

**The Embodied Emotion Management of Extrasensory Practitioners:
A Reflexive Approach**

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Abstract

In this thesis I adopt a reflexive approach to examining the emotion management, identity work and the ethical and normative aspects of extrasensory practices. Using my own method of Systematic Emotional Embodied Reflexivity (SEER), the thesis draws upon ethnographic data (consisting of extensive involvement within esoteric/new age subcultures, participant observations at a mediumship training college and interviews with practitioners and spiritualist leaders) to provide a sociological analysis of the relational considerations which underpin extrasensory work. Key findings suggest that the ideal of authenticity guides the identity work that practitioners do; however the data indicate that authenticity is more spiritually complex than it appears. Practitioners claim their interactions are significantly embodied, based not simply on thought and feeling but also on bodily senses and cues. In sum effective emotion management for the extrasensory practitioner involves achieving distance from the self in order to successfully present Spirit to the recipient. Nevertheless, ethical considerations often provide practitioners with interactional dilemmas contradicting the detached experiences they report. Using SEER to account for my own extrasensory experiences within the field, allowed me to experience emotion management as reported by the participants and facilitated reflective analysis.

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Declaration of Originality

In accordance with the University regulations, I hereby declare that:

1. This thesis has been composed solely by myself
2. It is entirely my own work
3. It has not been submitted in part or whole for any other degree or personal qualification

Chapter 1

Introducing the sociological significance of extrasensory practitioners

Introduction

Love them or dismiss them, everyone has an opinion about extrasensory practitioners, otherwise known as mediums, psychics and clairvoyants. This thesis is about a journey I began which was a result of personal experiences that led me to question assumptions commonly held about people with extrasensory skills. There was something in the experience of having psychic readings that for me needed further explanation. I wanted to know what it was like to be an extrasensory practitioner, what went on inside their minds when they interacted with Spirit and then gave this information to me, and how they came to terms with and act out these abilities.

As I got into that journey I realised that there was something in me that was unknown, undefined and unexplainable. It became a journey into my self as much as into the perceptions and practices of the outer world. What this self-exploration has given me is a range of experiences of taking research into extrasensory experiences from one point of understanding to a different point of understanding. There were times when I was wearing two hats, where I was unable to distinguish between researcher and experiencer.

There is still no evidence to prove that extrasensory abilities are real. This, however, goes to the heart of the question about the nature of reality. It often does not matter what it is that has shaped how people live their lives, conduct their work and formulate their identities. I certainly have been changed by beliefs and experiences that I did not initially think were possible. The extrasensory practitioners within this research were open about their sets of values and beliefs and were quick to admit the problematic nature of their experiences, which even in their eyes cannot easily be captured. Through this journey, though, I was able to feel these occurrences obtaining experiential insight into Spirit and the practitioner. I entered a door into their world.

Chapter overview

In this chapter I begin by introducing the aims and the objectives of the thesis and its key contributions to the development of knowledge. I then discuss why I selected the term 'extrasensory practitioner' by examining definitional complexities and important terms that I use throughout this thesis. I then proceed to highlight the prominence of extrasensory practices in contemporary society, which arose together with Spiritualism. I highlight how opposing positive and negative impacts have been reported for clients using such services, which explains the need for further understanding of these practices. I emphasise that this additional understanding needs to start with the practitioners themselves, with identifying how they make sense of the work that they do.

Underpinning extrasensory practices is the awareness and acting out of opposing bias over belief in an afterlife, which is significant for all involved in extrasensory practices: practitioners, clients and researchers. By examining this debate early on I show why researcher reflexivity is essential and thus a key focus of this thesis (Davies and Spencer, 2010). I end by discussing past and current sociological research into extrasensory experiences, explaining where this thesis is situated in relation to this research and why it is important. I underline the interactional considerations that practitioners frequently report when providing advice to clients, which imply that practitioners have to use emotion management strategies when conducting this work.

Aims and objectives of this thesis

Within this thesis I investigate the strategies that those I term extrasensory practitioners (such as psychics, mediums and clairvoyants) use to construct their identities and explore the embodied emotion management they conduct. An ethnographic research process was designed to get such practitioners to interpret and reflect upon their phenomenological experiences and self-management strategies. I also aspired to capture experiences that practitioners reflect on ordinarily in their workaday lives. I sought to account for inner feelings and sense-making processes, which may be motivated by social factors (e.g. social position, presumed client expectations, identity and experience, context and power, morals and values).

I therefore scrutinised literature sources regarding extrasensory practices, as well as those regarding the sociology of emotions (more so studies focusing upon emotion management and identity) so that I could identify topics of interest and issues of concern that I could focus upon during the research process, which also helped to steer interviewing. I did, however, also seek to implement a thematic approach to analysing data independent of such theoretical predispositions and primarily allowed the practitioners to talk freely and in-depth about their experiences. I sought to identify common themes in the collective experiential accounts of extrasensory practitioners (this included interviewing a small sample of clients), which would advance knowledge of what happens during extrasensory consultations within both Spiritualism and esoteric subcultures.

I was aware, however, of three issues. Firstly, I had earlier positive and negative experiences of being involved in extrasensory practices through my previous identity as a client, which meant that I had been acculturated to some extent into Spiritualism and the subculture prior to conducting this thesis. Secondly, I knew through such prior involvement that bias (e.g. whether one believed in Spirit) was significant to all those involved within extrasensory research and practices and that this debate had also impacted upon me. Thirdly, emotion management of the researcher is often not explored fully inline with the actual primary research aims, which was apparent through studying a wide array of emotional labour literature. I thus created Systematic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity (SEER), a method that I could use to account for the emotion management I was likely to conduct during this research. Using SEER meant that experiences I had in the field enhanced the research.

This thesis addresses the following key research questions:

- How can the study of embodied emotion management aid our understanding of the work of extrasensory practitioners?
- What role does the researcher's emotion management play in a study of this kind?
- What influence do clients, and the relationship between practitioner and client, have on the emotion management of extrasensory practitioners?

- How and to what extent are ethical considerations incorporated into the work of extrasensory practitioners?

I will now discuss the key terminology used throughout the thesis, including an explanation of why I coined¹ the concept of the 'extrasensory practitioner' rather than adhering to existing definitions, such as medium or psychic practitioner (Wooffitt, 2006).

Defining 'extrasensory practitioners'

Extrasensory practitioners use the senses in a different way compared to ordinary interaction, including focusing on the mind, body and social situation to induce an altered state so that Spirit can be present and/or communicate. I use the singular term Spirit in the way MacKian (2012) describes it when she explores everyday spirituality. She claims that:

Many participants were explicitly seeking a relationship with a very *other* worldly 'spirit'. This spirit might be defined differently, as the spirit in nature, the spirit of angels, spirits of the deceased or universal spirit; but at the heart is a communion with 'spirit'. The second interesting thing I stumbled upon was that this spiritual relationship had a tendency to spill out into the broader fabric of everyday life. It was not only whilst on the treatment bed having Reiki that their link to spiritual energy was present, it was also evident in the way they talked about every aspect of their lives, from personal relationships to work. This was spirituality of, and in, everyday life.

Extrasensory practitioners are defined in numerous ways and practitioners even argue amongst themselves regarding how their diverse abilities should be classified. New sensory experiences and methods are frequently reported. In broad terms, extrasensory practices can be split into two categories: the physical and the mental

¹ This is an entirely new term that I have developed.

(Cornell, 2001; Wooffitt, 2006). Physical mediumship is about the dead making the living aware of their existence through the occurrence of activities such as ‘table tipping’, rapping or moving objects without human influence (Cornell, 2001; Pearsall, 2004). It is becoming increasingly difficult² to witness the occurrence of physical mediumship if you are not permanently involved within spiritualism or esoteric groups. Mental mediumship is what is more relevant within this research³; this is where the deceased person reportedly uses an extrasensory practitioner’s mind and body to convey his/her personality or information through influencing the practitioner’s consciousness.

This involves the practitioner experiencing non-physical pictographic signs or scenes (clairvoyance), hearing verbal snippets (clairaudient) or sensing the presence of (clairsentience) deceased loved ones and Spirit guides. One of the most recent classifications is clairgustance, where the medium can taste a food significant to Spirit. Trance mediumship is also mental mediumship and involves the Spirit taking over the body of the medium completely (Cornell, 2001). The medium’s tone of voice may change; their body may alter or the physical defects the Spirit may have had when alive may be acted out. Automatic writing is another form of mental mediumship where the practitioner enters an altered state of consciousness; the Spirit then influences the thoughts of the practitioner to produce the writing. Gauld (1983), like others, is sceptical of some methods (in his case automatic writing). He argues that ‘they simply reflect dramatizing tendencies and the responsiveness to suggestion and to cultural influences, characteristic of automatic writing in general’ (Gauld, 1983: 27).

Recent resurgences of methods that do not require the mental capacities of practitioners show that interpretation of Spirit messages within the extrasensory is a key concern (Cardoso, 2009; Batey, 1999). Instrumental trans-communication has become popular, wherein Spirit entities supposedly communicate through electronic equipment. Some argue that this is ‘in the most objective way possible, free from the interference of human mental (cultural, social, ethical historical, etc.) patterns’ (Cardoso, 2009: 13).

² Physical mediumship occurs within closed groups where regular spiritualist mediums have to be invited to join the group or within specialist-organized groups. This is different from the Victorian era where physical mediumship occurred frequently within séances (Sutton, 2009).

³ Further discussion within this chapter will relate to mental mediumship.

Some call themselves mediums on the premise that they channel energy. They adopt spiritualist philosophy and see humans and the multi-dimensional universe as being all connected through ether (i.e. energy). Using their bodies to channel energy, they claim to be able to predict, diagnose and heal based on their ability to identify the client's energy, often through reading auras (colours that they claim surround people) (Doyle, 1989; McLaren, 1998). Some mediums, like psychics, do not necessarily cognitively or psychically communicate with deceased entities but they do use their extrasensory abilities in order to identify energy and interact with living people. The term psychic is closely connected to medium. Both use extrasensory means. However, like those mediums that view auras, the psychic claims to be able to sense future events or know personal information about people without communicating with the deceased (Parker, 2003). Some mediums claim to be able to have both psychic and mediumistic abilities. They use a variety of terms (such as 'psychic medium', 'medium clairvoyant', and 'clairaudient medium' to define themselves, often depending on the specific type of ability they claim to have).

The key difference between these practices is whether Spirit entities are thought to be able to convey their social personalities to provide verbal or/and embodied evidence of Spirit's existence (Howarth, 2007). Overall, practitioners claim to have multiple abilities, with some who advocate developing the use of all of these senses and abilities. Development of such abilities is reported to be the key focuses of the work practitioners do. This thesis therefore uses the term Extrasensory Practitioner to capture the diverse range of extrasensory skills these practitioners report. In using this classification, I am not ignoring the complexity of these practices. Rather, it allows me to focus on the practitioners' identity work and emotion management irrespective of the methods they claim to be using to induce Spirit⁴ (Gauld, 1983: 19; Walter, 2008; Wooffitt, 2006; Wooffitt and Gilbert, 2008).

From now on for simplicity, I use the term practitioner to refer to the extrasensory practitioner. Individuals who use these services will be referred to as clients or recipients (i.e. of the extrasensory practices) depending on the context of the discussion. Like other professionals, practitioners use a range of work-specific

⁴ Whether they communicate or acknowledge Spirit's existence.

terminology that will be discussed throughout this research. In the next section, though, I explore three key terms - 'proof', 'spirit guide' and 'esoteric subculture' - that are central to extrasensory work.

Other issues to consider

In this thesis I argue that, regardless of whether practitioners are truly able to speak to the deceased, it is important for these practices to be examined in a way that recognises that these experiences are real and valuable to those who have them. It is recommended to those who read this work to accept the experience of extrasensory phenomena as 'valid whether all, or some, or none of the phenomena known as paranormal have any reality in fact' (Evans, 1982: viii). Indeed Evans (ibid) argues that:

a phenomenon does not have to be real to justify study; recent years have indeed seen several fascinating studies of the social effects of non-existent phenomena or phenomena which were certainly not what they were thought to be at the time.

Practitioners nonetheless often describe tensions between context, inner feeling and action. It is questionable, therefore, whether one can capture true feeling in any social situation. Feeling can be unconscious, spontaneous while manageable but also embodied and physically unobservable. Spirit emotion that is defined in the analytical chapters shares these characteristics, involving interpretation and detachment. Sometimes people are unaware of what emotion/s they are managing, how to process and articulate their own feelings and those of others. Social bonds may be contextual in that personal and professional factors sway interpretation of experience. This has consequences for the research process in that data collected has to be treated not as the fact/s of what actually happened but rather as the practitioners' ways of making sense of their experiences in reporting them to me, the researcher. It is also not possible to directly access interactional skills through the process of interviewing. This thesis, however, provides analysis of the reported experiences combined with other observational methods that took place within the subculture, which provides a richer examination suitable for the focus of this thesis.

Extrasensory practices in contemporary UK culture

Extrasensory practices (including mediumship and psychic consultations) are now widespread, popular and a big income generator. Practitioners are now the driving force behind lucrative commercial sectors (Hanson, 2001; Hazelgrove, 2000; Romans, 2009; Shepherd, 2009). Spending on extrasensory knowledge is not restricted to those involved exclusively in esoteric culture but is becoming a widespread occurrence across the globe (Jorgensen and Jorgensen, 1982; Wooffitt, 2006). Individuals or groups can attend one-to-one sittings with practitioners who advertise their services through private and commercial means, via stage demonstrations, telephone services that individuals can call 24 hours a day from the comfort of their own homes, via email or Internet websites. The World Wide Web has opened up unlimited possibilities, where practitioners from the USA and New Zealand are offering similar services to those in the UK. Readings are promoted frequently via Facebook and other social networking sites (Ryan, 2012).

Extrasensory practices are highly visible in celebrity and popular culture. Large numbers of mediumship, psychic, and paranormal TV channels exist (Sparks and Miller, 2001). Celebrity figures have been shown on TV to invite famous practitioners into their homes, which symbolically emphasize the importance of this work to millions of viewers. Extrasensory practitioners produce bestselling books regarding the nature and experiences of their work (see Edwards, 1998 and Neil, 2008). Some practitioners have respected status amongst clientele and some are becoming celebrities in their own right, which is evident through the number of clients or audience members they have or the type of celebrity client they attract. Stage demonstrations alone have a massive following. It is not unusual for well-known mediums' US tours to sell out shortly after the dates have been released.

A wide variety of groups and movements exist that promote the legitimacy of the extrasensory and the spiritual nature of life (Steward, 2002). These are advertised both locally and via the Internet. While aiming to demonstrate the existence of life after death through spiritualist philosophy and demonstrations of mediumship, they also provide a means of social support and training to individuals who are interested (Way, 2004; Wallis, 2001). There is a tendency for literature to distinguish between

those working within the Spiritualist church and those who are typically designated as 'secular'. However, I am going to use the term 'independent', rather than 'secular', to acknowledge practices that occur in the secular context (such as stage demonstrations, telephone services and psychic social networking) but which may still incorporate, by the practitioner, the promotion of Spiritualism. This thesis shows that such movements and groups still influence what have been previously conceived as secular and somewhat separate practices to Spiritualism (Wooffitt, 2006). I will therefore now briefly introduce the spiritualist movement and how it has become prominent within the UK.

The development of current spiritualism and spiritualist philosophy

Mediumistic tendencies, spiritual phenomena and experiences 'have been found in diverse societies and in most historical periods' (Cornell, 2001: 163). Evidence of this can be found in various historical, anthropological and religious texts from across the globe (Lorimer, 1984). It is known that 'belief in contact with spirits and higher beings can be traced back to Greek and Roman civilisations' (Wooffitt, 2006: 4). Fontana (2005) refers to Plato's account of Socrates (469-399BC). His tendency was to go into trance-like states for extended periods. During these practices he would consult with his guiding Spirit over theological, philosophical and social ideas. Socrates' diverse religious ideas and practices, which opposed state norms, resulted in him being sentenced to death, highlighting how negatively such practices were viewed.

Doyle's (1989) history of spiritualism acknowledges Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a scientific philosopher, as the first person to write about his own beliefs concerning afterlife existence. Swedenborg claimed to have abilities such as interacting with Spirit entities and being able to travel in his mind (and astral body⁵) to other realms, while still being psychically present in the social situation. In this sense, he was present at public gatherings where there were many witnesses; however, he was still able to report on happenings faraway that he claimed he had experienced through using his extrasensory abilities and which, he argued, had no

⁵ Astral body is based upon the notion that there are spiritual and material contexts within what we perceive as reality; bodies that are sensitive to spiritual substance can instantaneously travel dynamically in all contexts whilst still being visually embodied to others in the immediate, social situation (Murphy and Ballou, 1961).

other way of knowing. Doyle maintained that this proved his abilities. After Swedenborg's death, a practitioner claimed his Spirit relayed various spiritualist teachings about life following bodily death and about the nature of other worldly realities. Swedenborg's scientific status has meant that these accounts have worth within spiritualist teachings⁶. In other historical accounts documentation of spiritualistic phenomena differs in that earlier and later experiences are seen to have more validity (Lombroso, 1988; Lorimer, 1984).

'In the early years of the Victorian period the technological revolution, born of the industrial revolution, was providing new means of probing the unknown' (Pearsall, 2004: 15; Webb, 1974). In this period mesmerism was practiced, a system that refers to an eclectic mix of methods based upon the use of energy and its perceived possibilities. The laying on of hands was used to channel energy to others; 'sensitives' would go into trance-like states and perform hypnosis, on and off stage, to relieve pain and awaken Spirit energy⁷. Daniel Home, another figure in the spiritualist Victorian era, ostensibly had extrasensory cognitive ability, which could prompt Spirit to move furniture and even float in the air (Lamont, 2005). Sensitives had elite social status through their ability to provide a form of therapy that involved predicting the future or illness (predicting illness and identifying illness that was undiagnosed), talking with Spirit and identifying things about people that they should not have been able to know. However, they also suffered accusations of charlatanism and the nature of their practices prompted social fear among the public generally as well as among religious domains (Hazelgrove, 2000). Examination of early reporting of these experiences suggests that they were philosophically driven, individualistic⁸ or collective experiences produced in relation to social hype and persuasion of the mass mesmeric and spiritualist activities (Fontana, 2005; Hazelgrove, 2000; Owen, 1989).

The practices of two sisters in particular had mass social significance upon how extrasensory practices came to the UK and developed into the current spiritualist movement. According to numerous historical accounts, the founding of the current

⁶ It is evident that pro-spiritualist bias influences Doyle's account. He tries to adhere to the rational, scientific consensus throughout society at the time. This is evident when he purports to Swedenborg's scientific status in an attempt to validate spiritualist mediumistic experience.

⁷ The latter progressed in the concluding part of the movement.

⁸ These experiences were not always a matter of interaction between living people but often between the practitioner and Spirit, such as in Swedenborg's experiences.

movement dates back to the séance culture of the Victorian times and to the Fox family. This was an American household that was experiencing significant tapping in their home in Hydesville, New York in March 1848 (Hazelgrove, 2000; Pearsall, 2004; Weisberg, 2004). It was found that the two Fox sisters were sensitive to the noises, which were thought to be Spirit contact. This was because the sisters devised a method of initiating and contextualising responses according to the frequency of this tapping. In this sense, they claimed that they had developed their own method with which to communicate with the deceased. Many visited the Fox's home to investigate and the sisters also made public appearances to demonstrate their abilities (Wooffitt, 2006). Even though the sisters received both positive and negative news reporting, many millions of Americans accepted this as proof of life after death and from this point onwards the spiritualist movement increased in popularity (Lombroso, 1988).⁹

The adoption and scrutiny of practices, which occurred and later spread across many European countries without the media coverage that is currently in operation, emphasises the impact of extrasensory phenomena at that time. Spiritualism was 'the first movement to be imported from the United States' in 1852 (Pearsall, 2004: 9). 'Today it is customary for trends first to show themselves in America before being transplanted... in Britain, but in 1852 this was something new' (2004: 9). Pearsall (2004: 29) states that society already had the foundations to allow spiritualism to flourish where:

there was a body of workers already trained in mesmerism...., together with their audience, conditioned to accepting miracles and cosmic phenomena. The idea of communicating with the dead was naturally more interesting to the merely curious than flames streaming from magnets or the singular ability of certain men and women to put other men and women into a trance, and Spirit circles were an amusing way to spend long winter evenings.

Extrasensory practitioners began travelling further afield to promote spiritualist practice, which resulted in new opportunities and social mobility. In a year, the first

⁹ Actual belief in these happenings is to be assessed with caution given that there is a lack of actual evidence of widespread belief and anecdotal and media reports are all that can be relied upon.

spiritualist church was opened in the UK in Keighley, Yorkshire in 1853. Spiritualist press emerged two years later with the founding of the The Yorkshire Spiritual telegraph in 1855. Spiritualism was rapidly becoming rooted in the fabric of British life. I will now explore the development of Spiritualism between the first church in the 19th century and the present day.

There are noteworthy reasons why Spiritualism was later to expand and progress into the widespread religion it is today. Significant numbers of churchgoers became dissatisfied with Catholicism's and Christianity's hierarchal and patriarchal structures and mainstream church attendance decreased (Pearsall, 2004). Spiritualism, like mesmerism, not only provided unique social status and mobility, primarily to women, but followers had new opportunities to mould previous religious teachings and symbolisms in accordance with new egalitarian principles (ibid). The public distrust of patriarchal religious orthodoxy and wider social circumstance emphasised and drew positive attention to the developing ostensible autonomous ethos of spiritualist practices (ibid). In the early days of Spiritualism's development, Spiritualists aspired to not be accountable to a central body or organisation and to be progressive on par with science and philosophy.

Indeed the 1860's and 1870's saw a growing popularity of Spirit practices, churches and Spiritualist associations. Specifically between 1869-1871 Spiritualism attracted and continued to attract the serious attention of science and well-respected figures such as Sir Oliver Lodge, great physicist of the 20th century and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Croydon Spiritualist Church, 2015). In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research was founded with the aim of examining extrasensory phenomena using rigorous scientific methods. In 1884 a group of eminent scholars and scientists formed the now College of Psychic Studies in London to promote a hub where likeminded people could continue discussion and investigation into Spiritualism.

Oppositions from mainstream religion though remained and fear was ignited and comparisons made between Satan, the occult and Spiritualism (Hazelgrove, 2000). Five years later there was a need for Spiritualism to unite its various facets into a more formalised setup to be able to stand up to this hostility and counteract such social panic (ibid). 1887 saw the arising of "Two worlds" Spiritualist weekly newspaper,

which facilitated the formation of Spiritualism's organisational structures (SNU, 2015). Its creator Mrs Emma Harding Britten had also previously channelled the Seven Principles of Spiritualism from the Spirit of Robert Owen who was an influential socialist reformer and who, before his death, was introduced to Spiritualism through Mrs Hayden (Ibid).

The organising of Spiritualism, including its philosophical growth, had begun and continued to develop and strengthen over the coming years. 1901 saw the most significant expansion; the creation of the Spiritualists' National Union (SNU), which has remained the largest Spiritualist organisation to date¹⁰. With the SNU came the philosophical development of Spiritualism and extrasensory practitioners now adhere to values and rules that explain the dimensions of worldly existence and communication and incorporate into their work various moral and ethical factors linked to spiritual viewpoints (Skultans, 1974).

Spiritualist philosophy acknowledges that mediumship is the result of the different evolutionary states of life where human consciousness: sensitivity, intelligence, knowledge, will, and individuality develops - sometimes incarnated and in other instances discarnated - acquiring experiences that in sum can be defined as a whole, as life itself (Espinosa, 2005: 1)

Goode (2000), however, argues that some practitioners simply offer a service for money, without holding such philosophical or moral beliefs. This may be true in some cases. However, the history and use of spiritualist terminology throughout practitioner advertising and mediumship and psychic demonstrations suggests otherwise (Jorgenson and Jorgenson, 1982 and 1992; Wooffitt, 2006). Extrasensory practitioners currently operate in accordance with these long established spiritualist-orientated viewpoints, often within collective contexts (church or stage gatherings) and within a

¹⁰ SNU promote the religion and philosophy of Spiritualism as based on the Seven Principles:-

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.
4. The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul.
5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation and Retribution Hereafter for all the Good & Evil Deeds done on Earth.
7. Eternal Progress Open to every Human Soul" (SNU, 2015).

society that has often over the last fifty years presented a negative view of the work they do and criticised the type of people they are. Those who investigate the extrasensory therefore need to grasp the reasoning behind these practices as frequently new methods, practices and assumptions arise.

Following the creation of the SNU, Spiritualism continued to strengthen, however it was not until the First and Second World War period that Spiritualism really flourished. Between 1913 and 1918 respected figures including, but not restricted to, Sir Oliver Lodge (who had by that point conducted 25 years extensive research into Spiritualism) and again Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, publicly admitted to their belief in Spiritualism (Croydon Spiritualist Church, 2015). J Arthur Findlay MBE was amongst these respected figures and in 1964 he bequeathed his stately home to the movement to be used as a college to explore the extrasensory (see chapter 5).

Spiritualism was popular during the war period because it helped the masses deal with the possibility of death, grieving and social uncertainty. Such uptake of Spiritualism correspondingly impelled sceptics to fiercely object to practitioners they thought were taking advantage of vulnerable individuals (Wallis, 2001). Such viewpoints are still prevalent today and became enforceable in the law. 1944 saw a trial and prosecution of a fraudulent practitioner. Mainstream science and academia in general still have a tense relationship with the possibility of the afterlife and bias is rife.

Nevertheless over the last seventy years Spiritualism has continued to develop and refine its organisational structures including appointing ministers, performing weddings and funerals, developing educational establishments and courses (SNU, 2015). Practitioners who were significantly involved in Spiritualism during this period of rapid development refined their reputation and extrasensory accuracy. For instance Gordon Higginson became a spiritualist from the age of 12 with the encouragement of his mother who was also a practitioner. Gordon became known as the longest serving president of the SNU and in 1970 he was known to have saved the union from bankruptcy. He has memorial services and websites dedicated to his spiritualist work (see www.gordonhigginson.co.uk). Such figures have since been written into the teachings and celebrations of Spiritualism as it continues to develop.

Despite financial obstacles, accusations that spiritualist churches are more suited to the elderly, alongside a reported drop in attendance figures; Spiritualism has persisted as a unique movement for the last 167 years (Wallis, 2001). According to the SNU website:

The SNU supports and has helped to unify around 350 Spiritualist churches and centres throughout the United Kingdom. There are over 2500 individual Spiritualists who pay an annual fee for formal membership of the company. SNU churches and centres have a total of approximately 14,500 people who pay an annual subscription for membership.

It still continues to offer an impressive range of educational courses including a variety of training events that are available on a free, paid or donation basis (SNU, 2015).

Other countries have their own governing bodies, such as the National Spiritualist Association of Churches in the USA (NSAC), the Foundation of Spiritualist Mediums in New Zealand (FSM) and the International Spiritualist Federation (ISF), created in Belgium. The SNU in the UK is by far the largest and more organized of all these governing bodies with comprehensive principles and rules about how mediumship should be conducted. The accessibility and promotion of spiritualist practices within the spiritualist movement has had a significant impact upon the mainstream integration of what could be conceived as spiritualist practices. The spiritualist movement has therefore been the subject of a significant amount of academic as well as public interest. There has been less academic focus on the various wider independent practices that are reported today (Wooffitt, 2006). I seek to address this issue in this research by exploring both spiritualist and independent practitioners.

The positive and negative responses of extrasensory practices

Extrasensory practitioners are viewed in strikingly different ways. Within the spiritualist church, congregational members¹¹ see them as people who are serving

¹¹ Who are likely to believe that a Spirit world exists.

Spiritualism in their attempt to talk to Spirit. To others who consume extrasensory knowledge, practitioners are viewed as trusted confidants and advisers. Practitioners establish themselves in society as professionals in their own right. This can involve attending specific training camps or development circles or groups. Numerous advisory associations have developed which offer guiding principles and codes of conduct to extrasensory practitioners. It is clear that independent practitioners seek professional status for the services that they provide. Holding such memberships is likely to provide the impression of higher-level training and regulation to their clients. Like other forms of consultancy or psychotherapy, these services are marketed differently to specific markets. Individuals can visit private homes, shops and centres. Some practitioners even have consultation rooms in respected postcode areas attracting affluent clientele (Lester, 1982; McDonald, 2010).

Some practitioners claim they have roles similar to that of mainstream professions, including psychic surgeons, psychic doctors and even psychic detectives (Lyons and Truzzi, 1991). Others report working in partnership with formal institutions (such as the police), although these establishments do not acknowledge such working relationships¹². The roles that mediums choose are reminiscent of occupations that are highly regarded in popular culture. Nevertheless, extrasensory practitioners have also been portrayed negatively as deluded individuals who have been brainwashed by cult-like motivations (Randi, 1981). They have also been branded frauds and are considered by some as only suitable for entertainment purposes, while concerns have been raised regarding the potentially damaging nature of the advice they provide (Davis, 2008; Randi, 1981; Shepherd, 2009).

Research has highlighted the therapeutic benefits of extrasensory practices. Semetsky (2006) evaluates the projective nature of tarot. Assessing its value as a psychotherapeutic assessment and counselling tool, she claims that the laying of these cards aids therapeutic self-expression through the aligning of unconscious and conscious thought processes. These are elicited through the symbolic nature of the spread.

¹² The UK police, for example, fail to assign special significance to mediums' claims and treat claims as they would any witness. I know this through a well-respected informant within the police.

By means of projecting a client's life-world of beliefs, hopes or unconscious desires, Tarot collects 'data' that may be considered clinical: a person's thoughts, emotions, feelings, level of awareness, judgement, social adjustment, coping abilities, relationship with significant others plus the whole world of repressions that may emerge and call for exploration during a reading (Ibid: 188).

Semetsky claims that 'the reading triggers spontaneous associations for a client who thus tends to respond equally spontaneously' (p. 189). This spontaneity is something that may not occur in other cognitive behavioural sessions. She advocates the incorporation of spiritual dimensions to mainstream clinical mental health practices, emphasising that it can benefit clients immensely.

Other research, though, has shown the negative effects of extrasensory practices. For instance, Shepherd (2009) examines the relationship between addiction and those using psychic, tarot and mediumship hotlines and concludes that addictive behaviours were induced when using these services. This research suggests that there needs to be development of 'addiction theories amongst non-substance using behaviours' as a response to the actions these readings prompt; these behaviours are also encouraged by the availability of new technologies (Shepherd, 2009: 287; Ryan, 2013). Well-known actress Sarah Lassez stresses that she initially found psychic advice immediately therapeutic, although later she became a silent addict, which caused her extreme emotional and monetary difficulties (Lassez and Sardar, 2006). During an interview with the New York Times she emphasised that this type of addiction is common and the consequences can be dire. Individuals can develop an unhealthy dependency, important life decisions are changed, and fundamental assumptions of self are altered (Williams, 2006). She has since developed an online support group (see Lassez, 2015). Such support networks imply that these practices are having an impact beyond simple advice offering, generic entertainment or cathartic value.

It is clear then that in extrasensory research there are contradictory stances regarding the impact of such practices. While there has been a highlighting of the ethical complexities associated with the information practitioners provide (Randi, 1981), and

the overuse of esoteric services (Shepherd, 2009), it is also argued that extrasensory consultations are therapeutically orientated. Both Semetsky (2006) and Shepherd (2009) raise issues overlooked by previous research and highlight the need to explore individual experiences of such phenomena, providing more in-depth insight into how practitioners conduct their work. Exploring further the nature of extrasensory experience may aid the development of responses to the positive and negative effects of mediumistic work (Edge, 1993; Shepherd, 2009; Wooffitt, 2006).

Regardless of whether extrasensory abilities are real, this literature shows that these practitioners have social influence and that these practices need more research in order to be more fully comprehended. I argue that understanding into these practices needs to begin with the practitioners themselves, of how they make sense of the work that they do. I have shown that practitioners are viewed in strikingly different ways; however, within the following section I show how these differences in opinion relate to a key debate which not only effects the practitioners when they are conducting their work but which difference in belief guides all involved, including researchers. It is a debate, which has significantly influenced the focus of this thesis emphasising to me the importance of my own reflexivity throughout the research process.

Bias within extrasensory research and the necessity of researcher reflexivity

To accept that individuals have extrasensory abilities and actually communicate with Spirit entities one has to take a definitive stance concerning one of the longest standing and most controversial theological and philosophical debates: that human, and even animal, consciousness can transcend and exist in another context (or realm), following bodily death (Cardoso, 2009; Randall, 2009), and also that we can communicate with such spirits. Over the years, those claiming to have extrasensory abilities have attracted much attention from researchers from opposing perspectives (e.g. believers versus sceptics).

In 1994, the Scole Group conducted one of the most prominent investigations to date (Fontana, 2005; Keen et al., 1999). Purportedly at the request of their Spirit contacts, a group of spiritualist practitioners invited researchers to their séances. The aim was for the researchers to experience and test contact with the deceased so that life after

death could be proved (Fontana, 2005; Keen et al., 1999). The investigators claim to be convinced of the afterlife having witnessed a wide range of extrasensory phenomena. It was argued that these happenings would be impossible to replicate through trickery (Fontana, 2005; Keen et al., 1999). The findings from the Scole Group, though, failed to satisfy those sceptics 'troubled by the lack of apparent controls in the Scole sessions' (Streiff, 2012: np). Investigations such as these, therefore, like many others, have failed to resolve the debate over the possibility of the soul's transcendence of death and of post-mortal contact. The extrasensory, in its many forms, has a tendency to be assessed in the academic world in conjunction with the spiritualist movement and its methods (Nelson, 1969)¹³.

Other researchers believe that there is no 'afterlife' and rely upon scientific / materialistic paradigms to explain their existence (Sharp, 1999). While there is increased consumer interest in extrasensory practices, the rapid development of scientific paradigms within advanced societies means that there exists a complex understanding of human and worldly capabilities. Scientific, physiological and neurological methods have been developed, including DNA and genetic manipulative techniques. Le Breton (2004: 2) emphasises that 'previous perspectives on the human are disappearing and are being replaced with a conception based solely on genes, which is to say pieces of information that constitute an amorphous and inscrutable signifying form'. One's unique thought processes and emotions are viewed as nothing but genetically-determined chemical reactions that cease upon death (Chalmers, 1996; Dennett, 1991). Soundbite scientific discourse has become both fundamental and authoritative in navigating the uncertainties of consumer-driven and risk-centred societies (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Marcuse, 1964; Muncey, 2006). Some scientific paradigms are disengaged from spiritualist or global theological philosophies and have a bias towards the advancement of types of systematically-validated knowledge regarding human functioning. The proving of life after death would affect such theories and would have global impact in unprecedented ways (Burwood et al., 1998).

In such societies (that are 'grounded in traditional religion, political-economic ideology, and scientific rationality'), serious belief in and those who investigate afterlife survival are debunked as eccentric devil worshipers and non-academic / anti-

¹³ Weekly church services provide easy observational access from which to investigate the extrasensory.

scientific (Fuxe, 1947; Jorgensen and Jorgensen, 1982: 373; Truzzi, 1998).

Extrasensory practices examined in relation to paranormal or occult literature has been particularly stigmatising towards those participating in such practices (calling them deprived or deviant) (Collins and Pinch, 1979; Goode, 2000 Hanson, 2001). Fuxe (1947: 443) argues that:

the term occult has a variety of meanings. To many it is the antithesis of science, the bugbear of religion. To others it is the know all and believe all. It often is dismissed with not a little display of emotion, as unworthy of intellectual consideration and is said to be akin to superstition and the unreal. On the other hand it may be used objectively merely to suggest that which is not entirely known.

Much research, by design, gears towards exposing trickery, maliciousness or the delusional tendencies of the medium (such as schizophrenia and multiple personality disorders) (Cardena et al., 2002; Wheatley, 1994; Moreira-Almeida et al., 2007). Hyman, (1981) for instance, claims that cold-reading techniques are used to promote practitioners as having extrasensory perception (ESP) when in reality they are using combinations of guesswork, reading body language, and language manipulation. Others adopt this stance claiming that most mediums use vague or ambiguous statements (known as the Barnum effect) (Forer, 1949; Randi, 1981; Schwartz, 1981). Wiseman et al. (1996) suggest that mediums and psychics use placebo props like crystal balls, tarot cards and pendulums to dramatize their accounts, in order for them to be more persuasive. Mediumship has been thought of as a self-fulfilling practice; hence, if the medium 'began his career with little belief in his method, the inevitable reinforcement of persuaded clients increases his confidence in himself and his system' (Forer, 1949; Hyman, 1981: 81). The individual then begins to really believe that they have these abilities. In such cases their identity changes and they identify themselves to others as mediums. Such research therefore claims that mediums are the deluded victims of social conditioning.

Such pre-judgment is longstanding. Gauld (1983: 5) signposts in his historical account of mediumship research that 'the 1870's had been the decade in which 'scientific'

materialism of a rather crude kind had made unparalleled advances at the expense of all varieties of religious [and spiritual] belief'. He emphasises that this had a huge influence on the development and urgency of psychical research. Nevertheless, even extrasensory research is constructed within this wider scientific social system. Within parapsychology, for instance, there continues to be dispute over the over-use of scientific rigour¹⁴. Parapsychology differs from psychical research into mediumship. Parapsychology is geared towards aligning itself to materialistic norms through providing credible scientific investigation into the validity of 'psi' (which is a term that relates to a broad range of extrasensory abilities, including extrasensory perception (ESP) that cannot be physically explained) (Blackmore, 2003). Psi does not have to refer to one's existence beyond death but is also attributed to cognitive factors, which remain unexplained. In the UK there is also a growing number of parapsychological university departments that test psi within laboratory or controlled settings. Much of this scientific enquiry claims to be conducted on the basis of disbelief and repetition, until the phenomenon is proven (Rhine, 1954). Nevertheless, the scientific validity of parapsychology is still disputed (French, 2004).

Science itself is clearly socially constructed and fraught with bias like other dogmas. Significantly though disciplines such as physics have begun to indicate that 'reality' as some scientists would believe it to be, is very different from longstanding traditional scientific perspectives. 'Physics has always been a logical study of the world around us, which is conducted by reducing all events and natural phenomena to their most fundamental elements' based on standalone cause and effect (Beichler, 2001: 52, Oroc, 2012). 'These elements are 'matter,' 'motion,' and 'matter in motion' as understood against the back-ground of our common space-time framework' (Beichler, 2001: 52). Beichler (2001) claims parapsychics emerged in 1974 though it did not progress as a legitimate field of scientific study, as expected, because of the stigma of exploring PSI, which organically challenges traditional frameworks. Recently though he emphasises that 'newer interpretations of the quantum have opened the debate to other perspectives of reality' where attitudes in broader psychics as a whole are positively changing (Beichler, 2001: 50).

¹⁴ Believers often claim that it is impossible to prove extrasensory phenomena using current scientific measures, which are seen as incompatible with the types of extrasensory experiences practitioners report.

Quantum physics appears to conceptualise the universe to be much more sympathetic to the views of Spiritualism (e.g. consciousness existing outside of the body, the existence of multiple dimensions and so forth). Once you look past 'traditional' reality, things get peculiar. 'Energy moves around without apparent rhyme or reason, possessing strange qualities like "charm" and "spin", while every electron in the universe appears to influence (and be influenced by) every other electron in the universe, through "spooky action at a distance"' (Oroc, 2012: 19). For instance quantum superposition strikingly finds that a particle can exist in two different states simultaneously (Romero-Isart *et al* 2010). Moreover, quantum entanglement finds that particles can affect another despite being on different sides of the universe (known as nonlocality) (Kelly, 2015; Radin, 2006). Some physicists expand upon this and believe that electrons are more likely to appear when a human consciousness is observing them. Such findings resonate, on some level, with practitioner reports, such as the preparation needed to prompt extrasensory phenomena, or of their own experiences of astral travel: a process of consciously being present in different dimensions of reality (quantum superposition).

I have merely touched upon some of the broad elements of quantum physics. It is still evident that exploring the implications of such findings is slow and fierce bias still remains. Irwin (1999) thus acknowledges the need to balance scientific versus spiritual methodologies when exploring the extraordinary. Thalbourne (2008) also emphasises how reflection upon a researcher's thought process is imperative and may affect psi investigation. He elaborates upon the concept of 'psychopractic causation'. This concept advocates that there should be a genuine desire for knowledge (such as wanting to discover the authenticity of extrasensory capabilities, not just disbelieving from the outset). There should then be a process of attention diversion, which involves undertaking a new task, or sleeping. This appropriates conscious and unconscious thought processes, which, he argues, enables less bias in research findings. Rather than adopting a wholly scientific method, he claims that individuals 'should urgently be researching spirituality and related attitudes and their possible effects on... psi-

experiments, and perhaps taking stock of their own attitudes of this kind' (ibid: 32) ¹⁵. In this sense Thalbourne is arguing for much-needed researcher reflexivity in extrasensory research.

Truzzi (1998) advocates the perspective of Anomalistics to explore psi. It identifies that there are those who adopt radical positions who seek to explore mediumship. He argues that the way forward is to adopt a healthy scepticism and a multi-disciplinary approach when investigating such phenomena through incorporating disciplines such as science, sociology and theology. This approach, he claims, is more methodologically stringent rather than discounting the phenomena before investigating or believing everything as valid evidence of an afterlife (known as mystery mongering) ¹⁶. This thesis shows that researcher belief need not be fixed in this way and may change throughout the different stages of the research.

Belief that the fiercely sceptical (otherwise known as debunkers) or pseudo sceptics (those who claim to be objective but are not), or mystery mongers (those who believe everything) will jeopardise their own experiments and never obtain an appropriate view of true reality, is one of the key ideas surrounding extrasensory research which, in turn, influences research focus and findings (Truzzi, 1998). It is clear, then, that bias is significant in extrasensory research. It is unrealistic to believe that research exploring practices without looking at the truth of the phenomena is free from such bias. The aim of this research is to use my beliefs as a tool to assist in exploring experience.

Whether researchers believe or not in an afterlife helps to maintain specific assumptions of extrasensory practices and is something that I specifically wanted to avoid in this research. Firstly, the sceptical tone of, or downplaying of, research findings is common by researchers who are believers so that their research will be more palatable to respected audiences within mainstream academic departments ¹⁷

¹⁵ Thalbourne (2008) also argues that 'paranormal effects occur in our experiments (and lives) only if the higher consciousness permits them to happen, and that it does so only in such a manner that the phenomena inspire an interest in spirituality but cannot be used reliably for materialistic, self serving purpose'. His rhetoric suggests he is a believer in the afterlife.

¹⁶ This perspective, though, is still situated within its own assumptions that psi phenomenon can be examined within scientific boundaries that may be too limited to account for full human and worldly capabilities.

¹⁷ I also know this through many conversations with academics

(Cornell, 2001; Truzzi, 1998). Secondly, much literature illustrates limited conceptual understanding of the complexity of extrasensory practices *in practice* through focusing upon whether they are real rather than exploring the actual experience of them.

I have not sought to provide a complex assessment of believer versus sceptical literature (or paradigm disparities). For literature that addresses such issues, see Collins and Pinch (1979) and Wallis (1985). The goal here is to emphasise that the biases brought by multi-disciplinary researchers to research into extrasensory practices are influenced by hidden complexities (such as the need to retain professional respectability, funding and ones own experiences). Extrasensory practices are, therefore, a complex and doctrinally motivated topic to explore.

Difficulties arise regarding how to appropriately study practices that do not make sense according to conventional notions of reality, like the experience of extrasensory communication itself (Meintel, 2007). Hanson (2001: 424) argues that ‘sociologists do study belief in the paranormal, and they conduct surveys of paranormal experiences. But as a practical matter, they are forbidden (via subtle pressures) to attempt to induce the phenomena and engage with it directly (as is done in normal scientific research)’. More recently, though, some sociological researchers have seen it as essential to disregard such bias and engage more personally with mediumship to sociologically contextualise metaphysical experience (Hazelgrove, 2000; Meintel, 2007). Research direction is progressively changing for investigating the extrasensory by looking beyond discourse, or from what is observable from the immediate setting. Somewhat untraditional postmodern ethnographic methods have been developed that provide interesting findings (Emmons, 2003; Meintel, 2007; Ryan, 2013). For instance, Emmons (2003)¹⁸, a sociologist, sought to retain his scepticism while learning the methods of mediumship in order to fully understand what it was like to experience Spirit messages. He provides a phenomenological, auto-ethnographic account of the embodiment of Spirit messages while reflecting on his own and his interviewees’ experiences.

¹⁸ Co-authored with Penelope Emmons.

This thesis seeks to be situated in alignment with a new era of extrasensory research that is more transparent (Emmons and Emmons, 2003; Mackian, 2012; Ryan, 2013). Evans (1982: vii) argues that:

to seek to study a phenomenon, without at the same time studying those who report it and those who receive or reject the report, is to omit an entire and often essential dimension.

Even though I am exploring the experience of practitioners rather than the truthfulness of practitioners' claims, I still need to acknowledge that to believe or not to believe in the authenticity of the extrasensory is not just an irrelevant dispute but is central to notions of human, bodily and conscious experience. Belief in an afterlife is the basis upon which practitioners construct their identity, choose the groups that they involve themselves with and the emotion management they conduct, as well as the advice that they provide and the way they present it.

As a researcher I had my own philosophies and experience of consuming extrasensory knowledge prior to designing this research, which provided me with my research focus. Experiences during the research process led me to acknowledge that leaving myself out of the study would have been doing it, and the participants, a disservice. In my attempt to fully explore and appropriately represent the experiences of my participants, rather than asserting my perceptions of truth, this research is grounded in Systematic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity (SEER), a method I created to document and analyse my own experience in the research process. In sum, reflexivity is a key focus and woven throughout the different chapters of this thesis.

The author's own involvement with the extrasensory

Shortly after becoming a parent and leaving work I developed an interest in extrasensory practices through becoming friends with an extrasensory practitioner; I will give her the name Lucy. Before being a parent, I worked in various customer service and relational roles, including telesales, train stewardess and barmaid. My interest in Lucy's abilities prompted me to attend the local spiritualist church. The venue was within easy reach and attending incurred no substantial financial cost. As I

was unemployed and a lone parent, I used to look forward to getting out of the house and pursuing this interest. Visiting the church satisfied my curiosity about the extrasensory for a while, although it was rare that I would get any significant information or advice about my situation or the future, which I felt I needed. Extrasensory practitioners tended to approach the regular members of the group more frequently, and bearing in mind the church offered three services per week, including many mediumship development sessions, my attendance was by no means regular. I then began to save up to see 'psychic clairvoyants' outside of the church context, which I believed would provide me with advice for the future as well as contact with spirits. I felt I would benefit from this at the time; generally, I felt low and physically exhausted and was looking for some guidance and something to look forward to.

Lucy would also make sense of the Spirit messages, advice or predictions that I was given from others. She gave me advice on a regular basis about which directions to take in my life. I trusted her advice and followed it because of proof¹⁹ she had given me during our range of early meetings. At the time, I believed she was genuinely able to contact the dead. In addition to her role in my life as adviser, we became close friends. Despite my gratitude for sparking my interest in the subject area I do believe that there was potential for manipulation within our friendship, which was significant in my decision to study the dynamics of extrasensory practices. I began to feel I had a lack of autonomy over my decisions and I was over-relying on the possibility that her advice could be true. We are no longer in contact, although many of the detailed discussions that I had with Lucy and the advice that she gave me have continued to remain relevant.

I have been told some shocking things from a wide range of extrasensory practitioners, when I was seeing them as a client rather than interviewing them as a researcher, that preyed on my mind for a long time, so much so that they caused me to disconnect from some members of my family and social support network for extended periods. However, I also received a lot of reassurance and felt a sense of wellbeing after readings. These contradictory experiences of extrasensory practices, together

¹⁹ I'm not claiming to believe or disbelieve proof; however, I did believe at the time that Lucy was providing me with information. Proof is when information of a significant, often very personal and believable, nature is provided to the recipient.

with my previous work experiences in the service industry, and through studying anomalous experiences, emotions and the body during my undergraduate degree led me to design this research. I will discuss my experiences relating to the research process in Chapter Four. I will now explore sociological research into extrasensory experiences, explaining where this thesis is situated in relation to this research. I will end by showing why, in relation to this research, the identity and emotion management of practitioners is important to conceptualise.

Sociology and the extrasensory

Much research has focused upon the authenticity of extrasensory practices – on whether mediums can really communicate with the deceased. Nevertheless, the extrasensory is now researched from a variety of paradigms (such as, psychological, social psychological and sociological perspectives). These positions seek not to debunk²⁰ but to assess the value of extrasensory experience in accordance with theories of the mind, consciousness, personality and society. Sociological interest in mediumship is a developing field of study. Rather than focusing upon whether the phenomena are real, prime attention is given to examining the extrasensory as a cultural product (MacKian, 2012). The sociological approach investigates what techniques are used, reasoning processes, experiences and effects (individual, group and societal) occurring throughout practices. Extrasensory practices are assessed in accordance with various social factors including, 'socialisation, interaction, class stratification, gender hierarchy, deviance, conformity and persuasion' (Goode, 2000: 97; Jorgensen, 1992).

Marginality

Sociological interest in the extrasensory became topical in the 1970s. Compensation theories were used to understand why people were involved in a wide range of occult practices, such as witchcraft (Moody, 1974a; Truzzi, 1974), Satanism (Moody, 1974b) and astrology (Wuthnow, 1976). Compensation theories are grounded in the belief that those who are socially dysfunctional or economically disadvantaged are more likely to participate in esoteric practices. Skultans' (1974) account of spiritualist practices claims that working class individuals are more likely to use spiritualist

²⁰ The researcher may still have bias and be restricted by various structural academic constraints.

services as a coping mechanism and gain social and therapeutic benefit through their involvement²¹. Nelson (1975), using survey methods, investigated psychic²² experiences in an English town. He found evidence to support the view that psychic experience links to social class. He concluded that psychic experience is more likely to occur for the geographically mobile as a result of being subjected to more cultural influences, compared to others who have more localised values. Individuals who have more cultural awareness are likely to be influenced by deviant subcultures throughout their quest for personal development.

Such research supports the hypothesis that those who are outside the social norm²³ are more likely to become involved in mediumship. Yet this still may be relevant to contemporary UK culture since it is now the norm²⁴ to live increasingly mobile lives together with mass involvement in extrasensory practices. Wuthnow (1976) conducted a survey to examine those who had an interest in astrology. It was found that these individuals were most likely to be among the deviant or the lower stratum²⁵ (such as women, the unemployed or those separated from a husband / wife). Haraldson and Houtkooper (1991) link relationship difficulties with the likelihood of having psychic experiences²⁶. Arguably, such research is still relevant as it reinforces a negative image of practitioners, which they have to relationally deal with in the way they manage themselves and communicate with others.

Such studies are socially constructed and changeable given that now it is discriminatory to deem women as the lower sex as women's opportunities and status in society has genuinely changed (Abbott, 2006). Such ideas, though, together with the bias of academic research, have also influenced sociological investigation into the

²¹ Her study is based, however, upon practices within one town, so the wider representativeness of this research is questionable.

²² Nelson's definition of psychic incorporates mental and physical mediumship.

²³ It was less common in the 1970s to be geographically mobile.

²⁴ Social mobility no longer relates to anything unusual or marginal but is linked to factors such as global business and employment opportunities, with a propensity towards individualisation rather than extended familial practices.

²⁵ I am reporting research that made certain assumptions about social stratification. I personally do not believe such assertions.

²⁶ Haraldson and Houtkooper (1991) analysed three psychic experience questions (telepathy, clairvoyance and contact with the dead) that were included in a human values survey conducted in 13 countries. It was concluded that educational attainment had no effect on the reporting of these experiences, though those suffering from relationship difficulties or living together but not married were more likely to have psychic experiences.

extrasensory (Haraldson and Houtkooper, 1991; Nelson, 1975; Wallis, 2008; Wooffitt, 2006). It is therefore imperative to reflect critically on present and past social conditions when drawing conclusions from sociological studies (Edge, 1993). Themes such as social dysfunctionality or welfare dependency became symptomatic of the times²⁷. Those who state that involvement in mediumistic phenomena is a response to eccentric tendencies, social dysfunctionality or non-standard practices could themselves be the product of their own socially-conditioned views (Payne, 2006). Focus upon the social conditions of such practices has meant that the actual experience of extrasensory was largely ignored.

Stereotypes are still sometimes imported uncritically into research on the extrasensory. Hanson (2001), for instance, provides biographical indicators of some of the most prominent psychics in the West. He describes these individuals as anti-conformist, with strange lifestyles, homosexual or lesbian tendencies and an inability to stay in long-term²⁸ employment. The way in which Hanson made reference to sexuality was such that it implied deviance, which is incorrect but a view informed by previous research.

There has been limited research that specifically links socio-economic disadvantage and involvement with mediumistic practice. However, many have drawn upon compensation theories and associated stereotypes of extrasensory involvement. Even Shepherd's (2009) research begins with the belief that being a psychic and consulting with a psychic is a coping mechanism to help with the effects of social deprivation. Her data, though, reveals that the majority of individuals participating in these practices is educated to degree level. Overall, what research has been conducted shows that there is no significant link between social disadvantage and partaking in such practices (Hufford, 1982; Rice, 2003; Wooffitt, 2006). This signifies that conclusions are dependent upon one's wider bias and view of the world. Common consensus regarding what has prompted, and still prompts, involvement in the extrasensory does exist in two areas: gender and bereavement.

²⁷ Haraldson and Houtkooper (1991) published their work during the 1990s, when the UK population was going through mass social and economic change. Daily life was fraught with economic fears and uncertainties where the rebuilding of society, based upon nuclear family values, became the forefront of the political agenda. Welfare systems were in place to provide secure foundations for economic success, yet they also prompted the labelling of dependent individuals or those who failed to fit the ideal norms.

²⁸ Many of these practitioners may be self-employed and conduct extrasensory work on a full-time basis.

Gendered work practices

Early development of spiritualist practices has been linked to the feminist movement and female empowerment where women were seen as able to achieve more social mobility within the spiritualist organization compared with other religious organizations (Hazelgrove, 2000; Gauld, 1983). Individual accounts of women's experiences were, however, not the key focus of previous research, and I argue that they are essential to explore. In other words, this thesis does not particularly focus on gender from an analytic point of view but primarily explores female experience. The research literature shows that the majority of participants within extrasensory practices are women, referring to both practitioners and clients (Wooffitt, 2006). Analysis of current extrasensory practices provides the ideal conceptual foreground for the analysis of gendered work practices. Nevertheless, this thesis chooses not to focus specifically upon the debate of gender equality but to address gaps within the mediumship and emotional labour literature by focusing more on female emotionality²⁹.

