

POWER IN BELIEF:
A FOLKLORIC STUDY OF THE FEMALE PSYCHIC COMMUNITY &
ACCESS TO POWER

by

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August, 2019

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Abstract: The ways in which women are denied access to power by societal and religious organizations serves as a significant focal point in academic research. Entities that seem to evade patriarchal influence offer females the best chance to acquire power. One of these entities includes Spiritualist practices. Some have shown that Spiritualism functions as a way for women to improve their status in society, while others have identified it as limiting them to traditional feminine roles of family, relationships, and household. Through an analysis of thirty-four narratives written by psychics-in-training and five memorates gathered from interviews with clients of psychics, I argue that psychics-in-training are seeking both societal and religious power through their supernatural practices while clients of psychics only receive religious autonomy from Spiritualism. Clients of psychics are not pursuing societal power with Spiritualist practices as they predominately report supernatural messages about living and deceased family members, love, marriage, and children.

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A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master's of Art in English

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I dedicate this study to my inspirations,

Salamon, Luna, & Solstice

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to numerous people for helping me reach this point in my educational journey. Faculty members at East Carolina University have been foundational in helping me acquire necessary academic skills and develop ideas that have led to this study. Although I cannot name all of them, I would like to identify a few that have played significant roles. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Andrea Kitta, who has gone above and beyond to give me feedback on all my work presented on these pages as my thesis advisor. She has pushed me to think outside of my own comfort zone while remaining a motivating presence. I also owe Dr. Su-ching Huang and Dr. James Kirkland gratitude for serving on my thesis committee and providing me with valuable information that I will take as I move into my next academic role.

I would additionally like to thank all my interview participants – Allison, Kiley, Michelle, Mykleanne, and Rosanna. My interactions with these informants led to ideas that became an essential component to this research. I would also like to thank the psychics-in-training, who were brave enough to post their experiences online. These narratives were crucial in understanding the perspectives of psychics. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the believers in the paranormal and those involved in supernatural research. Without them, I would not have informants and models for my own personal and research interests.

Lastly, I need to thank my family members that allowed me, sometimes reluctantly, to take time away from family life to research and write. In particular, I would like to thank my mom, who taught me the importance and value of education at a young age. These lessons led to developing a determination that has gotten me through all the obstacles of higher education thus far. Throughout my time at East Carolina University, my mother cared for my children while I secluded myself to read, think, research, and write. I also need to thank my daughters, Luna and Solstice, for their patience and understanding when I needed to take time away from my role as

mother to fulfill my duties as a student. Finally, I want to thank my partner, Salamon, for continually believing in me. When I would lose faith in myself, he would remind me of my own abilities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introductory Remarks about Spiritualism.....	1
Academic Responses to Spiritualism	4
Objectives.....	8
Fieldwork & Methodology	11
Chapter Construction.....	14
CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF WOMEN & POWER	18
Introduction to Women & Power	18
Spiritualism & Gender Roles	19
Spiritualism & Feminism.....	24
Women, Society, & Power.....	27
Women, Religion, & Power.....	30
Conclusion to Women & Power.....	36
CHAPTER 3: POWER FOR CLIENTS OF PSYCHICS	38
Introduction to Psychic Seekers	38
Psychic Seeker Identifiers.....	41
Proving Authenticity.....	43
Purpose of Psychic Readings: Loved Ones' Visitations & Premonitions	46
Purpose of Psychic Readings: Love, Marriage, & Children	50
Purpose of Psychic Readings: Self-Knowledge.....	54
Purpose of Psychic Readings: Societal Power.....	56
Conclusion to Psychic Seekers.....	60

CHAPTER 4: POWER FOR STUDENT PSYCHIC PRACTITIONERS.....	63
Introduction to Psychic Practitioners-in-Training	63
Psychic Practitioner-in-Training Identifiers.....	65
Proving Authenticity.....	68
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Societal Power	71
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Self-Knowledge	79
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Loved Ones’ Premonitions & Visitations	82
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Awareness or Exercise of Gifts	85
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Love, Marriage, & Children	88
Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Natural Disasters.....	90
Conclusion to Psychic Practitioners-in-Training	93
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	95
Concluding Remarks about Spiritualism	95
Religious Power for Psychic Seekers	99
Religious Power for Student Psychic Practitioners	107
Societal Power for Psychic Seekers	109
Societal Power for Student Psychic Practitioners	111
Limitations & Importance of Study.....	113
WORKS CITED	116
APPENDIX A: IRB NOTIFICATION OF EXEMPT CERTIFICATION.....	124
APPENDIX B: ALLISON’S INTERVIEW.....	125
APPENDIX C: KILEY’S INTERVIEW.....	133
APPENDIX D: MICHELLE’S INTERVIEW.....	137
APPENDIX E: MYKLEANNE’S INTERVIEW	141
APPENDIX F: ROSANNA’S INTERVIEW	154

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Remarks about Spiritualism

Since the beginning of Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century, the tradition has developed with marked diversions from the major organized religions in the United States. The beliefs emerge during a unique time and space. Unlike many organized religions that trace their beginnings to a male leader, Spiritualism began with two young girls, Margaret and Katie Fox. This distinctive gendered origin coupled with the fact that Spiritualism never became an organized religion with leaders, structure, rules, and roles has opened the tradition to be embraced by feminists seeking freedom from the male dominated world. Women are able to hold powerful positions as psychic mediums as they deliver supernatural messages to their clients. They remain unregulated by a male dominated hierarchical leadership structure and often times maintain various levels of independence to perform their gifts for monetary value. Unlike many Christian denominations, mediums are able to participate outside of a restricted structure that frequently favors male figures in their leadership positions. This image of the powerful psychic attracts female clients. In this way, Spiritualism has evaded the influence of the patriarchy that is found in so many other American religions. The prevailing religious organizations and society at large are governed by male-controlled views and values that limit women's access to power. This less powerful position within the societal and religious spheres has led some women to a tradition that has historically failed to link to the American patriarchal society. It is from this foundation that I explore a connection of Spiritualism with feminist notions of power as experienced by women today.

In this study, I will be examining the role of power in modern-day Spiritualist practices. I will do this in two ways to investigate the functions of Spiritualism on both sides of the psychic community, the clients of psychics and the psychic practitioners-in-training. Firstly, I conducted interviews with women who sought out the abilities of psychic mediums. I will use these memorates, or narratives of paranormal events, to determine if women are using the knowledge obtained from psychic readings to acquire religious and/or societal authority over their lives. Secondly, I have gathered narratives posted in an online forum of people who have had psychic experiences. I will use these memorates to analyze whether psychics-in-training are using their abilities to gain power over their religious and/or professional selves.

Overall, I will study whether female clients of psychics and/or female student psychic practitioners are tapping into a power that is denied by society and organized religion. I will argue that the clients of psychics become empowered during psychic readings but this power remains mostly within the normative gender roles for women. In other words, women seek out people with psychic abilities to become more informed and, therefore, find a sense of control in their personal lives. However, the areas that result in power are the issues that are typically found in the restrictive feminine role. Rarely do women use psychic readings to gain societal power through messages about financial, education, and/or career decisions that would give them direction to job promotions or wage increases. However, psychic seekers do use Spiritualist practices to gain personal religious power by evading the restrictions found in Christian denominations. Additionally, they begin to use individualistic New Age traditions to fulfill their own spiritual needs and take steps towards a shift from client to psychic-in-training. In contrast, psychics-in-training are using their supernatural gifts in hopes of obtaining both religious and societal power. A significant portion do not report any affiliation to an organized religion. It

could be concluded that they are not a part of a religious organization, or at the very least do not find it important to note in a paranormal narrative. Plus, they use the online platform to help each other develop their supernatural gifts. In this sense, they are a part of a non-hierarchical spiritual community that serves its participants in a similar way to a religious organization. Psychics-in-training are also exercising their gifts in hopes of obtaining some societal power. The fact that they ask questions and seek advice from each other suggests that these online participants want to develop their skills. Given the rise in the fortune-telling industry, it could be concluded that psychics-in-training are hoping to be able to sell their paranormal abilities in exchange for financial rewards. This firmly places psychics-in-training in a situation of being able to access more societal power.

Before beginning, I would like to make a note about language. I use the term Spiritualism to denote the practice of giving and receiving psychic readings. Many of the psychic seekers do not self-identify as Spiritualists, but I have chosen to use the term to signify this practice for simplicity's sake. I also interchangeably use the terms clients of psychics and psychic seekers for those who have gotten readings with psychics. I additionally use the terms psychics, mediums, and psychic mediums to represent the group of people who receive and vocalize supernatural messages for other people. Psychics-in-training or student psychics are a spectrum of people ranging from those who have noticed something peculiar but significant in their lives to those who are exercising their supernatural abilities. Psychics-in-training, however, do not receive monetary benefits for their skills yet.

Academic Responses to Spiritualism

This study has developed largely from the work of two folklorists: Elizabeth Tucker and Gillian Bennett. In her essay, “Messages from the Dead,” Elizabeth Tucker links female mediums of Lily Dale to feminist activism. She argues that the large number of female psychic practitioners and female clients is key to understanding Spiritualism as a cultural symbol of feminine power. Tucker traces this power back to the heyday of Spiritualism when she says, “Lily Dale...has a long, proud tradition of feminist activism. In the late nineteenth century, Susan B. Anthony and other feminists gave speeches that made the town a center of support for women’s suffrage” (176). Not only does Spiritualism become connected to feminism but the town of Lily Dale as well. Tucker additionally identifies Inspiration Stump, a place in Lily Dale where psychic mediums and clients assemble for readings, as a spiritual focal point and position of power. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the stump functioned as a bodily podium where psychics would delivered readings with the same fervor of political speeches (Tucker 177). Today it still holds that sacred and powerful center. Tucker concludes that the mostly female-centered practice of Spiritualism has attracted a large portion of female psychic practitioners and clients with an image of power. Tucker explains, “In Lily Dale, mediums are perceived as having a crucial ability: the power to deliver messages from the dead. Since most of these mediums are female, people’s perception of their power has cultural significance. Mediums serve as cultural symbols of women’s power” (188). The image of the strong, powerful women then becomes intertwined with the image of the psychic medium.

Others have also found a large female presence among psychics and their clients. In the HBO documentary, *No One Dies in Lily Dale*, 15 mediums were formally introduced and 12 of them are women. The stories of five psychic seekers were captured and three of them are female.

These statistics show that 80 percent of the psychic mediums and 60 percent of clients in Lily Dale are women. Similar to Tucker's research, this suggests a strong female attraction to Spiritualism on both sides of the community.

Unlike the work of Elizabeth Tucker, Gillian Bennett finds that older women use their psychic abilities in a way that allows for only passive power that upholds traditional female roles. In her essay "'If I Knew You Were Coming, I'd Have Baked a Cake': The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group," Gillian Bennett interviews eighty-seven women ranging in ages from sixty to ninety-five. She finds that her Christian informants only have a passive power because their premonitions are uncontrollable, only allowing those involved an opportunity to prepare for the future without being able to change it (Bennett 134-135). Bennett explains it best when she says, "Psychic gifts seem thus specially tailored to the traditional female role, because they demand patience, watchfulness, compliance – not action...Psychic gifts, by forewarning the individual of trouble to come yet allowing no remedy by action or interference, increase that passive strength" (135). Using the passive language of her informants, Bennett argues against the idea that psychic abilities are connected to female power. She is able to show examples through her interviews where women use these gifts but only in a traditionally submissive way.

My own academic interest about psychics, women, and power was born from the work of Elizabeth Tucker and Gillian Bennett. This study, however, will utilize sources from several disciplines. Historical studies of Spiritualism were greatly influential. David K. Nartonis presented research of Spiritualism between the years 1854 through 1873, showing how the movement did not form churches or hierarchical leadership roles. Ann Braude demonstrates the interconnection between the women's movement and Spiritualism. These two linked entities

complimented each other and helped further women's position in society. Alex Owen studies the central leadership role that women played as mediums during the late Victorian era while exploring gender relations of that time. Beth Robertson examines the fluidity of gender and sexuality displayed by psychics using the examples of two popular North American mediums: George Valiantine and Mina Crandon, otherwise known by her stage name Margery.

Studies about women's position in societal organizations provided insight for my own research. The United States Bureau of Labor offered an awareness into female inequality in the workforce, showing where the inequality exists and how it manifests in women's lives. Michelle J. Budig and Paula England's research illuminates the vulnerable position of women in the workplace after entering motherhood citing some of the obstacles mothers will face while trying to maintain and further their careers.

Research about women's position in religious organizations are equally influential. Elaine Lawless' study of female ministers offers an understanding of women in ordained ministry. Mark Chaves studies the history of women in American Christian religious organizations and the reasons behind their absence of authority positions across several denominations. Tony Walter and Grace Davie explore the possible explanations for the significant female presence in religious organizations while lacking leadership roles. In his essay, "Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible," Jimi Adams studies the stages of congregational leadership – participation, general leadership, seminary education, congregational preaching, and head clergy – and identifies barriers that exist for women each step up the hierarchy. Mary E. Lowe's study illuminates the underrepresentation of female leadership in American churches while contributing the majority of the membership. Although leadership has traditionally favored men, Lowe argues that theological education needs reform as more women enter religious

professions. Leah Power and Stephen W. Cook use research and theory to examine relationships between religiousness and conforming to feminine norms among adult Christian women in the United States. They find that Christian women understand their roles as being domestic and involving children. Landon Schnabel examines the macro effects of religious adherents among predominately Christian, Muslim, and Hindu peoples concluding that countries with a higher proportion of religious people result in greater inequality. To build from this inequality found in Christianity, Sabina Magliocco's work on neo-paganism in the United States argues that Pagans and Witches have access to power while creating spiritual meaning in their lives.

Recent sociological research about Spiritualism was significant in developing my own ideas. A study conducted by Stephen L. Muzzatti and Emma M. Smith finds that fortune-telling sells customers some semblance of control. Similar research is found with Janet Baldwin in her essay, "Reading Tarot." Baldwin claims that solitary Tarot card readings give women an ability to predict and control unexpected events. The influence of other folklorists cannot be ignored. My entire thought process is inspired by the work of David Hufford's experience-centered theory; Bill Ellis's research on new religions; James McClenon's essay about supernatural experience, belief, and healing; Maxine Miska's experience of a failed séance; Kenneth Pimple's research on ghosts and Spiritualism; and Leea Virtanen's work on psychic experiences, even though these scholars are not directly cited in my research.

Beyond academic research, I have conducted fieldwork into the issue of power in relationship to the psychic community. I completed five personal interviews through the medium of emails and videos with clients of psychic mediums. I also used thirty-four memorates of psychic practitioners posted in an online forum on a website titled *Psychic Experiences*. It is

from these sources that I have developed my own positioning about psychic abilities as a method for acquiring societal and religious power.

Objectives

In the nature of full disclosure, I would like to confess that my interest in Spiritualism extends beyond the academic. I have sought the advice of two psychic mediums on three occasions in addition to other forms of New Age traditions, such as palm and Tarot card readings. I initially scheduled meetings with psychics out of pure curiosity. I studied religion academically, and I threw myself into any inviting religious or spiritual experiences. At the time, I was trying to understand belief from an academic standpoint while exploring my own belief system. Out of all the different beliefs I encountered, I was particularly awed by my readings from psychic mediums. Among other topics covered, I was able to communicate with my deceased father and a friend who committed suicide. I was immediately struck by the language that the psychics used when conveying messages from my loved ones. Certain phrases manifested from the mouths of mediums that were typical of both my deceased father and friend. I was instantly curious if other people had similar experiences. My own encounters with mediums triggered questions about psychic readings that would eventually contribute to this study. I also noticed that the information I received during my psychic readings made me feel empowered about situations that were uncertain before my interaction with the psychics. I recall wishing that I had a gift to see the future and talk to the dead. Not only would I be able to help others feel in control of their lives and make decisions that would ultimately create a better life, but I would have a power that nobody could take away. It was from my own experiences and

current research that set me on a path to further investigation. I began to develop questions that directed my study:

- Do female clients and/or psychics-in-training gain religious power from Spiritualist activities? Do clients and/or psychics-in-training view Spiritualism as one of the components to their unregulated spiritual practices or is it supplementary to an organized religion? This question came from the inquiry into whether women are trying to fulfill their spiritual needs outside of the boundaries of patriarchal, organized religions. If Spiritualism and other New Age traditions are the predominant spiritual practices in women's lives, then an argument could be made that they are using psychics and/or psychic abilities to obtain spiritual power in their lives that would otherwise be denied by organized religion. If Spiritualism is something that women practice in addition to attending their churches, then this issue becomes more convoluted. Women may still be using Spiritualism as a way to gain some autonomy over their spiritual lives while still practicing in a male-regulated religion or they may simply be adding Spiritualism to their individual belief systems.
- Do female clients obtain societal power through information received during psychic readings? What questions are clients hoping that psychics are able to answer? These queries directly speak to the purpose of Spiritualism in women's lives. If women are seeking psychics to answer questions to further their positions in society, then it could be argued that they are using psychic abilities to obtain power within society. For example, if women are asking questions about education, career, and/or finances, then women are seeking advice that would help them make choices to navigate through the male-dominated realms of society. If, on the other hand, women are asking questions

about areas of their lives that fall under traditional female gender roles, then women are using psychic abilities for other purposes. For instance, if women are asking psychics questions about their families (both living and dead), friends, relationships, and/or future children, then the women could be interpreted as looking for advice in the category of the typical feminine role.

- Are psychics-in-training using their abilities to gain some societal power? How do female psychics-in training use their powers in their own lives? This question follows the same logic as the question about female clients of psychics. If women are using psychic powers to answer questions that would benefit their positions in society, then they are using these abilities to gain societal power. However, if psychics-in-training are focused on information that falls within traditional feminine roles, such as family, friends, relationships and/or future children, then their abilities are used within the acceptable female gender role. The psychics-in-training also have an additional element of gaining financially from their gifts. Therefore, determining if these psychics-in-training are hoping to eventually use their abilities for a future career would suggest their desire to tap into an area of societal power.

I will search for the answers to these questions within the memorates of both the female clients of psychics and psychics-in-training. I will explore the idea of clients obtaining religious and/or societal power through psychic readings in chapter three. Chapter four will focus on the memorates of those undergoing psychic experiences. Within that chapter, I will investigate whether psychics-in-training are using their talents to acquire societal power and whether this spiritual ability has taken the place of an organized religion.

Fieldwork & Methodology

The initial stages of my research originated with a focus from the client's perspective. I began to think about how people approach psychics and their purpose for doing so. Before my first psychic reading, I was curious, but I was also open to new spiritual experiences. I would not have claimed to have had a firm belief in the power of psychics nor did I walk in to the reading without some skepticism. I additionally became curious about how often people visit psychics. Due to the cost alone, I was only able to see a psychic a few times. My readings ranged from \$80 to \$100 for an hour so I would not have the luxury of returning often or even regularly. I also became interested how psychic readings tied in with the religious beliefs of others. I wondered whether people who go to psychics were unaffiliated to an organized religion or if they managed to negotiate the contradictions to allow for both in their belief systems. I am not a part of any organized religion, but I wondered how those who are would approach the different traditions. The heart of my research comes from questioning the contents of the actual psychic readings. I wanted to know if people had similar experiences to mine with those who have passed on. I wanted to look for trends that show common reasons for people to request psychic readings. Lastly, I was interested in how these psychic readings affected the lives of those who received them. My own psychic readings gave me peace of mind with decisions I have made, clarity for future options, and helped me get closure with those that have died. I was hoping to find out the variety of influences that came from psychic readings. From these areas of curiosity, I was able to develop six questions for people who have had psychic readings. The following are the questions I used:

1. Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

2. How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.
3. Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?
4. What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.
5. Tell me about your psychic reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?
6. How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

I chose to approach my participants with questions that framed the subject matter in a positive light because of the stigma attached to the belief in psychic mediums. By doing this, I was showing my informants that I was not judging them or their belief systems. My intention was to have a more open conversation about psychic readings instead of having the responses of my participants colored with language of fear and/or justification.

I began with a list of five family members and friends who have previously talked to me about psychic readings they have received. From those five people, I was given five more possible informants. Half of the possible interviewees live outside of my town and the other half had conflicting schedules that would not allow us to meet up for personal interviews. I then made the decision to conduct these interviews through email. I was able to organize a follow-up interview with one informant, Rosanna, via email, and another, Mykleanne, through a video. For Mykleanne, I emailed her follow-up questions and she chose to respond with a video. This method allowed for flexibility for both myself and my informants, but it is also problematic for a number of reasons. Only six people responded to the interview questions through email. I suspect that some were hesitant to write their responses to the questions as opposed to discussing them. It

also allows for people to procrastinate and forget about the interview, becoming a long-lost unanswered email. Of the people who did respond, five were female and one was male. For the purpose of this research, I only focused on my female informants. Those five participants are educated white women who were born and raised in southern Idaho. Four continue to live in Idaho while one has moved to Hawai'i. The ages of my informants range from twenty-four to fifty-three. Two participants are in their twenties, two are in their thirties, and one is in her fifties. Only two informants self-identified as Christians while the three others do not affiliate with any organized religion.

After looking at the perspective of the client, I turn to examine the psychic practitioner. I only personally know a few people with psychic abilities, thus to get a higher number of psychic memorates, I used an online forum on a website called *Psychic Experiences* (www.psychic-experiences.com) where psychics-in-training can post about their experiences and receive help from their peers. There are over 12,000 narratives posted beginning in October of 2006, and people continue to post about their psychic experiences today. I limited the number of memorates by both date and type of experience. I used narratives from 2017 to match the year of the psychic seeker interviews and only those that are categorized as premonitions. The purpose for using only narratives from 2017 was simply to limit the memorates to an amount that was not overwhelming. I also wanted it close in dates with the client interviews because of the social and political changes occurring at the time for women in the United States. This gave me thirty-seven personal psychic experiences to examine, three of which came from the same informant, klamathstorm. To avoid misrepresenting the demographics of the online psychic community, I took the three memorates from the same informant and counted it as one. This left me with a

total of thirty-four narratives for analysis. As I read through these experiences, I asked the following questions for each informant:

1. Where does the informant reside?
2. What is the age of psychic posting about a supernatural experience?
3. What is the gender of the person giving their psychic accounts?
4. What, if any, religious affiliation does the informant share?
5. How is each person using his/her psychic abilities? Is he/she using them increase his/her position in society or to uphold traditional gender roles?

Out of the thirty-four memorates, the majority of informants are young female adults living the South and Midwest with unspecified religious affiliation.

Chapter Construction

In Chapter 1: Introduction, I have given a brief overview of Spiritualism. I explained how my research developed from the work of Elizabeth Tucker and Gillian Bennett. Tucker argues that Spiritualism is connected with feminism and that women are largely drawn to the tradition because it lives outside of patriarchal influence. Bennett, on the other hand, found that her informants only used their psychics abilities in a way that upholds traditional gender roles. From these academic responses to Spiritualism, I developed my own research based on questions about religious affiliation and purposes for psychic readings and abilities. I explained how I will use personal interviews to examine women's purpose for attending psychic readings, and I will utilize an online forum of memorates to explore the ways psychics use their own powers. The introduction concludes with an outline of content for each chapter.

Chapter 2: History of Women and Power explores women's societal and religious roles in the beginning and most popular time for Spiritualism, the mid-1800s, and compare them with women's societal and religious roles today. I argue that Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers a path for female societal and religious power. I look at how gender norms are used to acquire power through the process of mediumship. I will show the connection between Spiritualism and feminism, claiming that the two movements helped to further their own causes. I then turn to an examination of societal roles in the nineteenth century and today, showing that women are still fighting against ingrained gender norms while receiving power through unregulated tradition of Spiritualism. Lastly, I scrutinize women's religious roles within Christian communities throughout the same time period. Although Christian leadership roles have been opened to women, they still face obstacles of equality. Within restricted American society, Spiritualism became a way for women to acquire societal and religious power through occupations and religious autonomy.

