walk your personal path- without judgment. We are based on Spiritualism, a religion that believes in communication with All; our inner Spirit, departed ones, and God, as a proven fact based in Science. Each week we invite new speakers from various faiths and walks of life, to join us and share their individual walk with us."					
Oviedo, FL	-	3	Sunday service, Monday Mediumship Circle, Wednesday Meditation Circle	-	https://www.oasc.church/ (Accessed 19 June 2022)

Cassadaga Spiritualist Psychic Center					
"Spiritualism means many things to many people. To some it is a philosophy, to some a religion, to some the science behind mediumship and evidence of life after death, along with the natural laws of cause and effect, to some it is the life long [sic] study and attainment of spiritual wisdom."					
Cassadaga, FL	-	-	Services for sale (charts, readings, etc.)	-	http://www.cassadaga.info/home.html
The Spiritualist Church of Awareness, NSAC					
"NSAC Declarations of Principles 1. We believe in Infinite Intelligence. 2. We believe that the phenomena of Nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence. 3. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith, constitute true religion. 4. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the the [sic] individual continue after the change called death. 5. We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism. 6. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." 7. We affirm the moral responsibility of individuals, and that we make our own happiness or unhappiness as we obey or disobey Nature's physical and spiritual laws. 8. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any soul here or hereafter. 9. We affirm that the precepts of Prophecy and Healing are Divine attributes proven through Mediumship."					
Orlando, FL	1975	1 or 2	Sunday service, Sunday mini readings	- \$20 - \$25 / 15-minute mini-readings	https://myscoa.com/ (Accessed 19 June 2022)
Alchemy and Ashes					
Lutz, FL	-	-	Readings, items for sale, classes on pendulum divination, automatic writing, tarot, and PowerPoint slides for purchase	- \$20 - \$30 / class - Reading fees: \$30 / 15 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$100 / 60 minutes	https://alchemyan dashes.com/
Temple of Love and Healing					
St. Petersburg, FL	1977	2	Sunday Service, Monday yoga (meetup groups for Psychic fairs and message circles, etc...)	- \$12/ session or \$30 / 3 sessions - Message circle: \$12 / evening	https://www.meetup.com/psychic-events-and-classes/) and https://www.templeofloveandhealing.com/ (Accessed 19 June 2022)
Temple of the Living God					
St. Petersburg, FL	1960	-	Psychic Fair	\$15 / 15 minutes	https://www.facebook.com/Temple-of-The-Living-God-of-St-Petersburg-116086345085630/

My Jade Moon					
St. Petersburg, FL	-	-	Tarot readings / Sells white sage, salves, essential oils	\$75 / 60 minutes; \$40 / 30 minutes	https://www.yelp.com/biz/my-jade-moon-st-petersburg and https://myjademoon.com/services
Earth Angel Gifts					
Tampa, FL	-	-	tarot readings / sells crystals, tools, jewelry, books, numerology readings	-	https://www.earthangelgiftsllc.com/products-services/tarot-readings
The Violet Butterfly					
Palm Harbor, FL	2019	-	tarot readings and medium readings / other services for sale	Readings (psychic, oracle, and tarot): \$40 / 20 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$90 / 45 minutes; \$120 / 60 minutes. Various other prices depend on medium for readings. Anna-Victoria: \$60 / 30 minutes; Debra Mary: \$65 / 30 minutes.	https://thevioletbutterflymhc.com/
Mystical Scents					
Thonotosassa, FL	-	-	Metaphysical shop; "We have a large range of mystical [sic] and magickal [sic] items for everyday use like herbs, incense, and crystals." They also have readers at the shop and teach tarot and Reiki.	Intuitive readings: \$25 / 15 minutes; \$50 / 30 minutes; \$75 / 45 minutes.	https://www.mystikalscents.com/
Enchanted Triple Moon					
Zephyrhills, FL	-	-	Sells various items (oils, feathers, fan, singing bowls, bells, tingshas, mallets, sand, candles, stones, jewelry, altar cloths, crocheted items, charcoal, and many other things), intuitive readings, and crystal session	Intuitive readings: \$35 / 15 minutes; \$50 / 30 minutes; \$75 / 45 minutes; \$90 / 1 hour. "Full spectrum crystal session": \$50 / 30 minutes.	https://enchantedtriplemoon.com