Bereavement and extrasensory practices

The mass bereavement of the post-war period meant that researchers viewed mourning as a key factor in why individuals were consulting with mediums or attending demonstrations (Hazelgrove, 2000). This connection continues to be one that informs present-day thinking, where mediumship and experience of it is frequently examined in light of sociological bereavement theories (Cornwall, 1994; Wallis, 2001; Walter, 2006 and 2008). Walter (2008) investigates the social factors and processes that are intrinsic to mediumship usage. Putting the bereaved at the centre of his analysis, he combines ethnographic fieldwork observations of a spiritualist church, attendance at a development circle ³⁰and interviews with counsellors who assist bereaved parents. He emphasises that involvement with spiritualists can be thought of as an ordinary experience following the death of a loved one. He states that when individuals visit a spiritualist church there is a concern with

²⁹ The importance of exploring female emotionality will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

³⁰ The mediums sit in a circle close by each other to maintain energy flows and elicit Spirit contact (Meintel, 2007).

how the deceased has coped with death. Thus, visiting the church allows the client to gain reassurance from the deceased that they are okay. Interviewing counsellors, I argue, may be problematic because the bereaved parents may not wish to discuss in-depth their involvement with mediums because of the negative connotations I have discussed. Mediumship usage for these people is likely to be a highly sensitive issue and it is questionable how representative these findings are. Nevertheless, Walter argues that since mediumship addresses issues regarding the boundaries of death, visiting a medium can be immediately therapeutic for the bereaved³¹. In summary, death becomes the primary concern instead of the actual experiences relating to the extrasensory work itself (Wooffitt, 2006).

Within the consumer domain, the advertising of extrasensory practices suggests that these practitioners offer a form of counselling which focuses upon life's uncertainties rather than on bereavement. These practices are an eclectic mix of non-conventional counselling practices, which also draw upon esoteric philosophy and methods (Jorgensen, 1992; Lester, 1982; Shepherd; 2009; Wooffitt, 2006). Lester (1982), for instance, explored the counselling potential of psychics by going for tarot card readings himself. He concludes that the reading was similar to supportive psychotherapy and was geared towards making clients more adept at facing future life worries. He states that the availability of these practices is attractive compared to spiritualist practices that are only available at specific times and geared towards certain types of knowledge.

Wallis (2001), like Skultans (1974), conducted ethnography of mediumship within two British spiritualist churches. Wallis found that bereavement is not the primary motivator for involvement. It is the supportive group and philosophical environment that maintains involvement. Wallis' research has a small sample size and more research is needed before firm conclusions can be made. However, his findings suggest that the reasons for participating in the spiritualist movement are far more complex than previously thought. Hazelgrove (2000) argues that it is widely believed that people turn to mediums as a response to bereavement and to escape from the ethos of

³¹ His view highlights various problematic assumptions based upon marginality compensation theories where he categorizes astrologers and mediums as the same, which shows how stigma has continued in more recent research (Walter, 2008).

materialistic societies, in order to rationalise faith and restore the comforts of religion. She adds, however, that the spiritualist context primarily serves as a means by which people can contextualise and identify with their metaphysical experiences. Jorgensen and Jorgensen, (1982) and Jorgensen (1992) show that coming to terms with one's own extrasensory experience may be the primary reason for involvement. In other words, potential practitioners seek advice and support from established practitioners. In this sense clients may not be simply clients but practitioners in the making. These studies show more personal reasons related to practitioners' identity that are key to such practices and worthy of examination.

Moreover, to view extrasensory involvement as a result of social marginality or bereavement means that people's actual experiences of these consultations have, in the past, been analytically invisible. This thesis situates itself alongside sociological research that seeks to change this. I examine what factors, issues and experiences are important for the practitioner when conducting their work. Again, it is concerned with how the extrasensory practitioner constructs their identity and what emotion management they do in order for them to interact successfully with others.

Authenticity, trust, context and language in extrasensory practices

There are those who have moved away from analysing the causes of involvement in extrasensory practices to exploring the interactional complexities and use of language in a range of extrasensory domains (Wallis, 2001; Wooffitt, 2006; Jorgenson and Jorgenson, 1982; Meintel, 2007; Ryan, 2013). Anthropological research has highlighted key communicative issues within extrasensory work, which appear relevant to western mediumship (Gauld, 1983; Mayer, 2008; Wooffitt, 2006).

In Bali, mediums are seen by the majority of Balinese people to be healers. This is similar to how some within British esoteric subcultures view UK practitioners. Yet notions of healing and identity as a medium are complex in Bali. Mediums in Bali are not simply conveyers of information but also theatrical performers operating to bridge the gap between differing levels of spiritual reality. In Balinese culture 'spirits and gods...have concerns with the daily life of the living' (Edge, 1996: 175). Balinese mediumship ritualistically focuses upon the maintenance of equilibrium, through the

process of offerings, between three tiers of existence: the upper godlike world, the visible illusion in which the human is situated and the lower, demon-ridden world (Edge, 1996). Balinese mediums have to go through a process of information checking and majority voting where those seeking answers to important questions 'consult four mediums, one from each of the four directions in Bali, about the same question / problem, and then one should evaluate what was said by them all' (Edge, 1996: 174).

Similar information checking occurs by clients of current UK practices. Clients tend to check with other mediums whether the information they have been given is authentic (Metcalf, 2009). This highlights that there is a significant need to be perceived as authentic. For Balinese practitioners, authenticity is extremely important. Spirit is held in high regard and it is firmly rooted in their culture. Edge's (1996) research found commonalities between Balinese and westernised practices. Firstly, information is offered by the medium to the client; in Bali, though, information is geared towards healing illness through what offerings to Spirit should be given to prompt cure, and not to communicate with loved ones. Secondly, the spirits and not the mediums are treated as the source of, and responsibility for, the information provided, which is the same as in the West. Thirdly, questioning and reading body language of the client occurs. Finally, mediums have a primary therapeutic role within all of these contexts (including in Cambodia). In Cambodia, mediums have heightened social ranking. Spirit possession practices (physical mediumship) serve a healing, social support function in a context where – perhaps due to the economic and social effects of war – individuals seem to trust Spirit more than community members (Bertrand, 2005). Again, this highlights that trust is a key factor.

Such research suggests that mediumship is primarily constructed through language (e.g. what the medium says rather than what can be seen) (Wooffitt, 2006). It signifies that the notion of Spirit being responsible for the information may be significant to the practitioner (when conducting their emotion management and interacting with others), which should be taken into account within this thesis. Finally, mediums develop effective ways of not only presenting extrasensory abilities but of also being able to socially interact and have their abilities accepted (Walter, 2006). Overall, this research highlights the importance of contextual practices, such as healing, authenticity and trust, within extrasensory practices. Limited sociological research

exists that explores how mediums emotionally manage themselves to be so authentic (except through language, see Wooffitt, 2006). The diversity of the cultures described here shows that extrasensory practices have underlying and often influential, context-dependent, norms and values that are diverse, sporadic and formulated by the social realities in which they are situated. Any research design that explores the extrasensory and, in particular, practitioners' experience needs to acknowledge such factors.

*The language of psychic practitioners*³²

The wider research on extrasensory practices suggests that language is analytically significant. However, few have focused on its usage. Wooffitt's (2006) research is revolutionary in this area as he uses conversation analysis to explore verbal interaction in mediumship demonstrations. He identifies the organized patterns of communication through which extrasensory beliefs and experiences are negotiated and maintained. He identifies a three-part sequential organisation of the talk occurring in displays of mediumship, which the medium and client collaboratively produce. He shows that this organisation occurs regardless of where the mediumship takes place (such as stage demonstrations or one-to-one sittings).

Wooffitt also highlights how such language usage can be persuasive, even when the medium uses vague and ambiguous statements. He concludes that there are subtle linguistic techniques in these interactions wherein these techniques are used to demonstrate the medium's authenticity. Again, authenticity is presented as highly significant. Wooffitt's research was significant in improving sociological understanding about extrasensory practices. Gauld's (1983) research though shows that while shamans use cognitive skill and language they also incorporate a variety of often unspoken holistic healing techniques, claiming to use animal Spirit guides and energy channelling which would not be apparent if solely observing language³³. This thesis, therefore, goes beyond examining the rhetorical display of mediumship to explore notions of the personal, the cultural, and the unobservable together with the emotion management of such language.

³² Wooffitt's definition of those who partake in extrasensory practices.

³³ Shamanistic practices are similar to practices prior to Spiritualism where practitioners diagnosed illnesses rather than the contacting of loved ones currently evident.

The importance of studying emotions, experiences and the body within extrasensory work

Wallis (2001) conducts interviews with both mediums and attendees. Using this approach he is able to reveal the immediately therapeutic, yet persuasive and philosophical, nature of the spiritualist environment. Some of the factors he identifies may not have been evident from the analysis of language or observation alone. Meintel (2007) abandoned the intended traditional observer role. She adopted a highly participatory role within a spiritualist group that she observed over a nine-month period. She sought to enter the meditative and trance-like states that mediums do. She apparently gave out healing to other members of the group and also partook in social activities away from the primary setting. These experiences, she claims, allowed her the opportunity to develop a different perspective on the spiritualist environment compared to her views prior to her more in-depth involvement.

Her auto-ethnographic account provides insight into the daily activities intrinsic to mediumship. She reveals how the practising of clairvoyance is also a social pursuit where spiritualists are highly committed to the spiritual and emotional development of others in the group. She assesses the therapeutic nature of mediumship practices from an embodied perspective based upon her own personal reflections. This enables her to raise issues that may not be immediately evident to the traditional researcher about the complex role of the body within healing practices. She reflects on unexpected feelings that she experienced during the healing process. Her prior presumption that healing involved actual bodily contact was changed when she found it can occur via alternative remote methods.

Her findings highlight a close relationship between mediumship and healing where this healing operates in parallel to any advice given. Again, this highlights experiences that the analysis of the language or observation of mediumship may fail to fully account for if not vocalised. Those who have focused upon the emotional nature of mediumship have done so within the spiritualist context, given that its main focus has been seen to be providing bereavement support (Walter, 200). However, Meintel's research has shown how emotions are closely related to the practitioner's identity and

relationships with others. Ryan (2013: 2), using auto ethnography, explores 'ways in which individuals present their psychic-spiritual selves online, how they negotiate their online identities and make sense of their culture.' She does this through interacting with others online, reflecting upon her own participation within such online (and offline) cultures, which, in her view, provides in-depth understanding of such experiences.

Like the research carried out by Emmons and Emmons (2003), as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Meintel (2007) and Ryan (2013) show how extrasensory practices should be explored using sociological conceptualisations of the body and emotion and should involve in-depth ethnographic reflective and even auto-ethnographic methods. Both Emmons and Emmons (2003) and Meintel (2007) illustrate that these experience-centred approaches provide unique insight into the micro-norms and social processes that operate throughout extrasensory groups. Such methodologies have also allowed them to assess their own experiences and to gain better, much sought after, understanding of individual experience and of wider extrasensory practices. These postmodern ethnographic stances enrich sociological paradigms of studying anomalous phenomena. Such research can be used alongside more traditional methods to gather a more reflective sociological insight into extrasensory practices.

Emotion management and extrasensory practitioners

Again, extrasensory practitioners tend to operate as a combination of non-regulated counsellors, advisors and predictors of the future (Christian, 2004; Hanson, 2001; Lyons and Truzzi, 1991). These are people who claim to have specific or multiple (broadly parapsychological) cognitive abilities or learnt traits (such as the ability to receive extrasensory communication, whether it be through clairaudience, clairvoyance, mediumship or reading various objects or cards), which permit them to intimate knowledge about others.

Walter (2006) illustrates that extrasensory consultations involve a managed interactional process, grounded in having to adapt social, emotional and relational skills (such as the ability to listen, to display empathy and maintain confidentiality), which is similar to bereavement workers and counsellors. In such highly-charged

interactions, impressions of the dead can leave a lasting impact on friends and relatives (ibid). Jorgensen and Jorgensen's (1982) research into esoteric culture also explores the relational elements of tarot readings and reports that practitioners can find readings tiring and stressful. These are issues that are also widely discussed in practitioner biographies. Even though these accounts are anecdotal and need to be treated with caution, there is enough repetition throughout different sources to suggest that these are areas of concern for practitioners.

Consultations between extrasensory practitioner and client as shown here are based upon perceptions of authenticity and trust. Such interactions are likely to have the potential to have significant influence on both parties, upon their own perceptions of identity and the way that they live their lives, as they did for me as a client. The following extract from a well-known practitioner's biography shows that extrasensory consultations are indeed guided by social, emotional and ethical factors. Edward (1998: 80) states that:

Delivering certain kinds of information can be awkward. But when I'm doing a reading, whatever I get, my client gets. I don't hold back, even if the messages are of a personal or potentially embarrassing nature. The same holds true for bad news. In some cases I might cushion negative information, or couch it in a way that will minimize the chances for a negative result. For instance, if I'm seeing a car accident, accompanied by a feeling that this is something in the future, I know that I'm being shown it for a reason. I am supposed to pass on the information, maybe as a warning. But I'm careful how I present the information. I don't want the person to be so nervous that she makes an accident happen. So I might say, "Be careful driving", especially if the information coming through is vague. I'm careful about making negative predictions.

Edwards highlights something, which extrasensory practitioners have to do which is self-managing through the way that they present themselves to clients; it shows that these consultations are emotionally and ethically driven and that various factors are

often considered when providing advice. Practitioners reflect upon the nature of the information and the impact that this could have on the client while having to deal with the quality of the experience itself. Practitioners interact in a phenomenological way with the Spirit world and they report that this is a skill that is complex and difficult to explain. It is not like having a conversation, as you would expect with the person sitting opposite. Rather, some mediums see images in their mind or hear muffled speech, like speaking over a bad telephone connection, to which they then must apply social meaning when relaying this information to clients (Edward, 1998). So while the ethical dynamics of extrasensory advice are a concern amongst sceptics who dismiss the authenticity of such advice, ethical issues, contrary to belief otherwise, are key concerns for many practitioners (Davies, 2008; Randi, 1981)³⁴. These issues, together with the visibility and instant availability of extrasensory services, imply that these services are socially significant and need further sociological investigation.

This thesis thus aims to expand current sociological research by examining the embodied emotion management, identity work and ethics of extrasensory practitioners. I support Truzzi's (1998) argument that the sociologies of the occult, in this case the extrasensory, must be ultimately integrated with and critical of all relevant sociologies such as those of science, religion and the body, consciousness and emotions, to obtain a full understanding. Spirit and extrasensory practices are social phenomena that are a part of everyday life (MacKian, 2012). The management of emotion is a key component of extrasensory consultations. Thus, examining extrasensory practices in relation to social theories of emotion within this research will provide a richer understanding of such work.

Chapter-by-Chapter Outline

In chapter 1 I introduce the aims and the objectives of the thesis. I define the term 'extrasensory practitioner' and other important terms that will be used throughout the thesis. I have explored extrasensory practices in contemporary society, together with Spiritualism. I then highlighted the need for further understanding of these practices. This understanding needs to start with the practitioners themselves, with identifying how they make sense of the work that they do.

³⁴ Six years ago when consumer law was updated, extrasensory practitioners were included. When charging clients they have to state their services are for entertainment purposes.

Underpinning extrasensory practices is the awareness and acting out of opposing bias over belief in an afterlife, which is significant for all involved in extrasensory practices: practitioners, clients and researchers. By examining this debate early on I have illustrated why my own reflexivity is essential and thus a key focus of this thesis. I have discussed sociological research into extrasensory practices explaining where this thesis is situated in relation to this research and why it is significant. I concluded by stating that extrasensory practitioners have to use emotion management strategies when conducting this work.

In chapter 2 I examine research relating to the concepts of emotional labour and emotion management, which includes exploring identity. I explore the social construction of emotion (i.e. the different ways researchers examine emotion). I discuss my adoption of an interactionist perspective. I then explore Hochschild's (1983) idea of emotional labour; this includes a discussion of emotion management, which is the key focus of this research. Hochschild's work has inspired a body of research that seeks to develop understanding of the emotional component of social interaction within a wide range of contexts. I will show how this literature relates to the work of extrasensory practitioners.

In chapter 3 I discuss methods sampling, of data collection and data analysis discussing the perceived advantages and limitations. I reflect in-depth upon the methods of data collection while conducting interviews and the participant observations I conducted at a college that trains extrasensory practitioners. I discuss issues of access, role of gatekeeper, the roles I adopted and how I managed the collection of data throughout.

I discuss my adoption of a thematic together with a grounded approach. I discuss my invention of a method called Systematic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity (SEER), to account for researcher reflexivity within the research. I discuss ways that I collect data relating to my own emotion management through the research process and reflect upon the way within which I analysed this data.

In chapter 4 I reflect upon my participation within the subculture. Implementing an ethnographic approach provided a window to explore the practitioner's world. However I sought to develop this approach by creating the SEER method that accounts for my own emotion management something that is much needed throughout studies in the sociology of the anomalous experience and the sociology of emotions literature. Some have political agendas of producing types of acceptable knowledge; these agendas impact at various levels including work roles, and guide those, emotionally and practically, who conduct and inform research. I therefore assessed my own construction of knowledge as a researcher within this field.

In this chapter I discuss data analysis associated with the SEER method and discuss in depth the four stages of emotion management I conducted which I have categorized as follows: "On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase"; "Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase"; "Being an active believer: a new way of thinking"; and, finally, "Being a sympathetic disbeliever". The data collection methods of SEER allowed me to come to terms with and write about the extraordinary experiences that I had within the field, which challenged my own sense of self and which are discussed within this chapter. Unexpectedly SEER permitted me to see my own research in a different unexpected ways and through the eyes of a believer. As a method it also allowed me too see my immersion in the research. Overall this method has added much value to this thesis.

In chapter 5 I provide a descriptive account of a mediumship college. I discuss the procedures within the college, the course content and the activities within. This chapter provides an insight into the practitioners' world, which helps to contextualise further analysis in coming chapters. I introduce key findings relating to the students sense of self and their relationship to the context.

In chapter 6 I critically explore the identity work that practitioners do in relation to their work. The key argument is that authenticity for the practitioner has dual significance and is not just about the practitioner presenting and ostensibly proving their abilities but authenticity centres upon their whole sense of spiritual self. I found that practitioners use a variety of techniques to do this identity work, where clients also help practitioners reinforce their view of themselves.

In chapter 7 I explore the emotion management, embodiment and ethics of extrasensory practitioners. It explores how the practitioners conduct emotion management. I discuss how practitioners use a variety of preparatory techniques and strategies, which enable confidence, them to retain a sense of self and prevent negative effects and to assist them in achieving a specific frame of mind to work. I discuss how emotion management is required when identifying and relating to the recipient and also throughout the delivery of extrasensory information which includes getting the flow right, interpreting messages and when keeping a professional distance. This chapter argues that practitioners have all kinds of emotional techniques that are designed to push aside the self. However ethical factors can impinge upon this distance.

In chapter 8 I provide an assessment of my research. I begin by providing a summary of the main findings of the four analytical chapters, chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. I then critically explore the worth of these findings in relation to the sociology of emotions and the sociology of anomalous experiences literature and highlight the key contributions I have made in this thesis. I then identify the perceived limitations of this research and suggest further areas of study. I end with a closing statement advocating the uniqueness of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Emotion Management, Identity and Extrasensory Practitioners

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine literature relating to the concepts of emotional labour and emotion management, which includes exploring identity. In turn, I will show how this literature relates to the work of extrasensory practitioners. I begin by surveying the social construction of emotion (i.e. the different ways researchers examine emotion) and explain my adoption of an interactionist perspective. I then explore Hochschild's (1983)³⁵ idea of emotional labour; this includes a discussion of emotion management, which is the key focus of this research. I examine how academics have drawn upon Hochschild's ideas to develop their own accounts of how individuals make sense of and manage their experiences and interactions with others. Regardless of the ways in which Hochschild's work has been interpreted, it has inspired a body of research that seeks to develop understanding of the emotional component of social interaction within a wide range of contexts. I explain my own approach and how it has informed my methodology at the end of the chapter.

Conceptualising emotion

Historically, within sociology there has been a lack of reflection upon the social nature of emotion. Emotion is often seen as something that is in opposition to reason, which is the foundation of social science. The neglect of emotion is linked to constructs of western rationality, of divides between the body and mind, between subjectivity and objectivity, which have historically grounded sociological thought (Turner and Strets, 2005). It is thus evident then that 'the conventional opposition between emotion and reason typically leads sensible people to reject emotion and to regard it as an inappropriate category of analysis, unless in accounting for psychological and behavioural pathology in which case the emotions are held to predominate' (Barbalet, 2002: 1). Williams (2001: 30) argues that: 'if emotion, for example, underpins all our actions and our relation with the world then what does this tell us about instrumental

³⁵ I will, within the rest of this chapter, use Hochschild (2003), an updated version of her original text.

rationality itself?' Emotions, I argue, should be at the heart of sociological investigation. As Hochschild (2003: 76) notes: 'if we are to bring sociology closer to reality, we will do it very poorly if we close an eye to feeling. We must open the other eye and think about what we see'.

Over the last thirty years there has been significant development of sociological approaches to emotion and the body (Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Shilling, 2003). The increasing importance of the service sector and the consumption of symbolic commodities have had a significant impact (Perrons, 2003; Nixon, 2009; Wharton, 2009). There has been increased public as well as academic interest in emotion. Williams (2001: 11) argues that challenges to rationality, interest in the social body and a 'a burgeoning new industry of 'psy-therapies' and mind-altering drugs for the emotional 'ups' and 'downs' of our lives' are a contributing factor. Value is also attributed to unmanaged emotion that escapes direct control or objectification. These are all factors that are relevant to extrasensory work that is geared towards counselling and large-scale demonstrations where there is normative public expression of emotion.

Exploring notions of the self and social interaction is fundamental to sociological analysis, and to what I will investigate within this research. Emotion, rather than being detached from reason, is embedded in daily interactions and decision-making. During social interaction people adhere to the rules of the social situation (Hochschild, 1983). To possess a 'self' 'necessarily implies an ability to take one's actions, emotions and beliefs as a unified structure' (Elliot, 2008: 32). Appropriate emotion is often used to achieve the desired action, even if that action is objectivity (Barbalet, 2002; Hochschild, 1983). Emotions should no longer be viewed as an unfit topic of sociological enquiry, or as irrelevant to the practice of sociology. Emotions should be studied and even used reflexively to enhance the research process (Etherington, 2004).

Despite historical neglect, the study of emotions is now multidisciplinary in focus, with contributions 'from a variety of theoretical and ideological perspectives' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1998: 211). Feminists, in particular, have focused on emotion in care work and its exploitation within the service sector (Oakley, 1974; Morini, 2007). Other

researchers explore personal autonomy, ethical and moral complexities and the diversities of interaction (Bolton, 2005 and 2011). What was once thought to be within the remit of mainstream psychology is now also considered of significance for sociology and social psychology. I argue that, in order to develop a more inclusive understanding of the current social world, a more probing sociological focus on feeling is needed that not only concentrates on structural inequalities but also on individual experience.

Emotions are a fundamental part of social life. However, there is little agreement about what emotion actually is (Barbalet, 2002). Approaches that have focused on either the biological, physiological or the cognitive basis of emotion have been accused of ignoring the significance of the social formation of emotion (Denzin, 2009 [2007]). Social constructionists argue that emotions are 'brought into existence through shared vocabularies, rituals, customs and conventions' (Williams, 2001: 13). There are differences among social constructionist approaches. Some strong social constructionist approaches emphasise the 'social as opposed to the biological nature of emotions' (Ibid). Emotions are seen to change historically and contextually, which opposes physiology-centred views. Emotions are viewed 'as learnt rather than inherited behaviours or responses' (Lupton, 1998: 15) and 'attention is paid to the ways in which emotional phenomena are given different meanings which have wider social and political implications', as well as moral connotations. (Lupton, 1998: 16).

I favour an interactionist approach, which locates the phenomenon of human experience in the world of social interaction. Jackson and Scott (2010: 821) state that 'what is specific to interactionism... is that interactionism fluidity and contingency is emergent from the actualities of everyday social practices, which ensures that it avoids the dangers of ungrounded abstraction common in other forms of theorizing'. 'Interactionist study locates the phenomenon of human experience in the world of social interaction. It directs attention to the emergent, conflictual, dialectical, problematic features of ongoing interaction' (Denzin, 2009: 14). It views 'the human body as a structure of on going lived experience' (Denzin, 2009: 3). This view is relevant to the kind of extrasensory experiences that are reported when engaging with Spirit (MacKian, 2012).

Hochschild's *The Managed Heart*

One of the most influential perspectives regarding the social nature of emotion is Hochschild's (1983) interactionist work, *The Managed Heart*. This research is revolutionary in bringing the study of actual emotion into the academic domain rather than solely the examination of interactional display. Wharton (2009: 148) accurately states that 'virtually every current study of emotional labour positions itself in relation to one or more of the book's claims'.

Hochschild's research began with the aim of describing and showing how private and public elements of emotion operate. She explores how emotion guides notions of the self in social interaction on a daily basis. More specifically, Hochschild begins by seeking to explore 'how people of different sexes and social classes experience emotion and manage it' (2003: 12). Her intention was to investigate and conceptualise emotion in interaction, which had previously not been the focus of research.

Hochschild adopted an ethnographic methodology to examine, in-depth, the relational work of flight attendants, highlighting the demands for emotional labour in an airline that put a high value on excellent service. She also examined the role of debt collectors within the airline, which allowed her to explore two 'extremes of occupational demand on feeling' (2003: 16). She distinguished between workers whose role is to enhance the status of the customer and those whose job means that they often denigrate the customer. She states that, despite their different occupational focus, the same principles of emotion management apply to both. From this data she provides 'a set of illustrated ideas about how society uses feeling' (2003: 17)³⁶.

Her analysis of emotion focuses on its social uses through the development of concepts such as feeling rules, emotion work, surface acting, deep acting, and emotion management and emotional labour, which will be explored within this chapter. Feeling rules provide the foundations upon which emotion work, emotion management and emotional labour proceed. Surface and deep acting are processes involved in the management of emotion, and emotional labour is when this emotion work has

³⁶ She applies value to quotations from real people rather than from publication.

exchange value and is acted out in public. Hochschild uses the term emotional labour to denote:

the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value. I use the synonymous terms emotion work or emotion management to refer to those same acts done in a private context where they have use value' (2003: 7)

Drawing on Marxism and the work of Freud, Goffman and C. Wright Mills, she argues that human emotion is being changed by commercialisation. When she conducted her research, the service sector was increasing in importance, where good service was the product and a tool to be utilised within privatised competitive domains. She argues that there is an increasing requirement to produce appropriate, even if false, emotions during workplace interaction. The key point that she makes is that this results in having less autonomy over emotion, when rules regarding the expression of emotion belong more to the company than to the individual. Hochschild questions the consequences that this has for employees, especially for women. She states that emotional labour can be a good thing; however, 'exploitation depends on the actual distribution of many kinds of profits - money, authority, status, honour, well-being. It is not the emotional labour itself, therefore, but the underlying system of recompense that raises the question of what the cost is' (Hochschild, 2003: 12).

In this sense, interactional display is not only produced according to what is fitting within society but emotions are manipulated and controlled in accordance with specific company values and goals. Hochschild claims that there can be negative effects for the worker depending upon the techniques they implement to deal with these demands. Bulan et al. (1997: 236) express similar concerns.

The service worker's actions have become today's economic product. As the creation of post-industrial services has become our primary mode of production, and workers themselves have become the vehicles through which products are created,

marketed, and sold, new questions arise concerning how best to conceptualize the demands associated with such work, as well as their possible effects on individual well-being.

Hochschild's work has been extremely influential in both developing key concepts and promoting research into emotional labour and emotion management and, thus, bringing emotion to the forefront of sociological analysis. The following discussion, therefore, critically explores her perspective further, including examining her main themes: feeling rules, emotion work or emotion management, emotional labour and surface and deep acting.

Emotion management (and emotion work)

Hochschild argues that throughout everyday social interaction individuals carry out emotion work, which entails emotional displays that are measured against what is appropriate behaviour within any culture, group or social situation (private contexts) at that specific time (Hochschild, 1979 and 1983). Each context has feeling rules where moral, ethical and normalised viewpoints impinge upon individual management of interaction. Successful display of appropriate emotion (emotion work) acts to maintain harmony and social norms within these domains. Hochschild uses the example of a child who is expected to express gratitude on receiving a gift, despite the fact of not actually liking it. Displays of disappointment would cause feelings of upset in the gift giver. Therefore, the child is taught from an early age to hide their true emotions. The child, therefore, learns to manage their emotions; emotion management is the primary focus of this research.

Emotion management, as Hochschild uses the term, 'is an effort by any means, conscious or not, to change one's feeling or emotion' (Hochschild, 1983: 9). Those who have explored or developed her work have interpreted emotion management in diverse ways (Bolton, 2005). Wharton (2009: 149) describes emotion management as 'essentially a private act, influenced by broad cultural and social norms about what is appropriate to feel and express, but not directly regulated by other people or organizations'. This notion of private, then, can be interpreted in two ways: private in the phenomenological management that the individual conducts or private in the

context of non-paid labour. Bolton draws upon Hochschild's concept of emotion management but argues that it belongs in the public domain. She uses terms such as 'emotion self management' to discuss nurses who provide the extra caring that contradicts workplace cost effectiveness but aligns more to individual values (Bolton and Boyd 2003; Bolton, 2005 and 2001). Syed (2008) also finds that culturally diverse morals and values influence workplace interaction. These accounts suggest that company and individual values, as well as culturally-specific factors, are likely to impinge on the management of emotion.

Emotional labour, surface acting and deep acting

According to Hochschild, when emotional modification is required within the workplace, which is far more likely now with more service-sector work, it acquires exchange value and becomes 'emotional labour'.

Emotional labour... requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others³⁷. [It is] the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value (Hochschild, 2003: 7).

Hochschild distinguishes between two types of acting – 'surface' and 'deep' – that are entailed in carrying out this emotional labour. Surface acting is the type of emotion management that is conducted by the child when she pretends to like the gift (Hochschild, 1983) or when the stressed fast-food worker smiles with delight at the customer but does not really mean it (Ritzer, 2004; Leidner, 1993). In this case, the worker knows that they are acting but it is how they deal with this knowledge that determines how this affects the worker. Hochschild argues that this can result in the worker feeling guilty about acting or, even when the worker does not feel guilty and accepts that this is just a part of the job, they may still feel cynicism about the

³⁷ The 'proper state in the mind of others' assertion implies that specific consumer expectations apply during interaction. Despite this, Hochschild focuses specifically on flight attendants and their perspective of their interaction with customers, rather than on the perspective of the customer.

interaction. In some stages of the research process I had the same feelings of guilt and cynicism regarding my interactions with practitioners, which I examine in Chapter 4.

Hochschild (2003) states that the speed up of services (e.g. where there are more customers and more is expected of the worker) makes it more difficult to conduct emotional labour (which means that there are contextual factors that may impinge on what type, and consequences, of acting is possible). When there is a speed up of service it is 'harder to keep the public and private selves fused. As a matter of self-protection they are forced to divide' and the worker becomes detached from the job (Hochschild, 2003: 133). Emotionally dividing the self in this manner can cause an immense amount of stress for the flight attendant and how they relate to others. 'The issue of estrangement between what a person senses as her "true self" and her inner and outer acting becomes something to work out, to take a position on' (Hochschild, 2003: 136). In some way, by detaching the worker is carrying out self-preservation. Self-protection is analytically interesting, and relates significantly to the practitioners interviewed for this thesis, who use various strategies to protect themselves from other individuals or Spirit forces.

Despite the stresses, Hochschild suggests that 'surface' acting workers who are able to reflect upon such inner and outer acting are still able to retain a sense of self or view the non-work self as the real self, which Hochschild considers healthier for them. This, in some ways, presents a fixed view of identity in that there is an authentic self that needs to be preserved. Notions of an authentic self, however, are significant to the spiritualist philosophy and thus to extrasensory practitioners throughout their work. The practitioner's self has to be the most spiritual self it can be whilst being true to one's authentic self (see Chapter 6).

Deep acting is different from surface acting because it involves an individual modifying their true feelings (e.g. by drawing on previous emotion memories of similar situations) in order to induce appropriate emotions as real and then feel them for real. Hochschild writes about the flight attendant who believes the passengers' rude behaviour is acceptable because the passenger may be stressed. The worker uses memories to visualise a positive outcome or a time when they had to be empathetic. Once this emotion management has been conducted, the attendant, over time, then

begins to accept this as normal behaviour from passengers. Hochschild states that this method of emotional labour is the one that is most likely to be instilled in the worker during training and the one that is most likely to be favoured by profit-driven organisations because when acted out it is seen as more convincing. Hochschild states that in service work the perceived authenticity of the interaction is important, where individuals work towards deceiving others as well as themselves. This relates to psychic practitioners when it is required for them to be perceived as authentic within a society where many are sceptical

Hochschild suggests that the deep acting flight attendant may have difficulty in depersonalizing work-related behaviour towards them, and thus takes company praise or criticism personally. This can then result in the displacement, burnout and loss of the authentic of self (Hochschild, 2003; Taylor and Tyler, 2000). Individual identity, Hochschild argues, risks becoming standardized and part of the organization or the profession. This can eventually lead to a sense of numbness, a lack of ability to feel anything, which, supposedly, can affect the individual both mentally and physically³⁸. Within both surface and deep acting, the management of emotion links significantly with the identity of an individual. Overall, Hochschild sees human emotion becoming transformed in some way. I reflect upon such issues in relation to extrasensory work, specifically in Chapter 5 in which I discuss practitioners entering spiritualist training settings.

Gender issues are significant for Hochschild. She argues that there is no gender equality in the conducting of emotion management and, even though both genders conduct it throughout private and everyday domains, women, because of their socialisation, tend to provide the most caring within the family and at work. Rather than expressing their true individuality and attending to their wants and needs, women altruistically operate to the benefit of others³⁹. It is argued then that this serves to reinforce female subordination.

³⁸ Hochschild refers to the many flight attendants that have reported sexual estrangement. This illustrates her interpreting her data in line with psychoanalytic theory.

³⁹ Different social classes have varying focus on feeling. She supports theories that acknowledge 'two types of "family control system", the positional and the personal' (Hochschild, 2003 [1983]: 156). The theory is that working-class families (positional) 'base authority on impersonally assigned status and not on personal feeling'. Middle-class families place more emphasis on the sensitivity of feelings (personal), where feelings are worth paying attention to and 'are meant to be

The development of Hochschild's work

The concepts of emotion management and emotional labour have been used in many different disciplines to explore social interaction, which has led to different interpretations and distortions (Simpson and Smith, 2006; Wharton, 2009)⁴⁰.

Wharton's (2009) review of the sociology of emotional labour suggests that the literature can be divided into two main areas. The first focuses on interactive work looking at the organisational structure and the social interaction of service work. The second examines the expressive individual, how they manage emotion and the consequences of this. Debate within this literature focuses on two issues: a) exploitative consequences (such as the extent to which emotional labour is seen to be 'natural' for women); and b) the use of strategies that participants use to manage the obligations and consequences of such emotional demands.

Both strands of the literature focus mainly on the negative impacts on women through hierarchy within a wide range of service sector settings, such as beauty therapy (Sharma and Black, 2001; Toerien and Kitzinger, 2007); the airline business (Taylor and Tyler, 2000; Tyler and Abbott, 1998); clothing retail (Pettinger, 2005); the night-time economy (Monaghan, 2002); and home-based enterprises (Di Domenico, 2008). Such research rightly seeks to expose emotional labour as a discriminatory downgraded obligation of much gendered work. Hochschild's emphasis on gender has meant that much sociological emotional labour literature is politically driven, in which even the strategies that participants use to manage the obligations and consequences of such emotional demands are examined in relation to coping with gender inequality (Meanwell, et al, 2008). While there is nothing wrong with this, it is a criticism that this has lessened the focus on exploring actual female emotionality (real feelings).

Toerien and Kitzinger (2007) analyse recordings of salon interaction and emphasise that the beautician has to perform multiple tasks (e.g. maintaining client rapport that can conflict with their primary work role), impinging on the ability of the worker to

managed - monitored, sanctioned, and controlled' (2003:158). Hochschild, therefore, implies that female middle-class individuals are more prepared for the demands of future emotional labour.

⁴⁰ There are those who have used the concept to describe occupations with emotive orientations rather than emotion work being an inherent requirement of the work or the profession (Dingwall and Allen, 2001). Other concepts, such as emotional performance and intelligence, have been interpreted wrongly as emotional labour (see Huy, 1999; Reay, 2000; Wainright and Calnan, 2002).

carry out the practical element of the service⁴¹. Such invisibility of emotional labour in relation to the varied nature of low-paid skilled work, they claim, contributes not only to the subordination of women but also to much work-related stress. Toerien and Kitzinger analyse emotional labour by recording instances of emotional labour being conducted within the workplace. While this analysis provides insight into the workings of emotional labour, I would argue that it is not just what one observes that is of fundamental importance. Rather, the conduct of emotion management (how a person manages the mind and body during interaction) needs to be explored. For example, Tyler and Abbott (1998) illustrate that not only do airline stewardesses have to carry out emotional labour as part of the job but that they also have to exert self-control (emotion management) through serving food but limiting their own nutritional intake. This, in their view, highlights the risks (e.g. developing eating disorders) of such work. Expectations to smile, to provide a first-class service, and to portray presumed femininity do indeed have added emotion management requirements.

Such literature focuses on the negative implications of emotional labour through illustrating how women and their bodies are significantly controlled throughout consumer domains (Rafaeli and Worline, 2001; Wolkowitz, 2002). It is argued that 'those who perform emotional labour are susceptible to a range of identity-related issues that impinge on their psychological well-being' (Wharton, 2009: 149). Feminist research has been critiqued, though, in relation to how much actual real female emotionality and identity work is revealed throughout such research (Bolton, 2005; Wharton, 2009).

Diverse forms of emotion management and identity work

Criticism of the lack of exploration of real emotion has prompted research that explores the diversity of emotion management and identity work (Bolton, 2005; Bulan et al., 1997; Perrons, 2003; Morni, 2007; Warton and Erickson, 1995; Wier and Waddington, 2008; Williams, 1998). This literature focuses mainly, but not exclusively, on caring professions. A number of themes emerge from this literature that are of relevance to the work of psychic practitioners, which include self-management

⁴¹ Sharma and Black (2001), examining beauty therapists, argue that there should be a professional perception of the occupation, which is acknowledged through better pay and conditions.

(Bolton, 2001 and 2005), morals and values (Syed, 2008; Twigg, 2004), coping mechanisms (Dyer et al., 2008; Mann, 2004; Theodosius, 2008), individuality and life experiences, the diversity of contextual practice (Gunkel, 2007; Williams, 2003), cultural support and collective mentality (Dyer et al., 2008; Zapf, 2008) and the effects of power and social status (Wolkowitz, 2002).

Self-management is key to the conducting of emotion management. Bolton (2005) argues that women use self-management strategies to resist their perceived secondary status. Her typology of emotion management provides a different conceptualisation of workplace emotionality from that of Hochschild. Rather than focusing on surface and deep acting, she distinguishes between four types of 'emotion self-management (ESM)' (Bolton and Boyd, 2003: 291). 'Pecuniary' ESM refers to the 'commercial use of emotion in organizations' (emotional labour) and 'Presentational' ESM refers to workers' social skills (emotion work) (Ibid). 'Prescriptive' ESM is when workers are 'following occupational feeling rules but not... as an exercise in cost efficiency' (Ibid). 'Philanthropic' ESM refers to not following rules but instead providing that extra something allied to their social values and moral position.

Morals and values are seen within other studies to have a significant influence on emotion management (Dyer et al., 2008; Syed, 2008; Twigg, 2004). Dyer et al. (2008) claim that nurses are 'prisoners of love' through the love-money dichotomy of caring. This means that workers gain overall satisfaction (regardless of low pay and 'dirty work') through selfless acts of care giving (such as, talking more to patients who do not have family visiting). These nurses, therefore, operate as part of a collective mentality within the context that they work ⁴² where morals and values are more important than the unpleasant elements of the job. What this research also shows is that the public and private distinction is not straightforward. This is especially relevant within extrasensory work where practitioners operate within multiple different contexts doing paid and unpaid work in public and private contexts. Hochschild (2003), in her Afterword, acknowledged private acts being sold as commodities. She argues that there is a new marketization of private life or a new care sector emerging. We can see this through the emergence of wide range alternative

⁴² Dyer et al. (2008) also denote that primarily low-end care work is devaluing and assists in the subordination of women (especially migrant workers).

practitioners⁴³ who provide similar non-regulated services that focus on the private and wellbeing.

Within the UK National Health Service these 'Prescriptive' and 'Philanthropic' categories intertwine, illustrating the impact of social and internal relations and how this impacts on interactions within the institution (e.g. where the relational demands of the job are morally important but conflict with the speed up of services within competitive domains) (Theodosius, 2008). Bolton's four-fold typology acknowledges the interplay and flexibility of different emotion management techniques, when workers present a 'professional face' to seniors while at the same time having to adapt to present an 'acceptable face', including a moral persona, to customers (Bolton, 2001: 85). A variety of methods, including laughter during worker-to-worker interaction, enable workers to deal with the emotional demands made upon them.

Coping mechanisms are integral to emotion management. Bolton states that workers have coping mechanisms (on stage and off stage, so to speak) for dealing with the demands of emotion management; thus, nurses may offload to and laugh with colleagues (off stage) about the stressful requirements of the job. Through using humour in work with colleagues they can care for patients with more of a sense of solidarity and common purpose, which may improve overall wellbeing and work effectiveness (Dyer et al., 2008; Theodosius, 2008). Theodosius (2008), though, illustrates how collegial relations can increase the stress felt by nurses. The nursing profession can be competitive, especially between those seeking promotion and with those of a higher status (such as doctors and consultants); together with the demands of the job, this can cause conflict.

Sanders' (2004) research into sex workers has shown that humour has a more complex usage. The sex worker uses humour to attract customers, to improve their sexual relations with clients and to maintain group relations. In this sense, humour is a coping mechanism but it also has exchange value and becomes a vital part of the display of emotional labour that helps to build rapport with the client. Mann's (2004) research explores other coping mechanisms, including depersonalization in counselling work. Depersonalisation is when 'individuals become emotionally

⁴³ Including extrasensory practitioners

detached from service recipients, intellectually listing them as objects rather than as people' (Mann, 2004: 12)⁴⁴⁴⁵. It is a way of keeping a professional distance.

Extrasensory practitioners appear to conduct self-management and there are many similarities between extrasensory work and the issues discussed in other research in that they have awareness of ethical conduct and use humour in their work. For example, if we examine Edward's (1998) reflexivity over how he presents information from Spirit to his clients, it suggests that he conducts philanthropic emotion self-management through being mindful of how he / she presents Spirit information that could be potentially harmful. The intensity and extent of this philanthropic ESM may vary between different practitioners. Practitioners may use different ESM techniques from one other. Practitioner accounts suggest that they have a 'working relationship' with Spirit; spirit guides are often seen as colleagues in the production of extrasensory advice and practitioners seem to portray themselves as interacting more honestly with the Spirit than with the client. Humour is something that is used frequently within displays of mediumship, and, therefore, its relationship to emotion management is worthy of further examination.

Extrasensory practitioners do not always sell their services. They sometimes use them to gain status, or, within the spiritualist church, for spiritual or moral reasons. However, they are essentially doing the same thing in all of those settings and, therefore, in some ways it does not seem useful to distinguish between emotion management and emotion work on the one hand and emotional labour on the other. I am therefore going to talk about emotion management to cover the embodied extrasensory work that they are actually doing. This thesis will, therefore, not refer to emotion work but rather to emotion management, which will be defined as something that takes place within extrasensory practices within a diverse range of public and private contexts.

In this thesis I examine the potential interplay of different emotion management techniques in relation to extrasensory work and the identity of the practitioner,

⁴⁴ 'Also indicative of depersonalisation is the negative, cynical perceptions of others as well as the job itself' (Mann, 2004).

⁴⁵ Those in need of counselling are likely to have significant emotional investment in the services; however, limited research has been conducted into the effects of depersonalisation.

including the influence of morals and values (i.e. Philanthropic ESM). I explore the reflexivity in how extrasensory practitioners make sense of the work that they do. I also seek to explore whether the keeping of a professional distance is needed within extrasensory work and the methods utilized. Collegial relations have been presented as having an impact on strategies that workers use and the conducting of emotion management. Such relationships are significant in extrasensory work. Meintel (2007) states that spiritualists are concerned with the emotional development of others in the group. Such relationships in the emotion management literature are seen to assist effective emotion management through the use of humour (Bolton, 2001), while egotistical factors have also been seen to prompt conflict (Theodosius, 2008). I will explore these tensions in relation to extrasensory work, where perceptions of authenticity are of prime importance.

Individuality and the life experiences of a worker are seen to influence emotion management and its subsequent effects on the individual. Both Bolton (2005) and Dyer et al.'s (2008) research suggests that notions of the private and public are not as separated as Hochschild proposes. Hochschild was initially less explicit about how the complexity of emotion management related to the individual since her emphasis was on gender issues and the tensions between public⁴⁶ and private⁴⁷. Bolton (2005) states that, regardless of economic demands, workers themselves determine how much interactional effort there is. The individual often negotiates what is considered public and private, which adds to the complexity of identity and emotion management (Bolton, 2005; Leidner, 1993; Ritzer, 2004; Wharton, 2009).

Rafaeli and Worline (2001) acknowledge that individuals may be more at risk of absorbing company values if they are socially isolated outside of work since work then becomes the individual's primary source of socialisation. This is relevant to the literature concerning extrasensory practitioners in two ways. Firstly, it relates to the early sociological literature that focused on compensation theories in that people who were socially isolated or deviant would be more likely to be involved in extrasensory practices. Secondly, Jorgensen and Jorgensen (1982) and Jorgensen (1992) have shown that isolating personal experiences of extrasensory phenomena may prompt

⁴⁶ In commercialised domains.

⁴⁷ In her Afterword to the 2003 edition of *The Managed Heart*, she acknowledged that identity was more complex than originally presented.

involvement as a client of such practices in order to understand their own experiences and to accept these experiences with the help of others who are fully-fledged extrasensory practitioners. In this sense, extrasensory experiences that are deemed controversial in society may have been the cause of isolation, depending on the individual circumstances of the practitioner.

Surana and Sing's (2009) research into the emotion management of Indian call centre workers shows that it is likely that the effects of emotion management depends on whether their work role is considered meaningful and accepted within their immediate environment and society. I have discussed how extrasensory practitioners have a challenged relationship with many in UK society. Many contest the authenticity of their work, which in turn has consequences for the practitioner's emotion management, which I will explore within Chapters 5, 6 and 7. It is significant, though, that practitioners' complex involvement within the esoteric subculture means that the practitioners do not consider their advice-giving simply as work; in fact, being an extrasensory practitioner appears to be a way of life for them.

Contextual factors have been shown to impinge upon emotion self-management (Bolton, 2005). Much research portrays workers within the service sector as passive, or as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1979) who absorb company values and act out the corporation's requirements. Williams (2003) research into airline workers illustrates that, for some workers, it depends on how connected to and how valued they feel by the company as to how they perceive and manage such emotional demands. Hence, doing such work can also have significantly positive effects for workers in that they claimed to not be negatively affected by the organisation (Gunkel, 2007)⁴⁸. This is relevant to extrasensory practitioners because all independent practitioners I interviewed have connections to Spiritualism.

Organisations are complex spaces given that 'organizations impose certain specific emotional habits in the selection and retention of their members': 'for example, different feeling rules can be prescribed for Disneyland entertainers or funeral parlour workers' (Huy, 1999: 343). Goffman (1968: 15) states that "every institution has encompassing tendencies" wherein interactions within them are governed by internal

⁴⁸ Hochschild would argue that they have simply become more a part of the organisation.

unspoken rules and norms. Huy's (1999) research shows that organisations have 'organisational behaviours' that can be mobilized to impact on workplace missions. For him 'organizations are repositories of shared emotions that are also enacted in terms of visible emotion-attending behaviours. These behaviours become organizational routines that enact cultural norms related to feelings about change' (1999: 343). This suggests that in order to examine the identity work and emotion management of extrasensory practitioners I need to explore the contexts and organisations within which they work, exploring how their connection to such domains influences identity and emotion management (Furham, 2008). I therefore reflect on spiritualist domains within Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 4 explores my own experiential account of extrasensory experiences within a spiritualist context and how I managed them.

Professionalism and associated codes of conduct have been examined in relation to emotion management. Research into the emotional labour of professional groupings began developing in 2002 (Harris, 2002). Studies have now explored relational dynamics within a wider range of professional groupings and consultancy professions that require intense, sometimes unavoidable, relational skill, such as bereavement service providers, counselling and people workers (O'Donohoe, 2006; Mann, 2004), physicians (Larson and Yao, 2005), lawyers (Harris, 2002), university lecturers (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004), nurses (Bolton, 2001; Theodosius, 2008; Walby, 2009) and hospice workers (Boston and Bruce, 2008).

These studies have illustrated that there are diverse professional, moral, value and contextual factors that influence emotion management. Harris (2002: 555) argues that 'in contrast to many occupations, much professional work is distinguished by a reliance on the ingenuity, reflexivity and innovativeness of the individual professional'. In light of such factors, professionals are not just controlled in accordance with company stipulations but are guided more definitively by their professional status. Harris's (2002) research into the emotional labour of barristers shows that adherence to professional codes of conduct⁴⁹, alongside moral values, may prompt individual autonomy regardless of the financial demands of the firm. Ogbonna and Harris (2004) show that adhering to professional conduct can be an additional source of work

⁴⁹ Their professional integrity could be seriously jeopardised if they knew that the Accused was guilty when pleading not.

intensification within the university context, where academics have to balance diverse tasks like research, management and student counselling. Ogbonna and Harris argue that the multi-faceted nature of the work has meant that many 'lecturers believe that they cannot be 'professional' without emotional labour' (2004: 1199).

Professionalism and associated codes of conduct relate to extrasensory practitioners in numerous ways. Extrasensory practitioners are seen as adopting the role of non-regulated counsellors as well as life and future advisers (Christian, 2004; Hanson, 2001; Lyons and Truzzi, 1991). There is evidence that practitioners are attempting to professionalise themselves through their memberships of spiritual organisations and the training courses that are available. While I have already acknowledged that morals and values may prompt what Bolton (2005) terms Philanthropic ESM, it is evident from this literature that viewing oneself as professional may impact upon one's identity and emotion management in complex ways, and I explore this in relation to extrasensory practitioners.

Mediumship literature has shown that those involved in extrasensory practices are mainly women (Hazelgrove, 2000); as such, Spiritualism and independent practices may indeed reinforce the subordination of women. Nevertheless, through acknowledging the dynamics of emotion management within the wider literature, I have acknowledged the need to focus on the "real" emotion of extrasensory practitioners.

There are, however, further shortcomings of the wider literature that relate specifically to extrasensory practitioners, which I will now discuss.

Emotion Management, client involvement and the role of the practitioner's body

Much of the literature on the complexities of emotion management and identity that I have discussed fails to explore how emotion management is also an embodied process (Wolkowitz, 2002). It also fails to explore the influence the receivers of emotional labour have in the process of emotion management. In-depth insight focusing on the real bodily experiences of those conducting emotion management is needed. What focus there has been on the body within the emotion management literature has

simply examined how the norms of femininity and masculinity have been expressed through bodywork. Bodywork has two aspects: it 'refers to the work that individuals undertake on their own bodies and to the paid work performed on the bodies of others' (Gimlin, 2007: 365).

For example, 'the body becomes a project to be worked upon fashioned and controlled, a site of self-identity and reflexivity, as well as of consumption' (Twigg, 2004: 61). Mears and Finlay (2005) show how a model whose job centres on bodywork conducts emotional labour to resist objectification. The research on sex workers of both Kong (2006) and Sanders (2004) also illustrates how notions of bodywork intersect with emotional labour. Sex workers gain financial reward from transforming their bodies into consumer products but at the same time conduct emotional labour and management to maintain as much safety as possible (Kong, 2006). Female workers may have additional work to do on their bodies by having to express the demanding norms of femininity through their bodily appearance. This is what Witz et al. (2003) have referred to as aesthetic labour. It is evident that some extrasensory practitioners adhere to a dress code that could be identified as *alternative* and allows those within and outside of the esoteric subculture to identify its members; this suggests that the practitioner is conducting aesthetic labour (Witz et al. , 2003).

Some extrasensory practitioners add to this aesthetic labour in that they care for others bodies through a variety of healing practices, which are common within the esoteric subculture (Meintel, 2007). Erickson and Grove (2008) acknowledge how bodywork in the care of other's bodies is underpinned by power and status differentials given that many care providers have significant power over those under their care. Dyer et al. (2008) explore the bodywork of migrants in the UK's National Health Service. They emphasise that this care work is 'poorly paid and is often undertaken on a temporary or informal basis', which provides negative foundations on which such care is based, which could have dire consequences for the recipients of the care (Dyer et al., 2008: 2030). The key theme they stress is that the symbolic associations of working on bodies (such as the caring female) cause the 'devaluing and feminizing of this work' and divert attention away from the real consequences of this work (2008: 2030).

Care work is often de-skilled and the potential negative impacts of such work for those receiving care are under-acknowledged. Power and status and the negative impacts of advice giving and healing have all been attributed to the work of extrasensory practitioners (Davis, 2008; Randi, 1981; Shepherd, 2009; Williams, 2006) but have not been the subject of much analytical focus because of the lack of insight into the process involved in such practices. Much of the literature that has explored emotion management has failed to incorporate conceptualisations of consumer involvement, especially in sensitive research (Erickson and Grove, 2008)⁵⁰. Yoo's (2010) research focuses on the emotion work of cancer patients and how they manage emotions in the disclosing of sensitive information to relatives. It was found that patients would benefit from being less mindful of the recipient's feelings and being more honest in their disclosures. This illustrates that people conduct emotion management and edit information according to how they perceive others, as well as how they believe those people will be affected by the information that they provide. When I was a client of these practices I often wished for more honest disclosures from the practitioners whose services I was paying for. I suggest that the way to address these negative impacts effectively is through having an insight into the individual experience of such caregiving and gaining insight into how such care is received by clients. This thesis thus incorporates some understanding of client involvement.