In Chapter 3: Power for Clients of Psychics, I will argue that female psychic seekers are using their encounters with psychic mediums to obtain religious autonomy. I show how they are avoiding the submissive female position found within organized religion while fulfilling their spiritual needs using unregulated and non-hierarchical traditions. In contrast, female clients are not directly using psychic readings to gain societal power in their lives. I conclude this by analyzing memorates obtained through personal interviews of five female psychic seekers. Through my exploration, I determine four categories of psychic readings. These include (1) visitations from and premonitions about loved ones; (2) love, marriage, and children; (3) self-knowledge; and (4) societal power. Gaining societal power is determined by future access to education, career, and/or financial decisions, all of which would give women an advantage in the

male dominated society. Instead of using the talents of psychics to tap into ways of obtaining societal power, my informants more often receive information that predominately lies within the traditional female roles of the family.

Chapter 4: Power for Psychic Practitioners investigates the ways that student psychics use their powers. In order to determine this, I analyze thirty-four memorates of premonition and precognition experiences posted by psychics-in-training on the website *Psychic Experiences* (www.psychic-experiences.com). I identify three methods used by psychics to prove their authenticity throughout their narratives. Student psychics demonstrate their validity in their memorates through direct or indirect ways, or by illustrating a lineage of gifts with a longevity of personal abilities, genetic link with other psychic family members, or an onset of abilities with a traumatic event. I additionally determine six different types of supernatural messages student psychics receive. These include (1) societal power; (2) self-knowledge; (3) loved ones' premonitions and visitations; (4) exercise or awareness of gifts; (5) love, marriage, and children; and (6) natural disasters. I argue that psychics-in-training are seeking societal power through their directly validated visions. These authenticated visions coupled with inquiries on how to strengthen their skills suggests a desire to hone their abilities in a way that could lead to financial rewards.

In Chapter 5: Conclusion, I summarize my findings that I discovered from my interviews with female clients of psychics and student psychics memorates on the website *Psychic Experiences*. I argue that psychic seekers obtain religious power over their own lives because Spiritualist practices are identified as a part of a personalized, unorganized spirituality in the majority of interview participants. Clients of psychics demonstrate self-governance when it comes to spiritual matters and shy away from religious organizations that deny them autonomy

over their spirituality. Similarly, psychic practitioners-in-training gain religious power from their gifts that give them both autonomy over their own spirituality but also leadership over others. I argue this by pointing out that a significant number of online informants do not mention affiliation with any religious organization and the fact that they use their online platform to assist each other in skill development. I argue that clients of psychics do not use their psychic readings to obtain societal power by finding ways to use their interaction with psychics to benefit themselves within society. Instead, they use psychic readings to obtain information that is categorized within the traditional female role. In contrast, student psychics use their abilities to acquire societal power with directly authenticated visions and through their inquiries about gifts development that is used to benefit themselves and shape the outside world. Once these psychics-in-training are able to refine their abilities, they will be able to receive financial benefits from other people. I conclude by identifying the weaknesses with my current research, offer suggestions for future research, and showing the importance of this study.

CHAPTER 2:

HISTORY OF WOMEN & POWER

Introduction to Women & Power

Before examining the purpose of psychic readings for women today, an understanding of the societal and religious roles inhabited by women beginning in the nineteenth century is needed. This will show some places where women had access to power and some of the organizational entities that withheld it from them. I will begin by exploring the function of Spiritualism beginning with its establishment in the mid-nineteenth century. Spiritualist activities allowed both men and women to explore roles outside their restrictive gender norms. This led to a combining of the movements of Spiritualism and first-wave feminism. Psychic mediums used their platforms to pontificate about women's issues, spreading feminist rhetoric further than the women's movement could have done on its own. As paid psychics, women were able to acquire some societal power that led to other job opportunities for women. However, the occupational choices were still limited and the wages were poor.

First and second-wave feminism pushed for women's rights in the workforce but also for leadership roles within religion. In the nineteenth century, women were only moral authorities within their homes. Some Christian denominations ordained women as early as the mid-1850s while others did not open up leadership roles until the 1970s. Some Christian groups, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, do not allow women to hold the highest forms of leadership. Even with leadership roles, women face obstacles and discrimination that withhold full gender equality. Within Christianity, female leadership only gives an image of equality to subdue the pressures from the state, the women's movement, and vocal Christian members pushing for gender equality. In *Ordaining Women*, Mark Chaves explains how full ordination for women did not

lead to equality within churches. He states, “When congregations are unable to hire a male minister, perhaps because of an overall clergy shortage or an inability to pay a good salary, they will turn to women to do the job. Turning to women, however, does not necessarily translate into granting them full formal equality” (Chaves 32). Denominations were able to present an appearance of equality by allowing female clergy but offered them positions the men did not want in small, rural churches with meager wages, making it difficult to support themselves.

The beginning of Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century opened up paths for women both within society and religion. It challenged restrictive gender norms and behaviors and gave middle-class women job opportunities. But it also became the only religious leadership roles that women could inhabit without being constrained or regulated. Christian women lacked religious autonomy and leadership positions, a situation which still exists today for many females in organized religion. It is not surprising then that nineteenth-century women and women today are drawn to Spiritualism and the images of feminine power that it portrays. In this chapter, I will argue that the Spiritualist practice of mediumship has historically given women societal and religious power.

Spiritualism & Gender Roles

In the nineteenth century, Spiritualism grew out of the appearance of upholding gender norms while, at the same time, allowing practitioners an ability to transcend it. It is through these carefully crafted stages that women were able to embrace mediumship within the bounds of feminine expectations and then use this new religious practice to break out of their gender norms. This became one of the ways that nineteenth century women were able to challenge their roles within society. In other words, women used the stereotype of their passive natures to gain some societal power by challenging gender roles through mediumship.

In the mid-1900s, women were presumed to embody feminine characteristics defined as negative and passive (Braude 23). Their submissive roles created a situation where power was taken from the females and given to those in authority – fathers, husbands, religious and political leaders, and so on. This created a situation where women were seen as dependents of authoritative figures, who needed to make decisions about most aspects of their lives. At the beginning of Spiritualism, the practice of mediumship was understood as feminine due to its passive nature. The act of becoming a vessel where spirits were given a voice was understood as a submissive action. Ann Braude describes the situation perfectly in her book *Radical Spirits* when she says, “Women did not consciously choose to be mediums. Rather, they and their coreligionists believed that the spirits chose them and that they passively allowed spirits to communicate through them. Even the process of becoming a medium was referred to in the passive form: one was said to be ‘being developed as a medium’, the active roles being attributed to the spirits” (83). Not only were psychics viewed as inactive participants in the process of speaking to the dead, but the language described the practice as a passive experience for the mediums.

Mediumship was further ingrained in the onlooker’s view as an acceptable feminine role because of the presentation of Spiritualist activities. The way men and women played out their parts appeared to be consistent with acceptable gender roles of the time. Men managed the Spiritualist gatherings while women’s bodies were used to spout messages from beyond the grave. The imagery of men in total control moderating the female experience, an event that was perceived as powerless, was in alignment with gender expectations. Women were not in an authoritative position as mediums. It was not understood that the messages were coming directly from the women but from someone who took control of their bodies for their own purposes. This

imagery was congruent with normative interactions between the genders outside of Spiritualist activities. Braude explains how mediumship appears to fit within expected gender norms, stating, “The juxtaposition of men officiating at large assemblies with unconscious women voicing extemporaneous visions of heaven in verse both satisfied existing sexual stereotypes and pushed them a step further” (85). Once mediums were understood as upholding societal views of men and women, people inside the tradition were able to push the boundaries of gender expectations.

It is from the view of Spiritualism upholding gender norms that both men and women were able to push the bounds and transcend the expectations. After people had seen enough séances to define their expectancies, mediums were able to use the activity to experiment outside their restrictive gender norms. In her book, *The Darkened Room*, Alex Owen explains how Spiritualism was used to transcend normative gender roles:

Within the séance, and in the name of spirit possession, women openly flagrantly transgressed gender norms. Female mediums, with the approval of those present, often assumed a male role and sometimes also a trance persona which was at total odds with the Victorian idea of respectable womanhood. Whilst male mediums were also known to assume a female spirit voice or personality, their séances did not involve the dramatic theatrical representations for which the women became famous. (12)

The overall experience of mediums was understood as passive and, therefore, feminine. Psychics were not in control of the experiences, their bodies or voices, or the messages being conveyed. Therefore, mediums were not able to articulate which gender would come through during a séance. Because of this passive, uncontrollable nature, both men and women mediums were able to explore outside of their gender expectations during séances.

There are several examples of psychic mediums using Spiritualist practices to transcend normative gender roles. In her essay, “Spirit of Transnationalism,” Beth Robertson examines the fluidity of gender and sexuality displayed by psychics using the examples of two popular North American mediums: George Valiantine and Mina Crandon, otherwise known as Margery. When male mediums were in séance states, they were understood to be embodying a role similar to female mediums. As pointed out by Braude, the characteristics of the medium will be feminine despite the gender of a psychic. This feminine nature was defined as passive, negative, and opposed to the masculine will-power (23). Many believed that a submissive nature was needed to channel spirits and that this work was ideally done best through the submissive nature of women. However, male mediums still existed and the way they presented themselves in séances was outside the male gender norm but within normative psychic representation. According to Robertson, to accept his role as a medium, Valiantine conformed to the stereotypes of mediumship and was labeled as simple-minded, unprivileged, passive, weak-willed, and not masculine (158). Although his masculinity was questioned, Valiantine needed to present himself within the norms of psychics to be viewed as a valid, trustworthy medium. Robertson goes on to further say, “As a medium, Valiantine’s passive, intuitive and ‘simple’ characteristics were transformed into desirable and even necessary traits for effective spirit communication” (158). However, these feminine traits still led to questions of masculinity. Robertson explains, “Allowing the spirits to penetrate him, Valiantine adopted an effeminised role” (165). In this sense, it was almost necessary for male mediums to give up their masculinity to fit within norms of mediumship and be viewed as legitimate psychics. At the same time, though, it allowed men to experiment outside the male gender role of masculine, strong, and in control. This gave men an opportunity to live outside their gender bounds but it may also be the reason there were fewer

practicing male psychics. Men at this time, for the most part, did not want to be viewed as weak and effeminate.

Women similarly experience gender bending during séances, but with different benefits than men. While male mediums are viewed as effeminate, female mediums were able to explore within the normative male roles of power. This allowed women to step outside of their submissive roles and engender male aggression and control. Again, the reasoning behind the acceptance of women acting within the bounds of male gender roles comes from the idea of mediums being vessels. If a male personality is being channeled through a female body, then it would have been acceptable that the message appears with typical male signifiers and behaviors. Margery was one such psychic medium that became famous for her displays of manliness. As Robertson notes, Margery claimed to channel her deceased brother Walter and, by doing so, performed the rugged manly traits of aggressiveness and rowdiness. Margery became a controversial figure because her transgressive sexuality and display of masculine attributes whether she was in a trance or not. Robertson explains how Margery stood out for her behaviors that were not congruent with respectable womanliness in the nineteenth century:

Margery was already highly experienced in testing the bounds of the gendered body. She regularly exceeded the categorisation of feminine passivity and engaged her investigators in ways that were both titillating and disturbing at once. Her intelligence and allure, coupled with a strong will and cutting wit, made her an impressive figure in the annals of psychical research, even apart from the disconcerting phenomena she produced in the séance room. The controversial substance known as teleplasm poured from Margery's vagina, allegedly forming

hands and “rods” that would perform various tasks for the success of her investigators’ experiments. (160)

Margery was one of the more extreme cases but her experience as a medium demonstrates how expressions of gender and sexuality were able to be practiced differently through trance states. One important note to point out about Margery is how she was able to express herself through conventional notions of masculinity while performing as a medium and, eventually, began to present herself this way in her regular, everyday life. This illustrates the progression of how gender norms were being challenged within society through Spiritualist activities. Once it was established that mediums in their passive roles as vessels and voices for the dead could represent a variety of gendered behaviors, it allowed for an opportunity to present oneself outside of the societal gender norms. Braude expounds, “Nineteenth-century stereotypes of femininity were used to bolster the case for female mediumship...The very qualities that rendered women incompetent when judged against norms for masculine behavior rendered them capable of mediumship. Mediumship allowed women to discard limitations on women’s role without questioning accepted ideas about woman’s nature” (83). With this progression, it is not surprising that Spiritualism becomes attached to the women’s movement in the nineteenth century.

Spiritualism & Feminism

Partly due to its view on gender, many Spiritualists also adopted the label of feminist. Spiritualism and first-wave feminism linked movements because of their mutual worldview and common goals. In *Radical Spirits*, Ann Braude identifies how these two organizations interact in the nineteenth century when she says, “Spiritualism and woman’s rights intertwined repeatedly

as both become mass movements that challenged the existing norms of American life. The two movements shared many leaders and activists. While not all feminists were Spiritualists, all Spiritualists advocated women's rights" (58). Both groups questioned gender norms, particularly focusing on women's proper role and sphere, and rejected hierarchies within the government, churches, and society at large. Spiritualism was broader in their rejection of hierarchies "denouncing the authority of churches over believers, of governments over citizens, of doctors over patients, of masters over slaves, and, most of all, of men over women" (Braude 56). Feminists, on the other hand, rejected the hierarchies and fought for the rights mainly of women and slaves. Nonetheless, Spiritualism becomes a major vehicle in advocating for women in the mid-nineteenth century.

With its vocal push for women's rights, it is not surprising that Spiritualism attracts many female followers seeking societal power. In *The Darkened Room*, Alex Owen elucidates the social situation when she says, "[I]t is no accident that spiritualism, a movement that privileged women and took them seriously, attracted so many female believers during a period of gender disjunction and disparity between aspiration and reality. Spiritualist culture held possibilities for attention, opportunity, and status denied elsewhere" (4). Through the practice of mediumship, Spiritualism departed from typical gender norms and gave women opportunities to speak in public, occasions that they had previously been denied. Often times, women would use the platform as a medium to lecture on women's rights. This resulted in spreading the feminist message more widely than the women's movement could have done on its own (Braude 79). In this sense, mediumship allowed women to perform in positions of power. Owen aptly states, "Spiritualism validated the female authoritative voice and permitted women an active professional and spiritual role largely denied them elsewhere" (6). Not only did women that

displayed their psychic abilities acquire societal power through voicing their ideas during trance, but they became female images of power for audience members.

The relationship between Spiritualism and feminism was not always congruent. At one point the two paths diverged. Spiritualists continued to reject hierarchies and fight for radical reform while feminist activists put aside their agenda to focus on abolition of slavery for African Americans. This became a situation where the feminists let go of their own personal fight for inequality and saw themselves as activists that fought for equal rights for all people. Braude further explains:

While Spiritualists continued to fight for the radical reform agenda of the 1850s throughout the nineteenth century, a narrower program concentrating on the right to vote arose among activists who identified themselves with abolition but not with Spiritualism...[woman's rights agitators] remained a subgroup within the abolition movement....They perceived themselves as working for equal rights for all people, black and white, male and female, but their concerns remained secondary in the larger movement, which was aimed primarily at the abolition of slavery. (78)

Many of the agenda items for the women's rights activists became less important than African American freedom. The Spiritualists "continued to pursue the broad woman's rights agenda of the 1850s, pressing for dress reform, marriage reform, and economic rights, all of which disappeared from the postwar suffrage movement" (Braude 78). Feminists became a part of a larger group fighting for equality but, in doing so, their agenda for equality became secondary to that of abolitionists. Connecting to Spiritualism, however, gave feminists a more widespread

platform in which to spread their messages about women's issues. This undoubtedly led to some advances for women within both the work and religious spheres of life.

Women, Society, & Power

In the nineteenth century, roles within society were determined by gender and socioeconomic status. Middle-class men were expected to work outside the home and support their families while middle-class women were required to manage their households, birth, and raise children. It appeared there were far greater gender equality among lower-class people because they were equally poor. Although lower-class women worked outside their homes as domestic servants, seamstresses, or factory workers, they remained in a powerless situation due to their limited income and opportunities for job advancement. Middle-class women in the 1800s, however, were able to take steps towards power in society with the help of Spiritualism.

Spiritualist activities opened up the job market to middle-class women. Mediumship gave women opportunities to earn money using skills other than those utilized by lower-class women. Female psychics were paid for their abilities and, once the women broke into the job market, other occupations became accessible to them. In *The Darkened Room*, Alex Owen argues the connection between mediums and workforce options:

At the beginning of the 1870s...female clerks and secretaries were virtually unknown. But within twenty years, nearly 18,000 women were employed in these capacities, and nursing and teaching had also been opened up as suitable professions for women. It is significant that this was the same period which saw the meteoric rise and then demise of the famous female spiritualist mediums of the 1870s and 1880s, some of whom were able to make a good living from their

talents. By the 1890s when these mediums began to fade from the scene many thousands of women had already made their way into the public domain via jobs in local government, business, and commerce. (2-3)

The fact that women knowingly took jobs that paid less wages resulted in difficulties for those who had to support themselves. Despite the wage gap, many women at the time were thrilled to be given opportunities outside the home. However, this female sub-standard pay would eventually result in another wave in the women's movement to address this inequality issue.

Although feminists have made significant strides towards equality for women in the workforce, American society is still strongly controlled by patriarchy today, perpetuating views of females as the weaker sex and resulting in less access to power. In the United States, women tend to occupy the least paying jobs due to social conditioning. For example, only twenty-six percent of careers in computer and math are occupied by females ("Women's"). Even when women are able to climb the corporate ladder and obtain high paying jobs, they continue to get paid seventy cents to the dollar for the same work as men ("Women's"), a number that delves even lower for women of color. In their essay "Religiosity of Women," Tony Walter and Grace Davie argue, "Women's paid work is far more likely than men's to be of a caring nature - in the caring professions, as care assistants, or in other work which involves the skilled use of 'emotional labour'" (654). This stereotyping within the workforce has not only kept women contained in socially acceptable roles but continues to perpetuate the idea that females should hold the occupations with the lowest wages.

The fact that the United States does not have paid maternity leave is another example of women's current lack of access to societal power. This forces women to make hard decisions about if and when they will have children. Many women are obligated to return to the workforce

earlier than they wish from fear of losing their jobs. Research has suggested that women often get overlooked for promotions because of the time taken away from work to birth and care for children, both of which are societal gender norms for women (Budig and England 208-209). Not only are women still facing inequality within the workforce but the societal gender norms of the nurturing mother have resulted in discrimination outside the home.

Our current political climate has shown a regression in women's rights that females have worked so hard to achieve throughout history. The current threat to women's healthcare under the Trump administration is just one of the major regressive burdens forced on females. This threat not only includes options for healthcare facilities, with the closures of Planned Parenthood, but individual autonomy over the female body. Deciding healthcare options for women directly demonstrates the patriarchal view that females are incapable of making this decision on their own, mimicking the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when women were required to have their husbands' consent for access to different healthcare choices. This same imitation can be seen in other decisions made about female healthcare. While women are legally allowed to get tubal ligation without their husbands' consent, many physicians will refuse to perform the procedure of getting women's tubes tied and often require a thirty-day wait period.

The sexist comments about women from our own commander and chief have additionally demonstrated patriarchy at its best. In public and influential roles, Donald Trump has belittled women and made it socially acceptable to treat females as no more than eye candy and play toys for powerful men. In a conversation with Billy Bush, a television personality from *Access Hollywood*, Donald Trump repeatedly makes vulgar and sexist comments about women. Trump is now famously quoted as saying, "...when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything...Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything" (Bullock). Even though this

conversation occurred before Trump became president, it was public knowledge before the election. The American people were fully aware of Trump's demeanor and yet he still surprisingly had female supporters, sending the message that this type of misogynistic expression is acceptable when defined as "locker room talk" among men. Anti-female rhetoric, such as that used by President Trump, leads to viewing women as nothing more than objects and results in a plethora of issues.

Women, Religion, & Power

Not only have American women progressed in the workforce since the nineteenth century, but they have also made some strides in the religious sphere. In the 1800s, women made up a significant portion of religious participants but they were largely unrepresented among Christian leaders. Every week, Christian women saw more of their sisters than brothers, yet they were denied ordination and positions of authority in addition to being excluded from making decisions about church operations (Braude 81-82). During this time period, women were given some spiritual power but it was limited. Alex Owens, in *The Darkening Room*, explains, "During the nineteenth century, spiritual power exercised within closely defined limits was considered appropriate for women. In this context it was validated as moral influence, and moral influence was lauded as harmonious and uplifting component of domestic life" (9). Women were moral authorities in the home but this position did not extend into leadership positions with the churches.

The female gender roles that kept nineteenth century women from holding religious leadership positions has changed very little today. In "Breaking the Stained Glass Ceiling," Mary Lowe points out that women continue to be the highest number of participants in Christian

denominations, yet, females continue to hold less leadership roles than their male counterparts. Lowe argues that “the number of women who are actively engaged in religious life and those not in leadership is too significant to ignore” (318). This could be partly due to the similar gender expectations from the nineteenth century. In their essay published in *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, Leah Power and Stephen W. Cook use research and theory to examine relationships between religiousness and conforming to feminine norms among adult Christian women in the United States. Power and Cook find that Christian women understand their roles as being domestic and involving children (648). These studies show that Christian women may be excluded from religious leadership positions due to restricted gender norms.

Women may additionally lack leadership roles in Christian churches because of their own self-limits. Women have different stated purposes for attending religious ceremonies. In their essay “The Religiosity of Women,” Tony Walter and Grace Davie cite an interview study conducted in 1996 in the United States. This study finds that “many women valued their churches for the social and emotional support which existed irrespective of the women’s exclusion from formal power; for women are more concerned with connection and relationship than with hierarchy and power” (Walter and Davie 645). Another study Walter and Davie address finds the same results but this one interviews women in Wales. A 1997 study of Welsh Christians finds that “the women were not bothered that men dominated church committees, because the real life of the church was, for them, the shared social life of women” (Walter and Davie 647). This research is suggesting that men and women participate in church activities for different purposes. Women are not attending church to lead but for social and emotional reasons. Although this seems to be the case, it could still be argued that these differences in purpose could be stemming from expected gender norms. Nonetheless, for women to accept these divided roles

within church organizations becomes a way of self-limiting and remaining excluded from powerful religious positions.

Despite women's stated reasoning for church attendance, there have still been both external and internal pressures for equality. The greatest pressure for changes towards gender equality come from outside the religious realm. As cultural transformations have led to greater gender equality, American churches have been pressured to follow. This external pressure stems from a variety of sources. In *Ordaining Women*, Mark Chaves identifies the various outside forces influencing change within churches when he states the following:

[T]here is pressure emanating from outside the religious sphere altogether, pressure that is pushing mainly in the direction of greater gender equality in religious organizations. Included here is pressure coming from the state and pressure coming from an organized women's movement. Also included is the more subtle normative pressure stemming from the fact that support for formal gender equality has become increasingly widely diffused in American society during the twentieth century. (38)

Because American culture is shifting towards more gender equality, the religious realm has felt the force to follow that change. In fact, "denominations were more likely to change their rules in the direction of gender equality during both waves of the women's movement than during other periods" (Chaves 49). This shows that churches were highly influenced by the women's movement when it came to church policies. There have also been internal pressures to allow female ordination from those that are influenced by the rhetoric of the state and women's movement. Additionally, denominations influence each other with their decisions about allowing

women to hold leadership roles (Chaves 38-39). Both internal and external pressures for gender equality have led to some changes within churches but they are not without limitations.

Gender equality within the religious realm has been a slow process. Formal gender equality began at the same time in the disciplines of religion, medicine, and law. In fact, religion was above the curve at the time giving Antoinette Brown full ordination in 1853 while medical and law schools didn't allow women entrance until the late 1860s (Chaves 41). Despite the fact that religion was the first to open their doors to women, they did not progress at the same rate of medicine and law. Chaves explains when he says, "Religious organizations, as a population, are slower than other types of organizations to institute formal gender equality because of their greater autonomy from the state. In American society, religious organizations' relative immunity from state regulation means that they are able to display their gender conservatism in ways that other organizations cannot" (42). Because there is a separation of church and government in the United States, the role of women was able to remain in the more conservative spheres, keeping the outside pressures at bay.

