

[Bringing the Poltergeist into the Laboratory](#)

Cases of “poltergeists” – involving the anomalous movement of objects and production of strange knocks with no apparent source – are fairly familiar to most of the general public. Less familiar are the few laboratory studies conducted with the individuals thought to be at the center of these alleged events, which are among the things which seem to hint at there being a “human side” to the poltergeist.

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From the viewpoint of parapsychology and psychical research, poltergeists are characterized by a series of ostensibly anomalous physical phenomena that take place over a relatively short period of time – anywhere from a few weeks to several months, at most. Most often, the phenomena involve sudden and sporadic movements of objects without any apparent physical force acting upon them. Occasionally, the phenomena may also involve unusual sounds, such as raps or knocks, which seem to have no apparent source.

Since the time of the earliest known cases, there has been a traditional folkloric assumption that poltergeist phenomena are due to the mischievous activity of ghosts, demons, or some other kind of discarnate spirit. This assumption still lingers to some degree in the present time, usually fueled by exaggerated depictions of the poltergeist in television, film, and the print media. Even if one looks up *poltergeist* in *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary*, the term will typically be defined along the lines of: “A mischievous ghost, esp. one that makes mysterious noises.”¹ The assumption is even inherently reflected in the term itself, which can be seen when one dissects it from its roots in the German language. The first half of the term, *polter-*, derives in part from the verb *poltern*, which means, “rumble,” “to make a noise,” or “bluster.”² The related term *Polterabend* refers to a wedding-eve party where glass and old crockery are broken by the guests as a sign of good luck to the engaged couple, resulting in a great deal of noise.³ The second half of the term, *geist*, actually means “spirit, apparition, or ghost.”⁴ Thus, the two halves of the term combined seem to represent the traditional image of a “noisy spirit.”

Due to the overt similarity in their characteristics and the implied suggestion of spirits, poltergeists may often be confused with haunting phenomena. There are, however, some subtle differences between the two that make it possible to distinguish one from the other.^{5,6} As noted, poltergeist occurrences are usually of short duration. Hauntings, on the other hand, can range over a much longer period of time, lasting many months or even years. Hauntings can involve anomalous object movements and noises, but these tend to be much more spread out in time than in poltergeist cases, and thus, they tend to be more infrequent. Whereas hauntings often include reports of apparitions, poltergeists tend to lack such reports. Perhaps the most critical component that distinguishes the two phenomena is that, whereas hauntings tend to be associated with a certain *place*, poltergeists tend to be associated with a certain *person*.

In a majority of the cases documented by parapsychologists and other observers, it has been noted that poltergeist disturbances tend to focus around a certain individual (referred to as a poltergeist *agent*), with the disturbances often occurring in this individual’s presence and

within his or her general vicinity.^{7,8} Often times, the agent is a person who is found to be experiencing a certain degree of psychological distress related to interpersonal problems with other people that the agent lives or works with. For example, the agent may not get along very well with his or her own parents or siblings, and may harbor a desire to escape from a difficult home life. Alternatively, the agent may feel that he or she is being neglected or ignored by his or her parents, and may long for care or attention. Within a work setting, the agent may be facing some conflict with the boss or co-workers, and feels stressed by the situation. It is often found in these cases that once the agent is able to resolve these problems and deal with his or her tension, the poltergeist disturbances tend to vanish along with the agent's problems, suggesting that poltergeists are more likely to be human-related rather than spirit-related.

If the unusual object movements and noises in poltergeist cases seem to focus around an agent, then it may be hypothesized that they involve a large-scale form of *psychokinesis* (*PK*, or "mind over matter") on the part of the agent that occurs mostly on the unconscious level. This hypothesis may seem more sensible in light of the significant evidence gathered from experimental studies of PK conducted under controlled conditions. In such studies, ordinary people attempt to mentally influence the roll of dice or the sequence of numbers being produced by an electronic random number generator (RNG) in such a way that they would be able to make a certain number come up more often than would be expected by chance alone.⁹⁻¹⁵ And in other studies, certain people have attempted to influence larger objects via PK, such as compass needles and thermal gauges.¹⁶

Case studies suggest that poltergeist disturbances occur unexpectedly or spontaneously, and tend to recur over short periods of time. To better reflect these observations, J. Gaither Pratt and William G. Roll had coined the term *recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis* (or *RSPK*, for short) as a descriptive.¹⁷ RSPK is the technical term most parapsychologists still use today to refer to poltergeist phenomena.

