

## **“Are you there, Spenser?” Attempts at ‘PK by Committee’ in a Séance-like Situation**

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**ABSTRACT:** The term PK by committee refers to a group psi effect that was hypothesised by D. Scott Rogo (1986) as being more consistent than a psi effect produced by an individual psychic. The Philip group (Toronto, Canada), formed by I. M. Owen with M. Sparrow (1976), was essentially a ‘committee’ of individuals attempting to elicit PK effects. The Philip group inspired the formation of the Spenser group (Adelaide, South Australia), which was comprised initially of a team of eight professional and amateur paranormal investigators. The Spenser group attempted to generate a fictional entity, the sea captain Spenser Blake (1770-1850), with whom conversation was attempted. No visual manifestations of Spenser were sought or produced. Spenser group sitters’ attempts at table-tilting and table levitation met with failure. Doubt remains over the cause of some rapping and scratching sounds. Attempts at influencing a candle-flame psychokinetically produced a statistically significant effect. The more salient anomalous effects produced across a series of 27 sittings are reported and attempts to explain them in rational terms are presented.

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## INTRODUCTION

D. Scott Rogo (1986) was one of the first paranormal investigators to draw attention to the theoretical possibilities of “PK by committee” (p. 126). By ‘committee’ he meant a group consisting of like-minded individuals all aiming at achieving one and the same paranormal goal. He felt that a group of individuals “might be able to produce PK more consistently than a psychic can” (p. 126). This idea was the essence of the endeavours of the so-called Philip group (named after an imaginary entity) in Toronto during the early 1970s, and Rogo was specifically referring to that group.

The leader of the group, Iris Owen of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research (and wife of parapsychologist, A. R. G. Owen), theorised that anomalous entities (i.e., ghosts, apparitions, etc.) might actually be conjured up by the very people who report these phenomena. The Philip group’s methodology included trying to get into the ‘spirit’ of things by singing songs and telling jokes. Generally, they attempted to create a more relaxed atmosphere than the typical séance situation, but in those early months they failed to provide substantial evidence that ordinary people could conjure up an entity. However, they demonstrated some alleged PK-type effects, including table-tilting, table-‘walking’ and sliding, and rapping sounds in tables of various sizes (see Owen with Sparrow, 1976).

The Philip group went on to attract considerable attention from the news and television media, resulting in television appearances, and the production of films documenting their achievements. Thus there exist permanent visual records of Philip’s exploits, including his comical attempt to shift the table up onto the stage to be with a talk show host, and on another live television show, Philip’s complete flipping of a table upside down. These effects were produced after the group shifted its focus towards generating the types of effects reported in Batcheldor’s (1966, 1984) experiments with his own group.

The Philip group adopted Batcheldor’s (1966, 1984) technique, which he himself borrowed from nineteenth-century spiritualists. In a typical spiritualist circle, people would sit around a table and place their hands lightly on the surface. A medium at the head of the table would attempt communication with a spirit, usually that of someone thought to be deceased. Batcheldor’s (1966) group never really attempted to communicate with an “unseen intelligence” (p. 356), and Batcheldor admitted that they were more interested in physical phenomena, of which documented accounts are “sadly unconvincing” in comparison to “the richness of first-

hand experience” (p. 356). Of course, the film records of the Philip group are the closest that many may ever get to witnessing these sorts of phenomena. Nevertheless, Batcheldor reported rapping from tables of various sizes, as well as “table sliding” and even “total levitation” (p. 349).

One of the most impressive features of Batcheldor’s (1966) procedure was the innovative and commendable use of buzzers and lights, which were triggered whenever table-tilting or levitation occurred. These were necessary as sessions were conducted in darkness. Batcheldor also used scales, by which he demonstrated actual changes in weight of tables and sitters during sessions. Other phenomena reported by Batcheldor (1966) included table tremors, unexplained “gluing” of the table to the floor, breezes around hands, intense cold, pulling back of sitters’ chairs, and feelings of being touched (pp. 350-352).