The external pressures eventually pushed their way into many Christian denominations but this did not lead full formal gender equality. Although churches had to change their regulations about gendered leadership roles, these female clergy were not without obstacles. These impediments are found within the rhetoric used in churches. Chaves explains, "When women spoke in church it was called a 'talk' while when men spoke in church it was called a 'sermon'" (25). The inequality permeated the language and perpetuated gender inequality. More visible inequality can be found within the actual job positions. Female pastors were assigned congregations that their male counterparts did not desire and they were given less wages. Chaves expands, "When women do have jobs as sole or senior pastors, they are significantly more likely

than men to have jobs in congregations that are small, located in rural areas, and whose finances are precarious. Female clergy also earn lower salaries than male clergy” (29). Women were often given leadership roles when there was a clergy shortage or not enough funds to pay a decent salary. Laypeople also discriminated against female religious leaders. Chaves shows this prejudiced behavior:

Surveys of lay people...indicate substantial resistances to female clergy even within so-called liberal denominations. Although majorities of lay people in denominations that ordain women say they would themselves accept a woman minister in their congregation, they also are willing to discriminate against female clergy in order to satisfy the large minority who object to female clergy. Few members, moreover, are willing to support affirmative action policies for female ministers. (31)

Not only do women have a difficult time finding leadership roles within their churches, but they also are not supported by the larger congregations. This suggests that female clergy are given leadership opportunities to appease those influenced by external and internal pressures for gender equality but, in actuality, those positions do not necessarily translate into equality within religious realm.

Some have noted that the gendered leadership roles within Christianity have to do with making the religion appealing to men. In his essay, “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible,” Jimi Adams studies the stages of congregational leadership – participation, general leadership, seminary education, congregational preaching, and head clergy – and identifies barriers that exist for women each step up the hierarchy. While leadership positions are given to women, Adams shows there is a “glass escalator” for men to rise to the top positions in religions to produce a

more legitimate organization. Furthermore, this rapid advancement into leadership roles makes the religious institute attractive to men (Adams 99). Within our society, the imagery of male leadership is more acceptable and it has the added bonus of enticing more male membership in an organization where men are lacking.

Overall, these obstacles with female leadership still show significant inequality within the Christian domain. In fact, studies have shown that the more religious citizens are in a country, the more inequality that exists. Examining countries with predominately Christian, Muslim, and Hindu peoples, Landon Schnabel examines the macro effects of religious adherents in a country based on two indicators of material gender equality: the United Nations Gender Inequality Index and the Social Watch Gender Equity Index. Schnabel finds that “the proportion of the non-religious people in a country is clearly and strongly associated with great gender equality” (898). Countries with a higher proportion of religious people result in greater inequality. This suggests that organized religion is one of the culprits that inhibit women from achieving their full potential.

Limited access to power for females in organized religions have then led many women to the unorganized and unregulated tradition of Spiritualism. In the nineteenth century, women were attracted to Spiritualist practices because it offered them positions of authority. Braude argues that female psychics were given positions of power that they would have otherwise been denied:

As mediums, women became sources of religious truth and, as such, assumed the authority of religious leaders...Mediumship circumvented the structural barriers that excluded women from religious leadership. By communicating directly with

spirits, mediums bypassed the need for education, ordination, or organizational recognition, which secured the monopoly of male religious leaders. (84)

Through mediumship, women were finally given authority positions and were able to use this station to voice their concerns. In the article, “The Rise of 19th Century American Spiritualism, 1854-1873,” David K. Nartonis argues that “Across cultures, those whose natural voices have been suppressed have found speaking for the dead a powerful, political tool because it derives authority ‘from direct individual spiritual contact or experience rather than from office, position, or training’. Thus, for a time, Spiritualists were among the few American women allowed to speak in public” (363). During this time period, women used this platform to voice moral concerns about women’s rights and “white male failing such as intemperance, solicitation of prostitution, and the ill treatment of women, children, blacks and American Indian” (Nartonis 363). Not only did women use their psychic abilities to gain power in the religious realm but they were able to express their concerns about societal issues. In this way, the absence of a typical organizational religious structure has opened Spiritualism up to a new a refreshing tradition that allows equal opportunity for females beginning in the nineteenth century and extending into practices today.

Conclusion to Women & Power

In this chapter, I have shown how Spiritualist practices have given women an opportunity for both societal and religious power. In the nineteenth century, women used the understood and accepted passivity of mediumship in a way that was expected of their own submissive gender norms. The séance then became a platform for women to voice their concerns about society. In this way, feminine passivity became power for women in the mid-1800s. Partly because of the

view of gender during séances, Spiritualism and feminism become two intertwined movements that spread the message of female equality. Mediums in a trance often lectured on issues facing women in the nineteenth century. Psychics, thus, became images of female power. Spiritualism additionally gave middle-class women jobs outside of their home as paid psychic mediums. This opened up the workforce to other occupational opportunities for women but with limitations on both job types and wages.

Unlike Spiritualism, organized Christian religions have set restrictions on women. In the nineteenth century, women were viewed as moral authorities but this title only had power within the bounds of their homes. Even though more female members fill Christian churches, more males occupy leadership roles. As feminists fought for women's rights during the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, religious roles were opened for women in Christian denominations. However, these leadership roles did not lead to gender equality. It only gave the image of equality while female leaders continued to struggle with obtaining desirable positions, earning livable wages, and acceptance from the congregations.

Due to the lack of autonomy and leadership roles found within Christianity, women in the nineteenth century are drawn to the power of the female dominated tradition of Spiritualism. It gave women opportunities that were denied in both society and churches. They were able to work for wages outside of the domestic sphere. They held leadership roles within the Spiritualist tradition that allowed them to speak to groups of people in public places. Since they were vessels for dead beings, women were voices of spiritual authority that did not need education or an organized structure with a male leader at the top of the hierarchy to be legitimate. In this sense, Spiritualism became a method for women to obtain societal and religious power in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER 3:

POWER FOR CLIENTS OF PSYCHICS

Introduction to Psychic Seekers

The early stages of this research came from the viewpoint of the client because that is my lived experience. I have received a few psychic readings, and I find it interesting to compare it with insights given to other people during their readings. A conversation between my grandfather-in-law about his experiences with a psychic stood out in my mind as I formed my preliminary ideas about this research. One conversation, in particular, raised my curiosity about gendered psychic experiences. My grandfather-in-law discussed his interest in learning about financial investments and land purchases during his psychic reading. I, on the other hand, was more concerned about both my living and deceased family members and friends. These differences led to inquiries about the purpose of psychic readings. Through interviewing women who have had psychic readings, I hoped to identify commonalities among them. I also wanted to understand this supernatural experience in terms of the religious affiliations of the participants. From this perspective, I developed the following six interview questions to ask women who have had psychic readings:

1. Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?
2. How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.
3. Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

4. What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.
5. Tell me about your psychic reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?
6. How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

These questions may appear to be leading but I chose to frame them with positive language due to the stigma of psychic belief. I wanted my informants to openly share their ideas and experiences without the fear of judgment or the need to justify their beliefs. Five women agreed to answer these interview questions through the medium of email and a pre-recorded video. Three of them are members of my family and one of them is a long-time friend. Only one of the participants, Allison, and I do not have a personal relationship. I was linked to her through another interviewee, Kiley, when she learned of the content of this research.

For the purpose of clarity, my informants discuss their readings with only three different psychics. Most of my informants visited David Akins, a clairvoyant located in Nampa, Idaho. The participants discussing their experiences with David Akins include Kiley, Michelle, Mykleanne, and Rosanna. Michelle and Mykleanne additionally converse about their visits to intuitive Lisa Tenney located in Boise, Idaho. Rosanna speaks about an unnamed Channeler who employed her. Since Rosanna lives on the Big Island in Hawai'i, it would be safe to say that this Channeler also occupies residency on the same island. The only informant that did not get a psychic reading from these sources is Allison. She received a reading by the televised psychic, Theresa Caputo, otherwise known as The Long Island Medium. Although Allison received a reading from this famous psychic, she did so at a recording of her show in Boise, Idaho. With the exception of the Channeler in Hawai'i, all of the psychic readings occurred in Idaho. Only two of the psychics, Rosanna's Channeler and Theresa Caputo, are not residents of Idaho.

A commonality among all memorates is a stage where the psychic seeker needs to prove authenticity of the psychic reading. All narratives have a point where the psychic gives information during a reading and the seeker connects that information to experiences in their own lives. Often times, this is occurring throughout the entire memorate with every new revelation in the reading. Other times it happens just as the beginning to prove that the psychic has legitimate talents, which then allows the seeker to believe everything that follows.

After analyzing the memorates of my female informants, I was able to identify four purposes for psychic readings. The first purpose of psychic readings revolves around family and includes receiving messages from deceased loved ones and obtaining premonitions about living loved ones. Love, marriage, and children are the second purpose for seekers to get psychic readings. This category is also divided into two parts of future marriages and love interests and possible future children. I have added the section about children within this purpose because both exist within the realm of the future and they are often connected. The third purpose of psychic readings is to gain some insight about the self. This type of information includes ideas about personality traits and past lives. The least likely purpose for psychic readings is to gain societal power, which is determined by examining messages and interactions with psychics that could lead to more powerful positions in society. The overall argument of my research made through the analysis of five women suggests that female psychic seekers use the supernatural talents of psychics to gain religious power, but they also use their interactions to obtain information that predominately lives within traditional female roles of the family. Women are not using psychics to gain societal power as often as they are seeking insight about themselves and family members.

Psychic Seeker Identifiers

My informants have similarities in demographics. All are white females that were born and raised in southern Idaho. All but one still lives in southern Idaho. The one who moved away from her hometown lives in Hawai'i. The interviewees range in age from twenty-four to fifty-three with two in their twenties, two in their thirties, and one in her fifties. Each of the females interviewed are educated women. They have earned some sort of degree in higher education. Two hold associate degrees while three have earned bachelor's degrees. My research then supports David Hufford when he says, "All of the best empirical data from the past several decades shows that modern education does *not* eradicate spiritual belief" (17, original emphasis). It is important to note that my informants do not speak about their psychic readings as a part of the Spiritualist tradition. They do not connect the two, although I use the term Spiritualism to describe the practice of going to a psychic medium.

The unorganized aspect of Spiritualism and belief in psychics led me to questions about the belief systems of my informants. Do people who seek psychic readings tend to be unaffiliated with any organized religion? For those who are a part of an organized religion, does that religion accept their belief in psychics or have they had to personally negotiate their contradicting beliefs within their own system? This curiosity led to the interview question: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties? Most informants focused on the religious aspect of the question. Of the five female interviewees, two noted they were a part of the Catholic Church. Both women did not find their belief in psychics to contradict with their affiliated religion. Allison notes that the psychic she saw is also a part of the Catholic tradition. She states, "I would say that most Catholics don't believe in mediums because it kind of contradicts certain beliefs, but Theresa [Caputo, the Long Island medium] herself is Catholic"

(Allison). Another informant points to biblical contradictions to navigate her belief system. Kiley explains, “Being a Christian I think we are preconditioned to not believe in psychics. I have seen many conflicting biblical statements that have been interpreted as condemning psychics and others that endorse them as ‘gifts from God’. However, the Bible condemns a lot of strange things. So I wasn’t too worried.” Both Allison and Kiley have managed to blend their beliefs to create a rational, well thought out belief system.

The other three interviewees did not claim a religious affiliation and two expanded on their belief systems as a spiritual approach that allows one to draw from many different traditions. Michelle states, “For me, there is no conflict religiously, ethically or morally with my readings. I believe in a higher power and however one taps into that power – it’s personal.” Rosanna takes a similar spiritual approach but remarks about the conflict that would occur if she had stayed in the church in which she was raised. She says, “If I had remained Catholic, then yes, it would have conflicted with doctrine. It does not conflict with my personal belief...I do feel that we are not alone in this world and that Love surrounds all of us” (Rosanna). Despite a connection with organized religion or not, my informants did not find a belief in Spiritualism an issue. This shows a flexibility with the tradition that aligns with its view of women and demonstrates a more liberal approach than organized religion, which stems from its unorganized and unregulated nature. Since most psychic seekers do not affiliate with an organized religion and use Spiritualism to answer philosophical questions about life, this suggests that clients are using interactions with psychics partially to gain religious autonomy.

Proving Authenticity

A unique attribute to the Spiritualist tradition is its ability to prove itself. Unlike many organized religions that function on the basis of faith, Spiritualists are able to demonstrate their validity through unknown, personal knowledge about others. All the narratives from my informants have this element within their psychic readings in some way or another. Some begin by showing how a piece of information provided by the psychic actually fits into the reality of their lives. This then sets up the client to believe the rest of the reading that follows, even if there are portions that do not apply to their lives at the time. Others connect their readings to their lives with each piece of information, continually reiterating the talent of the psychic.

Some occurrences from the psychics proving their authenticity did not result in any type of a message or insight for the client. This is a portion of the reading where the psychic is purely showing evidence of his or her supernatural abilities using information that the client can recall from their own memories. Kiley offers an example of this type of message when she says, “He [psychic David Akins] saw my sister-in-law as very motherly with at least 5 to 6 children around her and said she had a nurturing/teaching spirit. She has 3 nieces, a nephew, 1 child and one on the way and is an educator! That part gave me goose bumps.” This information given by a psychic does not reveal any new revelation about Kiley’s life. The psychic is able to see that her sister-in-law is a mother and nurturing teacher with five to six children around her. Kiley then identifies her job as an educator and affirms that she would have six children around her given her family size. This does not give Kiley any message or insight into her life. Instead, its sole purpose is to give her confirmation that the psychic is not just creating ideas from his head. Likewise, Michelle had a similar situation when she says, “Before I even sat down I was asked... ‘Who is Bill...both of them?’ At the time I was divorcing my husband of 22 years – Bill, and

was just beginning to date a man named Bill.” Again, this information does not divulge information that is useful for Michelle about how to deal with her ex-husband and new boyfriend. This method is used to merely to prove the supernatural talents of the psychic and to gain the trust of the client to believe other information that is provided during the reading.

More often than not, the psychic combines proving authenticity with a message for the client. Sometimes the messages are direct while other times they are hidden in the reading.

Rosanna has an example of proving authenticity while delivering a direct message:

When my parents divorced, my paternal Grandparents treated my Mom like she was at fault for the whole situation. My Grandfather had always had a good relationship with my Mom and vice versa. So it really hurt my Mom when my Grandpa stopped talking to her. When we did the session with Dave Atkins [a psychic], he said that my Grandpa. I don't think he actually said my Grandpa, he said more like “an older male figure” or something like that. Anyway, he said that Grandpa wanted to let my Mom know how much he thought of her and that he had been sorry how things had gone unresolved with them. This really was a huge sign to me that this session was authentic.

In this situation, Rosanna offers a back story about what happened between her paternal grandparents and mother during her parents' divorce. She then reveals a message given by the psychic about the unresolved issues between her loved ones. The psychic is proving authenticity by knowing personal and sensitive information about Rosanna's mother. He then gives her a message about the situation from a deceased loved one to give her some closure. Rosanna then ends this portion of her memorate by reiterating that psychic David Akins was “authentic” because of his knowledge about such personal information.

While Rosanna's example has a direct message, there are other narratives where the message is hidden within the imagery of the psychic's communication while proving authenticity. Allison has an example of the Long Island Medium proving herself as a legitimate psychic with an indirect message:

[Theresa Caputo, the Long Island Medium,] scanned the audience, locked eyes with my family, and came immediately over to us. "Who's the mother figure who passed" was the first thing she said and was looking straight at my dad. My dad was in shock and couldn't seem to speak. Now normally, my dad is the most outgoing man you'll ever meet and I had never seen him like this. I was pointing at him and was like "His mom, his mom." Theresa looked at me and said "Do you have something of your grandpas? With a fingerprint?" I was in shock. After my grandpa passed away my grandma gave all the grandkids gold necklaces that had my grandpa's thumbprint on the front and his name on the back. My sister and I had both brought ours to the reading, and were in our pockets. She couldn't see them. She went back to my dad and he mumbled out yes, it was his mom. She said, "I see her lying in bed, with prescriptions on the nightstand...and she doesn't want to go, she isn't ready to die. But there is a male spirit sitting on the edge of her bed, telling her it's okay, telling her it's her time. I feel like it's her soulmate." My grandma was a nurse her whole life. She was very self-medicated, took pills to wake up and pills to go to sleep because she usually worked nights. My grandma passed away in her bed, with prescriptions bottles on the nightstand, from a failed liver. At the beginning of the show, when Theresa was giving her big speech about her readings, she said when she says "soulmate" that doesn't

mean it's necessarily a spouse, it can be a mother, brother, best friend, just someone who was substantial to your life. My dad believes the male sitting on the edge of my grandma's bed was her dad, because she was the closest to him and they had a very special, loving relationship.

In this interaction, Theresa Caputo earns Allison's trust by identifying a specific necklace that she has hidden away from sight. Receiving this information from the Long Island Medium did not provide any insight into how she should live her life. Its purpose was only to show the legitimacy of Theresa Caputo's talents. The psychic then goes on to describe Allison's grandmother on her deathbed. The account is one that Allison's family can relate to their lived experiences. The fact that Theresa Caputo identifies medication on her nightstand directly speaks to her grandmother's situation of being "self-medicated." The new information given by the psychic is that of the "soulmate" at the edge of her bed. This is where Theresa Caputo moves from authenticating herself to giving the family a message. Allison and her family are comforted by the idea that her grandmother was not alone on her death bed. Instead, she was being comforted by her own father as she left this life. This example not only serves as an authenticating message but then moves into one where the family then has closure. The pattern of psychics confirming their supernatural abilities while giving the clients a message or insight into their lives is the most commonly occurring pattern of memorates about psychic readings.

Purpose of Psychic Readings: Loved Ones' Visitations & Premonitions

Talking to deceased family members and receiving premonitions about living family members were the most commonly reported memorable parts of psychic readings with twelve occurrences throughout the memorates. Of the twelve, seven of these were messages from the

deceased, and five of them were premonitions about the living. Communication with the dead serves two purposes: receiving a message from a loved one who has passed on and learning about the consistent presence of our loved ones in our lives even after death. Of my five informants, three reported details of a message from someone who has passed on. During her reading with Theresa Caputo, the relationship between Allison and her boyfriend was blessed by her grandparents and her boyfriend's little brother. She explains it with this passage from her interview when she says, "She [Theresa Caputo] turned and started walking away. When she turned back and said to my then boyfriend, 'Have you been talking about marriage'? Everyone started laughing because he immediately started blushing and he said, 'Yeah, yeah we've talked about it'. Then she said, "Okay I get it. Your mom and your dad [talking to my father about my grandparents] are with his [my boyfriend's] brother because they know of these future plans and give their blessing" (Allison). From this message, Allison gained reassurance her grandparents and boyfriend's family were happy about her relationship with her boyfriend and future husband.

Michelle also reported a message from a deceased loved one that had to do with her family. Before her mother passed, she wanted her four granddaughters to inherit certain rings. One of the rings was missing. In her reading with David Akins, Michelle asked her deceased mother the whereabouts of the missing ring. Michelle explains her conversation with her mother and message she receives when she says, "I asked David to ask her where the missing ring was. She said that she would tell someone where to find it. I did not mention this comment to anyone. On the next trip to Twin Falls [to visit my father], without a word, Myki [my daughter] got out of the car, went into the house without speaking, walked up the stairs and found the ring." Through her ability to communicate with her deceased mother, Michelle is given peace of mind that a missing and meaningful piece of jewelry would be found for her family.

Lastly, Rosanna described a conversation with her deceased grandfather, who had a message for her mother. In this situation, Rosanna and her mother were at the psychic reading together so the message was given directly to her mother in Rosanna's presence. Rosanna describes the moment at her reading when her grandfather sent a message through the psychic David Akins to let her mother know about his regret for the unresolved issues between them. In this situation, being able to communicate with a dearly loved family member gave Rosanna's mother comfort about a severed relationship. She was able to heal from this experience and move beyond the hurt it caused.

The other purpose of communicating with deceased loved ones is learning about their consistent presence in our lives. There is power in knowing that death does not separate us from our loved ones and that our family members are present in our lives after they have passed on from this life. Mykleanne reports this continual presence in several of her psychic readings. She explains, "We [psychic David Akins and myself] talked about how she [my grandmother] would be walking across the stage with me when I graduated from college" (Mykleanne). A psychic reading also revealed that Mykleanne's grandmother was helping her through the process of getting her first apartment. She expounds, "We [psychic David Akins and myself] talked about the apartment that I am currently in, and the colors and schemes I am kind of doing with this. And how important that is in my life and that my grandmother was here to kind of guide me to the apartment that I am in and pick the colors that I'm doing" (Mykleanne). These two examples were impactful for Mykleanne because it reaffirmed that her grandmother is with her during important events, like graduation, and smaller tasks, such as decorating an apartment.

Michelle demonstrates how the deceased have a consistent presence in our lives and how power comes with that presence. She discusses the following experience with me:

[M]y mother was “present” at the reading and told David [Akins, a psychic] to tell me something very private that my mother had been doing in my home with my daughter Olivia. She told David that she and Olivia visited each other every evening after Olivia went to bed. The crazy thing was, about a week or two before this reading, Olivia and I were lying in bed and she told me that grandma came to visit every night and not to be afraid. (Michelle)

This message from her mother not only showed her that death does not separate people but it gave her the power to deal with her daughter’s unique talent. She elaborated during our interview that part of her purpose for seeking a psychic reading was to guide her daughter so she would not feel like an outcast with strange abilities (Michelle). In this case, the power obtained is two-fold: the power of having assurance that our loved ones are still around and the power to help her daughter through a difficult and unique experience of understanding her own psychic abilities.

Beyond the communication with the deceased, the second portion of this category is receiving premonitions about living family members. Understanding the people in our lives gives us the power to approach those people in ways that will enhance the relationships. During her psychic reading, Kiley was able to learn about her daughter and how she will be as she gets older. In our interview, she says, “David [Akins, a psychic] pinpointed my daughter’s personality to a T. He recited what her actions and demeanor were and what they would be. That she is/would be caring, energetic, sensitive, and strong willed” (Kiley). This information gives Kiley a deeper understanding of the kind of child she will be raising. She can now adjust her parenting to meet the needs of her daughter with this insight. Mykleanne reports a similar experience during her psychic reading that gave her peace of mind and direction when dealing with conflict. She explains in the following excerpt of her follow-up interview:

[W]e [psychic David Akins and myself] talked a lot about my sister and my mom and my dad just to kind of check in to make sure they were doing well. Like make sure the people around me are happy and doing well for me just to understand like what's going on with them if I am not fully engaged. Like with my sister, we had some tough years there for a little bit just like sisters do, which I bet you know. But being able to talk it through with David and kind of see it from a different perspective of the type of person my sister is was a big deal. (Mykleanne)

In this part of her interview, Mykleanne explains the need to “check in” on her family and ensure they are doing well. She was additionally able to resolve issues between her sister and herself by obtaining the power to be able to understand the situation from her sister's perspective.

Purpose of Psychic Readings: Love, Marriage, & Children

The second most commonly occurring category of psychic reading is receiving information about future love interests, marriages, and/or children. This category had six occurrences throughout the memorates, with three references to future marriages and three remarks about future children. The power in knowing this type of information is otherworldly. It gives the recipient insider information in which no one else is privy. Some people are more likely than others to seek out information about their futures. Mykleanne is one of those people who repeatedly receives readings about her future husband. In our interview, she expands on this topic several times when she discusses readings she received from psychic David Akins and intuitive Lisa Tenney. In her first reading with David Akins in July 2011, Mykleanne receives information about the type of man in which she should be looking:

And then for me, one big deal that is always happening with every reading is a constant, whether it be with David [Akins, a psychic], Lisa [Tenney, an intuitive], or tarot cards is my future husband or my future person, whoever that may be. I talk a lot about that. As I mentioned, I am a Libra. I love love. I just want to find my person and be with him forever. So, we talked a lot about that. It is kind of a constant thing that comes up. Talks about, you know, I have a lot of addiction from both sides of the family. Through readings, I have been able to understand that more. But I won't be with someone who is an addict. I will be with someone who can really control himself in those environments and who don't have those tendencies. Whereas, I have dated people in the past who have that addictive quality, which is not good for me. It is very harmful.