One way to explore the hypothesis of PK on the part of the agent would be to try and examine any PK abilities that the agent may have, under conditions of controlled observation. In a sense, this would be an effort to try and bring the poltergeist into the laboratory. Due to the rarity and short duration of poltergeist cases, only a few opportunities have even arisen to study poltergeist agents in this manner throughout the history of parapsychology.¹⁸ As a result, they tend to be overlooked or missed by the media, skeptics, and the general public. Here, we will briefly examine two of those opportunities, which came about in connection to cases that were personally investigated by one of the most prolific researchers of poltergeist phenomena in the history of modern parapsychology, the late William G. Roll.

Roll had a career in parapsychology that spans just over half a century. After having an eventful adolescence in World War II-torn Denmark, he went to the United States to study philosophy and psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. Following a year of graduate work in sociology, Roll then went to Oxford University to study parapsychology under Professor H. H. Price. In 1957, he was invited by J. B. Rhine to join the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University, and it was there that he got his first exposure to poltergeists when Rhine asked him and J. Gaither Pratt to investigate a "house of flying objects" in Seaford, Long Island.¹⁹ Roll had taught parapsychology at the University of West Georgia until the time of his retirement in 2000, and from 1961 up to the time of his death in January of 2012, he had served as the research director for the Psychological Research Foundation.

The Miami Case

In January of 1967, Roll and Pratt had investigated poltergeist disturbances that were occurring in a small Miami shipping warehouse which specialized in the distribution of Florida-themed souvenir merchandise. According to the warehouse owners and employees, small souvenir objects (such as beer mugs, highball glasses, and ashtrays) were frequently falling off storage shelves in various areas of the warehouse, sometimes breaking on the floor in the process. In some instances, the objects had fallen some distance away from where they were initially placed, suggesting that they had taken flight to land where they were found. Larger objects, such as cardboard boxes, also occasionally fell and spilled their contents. Although one of the owners of the warehouse initially attributed these apparent “accidents” to simple carelessness on the part of his employees, it was soon noticed that they occurred most often whenever Julio, the 19-year-old shipping clerk, was present in the warehouse.

The object movements were still happening when Roll and Pratt arrived, and this allowed them the rare opportunity to conduct a semi-controlled experiment with a poltergeist. They noticed that there were certain shelves in the warehouse from which objects repeatedly fell or took off, and they decided to place specially-selected target objects on them to see if these objects would later move. They were able to maintain a fairly good degree of control of the situation by inspecting the areas around the target objects for magical devices beforehand, and by closely monitoring the movements of the employees, particularly Julio. At least ten of the target objects placed by Roll and Pratt had moved at times when either or both of them had the area under surveillance. At least seven of the movements occurred when Roll or Pratt had been directly watching Julio.^{20,21}

In one such instance, Roll was watching Julio place a plastic alligator figure on one of the storage shelves, in the hopes that the little figure might become a target object. A photograph that Roll had taken at that moment can be seen below.



A photo taken by Roll of Julio placing the plastic alligator figure on a storage shelf inside the Miami warehouse.

At that same moment, a highball glass sitting on another shelf four feet behind Julio had fallen to the floor and shattered. Roll was five feet away from Julio, and he could see that both of Julio's hands were occupied at the time: in his right hand was the alligator figure, and in his left hand was his filling order clipboard (see the photo above). Only two other employees were in the warehouse at the time, and they both had been more than 15 feet away from the glass when it fell. It did not seem plausible that either of them could have picked up the glass and thrown it because no one had been near the glass since Roll and Pratt initially placed it there. In the process of placing it, Roll and Pratt also checked the area for strings and any magical devices with which the event might have been faked, thus excluding the possibility of trickery.²²

A month after Roll and Pratt's investigation, Julio was invited to the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man's (FRNM) Institute for Parapsychology in Durham, North Carolina, for three days of psychological evaluation and PK testing. The results of the psychological evaluation seem to indicate that Julio sometimes experienced feelings of unworthiness and guilt at not having lived up to his family's expectations. There was also some indication that he harbored feelings of resentment towards one of the owners of the Miami warehouse, who he may have seen as being "phony and cheating."²³ These results were consistent with the idea that poltergeist agents may be facing psychological distress.

