

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored several dimensions of the process of becoming a medium in Puerto Rico based on the life-stories of 16 mediums. In an attempt to provide a more complete picture of this process, I have chosen a global orientation rather than emphasizing any one specific dimension. A limitation of this approach is that one does not have the opportunity to discuss each dimension in detail. However due to our limited knowledge about the development of spiritist mediums, it was necessary to offer a global picture in order to concentrate on specific dimensions in future research.

In my view this research has contributed to the study of **Espiritismo** in several ways. By examining the education of mediums, this study has increased our understanding of a traditional model of healer education. The education of mediums is guided by the principle of **desarrollo**, a process of transformation which involves the medium in constant examination of his/her practice and life. When some of the mediums said they are always in **desarrollo**, they were referring to the idea that transformation was a continuous developmental challenge in their careers.

Education as **desarrollo** involves an initial period

called the "opening of the brain" in which the medium begins to have contact with the spirit world. For some mediums the opening of the brain was a distressful experience to the point that they experienced an emotional crisis called an **obsesión**. Other mediums were able to overcome the initial period without suffering any **obsesión**. The opening of the brain represents an experience of transformation which prepares the mediums for the **desarrollo de facultades**. The focus of **desarrollo de facultades** is on expanding the healer's ordinary consciousness so that he/she can develop abilities that reside in other states of consciousness. By learning to control and regulate different states of consciousness, a medium is able to develop the capacity to communicate with a spiritual dimension in order to help the community.

Through a comparison with the model of education as transformation, I described the major principles that characterize education as **desarrollo**. Education as transformation and education as **desarrollo** emphasize experiences of transformation, the role of the spiritual dimension in the life of the healer, service orientation of the healing work, inner development not manifested by changes in external status, development of the healer's character, and the role of the healer as a moral explorer.

Another contribution of this thesis is that it offers evidence for the validity of the model of "education as transformation" as a generic traditional model of education. Katz's model contains principles that are relevant to the education and development of spiritist mediums. The relevance of education as transformation for the training of professional helpers has been examined by Katz (1981, 1982b, in press-a), Simonis (1985) and Cheever (1984). They have argued that education as transformation may contribute to the improvement of the training and education of Western mental health professionals. Any kind of model of healer education needs to stress principles such as service orientation, development of character and experiences of transformation.

The education of Puerto Rican helpers has been criticized because it does not take in consideration the cultural reality of the Puerto Rican society (Rivera, 1984). The education of professional helpers in Puerto Rico is guided by Anglo educational models that do not respond to the specific needs of the Puerto Ricans (Albizu-Miranda, 1966). By being an example of education as transformation, the education of the spiritist medium may have implications for the education of professional helpers from Puerto Rico. If the model by which mediums are educated is responsible for their effectiveness, then the training of Puerto Rican

helpers will be improved by adopting principles of education as **desarrollo**.

An important lesson from this study is that in order to do research on **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico, one has to specify the type of spiritist movement that one has investigated and the type of medium who has participated in the study. This kind of data is essential for evaluating the results of a study.

Although the presence of different spiritist movements has been recognized in the literature, it was never the focus of any study (Koss, 1977a; Seda-Bonilla, 1969b; Steward et al., 1956). My data suggests that instead of studying Puerto Rican **Espiritismo** as if it were a homogenous and uniform healing system, researchers have to focus on the varieties of spiritist movements and spiritist mediums.

Another contribution of this research is that its findings indicate the need to reconsider the idea that all or the majority of spiritist mediums experience an emotional crisis when they are in **desarrollo de facultades**. Several mediums in this study did not report having suffered any severe crisis while becoming a medium. For these participants becoming a medium seems to have been a natural process which was not undertaken because of a need to resolve an emotional problem. To say that "spirit mediumship

development is a process in which the **ataque** (the Puerto Rican Syndrome), as an involuntary regression...becomes restrained to serve as regression in the service of the ego" (Garrison, 1977a, p. 440) may apply to some mediums but not to a good number of them according to the findings of this study.