While the body has been explored from the perspective of aesthetic labour and the care of others' bodies, research is needed that incorporates notions of embodiment into actual emotion management. Most of us within our lives have experienced the bodily effects of stressful situations known as the fight or flight state. This shows us that our body impacts on us in often uncontrollable ways. Freund (1998) emphasises the importance that bodily space has during interaction and discusses the use of bodily space and how this affects emotion management. He suggests that 'emotion work regulates the psychosocial and experienced bodily boundaries between self and others'. (Freund, 1998: 270). He argues that in the performing professions the containing of feelings and appearances heightens the stress factors of this work. These effects are increased when the performer perceives his stage persona to be inconsistent with his sense of self and the image that he is trying to convey.

'Dramaturgical stress emanates from threats to self-other or group boundaries, or to

⁵⁰ Stringent controls by health-governing bodies often restrict the exploring of in-depth client views (Hope, Savulescu, and Henderick, 2008; London, 2007; Webster, 2004).

the security of informational preserve-threats, in short, to ontological security' (Freund, 1998: 269).

This thesis seeks to develop notions of how the body links to the conducting of emotion management, especially in work where the worker conducts significant reflexivity (i.e. extrasensory practices), which will fill a gap within this research. Embodiment links to extrasensory practitioners in key ways. Within such work, authenticity and sense of self is of crucial importance and the questioning by others of one's belief is something that frequently occurs. It is likely then that extrasensory practitioners suffer dramaturgical stress during their work and especially during public stage demonstrations. I have discussed how extrasensory practitioners do aesthetic labour and how they care for the bodies of others through healing. Extrasensory practitioners' connection with their own body during their experience of Spirit, though, also has functional significance to the conducting of emotion management, which will be the main focus of this thesis. I explore how practitioners prepare and manage such bodily stresses and identify and manage the embodied experiences of Spirit.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have established that it is important to understand that human feeling is a fundamental part of social communication and interaction. Emotion is viewed differently depending on which paradigm one aligns with. I align with the interactionist approach that permits researchers to explore how participants make sense of their own behaviours. From this perspective, the visibility and use of extrasensory practices are constructed through the everyday social interactions of practitioners and, thus, I seek understanding of the self-management of such individuals. Such a perspective values the influence of social process (such as group formations, identity construction and conflict). I have shown in the first two chapters how factors such as social norms and disputes, the reflexive individual, organisational belonging and moral and values in the study of emotion management all relate to extrasensory practices.

In this chapter I have critiqued Hochschild's original essentialism⁵¹ to argue that emotion management is far more complex than the worker displaying appropriate emotion. It is essential that 'real emotions' are explored and not just the gender inequalities of a wide range of service sector and caregiving work. Hochschild's work is revolutionary in theoretically acknowledging emotions throughout social interaction. Hochschild examines not just the display of interaction. She seeks to examine interpersonal labour requirements, displays of feeling and the actual management of emotion. In this sense, interactional display is not only produced in relation to what is fitting within society but also emotions are manipulated and even controlled in accordance with specific company values and missions. She has, therefore, put a name to what service workers, like flight attendants, have to do on a daily basis and this has prompted considerable further research. Hochschild's theories, though, have to be accepted with caution. Her analysis was restricted to a specific era and workplace, which had its own social and hidden norms⁵². She conceptualises emotion management without using methods that might account for the phenomenological experiences of her participants, which inhibits her from gaining in-depth insight into the conducting of emotion management. Research into emotion management needs to have an in-depth insider's understanding of the hidden social context and also the complex influences that guide workers or professionals. However, these workers are also embodied beings with bodily experiences that are likely to impact on the emotion management. These are all issues I will reflect on when examining the emotion management of practitioners.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the actual management of emotion through using reflexive methods which not only account for the inner (and outer) emotion management and identity work of extrasensory practitioners but also for the

⁵¹ She later acknowledged the flaws in her own theory.

⁵² Hochschild discusses class and the impact that one's socialisation and social grouping have on the conducting of emotion management and the display of emotional labour. Hochschild claims that 'if it is women, members of the less advantaged gender, who specialize in emotional labour, it is the middle and upper reaches of the class system that call most for it' (2003: 20). Her assertions on class are culturally specific and need to be treated with caution. Some individuals (such as those who are self-employed) may not be attached to large organisations or occupations and may fall out of the remit of specific social classification. Hochschild argues that 'in general, lower-class and working-class people tend to work more with things, and middle-class and upper-class people tend to work more with people' (2003: 21). Again, these claims should be treated with caution as they illustrate a very exacting view towards class behaviour that in other societies is not fixed but fluid in accordance with external factors.

researcher's own emotion management. As Wharton (2009) states, one cannot examine organisational structure and interaction without also examining the expressive individual. I advocate in-depth ethnographic qualitative approaches to gain insight into emotionality and its management and to address the complexity of identity and diversity of experience. I argue that an insider's understanding is essential for research on emotion management to obtain a complex understanding of what motivates or guides workers, accounting for social factors, group belonging and different contexts. These are all important issues that relate to the work of extrasensory practitioners. I argue that research needs to explore the links between emotion management and the body, which is clearly important in extrasensory work. I also explore the role that consumers play in the conducting of emotional labour and emotion management. The next chapter therefore discusses how I conducted this research by reflexively considering all stages of the research process.

Chapter 3

The Research Process

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the detailed progression of the research process in alignment with the aims and objectives of the research that was discussed in Chapter One. I discuss why I selected a reflexive and ethnographic approach to addressing my research questions. I discuss Systematic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity (SEER), a method that I created, which allows researchers to account for their own emotion management in the research process. I discuss the development of this method early in this chapter because it was a method of data collection and analysis that was implemented simultaneously with other data collection methods in order to reflexively ground the research⁵³.

Following a description of SEER, this chapter provides a summary of the data collection process that occurred throughout the research. It systematically explores the stages of the research process as it occurred, starting with sampling methods, providing a rationale for the events that transpired. I discuss why some methods were more successful than others. I explore issues relating to data collection and management. I then provide a detailed account of the ethical considerations that were made throughout this research. To finish, I provide a breakdown of how data analysis was conducted.

The ethnographic method

I needed an approach that would address the complexities of my research questions. Surveys, for example, have the potential to reach a wide range of participants and produce statistical trends with a focus on individual variables. A recent population survey, for example, was effective in categorizing the experiences of individuals who recall paranormal occurrences (Castro et al., 2014). Surveys, though, are limited in

⁵³ The analytical themes that were generated using SEER will be explored and discussed in more depth in the following chapter, in which I describe my journey, including the three stages of emotion management that I conducted throughout the research process.

scope to collect the subjective rich data that was required here. 'While survey research is good at describing what people do, it is rather less effective at explaining or understanding why they do it' (Alaszewski, 2006: 36). Equally important was a need to account for my own emotional management during the research process so that the study was grounded in honesty and transparency in relation to my own bias concerning extrasensory phenomena. I will discuss how I did this in the following two sections, in which I explore reflexivity and the SEER method that I developed to acknowledge researcher emotion.

A qualitative ethnographic multi-method approach to collecting data was adopted (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Ethnography was chosen as it challenges dominant positivist methods that align with scientific measures to assess human behaviour. The view is that social phenomena need to be examined within natural settings to gain insight into the complexities of the social world. 'Human actions are based upon, or infused by, social meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 7). Even though an outsider may think they have grasped the reasoning behind extrasensory practices, I knew from my prior experience of spiritualist domains that continuous involvement within the esoteric subculture would be required to achieve adequate understanding. This method was chosen as it would allow me to participate within the subculture together with more formal interviewing.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1-2) argue that:

In its most characteristic form [ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research. Equally, though... there is a sense, in which all social researchers are participant observers; and, as a result, the boundaries around ethnography are necessarily unclear.

Within this study professional and personal boundaries were blurred between formal and informal methods of data collection within the extended five-year research period. It was extended due to an accident and other health issues which resulted in periods of leave of absence from the research. Formal methods included telephone, face-to-face and group interviewing, participant observation and researcher reflexivity. Additionally during the research period, I did a lot of informally 'hanging out' within esoteric spaces. I will now discuss the importance of acknowledging the blurring of these boundaries and this will lead onto an explanation and discussion of the SEER method that I developed to analyse this.

Reflexivity in fieldwork

Underpinning all of the methods I used for this research is the methodological approach of reflexivity. Reflexivity within sociology would have previously compromised the principles of objectivity, leading to accusations of over involvement (Etherington, 2004; Sampson, 2008). Such assumptions are symptomatic of the previous neglect of examining the social role of emotion. Both the areas of emotion and reflexivity are now broadening the parameters of sociological concern (Etherington, 2004). Within this study these two areas intertwine. This research indeed permeates many once restrictive boundaries: the mind-body divide, emotion versus observable interaction and reflexivity versus objectivity.

Being completely objective during any interactional data collection process is unrealistic. Life experiences, the paradigms with which we align and the methods we use direct academic focus; however, this is irregularly admitted (Etherington, 2004; Sampson, Bloor et al., 2008). 'Indifference or numbness is an emotional state within itself it involves a reduction, not an enhancement, of our cognitive faculties' (Kleinman and Copp, 1993: 33). Indeed 'the proper emotional state for analytic distance' has been shown to inhibit analysis (Kleinman and Copp, 1993: 33). Reflexive methods, as well as examining social emotion, are advocated across the social sciences, especially in feminist and gender research (May and Perry 2011). Sampson, Bloor and Fincham (2008: 921) highlight that:

Feminist researchers have made an influential contribution to the development of research techniques that have led researchers to become more reflexive, more conscious of power relationships and responsibilities in research and more sensitive to arguments about knowledge, how it is 'created', endorsed or identified, and by whom.

When examining emotions and interaction, especially in qualitative research, the emotional position of the researcher needs to be incorporated into analysis and not just presented as an afterthought (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Reflexive researchers reflect upon the need to manage their emotions or how their worldviews have impacted on participants or the research itself. Emotions, and participant emotions, and their 'unreflexivity'⁵⁴ towards such things as 'doing gender' and unequal power dynamics (Martin, 2006), are tools to enhance the research project not hinder it (Kleinman and Copp, 1993). Jorgensen (1989: 9) states that researchers 'are encouraged to cultivate appropriate interpersonal skills as well as related abilities to think and act with sensitivity and creative judgment in the field'. This highlights the researcher's subjective, often unexpected, emotional management throughout the research process, which is guided by ethics, their own morals and values, and institutional expectations (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). This labour can have significant personal impact as well as academic consequences (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Dickson-Swift, James et al., 2009). Moreover, the silencing of emotional experience can lead to burnout affecting researcher wellbeing (ibid). In summary, I knew that I would embark on an emotional journey but I also knew that these emotions would be used to inform the data in various ways.

Allowing myself to become emotionally close to this research led to data collection that might have otherwise been ignored and resulted in novel opportunities (such as being invited to groups) (Kleinman and Copp, 1993). Theodosius (2008) examines emotional labour and nursing. She acknowledges that she was a nurse prior to research, although the importance of this is not examined in depth. This is common amongst similar studies of emotional labour and means that full assessment of the impact of researcher values on analysis cannot be made. Jorgensen (1989: 27) argues

⁵⁴ The things that people are perceived by others as not thinking about but really should, and on which they are challenged.

that 'personal interests hold potential for new insights and creativity inspired by emotional and intellectual identification with the topic of study... other people are [then] able to evaluate further the influence of values on your findings'.

Addressing these factors was pertinent within this research for the following reasons. Firstly, extrasensory work is a feminized phenomenon. In this study all participants, excepting four practitioners, were female, including me; this raises issues of power, identity and social status (Segel, 2011). Secondly, arguments about the authenticity of practitioners' knowledge surround extrasensory work. Thus, some researchers have political agendas around producing acceptable types of knowledge; these agendas impact at various levels, guiding those, emotionally and practically, who conduct and inform research (Jorgensen, 1989; Northcote, 2007). Thirdly, the extrasensory practices are experiential and require an introspective and interpretative approach at all levels of the research process. Finally, I had prior knowledge of the phenomena under study, which impacted upon the research design and led me to be extra-sensitive to personal and professional responsibilities aligned with this research.

Using a systematic way of accounting for my own emotion I was able to assess the assumptions and prejudices I made (Kleinman and Copp, 1993; Etherington, 2004). I will now discuss this system and highlight the value that it had. It is discussed before exploratory methods of data collection, such as interviewing and participant observation, because it underpinned these methods.

Systematic Embodied and Emotional Reflexivity (SEER)

SEER is a method that I created to account for my own emotions and how they impacted upon all stages of this research. Having acknowledged that many researchers who explore the emotional labour concept, or who do work within the sociology of emotions more generally, omit their own emotions within the research process I required a systematic way of accounting for them. SEER is inspired by Kleinman and Copp's (1993) research series *Emotions and Fieldwork*, which provides advice on accounting for emotions within the research process. The following guidelines are a summary of their key directions:

- I. Write as much as you think you should on what you think is useful data, highlighting any assumptions or feelings.
- II. When in the field you have to be reflexive (e.g. 'put your reactions as much as possible, into your field notes' (Kleinman and Copp, 1993: 58)).
- III. When collecting data, write about any discrepancies between your expectations and what actually happened.
- IV. Leave for 1-2 days.
- V. Make notes on notes, reflecting on why you think you experienced those emotions.
- VI. 'Think about the tone that was used' (ibid) when you wrote the observations. Does this provide any clues to how you were feeling or the underlying emotions?
- VII. No matter how extensive your field notes you should always have two sets at any one time: one for data collection and one for notes on data collection.
- VIII. Do not go back to the field until you have made sense of the notes. Remember that notes are always incomplete.
- IX. Create or join a group of those who share your worldview, possibly from other disciplines. Ask them to listen out for the assumptions held in your account through reading the notes. Let others pick up on your mood and the tone of your voice.

Even though Kleinman and Copp's focus is commendable, their strategy is not fully compatible with some settings, particularly where participant observer roles and researcher resources hinder complex note taking. There were limitations in adhering exclusively to these guidelines within the college setting and I explore these shortly. Nevertheless, I could see how adopting a reflexive approach to field notes had value to an overall approach to which I was adhering. This, therefore, led me to develop my own system, which is how SEER developed.

I have kept diaries all my life but I knew that this would not be sufficient to take into account emotional and embodied factors throughout quite a complex ethnographic research process. As such, I developed the idea of templates so that I had a systematic way of accounting for how I felt before, during and after data collection. This would also mean that I could focus on the same issues and feelings and that this could be

replicated throughout the research process. I did, however, have scope to expand and free write if required.

The template contained questions that were inspired by Kleinman and Copp (1993) but which I developed. I also kept a researcher diary and personal journals. The following template shows the stages of keeping reflexive data and also the questions that I asked myself before and after data collection⁵⁵. Reflecting on my own emotionality in a systematic way within this research served to limit harm to me. Moreover, it prevented me from fully disconnecting from my academic identity (otherwise known as ‘going native’), which, in turn, prompted increased analytical rigor.

Figure 3.1: SEER stages of data collection

<p><u>Part 1</u>Involves the researcher reflecting on their own feelings prior to data collection (e.g. interview or observations)</p>	<p>How are you feeling today? How do you feel within your body (e.g. nervous stomach, aches and pains)? Why has this participant been chosen? What is your mission? What will this resolve? What assumptions did I have about the person? Or What images do I hold of the people and the place? How do I feel about those images? How did I come to study this setting at this time? What needs do I expect this setting to fulfil? Do I have an axe to grind? Do I expect this study to help me resolve personal problems? Am I hoping to create a different self? What political assumptions do I have? What kinds of setting activities or subgroups might I</p>
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⁵⁵ I have not included the completed versions of these as they contain sensitive information.

	avoid or discount because of who I am or what I believe?
<u>Part 2:</u> Following the interview / observation process, answering questions such as:	<p>What are your feelings about the interview / observations?</p> <p>Are there any discrepancies over earlier assumptions?</p> <p>What worked / didn't work in terms of interview structure and interviewing style?</p> <p>What are my tentative interpretations / ideas for analysis?</p> <p>What did I not find out?</p> <p>What do I need to clarify / check out with the participant?</p> <p>Do I want to amend my interview guide?</p>
<u>Part 3:</u> Involves the researcher's interpretation and significant reported experiences of the participant's emotion relating specifically to the data collection.	<p>How did the participant show their feelings through non-verbal actions, hand movements or facial expressions? Or were there changes in tone or pauses?</p> <p>How did the participant respond to the interview / observations? Positively, enthusiastically, or do you think there was an agenda?</p> <p>What other comments do you think are relevant?</p>
<u>Part 4:</u> Researcher diary	Free writing / audio about the research process
<u>Part 5:</u> Personal journal	Diary keeping about personal issues, interests etc.

Adopting the SEER method meant that there was examination of 'the collaborative interview process-the practices of interviewers and interviewees-rather than focus solely on the outcome-the word spoken by interviewees' (Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillmann-Healy, 1997: 123). Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillmann-Healy (1997) advocate interactive interviewing as an effective method of assessing emotion in research. This requires multiple interviewing with the same participants and participating in shared

activities external to the research situation so that the researcher can become closer to the 'other' and experience emotionality from the participant's perspective to establish what motivates them. I could not adopt longitudinal methodology within this research because of time restrictions. However, the SEER method and my participation, over five years, in similar activities to those reported by my participants meant a level of insight comparative to interactive interviewing was reached.

I did not focus specifically on an individual participant/s over a long period of time, as in interactive interviewing; however, similarly, the methods I used also did not fit into traditional categories of semi-structured interviewing, which are thought to be able to explore emotionality but can still be restrictive since they are focused on the questions / bias of the researcher. The aim here was to adopt an interpretative position and to expand upon traditional methods of interviewing. I knew themes were useful to steer interviews but I chose to primarily allow my participants to talk freely; however, this resulted in emotion management from me. There is an increasing literature corpus relating to feminist and gender research that challenges traditional methods (Roulston, 2010; Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008; Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Hertz, 1997). This is where this research situates itself. SEER allowed me to identify three stages of my own emotion management during the research process and this will be discussed in further detail later in this work.

Summary of data collection

Ethnographic data was collected between 2009 and 2013, including interviewing, observations, participant observations and other forms of written data. Researcher diaries and templates were also documented.

Participants were recruited primarily through Facebook, from the UK as well as from international domains, including Spain, Finland, the USA (California and Dallas), Canada and New Zealand. Leading figures in UK spiritualist organizations also contributed. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with extrasensory practitioners, eight with clients and one with an esoteric expert. Participant observation was conducted during a weeklong mediumship course in the UK (2010).

During five years of research, I immersed myself fully into spiritualist and esoteric subcultures. This involved various contexts in diverse locations, often on a daily basis, the making of many friendships, spiritual transformations and the perceived acquiring of extrasensory abilities. Extra-sensory practitioners were at ease about ‘talking emotion’. Again, this study remained restricted to my own observations and interpretation of the practitioners’ reported experiences, as well as those of the spirits with whom they report interacting, of how they perceive and experience their emotion and that of their clients. Barrett (1998) conducted novel interviews with practitioners during which she asked if she could speak to the Spirit source directly and record their experience. I had similar experiences throughout the interviews I conducted where the practitioners would claim they were channelling the information and that it was Spirit’s account of the practitioner’s experience, and of what I needed to know and focus on in regards to some higher good or my own development.

Figure 3.2: Summary of Dataset

Researcher Reflexivity	36 interview templates Emotion-focused field notes Researcher’s audio and written diaries
Interviews	27 interviews with practitioners 8 interviews with clients 1 face-to-face interview with a famous astrologist
College Ethnography	12 files of audio researcher observations 2 one-to-one interviews with mediums attending the course 1 tutor interview Group interview with three mediums 3 talk tutorials, including one from the course leader 3 meditation sessions 3 practical workshops

Sampling using social networking

Within a previous research project I attempted to recruit people who were involved in esoteric practices via adverts in esoteric shops and spiritualist centres, but this proved ineffective (Metcalf, 2009). Firstly, this sampling method resulted in insufficient numbers of respondents. Secondly, those who did respond were not geographically diverse. Thirdly, respondents may have had to spend money on a phone call replying to me. Alternatively, to place an advert in national esoteric literature would have resulted in fees ranging from hundreds to thousands of pounds. I was, therefore, at the time of the previous project faced with the issue of how to attract a reasonable number of participants who were not bound to a specific locality in order to ensure the research was representative of extensive practices within the UK, as well as further afield. I also needed it to be cost effective. I selected social networking to recruit participants, which was free, effective and internationally wide-reaching. I used the same method of social networking for this research. Using this method again had the advantage of obtaining hard-to-reach and demographically diverse participants. Recruitment occurred via a self-created Facebook site, which had accumulated over 330 members since the previous research. The site included an information page where details of the research were documented and requests for participants were made. There was also a discussion facility where the researcher or participants could create discussions. These threads acted as online focus groups that could have been adapted to inform this research. This did not occur, though, as capturing emotionality within an online space has its own contextual issues as it is known that individuals conducting themselves within social networking contexts may be able to present their ideal and likeable self more effectively (Orgad, 2005). The data collected from the online focus groups did, however, assist me in assessing topics of current concern to guide the use of the methods I had selected.

To recruit participants using the same social networking page but for a different, although related, project, an update function on the design of the website was used and I could also amend the description page and send out messages to the group. The designs of Facebook page layouts are currently subject to regular change. At the initial stages of participant recruitment in 2009 to 2010, sampling using online social networking sites was unheard of and cyber methodological principles were still

developing (Hine, 2005; Garcia et al, 2009). Social networking was already being used to explore consumer behaviour, although utilizing these types of sites as research tools within the social sciences was rare (O'Connor and Madge 2003; Casteleyn, 2009).

This study was novel in its approach at the time of development. Sampling in this way, however, was conducted on this limited understanding, or restricted by the actual design of these online spaces (within the period of their early development). Social networking is now a widespread communicative tool, allowing friends, groups (including esoteric groups and practitioners) and businesses to share insight into lives, common interests, products and upcoming events. In turn, there have been advances in online methodology, or social networking sampling (Boellstorff et al., 2012). In sum, this method of sampling was invaluable and worthy of further academic focus, especially to obtain participants from specialized subcultures.

Alongside social networking, a snowballing effect occurred where people who were contacted through Facebook would inform others (Silverman, 2005). Participants also arose from my involvement within the subculture, such as attending various esoteric events, workshops and shops.

Interviewing

Much has been written about the effectiveness of face-to-face interviewing for building rapport with participants and limiting researcher effects (Stephens, 2007). Telephone respondents have been found to be more wary of the interview and to act in more socially desirable ways than face-to-face respondents (Fenig et al., 1993). However, within this study I found the opposite, where respondents would be far more revealing over the phone compared to the face-to-face interviews I conducted. Participants sounded relaxed and eager to talk. I also felt comfortable using this method since most of my work experience to date had been phone-based research and customer service.

Telephone interviews lasted between one and three hours. Interviews were kept informal to reduce the participants' feelings of being surveyed and to enable me to build rapport with them (Holt, 2010). Telephone interviews lasted far longer than the fewer face-to-face interviews and richer data was gathered. An interview guide was adhered to, which included general topics and prompts relating to emotion

management. This guide was created to keep the interview focused, although the participants were not restricted systematically to answering all of the questions. I steered the conversation in the direction of what felt right at that time. However, in the majority of cases, in which participants came across as being passionate about what they do, it became difficult to steer the conversation to topics relevant to emotion management. I was aware that these reports were representations of experiences and may not have been what had actually occurred. The interview style and the focus of topics within the interview guide was an interpretive process that evolved in that it adapted according to person, context and practice (see appendix 5, page 273).

Participants seemed at ease talking about their work. Firstly, some had the opportunity to participate and share their experiences via the Facebook site in an informal manner (Ellison et al, 2007). This meant that they became aware of the research aims and objectives prior to the interview. This reduced suspicion during interviewing that I may have been a debunker⁵⁶, which is a key concern for practitioners. Secondly, many participants saw speaking openly and being attentive during the interview as part of their spiritual mission. Thirdly, while I had previous experience in telephone work so did many of the participants since it is a part of some mediums' work as telephone psychics. They reported being comfortable with telephone interviews when asked. Finally, some of the practices that practitioners described are based on belief but also on scepticism, thus practitioners conveyed enjoyment of talking with someone who did not judge them. During telephone interviews participants relayed their experiences with ease. However, small silences and the lack of visual cues meant that there was a requirement to stay alert to steer the conversation (Holt, 2010). This was easy to negotiate since I used good quality recording equipment on a landline that was wired directly into the socket rather than relying on hands-free or a signal, which can produce unwanted sound.

In addition to the telephone interviews, I conducted four face-to-face interviews where being in a public place proved to be disruptive to the interview. I wanted to keep the interviews as informal as possible and so chose locations that were public but quiet. However, the noise within these environments was still disruptive and poorer

⁵⁶ A skeptic who is not open minded and who dismisses extrasensory phenomena.

quality recordings were made. There was also a degree of unpredictability involved in face-to-face interviewing in a public place. For example, when interviewing a well-known astrologist, his status meant that individuals would approach him, disrupting the interview. In other cases, catering staff would ask if we needed assistance.

By conducting interviews over the phone, visual assumptions were also not made. Practitioners often wear themed 'alternative' clothing and jewellery that at that point in the research process I would have deemed as unnecessary and a sign of inauthenticity. I did, however, have access to the Facebook profiles of the practitioners; these profiles vary regarding biographical and photographic content so I could not limit these pre-judgments completely. Time practicalities affected my performance when conducting a telephone interview with a participant from Australia that lasted for two hours, stretching into the early hours of the morning, British time. I will now describe the process of being a participant observer within a mediumship training college.

College ethnography

Selecting the college setting

During telephone interviewing, many mediums stated that they had previously attended, or were planning to attend, this highly regarded training venue. This raised various questions: What was so special about this college? Why were the practitioners I interviewed so enthusiastic about going there? What did they teach there? Was this college trying to professionalize mediumship? The college also has its own social networking page on Facebook for students, past and present, to connect socially and share experiences and Spiritualist philosophy.

Hochschild (2003) emphasises that individuals are bound by contextual motivators to act in certain ways, where the observable presentation of the self is actually the final, frequently false, product of managing one's emotion. Again, this management often involves self-created empathy for those that the service provider is interacting with, based upon previous life experiences. Much emphasis and blame is placed upon the commercial objectives of the workplace for this creation of the false self. Practitioners

within this research, though, are often self-employed and their work can also be contextually and geographically diverse. I sought, therefore, to explore whether there was a promotion of specific philosophy, ethical guidance and techniques of conducting and supporting this work. If one attends the college it is fair to pre-suppose that they will have a grounded interest in these areas.

In the beginning, I was specifically focused on the purpose this training centre served for the individual medium in relation to their work. However, as the research progressed the setting became invaluable to understand, technically, what was involved when inducing contact with Spirit, what was thought to have occurred- to gain experience into the mental, embodied and collective experiences and understand the emotionality of participants. In this sense, this setting served an important function in my ability to understand believers' experiences and emotionality because of the extrasensory experiences that I had in the setting⁵⁷.

The college offers approximately seventy courses a year relating to all aspects of the extrasensory and spirituality⁵⁸, which raised the issue of which course to focus on for this research. The course 'So You Want To Be a Medium?' was chosen. It is available to anyone, from newcomers to more advanced mediums. The course promised to offer a supportive environment with workshops, demonstrations and specialist clinic sessions focused on developing awareness of Spirit; practising mediumship and healing; improving mediumship communication; enhancing presentation skills and confidence; and improving the quality and depth of mediumship work. The marketing material presented the course as expert-driven, friendly and exciting and a quick fix for those who wanted to become a medium or who had a desire to progress further. I selected a mixed ability course because I thought this would provide me with a wider perspective on extrasensory practices.

Gaining access to the college

I contacted, via email, the press officer at the college to request permission to attend this course. The press officer is male and a practitioner with over 40 years of

⁵⁷ Chapter 4 will explore this more fully.

⁵⁸From advanced numerology and spiritual awareness through to advanced mediumship and teacher training.

experience. He has been a tutor at the college for the past 16 years. He has various committee and administrative roles within the organization, including overseeing the publication of spiritual literature. He has now progressed to teaching aspects of mediumship (including trance) in various international domains. I requested authorization to observe and to interact with the participants and the course leaders. I invited course leaders, tutors and centre officials to be more formally interviewed. The email explained that the research aimed to explore the emotional and ethical dimensions of extrasensory consultations from the perspective of the practitioners themselves. It emphasized that the research is not concerned with trying to debunk or endorse claims of mediumship but rather to investigate the associated social factors of mediumship that need to be explored further in academic research. All the details of informed consent and the use of data were provided.

This request was swiftly accepted under the conditions that I attend the course adopting the dual role of student / researcher and that the course leader for that week also agreed to my access. I was informed that the normal working hours of the course were from 9.30am to 9pm, and so the press officer doubted that this would allow any time to interview course officials. The press officer forwarded the email to the course leader. The course leader is a woman in her middle fifties who reports to have been aware of Spirit since childhood. As a teenager, she was a working medium within a spiritualist church. Being nurtured by some of the most highly-regarded mediums led her to travel extensively throughout the UK, demonstrating mediumship and teaching. She has been a tutor at the centre for 19 years and also travels extensively overseas to teach aspects of mediumship. She is presented as an expert in the field, alongside having multiple business interests relating to mediumship and spirituality, which include her own training centre and commercially available training materials. I was unaware of both of the gatekeepers' biographies before entering the setting.

The course leader responded, allowing me access to the course on the same basis as the press officer. She stated (via telephone), however, that she would make time for the additional interviews. She appeared rushed during the time of the call so it was agreed that we would meet upon arrival at the centre to discuss the student / researcher role that I would adopt. This meant that there was a degree of uncertainty before entering the setting, since I had not been to the setting before. The course fee of

£440.00 (including food and residential accommodation for seven nights) was then paid. When booking the course the only available room was a shared room with three others.

The role of participant observer

At this point of gaining access, the uncertain nature of the research process was a concern. I knew I had a rationale for participating within this setting, and the gaining of access was too advantageous to decline; however, my research focus was still developing, which caused the unease about whether I would audio record or simply make field notes of relevant observations within the setting. Other issues also arose from these initial contacts:

- I. What exactly would a student be expected to do? This caused me concern since I had never attempted to induce extrasensory communication before.
- II. What would my dual role involve?
- III. How would I manage data collection with dyslexia during the long working hours of the course?
- IV. How would I manage my data while sharing a room with others?
- V. Would the other tutors on the course be as accommodating as the course leader?
- VI. What group would be the best to observe? Would the setting be flexible enough to allow me to observe other groups?
- VII. Would the gatekeepers and setting be problematic when collecting data?

Upon arrival at the college I was shown to the tutors' area and a one-to-one meeting took place with the course leader (gatekeeper) during which it was agreed that I would adopt an overt role. The course leader gave me the option of conducting the research covertly, but I felt that this would not have been ethically feasible, and would have caused issues when collecting data. I felt that I would have the opportunity to have more discussions and collect more data if students knew me as a researcher. During the introductory session I introduced myself and explained the purpose of and general focus of the research. I also stated that individual students could share their experiences with me confidentially or could take part in more formal interviews. The

course leader provided me with a quiet room with set times to conduct interviews. Individual students did have the right to decline to take part in all observations if they did not want to take part in the study. I thus could adapt my observations and recordings appropriately. I also explained to students that I would omit any names or identifying features from the written report.

I approached the course leader regarding which group I would be assigned to. It was agreed that because I had knowledge of this area that I would be placed within the intermediate group, which is above the beginners' group. I was, however, informed that I would only be able to observe that group, which was unexpected because I thought I would have some mobility throughout the setting. However, I quickly grasped that the condition of my access to the college in terms of being a student were to be strictly adhered to. I was informed that groups work on the notion that energies within the group build up over the week. I would, therefore, disturb or destroy these energies if I were to be mobile across groups. I was informed that a good level of energy vibration is essential for the developing medium within a training situation in order for them to learn and achieve stronger and effective ways of reaching altered states of consciousness to communicate with Spirit. This restricted the diversity of data I could collect and, unknown to me, initially enhanced the persuasive nature of the actual environment. It was more persuasive since extraordinary happenings seemed more noteworthy when having to do the same routine everyday (such as having to sit with the same people for lunch and having meditations and lectures at the same time). In the next section I discuss how I managed the data collection.

Note taking, recording data and data management

The course was intense with the working hours between 9.30am and 9pm. It was therefore crucial that I developed an effective way of collecting field notes. The aim was to keep two types of audio dictation: one for observations and another for self-reflexivity, or 'notes on notes' (Kleinman and Copp, 1993: 59), which I would review and upload to my laptop each day. However, the reality of the research setting and this overt participant observer role meant that these methods had to be adjusted. During observations mainly written notes were kept as leaving the room during workshops would have, again, according to another tutor, disrupted the energies in the room. I

was, however, given permission to make audio recordings of some of the full sessions. I often used audio dictation outside of teaching hours to elaborate upon my written notes. I also used this method during breaks to quickly capture mental notes when the sensitive nature of group activities (such as reportedly channelling dead relatives) prevented me from making even written notes. Adhering entirely to the emotion-focused way of collating field notes that Klienman and Copp (1993) suggest (e.g. leaving notes for 1-2 days) was impossible because of the intensity of the setting.

When in the setting, students would approach me at every given opportunity to share their stories. This experience sharing was advantageous. However, it also left me with limited time to review the audio files; leaving them for a day before revisiting them was not possible due to the structure of the course. I also had the added disadvantage of sharing a room, which meant that uploading and listening to files would be disruptive to students who were sleeping, even during the day⁵⁹. If I sat in quiet areas I would still be approached. I would capture audio notes at any given opportunity and, even though these were limited, I developed a system whereby I would complete detailed daily audio notes at 6am and 11pm, when the college was quiet, or when I could enter the gardens undisturbed, all of which meant that the days were even longer for me. Nevertheless, my field notes were comprehensive documents where I documented a detailed account of my emotionality, expectations and assumptions prior to entering the setting, as well as within and on leaving the setting, and this became invaluable during data analysis.

I collected as much data as possible without knowing its relevance. During the observations I looked out for hidden organisational structures, rules and regulations, tutors' talk (such as specific promotion of ways of conducting mediumship) and student responses (such as feedback regarding teaching and promotion of tutors' own methods). I also acknowledged my own responses and my role within sessions. Within these audio notes I would expand upon my written notes and capture my emotions concerning the setting and the overall data collection process. I was confident that I had full recordings of sessions so field notes were focused on emotionality (such as tone of voice and laughter, and the non-verbal responses of participants). I planned a

⁵⁹ It was reported that mediumship is physically and mentally exhausting, which caused some students to take respite during the day.

full day out of the setting to review data; however, due to leaving the setting early⁶⁰, this failed to occur. The audio files that were collected were then uploaded to my laptop whenever the opportunity arose and were organised further according to the date of each session. The data was then password protected and sent to a secure data storage bank.

Audio diaries

Practitioners' use of emotion discourse (Edwards, 1997), and preliminary analysis of interview data indicated that during extrasensory work practices⁶¹ practitioners indeed conduct a form of emotion management. These were narrative accounts, which are valuable, but also ones that relied upon memory, which restricted the type of analysis one could undertake.

Alaszewsk et al. (2000) experienced a similar issue when researching how community nurses managed risk throughout their practice. They identified that both interviewing and observation presented flaws of memory recall and discussed the problematic nature (for the validity of findings and the risk for patients) of intruding upon a sensitive setting. Alaszewsk and colleagues used a reflexive method in persuading the nurses to record their own diary accounts. In their view diaries provide unique insight into practices that participants take for granted and thus fail to mention in an interview, allowing introspective access into their world. I required that level of introspection within this study.

Limited tools are needed to complete written focused diaries and the text is already transcribed for the researcher. However, there are issues as to whether through *written* text the researcher can obtain a full sense of emotionality, whereas within *audio* entries there is less of a delay between thought and articulation. Theodosius (2006: 901-902) found that audio 'diaries encouraged a more personal disclosure of private emotions and feelings, as typically occurs in the diary format'. Nevertheless, 'for many researchers, the personal nature of diaries makes them an unreliable and biased source' (Alaszewski 2006: 30). I argue that this depends on the study topic and

⁶⁰ I had an accident, falling down the college cellar thinking that it was a door leading elsewhere, and had to seek medical attention and leave the setting earlier than planned.

⁶¹ The concept is being used as it includes the management of emotion.

the researcher's viewpoint regarding objectivity. This thesis is emotion focused, requiring the practitioners to be as reflexive about their experiences as possible. Beneficial to the research would have been to capture emotion management in action or rather in, as far as possible, real time without much opportunity for editing by the participant or need to present their public persona. It was hoped that diaries would become a private ritual where researcher effects were lessened.

A diary template was designed to give participants instructions on how to complete these diaries. This included informing the participant of the purpose of the audio diary, which was to capture their feelings and experiences as they happen in relation to their work. A set of simple instructions stipulated what kind of information needed to be captured and when. It included instructions on how and when to complete the diary, explaining that the focus was on experience as it happens, such as talking out loud about their preparatory techniques prior to a consultation and their feelings afterwards. Other practicalities, such as operation of the dictaphone and collection, were outlined (see Appendices). These templates were given to four participants and, unfortunately, all failed to keep their agreement to complete them. On reflection, it was perhaps the time that it would have taken to complete that was off putting, or the extent of personal disclosure. Only one practitioner returned the dictaphone.

I learnt a valuable lesson here but, unfortunately, was unable to extend analysis to provide further insight into the inner experience of participants. However, my own reflexivity through using SEER and the experiences I had within the college setting provided insight into inner experience that I was not fully expecting. The multi-method approach I used still provided rich analysis. Indeed, it got me to thinking about how I could use audio diaries in my own reflexivity. I used this as an effective method throughout the research process and used an audio note taker to catalogue and make notes on recordings, which I found useful to reflect upon, especially during the data collection and write-up phases.

Hanging out with extrasensory practitioners

Hanging out consisted of informally attending various training courses and workshops, spiritualist churches / private centres and development circles, spiritual

places and paranormal events and fairs. During the research process I have been invited to private homes to practise trance and physical mediumship. I have been invited on nights out and even paranormal cruises and holidays abroad with practitioners. It is difficult to define the role that I adopted in these contexts; however, I was always open and honest about my research interests and I have never collected formal data within these settings, but rather used them as opportunities to simply reflect within my researcher's audio and written diaries. This was frustrating at times when particularly interesting data could have been collected. I did have to be mindful not to overload myself with too much data, appreciating my experience in the moment, which I could later reflect upon. Such hanging out was nothing new to me since I was once a client of these practices.

Public / private boundaries were blurred further when participants contacted me, offering support following the accident, and subsequent friendships were formed. This shows that even though research often halts it does not mean one's connections with it pauses too. In fact, this period of detachment enhanced my own understanding of extrasensory practices. I will discuss my own reflexivity in due course. The methods selected here relate to, yet extend, Hochschild's (2003) original methodology through the use of hanging out and reflexivity. In sum, I adopted an in-depth eclectic style of collecting data, where supplementary data was also collected from advertisements and other materials associated with extrasensory practices and spiritualism.

Overall, this study relies on descriptions of how practitioners perceive emotion, and how they make sense of their experiences and that of their clients within the formal data collection. However, my exposure to the esoteric subculture provides additional insight, to explore and make sense of these formal descriptions, where authenticity is significant but experience should be studied.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was provided by the Sociology Ethics Committee at the University of York to conduct all components of the research. Ethical guidelines provided by the British Sociological Association, International Sociological Association and the British Psychological Society guided this research. Verbal and written consent was gained

from all participants, except when hanging out occurred. When I hung out I was: a) already participating to some extent in spiritualist practices and b) open about being a researcher, but stated that I was not formally recording anything or conducting research while being within esoteric and spiritualist settings, although I explained that I would reflect upon my experiences of being involved. I also stated that if people wanted to formally take part in my research they could.

Facebook, by its design⁶² at the time of the group's creation⁶³, addressed ethical issues such as informed consent and the withdrawal rights of participants. This page also allowed the researcher to make disclosures regarding the use of data. Participants always had the option to withdraw from the group and I also clearly stipulated this within information pages, which were plainly visible.

The risk of causing harm to participants was actively considered throughout all elements of data collection. Several steps were taken to ensure that this was prevented. Each participant provided verbal or written consent. The informed consent form contained the aims of the research, details about the use of information and rights regarding withdrawal from the interview; moreover, checks were made with the participant to ensure understanding was gained (see appendix 4 page 272).

I had concerns after some interviews that participants may have disclosed more than they felt comfortable with. This raised questions of how to manage this to prevent harm. When participants were disclosing sensitive information I asked if they felt capable of continuing the interview. All participants were questioned and expressed positive feedback regarding the interview process. I provided both my supervisor's and my own contact details in case any participant had any concerns after the interview.

The introductory speech in the college setting meant that the issue of consent over observing and collecting data was addressed formally. As the course fully booked, with approximately 120 students in residence, it was not possible to obtain signed consent from every student. The issues of informed consent were dealt with in numerous

⁶² Through having particular functions within its layout, such as allowing people to join the group or to Unlike, which means leaving the group.

⁶³ Facebook keep changing their design.

ways. Firstly, it is written within the contractual booking paperwork that the recording of sessions may occur for educational or outside purposes. Secondly, I explained that I would not be collecting identifying information, and that my focus would be on course content and practices within and not on personal information or personal conduct. I emphasized that if anyone had issues with me observing them then they could speak to me directly or highlight this anonymously at reception if they felt uncomfortable approaching me. I gained written and verbal consent from course leaders and permission was acquired to audiotape some sessions. No participants expressed concern about the research, but many expressed strong interest.

There are ethical issues to consider when conducting research with a reflexive focus. Sampson, Bloor and Fincham (2008) argue that reflexive researchers are at risk of increased emotional harm compared to distant researchers. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007: 327) also highlighted 'issues relating to rapport development, use of researcher self-disclosure, listening to untold stories, feelings of guilt and vulnerability, leaving the research relationship and researcher exhaustion'. As will be reported in the next chapter, I did indeed reflect upon many of these issues and they undoubtedly have had an impact on me. Nevertheless, I am sceptical regarding whether my research was more harmful to me than to other researchers and I argue that these factors are simply a normal part of the research process.

Researchers who utilise reflexivity at least have an outlet to express what actually happened in the research rather than distant researchers who may deal with concerns privately. I found that this disclosure allowed me to come to terms with these experiences and thus prevented harm. Kleinman and Copp argue (1993) that 'we might be made somewhat more comfortable if less of our efforts were devoted to the avoidance, denial, and control of emotions and if more of our efforts were directed to the understanding, expression and reporting of them'. Acknowledging the emotionality of this research and having support mechanisms in place, I argue, avoided emotional harm or burnout (Sampson, Bloor et al., 2008; Dickson-Swift, James et al., 2009).

Data management and transcription

All data except the researcher's audio diaries was transcribed verbatim. In order to manage the large volume of data the intention was to use the Atlas TI data analysis package to code the data. However, since I did not transcribe the data and it was sent to a professional company where a confidentiality agreement was signed, I found that I did not have the initial repeated engagement with the data that some transcribers report. I, therefore, printed all transcripts, coding them manually, which took several months, and this then meant I engaged fully with the data.

Data analysis: approach and procedure

Various forms of analysis were considered for their appropriateness for this research. Within this study, Spirit sources are reported to be elicited cognitively but extend cognition as it is normally taken to be. Spirit sources are thus reported to direct interaction and embodiment, which can result in a degree of detached responsibility regarding talk and action of the participant. When exploring 'extraordinary or ultimate human experiences, such as unitive consciousness, peak experiences, transcendence, bliss, wonder, group synergy and extrasensory and interspecies awareness' researchers have highlighted the complexity of this interaction (Braud and Anderson, 1998: ix). Barrett (1996) asked mediums to channel Spirit and then conducted interviews with Spirit to explore the Spirit's experiences of using the medium. She provides the following findings:

Interview results from the sources were remarkably uniform in certain areas. Each source reported feeling a long-term, kindred, or multi-lifetime relationship with its channel, and most sources considered themselves to be separate autonomous beings. Almost all reportedly adjusted their vibrational frequency to achieve communication with the channel. Sources also described how, during the transmission of information to and through the channel, they made efforts to cooperate with the channel in a team effort to achieve an accurate transmission and presentation (Barrett, 1998: 162).

Many approaches to data analysis (e.g. discourse analysis) do not have built into their philosophical foundations the tools with which to explore the claims of extrasensory practitioners without falsifying them. They would fail to capture, in the full experiential sense, embodied experiences that can spontaneously consume the practitioners within this study, in their bodies and minds. As a researcher who wishes not to impose bias I need to fully respect my participants' reported experiences and find a method of analysis that, by design, does not dismiss such experience. My aim is to accept these claims as experiential truths.

Therefore, a thematic analysis combining both inductive and deductive (grounded) approaches was deemed more suitable for this study. On the one hand the grounded approach, focusing on the theme of emotion management, was applied to the data set to see how data related to current findings in the sociology of emotions literature. However, I did not want practitioners' experiences assessed solely in relation to theories. I wanted the data to speak for itself in the sense of identifying and looking for themes of significance that would relate to how the extrasensory practitioner experiences the work that they do.

Using grounded and thematic approaches together, a number of themes began to emerge. The data was analysed to develop categories and concepts that align with emotion management but inductive flexibility was applied to develop other theories or extend current definitions and understanding. Analysis involved manually coding the printed transcripts using a colour system. I then produced a mind map of these codes, which I immersed myself in on a daily basis. Themes started to emerge. I then produced a table of codes and related themes. Before the write-up process I examined the theme and looked for meaning repeatedly within the transcripts. Data either related to relevant theories within the emotions literature or new understanding arose. For instance, the thematic approach was particularly useful when exploring the college dataset.

Finally, I repeated this data analysis process with the 'researcher reflexivity' data set consisting of all five parts of the SEER data collection process. I again identified codes using the same inductive method and then produced a mind map of these codes, in which I immersed myself on a daily basis. Eventually, three stages, consisting of

specific qualities and experiences relating to my own emotion management and reflexivity, were identified. The following chapter explores these stages in more detail, which includes a table showing the phases, the motivators and what emotion management corresponded with the phases, including the perceived impact it had for the research process. Using the SEER method allowed me to revisit the original dataset data in an informed way, refining codes and themes to highlight the experiences of the practitioners as well as to identify my own relationship to the research process. My supervisory team assisted with this analytical process where they could also acknowledge and discuss instances of researcher bias with me. Conducting SEER was enlightening, confirming how I had become so consumed by my research, highlighting stages within the research process where my identity was changing and I was being acculturated to being someone who believed they had extrasensory abilities.

While this gave me unique opportunities of data collection I questioned whether I was being as objective as I had initially intended in my writing and this led me to seek additional supervisory support and data sessions in the later stages of analysis and writing up. Thankfully, with the use of SEER I was able to reflect on my inevitable bias in order to take these into account in the analytic process.

Becoming so involved with the research I believe had a positive impact in that I was able to share the experiences of practitioners. I know through becoming closer to extrasensory practices I have had opportunities and gained knowledge that I doubt I would have gained any other way. In the following chapter I discuss these experiences.

Chapter 4

Seeing through the eyes of the believer

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of my participation within the esoteric subculture in relation to the diverse range of extrasensory practices I explored. I sought to understand extrasensory identity formation, the features of extrasensory emotion management and how practitioners make sense of their world and interactions with others. However, I needed a more comprehensive understanding of esoteric settings and subcultures than I had previously held through my identity as a client of these practices.

Implementing an ethnographic approach provided a window to explore a wide range of practices, the development of skills, including presentation skills, the lifestyle of practitioners, morals, values, ethics, feeling rules and much more associated with the extrasensory. However, if I were going to explore the emotion management of my participants I thought it imperative to explore my own. I believe this to be important since researchers who have explored emotion management have often explored domains of which they had previous experience. They acknowledge this but have rarely explored the significance of this prior experience or of their own selves within the research process (Bolton, 2005). In the previous chapter I discussed this in more depth, arguing that, despite the increased emergence of reflexivity in feminist research (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002) and the emergence of auto-ethnographic methods (Ryan, 2012) related to exploring online psychic practices, accounting for the researcher's emotions is still limited within studies of emotional labour, emotion management and, in particular, the extraordinary.

Alongside traditional ethnographic methods, I implemented the method of Systematic Embodied Emotional Reflexivity (SEER), which allowed me to analyse my position within the research process. Creating this emotion-focused method of collecting field notes through the use of templates, keeping research diaries and additional personal journals, which I could reflect upon and share with my colleagues and supervisors,

meant that my own identity, assumptions and prejudices during the research process could be comprehensively and systematically reconsidered (Etherington, 2004; Kleinman and Copp, 1993). The development of SEER is my contribution towards developing research on the experience of researchers that is more transparent. Reflexive research, by name, often does not mean that the researcher's position is comprehensively considered. Within this chapter, I will show how meticulously accounting for researcher experiences can provide much rich data and add value to the overall research.

Within the introductory chapter, I emphasised that I would be adopting a reflexive approach and that this research was a personal journey as well as an academic one. I went on to talk about my experiences before academia, how I used to regularly consult with extrasensory practitioners. These early experiences contextualize the experiences I had within the field and relate specifically to this chapter. SEER, however, not only enabled me to be reflexive but also allowed me far more access to my research participants' viewpoints than I had ever anticipated. My experience has become a lens through which to understand the identity transformation of my participants. The next chapter explores contextual factors regarding the training of the extrasensory, which also relates to the practitioners' identity transformation.

SEER has allowed me a richer understanding of my connection to the research process. It permitted me to view my own research through the eyes of a believer. Moreover, when required, it also prompted me to bring my critical sociological lens to the forefront during the stages of analysis and writing up. It allowed me to come to terms with and write about the extraordinary experiences that I had within the field, which challenged my own sense of self. The mediumship training college, which is explored in the following chapter, was significant for me as it is what I believe prompted me into having my own unique phenomenological experiences. Within this chapter, I reflect upon these experiences. I discuss this not in terms of data collection phases but in relation to the stages of my own engagement with the research topic. I reflect upon four stages of my own emotion management throughout the research process.

Four stages of researcher emotion management

I went through four stages of emotion management throughout the research process, which I have categorized as follows: “On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase”; “Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase”; “Being an active believer: a new way of thinking”; and, finally, “Being a sympathetic disbeliever”. These stages relate to various factors within the research process. Previous involvement with spiritualist establishments, my previous identity as a client and my new identity as a researcher all influenced these stages and the perceived impact that they had on the research. It was my intention to account for my own emotion management, including my ability to represent my participants’ experiences. I never anticipated the extent to which SEER, as a method, would allow me introspective access to my participants’ world through reflecting upon my own experiences. In this sense, my evolving insight resulted in the accidental adoption of the auto-ethnographic philosophy (Chang, 2008). I have summarised the four stages I went through, what motivated them and the perceived effect it had on the research⁶⁴.

In the early stages of the research process I went through a process of re-acculturation into the academic culture. During this time, my identity was changing from client and student to researcher. Within this acculturation process, I went through two stages, which I have termed: ‘On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase’ and ‘Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase’. Both of these stages occurred at intermittent times throughout the early stages of sampling, interviewing and writing literature reviews.

On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase

When I started my PhD research I began to question my earlier beliefs. Even though my research explores experience rather than the actual truth of the phenomena, my ontological beliefs did have a function within the research process (e.g. the way I would interact with clients, affecting what information I focused on and the way that I wrote). My pro-practitioner phase occurred when I was learning to question extrasensory practices from a sociological perspective but understood academics to have limited knowledge about the reality of these practices comparable to my beliefs

⁶⁴ See Figure 4.1 and 4.2, pages 122-123

and experiences. This stage was missionary because I had made it my goal to improve understanding of these practices through the writing of my thesis.

Sceptical literature made sense and provided me with a fresh perspective on extrasensory interactions that previously had, for me, a mystical quality. It prompted me to be more selective in my beliefs and inspired me to seek out further knowledge (O'Keeffe, 2005; Hyman, 1981a). I only had immediate access to literature within my institution that centred on sceptical and agnostic viewpoints. This literature included compensation theories (Wuthnow, 1976; Moody, 1974a and 1974b) that explain extrasensory experience or involvement as a response to disadvantaged social position.

I originate from a disadvantaged social position where there were sometimes barriers against me fully embracing university life. I felt very protective of my identity. I found it dismissive and patronising that my use of extrasensory practitioners would be explained as simply a response to my social condition. Such literature led me to believe that sceptics were simply being dismissive and that they failed to fully explore and understand these practices correctly. This is a common belief held by every practitioner that I interviewed. I wanted to show academia that there was some truth to these experiences. I felt frustrated that there was misunderstanding about those involved in extrasensory practices, according to what I had learnt from my own experience. I understand now that my research skills were still developing, which is a normal part of the developmental process of junior researchers. However, this limited access to esoteric literature influenced the judgements I made and how I interacted with practitioners, including what to focus on in my interviews. When I first began interviewing I was very pro practitioner, emphasizing to my participants that it was my aim to convey the reality of their practices, rather than to be sceptical; this helped me build a rapport with them.

Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase

Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase occurred when I was absorbing and coming to terms with increased knowledge (e.g. reading wider literature as well as interviewing) and my evolving identity as a researcher. I was critical of extrasensory practices, becoming increasingly sceptical of their authenticity. Over the course of the

research, perceptions of the people that I was researching rapidly fluctuated. Having previous experience of telephone work meant that telephone interviews were comfortable for me to conduct and I felt confident about how to open and steer conversations. I was able to relate well to practitioners. I found participant accounts inspiring, although for me they were becoming far-fetched, repetitive and unethical (dismissive). I was surprised that I was thinking this way and was scared of being exposed. I began exploring a wider range of literature than was immediately available within my institution that explored in more depth the complexities of extrasensory practices. In my opinion, I was beginning to develop critical thinking but, at the same time, I was becoming uncertain of my earlier beliefs, which was a strange feeling. Being a client / questioner throughout my early involvement with Spiritualism, I was concerned that I would become sceptical through attending university. I liked the thought of there being something more beyond this life. It was strange to think differently and I had feelings of guilt for thinking this way.

I used to find significance in every word spoken by a practitioner. Were the words of practitioners during 'normal' talk (i.e. not during consultation) spoken from Spirit?. These individuals were magical to me. Often the researcher is the knowledgeable figure that research participants look up to. In the early research stages, I saw practitioners as having the higher status and power. Nevertheless, as the research process developed, I found myself having to manage these interactions more, occasionally withholding my real thoughts and feelings. I found that practitioners would often take control of the conversation. A benefit of them doing this is that I would hear an uninterrupted version of their experiences and of what they felt they needed to highlight. Practitioners frequently talked quickly to get their point across, and it was clear that the interview for them was an opportunity to emphasise the accuracy of their advice. After a while, for some interviews, this became repetitive, appeared self-centred, and I found myself having to control my emotions and act appropriately according to my professional status.