To explore a possible PK effect on Julio's part, the FRNM staff led him through a series of PK tests over the course of three nights. One of these tests utilized an automated dice-tumbling machine consisting of a two-foot long rectangular tube made of clear and sturdy plastic, which is rotated around in a circle by an electric motor belt. A pair of dice is loaded into the tube through a trapdoor at one end, which is held in place by spring clamps while the tube is rotating. The dice fall from one end of the tube to the other as the tube rotates, bouncing off a number of baffles as they tumble down, with the machine pausing after each turn so that the numbers on the die faces can be recorded.²⁴ An image of this rotating dice machine is shown below.



A photo of the automated dice-tumbling machine used in PK tests conducted at the FRNM. The man sitting to left of the machine is J. Gaither Pratt.

As mentioned previously, the goal for a person participating in the PK test is to make a certain number come up on each of the two rolling dice more often than chance alone would call for, through the application of mental will. Each individual test is made up of six trials, one for each of the six numbered faces on a die to act as the PK target.²⁵ By going around the die in this manner, any imperfections in the dice or the machine will cancel each other out and not contribute to the overall score.²⁶



A photo of Julio being tested for PK with the dice-tumbling machine at the FRNM's Institute for Parapsychology, while being observed by researcher John Stump.

Julio participated in three PK tests with the dice machine during the first night of his visit, consisting of 18 falls of the two dice, or 36 test trials in all. With probability of successfully rolling the target die face being 1 in 6, he would be expected to score six successful rolls by chance alone. Julio actually scored nine successful rolls in all – three more than would be expected. But with an odds ratio of only about eight to one against chance, this is not a significant result by statistical standards.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, there were some curious incidents that occurred during Julio's tests which may have been suggestive of a PK effect. For example, during the second trial of Julio's first test, the loading trapdoor at the end of the tube on the dice machine suddenly popped open, causing the dice inside to tumble out onto the tabletop. The FRNM staff never had something like that occur with the machine before, and they simply figured that the trapdoor was not tightly fastened. After the dice were reloaded and the trapdoor was firmly shut, the test continued.

But then, on the fifth trial, the trapdoor again popped open and the two dice fell to the tabletop, both of them landing with a successful roll of five on their faces. The trapdoor stayed put for the sixth and last trial of that first test, which produced one successful roll of six. When the second test was started, however, the trapdoor swung open a third time and the two dice fell onto the tabletop, landing with a successful roll of one on each of their faces. The trapdoor remained in place throughout the rest of the second test, but popped open one final time at the beginning of the third test, with one of the dice again showing a successful roll of one. An

interesting thing to note here is that Julio scored five of his nine successful rolls on the occasions when the trapdoor popped open, with this result having an odds ratio of just over 100 to 1.²⁷ Nothing like this occurred on any of the other PK devices that the FRNM staff had tested Julio with that first night.

On Julio's second night of PK testing, the dice machine test was again briefly tried with him to see if the same peculiar event would happen. The trapdoor did fly open once, despite the fact that it had been firmly closed and was carefully inspected beforehand by the FRNM staff to make sure that it would not open by natural means, and that it was not rigged to open through simple trickery. Perhaps even more peculiar was the observation that the trapdoor opening *did not* occur whenever the dice hit the bottom of the tube, when the force of the dice hitting the trapdoor might have naturally caused it to pop open. Rather, the door opened *only after the dice were already resting on the bottom of the tube*, just as it was beginning to swing upward for another rotation.²⁸

Another example of a curious incident suggestive of PK occurred during a rest break in between tests. Roll and three members of the FRNM staff were in an office, with Julio standing in the office doorway, holding a coffee cup in his right hand. A crash was suddenly heard in the hallway behind Julio, and everyone went in search of its cause. A large decorative vase that had been sitting on a table located on the other side of the hallway was found broken on the floor. The bottom of the vase and its glass stopper were both still intact, but the neck was shattered to pieces. The point at which the vase hit the floor was about five feet from the table on which it stood. It was about 16 feet from Julio's position in the doorway, and the vase had apparently moved toward him when it was displaced. At least two of the FRNM staff members had been standing opposite of Julio when the crash was heard, and had him in their sight at least partially at that moment (they could see Julio's right arm, but his left arm was out of view).