This study also suggests that the development of spiritist mediums cannot be separated from the socioeconomic context in which the mediums are moving. It was explained that socioeconomic changes may be affecting the development of new values and ideologies about the spiritist practice. The practice of Indigenous **Espiritismo** and Kardecian **Espiritismo** may be understood as promoting values linked to different social classes. While Indigenous **Espiritismo** is consonant with the values of the lower-class Puerto Rican, Kardecian **Espiritismo** has a middle-class ideology. The relationship between the spiritist movement and social class seems to be a dynamic one; both influencing and modifying each other. Commenting on the relation between healing systems and social class, Mullings (1984) wrote:

...Therapies are aligned to specific class interests and ideologies. This is not to say that therapies are limited to this or that class or stratum but that they express and perpetuate the interests of a given class or group. In fact, it is the extension of ideologies to people beyond the class whose

interests they express that may allow for control and manipulation of the social order. By mediating ideology - promoting certain elements and de-emphasizing others - therapists and therapists reinforce a given social order (p. 198).

### Suggestions for Future Research

Several research questions have emerged from the data in this study. First, future research on spiritist mediums should focus on the experience of **obsesión** in order to achieve a deeper understanding of this emic category. Mediums who have suffered an **obsesión** can be compared to those who have not suffered one in order to identify possible differences in personality and degree of adjustment. Second, the administration of personality tests such as the Rorschach and the Thematic Apperception Test to the mediums may reveal important dimensions of their psychological dynamic. Data from these tests should be interpreted in a culturally sensitive way.

Third, the relation between creativity and mediumship development needs to be explored in a systematic way. This study suggests that in several cases the process of becoming a medium fosters the development of creativity. A careful examination of this theme may help us to increase our

understanding of the factors that stimulate creativity.

Fourth, several of the participants in this study began their development as mediums when they were children. A future study should examine the influence of spiritist beliefs on children's cognitive and emotional development. A longitudinal study with a sample of children who have been socialized as **Espiritistas** will have deep implications for the disciplines of psychology and education.

Fifth, the life of those mental health professionals who are also spiritist mediums is another possible area for future research. By studying these kinds of healers we may be able to understand the issues confronted by healers who are moving between two different healing systems. It will be important to know if they integrate both healing systems in their practices or keep them separated.

Finally, considering that this is only a first step in the understanding of the medium's life, it is essential to do more research in this area using a life-history approach. From this kind of research, more may be learned about the nature of healing and the influence of cultural elements in this process. By giving mediums the opportunity to speak for and about themselves, one may also be contributing to their empowerment.

## Appendix A

Interview Schedule  
(English Version)

1. Can you tell me the story of how you became a medium?
  - a. When did you begin to have communication with the spirit world? What was your reaction to these first experiences? What was the reaction of your family?
  - b. Describe the first experiences in your development as a medium.
  - c. Describe your childhood and adolescence in relation to your involvement with **Espiritismo**. What were the most significant experiences in these two periods?
2. How did you develop **facultades**?
  - a. What were the things that you had to learn in order to become a medium?
  - b. What kind of **facultades** did you develop? What does it mean to develop **facultades**?
  - c. Did you have any kind of problems while you were developing **facultades**? Did you experience an **obsesión**? How were you able to overcome these problems?



- d. Did you go to a spiritist center to develop your **facultades**? Were there significant persons who helped you in this process? How did they help you?
3. Have you confronted any obstacle or limitation in your development as a medium? Have you had doubts about becoming a medium?
  4. Describe some of the most significant moments in your development as a medium.
  5. Have you ever needed the help of other mediums? Describe these experiences.
  6. Have you identified your spirit guides? How did you know who your guides were? What kind of relationship do you have with your guides? Could you describe them to me?
  7. Are you a conscious or unconscious medium? What do you consider the best way to work with the spirits? Why?
  8. What kind of medium are you: a medium-in-development, a partially-developed medium or a fully-developed medium?
  9. Describe if there have been any significant changes in your practice as a medium. Have you made changes in the way in which you help others?
  10. What is the role of **pasar** the spirits in the process of developing **facultades**? Have you ever been able to **pasar** a spirit? Could you describe the first time? A recent time?

11. Describe your relationship to the community. How do people react when they discover that you are a medium? What do you think should be the role of the spiritist medium in the Puerto Rican community? Was your contact with the community affected after you became a healer? If yes, how was it affected?
12. Has your relationship with your family been affected by your development as a medium? How does your spouse see your work as a medium? How do your children see your work as a medium?
13. How has your marriage been influenced by your work as a medium?
14. What have been the major satisfactions and dissatisfactions with your work as a medium?
15. Can you describe an example of a successful case in which you were the main helper? Can you describe an example of a case in which you were not successful? Why were you not able to help the person? What do you do when you recognize that it is not possible to help a client?
16. Could you describe your participation in a typical spiritist meeting? Could you describe your participation in a recent spiritist meeting?
17. Describe the things that you usually do in a normal day.