I eventually became unsure of what I actually believed in. For some, this would be equivalent to achieving the perfect state of objectivity, but for me it was a state of frustration resulting in a lack of motivation. I was struggling to write assertively because even though examining experience should have been at the forefront of my

mind, I myself wanted to know whether there was anything to this belief in Spirit because I felt I needed to write with a purpose.

Before entering the college setting, I was feeling cynical and sceptical about the possibility that extrasensory communication was real and about the motives of the students. At this stage in the research process I was passionate about the potentially damaging effect that extrasensory information could have upon a person's life, which led to apprehension about how I would deal with these feelings while interacting with the people on the course. How would I react if the students or teachers did anything that I perceived as potentially damaging to others? I was concerned I might find it exasperating that people accept the extrasensory without questioning. I assumed that everyone on the course would be a believer and that I would be the only one who was open minded. I explored online information about the college and read forums relating to it. People reported that the college was a supportive environment, which reassured me.

There were reports, though, of students experiencing changes within the self, which fuelled my cynicism even more with regards to how an environment could have such an impact. However, I also reported a similar kind of change in my identity from engaging closely with the university environment. My conscious thought was to keep an open mind and enjoy the research process. However, in reality, I dealt with these uncertainties by drawing on the positive aspects of my prior involvement as a client within spiritualism, reminding myself of the immense support I had once experienced. In this sense, I was using reminders of previous experience to remain positive in my interactions with my participants, which is similar to the stewardesses in Hochschild's (2003) study where they would have sympathy for demanding customers by thinking that they must have had a bad day. I was particularly adept at this emotion management, which relates to my previous occupation where I spent years working as a stewardess.

Due to the emotion-focused nature of the research I was contemplating being honest about my mixed views during interactions. I had concerns about how I would introduce myself. Would I use student, which sounds friendlier and less official than researcher? I did not want to come across as someone official who was just present to observe those at the college. I knew that I had a role to adopt but similarly I did not

want to detract from the study's importance. I felt comfortable about embarking on the research but was slightly fearful of whether the atmosphere at the college would be frightening, whether I would actually see psychical evidence of Spirit or change as a person. I anticipated it would be a culture shock being within the same environment for a week. I assumed that there would be no new methods taught other than what I had previously observed in spiritualist churches. Practitioners present themselves in a confident manner, so I assumed that the course leaders would also. I suspected practitioners would help me because of the altruistic nature of spiritualist philosophy. I made specific assumptions about participants prior to my observations. I was able to comprehend the influence of these assumptions throughout the later stages of data analysis of the practitioners' dataset in that I identified that I had chosen to focus upon specific things because of my belief at the time. I was interested in gaining knowledge about all aspects of the course, especially presentation skills. I was interested in whether the college promotes certain ways of acting and if this contradicts how practitioners say they receive their extrasensory information.

I did feel I had an axe to grind, as a lot of practitioners during interview were not taking responsibility for the information that they reported giving to clients, stating it was Spirit (rather than themselves) who wanted the person to have the information. I was concerned that some of the information the practitioners reported giving to clients might have a negative impact on the client's life. I felt they must have to interpret this information and thus incorporate their own social views into the process. I thought this was very dangerous, especially to some individuals who may be vulnerable. I was, to some extent, adopting the viewpoint of those theorists who annoyed me at the beginning of the research process and it was clear that my views had shifted. I felt practitioners were well intentioned but unaware of how damaging their advice could be. I knew these practices would continue and that there was a fine line between benefit and harm, which angered me. I could not see a resolution to this. I was uncertain of what I wanted to learn by visiting this setting. My research aims were quite broad in that I wanted to see if there were attempts to professionalize practitioners and wondered how this related to the concept of emotional labour.

On entering the setting, I was full of anticipation and students responded to the research aims well. Despite my apprehensions, I was enormously pleased to have the

opportunity to attend the college. I felt positively about the setting. I was cynical, though, and aware of how easily influenced students could be. I felt bad for thinking this as I felt I was being disloyal to the people who were initially helpful. Students claimed to question everything, even their own abilities. They asserted that the spiritualist organization that they belonged to would say that there was something wrong if they did not question the reality of the Spirit. I found this questioning inauthentic because I believed that an extrasensory practitioner should know whether what they were doing was real and whether the information they received was from Spirit.

Reflecting on my reactions at the time, I can now see that I was making assumptions about their phenomenological experiences because I had previously had high regard for the presumed abilities of practitioners. I also contradict myself, as this opposes my earlier claim, in this chapter that students ought to be questioning. However, when they do what I want them to do, it challenges my earlier perceptions of them having authentic magical abilities, a view I cultivated as a client before academia. These tensions prompted me to explore, in more depth, the facets of extrasensory communication. I was enthusiastic about the practical group work and I desperately wanted to know: What does it feel like to experience Spirit?

Some tutors were more evasive than I had expected, often not having the availability to share their experiences or forgetting about agreed interviews. Goffman (1968), in his book, *Asylums*, acknowledged how it can be difficult to gain sociological insight into diverse interaction within an institutional setting. I started to see the college setting as a persuasive institution that has a hierarchy with rules and regulations rather than simply examining individual experience. I found that when adopting a student role I clearly belonged to the student domain and that there were restrictions to genuinely learning about staff practices. Within these limitations, I have felt more qualified speaking about the student domain. Students would share their experiences enthusiastically without me approaching them. I thought I had good knowledge of extrasensory practices and philosophy but once this sharing began I realized how much I had to learn.

I encountered difficulties in understanding why students believed to the extent that they did. Experiential group work was a prime example when students would give others information that, according to them, was extrasensory. The recipient, however, often did not treat this information as incorrect or vague. There was acceptance that students were learning and there was a downplaying of these errors. When information was accepted, students celebrated, were supportive of each other and boasted to others. This reminded me of Hyman's (1981b: 81) claims that 'even if the reader began his career with little belief in his method, the inevitable reinforcement of persuaded clients increases his confidence in himself and his system'. The tutors required that the students convey the personality of the Spirit, yet the information appeared vague. This reminded me of the 'fallacy of personal validation' argument, which seeks to account for how individuals might accept standardized personality statements (Forer, 1949: 79). The very literature that I once criticised for not representing practitioners' experience became relevant to my experience within the setting. I saw how practitioners, by thinking like mediums, and being influenced by group dynamics, could develop perceptions of having authentic abilities. This relates to Hochschild (2003) argument that increased surface acting (doing a job but retaining a sense of self) leads to deep acting (loss of self and identity change). In summary, observing group work fuelled my cynicism and I began to question whether mediums were really communicating with Spirit. I still, at this stage, had a belief in Spirit but I was questioning the student's ability to communicate with Spirit.

I did, however, develop a respect for the students since it was evident that they took their beliefs seriously, devoting time to exploring these practices, often travelling far to attend training, reading philosophy and completing spiritualist qualifications. I also was surprised at how much international travel was involved for tutors and the stringent educational and selection process that those tutors at the college had to undergo. I was becoming interested in the setting as a whole, and there were clearly many avenues to explore. I was within a training establishment and found it strange not having awareness of the training side of the institution, especially since I was involved with teaching within my university. I really wanted access to the tutors' world but had to adhere to the student role within the setting. Nevertheless, my early experiences within spiritualism had practical benefits whilst I was working within the setting. Having philosophical knowledge of spiritualism meant that I could have in-

depth discussions. Students expressed satisfaction at speaking to someone who at least understood their stories. I did not, though, take for granted the meaning of concepts; instead, I sought clarification to ensure I had understood the correct meaning. Such knowledge sharing I believe empowered students.

On other occasions, I approached interviews and training courses with the belief that I knew more than participants, which caused me to make prior assumptions at the early stages of data collection. I found at times that I could relate to participants but that I was not fully participating within the environment. They were experiencing magical occurrences represented through states of euphoria. In their world, the existence of Spirit was never questioned; it was only the practitioner's ability to experience Spirit that was questionable. I could not fully share in these experiences as I was questioning the origins and reality of Spirit. There were times when I was in awe of their enthusiasm and positivity. Students reported that researchers have difficulty understanding their experiences because they are experiential and not observable. I was fascinated and wished I could experience extrasensory communication. I was expecting something magical to happen or nothing to happen at all, anything that would have confirmed my doubts. This leads me to the following discussion of being an active believer in the extrasensory and exploring the perceived extrasensory experiences I had.

Being an active believer: a new way of thinking

The experiences that I had within the college meant that everything shifted again and I became an active believer. It was active in the sense that my role as a researcher changed to being more of an individual consumed with extrasensory practices. It did not feel like I was doing the research and at points throughout the research process I forgot that I was the researcher. At the same time, this improved my reflexivity since the spiritual people with whom I was interacting appeared consistently self-reflexive, as it is the norm within spiritualist domains to look within at oneself. I will now explore the factors that encouraged this believer phase, which started from the extrasensory experiences I had in the college.

The most prominent experience occurred for me during a group-work session after being at the college for two days. The tutor instructed members of the group to practice giving one-to-one readings, like a private reading scenario. How I would adopt this role concerned me because I did not know the technique used to contact the spirits. Others appeared to know this technique since I was in the intermediate group and not the beginners' group. With chairs positioned in a circle, the tutor instructed everyone to connect and feel the Spirit energy. This process took ten minutes and involved going into a meditative state. She brought us out of the meditative state by asking everyone to open their eyes and feel their physical body. In meditation, those who believe in the extrasensory tend to believe in a soul and that this soul detaches from the physical body.

After some group work, she asked us to work in pairs. I was concerned at this point and even suggested that I go into the beginners' group. I did not know what to do and I felt uncomfortable at having to give a performance I did not believe in to the student with whom I was paired. The tutor suggested that rather than changing groups, she would help me. The tutor then talked me through a meditation while I was sitting in my chair. She instructed me to imagine that energy was rising from my solar plexus (stomach area) up through the heart chakra (heart area), up through the third eye (forehead) and then to focus upon the energy flowing in through the top of my head. These chakras relate to the principles of reiki healing based on the idea that there are specific energy points that you can meditate on within the human body. I closed my eyes while imagining this energy. I then saw bright purple and white colours in my mind. I told the tutor what I was experiencing and she confirmed that I was now connecting with the Spirit world. I was still sceptical at this point. I had done many meditations within various groups within the wider subculture, so experiencing these colours was nothing new.

The tutor then told me to relay exactly what I saw and felt when I had my eyes closed. I then saw an image of a bald-headed man with hair around the side of his head with his head upside down and a blue light on top of this head. I would say he was in his sixties. I could not see him that clearly but his age popped into my mind. As I thought, 'I think you are about sixty', the number sixty flashed in my mind. I was relaying this information to the tutor, talking her through the experience in my mind. I then

experienced a tingling sensation in my right arm and I saw in my head a purple light going towards this figure. The tutor asked me what I was feeling. I then felt a tightening in the chest. She asked what caused the spirit's death. I felt a tightening across my chest again. The pain I was experiencing was strong enough for me to gasp. I informed her of what I was feeling. I heard the tutor say to the woman I was paired with that the message was not for her but was for the tutor.

The tutor became excited. She asked, "So what else do you get?" I was excited too. The tutor asked, "What feeling do you get about this person?" I meditated some more and something came over me. I had no control. I started laughing uncontrollably – laughing and crying – and I felt a weight on the top of my head. I then got an image of a big furniture chest, like one that you would place at the end of a bed, with its lid closed. I told the tutor. She asked me what was inside the chest. At that point the lid opened and showed me what looked like white towels, and then this colour changed to yellow. I saw other images forming in my mind but they were like shadows and I could not determine what they were. After I shared this experience, the tutor suggested that I now rest. I felt incredibly tired but upbeat at having had this bizarre experience.

The tutor explained that she and her husband had spoken earlier about not hearing from this Spirit for a while. By helping me, the tutor claimed that she was also connecting with the energy of this Spirit to help me bring through significant information. She confirmed that he was sixty when he died and that he was a bald-headed man with hair around the sides of his face. He was a great healer, which the colour purple signified. She explained there was an occasion when the tutor and her husband and friends had dressed this man up and put a funny blue hat on his head as a joke. This man was a joker with a great sense of humour, explained the tutor. Later, while this man was staying at the tutor's house, he filled her furniture chest up with yellow soapsuds so that she got a shock when she went to get some towels. At which point she was laughing and seemed happy that I had relayed this significant memory.

While at the college I felt I had to be logical about these experiences, questioning whether the tutor was perhaps fitting information to her experiences or was using my status to promote the validity of these practices to other students. Confirmation from the tutor made the experience more real for me. However, I cannot deny the cognitive

experiences and, more specifically, the emotion that occurred in my own mind and body during the altered state that I had induced. I found these new experiences bizarre and I was excited about what this meant for the interactional procedures that I was trying to explore.

When I left that session and shared these experiences with other students, they and the tutor were very complimentary about my abilities. I felt at that point that I was being included in their culture; this was very uplifting and it made me feel valued. Unfortunately, the following day I had to leave the college due to an accident and, subsequently, had to take extended leave from my research. I, therefore, had to postpone my transcription and data analysis. My personal experiences following this accident led to more contact with practitioners and to further spiritual experiences. These experiences increased my understanding of these practices, even though I could not document all of them formally due to my health. I did, however, write summaries of them in my personal journal.

I was beginning to think in the same way as my participants. The individuals I spoke with had symbolic ways of thinking about their life and interactions with others. Spirit was the guiding force and the notion of it, for the majority of practitioners, creates a daily sense of magic and synchronicity. Synchronicity is a common term used by practitioners. The term, as they used it, represents a wide variety of interactions with people and experiences that they had which possessed an exciting and relevant quality to them and which impelled them to reflect upon the spiritual nature of life or their spiritual sense of self. Spirit is seen as authoritative, calm and knowledgeable being that teaches lessons and monitors human behaviour and worldly events. At one point I believed that Spirit was controlling my actions to direct the outcome of this thesis. Similar to the practices of the practitioners I was observing, I began to interact based on signs I saw in life and dream states that helped with the decision-making processes. For example, my deceased relative was a postman, and if I needed confirmation from Spirit that the right decision was being made then if a post van or anything to do with Royal Mail came into view, at that particular time of thought I believed that I had the support of Spirit. Other symbolisms involved finding objects or making meaningful contacts that all served to strengthen the notion to me that the Spirit world was real and consistently interacting with me in a magical way.

In sum, I cannot discount these experiences, especially those I had during and after conducting the in-depth ethnography at the mediumship-training centre. What I did not expect was to begin a spiritual awakening and to experience the sensory and embodied experiences exactly like those reported by the very participants I was interviewing. During the meditative states, I saw symbols in my mind's eye. While in altered states of consciousness I received audible information as though I was hearing myself externally. When linking with Spirit energy I also embodied their emotion, personality and the ailments that caused their death. These experiences were very real to me physically and emotionally and they continued after leaving the college.

Spiritually, I acquired a sense of peace about my whole being. I started to appreciate nature, to feel calmer. I became surer of who I was. I felt less stressed and rushed. These experiences impelled a total lifestyle change. I became healthier. I gave up smoking. I slept less yet had more energy than I had ever experienced before. Various websites and books highlight the physical symptoms and causes of spiritual awakening. Taylor (2010) discusses the disturbing of homeostasis as the cause for spiritual awakening. He claims that the body regulates itself but that, when this is out of balance through illness, fasting, sleep deprivation and so forth, we are more likely to experience higher states of consciousness. The effects I was experiencing could have been due to my accident. He also links meditation to spiritual and mystical experience which links to the practices at the college. MacKian (2012: 95) explains how, despite the diversity of the individuals in her study, "Spirit' served as a common grounding factor for regaining ontological security after a disruptive event of some sort'. My spiritual journey and relationship with Spirit were certainly triggered by events where: a) my sense of self was challenged and b) I thought I could die. Thus, experience of Spirit certainly provided me with meaning in my life, focus and comfort. It increased my understanding of why my participants, who had experienced similar triggers, had become involved in spiritually-orientated practices.

Accidental⁶⁵ friendships developed with spiritual people where, during these contacts, I experienced frequent feelings of déjà vu. During this period, I read books on spirituality, philosophy of Spirit and mediumship and psychic development. I began attending the local spiritualist church more often and became actively involved in the

⁶⁵ I conceived them as accidental since they felt synchronistic in some way.

committee. I appreciated and understood spiritualism more. I experientially knew what 'feeling the changes in energies in the room' or 'getting into the flow of Spirit communication' meant. On one occasion, because of my enthusiasm, a medium, knowing I was once researching this area, drew a diagram explaining how mediums achieve the correct level of energy to communicate. I would never have gained this information if it had not been for my involvement. Mediums believe that there is a universal energy source, accessible to anyone, that can be drawn upon (through eliciting altered states of consciousness which then become habitual) in order to contact Spirit. Spirit is viewed as existing on a higher plane (or 'vibration') than we do here on the 'earth plane' of existence. Even though I was aware of belief in energy, the process within a spiritualist church service was more complex than I had originally understood, involving more persons than the client and the practitioners and Spirit. Other practitioners within the audience had the role of achieving a link with Spirit to obtain spirit energy then telepathically giving this energy to the practitioner on the stage. The practitioner was aware of this and it showed the complexity of emotion management the practitioners were conducting.

From this perspective, and literally by accident, I was really living my research. Where once I believed that I had insider's knowledge, I realized how previously disconnected I was in that my early understanding was very limited. I not only gained understanding of practitioners' embodied experience but also of their emotionality. On one occasion, I woke up at 3am and saw a woman at the end of my bed. I instinctively knew it was not an actual person. Rather, it felt like an impression of a person. I experienced a sense of shock but not in an overwhelming way, instead I felt stillness and a slight discomfort, and I coped with this experience by going back to sleep, holding onto the belief that I would be protected by Spirit. At another mediumship course, which I attended the week after having this experience, the woman I shared a room with, who was very much alive, was the woman who had been standing at the end of my bed three days earlier. Such experiences were very real to me. Reports of similar experiences by others strengthened my belief that the Spirit world was in some way interacting with practitioners and myself.

The following extract from my personal journal illustrates the extent of my spiritualist beliefs. I wrote:

Well, I have purchased this journal in order to document my spiritual journey. Some quite bizarre things have happened to me recently that have changed the being that I am, the way I look at the world, the way I feel and the person that I would like to become. This journal will be in the moment as much as possible; however, initially I feel like I need to document a few things that have occurred to start me off on this exciting journey, during which I have had many synchronicities, met some wonderful people and had many feelings of déjà vu. Where I would have once chosen this diary at random, I went to a few places to get the one that felt right in which to document events that are so personal to me. It feels rather indulgent but I am going to enjoy it because I know that what I document here will help when looking back to help others on similar journeys or in my future chosen field of work.

I got a buzzing feeling when I wrote the title to this journal, 'Psychic Connections', because it's something a while ago I put on a vision board, something I wanted to achieve. At the time, it was the title of a book I wished to create but I know now, even if only in the conceptual sense, that psychic connections means so much more to my journey as a spiritual person. I watch so many people, including those in the café I am in now, who appear so disconnected via technology from really 'seeing' what is around them. I guess they all have their stories. I just feel blessed that I am now looking, taking advantage, guided by Spirit of the world I live in - it and the wonderful energies in it. I hope that consciousness will raise and many more will experience this wonderful feeling and connectedness. Blessings my friend ♥

At the time of keeping this journal, I had already conducted my participant observations at the mediumship college and I was still involved within the subculture.

In one sense, this extract shows that I am significantly self-reflexive and that personal progression is extremely important to me. It shows that I am practising a concept of mindfulness, which a lot of practitioners conduct, where there is emphasis on enjoying and living in the moment which is supposed to help with spiritual awareness, anxiety and stress reduction. It is also evident that while I was writing the diary I was making assumptions about people's awareness and I believed that I had a special view of the world. Synchronicity is a key concept within extrasensory work; the extract therefore shows that I was using the same terminology that my participants use. At the time of writing I used the term "blessings my friend ♥", which is also a spiritualist way of conveying well intention, as though I have the right to bless someone while ending the communication. I remember feeling as though something other than me was influencing what I wrote; that in some way I was channelling the information. These beliefs all emphasised the special view I had of myself, at that particular time. It is evident that at the time of writing this diary I felt uplifted and special, and I believed that I had increased awareness of the spiritual aspects of the world and that Spirit was guiding me. I am conveying this spiritualist philosophy within my diary through writing that individuals are connected and there is a collective consciousness.

I realised that being spiritual is a way of life, something guided by one's own experience, which is difficult to examine, through actual visible or audible evidence. I was experiencing first hand the actual motivators and Spirit emotion that mediums claim guide their emotion management. I would never have gained this information if it had not been for my increased involvement. These experiences unavoidably not only impacted on this research but also allowed me to experience spirituality which some practitioners say guides their interactions with others. Subsequently, this brought to the forefront the complexity underpinning what motivated practitioners to conduct readings and raised further questions within the research process. What experiential impact did the college have on my experiences? How could I assess whether participants were spiritual (which is a continual process within itself)? Do spiritually-aware practitioners operate differently to those who have not reached this level of insight or way of life? Were such questions even relevant to extrasensory work?

Being a sympathetic disbeliever

The final stage I went through was the sympathetic disbelieving stage, which occurred mainly throughout the later stages of the research process, during which I was still involved with the subculture while also analysing the data that I had collected. There were two main factors that prompted this stage: a) the analysis of my personal journals and b) coming to see the teaching of authenticity as being inauthentic within demonstrations of mediumship. There were three stages to my data analysis. Firstly, I conducted primary thematic data analysis on the main ethnographic data I had collected (such as interviews and participant observations). Secondly, I conducted a thematic analysis on my own reflexivity data, exploring instances of emotion management that I may have conducted. I examined how I was constructing my own identity through the rhetoric that I was using in my journals. Thirdly, findings from the second stage of data analysis led me to revisit the main data set that explores practitioners' experience. It was the latter stages of data analysis, when examining my personal journals, having new experiences in the subculture, and when my supervisors made explicit the assumptions and bias in my writing, which prompted this final stage of emotion management.

It was when I was reviewing my own personal journal as part of the SEER analysis that I realised how immersed I was in the subculture and the spiritually-orientated language and views that I was displaying. Within my research journal, I was still acting as a researcher, acknowledging significant experiences that I considered to be useful for this research. However, my personal journal shocked me into accepting that spiritualist philosophy was ingrained in my writing and life in general. It is important to note that when I was analysing myself in this manner my exposure to the subculture was also less frequent. The awareness that I was now achieving led to a degree of detachment and highlighted how persuasive spiritualist and esoteric settings could potentially be. Spiritualist and esoteric contexts can be supportive and provide a sense of belonging. However, there is also reported bad behaviour (such as gossip and bullying between committee members), which I witnessed. This also fuelled my cynicism about the actual spiritual nature of some. This led me to question the intentions of certain people and bolstered the disbelieving phase I was experiencing.

I witnessed instances of the teaching of presentation styles, people accepting generic statements, and openly saying that Spirit information could relate to numerous things / people in their life (otherwise known as fitting information). It was as though the teaching of authenticity made the whole process seem inauthentic and staged. This disbelief may be down to being overly involved with the subculture, the effects of the PhD process or even networking with sceptical people. Nevertheless, I was simply not convinced that genuine communication with Spirit was occurring or, indeed, that it was even really possible. I was starting to doubt these abilities and Spirit. Where I once found these practices enlightening I was now finding them tiresome and predictable.

This disbelieving stage was the hardest stage emotionally for me, especially in my interactions with others. Throughout my involvement within the subculture, people had been willing to give up their time to explain concepts or practices to me. I felt highly protective of these individuals, some of whom have become dear friends, and I felt the need to appropriately represent their experiences, as they try to make sense of the work they do. I felt I should be representing their viewpoint as far as possible. I felt guilty for feeling this way, doubting the authenticity of their abilities, and for going to fewer events than I did before. I also felt a sense of loss because believing had once shaped my life and provided me with purpose.

Regardless of the interactional dilemmas I faced regarding my non-belief, I am glad I went through this stage because it had a positive effect on my writing. In addition, I was able to analyse my data from a more detached perspective. I revisited the data collected at the college that highlighted how the tutors and students promote ways of behaving and interacting, creating a form of group consciousness, support and deviance that was specific to that environment. Through considering my own emotionality within the setting, I was able to assess these factors in relation to the inner experience of my participants. However, I was now able to see how the college itself was persuasive without my own extrasensory experiences clouding my judgement. This led me to place the environment as my primary analytic focus: a lens through which to understand the identity transformation of my participants, which I explore in the next chapter.

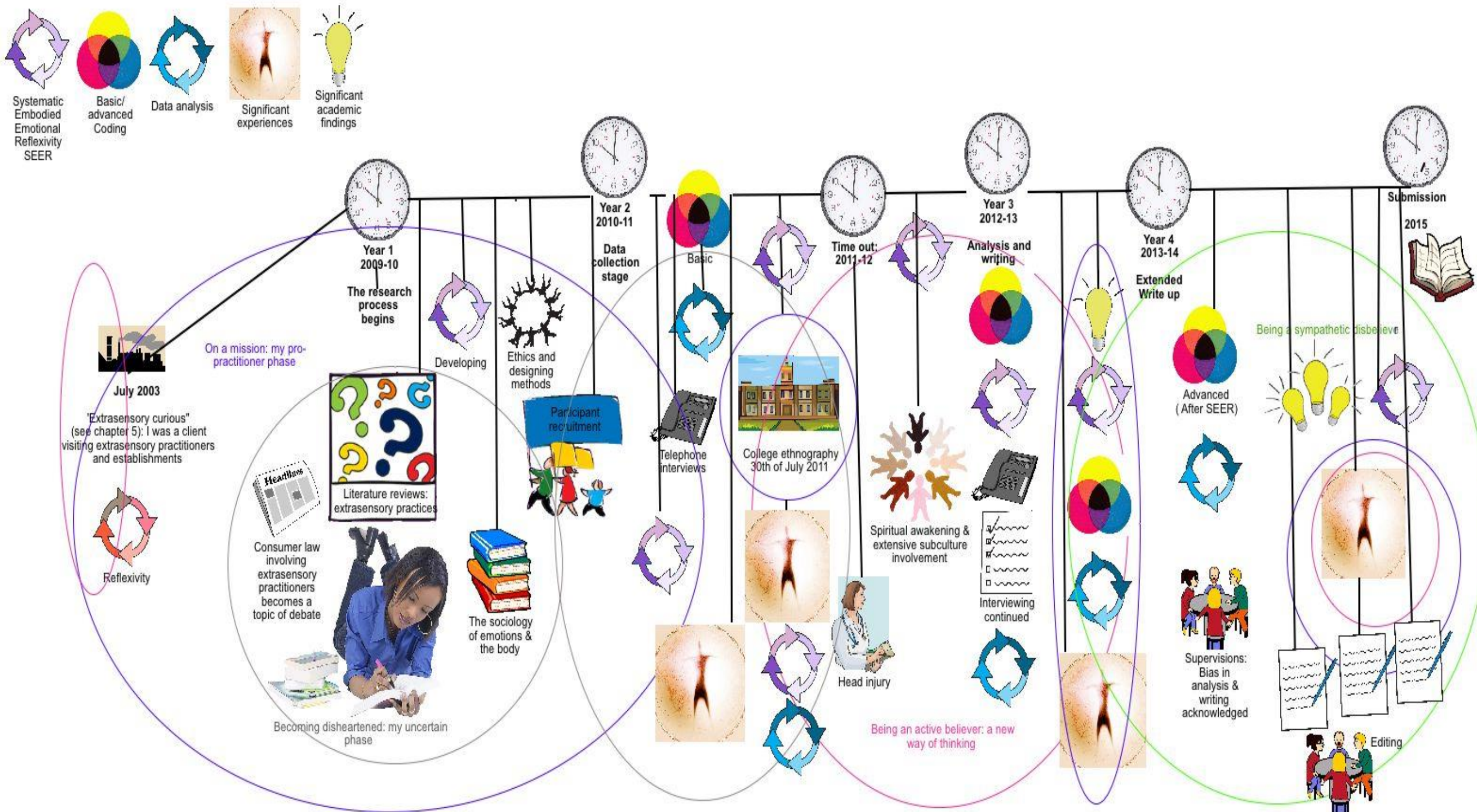
Summary

I wanted to gain knowledge of the extrasensory practitioners' world and I did this to a greater extent than I had expected. Practitioners reported enjoying talking about their experiences with someone who understood them and who had prior experience of extrasensory practices. However, as I have discussed here, this was not a simple process for me. I found that even though I was not looking at whether these abilities were real, my beliefs still directed my own emotionality throughout the research process, during which I went through four stages of emotion management.

For practitioners, belief in Spirit shapes their life. Practitioners never questioned this belief in Spirit, which has significance for the management of emotion. Academics have stated that what guides extrasensory practitioners is a desire to be perceived as authentic, defined as people accepting that they have real extrasensory abilities. In the following chapters, I will show how authenticity was far more complex than this. I gained this knowledge through the introspective and novel experiences I had access to in the field.

I established that whatever the origins of the communication, some practitioners appeared to be experiencing real feelings through their body and mind, something which I experienced myself. Becoming an active believer was a learning curve but one that I recognise has enriched this research. I will now illustrate how, even when being consumed by research - by developing and using appropriate methods - sociologists are still able to tell the story of the participant. SEER has helped me significantly with this. Overall, I have shown how, regardless of whether I wanted it to or not, my belief had a function within the research process. I argue, therefore, that in research areas where there is strongly held opposing views more research needs to incorporate such experiences into its methodology.

Figure 4.1: A visual summary of the timeline of the research process.



This visual timeline shows how periods of data collection and continual analysis overlapped. Colour coding the different phases of researcher emotion management illustrates how my own perspectives fluctuated in relation to the research process.

Figure 4.2: The four stages of researcher's emotion management

Phase	Motivator	Emotion Management	Research Impact
On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase	Sceptical literature	Not fully participating	Agenda based upon belief and social impact / mission to raise awareness
Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase	Supervisor influence	Acting with Ego Frustration	Struggling to write assertively
	University life / identity		Assumptions
Active believer	Supportive / persuasive / fun culture	Personal enthusiasm	Novel opportunities
	Self confidence	Believing I had extrasensory abilities	Insider's perspective
	Genuine people / friendships	Ease of knowledge sharing	Writing from a believer's perspective
	Respect for participants	Distance from academic identity	Increased reflexivity
	Sensory, bodily experiences, including dreams	Impact upon family	Personal data
Sympathetic Disbeliever	Far-fetched Accounts	Guilt	Increased networking
	Teaching authenticity equates to lack of authenticity / Fitting information	Sense of Loss	Detached and more systematic in my writing
	Sceptical acquaintances	Less involvement in subculture	Looking for bias, both believer and sceptic, in my writing
	Over exposure within subculture	Embarrassment at university	The ability to develop concepts
	Analysis of Researcher / personal	Feeling protective over participant / Responsibility to appropriately portray their experiences	
	Write-up process		

Chapter 5

So You Want To Be A Medium?

A reflexive analysis of attending a mediumship training college

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss findings relating to the in-depth ethnographic study that I conducted at a residential mediumship-training college in the south of England. In the previous chapter I explored how this course challenged my sense of self and the impact that this had on my research. I now extend this analysis and explore the college setting as a process of socialization and possible identity transformation for those who enter it, those with an interest in becoming an extrasensory practitioner. The objective of this chapter is also to provide a picture of what kind of world I will be exploring in the rest of this thesis.

I introduce the college by exploring its history and describing the physical setting, which, along with the course programme, will contextualise subsequent analysis. I focus on the structures and constraints on activity through providing a reflexive analysis of the college's introductory procedure. I then further this analysis by focusing on the social construction, language and management of Spirit. In this section I explore how belief in Spirit is socially constructed within the college setting, including the promotion of philosophy, language and the adoption of specific promoted practices, emotionality and rituals. Within this specific language usage there is also the promotion of silence, which suggests a mechanism to aide the construction of Spirit, to promote oneself as an effective communicator, and adhere to community solidarity. I then investigate key issues relating to the students' sense of self and the context.

The History of the College

The college is based in a small village in the south of England with excellent commuting links. It is a large Jacobean style stately mansion built in 1871, surrounded

by 33 acres of parkland, including various outbuildings. In 1923, Arthur Findlay and his wife bought this mansion for their retirement. During the Second World War the armed forces used the building as a hospital, which meant that many wartime deaths occurred within the building. Students talked about this history, stating it as a reason why the place had a specific atmosphere. Findlay was a well-respected British Spiritualist, a persuasive author on the subject of the extrasensory, and a businessman whose interests included land, farming and law (Findlay, 1957, 1955, 1953a and 1953b; Findlay and Sloan, 1951; Findlay, 1949, 1947, 1939, 1936 and 1933; Findlay and Sloan, 1931 and 1924). He considered himself to be a rational, scientifically-minded man but one who believed that human personality survives physical death. His views were inspired by his friendship with direct-voice⁶⁶ medium John C. Sloan. Findlay (1933: 5 and 21-22) claims that:

Spiritualism is the only religion mankind (sic) needs, as it gives a scientific explanation of the reasons for man's existence here on earth and the proof positive of his continued existence after death... We now know that this Universe is made up of substance, and what we sense, namely physical substance, is only etheric vibrations. In other words, the Universe is made up of a gigantic scale of vibrations, which goes under the name of substance. Now there is a physical substance, which we can see, and handle, but there is also etheric substance, no less real, which in our physical bodies we are unable to sense. Our physical bodies are a trinity, made up of mind, etheric substance and physical substance, but owing to our having this etheric body, and owing to the fact that the physical body is but a cloak or a covering, it can be understood how throughout the ages mankind has had always a vague instinct, which enabled him to look on the physical world as a state of preparation for the world to come, and that there was intelligence governing this world.

⁶⁶ Direct voice is where Spirit voices are heard externally by sitters in the atmosphere without the use of a medium.

Findlay's writing now forms much of the philosophy that the current UK spiritualist movement promotes. Findlay bequeathed his home to this movement so they could achieve his wish of training proficient mediums to continue contact with the Spirit world. The building is now one of the main colleges in the world for the advancement of mediumship and it has connections with other training establishments in Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Additional training centres, connected to this movement, are opening up throughout the UK.

The College Setting

Known by locals as Spooks Hall, the atmospheric nature of the secluded building and parkland certainly sets the scene for a focus on otherworldly practices. After a long drive past various accommodations and through the woodland grounds, the main teaching building comes into focus. The main building has an elaborate entrance area. The inside of the building is accessible through an arched entrance with a weighty black Victorian door. This entrance leads to the college reception, which is the first point of contact for students when they arrive in order to check in. Upon checking in several things are provided: a) a course information booklet (including information about future courses); b) a questionnaire so tutors can rate students' abilities; c) access codes; and d) a list of rules and regulations. Reception also deals with general queries, administration, and security.

The college building has many walkways and different entrances to other parts of the house. There are weighty old interior doors to the left and to the right of the reception desk that allow access to other areas. The left door leads to a passageway, which leads to a lift, staffing areas and basements and a walkway that links to the right side of the building. Within the right side there is a lobby area with off-set rooms such as large dining rooms and a library. The library looks very grand with an impressive selection of books covering all walls. Teaching takes place within these rooms.

At the centre of the lobby there is a main staircase that leads to the tutor area. This area is where the tutors' sleeping accommodation and rest rooms are situated. Adjacent to the tutors' area is a small museum surrounded by glass walls. This houses various Spiritualist artefacts. The next two floors above the museum are where the

students' residential accommodation is situated. Accommodations also surround the main building. Accommodation ranges from double to twin and larger (3-4 beds) shared rooms, with or without en suite facilities. Communal showers and toilets are also provided.

To the right of the main staircase and again right there is a walkway, which leads to a large living room. The same walkway leads to the dining room, which is where meals are eaten. Near to the dining room there is a college bookshop. It sells a wide range of items, including philosophical books, crystals, gifts and CDs (including those developed by the tutors). The shop opening times coincide with the break times of the course. There is an indoor communal seating area and a bar (which is open for two hours in the evening). The building is surrounded by beautiful gardens where students often congregate in little groups, sit alone meditating or walk around. There is also a covered walkway that leads to a healing centre. Next to this centre is the sanctuary, which has Spiritualist services open to students and local people. Both of these venues are also used as teaching spaces, normally for the advanced groups who are kept away from the main building.

A clear divide between staff and students areas existed, which was reinforced by the building layout with limited mobility between these areas. There was a calm yet highly-charged⁶⁷ feeling within the building and amongst staff and students. It was as though the place had its own consciousness where everyone was very relaxed and happy, which differed from other spiritualist settings I had visited. The following extract from my researcher's diary describes this:

It's as though you are floating around, that's the best way I can describe it. You are so relaxed and not with it. The college has two cats and I went to stroke them and they were actually comatose, they were lying on their backs with their faces up, just so chilled out. I have never seen cats behave like this and I cannot explain why the place is like this.

⁶⁷ The term 'highly charged' is the one used by practitioners (and by me at that time) as this was how the atmosphere in the building was perceived in that many things that happened there were said to be due to Spirit. For example, a sudden closing of a door or a cold draft was likely to be attributed to the presence of Spirit and / or Spirit's attempt to communicate.

It is evident from the extract that I am experiencing a feeling that is unusual for me - something out of the ordinary. It could also suggest that my socialization within the environment had begun, given that I am acknowledging the emotionality of the setting and the residents within.

Educational Programme

The college offers approximately seventy courses a year relating to all aspects of mediumship and spirituality (from advanced numerology and spiritual awareness through to advanced mediumship and spiritualist teacher training). The course I attended was: 'So You Want To Be a Medium?' This course had the same activities at the same time every day for the duration of the course (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Course Programme

So You Want To Be A Medium?					
	9.30-11.00	11.30-1.00	2.30-4.00	4.30-6.00	7.30-9.00
Saturday				Welcoming introductions	Opening Service
Sunday	Meditation and Talktorial	Group Work	Group Work	Workshop	Evening service in the Sanctuary
Monday	Meditation and Talktorial	Group Work	Group Work	Workshop	Solve it
Tuesday	Meditation and Talktorial	Group Work	Group Work	Theatre trip	
Wednesday	Meditation and Talktorial	Group Work	Group Work	Workshop	Evening Service in the Sanctuary
Thursday	Meditation and Talktorial	Group Work	Group Work	Open Circle	Come on in, the water's fine!
Friday	Student Space	Group Work	Group Work	Guardian Angels & Forum	Closing Service

Structures and constraints of the college

College life felt structured and controlled on immediately entering the setting. The information provided by the college reception, the rigid course timetable and the similarities of each day, having to sit at exactly the same table and chair for meals, the rules and regulations and the structural layout of the environment itself, all gave me this impression. Within Appendices 1, 2 and 3, I have provided a descriptive account of what is involved within each section of the course (e.g. “meditations and talktorials”, “group work” and “workshops”). Data collected within the college revealed that life there resonates with Goffman’s notion of the Total Institution (Goffman, 1968).

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (Goffman, 1968: 11)

Within the following sections I examine particular ways in which Goffman’s theories are useful to understanding college life, particularly the ways in which it can provide insight into the social processes and mentality within the college.

In his book, *Asylums*, Goffman examines the ideal type of total institution and explores the changing identity of individuals upon entering such a setting (Goffman, 2007). Hochschild’s (2003) work shares similarities with the earlier ideas of Goffman concerning how a context can influence the formation of identity and the potential loss of a person’s authentic self. Goffman’s work centres upon the regime of the organisation, daily occurrences and the hidden practices only known to those within the institution. Goffman’s work has been used to make sense of a variety of settings, including schools. His work was therefore useful for examining the routine practices of the college relating to the identity work and emotion management of the students and tutors. Goffman argues that a total institution has the power to create its own behaviours, norms and values, which an outsider would be unable to grasp. Total institutions may be well intentioned (e.g. therapeutically or educationally focused) but

the politics of, ⁶⁸ and taken-for-granted processes within, the institution can impact upon the behaviour and identity of those within. I have selected six key elements that influence behaviour within the total institution and these will be reflected upon within the subsequent discussion.

Firstly, within the total institution two contradictory worlds develop: the inmate versus the staff world. Inmates 'enter and, after a period of time, they leave and re-enter society' (2007: xiii). Staff members, however, tend to always have mobility between the inside and outside world. They are therefore less affected by the institutional mentality. Secondly, upon entering the institution inmates go through a process of mortification (Goffman, 1968). This is a process whereby 'a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of [the] self' occur (Goffman, 1968: 20). The inmates are stripped of their previous identity, morals and values. When entering the institution barriers are created between the inside and outside world where the institution is of primary importance. Outside identity is less important and is replaced with one of inmate, or student, in the case of this thesis. Often there are also physical barriers, such as high fences or visible intercoms and security. Thirdly, there is an admission procedure, which includes a sharing of personal details, explanation of the rule system, and often tests of obedience.

Fourthly, there is a process of 'contaminate exposure', which is based upon three areas: 'standard', 'physical' and 'interpersonal' (Goffman, 2007). Standard exposure refers to the staff sharing information about the inmate and monitoring inmate behaviour. The inmate has a lower status compared to the staff. Physical exposure is when the inmate is in a situation that forces social relationships (such as they might be subjected to inadequate living facilities). Interpersonal exposure incorporates ongoing conduct evaluation, lack of privacy and the constant anxiety of rule breaking.

Fifthly, staff members, through the use of the 'privilege system', hold the most power. The privilege system works in a systematic way. There are sets of house rules that create a restrictive environment. There are then small privileges that are an important part of inmate life and conversation. If these rules are broken privileges are withdrawn. These procedures also uphold divisions between inmates and prevent

⁶⁸ Politics referring to when staff are held accountable for occurrences that may negatively affect the smooth running of the place

alliances against staff. Conflict is also required for staff rule. Each group tends to think of the other by way of condescending stereotypes. Some inmates play the role of the perfect inmate who abides by all of the rules and shows awe-like respect for those who govern. Others rebel, though this often results in increased behaviour modification from staff and leads to inmates becoming institutionally dependent and developing unhealthy attachments to staff and institution.

It is clear that Goffman's theories have relevance for the process of socialization into the institution in which I conducted my ethnography. The identity change of those within the college is of particular interest, as I discuss next.

Applying Goffman to College Life: A descriptive account of the introductory procedure

The college's formal introductory procedure (or process of socialization) took two and a half hours and consisted of: a) an informal gathering; b) a formal college welcome; c) a formal course-specific introductory talk; d) an introductory gathering, which included a meditation session. There was then the option to attend a spiritualist church service lasting a further one and a half hours. It was evident from college advertising that other courses followed a similar format. I will now explore this introductory procedure in more depth.

In the informal gathering refreshments were available within a small social area where students could introduce themselves. Tutors did not attend this meeting. An admissions procedure was being carried out which involved contaminate exposure and the overall promotion of the staff versus inmate world (Goffman, 1968). Firstly, the majority of students were in shared rooms having to share basic living facilities and sleeping in conditions that forced social contact. Upon arrival at the college the first thing students tended to do was to go and see their sleeping accommodation and, as such, social contact with other roommates was sometimes unavoidable. Secondly, student exposure continued because the social area that hosted the informal gathering was small and it would have been perceived as impolite not to talk to others. Thirdly, with no tutors attending this informal gathering, it was clear that a divide between students and tutors was being generated. The extent and effects of this contaminate

exposure could be dependent upon how well students knew each other previously, other courses they had attended, how well they knew the tutors and their knowledge of the rules and regulations. Nevertheless, all students would have, of course, at one time been newcomers to this admissions process. After this initial meeting, students then proceed to the Sanctuary for the formal welcome.

There were 115 students at the formal welcome, the majority of whom were women (83), which is in line with the gender division across extrasensory practices (Hazelgrove, 2000). Only forty of the students were first-timers at the college. Course officials were recognisable as they sat on a raised stage placed in front of the students. Being physically elevated above the students in this manner reinforces the student versus tutor divide within the college. In the welcome meeting tutors explained the practicalities of college life, including the college rules. These were as follows:

- No healing or private readings to be conducted by students for each other outside of formal teaching hours.
- Students are not allowed to take photographs of the inside of the college without prior permission from college staff or tutors.
- Be quiet at night and have respect for other students sleeping.
- Sit with the same people at lunch times.
- No drinking in workshop venues.
- No smoking within the building.
- Students must book taxis the day before departure.
- Students must vacate rooms by 10.00am on day of departure.

Explaining the rules was combined with the tutors conducting entertaining introductions. Humour was clearly being used as an effective presentation method to build rapport with the students and / or as a 'coping mechanism' to deal with presenting to a large audience (Bolton, 2001). Explanation of the rules in this manner demonstrates that an admissions procedure was underway (Goffman, 1968). Tutors systematically took to the stage to introduce and emphasise the supportive nature and multi-cultural focus of the college. In this and future meetings, it was emphasised that students had travelled long distances (such as from Australia and China) to attend. Students were upbeat, appeared excited, and responded with cheer to introductions.

All these positive speeches served the purpose of enhancing the credibility of the college, making it special and distinct even from other spiritually-orientated contexts. It was clear that divisions were being made between the outside and the inside worlds, in the latter of which the institution was of primary importance.

After this session, a formal course-specific introductory talk occurred in a different room. Like the other room there was also a platform with lots of spiritual information on the walls. Sixty-five people were on the course in which I was participating. The course leader gave an entertaining introductory talk, amusing us by explaining how students and tutors frequently get lost within the building. The programme for the week was described. The course, she explained, is split up into four smaller groups, dependent on student abilities. The course leader informed us that the more times students attend the college the more quickly they develop mediumship skills.

As mentioned earlier, students are provided with a questionnaire upon arrival, which asks them about their mediumship abilities and experience. The tutors claimed that they would assess these questionnaires according to ability and then allocate students to the appropriate grouping. This selection process served to allow a reward system, in that those in higher ability groups were allowed to conduct private readings, thereby contradicting the rules stated in the introductory session. Allowing special privileges and rule breaking promotes conflict between those of lower and higher abilities. Conflict, as Goffman suggests, is essential for the tutors (authority figures) to stay in control (Goffman, 1968). I was unable to confirm how tutors selected their groups since I had limited access to staff practices.

In this group-specific introduction the course leader told us, the new students, about an encounter with a past student (tests of obedience). She recalled her previous encounter out loud as though she was partly talking to the student in question:

I said to him, 'right, if you're that good, give me a reading' (She laughs). They tend to back off. They kind of think, oh, this is going to be a hard nut to crack, and they kind of back out of it, and then they mellow down a little bit.

She was talking about a student who was very confident about the accuracy of their abilities, even when others disagreed with them. The course leader stated that having an ego is dangerous, especially when some think that they are better than others. Throughout the talks it was reiterated that students were not allowed to do private sittings without the supervision of tutors and that tutors take these matters seriously. Tutors stated that student monitoring occurs within tutor areas and the tutors cannot be deceived because of their extrasensory abilities, which they can use to uncover the truth. Tutors are claiming here that the thoughts of students are available to them at any time. This was clearly an important rule since it received so much emphasis. The course leader talked about a student last year who told an Australian student that a family member was going to die. The student was distraught throughout the entire course as she was unable to check this information. Ethical factors were being used to rationalise the rule's importance. If this story is true it also shows the extent of belief that students have or can develop whilst within the setting.

The final session, called the tutor's introduction, felt more intimate since all attendees were sitting in a circle. There are specific reasons, relating to the flow of energy, why practitioners sit in a circle. It became apparent that practices within the college could have hidden philosophical meanings for why things were done in certain ways. A female minister⁶⁹ opened the proceedings by welcoming everyone. In her sixties, she has been a medium for twenty years and she also teaches mediumship abroad. According to the college website, and the stories she told over the duration of the course, she has featured on television, has attracted widespread media attention for her abilities and travels extensively with her work. Wooffitt (2006) reports that mediums' biographies contain specific features (such as international travel, media coverage and celebrity clients) that are aimed at increasing perceptions of authenticity (e.g. having genuine abilities) and trustworthiness. I felt that the assertion of authenticity was the key focus for tutors and, when talking about their experience, students appeared impressed. These biographies all assisted in the persuasive nature of the course. It was understandable why students with an interest in the extrasensory would look up to the tutors.

⁶⁹ She has gained qualifications from the spiritualist church to conduct special duties such as special services, weddings and funerals. She was also the leader of the group to which I was allocated.

Within the introduction, tutors talked about the “flow of Spirit”, telling us that we should open our soul to them. They stated that the college was a “community of love” directed towards the “preserving of the Spirit”. Students were encouraged to enjoy their spiritual journey, to experience the “divine power”, and use both to open up their full potential. Tutors stated that students needed to free themselves from the materialistic world and get into the flow of Spirit. Moreover, they talked about our growth, the potential spiritual journey that we could go on, and the transformation that would take place while within the college. Tutors stated that there was nothing special about mediumship in that a medium is just a mediator between the next levels of existence. Yet tutors claimed that the existence of the college was a massive testament to the soul’s improvement. Again, the college was being presented as special. Tutors recommended that students, throughout the duration of the course, thank people for Spirit messages they may receive because effort is required to gain the information. Students were encouraged to be gentle with people, and not to worry about giving and receiving incorrect information, under their supervision. Within these latter introductions, significantly more spiritualist-orientated language and philosophy was used and many students already knew what these terms referred to, which suggested that they were being re-aculturated into the college. Clearly, there were relational expectations corresponding to successful displays of appropriate emotion, acts that maintain harmony and the expected social norms of the setting and also ones that relate to wider extrasensory work.

Tutors explained that the overall purpose of the course was to become more skilled, more settled with the energies, and to view and treat the college as a sacred space. Students were encouraged to carry out various rituals to ensure this progression (such as starting the day off well by sleeping soundly, eating a good breakfast and having time for personal reflection). Quiet time and calm behaviour were all seen as vital components of this sense of self. The course leader then emphasised that students should enjoy having no television at the college and to also limit mobile phone usage. Students are, therefore, encouraged to be more spiritually, rather than materialistically, minded. She stated that the aim for students should be to enjoy the peace and quiet of the institution and to open up the soul. She talked about working hard, emphasising that a medium is not good if they are not effectively communicating. This was a chance to develop, she asserted, and to practise on each

other under the guidance of tutors and during teaching hours only. She claimed that the power within the group was very important. Again, the rule of not conducting readings outside of formal teaching hours was asserted.

Tutors explained that a day's work within the college was equivalent to six week's work within other spiritualist development circles and training settings. Again, these accounts all function to make the setting the student's primary focus. Tutors present the college as the more knowledgeable domain where there are clear divides between it and the outside world. Divides, though, are not only created between materialism and the spiritual but also between the college (Spiritualism) and other Spiritualism / spiritualist contexts, between the mainstream and the specialized (when the tutor asserts the validity of mediumship over mainstream counselling) and between familial and spiritual (tutors claimed that people had a tendency to attend the college in secret for fear of familial repercussions). In this final session Spiritualism was again presented as the most knowledgeable and inclusive of all religions.

Reflections on the introductory procedure

Reflecting upon this descriptive account of the introductory procedure, I could see that speeches were positive, inspirational and persuasive. Students would mirror the tutor's body language while occasionally nodding their heads in agreement, which led me to the conclusion that they were being persuaded. The way that the introductory procedure was constructed was also persuasive. For instance, it is evident that throughout the three introductions the key focus is the same: a) the superiority of the college and staff is promoted; b) spiritual philosophy permeates talk; and c) the rule system is consistently reinforced. Having the three sessions within the introductory procedure initially gave me the impression that there would be a diversity of topics covered in each session. Nevertheless, it was evident that each session had the same focus that was simply being repeated. This repetition, I argue, is liable to mean that students were more likely to absorb the information; it also reflects the importance given to these themes by the college tutors.

Space constraints prevent me from discussing all of the elements of the course in depth; however, within the Appendices I provide an overview of what is involved in each of the course components. Meditations lasted for 45 minutes and acted as a

preparation for the talktorials. I often felt that my mind was clear and that I was relaxed and more focused after a meditation session. Students reported that they felt the same way. In this way students were being prepared to absorb the information within talktorials. Talktorials involved the tutor drawing upon spiritualist philosophy and their own reflections and advice on particular topics, talking about their career together with advising the students what they must and must not do. Some talktorials were more interactive than others. Often tutors selected specific students to demonstrate their extrasensory abilities in front of the large number of students.

Group sessions were smaller and segregated according to perceived ability; these involved further talks from tutors and some group work. Formal teaching ended after workshops, which were a more interactive form of a talktorial and often involved working in larger groups. Again, the promotion of spiritualist philosophy, the staff and the college were the key focus. There were also clearly hidden ways of behaving, codes of conduct and acting that students displayed during social activities (Wielder, 1974).

The college estate creates a secluded environment surrounded by nature for likeminded people to share experiences and learn skills. The formal introductory procedure and the elements of the course described here clearly focus upon the value of this supportive and atmospheric environment that presents itself as being expert driven. The college ethos creates barriers between the inside and outside world. Firstly, this is visibly evident through the secluded building in its own grounds, the weighty black door and the complex access procedure involving the holding and use of access codes to enter the college and having to enter through security desks after hours. There were also security cameras around the inside and outside of the building which allowed student monitoring. Secondly, tutors' numerous accounts focused on many divides (e.g. materialistic versus the spiritual, church versus college and so forth), where the college was presented more favourably. There is, though, more mobility for the students within this setting to interact with the outside world compared to other total institutions (such as prisons or hospitals). Nevertheless, leaving the college was difficult because of the structured nature of the course content. A midweek trip to the theatre was even focused on a spiritually-directed topic.

The college space is structured to maintain a divide between tutors and students. Foucault (1979) argues that the way institutions are designed, with specific divides, acts to assert visual psychological power over those members with less status. It was clear that the use of platforms, together with the overall college layout, emphasised the superior nature of the tutors. With staff being on the first floor there was no requirement for them to walk through designated student areas. However, students had to walk past tutor areas (to reach the teaching rooms) where there were visible 'Keep Out' or 'Strictly Tutors Area Only' signs. These served as visual reminders of the students' lower status within the setting.