UCSS Spiritual Centre					
<p>"We as Christian Spiritualists recognize God, the Infinite Intelligence, as our Father, and JESUS THE CHRIST of Nazareth, the divine Son of God, as the greatest teacher, medium, and standard-bearer of truth the world has ever known. We believe that the phenomena of nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expressions of Infinite Intelligence. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression, and living in accordance therewith, constitutes true religion. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death. We affirm communication with the dead is a so-called fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Gold Rule: Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them. We affirm the moral responsibility of the individual, and that he makes his own happiness or unhappiness as he obeys Nature's physical and spiritual laws. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any human soul, here or hereafter. We affirm that the practice of Prophecy, as authorized in the Holy Bible, is a divine and God-given gift, re-established and proven through mediumship by the phenomena of Spiritualism. We affirm that all of our Principles are made possible through Meditation and Prayer."</p>					
Orange City, FL	-	2 or 3 / week	Sunday Healing service, Thursday Service (meditation, table tipping, message, etc...). They also have a full moon meditation scheduled (additional event).	They do not charge for services.	http://www.ucss-spiritualcentre.com/our-principles/
Chapel of Spiritual Light					
<p>"We are a Spiritualist Church affiliated with the American Spiritualist Association, Inc. We Have [sic] been a part of the College Park community since 1993. The church and it's [sic] members are focused on spiritual growth and healing as we unfold in spirit. We warmly invite you to learn more about Spiritualism, healing, and our church and it's [sic] services along with our ongoing education programs. We welcome open-minded individuals regardless of race, heritage, gender, or sexual orientation to join as one in exploring and empowering the human spirit"</p>					
Orlando, FL	1993	-	Sunday service on Zoom / "Hands-On [sic] Healing and the Messages portion of the service will be Temporarily Canceled"	No charge	https://www.facebook.com/TheChapelofSpiritualLightOrlando/ and http://www.chapelofspirituallight.org/about-us.html
The Spiritualist Chapel of Melbourne					
<p>"Spiritualist's Declarations of Principles 1. We believe in Infinite Intelligence. 2. We believe that the phenomena of Nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence. 3. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith, constitute true religion. 4. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the the [sic] individual continue after the change called death. 5. We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism. 6. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." 7. We affirm the moral responsibility of individuals, and that we make our own happiness or unhappiness as we obey or disobey Nature's physical and spiritual laws. 8. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any soul here or hereafter. 9. We affirm that the precepts of Prophecy and Healing are Divine attributes proven through Mediumship."</p>					
Melbourne, FL	-	Sunday service; Thursday classes	"Sunday Services include meditation, healings, mini-spirit readings, music and camaraderie."	Thursday classes cost \$50 (members get a discount).	https://www.spiritualistchapel.org/ (Accessed 19 June 2022)

<i>Psychic and the Genie</i>					
Stuart, FL	-	-	Psychic/Medium readings, tarot card readings, angel card readings, chakra/aura analysis, guided meditations and reiki circles	Mediumship: \$70 / 30 minutes; \$35/ 15 minutes.	https://www.psychicthegenie.com

Appendix 3: Sample of Florida Mediums

The mediums who participated with this project provided excellent accounts of their experiences and allowed for detailed descriptions to be built into this paper. In addition to those accounts, the following table of mediums (who did not participate in interviews and surveys, and therefore were not assigned pseudonyms) provides more quantity in certain areas of research (pronoun on record, connection to religion, type of mediumship, and cost for services).

Name	Pronoun Used	Group	Religious Notes	Type of Work	Cost	Source
[Redacted]	-	-	Generic Spiritualism comments on the website. "My Native American father taught me to hear the voices of the spirits and to interpret dreams, just as his Native American ancestors did."	Reader, Psychic, Mystic and Telephone Reader	-Readings: \$80 / 30 minutes. -Holistic and Spiritual Healing: \$150.	http://www.cassadaga.info/about-us.html
Cassadaga Raven Star	she	-	Refers to Cassadaga and its founder Colby throughout website, but her connection to Spiritualism is not clear. She is an Ordo Templi Orientis practitioner.	psychic reading, ouija board, tarot card, seance, aura cleansing, astrology prediction	Accepts donations; \$140 / session (2021, personal communication, 14 and 16 June)	https://innovativelivingsc.wixsite.com/website
Pastor Peter Kennell	he / his	-	"He is an ordained Christian minister, medicine man, and the founder of the Oklevueha Native American Church of Spirit Talks"	Psychic Medium, tarot readings, spiritual counseling, healing, past life ceremony, exorcism (among others)	"\$60 per half hour, \$100 per hour, \$35 for 15 minutes. These are all the recommended donations for our services."	http://cassadaga.biz/