John G. Neihardt, founder of the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis (SORRAT; McClenon, 2001) hypothesised that rapport between members of a group is related to paranormal phenomena. Neihardt formed a Philip-type group with students of the University of Missouri at Columbia (USA). After a few months, they reported rapping noises and movement in their table. They also alleged to have ‘communicated’ with spirits using raps to stand for letters of the alphabet (e.g., 1 rap = A; 2 raps = B, etc.), and reported levitation of the table when hands were not in contact with the surface of the table. It is important to note McClenon’s (2001) “impression” that SORRAT group members are “completely convinced of the authenticity” of their alleged paranormal phenomena, yet “virtually all professional parapsychologists are unconvinced” and “few . . . feel [the SORRAT] case is worth investigating” (p. 75).

The Philip-group paradigm (or PK by committee) has been replicated elsewhere, and imaginary entities such as Lilith, the Artful Dodger (*pace* Dickens), Santa Claus, and Silk the Dolphin, have all been ‘responsible’ for similar effects as those produced by the Philip group and Batcheldor’s group. Another tertiary college even got involved (Bourgeois, 1994). Eight undergraduate students and the professor of an experimental parapsychology class at Franklin Pierce College (New Hampshire, USA) spent ten weeks attempting to produce PK by committee. They called their entity Alexander, an officer in the Confederate army, and advisor to General Lee.

In the hope of eliciting psi effects in the short time available, Bourgeois and his group (with Alexander!) tried to influence a candle flame, which is regarded as a highly ‘labile’ system and therefore theorised as being more easily influenced by psi (see Braud, 1981, for a full explication of labile systems). Bourgeois found that “If the group was discussing light, possibly fun activities, the flame would flare up higher and

brighter than it previously appeared. . . . [If the group] talked about subjects that were apparently taboo to the spirit, the flame would shrink until it appeared the candle would die out.”

Recently in Australia, a group in Sydney, New South Wales, who created a fictional character Skippy Cartman, also reported anomalous Philip-type phenomena, including raps and table-tilting (Williams & Lang, 2002). While following the Philip group methodology for a while (i.e., singing songs and attempting to converse with Skippy), the Skippy group eventually gave up that methodology, and relied predominantly on rubbing all parts of the table, staring at its centre, and simply waiting for something to happen. Other phenomena reported included “creaking of the table,” and the table “walking around on the concrete floor in slow bursts, up to 2 meters at a time” (Williams & Lang, 2002, p. 41).

At about the same time as the Skippy group got started, a team of professional and amateur paranormal researchers in Adelaide, South Australia, formed the Spenser group, named after a fictional British sea captain Spenser Blake (1770-1850; for his life story, see the APPENDIX). The aims of the Spenser group loosely followed those of the Philip and Batcheldor groups, and the Spenser group also practiced telepathy. When discussions over the formation of the group began, it was understood that any psi phenomena reported might well be the product of a group mind, rather than that of a manifested entity named Spenser.

At one stage of the series, attempts were also made to elicit psi effects in a candle flame, following the success of the Franklin Pierce College group with their candle (Bourgeois, 1994). It was hypothesised that a candle flame could be used as a medium of communication.

The present study is a report of the methodology and findings of the Spenser group, which followed the ideas and suggestions of Owen with Sparrow (1976) and Batcheldor (1966). The present study also introduces procedures and critical approaches to the observed and reported phenomena, which the authors believe should be used by other researchers interested in testing the ‘paranormality’ of their PK by committee.

## METHOD

### *Sitters and sittings*

Initially, the group was comprised of eight sitters, here listed alphabetically: Mikele Barrett-Woodbridge (MBW), Alison Bruer (AB), Jeff Fausch (JF), Ashley Harbutt (AH), Cheryl Hyland (CH), Colin Mitchell (CM), Kathy Painter (KP), and Lance Storm (LS). By the time the group

held the last of its sessions, there were six regular sitters: AB, JF, AH, CH, CM, and LS, with a guest sitter in attendance at the last two sessions.

The series of sittings began on August 9, 2001 and the group decided to have the last session on June 24, 2002 due to loss of interest amongst some members of the group. There were a total of 27 sittings. The group met every week unless more than two group members could not attend, under which circumstance the session was cancelled. Sittings would last about 2 hours.

