

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Response to “Mediumship Not a Near-Death Experience Aftereffect”

To the Editor:

Although P. M. H. Atwater originally directed her Letter, “Mediumship Not a Near-Death Experience Aftereffect,” to me (Foster) as first author of the article on which she was commenting (Foster, Kahoe, & Nardelli, 2018), I have written this response in collaboration with the co-author of the original article on the topic of spontaneous mediumship following near-death experiences (NDEs)—Jan Holden (Holden, Foster, & Kinsey, 2014), with input from the near-death experiencer (NDER) who first inspired Holden and me to research this phenomenon. In this response we also will reference a third article published so far on this topic (Foster, Lee, & Duvall, 2015).

Both Atwater’s investigations and our research appear to have led us to agree on two fundamental points. One point is that it is rather common following an NDE for an experiencer to begin to perceive disembodied—physically deceased—people and animals, as well as other spiritual entities, and that NDErs sometimes perceive the disembodied to be asking them to convey messages to other living persons, usually the relatives or friends of the disembodied. A second point is that this type of experience can sometimes be challenging—even debilitating—for the experiencer.

What we seem to disagree about is the definition of mediumship. Quite literally, the term *medium* refers to a medium of communication—in this case, a living person who serves as a medium of communication between the disembodied and the living. We believe the confusion results from the matter of differentiating between traditional, *intentional* mediumship and what we have termed *spontaneous* mediumship (Holden et al., 2014). Most often in intentional mediumship a professional medium—someone purportedly skilled at contacting the disembodied and conveying messages from them to living people—is approached by a sitter—a living person seeking to communicate with a disembodied person—asking the medium to provide the sitter with a mediumship reading in which the medium purportedly contacts the disembodied and conveys information from the disembodied to the sitter. By contrast, as we indicated in our original study (Holden et al.,

2014), in spontaneous mediumship a person not seeking to serve as a medium—in this case, an NDEr—perceives oneself to be approached uninvited by a disembodied person (or animal) and asked to convey a message to another living person. In other words, the NDEr perceives that the disembodied person is requesting the unexpected and unseeking NDEr to act as a medium of communication with a still-living person—that is, to serve as a medium. This is what we have termed spontaneous mediumship: The NDEr perceives oneself to have been unwillingly placed in the role of medium by the disembodied—regardless of whether or not the NDEr decides to convey the message. Atwater appears to believe that the term *mediumship* applies only to traditional, intentional mediums and does not apply to what we have termed spontaneous cases. If, after reading this reiteration of our rationale, she still believes this, we will just have to agree to disagree.

But more important than the heuristic matter of terminology is the value of the term *spontaneous mediumship* for NDErs. In preparing this response, we sent Atwater's letter to the NDEr who first inspired Holden and Foster to research this phenomenon. To review, this NDEr consulted with Holden because, beginning immediately after her NDE and continuing for more than a year, she was plagued with uninvited visits from disembodied people—some of whom she knew and some she didn't—wanting her to convey messages to still living people—some of whom she knew and some she didn't. She was at the time debilitated by these experiences that resulted, among other things, in interrupted/deprived sleep and moral dilemmas about how to respond to the requests. Since that time, she not only has developed skills to manage these experiences but also has become a resource to others struggling with this NDE aftereffect. She said,

As I look over this letter from PMH, my first thought is that this could potentially be dangerous and psychologically harmful for experiencers who are having this aftereffect. When I was in the earliest stages of integrating all of my aftereffects, especially this particular aftereffect, I would have spiraled out if you had told me that this was not mediumship or not an aftereffect. Now I'm able to brush it off and look at it more rationally and objectively, if I had read this 6 years ago, it would not have been productive for my integration process, it likely would have set me back. My thoughts are, if mediumship isn't an aftereffect of NDEs, then what is this? I had nothing like this going on prior to my NDE. . . .

As I think about it, I wonder if the main disagreement or misunderstanding is in the definition of mediumship. All of the things that

she mentioned in her letter I would consider mediumship, not just the bottom paragraph that she acknowledges as mediumship. . . .

I just know that there are a lot of people who have been suffering because of these types of events that take place after their NDEs. When people talk to me about it, I come from the position of compassion and wanting to understand, I just assume that they are telling me the truth. Whether they are or not, there seems to be great healing in just believing them and hearing them out. I just really think we need to cautiously treat this as we would treat any aftereffect, almost with kid gloves, because we are dealing with people who are really having a hard time with this.

Since her NDE less than 10 years ago, this experiencer estimates that she now has over 300 paying client sessions each year, of which approximately one-third are seeking coaching related to development of spiritual gifts and management of spontaneous mediumship as an NDE aftereffect. In addition, she estimates over 100 additional emailers each year asking general questions and/or seeking guidance regarding spontaneous mediumship as an aftereffect. She herself noted that in one encounter with Canadian psychiatrist Yvonne Kason, she found Kason “so supportive and helpful in the area of mediumship.” Part of what was helpful was Kason’s affirmation that what this NDEr was experiencing was mediumship—though spontaneous rather than intentional.

It may be of interest to readers that in this NDEr’s own psychospiritual evolution, she reported:

I think it’s also important to note that this aftereffect appears to evolve with development over time. While I used to communicate more with disembodied souls as a medium, I now seem to be communicating more with the higher self or the Angelic realm, more lightbeings and higher vibrational realms. This might be because I’ve evolved, or it might be because of my resistance to mediumship. I find that communicating with disembodied souls still very much involves their personalities and sometimes egos which doesn’t feel like pure information to me. When people are seeking healing or to better their lives, my preference is higher vibrational beings. When people are seeking to heal unresolved issues with their relationships [with] souls who used to be in the physical world, then I find that type of [mediumship] communication to be relevant. Others who have experienced mediumship as an aftereffect also seem to move away from it, in a sense, after time.

Atwater seems to have based her disagreement with our terminology on what she perceives to be her own superior investigative methods. She referred to her in-depth interviews and how online surveys

are an inadequate means of research. We're not sure how to respond except to say that we were careful to structure our original survey (Holden et al., 2014) with open-ended rather than leading questions; that the second article on the topic of spontaneous mediumship (Foster et al., 2015) was based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two NDErs who clearly reported the existence, challenges, and rewards of spontaneous mediumship; and that the third article (Foster et al., 2018) was an analysis of 41 NDErs' own words in response to open-ended, rather than leading, questions from our 2014 survey. Whereas all three of our publications have passed peer review—close evaluation by experts in the field of near-death studies, Atwater's refutation of the term has not.

We believe NDErs have spoken for themselves in confirming the existence of, and integration process surrounding, spontaneous mediumship. But most important, our inspirational NDEr affirmed both the helpfulness of giving a name to the phenomenon she was experiencing and struggling with and the danger of negating the use of a term that contextualized her experience and fostered her integration process. Thus, in defense of the term spontaneous mediumship are both technical accuracy and clinical value.

References

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Ryan D. Foster, PhD, LPC-S, NCC, CHST
Tarleton State University-Fort Worth
RDFOSTER@tarleton.edu

Janice Miner Holden, EdD, LPC-S, NCC, ACMHP
University of North Texas
jan.holden@unt.edu