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Exploring the Effects of Mediumship on Hope, Resilience, and Post-Traumatic Growth in the Bereaved

Caralyn J. Cox, Callum E. Cooper and Matthew D. Smith

Abstract

In previous decades there has been a lack of research into what people who sit with mediums gain from this process in terms of psychological benefits. Taking a positive psychology perspective, a qualitative approach was used to explore the effect that mediumship has on the bereaved. Seven participants gave retrospective accounts of a sitting which was felt to be meaningful to them, explaining reasons for this belief. This was explored using a thematic analysis. Findings suggested that mediumship appeared to furnish some resilience. Coping which appears linked to hope, linked to post-traumatic growth and also appears to be enhanced when someone experiencing a sitting with a medium believes they have had confirmation of survival of the deceased. Hope appeared to be increased, and resilience and coping were reported as strengthened after a subjectively meaningful sitting with a medium. The implication therefore is that mediumship appeared to offer positive psychological tools to enable better coping styles post-bereavement. This study has been condensed and updated from the original dissertation research conducted by the lead author (Bains, 2014 [now Cox]) and supervised by Smith.

Keywords: Mediumship, post-traumatic growth, positive psychology, qualitative research, thematic analysis, bereavement

Bereavement is a universal experience that can follow many paths. The five stages outlined as necessary to healthy grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). People often experience these stages in a variety of ways and orders, although rarely all five, nor always in the popularly proposed order (see Kastenbaum, 1989). In some cases this could progress through to what is considered as complicated mourning or grief (Shear, Monk, & Sillowash 2007), and may be prolonged or cause adverse health problems to the bereaved. Bereavement is also considered necessary to adjustment after loss, in order to accept life without the deceased (Schultz, 1978). Rando (1993) suggests that a mourner must acknowledge the reality of a death or they may start to construe the death as a temporary absence and not deal with it and re-adapt to their life afterwards.

Upon experiencing grief, some people will do nothing, some will see a counsellor, and some might seek spiritual counsel – amongst other things. This counsel can be sought via a religious figure such as a priest or vicar when grieving (Burke & Neimeyer, 2014). Sigmund (2002) would argue that pastoral counselling offered by religious figures, and certified pastoral counsellors is seen as helpful. Conversely, there is also the claim that spiritual or pastoral counselling will not benefit people who have no interest in, or are against any religion or spirituality (Sigmund, 2002). Yet some people irrespective of religious beliefs may seek to communicate with the person whom they have lost through a medium in a one-to-one setting, or via a platform demonstration in a spiritualist church (e.g. Beischel, 2014, Roe, 1998; Rock, 2014; Wright, 1920). In this con-
text, mediums are defined as “individuals who are used as an agency to receive communication from deceased human beings or other supposed disembodied entities” (Gauld, 2005, pp 215-223).

Recent research on mediumship has tended to be either “proof-focused” aimed at exploring whether mediumship is actually providing afterlife communication (e.g., Braude, 2003; Fontana, 2005; Robertson & Roy, 2001), or “process-focused,” which may focus more on the medium’s experience (e.g. Roe, 1995; Roxburgh, 2008). There have been fewer studies that have focused on whether mediumship can provide positive health benefits to the bereaved, as might be found in counselling. However, two existing studies of this nature, which yielded positive results, are Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013) and, Beischel, Mosher and Boccuzzi (2015). Both studies explored the therapeutic capacity of mediumship with comparable findings. Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013) looked at mediumship as a form of counselling from a counselling perspective, while also using a strong positive psychological perspective to explore the adaptive outcomes following an adverse event, specifically bereavement. It was found that in those who sought ‘mediumistic counselling’ following a bereavement, there was a higher sense of agency resulting in adaptive coping. This sense of agency expanded into a belief that life would get better, which could be considered to be post-traumatic growth (PTG). However, no measure such as the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006) – proposing only two items, one focusing on religiosity and spiritual understanding – was used in this study as it was anecdotal reporting, yet, it would offer potential for a more longitudinal study.

PTG can be defined as positive personal changes that result from the survivor's struggle to deal with trauma and its psychological consequences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). “Spiritual Change” is one of the five domains of PTG which is now being proposed, which fits well in relation to this study due to the nature of reported changes in beliefs and the experience of mediumship (Tedeschi et al, 2017). Similar finding were uncovered by Beischel, Mosher and Boccuzzi (2015), where the impact on grief for those who had a sitting with a medium was explored through survey feedback. Is was found that in turning to mediumship as an alternative to other therapies for coping with loss, the bereaved reported positive outcomes such as relief from the grief they suffered and a sense of a continued bond.

Both studies produced themes identified in bereaved individuals following interaction with mediums, which include: continued bonds with the deceased, relief, hope, spiritual healing, resilience and PTG. This present study aims to extend and build on the work of such research, to further explore theories of positive psychology, which is the science of what makes life worth living (Peterson, 2008). It can also been seen as founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014). Many people consult mediums and appear to display positive gains, even when spiritualism is outside of a person’s usual beliefs or faith system, sometimes after unexpected contact from the deceased (e.g., Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1996).