### *Apparatus*

The following equipment and materials were used by the group: (i) black and white security camera (no audio); (ii) infra-red/colour video camera (with audio); (iii) VCR recording equipment; (iv) tape-recorder; (v) pressure-zone microphone; (vi) Compact Disc (CD) player; (vii) CD of Australian 'bushman' songs; (viii) large wooden table (29" x 48") with a hard laminex top; (ix) a conventional card-table (29" x 29") with a soft vinyl top; (x) A set of tea-candles (described later in detail); (xi) matches; (xii) glass flues to cover the candles; (xiii) Spenser's 'life script' (see the APPENDIX); and (xiv) song sheets.

### *Procedure*

Spenser sessions were held at the home of LS and AB in a paneled and insulated studio in the backyard of the house. All events and details were recorded from the very first session to the last session, which included video and sound recordings of the group around either of the two tables. Reports were prepared by CM from the audio and videotapes, and e-mailed to the group members after the sessions (usually the following week).

Some sessions were conducted under normal electric light (full illumination) and others under red light (reduced illumination), but in both cases, illumination was such that all sitters and their hands were visible to other sitters as well as the camera.

For the first four sittings there were only sound recordings. For each of the next three sessions there was video recording of the enclosed candles as well. Three subsequent sessions had the camera fixed at a low elevation, but for sessions 11 to 27, the camera was positioned high above the group so that all sitters could be seen from the waist up. Their hands could also be seen, which proved to be important when the occasion called for identifying the sources of rapping and scratching sounds that appeared to come from the table. Hands were kept on the table face down. The group started with the large table, but early in the series, they switched to the small table.

Sessions usually started with a segment from Spenser's life story read by CM. Sitters meditated on these events, and they each related to the other sitters any relevant thoughts, feelings and imagery. Some sessions included meditation to help get sitters to concentrate during the session. No one went into trance. No one attempted mediumship with unknown entities. Some sessions featured the singing of sea shanties from Spenser's era to help put sitters in the mood.

After the first few sessions, it was decided that table-tilting, table levitation, and rapping were forms of macro-PK, and some sitters thought that to attempt PK on such a 'grand' scale might induce a psychological hurdle that could prove difficult to surmount for amateurs who made no claims to having PK ability. It was suggested that the group start with a task that was less challenging, and so influencing a candle-flame psychokinetically (perceived to be a more labile medium) was attempted for four sessions. Sitters would ask Spenser various questions about his life, and so-called 'answers' (i.e., 'responses') were expected from the candle in the form of flickering or wavering of the candle flame. A perfectly still candle flame was taken to mean no answer, whereas any movement of the flame was taken to mean 'yes' or 'no' according to the wording of the question (see RESULTS section below, *Testing the Spenser Candle*).

## RESULTS

### *Table Noises: Creaks, Raps, Taps, and Scratches*

The following is a comprehensive account of the more salient events of creaking, rapping, tapping and scratching that were reported and/or recorded on audio-tape. On a number of occasions, these events were too faint and therefore did not record on audio-tape. In those cases, only the depositions of Spenser group sitters that follow can count as evidence that these events transpired in the way reported here.

In the early sessions, before any noises were heard coming from the table, several sitters occasionally reported feeling 'vibrations' from the table. In the 10<sup>th</sup> session, one distinctive and drawn-out scratching noise was heard coming from the table by everyone except CM and MBW. It was agreed that the sound appeared to have come from in front of JF at the other end of the table from where CM and MBW were sitting.

The sound occurred immediately after LS had asked Spenser to raise the table from whichever end he liked. The noise was just barely audible on audio-tape. JF said it was as though a finger or fingernail had scraped along the rough wood on the underside of the table. He then demonstrated with his finger and it was agreed by at least three participants

that the sound did resemble a finger scrape, but at a fainter volume. LS thought it was the table trying to move. AB said it sounded like either a “scratching or a creaking of the table,” and LS said it sounded “more like a creak.” Note that all sitters could see all hands on the table and there was no opportunity for anyone to actually put their hand under the table without being seen. This scratching sound was never repeated with the same clarity, although in later sessions a few sitters occasionally reported hearing or feeling a ‘scratching’ type sound.