I have shown how an admission procedure exists within the college through the use of the questionnaire (sharing of details), introductory procedure (explanation of rules) and the course leaders viewing overly-confident students in a negative way (tests of obedience⁷⁰). Sitting with the same people at lunch times, as a rule, makes the college experience feel repetitive. This rule was explained to students in a rational way, arguing that it avoided congestion within a small dining space. College life soon began to feel routine, and socialisation with the same students served to enhance these feelings. With the absence of external stimuli, such as television and smart phone usage, which was discouraged but not forbidden, it was clear to see how easily one could absorb the spiritualist ethos.

It was evident that the students who were given privileges were adept at presenting the personality of the Spirit they claimed to be connecting with. They appeared to have adopted a specific way of presenting this information that appeared familiar to watch: a presentation style that focused upon drawn-out personality characteristics. These privileges illustrated to students that other students were more skilled, and this, in turn, created conflict. One interviewee claimed this selection process was unfair and functioned so that tutors could retain their favourite students. Other students also spoke about these favourite students negatively.

It was during social time that it became evident that the privilege system of allowing excelling students to conduct readings as part of their assessments without the

⁷⁰ There were tests of obedience in that tutors were the ones who presented themselves as having the most powerful abilities within the setting. Anyone who asserted that they were correct when the tutor said differently was challenged.

supervision of the tutor was suspect. Firstly, there are no formal qualifications gained from attending these courses. Secondly, these readings were conducted on a sporadic basis so it was questionable as to whether constructive assessment was occurring. The combination of all of these factors, including the conflict discussed here, clearly impacts upon whether an individual is acculturated or re-acculturated into the college in that the obedient student may feel more accepted by the tutors.

Social construction of Spirit

The philosophy of Spirit

In this section I provide analysis of how belief in Spirit is socially constructed within the college setting, involving the promotion of philosophy and the adoption of promoted practices, specifically silence. This construction of Spirit begins with the promotion of specific reading that focuses primarily on the existence of energy or Spirit. It is known that belief in spirits and spiritualist experiences has occurred in diverse societies and historical periods. As previously stated the experiences of the Fox sisters prompted the official formation of the current spiritualist movement with the aim of proving the existence of continuous life. The college belongs to this spiritualist movement and thus this membership has pedagogic implications. Certain books related to belief in spiritualism, including a large number of Arthur Findlay's books, were promoted to the students throughout talktorials and group work by different tutors, indicating that the tutors were required to focus on a specific body of texts. The college also offers a tutor educational programme that incorporates a specific reading list, although I was unable to attain a copy of this. One's relationship with Spirit was key. Students would frequently discuss what literature they had read and this was the same literature as had been discussed within the course. The college library was visible for the students to see and the diversity of the books may have provided the perception to some that the college was freethinking. There was, however, no immediate access to the diverse range of books that were housed in the college library since access to them had to be prearranged. Literature that was promoted within sessions was readily available from the college bookshop – a practice that had financial implications for the college. In this sense, Spirit was a commodity within the setting.

Figure 5.2: Spiritualist language used specifically within the college

The flow of Spirit	refers to the experiences of giving information and 'becoming the spirit' through feeling their persona and embodiment.
Community of love	refers to the caring loving nature of spirit and the mediums within the college environment.
Preserving of the Spirit	refers to the continuous promotion of life after death and the presence of etheric substance, which Findlay's philosophy asserts.
Sitting in the power	a meditation technique where you connect with Spirit energy, not for the purpose of giving information to a client but rather for the student's progression to learn how to identify with Spirit.
Divine power	refers to energy as a whole which encompasses love and positivity.
Journey	does not imply a journey as in getting from A to B but rather a spiritual journey involving the multiple lives of the same soul that had lessons to learn.

The definitions in Figure 5.2 are based on my understanding of the terms through my observations and discussions with tutors and students. Such terms were used freely without explanation and, hence, I suspect there was assumption that both students and tutors would have an understanding of their meanings. Not all participants may agree with these definitions; nevertheless, I wish to illustrate here that there was specific language used within the college, which primarily promoted one's relationship with Spirit. The use of language in this setting acted to reinforce the students' belief in this energy. As previously stated the college was considered to be special and to have powerful energies because of its history, and the use of particular philosophy and language aided such perceptions.

Silence and its function

The practice of silence was frequently promoted within the college. One talktorial was focused on the topic and it was at the centre of much group work. Silences were promoted as an aid to open up the senses to prompt revelation from the self or Spirit. Students would often remain silent and calm or rather monk-like during social time.

This did not cause concern amongst other students but was viewed as a studious and valid way of being. Wooffitt (2006), in his research on the language of mediums and psychics, refers to the use of silence as a form of trouble management that mediums use when dealing with uncertain responses from sitters. The use of silence within the college setting was tied to the promoted philosophy of the college. It was a method that was used to apparently maintain contact or develop a more advanced relationship with Spirit. It had an interactional function, like Wooffitt's research, in that its use was about displaying a serious engagement with the college training to tutors and students.

Basso (1970: 225) explores the use of silence within Western Apache Culture. Silence, he reports, is used within this culture to uphold respect, especially during curing ceremonies involving medicine men who invoke supernatural powers. He suggests that it is a mechanism 'associated with social situations in which participants perceive their relationships [with] one another to be ambiguous and / or unpredictable' (ibid). His theories relate to what was happening within the college context in which silence had multiple functions. Withholding of talk within the college context is: a) a ritualised practice which acts to reinforce community solidarity; b) a way developing and convincing oneself of an individual connection with Spirit; c) a mechanism used to present an authentic link to Spirit and deal with uncertainty should authenticity not be accepted.

Listening to students displaying their extrasensory skills, I observed a common manner in which they relayed information. A tutor brought an advanced medium onto the stage to demonstrate. Her report of what she was receiving from Spirit is as follows:

As I was sitting there I was very much aware of a lady, now I know I've got quite a tall lady, I want to go, erm, 5'9", 5'10" with this lady. I know I've got a lady that was very slim throughout her life. I know that there was a cancerous condition because she actually has lost more weight and I feel the looseness in my clothes. I am also aware that this lady would be, I'm not sure of the relationship because I know she

was a grandmother, but I'm not feeling she was the person's grandmother here, erm, with this so.

This extract of talk was very drawn out in that the medium spoke slowly with long silences in between, which was typical of knowledge sharing within the college context. This fashion of relating implies that the student has a connection with the Spirit and is interpreting extrasensory information without giving out specific details about the deceased personality. The way students expressed this information often included pauses, silences and closing of the eyes to add dramatic effect, all of which served to suggest contact with Spirit. It was as though they had learnt standard performance techniques related to their assigned tutor's style within the college. A newcomer within the same session did not adhere to this scripted method but was encouraged to adopt this style by the tutor. In addition to the use of silence, Wooffitt (2006) highlights how such language usage can be persuasive even when using vague and ambiguous statements based on other subtle linguistic techniques.

Ritualistic, embodied and emotional experience

The college has a systematic way of constructing this belief in Spirit through reference to literature and language; additionally, this was reinforced through drawing on individual and collective experiences (e.g. through meditation, rituals and group work). The body and emotions are key to constructing belief in Spirit within the college. Tutors promote the opening of senses and getting to know one's body balance as ways to achieve increased awareness of spiritual matters. Students are taught that heightened awareness of the body is crucial. Meditation is a daily practice. There are various commonalities within meditative practice. There are requirements to focus on the tutor's voice, relaxing the body but not the mind, focusing on breath and visualisation of light. Each of the different colours experienced while meditating comprised meanings that are learnt through contact with spiritualist teachings and provided confirmation to the student that an authentic experience was occurring. However, individual adaptations to these meanings are encouraged. For instance, the colour purple may mean healing to one practitioner whereas to another blue may represent healing. White had the universal meaning of Spirit, and terms such as the 'white light of protection' were used. When experiencing these effects, and often

during group work, some students would report that a lot of effort was required, where straining the mind to experience the full effects of this energy prompts headaches and feelings of tiredness. Themes of significance were starting to arise in that experiences of unwanted affects assist practitioners in constructing their identity and authenticity, something I explore in the following chapter. Typically, though, following meditation, students expressed feelings of happiness and bliss. It was clear that meditation served as a ritualized practice to maintain this belief in energy and Spirit and to support Spiritualism's belief in the survival of the human soul following physical death. Again, arguably, meditation within the setting served to create a relaxed environment and served as an experiential technique through which students were more likely to accept further knowledge as truth.

Ethics, morals, values and the supportive nature of the college

Normalised moral and ethical ideals form the basis upon which individuals negotiate their interactions with others. Within the college setting, many rules were associated with spirituality, and the context and the practice of mediumship were promoted. One way of doing this was through the use of rituals. I have already referred to instances when students were encouraged to adopt good self-care (such as sleeping well, eating a good breakfast and personal reflection). Nevertheless, more direct rituals were promoted. One of the rituals promoted was called 'guardian angels', which involved finding significant objects for another student (whose name you were provided with during the introduction procedure) over the duration of the course. By its introduction, this normalised acts of consideration, being caring and giving. Moreover, this custom served the function of promoting ways of acting within the college wherein anyone who deviated from these norms by not conducting the ritual would be revealed as abnormal, uncaring and deviant.

Group dynamics were significant in the social construction of Spirit within the setting. Again, the identity of the "medium" was constructed within group work in unique ways. Within these sessions students would give others information that was said to be relayed through extrasensory means. However, much of this information was quite general in nature. There was acceptance that students were learning and a downplaying of any information that was not accepted by recipients, which all assisted

in the creation of a new identity and prevented dissociation from the college context. When correct information was given students would celebrate and boast, adding to perceptions that authentic experiences were occurring. Students would say things like: "Well, I must be a medium then!" In this sense, positive reinforcement was crucial to the development of the medium's identity. In contrast, the student who did not receive this feedback started to question her abilities.

Emotionality and disclosure within the college

A high level of emotionality was intrinsic to the college course. Talktorials were reflexively driven, during which disclosure and emotional expression was built into the fabric of training. Showing emotion was explicitly relevant within all talktorials. Within the first talktorial, the tutor relayed an emotional story about a boy who was plagued with guilt for accidentally killing his father. Within the second talktorial the tutor talked about an intimate meditative practice that assisted in releasing emotion to overcome a strained relationship she had with her father. The third talktorial was the most expressive, and in this session the beginner medium reportedly brought through the Spirit of the tutor's dead daughter. The tutor talked about not having any contact with his grandson following his daughter's death because being in his company was too painful. Following all of these expressions there were public displays of emotion where students, crying uncontrollably, claimed that they could relate to the stories told. I also felt emotional at these times.

Within discussions, students would share with me with ease their dire childhood experiences or social circumstances, providing knowledge that I would have not deemed appropriate to share with strangers. It was clear then that this expression was providing the students with a framework to license a particular construction of self as a compassionate, emotionally-expressive individual. Wooffitt and Gilbert (2006) found demonstrations of mediumship to be primarily emotional experiences where public displays of cathartic release are expected. The fact that expression is built into mediumistic training suggests that emotionality can be socially produced and not accidental.

Nevertheless, despite emotionality being built into the fabric of training, mediums were said to be overly sensitive to the world of Spirit and human emotion. A tutor explained how she would get so emotionally involved with the client that she would cry herself. It was asserted that mediums would need to learn protective methods to deal with this emotionality otherwise the medium would be emotionally affected themselves and unable to cope. Seeing how emotionality functioned within this setting provided me with knowledge about the identity work and emotion management of practitioners. Spirit was presented as something that needs to be managed. The students are, therefore, taught techniques so that they can take charge of their own experiences. In this sense, the college could be seen as empowering the students.

The college and the extrasensory practitioner

In this chapter, I have explored the college setting to examine it as a process of socialisation and possible identity transformation for those who attend the course. In what follows, I highlight two key findings in relation to this process: challenges to the student's sense of self and phenomenological exposure.

Challenges to the student's sense of self

I have shown how the six features I selected from Goffman's (1968) work apply to the college practices leading to the socialisation of and identity transformation of the individuals entering it. Applying Goffman's theories to the college has not only highlighted the college's socialisation process but it has also shown the college as having the ideal physical and philosophical conditions for identity transformation. It has shown how the college environment has the ability to impact upon student identity in unique and very persuasive ways.

During the introductory sessions and talktorials references were made to a transformation that would take place while at the college and that students would be different upon leaving. It was apparent from interviews and observations that some students had become attached to the tutors and college. Only forty students were new to the college out of a total of one hundred and fifteen, meaning almost two thirds of the students had previously attended the college.

An interviewee confirmed that he had attended the college eight to ten times per year. It was clear by talking to him that he had absorbed the college ethos. For instance, he had limited contact with other students so he could privately sit in silence for Spirit. He was quite open about his attachments to specific tutors. Within his life he explained to me that he had disconnected from friends that were not spiritually minded. When not at the college he spent most of his spare time participating within three different spiritualist churches and taking part in other mediumship courses. He consulted with Spirit over mundane daily decisions. This student told me he was suffering from depression and often experienced conflict with other college members that would upset him.

It is difficult to assess the identity transformation of every student. However, three other students, including two academics and a business executive, told me that they had left their previous careers to explore more spiritually-orientated goals. There were indications that the students were adopting and acting out the spiritualist philosophy by being a practitioner and not just a student. This was evident throughout much interviewing when students would state that Spirit had wanted them to talk to me to assist with my research. This highlights that the students were creating a distance from the self and becoming increasingly involved with Spirit. Conflict, nevertheless, either encouraged further involvement with the college or caused the student to be dissatisfied with their self. For instance, the student who expressed frustration to me about the selection process confided in me that she had lost confidence in her mediumship and her extrasensory abilities were not as strong as they used to be. After formal group work she would state that she was not enjoying the experience as she had previously done. She explained this in terms of being paired with the fun and confident individuals. Since she perceived the louder individuals as getting the most attention she would frequently complain, calling them attention seekers and people who would prevent her from getting the support she needed.

The setting draws upon unique spiritualist-orientated philosophical teachings that underpin all the sessions and practices within the college, which not only encourages new students to alter their previous identity ('extrasensory curious'⁷¹ into student then practitioner), but also challenges their whole sense of self. The college urges

⁷¹ A term I have created.

them to adopt a specific ontological view of the world. It also provides them with details of the expected social norms, morals and values they should reflect upon if they become practitioners. Students were told that they had a moral obligation to be reflexive, often reflecting upon childhood memories or the body to release pent-up emotion. Tutors asserted that everyone has to then offer the best to Spirit and to the client. This reflexivity acted as a code of conduct based upon increased awareness of the self. Practitioners needed to have understanding of the potential dangers of changing clients' beliefs; they needed to be sensitive, to guard their words, as well as being non-judgemental and showing empathy and compassion. These are clearly interpretative practices. Students were being encouraged to modify their previous self and adopt this new spiritual sense of self. Returning students showed that they were 'spiritually consumed'⁷², given that many had disengaged from their previous occupations and friends. Meditation practices and group dynamics function to enhance the overall student experience and adoption of the promoted philosophy.

Phenomenological exposure

I have shown how the sharing of details occurred through the questionnaires, the selection process and the allocation of groups. Physical exposure is when the inmate is in a situation that forces social relationships (such as they might be subjected to inadequate living facilities). I have also shown how physical exposure occurred within the college through the students having limited autonomy over group placements, sharing living accommodation and meal times with others. There were frequent complaints expressed about the sharing of accommodation during conversations with students. Some stated that they were sleep deprived and that it was affecting their anticipated positive experience of the college. Interpersonal exposure incorporates ongoing conduct evaluation, lack of privacy and constant anxiety of rule breaking. Interpersonal exposure occurred within the college in key ways: a) through the living facilities and the lack of privacy; b) declaration and anxiety of the rule system.

In this setting, however, a fourth area of contaminate exposure existed that I have termed 'phenomenological exposure', which was used to uphold the rule system. As previously stated, tutors would frequently assert that no private readings were

⁷² A term I have created.

allowed and students would often make reference to this rule. Phenomenological exposure involves tutors within this setting publically claiming to have extrasensory access to the thoughts of their students. Tutors state that they cannot be deceived because of their extrasensory abilities and would use this to claim to know if someone had conducted a reading without permission as part of the reward system.

More experienced practitioners stated that they had protection methods to prevent this mind reading. Having preventative measures meant that the risk of being observed was taken seriously but was also linked to perceived ability. Students who were new to this kind of (supposed) monitoring may also have limited ways of seeking to prevent this access to their mind. The environment, therefore, is additionally persuasive because even the thoughts of the students are allegedly not free from surveillance. Spirit was also presented by tutors as having the power to remove extrasensory ability from those who were deviant or unethical. There was a constant anxiety regarding rule breaking. Nevertheless, some students were deviant. One student, during our interview, proceeded to provide me with extrasensory advice outside of teaching hours. However, this advice was carefully presented using abstractions rather than assertions. Discussion with other individuals and groups that congregated in the college grounds confirmed that this providing of extrasensory knowledge that went against the formal rules was a frequent occurrence.

Through examining structure and constraints and then the social construction, language and management of Spirit, I have illustrated how persuasive and influential the college may be to those who enter it. It is a place with its own norms, rules and language that only an insider would be able to grasp. It is persuasive in many ways. Nevertheless, I have also shown how students may experience the environment as uplifting and supportive and a place with which they form an affiliation and at which they choose to complete further training. This chapter has wider relevance in that it shows how the actions of practitioners are often influenced by the beliefs, methods and values of institutions within spiritualist and esoteric subcultures. I hope it has provided some insight into the worlds I entered when researching this thesis.

Chapter 6

The Social Construction of Practitioners' Authenticity

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss findings relating to the social construction of practitioners' authenticity. It is documented in extrasensory research that practitioners primarily seek to prove their authenticity in interaction with others by providing proof of their contact with Spirit (Wooffitt, 2006). I here discuss how authenticity for the practitioner is a complex issue relating to the practitioner's identity work and notion of self.

In this chapter I describe the following strategies that I identified through my interviews with practitioners. These key findings include emphasizing innate abilities (e.g. childhood experiences), significant happenings, channeling Spirit (e.g. spirit guides, embodying Spirit, meditation), channeling different types of information, third-person accounts and down-playing their own involvement to suggest a strong connection to Spirit.

I also discuss how practitioners speak, or give impressions, about the speed and the quality of the extrasensory information so as to emphasize that their job is difficult and expert-driven. If the extrasensory information is unclear or irrelevant practitioners often attribute this to illness. In this sense I explore how those within the esoteric subculture hardly ever question Spirit; it is only practitioners' abilities and health that are ever in doubt. Client responses to information provided by practitioners are explored and illustrate how clients co-construct an authentic experience of Spirit.

Overall, I will show how 'authentic (spiritual) selfhood' is central to extrasensory work. Spirituality and esoteric philosophy are key to how notions of the self develop. I also explore the significant role of Spiritualism in the construction of authenticity and how spiritualist settings recruit people into practicing extrasensory work more formally within a group setting, which results in the individual being convinced that

they have extrasensory abilities. I explore how, within such contexts, the notion of the spiritual self is frequently played out (e.g. through the management of ego) and I reflect on reported identity change.

'Authentic (extra-sensory) abilities' and 'Authentic (spiritual) selfhood'

When I interviewed practitioners and observed and participated in the subculture they spoke to me about two different types of authenticity. I have called the first type 'authentic (extrasensory) abilities,' which entails the practices used by practitioners to construct their extrasensory abilities as genuine. This is the notion of authenticity that is more widely discussed (and debated) in extant literature. For example, Wooffitt (2006: 17) states that:

A medium's authenticity rests on the acceptance that some aspect of the human personality survives death; and that he or she can communicate with the dead and relay information to the living, either through direct communication with the spirits of the dead or via an intermediary Spirit guide. And other kinds of psychic practitioners require that we accept that a person can interact with or acquire information about the world through means other than the normal five senses.

Wooffitt's definition resonates with practices that I observed repeatedly in the interviews I conducted; practitioners would, in a variety of ways, seek to convince me about the truth and extent of their extrasensory abilities. For example, practitioners would tell me about times when clients had given them positive feedback, saying how the information provided to them was correct⁷³. Authenticity is, I argue, crucial to how the practitioners present themselves *to others* through language. However, in this chapter I also illustrate that practitioners are highly reflexive about their abilities. It is not only that they seek to convince others of their authenticity, but that it goes in both directions: convincing others that they are genuine as well as convincing themselves. This chapter extends previous literature by showing how practitioners work to reassure not only the outside world, but also themselves, that their connection with

⁷³ It is important to note that these are secondary accounts.

Spirit is genuine. For example, I argue that, through the act of conveying their 'success stories', the practitioners were not only constructing themselves as genuine but also reinforcing their own view of themselves.

Practitioners draw upon a variety of techniques to do this identity work, and clients also help practitioners to reinforce their view of themselves as authentic. I explore these mechanisms in this chapter. While authors like Wooffitt (2006) take an agnostic stance on such matters, they infer that authenticity (within the restrictions of the definition above) is a primary motivator for the practitioner and that their interactions are driven by it. However, as I argue within the following discussion, authenticity is not always about the acceptance of the truth of abilities. I have called the second type of authenticity that practitioners discussed with me, 'authentic (spiritual) selfhood'. This entails being true to oneself, which is partly about living a truly spiritual life. The two types of authenticity can work in tandem because it is also the case that claims to an 'authentic (spiritual selfhood)' can work to bolster perceptions of authentic (extrasensory) abilities because practitioners can use claims of living a spiritual life as a way of setting themselves apart from others (especially other mediums, who might thereby be positioned as less authentic).

This second category of authenticity became apparent through exploring the reported experiences of practitioners from an emotions framework. I explored the identity work that practitioners conducted, but in relation to their own reflections of emotion management. I exposed how authenticity is far more complex than suggested thus far in existing literature. This was significant because the practitioners' own reflexivity resonated with Hochschild's (2003) view of the authentic self. She argues that, within a work context, one's relationship with the authentic self is under a constant state of construction. Alienation from one's true self can occur due to excessive relational demands. The management of the emotions and body within the workplace can lead, Hochschild suggests, to the permanent shaping and transforming of identities and bodies. Hochschild has been criticised for positing the existence of an authentic self without clearly defining of what that authentic self consists. This has been debated throughout the literature concerning emotion (Theodosius, 2006), where some argue there is no such thing as the authentic self and that identity is constantly under

construction. This chapter will contribute to that debate, with a specific focus on extrasensory practitioners.

The main argument of this chapter is that authenticity is not simply about the practitioner wanting to convince others that their abilities are real. During my interactions with participants they described authenticity as something inward, to do with their awareness of their own **core** identity. This type of authenticity has consequences for the way the practitioners (say they) interact with others. The practitioners spoke about being altruistic; acting with compassion and sensitivity; trusting in the guidance of Spirit; and being true to their true self, feelings and spiritual development. This led me to study these beliefs and desires but also to question how they may be socially constructed within a spiritualist framework. I was interested in whether the practitioners were creating or interacting in accordance with common feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983). In this way one could argue that the authentic self was authentic only within this framework.

Authenticity in both its forms determines how practitioners construct their identities and vocationally manage themselves and their interactions. How authenticity is managed and presented also determines how successfully these displays are received. The client reinforces the abilities of the practitioner but ethical issues are often a concern for the practitioner.-Within the following discussion I will examine how, for the practitioner, these notions of authenticity are linked to the construction of identity and emotion management.

Type 1: Authentic (extrasensory) abilities: Constructing one's abilities as genuine (both for others and self)

Presenting oneself as having authentic extrasensory abilities is how practitioners convince themselves and others that such abilities are genuine. Within the following sections I explore how practitioners reflect on their childhood experiences of Spirit to acknowledge that they have innate talent and thus superior abilities. I explore the ways in which practitioners channel Spirit. For example, practitioners construct authenticity through their relationship with Spirit guides, by embodying Spirit and through the different types of Spirit information that is communicated to the client

and the way in which it is relayed. This information acts as proof of Spirit communication and I will explore this in depth. I then explore how clients co-construct authenticity with the practitioner; clients are, therefore, not neutral receivers of information and do have a role. I explore two strategies that practitioners use to emphasise authenticity to others (e.g. through using third-person accounts and communicating with Spirit without knowing how they are doing so). I explore how the practices within Spiritualism and professionalization assist the practitioner in believing that they have extrasensory abilities. Finally I will explore how meditation is likely to reinforce practitioners' overall belief in Spirit.

Innate talent (or gift)

Constructing extrasensory ability as a gift, rather than something that is learnt, is part of displaying these abilities as genuine. One common form of evidence of having an innate gift was reporting childhood abilities / experiences. During the interviews I conducted with practitioners they would often refer to childhood experiences, like seeing dead relatives or having imaginary friends, which were episodes said to have occurred around the ages of three to five years old. Kate, for example, explains how she has always had predictive skills and a strong relationship with Spirit and that she used to talk to her late granddad when she was three years old. She explains:

I always knew when things were going to happen and I always had a very strong relationship with spirits, now, we'll probably say Spirit guides, but I also had my late grandfather who died when I was three, but he started to communicate and he started coming, you know, coming to me, so he was one of my very first influences.

Alice also recalls a third-person account from her mother that she had similar childhood experiences around the same age as Kate. She explains:

There would be a little bit of clairvoyance going on I think in my childhood. There were things I remember which I think all children do like having imaginary friends. I remember the

names I was coming out with 'cause my mum would ask me whom I was talking to. This is going back to when I was about three and four, and she always used to tell me stories about how she would ask me about who my friends were and I would give the names of a relative in the family who had gone to Spirit a few years ago. I found that I was even getting second names as a child, which I can't remember doing, but it's stories that my mum has told me, and she used to tell me these stories before I even became spiritually aware. I've had it since early childhood without realising what it was really.

Kate is self-assured in that she claims to remember the communications she had with her late granddad. However, Alice is constructing her sense of self through what her mother has told her. She believes, then, that since early childhood she has been able to communicate with the dead without understanding what the nature of this communication was. This is an important point. It bolsters her claim that this is an innate talent; in other words, she had not yet read, trained or learnt these things, so not only are they innate but they must also be real as they have not been created by external influences. In stating that her mother would share these stories with her before she was spiritually aware, there is a suggestion that her mother had no ulterior motive in sharing these memories with her. Moreover, her acceptance of them helps Alice to construct her own identity as having innate rather than learnt abilities. In building this as a third-person account, which I explore soon in more depth, she lends credibility to her claims – it is something that was observed by another person and not just based on her memory, which could be flawed.

These types of childhood accounts are one of the rhetorical strategies participants used to demonstrate their authenticity to me; yet they also function so that the practitioner can develop their own extrasensory identity. When Kate talks about her childhood experiences, she refers to the strength of them; within the subculture, strong innate abilities are viewed as superior to those that have to be learnt. Practitioners claim that extrasensory abilities can be developed by anyone and there are many books and courses that can help. In this sense, by suggesting that their abilities are innate, practitioners can seek to set themselves apart from other people.

This can be from others with no such abilities as well as from those who have had to learn them.

Alice talks about receiving second names, which could be considered as Spirit interacting with her on an advanced level. I have rarely witnessed in demonstrations of mediumship the giving of second names to the client (see the following section on types of information). When Alice claims: "I've had it since early childhood without realising what it was really", this suggests that she has or is still within a process of constructing or coming to terms with herself having extrasensory abilities (e.g. she did not ask for these abilities and in real time did not know what they were) since it is something of which she later became aware. Practitioners spoke about why it was not until later in life that they started to construct an extrasensory identity, in many cases because parents were often concerned about them having these experiences. Many claimed they were made to repress them until they had the free will to develop them later in life.

Other practitioners who did not have childhood experiences still recall a significant point in which they became aware of these abilities, normally following a significant life event or trauma (such as a health issue or bereavement). Some people might only recognize these skills later in life, whereas Kate talks as if she always knew. Having these abilities as a child offers a way for practitioners to claim enhanced authenticity, and spiritual awareness and superiority. Practitioners often referred to their extrasensory abilities as 'gifts'. A gift is traditionally known to be something that is given (or innate / natural). Using this term not only distinguishes them from other mainstream advice providers but it also suggests that they are in some way special. It delivers the impression that they have been specifically chosen. Indeed, many practitioners told me that they feel it is a privilege for them to have these abilities.

The practitioner as a 'channel' for Spirit

Practitioners have many ways of asserting authenticity, which involves channelling Spirit. This channelling comes in the following forms: having a Spirit guide; embodiment (experiencing physical effects, e.g. of a heart attack – that serves as evidence to present to the client; feeling cold, for example, could act as evidence to the

self that one is truly in contact with Spirit); meditation (ritualized practices which sometimes involves channelling Spirit⁷⁴); managing information and, finally, downplaying one's 'involvement' in order to present a true source (e.g. the practitioner does not know where it comes from or how they make the connection, it simply happens to them, which implies that the experience is authentic).

1. A practitioner's relationship with Spirit guides

Many of the practitioners claimed that they had a Spirit guide or a team of people in the Spirit world working with them. Participants described Spirit guides as progressed souls helping them with the technicalities of their mediumship, with life lessons the participant personally had to learn, and with developing the universe to be more spiritual. On the training courses I attended, students were encouraged (as one of the basic methods of extrasensory development) to develop awareness of who their Spirit guide or team were through meditation practices and sitting in silence to feel the presence of the guide or team.

Kathleen explained to me that it does not matter what age, ethnicity or gender the Spirit guide or team are. She asserts that there is a risk that it can prevent practical and spiritual development when students adopt the persona of the Spirit guide / team. This suggests that there is a concern that engaging with a Spirit guide can alter the identity of the practitioner, especially when they begin to adopt the characteristics of that person. This tutor told me that some practitioners start to dress and live their life in a way the guide would.

Having a Spirit guide brings a third person or a team into the interaction and decreases the (reported) responsibility of the practitioner⁷⁵. Jasmine, for example, states:

I can only get what my people talk about to your people that's
the only things I can give you, I can't make... start making things

⁷⁴ Meditation appears to be a practice to reinforce belief in Spirit as a way of experiencing something.

⁷⁵ Ethical factors are often what motivate interaction and will be discussed further within subsequent analytical chapters.

up and if that's what they expect then I can't do and I won't do that.

Jasmine is claiming that her Spirit guides are talking to the client's dead relatives and she can only give the client what she is given. Again, I would suggest that this is a means of claiming authenticity – that it is not that the practitioner is 'making up' the information she is giving to the client, but rather that she is a mere conduit for what the (authentic) Spirit guides have transmitted to her. It depends on whether the client accepts what the practitioner is claiming as to whether it increases the practitioner's authenticity. It implies that they have not created their skills but rather that transmission of the information has been made possible by the third person in the Spirit world.

Throughout my interactions in the subculture, practitioners reported having (or showed) an immense amount of trust in their Spirit guides and often used to proclaim the correctness of their guide when a client would challenge them. This is, potentially, a powerful strategy for countering such a challenge: if people think that the information is coming from a higher force then they may be less likely to believe that the information could be false. If the practitioner's authenticity is challenged, s / he can state that it has come from the team or guide. Regardless of belief, there is no way for those without extrasensory abilities to check this advice other than consulting with additional extrasensory practitioners.

II. *The practitioner embodying Spirit*

During the interviews practitioners would frequently talk to me about how when receiving extrasensory information it could impact upon their bodies in numerous ways. Two distinct types of bodily impact were described to me. Firstly, there were experiences of being able to feel or experience the message that was meant for the client, so if the deceased person died of a heart attack the practitioner could feel the heart attack and then be able to relate this information to the client. Exploring this component leads to exploring how the extrasensory practitioner stages himself or herself as authentic. Secondly, there were bodily experiences that acted as self-

confirmation of the authenticity of Spirit to the practitioner, or of the practitioner's own abilities to communicate with them.

It is evident that practitioners have presentation styles that they adhere to within their work⁷⁶. This discussion is restricted for now to how the practitioners present themselves in relation to authenticity. It is indicative that bodily experiences leave a lasting impact on the practitioner, especially when they can relay at ease the details of these experiences years later. Sarah explains:

We had a tape recorder on and I just went completely paralysed. I had terrible pains in the side of my head and I said, it's John, here, your husband. I said, I've got a brain tumour here and I said, he had a stroke, and, I was completely paralysed, you know, like this. I get all the physical - I can't understand how they do this to me. Not a lot of people are like me. If I have somebody's granddad coming through, I'll get, like, an amputation and I'll see the wheelchair and I'm going, can you give us my leg back please?! [Laughing] It's, like, weird because I've got no leg. I don't mind heart attacks, they're quick, I get, like, a sharp pain there. They can be there for a while, they can be there for a couple of minutes, it can be there for five minutes, all depends how strong the person is that's coming through. If I get a cancer symptom, which is, like, the cancer symptoms I get, like, a burning sensation, what'll happen is it'll pinpoint on my body where it is. So, I had a lady the other day and I was, ooh, take it off me, will you, it's too strong, bowel cancer and I'll hear them say, bowel cancer, you know, like that. I've had all sorts when I think about it. It's just weird and amazing how they can put it on to us, you know, I've even seen me blind.

Sarah talks about how she experiences a pain and, dependent upon the location of this pain, she is then able to advise the client as to what caused the death of the Spirit with

⁷⁶ *I explore this in the next chapter.*

whom she is in communication. She is giving me an example of a health condition that she has heard from Spirit. In doing this she is offering me further evidence of a connection to Spirit. Within the esoteric subculture, hearing spirit is thought of as an advanced skill. When I questioned practitioners about the Spirit voices they experienced, they would often describe that it was their own inner voice that they were hearing, not a different voice, but that they knew it is coming from Spirit. They often knew the source was Spirit as it was as though Spirit was embodying them; it had a different sensory quality and they were able to distinguish between their own thoughts and that of Spirit. I discuss the qualities of what I have termed “Spirit emotion” in the following analytical chapters. This practitioner, however, claimed to hear a different voice to that of her own.

When Sarah states that she uses a tape recorder, it works as a rhetorical practice to increase believability. The tape recorder has this effect because it implies the experience could be revisited on tape and that the practitioner is not lying. When she claims, “not a lot of people are like me”, it shows that she has constructed herself as having special abilities. The strength and intensity of the experiences are significant here and the unpredictability of such experiences presents the practitioner as passive. These are all ways in which she is presenting Spirit as powerful and by which she is asserting her authenticity to me as the interviewer. When she states, “I get all the physical - I can’t understand how they do this to me”, this is similar to not having understood her childhood experiences. Again, the “I can’t understand” seems to function as a subtle ‘inoculation’ against any kind of claim that the practitioners are generating such experiences themselves.

These bodily experiences are also instrumental in a consultation with a client. Sophie explains:

I’ll ask them a question, I’ll say, you know, did your grandfather have a chest condition, because I’m feeling as though I’m having a bit of a chest pain myself. Symptoms that usually come to me I will share it with them. It does influence the reading, but luckily it doesn’t have any long-term effect with me after

I've stopped. The pain will go away as soon as it comes, it normally lasts seconds really.

Physical experiences are described to the client and act as evidence that they are in contact with their relative. The client only has the medium's claim to have experienced the symptom (except in cases where there's some other kind of bodily display). It provides the client with a different type of practical evidence. I will discuss how practitioners manage these experiences as part of their emotion management in subsequent chapters. This may impact upon how these experiences are displayed to the client and in turn how authenticity is perceived. This is, however, speculative and the focus of this chapter is on the detail of the rhetorical work by practitioners.

However, Amelia suggests that these experiences can be multi-sensory to the extent that the practitioner relives the death of the Spirit with whom she, or her Spirit guide, is communicating. She explains:

If they've hung themselves it's a tightness I get around my neck, that's when I know it's like that, because I go oh, and I can't breathe. If it's that, I feel as though they're turning my arms round so I know it's like that. I tell you what I had a few months ago was somebody who gassed themselves in a car. So I get the petrol fumes, I get smells through. Oh, and I've just been shown a car and I can see them sitting inside the car doing it. So I get all these pictures and I'll say I've got your uncle here and he's just told me...we're going back about 20 year ago when he took his own life, he gassed himself in the car and oh god!

These accounts are being presented as having real experiential value for the practitioner. Another practitioner, Kerry, explains how such embodied experience can impact physically on the client.

I said the name, that battle frenzy that I was experiencing shot across the room, almost in a visible form, shot Stuart in the chest and Stuart was on the floor, crying his eyes out, in

seconds, because that power had gone from me, as the receiver of it and the energy just shot across the room to him.

This practitioner describes a collective experience between her and her client. They also claim they are passive and have no control over this experience. Passivity is a rhetorical strategy used to increase authenticity. The practitioner here uses the word 'power', which she claims is Spirit energy that she felt but then which travelled from her to the client. She infers that something was felt and experienced physically by the client (e.g. a pain in the chest). If the client did experience this it would perhaps act as additional experiential proof of communication with Spirit. Additionally, here the practitioner has had a collective experience, where this increases perceptions of her ability to interact with Spirit in a meaningful way. When I was a student observer within a college I experienced these collective experiences and this had, for a period of time, a significant impact on perceptions of authenticity for me. At the very least the above account suggests how the practitioner has interpreted the client's emotionality (e.g. crying his eyes out) as an embodied experience based on her own extrasensory experiences.

Finally, as explained previously, there was a second distinct type of bodily experience described to me. This second type involved bodily experiences that acted as self-confirmation of the authenticity of Spirit to the practitioner or of the practitioner's own abilities to communicate with them. This suggests that whatever practitioners are experiencing there is uncertainty, and so they seek and welcome confirmation and that embodied forms of confirmation are effective.

Lottie explains how experiencing an icy feeling down her back gave her confirmation that she was communicating with Spirit.

So, if something is very strong, with a lot of emotion attached to it, then, that, for me, is, you know, wow! And, I get cold, I get this icy feeling down the back of me, then, I know that, you know, I'm on a winner.

This implies that practitioners do question their own abilities as being authentic experiences but when they feel a sensation, such as coldness, this serves to provide the practitioner with physical evidence for their phenomenological experiences. Participants showed a preference for powerful experiences as it confirmed for them that they were connecting with Spirit rather than simply with their imagination.

As well as feeling the Spirit through sensation and pain the practitioners I interviewed would also experience smells and tastes. Tracy describes a time when walking into her bedroom: "I walked into a really cold clammy cloud of perfume. And logically I couldn't make out how, or what, it was at all but the perfume was like a real mix of roses, lilac, lavender, violets. It was quite old fashioned". These types of sensory experiences help practitioners to construct their worldview that Spirit is always around. It not only reinforces their belief in a Spirit world but also provides them with a sense of support and guidance.

III. Types of Spirit (channelled) information

There are different types of information that practitioners claim to have received from Spirit that act as strategies to reinforce authenticity to the client. I have established three types of channelled information within the data: public information, sensitive information and unclear / irrelevant information.

Practitioners often explained to me that they had access to high-profile knowledge (often linked to criminal investigations) to which others did not have access. Kerry, for example, claims to have information relating to a high-profile missing child case. She states the following:

They actually show me pictures. I mean of [name of high-profile missing child] and I could go on a plane next week and show them that she's been passed over a long time. They said yesterday there were signs of her in India - I went: 'What a load of rubbish!' But I tell you something, there's a lot the mam and dad are hiding.

The only way that she would have access to this information is through her apparent extrasensory abilities, which she infers are better than the methods that are used by those carrying out criminal investigations. Through providing such information to me she is reasserting her status as an individual who possesses exceptional abilities that she claims have significant benefits to society and are more advanced than law enforcement. During interviews, practitioners claimed that they often had access to a range of information that, according to them, they could not have possibly known by means other than from Spirit. Knowing such public knowledge through Spirit is another mechanism used to enhance authenticity.

Participants believe that they have to manage the information they receive from Spirit to be sensitive to the client, who may have experienced difficult life circumstances. This awareness on the part of the practitioner links to: 1) the construction of spiritual identity through empathy and compassion; 2) the management of authenticity. As Sally illustrates:

Even if I'm doing the platform⁷⁷ I'll always try and get a feeling for someone, if somebody looks a bit, sort of, let's say it's their first time, I'll be more gentle with them. And you'd just be a bit more sensitive with them, and I think it's the case, and see it is a big responsibility because whatever messages I give people it could be quite damaging to them really.

This signifies the internalisation of beliefs linked to the spiritualist domain and of ethical awareness of how the information they provide can impact upon what is presented to their clients. Consulting from within an ethical framework also means that it is acceptable for the practitioner to be vague. If they claim that they are being sensitive to the client this validates their ambiguity and makes their authenticity more difficult to challenge. The above quotation also suggests that there are differences in the way that platform work is conducted compared to other readings where the practitioner may not need to be on show.

⁷⁷ A platform is another term for a raised area, normally at the front of a spiritualist church. This is where the practitioner stands to display their communications with the Spirit world to the other churchgoers.

Practitioners explained to me that the advice they provide could have an effect on the recipient. Brooke illustrates the serious nature of readings.

If I've touched on something within someone, like especially if it's child abuse or rape or something like that then, depending on how that person has dealt with it up to that point, it could be something absolutely soul destroying. It's going to leave them in a vulnerable position, where they might turn to addictions or some kind of self-harming or that sort of thing. So you need to be aware that what you're saying could be detrimental to someone. They might be fine when they're sitting in front of you, but as soon as they get home, they might they could do something. And I'm not willing to risk that person's life over something I've said, without backing it up.

This practitioner is suggesting that she is still willing to give information that could be detrimental but that making the message meaningful to the client will lessen the potentially negative effects. Brooke refers to the need to back it up. Backing it up relates to the presentation of authenticity and to providing the client with a meaningful message that must have been gained through extrasensory means. Therefore, the authentic source (e.g. Spirit) is more likely to provide truthful information and thus have a lesser impact upon the client.

Within face-to-face interviews, practitioners would occasionally pause and be silent mid conversation, similar to what I experienced in the college. Again, Wooffitt (2006) refers to the use of silence as a form of trouble management that mediums use when dealing with uncertain responses from sitters to enhance perceptions of authenticity. Silence was used during these interviews in a comparable way. The practitioners were not providing me with a demonstration of mediumship, so, in this sense, there was no urgency for them to draw upon linguistic techniques. However, the practitioners still appeared to want to convince me of their authenticity as an extrasensory practitioner. The practitioner used silence as a way to suggest that they were waiting for a response from Spirit and / or that the information was unclear and needed the practitioner as

the expert to interpret it. In doing this, practitioners were confirming that they had a consistent link with Spirit and that Spirit was helping practitioners with the interview.

Silence was not restricted to interviews but was repeatedly promoted within training settings. By creating a joint belief in connection with Spirit, the withholding of talk was a ritualised practice which helped to increase solidarity. The use of silence was clearly less of an interactional response but was tied to the promoted philosophy within such settings as a method to build a relationship with Spirit. However, it was also used as a way of dealing with the uncertain nature of the environment where mediums were competing for status and authenticity. Practitioners would remain silent, calm or rather monk-like, which some may perceive as looking more studious and thus like a more advanced practitioner. Clients expressed that practitioners often provided them with unclear or irrelevant information but that they often gave the practitioner the impression that they were correct. They did this so that a link with Spirit, which they believed in, could be maintained. In this sense the clients reinforce the practitioner's belief in their abilities based on their own beliefs and not on the direct accuracy of the information that is being provided.

Clients explained to me that they would receive information that was not relevant to them directly. Grace explains:

My husband and I had gone and had separate readings, and he was having a reading with someone and all of a sudden in my reading, which was meant to be for me, his grandfather had meant to come through and gave loads of information, because he couldn't get through on the other one [laughing] and I just felt like all the information was for him but not for me [laughing]. So I was a bit miffed as far as that was concerned [laughing].

Grace suggests that at some point during the interaction she interpreted that the information with which she was being provided was not for her. Clients then find relevance within their family, often having a large data source from which they can draw, and fit the information that is being provided to them by the practitioner. With

this type of co-construction between practitioner and client it is very difficult for the practitioner to be shown to be wrong. It is likely then that the practitioner will internalise perceptions of authenticity and convince others. A client, Sam, explains that:

I've always been quite, sort of, truthful, so if someone comes through to me, or sometimes to get a bit more detail I've said, yes ⁷⁸because I haven't quite thought hang on a minute I need some more details here. If I had said no straightaway I'd have felt that they might have dropped it. So I've gone yes, because a part of my mind is trying to work out who it might be, or what the information might be about. But normally I have said yes, more at the beginning to try and get them to explain a bit more of what they're picking up.

Sam explains that she is also providing the practitioner with incorrect acceptance that the information is correct, in the hope that the medium will provide relevant information later. This highlights a mis-match between the real belief that the information is incorrect and the action of saying it is correct. It shows that often one cannot take at face value what the client is accepting as authentic. Sam believes so strongly that the practitioner is in contact with Spirit that she is patient enough to wait for further information.

Proof for the client that the information originates from Spirit

Practitioners have different perspectives on what they class as evidence (depending on sensory skill used). Amelia explains:

It's a very different sort of feeling. So someone leaving from a Spirit reading will be saying, 'It was wonderful, I know my grandma was here'. If I've been successful, that's what they'll be saying. If they're going away from a successful psychic reading, it will be, 'I can't believe, she must have been inside my head!

⁷⁸ When this client is saying yes or no they are agreeing / disagreeing with the practitioner. There is a belief that saying yes improves the connection the practitioner will have to client and Spirit.

Within the data set there were three main ways that practitioners claimed to make the information they received from Spirit meaningful (this was not restricted to what they considered sensitive interactions). Firstly, they would provide significant information that had meaning for the recipient, including dates of significant happenings, names of the deceased or recalling memories that the practitioner “just could not know”. Secondly, they would bring through the personality of the Spirit. They would do this by using specific presentation styles. This type of meaningful message was encouraged within the training college and also significantly within spiritualist settings. Alan explains:

There was a man called [name deleted] here, he told me years ago that you’ve got to bring the toothpaste to somebody. You know your husband rolled it up from the bottom, how he always squeezed it from the top, how he always left the top off. The only things that you know about, that annoyed you. That is your husband, that is proof that your husband is still with you and around you and trying to guide you. You’ve brought them through; that’s who they are. That’s them, that’s their character, their personality, the way they stood, the way of the eye movements, the little gestures they used to do.

Thirdly, they would provide predictive advice about the client. However, many practitioners claimed to give clients a series of options (e.g. your life can go this way or the other). Not committing to specific advice giving was seen as less harmful to the client but also means that the practitioner may be less likely to have their authenticity challenged. Alice explains:

If someone says: “oh would you ever tell anyone when he or she were going to die”, and I said: “only if they really wanted to know, and if they were over 70”. You know, I’m not going to because as I said, life changes every second, you know, you might be going to die tomorrow. I was reading a guy yesterday, and I said by the time you’re 30, I can see you wandering around basically being on heroin, being a shadow of a person. If

you go this other way you will be fine and you will have a business by the time you're 30.

Failure to commit to a specific answer can be seen within this anecdote.

Firstly, this type of information could be damaging, depending on the client's state of mind and beliefs, and advice of this kind could be self-fulfilling. While information is still being provided to the client, it is not specific advice that the practitioner denotes, and this is acceptable as one's fate can change with time and the choices one makes. On a practical level, such belief and failure to commit to a specific answer means the authenticity of the practitioner might be more difficult to challenge and the practitioner can defend the information that they provide. On the other hand, a sceptic might challenge it on the grounds that it is so 'open' that it could apply to anyone.

It is clear then that the practitioner will provide enough evidence through a variety of techniques to suggest that they are in touch with the client's deceased relatives.

However, these techniques are often combined with assertive and confident presentation styles, with which they report drawing upon the expertise of the Spirit guide if they are challenged.

Strategies that clients have to test practitioners

It was evident that while clients assist in co-constructing practitioners' authenticity, clients also had strategies to test practitioners. This indicates that the practitioner's authenticity is a vital question for the client. It shows that the reality of Spirit is not questioned but rather the ability of the medium; this is also comparable to the way students were acting within the college. It adds to the complexity of authenticity, in which clients play a fundamental role in. Many clients have a firm belief in Spirit themselves. Karen states:

I have a little test for them. Basically, I have made an agreement with my Spirit guide... that when I meet another medium they pick up on and tell me what it is... they don't actually understand what it is they're telling me but I know that somehow they are picking up that information. So out of all the

people I've met I can honestly say about three people have done that. I choose whomever I see on the basis of the amount of good information that I get back from them. I've found it very useful because the key to it is that it's something that no one knows about, it's a very, very private and personal thing. He, this medium, picks up on it in all kinds of ways and all of a sudden they start talking about something and I know that relates to this key.

Karen firmly believes that she is testing the accuracy of the medium. She highlights how clients appear unaware of their tendency to fit meaning to information and the extent of their esoteric beliefs. Karen is clearly developing an extrasensory identity because she, like the practitioners, refers to agreements with her Spirit guides.

Another client, Penny, thought that having to check the information, later proven correct, was a positive experience as it lessens, for her, the idea that the practitioner has used telepathy (accessed thoughts that were in the clients memory rather than through Spirit) to give her information.

Me: Out of the mediums that you've seen, have you had any really positive experiences?

Penny: Yes, in the sense that they've given me information that I've had to go away and look up.

Me: Right.

Penny: And to me the fact that I've had to go and do some research to find it I've just found mind-blowing because there is just no way that they would have known that piece of information...

A client, Sue, explained to me that she had once challenged a practitioner.

I was at a spiritualist church and the medium came through, and to my husband, talked to my husband and she was giving him various, sort of, information and we couldn't accept any of it. It got to a point that the woman got quite stroppy with us because we couldn't accept what she was saying. It just didn't make any sense to us whatsoever and it really, it came to a head when she said, okay, now I'm getting that you've got lots of paintings and photographs in your house and you keep finding them askew and we just burst out laughing. We went, we've only just moved in, we've got no paintings or pictures up on the walls whatsoever and she just sort of hmm, and went, oh, I've had enough of you.

Sue is illustrating that for the practitioner to display authenticity the information has to be of a certain quality and whether it is accepted is dependent on the client's circumstances as to. Within this section I have discussed the different types of information that may be accepted as proving that the practitioner has an authentic link to Spirit and, as the above extract shows, the construction of authenticity is mutually achieved between practitioner and client.

Using third-person accounts to increase authenticity

Michelle states that she receives confirmation of her abilities from police officers in her local area.

I mean I had two police officers come to my office because there was a bit of hassle in [name of place], and they came in and they were just talking, 'what do you actually do here?' And I said, 'oh, I'm a medium,'. And the police officer, the woman and man just stood there and I looked at her and I went da-da-da, and she was crying her eyes out. She said, 'god, you've got my grandmother through and everybody through, you know.' I said, 'another thing as well,' and I went over to him and he said, 'eee, I want to come back for a reading.' But I was the talk of

Clifford Street in Byker, all the police were talking to me on their breaks.

This emphasises her authenticity in that if credible people, with authoritarian roles in society, are asking for her advice then she must possess good abilities. Tracey explains that she would get strong urges to talk to people when she was walking along a street.

When I went to Mexico my son was about 18 at the time. And we'd been in the hotel two days and he was talking to these two young lads, and I'm looking, and I'm like oh god, here we go! I saw a police officer standing behind the two young lads and I saw one and he was pointing at them. And I just thought who are you? 'I'm his dad, and I died in the 9/11. I got crushed to death, can you tell him I'm okay?' I went, 'Do I have to?' I'll have to do it! Done it. I said, 'Could I have a word with you? I'm a medium. Was your dad a police officer?' 'How do you know that?' I said, 'He was standing behind you, because I do see them.' And he was like...I said, 'Another thing as well, did he die in 9/11? Did he get crushed to death?' 'Eee!' Tears just down their eyes, 'I can't believe it!' So he was on holiday with his best friend and the mam and dad, and they came round and invited me to go to New York, which I didn't take up, but they've asked me to go over and everything.

There are various components to this extract. Firstly, this practitioner claims to unwillingly offer this information to the recipient. This strategy functions to increase the likelihood that her story will be thought of as authentic (e.g. she is being compelled by the spirits) since Spirit is less likely to be questioned than the skills of the practitioner⁷⁹. Secondly, it shows that she is acting altruistically towards the recipient and has a commitment to Spirit. Thirdly, the information appears to be constructed towards creating suspense and believability. This is not just about the information that is spoken but also the way it is delivered. The message is built up by the practitioner, with lots of emphasis, until there is almost a punchline regarding the Spirit's death in

⁷⁹ I explore belief in Spirit more fully throughout the chapter.

one of the most famous terrorist attacks in the western world. Finally, the narrative involved seeing a Spirit, which is presented throughout different contexts within the subculture as an advanced level of mediumship. These four factors all function to construct the practitioner as authentically in touch with Spirit. Again, the practitioner reports that there was an emotional reaction from the client. She is producing this narrative as a way to construct herself as authentic. This report of an emotional reaction is part of the narrative that she has the ability to provide significant information. The display of emotion provides visible feedback regarding the authenticity of her extrasensory abilities.

Being able to recount the information that she has given these people a significant time later, and then recall the gratification that she received shows two things. Firstly, practitioners recall⁸⁰ specific instances where they believe or claim that they have impacted upon the emotionality of the recipient. Secondly, she wanted me, as the researcher, to also believe in her authenticity by describing the story in a specific way. Within the same interview, this particular practitioner would refer to how people were always telling her how good she is. She would talk about famous people and, like Michelle, authority figures who had come to her for advice. Overall, her narrative, with its specific elements, was presented in a way that was clearly meant to be persuasive.

Sarah explained to me that she would use a comments book to prove how happy her clients were with the service that she was providing.

I tell you what I'll do. Oh, why didn't I bring it today! I've got... I wish I'd have brought it now. I've got a comments book, which I do with everybody. I say can you put your comments down what you think? Everybody; fantastic, amazing, you've turned my life around, I don't know what I'd do without you, everyone puts a comment. Ten out of ten, fantastic, come to see you again very soon, going to pass your number on. That's what I get. So I do a comments book with everybody, so I show everybody, oh there, have a look at that.

⁸⁰ I accept that I don't have evidence to support whether this is genuine recall or not.

These accounts all highlight devices that practitioners use to promote their abilities through the strategy of using a third person's testimony. The use of significant detail is part of constructing the narrative as an accurate description of a recalled reality.

Communicating with Spirit without knowing how and without it being a matter of choice

While some practitioners use third-person accounts to assert authenticity, other practitioners also use another technique, which is to claim limited control over their abilities, or knowledge of how, their abilities work. Zoe states that she has a client who visits her on a regular basis. She expresses to me her pride that the client consistently provides her with confirmation of the correctness of her abilities.

The lady I've been seeing in the last few weeks, I've been seeing her for three years. Whenever she needs to know something, she rings me up and says: 'Where are you?' And I say: 'Well, okay, I'm nearby'. And then she goes: 'Well, I'll pick you up and we'll have a cup of coffee', and I go: 'Yeah, no worries'. ...I helped her move house in the last few days [laugh]. So that's why I did so many readings in the last few days. I read her grandmother as well and I read another one of her friends, and I read her brother. You're 100% right they'll say, and I go: 'Oh really, how cool!' You know what I mean, like I don't know how it happens, I don't know where it comes from. I just decided I could do it. And so if I get confirmation that I'm doing the right thing, then that's you know, that's what I need. Like I...like I said, I wasn't paid for any of the readings I did in the last few days.