In her first psychic reading, Mykleanne has set up the scenario that she is concerned about meeting her future husband, and this topic will be approached again and again in her readings. In this particular reading, she is given some insight into the type of person she will eventually marry. There is power in this type of insight. She can then eliminate certain people she may be attracted through knowledge about her predicted love interest.

In her second psychic reading with David Akins on 14 March 2013, Mykleanne receives more detailed information about her future husband:

Once again, my love and my future came up because that is so important to me and it's who I am as a person. We talked about my husband once more. David [Akins, a psychic] said I shouldn't be going on dates at that time because he's not going to make a difference, which is really interesting because around this time I

met my ex-boyfriend. So, this is interesting because some of the stuff that David told me about I should have listened to a little bit more.

The power that came from this reading was even more direct. Mykleanne was told not to date at all around this time because she would not find the man that she will marry. She admits that she did not take this advice and it caused some unnecessary emotional trauma. She goes on to explain that the relationship with her ex-boyfriend “took a toll” and “was everything that I wasn’t needing in my life at that time” (Mykleanne). The power that came from this reading was not utilized but Mykleanne is now able to reflect on her past and see how she could have avoided this heartache in her life by using the knowledge given to her during this psychic reading.

In a reading with Lisa Tenney, Mykleanne is able to obtain some insight into the approach she has to finding her future husband. In this portion of her interview, she elaborates about the helpful information she collects from her reading:

She [intuitive Lisa Tenney] really opened me up and it was hard because I was still struggling with the break up [with her ex-boyfriend] and going through the motions of life. You know, you are always wondering like, “When am I going to find that person. What is going on? What did I do wrong? Is there any closure that I can find within myself?” She [intuitive Lisa Tenney] really hit the nail on the head and said, “It is like an old movie film that just keeps on going forward and backward and forward and backward. Just constantly on repeat.” And that is so true, in my opinion, in how I kind of see the relationship. I just try and break things down so much that it is not healthy. So, she was really an eye-opener and said, “You just need to take your time. It’s not a big deal.” (Mykleanne)

The power Mykleanne gets from this reading is her entire approach to relationships. She is reminded that she can be somewhat intense about the relationships she is in, and she learns that this intensity can be detrimental. She is told to just relax and take her time as she is dating. This allows Mykleanne the freedom to let go of the stresses she has about fully understanding the intentions of the other person in her relationships. It allows her to re-adjust and to have more fun while still being aware of her own feelings in the relationship. Most of all, this reading comforted Mykleanne with the knowledge that her future husband will eventually come into her life.

Throughout the memorates, three interview participants spoke about premonitions of future children. During Kiley's psychic reading, she was given information about a future child. She states, "He [psychic David Akins] told me I would have another child and that child would be a boy. While this hasn't happened yet, I am not writing it off completely" (Kiley). Mykleanne has another example of receiving information about her future as a mother. She explains, "We [psychic David Akins and myself] kind of talked about the kids that I would have. I have been told by David multiple times that I would have a son, which is really impactful because I have never lived or been really around little boys...So I am excited for that impact. And I have always felt that I would have a boy" (Mykleanne). In this case, Mykleanne is given the power of reassurance that she will be a mother. She additionally learns the gender of one of her children, which reinforces her intuition about her future children.

The only narrative that reported a future child that did not have a positive response is that from Rosanna. When she received her psychic reading, she had a two-year old boy named Jude. She knew she wanted to have another child but she was not pregnant yet. Rosanna reports a prediction by psychic David Akins by saying, "It was also mentioned that I would have another child (Jude was 2) and that this child would be a girl." Enough time has passed since she gotten

this premonition from a psychic to know of its truth. Rosanna goes on to further explain, “That was not the case at all.” She did end up getting pregnant again but she gave birth to a baby boy. Unlike the other readings about future children, Rosanna’s was not full of hope and joy. Instead, it was clouded by an incorrect reading.

Purpose of Psychic Readings: Self-Knowledge

The third most memorable parts of psychic readings as reported by my informants is information leading to self-knowledge. This occurred four times among the narratives. However, only one informant, Mykleanne, expanded on this type of message. While looking at the notes from her five to six readings with a psychic, Mykleanne identified four times when a psychic gave her insight about herself. Of those four occurrences, two provided Mykleanne with instruction about how to live her life. One of these is given quite direct from the psychic. Mykleanne reports, “So we [psychic David Akins and I] talked a lot about myself. I’m an old school person. I need to meditate more, which I have been implementing more into my life within the last year. It has taken me about three years to figure that out. Meditation is hard for me. But that has been a really big key player to me.” This is one of the self-knowledge messages given to Mykleanne where she not only identifies with the message but also adds how she has implemented the information into her life. She now meditates, even though it is difficult, because she knows it will be beneficial.

Another example of receiving a self-knowledge message from the psychic David Akins comes when Mykleanne says, “So we [David Akins and myself] talked about a lot about myself and my energy and how I am a harmony girl. I am a Libra. So that makes a lot of sense that I need a lot of balance in my life. That I really have a hard time with closed off people. That I am

an old soul, which was really beneficial for me to understand, you know, that I have had these past lives and I come from different spaces.” This type of self-knowledge message is less about actions she needs to take and more about identifying what she needs in life. Mykleanne can use this knowledge in the future when she is feeling unbalanced or finds herself in a situation where she encounters a closed off person.

One of the self-knowledge messages that Mykleanne received had to do with her character but Mykleanne herself placed more importance on it by relating it to a deceased loved one. She explains:

One thing that David [Akins, a psychic] also mentioned to me in this reading is that Disney should create a Disney character like a princess about my life with how well in touch I am with animals. And then he compared me to Snow White, which I don't know if you know but Grandma Penny loved Snow White. That is her princess. They are like soul sisters. For someone to say that about me without...I guess he kind of could have known, but without truly knowing the impact that would have on my life. That was incredible and it still hits me to this day to know that, oh okay, I am like Snow White. My grandmother and I have that bond together, even when she is not here, which is really helpful to get through some of those tougher times. (Mykleanne)

Here David Akins gives Mykleanne some insight into her personal character, possibly as a way to authenticate his reading of her. He identifies her as a lover of furry friends but then he compares her to Snow White. That is where his reading of her ends. This comparison, however, leads Mykleanne to thoughts of her deceased grandmother, who favored the character of Snow

White. This portion of her reading not only gives her insight into her character but she feels a deep connection because of the trait identified by the psychic.

The last bit of self-knowledge the Mykleanne received during her psychic readings is more of a neutral observation. She says, “I was told about my past life that I was a medicine man or woman. She also told me that I’ve been a male in past lives, which I thought was interesting because I really gravitate towards that stuff sometimes” (Mykleanne). If she used this information to move towards a career in the medical field or learn more about natural medicines, then this self-knowledge information would be significant. Instead, it becomes something of interest but does not directly impact her life. Similarly, the information about being a man in past lives does not give Mykleanne insight into how she should live now. It simply is a point during her psychic reading where she connects the message to interests in her lived experiences.

Purpose of Psychic Readings: Societal Power

The least likely purpose of psychic readings, according to the memorates of my five female informants, is acquiring societal power. I would have expected that my informants use the gifts of psychics to help them acquire some power in the workforce. While analyzing the memorates, I looked for messages given by psychics that would help women improve their social status by influencing decisions about education, career, and finances. I found only two mentions of advice given about career and education. Mykleanne was the only person who discussed these types of messages but both were vague and show little promise for obtaining a significant improvement in social standing.

The first message of societal power that Mykleanne received from her psychic involves education. She explains with the following:

Actually, at this time with my education, David [Akins, a psychic] had thrown out the fact that I will continue my education. At that time, I was like, “Get me out of college. I don’t want to be here anymore. I am done.” But looking back now I am definitely going to get my master’s at some point. I am definitely going to continue my education in some way, shape, or form. And that was kind of a big one. Because in college, you know, I was like, “I don’t want to go back. I’m done! I’m done! I’ve over this!” But I am definitely looking forward to doing more with that. (Mykleanne)

Although this message gives Mykleanne insight into possible future decisions, it does not directly relate to a way for her to become more powerful in society. The information is ambiguous. She does not know what or where to study. She is not told to study a certain subject that will lead to financial security or study in a particular school that will allow networking with major players in her field. She is simply told that one day she will further her education.

Similar to the message about education, Mykleanne reports a vague message about her career. She states, “We [psychic David Akins and myself] talked about future notes like my career, which has gone back and forth with David, depending on what we’re talking about and where I am personally at that moment” (Mykleanne). This information is not helpful in gaining power in society nor is the statement said by the interviewee with any significance. She does not elaborate on it with any importance like she does with other topics discussed during her readings. This is not to suggest that career advances are not discussed during psychic readings. I suspect that they may be one of the top ten items conferred about with psychics. However, my informants did not touch on this topic in any significant way when asked to elaborate on their most memorable parts of their psychic readings.

Instead of gaining societal power, my informants reported being personally and religiously influenced by their psychic readings. Some informants were more general with their statements of influence. For example, Kiley says, “I think it has opened my mind to more things I didn’t notice or pay attention to before.” With her psychic reading, Kiley has acknowledged that she has become more observant. Rosanna provides a similar statement when she says, “I find them [psychic readings] more useful as a reinforcement of my own inner thoughts and feeling and what might come through in my own meditations.” With her statement of influence, Rosanna claims that her psychic readings have had limited impact and suggests that everyone has abilities similar to psychics.

Two of my informants report a spiritual or philosophical significance gained from their psychic readings. Allison points out the religious influence she received through her psychic reading by saying, “I really feel like it made me closer to God, and it gives me assurance that our loved ones are always with us. I truly believe it now. And I know I probably sound crazy to some people, but it really was a life changing experience that gave me so much comfort in the unknown of our after lives. It gave my husband and dad some closure, and changed their lives as well.” Allison was truly affected by her psychic reading by reinforcing her ideas about God and the afterlife. Mykleanne reports a similar impact from her experiences with psychics. She says, “My readings have opened up a whole new world to me. I feel more certain about my thoughts and beliefs when it comes to faith, religion, the after live, etc. Without these readings, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I feel more whole and more myself now” (Mykleanne). Later in the interview she expands, “My life has changed because of the things I have heard and the people I have talked to in the sense that I would be still wondering and wasting energy on this. Whereas now I understand to a certain extent what’s going on and what will be foreseen in the future if I

chose to go down those paths” (Mykleanne). In this statement, Mykleanne is speaking about the premonitions she received during her psychic readings about her future love interests and children. It may also be pointing to the information she obtained about her education and career options. All five interviewees were impacted by their psychic readings to different levels but none report significant ways to tap into societal power.

The fact that my informants do not use psychics to gain societal power, or at least not discuss it during our interviews, has led me to question the type of power they obtain during psychic readings. Is the power obtained from psychic readings one that results in societal power or is it still bound within traditional gender roles? Gillian Bennett and Elizabeth Tucker look at issues of power in their research about psychics. Both focus on the psychic rather than the recipient of the psychic reading but their research may give some insight into answering the above question. Bennett suggests that her informants use their abilities in a way that allows them to remain in their traditional roles. She states, “Telling stories like these [narratives about involuntary ESP] is one way a woman may claim status and yet not challenge the conventional perception of her proper role...Properly used, the gift confers only passive power” (Bennett, “If I Knew” 134). With this information, one could argue that my informants are similar to Bennett’s and keep within traditional gender roles. They seek information about deceased, current, and future family members, which places them within the traditionally female realm of the household. It is undeniable that this knowledge gives power to my informants in their personal lives but it does not extend beyond the traditional gender roles. At the same time, though, some of the information that is given goes beyond societal power, giving women spiritual power that is denied by many organized religions. It allows women to maintain relationships with their deceased loved ones and learn about their futures.

Elizabeth Tucker, on the other hand, connects mediums with power, a claim that Bennett would not deny. Tucker notes that Lily Dale has a connection with feminist activism with a history of Susan B. Anthony and other feminists giving speeches in the town. She states, “In Lily Dale, mediums are perceived as having a crucial ability: the power to deliver messages from the dead...Mediums serve as cultural symbols of women’s power” (Tucker 188). In this sense, women are able to obtain power through a connection with a psychic. The simple association with psychics would connect women to power found in the feminist movement. This power may be vague but it would certainly affect the way women viewed and presented themselves to the rest of the world. The mindset that comes from the association with the “cultural symbols of women’s power” (Tucker 188) could exude confidence in females that would open them up to societal power. However, my informants report significantly more information from their psychic readings that is categorized within the female role.

Conclusion to Psychic Seekers

In this chapter, I have shown that women utilize psychic readings to obtain information that lies within the traditional feminine role. The five female informants used for this study most often report messages from psychics that revolve around family. The most frequently reported category during psychic readings is receiving messages from deceased loved ones and premonitions about living family members. The second most common reason for receiving a psychic reading, according to my informants, is to learn about the future in terms of love, marriage, and children. Learning about the self is the third most reported purpose for a psychic reading. In a weak last place is the fourth purpose for psychic readings, which is acquiring societal power through messages that would directly impact women in the workforce. In this

situation, it was determined by psychic messages that would help women gain more access to power within society. With an analysis of memorates from psychic seekers, I argue that women use the abilities of psychics to only obtain information that predominately exists within traditional female roles of the family. Seeking advice about education, career, or finances to further their social standing and acquire societal power is not among the reasons women get psychic readings.

It is undeniable that women receive some sort of power through knowledge given by psychics. Messages from the deceased give recipients power by affirming a relationship, helping to find a missing object, or repairing a broken connection. Knowing that death does not sever relationships with the deceased has a level of power in the lives of my informants. It helps them maintain relationships with family members that are deceased and those who are still living. Learning information about current and future family members holds a certain level of power. Understanding current family members helps people approach their loved ones based on the knowledge of their personalities and perspectives. Given information about future family members opens one up to a plethora of power through that knowledge. One can know specific personality traits or whether or not to date during a specific period. It relieves the stress of being in the dating scene and the anxiety of finding or possibly missing the perfect spouse. Finally, self-knowledge gives a person power about specific actions to take, warning signs to look for, and an ability to live comfortably in their own skin. The information that women acquire from psychics directly impacts the way women conduct their lives. It additionally gives women some power over their spiritual lives, which is denied by many organized religions.

This power, however, upholds traditional gender roles as it focuses on family, both living and dead, and issues within the household. Women seeking psychic readings in my research did

not discuss ways to obtain societal power to improve their positions in society. Instead, their power comes from the more traditional roles of women and maintaining relationships with family members, both living and deceased. This is not to suggest that women are definitively not seeking societal power from psychic readings. In this preliminary research, I did not find this to be true. However, more research needs to be conducted. Follow-up interviews with my current informants are necessary to ask questions about topics that would allow women to tap into societal power. It is entirely possible that women are using visits with psychics to ask about ways to access more societal power but do not initially speak with me about it because it is socially more acceptable to talk about family, love, and future children. It is also probable that socially acceptable topics are addressed by the psychic based on the client's gender. I will additionally need to find more informants outside the demographics of my current interviewees to further my argument. Five white educated women from southern Idaho do not offer the variety needed to support my claim with conviction.

CHAPTER 4:

POWER FOR STUDENT PSYCHIC PRACTITIONERS

Introduction to Psychic Practitioners-in-Training

Now that we have examined the memorates of psychic seekers, we will turn to the narratives of psychic practitioners-in-training. Unlike the personal interviews I conducted with the clients of psychics, I used an online source to gather narratives from student psychics. The website *Psychic Experiences* (www.psychic-experiences.com) serves as a platform for psychics-in-training to share their events and receive feedback from other student psychics. The first post is dated 11 October 2006 and since then there have been over 12,000 submissions. To limit these, I took a few steps. I firstly searched only under the category of premonition and precognition in the website's internal search. My reasoning behind this choice comes from the objective of desiring to learn what type of messages psychics receive about the future and if these messages are used for the purpose of acquiring power. I then only pulled memorates from the year 2017, and I removed any narratives from psychics outside of the United States. Since I am trying to determine if psychics use their abilities to acquire societal power, I needed to define the boundaries of that society. After these limitations, I ended up with thirty-seven posts. I eliminated one of those because it was not firsthand experience of psychic abilities; it was a post about a co-worker of the author's mother predicting her birth. Three of the other narratives were combined because they were written by the same author with the username klamathstorm. I did this so I did not misrepresent the identifiers of psychic practitioners-in-training by counting one person as three separate people. Additionally, these three posts are connected and build off of each other. This left me with thirty-four memorates about psychic abilities categorized as premonitions and precognitions.

By analyzing narratives of student psychics, I wanted to determine patterns for the purpose of psychic abilities. I particularly was interested in determining if female psychics-in-training were using their gifts to gain power in their own lives. If women use their abilities to make decisions to improve their positions, this could be a determinant that they are using their gifts to gain some societal power. However, if their abilities lead to information about family, friends, love, and/or children, then it could be argued that these gifts are used for purposes that fall within traditional and acceptable female gender roles. This chapter, similar to all of my research, is influenced by the work of Elizabeth Tucker and Gillian Bennett. Tucker argues that Spiritualism's practitioners and clientele are attracted to the image of strong, powerful women that are allowed to exist within the tradition due to a lack of hierarchical leadership roles (Tucker 188). Bennett, on the other hand, finds that her female informants use their psychic abilities in a passive way that upholds traditional female gender expectations (Bennett 134-135). These two academic viewpoints remain central to this research.

Through an analysis of thirty-four narratives of premonition and precognitive experiences of student psychics on the website *Psychic Experiences*, I was able to identify three ways that psychics-in-training prove their authenticity and six different purposes of psychic abilities. Narratives provided by psychics about their experiences more often than not try to demonstrate some sort of authenticity through direct or indirect ways, or by showing a lineage of abilities with family members, personal background, or an onset of gifts with a traumatic event. The purposes of psychic abilities are listed with the first occurring the most: (1) societal power, (2) self-knowledge, (3) loved ones' premonitions and visitations, (4) awareness or exercise of gifts, (5) love, marriage, and children, and (6) natural disasters. Overall, in this chapter, I will be arguing that student psychics use their abilities with the intention of obtaining societal power.

They do this by posting their experiences online and requesting help from other student psychics to develop their gifts. They additionally exercise their abilities to strengthen their supernatural talents in a powerful way to not only benefit themselves but to shape the outside world. As psychics-in training develop their abilities, a desired outcome shared among most of the student psychics online, they can acquire a new career with lucrative financial rewards.

Psychic Practitioner-in-Training Identifiers

The *Psychic Experiences* website asks their contributors to provide information about their age group and location in which they live. By reading through the posts, I was hoping to also find out information about the gender and religious affiliation of the student psychics providing narratives about their experiences. When posting a new memorate, the website asks the psychic to identify the location where he or she lives. Instead of documenting the location by state, I have chosen to group locations based on the regions as defined by the United States Embassy. The largest portion of the narratives comes from the South, with twenty-two psychics-in-training posting about their experiences from there. The Midwest holds the second position with twenty memorates. Coming in third is the West with five posts and not far behind, ranking fourth, is the Southwest with four posts. The Mid-Atlantic is fifth with three posts, and last is New England with only one post. Although I have limited my online informants to thirty-four, I have thirty-five location identifiers. At some point between 13 June 2017 and 10 August 2017, one informant, klamathstorm, moved from Washington to Ohio. This psychic was counted twice in location for both the West and Midwest.

Psychic Experiences did not require their clientele to identify by exact age. Instead, they have age range categories to select, if they chose to add this information to their experiences. The

majority of informants fall under the young adult group with twenty posts. The second most common category with nine contributions is that of teenager. There were four middle age adult posts, leaving this group in third place, and, lastly, one unknown post where the informant chose to not identify by age.

The only identifiers on *Psychic Experiences* were location and age. However, I wanted to additionally know the gender and religious affiliation of my informants, if possible. Some informants were very direct about their genders, adding words to their narratives like “woman” (Tonj100, SusanLM), “girl” (BorderlineSpaceGirl, biker4jc2u), “mother” (carriwill), or “pregnant” (amandac9616, pastelcheerytrees). Another memorate author referred to her future self as “she” (SkyQueenJes). Some included their actual names with their posts that showed their gender: Josephine (Questioner15), Vanessa (Avobaedo), Amy (Amous83). Others had feminine usernames: kittahkatt, Amethyst_May, kaylabear, SkittyKittyCat12, sunshine_taylor, squashblossom. A few informants mentioned relationships with their boyfriends (klamathstorm, unlucky18, kaylabear) or husbands (nikki39101, lizk82). If there were not any direct evidence indicating gender or there was any doubt, I categorized that memorate under an unknown category. Using this information, I classified twenty-one narratives as authored by females, no memorates authored by males, and thirteen narratives with gender unknown. This data continues to reflect the stance that females tend to be attracted to Spiritualist practices.

Religious indicators were the most difficult to determine among the informants on *Psychic Experiences*. Few outrightly state their beliefs or disbeliefs while others allude to it. The majority of people, twenty-eight to be exact, chose not to talk about their religious beliefs or affiliations in their memorates. One informant directly takes a nonreligious stance by declaring, “I’m not religious, and I consider myself a staunch skeptic” (amm0714). On the opposite side of

the spectrum, another memorate author offers a firm belief with a religious denominational affiliation by stating, “I do believe in GOD and I am catholic” (javousaime). Two other informants discuss a belief in a God, with a capital “G,” but do not report religious organizational ties. One writes, “I really believe it was God’s voice warning of danger in Gina’s [sister’s] life” (carriwill). The other one directly talks about God, church, being Christian, and praying but then goes on to say, “I no longer go to church but I still have a belief in God” (biker4jc2u). Two other narratives talk about their beliefs of their family members. One author talked about how her mother also had dreams that came true but it scared her. Her mother “prayed to God to make them go away” (SkittyKittyCat12). The other informant simply states, “I come from a christian family” (tkoestdance). These family member beliefs are somewhat revealing because of the use of language. The first one from SkittyKittyCat12 decides to capitalize God, and she also shows how the use of the ritual of praying appears to be the norm in the household. The second one from tkoestdance seems to imply that the family members are practicing Christians, and he or she is influence by these religious beliefs in the very least. Due to that influential nature, I have chosen to categorize this memorate under religious. The religious categorizations for psychic informants then become twenty-eight as unknown, five as religious, and one as not religious.

From this information, I argue that student psychics are using their paranormal abilities to fulfill their spiritual needs. The majority of informants do not affiliate with any organized religion, or in the very least do not find it necessary to document it in a supernatural narrative. This suggests that psychics-in-training do not regularly attend Christian church services or hold a strong belief in Christian doctrine. The one informant that is strongly categorized as religious makes it a point to document an active belief in a religious organization. Others would also make

note of similar beliefs, especially given the taboo nature of psychic belief within many Christian churches. Furthermore, the online community serves as a non-hierarchical religious group that offers help in understanding supernatural experiences and developing paranormal gifts. In this way, *Psychic Experiences* functions as an online religious community for psychics-in-training.

Proving Authenticity

Unlike the memorates of psychic seekers, psychic practitioners-in-training nearly always have some way of proving the authenticity of their visions. In fact, only six informants, or 18 percent of student psychics examined, did not try to validate their psychic experience: Fitnessstactic, tkoestdance, SkyQueenJes, carriwill, pastelcherrytrees, and kaylabear. Through a thorough analysis of memorates, I have identified three ways that psychics demonstrate validity when describing their supernatural experiences: direct authentication, indirect authentication, and lineage.

The first way psychics show their supernatural experiences are legitimate is through direct authentication. This occurs when a psychic has a vision about something and it happens in that exact same way in the future. Direct authentication is the most common occurrence when speaking about psychic experiences, with twenty-one informants demonstrating this type of validity thirty-eight times. Some psychics used this tactic multiple times when describing their supernatural happenings. Oftentimes, they use it with every vision they discuss in their memorate. An example of this type of authentication comes from SusanLM. She explains, “When I was very young, age 3, I told my grandfather he would die soon, he passed within a day. Since then I have sensed the death of my husbands family members, my father, brother and

even a few friends/acquaintances” (SusanLM). In these two sentences alone, SusanLM has been able to describe her psychic abilities and prove her talents.