18. If you have the opportunity to write a book about your life as a medium, what are the things that you will give more emphasis to?
19. How has the process of becoming a medium influenced your way of being?
20. Is there any danger in working as a medium? Explain.
21. Do you charge for your services as a medium? Do you accept donations from your clients? Why?
22. What are **pruebas**? What is the role of **pruebas** in your development as a medium? Can one become a medium without having **pruebas**? Do you consider yourself a medium of **pruebas**?
23. What are the causes of people's problems? How do you determine the kind of problem that is affecting a person? Do you use any special way or method in order to help others?
24. Do you use ritual objects such a **agua de florida**, candles and incense in your work as a medium? What are the functions of these ritual objects in the healing process? Could you help a person without using ritual objects?
25. How do you work a **causa**? Could a medium work his/her own **causa**? Could an ignorant spirit be educated without giving a manifestation through a medium? Is a client

- responsible for what is happening to him/her?
26. What are the characteristics a good and effective medium should have?
  27. What are the most important elements in your education as a medium? What do you consider the least important elements?
  28. If I want to become a medium, what should I do?
  29. Are you in charge of the education of other mediums? How do you educate them?
  30. What are the characteristics the **Presidente** of a center should have?
  31. What are the elements that should be emphasized in the education of the medium?
  32. What is the role that the reading of spiritist books has in the education of the medium?
  33. What do you think are the most important conditions for healing to occur?
  34. Is everybody born with **facultades**? Why? Could the **facultad** be used to harm others? Is a medium borned or made?
  35. Why do some mediums suffer an **obsesión** when they are developing **facultades**? Does a medium have to suffer an **obsesión** in order to develop **facultades**?
  36. Is **Espiritismo** a religion or a science? What is your

- attitude toward other religions? What is your religion?
37. What are the areas of the development of mediums that you think should be explored by me?
38. How did you feel during the interview? What are the questions that were not clear to you? Did any of these questions make you feel uncomfortable?

## Appendix A

### Interview Schedule (Spanish Version)

1. ¿Podría decirme la historia de cómo usted se convirtió en médium?
- a. ¿Cuándo comenzó usted a tener comunicación con el mundo espiritual?
- b. Describa sus primeras experiencias en su desarrollo como médium.
- c. Describa su niñez y adolescencia en relación a su involucramiento con el Espiritismo.
2. ¿Cómo usted desarrolló facultades?
- a. ¿Qué cosas tuvo que aprender para llegar a ser un médium?

- b. ¿Qué clases de facultades desarrolló? ¿Qué significa desarrollar facultades?
  - c. ¿Tuvo usted alguna clase de problemas mientras desarrollaba facultades? ¿Sufrió usted una obsesión? ¿Cómo usted sobrepasó esos problemas?
  - d. ¿Asistió usted a un centro espiritista para desarrollar sus facultades? ¿Habían allí personas significativas quienes le ayudaron en ese proceso? ¿Cómo le ayudaron?
3. ¿Ha confrontado algún obstáculo o limitación en su desarrollo como médium? ¿Ha tenido alguna duda acerca de su trabajo como médium?
4. Describa algunos de los momentos más significativos en su desarrollo como médium.
5. ¿Ha necesitado en algún momento la ayuda de otros médiums? Describa esas experiencias.
6. ¿Ha identificado sus guías espirituales? ¿Cómo supo usted quiénes eran sus guías? ¿Qué clase de relación usted tiene con sus guías?
7. ¿Es usted un médium consciente o inconsciente? ¿Cuál usted considera es la mejor manera de trabajar con los espíritus? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Qué clase de médium es usted: un médium en desarrollo, un médium parcialmente desarrollado, o un

médium completamente desarrollado?