Firstly, this practitioner is using the technique of third-party validation to suggest to me that there must be some truth in her abilities (e.g. if she has people that come back and see her then she must be talented). Secondly, this practitioner is stating that she does not know where her presumed extrasensory awareness comes from. This lack of awareness may increase perceptions of authenticity since it suggests that if she does

not know how this kind of thing just happens then surely she cannot be making it up; in other words, it is coming from something other than the practitioner's own thoughts. In order to present a true source, practitioners may claim that they do not know where it comes from or how they make the connection, but that it just happens. In this sense, the practitioner is asserting that I do not just rely on her account but that there are other extraordinary forces at work, a strategy that downplays her own involvement.

In addition, this practitioner states that she was not paid, thereby suggesting that she has no ulterior motive, and thus possibly improving the genuineness of her claims. Practitioners' absence of motive links to the development of the spiritual authentic self, which also functions to enhance authenticity⁸¹.

Alice discusses her own perceptions of her authenticity.

I've even said to my mam, well people can wire me up, test us, whatever, you know. I am genuine, I'm not a fake, I'm genuine, you know. Sometimes I used to say to my mam, I don't want to be like this, you know, sometimes you get a little bit fed up with it because you feel as though you haven't got a life of your own, as well, it's half and half.

Alice is stating that she is half in this world and half in the Spirit world; in this sense, she is suggesting that she has a significantly close relationship with Spirit. Crucially, though, she is emphasising that this is sometimes contrary to her wishes – she gets upset because she does not have a full life of her own. This is significant in that it emphasizes that this is not a matter of choice. This is another way in which practitioners can claim that their abilities come from Spirit and, therefore, are genuine. Focused on the fact that people might not believe, her rhetoric primarily serves the purpose of downplaying the extent to which she chooses to receive the information from Spirit and chooses to have these abilities. The interviewee is working to construct her gift / skill / talent as authentic. Firstly, here she is suggesting that her abilities are scientifically testable and that she is willing to be tested. Secondly, the

⁸¹ Discussed further on page 192.

way in which her 'getting fed up' suggests that this is something inflicted on her acts to suggest that she cannot avoid Spirit, even if she wants to, and that she would sometimes rather she did not have this gift. She also uses the phrase "you know" three times, which is indicative of her attempt to persuade.

Practitioners use another strategy to downplay their involvement; practitioners claim that they do not have to ask the client questions until the end of the consultation.

Michelle explains:

Some people, you see, I don't ask them anything. I don't ask a thing. They sit down, I say, 'Listen, I don't want to know nothing,' I put the tape on and I go da-da-da, they go, 'oh...' I go, 'shh!' They go, 'eee, I love it, because you don't ask me anything.' Well, why should I ask you anything? I shouldn't have to ask you a thing! [chuckles] But I've been to this lady and she was asking me loads of questions, I went, 'yeah, because you've been to a con woman, that's why.'

When I do an audience, I've got the mic there and I'll go, 'I'm coming to you, I've got your sister standing right behind you, she had the breast cancer and she's telling me...' da-da-da. And then they'll go...da-da-da, and I'll go, 'shh, I don't want to know, don't you tell me'.

Here there is a direct orientation by the practitioner to the question of authenticity among practitioners. Michelle describes two different types of consultation: one-to-one and stage demonstrations, inadvertently claiming that, regardless of type, she does not need to ask any questions of the client. In this sense, the practitioner is suggesting that she has all of the information that she needs from Spirit. No questions being allowed then is a mechanism to assist the practitioner in displaying authenticity. When observing spiritualist church demonstrations it was a common belief between churchgoers, including practitioners, that recipients could not ask questions as this might affect the flow of Spirit or the practitioner's connection to the spirit world.

Authenticity is clearly extremely important for the practitioner. Thus far I have explored techniques that practitioners use to construct themselves and their abilities as genuine, which include emphasising talents and gifts, life experiences, different types of channelling Spirit through Spirit guides, embodying Spirit and meditation. Different types of information are often provided to give perceptions of authenticity, and, as I have shown, slow and irrelevant information is still accepted and an authentic link with Spirit is still presumed. I will now explore Spiritualism in relation to the self-perception of authenticity, since spiritualism is influential in esoteric practices.

Spiritualism and constructing the authentic (extrasensory) self

Within the subculture there were mechanisms to ensure that the participant begins to internalise belief in Spirit and believe in their own ability to communicate with the Spirit world. I thought prior to data collection that involvement within the spiritualist context was distinct, or at least separate, from secular domains, such as psychic fairs, development workshops, centres and Internet groups. I thought that since spiritualist contexts had been examined as a standalone phenomenon, I would focus on what I conceived as secular practices. However, I found I could not separate out practices in this manner and that the spiritualist church acts significantly as a recruiter (and sometimes a philosophical point of reference) for the whole subculture. While many of my participants have their own businesses and go to a variety of events outside of the spiritualist context, most of the practitioners I interviewed were involved to varying degrees with spiritualism. I will now explore how the spiritualist church can contribute to convincing a new recruit that they are an authentic practitioner.

I established that the majority of practitioners view the Spiritualist National Union as the leaders when it comes to promoting the authenticity and ethical dynamics of extra-sensory communication. Ethics has an important relationship to authenticity within the spiritualist movement. The SNU offer courses on mediumship, residential, day and distance learning to allow the medium to become accredited within the realms of their institution. Attending these courses affords the practitioner additional status, all of which may increase the perception of authenticity to self and also to clients. Tracey explains how involvement in spiritualism allows her to explore her interest in the esoteric and reinforces belief in the authenticity of Spirit communication.

When I first moved down here to Somerset I wanted to pursue it more, so I went to see a chap and he was doing a performance and afterwards I asked him, 'What's the best way of development?', so he said: 'Go to the local spiritualist church'. I went along to loads of spiritualist services and over a period of six months I suppose I saw about twelve mediums. It's amazing who you see, and then they recommend people that you can go and talk to. It's kind of a little community with different things happening and everyone does sort of know each other and their reputations. I got messages from quite a few - some were very vague but some were so specific, and the information really blew my mind.

In this passage, Tracey describes how the information that she receives from a practitioner can be vague and specific, and yet she is not dissuaded by vague messages and her belief in Spirit communication is still reinforced. She states that she wishes to "pursue it more". This suggests that she may have already had a belief in Spirit, perhaps having her own experiences (Hazelgrove, 2000), but that the spiritualist church provides a meeting point where knowledge can be shared and evidential mediumship experienced (Wallis, 2001). It is, therefore, the supportive group and philosophical environment that enhances practitioners' own perceptions of authenticity.

Once a new recruit shows enthusiasm for what occurs at the spiritualist church they sometimes get more involved in the setting, which involves attending group sessions focused on the development of mediumship (these are called Circles). Most churches advertise these activities. Amelia and Grace both explain how their recruitment within the spiritualist context quite quickly led to "learning authenticity": collectively meditating and then giving information to others, sitting in a circle. I'll start with Amelia.

What was interesting was I joined the development circle, and within a few weeks, two or three weeks, I was giving information that I couldn't believe, where did I get this

information? I continued with the Circle, and took on board that I seemed to know these things without knowing how I knew them. Eight months later, from starting the development circle, I was doing my first service, as a fledgling medium, with the medium from the Circle. I found I could do it and it was accurate. Within 12 months I was sitting, running the Circle, with the medium. Because I'd done a lot of group counselling before Circle work fitted. I was told by a Spirit, 'Right you're going to train mediums'.

There was acceptance that she knew things without knowing how she knew them. This raises unique questions relating to the actual phenomenology of mediumship in that practitioners were describing subtle experiences that could not be distinguished from ordinary thinking. A practitioners' belief in Spirit is fundamental to whether the experience is categorized as extrasensory. In addition, Amelia highlights that this acculturation process is a quick one, in which she was training mediums herself within 12 months. Amelia's talk suggests that positive reinforcement has a significant influence on the identity of the individual as an extrasensory practitioner.

Grace used to write for pagan magazines and therefore used to interview a lot of extrasensory practitioners. It was suggested through them that she should go to a development circle and that is when she discovered her abilities.

I started to go along to spiritualist churches on Saturday night or Sunday evenings, depending on what night they were on, to look at other mediums working. And then I went to an open circle and found that I was able to give short messages, but messages that, you know, were lucky enough to be accurate really. I got a hunger for it, a hunger for knowledge really. I started to go to development classes after that where you were taught about how to meditate and close down and, you know, and just basically the foundation work really if I was to become a medium, then, how it was done, or how it was advised to be done really. I just grew a passion for it, and my teacher there

felt I was ready to actually do a fledgling night, now a fledgling, you probably know that anyway but a fledgling is someone who is not quite ready, or they don't feel ready to do a platform at a spiritualist church, you know, to conduct a service on their own. I, sort of, got taken under the wing, if you like, by experienced mediums. It went from there really, I felt, I just started to enjoy it and then there was a few cancellations, some mediums were actually cancelling and said that they couldn't make it on a certain evening so I was asked to stand in. I've taken it from there and now I'm sort of working in local spiritualist churches.

What Amelia and Grace highlight is that new recruits go through an introductory process that involves them initially questioning the origin of their extrasensory experiences, which then leads to acceptance of not having to know how they do it, and then internalization of this authenticity. In other words, they are not simply attempting to convince others of their authenticity but rather go through a process of convincing themselves. I mean, internalising that they eventually believe, without a doubt, that they have the ability to communicate with deceased loved ones and that Spirit exists, leads to further personal validation and eventually the internalization of authenticity. Amelia accepted that she knew accurate things without knowing how she was doing it. This "not having to know" shows the underlying belief that participants have in Spirit. While this is a technique to promote authenticity to others, it could also signify that they actually do not know how they provide meaningful information to recipients. In this sense, belief in Spirit precedes any significant experience or lack of. They now have experiences that they then explain in terms of Spirit rather than other frameworks. This kind of reality construction is similar to claims that practitioners make about having extrasensory experiences as children.

Both Amelia and Grace talked passionately about their abilities and both progressed quickly, either onto training other mediums or working on the platform within spiritualist churches. This suggests that spiritualist churches are important in the learning, display and internalization of authenticity, but, more specifically, that for both Amelia and Grace mentoring and peer support assisted significantly in this

progression. This reinforces the belief that the spiritualist church not only acts as a recruiter but also a supporter of authenticity.

Professionalisation and 'developing' the authentic (extrasensory) self

During the time of my involvement with the subculture, I met many practitioners who presented themselves as professional. It could be argued that professionalism is likely to increase perceptions of authenticity as well as the ways in which practitioners present themselves as authentic to others. However, while this is partly true I will show the ways in which professionalism is linked significantly to how the practitioners conceive themselves as authentic. Consumer Protection from the Unfair Trading Regulations 2007 certainly has some impact on practitioners needing to appear more professional; moreover, practitioners are now required to have public liability insurance. Despite these consumer laws extrasensory work still lacks formal regulation. Amelia addresses these issues:

I do feel we've got to have the ethical debate. Absolutely. Because the only way to protect vulnerable people, and we're dealing with vulnerable people, is for there to be a level of ethical awareness, and a level of commitment. Now, spirits do apply a penalty if you're not working ethically, because they'll hold you, they won't let you progress in your development. You kind of reach a plateau and you don't seem to be able to move off that plateau until you've got your head round what it is you're doing and how important it is.

For practitioners it is often Spirit that governs their professionalism and ethical behaviour. Such an extract illustrates the strength of belief and the close relationship that practitioners have with Spirit. While this is another way of claiming connection to Spirit, it is suggestive here that professionalising their connection to Spirit is central to the practitioners' construction of their abilities, belief systems and identity (MacKian, 2012). Amelia continues:

But then you've still got the problem with Spirit contact, that how can anyone prove you are lying? I mean the Consumer Protection Regulations really struggle. People are doing all sorts of disclaimers, and insurances and stuff like this, but effectively, at the moment there's no case law, there's no right or wrong. Nothing's been tested. So it's very difficult. The raising of the issue of ethics is important, I record every reading. And give people a CD. I do that for my protection and their protection. I keep a database, an archive, in a locked drawer, of memory sticks, with the readings on. And I do that because I want that person, first of all, to hear everything I've said, because in a reading people only really hear half of the reading. But also because at the end of the day, if they come back and say, 'You told me to do such and such and such,' I have a reading, where I can say, 'No actually I didn't tell you to do that'.

Giving people a CD connects to the earlier idea that a recording is part of providing evidence for the validity of the reading, although here it is serving a different function. Amelia presents herself as acting from within the best interests of their clients but there is also a need to protect the self. Acting from within a healing / ethical framework is again a way of increasing authenticity, both to others and also the self, in constructing oneself as spiritual. Practitioners possess awareness of the unregulated nature of their work and thus their attempts at giving themselves codes of conduct is clearly a mechanism for them to be seen in a more positive light and as having a stronger connection to Spirit. Amelia claims to have ethical awareness when providing information to her clients and the majority of practitioners I spoke with had ethical views associated with their work. Many practitioners spoke about how the codes of conduct they followed were connected to their own morals, values and expectations within the subculture and society.

Many of the practitioners viewed professional development as very important and frequently sought out accreditation and further training like that provided by the college I observed. This self-improvement is used as a mechanism to set themselves

apart from the less experienced mediums. Extrasensory skills were seen as something that needed to be continually developed and invested in. One participant claimed he used the large amount of money that he charged as a way to fund this training, thus justifying the expense and presenting himself in a more professional light to his clients and me. There were things that professional practitioners would and would not do or say when speaking with clients. Constructing oneself as professional could be viewed not only as a response to consumer law but it is likely that this heightens the client's self-perception of the medium's authenticity. It shows that practitioners would like acceptance within society and are attempting to self-regulate.

Meditation

During interviewing many of my participants reported that meditation was a daily practice for them, as it was within the college. Meditation functions to reinforce their own belief in Spirit through the channelling of spirit - the visions and colours that they experienced provided them with contemplative time and improved spiritual development. Others used meditation as a preparatory technique prior to consultations or large-scale demonstrations⁸². It was clear that meditation served as a ritualized practice for some practitioners (especially within training settings) to maintain a belief in Spirit and to begin, or reinforce, their perceptions of having these abilities and identifying themselves as practitioners. The students that attended these courses were quite serious about becoming practitioners or were practitioners who wanted to get better, so their identities were formed to some respect. Meditation within training settings (including spiritualist churches) also served to create a relaxed environment and as an experiential technique through which students would accept this knowledge as truth.

In this chapter I have explored the methods by which practitioners display a real connection with Spirit to the client; moreover, client involvement has also been touched upon. Both practitioner and client work together to create a genuine Spirit experience. Inaccurate and vague information is not significant enough to dissuade the client. Nevertheless, I have also shown how practitioners not only have to convince others that they have genuine abilities but that they also have to convince themselves

⁸² I explore this more when looking at the emotion management of practitioners.

of their own authenticity. This highlights the complexity of authenticity that is central to practitioners' work and important to how they construct their identity as an extrasensory practitioner. This leads me to the next section that further explores how authenticity is linked to practitioners' identities and senses of self.

Type 2: Authentic (spiritual) selfhood: Living an authentic life / being true to oneself

Within this section I discuss the extent to which practitioners immerse themselves in the esoteric subculture – making it a way of life, rather than just a hobby or job. I begin by discussing the relationship that the practitioner has with Spirit and how it impacts on their way of thinking and daily interactions, not just during their consultations with clients. I discuss how practitioners pride themselves on having a knowledgeable existence relating to all matters spiritual. I explore how notions of a spiritually-ready body are important within extrasensory work.

Spirit and the practitioner

Having involvement within esoteric subcultures assisted participants in exploring and reinforcing their beliefs in Spirit, similar to how spiritualism acts as a recruiter. Participants I spoke with all described symbolic ways of thinking about their life and interactions with others, which are based upon spiritual and esoteric philosophies and language. Practitioners spoke of feelings of déjà vu, seeing signs, having religious visions, and saw their extrasensory work as important. Spirit, for the majority of practitioners, creates a sense of magical and synchronistic living on a daily basis. Spirit was presented as being an authoritative, calm and knowledgeable being that taught lessons, monitored human behaviour and worldly events⁸³. Presented as eager yet unpredictable, sometimes Spirit was in need of being controlled. Spirit, therefore, represented various opposing personality traits: the need to be sometimes controlled while also being knowledgeable. These contradictions were not immediately apparent until analysis took place.

⁸³ Spirit is referred to in both the singular and collective sense.

A connection with Spirit did not simply have the function of a way that practitioners could assert authenticity - what they were describing was a way of life for them. Many practitioners interact on the basis of signs and significant happenings that they see in waking life and dream states that help with decision-making processes during their interactions with others. If a practitioner's deceased relative was a milkman and the practitioner asked for confirmation from Spirit that the right decision was being made, then if anything to do with milk came into view at that particular time of thought then that was the participant's confirmation of Spirit. Amelia illustrates Spirit's impact on her life when discussing a business opportunity with me:

I did get contact from a few companies, this again is something I didn't go looking for, it was prompted by stuff that came into my email that I felt like it was sent by Spirit.

In this extract, Amelia refers to a common belief that Spirit can guide the right opportunities to the practitioner. It shows the spiritual extent of some practitioner's beliefs where they attribute what others could consider as normal occurrences to Spirit. The practitioners I spoke with constantly reflected on Spirit in this manner.

Spiritual knowledge and backgrounds

Participants claimed to have experience in diverse areas, such as Paganism, elemental worship, backgrounds in Buddhism, ministerial diplomas in alternative religions, working with monks, involvement in occult societies, being members of the Golden Dawn Witchcraft movement⁸⁴, and, most commonly, having Romani gypsy backgrounds. During my interactions with participants they used their knowledge of spiritual and alternative traditions to support their arguments of why a Spirit world exists, which plays a significant role in how authenticity is perceived and managed.

Kate explains that from an early age, she used to read books about religion and mysticism and philosophy, divination, magic, occultism, anything that was to do with the unknown. Her parents would complain, stating that she was too young for those

⁸⁴ A movement linked to Aleister Crowley, who was a well known occultist.

books and that she would not understand them. This she explains made her more determined. Kate sees it as important to absorb as much knowledge as possible about all areas relating to her work. She now travels extensively and globally to provide extrasensory support to spiritual leaders. This suggests that Kate places much importance on gaining as much spiritual knowledge as she can about a diverse range of practices. This is not restricted to Kate. Most of the practitioners that I spoke to appeared well-read and knowledgeable about diverse areas of the occult. This knowledge works towards supporting the practitioners' belief in the Spirit world and in the construction of a spiritual self. However, it also bolsters the view of having authentic (extra-sensory) abilities and provides the client with a sense of ease that the practitioner knows what they are doing and that they are taking their work role seriously. Dawn, for instance, told me how her tutor's knowledge, and confidence about all different spiritual traditions, increases her faith in Spirit communication generally.

Spiritual characteristics and the preparation of the spiritual body

Across the conversations I had with practitioners they never doubted the existence of a Spirit world. They only questioned on occasions their own, and others', ability to connect with Spirit. My involvement within training settings confirmed this. For my participants a belief in a Spirit world was not a construction; it was the way it is. My involvement in the subculture confirmed that for practitioners this is not just a job but also a way of life.⁸⁵ This links also to authenticity and the self, as, for many, this way of life was about acting spiritual through being a good person and serving Spirit. Brian states that:

You really need to be fine-tuning the vessel, so that you're worthy to be the vessel of Spirit. They do choose the most unlikely people, you know, and you don't need to be spiritual to be a medium. But, where excellence is, it's where spirituality and mediumship combine. For anybody, any fool can be taken off the street and be taught how to give a basic link to the

⁸⁵ I learnt, or rather developed, this way of thinking, which assisted me in being able to relate effectively to my participants. I had to see the world fully through their eyes, which, to some extent, I managed to do.

Spirit. But that is not going to give any depth to the person's own development, their own evolution.

This practitioner is talking about the importance of certain spiritual characteristics and identity work that a practitioner should do when communicating (working) with Spirit. It infers that Spirit selects people to communicate with but then also that anyone can be an extrasensory practitioner. Here, the practitioner talks about spiritual development alongside the development of extrasensory technique. In this sense, being spiritual acted as a mechanism for this practitioner that allowed him to set himself apart from other practitioners. Hayley states that:

Spiritually, it's just nice to say, you know, I'm very sorry about your loss of your loved one and just share your own experience, like I would say I really understand what you're going through because I remember when my mum passed away...

Hayley describes what she conceives as being spiritual- a form of empathy, of relating to the client and showing her that she is not alone in her experience. She is able to do this through reflecting on her own experience. While being compassionate, Hayley is describing a form of emotion work that she is conducting through remembering a time when she was grieving, and, in doing this, it makes it easier to relate to the client. It also suggests that practitioners are self-reflexive and notions of what is spiritual may be different between practitioners because of different life experiences.

According to practitioners there were often experiences that prompted this spiritual awareness. Colin explains:

I had a lot of time off work because to be honest I got burnt out...I had a bit of a breakdown to be honest with you... I was actually off work for a year. So I had some therapy and basically, I don't know if it was a midlife crisis, or whatever, but I felt, I got very, very disillusioned...and that was the time when I really threw myself into my spirituality and I feel as though

there's a bit of synchronicity, I feel as though that had to happen to me to make me, to make me more aware, I needed to have that time out to take me spiritual work further. I think everything happens for a reason. I feel as though ...the breakdown that I had was actually a gift, so, I often when I do my meditation, I often thank, thank, you know, the high being, whether it be god, or whatever's out there, controlling the universe, I actually thank them for that experience because it's opened me up a lot.

This practitioner describes a breakdown he had which he believes was caused due to the stresses of a previous job in social work. This, he claims, made him more spiritually aware. He now looks at the breakdown as a positive experience, making him more spiritual (e.g. opening him up), which the practitioner views as preparation for the work that he does. This extract shows that he has described spirituality as a coping mechanism of reflecting on what has happened to him. This illustrates the positive-thinking strategies within the subculture. It shows how the practitioners own life experiences have increased his sense of authenticity. The experience Colin describes also suggests the absence of an ulterior motive in that the practitioner is stating that he did not ask for this awareness.

Absence of ulterior motive – working to 'heal' people, not for the money

Within the interviews it often arose how much the practitioners charged for their consultations, which was within the region of £30 to £100 for a 30-40 minute consultation. They offered a wide range of different services and therapies via face-to-face, email and telephone consultations. Despite this work being quite lucrative, none of the practitioners claimed that it was financial reward that motivated them. As Ken states: "it's not about the money really, because I think it's, it's the joy of seeing somebody's face light up when you've given them a personality trait." Providing the client with personality traits of their deceased loved ones is considered by many mediums as providing a good service to the client but is also, as I have discussed, a mechanism that increases perceptions of authenticity.

Overall, practitioners consistently presented themselves to me as acting from altruistic and spiritual standpoints, rather than their work being about egotism and money. They would attend spiritual retreats, training courses and events and would consistently talk about the bettering of the self. It became clear to me that this was not just a strategy for portraying the self as authentic but that it was also, in my view, the practitioners' way of being true to their own selves and developing an authentic sense of self. Alan talks about his motivation for becoming a medium.

I've felt that there was often a bit of me where I always felt as though I needed to heal people. I mean, obviously, within the social care sector you do have to do it on a professional basis and often you cannot wave a magic wand because there is red tape. But I just felt I always just wanted to do a little bit more about the world, not that I was out to save the world, or be a martyr.

Practitioners such as Alan often reported having previous or current care occupations, ranging from social work to nursing and counselling. Experience as care providers suggests that these practitioners were presenting themselves as kind individuals. Alan is making an indirect comparison between his experience in social care and mediumship, but is suggesting that there are often too many restrictions to help people in the social care sector and that this is what makes extrasensory work appeal to him. He infers that he can help more people without restrictions through his extrasensory consultations. For another practitioner I interviewed it was person-centered counselling that compelled her to examine spirituality and explore the esoteric subculture further. She left her mainstream counselling occupation and now runs a successful mediumship development business that offers a wide range of services. This practitioner saw her mediumship work offering more fulfilment to her and more care to individuals than her mainstream job, and so altered her identity accordingly.

Often practitioners wanted to pursue more mainstream occupations, but spoke about how they could or were planning on incorporating their extrasensory abilities into their work. Katherine explains:

I want to be a nurse, which is going to be the best way that I can actually sustain a career, while using the esoteric skills that I have. I can use those skills and my physical nursing skills; I can use both to be the best person I can be here and to help as many people as possible.

This practitioner is presenting herself as extremely caring and there is no downplaying of her abilities, which would be an indicator of her wanting to be perceived as authentic. However, it is notable that this practitioner does not use her extrasensory abilities on a professional basis and had been consulting for less than 12 months. She is not acting from within a professional capacity, thus it may be the case that she has less reason to assert her authenticity so directly. Nevertheless, what these accounts suggest is that the primary motivator of practitioners is to help people rather than monetary gain.

Being true to the authentic spiritual self

It was evident that authenticity within extrasensory work also means the development or adherence to the authentic self that is guided by what one views as morally right or wrong. However, such issues are also moulded by group dynamics and spiritualist philosophy. This definition of the authentic self of extrasensory practitioners is the way that practitioners described their construction of an authentic extrasensory self to me⁸⁶.

An authentic self is independent from the social self; it is innate and unique to the individual and has characteristics that are immediately unchangeable. It is a self that one can be disengaged from but also one which you can be reunited with through spirituality. It is reflexively accessible and will naturally evolve according to being true to one's core beliefs and desires over time. This self occasionally requires putting

⁸⁶ The following extract is a definition that I have created, inspired by the reported experiences of practitioners.

one's social needs and desires to the side in order to lead a spiritual life.

This kind of self-awareness was encouraged by teachers within the college, was spoken about by practitioners when I interviewed them, and was apparent throughout the subculture.

Hard life experiences - making it possible to relate to people in a genuine way

Many practitioners spoke about wanting to be the best person that they could be through having self-awareness. Life experiences and the development of the person, or getting to know the authentic self, is significant to the development of the practitioner's authenticity. The following quote from Alan sums up this spiritual outlook on life. He simply states:

Without the tears you wouldn't have the flowers of the soul.

This indicates a belief that a person has had to have had some negative life experiences in order to gain self-awareness; moreover, this represents the stories of all those in the subculture shared with me. During the interviews, many practitioners spoke substantively about their life experiences, suggesting to me that they were very self-aware.

The following extract is from a focus group that I conducted with a group of students at the college where I conducted my participant observations.

Tom: You need some sort of pain in your life.
How do you work with people? Somebody comes to you and they've lost three children, foetuses. If you've lost your own, just one, you understand the pain, you'll understand that's a child and that mother will always love the most the one they lost. The pain will always be there. Did I do this wrong, did I do that? Could I have done this? Should I have stopped

smoking? The pain and anguish is always there. They blame themselves. Most mothers do.

Chloe: You've got to have that compassion.
Yeah pain, and it creates empathy.

Tracey: Being a medium is about being an authentic spiritual person having compassion and empathy for others.

Practitioners were talking about a belief that you have to have painful life experiences in order to possess compassion and be able to relate to people and be successful at mediumship or other extrasensory work. There is a belief, especially in evidence at the college as well as in the literature (Skultans, 1974), that the majority of those drawn to the esoteric have had difficult early lives.

The extrasensory practitioners (spiritual) management of Ego

I have attended various events, both within the SNU and independently, where I have noticed differences in the technique of practitioners. Spiritualist contexts in particular have their own stratifications and social formations meaning that the institution has established a robust code of conduct, dress, presentation style and ethical principles. Displays of authenticity within this setting tend to focus on personality traits (e.g. generic statements to which many people can apply meaning) that the practitioner will convey to the recipient, normally within a church setting or development circle. It was within spiritualist contexts that I gained insight into the complexity of authenticity and the practitioners' idea of the development of an authentic spiritual self. Such identity work, though, is not restricted to the spiritualist context and many now independent practitioners spoke of such reflexivity.

The primary issue in SNU settings is that practitioners are informed that they have to be careful about how they relay information to recipients (e.g. sensitive information). This raises issues about how authenticity is presented to the client but it also illustrates that the development of the spiritual self is significant to authenticity within extrasensory work. Lottie, a leader within spiritualism, talks about boundaries, not

only in terms of what the medium can give to the client but also what a medium allows Spirit to show them. Spirit is seen as something that needs to be controlled so that practitioners can retain their sense of self and what they conceive of as spiritual qualities.

Interpretation or restriction of channelled information has issues in that it may be considered as less authentic or as not providing significant meaningful information. This is particularly relevant with spiritualist settings where one is expected to present information ethically and act in a certain way. Lottie explains:

You do actually lose something of the power of Spirit in the editing, but you have to be aware that there are people who could be massively offended in the audience.

Michelle, though, recalls the time when she was barred from her local spiritualist church. She claims that the leaders of the church viewed the accuracy and unethical nature of her way of giving advice as problematic.

I was told I shouldn't have walked down the aisle. I said, 'Yes, but people couldn't hear me.' 'You shouldn't be using your hands'. 'I want to use my hands.' I'm not going to stand like this [puts her arms by her side]. It's stupid! Oh, hey! I shouldn't be using my hands. I shouldn't have been too focused on the death because it was her 12-year-old daughter. So when I went to her, I went, 'I've got Natalie here, your daughter.' I just felt, 'oh,' I felt a knife go into me. Well, she was murdered. I turned around and said to the mother, 'I've got your 12 year old daughter here, Natalie, and she's telling me she was murdered.' I just get a knife. I got wrong for saying murdered. I should've said 'unforeseen circumstances.' I want to be accurate. I think if I've got that gift, give it.

This suggests that there is conflict within the individual in terms of them adhering to different ideals of what they consider as authentic displays, as well as having to

manage him or herself within the spiritualist context. Many clients and practitioners explained to me that they saw the spiritualist way of presenting the personality of the Spirit as overly vague. Some even said that ethically they owe it to Spirit to be more accurate, which suggests that the spiritualist view of being spiritual is different from one's own interpretation. Some practitioners argued that this gave clients the impression of them not having true abilities and that these rules of Spiritualism restrict the practitioner presenting their information in the natural way that they receive it from Spirit. However, what they conceive as appropriate conduct and how they manage these restrictions depends on the individual practitioner. Zoe explains:

If somebody were to get very tearful, I'd ask them if they would like me to carry on, especially if it's in the church, you're actually in a public place. I wouldn't like it personally, I wouldn't like somebody to make me cry in a public place, so I ask them, you know, if they feel comfortable to see me afterwards. Even if it means me getting late home I'll have some one-to-one time with them because I often don't think it's fair. Sometimes people will say carry on and they're quite strong and say that, you know, I do want you to carry on because this is what they want. Sometimes it's tears of happiness and tears of just relief as well, but if somebody is getting really distraught and they're not really giving me the feedback that they want me to carry on, I'll ask them afterwards. I certainly wouldn't give anybody any information, I mean... I mean to be honest I've seen people at open circles giving messages and sometimes it's been about as serious as a relative actually taking their own life and they've just gone straight in for it and me personally I think that's very unprofessional really and morally wrong to do that to someone, it's about, it's about giving people, sending out love and healing to them, it's not about, humiliation or proving yourself, it's not about me being a showman or anything. If I did get a, quite disturbing messages about someone, I wouldn't

want to give that message in public cause it's not about me or my performance, cause I'm not an actor at the end of the day.

Zoe's reflections suggest that authenticity within Spiritualism is based on getting the correct balance between the mechanisms available to the practitioners within the spiritualist context in order to display the authenticity of abilities and the construction of a spiritual self. Construction of a spiritual self is evident here when Zoe reflects on morals, giving to people, sending out love and healing to them. She makes a distinction between direct information that may be damaging to the recipient and spiritual conduct, which suggests that being spiritual is a mechanism that Zoe uses to set herself apart from other practitioners.

Some practitioners within the subculture, like Zoe, felt uncomfortable about others' accuracy and ways of conduct⁸⁷. This is a really important contradiction / dilemma in that some practitioners felt restricted by the spiritualist way of presenting information, feeling that it was not accurate and direct enough in relation to their own notion of a spiritual self (what Spirit would want); however, when practitioners were direct it was considered ego-driven. Sceptics may say it was simply that their Spirit information was not convincing and thus the practitioners in question needed more methods to improve perceptions of authenticity.

It could be argued that this is a different issue to authenticity. This focuses on a lack of professionalism and a lack of ethical behaviour and is, at least potentially, a different kind of criticism. This interviewee is not saying that another practitioner's information was inaccurate but that there are ethical and professional reasons for not providing the information in that context. However, within the wider meaning of the term, it is clear that this does link to authenticity. When practitioners are unethical and provide direct information they are viewed within that context as working from the need to be correct (e.g. ego) rather than from the authentic self, which involves having compassion for others. While the spiritualist context acted as a recruiter and a validating environment, some extrasensory practitioners described bullying behaviour which caused them to disengage from settings that were supposed to be spiritually motivated and in which they often claimed they were being true to their

⁸⁷ This conflict covered all areas of the subculture and those involved in paranormal investigations badmouthed other paranormal investigation teams for not respecting the locations.

spiritual self. Spirit was also used to police such matters given that there is a belief that if the practitioner becomes too egotistic, or perhaps unethical, then Spirit will have the power to remove these abilities from the practitioner; that, in some way, when attempting to work the practitioner will not have the ability to contact Spirit anymore.

Discussion

Within this analysis I have critically explored the concept of authenticity within extrasensory work and have shown how it contributes to the practitioner's development of identity, having both functional and emotional significance. I acknowledged at the beginning of the chapter that the key argument centres on authenticity and that this is more complex than what is presented in current extrasensory literature. Often it was the case when the same extract demonstrated both forms of authenticity. For example, the 9/11 case works for both. The claim that the medium was 'compelled' by Spirit to speak to the boy is evidence of 'channelling' (i.e. a claim by the practitioner that she is not the author of the information; it is coming from somewhere else. Indeed, she may even wish not to be the 'channel', but feels unable to do otherwise). It is, however, also the case that she feels duty-bound to pass on the message because to not do so would be to fail to be true to the self and her relationship with Spirit.

Existing literature that draws on the role of authenticity within extrasensory work is primarily concerned with whether practitioner abilities are real. Even sociological literature is concerned with how mediums present their abilities as real. This resonates with practitioners claiming they experience stigma and have their abilities regularly challenged. By nature then the participants within this study work towards the "presentation of authenticity" to prove these abilities and to some extent counteract these challenges.

I reveal, however, through examining the relationship between self and authenticity that the practitioner does not solely concentrate on promoting the truth of their abilities. Most practitioners reflect upon authenticity of the self (the I). This "doing authenticity" explores the issue of authenticity from a different epistemological

position. It involves them looking within themselves (often within the restrictions of the spiritualist domain) and comparing the authentic 'I' against the socially manipulated self which practitioners call "the ego". This kind of reflexivity links significantly to the construction of a spiritual identity. Guilar (2008) discusses the spiritual way of doing authenticity. He claims that authenticity is spiritually focused. It is character building and, again, getting to know one's unique self. He states that authenticity refers to 'powerful listening and respect, an ability to suspend your beliefs while learning from others, and the courage to speak what you really feel and think' (2008: 202). Looking inward at the self in this manner has religious, philosophical and psychological connotations and spirituality and reflexivity is clearly integral to this subculture. It is clear then that the concept of authenticity is fluid and multi-dimensional, where meaning is dependent upon one's social and religious views and position. In this chapter, knowledge of the functionality and meaning of authenticity within extrasensory work has been expanded. Overall, I highlight the value of reflexivity and the conscious making of identity within extrasensory work.

Chapter 7

Embodied Emotion Management and the Ethics of Extrasensory Practitioners

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the emotion management, embodiment *and ethical factors* that guide extrasensory work. I conceptualise extrasensory work as a form of multi-layered and embodied emotion management. In the previous chapter, I found that authenticity is not simply about the practitioner wanting to convince others and themselves that their abilities are real. I discovered that being authentic was something inward, to do with the core identity of being a spiritual person. While it was evident that practitioners used techniques to assert their authenticity, they also spoke about being altruistic, acting with compassion and sensitivity and in accordance with their own socially-constructed beliefs. So, while authenticity evidentially guides the interaction of the practitioner it was clear that there was also an ethical foundation to this work. In this chapter I examine how practitioners manage their emotions in order to fulfil their role. I had broad research questions. Firstly, what kind of emotion management is required to be an effective extrasensory practitioner? Secondly, what are the goals of this management? Finally, what are the achievements and consequences? The following analysis addresses these areas.

My data suggest that all aspects of emotion management are embodied but that practitioners have diverse methods and styles of presentation. This means that practitioners are often multi-skilled and that there are different types of emotion management requirements for different tasks where they move between different techniques. The roles and methods that they adopt are often dependent on their knowledge, context and group affiliation. I explore how spiritualist contexts impact on emotion management and I explore what techniques, strategies and reflexivity are needed to conduct emotion management.

I begin by examining what experiencing Spirit emotion is like for the practitioner, including both positive and negative beliefs surrounding it and the techniques used to prompt it. I will touch on how the negative experience of Spirit emotion may impinge

on the practitioners' sense of self. Exploring Spirit emotion is essential for further discussion on how practitioners manage their emotions during interaction with clients. This leads me to the next discussion on the preparatory techniques that are used by practitioners (a) to enable them to retain a sense of self and prevent negative effects and (b) to assist them in achieving a specific state of mind in which to work. Those who did not prepare still had techniques to maintain confidence. Confidence is very important for the conducting of emotion management, when practitioners used these preparatory methods and other strategies throughout the conducting of emotion management to ensure it is maintained. I discuss ethics in this chapter. Firstly, I examine how this is linked to contextual factors given that there are requirements in spiritualist settings for practitioners to conduct emotion management related to presentational requirements. Secondly, I argue that ethics has wider relevance beyond spiritualist settings given that it forms the basis of the emotion management that the majority of independent practitioners conduct.

Practitioners see consultations as uplifting and of benefit to the client. I discuss these aims in relation to emotion management and, again, the practitioners' sense of self. I will then explore the facets of emotion management in extrasensory consultations in more depth. These include identifying and relating to the recipient; the delivery and feeling of extrasensory information, and shutting off and keeping a professional distance.

My central argument in this chapter is that for the extrasensory practitioners there are many kinds of emotional techniques during extrasensory work that are designed to push aside the self and connect with Spirit. Disengaging from the self is the key objective of the practitioner; however, this can come into conflict with ethical deliberations, including how practitioners interpret the information they receive, protect clients and provide an overall positive experience.

Experiencing Spirit Emotion

Spirit emotion is a term I have created to encapsulate a form of channelled energy, or Spirit, that was reported as experienced by practitioners. These experiences are often emotional, during which practitioners experience Spirit rather than just knowing of

Spirit. It is described within the interviews I conducted as an additional phenomenological component coming from an evolved universal energy source different from the extrasensory worker's own emotion. It has various characteristics, which will be discussed in the following section. Whether Spirit emotion really exists is not of importance here because it is something that practitioners described managing and because it was real to them.

All participants claimed to have experienced Spirit emotion in various forms: to feel the energy or the power⁸⁸, both in conscious and dream states. Alan, during a college workshop, describes the differences in energies:

Allow yourself to be free from the cage you put yourselves in; you know, with our mediumship or your soul energy⁸⁹, or your psychic energy, whichever energies we're going to work with at a given time. You're being of service to people, to humanity, and your channel⁹⁰ through which this God-like energy can flow.

Sarah describes experiencing Spirit emotion and the reactions that can occur:

Remember of course that emotion is two-sided; when my angel, Lily, comes close the love that she radiates is so immense that I shake and cry with the love that she brings. I feel her presence and the tears begin to emerge.

Experiences of Spirit emotion were embodied experiences, viewed as pure, divine and often based upon ritual. Reports such as these were based on the belief that this universal energy source (Spirit) is accessible through eliciting altered states of consciousness. The automatic nature of these experiences depends on the experience and skill (learnt or innate abilities) of the practitioner. Many describe their altered states as just happening (e.g. becoming habitual). Other practitioners describe how

⁸⁸ A term frequently used by practitioners to describe energy.

⁸⁹ This is the energy of the medium and relates to the authentic self, the God-like energy is Spirit emotion in this quotation.

⁹⁰ Your channel in this context means Spirit guide.

they induce this Spirit emotion, managing themselves and it. In the previous chapter I looked at how practitioners would, for example, describe feeling cold in a specific part of the body as a means of identifying that a Spirit was communicating with them. However, in order for the practitioner to contact or maintain contact with spirits that ostensibly exist in higher, faster vibrations within this universal energy source, compared to humans on the slower earth plane of existence, I will illustrate how specific emotion management techniques had to be used.

Practitioners described having to speed up their bodily vibration. They do this through focusing on their mental faculties, which act usually involves blocking out social distractions within the immediate environment, being reflexive about their thoughts and feelings, and sometimes enacting forms of meditation or using preparation techniques. According to practitioners, spirits then have to also slow their energies down to communicate, which involves effort from Spirit. In this sense, there is a mutual respect between practitioner and Spirit with regard to much proficiency this takes.

The skills needed here resemble the reflexive requirements of emotion work. In this sense, the practitioner is using techniques to put herself into a specific state of mind, which involves distancing the social self to improve awareness of Spirit in order to do her job. It is about making a distinction between experiencing the immediate self and the expectations of the social self / Spirit.⁹¹ The beliefs that practitioners had about this experience of energy often prompt the many preparatory techniques they use. These beliefs clearly link to practitioner assertions of authenticity (e.g. being special and receiving sensitive information). In this chapter, though, I am concerned with what this tells us about the practitioners' strategies for handling emotion.

Practitioners presented themselves as sensitive individuals (the old term for medium is 'sensitive'), who have to be careful of energies associated with spirits, people and places that would disturb them more than the average person. Jasmine describes her experience:

⁹¹ This is similar to how the child within Hochschild's (1983) study presents itself to the world in one way despite feeling something different.

It's hard sometimes to shake the other person off. Like the other night when I gave a reading. I was reading someone and the person who they were enquiring about, I found out they have a mental illness, I was sitting there and my mind was racing. Just racing, and I didn't like that feeling at all. I was sitting in another person's mind, and I didn't like the mind that I was in.

Jasmine describes an unwanted experience. Feeling that her mind was racing provides her with the impression that she is experiencing the Spirit's previous illness and that the Spirit has embodied her. In this sense, the practitioner's self was more detached, but it is clear from her recollection that there was still awareness of what was happening. This is a high-intensity experience, which practitioners consider for themselves as convincing, as proof that they are having an authentic Spirit experience.

Such experiences not only suggest that practitioners have to deal with phenomenological occurrences but that these experiences are felt quite strongly within the body. Physical effects, as discussed in the previous chapter, often make the experience more prominent and often also more difficult to manage than others. I am simply treating them here as reports of negative emotional experiences, which lead to some of the techniques practitioners use. It is important to note that not all experiences are negative; practitioners also described the need to manage the self while having positive experiences.

I have established that practitioners would often use third-person testimonies to assert their authenticity. The following account is interesting because practitioners use similar anecdotes to describe the dangers of negative energies and the emotion management they need to conduct. Sarah points to her confidence⁹² at managing negative experiences, this time negativities associated with the client:

I've had a lady come up to me when all the other psychics told her to go away, they didn't want to talk to her, and she was obviously desperate. She sat down and I held her hand and I

⁹² Confidence is a key theme and will be discussed further within the chapter.

went 'oh okay', and she said 'what please, tell me'. I said I was seeing a man who had molested a child when he was a teenager. No one wanted to read her because no one wanted to feel that guy. So yeah, you get really odd experiences like that.

Sarah is willing to potentially experience something negative to help the client. Sarah expresses how a client can have a negative impact on the practitioner's self, not due to the client's personality but because of the Spirit associated with the individual. The client is not being presented as negative, rather it is the deceased person associated with this individual that seems problematic. In this sense, the client has a Spirit attachment that some practitioners may not want to experience. Spirit attachment is a Spirit that impacts on the person's sense of self; it may shadow the person's own personality to make them act differently. It is something that can usually not be managed and usually does not easily leave the person. Experiencing Spirit emotion involves being reflexive about one's own thoughts and feelings and entering a different state of mind to experience Spirit. A Spirit attachment may be viewed as something that would stop practitioners doing their job, as something to be feared. Practitioners would often state people or other practitioners had Spirit attachments if they acted in ways seen as unacceptable by the observer.

In Sarah's case, she is managing the negativities with Spirit rather than a flawed person. One could perceive in this extract that Sarah is presenting herself as special or unique compared to other practitioners given that she was willing to experience the negative energy and potentially put herself at risk to help the client. However, there are many emotion management techniques that allow the practitioner to do this without risking damage to the self. The key consideration of this chapter is the extent to which the self is aware or detached, something that appears to be a significant concern for the practitioner. For instance, within Sarah's interview she described how the belief in her Spirit guides and using psychic protection kept her safe while working with negative energies. I will now explore the different preparation techniques that were used by practitioners and which are designed to protect the self, provide the practitioner with confidence and to finally push the self-aside to experience Spirit. This will include exploring the functional significance that Spirit guides had for the management of emotion.

Preparation techniques for extrasensory work

Preparation of the ability to connect with the extrasensory starts at the levels of: 1) having awareness as a child; 2) emotional triggers, such as major life events; and 3) development of extrasensory abilities subsequent to 1) or 2). Within the authenticity chapter I examined these three elements. Life experiences of the medium are evidently important preparation for extrasensory abilities and being able to empathise with clients, including having ethical awareness. The aim here, however, is to examine how the practitioner immediately and practically prepares for the relaying of extrasensory information to the client.

Practitioners either prepared for consulting with clients or were confident they felt there was no need. For those that did prepare the following techniques were used to induce the right frame of mind: feeling the presence of and working with guides; psychic protection; setting the intention; meditation techniques; the use of props and other rituals.

Spirit guides were briefly discussed with regard to how they functioned to authenticate the practitioner, implying that the practitioner had not created their skills but that these were made possible by a third person within the Spirit world. Spirit guides are unique to the practitioner, looking after their best interests. As practitioners' skills develop they often report becoming aware of new guides with new personalities, which can offer them new support, such as different goals, and teachings. This will reflect the new needs the practitioner has according to her / his development. Having awareness of one's Spirit guide/s and their changeability represents the bond that the practitioner has with the Spirit world. However, many practitioners talked about feeling the presence of Spirit guides as being a major element of their preparation for giving clients advice. Working with Spirit guides provided them with a sense of confidence, supervision and honour in that they were serving the Spirit world in the correct and supported way. Within this relationship, trust in one's guide and Spirit was repeatedly spoken about. With all of these factors in mind the guides did not simply act to authenticate. Guides have interactional significance when it comes to the emotion management, ethics and bodywork of practitioners.

Practitioners within the college were encouraged to detect the guide's presence. This workshop leader explains:

I need you to understand it's not vital that you know everything about those who work with you from Spirit. What I want to get you to know is their presence. I want you to get to know what they feel like, what their energy is like, how your energy changes as they move in around you. I want you to understand the change that happens to you when they step closer to you. Take your time, get to know who's working there, and create a personal bond between you and them. And do it in this quiet time, in this sitting still, of being in the presence of Spirit and saying: 'Okay, folks, I'm here again, what are we doing today?' What matters is, what do you gain? What benefits, what power, and what energy do you get from having them as your helper?

Evidently, then, experiencing Spirit guides is a personalised concern involving significant practitioner reflexivity: distinguishing between the self and the familiar feeling of a specific Spirit. Practitioners within this study knew their Spirit guides to varying degrees and had differing opinions as to their guides' roles and responsibilities. These differences normally centred on how much autonomy the practitioner did or did not have with regards to their experiences or work compared to the authority of the Spirit guide.

Practitioners described guides as functioning to oversee interaction between them and the client but also to protect the practitioner from harm. Practitioners had working agreements with their guides, or team of guides; this was encouraged within training settings. Amelia explains:

Well, the spirits and I have an agreement. I've sat and thought, and set the intention quite clearly, that this is how I work and if you wish to work with me, there are some things that you need to know. I see it as a partnership, I don't have to pass on

everything Spirit gives me, and similarly they don't have to give me everything. It's a partnership. They do their job, and I do my job. I ask them to be respectful of the audience. I do know that sometimes I have to say things in certain ways because they are respecting the person who's getting the message. I quite often have, maybe, somebody who's committed suicide. I do get quite a bit of contact from family members, young people who've passed away, drug or alcohol issues. I will usually say, 'Somebody passed in tragic circumstances,' because most of the spirits don't want to go into the information in a public arena. It may be different when I'm doing a one-to-one reading, when I may have to make reference to something about a person's death. Again, it's whether it's necessary as evidence.

Amelia describes her guides as having social etiquette and knowledge of public versus private arenas. Amelia states she has a working relationship with the Spirit guides, briefing them on her ethical expectations. During interaction, though, she claims that this brief is firmly embedded and the Spirit guides are careful of the type of the information that is conveyed to her, the practitioner, and which eventually reaches the client.

In this respect, she has set the intention to act ethically. She explains: "they don't have to give me everything", which attitude presents her as being more detached from the final process of advice giving, given that it is ethical advice from Spirit. Spirit guides appear to assist practitioners to distance from themselves in what they perceive as a safe way (e.g. the guides act ethically when requested and will protect against negative energies). This data suggests that they act as an ethical filter to what is deemed appropriate for the client to witness, which varies according to location practitioners works within.

This workshop leader explains how Spirit guides provide a signal to the practitioner that they are ready to work.

As I start work I will just feel that hand on my shoulder and it's like we're here, come on, let's get on with the party. That now is my signal that I'm ready to work. But it's your individual way. One lady tells me she hears a high-pitched sound, another student tells me that they get a particular smell, someone else says like they just feel peaceful, they feel this energy. Someone else gets excited, someone else calms down, someone gets warm, someone gets cold, someone feels a tingle, and someone touching their hair, their face; it's unique to you! Because they give you their signal that they're there. One lady tells me: 'I don't really feel anything, it's almost like I go into a void, there's nothing there but the information'. Then so be it! But if you don't spend time sitting in that energy, spending time in the presence of Spirit, that is the essential ingredient to develop your mediumship and provide a service.

This extract suggests that there are many sensory, and primarily embodied sensory, ways in which mediums can confirm that they are in the presence of their Spirit guides that assist them in feeling ready to work. Going into a void represents that the practitioner is distanced more from the self in that it is the information from Spirit that they focus on.

Overall, the practice of knowing the presence of a Spirit guide is clearly a means of creating the right kind of state of mind for doing extrasensory work. The extract also suggests that other techniques, such as meditation, are being promoted, which increases the practitioner's connection to Spirit. It is evident that a sense of embodiment is something frequently experienced while extrasensory practitioners manage their emotions, prepare and conduct emotion management. These embodied experiences occur when the state of mind of the practitioner changes.

During interviewing or workshops, I myself have experienced the sudden coldness or the bodily tingles that these practitioners frequently describe, especially when supposedly receiving information with high emotional significance. This, for me, added intensity to the interaction and applies significance to what is being said. Or

perhaps the intensity of the emotional talks induced a physical reaction in me. Nevertheless, whatever way these bodily reactions were conceived, practitioners still reported certain spontaneity to them, often without associated talk. There are experiences that the practitioner, often with the Spirit guide's help, can initiate and manage, as opposed to these embodied experiences, which can be spontaneous. Practitioners feel reassured by embodied signs and experiences that they are disengaging from the self to receive Spirit.

In summary, when practitioners were invoking the guides as a means to help them manage their emotions, these guides played a significant preparatory role that ultimately resulted in achieving as much distance from the self as possible. There was often a systematic way of practitioners achieving a different state of mind. It was viewed as essential to focus significantly on the changes in energy that often involved a high-intensity sense of embodiment and then, eventually, familiarity of feeling and of confidence occurred. Despite guides being linked to authenticity and spiritual development, it was evident that they served important functions within practitioners' working lives. Guides were thought to be able to protect the practitioner from negative energies, giving them the confidence to work. Nevertheless, practitioners had other ways of dealing with perceived threats. The first is the use of psychic protection.

Practitioners across all contexts and with diverse skills (such as mediumship or psychic work) would use methods of psychic protection that centred on the use of various visualisation techniques. This included the practitioner imagining that they were covering their bodies with what they called the white light of protection, or imagining herself or himself in a protective bubble that contains their own energies within it, preventing contamination by other energies. These methods were a main focus within the college as they were seen as essential for the wellbeing of the practitioner. Others also, or alternately, wear symbols of protection (such as a cross or pentagram) or hold and wear protective crystals.

If psychic protection were not used before a consultation some practitioners believed that they could suffer negative mental and bodily effects and may risk acquiring long-term Spirit attachments, such as those discussed previously. I established that psychic protection is a normalised yet contested routine, meaning that there were opposing

beliefs as to whether it was needed in preparation for consultation. Some practitioners believed that protection was essential, while others believed that there was nothing that would cause them harm and others trusted their Spirit guides enough to protect them and did not feel that they needed other methods. Some did not protect themselves because they did not believe there was anything harmful that could affect them. Kate explains:

I used to get told off by the other psychics, saying you don't ground yourself, you don't protect yourself. And I'm always like, well, you know, they didn't in the old days either, did they? I'm very much more of a free Spirit; I'll just do whatever I want. I don't go by their rules. I go by the philosophy of the old woman in the village who just went around helping people.

The use of psychic protection appears relative to how practitioners perceive themselves and their own skill. To state that protection is not needed appears to be a mechanism to again emphasise authenticity (e.g. through acting altruistically and skilfully no harm will come to them). However, what concerns me here is what purpose this need for protection serves for the practitioner. It provides them with a sense of confidence and reassurance that the consultation will go well and helps to separate the self from the working self (e.g. the self is kept safe whilst channelling occurs).

In order to experience the changes in energy and Spirit emotion, practitioners often said that they needed to have the firm intention to do so. Kate explains:

If I know I'm seeing somebody, and I very rarely do at short notice, I will sit and I'll meditate a little bit and I'll ask the guardian angels to come round and give me some protection and some help. Because I've got to tell them over there that I'm going to do it, and if they'd like to come and join me for this reading, well, fair enough.