At the next (11<sup>th</sup>) session, one sitter felt vibrations, and four sitters (AB, CH, JF, and CM) heard two faint taps coming from the table. Later, LS and JF heard a series of seven to eight faint taps, which were picked up by a microphone taped under the table. However, the sensitive (pressure-zone) microphone on top of the table did not pick up these taps.<sup>1</sup>

In the following sessions, sitters continued to hear occasional faint taps from the table, and the occasional creak. Sitters also felt vibrations in the table. Given that it is often difficult to accurately tell the source or direction of a noise, these noises could hardly be regarded as evidence of PK because it was discovered that similar noises could be produced from the tapping of an uneven chair leg on the floor, or a foot tapping on the floor. However, it was noted that, in the case of at least one tap, there was a deep-pitched sound unlike those that could be produced by a chair leg or foot tapping.

At the 17<sup>th</sup> session, the group switched to using the card-table.

The 18<sup>th</sup> session proved to be pivotal because raps began in earnest, so this session is reported in detail. The raps that occurred in this session were both heard and felt by sitters. These raps could be heard and felt coming from under the sitters’ hands, and in the case of the louder raps, were heard later on audio-tape. There were multiple raps and taps during this (18<sup>th</sup>) session. CM estimated at least one hundred.

There was no particular correspondence noted between ‘conversation’ with Spenser and the occurrence of these raps and taps. Although occasionally there were isolated instances of correspondence, these could easily be put down to coincidence due to the number of taps occurring. In addition CH and JF *felt* a possible scratching under the table, and AB thought she heard scratching (later), and then later still AB reported feeling a scratching under her hand moving towards the centre of the table.

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<sup>1</sup> Because some of these sounds are faint we use the term ‘taps’, reserving the term ‘raps’ for the louder ones. These taps have also been described by LS as ‘clicks’, which conveys the sharpness of these sounds as heard and felt, although they have a deeper pitch than is conveyed by the term ‘click’.

AB also felt as though her hand was poked from beneath during this session, and at one point she reported feeling as though there was a 'wave' of the table under her hand.

At the 19<sup>th</sup> session, there was again a plethora of raps. While telepathy was being undertaken, there were no raps, although sitters had their hands on the table as normal. When the telepathy session stopped, and sitters began talking to Spenser, faint taps occurred, followed by a single loud tap. This loud tap was followed later by a great number of raps and taps, as in the 18<sup>th</sup> session.

Attempts to control the location of the raps, by asking for raps to occur in particular places, resulted in no success. In general, 'asking' for raps was unsuccessful—the raps seemed to occur 'on their own schedule' (except those that sitters consciously produced by altering the pull of their hands on the table—see next section *Manipulating the Table*).

At the start of one session, taps occurred during the meditation period (hands were on the table), and these taps were so well defined that JF opened his eyes to see who was tapping the table, but no one appeared to be doing it.

Overall, it was not possible to state conclusively whether these raps and taps were paranormal. In the next section, we consider possible ways in which the raps and taps described above could have been produced normally.

### *Manipulating the Table*

From what follows in this section, we do not expect our readers to assume that we claim to have identified the sole cause of the ostensibly anomalous effects caused in the tables. However, attempts to explain the above effects in parsimonious terms is *de rigueur* of the scientific method, so we must acknowledge the effects that are possible as a result of unconscious muscular action (see Batcheldor, 1966; Brugger, 2001). Therefore, during the 18<sup>th</sup> session, sitters began experimenting with different ways of mechanically producing taps in the table.

First, sitters tried pressing hard on the table one at a time, but the sensations produced this way did not seem to feel anything like the raps sitters had been feeling. CM tried bumping his leg against a table-leg, and then against the metal hinge of the table-leg, but neither effort produced the same effect. LS tapped his finger on the table in an attempt to elicit similar rapping sounds. AH commented that the pitch of the raps was deeper than the sound produced by the tapping of a finger. At the suggestion of CM, sitters tried straining the table in different ways to see if sitters could produce raps, but this resulted in gross movements of the table.



Later, AB suggested that sitters put very slight pressure on the table by pulling their hands in towards themselves. As AB did this, taps immediately occurred. AH then tried it too, and audible taps were produced.

As sitters continued to experiment with this method of slightly pulling hands in towards themselves, taps occurred on every occasion. When sitters stopped doing this, there were no taps. Sitters started again, and there was a loud rap followed by more raps. Sitters then stopped pulling, and just relaxed their hands—there were no raps. Later in the session, sitters began slightly pulling with their hands again and taps occurred again.