Although one might argue that Julio could have caused the crash through trickery by pulling a string in his left hand that was attached to the vase, there are several potential problems with this argument. Although Julio's left arm was obscured, no string was found in his left hand or on his person when Roll and the staff members focused on him immediately after the event. Similarly, no string was found near the vase, nor was there one lying in the hallway. In addition, it did not seem plausible that Julio could have tied a string to the vase because there was no free moment in which he had been left alone; Roll had been with him at all times. Roll and the FRNM staff also accompanied Julio when they went from room to room, so there was also not a moment in which he had been unobserved for a prolonged period.²⁹ If this incident with the vase did involve a genuine PK effect, then it may have been one of the first RSPK incidents to occur within the controlled space of a laboratory. And, as we will see in the next case, it may not have been the only one.

The Columbus Case

Beginning in early March of 1984, a series of poltergeist occurrences was reported in the Columbus, Ohio, home of John and Joan Resch. The occurrences primarily involved the movement of household objects of various sizes and weights, from as small as a hair barrette to as large as a loveseat. In addition, a small number of electrical disturbances were reported that involved room lights and appliances spontaneously turning on and off by themselves. When the

Resches called in a family friend who was an electrician, he too witnessed the electrical disturbances first hand, but was unable to trace them to any apparent problem in the home's electrical system.³⁰

It was soon noticed that the occurrences seemed to center around the Resches' 14-year-old adopted daughter Tina, who they had raised since she was ten months old. Although she was bright, Tina exhibited a number of social problems while attending public school and was being home schooled instead, which isolated her from her peers. She was also facing difficulty coping with the sudden accidental death of her closest friend and confidant the year before the occurrences began. John and Joan Resch had become well known in their local community for their outstanding work as foster parents, and they were caring for four other foster children besides Tina at the time of the poltergeist outbreak. As a result, their attention was often divided, with very little being focused toward Tina (being the oldest child). Unable to regularly receive positive attention from her foster parents, Tina resorted to drawing negative attention from them by frequently misbehaving. This led to conflicts between Tina and her parents that often escalated into physical confrontations, the peak of which was reached the night before the poltergeist occurrences started.³¹ The situation seemed very much in line with that of psychological distress.

The poltergeist disturbances occurring in the Resch home soon caught the attention of the news media, and the local newspaper *The Columbus Dispatch* sent reporter Mike Harden and photographer Fred Shannon to the home. While they were interviewing Tina in the living room, two telephones sitting on the table next to Tina began to spontaneously fly across the room. Eager to capture the movement on film, Shannon trained his camera on the phones for several minutes, but they did not move. Only after he had put his camera down did they suddenly fly off the table again. Noting the apparent elusiveness of the phenomenon, Shannon held his camera toward Tina and the phones, but then looked away. When he saw movement in the corner of his eye, he snapped the shutter. The approach was effective, and his resulting photo (shown on the next page) appeared to show a phone in mid-flight across the lap of a startled Tina. The photo soon appeared on the front page of the *Dispatch*, alongside Harden's story on the poltergeist.³²

Aside from Harden and Shannon, Tina's caseworker from the Franklin County Children's Services also witnessed one of the flying phone events. She stated that the phone struck the loveseat she was sitting on with an impact too strong for Tina to have thrown it. She had also seen both of Tina's hands at the time of the event, and was sure that Tina did not throw it.³³

Hardin's story and Shannon's photo were eventually picked up by the Associated Press, and for a few weeks, the "Columbus Poltergeist" case became national news. This led to a flurry of media coverage that initially reported on the case in ways that did not make it look very promising on the surface. At one point, the media held a news conference with the Resches that unexpectedly turned into a nine-hour vigil when a large group of reporters insisted on staying in the home until they were able to capture a poltergeist occurrence on film. During this vigil, a TV camera crew filmed Tina pulling down a lamp on the table she was sitting next to, an event she had apparently staged just to satisfy the reporters, who would not let her leave to visit a friend until they had witnessed something.³⁴ Most skeptics who were critical of the case immediately focused on this staged incident, blew it out of proportion, and used it to dismiss the case,

claiming that it was evidence that Tina produced all of the poltergeist disturbances through simple trickery.³⁵



A picture taken by photographer Fred Shannon which appears to show a telephone in flight across the lap of a startled Tina Resch.