Jackie Arnold	-	SCSC	led to SCSC by God	messages from deceased loved ones and pets, psychic readings, healer, life guidance	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/jackie-arnold.html
Marla Chirnside	-	SCSC	-	Medium, healer, biogenesis practitioner	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/marla-chirnside.html
Rev. Ed Conklin	he / his	SCSC	-	Medium, healer, clairvoyance, clairaudience / "In his readings, Ed brings through reliable and evidential knowledge of spirit relatives and friends, spirit guides, sometimes animal pets, past lives, health conditions, finances, and relationships."	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-ed-conklin.html
Rev. Judy Cooper	she	SCSC	- "Judy is a former co-pastor of The Light of Spiritualism Church in Orlando." - "In addition, Judy is a former SCSCMA Board of Trustees Member serving 10 years and is currently the Associate Pastor of the Colby Memorial Temple."	Clairaudient, clairvoyant, clairsentient	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-judy-cooper.html
Rev. Diane Davis	-	SCSC	-	-	-	https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-09-01/florida-cassadaga-spiritualist-camp-psychics

Nellie Conner	her	SCSC	-	Medium, healer	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/nellie-conner.html
Rev. Patricia Carpenter	-	SCSC	-	"Medium, Healer, Spiritual Counselor and Minister"	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-patricia-carpenter.html
Rev. Dr. Phil DeLong	-	SCSC	-	"Medium, Healer, Teacher"	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-dr-phil-delong.html
Nora Esther	She / her	SCSC	"Nora is most happy when she can help someone understand Spirit communication and the religion of Spiritualism."	"Medium Healer"	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/nora-esther.html
Anita Evans	she/ her	SCSC	"Anita was the daughter of a Southern Baptist Deacon and her Mother a Medium, as well as her Grandmother and Great Grandmother. Being raised in the Baptist religion and also attending Spiritualist meetings with her Grandmother has given Anita the availability to understand and answer many questions regarding both belief systems."	Medium	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/anita-evans.html
Rev. Dr. Sheldon Ganberg	his	SCSC	"As an ordained Spiritualist Minister, Dr. Ganberg teaches classes, performs workshops and has been a guest speaker at Unity, Science of Mind and Spiritualist Churches as well as numerous spiritual organizations "	Shamanic practitioner, Medium	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-dr-sheldon-ganberg.html
Rev. Dr. Louis Gates	-	SCSC	-	Clairvoyance, "Medium, Healer, Teacher"	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-dr-louis-gates.html
Marie Gates	-	SCSC	-	"Medium and Healer"	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/marie-gates.html

Pauline Gold	she /her	SCSC	-	"As a medium/psychic and healer in Cassadaga, FL she's expanded her Signing opportunities where she provides intuitive/spiritual counseling."	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/pauline-gold.html
Brenda Gross	she	SCSC	-	"Brenda's abilities include Clairvoyance (ultra sensitive perception), Clairsentient (feeling perception), Clairaudient (hearing Spirit), as well as Trance Mediumship (channeling Spirit)."	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/brenda-gross.html
[Redacted]	she	"Mediumship Development Series"	"... Rev DJ Guerra (now in the world of spirit) of Harmony Metaphysical Church, Tampa, soon became my first intuitive development mentor and after a year of mentorship and training, I was providing intuitive services for the church. I continued to honor Spirit by making my services available to the public (working out of local metaphysical shops and taking phone appointments) while still maintaining a certain level of purposeful anonymity. "	Medium	\$95 - \$630	https://www.elissawilds.com/