In later sessions, this method of some (or all) sitters pulling the hands in towards themselves, and on occasion releasing the tension of the weight or pull of the hands, was repeated with fingertips, or just resting fingertips on various parts of the table using (a) one hand each only, (b) two fingertips each, or (c) only one fingertip each. The results were similar as before, but the number of raps or taps lessened dramatically as hand contact with the table decreased. No raps or taps occurred when hands (or fingers) were completely off the table. When participants stood up with just fingertips on the table, no taps or raps occurred. When participants sat down again with hands flat on the table or fingertips on the table, taps resumed.

In later sessions raps also occurred when sitters consciously released the slight pressure on the table caused by the slight pull of hands towards themselves. Each time a sitter did this, a rap would occur. This slight pull of hands towards the sitter is simply the result of the weight of the arms pulling on the hands. When this was released by slightly lifting the arms a rap would occur.

During the 26<sup>th</sup> session, CM found that taps would occur when he shifted his weight slightly on his chair while his hands were ‘glued’ to the table due to perspiration. CM found that an audible light tap would also occur every time he slightly altered the weight or ‘pull’ of his hands on the table.

In all of the above manipulations of the table, with their accompanying noises, there were no visible movements of hands on the table.

The results of this section show that it is possible to produce raps and taps in normal ways, such as through manipulation of the table by one or more sitters. In the above examples, these manipulations were consciously produced, but there is the likelihood that many of the raps and taps reported in the section *Table Noises*, were produced unconsciously. This conclusion does not rule out the possibility that some proportion of those effects were paranormal.

*Anomalous Lights*

Three sitters (LS, AB and JF) saw ‘lights’ on different occasions,<sup>2</sup> seemingly in the external environment. LS saw a tiny flash of light on two occasions, a ‘blue dot’ on another occasion, and on yet another occasion, a white light that hovered in the room.

AB saw a light that flickered in three different places in the room. She described these lights as not a direct light source, but the “remnants of seeing a light,” and she thought they might have been normal “optical effects.” At another session, she suddenly saw a grid of about 20 red lights like LED lights—this had never happened to her before. At the same time as AB described this light effect, MBW saw a ‘flash’ of a white triangle in the room.

JF saw a white light moving towards the table, and on another occasion, sparkly lights near AB’s hands.

One session was conducted in semi-darkness and videotaped using infrared light. On a few occasions, when viewing the video-tape play-back, there were instances of so-called ‘orbs’ ‘flying’ or ‘floating’ across the field of view. The cause of the orb phenomenon has not been confirmed, but all sitters have since said, on one occasion or another, that they could be reflected infrared light from fine dust particles carried by convection currents in the room.

*Unusual Bodily and Sensory Perceptions*

Most sitters at various times reported bodily sensations of various types. These included hot hands, feeling that the palms of the hands were being poked from beneath, the sensation of being touched, and throbbing or tingling fingertips. AH felt that he was poked in the leg behind the knee on one occasion.

Between sessions, AB brought a friend into the room to see the set-up, and while her friend touched the table, AB felt she was grabbed on the leg and felt a sensation down her back. On another occasion, AB felt as though a hand was placed on her leg.

On one occasion, CH reported smelling a liquorice or aniseed smell, and on another occasion, she reported “weird feelings in her arms

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<sup>2</sup> We recognise that the source of these lights may also be endopsychic (i.e., originating in the psyche), rather than just exo-psychic (i.e., originating in the environment). Cf. Jung’s (1959/1978) description of the so-called ‘mandala’ (circle or wheel symbolism), which makes its first spontaneous appearance in consciousness as an “unimpressive point or dot” (para. 60).

like she had been getting injections” (i.e., like the ache and stinging in the upper arm after an injection).

A guest sitter at the final session felt a light, but very cold breeze across her hands. At the final session, CM felt a sensation as though a needle was being stuck into the top of the little finger of his right hand, and later in his upper right arm, almost like acupuncture.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> session, AB felt that her “chair was grabbed from behind.” She remains uncertain as to the cause. In the same session, CH had the sensation of being touched.

More unpleasant bodily sensations included, (i) three sitters experiencing unusual head sensations in the 10<sup>th</sup> session (AB—head expanding from within; CH—pain in top of head; MBW—dizzy sensation in her head like that preceding her OBEs); (ii) AB experiencing a ‘heavy’ feeling around her head and shoulders, and (iii) in the 17<sup>th</sup> session, three sitters feeling sick in the stomach when they stood up during the session and sat down again.