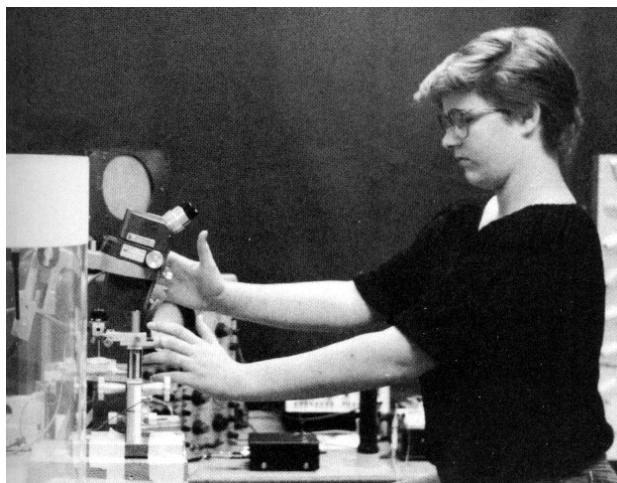
The media attention did have one benefit, however; it brought help to the Resch family by drawing the attention of serious investigators. Three days after the news conference, William Roll arrived from North Carolina with his assistant Kelly Powers, and Joan Resch invited them into the home. During their first three days of observation, Roll and Powers both witnessed several occurrences that could have been staged, initially causing them to cast doubt on the possibility that the case was genuine. Soon after, however, Roll began witnessing a series of events that he could not dismiss. In one event, an empty teacup that Roll had placed on a bedside table in Tina's room moved about twelve feet across the room. Tina was in Roll's direct view at the time, as he watched her mop up some water she accidentally spilled. Both of her hands were occupied, and a bed stood between her and the table, so she could not have grabbed the teacup and thrown it.³⁶

Two other events occurred consecutively while he and Tina were rehanging a painting that had fallen off the wall.³⁷ As Roll was using a pair of pliers to hammer the hanging nail back into the wall, with Tina standing right beside him, the tape recorder that he was using to document the occurrences suddenly flew off the dresser behind them and landed about eight feet away. At the time, Roll had Tina's hands in view, one of which was flat on the wall and the other at her side. Placing the pliers on the dresser, Roll went to pick up the recorder and make sure that it wasn't damaged, keeping Tina slightly ahead of him as he went. While he was kneeling down to check the recorder with Tina standing in front of him, the pliers apparently flew from the dresser and struck the headboard of a bed, about six feet away. Roll noted that Tina had her hands at her sides and had been more than eight feet from the pliers at that moment. Given that he had observed her ahead of him as they went to retrieve the recorder,

the idea that Tina had picked up the pliers while crossing the room and thrown them a few minutes later is not plausible.

In order to give her additional counseling and test her for PK in a laboratory setting, Roll brought Tina to Spring Creek Institute in North Carolina in October of 1984. By this time, Tina's RSPK was already in recession, and fewer poltergeist occurrences were being reported around her with time. However, psychotherapist Jeannie Lagle Stewart, who was asked to help counsel Tina during her visit, had found a way to possibly "reactivate" Tina's abilities through hypnosis. During a hypnotic session, Stewart asked Tina to recall the conditions under which the poltergeist disturbances had occurred in her home back in Columbus. The memories were unpleasant for Tina and elicited feelings of abdominal discomfort that she often associated with her RSPK. After the session had ended, four objects that Tina selected from her purse as possible PK targets had moved at separate times.^{38,39}

To test Tina's PK abilities, the late neurobiologist Stephen Baumann had constructed two innovative PK detection devices. The first of these devices consisted of a computer-interfaced microelectrode that recorded electric action potentials emitted at a steady rate by cultured pacemaker neurons taken from the large sea snail *Aplysia californica*.⁴⁰ The goal of the PK subject was to either increase or decrease the rate of the action potentials during randomly determined periods. The second device utilized two piezoelectric crystals made of lead zirconate titanate enclosed in a bell jar.⁴¹ One crystal that was visible at the top of the jar would act as the PK target, while the other crystal, hidden in the jar bottom, would act as a control. Both crystals were monitored through probes connected to charge amplifiers, and their charge output was registered on a running polygraph strip. The goal here was to attempt to apply pressure on the target crystal through PK such that it produces a registrable piezoelectric current, while the control crystal remains inactive. Both devices were mounted side-by-side on a vibration-damping lab bench to reduce the possibility of vibration artifacts.