Cher	she	Alchemy and Ashes	-	Psychic Medium, clairaudient, prophetic dreams, energy healer, Reiki Master, automatic writing	\$30 / 15 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$100 / 60 minutes	https://alchemyandashe.com/intuitive-readers/
Rev. Karen May	she / her	Alchemy and Ashes	"She trained under Reverend Lippincott founder of Harmony Church opened in 1963. It was the first metaphysical church in Tampa, FL. Karen started her psychic readings publicly in 1988 for Harmony Church. In 1991 she was ordained, and went on to shared [sic] her gifts with the Temple of Love and Healing in St. Petersburg from 1991-2008."	Claircognizance, Clairvoyance, psychometry, pet communication	\$30 / 15 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$100 / 60 minute	https://alchemyandashe.com/intuitive-readers/ (Access 19 June 2022)
Angelique Barlowe	she / her	Alchemy and Ashes	-	Claircognizance	\$30 / 15 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$100 / 60 minute	https://alchemyandashe.com/intuitive-readers/
Tereese Filos	she / her	Alchemy and Ashes	-	"precognition" / psychic medium	\$30 / 15 minutes; \$60 / 30 minutes; \$100 / 60 minute	https://alchemyandashe.com/intuitive-readers/
Rev. Sandra Helton	she	SCSC	-	"Sandra is a minister offering intuitive counsel..."	"Personal Counsel/ Mentoring: 55 for the initial session and 35 for subsequent sessions unless other arrangements are made."	http://www.sandrahelton.com/Consultations.htm and https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-sandra-helton.html

Rev. Maeda Jones	she	SCSC	-	Medium (including for pets)	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-maeda-jones.html
Rev. Jo	she/ her	Mystical Scents Metaphysical Store	"Her own spiritual journey began back in the '70's at the Lighthouse Metaphysical Church in Tampa where her psychic abilities were recognized and encouraged by Rev. William Lamb."	Spirit Tarot Cards, psychometry, aura reading, Clairaudience Clairvoyance,	Intuitive readings: \$25 / 15 minutes; \$50 / 30 minutes; \$75 / 45 minutes	https://www.mystikalscents.com/book-online and https://www.mystikalscents.com/rev-jo
Deb Jordan	-	SCSC	-	Medium, Healer	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/debra-jordan.html
Dr. Geri Krista	she	SCSC	"While following her own Spiritual Path. Geri has studied Metaphysics since 1977. Geri is an Astarian - studying from the Astara Book of Life since 1993. She also studies from the Siddha Yoga course of study. In the early 1980's, she received Shaktipat from the Guru - Baba Muktananda. She also studied QiGong with GrandMaster Weizhao Wu and his successor Master Teresa. Both Baba Muktananda and GrandMaster Wu have passed to Spirit. Dr. Geri is blessed to continue learning from both of these Masters even after they left their physical bodies."	Medium, Healer	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/dr-geri-krista.html
Richard Russell	-	SCSC	-	Clairvoyant, clairsentient	Sliding scale; \$65 / 45 – 90 minutes	https://www.cassadaga.org/richard-russell.html and http://www.mind-body-spirit-411.com/MediumAboutUs.html

Joy Sagar	he	SCSC	"Joy has been received well within the Spiritualist Congregation and Churches."	Clairsentient, Clairvoyance, Clairaudient, Clairgustient	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/joy-sagar.html
Rev. Margaret Schmidt	-	UCSS Spiritual Centre, SCSC	"Eventually, I became the pastor of the UCSS Spiritual Centre, a Christian Spiritualist church in Orange City where I still preside as pastor today.... I love church work and giving messages and healing to all who attend our services."	Medium	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-margaret-schmidt.html
Rev. Arlene Sikora	she	-	"She is certified as an ordained minister, medium, healer and National Spiritualist Teacher through the National Spiritualist Association of Churches where she received the National Spiritualist Teachers Award."	Medium (at some point clairvoyant)	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-arlene-sikora.html
Trish Smith	she	SCSC	"Trish is also a teacher and an effective public speaker. She is often seen at the local spiritualist churches giving talks and lectures about spiritualism. She volunteers her time to give, "Messages" at message services which brings comfort to many. "	Trance, "Trish is a natural born psychic medium and started seeing spirits from a very early age."	-	https://6thsennection.com/trish-smith-psychic-medium/
Sydney	her	SCSC	-	Clairsentience, Clairvoyance, Omnipresence, Clairaudience	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/sydney.html
Rev. Claire Van Cott	she / her	SCSC	-	Clairaudient, clairvoyant, clairaugustient, clairsentient	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/rev-claire-van-cott.html on 10/5/21 and http://www.clairevancott.com/

