

ABSTRACT

Objectives: To study for similarities and differences between spiritistic mediums and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) patients based on a structured interview.

Methods: Twenty four mediums, selected among different spiritist organizations in Sao Paulo, Brazil were interviewed by using the Dissociative Disorder Interview Schedule, and the results were compared with DID symptoms described in the literature.

Results: The spiritist mediums are similar to the DID patients with respect to female prevalence (76.5%), high frequency of Schneiderian First-Rank Symptoms of Schizophrenia (average of 4 per medium) and reports of extrasensory experiences. Meanwhile, the mediums deviate in other characteristics: better social adjustment, low prevalence of mental disorder, lower use of mental health services, no use of antipsychotics, lower prevalence of histories of both physical (8.3%) and sexual (21.7%) childhood abuse, sleepwalking (20.8%), imaginary childhood playmates (25%), secondary features of DID (average of 2.2) and symptoms of borderline personality disorder (average of 1.2).

Conclusion: The mediumistic experiences analyzed seem to not be comparable to DID since the former are associated with better mental health, social adjustment and differ in almost all DID clinical characteristics.

1) Introduction

The study of trance and dissociative phenomena has been seminal to psychiatry and psychology.

Mediumship: an individual (called medium) is considered to be in communication with or controlled by the personality of someone deceased or a non material being.

Mediumistic experiences have occurred along the History and are widespread all over the world.

Despite both mediums and DID patients share experiences of outer personality manifestation, the relationship between both experiences remains controversial.

2) Sample

Population: 115 actively practising mediums randomly selected from Kardecist Spiritist centers in São Paulo, Brazil.

Sample: All medium subjects (n = 12) identified by the SRQ (Self-Report Psychiatric Screening Questionnaire) as probably having psychopathology and a control group (12 healthy mediums).

Total sample: 24 mediums
Average age: 48.5 ± 11.7 years (range 27-72),
79.2% female
45.9% with graduate level studies
Have been spiritist for 18.8 ± 15.7 years (5-72).

3) Conclusions

- Actively practising spiritist mediums showed
 - evidence of good mental health and social adjustment
 - low childhood abuse
 - high prevalence of Schneiderian symptoms that were unrelated to markers of psychopathology
 - mediums did not share most of the history and clinical features of DID patients

- Despite mediumship and DID share the experience of another personality, these phenomena seem to be two distinct categories of experiences. Mediumship probably is not just another cultural manifestation of DID

- Present findings need to be replicated by studies with larger samples and from different populations.

Differences between spiritist mediumship and dissociative identity disorder on structured interview

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Table 1- History and Clinical Features

	Mediums	DID patients ¹
Childhood abuse		
Physical	2 (8.3%)	82%
Sexual	5 (21.7%)	90%
Sleepwalking	5 (20.8%)	56%
Imaginary playmates	6 (25%)	48%
Borderline PD symptoms	1.2 ± 2	5.2 ± 2
Schneiderian symptoms	4 ± 2.35	6.4 ± 2.8
Previous use of antipsychotics	0	56.00%

Table 2 - Schneiderian First Rank Symptoms (FRS)

	Mediums
Prevalence of Schneiderian First Rank Symptoms	
Average number of symptoms per medium ± SD	4 ± 2.35
thought insertions	87%
feeling insertions	78.3%
outside influences affecting the body	78.3%
actions controlled by external power	69.6%
hearing voices arguing in your head	26.1%
voices commenting on your actions	26.1%
having thoughts which seem to be someone else's	21.7%
hearing thoughts out loud	13%
other people hearing your thoughts	4.3%
thoughts taken out from the mind	0
Correlations between FRS with	r (p value)
Social adjustment (SAS-SR)	-0.2 (0.38)
Common psychiatric symptoms (SRQ)	0.16 (0.45)
Physical abuse	0.12 (0.58)
Sexual abuse	0.04 (0.84)

Table 3 - Secondary Features of DID

	Mediums	DID patients ¹
Average of secondary features	2.2 ± 1.8	10.2 ± 3.5
Voices talking inside head	13 (54%)	87%
Handwriting changes	7 (29%)	27%
Amnesia for childhood	7 (29%)	82%
Voices coming from inside	6 (25%)	82%
Feelings of unreality	5 (21%)	57%
Referring to self as "we" or "us"	5 (21%)	73%
Another person existing inside	4 (16%)	90%
Flashbacks	2 (8%)	67%
Being told by others of unremembered events	2 (8%)	63%
Another person taking control	1 (4%)	81%
Strangers know the subject	0	44%
Noticing that objects are missing	0	42%
Blanks spells	0	68%
Coming out of a blank spell in a strange place	0	36%
Objects are present that cannot be accounted for	0	31%
Person inside has a different name	0	71%

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