Kate's preference not to do short-notice readings suggests that the preparatory process she adheres to is important. Setting the intention for this practitioner involves asking guides for help, often through sitting in a quiet place or meditating and asking for guidance. Some practitioners believe that thinking that they want to communicate with Spirit and / or vocalising this intention will be enough for Spirit to interact with them. Within the college tutors would encourage students to set the intention at the beginning of the day, within group work (e.g. by prayer). In this sense, the practitioners would set boundaries with the Spirit world. Setting the intention can be quite specific. Kate states:

What I tend to ask for, or what I tend to look for, whether it's psychic or a Spirit reading, I have always sent the request, the intention to spirits. I need something that's going to be helpful to the person. If it's not helpful to the person, then why say it.

Practitioners such as Kate clearly use setting the intention as a preparatory technique to ensure the positivity of consultations. Such techniques are used as a form of self-assurance for the practitioner. It gives them confidence that the consultation will go well and will be helpful to the client.

Setting the intention raises issues of who is in control of the extrasensory experience: the Spirit or the practitioner? Some practitioners thought that just by thinking that one should set the intention to communicate with Spirit, that Spirit was *already* interacting with them. Setting the intention might infer that the practitioner was in control (i.e. starting contact with Spirit); believing, though, that Spirit had overriding control of the thoughts of practitioners suggested otherwise. One tutor encouraged students to communicate with spirits about whom she had already told us (i.e. her thinking of them already suggested a link to the Spirit). For instance, I was told to bring through an academic who died of addiction problems when he was in his fifties.

All the students, at the request of this tutor, claimed to communicate with the spirits she had instructed them to. These practices (like 'setting the intention' and 'psychic protection' alongside beliefs about Spirit) serve the purpose of binding the practitioner to Spirit (e.g. even the thoughts of the practitioner are not free from

intrusion) and they provide the practitioner with confidence. Within these methods focus is on the extrasensory self and Spirit rather than on the ordinary self; however, there is a self that needs to be protected. The need to set the intention compared with the notion of Spirit impacting upon practitioners' thoughts highlights the contradictory nature of reported accounts of emotion management.

Another preparatory method that participants reported was meditation and tuning in. Derived from what participants told me, both during my participation at the college and hanging out within the subculture, meditation mainly involved calming the mind, focus, visualising light and symbols in the mind. In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which meditation served the function of reinforcing the practitioners' perception that they were in contact with Spirit (e.g. experiencing light and symbols). Meditation, though, is also something that practitioners used to prepare for consultations or stage demonstrations. *Susan states:*

In order to tune in to that Spirit world, you are creating sacred space, sacred time to be with another dimension, with other minds, who are dead, people who have left this earth, people who have moved beyond this difficult plain. Before I start to work, you know, say, for example, I've got somebody ringing me this afternoon. I had a client and I sat from, like, quarter to three, before the guy rang at three o'clock, and I sat and I tuned in, and I listened to what the spirits had to say about him, before he rung and I was tuning in, onto his vibration, onto his energy, getting into the zone and just being aware of what the energy was around him. So, I'm tuning in, I'm refining my energy to receive the call.

Meditation for Susan provides the right conditions to prepare to communicate with the client. She is describing a process of tuning in, which practitioners refer to when wanting to contact Spirit. In this case tuning in involves a form of meditation, which is spiritual and client-focused. It, again, provides the practitioner with time experiencing Spirit prior to the consultation, which could be seen as a practice technique that

provides the practitioner with confidence, especially when interacting with a potential stranger.

One may think of meditation as a solitary relaxed endeavour. However, meditation for the extrasensory practitioner often involved movement, specifically moving the body. Practitioners explained to me that moving the body helps them to prepare for extrasensory work. Kerry explains:

I sometimes, if I can't get a connection, I'm getting I'm trying to get in a certain rhythm with my body, so I'm really moving, I'm standing up and I'm moving around and even I sense in my hands something. But that movement, that rhythm, brings me into a certain emotional situation, I don't know why. People generally see meditating as sitting down with your eyes closed. But actually, meditation is a moving thing. If you actually look into the proper Buddhist way of doing it, meditation is actually done with movement. That's what I do, I move around my place, doing whatever I need to do.

It is clear that this practitioner is speaking as if she is preparing to channel energy in that she experiences something in her hands (e.g. the energy running through her body). It illustrates how closely related bodily experiences are to the management of emotion in extrasensory practitioners. Movement, together with meditation, is a practice for engendering the proper sense of emotion within the practitioner prior to working with a client. Zoe explains

There's a lot of the mechanics of it, of the feeling, of the things you feel building in your body. I mean, before I go off to demonstrate, you know, I can feel the power coming. Some might call it a form of stage fright, it is a form of stage fright, but, what's happening is, within the enigma, that there's this, kind of, fear aspect that, kind of, builds up and, then you have to, kind of, dissipate that. So, either pacing or walking, or just

reminding yourself, it's the power coming I can feel, it's not impending doom.

Movement for this practitioner seems to suggest that focus is taken away from thought processes, thus making it easier for them to detach from the self and become a channel of this energy. Reassuring them that it is the power coming that is creating the bodily reactions and not their lack of confidence helps to create the correct state of mind for them to perform. What are being described here are strategies for handling emotion. In this case, the emotion that is being managed is the fear of performing in public, which may be different from preparing for a one-to-one reading.

Practitioners also have specific rituals or items they would take to work that would assist them in feeling prepared. Lauren states:

It's the old priestess way of preparing yourself spiritually, you know. I like to make sure I have a really good cleansing shower. I like to try and get as much as sleep as I can, which is hard for me because I don't usually sleep very well. I like to make sure that I look really healthy; I don't look like a degenerate sort of person. That's really, really important to me.

This suggests that practitioners view tiredness as impacting upon their ability to provide a good service. It supports the view that the self needs to be present to have the capacities to manage the interaction. This connects to the main argument of this chapter in that emotion management for the practitioner involves dealing with something of a dilemma– a dilemma between needing the self to manage the interaction (and ethics of the reading) and needing to sideline the self so that they can serve as a channel for Spirit. Lauren is also describing the preference to look good and conduct aesthetic labour. She states:

I've got my psychic kit I bring with me. My sister made me a little drawstring bag. She just gave it to me one day; she'd made it out of all these beautiful Asian blue materials. She made me a whole heap of different pouches to put my cards in and to put

my crystals in and stuff. Everything goes into this little bag, and I have my cards, my crystals, my candles, and my incense.

Hyman (1981) suggests these are props used to enhance perceptions of the authenticity of practitioners. While this may be the case, it is evident that these items provide Lauren with a sense of comfort and confidence to feel prepared by the act of physically preparing something, be it either oneself or preparing a tool kit to bring along to work.

Practitioners also frequently referred to having trust in Spirit and one's abilities prior to and during extrasensory work. Kerry explains:

I mean, you know, when I was at college, a lot of people would say, "Oh before the sitter comes, I spend a half hour meditating". I didn't have time for that. I'm a mum. You know, I had to get on and live my earthly life as well. So I just learnt to trust that they would be there when I had to go up to work.

Kerry describes how her trust in Spirit aids her not having time to prepare for a consultation; similar to those who reported not needing psychic protection. In this sense, she has established a working relationship with Spirit so that she is confident that they will ensure a positive experience while working. Practitioners either have techniques for 'getting into the zone' or they have a strong belief that Spirit will not let them down. The strategies vary, therefore, between being super-prepared and the practitioner relying on their experience and skills (i.e. trusting in their own abilities), which is common in other professions that require public speaking. Zoe explains:

Often, when people are first starting, when they have to demonstrate, this huge fear of what if it's wrong, what if I can't do it, what if, you know, so you go through all these, kind of, self doubts. The Spirit will never let you down, but, sometimes, you can let yourself down by being too caught up in nerves or too fearful or too worried about what you've got on, or, you know, any number of things. You know, if someone says, "no, I just

don't remember that, or I don't understand that", you have to get away from being affected by the "no".

When clients do not see the relevance of the information given to them and they resist accepting it as a truth, this accentuates the practitioner's self doubt. Having courage and the skills to present then is clearly a key concern for extrasensory practitioners. It is also clear from Zoe's account how the recipient of the information can impact negatively on the practitioner's emotion management, especially if the practitioner does not receive the desired response. For Zoe, trust in Spirit, when she claims that "Spirit will never let you down", is a method of depersonalisation⁹³. She focuses on her trust in Spirit, rather than the client, to cope with these relational demands. Overall, this data suggests that whether practitioners do or do not use preparatory methods, they still have to achieve a specific frame of mind to do their work, one that involves detaching from the self in order to focus on Spirit. Central to this work is having confidence by feeling calm or energized, protected, experienced or physically prepared, depending on the context and the characteristics of the practitioner.

Closely related to the experience of Spirit emotion and the ethics of extrasensory advice giving is the Spirit guide. As I have discussed, practitioners' interaction with a Spirit guide means that often the self is less existent within interaction wherein the guide has ethical authority. However, the degree to which this self is present in interaction is a contested issue for the practitioner and is related to ethical issues. Ethical factors are central to prompting the conscious control of emotion and information giving; they guide the emotion management of the practitioner. While investigating these issues, I will focus particularly upon practitioners' relationship with the self, which is clearly vital to the extrasensory practitioner's emotion management.

Emotion management and ethics

In the previous chapter I examined the relationship between ethics and authenticity: how when the practitioner acts ethically it may impact on perceptions of authenticity. I now explore how ethics is significantly linked to contextual issues (specifically within

⁹³ Depersonalisation is when 'individuals become emotionally detached from service recipients, intellectually listing them as objects rather than as people' (Mann, 2004: 12)⁹³.

the Spiritualist National Union), the positive focus of consultations and the practitioner's sense of self. With these influences in mind I will explore what this means for practitioners' emotion management.

Recognizing the potential dangers of providing extrasensory information is a key concern outside and within the esoteric subculture, especially to those considered vulnerable like the bereaved or ill. Charles, an astrologist, captures this concern:

I believe that the power of self-fulfilling prophecy is dangerous, and a lot of telepaths, whether they call themselves clairvoyants or psychics or mediums or whatever, they just don't get it, they don't realise how powerful it is. They don't think. They plant dark images in people's minds.

What Charles is highlighting here is that these consultations may have negative effects as a result of the suggestibility of all clients, not just vulnerable ones. Within a previous study I conducted I found that clients had a tendency to retain advice (both positive and negative) that would, according to them, influence their later decision-making (Metcalfe, 2009). This is what Charles is suggesting here. Consumer protection regulations also reflect this concern and expect ethical conduct during extrasensory work. Nevertheless, there are very limited guidelines as to what kind of conduct is expected in the wider domain. I know of no sociological research into the ethics of these practices.

What is often not portrayed is that ethical issues, associated with the type of advice and the way the information was relayed to the client, were a key concern for practitioners, impacting on the way they manage their emotions and their interactions with clients. My data suggest that practitioners' ethical awareness is an individual moral and spiritual concern, according to each practitioner's beliefs and influences from the wider subculture.

Within spiritualist settings, presentation criteria exists that practitioners are required to follow. Practitioners aim to display an authentic link with Spirit through conveying the correct personality and emotion of the deceased, together with any positive information. Dealing with these factors, practitioners claim, involves skill and much emotion management (i.e. they negotiate their relationship to themselves, to the

institution, to Spirit and to clients through a process of self reflexivity and then presentational skill). The Spiritualist National Union is fundamental in the promotion and adherence of ethical awareness. Such rules and regulations influence how practitioners emotionally manage and present themselves, not just within spiritualist environments but also further afield. It is important to note that much extrasensory training in the UK is connected to this institution. Spiritualist teachings, therefore, easily influence practitioners in the public domain.

Within the SNU, as well as during other events, I have found similarities and differences in the observed presentational technique of practitioners. Spiritualist contexts have their own stratifications and social formations where the institution has established a robust code of conduct, dress, presentation style and ethical principles. Within the spiritualist context the practitioner's motive is not monetary⁹⁴. Gaining recognition, status and a spiritual sense of self throughout their interactions with others in such environments was frequently referred to during interviewing or throughout my hanging out within the subculture. Therefore, being perceived as authentic and acting ethically is equally important in such domains.

What I am concerned about in this context is how presentational requirements prompt practitioner reflexivity in relation to emotion management. The primary issue within SNU settings is that practitioners are informed that they have to be careful about how they relay information to the recipient (e.g. sensitive information). Practitioners are not allowed to focus on negative past events or predict future negativities. They are instructed to focus primarily on the deceased person's personality to prove life after death and to relay information in a sensitive and positive manner. Michelle explains how this prevents her working the way that she wants to:

I was told I shouldn't have walked down the aisle. I said, 'yes, but people couldn't hear me.' 'You shouldn't be using your hands. I want to use my hands.' I'm not going to stand like this [puts her arms by her side]. It's stupid! Oh, hey! I shouldn't be using my hands. I shouldn't have been too focused on the death

⁹⁴ Practitioners only get expenses, such as travel.

because it was her 12-year-old daughter. So when I went to her, I went, 'I've got Natalie here, your daughter.' I just felt, 'oh,' I felt a knife go into me. Well, she was murdered. I turned around and said to the mother, 'I've got your 12-year-old daughter here, Natalie, and she's telling me she was murdered.' I just get a knife. I got wrong for saying murdered. I should've said 'unforeseen circumstances.' I want to be accurate. I think if I've got that gift, give it.

Michelle's account signifies the kind of emotion management that is required within spiritualist settings where there is a conflict that needs to be managed regarding what they are feeling and what is acceptable to reveal. Practitioners frequently spoke about having to be mindful of appropriately presenting their bodies as well as editing their phenomenological experiences to speak to churchgoers in an ethical way. This often involves putting their beliefs to one side concerning the way they should work, or not in Michelle's case. Michelle highlights how restrictive some practitioners perceive spiritualist contexts to be. Again, in the previous chapter Lottie explains this dilemma when she talks about losing the power of Spirit in the editing (see page 192 for full quotation). A shared view amongst practitioners was that channelled information that is edited according to spiritualist requirements is conceived of as less helpful (less powerful) but also less harmful or upsetting to the recipient. *Editing, therefore, is a balancing act: practitioners must be both absent when connecting with Spirit and also able to edit (i.e. to be present) in order to act ethically.*

Most practitioners I interviewed had been or still were connected to Spiritualism, whether it was on a professional or developmental basis, since Spiritualism acts as a recruiter for these practices⁹⁵. Practitioners spoke about their own businesses and also serving⁹⁶ the spiritualist church as well as speaking about having to change methods of presentation accordingly. This means that practitioners are often multi-skilled and there are different foci of emotion management for different tasks. Despite this diversity, there is a significant concern for the practitioner concerning how much

⁹⁵ Also discussed in Chapter 6.

⁹⁶ Practitioners working on a voluntary basis within the spiritualist church see that they are being of service to the spiritualist church, Spirit and others (e.g. human development).

they are aware in the interaction. Amanda works within the spiritualist context but is describing her private work here:

Whatever I get I never keep nothing from nobody. I had this gentleman come, he's in his 50s and he sat down. Straight away his mother came through, she says, 'Tell him it's his mam. He must go to the doctors, he's got bowel cancer but he doesn't know.' Oh god, how am I going to do this? I can't say by the way you've got bowel cancer. So I put it a different way. I'll say, 'Listen, I've got your mam here and she's just told me I'm getting terrible pains here down below.' 'Oh, you're right, yes.' I says, 'Can you please go to the doctors? Please! Because if you don't...' and then I'll have a bit of humour, I says, 'You'll end up where your mam is, you know, and then...' With a sense of humour, I can't say and by the way, you're going to go and die!

Amanda signifies the importance of the type of information that practitioners often feel compelled to give to clients. This consultation did not occur within a spiritualist context but, from her perspective, she still needs to edit the information in order to show sensitivity towards the client. Amanda's account, though, is even more complex than that as she also says that she never keeps anything from her clients. In other words, she is toning down advice. This process makes her extremely aware of herself in the overall experience, including how she has to make judgements about what it would be appropriate to say to the recipient and of how to tell him inadvertently to seek medical help without alarming him. Humour has functional significance in the emotion management of extrasensory work in that it is seen as reducing a negative emotional reaction *to* the warning.

Ethics are clearly what guide the interaction and how the practitioner manages themselves and presents the information. Practitioners reflect on common ethical rules that provide the moral basis on which their interactions with clients rest. For instance, here are some of the ethical rules that were described to me during the interview process with practitioners:

- To maintain confidentiality
- Not using insulting or foul language
- Not *predicting* death
- Not diagnosing medical conditions
- To avoid giving children advice
- Avoid reading for friends too often
- Avoiding harm to all
- The need for progression and own autonomy
- Not conducting consultations under the influences of alcohol or drugs

It is, in one sense, the practitioner's attempt to self regulate in the absence of formal regulation, except from within the spiritualist domain. Amelia discusses her ethical awareness:

I do feel we've got to have the ethical debate. Absolutely. Because the only way to protect vulnerable people, and we're dealing with vulnerable people, is for there to be a level of ethical awareness and a level of commitment. Now, spirits do apply a penalty if you're not working ethically because they'll hold you, they won't let you progress in your development. You kind of reach a plateau and you don't seem to be able to move off that plateau until you've got your head round what it is you're doing and how important it is.

Amelia acknowledges that there is a need to protect vulnerable people. Ethics though, from her perspective, are tied up with a unique way of thinking that may not make sense to others, in how Spirit and Spirit guides exist to oversee the work of the practitioner. The client was seen to be equally sensitive and prone to harm from Spirit information, the practitioner's interpretation of Spirit or themselves. Lottie explains:

For me I know they'll take everything I say. The sceptic may dismiss most of it, but the believer will take every bit of it. And that's why it's so important it's not me passing the judgement. If somebody says to me, 'I don't know whether to leave my

husband or not, and I want some Spirit guidance.' I can't say, 'Yes' or 'No.' I have to walk a very, very fine line. And the spirits who come through walk that fine line too.

Having more practice at extrasensory work may provide the practitioner with more confidence and more ethical awareness through the different people with whom they interact. However, the need for ethical conduct provides, again, an emotion management dilemma for the practitioner. For instance, practitioners talk about needing to act ethically based on his or her personal social experiences, spiritual beliefs and so forth, thus making the self very present in the interaction. Nevertheless, to have the relationship with Spirit that Amelia has often means that the practitioner needs to not be as fully engaged with the self. Amelia explains:

Without thinking, without analysing, I will just speak. Very much like stream of consciousness speaking. And the thoughts of me, what I might be thinking, will be somewhere else entirely. In order to adequately reflect the Spirit person, I haven't got to be there. One of the sayings I give to my students, is, 'Take the I and the ME out of medium and you have 'dum'. That's me. I have to be dumb, stupid or quiet, whichever way you want to express it, but, basically, I shouldn't be there. I shouldn't be interpreting, I shouldn't be saying, 'I think it's this,' or, 'I feel it's that.' I should try to be out of it as much as possible.

Adhering to these ethical principles not only guides interactions but also prompts reflexivity and emotion management on the part of the practitioner. Emotion management occurs through being distanced from the self and placing more emphasis on a Spirit guide or Spirit. Staying detached involves a form of emotion management. The degree to which the self is present in interaction is a factor of much deliberation to her and others I interviewed. It is something that they frequently discuss and have to consistently manage. In sum, how practitioners reflect on these tensions is inherently important to the conducting of emotion management within extrasensory

work where practitioners have coping mechanisms (e.g. not interpreting information) to deal with the need for this reflexivity.

The various influences on extrasensory work, such as authenticity, and ethical issues, mean that practitioners have much to consider when working with clients. There are variations between working contexts and in the way practitioners describe dealing with presentational requirements. Some practitioners described focusing more on keeping the consultations upbeat, ethical and positive in content. Others focus upon giving information on the client's life circumstances and future. Practitioners described methods they used to contend with, and often avoid, the emotionality of these consultations. What many practitioners in this study have highlighted is that good, learnt and practised presentational skills are essential to be able to convey phenomenological, often embodied, information to the recipient.

Specific presentation styles were taught at the college and throughout other events and courses I attended. The aim here is not to provide exact analysis of the presentation styles, since recordings of the actual interactions would be required and have not been obtained. Rather, I will provide insight into how practitioners cope and manage the presentational requirements they identify and what this means for their own emotion management.

The therapeutic, emotional and positivity of extrasensory advice

Related to the overall ethical considerations within extrasensory practices, practitioners claimed that consultations should have a therapeutic and overall positive focus. Practitioners reported using techniques to ensure this happened. This would influence the type of advice practitioners were willing to provide, their own emotion management and the way they presented it to the client. Practitioners are not merely conveyers of information but are often onstage in the public domain and trusted counsellors. Extrasensory work has emotionality and sentimentality at its core in that clients reacquaint with the deceased. Katie explains:

Everybody in the Spirit world when you're doing a reading has a personality the same as you have a personality here. If you bring that personality through you've brought them through;

that's who they are. That's them, that's their character, their personality, the way they stood, the way the eye movements, the little gestures they used to do. You know most of those things.

Because of Katie's presentational techniques, recipients of her work can presumably have some experience of their deceased relatives or associates' personalities. These consultations can, therefore, be very emotionally driven and I have viewed much public display of emotion from recipients. It is, therefore, not only the content of what is said that is of significance. Rather, the emotion that underpins the talk or the way the information / personality is conveyed through bodily expression or tone of voice, which is fundamental. Katie embodies the Spirit whose characteristics become part of her own expression. Presentational techniques, which conveyed the personalities of the Spirit, were common within the college and they seemed familiar from observations of them. Embracing the Spirit's personality appears to be a way Katie becomes more connected to Spirit and further distanced from the self.

Amelia claims:

If I have something that may be quite difficult to handle, then I will need to have something that can shed some positive light on the situation.

What Amelia is describing is her attempt at managing her client's emotions by her perceived effect of negative information on the client. By providing both positive and negative information, she determines that this may make the consultation more enjoyable and beneficial for both the practitioner and the client. What she is describing is a balancing act between presenting positive and negative information, which takes effort through distinguishing between thoughts and expectations and requiring, on her part, good relational skills for the consultation to have a perceived positive outcome.

In large-scale demonstrations, practitioners claimed to use humour to provide positive experiences. Michelle states:

When I do an audience it's not all doom and gloom. Everybody goes: 'God, it was brilliant, when are you doing another one?' They'll say: 'God, we had such a laugh', because I had everyone laughing in the audience. At the end I'll go to the audience, 'Does anyone want to ask some questions about death? Anything you can ask me?' I had this woman say, 'Do you know anything dirty about anybody in here?' I went, 'Yes, I do'. And I'm not looking anywhere, I said, 'but it's down that way.' 'What do you know?' And I said, 'Oh right, by the way I've just had a grandmother going into a drawer here, and I'm not going to mention, but there's four of them, vibrators.' [Laughter]

Humour has a function in providing a more entertaining and engaging experience. Nevertheless, the use of humour appears to aid emotion management. Jon states:

I think humour is good as well. If I see someone either a little bit uneasy but they still want to work with me then I'll put them at ease by telling a joke, a self-effacing joke about myself, or something. I'll say something like, 'I was doing a psychic supper the other week, but I was really starving cause I didn't get any food, because they said to not feed the medium.'⁹⁷

Jon is acting on the perception of unease from the client. Clients who appear not as engaged with the practitioner may not be as receptive and, as I discussed in the previous chapter, clients often co-construct perceptions of authenticity. One way to cope with this appears to be through using humour; thus, the practitioner portrays himself in an upbeat manner in order to get the client on side. Humour, therefore, is seen to benefit the practitioner and not just the overall performance.

Humour is generally a behind-the-scenes coping mechanism within relational work (Bolton, 2005). Humour in extrasensory work is often used in an open way in front of

⁹⁷ "Feeding the medium" is a term used to suggest that clients give the practitioner information about themselves, which jeopardises the authenticity of the consultation.

the client and is perceived to improve the overall client experience. Knowing how to use humour appropriately requires degrees of social insight from the practitioner.

I do feel it's important to tell jokes and develop your own persona on stage but at the same time it's not about me, it's about the people, so I'd always put their feelings before mine, you know.

This practitioner, Alan, is talking about stage presence (private and public identity) and how social factors impinge on the delivery of extrasensory information. It means that the practitioners appear to be very present, rather than the Spirit, in the interaction. This practitioner acknowledges that humour is important but focuses on the client's needs rather than on his own. This is about conveying an ethical approach to mediumship (the rule here being that practitioners have to put the client's feelings first). Again, ethical considerations are making the practitioner's social perception more prominent in the interaction. This awareness of self during the giving of extrasensory information becomes a dilemma for the practitioner.

Extrasensory practitioners and emotion management during the delivery of information

Identifying and relating to the recipients of extrasensory work was significant to the emotion management the practitioner conducts and the delivery of extrasensory information. Practitioners talked about feeling a connection with clients or achieving a link with them (i.e. a feeling that the practitioner is connected to their energy and Spirit) prior to or during a consultation. Feeling a connection or link with a client was described as slightly different from the way that they would experience Spirit emotion (e.g. identifying between one's own thoughts and that of Spirit). During large-scale demonstrations, identifying or relating to a recipient may involve detecting the recipient from a multitude of others, or, in a one-to-one consultation, it may involve the recipient being responsive to extrasensory information based on perceptions of rapport (i.e. whether practitioners feel a connection of energy). Practitioners describe this connection as just a vibe or feeling that they would experience from somebody in the audience. Other practitioners would state that they would see bright lights or

colours above the heads of recipients and thus knew the information was for them.

Colin explains:

There might be ten people in that room who can take that name so you then have to piece it all together and ask for other information. So what I'll do is I'll see if I've got a vibe from someone. If I feel a connection with someone in the audience I'll go to them and then do a bit of clairvoyant work with them. I'll ask them [Spirit] information about them, and I'll say, 'Oh, you know, at the moment you're going through a time where there are a lot of gates open.' I'll ask for an image to be given and then after that they can, hopefully they can take that information and then the Spirit will come in. So I just work better if I start off clairvoyantly and then I'll welcome the Spirit in there, because then I've got the connection with the person already. If their loved ones do want to come through in Spirit, I think they respect me more in a way, if that makes sense, because then I've already built up the connection and have taken the time out, you know, to actually get to know the person.

In this case the practitioner needs to manage the possibility that generic information could be relevant to a number of people. Across many of my interviews, practitioners reported that this often caused anxiety for them, and there were different ways of dealing with this. Practitioners explained this vibe as energy that the practitioner felt was pulling them towards the client – something that they described as being Spirit-driven. Colin signifies that he has a specific structured style of working that assists him in coping with these relational demands.

He claims, "Hopefully they can take that information". Building up a connection in this sense appears to be related to the acceptance of information and the responsiveness of the client - acceptance of information is important for the practitioner to continue. The lack of a connection or a link is often used to explain unsuccessful instances. Alan explains:

Sometimes you have good nights and sometimes you have days where, where you try working with people and you just can't get anything right [laughing]. I'm aware that's happened, and it's not great when it happens, they say not to work with ego, but it is a horrible feeling when you don't get it. So when that happens, I mean I have been, been honest with people. I've said look I really can't, I'm very sorry I'll come back to you if I can, but I'm really not getting a link with you, and I will reassure that person. I will say that, you know, you, I will tell them that they're in a very good place at the minute because there's no message needed for them. So sometimes that can be difficult, but I think factors that make it difficult is that if I'm unwell myself. Or if I'm feeling tired, and I think you've got to be honest and sometimes cancel, luckily, touchwood, it's not happened, but if I was unwell I would, I wouldn't want to waste people's time really.

Alan identifies that there are times when the practitioner cannot achieve a connection with the client or a link with Spirit for the client. While Alan is conducting emotion management (i.e. managing the negative emotion associated with the event not going well) he is using two strategies. The first of these is seemingly convincing himself and the recipient that it is Spirit who has decided that no message is needed rather than claiming he lacks ability. Secondly, Alan manages the inability to conduct more emotion management through claiming to be unwell. Alan pinpoints the common distinction between the governing nature of Spirit and then the secondary position of the self as the communicator. Other practitioners used terms such as their "radar" being a bit off if they gave wrong information to the client, which serves to provide the impression that there is something other than themselves to blame. Other practitioners trusted their guides to identify (i.e. in the practitioner's thoughts) the right person to give the information to, and they were often unwilling to accept when clients stated that the information was irrelevant. Guides provide the practitioner with confidence and this plays a key role in the delivery of information. In this sense, practitioners were managing the negative responses from clients through identifying

more with the experience of Spirit than with what the client was saying (i.e. they were in the flow).

Another important concern for the practitioner while conducting emotion management is the ability to get into the flow of giving the information to the client. Practitioners deliberate over the correct way to *experience* the delivering of this information, which allows them to acknowledge whether the information is coming from them or Spirit. Colin explains:

Sometimes it might just take a second or two, or sometimes it might be a bit more to build up cause I might start getting more information about say, for example, I might get a clairvoyant feeling like they're good at golf, or good at a certain sport. I'll tell them this and then, I might get a message then about where they got that ability. So I might get a grandfather coming through, or a relative in Spirit who has also had that talent and then it just opens it up a lot. You get into the flow of it.

Getting into the flow before or during communication is a key term used by practitioners and was much focused on during training. A flow also appears to involve a client being receptive to, and not halting, the interaction in whatever forms this may emerge. Responsiveness suggests that the practitioner achieves a specific frame of mind and continues to connect more with what they conceive as Spirit rather than the self. Lottie explains:

There's a very fine line between your own memories of things and Spirit. The longer gaps you have between statements, the more likely that you'll go into your own unconscious mind and the subconscious will sort something out that is part of your own life experience. Now, it may be related to the Spirit person, who is, kind of, touching your mind about it but it may be because you've just, kind of, come completely out of the zone.

There are three issues here. Firstly, there is the emotion management it takes to distinguish between the self and the Spirit. Secondly, achieving a specific state of mind (i.e. something other than ordinary awareness in normal interaction) is important. Finally, there are presentational issues to contend with (e.g. avoiding gaps between speech, which is indicative of a weak connection to Spirit).

Sarah also explains:

You can try too much to get something. You might just get a name very quickly what comes to your mind, but that might be a name of your own self-consciousness. It might be a name of a friend see, so you'll say that name. Sometimes it's not happening if there's an effort there. If I feel as though it doesn't work, I will be very honest with people.

For both Lottie and Sarah there seem to be questions over which experiences are from the self and which are from Spirit. The effort they use to decipher such experiences is significant. In Chapter 6 participants showed a preference for powerful, embodied experiences that provided confirmation that they were experiencing something authentically extraordinary, rather than their own minds playing tricks. Here, I go further in identifying that during the delivery of extrasensory information deciphering between one's mind and Spirit is based on being in a specific frame of mind or the speed of experiencing and delivering the information. Feeling like it does not work, as Sarah acknowledges, confirms, as mentioned in Chapter 6, that the client's responsiveness is fundamental to the practitioner's ability to get into the frame of mind to conduct emotion management. In sum, the key focus is for the practitioner to put themselves to one side and increasingly relate to Spirit with the help of the client.

When practitioners put too much mental effort into eliciting extrasensory emotion / information problems arise. Sarah describes effort as indicative that there is something wrong and that the consultation is not working, that her own consciousness is overriding Spirit. Information that is received by the practitioner quickly is still questioned. This illustrates that some practitioners may be in a constantly questioning state during interaction, trying to decide whether the experience is coming from them or the Spirit. Effort and hesitation prompts the

questioning of the authenticity of Spirit emotion and leads to applying significance to their own mind: questioning interpretations and / or imagination. Nevertheless, the diversity of this questioning (i.e. speed of information versus effort) suggests that, for practitioners, Spirit contact has to feel a certain way. It is difficult to explain what this feeling was like for practitioners since many could not articulate their experiences, rather simply knew the familiar feeling.

Having confidence was clearly a concern for the practitioners I spoke with and experiencing confidence may be a familiar feeling they identify with. Nevertheless, the feeling of Spirit contact appears more complex and often involves 'embodying feelings' that are experienced as being distinct from the practitioner's own feelings. Susan explains:

Most people, they are very highly developed clairsentients. They can feel this is dad, this feels like a big man, this feels like a heart condition, this feels like a manual job and I feel I'm in a coal mine, I feel...and it's all feel, feel, feel and that is, actually, going to develop all the other things as well because you can be having all the visions in the world, but if you can't feel into knowing what it's about then it's lost on you.

Susan is referring to most people in the subculture, not generally. She is signifying that the feeling of Spirit essential, that it is not the information but the feeling that she relies on. Tutors at the college claimed that the vast majority of practitioners are mostly clairsentient and often do not hear or see anything, but simply sense / feel what they perceive to be Spirit. Feeling for such practitioners is thus very important to such practices and, even though they claim to be experiencing different feelings to their own, they still need to be present in the interaction to be able to articulate and manage this.

While feelings need to be managed so does the experience and presenting of the extrasensory information. The issue of interpretation causes a significant dilemma for some practitioners. This is how much the practitioner's social self is present during extrasensory work and how much meaning the practitioners apply to the

phenomenological experiences they are having. Whether or not practitioners should interpret the messages they report receiving from Spirit is a topic of significant debate. Spirit emotion, as experienced by diverse practitioners, is complex where differences appear to be based on the extent of feeling and internal and external symbolism experienced. Unlike 'feeling', Spirit emotion was often described as entirely blocking the extrasensory practitioner so that his or her interpretation (emotional and social) was not present or as needing to be consciously managed. To revisit Amelia's quote (also on page 234)

Without thinking, without analysing, I will just speak. Very much like a stream-of-consciousness speaking. And the thoughts of me, what I might be thinking, will be somewhere else entirely. In order to adequately reflect the Spirit person, I haven't got to be there. One of the sayings I give to my students, is, 'Take the I and the ME out of medium and you have 'dum'. That's me. I have to be dumb, stupid or quiet, whichever way you want to express it, but, basically, I shouldn't be there. I shouldn't be interpreting, I shouldn't be saying, 'I think it's this,' or, 'I feel it's that.' I should try to be out of it as much as possible.

In cases such as these, this leads to the questioning of how much the practitioner consciously conducts emotion management. If the practitioner claims to be detached, that detachment still undoubtedly involves internal management. For instance, the practitioner has been able to achieve a state in which she experiences herself as 'not present' (at least, to an extent). However, later in the interview Amelia said the receipt of Spirit emotion needs some social input. The majority of practitioners frequently articulated similar contradictions. Amelia explains:

What should come through in the reading should be what that Spirit chooses to say. Now, it's not a hundred per cent, because on an ethical point, I have to have some control. So, if I've got an angry person who wanted to shout at the sitter then I have to be able to say, 'No you can't do that.' So, it's like I'm driving

the car, but they're taking left, right, round that roundabout, over that bridge. Wherever they want to go. So, to a greater extent, I'm not present.

What Amelia is articulating is a dilemma for practitioners between distancing from the self in order to be a channel for spirit and allowing the self to manage the interaction to ensure ethical conduct. Ethical considerations, such as not being offensive to the client, clearly assist in bringing the practitioner's awareness back into the interaction.

Other practitioners try to limit this dilemma by focusing specifically on the experience or the information in a literal way rather than applying social meaning to it. Alan explains:

If they say, 'Yes, you can go as deep as you like,' you give exactly what comes through because once you start to analyse it, well let's say, let's put it this way: as Nostradamus said he said he could see pigs flying, but what he was seeing was people with oxygen masks on. So, if you're, you've got a patient in front of you, give what you see, you don't try to analyse it. You destroy the message because you've put your interpretation onto what you've seen but what you're seeing is totally different to what it is.

Practitioners such as these believe that what is experienced in their mind, symbolically or from a feeling, should be related to the client in that form and that they should not apply their own interpretation of the symbols they are experiencing or what the feeling means. Alan explains *further*:

Alright, so all of a sudden you're there and you say, 'I see bananas, erm, you eat a lot of bananas?' You've already destroyed the information. 'Cause you've said, 'You eat a lot of bananas,' the person says, 'No I don't eat a lot of bananas.'

Alan is stating that interpretation allows the client more chance to reject the information. In this sense, using the method of no interpretation may be a coping mechanism to make emotion management easier through maintaining a closer connection to Spirit by allowing the client to apply his or her own meanings to the statements provided. The client is likely to accept and attribute meaning to some quite broad statements to enable the practitioner to get into the flow, which, in turn, provides the practitioners with confidence and acceptance. Providing no interpretation appears to be a way of avoiding ethical reflexivity on the part of the practitioner.

Practitioners had other emotion management strategies to cope with the emotionality of the interaction, rather than just the content of the information.

Practitioners spoke about the emotional effects that their extrasensory work can have on them and how there was a need to shut off and distance themselves, which was similar to the preparatory protection methods. Susan explains:

I feel for somebody just setting out, the difficult one is the grief. That's one where you can tend to become over involved, and just because they're crying or distressed, or angry or whatever, you can start to get drawn in emotionally.

Susan is talking about how physical displays of emotionality from the client could trigger emotional response and compassion from the practitioner. The concern is that if practitioners do countless of these consultations it will soon have a negative impact on them. The college were fundamental in teaching the need to control the emotions, as this student recalls:

A particular lady I was talking to yesterday came here ten years ago and I was in her course. I'd been there two days and she turned round to me sharply and said "[name of student] you'll now stop crying". She was right. Because those days I used to do a fair bit of private reading of a weekend but my wife used to see how it had upset me emotionally. I could be watching television and the tears will be rolling down my eyes off the

two readings I'd just done. I was still tied up with it emotionally. So, after I started coming here, they teach you how to handle this. They teach you how to understand it. They teach you how to put it in its perspective place. They teach you that you can't be a medium that's open all the time. It'll destroy you. You've got to learn how to say, "I work now, now I shut off".

The student is talking about the training of emotion management and how they understood the need for this. This student is describing himself as the sensitive practitioner who is affected by the emotions of his clients. Shutting off is a way of this student separating his working identity from his private identity. The college teaches visualisation techniques similar to psychic protection for achieving this state of separation. Shutting off often involves visualising that the link with Spirit has been broken, setting the intention to Spirit that they no longer wish to be impacted upon in an emotionally negative way.

Practitioners also used the method of keeping a professional distance to deal with client emotionality during interaction. Psychic protections, emotional and physical distance were seen as paramount to the wellbeing of the practitioner. Michelle explains:

The mother sat down and I said, "Look, I've got your daughter here" and the daughter was saying to me, "Look, everyone thinks I killed myself. I didn't. It was an accident, an overdose of heroin". And she'd gone on to tell me she'd been in the flat three days before the mother found her. She'd only been over there about ten days when she came through, but the mother was desperate. She needed to know the daughter hadn't killed herself. Now that was very emotional. The mother was crying and, under normal circumstances, I'd get up and give them a hug. But when I'm working, I can't do that.

Here the practitioner is clearly describing a situation in which, by choice, she avoided being over-empathetic with the client, which involved her using distancing techniques

(such as no physical contact). The practitioner sees no contact as a tool to prevent her becoming too emotionally involved. However, this instance is clearly memorable to the practitioner where she has been able to recall a conflict between what she normally would do if someone were visibly upset and what her working status prevented her from doing.

Discussion

The findings discussed in this chapter regarding the emotion management of extrasensory practitioners make original contributions to the mediumship literature and the sociology of emotions literature. It provides an interactionist perspective in an attempt to understand the interpersonal management of these practices. It also starts sociological research into the role that ethics play throughout practitioners' work. It illustrates that the body is significant in the conduct of emotion management in extrasensory work not simply regarding the healing work or aesthetic labour practitioners may do but also to how embodied emotion management feels.

In this chapter I have primarily highlighted how practitioners construct a sense of self of being an extrasensory practitioner and how practitioners make sense of the work that they do. While there are those who have successfully studied the language usage of these consultations, this study is novel in exploring emotion management, the factors associated with why practitioners interact with others in the way they do.

Practitioners, within their work, aim to experience something other than their own consciousness. The process of eliciting these types of experiences involves, on one level, what could be conceived as altered states. Yet, more specifically, it involves practitioners conducting significant reflexivity and achieving a different state of mind and embodiment compared to their ordinary state. In other words, it is complex emotion management that they are conducting for which different strategies are used.

In this chapter I have examined these strategies. I explored the preparation techniques that practitioners use. These preparation techniques expose much about emotion management. Guides, for example, are a way in which the practitioner can believe they are less connected to themselves and more able to adopt the role of extrasensory

practitioner through establishing a regular connection with Spirit. Throughout the preparation techniques I have explored, practitioners attempt to separate themselves into having private and public identities through using psychic protection methods. Nonetheless, with extrasensory practitioners, emotion management being conducted in a private context often suggests not the nature of the context but rather the state of mind as private. The difference between extrasensory practitioners and other workers is that extrasensory practitioners often expose this private emotion management and make it public though talking out loud to the recipient, explaining their immediate experience of Spirit. This is evident through the different techniques they use to conduct their identity work (e.g. as a tool to give the impression of authenticity; or using silence and pause and then claiming not to be able to achieve a link), when presenting the personality of the Spirit or when interpreting information (i.e. practitioners would say: 'He's showing me this,' and would talk the client through the process of their experience).

I have shown how extrasensory practitioners' identity and emotion management is directly associated with spiritual philosophy, involving the maintaining of specific ideals, morals and values. This is what is so valuable about research in this thesis in that experience is explored rather than the truth of practices. Identity in extrasensory work is thus not as clear-cut as one would imagine (e.g. being able to distinguish between church, working and home life). In other words, extrasensory work is the practitioner's way of life.

The need to protect the self from negative energies, both human and Spirit, illustrates the unique view of the world that practitioners have. For them, there is a spiritual self that needs to be preserved. Extrasensory practitioners develop an acute awareness of bodily experiences that are significantly linked to the management of emotion. Bodily experiences are closely related to instances when practitioners claim they have an instinct about something (e.g. they will go cold or experience prickly heat). Such bodily experiences provide practitioners with the signal to work, to safeguard them, to provide additional evidence throughout consultations, making the information a very real experience for them and the client. Practitioners referred to having trust in Spirit and their own abilities. In one sense, talking about Spirit in this way is a mechanism to retain distance from oneself and a closer relationship with Spirit, which is central to

this work. Trusting in a positive outcome comes with experience, confidence and efficiency.

Ethics, I found, is fundamental to extrasensory work. Until now there has been no known academic research that has explored what ethics mean for extrasensory practitioners. What is often not portrayed in other mediumship studies is that ethical issues, associated with the nature of advice and the way this is presented to the client, is also an important concern for practitioners, impacting on the way they manage their emotions and interactions with others. This research illustrates that while independent practices within the esoteric subculture appear separate from bigger institutions, such as the Spiritualist National Union, this spiritualist philosophy impacted on much of the practitioners' reflexivity within this study, hence why it was important to adopt an interactionist perspective and investigate contextual complexities. Overall, I found that spiritualist settings require significant and quite specific emotion management from practitioners where the presentational style is, to some degree, pre-determined. Aside from contextual factors, though, the positive nature of extrasensory work and the overall diversity of practitioners' work - whether they do one-to-one consultations, phone work or conduct large-scale demonstrations - means that practitioners often have to adapt their emotion management according to ethical expectations.

I have explored what emotion management is required throughout distinctive stages of extrasensory work. Firstly, I explored how practitioners identify and relate to their clients, how detecting the client from a large group of others is based on the responsiveness of the client and how much the practitioner can achieve a link or distance from the self. Again, practitioners claim that this selection and responsiveness is based on feeling. Practitioners, on occasions, need to manage the fact that the extrasensory information may be relevant to a multitude of people in the audience. This caused anxiety for practitioners and it was evident that they had many ways of managing this. However, ultimately, responsiveness and acceptance was important for emotional management to continue. Secondly, I explored the delivery of extrasensory information. I established that there were key themes relating to emotion management, such as 'getting into the flow', 'interpretation of Spirit messages' and 'shutting off and distancing'. The key focus for practitioners in the flow

is to experience Spirit more than to be aware of themselves or the reactions of clients. I established that those who are more likely not to interpret these experiences, and simply focus on the receipt of their phenomenological experiences in whatever form (e.g. pictures, symbols, feelings and so forth), might themselves prevent further probing from the client. Ethical considerations bring the practitioner's awareness back into the interaction, which causes a frequent state of reflexivity. It could be suggested that no interpretation is a coping mechanism or a way that practitioners can lessen the emotion management that they have to conduct.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusion

As beings of energy and consciousness we experience many different moods and states, and we can choose to change these moods at will, changing our atmospheric influence on the world around us. We are definitely not victims of a cruel and predestined universe. We are co-creative actors affecting everything, materially and energetically. And, as creators, we can do good and we can do harm.

(Bloom, 1996: 149)

Introduction and Chapter Aims

I entered the door into the extrasensory practitioner's world and I experientially learnt more than I could have ever imagined. The participants in this study welcomed me, occasionally into their lives, and shared their time and kindness to ensure I understood their experiences and way of life. They talked with the need to be taken seriously, to be understood and to be able to share their experiences without condemnation. In their world there is passion; to them life is full of magic, trust and belief. They live with a desire to progress themselves spiritually and to improve overall earthly existence. These are individuals who are having real experiences in their minds, bodies and *hearts* and they wanted someone to understand these extrasensory occurrences and, furthermore, to take them seriously as individuals.

In this thesis I have adopted a reflexive, ethnographic empirical approach in order to explore the reported experiences of extrasensory practitioners. As a previous client of extrasensory practices, I specifically wanted to know: What is it like to be a practitioner? How do these individuals construct their extrasensory identity? How do they manage their own emotion effectively while working? I wanted to know what the goals, achievements and consequences of extrasensory emotion management were. I had previously experienced the negative effects of believing extrasensory advice, and

this is what personally inspired me to explore extrasensory practices academically. In this research I thus wanted to also explore the role that ethics played in practitioners' emotion management. I knew, though, that it was not just the practitioner's accounts that were central to this understanding but also how these accounts are interpreted. Consequently, I began the research process with the aim of monitoring my own bias in some way, which led to my creation of a new method called Systematic Emotional Embodied Reflexivity (SEER). With SEER my aim was to explore, in a detailed and systematic way, the relationship between the thesis and myself.

In this chapter, I provide an evaluation of my research, and conceptualise these reported experiences, in my attempt to bridge the gap between the world of academia and extrasensory practitioners. I begin by providing a summary of the main findings of the four analytical chapters, chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. I then critically explore the significance of these findings in relation to the sociology of emotions and the sociology of anomalous experiences literature and highlight the key contributions I have made in this thesis. This leads me to identifying the perceived limitations of this research and pinpointing areas of further study. I conclude by providing a final statement advocating the uniqueness of this thesis.

Summary of Thesis Findings

In Chapter 4 I reported findings from the reflexive thematic analysis I conducted on my own extrasensory experiences and experiences of the research process, which I recorded systematically through the application of SEER. In this chapter I reflected upon my previous identity as a client and identified that during this research I went through four stages of my own emotion management. I have categorized them as follows: "On a mission: my pro-practitioner phase"; "Becoming disheartened: my uncertain phase"; "Being an active believer: a new way of thinking"; and, finally, "Being a sympathetic disbeliever". I found that these stages influenced the way I collected and interpreted data; acknowledging this resulted in increased critical analysis. I found that, regardless of whether I wanted it to or not, my belief had a function within the research process.

Recognising the four stages of emotion management I conducted, for me, highlighted the value of adopting reflexivity to examine emotions and practices, which all involve reflexivity. Even though I was clearly becoming 'spiritually consumed' (see following discussion) - by using SEER - I found that, as primarily a sociologist, I was able to critically identify this immersion as having occurred. I was then able to use my own experiences as data in order to explore my participant's experiences.

My active believer phase began while I had embodied and phenomenological experiences myself at the college. Nevertheless, this phase was accelerated because of an accident that I had in the setting, which resulted in further contact with practitioners. Events at that time led me to believe and experience that I was having a spiritual awakening, which led to further experiences that I perceived to be extrasensory. During this time I gained invaluable understanding into my participants' spiritual way of life, emotionality and their embodied experiences, about which I had previously questioned the legitimacy. I found that regardless of the actual existence of Spirit, practitioners probably experience real feelings in the mind and body which I had experienced directly within and outside of the college setting.

In identifying these phases of emotion management, I have added an extra reflexive dimension to my analysis. I have shed light on the emotion management required of researchers (in addition to my more direct focus on the emotion management required of extrasensory practitioners), which is a contribution to the emotion management literature.

In Chapter 5 I examined the training of extrasensory practitioners.

During interviewing, participants would repeatedly talk about how they had attended a particular college setting. The key focus of my participant observations in this setting was to explore its significance and to understand the practices of individuals within this context. During my time within the college, it became quickly apparent that it was the environment itself (i.e. the layout and its structured practices, rules and regulations) that was pivotal in the encouraging and maintaining of an extrasensory identity. I thus began to see the college as a persuasive institution. I explored *how* this institution was persuasive and provided a reflexive analysis of the practices within. In

this chapter I established a variety of expected social norms, morals and values relating to esoteric-orientated practices.

I established that there was a process of socialisation occurring within the setting and examined the different facets of this, including the introductory procedure, emotional disclosure, the supportive nature of the teaching sessions, the construction of Spirit and embodied experiences in the workshops. In relation to this process, I identified two key findings regarding the relationship between the extrasensory practitioner and the college. Firstly, they were 'challenges to the student's sense of self' and, secondly, a process of 'phenomenological exposure'.

Challenges to the student's sense of self occurred in various ways. The institution encourages students to embrace a specific ontological view of the world, drawing upon philosophical teaching, which potentially challenges the student's concept of self depending on previous exposure to the setting. I found that different student identities were being played out in the setting: those who were, firstly, either *extrasensory curious* or, secondly, *spiritually consumed*. Those who were *extrasensory curious* were encouraged to be self-aware, adopt a specific view of the body and develop a new spiritual sense of self. However, it was found that many students were returning to college and seemed to already have awareness of the norms of the setting and, on speaking with them, it was evident that spiritualist practices may have consumed them; they were, in other words, *spiritually consumed*. It appeared as though they may have developed some institutional dependency, where they repeatedly attended courses and claimed to have disassociated from previous occupations and friends that were not spiritually focused.

In Chapter 5 I also discussed the different facets of Goffman's (1968) theory of total institutions. The process of contaminate exposure was particularly pertinent within the college, where students were subject to the sharing of details, lack of privacy and anxiety over rule breaking. However, I found that within the college even the thoughts of the students were (reportedly) not free from surveillance. I thus developed a new concept of phenomenological *exposure*. Phenomenological exposure involves tutors publically claiming to have access to the thoughts of students through the use of their extrasensory abilities. Awareness of phenomenological exposure led to strategies

being used by the students in the setting. Phenomenological exposure may apply to other extrasensory practices and settings.

In Chapter 6 I conducted a thematic analysis and explored the notion of authenticity in relation to extrasensory practitioners. This examination centered upon exploring the practitioners' construction of an extrasensory identity. The key findings of this chapter were that there are two categories of authenticity and that authenticity is more complex than what is presented within the sociology of anomalous experiences literature.

Type 1 was categorised as Authentic (extrasensory) abilities: Constructing one's abilities as genuine (both for others and the self). I found that authenticity involved not only displaying to others that extrasensory abilities were authentic but also that practitioners reflect consistently on how they establish for themselves that these abilities are real and from Spirit. Type 2 was categorised as Authentic (spiritual) selfhood: Living an authentic life / being true to oneself. I found that practitioners were not simply focused on promoting the truthfulness of their abilities to others. Most practitioners sought to live in accordance with an *authenticity of the self*. Practitioners were often in a state of reflexivity, of examining oneself as being spiritual and comparing this to alternative egotistical ways of acting. I found, through hanging out in the subculture, that this is not simply a job for practitioners but a way of life.

I discovered that practitioners use various techniques to assert this authenticity. Emphasizing innate abilities (e.g. childhood experiences), significant happenings, channeling Spirit (e.g. spirit guides, embodying Spirit, meditation), channeling different types of information, third-person accounts and down-playing their own involvement in providing the types of advice were all strategies that practitioners used to construct themselves as authentic. Authenticity of self was constructed specifically through learning from difficult life experiences and being able to relate to clients. In relation to clients, I illustrated instances where clients co-construct with the practitioner an authentic experience of Spirit.

In Chapter 6 I also showed that a practitioner's body plays a significant role in the construction of authenticity. Embodiment of Spirit occurs in two distinct ways. Firstly,

through 'experiencing the message' (e.g. feeling the Spirit's heart attack to then say to the client, she / he (their relatives / associates) died due to a heart attack) as evidence to present to the client. Secondly, as verification to the practitioner herself that she is truly in contact with Spirit and not imagining it. Meditation was a ritualized practice involving embodiment and served to reinforce the overall belief in experiencing Spirit. While such strong bodily experiences may have been unpleasant to experience, practitioners went into significant detail about actually being glad of them, since these were experiences acting for them as confirmation of their own authenticity.

In Chapter 7 I conceptualised extrasensory work as a form of embodied emotion management and explored the ethical factors that guide extrasensory work. In this chapter I proposed a new concept of 'Spirit emotion', which describes practitioners *experiencing* Spirit; such experiences may be managed in a comparative way to how someone manages their own emotion. The key finding within this chapter is that while practitioners conduct emotion management they are primarily managing a tension between having to be both present in the interaction and, in principle, be absent from channelling Spirit. It was found that ethics impinge on this process and cause a state of conflict for the practitioner where it was clear that practitioners were conducting self-reflexivity.

More specifically, it was found that emotion management involves practitioners conducting significant reflexivity and achieving a different state of mind and embodiment compared to their ordinary state. To achieve this, they use different preparatory techniques and strategies. There were key themes relating to emotion management, such as 'getting into the flow', 'interpretation of Spirit messages' and 'shutting off and distancing'. The objective of 'getting into the flow' is to experience Spirit more than to be aware of themselves or the reactions of their clients. The question over whether to interpret Spirit information I found was a contested issue amongst practitioners. It was easy to see how those who did not interpret may have been using the method to make emotion management easier and increase the receptiveness of their claims. A key finding within this chapter is that the utilisation of these methods is geared towards the practitioner maintaining confidence in her or his abilities.

In this section I have summarised the key findings of the analytical chapters of this thesis. I will now expand upon the overall contributions of the thesis, exploring the uniqueness of this research in relation to the wider extant literature.

Contributions of this Thesis

This thesis contributes to three main areas: research on emotions and the body; research on anomalous experiences and to methodology. It is centered within both sociology and social psychological disciplines. Furthermore, the thesis is likely to be informative to other areas, such as Women's Studies and parapsychology. I explore each of these contributions in the following section and explain how my findings advance or inform these areas.