Margarita Varela	she / her	SCSC	"This willingness to pursue her spiritual life to the next level enabled her to accept a spiritual invitation to visit Cassadaga and thus began her studies in Healing and Mediumship."	"She is the first Spanish speaking person to receive Certification as Medium & Spiritual Healer from... [SCSC]. She is fully bilingual and gives spiritual readings through different modalities whether clairsentient, clairvoyance, clairsaudience..."	-	https://www.cassadaga.org/margarita-varela.html
Michelle Armstrong	she /her	She trains mediums	-	Evidential medium	-	https://michellethemedium.com/development-circles-2021 and https://michellethemedium.com/media-kit
Carl Sever	-	He trains mediums	-	-	\$125 / 30 minutes	https://carlseaver.com/about/ and https://carlseaver.com/book/
Heidi Jaffe	-	Forever Family Foundation	-	Psychic and Medium	\$175/ 30 minutes (pricing goes up from here)	http://www.heidithemedium.com/

Cynthia Faye	her	-	-	Psychic and Medium	- "Ask me about relationships, travels, and predictions for the year ahead." \$100 - "Talk to your loved one from the other side." \$150; - "Dive into more detail than ever before, with Cynthia Faye's Signature Reading. Get your questions answered & begin your healing through Cynthia's spiritual gift.": \$180.	http://cynthiafaye.com/services.html
Christopher Johansen	he/ his	-	-	Psychic Medium	\$70 / 30 minutes; \$35 / 15 minutes	https://www.psychicnthegenie.com

Monica Hilbert	-	-	"I've been doing psychic readings in the Tampa Bay area since 1998. I was a psychic reader at the Temple of Love and Healing church and the Temple of the Living God church (both in St Petersburg) for over 15 years."	"I am a Psychic Medium, Angel Practitioner, and Spiritual Healer who works with the Archangels and Ascended Masters to provide guidance, answers, support, and emotional & spiritual healing." - "I am Clairvoyant, Clairaudient, Clairsentient, and Claircognizant, a Seer, and a Spiritual Healer."	\$125 / 60 minutes (psychic reading); \$175 / 60 minutes (mediumship reading)	https://www.gypsymonny.com
Karla M. Gutierrez	-	-	-	- Mediumship readings, psychic readings, energy healing - "As a medium I use a variety of methods, such as clairvoyance (clear vision), clairaudience (clear hearing), claircognizance (clear knowing), and clairpathy (clear emotion)."	-	https://www.karla-gutierrez.com
Carolan Carey	her	"In the Psychic Flow" (radio show)	-	psychic medium	-\$60 / 30-40 minutes - Gallery: \$150 (for groups in Sarasota, FL)	https://www.carolancarey.com

Tammy Holmes	she	-	"Tammy begins all of her Readings with a short prayer of protection and gives you exactly what she gets. "	"She is Clairvoyant (sees), Clairaudient (hears), Clairsentient (feels) and speaks directly to spirits, guides, people and animals on the other side. She has Remote Viewing abilities (Past, Present & Future)."	\$125 / 30 minutes; \$250 / 60 minutes	https://tammyholmes.com
Christine Lynn	-	-	"The sea is my church, my place of peace where I connect with God the most. It is there my soul is intensely replenished and filled more than anywhere else. This is where I practice meditation/prayer with deep love and reverence for life. "	"I offer my clients psychic readings while utilizing the intuitive gifts of clairvoyance, clairsentience and clairaudience."	\$60 / 30 minutes; \$120 / 60 minutes (5 complimentary minutes per block of time)	http://www.psychic-reading-christinelynn.com/default.asp
Jason Zuk	his	-	-	relationship advice, career guidance, goal advice, spiritual development, communication with the deceased	\$60 / 20 minutes // \$90 / 30 minutes	https://www.thesocialpsychic.com/

Psychic Shawnee	she	-	-	"Psychic Readings, Tarot Readings, Reuniting Lovers/Soul Mates, Palm Readings, Crystal Reading & Healing , Relationship Help, Insight into Jobs & Finances, Health Problems, Healing Family Issues, Clearing Past Karma , Stopping Negative Energy, Aura Cleansing, Chakra Balancing, Insight into Business Issues, Crystal Readings"	-	https://www.psychicshawneemedium.com/
Joseph Lobrutto	his	-	-	Evidential mediumship	-	https://ourjourneyoflife.com/
Bernadette King	-	-	-	"For many years, I've been a professional psychic medium, Shamanic practitioner, animal communicator, and Spirit, Totem, & Power Animal practitioner." - "evidential psychic medium"	\$75 / 30 minutes; \$150 / 60 minutes	https://whatismyspiritanimal.com/