### *Unusual Perceptions of the Table*

A few sitters reported unusual perceptions of the table moving towards or away from them, and the table ‘stretching’ between their fingers. On one occasion, a sitter felt that the table made a ‘wave’ beneath the sitter’s hands.

### *Other Events*

In one session, the light in the room flickered while sitters had their eyes shut during meditation, but this could have been a power interruption. On two other occasions, CM’s mobile phone (i) beeped twice and (ii) rang and then cut off on being answered, but these could be explained conventionally.

On two separate occasions, a key and a piece of aluminium foil were placed in the centre of the table and sitters asked Spenser to bend them at that time, or during the week while they were away. Neither object bent during or after sessions.

At several sessions, a musical mug was placed on or near the table. This mug played a tune when it was lifted or tilted sufficiently to allow light to shine in on the base of the mug, thus triggering a light-sensitive switch. No anomalous triggering of music from the mug occurred. On one occasion, JF saw a dark shadow moving down towards the tape recorder.

### *Testing the Spenser Candle*

In this section are presented the results of statistical tests on data generated from five burning candles. It was hypothesised that a candle

flame could be used as a medium of communication. The candles used were all tea candles (consisting of a round wax-filled tray about 2.5 cm in diameter and 1 cm deep). The same type of glass flue was used on all candles to standardise the test conditions by eliminating the ambient draft and other extraneous flows of air in the room that might be caused by (say) sitters breathing.

The burning candles were filmed on videotape, and during the playback of the tapes, the first author (LS) counted all flickers (F's) just after the glass flue was placed over the candle and corresponding atmospheric disruptions to the candle flame had ceased. The gap duration between F's in seconds (timed with a stop-watch) is the dependent variable.

*First test (Spenser candle only—September 6, 2001):* A total of 65 F's in the 'question-asking' condition was compared to a total of 65 F's in the control condition (a total of 130 flickers). Counts of 65 flickers were used because the maximum number of flickers available in the 'question-asking' condition was 65. The average gap between flickers for the Spenser candle (control condition) was  $M = 20.80$  seconds, and in the Experimental condition (i.e., 'question' condition) it was  $M = 15.43$  seconds. This latter figure shows that flickers came at a faster rate in the experimental condition compared to the control condition.

The Wilcoxon test was used to test the difference between these gap durations (this test was used because the same candle was used in both conditions). A significant difference between gap durations in both conditions was found,  $z = -1.60$ ,  $p = .05$  (one-tailed). Chance does not seem to account for the greater frequency of flickers during the experimental condition. Such a result would be expected because Spenser's 'responses' would be in addition to the expected count, which can be gauged from the control condition.

This result is *quantitative* only, and is therefore only suggestive of a psi effect. The result can be compared with the *qualitative* fact that CM's report (from the first session that the same candle was used; August 30, 2001) shows that some responses from Spenser were coming at the appropriate time (i.e., right after a question was asked). Unfortunately, the candle was never filmed, and therefore, cannot be further tested statistically.

*Second test (four control candles):* The above statistical result needs to be put into perspective because it might be an artifact of an 'unusual' candle. That is, the Spenser candle might be an anomaly in itself. It was hypothesised that the Spenser candle burned in an unusual way compared to other tea candles. To test this rival hypothesis, four control tea candles were

each lit and tested separately under the same conditions as the Spenser candle.

The means of the flicker durations for each candle were as follows: Candle #1,  $M = 80.00$ ; Candle #2,  $M = 117.86$ ; Candle #3,  $M = 47.29$ ; and Candle #4,  $M = 66.14$ . A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no significant difference on frequency counts,  $\chi^2(3, N = 56) = 5.10, p = .165$ . All four candles appeared to flicker at the same rate as each other, and any differences were due to chance.

In a second Kruskal-Wallis test, the data generated from the Spenser candle in the control condition was included for analysis with the data from the four control candles. This time, there was a significant difference in frequency counts,  $\chi^2(4, N = 70) = 14.46, p = .006$ . This result means that the Spenser candle in the control condition flickered at a different rate compared to the other four candles, which does not bode well for any inference about a paranormal effect that might be made from the results of the *First Test* above. That is, the Spenser candle was not typical of the candles in the batch from which it was drawn.

