

---

**Julie Beischel**


---

# The Reincarnation of Mediumship Research

**A**ny casual examination of this year's line-up of television shows will demonstrate society's current fascination with life after death and individuals called mediums who experience regular communication with the dead. And while humanity's attempt to determine the facts about the afterlife spans eons, cultures, and religions, these questions were first tackled by science about 130 years ago. At that time, scholars and scientists in England and the U.S. began to study mediums and systematically address the survival of consciousness hypothesis (or simply "survival"). The survival theory states that an individual's consciousness or personality continues to exist, separate from the body, after physical death.

During the last century, studies of psychic abilities such as telepathy (mind to mind), clairvoyance (mind through space), and precognition (mind through time) increased in both frequency and rigor. Progress in developing sound methods to study the information mediums report, on the other hand, suffered a slow death during that time and has only in the last decade experienced life again.

Among those studying mediumship are Tricia Robertson and Archie Roy, researchers in Scotland who published three key papers between 2001 and 2004 describing and testing a method used to examine mediums' abilities to report information relevant to the recipients. In addition, mediumship research has been performed at both the University of Virginia and the University of Arizona in the U.S.; however, the latter research program, where I served as co-director, closed at the end of 2007.

At that time, my husband Mark Boccuzzi and I founded the Windbridge Institute in order to continue performing this important research. Windbridge is based in Tucson, Arizona, but the research participants with whom we work are located all over the country. At Windbridge, we continue to address the mediumship phenomenon via several research initiatives, described below.

Today, mediumship researchers can confidently offer the conclusion that certain skilled mediums, during events called readings, can report accurate and specific information about the deceased loved ones, known as "discarnates," of living people called "sitters." They do this using what we call Anomalous Information Reception, or AIR, meaning they do so without any prior knowledge about the discarnates or sitters, in the absence of any sensory feedback, and without using fraud or deception.

Nevertheless, numerous questions about mediumship remain.

## Bringing Mediumship into the Lab

In order to study mediumship appropriately in the controlled environment of the laboratory, we treat it like any other natural phenomenon being studied. This involves two equally important factors: (1) an optimal research environment and (2) maximum experimental controls.

In order to create an optimal mediumship research environment, we recognize that there are potentially three people participating in each reading—the medium, the sitter, and the discarnate—and design protocols accordingly. We also optimize the process for the mediums by, for example, performing phone readings at times chosen by the mediums and requesting information commonly found in "regular" medium-client readings. In addition, we screen, train, and certify research mediums and work only with mediums whose abilities have been demonstrated under controlled conditions. By optimizing the research environment, we increase the probability of capturing the phenomenon, if it exists, in a laboratory setting.

We also want to eliminate all conventional explanations for the accuracy of the mediums' statements by maximizing experimental controls. To do this, we use a quintuple-blind protocol, which is a method that employs five separate levels of controls: the medium, the sitter, and three experimenters are each blinded to different pieces of information.

During a typical quintuple-blind experiment, I contact a certified medium on the phone at a scheduled time with the first name of a discarnate that another experimenter has provided to me by email. The medium and I are both blinded to any other information about the discarnate or the associated sitter. During the reading, I ask the medium several specific questions about the named discarnate. The sitter does not hear the reading. The medium then performs a second reading at a different time for a second discarnate and sitter. The two readings are then transcribed and formatted to remove references to the discarnates' names, and the two sitters associated with the named discarnates then score each of the two readings for accuracy without knowing which is which. The experimenters who interact with the sitters during their initial training and during the scoring of the readings are blinded to which medium read which discarnates, which reading goes with which name, etc.

This quintuple-blind protocol prevents the inadvertent (or intentional) leakage of information and successfully eliminates all the "normal" explanations commonly put forth by so-called skeptics attempting to dismiss the reality of AIR. These include fraud, rater bias, information so general it could apply

to anyone, cueing by the experimenter, and “cold reading,” a technique in which visual or auditory cues from the sitter are used to fabricate “accurate” readings.

### Proof-focused Research

We are currently collecting data from certified research mediums using this quintuple-blind reading protocol in a study that will replicate and extend a previously published triple-blind study of unscreened mediums that demonstrated positive results. These types of studies are called “proof-focused” because they gather proof that systematically and definitively addresses the existence of AIR.

However, even if we collected a library full of positive proof-focused data, we could not conclude that mediums are talking to the dead.

Why not? Though we can eliminate all the “normal” explanations for the accuracy of a medium’s statements using the quintuple-blind protocol, three “paranormal” explanations each still fit the data. The first is a theory called super-psi, which posits that the medium retrieves information through clairvoyance, precognition, and/or telepathy with the living (collectively called “psi”) at a level that exceeds that demonstrated in laboratory studies of psi. In the super-psi theory, mediums use telepathy to read the minds of the sitters, use precognition to see into the future to a time when they receive feedback about the reading, use remote viewing to see death certificates and photo albums, and so on to gain informa-

tion about discarnates. Along these same lines is the psychic reservoir hypothesis, which claims that all information is stored somehow and somewhere in the universe and mediums are simply accessing that cosmic database to gather information about discarnates.