A photo of Tina Resch as she participates in a PK test designed by the late Stephen Baumann at Spring Creek Institute.

Tina's results with both of the devices were initially promising. She seemed to be able to affect the pacemaker neurons' action potential rate in four experiments, with the most striking instance occurring at the end of the first experiment. The neuron stopped firing for about 23

seconds before continuing to emit action potentials at its regular pace. Five minutes later, it stopped firing completely. When Tina attempted to influence the target piezoelectric crystal, large-amplitude oscillations were observed on the polygraph recording strip. Similar oscillations were able to be produced when the experimenters simply tapped on the lab bench in a certain manner, but no one observed Tina doing this, with her hands resting on her lap during most of the sessions.⁴² Despite their promise, the results were difficult to evaluate statistically and some possible artifactual influences could not be ruled out with certainty.

During the breaks between the experiments, even more pronounced events that were suggestive of PK had occurred while Tina was being observed.^{43,44} During the first break, Tina and Stewart were exiting a computer room when a six-inch screwdriver moved about five feet from a desk near the window to the floor. Stewart then watched as Tina picked up the screwdriver and put it firmly in the middle of the desk. They both turned to leave, with Stewart walking behind Tina to carefully watch her movements, when Stewart heard the screwdriver land on the floor a second time. In order to land where it did, Tina would have had to pick up the screwdriver as she was leaving and throw it up over her and Stewart's heads. According to Stewart, Tina's hands did not move while she was watching Tina ahead of her, and she was certain that the screwdriver remained on the desk as they were leaving.

Tina again picked up the screwdriver from the floor and was placing it in a desk drawer a few minutes later when she and Stewart both heard something land on the carpet in Baumann's office across the hall. Stewart went into the empty office and found five coins that she had previously seen on Baumann's desk were now on the floor. When the sound of the coins falling was heard, Stewart had been watching Tina and was sitting between Tina and the doorway. Tina was also about eighteen feet away from the coins and further separated from them by a wall, so she could not have possibly faked the event.

The movement of the screwdriver and the coins seemed to make Tina upset, so Stewart suggested that they go outdoors for the remainder of the break. While they were sitting on the concrete steps just outside the lab, a hairbrush from Tina's purse was heard landing on the walkway behind them. Tina was sitting to Stewart's right at the time, and was seen holding a cigarette in her left hand while her right hand was on her knee.

About ten minutes later, Tina and Stewart were back inside the lab, standing in the doorway to a workroom and talking with Robert, a Spring Creek lab technician. Stewart saw movement in the corner of her left eye and turned to see a pen hit the wall. She had Tina in view when the pen landed on the floor, and did not think Tina threw it. Robert said that the pen belonged to him, and had been lying on his work cart in the workroom about fifteen feet away.

Just before the second experimental session was to begin, Tina and Stewart both went into the restroom. Tina went in ahead of Stewart and was at the sink mirror while Stewart examined the room for loose objects. Tina then went into one of the stalls and Stewart went into the one next to her. A loud crash was heard a moment later, and a fruity scent filled the air. When Stewart came out of the stall, she found a glass deodorizer broken on the floor, with its scented liquid spilled. The deodorizer's plastic container, which was mounted to the wall above the mirror, had its lid raised; Stewart noted that it had been closed during her examination of the room. Stewart also did not think that Tina could have opened it because she had been observing Tina up until the time Tina went into the stall, and had been touching Tina's foot in

the open space at the lower part of the stall partition to make sure Tina did not move while she was in the stall.

Three more events occurred following the second experimental session. Roll and Baumann were in the conference room, with Tina and Stewart standing outside in the hallway, when a loud bang was heard coming from the empty experimental room. When Roll and Baumann entered, they found a half-inch dent in the far wall. It had been apparently caused by a one-pound battery that flew twelve feet across the room before hitting the wall and landing beneath a table. Baumann last saw the battery sitting on the lab bench with the PK test devices, and was sure that the dent in the wall had not existed previously. Robert then entered the room in response to the event, and as he went over to talk to Tina in the hallway, he heard another noise. A nine-inch crescent wrench on his work cart had apparently flown about eight feet from out of the workroom and into the hallway, landing behind him. Finally, when the staff was readying to leave the lab, Stewart witnessed a black rubber bag attached to an anesthesia machine waving back and forth on its own. Tina was at the entrance to the lab and at least four feet from the machine at the time.