However, even though the Spenser candle flickered at its own (albeit faster) rate compared to the other four candles, the flicker-rates of these other four candles are really irrelevant. The two conditions (experimental and control) for the one candle are valid in their own right. Nevertheless, the four-candle test is important because it highlights the importance of sampling. While burning one candle is really an example of a single-case design, it might be argued that replication is really the only way of establishing whether we really had a repeatable and therefore scientifically 'interesting' effect. Unfortunately, the Spenser group abandoned candle-burning for the simple reason that some sitters wanted to get back to attempts at generating 'table' phenomena.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of the Spenser group are somewhat ambiguous. The exceptional events remain unexplained, and we welcome helpful suggestions, alternate explanations, criticism and/or other contributions to the debate. In consideration of the results reported above, the more salient of those results (and the most difficult to explain) leave us in a quandary. While a number of the sitters would like to claim without prejudice that they may have witnessed *some* paranormal effects, the collective doubt that all sitters still entertain about those phenomena holds equal sway. Further experiments may throw light on the nature of the phenomena.

It is interesting to note that the sitters reported a few extra phenomena similar to those reported by Batcheldor (1966), namely a cold breeze across hands, feelings of being touched, and one occasion when a sitter felt her chair being grabbed, but not actually pulled back as was reported by Batcheldor (1966). Also, the episode of the quite audible and drawn-out scratching sound (see the section *Table Noises* above) that came from the large table, heard by at least five sitters, remains one other more salient event.

Results from the 18th, 19th, and 26th sessions (see the section *Manipulating the Table* above) suggest that raps and taps that occurred may have been the product of strains in the wood of the table as a result of the collective weight of many hands on the table.<sup>3</sup> When the manual forces changed slightly (without any perceptible movement of hands on the table) raps would occur. Perhaps these were caused by a sudden release of the strain set up in the wood. It is still possible that some or all of these raps were paranormal in origin. They may have been caused paranormally when we unconsciously expected them to occur.

Regarding that possibility, we note that the waveform of the anomalous raps in the Philip experiment differed from the waveforms of artificially produced raps (see Owen with Sparrow, 1976, pp. 211-214, for an audio analysis of the Philip group raps). However, the Philip group's artificially produced raps may have been produced by tapping on the table with the fingers, or otherwise striking the surface of the table. Therefore, the waveforms of anomalous raps (*generally*) may not in fact differ from waveforms produced by the release of strains set up in the wood of the table by weight of hands.

It is clear from the sessions where raps and taps occurred in abundance that there are normal ways of achieving these phenomena, but we cannot rule out the possibility of some number of these raps and taps being paranormal in origin. However, the possible causes suggested above prove that there are more parsimonious explanations, but a single parsimonious proof is not necessarily conclusive proof that all the effects we witnessed were explicable in 'normal' terms. Therefore, the possibility of anomalous effects cannot be ruled out.

There still remains the question of why there were no 'outstanding' anomalous table phenomena (i.e., tilting and levitation) as reported by other

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the findings of Brugger (2001), whose neuro-scientific research indicates the possibility that automatic behaviour (e.g., unconscious hand movements) can eventuate in the human subject without their conscious awareness.

groups. It may be that belief in the phenomena was not strong enough (see Batcheldor, 1984, pp. 108-109, for a discussion of the importance of belief), or perhaps, the group simply did not comprise sufficient numbers of the desired personality types (extraverts?) considered necessary for these types of experiments. The only way to answer these questions is to form groups that focus on these issues.

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APPENDIX

*Spenser Blake's Life*

Born: 1<sup>st</sup> April 1770 on a farming estate outside Dover, England.  
Died: 1<sup>st</sup> April 1850. Religion: Church of England; Parents: Arthur and Sarah.

Spenser spent his childhood on a dairy farm. He was an only child. He had a passion for the sea; he would walk down to the white Cliffs of Dover to watch the tall ships sail by. Spenser spent hours dreaming of going to sea and becoming a sailor.

1785: Spenser gets his father's permission to join the Royal Navy. Spenser becomes a cabin boy at the age of 15. He is put on the ship HMS CAPTAIN, a 74-gun battleship, under the command of Horatio Nelson.