9. Describa si han habido cambios significativos en su práctica como médium. ¿A hecho usted cambios en la manera en que ayuda a otros?
10. ¿Cuál es el rol de pasar los espíritus en el proceso de desarrollar facultades? ¿Ha podido usted alguna vez pasar un espíritu? ¿Puede describir la primera vez? ¿Una ocasión reciente?
11. Describa su relación con la comunidad. ¿Como la gente reacciona cuando descubre que usted es un(a) médium? ¿Cuál usted cree debe ser el rol del médium en la comunidad puertorriqueña? ¿Fue su contacto con la comunidad afectado luego de convertirse en médium? Si la respuesta es sí, ¿cómo fue afectado?
12. ¿Ha sido afectada la relación con su familia a causa de sus desarrollo como médium? ¿Cómo su esposo(a) ve su trabajo como médium? ¿Cómo sus niños ven su trabajo como médium?
13. ¿Cómo su matrimonio ha sido influenciado por su trabajo como médium?
14. ¿Cuáles has sido sus mayores satisfacciones e insatisfacciones con su trabajo como médium?
15. ¿Puede describir un caso exitoso en el cual usted fue el principal agente de ayuda? ¿Puede describir un caso en

el cual usted no tuvo éxito? ¿Por qué usted no pudo ayudar a la persona? ¿Qué usted hace cuando reconoce que no es posible ayudar al cliente?

16. ¿Puede describir su participación en una reunión espiritista típica? ¿Puede describir su participación en una reunión espiritista reciente?
17. Describa las cosas que usted usualmente hace en un día normal.
18. Si usted tuviese la oportunidad de escribir un libro acerca de su vida como médium, a qué cosas le darí más énfasis?
19. ¿Cómo el proceso de convertirse en médium ha influenciado su forma de ser?
20. ¿Hay algún peligro en trabajar como médium? Explique.
21. ¿Cobra usted por sus servicios como médium? ¿Acepta usted donaciones de sus clientes? ¿Por qué?
22. ¿Que son pruebas? ¿Cuál es el rol de las pruebas en su desarrollo como médium? ¿Puede uno llegar a ser médium sin tener pruebas? ¿Se considera a sí mismo(a) un(a) médium de pruebas?
23. ¿Cuáles son las causas de los problemas de las personas? ¿Cómo usted determina la clase de problema que está afectando a una persona? ¿Utiliza usted algún método o forma especial para ayudar a otros?



24. ¿Usa usted objetos de ritual tales como agua de florida, velas e incienso en su trabajo como médium? ¿Cuáles son las funciones de estos objetos de ritual en el proceso de sanación? ¿Podría usted ayudar a una persona sin usar objetos de ritual?
25. ¿Cómo usted trabaja una causa? ¿Podría un médium trabajar su propia causa? ¿Podría un espíritu ignorante ser educado sin dar una manifestación a través del médium? ¿Es el cliente responsable por lo que le está pasando a él o ella?
26. ¿Cuáles son las características que un médium bueno y efectivo debe tener?
27. ¿Cuáles son los elementos más importantes en su educación como médium? ¿Cuáles considera usted son los elementos menos importantes?
28. Si yo quisiera convertirme en médium, ¿qué debería hacer?
29. ¿Está usted a cargo de la educación de otros médiums? ¿Cómo usted los educa?
30. ¿Cuáles son las características que el Presidente(a) de un centro debe tener?
31. ¿Cuáles son los elementos que deben ser enfatizados en la educación del médium?
32. ¿Cuál es el rol que la lectura de libros espiritistas

- tiene en la educación del médium?
33. ¿Cuáles usted cree son las condiciones más importantes para que ocurra la sanación?
  34. ¿Nace todo el mundo con facultades? ¿Por qué? ¿Puede la facultad ser usada para hacerle daño a otros? ¿Nace el médium, o se hace?
  35. ¿Por qué algunos médiums sufren una obsesión cuando están desarrollando facultades? ¿Tiene un médium que sufrir una obsesión para desarrollar facultades?
  36. ¿Es el Espiritismo una religión o una ciencia? ¿Cuál es su actitud hacia otras religiones? ¿Cuál es su religión?
  37. ¿Cuáles son las áreas del desarrollo del médium que usted cree deben ser exploradas por mí?
  38. ¿Cómo se sintió usted durante la entrevista? ¿Cuáles son las preguntas que no estuvieron claras para usted? ¿Alguna de estas preguntas le hicieron sentir incómodo(a)?