Given the succession of events the day before, a table was set up in the conference room the next day. Various objects were placed on this table as possible PK targets, including a hose clamp, an L-bracket, drill bits, a plastic level, an AA battery, and a twelve-inch socket wrench. All of these objects moved at separate times, even though Tina was kept away from the table at all times.^{45,46}

Following a hypnosis session, Tina was standing in front of Stewart in the hallway outside Baumann's empty office when a noise was heard from within, and the hose clamp was found on the floor of the office. To get there, the clamp would have had to leave the target table in the conference room, went around a corner into the hallway, and then around a second corner to enter the office doorway, a distance of about 33 feet. The idea that Tina had taken it from the target table and later thrown it was not plausible because Stewart had watched her during the event, and Roll was sitting near the table to prevent her from taking any of the objects. About fourteen minutes later, a roll of wire also landed on the floor of Baumann's office in nearly the same place that the clamp landed. The wire was not among the objects on the target table, and came from a table in a room about eight feet away. During the event, Tina had been with Stewart and Baumann, her back to the office and her hands visible on the doorway to another office.

The last event of the day occurred approximately eleven minutes later, when Stewart and Baumann were standing between Tina and the target table in the conference room, packing up equipment. They were facing Tina with their backs to the table when a loud bang was heard down the hallway, coming from the direction of a storeroom. When they got to the area, they found a large dent in the storeroom door, and the socket wrench lying inside the room. To get where it was found, the wrench would apparently have had to leave the target table, fly past all three individuals without them noticing, move nineteen feet down the hallway, and finally turn right to strike the storeroom door and land inside. Tina could not possibly have grabbed the wrench with Stewart and Baumann positioned in front of the target table, and without them seeing her move behind them to do so.

The following day was the last day of Tina's counseling and testing. During a break following the first experimental session, Stewart and Tina were standing by a console in the

computer room when Stewart heard a sound behind her. As she turned to look, Stewart saw movement across the line of paper hanging from a printer, and then found a plastic level on the floor just below the printer. To get there, the level would apparently have had to leave the target table and fly about forty feet in a curved path around two corners, the longest distance seemingly traveled by a target object. When Stewart heard the sound, she was watching Tina go through her purse with both hands, so it is not likely that Tina had thrown it. Roll was also certain that Tina had not been anywhere near the target table beforehand, so it is also not likely that she took it from there.

Stewart then went into Baumann's office so that she could use the phone on his desk, and took Tina with her. They were both sitting next to each other on the desk, with both of Tina's hands grasping Stewart's free hand while she was talking on the phone, when a loud noise was heard across the room. Baumann also ran into the office upon hearing the noise, and a pocketknife belonging to him was found lying on the floor. He had placed it on his desk some time earlier and it apparently moved from behind Stewart and Tina to land about twelve feet away. Although it is possible that Tina could have grabbed it upon entering the office, she could not have thrown it while Stewart was on the phone since her hands were holding Stewart's hand. About fifteen minutes later, Stewart saw Baumann's wallet, which had been next to the pocketknife on the desktop behind Tina, strike Tina on the side of the head.

The office events made Tina upset, and Stewart took her into the conference room to guide her through a relaxation exercise. Roll was also in the room guarding the target table, and Tina sat by the window with Roll and Stewart in front of her, blocking the table. As she was sitting, Roll heard an AA battery strike the window behind Tina. About a minute later, an L-bracket also struck the window. In neither case was Tina seen making suspicious movements in the direction of the target table.

The last event to occur while Tina was observed happened about five minutes later. Tina got up from her chair and went to the doorway of the conference room, with Roll and Stewart following to make sure she didn't access the target table. As she stood with her hands on either side of the doorway, a sound was heard behind Roll and Stewart. A drill bit had hit the window and landed in roughly the same place that the battery and the bracket landed. All three objects had moved about ten feet to land where they did.