Although much less often, psychics additionally confirm their abilities as valid with indirect authentication. This tactic occurs when a psychic has a vision and it does not directly play out in the same way in the future. Instead, the psychic must interpret message in a metaphorical way. Only six informants on *Psychic Experiences* used this method a total of seven times. Indirect authentication is much less popular likely due to its ambiguousness. The interpretation element gives the appearance of stretching the vision to fit into actual life. One of the best indirect authentications comes from amandac9616. She elaborates:

[T]his dream came true in a different sense in my life. Back in December 2012 I was pregnant with my third child. I had a dream that shook me to the core! I’m standing at a lake, there are concrete walls on both sides and a building on the bank, a concession stand or lodge. I’m standing by myself but look to my left and my husband has one of my boys and to the right my stepmother is standing on the steps on the side of the building with my oldest son. I remember feeling panicked, I just know there is something wrong. As I look up I see a huge tidal wave. As it blocks out the sun I try to get to my loved ones before we’re all swept away. I wake up. OK so I didn’t think anything of this and just told myself that it was a dream brought on by fear of what was supposed to happen back in December of 2012. You know, end of the Mayan Calendar. But, last year something tested that theory. My family and I hit hard times and what happened after that sure did feel like a tidal wave. My husband got hurt and couldn’t work, we lost our house, our car decided to die on us and we had to stay with family members. Well summer

last year both my husband and I were incarcerated and my 2 youngest children (my middle child that was with my husband in the dream and my youngest whom I was pregnant with at the time of the dream) were taken by children services. Before my boys were taken we visited a lake in Indiana and instantly I recognized this lake as the same lake in my dreams, concrete walls and all. We live in Ohio, but guess who took our boys, Indiana. (amandac9616)

In this memorate, amandac9616 dreamt of a literal tidal wave but never actually experienced that natural disaster. She was required to interpret the tidal wave as a symbolic catastrophe that would occur in her life in a much different way. All of the indirect authentications occur in this same format. The psychic has a dream or vision and a detailed explanation must follow in order to apply it to reality. I am not suggesting that this method determines that the psychic is less valid; I am simply pointing out ways that psychics validate their gifts.

The last way psychics demonstrate their authenticity is through lineages. This occurs with three different methods. The first way, occurring eleven times throughout the memorates, is by offering a personal background that shows a lengthy experience of these talents. When psychics give personal backgrounds to validate their gifts, it often comes at the beginning of their narratives. Question15 gives an example when she says, “Ever since I was a little girl I always knew when something was going to happen pertaining myself. Since then these feelings have gotten stronger.” When using this method, psychics try to show the longevity of their supernatural talents and how they have become common place now. For as long as they can remember, they have had these abilities and they continue to develop them throughout the years. Another type of lineage method is going beyond the personal background and explaining how these gifts have a genetic link. Seven informants use the family lineage to show their own

legitimacy. In this case, psychics are saying that their abilities are validated because others within their families also have these gifts. ForeverASstorm distinctly illustrates this type of validation in the following statement: “I do know, however, that on both sides of my family, they have good instincts and senses. I’m guessing that is why I do too.” The last lineage authentication method is identifying an onset of psychic abilities with an event. Only one informant used this technique. Amous83 explains, “In 2001 I was in a horrible car accident. I had passed in the accident and was revived. Since that time my experiences have skyrocketed. I drain the charge out of batteries. I cannot wear watches because they become inoperable. I am extremely sensitive to electronic waves. I can sense when there is a spirit near me or in the room. These experiences I have dealt with since the accident.” Amous83 provides an explanation for her supernatural abilities by attributing them to a traumatic car accident where she nearly lost her life. Even though this type of substantiation only occurs once throughout the thirty-four memorates, it is worth noting because other psychics may have had similar experiences.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Societal Power

Through a detailed examination of narratives from psychics-in-training on the website *Psychic Experiences*, I was able to identify six uses for psychic abilities. The most common usage is the desire for societal power, which occurs twenty-seven times among the student psychic memorates. This transpires so often, in fact, that, only seven of the thirty-four informants do not use it. The desire for societal power for psychics-in-training is unique because it is only a yearning at this point. The informants have not reached the point of acquiring this power yet as they are in the process of understanding and controlling their abilities. I was able to identify three

stages in psychic gift development within the narratives of student psychics: uncontrollable, a combination of powerful and uncontrollable, and powerful.

Throughout the online memorates, four psychics-in-training spoke of their abilities as uncontrollable experiences, three refer to their abilities as both uncontrollable and powerful, and four described their gifts as powerful. Those that spoke of their abilities as powerless tend to use terms like “involuntary messages” (klamathstorm). Elebrun also describes psychic gifts as uncontrollable with this statement: “I guess what I’m saying is I dream of the future. I’m rarely able to change the events that will occur. I’m only able to see my future and the ones I’ve grown to know...I can’t control it, or who I help. I can’t really control anything.” Both of these informants describe psychic gifts as unintentional. They cannot determine what they see or what messages they receive.

Other supernatural experiences describe the inability of student psychics to control their visions. Avobaedo illuminates such a powerless experience when she describes a man that appears regularly in her dreams:

These dreams didn't start getting odd until I hit the age of 13; that's when a young guy started appearing in them. Now, this might not be too strange to others because random strangers appear in dreams all the time (either from people they've seen on the street or T.V./whatever) but to see this guy appear in every precognitive dream I've had since I was 13, is definitely a whole other level of strange. This guy is at least 18 or in his early 20's and he's been that age for as long as I've dreamt those precognitive dreams. He's Caucasian and has jet black hair, which he keeps slicked back and he's got these eccentric blue eyes. This dude looks like he literally came out of the 1950's, he looks like a total greaser

and I have never met anybody or a seen a stranger who looks anything like this guy that decides to consistently appear in my precognitive dreams. Although he appears in the dreams, I have yet to actually meet him and believe me, it is beyond confusing and frustrating to dream about someone you haven't met- especially if they're consistently in them.

This man does not seem to be threatening or frightening for Avobaedo. However, his appearance in her dreams for years is described as “confusing and frustrating” (Avobaedo). With this statement, this informant is expressing a desire to understand presence of this strange man or cease to see him in precognitive dreams. This remains only a desire because Avobaedo lacks the power to make either happen.

Other psychics-in-training describe their powerless situations when explaining their variability of gifts. Amethyst_May documents an involuntary fluctuation in abilities. She explains, “I have been having a really weird phenomenon happening where I could feel that my abilities or energies are high- I don't know. They have been more active since I was in Nevada...So, for whatever reason my abilities have been more active since I moved back and I am not sure why” (Amethyst_May). This statement is congruent with other informants’ feelings of powerlessness. Amethyst_May might be experiencing a more powerful situation but it is only due to her current location. If she had to move, her gifts and access to psychic powers would decrease. She is limited in future decisions about relocation if she wants to maintain high energies. Furthermore, it could be suggested that if her powers are decreased due to location, other factors may cause her to lose her gifts. These inconsistencies result in an unpredictable fluctuation of powers.

The next stage of gift development for student psychics is an in-between stage where the informants refer to their abilities as both uncontrollable and powerful. They are able to recognize their powers but are not able to control them yet. These psychics-in-training, totaling three among the narratives, are using the online platform of *Psychic Experiences* to seek help from other Spiritualists in developing their abilities. A typical pattern for a memorate includes explaining a supernatural experience and then requesting help to understand and control it. For example, javousaime states, "I dream of things and they happen. Can someone help me understand how to control this? I also would be day dreaming and all of a sudden i'll mentally picture an object. Then later that day it will appear to me in someway. Please help. Id like to learn to control this." This piece of narrative from javousaime shows a supernatural gift but the student psychic lacks and ability to manage it.

Other memorates describing psychic abilities as both powerful and powerless follow the same pattern. SusanLM describes a scary supernatural experience that would likely be labeled as sleep paralysis:

[T]here's the shadow standing by my bed. The dark shadowy figure that's at the edge of my vision. The shadow that holds me down, makes me feel as though I can't breathe. Shows me horrible things, and I can feel him watching me, draining me. What is this? I've always known there was someone there, but now it feels threatening. But just this one shadow, the one that lurks, just at the edge of my vision. Can anyone give me guidance? Help me figure out what this all is? My mother just wants me to pray it away. But I don't want to lose this gift, it doesn't feel wrong, I just don't know how to control it or fine tune it. Is it possible to learn

that? Am I too old to learn how? I just need some kind of direction/guidance with all of this. Please. (SusanLM)

Even though this supernatural assault is frightening, SusanLM recognizes the significance of the experience. The “dark shadowy figure” has always been there but now it has escalated into a threatening presence that watches her, drains her energy, and puts terrifying images in her head (SusanLM). SusanLM is unable to control when this figure appears to her but she does not want to get rid of it. Instead, she is requesting advice on how to understand it. She calls it a “gift” that she does not want to lose (SusanLM). This then becomes an example of a psychic-in-training in the in-between stage. She has supernatural abilities but she still needs to learn more about those gifts.

The last example of a powerful and powerless psychic found among the memorates seems to be a more advanced level in the in-between stage. This one comes from informant SoThatHappened:

I do not think of myself as a full fledged psychic or even in the same group as a psychic kind of person, but for about nine years I have been seeing bits and pieces of things that have not happened yet. It only happens for a second but feels like a real memory. I can never tell when it will happen or how long it takes for the flash to actually become real... I can't control when the flashes will happen or predict they actually come true. I once had a flash that came true in ten minutes and another one that came true in seven years. I honestly have no idea what is going on or how to control it. I do not know what caused it or what it means or what to do with it. I can't tell if my imagination is screwing with me or if this is actually happening. I can't control what I see and I can't control when I see it. So far all I have seen is

about ninety six percent accurate. The other four percent are either hasn't happened yet or they are just imaginative thought that do not mean anything.

This narrative is significant for a few reasons. SoThatHappened does not self-identify as a psychic. However, he or she has been having visions of the future and recognizes the significance of this supernatural ability. He or she also admits to having little control over the visions. Unlike others in the in-between category, though, SoThatHappened is at the level of a greater precision, determining a ninety-six percent accuracy rate. This memorate serves as both one explaining the power of visions with the added bonus of correctness while also describing powerlessness with an inability to control the supernatural gift.

The last stage of gift development found among the narratives of psychics-in-training on *Psychic Experiences* describe their abilities as powerful. Four informants identify their gifts on this level. These student psychics tend to use terms like developing, control, and powerful. The implications in these memorates are that psychics-in-training can strengthen their abilities through practice and eventually use them on the outside world. Informant starsofclay explains the first step in this process by saying, "I have been working very hard on developing my gifts. I'm not even sure what my gifts are, so I'm pretty much trying everything...I know that I want to be a medium, preferably a clairaudient and clairvoyant medium, but as I am learning, I suppose you don't really get to pick your gifts-- I guess I can only try and figure out what they are." This portion of the narrative describes a student psychic "trying everything" to develop his or her supernatural abilities (starsofclay). Embedded within the words is the idea that gifts exist within people but it is up to those people to identify and develop them. Even though starsofclay clarifies that psychic abilities cannot be chosen, there is a deep insinuation that the gifts that exist within a person can be developed and used for their benefit. Another example showing a student

psychic's power to control her gifts comes from lizk82. She explains how she can lucid dream using her abilities stating, "I dream every single night, and I can control my dreams. I know I'm dreaming and I can change the course of my dream very easily" (lizk82). This informant is further than starsofclay in knowing and understanding how to use her gifts. At this point, though, it only affects the self. Both psychics-in-training have yet to use their abilities to influence the outside world.

Student psychics hold a higher level of power when they can use their gifts to influence people and objects outside of themselves. One informant, jaserusk, communicates the progression from development of gifts to using supernatural abilities in a powerful way:

Basically for quite a while now I have been able to do and see different things that other people can't. It started when I was about 10 years old when I could see figments in the air kind of like when you look at the top of a car on a hot day or when there is gas leaking somewhere. I would look at them before I went to bed and I would be fascinated by them. The more it happened the more I could control it. After a while of just being able to see it I could manipulate it, a little bit after that I could bring it towards my hands and I could shape it into beams and spheres. It has been even longer now and now I have premonitions, if I focus I can read minds and manipulate people (think something and they will do it) and my premonitions are becoming more and more often, they happen so much actually that it is like I'm living tomorrow, today.

Psychic-in-training jaserusk began by identifying his or her basic abilities. He or she practiced at controlling and shaping "figments in the air" (jaserusk). This led to a gift of reading people's minds and being able to prompt them into particular actions. This memorate explains the

acquisition of power in terms of stages and illustrates the level of social power that can be obtained by psychics.

The developed supernatural gifts can either be used for good or bad by the student psychics. The individual person has the power to decide how his or her abilities will be exercised. Informant sunshine_taylor describes the psychic gifts and how they're used by both her father and herself:

My dad forsees a person death. Over the years he would tell a person if they don't stop doing something such as eating to much, it's going to kill them. My dad is completely evil... He has no feelings at all towards anyone...The image he portrayed in public was for power. I use my gifts to help others not control and abuse. I watched so many people get told by my Father that they were going to die, and never survived. He thought this was funny to him.

This narrative explains the level of power that a psychic-in-training has once his abilities are developed but also the individual power to decide how the gifts will be used. Sunshine_taylor's father has advanced his abilities beyond that described by jaserusk. He goes past manipulation to a point where he can will people to death. In contrast, sunshine_taylor demonstrates how he or she uses psychic abilities differently by saying "I use my gifts to help other not control and abuse" (sunshine_taylor). This memorate illuminates the high level of power psychics possess, demonstrating decisions about how to use gifts and an ability to use them on others without permission.

The memorates describing different levels of power beginning as uncontrollable vessels, showing stages of gift development, and ending with self-described powerful abilities suggests that there are various ranks of student psychics. According to my online informants, beginners

have less control over their abilities and seek outside help to develop their gifts. More advanced psychics are able to shape the world outside of themselves and have the autonomy to decide how those gifts will be used. These different levels of psychic abilities need to be taken into consideration when determining access to power. Although beginners report less control over their gifts, it is undeniable that having supernatural abilities equates to some level of power. After all, experiencing the paranormal gives one access to a power that is unavailable to the majority of people. The fact that twenty-seven out of thirty-four online informants request assistance in developing their abilities demonstrates an intention for strengthening these gifts. After these abilities are refined, psychics are able to tap into societal power with new lucrative business opportunities. As fortune-telling has grown to a \$2 billion industry (Muzzatti and Smith 125), the access to societal power is limitless. The majority of my online informants intend to strengthen their abilities using their interactions with other student psychics in hopes of acquiring more societal power.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Self-Knowledge

According to my informants, the second most commonly identified purpose of psychic gifts is self-knowledge. It is reported nineteen times throughout the memorates. The largest portion of these types of narratives have direct authentication, with thirteen documented cases, while indirect and no authentication tie at three occurrences each. Messages received that have direct validations have a wide range under the category of self-knowledge. Most of them are non-threatening and are neither positive nor negative for the lives of student psychics. These include receiving information about future plans or occupations (Questioner15, SkyQueenJes), gifts (SkittyKittyCat12), predicting meals (Amethyst_May), and knowing future locations and

entertainment (klamathstorm). Two repetitive messages categorized as direct authentic messages of self-knowledge include predicting a future encounter with someone and car accidents. The future encounter message typically occurs because the psychic does not want to see someone and then that person appears in the same location. Informant SkittyKittyCat12 offers an example of this type of psychic message when she says, “The most vivid one [vision] was late 2016, and my mom and I were going to the cinema to see the movie 'Queen of Katwe'. As I stared out the car window, another one of those 'visions' occurred. I was sitting in the theatre, and a teacher from my school came up and sat next to me before talking as the movie was going, and I was extremely annoyed. And then it happened.” The other examples follow a similar pattern of going to some place, wishing to avoid a particular person, and then seeing that person. The other recurring direct validity message for self-knowledge is that of a car accident. Nikki39101 provides the most detailed version of this type of self-knowledge premonition. She expounds:

Over the years, I have experienced “the gut” feelings. Once I was shopping in the store for wine glasses, and I started to put my bags in the trunk of the car, and something told me “If you put the wine glasses, in the back of the trunk, someone could rear end you and break the glasses.” I ended up putting the glasses in the back seat instead. About a ½ mile down the road I was rear ended. (nikki39101)

This psychic predicts a minor car accident with a premonition of breaking wine glasses. Luckily, in this case, she listened to her vision and moved the wine glasses into safety. Unfortunately, the car accident did play out as predicted but it appeared to be minor, and nikki39101 is relieved that her wine glasses are untouched.

All the indirect validations involve premonitions of the student psychic’s own death. These, of course, could not be direct authentications because then the psychics-in-training would

not be able to write about their experiences. However, these supernatural messages become linked to some other condition in the student psychic's life. For example, moniv11 explains a premonition received as a dream and how it indirectly relates to his or her health:

I had a weird dream I guess, it was about 3 am I had gone to bed knocked out and then I was dreaming that I had woken up feeling chest pain like a heart attack and blurred vision I couldn't call 911 because of it so I walked to the kitchen as I could falling down (I have never in my life passed out) but somehow in this dream I knew I passed out and I felt it and I knew I was going die because I couldn't get to the phone and I live alone! The end of the dream I wake up in real life freaked out and drank some water, relaxed and went back to bed guess what happens next I'm having the same dream again, same episode but this time I knew if I stayed indoors I was going to die so I as best as I could I walked out of my apartment and yelled for help and I passed out outside my home this time and then I could feel a large dog coming to my rescue he pulled me by neck or shirt and I could feel the dogs got breath on my neck and pulled me to somewhere there was an ambulance or something that carried me away to a hospital end of story I wake up in real life the back of my neck felt warm from where the dog dragged me in my dream, I felt freaked out and relieved because in my dream I had a second chance and I think this a warning to me I been taking some medication and it has been raising my blood pressure and pulse really bad so I will stop taking it because I feel like it could kill me like my dream. (moniv11)

Student psychic moniv11 had a series of dreams about his or her own death. Instead of this being a direct premonition about coming events, moniv11 understood this to be a warning about

disastrous outcomes if a change in medication is ignored. In this way, this type of message does not directly link to the message's outcome but serves as a forewarning of coming events unless he or she does not make the necessary adjustments.

The last type of self-knowledge premonition has no authenticity element in the narrative. The three that occur among the informants are an accident, death of the self, and a future occupation. All these psychic events are told in a way that are not connected to their lived experiences. Student psychic kittahkatt has a premonition about her death but, unlike the near-death forewarnings, this one does not inspire some change in healthcare. The forewarning of an accident as described by Avobaedo does not nearly or actually happen in her life. And the future occupation premonition offered by SkyQueenJes reads as a hope for the future to become a flight attendant. All three visions clearly affect the psychics-in-training beyond just a typical dream. They stand out as something more significant, but they also are unconnected to their material lives in both direct and interpretative ways.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Loved Ones' Premonitions and Visitations

Premonitions of and visitations from loved ones are the third most often reported outcomes from psychic gifts. This purpose occurs eighteen times throughout the memorates and mostly depict images of danger, illness, or death of loved ones. Eleven of these premonitions are revealed in a direct way in the lives of psychics-in-training, only two premonitions indirectly come true, and four are not authenticated in any way. One informant, javousaime, offers a typical premonition of a family member by saying, "I dreamed my father came to visit me and told me it was his time to go. He asked if I was ready, I yelled at him no. He laughed and said goodbye. I woke up from a phone call from my mother at 5am. She told me to put my shoes on

and she was coming for me. She told me my father passed away.” The majority of psychic visions within this category follow is a similar pattern.

Only one premonition in this category was not directed towards family members.

Instead, sydneyhowey127 had a vision about a co-worker:

The night before I literally was crying and singing about suicide because my uncle killed himself almost a year ago. I'm not sure if that has anything to do with what happened today. But I think it was about 2 hours into my shift at work I started having this really bad feeling throughout my whole body. Like it wasn't a sick feeling it was just like... Shiat something tragic just happened. The bad energy would not go away at all and I was wondering to myself what is going on? I knew it had nothing to do with me because the lady it happened to, I walked past her and we smiled at each other and I didn't know it was specifically HER that it was going to happen to, but I felt something inside me when we made eye contact. I want to say about probably a half an hour went by, she got a phone call at work and it was in front of every one. She couldn't find words to speak and she fell to the ground balling her eyes out. I had no idea what was going on even though I knew what was going on if that makes sense? Her son had done the same thing my uncle did. And I knew how her son did it too. I literally had a small little thought of what it could have been and I was right.

This example deserves some attention because it does not fit in with the others in terms of who the vision includes. It stands out due to the fact that the psychic is not related or “doesn't have an actual close relationship with the woman” (sydneyhowey127). However, it does continue with the theme of psychics-in-training receiving messages about disasters, illnesses, and deaths. I

included in this category of premonitions about loved ones because of the similarities but I do want to make a note that the student psychic would not have labelled this vision as a premonition of a loved one. It is also important to note that no other forewarnings were given in the memorates that were outside the family. This one stands alone in this category.

Another abnormality in this category is a visitation from a loved one. This psychic experience is conveyed by unlucky18: “Regarding the death in my family I have smelt faint scents that use to revolve around my deceased relative, like smelling cigarettes in my room meanwhile no one else will smell it. Or his scent that I remember well from when he was here with us will stink up my room randomly.” This portion of the memorate describes a visitation from a deceased family member. It is categorized here to reflect the same sort of categorization found in Chapter 3 for the psychic seekers, which also identifies premonitions and visitations from loved ones. However, it is the only example of a visitation from the dead among the narratives pulled from the *Psychic Experiences* website under the premonition and precognition category in 2017. Unlike those narratives found in Chapter 3, this family member does not have a message for the psychic. Instead, he simply shows his presence through scent. It is possible that there are several more occasions where psychics-in-training are visited by the dead and possibly even receiving verbal messages from the deceased. It is entirely probable that I have missed them when I narrowed my memorate search to a category and year. Nevertheless, it is important to document this visitation from a deceased loved one here to reflect similarities with clients of psychics.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Awareness or Exercise of Gifts

The fourth most common vision as determined through the memorates of student psychics on *Psychic Experiences* is that of an exercise or awareness of gifts. In this category, all ten of these premonitions are directly authenticated. This category, though, is broken down into two different types of gifts: awareness of gifts and exercising gifts. In the awareness classification, psychics-in-training are noticing something peculiar in their lives. They cannot seem to control the visions but they hold some significance for the student psychics. One informant, squashblossom, beautifully explains this type of purpose of awareness of gifts:

I was dreaming something terrible, but couldn't see what it was. There were numbers whirling in ever increasing density, casting obscurity on the images of my dream. I can't recall to this day what I was dreaming about; just the numbers with their dervish intensity. It had all started like the large, fat plops that herald the coming of a summer rain shower. The numbers splashed down in ones, then twos, then ten at the time until they quickly became a deluge which morphed into the giant rotating beast that confronted me now. It was draining my brain and I just wanted it to stop. There was a certainty that something terrible was going on behind those numbers, but I couldn't see what.

I watched the spinning wheel of numbers in horrified silence until an owl appeared, growing larger rapidly. A great black thing, his saucer-like orange eyes bored into mine as he dove straight for me. Flying swiftly and arrow straight, the bird sliced through the numbers. Their frenzied dance interrupted, they disappeared until only the owl filled my mind's eye. Those eyes bored into and through me with the owl's passing, the chill wind of his wings touching my core.

Coming awake abruptly, I contemplated the dream. The thought crossed my mind that it might be more than a dream and something horrible was being foretold, but I quickly nixed that idea with the logic that I hadn't seen an owl in our woods in a very long time. It couldn't possibly happen if I didn't see an owl.

The next morning, driving to work, I was about a mile from my driveway when a dark shape ahead in my lane caught my attention. Thinking it was a buzzard I slowed down to a crawl in case he decided to take off in front of me, but no, as I passed in the left-hand lane to avoid the great black monster, it turned its head to regard me with the eyes of the giant owl from the night before.

Similar to all the visions about gift awareness, squashblossom had a vivid and chaotic dream about an owl. This dream becomes significant when she encounters an owl in her conscious life, an animal that she says she has not seen in quite a while. This type of vision serves as an awareness of psychic abilities. The person experiencing this type of vision recognizes his or her abilities as something special and deserving of development.