1793: Britain declares war on France. Spenser is now 23 years of age, and is now a gunner on the HMS MEDUSA, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade frigate.

1798: Spenser is involved in the battle of the Nile, which was a victory for the British. Admiral Nelson promotes Spenser to First Lieutenant for bravery and leadership.

1801: Spenser is involved in the battle of Copenhagen. The British destroy the Danish fleet. August 1801: Admiral Nelson is given sick leave and is replaced by Admiral Pole. On the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1801, the British navy attack Boulogne. The attack is a failure. Many men are killed and wounded. Some are captured, including Spenser. He is hit by rigging and falls over board. Spenser is picked up by the French military and sent to a prisoner of war camp outside Paris. Spenser spends the next 6 months recovering from his injuries. He is due to be executed.

1802/03: The French and British declare peace. Spenser is released in early that year. He travels across France as a lost soul, until he meets a French girl named Desiree who lives on a farm out side Toulouse. They fall in love and finally get permission from the family to marry. They are married on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1802. Spenser and his new bride move back to England in early part of 1803. It is good timing as Britain and France go back to war that year.

1804/05: Spenser receives an honourable discharge from the Royal Navy in 1804. Spenser still has a love for the sea so joins the East India Company in 1805. He is now 35 yrs old. Spenser becomes an officer on the HMS ELEPHANT. His wife Desiree stays in London, while Spenser travels around the world. He has great adventures travelling to India, Africa, the West Indies, China and the Americas. Spenser becomes a good businessman and trader and becomes quite wealthy over the years.

1820: Spenser, now 50 years old decides, to retire from active duty on the ships and is sent to India by the East India Company. Spenser sends



for his wife Desiree and their two children Jacob and Mary and they settled in Bombay. Spenser becomes even wealthier over the next few years, but something is still missing in his life. One day he meets an Indian yogi who teaches him meditation and inner peace and this makes his life complete.

1830: The East India Company stops trading due to a lack of profits and starts to close their overseas offices. Spenser and his family decide to go back to England. Spenser is now 60 years old and his children have grown up, married and got their own lives. Spenser was a freemason and would go to regular meetings. At one of these meetings he meets a man, William Light, who talks about a great adventure to colonise the southern part of Australia with free settlers. Spenser gets very excited about going to a new colony and the opportunity it may hold for a good businessman. Spenser and his wife leave for Australia on the ship HMS RAPID.

1836/37: They stop at Kangaroo Island in 1836 before sailing to the mainland of southern Australia. Spenser feels a special bond to this island and this is where he decides to settle, even before reaching the mainland. Late in 1836, Spenser decides to invest in the South Australia Company, a group of investors who purchased over 5500 hectares of land and pastoral rights to a much larger area. They also have whaling interests. Spenser and his wife settle on Kangaroo Island in 1837 on about 100 hectares of land near Cape Willoughby.

1845: A lighthouse is built on Cape Willoughby, above the Devil's Oven. This is a very dangerous coastline and many ships have been destroyed on the rocks. Spenser makes friends with the lighthouse keeper and would use the lighthouse for his meditation and his quiet time.

1850: Spenser's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday (1<sup>st</sup> April). His wife is returning on the ship EMILY SMITH after organising their supplies on the mainland. Spenser decides to go to the lighthouse for some meditation. Spenser is very old now and falls asleep. The lighthouse keeper heads up the many stairs to light the lighthouse light. Just as he gets to the top he has a heart attack and dies. A storm blows up with huge seas and the ship with Spenser's wife on board is blown off course and heads towards the Devil's Oven. There is no light to guide the ship. Spenser wakes up and realises that something is wrong. He looks out the window and sees the storm. He notices that it is dark and there is no beam of light. He tries to climb the many stairs, but he is very old and very slow. Spenser finally gets to the top of the stairs just in time to see the sailing ship with his wife on board crash onto the rocks below. The ship is smashed to pieces, and his wife is killed. Spenser is devastated and goes into shock. He staggers backwards in disbelief and does not see the stairs. He falls backwards down the stairs and is killed. To this day Spenser haunts the lighthouse trying to climb the stairs in time to turn on the light and save his wife.

*FINIS*