The third possible explanation for the accuracy of a medium’s statements is survival or life after death. Under this explanation, mediums are communicating with the survived consciousnesses of people who have died. In a recent issue of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, philosopher Michael Sudduth coined the term “survival psi” to point out that even under the survival hypothesis, mediums are using psi to gain information telepathically from the discarnates. In a subsequent issue of the *Journal of Parapsychology*, my co-author Adam Rock and I used the term “somatic psi” to collectively include both the super-psi and psychic reservoir theories. Under the somatic psi explanation, mediums use telepathy with living persons, clairvoyance (including of a psychic reservoir), and precognition but not survival psi to gain information about discarnates.

The introduction of these two terms has allowed for a more accurate discussion of what had previously been termed the “survival vs. psi debate.” For some time, parapsychologists have been engaged in this debate about whether mediumship data better support the survival psi or somatic psi theories. Individuals in this field have clear opinions regarding which of the theories tops the other, but no consensus has been reached.

At Windbridge, we’re looking to break the tie.

Dragan Trifunovic/iStockphoto



## Process-Focused Research

To address the survival psi vs. somatic psi debate, we are using a process-focused approach. In these studies, we systematically analyze the mediums' experiences of communication with the deceased.

As part of the services they offer clients, many modern-day mental (vs. trance or physical) mediums perform psychic readings in which they may use telepathy, clairvoyance, and/or precognition to retrieve information about the client or other living people. Thus, the mediums know how those psi phenomena "feel." Our process-focused line of mediumship research essentially asks the mediums if communicating with discarnates feels different than psychic readings in which psi is used.

The short answer is "yes." During a study we recently published in *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, we noted one medium's succinct description of this difference: "a psychic reading is like reading a book... a mediumship reading is like seeing a play."

Further studies under blinded conditions are required to more completely address the survival psi vs. somatic psi debate but we have taken some initial steps.

## Applied Research

At Windbridge, we are also interested in the practical social applications of mediumship readings. In this applied research initiative, we have begun investigating the therapeutic potential of mediumship readings in grief recovery. Researchers at the University of Memphis recently published an analysis of 61 clinical psychology studies which demonstrated that traditional psychotherapeutic bereavement interventions provided little to no benefit to the patients. In sharp contrast, spontaneous and induced experiences of after-death communication have been repeatedly demonstrated to dramatically diminish or even entirely alleviate grief. However, though numerous anecdotal reports exist regarding the positive and profound effects a reading with a medium can have on the grieving, very little is known about the potential therapeutic effects of a personal reading with a non-denominational, credentialed medium.

In our recent exploratory collection of reports from 83 individuals who received mediumship readings, the participants indicated noteworthy relief from grief. The participants also commented on the short- and long-term effects of a mediumship reading, their negative experiences with a mental health professional (MHP), and the importance of the combination of the two interventions (mediumship reading and work with the MHP) in recovery. We recently presented these results at the Toward a Science of Consciousness 2010 meeting.

## The Future

After a long hiatus, the mediumship phenomenon is once again being scientifically examined and public interest in the subject continues to thrive. We hope that this wave of attention will soon carry over to mainstream academics as well as

funding organizations so that addressing this topic in a timely, rigorous, and productive fashion with the necessary resources and personnel continues to be possible.

## Further Reading

- Beischel, J. (2007/2008). Contemporary methods used in laboratory-based mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 71, 37-68.
- Beischel, J., & Rock, A. J. (2009). Addressing the survival vs. psi debate through process-focused mediumship research. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 73, 71-90.
- Currier, J. M., Neimeyer, R. A., & Berman, J. S. (2008). The effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions for bereaved persons: A comprehensive quantitative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134, 648-661.
- Robertson, T. J. & Roy, A. E. (2001). A preliminary study of the acceptance by non-recipients of medium's statement to recipients. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 65, 91-106.
- Rock, A. J., Beischel, J., & Cott, C. C. (2008/2009). Psi vs. survival: A qualitative investigation of mediums' phenomenology comparing psychic readings and ostensible communication with the deceased. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 13, 76-89.
- Roy, A. E. & Robertson, T. J. (2001). A double-blind procedure for assessing the relevance of a medium's statements to a recipient. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 65, 161-174.
- Roy, A. E. & Robertson, T. J. (2004). Results of the application of the Robertson-Roy protocol to a series of experiments with mediums and participants. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 68, 18-34.
- Sudduth, M. (2009). Super-psi and the survivalist interpretation of mediumship. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 23, 167-193.



**JULIE BEISCHEL, PhD**, is Director of Research at the Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential. Dr. Beischel received her doctorate in Pharmacology and Toxicology from the University of Arizona in 2003 where she later served as the William James Post-doctoral Fellow in Mediumship and Survival Research and Co-Director of the VERITAS Research Program. Further information about Windbridge publica-

tions, investigators, news, studies, opportunities, and certified research mediums is available at [www.windbridge.org](http://www.windbridge.org).