The other variety of gift in this category is that of exercising abilities. In these cases, the psychics-in-training explain how they have become aware of their gifts but they conduct their own experiments to strengthen their abilities. One psychic, starsofclay, explains how he or she is working at developing abilities by making contact upon awakening in the morning. This informant explains the two times he or she received some sort of message and how that message played out in lived experiences:

I have been working very hard on developing my gifts...One thing that I am doing is trying to make contact when I first wake up- when I'm still in alpha waves and my ego is still partly down...A few cool things happen when I am in

this state: images come to me, I heard words audibly like someone is talking in my ear, and I also try to ask a question and see what is the first thing that pops in my mind. The latter has been the most accurate. I have had two hits doing this method... The first time it worked the answer was "bowling balls and baseball bats". Obviously, I was like... Uh huh... Ok... And really wasn't sure if it was something I made up or not, but decided to just go with it. I got out of bed, got dressed, and turned on the tv. Not being able to find much to watch, I switched on Netflix and decided to try a new show called "Crazyhead"- it's pretty funny if you haven't seen it- and right there in the intro song the first thing you see is a bowling ball rolling across the floor, followed by a girl swinging a baseball bat. I have to say that really struck me. I had never had a true psychic hit like this before, beside the occasional thinking a word or sentence right before it is said aloud by someone else in the room, or having a song in my head before getting in the car and there it is on the radio.

The second hit came this morning. I once again asked for a sign, and the first word that came into mind was "candle (s) "- I inquired further and the next thing that popped into my head was "you will cut their nails." That wasn't very strange to me actually because I own a dog grooming shop and we cut nails every day. Sure enough, one of my first customers of the morning came in for his dog's nails cut and he bought a pet odor candle. I was just so elated. (starsofclay)

In these narratives, the psychics-in-training are practicing developing their gifts. They already have an awareness that their visions are beyond typical dreams. Now they desire to move into a situation where they are strengthening these abilities. All of the memorates under the exercising

gifts category are similar. They tend to avoid practicing on anyone or anything of significance. This serves simply as an exercise in gift development.

The fact that psychics-in-training want to develop these gifts is significant. It appears that many of these online informants are novices or intermediate student psychics with hopes of becoming experienced psychics with refined gifts. In fact, some openly express this desire in writing. Psychic-in-training starsofclay reports, "I know that I want to be a medium, preferably a clairaudient and clairvoyant medium." This statement suggests a desire to hone his or her abilities in a specific way.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Love, Marriage, & Children

Ranking as fifth for the purpose of psychic gifts, informants on *Psychic Experiences* documented visions of love, marriage, and children seven times in their memorates. Love and marriage were only reported twice in this category, one of which was directed towards the sister of the student psychic and one that was about the psychic-in-training's own love life. In both situations, there were premonitions about love but the one regarding the potential lover of the psychic-in-training has a more elaborate narrative. Both are directly authenticated since both love interests are actually experienced for each person. This example, as written by biker4jc2u, is as follows:

Still I was testing this new found ability seeing what it meant and what it did and tried to want to live believe this person was real even if it wasn't telepathic but this person was still out there and I could feel them - I. Kept tiny notes of things about this person things I could feel like their personality body marking yes I felt a tattoo blue eyes. You get it I kept little notes on this new found ability as my

own personal science project...And well I'm glad I kept those notes. As the things I felt did match up. Turns out he has a tattoo on his back right where I felt one he has those blue eyes among other things like he only had one brother he has no other sibling these and many other. Things I kept a note of.

In this situation, biker4jc2u desired to find love in her life. In fact, her entire memorate is filled with this yearning. She details different ways she goes about finding love, including signing up for online dating. She begins to get visions of the man she will find and she keeps a journal of the fine points. Years go by and she finally connects with a man online. To her amazement, biker4jc2u bonds with a man to she has been envisioning for five years.

Three other narratives that are direct validations are found in this category of premonitions of children. Of these three, two are distanced from the student psychic as they are visions about the psychic-in-training's sister (AlmightyBlitz) and the psychic-in-training's cousin (sunshine_taylor). The last one is a premonition about the genders of the student psychic's own children (lizek82). All the memorates in this sub-category are not elaborate. Usually the author simply states seeing a pregnancy or the gender of a child. For example, AlmightyBlitz states, "One night I had a dream that my sister got pregnant...I think it was around may 21 of this year when my mom called and said my sister who dreamed was pregnant like 2 weeks earlier was pregnant." The author of these narratives are not using their gifts to tell the mothers about the upcoming pregnancies. Instead, they are learning about a pregnancy or gender of a child as a way of displaying their abilities to the online community. All of these psychics-in-training wait to find out if their premonitions are correct and do not discuss actions they took due to their gifts.

The last sub-section of the love, marriage, and children category is premonitions about future children of student psychics, but they are not authenticated at all. As of yet, the psychics-in-training do not have proof of these visions. Informant kaylabear describes this type of premonition in her memorate: “For the past year or so, I've had multiple dreams of a baby girl. She has dark brown hair and big brown eyes. Every dream I have of her she grows up a bit, and she's absolutely precious. Me and boyfriend of two years have recently been talking about kids and both agree we want a baby girl. My boyfriend has dark brown hair and brown eyes much like the baby I see in my dreams.” Both student psychics receiving this type of message admit that they are not pregnant, but they have vivid dreams of a child and are able to describe minute characteristics of the babies. These are not directly authenticated because these visions have yet to exist outside of the realm of premonitions. However, that does not discredit them. These dreams may become a reality in their futures.

Purpose of Psychic Abilities: Natural Disasters

The sixth and final category for purposes of psychic abilities found in the memorates of informants posting on *Psychic Experiences* is premonitions about natural disasters. There were only four events of this sort described among the narratives. Of the four, two memorates are labelled as directly authenticated. Both of these were posted by the same psychic-in-training, amm0714, and elaborates about visions of a tornado and tsunami. Informant amm0714 explains the forewarning of tornadoes with this vision: “The first dream occurred in early 2011. In it, I was in a city driving on an overpass. There were several large tornadoes all around and I was trying to drive to safety. Before one of them crossed the overpass directly in front of me, I woke up. Around two weeks later in April, we had the largest outbreak of tornadoes ever recorded in

history.” This narrative describes the vision in a dream of a forthcoming natural disaster. As with all direct authentications, the student psychic takes the reader from the images of the dream into occurrences in his or her lived experience. The second directly authenticated example from amm0714 follows the same pattern:

I dreamt I was on a public bus full of people, in a coastal area. I happened to glance behind me through the back window of the bus, and saw a massive wave rushing inland. I tried to warn the people and tell them we needed to get to higher ground, but everyone was panicking and trampling one another. I woke as the wave hit. Coincidentally, about two weeks later, a 9.0 earthquake struck Japan and caused a massive tsunami.

Both visions follow a similar configuration. The only difference is the type of natural disaster described. In both cases, the dreams lead to those natural disasters manifesting in real life.

In contrast, the other two premonitions of natural disasters are not validated. One is provided again by amm0714 and the other by klamathstorm. The similarity between the two is the form of natural disaster being reported in their visions. Both are forewarnings of future explosions. Informant amm0714 expounds on his or her vision:

The final dream I've had so far bothered me the most. This one occurred a few months ago. I was with my family on a tour in our area seeing some of the natural sights. Suddenly, a large bomb was dropped over the major industrial portion of the city. My family and I had just enough time to seek refuge in a cave, something our area is well known for. I remember trying to calm my family and lead them far enough out of the city so that we could regroup. Obviously this one has not come to pass, but the vividness still bothers me.

The vision as provided by klamathstorm is a little more complicated than the one given by amm0714. It exists within a dream of two other premonitions that do not belong to the category of natural disaster. Her vision also includes a foresight of a bee sting and her sister's forthcoming prenuptials, both of which are directly authenticated in her narrative. The warning of a possible war is the only part of the narrative that does not have any validation from our real life. I have cut out the portions of the memorate that include the bee sting and sister's marriage to allow for focus on the natural disaster:

The first vision/dream I had was when I was very little, maybe around 5 years old...I had an overwhelming influx of thoughts from it, and I started to cry. I didn't understand at the time. I remember thinking about some sort of nuclear war (the threats of one, I'm not entirely sure that I understood it at the time)...Anyway, the things I "saw" then are what is happening now... the threat of nuclear war seems to be hanging over us. (klamathstorm)

Unlike amm0714, klamathstorm views her vision to be authenticated by saying that "the threat of nuclear war seems to be hanging over us." In this sense, she understands that all of her visions in this dream have manifested in her lived experiences. Grouping all of the visions into one memorate as they appeared in her dream may have led klamathstorm to lump them all together as one authenticated premonition. However, for the purposes of this study, I have separated them and allowed for different categorizations. After all, we have yet to see a nuclear war and, even if we were on the verge of one, it has not become a reality for us.

Conclusion to Psychic Practitioners-in Training

Through an analysis of thirty-four narratives of premonition and precognitive experiences on the website *Psychic Experiences*, I conclude that student psychics use their abilities for spiritual autonomy and intend to use their gifts to obtain societal power. I began by categorizing the memorates to determine the purpose of the messages my online informants were receiving. The purposes include (1) societal power, (2) self-knowledge, (3) loved ones' premonitions and visitations, (4) awareness or exercise of gifts, (5) love, marriage, and children, and (6) natural disasters. The most frequently reported message was that of societal power. I firstly determine that participants on *Psychic Experiences* are on a spectrum of psychics-in-training, ranging from novices to students with more control over their abilities. However, these student psychics are not to the level yet where they are paid for their gifts. Instead, they are posting directly authenticated visions in a variety of categories to demonstrate the accuracy of their abilities. Then they request help from others online to further develop their gifts. They even show ways that they are strengthening their abilities in the fourth category of awareness or exercise of gifts. These actions taken by psychics-in-training suggest an intention of refining their psychic abilities for the purpose of tapping into the profitable business of fortune-telling. In addition to seeking societal power, student psychics receive religious power by avoiding the regulations of organized religion while using their online platform as a non-hierarchical religious community for support and assistance.

Although I have concluded that student psychics obtain religious power and intend to acquire societal power from their gifts, this serves as initial research. I made this argument by analyzing thirty-four memorates online. A greater number of psychics would need to be studied to uphold this argument. *Psychic Experiences* has over 12,000 narratives and it is only one

platform used to post about supernatural experiences. Each post on the website allows for correspondence with the psychic-in-training. Not only did I not interact personally with my informants by responding to their posts but I did not use responses from other student psychics within this study. Interacting with informants would allow for direct questions about religious affiliations and intentions for psychic ability development. It would also be beneficial to interview experienced, professional psychics for comparison purposes.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION

Concluding Remarks about Spiritualism

In comparison with the larger society, Spiritualism has given women opportunities that have been denied elsewhere. Throughout this thesis, I have shown how Spiritualist practices have offered women access to power throughout history. In chapter two, I explained the steps towards gaining more power for women in the mid-1900s while showing how women today still lack societal and religious power. I began by clarifying how mediumship allowed people to break from their restrictive gender roles. The feminine expectation of passiveness led to women taking the positions of mediums in the nineteenth century. At this time, psychic mediums were viewed as powerless vessels that were controlled by powerful spirits in need of a voice (Braude 83). When the male spirit manifests in a female medium, that woman is allowed to explore gender outside of the restricted norms. For some mediums, this gender experimentation began inside the safe bounds of a séance but then extended into everyday life, which was the case for the popularly defiant psychic known as Margery (Robertson 160). Once the psychic's role was established as passive and feminine, women were able to use the platform as a medium to voice and spread the feminist agenda (Braude 79). This not only allowed women to perform in positions of power but ultimately become images of power for audience members (Owen 80).

While Spiritualism presented nineteenth century women with opportunities to gain societal and religious power, females today are still fighting to obtain both types of power. In *The Darkened Room*, Alex Owen argues that mediumship gave middle-class women opportunities to earn money, which eventually led to other job prospects in the nineteenth century (2-3). Although women have made great strides when it comes to equality within

society, there are still issues that lead to inequality, such as gendered jobs due to social conditioning, pay wage gap, lack of maternity leave and motherhood discrimination, access to healthcare, and overall misogynistic expressions and rhetoric that have become normalized in American society.

Women have also made significant strides in obtaining religious power since the nineteenth century but not without noteworthy issues. In the nineteenth century, women were moral authorities in the home but not leaders in the churches (Owen 9). This lack of religious leadership roles is partly due to self-limitations. Women understood their roles to be domestic and involving the birth and raising of children (Power and Cook 648). Women have also reported attending church ceremonies for the purpose of social and emotion support as opposed to the masculine roles of leadership and power (Walter and Davie 645). External pressures coming from the state and women's movement and internal pressures from religious feminists and other denominations have forced Christian religious organizations to adjust doctrines to allow for female leadership (Chaves 38). Although women are allowed leadership roles in some denominations, there still remains substantial inequality. This discrimination is deeply ingrained within religious organizations, permeating the language and influencing how female leaders are viewed as opposed to male leaders (Chaves 25). Women are also given positions that are not desired by their counterparts. Female leaders face the challenges of being assigned rural congregations with unpredictable finances. This results in lower wages for female clergy, making it difficult to support themselves. They additionally are challenged with finding acceptance from congregations, even those that self-identify as liberal churches (Chaves 29).

In contrast to the challenges faced by female Christian leaders, Spiritualism offered nineteenth century women positions of power. They were able to work as mediums for financial

gain. They were also allowed in leadership positions that gave them a voice. Elizabeth Tucker, in her essay titled “Messages from the Dead,” furthers the link of female psychics with societal power. She illustrates the connection with female psychics in Lily Dale to feminist activism, arguing that Spiritualism is a cultural symbol of feminine power that attracts both female clients and practitioners (176). Tucker shows how Inspiration Stump served as a spiritual focal point where women were able to deliver psychic readings in a similar fashion to political speeches (177). Female psychics of Lily Dale are viewed as powerful religious figures who deliver messages to the living from the dead. Tucker argues, “Mediums serve as cultural symbols of women’s power” (188). The image of the strong, independent women becomes linked with the image of the powerful medium.

The work of Gillian Bennett complicates this academic view of Spiritualism as a feminist enterprise. After interviewing and analyzing eighty-seven female participants ranging in ages from sixty to ninety-five, Bennett argues that mediumship only offers passive power that upholds the traditional feminine role in her essay, “‘If I Knew You Were Coming, I’d Have Baked a Cake’: The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group.” Her Christian informants report only a passive power that allows for uncontrollable premonitions that give the recipients the passive role of preparing for the future rather than the masculine role of having power to change it. The position of the medium requires patience and compliance rather than action (Bennett 134-135). In this sense, psychic gifts are not considered a pathway to feminine power but abilities that are used in a traditionally submissive way.

The conflicting view between Gillian Bennett’s work and other scholars was the seed for my own study. I became curious about issues revolving around women and power, particularly focusing on the practices of Spiritualism. My intentions were to determine if female psychic

seekers and female psychic practitioners-in-training were using Spiritualistic practices to gain societal and/or religious power. From this initial inquiry, I developed the following objectives:

- Do female clients and/or psychics-in-training gain religious power from Spiritualist activities? Do clients and/or psychics-in-training view Spiritualism as one of the components to their unregulated spiritual practices or is it supplementary to an organized religion? This question came from the inquiry into whether women are trying to fulfill their spiritual needs outside of the boundaries of patriarchal, organized religions. If Spiritualism and other New Age traditions are the predominant spiritual practices in women's lives, then an argument could be made that they are using psychics and/or psychic abilities to obtain spiritual power in their lives that would otherwise be denied by organized religion. If Spiritualism is something that women practice in addition to attending their churches, then this issue becomes more convoluted. Women may still be using Spiritualism as a way to gain some autonomy over their spiritual lives while still practicing in a male-regulated religion or they may simply be adding Spiritualism to their individual belief systems.
- Do female clients obtain societal power through information received during psychic readings? What questions are clients hoping that psychics are able to answer? These queries directly speak to the purpose of Spiritualism in women's lives. If women are seeking psychics to answer questions to further their positions in society, then it could be argued that they are using psychic abilities to obtain power within society. For example, if women are asking questions about education, career, and/or finances, then women are seeking advice that would help them make choices to navigate through the male-dominated realms of society. If, on the other hand, women are asking questions

about areas of their lives that fall under traditional female gender roles, then women are using psychic abilities for other purposes. For instance, if women are asking psychics questions about their families (both living and dead), friends, relationships, and/or future children, then the women could be interpreted as looking for advice in the category of the typical feminine role.

- Are psychics-in-training using their abilities to gain some societal power? How do female psychics-in training use their powers in their own lives? This question follows the same logic as the question about female clients of psychics. If women are using psychic powers to answer questions that would benefit their positions in society, then they are using these abilities to gain societal power. However, if psychics-in-training are focused on information that falls within traditional feminine roles, such as family, friends, relationships and/or future children, then their abilities are used within the acceptable female gender role. The psychics-in-training also have an additional element of gaining financially from their gifts. Therefore, determining if these psychics-in-training are hoping to eventually use their abilities for a future career would suggest their desire to tap into an area of societal power.

As I conclude this study, I intend to answer the questions in my objectives in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Religious Power for Psychic Seekers

To have religious power, one needs to have the ability to govern oneself in spiritual matters and/or serve as a leader over others. The clients of psychics would not have an option to lead others, but it is possible that they could be self-sufficient in their own spiritual lives. To

determine this, I investigated the memorates of client interviews to establish how Spiritualist practices function in their lives. I particularly focused on the interview questions about possible conflicts between psychic readings and religious ties, and the question about the influence of psychic readings. I began by looking at whether the participants viewed Spiritualism as their main spiritual practice or whether it played a supplementary role in their belief systems. From this inquiry, I developed three categories for the function of Spiritualism in belief systems: (1) Organized religious belief takes precedence; (2) organized religious belief and belief in psychics are complimentary; and (3) psychic belief is a part of a personalized, unorganized spirituality. Using these categories, I determine that clients of psychics show a movement towards self-governance when it comes to religious matters and, consequently, are seeking a religious power denied by organized religion.

The precedence of organized religious belief, or the first function of Spiritualism for psychic seekers, is found in one of my informants who attended a psychic reading. Kiley self-identifies as a Christian and understands her religious belief and her participation in a Spiritualist activity may have conflicts. She negotiates her Christian beliefs with psychic belief by pointing out the other contradictions found within her organized religions. Kiley states, “Being Christian I think we are preconditioned to not believe in psychics. I have seen many conflicting biblical statements that have been interpreted as condemning psychics and others that endorse them as ‘gifts of God’. However, the Bible condemns a lot of strange things. So I wasn’t too worried about it.” Although Kiley explains that the accuracy of her psychic reading gave her “goosebumps,” it did not significantly change anything in her life. When asked how her reading has influenced her, Kiley responds, “[N]ot dramatically. I think it has opened my mind to more things I didn’t notice or pay attention to before.” Based on this statement, I have concluded that

her Christian beliefs take priority within her belief system. She upholds Christianity as her foundational belief while her belief in psychics appears to have hold a less important role.

The second function of Spiritualism for psychic seekers where organized religious belief and belief in psychics complement each other is reported by one interviewee. Allison self-identifies as Catholic. Her belief in psychics does not pose a problem for her. She recognizes that most Catholics do not have a belief in psychics because it contradicts dogma. Allison settles these incongruent beliefs by pointing out that her psychic, the famous televised Theresa Caputo, is a Catholic. Allison's belief in psychics does not replace her belief in adherence to an organized religion. However, both beliefs complement each other. Her experience with Theresa Caputo has strengthened her Catholic beliefs. She states, "I really feel like it made me closer to God, and it gives me assurance that our loved ones are always with us. I truly believe it now...it really was a life changing experience that gave me so much comfort in the unknown of our after lives" (Allison). Allison's experience with her psychic has reaffirmed her Catholic beliefs. In this way, the two beliefs harmonize together within her belief system.

The last function of Spiritualism for psychic seekers moves away entirely from organized religion. Three informants – Michelle, Mykleanne, and Rosanna – interpret their psychic belief as a part of a personalized, unorganized spirituality. Michelle points out that she was raised Presbyterian but would now be labeled as spiritual rather than religious. She does not see a conflict with her current spiritual beliefs with her psychic belief. She states, "For me, there is no conflict religiously, ethically or morally with my readings. I believe in a higher power and however one taps into that power – it's personal. I do not publically announce the fact that I do see a psychic or intuitive – for me its private and I don't care to listen to others opinions on the

subject” (Michelle). When asked about the impact that her psychic readings have had on her, Michelle responds:

I’m not sure if influence is the correct word or just a sense of wellbeing. My senses are more heightened at times because of the conversations and I do tend to file away the conversation to think about later. I like to visit with Lisa [Tenney], the intuitive, on occasion for energy work. Lisa helps to remove the negative energy from my life. When I finish a session with her I feel positive and cleansed.

With these statements, Michelle is identifying her psychic visits as a part of her spiritual practices. She is removed from her childhood religion and has found an alternative path to spiritual fulfillment.

Mykleanne also discusses her psychic belief as a part of her spirituality, which she connects to her overall health. She does not identify with any religious organization. When asked about how her psychic readings have influenced her, Mykleanne says, “My readings have opened up a whole new world to me. I feel more certain about my thoughts and believes when it comes to faith, religion, the after live, etc. Without these readings, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I feel more whole and more myself now.” Later in the interview Mykleanne elaborates:

My life has changed because of the things I have heard and the people I have talked to in the sense that I would be still be wondering and wasting energy on this. Whereas now I understand to a certain extent what’s going on and what will be foreseen in the future if I chose to go down those paths. And I am thankful for that. I am thankful for the reading and the opportunities to meet with these good carnival people and learn more about their craft and experiences along with mine.

Mykleanne compares her psychic readings to yearly physical check-ups. The body must be assessed annually and, similarly, the emotional and spiritual self must get evaluated. She explains, “I compare psychic readings to annual doctor appointments – you need them [to] keep balance in your life and to stay health[y]. Or at least I do. These appointments are also like a therapy session where a mirror is held up and you can’t escape because it’s you looking back” (Mykleanne). Not only does Mykleanne identify psychic visits as a part of her spirituality but she emphasizes the importance by stating the benefits to her spiritual, emotional, and psychological selves. She additionally explains how practices related to her spirituality have expanded due to her interest in psychic readings. She has now added Tarot cards to her spiritual practices.

Mykleanne expounds:

Because of a lot of these readings, I should mention, I have gotten into Tarot cards so every New Years Eve for the last three or four years, my mom and I go and get our Tarot cards read. And Livi [sister] has joined us and one of my mom’s really good friends have joined us to do that. So, I get those read for the year. This past January, I went and bought two decks of Tarot so I have been practicing Woe Tarot readings and kind of learning the art of Tarot. I am not really that good right now. I am really working on it. So, I have been doing that for my friends and myself and my family. Whoever is kind of interested. I don’t like to force it on them. But I really like Tarot. I think it is really interesting. It is something to walk through day to day life. So, if you have questions about certain things you can go to the Tarot and read that stuff. But without doing the meditations and readings I would have never been interested in this. I think I would still be a little scared of what is out there in the world that I can’t see or feel but definitely seeing is

believing in this art, which is something we've all kind of learned. At least with my mom and my sister. That has been really fun and kind of understanding that. Mykleanne's psychic readings have led to other spiritual practices added to her belief system that evades organized religion. She shares these practices with her close family and friends, and among these people is her mother, Michelle.

Rosanna is the last informant that views her psychic belief as a part of her spirituality. She reports being raised as Catholic but has no religious affiliation currently. She admits that if she had continued to worship in the Catholic Church, her belief in psychics would be problematic. She explains, "If I had remained Catholic, then yes, it would have conflict[ed] with doctrine. It does not conflict with my personal belief and with family that would have a problem with it, it is simply a matter of being discreet" (Rosanna). Rosanna expands on her belief in psychics with a warning of uncertainty by saying:

While I believe that many psychic/mediums have the potential of tapping into the spiritual side, I also believe that the person getting the reading needs to be very skeptical and careful with the information they provide during the meeting. People can be easily manipulated and taken advantage of with this route of information. I do feel that we are not alone in this world and that Love surrounds all of us.

Unlike my other informants, Rosanna touches on the problems she has encountered with her belief in psychics. She also de-emphasizes the affect her psychic readings have had on life.

