

Psychic Mediums Are the New Wellness Coaches

A woo-woo profession is getting a boost from the wellness industrial complex. Seems ... intuitive.

Credit...Illustration by The New York Times; Pamela Colman Smith

•
By Lisa Held

• March 19, 2019

“Intuition is magical, but it’s not reserved for a couple of people,” said Laura Lynne Jackson, 46.

She’s from Commack, N.Y., and makes her living as a psychic medium, and she was talking to hundreds who attended this year’s In Goop Health Summit in New York City (tickets start at \$1,000) who were there to learn how to tap into their inner intuition. “It’s for all of you,” she said.

[Ms. Jackson](#), who was joined by four other professional “intuitives” at the event (which also featured speakers like medical doctors, nutritionists and C.E.O.s), is one of several new mediums entering the growing industry of self-care.

While psychics have traditionally profited from claiming to predict the future or communicating with deceased relatives, many are now working in the general field of wellness, calling themselves “intuitives” or “intuitive healers,” who channel “energy” that helps people discover what they want out of life.

“A majority of the mediums that we work with are less interested in the party trick of showing off their psychic abilities and more focused on teaching people, women in particular, how to trust their guts and lean into their intuition,” Noora Raj Brown, the senior vice president of communications at Goop, wrote in an email.

In a so-called Spirit Studio, [Joe Perreta](#), 29, and [Kim Russo](#), 54, both psychic mediums, hosted group readings where believers seemed to significantly outnumber skeptics, with teary attendees reaching for tissue boxes placed around the room.

During one session, Ms. Russo approached Lauren Lamb, 38, and said her mother, who had died, wanted to pass on advice related to redecorating a room. Ms. Lamb said she was redoing her house, and some of the details Ms. Russo provided felt inexplicably specific to her.

“How would she possibly know that? I’m a believer now,” Ms. Lamb said. “I also think she was saying some stuff where she wasn’t just channeling people, she was like, ‘Here’s my advice, and I was like, ‘That’s useful advice for people.’”

This exchange is a gift to critics looking for examples of how Gwyneth Paltrow’s [wellness media empire](#) peddles [expensive quackery in the name of self-care](#). But, spirit visitations aside, Ms. Lamb is far from alone. A [recent survey](#) by the Pew Research Center found that 62 percent of Americans believe in at least one of four spiritual concepts identified as “New Age” (like reincarnation and astrology) and 41 percent believe in psychics.

Editors’ Picks

[One market analysis](#) found that the “psychic services” industry grew steadily over the past five years, reaching over \$2 billion in revenue in 2018 from activities like readings and public talks.

Image



Laura Lynne Jackson, in her office. Credit... Molly Matalon for The New York Times

The Communication Business

Celebrities, many of whom — like Ms. Paltrow — have extended their brands to content (if only on their personal social-media accounts), increasingly include mediums in their self-care entourage. Rosanna Arquette and Kathy Hilton (mother of Paris and Nicky) plugged Ms. Jackson. [Erika Gabriel](#), another medium, boasts that her clients include Minka Kelly and Tory Burch.

Lifetime promotes its show “Seatbelt Psychic” by declaring that the star, the medium [Thomas John](#), is “a trusted adviser to influencers and celebrities” including Courteney Cox and Goldie Hawn.

Handily, dead celebrities can also be invoked: At In Goop Health, [Deganit Nuur](#), a “clairvoyant intuitive,” said John Lennon was “totally” one of her spirit guides. “I call him in all the time, and he’s always like, ‘Do this, do that,’ and I’m like, ‘Thanks, John!’” (Supposedly clairvoyant healing sessions with Ms. Nuur are available at the Four Seasons hotel’s spas in New York City and Los Angeles.)

This is, of course, one of the planet’s oldest professions.

In various ancient cultures, shamans were considered a link to the spirit world. Haitian Voodoo, Puerto Rican Brujeria, and Wiccan traditions all focus heavily on communing with spirits. In the United States in the late 1800s, Spiritualism, a religious movement in which séances to communicate with the dead were a central practice, was incredibly popular.

While the language is different, communicating with spirits on the so-called other side is also an accepted practice in Christianity. Angels are central characters in biblical stories, and when human beings die, telling believers that loved ones will “always be with them” as spiritual guides is common practice.

Media-savvy mediums are nothing new, either. In the 1990s Miss Cleo advertised her pay-by-the-minute services on late-night infomercials with the catchphrase “You have questions, I have the answers.”

Today, in New York, turban-clad psychics, many with crystal balls and tarot cards, regularly lure Times Square tourists for \$10 readings, and sandwich-board signs advertising psychic readings dot sidewalks all over the city. It is a self-regulated industry, with professional associations like the Windbridge Research Center in Tucson and the Forever Family Foundation in Oceanside, N.Y., offering certification, based on their own protocols, like psychological tests.