Conclusion

The two opportunities to study poltergeist agents that we have examined here seem to provide some useful insights into reported poltergeist phenomena. First and foremost, they seem to lessen the argument of fraud as a possible explanation for the phenomena because the actions of the two RSPK agents were carefully and closely monitored by one or more observers throughout the study period. The two agents were also studied in an environment other than their home or place of employment – an environment that they were unfamiliar with and therefore could not have rigged for fraud beforehand. In addition, no clear evidence for magical devices or other signs of trickery was discovered near the agents or on their person during the study period. Second, if we assume that fraud can be excluded and that the phenomena are what they seem to be, then these opportunities may offer rare but interesting examples of ostensible RSPK observed under controlled conditions. In some sense, the researchers were able

to effectively bring a poltergeist into the laboratory for a brief time. The fact that the phenomena continued to manifest in the presence of the agent just as they did when they were initially reported seems to add support to the hypothesis that poltergeists, rather than being due to a discarnate spirit as originally supposed, are instead due to a living being. Many questions still remain about the nature of the poltergeist, but if more opportunities like these happen to arise in the future, we may eventually have some better answers to those questions.

References & Notes

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- ¹⁶ Heath, P. R. (2011). *Mind-Matter Interaction: Historical Reports, Research and Firsthand Accounts*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.
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- ¹⁸ A total of 116 poltergeist cases were documented between 1612 and 1974, and of these cases, 46 (40%) reported simple quasi-experimental tests that were successful. In the period between 1950 and 1974, six standard PK dice tests were given to poltergeist agents, three of which produced significant results. See Roll, W. G. (1977). Experimenting with poltergeists? *European Journal of Parapsychology*, 2, 47 – 71.
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- ²⁰ Roll, 1972/2004, Ch. 9 & 10.
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- ²² Roll, 1972/2004, Ch. 10, pp. 144 – 145.
- ²³ This is according to an evaluation and interpretation of Julio's psychological test results done by the late Gertrude Schmeidler. See Roll, 1972/2004, Ch. 13, pp. 170 – 171.

- ²⁴ A brief description of an early prototype of this automated PK dice machine may be found in Rhine, J. B., & Pratt, J. G. (1957). *Parapsychology: Frontier Science of the Mind*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, pp. 164 – 167.
- ²⁵ In other words, the person participating in the test aims for the “1” face on each of the two dice in the first trial, then aims for the “2” face in the second trial, the “3” face in the third trial, and so on, all the way around the die.
- ²⁶ For example, if one or both of the dice had some type of imperfection that caused them to be biased toward rolling a 6 more often than any other number, then this would add to the number of successful rolls when the “6” face is the PK target, but it will also subtract from the number of successful rolls when one of the other numbered faces is the target.
- ²⁷ To be a little more precise, the associated odds ratio is about 110 to one, based on an exact binomial p -value of .00895 for this result. See Roll, 1972/2004, Ch. 14, pp. 179 – 180, for details about this PK test with Julio.
- ²⁸ Roll, 1972/2004, Ch. 14, p. 180.
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- ³⁰ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 5, pp. 46 – 51.
- ³¹ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 3; Ch. 4, pp. 36 – 38.
- ³² The story that broke the news of the poltergeist disturbances in the Resch home was called “Strange Happenings Unnerve Family” by Mike Harden, which appeared on the front page of the March 6, 1984 edition of *The Columbus Dispatch*.
- ³³ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 7, pp. 78 – 81.
- ³⁴ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 9, pp. 95 – 99.
- ³⁵ Magician James Randi was the main skeptic to focus on Tina’s staged incident and interpret it as evidence of fraud in the Resch case. He also claimed that the photos taken by Fred Shannon showed further hints that the poltergeist disturbances had been faked by Tina through simple trickery. However, in discussing these photos, Randi never addressed the testimony of first-hand eyewitnesses such as Harden, Shannon, and Tina’s caseworker, who all stated that they did not witness anything which clearly indicated that Tina was faking them. See Randi, J. (1985, Spring). The Columbus poltergeist case: Part I – Flying phones, photos, and fakery. *Skeptical Inquirer*, pp. 221 – 235.
- ³⁶ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 12, pp. 128 – 129.
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- ³⁹ Roll & Storey, 2004, Ch. 17, pp. 187 – 190.
- ⁴⁰ Action potentials are the electrochemical signals that neurons produce through the movement of electrically charged ion particles through the axon, an elongated branch structure of the neural cell involved in sending messages to other neurons. For details on the process, see, e.g., Ch. 10 of Kandel, E. R., Schwartz, J. H., & Jessell, T. M. (Eds.) (2000). *Essentials of Neural Science and Behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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