Contributions to research on emotions and the body

I will now discuss one of my key, empirically-informed, contributions to the emotion management literature, that practitioners conduct a unique form of embodied emotion management. In Chapter 1 I discussed Wooffitt's (2006) research into how psychic practitioners adhere to predictable speech occurrences when relaying extrasensory advice. It is thus known that there are commonalities in how mediums manage these relations linguistically. Wooffitt and Gilbert (2006) also explain other key interactional issues during stage demonstrations. They specified that practitioners facilitate empathy, affiliation and positivity towards the audience. Jorgenson (1992) also reports the friendly, outgoing, insightful and compassionate nature of practitioners. Still nothing was known about the emotion management that practitioners were likely to be conducting. I thus concluded that, while practitioners were conducting themselves through the outlet of language, they were undoubtedly partaking in a form of extrasensory emotion management.

In Chapter 2 I investigated emotion management as a concept (Hochschild, 1983). I presented a detailed examination of the sociology of emotions literature concerning emotion management and a wide range of settings and themes were explored that related to extrasensory work, such as self-management strategies (Bolton, 2001),

morals and values (Dyer et al., 2008; Syed, 2008; Twigg, 2004) and coping mechanisms (Mann, 2004; Sanders, 2004; Theodosius, 2008).

In this thesis I have been able to conceptualise all facets of the embodied emotion management of extrasensory practitioners. I have explored the strategies that practitioners use, the impact that morals and values have on emotion management and the coping mechanisms that practitioners use. I have shown empirically in this thesis that emotions are at the heart of extrasensory practices, and that individuals have variable degrees of personal investment in these emotions, either in individual or collective formats.

In my research, practitioners reported experiencing a different form of emotion, something independent to them but which could have physical effects on them. This was emotion that they claimed to manage in addition to their own emotion. Spirit emotion impacted on the mind and body in various ways. It was established that the dynamics and intensity of the experiences depended on the skill of the practitioner (e.g. some had to induce Spirit emotion while for others it just happened). I, therefore, developed the concept of Spirit emotion and have revealed empirically how practitioners reported experiencing emotion from Spirit. This is a concept that could inform and be expanded on in future research into the interactional nature of these practices.⁹⁸

This thesis is unique compared to other studies that have examined relational work and emotion management. Unlike other studies, I am essentially exploring a three-way communicative process that extrasensory practitioners conduct. They are managing complex demands. Extrasensory practitioners have to be both present in the interaction and in principle have to be, to some extent, absent for Spirit. So, while practitioners are providing advice and / or aiming to be ethical like other mainstream counselling services, there is a third dimension that practitioners manage, which other work practices do not involve.

One of these three-way communicative practices is Spirit, and Spirit emotion and cannot be verified, except by extrasensory practitioners. These practitioners, though,

⁹⁸ Also a technique to assert authenticity.

operate differently compared to other mainstream relational occupations (e.g. counselling) in that they publically talk the client through their communication and relationship with Spirit and potentially make public their own emotion management in order to present to the world a real relationship with Spirit. In this sense, the public / private boundaries of conducting emotion management in extrasensory work are blurred. Emotion management that normally tends to be kept private in other professions may be made public in extrasensory practices. I have established what the main goal for practitioners is when conducting emotion management and that is to engage with Spirit in a believable way for them.

Within the emotion management literature academics such as Bolton (2001) describe the facets of the complexity of emotion management. I have achieved a comparative degree of complexity within this thesis. I have explored a diverse range of preparation techniques, strategies and methods, which assist emotion management. In Chapter 2 I emphasised the need for more research into the connection between the body and the conducting of emotion management. While there has been research that has examined aesthetic labour (Witz et al., 2003) and the care of others bodies, very few studies have explored emotion management as an embodied process (Freund, 1998). This thesis addresses this gap and makes some key analytical contributions to how the body can play a pivotal role in the conducting, even directing, of emotion management.

Contributions to research on anomalous experiences

In Chapter 1 I discussed how the literature on extrasensory experiences portrayed extrasensory practitioners as being primarily concerned with one type of authenticity, which is to prove to others that they have genuine extrasensory abilities (Jorgensen and Jorgensen, 1982; Wooffitt, 2006). I will now discuss another one of my key, empirically-informed, contributions, this time to research into anomalous experiences. I have improved understanding of authenticity within extrasensory work, and, furthermore I have developed a more complex concept of authenticity, which challenges current notions and is a major contribution to the anomalous experiences literature. Again, Type 1 was categorised as Authentic (extrasensory) abilities: Constructing one's abilities as genuine (both for others and the self), and Type 2 was

categorised as Authentic (spiritual) selfhood: Living an authentic life / being true to oneself.

It is easy to see why such perceptions are prevalent in society about practitioners' preoccupation with emphasising their perceived real experience of Spirit. In Chapter 1 I discussed bias within research. In Chapter 4 I admitted to feeling that within some interviews practitioners appeared self-centred, not geared towards academic exchange but rather towards promoting oneself. I found myself having to control my emotions and act appropriately according to my academic status. However, through going beyond the spoken word and achieving a deeper level of engagement with my participants, through experiences that naturally unfolded within the field, I was able to experience their spirituality, to experience the kind of identity work they conduct, to partake in a wide range of esoteric practices and incorporate them into my daily practices (e.g. meditation).

Hochschild's (1983) research into an individual's authentic self is something that is separate and needs to be protected from the negative effects of emotion management. I found that practitioners within this research stated that their authentic spiritual self was under a constant state of construction, yet there was an element of being true to oneself or instincts. Identity for the extrasensory practitioner was complex and reports of the conducting of identity work (and emotion management) were contradictory at times (i.e. the self was both present and absent; both content and seeking development). I have, however, made another contribution to the literature in that I have been able to provide a definition of the authentic self in relation to extrasensory work through the participants' reported experiences (see page 201).

Such conceptualisations are rarely available in many studies of emotion management. I have been able to gain empirical understanding of lived experience, which has meant that I have been able to make evaluations in a confident way to present a more thorough representation of practitioners' work. Most practitioners sought to live in accordance with an *authenticity of the self*. Practitioners were often in a state of reflexivity, of examining oneself as being spiritual and comparing this to alternative egotistical ways of acting. In other words, this is not simply a job for practitioners but a way of life.

In this thesis I have also strengthened conceptualisations of practitioners' emotion management and made an original contribution to the emotion and body research in developing some understanding of clients' involvement within extrasensory work. Clients have been examined in direct response to how they report to influence the practitioner's identity work and their emotion management. I have empirically shown that belief in Spirit functions to support perceptions of authenticity where clients (and others) have a strong belief in Spirit and only ever question practitioners' ability to be able to communicate effectively. This signifies the extent to which belief functions in such practices, which is often taken for granted by those regularly participating within esoteric subcultures and often a component not explored fully by researchers. Such findings can inform future research.

In Chapter 1 I defined my use of the term extrasensory practitioner and explored the diverse skills of practitioners. Irrespective of method, practitioners communicate with Spirit entities that are thought to be able to convey their social personalities to provide verbal and / or embodied evidence of Spirit's existence. In Chapter 1, however, I discussed those who were concerned with the potentially damaging nature of the advice (Randi, 1981; Shepherd, 2009). This thesis has shown, however, that, contrary to belief, extrasensory practitioners work is often constructed and acted out in accordance with concerns over ethics, in other words, ethics are central to extrasensory work and practitioners' awareness. There is no evidence within this thesis to suggest the effects of such advice are any less potentially damaging or therapeutic. However, I have also shown: a) that spiritualist contexts are fundamental in the promotion and adherence to ethical guidelines; b) that spiritualist ethical guidelines influence independent practices; c) practitioners working independently within the esoteric subculture share some common ethical guidelines (see page 232)

In this respect I have made a key contribution in that I have examined, from a sociological perspective, the functionality of ethics in extrasensory research. This thesis initiates research into the ethical dynamics of extrasensory consultations that, to my knowledge, has not been explored from a sociological perspective.

In Chapter 5, where I explored the college context, I have made key contributions to research into anomalous experiences in that I was able to assess the socialisation of my participants together with my own socialisation into the setting in a systematic way. This expands previous research, such as Wallis (2001) and Meintel (2007), by using a more in-depth systematic way of examining the settings influence on the researcher and any judgements made. Like any institution, I have shown how the environment is persuasive. I have, though, unlike other studies (Wallis, 2001), shown how this was constructed in a detailed way, drawing upon established and respected sociological theories. Through doing this I have been able to develop my own concepts, such as *phenomenological exposure*, *spiritually curious* and *spiritually consumed*, which are concepts that could also be developed in future research.

Contributions to methodology

I. Methodological contributions and anomalous experiences

In Chapter 1 I examined how Spiritualism developed, how the spiritualist movement arrived in the UK and how contexts within Spiritualism have a tendency to be analysed detachedly from other extrasensory practices. There has been limited sociological research into independent extrasensory practices. This thesis has contributed in a unique way to research into independent practices. Primarily, I have shown, from an interactionist perspective and through different stages of thematic analysis (of participant interviews and participant observations), how practitioners within this study were influenced by or are involved in spiritualist practices while conducting their own independent consultations professionally or semi- professionally. Such influence has methodological implications for future research into independent practices. It is a methodological contribution in the sense that Spiritualism promotes a philosophical and ethical framework, which any future research into extrasensory practices should take into account. In Chapter 5, when exploring the training of mediumship, I specifically revealed the persuasive, and yet supportive, nature of such spiritualist-orientated practices.

In Chapter 1, I also discussed the social significance of extrasensory practices. Extrasensory practices relate to various factors, such as consumer elements (mass

market of extrasensory services), challenges to rationality (mind / body debate), growth in general interest in the social body (embodiment, consciousness, consumer body, emotive being), the new industry of 'psy-therapies' (extrasensory practitioners as life / bereavement counsellors), sensationalization of emotions in the media (psychic programmes) and have impacted on local and global scales (such as the incorporation of extrasensory into consumer law and through past and current sceptical debate) (Williams, 2001). In Chapter 1 I explored the debate of bias, which is inherent in the study, and implementation of extrasensory practices. I suggested how one's belief in an afterlife is influenced by many societal factors and that this is enormously significant in the direction and presentation of extrasensory research. I acknowledged this debate, which both practitioners and academics frequently discuss, which, together with my own bias and previous identity as a client, inspired the unique reflexive approach of this research.

In this thesis I have developed a new theoretical method that could be particularly useful in extrasensory research. This method systematically accounts for researcher bias in all stages of conducting extrasensory research, including the writing-up process. SEER allowed me to fully embrace the research process through using templates, research diaries and also personal diaries to account for my thoughts and feelings. At the beginning of the research process I did not know that the strength of the SEER method would pull me out of being so engrossed in the research. When I was thematically analysing the templates and my own diaries, in particular the language that I was using, which was far from the academic language I was using in my thesis, I was surprised, and, together with other events that happened around that time (see Chapter 4), this led to the phase of *Being a sympathetic disbeliever*.

SEER, I recommend, will be particularly useful in promoting and improving transparency in extrasensory research because it allows researchers to reflect back, especially when conducting research in persuasive environments (both extrasensory related and academic), especially those that involve uplifting and therapeutic practices. I did not develop the SEER method so that it would prevent me from being so engrossed in the research. I developed the method because I felt so passionately about there being so much bias in research that people were acknowledging at conferences to me but not in academic research. However, the power of the method

meant that it was only through SEER that I saw and came to terms with my own immersion in the esoteric subculture.

I have made a significant contribution to the way future research in anomalous experiences could be conducted. Emmons and Emmons (2003), Meintel (2007) and Ryan (2013) all argue for the immense value that can be gained in conducting experience-centred research, which permitted them to examine their own relationship to the research, resulting in their own extrasensory experiences, which led to increased personal understanding of the individuals and the practices they were exploring. While these academics have used the self as a way to enrich the study and data I have been able to make my own contributions in developing a *systematic* way of accounting for emotion management throughout all stages of the research process. SEER also superseded these aims, allowing me not only to explore my own emotion management but also to experience the genuine lived experiences of participants. I was afforded opportunities and a level of connection with practitioners I doubt I would have experienced without becoming so involved. I was experiencing for real the emotionality that was guiding the extrasensory practitioners in their work

II. *Methodological contributions and emotions and the body.*

In reviewing literature into emotions and the body, I was amazed at the way research on emotions and the body were exploring emotion while emotionality had been left out of the research. In other words, while there was often promotion of the importance of researcher reflexivity, and acknowledgement of prior involvement in the research topic, in many cases this *reflexive voice* was not being heard.

I have made a significant methodological contribution in this thesis. I have taken notions of reflexivity, in relation to studies of emotion management, to the extreme. I have disconnected from traditional sociological notions of objectivity and have shown the value of embracing researcher reflexivity throughout all stages of the research process and in regards to the topic I was exploring. In this sense, I was able to use myself as data in order to understand my participant's experiences. This is more than just a thesis where reflexivity is noticeable. There is a duality of reflexivity: I have made an original contribution to the emotion management literature in that I have

explored the emotion management of participants at the same time as my own emotion management, which has addressed a gap in the emotions and body literature.

I have shown in this section how I have contributed to three key areas: research on emotions and the body, research on anomalous experiences and methodology. A key strength of this thesis throughout these three areas is my development of such novel methods, which have allowed me to achieve a deeper engagement with participants and a high level of honesty, which goes beyond other studies.

Limitations and areas of further study

In this section I do two main things: first, I consider the limitations of this thesis and I explore how I might do it differently; second, I suggest areas of further research.

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 I stated that I wanted to explore in-depth the emotionality of extrasensory practices. In Chapter 3 I discussed the value of *audio* diaries, showing that they provide less of a delay between thought and articulation, leading to less of an interpretative process for practitioners. This thesis is emotion-focused, requiring the practitioners to be as open about their experiences as possible. It was hoped that diaries would become a private ritual where researcher effects were lessened (Theodosius, 2008). This, I thought, would provide me with a more in-depth insight into the emotion management they reflect on. I, therefore, provided willing participants with audio equipment and instructions to encourage them to personally reflect daily on the emotion management they conduct, of which I could then thematically analyse. In Chapter 3 I provide a detailed account of what was involved in keeping these audio diaries.

I gave these audio diary packs to four practitioners and, unfortunately, all failed to keep their agreement to complete them. The equipment was expensive but I could not make a fuss if the equipment was not returned upon asking. I had to be careful of the networks of power within the esoteric subculture and to upset some practitioners may have had an influence on other participants taking part in the research.

On reflection, it was perhaps the time and complexity that it would have taken to complete the audio diaries that was off-putting to the practitioners, or the extent of personal disclosure may have been a factor. In Chapter 3 I emphasised how my reflexive, ethnographic approach achieved a comparative, if not stronger, level of awareness of the emotionality of my participants. If I were to do it differently I would not attempt to complete audio diaries again. I would simply put my efforts into embracing the practitioners' experiences as I did.

In chapters 4 and 5, when I discussed being in the college setting, I explained that I did not spend as much time within the setting as I had intended. I had to leave the setting on the fourth-day because of an accident I had. I opened a door thinking it was an outside door but in fact it was a door leading to the cellar. It was dark, I fell a considerable height and, as a consequence, I had serious head injuries. This meant that I did not complete the full course. I, therefore, did not go through the whole socialisation process and was not acculturated into the environment. This could be seen as both a positive and negative. The downside is that my analysis is limited in this respect. I had to disengage from the data leaving my observations untouched until I was well again to explore the relevance of them. I also had to take time out of the thesis, which impacted upon my momentum.

The upside was that, after the accident, many of the practitioners / students within the college contacted me. I was still pondering over the embodied and phenomenological experiences I had while at the college. Conversations with them reignited my passion for extrasensory practices; I started reading about spirituality and philosophy, and I hung around with spiritual people and was invited into their worlds. I began feeling the physical effects of a spiritual awakening. All of these experiences had huge value in seeing the practitioners' experiences from their perspective (see Chapter 4).

In this section I have examined the limitations of the thesis. I will now continue to explore limitations but also suggest areas of further research. The key areas I now discuss are consumer involvement, Women's and Gender Studies, statistics and the terminology associated to extrasensory practitioners.

Consumer involvement-limitations and areas of further research.

In Chapter 2 I highlighted the value of exploring consumer involvement in the emotion management of practitioners, and in Chapter 7 I touched upon how clients co-construct notions of authenticity through their own belief. If I were to begin this research again, however, I would have explored a wider sample of clients to provide a more thorough analytical perspective of their involvement. In this sense the project would be a three-part analysis of a three-part communicative practice and this is certainly something that I will seek to develop in future research.

Trance mediumship-areas of further research.

In my hanging out in the esoteric subculture I witnessed many extrasensory practices. One practice in particular, trance mediumship, which is rare to witness really interested me in relation to the link between the emotions and the body. Trance mediumship was different to other extrasensory practices in that Spirit had completely embodied the extrasensory practitioner and it was claimed that Spirit were speaking directly to the audience. The voice of the male medium sounded high and womanly like, the actual medium was said not to be present and I have never witnessed anything as unique as this. I can see the value of exploring the accounts of trance mediumship to expand upon understanding of the embodied emotion management of extrasensory practitioners.

Statistics – areas of further research.

While conducting research for this thesis I became aware that there is no available data on the number of individuals offering guidance based on claimed extrasensory skills. I can see the value in gathering some statistical data about the number of extrasensory practitioners working in the UK and an assessment of the size of the client base.

Terminology- contributions and areas of further research.

In chapter 5 through examining students verbal accounts I categorised the degrees of socialisation in the college as those who I deemed 'extrasensory curious' and 'spiritually consumed'. Within literatures in the sociology of spirituality and religion, and recent work on 'alternative spiritualities' there has been continuous discussion on the usage of terminology and the need to engage reflexively with subcultures to understand their role in modern society (Campbell, 2007; Heelas, 1996; Heelas, 2008; Holmes, 2007; MacKian, 2012). For instance, Heelas' (1996: 117-119) categorises 'New Age' practitioners as 'fully engaged', 'serious part-timers', 'causal part-timers' or 'sensation seekers' which are based upon his ambiguous evaluation of the role spirituality and a variety of extrasensory related activities plays in individuals lives. As MacKian (2012) provides a valid argument for, the term 'New age' simply does not represent how the participants she engaged with would choose to categorize themselves or represent their extrasensory way of life.

In this sense, the terminology I use represents her sentiments and is a much more sensitive and less emotive language that embodies what my participants were telling me rather than any externally imposed academic definitions I could have applied. Categorising complex practices is evidentially problematic and admirable however my approach has much to offer these discussions through the reflexive approach I adopted. I advocate further research that appropriately defines practitioners and the extrasensory work they do, so further understanding can be gained into their role in contemporary society. Similarly, while there is a need to move beyond the definition of the 'New Age' there is also a need to move beyond the use of paranormal literature, which perpetuates negative stereotypes and ill-informed classifications of individuals involved in extrasensory practices. My research has added to a growing body of research, which is addressing this issue (Emmons and Emmons, 2003; Ryan, 2012; Mackian, 2012).

Conclusions: Why has all of this mattered?

As a client, as a researcher and as an active believer, in all the hats I wore, there was the same argument: that the majority of individuals did not understand the true reality

of extrasensory experiences. I felt that there was a discrepancy between the spoken world, the academic world and the practitioner's world, and the practitioners clearly felt frustrated. I also felt discouraged, and there were times when I passionately wanted to give practitioners their voice to promote a deeper engagement in exploring and understanding such practices and the way of life. Within this process, it was a shock to discover that I also had limited comprehension of extrasensory reality, which is why I see immense value in the reflexive approach.

In this thesis I have been on a personal and academic journey: a rollercoaster of personal resilience, determination, sheer frustration, intellectual creativity, writers' block, and self- development. I have laughed, I have cried, I have truly experienced all of the emotions possible in striving to stay true to the initial objective of this thesis, which was to understand extrasensory practitioners' emotion management. I realise now that I was taken on a specific path through my own interpretation of Spirit. I needed to experience and build a relationship with Spirit for myself so as to be able to articulate my participants' experiences in a representative way. I have changed as a person through the research process, through embracing spirituality and through interacting with my participants. Being in the practitioner's world was, at times, a better place to be, a place of excitement, of magic, of support and there are times when I wish I could remove this analytical hat and run through that door again.

In using novel reflexive ethnographic methods I have provided an honest, transparent and experiential account that represents the genuine lived experiences of extrasensory practitioners. I have drawn on sociological theory but in many ways I have allowed the data to speak for itself.

Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1 Meditations

Meditation sessions and talktorials are linked together though a break divides the session. The meditation sessions were the first focus of each day. I will now provide a transcript of a typical meditation. Similar principles are used during group work.

And as you breathe in, be aware of the light within breath. You don't have to see it or feel it, just know it. And as you breathe in, allow this light to flow through every part of your physical body. And as you do so, we relax every muscle, every bone, every tendon, and we let go. So breathing in and allow the light flow, first of all, perhaps through the head and the shoulders and relaxing and letting go. As you breathe in, the light becomes stronger and it flows across the shoulders, down the arms, into the hands and the fingers, relaxing. And as you breathe in again, the light flows across the chest, downwards to the stomach, relaxing and letting go. Now feel that light flowing down the spine, touching each vertebra, moving upwards and touching the nervous system, and relaxing and letting go. And there again, as that light comes in with the breath, feel it moving into the seat. And as you do so, just relax every muscle, every bone, every tendon, and every nerve in your body, relaxing and letting go. And then finally, moving, as you breathe, that light from the seat right the way through the thighs, the legs, the feet, your toes, relaxing and letting go.

And this time, as you breathe in, breathe that light into the heart centre, the gateway to the soul, and be aware of the love that's there, that divine love, that love that doesn't discriminate, and bring that love to yourself. And as you do so, feel that expansion that takes place, feel the light brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter, filling your body. With each breath you take, that light becomes brighter and brighter still, until you realise that you are the light. And as you sit within this light, just be

aware that it can answer, it can give you a resolution or illumination on any problem that you have at the moment: just place it into the centre. It may be something to do with your mediumship, or your home life, or your material circumstances. Just embrace it, just be aware, be inspired. Just focus your mind and attention for one moment on that problem and place it within the centre of your [inaudible 0:10:09]. See it as an obstacle or a challenge, rather than a problem, and ask your soul for resolution or illumination, so that you may see it clearly in the light of this experience of light.

So now, I'm going to leave you in silence, to give you an opportunity to listen to the wisdom of your own soul, to become aware of its wisdom, its understanding and its direction. And if your mind should wander, then bring it back again to focus on it. Focus on that obstacle, that challenge you need to overcome and gain or ask for the resolution or an illumination. I'll leave you now in silence (Extract 1)

There were different tutors leading the meditation sessions everyday. Meditations and talktorials had a main focus, which varied each day. So rather than focusing upon the silence as the above meditation does there were also meditations that focused upon being within the presence of spirit and meeting spirit guides. Here is a table of the meditation theme and the corresponding talktorial theme.

Figure A1 Teachings within the college

Meditation Focus	Talktorial focus
Being within the presence of spirit	Spiritual development
Sound of silence	Nature, silence and the spiritual journey
Meeting spirit guides	Intelligence of spirit

I was unable to assess what the themes were during the end of the course because of an accident within the setting. I did however see commonalities between meditations.

Appendix 2

2.1 Talktorials

The first talktorial began by the tutor introducing spiritual development. The talk started by her explaining the routes into Spiritualism either a close family or family member died and relatives wanted proof of survival. Or individuals may have entered Spiritualism because they thought there was something more to what they were experiencing in daily life. She discussed television mediumship that might have captured someone's interest. Her rhetoric was very inclusive asking questions and making jokes.

She claims that there is more to spirituality, and the reason for being on the course is to develop spirituality. It is important to note that the course is focused upon mediumship and does not specify spirituality. The tutor claims that it does not matter how many books you read it is about the experience that you have. She goes on to talk about how Spiritualism was at its greatest years ago that it was a very strong power however now it is associated with old people. She talks about her own career in Spiritualism and that it was unusual for someone so young to be involved and how she had some of the greatest teachers. She argues that there is a need to bring spiritualism up with the modern times. She provides an example of the way that the college used to be and how it has adapted.

When I first started coming here to the college you did not mix with the tutors, there was no laughing, there was no joking, and there were no workshops. You went into the library or into...this wasn't the lecture room then, this was the dining room, or into the sanctuary and you listened to the lectures. There were no questions at the end of it; you came out and then you went into the next one and you did the same again. We've moved on. We're now interactive; I'm wondering when we're going to go to 3D! [laughter] Don't, it's not a good thought! But you know, this is about your spirituality, this is about making it real for you (Extract 1)

The tutor states that applying spirituality to everyday life is essential and unique to the individual person. She claims that she can give you the tools and skills but that the students have to develop it your own way. It can be a speedy journey she exclaims. She again refers to herself. Some people she claims do not want to be on a specific spiritual journey but they have an overwhelming need. She reasserts the value of the college in this spiritual development and being with likeminded people who do not question you. Though she asserts to the students not to measure themselves against other people because this will scare them; putting them off mediumship. Be the best that you can be and celebrate in the information that you do get right, she claims.

She reflects upon past procedures at the college that did not work. There was a requirement at having to have the advanced level of mediumistic ability to go straight to people with extrasensory information rather than offering information to a wide variety of people; then someone seeing the relevance of that information. This in her opinion is pushing the student to far where students should allow the mediumship to come naturally. She presents herself as also learning during the week. She emphasises the ethical elements of mediumship and advises the students not to say anything that you would not want to hear yourself such as be sensitive over terrible deaths etc.

She asserts that self-awareness is of most importance where time is the essential ingredient. The aim she states is for the students to build a bond with the spirit world. There is a team that work with you from the spirit world she claims. She emphasises that students do not need to know them they just need to be aware of their presence. Mediums she claims can sometimes use guides as status symbols to give others the impression that they are good at mediumship. Jokes are made about one student who had Elvis and the Pope as guide.

She advises to get to know the presence of the spirit guides it does not matter what age, ethnicity or gender they are. She attempts to relate to audience now saying well ladies it does not matter if he is ninety. She talks about herself, how long she has been a medium and how she felt the presence of her guides through no special technique but sitting in a quiet place and feeling their energy through heat on her back. When students adopt the persona of the spirit guide she emphasises this can prevent their spiritual development. She claims that if you are judging your helpers and inspirers

you're doing them a great disservice; you are unique. Creating a bond between you and them sitting still and being in the presence of the spirit is the most important task to mediumship development.

She talks about being spiritual and formal religion. She tells a story about when some Jehovah Witnesses came to her door and they could not wait to get out of her presence when finding out what she did. She asserts

But I need you to understand there are people who will be put off by what you say, who will be a little disturbed by what you tell them. But also there are people who will take a deep breath, sigh a sigh of relief, and say thank goodness, somebody else that understands this is not all that there is.

(Extract 2)

She claims she feels sorry for people whose indoctrinating religion state that they cannot be in the presence of those beliefs in the afterlife. Spiritualism is a religion, she claims. However, she claims that not everyone understands and makes reference to students last year who had to tell their husbands that they were in elsewhere but they were really coming her

She claims that

It is how we live our lives is important. It is not what we do as a medium; it's who you are as a person, because if I never took another church service, if I never did another sitting, I would still be a spiritualist. I will be still someone who needs to understand and know as much as possible about my own self. I would still be someone who needs to continue to strive to grow, to develop and to know more about my own self and my own spirituality (Extract 3)

She then reflects upon counselling training that she has completed and how it complements the skills of being a medium. Her counselling instructor advised her that he was in ore of her, in the sense that special people can only train to be a medium but anybody can train as a counsellor. We are trained by life, she asserts, all mediums have

had it rough you do not get rich doing what we do with money, but we get rich in love. We get rich in the spirit world. She asserts that students have that ability to find riches beyond their wildest dreams.

She then provides the students with an account of the positive effect of mediumship. She tells a sad story about a boy who was plagued with guilt for accidentally killing his father and that the extra sensory advice that she obtained from the deceased father allowed the boy to deal with the guilt and have positive memories and finally how she was asked to conduct a memorial service for the family. Students responded to this story by crying and claiming that mediumship was wonderful I also felt the emotion.

The tutor stated that

Everyone that you talk to, everyone that you share with will be changed because of what you say it makes you guard your words. Yes, it makes you think before you say things. But I don't think that's any bad thing. And I need you to know that what you do as a spiritualist, not a medium, but as a spiritualist changes lives. (Extract 4)

The tutor ended the talktorial by claiming that as a medium you are constantly changing there is an enfoldment-talking place. Finding time for meditation is key in the modern world even in departure lounges or on planes. There is a purpose of why students are on the course together. She claims that by looking around the room she knows it is going to be a good week and that the students can do it.

Before leaving the tutor introduced the practice of guardian angels. This involves each student being allocated with an envelope. Students are then allocated with a student's name that will receive the envelope but they cannot tell them. This involved each student calling out their name so the other student could secretly identify with him or her. Everyday the students have to place one item of significance in the envelope this can be anything that might have spiritual meaning for that person such as something inspirational from nature like a leaf or photograph of a landscape, if the student thinks the other likes chocolate they could put a chocolate bar in the envelope or crystals can be significant as they are presented as having healing properties. The tutor ends by

saying 'alright my darlings, have a wonderful morning and we'll see you later, thank you'.

The second talkorial focused upon nature, silence and the spiritual journey and relates to the meditation that was documented above. The tutor began by advising the students about having an awareness of a journey and referred to the spirit world as home. She claimed that all students will have lessons throughout life and the purpose on this journey is to establish ones own true nature as a soul and allowing expression of the qualities of the soul.

Of course, that it's so important for...um, for me to manifest the consciousness of my soul, or in other words, to bring about a bridge between my soul and my personality, and allow the qualities of the soul to express itself, you know, there is always, to me, a definite purpose behind this living experience. And, err, for me, my path is the path of mediumship. It is not necessarily the path of everyone, of course, but it is my path. And it has been approved to me as an individual, as an individual soul, it feels right. (Extract 5)

She then talks about her lengthy involvement within mediumship and that she has always been a person that has challenged; but that in this challenging, within the past twelve years (she has been a medium longer), it was revealed to her the nature of her connection with that universal energy. This signifies to students that it is ok to challenge, to have doubts over abilities and beliefs about life after death but that eventually this will be revealed as the truth. She then proceeds to talk about her main focus she claims which is nature and the universe. She claims

there is nothing in the world that does not speak to us; everything and everybody reveals their own nature, character and secrets continuously. The more we open up our inner senses, the more we can understand the voice of everything. And to be aware of those inner senses, we need sometimes just to be silent. And for me, what we tend to do is to fill that silence with sound; our voices, our chatter, our experiments, our -- yes, our experiments in our mediumship. We forget that it's in the silence, it's the

space in between the silence, or the space in between the experiment, that the silence itself which reveals all to us. And I'm hoping to bring some illustrations of that, as we talk to you this morning, and hoping you will share with me, some of your own that the silence has brought to you.

(Extract 6)

She talks about her appreciation of trees and that throughout her extensive travels she will often feel the energy of places. She talks about the desert as being a spiritual experience and then asks whether any of the students have been to the desert and one student responds and agrees that it is a very spiritual experience because it is so silent. She backs up the value of nature by making reference to books that she has read regarding other philosophers who determined the value of nature.

But she asserts that we like nature are molecular. Hence she asserts the important of listening to the body and viewing it as sacred. She tells the students a story about her diagnosing herself because she was aware of the balance of her body. Her doctor confirmed the diagnosis. She manages the illness through meditation. I am a balanced I am whole, she claims.

She claims that she finds it difficult to achieve stillness in her mind like she suspects others do also. She then provides a story that involved a trip about how music can be used to induce contemplation in meditation. She then talks about how childhood memories unconsciously affect us and goes in-depth about a personal story

She ends the session by claiming that to improve mediumship personal development is paramount hence students need to offer the best part of their soul to spirit. She instructs students to sit in their own meditative practice to be aware of the self, their own soul journey but not always to meet with the spirit world and through doing so students will receive wonderful feelings of guidance. You are a part of the divine power she emphasises where self-acceptance is key. Offer yourself to them and practice she instructs students. She claims

the spirit world, just to want you to sit, to allow them to direct they wanted me to sit for them so I did I didn't necessarily know what was going to come out of it but I trusted them (Extract 7)

She advises students to thank spirit and realise that sitting for spirit is something precious. However, she claims that the individual has personal choice over likes and dislikes of spirit instruction so if you want to be a medium, think carefully what your intention is. Spirit is being constructed as being the guiding force over human behaviour, that trust is required with this force but also that people have individual autonomy.

The third and final talkorial that I was able to document was focused upon the topic of the intelligence of spirit. He began by providing an overview of how spiritualism began by making the students aware of the history of the fox sisters. He like the previous tutor discussed seers who had mystical experiences and predictions and he reflected allot upon spiritualist philosophy. He reflected upon the intelligence of spirit guides in particular Silver Birch the North American Indian guide of Maurice Barbanell, quite a well-known trans medium who informed Maurice that her sitters must go home when arriving home the Second World War had begun. Intelligent forces are at work, he claims. However the main part of this session was very interactive. The tutor selected what he called an advanced member of the group to illustrate mediumship. A woman within her thirties was selected and stood on the stage.

The tutor asked her to make a link with the spirit world. The woman then said that she had a grandmother that had connected with her from the spirit world and gave very brief characteristics that three students could see the relevance of. The tutor was pushing for more information that, he claimed would show the intelligence of spirit. He asked the lady to ask the spirit to direct them to the right person who the message was intended. This can be done through the spirit speaking to the medium, the spirit putting the feelings of the correct person into the mediums mind or a spirit illuminating the aura (area around the body) of the person or standing next to that person. An aura is an energy field around a person that has different colours that mediums can view to determine how the client or sitter is feeling. This woman stated that the grandmother was a Marks and Spencer's type lady; which was then accepted

as proof that this deceased relative was trying to communicate. The tutor emphasised the woman's great mediumship abilities.

He then explained that anyone could achieve this level, he then invited a beginner to the stage. He asked if she had ever achieved a link with the spirit world before and the student said no, he stated that he would show her how. He talks her through the process. I want you to imagine that you're sitting in a beautiful transparent bubble, (the tutor says to the girl) "and actually she is in her auric field, just asking her to visualise it's a bubble", (the tutor says to the group) "so I'm asking you to be slightly mechanical" (back to the girl). The tutor then talks the lady through the process

Now I don't want you to see yourself in this bubble I want you to be there as if looking through your own eyes while you're sitting in that beautiful transparent bubble, it's an extension of you, it's a part of you. Now your feet are on the floor of this platform, which go down into the foundations of this building, which go down into mother earth, and I think we can all accept that there is a beautiful energy that naturally moves through mother earth to sustain life itself.

Whatever title you want to put on it mother earth, God and creation whatever you want to put on it but this beautiful natural energy, that is naturally moving around mother earth, but therefore must be naturally moving round the foundations of this building into this floor, this very room, into this platform, into your feet. This natural energy blending with your energy, magnifying it, giving it strength, moving up into your feet and as it does it become stronger and stronger, at no time will it become uncomfortable. We're talking about natural energies here. Up through your knees, into your upper legs, stronger and stronger, up into your torso, that's good, up into your torso, stronger and stronger. Into your chest as if your chest is going to burst as it fills the chest with this power, up into your throat, into your headspace, busting out the top of your head, like a beautiful fountain of energy into your bubble, filling your bubble. You and your bubble and the energy within your bubble just at one.

So from this point on don't allow my input to draw your attention away from the bubble, the bubble is the fuel of what we are about to do with the mediumship. So I just want to ask you a couple of questions and there is no right or wrong answer here, so be honest. Can you feel the energy you're sitting in?

Yes (says the student).

Brilliant. Can you see any colours? So what I'm saying is can you see the energy that you're sitting in?

No (says the student)

Okay so at the moment what she is saying is her clairsentience is active, but her clairvoyance isn't, can you hear the energy that you're sitting in?

No (says the student).

Okay so her clairsentience is active that's cool, don't worry about that, remember this lady has never linked to the world of Spirit, she is new to mediumship, okay, so if you can feel that energy, and it's ORIC field that you are feeling, your own energy that you are feeling, through her psychic awareness, through her sensitivity, if we put the world of spirit, someone from the world of spirit into that bubble she'll feel them as well surely, in the same way as she is feeling the energy in there, it's logic to me. So I want you to visualise, this is your imagination, you are using your imagination again.

As you're sitting in your bubble, mentally I'm talking about here, as you're sitting in your bubble, mentally I want you to look down at one of your hands, you know what hands look like, and when you can see that hand, obviously the arm is attached to it, but when you can see that hand just let me know. You can see it wonderful.

In a moment, not yet, but in a moment, you're going to reach your hand out beyond the bubble and invite in your mind, someone from the world of

spirit to take your hand, like you could meet and greet anybody, to take your hand, somebody who connects to one of the lovely people in this room and then you're just going to lead them back into your bubble.

So just do that in your own way in your own time, just do that. When you bring your hand back into the bubble look down to see if it is male or female hand in your hand?

Female (says the student) .

(Extract 8)

Appendix 3

3.1 Group work

Group work occurred in a more informal manner compared with the talktorials and the workshops and involves direct sometimes one to-one instructions off the allocated tutor where students reported emotional and embodied experiences. The group work that I discuss is restricted to the group that I had access to.

There were two parts to these sessions firstly the tutor would talk about the techniques within mediumship. She would then set tasks such as students demonstrating, pairs working together giving one-one readings or reading tarot cards. Sessions involved the tutor always placing the chairs in a circle and then she would stand at the front to instruct the group often. These sessions were more interactive than the talktorials often with students interrupting the tutor to ask questions nevertheless a vast majority of the time it was the tutor talking. During practical work the tutor would wander amongst people to observe and assist if required. .

The tutor presented herself as a collective member of the group stating that it was important to achieve balance and feel comfortable with each other within group work. There was a need she claimed of creating the right energy and to assist in this she instructed the students to be on time each day as to avoid keeping spirit waiting. There were also principles associated with placing the chairs in a circle in that energy would flow between individuals with balance. She repeated the same ethos that was promoted within the introductory sessions in that there were requirements to arrive in class calm and that creating a supportive environment was importance. She explained that with sessions all students would be made to demonstrate mediumship however there were no failures just experiments so if mistakes are made then it was ok as long as the students learn by them. Rather than just passing messages on though she explained that it is important for the students to have the focus of achieving awareness of spirit and blending with them to feel the energy. She focused upon the need for students to psyche themselves up to know within themselves, that they can succeed.

Within the first group work session the tutor advises the students that if it is ok she will be tapping into their energy. This permission seeking suggests that there are codes of behaviour being promoted within mediumship practice such as there is an ethical requirement to ask another person if you can make a psychic link with them. Her talks focused upon the altruistic reasons for mediumship of helping people (or rather souls) overcome difficulties but she focused more upon the importance of helping the spirit world. However her key focus within these sessions was that this sensitivity to extrasensory communication could cause damaging problems, which need to be managed. Students were informed that they have responsibility over this management in that looking after oneself through self-awareness is of prime importance. She informed students that she would teach them techniques that will help them with this management.

When developing as a medium she explained that for students, patterns that have been adopted in life and old emotions would arise therefore this process should be taken seriously. She promotes a specific view of identity as students being authentic souls that are restricted by the socialised physical body. The tutor explains

I'm a great believer that the soul has, erm, a purer aspect to itself, it also has mental, erm, and emotional if you think about Pythagoras and Socrates they spoke about the three aspects of the soul (Extract 1)

During the group work sessions the tutor would ask the group what methods are involved in mediumship and there would be much discussion over what was involved within clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience and so forth. She emphasises her advanced abilities and awareness frequently during these discussions but explains that students can attain this advanced level with the correct discipline.

She presents physical reality as extremely limited. She explains to the students that there is a team of spirit people that work with them that are likely to change as the students or rather souls learn different lessons throughout their lives. She provides the following story of one of the lessons she learnt. Getting involved in emotions is normal she promotes, as mediums are human and often when helping clients this brings to the forefront one's own childhood or emotional experiences and having

different reaction these interactions is normal. However the tutor informs the students that there are techniques, which can assist the medium when dealing with this emotional demand and that is about learning the discipline of spirit communication. She explains

You're not just working with spirit energy, even when you're working with spirit, you're not working entirely with that energy, you've got the energy of people around you, you've got their emotions, you've got their mental state, you know, it's all of that, that you've got to learn to handle. (Extract 2)

She refers to her own past experiences of being woken up in the middle of the night because the spirit world were eager to communicate with her. She had to develop a working relationship with them specifying working hours and times based upon trust and mutual respect . She explains

They're eager, so what you've got to do is just tell them when it's convenient to you and that's what I did. I said no, this is not the right time, but I will see you, I will make space for you at ten o'clock tomorrow morning or whatever time was right for me and that's what I did. (Extract 3)

Within other times when she does not want to work with them she explains the technique that she uses

you have to learn to put your shield on and way you put your shield is to build your oil field, and work in a bubble, I mean it's a joke. I work in a bubble, I've always, they call it the [name of tutor] bubble... (Extract 4)

Here she is referring to the psychic protection methods. However for these methods to be effective, she advises students that they have to believe it within the inner core of themselves. She emphasises that her big bubble is indestructible... until she gives permission. She explains

You walk a very fine line, a balanced line, so I had my life, all right, with my grandchildren, my children, all those things are important to me and my space, my time out, is important to me, so I won't be invaded by spirit, however lovely (Extract 5)

However when talking about connecting to the spirit during the agreed working times she refers to limited emotional distance between her and spirit

In the middle of giving the information I felt a shift, and you will feel that shift and it's as if you become, you are in the same skin as the person, you look and it's nothing to do with clairsentience you're looking through their eyes, you know exactly who they are, you can feel it, it doesn't happen all the time, but when it happens it's just stupendous, because you're feeling the soul energy of that person, and why they really want to connect with whoever. (Extract 6)

She refers to a sense of joy at having communion with spirit. She furthers this by claiming that she refuses to give readings to some people because their energies do not feel right. During the group work sessions a student emphasised that he felt that his ability to communicate with Spirit had gone. She talks about the value of silence. Also there is a requirement to get to know spirit energies otherwise the student will be over loaded. She promotes limiting external stimulus like watching the television in order to achieve a balanced self. She also stated that going to local spiritualist church and sitting in a development circle or creating one at home is of prime importance. She explains to the students that it is not about the evidence that you provide the client it is about making the client aware that you have made a connection with the deceased person through bringing through the personality of the person.

The tutor instructed members of the group to practice giving one to one readings to each other similar to a private reading scenario. The tutor positioned the chairs in a circle and everyone was told to connect and feel the energy with the spirits. This process took ten minutes and involved going into a meditative state similar to the process invoked within the introductory session. She brought the students out of the

meditative state by asking everyone to open their eyes and feel their physical body. In meditation a detachment between the physical body and soul was promoted.

Appendix 4: 4.1 Informed consent form



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To be read out by the researcher/moderator before the beginning of the telephone or face-to-face interview or participant observations. Verbal or signed consent will be gained and stored securely.

Hello my name is Sarah Roberts

I am a doctoral researcher who is conducting research to explore the experiences of people who provide Mediumship and psychic services and those involved with these practices on a formal or informal basis.

My supervisor Professor Robin Wooffitt is directing the project and should you have any questions he can be contacted at:

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Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Before we start, I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time

The interview or participant observations will be tape or video recorded, but the data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts from the results may be made part of the final research report, will be made available through the university archives and may be included in future publication but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in reports or literature. Are you ok to proceed?

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

(signed)

(printed)

(date)

(Researcher/moderator to keep signed/verbally agreed copy and email or leave unsigned copy with each participant.)

Appendix 5

5.1 + Interview Guide

Start by reading out informed consent form and document permission granted

This is simply a guide due to the informal nature of these interviews although these broad topics will be addressed.

Would you be able to start by you telling me a bit about yourself?

Background, age, occupation

When and how did you become aware and interested in mediumship?

Interests such as in spiritual and paranormal groups

Would you be able to share your experiences of being psychic or mediums?

Broad topics to be covered:

Contextual

- How often do you do readings and who with?
- How much do you charge? Is this your main job?
- What is your main identity such as medium or day to day job?
- How many clients do you see? Do you have regular clients? Can you tell me how you feel about that?
- Where do you conduct your work?
- How long do your consultations normally take?
- Have you received any formal training? And if so where? And what did this involve?
- How would you define your abilities or role?
- What is involved in this role (such as using spirit guides etc?)
- What do you think the main purpose of your role is?
- How do you feel about the recording and note taking of your consultations?

Expectations, belief and purpose of psychic advice

- What kind of answers do you think clients seek?
- And what advice do you give?
- What kind of advice won't you give?
- Do you think clients prefer P/M to mainstream counsellors?
- Do you view yourself similar to a counsellor?
- Do you think clients look up to you?

Emotion and informational management

- How do you prepare yourself for a reading?
- Do you remember what you say to clients afterwards?

- Do you feel the need to retain a professional distance from the clients?
- What happens during a reading?
- What kind of emotional or physical sensations before, during or after a reading?
- Do these factors influence the reading?
- In what ways do you maintain a consultancy relationship? Politeness etc
- What kind of ethical guidelines do you follow? (for instance are they people that you will not read for such as friends)
- Managing information- do you ever get information about the client that you would be unwilling to share or feel the need to relay in a sensitive or assertive way?

- Can you reflect upon
 - What would you consider to be a successful reading?
 - What would you consider to be a negative reading?
 - Any particular emotional encounters that you have had?
 - Positive experiences such as reassurance, hope and confidence
 - Negative experiences such as ethical considerations, fear and impatience, what kind of factors that make it hard for you to do your job?
 - Do you think that clients trust you? Examples, of trust or distrust (such as testing abilities)? How do you address this?

Usage and social applicability

- Have you had any feedback of your clients following the advice given in the
Short or long term?

Do you think some people can become reliant upon psychics or mediums? Have you had any instances where this has become apparent?

Work reflections

Do you keep a diary or journal about your experiences of your work?

Is there anything that you would like to tell me that we haven't already discussed?

Ask the participant if they would be willing to share their diary or willing to keep an audio diary?

NB Close the interview

We have come to the end of the interview. Do you feel ok about what we have discussed? I will be sending a copy of the informed consent form that I read out to you at the beginning of the interview. If you need to contact me feel free. Would you mind if I kept your details in a secure manner should the need arise for participation in future research.

Finally, I would like to thank you for taking part I have found your insight to be extremely valuable for my project and I wish you every success for the future

Thank you and best wishes

Appendix 6

6.1 Key participants

Practitioners	Age	Country	Background	Appears in pages
Kate	40's	UK	Kate is married. She had a strong awareness of Spirit as a child and as a teen she used to lock herself in a cupboard to practice communicating with them. She has a passion for literature and has impressive knowledge on a wide range of extrasensory topics. She offers numerous courses in the UK and abroad. She conducts telephone and face-to-face mediumship readings and is involved in the spiritualist movement. She also attends university as a mature postgraduate.	153-155, 184-185, 208-209
Alice	30's	UK (Scotland)	Alice has distant Romani gypsy associations and her family are highly involved in a wide range of extrasensory practices. She specialises as a full time practitioner in Tarot and mediumship and she attends her local Spiritualist centre.	153- 155, 167, 174
Jasmine	50's	UK	Jasmine worked as a music teacher before leaving and becoming a professional extrasensory practitioner. She is also a singer and feels Spirit around her typically when performing. She regularly attends extrasensory courses including those at spiritualist church. She also runs a diverse range of workshops and she has a special interest in improving awareness of Spirit guides and crystal healing.	156-157, 200-201

Kerry	Late 30's	UK	Kerry is a single mother of three children. She also has Romani gypsy connections. Her auntie taught her to read tarot cards at an early age and her interest in Spirit and extrasensory abilities developed from there. She now provides readings in an office, which is located above a shopping centre. She has a large client base and occasionally conducts large demonstrations in community halls and other venues.	160,162,211,213
Amelia	50's	UK	Amelia is well educated. She worked as a counselling professional specialising in alcohol and drug addictions. Her spiritual experiences increased when she had her first child and left her previous career. Skeptical at first, she started attending her local Spiritualist church and was encouraged to develop further. She has her own independent centre focused on increasing awareness of Spirit it offers a wide range of extrasensory services. She regularly serves on the platform within the Spiritualist movement travelling significant distances over the UK. She is a telephone medium working flexibly for a specialised company. She also works in a esoteric themed shop in a different town, providing readings. She has a large client base and other business interests.	160,166, 177, 178-181, 184, 204-205,219-220, 222, 230-231
Sophie	Late 30's	UK	Sophie is a civil servant. She loves the theatre and has been in many productions. She became involved in the spiritualist church following the death of her mother, wanting to come to terms with the extrasensory experiences she started to have. She provides mediumship consultations in her spare time and is on the church committee.	159
Kathleen	50's	UK	Kathleen has been working for Spirit and Spiritualism for the past twenty years. She has travelled extensively, also featuring on the BBC and in regional press. She is also a tutor specializing in evidential mediumship.	156

Sarah	40's	UK	Sarah was previously a hairdresser and is a mother of two children. She is now a full time practitioner and works from different local esoteric shops and a office. She specialises in Spirit rescue work (where Spirit are stuck between this world and the Spirit realm) and she organises very popular psychic festivals.	158-159,172,199,201-202,228
Lottie	50's	Spain	Lottie's grandfather was a working trance medium and she has been going to spiritualist church since a young child. She is now significantly involved in Spiritualism in her own right; she has travelled the globe to use her extrasensory abilities and is currently producing her own range of spiritual merchandise.	161,191-192, 217,219,227-228
Tracey	50's	UK	Tracey has grown up children who have now left home. She started to go to the spiritualist church when she moved house and felt lonely. She senses Spirit strongly and always has but with age these experiences became more prominent and frequent. She can recall significant stories in detail and is very passionate about the work she does. She offers private consultations and occasionally advice to strangers.	171,176-177,191
Sally	Late 30's	UK	Sally was in the armed forces and later she found herself homeless for a short period following posttraumatic stress disorder. Encouraged by a friend, she recognized she could communicate with Spirit so she started attending the local spiritualist church. This helped her mental health stabilise. She now works in various Spiritualist churches and also seeks to improve anti-bullying polices in them.	163
Brooke	30's	USA	Brooke had childhood experiences of talking to her deceased relatives. She was a counsellor specialising in cognitive behavioural therapy. She now works as a extrasensory practitioner on a one to one basis. She is especially interested in soul work and improvement and auras.	164

Grace	60's	UK (Wales)	Grace is a writer and editor of pagan magazines, she has had a lot of contact with extrasensory practitioners (prior to becoming one) and this is what prompted her to become more formally involved with the spiritualist church and conduct readings on a private basis. She has three children and several grandchildren.	177-179
Alan	60's	Australia	Alan has a background in the social care sector but became disillusioned with his profession because of the red tape involved in helping anyone. He sees mediumship as a more worthwhile career. He is involved in Spiritualism and attends regularly attends the spiritualist college.	167,188,190,199,22-226,231-232
Michelle	30's	UK	Michelle states she has relatives who have Romani gypsy backgrounds. She is known for large-scale demonstrations and famous clients. She has had media attention from national and regional press. She does not attend Spiritualist church.	170,172,192
Zoe	Late 50's	UK	Zoe is a semi professional medium who is highly involved in the spiritualist domain. She spends much time at the mediumship college and conducting platform services.	173,193-194,211,213-214
Lauren	30's	New Zealand	UK born, Lauren states she has Romani gypsy connections. She assigns to the Pagan faith and being a white witch. She is a married mother of one. She has had numerous childhood experiences of Spirit especially when around animals and riding her horses. Karen loves the outdoor lifestyle and the idea of self-sufficiency. Her Spirit experiences became more prominent after the death of her father. She reads tarot cards, conducts readings and has a few regular clients.	212-213

Dawn	50's	USA	Dawn is a legal secretary. She lives with her partner who is a practitioner. Encouraged by him she attended a few awareness courses and was surprised by the strength of her abilities. She is also now a professional practitioner and runs yearly mediumship course in vacation destinations.	185
Brian	Late 40's	UK	In his twenties and thirties Brian was an international lorry driver travelling all over the world. He then pursued his love of photography and travelled as a conflict photographer. He settled in Sweden for a while and then moved to India to live in a Buddhist Centre. He now runs his own retreat in the UK; treatments include extrasensory consultations, life coaching, reiki and massage. He has also attended the college numerous times.	185
Hayley	60's	Canada	Hayley has experienced Spirit from a young age. She visited mediums from the age of 16 and is interested in electronic voice phenomena. Following the death of her mother, a medium telling her granddaughter would be dead by 10 and then the end of her marriage, she began seeing practitioners and visiting the spiritualist church for reassurance. She now identifies as a Christian Spiritualist. She practices healing and conducts past life regression.	186
Colin	Late 40's	UK	Colin's granddad was a healer. Colin was previously a social worker but had a breakdown, which, he claims, boosted his spiritual awareness and involvement in Spiritualism. He works on the platform in church, doing other independent events and private face to face mediumship readings.	186-187,225,227
Ken	60's	Finland	UK born; before being a practitioner Ken was at the top of the corporate ladder earning a significant salary. The death of his wife made him reassess his life and retrain as an extrasensory practitioner. He regularly attends courses at the mediumship college. His goal is to open up his own school/college for extrasensory practices.	187

Katherine	Late 20's	UK	Katherine had experiences of Spirit as a child. She states she is not a professional practitioner but occasionally reads for people. She is currently retraining as a nurse and regularly attends the local spiritualist church 3-4 times a week.	188
Susan	Early 40's	UK	Sue was previously a chemist. She had an out of body experience following a car accident and was previously in an abusive relationship; these experiences led her to a journey of self-discovery. She left the relationship, sold her belongings and travelled the world. Seeking solace in spiritual establishments, she realised she could communicate with Spirit which challenged her world-view. She now works as a telephone psychic and blogger.	210,229,232, 232
Amanda	50's	UK	Amanda is a divorced mum of two. She was a stay at home mum for years. She later had her own successful cleaning business. She got involved in organising Ghost walks and events through a friend who encouraged her to attend her local Spiritualist church. She is now a professional extrasensory practitioner and still attends church.	218
Katie	30's	USA	Katie had a lucrative career she could not discuss. She is single and has no children. She is really into fitness and health, and views this as vital to her mediumship. She travels primarily to the UK, but also other countries, at least three times per year to attend mediumship courses. She has a reputation for transfiguring into non-human entities while channelling Spirit.	221-222
Jon	60's	UK	Jon was a plumber from leaving school and has grown up children. Throughout his life he has had experiences of Spirit, though it was not until the breakdown of his second marriage and associated depression that he explored the meaning of these occurrences further. He runs his own psychic events and development classes and works within many Spiritualist churches.	223

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