Sometimes duped-feeling clients call foul: in May 2015, a psychic named Priscilla Kelly Delmaro, 26, [was charged with grand larceny](#) after Niall Rice, a 33-year-old British consultant, accused her of taking thousands of his dollars. Ms. Delmaro was charged and spent eight months in jail.

A reading can be harmless fun, like reading horoscopes, but the incursion of psychics into health care might raise eyebrows. [Anthony William](#), the self-proclaimed “medical medium,” a.k.a., @medicalmedium, whose website includes praise from Pharrell Williams, Miranda Kerr and Robert De Niro, is behind a recent Instagram-fueled celery juice craze.

Mr. William advocates drinking a strict regimen of 16 ounces of celery juice every morning on an empty stomach. There is no science to substantiate his claim that this will solve all sorts of issues, only his citation of messages from “Spirit of Compassion.”

Ms. Brown, of Goop, said content from mediums on the site is minimal albeit popular and is labeled “fascinating but inexplicable,” as opposed to “supported by science.” Mediums are screened by a phone call, sometimes by a Goop staff member, sometimes by a “trusted friend of Goop.” According to Ms. Brown, the mediums do not know who they are speaking with.

The internet, with its troves of personal data, can be a boon to people claiming they are psychics — or a trap. A [New York Times Magazine story](#) published last month followed a sting operation in which a group created fake Facebook profiles and then attended an event with Thomas John, where he quoted details from the made-up lives they had created.

At the end of February, John Oliver ran a [scathing segment](#) on psychics, which focused on mediums, many of whom were caught making predictions that were wrong.

In the segment, Mr. Oliver explained the two ways mediums defraud people into believing they communicate with lost loved ones: cold reading and hot reading. Cold reading is a technique in which mediums ask a series of general questions and then rely on verbal and physical cues to glean increasingly personal information from an individual. Hot reading involves researching the people who are going to be in the room beforehand and using details from their online lives to fabricate readings.

Image

MaryAnn DiMarco, in her office. Credit...Molly Matalon for The New York Times



What Mediums Say

“If we look at the big question that mediumship is fundamentally exploring, it’s really: Is there life after death? And why are we here? Is there a connection between us? What is the meaning of all this?” said Ms. Jackson, whose first book, “The Light Between Us,” appeared briefly on the New York Times best-seller lists. (She will publish a second in June.)

A weekend retreat she is conducting at the Omega in June costs \$355. She would not disclose how much she charges for individual sessions, adding that she is booked for a decade.

MaryAnn DiMarco, 48, a medium and the author of “Believe, Ask, Act,” said that her clients are increasingly not looking for predictions. “They’re coming to me and saying, ‘I have so much going on in my life. Can you teach me how to make connection so that I can make transformation happen in my life for the better?’” she said.

Joshua Agan, 33, turned to Ms. DiMarco after contemplating suicide; he had weighed 400 pounds, altered his diet and started going to the gym, but wanted more changes. “Once my body was taken care of, then it kind of naturally went into me kind of chasing the spiritual component,” he said.

Mr. Agan, who owns a salon in Carmel, Ind., discovered Ms. DiMarco while attending a 2017 event hosted by Gabrielle Bernstein, a popular motivational speaker. He later flew to New York City with friends to attend a group reading and then, after Ms. DiMarco reached out to him personally with a message she said she felt she had to deliver to him, went back again for a one-on-one session, which she offered to him free of charge.

Ms. DiMarco, he said, allowed him to “step into my power and calmly let go of my existing experience,” he said. “And trust my spiritual side to lead me in the right direction. It doesn't come with total assurance, right?”

Lisa Levine, 42, is the founder of [Maha Rose](#), a wellness center in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn that also operates a retreat center near the Catskill Mountains. She regularly hosts workshops with Ms. Nuur, the “clairvoyant intuitive” at In Goop Health, and said she believes there are people who can connect with the “other side” and bring back valuable information, but that the medium’s intention is crucial.

“Is their intention to be a conduit for the spirits and to be of service to their clients, or is their intention to make a lot of money?” Ms. Levine said. “Telling somebody something that you think they want to hear, although not necessarily damaging, is maybe just like putting a Band-Aid on something. And maybe that is all the person wants, a Band-Aid, or some type of ‘it’s O.K., your deceased mother forgives you or your passed father does love you.’”

“Our desire to believe will take a message a long way,” she said.

Valeriya Safronova contributed reporting.

Correction:

March 19, 2019

An earlier version of a picture caption with this article misspelled the surname of the illustrator whose original artwork the illustration is based on. She is Pamela Colman Smith, not Pamela Coleman-Smith.

A version of this article appears in print on March 24, 2019, Section ST, Page 8 of the New York edition with the headline: Psychic Mediums Intuit a New Role. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)