When asked about the influence she experienced from her psychic readings, Rosanna states:

They really haven't. I find them more useful as a reinforcement of my own inner thoughts and feelings and what might come through in my own meditations. I see

that they would be useful for those that aren't quite connected to self. I do read books by Dolores Cannon, Doreen Virtue and various readings from Edgar Cayce. I read them to enrich my own self-awareness. I don't put them on a 'guru' type pedestal.

For Rosanna, her belief in psychics is a part of her spirituality but she states that she does not need psychic readings because she is already connected to the self. Rosanna believes that everyone has the potential of psychic abilities if they desire and develop them.

From the information received from these five interviews, I determine that belief in psychics for the clients significantly leads to self-governance when it comes to spiritual matters. I came to this conclusion due to the fact that three of my five informants have gained spiritual power by avoiding the submissive state of adherents in organized religion while finding other ways to fulfill their spiritual needs. In this way, psychic seekers obtain power over their religious selves that they cannot receive through patriarchal organized religions. Rosanna represents the firmest example of gaining religious power by not only denying her Catholic roots but by believing that psychic abilities exist within everyone. This gives all people a direct link to spiritual power and self-governance. She does not believe that one needs to visit a psychic to receive supernatural messages. Instead, one can develop psychic gifts and directly tap into the powers that offer spiritual affirmations and comfort. In her worldview, there does not need to be a distinction between psychic seekers and practitioners. According to Rosanna, everyone can be a psychic practitioner.

Similarly, Michelle and Mykleanne have moved away from the beliefs found in organized religion and have found power in personalized spiritual practices. Unlike Rosanna, Michelle does not believe that all people can have psychic abilities. Michelle specifically states

that these gifts are only developed within certain people when she says, “I also had a young daughter that seemed to have an ability to see and feel different things. She wanted to talk about it when she was young. I needed to be able to guide her and not let her know that others did not have the abilities that she had.” Michelle and Mykleanne have a level of religious power and self-governance but both are somewhat reliant on the gifts of psychics. In addition, they are required to pay for the benefits of these gifts similar to adherents in organized religion that offer tithing to their churches. Despite the reliance on others with psychic abilities, I argue that Michelle and Mykleanne have acquired religious power because their belief in psychics have resulted in the personal practice of Tarot card readings. This part of their spirituality mimics information they would receive during a psychic reading but without the monetary element. In this way, reading Tarot cards have also moved Michelle and Mykleanne from psychic seeker to psychic practitioner, giving them autonomy over their spirituality.

Allison and Kiley are the only two informants that do not fit under the category of acquiring religious power due to their belief in psychics. Allison speaks about her psychic reading as affirming her Catholic beliefs. This suggests that she understands her psychic and Catholic beliefs as complementary. However, this is based on one psychic reading by a medium who is also a member of the Catholic Church. It is difficult to determine with just this one interview what belief would take precedence if a psychic reading contradicted Catholic doctrine. Kiley is the least likely informant to gain religious power with her psychic belief. She does not appear to have a strong belief in psychics and, therefore, is not using this belief to acquire religious autonomy. Her Christian belief seems to be the foundation of her belief system.

The majority of psychic seeker informants are not a part of an organized religion. Plus, they demonstrate religious autonomy from their own psychic capabilities (Rosanna) and other

unregulated New Age practices (Michelle and Mykleanne). For these reasons, I argue that clients of psychics gain religious power due to their belief in and practices with psychic practitioners.

Religious Power for Student Psychic Practitioners

Defining religious power as an ability to govern oneself in spiritual matters and/or serve as a leader over others, I will argue that psychic practitioners-in-training have religious autonomy. I determined this stance based on an analysis of thirty-four online narratives from the website *Psychic Experiences*. Defining religious affiliations among my online informants was difficult. Very few stated their beliefs or disbeliefs in a direct manner. In fact, twenty-eight informants did not mention any type of organized religious belief or affiliations in their memorates. These informants are characterized in an unknown category. Only one informant directly takes a nonreligious stance by saying, “I’m not religious, and I consider myself a staunch skeptic” (amm0714). That leaves only one in a nonreligious category.

I have labeled five online informants as religious, although this is presented with some problems. One memorate author offers a firm belief with a religious denominational affiliation by stating, “I do believe in GOD and I am catholic” (javousaime). This informant is the only one with a firm Christian religious belief and affiliation. The remaining four memorates grouped in this category have limitations to their labelling. Two informants discuss a belief in a God, with a capital “G,” but do not identify religious organizational ties. One writes, “I really believe it was God’s voice warning of danger in Gina’s [sister’s] life” (carriwill). The other one directly talks about God, church, being Christian, and praying but then goes on to say, “I no longer go to church but I still have a belief in God” (biker4jc2u). These memorates from carriwill and biker4jc2u are problematic because the reader does not know exactly what they mean when they

use the term “God.” This could be used to identify the Christian God, signify a spiritual entity, or any of the definitions in between. I suggest that these psychics are speaking about the Christian God because of the capitalization of “God” and the avoidance of terminology that tends to represent beliefs outside of Christianity, such as the force or higher power.

Two other narratives that are categorized as religious talk about the religious beliefs of their family members. One author talked about how her mother also had dreams that came true but it scared her. Her mother “prayed to God to make them go away” (SkittyKittyCat12). The other informant simply states, “I come from a christian family” (tkoestdance). The use of language with these family member beliefs are somewhat revealing. SkittyKittyCat12 makes the decision to capitalize God plus shows that the ritual of praying is the norm in her household. The second narrative from tkoestdance implies that the family members are practicing Christians and he or she is at least partially influenced by these religious beliefs. Due to the influence of family members and the need to identify the family’s religious affiliations, I have chosen to categorize these memorates under religious with a side note of the problematic nature of this label.

The majority of online memorates are categorized as unknown religion, which suggests that organized religious beliefs serves a little role in the lives of these student psychics. Coupled with the fact that psychics-in-training use their abilities to gain self-knowledge and exercise their gifts, it could be argued that student psychics are using their talents to fulfill their own spiritual needs outside of organized religions. In addition, many of the psychics-in-training used the online forum to request help from others to further develop their gifts. For example, SusanLM finishes her psychic post by stating, “Can anyone give me guidance? Help me figure out what this all is? My mother just want me to pray it away. But I don’t want to lose this gift, it doesn’t feel wrong, I just don’t know how to control it or fine tune it. Is it possible to learn that? Am I

too old to learn how? I just need some kind of direction/guidance with all of this. Please. Any help/insight/guidance is appreciated.” Many of the posts end with this type of request for help. Learning to fine tune their supernatural abilities implies a need to strengthen their gifts, which can then be used in a leadership role as a psychic for other people. This echoes Ann Braude’s argument that female psychics held positions of power as “sources of religious truth and, as such, assumed the authority of religious leaders” (84). The memorates of my online psychic informants not only use their gifts to provide their own spiritual guidance, but they can use it to become leaders over others. Additionally, the online forum of *Psychic Experiences* functions as a non-hierarchical religious community where people are welcome to post about their spiritual experiences and receive feedback from their peers. This firmly identifies psychics-in-training with religious power.

Societal Power for Psychic Seekers

In this study, societal power was determined by psychic messages that would help women gain more access to power within society. For psychic seekers, this often is established through messages that would lead to improving their position in society by offering insight into education, career, and/or financial decisions. Through an analysis of five memorates acquired through interviews, I argue that clients of psychics do not acquire messages that lead to societal power but instead obtain information that is defined within the bounds of the traditional female role of the family. I developed six interview questions, one of which asked the participant to elaborate about the most memorable parts of their psychic readings. By analyzing this portion of the narratives, I identified four purposes for psychic readings. During typical psychic readings, women were mostly receiving messages about family members, both the living and the deceased.

Secondly, they received information about love, marriage, and children. Thirdly, psychic readings gave women insight into themselves. Ranking in last place is gaining societal power during psychic readings with information about education, career, or finances. Only one informant, Mykleanne, reported receiving information about education and career choices but that information was vague and not useful.

Although I conclude that clients of psychics are not using psychic readings to acquire societal power, it is difficult to ignore the power that women are receiving during these supernatural experiences. My informants report receiving power from affirming continued relationships with the deceased (Allison, Michelle, Mykleanne, Rosanna), getting closure from someone who passed too quickly (Allison, Rosanna), repairing a broken relationship (Mykleanne), and even something as small as finding a missing object (Michelle). When psychic seekers receive information about future family members, they gain a knowledge and power about how to proceed in their lives. They are able to look for specific personality traits or back off from dating during a period of time (Mykleanne). Dating becomes less stressful and the anxiety of finding or missing the perfect spouse is appeased. Lastly, self-knowledge offers women suggestions about specific actions taken to find balance, warning signs to look for, and an ability to live with confidence (Mykleanne). It is undeniable that the information that my informants received from their psychics directly impacts their lives. However, the information upholds the female traditional gender roles of the self, family, and household.

The commonality among all of these results of psychic readings is that of control. Women are predominately using psychic readings to gain control over their own lives. In their essay, “‘The Spirits Tell Me that You’re Seeking Help’: Fortune-Telling in Late Capitalism,” Stephen L. Muzzatti and Emma M. Smith argue that “fortune-telling has developed into an

industry that sells its customers some semblance of control. The fortune-teller serves as an appealing (an appeasing) resource, a kind of life advisor who offers support council, and assistance for the right price” (126). Similar research is found with Janet Baldwin in her essay, “Reading Tarot.” In her study about Tarot reading as a communal process, Janet Baldwin claims that solitary Tarot card readings give women a “sense of predictability and control even when unexpected events occur” (148). She uses the example of Sandra, who drew the Death card on the day she found out her nephew died. She was able to look back at her Tarot card reading and identify that card as predicting this unexpected event. During a reading a few days later, Sandra drew the Hermit card. This told Sandra that she needed to offer her family members solace even while she was feeling isolated during the incident. This Tarot card reading gave Sandra a sense of control during this emotional and trying time (Baldwin 148). Even though Muzzatti, Smith, and Baldwin identify how women are using supernatural experiences for the purpose of gaining control in their lives, Baldwin’s example still shows how that control is within the family and not used for societal power.

Societal Power for Student Psychic Practitioners

Similar to the analysis for psychic seekers, when determining if psychics are gaining societal power with the use of their gifts, I searched the thirty-four memorates to determine the purpose of psychic abilities. This inquiry is based on the work of Elizabeth Tucker and Gillian Bennett. Tucker explains that Spiritualism has a strong history with feminism, arguing that clients are attracted to the image of powerful women that exist within the tradition as female psychic mediums “serve as cultural symbols of women’s power” (188). Bennett conversely finds that her elderly female informants use their psychic abilities in the acceptable, passive way that

maintains traditional female expectations (134-135). Through an analysis of psychic narratives, I intended to determine patterns for the purpose of psychic gifts.

An investigation of thirty-four psychic narratives resulted in six purposes for psychic abilities. The most common purpose online psychics reported are intentions for societal power. The second is self-knowledge while the third most common purpose is premonitions and visitation by loved ones. Exercise or awareness of gifts ranks fourth and coming in fifth is messages about love, marriage, and children. The last purpose of psychic messages is natural disasters ranking as sixth. From this analysis, I show that informants on the website *Psychic Experiences* range from novices to intermediate student psychics. Although they are not paid for their abilities yet, they display signs of a desire to hone their gifts. Twenty-one student psychics post a total of thirty-eight directly authenticated psychic experiences. They do this exhibit their talents and accuracy of their gifts. The majority of informants, twenty-seven to be exact, then request assistance from others on the website to further understand and develop their abilities. Student psychics display their desire to strengthen their gifts by posting ways to exercise their abilities, the fourth purpose of psychic abilities. Some informants even post their intentions from their gifts, such as starsofclay who says, “I know I want to be a medium, preferably a clairaudient and clairvoyant medium.” I argue that these actions from student psychics on *Psychic Experiences* suggest an intention to refine their psychic abilities for the purpose of contributing to the lucrative fortune-telling business. After all, the occupation of a psychic medium is increasing as public interest grows. In their essay, “‘The Spirits Tell Me that You’re Seeking Help’: Fortune-Telling in Late Capitalism,” Stephen L. Muzzatti and Emma M. Smith explain the growth of this industry. They state, “Those who seek the services of fortune-tellers are no unusual in this regard, as more than six in ten adults (65 percent) in the United States

believe in the supernatural or have had experience of engaging with psychic practices” (Muzzatti and Smith 118). Furthermore, in 2016, the IBIS-World’s Psychic Services Market Research Report shows “a 2.4 percent annual increase in revenue in the fortune-telling industry between 2011-2016” (Muzzatti and Smith 116). This year showed fortune-telling as a \$2 billion industry (Muzzatti and Smith 125). Due to this increase in job opportunities and the fact that females make up a large portion of the psychic community, it can be assumed that women are financially benefitting from their psychic abilities and, therefore, gaining more societal power.

Limitations & Importance of Study

Throughout this study, I argue that psychic practitioners-in-training gain religious and societal power while psychic seekers only acquire religious power. My conclusions are not without limitations. While researching about female clients of psychics, I was only able to interview five women. These interviews were conducted through email and this methodology presented its own problems. I originally contacted ten people but only six responded. One male informant was eliminated from this study because I only wanted to focus on female responses. Furthermore, the demographics of my interviewees are narrow. Although my informants range in age from their twenties to fifties, all are white, educated women who were raised in southern Idaho. Only one interviewee no longer lives in Idaho and has moved to Hawai’i. To support my claim that psychic seekers gain religious but not societal power, I would need to find more diverse informants outside of the current demographics, particularly looking for diversity in age, race, and religious affiliations. I would like further fieldwork, both new and follow-up interviews, to be conducted face-to-face. I have found that people are excited to talk about their experiences with psychics in informal discussions. Writing about them, however, may be

intimidating and result unelaborated answers. By conducting my interviews through email interactions, I may have limited the information my informants were willing to reveal.

The psychic practitioner-in-training portion of my research additionally is clouded with limitations. I argue that student psychic practitioners acquire both religious and societal power through their Spiritualist practices. I make this conclusion by analyzing thirty-four online memorates found on the website *Psychic Experiences*. I restricted the narratives for this study by only examining those labeled as premonitions or precognitions from the year 2017. Even though I can post comments and/or questions below the posting, I chose not to interact with the student psychics and use their initial posting for my research. For future research, I would like to read through all the responses to the comments that other participants posted and post my own questions. In this way, I could interact with these informants to ask questions about their experiences that would help determine motives and outcomes. I would also like to conduct face-to-face interviews with experienced, professional psychics to acquire information in a discussion format. By doing this, I could learn more about the levels of student psychics and intentions in terms of societal power. Using both personal interviews and online interactions would be valuable moving forward with this research.

Other questions that need to be explored have to do with socially acceptable discussion topics among men and women. Are psychic seekers talking about receiving psychic messages about family as opposed to societal power messages because it is socially acceptable? It is possible that they receive messages about societal power but choose, either consciously or unconsciously, to avoid them. Psychic messages and gender also need to be explored from a psychic practitioner perspective. Are psychics giving different messages to male and female clients based on socially acceptable topics for each gender? To determine this, research would

need to add the male perspective to clients of psychics while asking gender-related questions to experienced psychics.

Despite the limitations, research about women obtaining societal and religious power through supernatural experiences is significant. It is important to look at religious trends among women and learn the purpose for those tendencies. This demonstrates the function of supernatural activities in women's lives. It is equally important to get an understanding of the societal position of females and learn the ways they cope with those limitations. It is noteworthy to know the methods women are using to acquire more power in society and over their spiritual practices. Identifying the function of supernatural experiences and methods for acquiring power offers females a roadmap to religious autonomy and less societal restrictions.

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APPENDIX A: IRB NOTIFICATION OF EXEMPT CERTIFICATION



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Holly Mathews](#)
CC: [Andrea Kitta](#)
Date: 8/2/2019
Re: [UMCIRB 19-001982](#)
Power in Belief

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 8/2/2019. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category #2B.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: ALLISON'S INTERVIEW

Informant:

Name: Allison

Hometown: Twin Falls, ID

Current town: Kimberly, ID

Age: 26

Gender: Female

Schooling: Business Associates Degree attained at University of Idaho

Ethnic, family, or religious ties: White, Catholic

Occupation: Realtor

Hobbies: Spending time with family/friends, golf, playing with my dog

Relation (if any) to researcher: None, former co-worker with her sister-in-law

Text:

Holly: Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

Allison: I would say I did, although how can you really be sure unless you experience it for yourself. I guess I hoped it was real, but wasn't 100% a believer.

Holly: How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.

Allison: I have only visited a medium one time, but I want to again. My family went to see Theresa Caputo (The Long Island Medium) in Boise at one of her live shows.

Holly: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

Allison: I'm not really sure. I would say most Catholics don't believe in mediums because it kind of contradicts certain beliefs, but Theresa herself is Catholic. In her first book she states that she tends to be able to read Catholics easier for some reason. I think that's maybe why she connected with my family so strongly.

Holly: What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.

Allison: I have watched Theresa's show for a while now, and when I saw she would be in Boise I knew I had to go. I went with my entire family and my boyfriend (now husband). My husband lost his little brother when he was about 10 and not a lot of people know about it, and my dad

had lost both his parents so I was hoping either my husband's brother or my grandma or grandpa would come through.

Holly: Tell me about your reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?

Allison: I feel like to truly describe how amazing it was I have to tell the whole thing, so sit back and relax because it's probably going to be long. Let's start at the beginning. As soon as we purchased tickets to go, I started telling everyone I was going to get read by the Long Island Medium. I mean I told everyone; co-workers, friends, family, etc. and they would all just kind of look at me like I was crazy. The typical response was "Okay Alli, we'll see. You know there will be like 3,000 people there right?" No matter what people responded I knew I was going to get read, I just had a feeling.

So when the day finally came of the show, my family headed up to Boise and were talking about it. My husband and dad seriously had to be dragged to go because they just weren't believers. "It has to be fake" "They probably look up the name of who bought the tickets and research your life." They had every excuse in the book as to why this could be fake. Little did they know their perspectives of believing or not believing were going to change in the most amazing way. (By the way, my mom was who bought the tickets and so if someone really were to look up names and life info they would only know her name, not who was going with her)

So, we arrived at the venue and there were a ton of people. Our seats said something like Row 3. I was so excited we were so close! "I know we are going to get read", I kept saying. Well that ended quickly when the usher came over and told us we were in the wrong seats, we were supposed to be in Row 3 on the BALCONY. I was so pissed. I thought, there is no way she is going to come all the way up here to read people. So my excited, good mood changed to a bad, pissy mood just like that. The show started and Theresa came out. She gave a very long speech about how she reads people, and how she doesn't try to prove she is real, she just tries to deliver messages from loved ones to heal people.

So she began reading people. There was a camera on her, and then a camera on who she was talking to, and a huge screen on the stage so everyone could see her and who she was talking to. She had a microphone, and then would hand who she was reading a microphone as well. So she said "I have a young boy, who passed from heart complications". My husband looked right at me, getting emotional, and said "That's Colin." (his brother) I was like, raise your hand! Yell it's you! And he just kind of brushed it off, because he doesn't believe, remember. Multiple people raised their hands down below and were like "well my son passed from this, and my son passed from that" Theresa responded with "No, no. We'll come back to him, he's for someone else."

So, she was reading people down below, and eventually she was standing under the balcony so we couldn't see her in person anymore, we could just see her on the big screen. Well all of a sudden, the screen went black. We could still hear her talking to whoever she was talking to but couldn't see. I got excited. She's coming up here. I knew it. Right when I had that thought the door swung open to the balcony and there she was with her camera man. Her eyes scanned the

audience, locked eyes with my family, and came immediately over to us. “Who’s the mother figure who passed” was the first thing she said and was looking straight at my dad. My dad was in shock and couldn’t seem to speak. Now normally, my dad is the most outgoing man you’ll ever meet and I had never seen him like this. I was pointing at him and was like “His mom, his mom”. Theresa looked at me and said “Do you have something of your grandpas? With a fingerprint?” I was in shock. After my grandpa passed away my grandma gave all the grandkids gold necklaces that had my grandpas thumbprint on the front and his name on the back. My sister and I had both brought ours to the reading, and were in our pockets. She couldn’t see them. She went back to my dad and he mumbled out yes, it was his mom. She said, “I see her laying in bed, with prescriptions on the nightstand...and she doesn’t want to go, she isn’t ready to die.” “But there is a male spirit sitting on the edge of her bed, telling her its okay, telling her it’s her time. I feel like it’s her soulmate.” My grandma was a nurse her whole life. She was very self medicated, took pills to wake up and pills to go to sleep because she usually worked nights. My grandma passed away in her bed, with prescriptions bottles on the nightstand, from a failed liver. At the beginning of the show, when Theresa was giving her big speech about her readings, she said when she says “soulmate” that doesn’t mean its necessarily a spouse, it can be a mother, brother, best friend, just someone who was substantial to your life. My dad believes the male sitting on the edge of my grandma’s bed was her dad, because she was the closest to him and they had a very special, loving relationship.

So she said a bunch of other stuff that I wish I could remember everything, but she eventually moved on from my dad and looked at my husband (remember, he was my boyfriend at the time). She said, “did you have a little brother who passed away from heart complications?” My

husband nodded, getting emotional because he never talked about his brother (and he didn't believe before) She said, "And do you have a tattoo you got in remembrance of him?" "You also have something in your wallet...that relates to your brother" My husband didn't know what that was. He told her he wasn't sure. She then said, "So I have your mom and dad (looking at my dad) and your brother (looking at my husband). And they are together. But I don't know why...you two aren't related?" She asked looking at both my dad and my husband. She turned and started walking away when she turned back and said to my then boyfriend, "Have you been talking about marriage?" Everyone started laughing because he immediately started blushing and he said "Yeah, yeah we've talked about it" Then she said, "Okay I get it. Your mom and your dad are with his brother, because they know of these future plans and give their blessing."

Like I said before, she said a lot of other things but I remember these the most because they really stood out. My husband got a tattoo a couple years before our reading on his chest that shows his brothers name, and his brother passes away from holes in his heart when he was a baby. The thing in his wallet that we couldn't figure out? A few days after the reading he called me into the room freaking out. He had found a prayer card that his aunt had given him the day of his brothers funeral that he usually kept in his wallet, but had recently cleaned out. And as we were driving home after the show that night he said to me, "I know we have talked about getting married before, but I don't think you understand how weird that was. I was literally talking to my friends last night about marrying you."

The entire car ride back to Twin Falls my family and I just talked about everything Theresa had brought up, and how every single thing she said was true. There is no way someone could guess,

or find out, most of the things she said. It was weird we thought though, how besides her mentioning my grandpa's necklace, he didn't really come through. My grandpa was the most outgoing, friendly man in the world and he surely would've had something to say. When I had a feeling we were going to get read I knew he would come through because I was the closest to him. Come to find out, the exact same time we were at the show, his best friend in the world, who he got coffee with every single morning with no matter what, passed away. We think he was with his best friend instead, and that is pretty amazing.

Holly: How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

Allison: I feel like when I tell the story, some people are iffy still, while the majority can tell by the way I explain everything how amazing it actually was. It kind of seems like a dream because it happened so quickly and was so incredible. It has forever influenced my life because I really feel like it made me closer to God, and it gives me assurance that our loved ones are always with us. I truly believe it now. And I know I probably sound crazy to some people, but it really was a life changing experience that gave me so much comfort in the unknown of our after lives. It gave my husband and dad some closure, and changed their lives as well. They truly are believers, when before the experience they were the complete opposite. It was amazing. And I can't think of any other words to describe it. I wish so badly we had a video of it so I could go over every single thing she said because I can only remember a select few things. I don't know if I would necessarily believe every single person who claims they are a medium or psychic, but I know 100% that the Long Island Medium is the real deal, and I feel so lucky I was a part of one of her

readings. I love telling the story to anyone who's willing to listen because it was the most magnificent experience of my life. One me and my family will never forget.