## Appendix B

## Glossary of spiritist concepts

agua de florida ("florida water"): an aromatic fragrance that is used in the giving of **despojos**.

agua magnetizada (magnetized water): water that is prepared by a medium to function as a medicine.

asistencias: good spirits

botánica: religious goods and herbs store specialized in selling paraphernalia for the practice of **Espiritismo**.

brujo (sorcerer): medium who practices black magic.

causa espiritual ("spiritual cause"): the negative influence of an ignorant spirit on the person's life which can produce a physical, psychological and/or spiritual problem. Condition that is caused by a spirit.

causa material (material cause): A physical condition requiring medical care.

centro (center): place where a spiritist meeting takes place.

comprobación (proof or verification): when the same spiritual message is received independently by two mediums, one verifies the other.

consulta ("consultation"): private meeting between a spiritist healer and his or her client in order to determine the source of the problem and the adequate treatment.

cuadro espiritual ("spiritual picture"): groups of spirits who are assigned to a person from his/her birth.

dar los auxilios: to give **despojos** to someone.

dar luz al espíritu (give light to the spirit): to educate an ignorant spirit.

desarrollar facultades (develop faculties): to develop the necessary abilities for becoming a medium.

despojo ("spiritual cleansing"): healing ritual in which a person moves his or her hands rapidly and strongly around the head. Its purpose is to eliminate the negative influence of a spirit.

encausado: refers to the person who has a **causa**.

espiritero: a medium who uses the healing power as a business to exploit people; one who is not an authentic **Espiritista**.

Espiritista (spiritist): follower of **Espiritismo** including mediums, spiritist clients and believers.

espíritu de causa ("spirit of cause"): the spirit that is responsible for the person's problem.

espíritu de luz (spirit of light): a spirit who has

achieved spiritual wisdom and is dedicated to helping the living.

espíritu desencarnado (disincarnated spirit): refers to the spirits of the dead.

espíritu encarnado (incarnated spirit): refers to the living.

evidencia: message received from the spirits.

facultad (faculty): the different kinds of capacities that a medium develops in order to communicate with the spirit world.

fluidos (fluids): spiritual energy involved in the causes of healing and illness.

guía (guide): spirit who protects a person.

La Colección: a book of spiritist prayers attributed to Kardec.

levantar la causa ("lift up the cause"): the activity of eliminating the negative influence of a spirit through a dialogue in which he/she is convinced not to continue doing harm.

limpieza espiritual (spiritual cleansing): ritual cleaning of the home.

Madama: black woman from the Caribbean area.

médium: person who has the capacity to communicate with spirits in several ways in order to help others.

médium en desarrollo (medium in development): medium who is beginning to develop faculties.

mediumidad (mediumship): capacity for communicating with spirits.

mesa blanca (white table): it is the name that has been used to identify Indigenous **Espiritismo**.

mistificación (mystification): when a medium is using deception in his/her practice.

obsesión (obsession): spiritual illness produced when an ignorant spirit is taking control of the person's actions and thoughts.

pasar espíritus (to pass a spirit): the capacity to be "possessed" by a spirit.

pases ("passes"): healing ritual similar to a despojo but with the difference that **pases** are used to transmit good vibrations or influences to the client.

Presidente (President): the head medium of a spiritist center.

protecciones (protectors): synonym of spirit guides. Spirits who are in charge of helping a person.

prueba (test): series of experiences, trials or tribulations conducive to the development of maturity, affinity and harmony with the spirit world. A problem which has been chosen by a person before birth in order to pay a

spiritual debt of a past life.

resguardo: object that is used for protection against the influence of ignorant spirits.

reunión (meeting): spiritist meeting.

sesión (session): same as spiritist meeting.

sobo: hand massages around the stomach.

trabajar la causa (working the cause): the necessary steps for convincing an ignorant spirit not to cause more harm to a person.

trabajo (witchcraft): the belief that a person can manipulate an ignorant spirit and seduce it to do harm unto others.

videncia (vision): spiritual revelation.

Appendix C

Summary of Demographic Data

Name	Age	Sex	Education	Marital Status	Children	Occupation
Diana	52	F	12	Married	3	Housewife
Generosa	59	F	9	Married	9	Housewife
Félix	78	M	0	Married	0	Retired
Luisa	64	F	12	Married	1	Housewife
Miriam	30	F	16	Married	3	Teacher
Marcos	39	M	18	Married	2	Counselor
Luz	59	F	1	Married	3	Housewife
Ernesto	26	M	16	Single	0	Student
Aúrea	51	F	5	Divorced	6	Housewife
Gela	53	F	4	Married	8	Housewife
Aida	55	F	12	Married	4	Housewife
Emiliano	74	M	8	Married	2	Retired
Juanita	62	F	8	Married	4	Housewife
Mayo	55	M	12	Married	1	Retired
Peruchín	69	M	0	Married	0	Janitor
Rosa	46	F	16	Divorced	2	Teacher