APPENDIX C: KILEY'S INTERVIEW

Informant:

Name: Kiley

Hometown: Twin Falls, ID

Current town: Twin Falls, ID

Age: 33

Gender: Female

Schooling: Bachelor's degree

Ethnic, family, or religious ties: Catholic

Occupation: Banking/ Loan Officer

Hobbies: playing with my toddler, reading, crafting, gardening/landscaping, interior design

Relation (if any) to researcher: Sister (in law)

Text:

Holly: Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

Kiley: I personally didn't have any reason to believe or disbelieve. I had never been and didn't know what to expect. I had heard of many different friends/family that had great experiences in their readings. The kind that gives you goose bumps. I wanted to go to a well known and highly rated medium.

Holly: How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.

Kiley: I have only had one psychic/medium reading. I saw David Akins at the Reflexions Center located in Nampa Idaho.

Holly: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

Kiley: Being a Christian I think we are preconditioned to not believe in psychics. I have seen many conflicting biblical statements that have been interpreted as condemning psychics and others that endorse them as “gifts from God.” However, the Bible condemns a lot of strange things. So I wasn’t too worried about it.

Holly: What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.

Kiley: I wanted to have the type of experiences that others had. I am adopted know very little about my birth family. I couldn’t think of any specific questions during my reading. I have only been once, but if & when I go again I will have more questions.

Holly: Tell me about your reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?

Kiley: I shared my reading with my sister in law. We had a joint session. She was the one who had told me about this medium and being that we married into the family, we had questions about our spouses. (Who are brothers with a crazy family dynamic and had a rather interesting upbringing.) I don't remember everything about my reading, but there were several parts that I do remember or that really stood out to me and gave me goose bumps.

- 1) David pinpointed my daughter's personality to a T. He recited what her actions and demeanor were and what they would be. That she is/would be caring, energetic, sensitive, and strong willed. At the time of the reading my daughter was around 3 years old. She is now 5.
- 2) He saw my sister-in-law as very motherly with at least 5 to 6 children around her and said she had a nurturing/teaching spirit. She has 3 nieces, a nephew, 1 child and one on the way and is an educator! That part gave me goose bumps.
- 3) He told me I would have another child and that child would be a boy. While this hasn't happened yet. I am not writing it off completely.
- 4) He said my child showed signs of clairvoyance.

I think I will get my tape back out and listen to it.

Holly: How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

Kiley: Not dramatically. I think it has opened my mind to more things I didn't notice or pay attention to before. I definitely would like to go again. Either by myself or with my sister in law. I would love to have a group reading.

APPENDIX D: MICHELLE'S INTERVIEW

Informant:

Name: Michelle

Hometown: Twin Falls, ID

Current town: Boise, ID

Age: 55

Gender: Female

Schooling: BS – University of Idaho

Ethnic, family, or religious ties: Raised Presbyterian

Occupation: Corporate Recruiter

Hobbies: DIY projects, cooking, travel, hiking

Relation (if any) to researcher: In-law (Michelle is my husband's aunt)

Text:

Holly: Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

Michelle: I was very skeptical at first. I was told of a psychic in Nampa and knew that his waiting list was about a year long. My mother was very interested in psychic readings so I purchased one for her birthday. She passed away before her appointment and was told to keep the appointment for myself. I was very nervous. A very good friend coached me through the first appointment – but did not attend with me. I also had a young daughter that seemed to have

an ability to see and feel different things. She wanted to talk about it when she was young. I needed to be able to guide her and not let her know that others did not have the abilities that she had. I often read about the subject privately. I did not want friends to look at Olivia differently when she was small so I didn't talk about it until my mother passed away and Olivia started to have "visits" with her at night.

Holly: How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.

Michelle: I have been maybe 12 times total – with two different people. David is more of a psychic while Lisa is of an intuitive with focus on energy. They have very different styles and ways of reading. I get different feelings with each reading -

Holly: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

Michelle: For me, there is no conflict religiously, ethically or morally with my readings. I believe in a higher power and however one taps into that power – it's personal. I do not publically announce the fact that I do see a psychic or intuitive - for me it's private and I don't care to listen to others opinions on the subject.

Holly: What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.

Michelle: As mentioned above, I didn't intend on seeing a psychic but rather just giving a gift to my mother and helping my daughter with her different abilities to see and feel others. My first appointment was more curious – but literally that appointment made my hair stand on end with the questions and comments that David had for me. That drove me to continue going once a year for a while.

Holly: Tell me about your reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?

Michelle: The very first reading was very memorable. Before I even sat down I was asked...”Who is Bill...both of them?” At the time I was divorcing my husband of 22 years – Bill, and was just beginning to date a man named Bill. Secondly, my mother was “present” at the reading and told David to tell me something very private that my mother had been doing in my home with my daughter Olivia. She told David that she and Olivia visited each other every evening after Olivia went to bed. The crazy thing was, about a week or two before this reading, Olivia and I were lying in bed and she told me that grandma came to visit every night and not to be afraid. No one could have heard that conversation and I had not repeated it to anyone. Thirdly, my mother asked about the “rings” during the reading. Before she died, she left a ring for me and each of her 4 granddaughters. At the time, we were missing one ring and couldn't find it thus, no one had been given their ring. I asked David to ask her where the missing ring was. She said that she would tell someone where to find it. I did not mention this comment to

anyone. On the next trip to Twin Falls, without a word, Myki got out of the car, went into the house without speaking, walked up stairs and found the ring.....she has no idea why she felt the need to do that – she can't even remember thinking about what she was doing.

Holly: How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

Michelle: I'm not sure if influence is the correct word or just a sense of wellbeing. My senses are more heightened at times because of the conversations and I do tend to file away the conversation to think about later. I like to visit with Lisa, the intuitive, on occasion for energy work. Lisa helps to remove negative energy from my life. When I finish a session with her I feel positive and cleansed.

APPENDIX E: MYKLEANNE'S INTERVIEW

Informant:

Name: Mykleanne

Hometown: Boise, ID

Current town: Boise, ID

Age: 27

Gender: Female

Schooling: College Degree

Ethnic, family, or religious ties: N/A

Occupation: Recruiter

Hobbies: Reading, traveling, fitness, movies, reality TV

Relation (if any) to researcher: Husband's cousin

Text:

Holly: Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

Mykleanne: Not really. My mom, sister and grandpa had gone before me and all loved it. I was skeptical about what happen and what would be said. I think I was more scared than anything because I didn't fully understand what was going to happen/how it happens.

Holly: How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.

Mykleanne: I have seen David Atkins 4 or 5 times and Lisa Tenney 2 times.

I love going to David, he is very straight forward with answers to questions or situations. Getting a reading from him is very quick and to the point. When I am looking for a broad overview to questions or situations, I look to David for guidance.

My readings with Lisa are almost opposite to David's. Lisa is both a medium and healer, her office is warm and comfortable. Appointments with Lisa can last for an hour+ and she is able to go into more depth when asked a question.

Both David and Lisa are incredible at what they do and have their own style. Sometimes you need to mix it up when it comes to your readings, get a different perspective on a situation.

Holly: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

Mykleanne: No, some of my family members thought it was strange though.

Holly: What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.

Mykleanne: I had a few family members visit with David before me and honestly, I was a little freaked out about the whole thing. My grandmother had recently died when my mom had her appointment with David and I had mixed emotions because I was still grieving this huge loss in my life. Eventually, I learned more about what takes place in readings and decided – on my own – to make an appointment. I wanted to hear from my grandmother, I wanted to learn more about the person that I was and who I could become.

I have had multiple readings for a varied of reasons. I compare psychic readings to annual doctor appointments – you need them keep balance in your life and to stay healthy. Or at least I do. These appointments are also like a therapy session where a mirror is held up and you can't escape because it's you looking back.

Holly: Tell me about your reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?

Mykleanne: David Atkins

- When my grandma came through for the first time
- When my grandparents come through
- David has spoken about my future family (kids, husband, etc.)

Lisa Tenney

- The thoughts and feelings I have/had about a relationship
- Information about my guides/guardian angels
- My well-being

Holly: How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

Mykleanne: My readings have opened up a whole new world to me. I feel more certain about my thoughts and beliefs when it comes to faith, religion, the afterlife, etc. Without these readings, I wouldn't be where I am today. I feel more whole and more myself now.

Holly: Can you elaborate on your memorable moments during your psychic/medium readings?
(This portion of the interview was conducted through a video sent by the informant.)

Mykleanne: My most memorable reading in general is my first one with David [Akins]. And that was back in July of 2011. So, dang, I had just finished my freshman year of college. It was a big year. I am finally grasping what had happened with my grandma. Obviously, she had been gone for awhile but just opening up to a new type of world. That there is something else out there. I've always kind of known that but being able to talk to David and kind of understand everything was very impactful for me. So we talked about a lot about myself and myself energy and how I am a harmony girl. I am a Libra. So that makes a lot of sense that I need a lot of balance in my life. That I really have a hard time with closed off people. That I am an old soul, which was really beneficial for me to understand, you know, that I have had these past lives and I come from different spaces. That was really interesting. We talked about future notes like my career, which has gone back and forth with David depending on what we're talking about and where I am personally at at that moment.

But some of the bigger impacts, we talked about my grandma a lot and this was the first time I was kind of able to connect with her in this realm. Because, I mean, you can talk to someone who has kind of passed but it is different when you have a medium being that third party. So it was really impactful and I cried a ton during this reading. I literally sat down and started crying because I was nervous and it was going to be so interesting to see kind of what was going to happen and what was going to be said. So, it was interesting. She [Myki's grandma] kind of just talked about how she loves my hair. She has always said when I was really little like, "Don't ever cut your hair. Your hair is so beautiful, don't cut your hair. You've got beautiful long, brown hair and don't do that. That's beautiful." So we talked about that. David had mentioned that "She was touching your hair. Can you feel that?" It totally freaked me out. I almost peed myself. I was so scared. It was weird. I didn't like that. I also had on her wedding ring, which was really interesting. And I'll wear that every once in a while, I'll have that on me. I wore it when I walked across the stage when I graduated high school. I've worn it to different readings with David just to feel a little bit closer with her. And he mentioned it that she really likes it when I wear her ring, which was really just a benefit because I love wearing it. I just feel a lot closer with her when I have it on. So that was a real big thing.

Then he [David Akins] talked a lot about me traveling to Arizona and California, which is interesting especially looking at myself now. If I am looking to move to Arizona. So even that long ago, for him to say something like that to me has impacted me even to this day. That's kind of a big deal. I really remember that and, then actually right after this reading, my friends and I decided to go to California for the following Spring Break, which was kind of crazy and made me put that in my mind. But it definitely happened. That was kind of a big moment.

We talked a lot about my sister and my mom and my dad just to kind of check in to make sure they were doing well. Like make sure the people around me are happy and doing well for me just to understand like what's going on with them if I am not fully engaged. Like with my sister we had some tough years there for a little bit just like sisters do, which I bet you know. But being able to talk it through with David and kind of see it from a different perspective of the type of person my sister is was a big deal. I think, so that was beneficial. Talking about my mom making sure we are all here and happy. I look up to her so much. To be able to make sure she was okay. And my dad is a whole different story so not even a big deal on that.

And then for me, one big deal that has always happening with every reading is a constant, whether it be with David, Lisa, or tarot cards is my future husband or my future person, whoever that may be. I talk a lot about that. I like to know that. As I mentioned, I am a Libra. I love love. I just want to find my person and be with him forever. So we talked a lot about that. It is kind of a constant thing that comes up. Talks about, you know, I have a lot of addiction from both sides of the family. Through readings, I have been able to understand that more. But I won't be with someone who is an addict. I will be with someone who can really control himself in those environments and who don't have those tendencies. Whereas, I have dated people in the past who have that addictive quality, which is not good for me. It is very harmful. I have talked to both David Akins and Lisa Tenney about that stuff. So it makes it a little bit more difficult. But it also helps when searching for somebody like that. That I'm not looking for that in the future, especially since I am still out on the prowl. Kinda just talks, you know, how these people are going to be really there. I am the ring-wearing type of girl, which is very true. I love

commitment; I don't like non-commitment. I don't like to go with the flow. I like to know what we are at this moment and moving forward. So that was interesting. We kind of talked about the kids that I would have. I have been told by David multiple time that I would have a son, which is really impactful because I have never lived or been really around little boys. I have always had a sister, all of my friends have sisters. I guess some of them have older brothers but I didn't really know them. So I am excited for that impact. And I have always felt that I would have a boy. And I know that motherhood is something that will definitely be a part of me. It has always been a part of my life and what I have wanted to do.

One thing that David also mentioned to me in this reading is that Disney should create a Disney character like a princess about my life with how well in touch I am with animals. And then he compared me to Snow White, which I don't know if you know but Grandma Penny loved Snow White. That is her princess. They are like soul sisters. For someone to say that about me without...I guess he kind of could have known, but without truly knowing the impact that would have on my life. That was incredible and it still hits me to this day to know that, oh okay, I am like Snow White. My grandmother and I have that bond together, even when she is not here, which is really helpful to get through some of those tougher times. So that is kind of the base of my first big reading, where it just takes by the shirt and kind of drags you through this. And it is so incredible and so interesting to see what would happen and what would be said, whether it would be "oh yeah, that totally makes sense" or "I don't really know about that. I'm willing to think about it."

My next big reading, I'm just checking through my notes, was March 14, 2013. I took a two year break from David, which I don't really recommend but I think it was kind of helpful because he gives you so much information that you just need to take a break from him and absorb the information. So we talked a lot about myself. I'm an old school person. I need to meditate more, which I have been implementing more into my life within the last year. It has taken me about three years to figure that out. Meditation is hard for me. But that has been a really big key player to me. I'm just looking through some of this stuff that really caught my eye. Once again my love and my future came up because that is so important to me and it's who I am as a person. We talked about my husband once more. David said I shouldn't be going on dates at that time because he's not going to have a difference, which is really interesting because around this time I met my ex-boyfriend. So this is interesting because some of the stuff that David told me about I should have listened to a little bit more. Not that I didn't learn or have fun in that last relationship but it definitely took a toll looking back and remembering the conversation I had with David. That relationship was everything that I wasn't needing in my life at that time. So it was and it wasn't, which is always really interesting.

We talked a lot about my grandma. She is with me all the time, I was told. She kind of traveled between my sister and I but she is with me a lot. And now, I've been told, that since my grandpa has passed, my grandma is with me more than my grandpa and my grandpa is with my sister. Because they kind of had a closer bond. So that is really important. Just the constant communication between my grandparents and I is so important to me because they are such a large part of my life. I was talking to my mom the other day and my grandmother was only with my for sixteen years of my life, which is crazy to think that here shortly she will have only been

with my for half my life and after that it will be less than half my life was spent with her. But she has made such a big impact that every day I talk to her. And every day I talk to my grandpa just to make sure they are watching over me. Whenever I walk into a medium, I always talk to them first. I say, "Okay guys, lets do this. Time to roll. Give me something good. Keep me up to date. Let me know what's going on. I want to check in on you guys." So that has been a really big part and, as the years have gone by, it has been more interesting. But we talked about how she [grandma] would be walking across the stage with me when I graduated from college, which was a really big impact. Mackenzie [cousin] and I graduated at the same time. So she was there with us. Kind of in that sense. A lot of this reading was important but it didn't really take me by surprise with a lot of things. The husband thing always does because it just hits me kind of hard.

Actually at this time with my education, David had thrown out the fact that I will continue my education. At that time, I was like, "Get me out of college. I don't want to be here anymore. I am done." But looking back now I am definitely going to get my master's at some point. I am definitely going to continue my education in some way, shape, or form. And that was kind of a big one. Because in college, you know, I was like, "I don't want to go back. I'm done! I'm done! I've over this!" But I am definitely looking forward to doing more with that.

We also talked about my guardian angels because I asked questions. I have three guardian angels at this time that I was kind of told about. One is a male and we didn't know a whole lot. One is a girl that was in her late 20s early 30s. Her name is Sara, and I don't know a whole lot about Sara. I haven't been able to kind of connect with her. And then I have another man. And I actually

learned more about this with Lisa that I could talk about in a minute. And obviously my grandma. She is always there with me.

And then I didn't go to David for a while. I saw David last February, so February of 2016, and I kind of got my ass kicked in the department of love because I had just gone through that big break up. And he [David] said that was never going to work. Your grandparents didn't agree – I heard some stories. So I went back to my mom and said, "What the hell! You didn't tell me this!" So that was kind of a big one.

Then last July 1st of last year, I went and saw Lisa for the first time. I would describe Lisa as more of a therapist medium than what David is, which is more of a medium. He kind of tells you straight. She really opened me up and it was hard because I was still struggling with the break up and going through the motions of life. You know, you are always wondering like, "When I going to find that person. What is going on? What did I do wrong? Is there any closure that I can find within myself?" She really hit the nail on the head and said, "It is like an old movie film that just keeps on going forward and backward and forward and backward. Just constantly on repeat." And that is so true, in my opinion, in how I kind of see the relationship. I just try and break things down so much that it is not healthy. So she was really an eye opener and said, "You just need to take your time. It's not a big deal."

She [Lisa] goes through...and David does too a little bit more now...she checks you out. She goes through the five major things like relationships like family/friends, relationships as in romantic, finance, career, education, self inside/outside, that kind of stuff. So she was really able

to kind of re-focus me on a few things. She really got into meditation and, after her, I went into a meditation class and kind of learned more about chakras and how to clean yourself on the inside and kind of get rid of stuff. But we talked a lot about moving forward and how I am going into a new chapter.

And then I went and saw her [Lisa] on my birthday last year so September 23, 2016. And I really felt a big difference on that day. I felt I was moving forward. I had closed the door from the past and I re-opened a door to the future. And she really verified that for me. And we kind of talked through some things about of my life and what this coming year was going to bring. I was definitely going to struggle in some aspects but not large struggles like I did the end of 2015 through 2016. I wasn't going to struggle as much and that was big.

We talked a little bit more about my guides and guardians. I was told about my past life that I was a medicine man or woman. She also told me that I've been a male in past lives, which I thought was interesting because I really gravitate towards that stuff sometimes. Sometimes boy clothes is better than girl clothes. So that was really really really interesting to hear that. So we talked about the shaman that is with me at all times.

We talked more about my grandparents, which always makes me cry. I just want to die when she brings them up. I'm going to be okay in the end, which always makes me worry. I am so wrapped up in the future. She has really just shown me that it is all going to be okay and that I'm going to be okay. And that this year I am really going to grow within and continue to grow and not worry about finding people and clicking. I have also talked to people about friendship

relationships and how I have struggled with girl relationships. I have always been better on boys and dealing with them because they aren't as difficult to talk to. We talked about that and how some of my friends I have had for lifetimes. So that was kind of interesting to talk to Lisa about.

We talked about the apartment that I am currently in, and the colors and schemes I am kind of doing with this. And how important that is in my life and that my grandmother was here to kind of guide me to the apartment that I am in and pick the colors that I'm doing. So that was a big one as well.

I guess that the biggest moments have been being able to communicate with my grandparents for the first time. Having my grandpa be there because he is such a strong, silent type. I mean, he tells you like it is but he is definitely the strong, silent type, in my opinion. And to kind of find out that they are still proud of me and they're still here with my every day. They are always going to be with me regardless of what I have going on in my life.

That's another thing they kind of taught me to journal. It is important to get those emotions out because it is transferring all those energies to pen and paper. Because of a lot of these readings, I should mention, I have gotten into Tarot cards so every New Years Eve for the last three or four years, my mom and I go and get our Tarot cards read. And Livi [sister] has joined us and one of my mom's really good friends have joined us to do that. So I get those read for the year. This past January, I went and bought two decks of Tarot so I have been practicing Woe Tarot readings and kind of learning the art of Tarot. I am not really that good right now. I am really working on it. So I have been doing that for my friends and myself and my family. Whoever is kind of

interested. I don't like to force it on them. But I really like Tarot. I think it is really interesting. It is something to walk through day to day life. So if you have questions about certain things you can go to the Tarot and read that stuff. But without doing the meditations and readings I would have never been interested in this. I think I would still be a little scared of what is out there in the world that I can't see or feel but definitely seeing is believing in this art, which is something we've all kind of learned. At least with my mom and my sister. That has been really fun and kind of understanding that.

My life has changed because of the things I have heard and the people I have talked to in the sense that I would be still be wondering and wasting energy on this. Whereas now I understand to a certain extent what's going on and what will be foreseen in the future if I chose to go down those paths. And I am thankful for that. I am thankful for the readings and the opportunities to meet with these good carnival people and learn more about their craft and experiences along with mine.

APPENDIX F: ROSANNA'S INTERVIEW

Informant:

Name: Rosanna

Hometown: Twin Falls, Idaho

Current town: Holualoa, HI

Age: 39

Gender: Female

Schooling: Associates in Liberal Arts

Ethnic, family, or religious ties: Grew up Catholic. No affiliation with religion currently.

Occupation: Homeschooling Mother

Hobbies: gardening, photography

Relation (if any) to researcher: Friend

Text:

Holly: Did you have a belief in the power of psychics/mediums before going to your first reading?

Rosanna: I had always been curious of psychics/mediums, however, when I also held a very skeptical view surrounding the information.

Holly: How many times have you visited a psychic/medium, and were those readings from the same person? If they were from different people, please explain why.

Rosanna: I have been to a psychic/medium once. Some of the information that was provided did seem valid and was information that could not be obtained from other sources. My grandfather came through and answered some questions that I had never verbalized.

I have also had a session with a Channeler. The information that came through this meeting was much more work-related due to the fact that I was working for the Channeler, and the entity that came through her had asked for me to have a session. By the time I had this encounter, I was already questioning my role and position in this job. The information that came through seemed to be much more threatening. I was told that I needed to make a commitment to this work and a failure to commit would have consequences. I didn't buy it.

Holly: Does psychic/medium readings conflict with or compliment your ethnic, family, or religious ties?

Rosanna: If I had remained Catholic, then yes, it would have conflict with doctrine. It does not conflict with my personal belief and with family members that would have a problem with it. It is simply a matter of being discreet.

While I believe that many psychic/mediums have the potential of tapping into the spiritual side, I also believe that the person getting the reading needs to be very skeptical and careful with the information they provide during the meeting. People can be easily manipulated and taken advantage of with this route of information.

I do feel that we are not alone in this world and that love surrounds all of us.

Holly: What was your purpose for having a reading with a psychic/medium? If you went multiple times, please explain your reason for returning.

Rosanna: I went to David Atkins because my mother really wanted a session and didn't want to go alone. I don't know if I would have gone on my own. I feel that information that comes from a medium could also be obtained through personal meditation and tapping into that source for yourself. I think that the information that mediums have to be filtered through their perception and can be interpreted wrong.

Holly: Tell me about your reading(s). What were some of the most memorable parts?

Rosanna: It has been about 10 years since my session with the Channeler. This session felt very "off" to me. It seemed much more of a manipulation than a personal reading. I did not take any of it to heart and actually quit the job with the Channeler shortly after. Most of the reading was about me "committing" myself to a certain project the Channeler had going. It felt very forced.

The session with Dave Atkins felt much more authentic. It has been about 10 years since this session. I remember talking about my grandfather who had passed a year before. Dave said many things that were authentic to my Grandpa. It was also mentioned that I would have another child (Jude was 2) and that this child would be a girl. That was not the case at all. My mom and

I went into our session together. I tried to sit back and let her get more information as I felt that is what she needed.

Holly: How has your psychic/medium readings influenced your life?

Rosanna: They really haven't. I find them more useful as a reinforcement of my own inner thoughts and feelings and what might come through in my own meditations. I see that they would be useful for those that aren't quite as connected to self. I do read books by Dolores Cannon, Doreen Virtue and various readings from Edgar Cayce. I read them to enrich my own self-awareness. I don't put them on a "guru" type pedestal.

Holly: When you said, "Dave said many things that were authentic to my grandpa," what exactly do you mean? Could you elaborate on that idea?

Rosanna: Here is the long story. When my parents divorced, my paternal grandparents treated my Mom like she was at fault for the whole situation. My grandfather had always had a good relationship with my mom and vice versa. So it really hurt my Mom when my Grandpa stopped talking to her.

When we did the session with Dave Atkins, he said that my grandpa...I don't think he actually said my grandpa. He said more like "an older male figure" or something like that... Anyway, he said that Grandpa wanted to let my Mom know how much he thought of her and that he had been

sorry how things had gone unresolved with them. This really was a huge sign to me that this session was authentic.