Seeking mediumship and “evidence of an afterlife” is not deemed to be a painful experience to those seeking a sitting, but rather is intended as a means to find peace and come to terms with the loss of a person who has died (see Beischel, 2014; Krippner, 2006). Thus, the exceptional experience of mediumship essentially provides an alternative to bereavement counselling, but with a spiritual approach. Certainly when we look at anomalous experiences during bereavement as a whole, the impact has predominantly been described as therapeutic and positive (see Beischel, 2014; Cooper, 2016, 2017; Cooper, Roe, Mitchell, 2015; Krippner, 2006).

The research by Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013) argued that where counselling is seen to take the form of mediumship, it produces a sense of agency where the bereaved feel they have established a continued bond with the deceased, the result of which was adaptive coping. The recommendation was that areas such as counselling, clinical studies, positive psychology, and parapsychology, would benefit from collaboration and showing awareness for such processes and outcomes (also see Cooper, 2016, 2017). Therefore, in taking the next step, this present study will explore themes of hope, resilience, and PTG further (all of which
were identified within the previous studies mentioned), to understand how a sitting with a medium is seen to promote these character traits or emotions from the “sitter’s” (the bereaved) phenomenological perspective.

To give a brief explanation of the theories explored within the context of this study, Masten, et al. (2009) suggested that resilience can be defined in relation to positive adaptations, and this is especially so when seen in the context of significant adversity. In this case bereavement is considered to be the significant adversity for survivors to manage, and previous research has suggested resilience to be buffered when survival of death is suggested by a mediumistic reading (or spontaneous experiences) and perceived as such by the bereaved.

Hope can also be seen within this context, where suggestions of an afterlife presents an ultimate form of goal attainment (Cooper, 2017), with the experience of mediumship presenting the experiential evidence for the experiene that there will be more to life beyond death. In the context of Snyder’s (1994) hope theory, a peripient is given the suggestion of life beyond death (cognitive agency – in this case a “will” to believe in survival), has experiences suggesting this which may either be spontaneous or sought, such as mediumship in the latter case (thought pathway – in this case the “way” in which this survival belief is supported), and achieves a continued bond with the deceased and a transformation of views on life and death (goal attainment – positive psychological support through the established perception/assurance that life continues beyond death ([also see Steffen, Wilde & Cooper, 2017]).

Clear comparisons can also be made with Snyder’s (1996) views on bereavement, in that we need some form of hopeful stimulus to facilitate the gap of loss, and exceptional experiences suggesting a continuation of life rather than a finality act as such (see Cooper, 2017). In turn, this appears to assist PTG and coping styles where mediumship is concerned, as an alternative to bereavement counselling (Beischel, Mosher & Boccuzzi, 2015; Beischel, 2014; Evenden, Cooper, & Mitchell, 2013). Extraversion, openness to experience, positive affect, and optimism, have all been established as positively associating with PTG (Joseph & Linley, 2008), these traits are often significantly impaired through bereavement. However, research has also produced data suggesting a transpersonal shift and personal attainment of a positive philosophy on life with enhanced appreciation for one’s own existence emerging after trauma such as bereavement (e.g. Lawrence, 2014; Malinak, Hoyt & Patterson, 1979).

**Research Aim**

Themes of hope, resilience, and PTG, are to be explored within the process of visiting a medium following bereavement, thus, further exploring and expanding on the generated themes of previous studies (Beischel, Mosher & Boccuzzi, 2015; Evenden, Cooper, & Mitchell, 2013), and an issue which has received little research attention.

**Method**

**Interviewees**

The study by Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013) contained a small sample of only three participants. In the present study and partial replication, a larger sample was considered to yield more meaningful interpretation overall of what is happening to the bereaved experientially within sittings with mediums. It could also explain more thoroughly why this is such a sought experience in some people as a means of managing bereavement.

There was a good demographic balance of gender and age. In total seven interviewees were recruited (Male, $n = 3$; Female, $n = 4$), with ages ranging from 23 to 65 ($M = 39.7$). Cultural balance in terms of ethnicity was noted as not being diverse enough, which may have been due to recruitment methods, where a call for
participants was put onto a social media group for people with an interest in the paranormal and a community group for local people. Backgrounds were mixed in terms of existing belief systems about life after death; some had an existing belief, whilst others had beliefs which evolved from having the experience of a sitting with a medium. Three participants claimed to have had beliefs of a spiritual nature for some time, with family members who shared those beliefs, one claimed to previously be quite sceptical, and two felt that their experience with a medium shaped those beliefs. Beyond the usual trauma expected following a death, three of the sample had experienced ongoing trauma about the manner in which someone had died. Two of the sitters had experienced the death of a significant relative by suicide.

Interview Procedure

Ethical issues were noted due to the sensitive nature of bereavement. Therefore, the BPS code of ethics (BPS, 2009) was fully adhered to throughout this study, especially when engaging with and interviewing the participants involved. However, much like previous research (Cooper, 2017; Krippner, 2006), it was noted that adverse effects were unlikely to occur given the therapeutic benefits of talking about such experiences. Even so, awareness for potential negative reactions during interviews was maintained by the researcher at all times. All interviewees were given an information sheet and then post-interview a debrief sheet, which also contained Cruse Bereavement Care helpline number and email address. In order to generate inductive data looking at the exploratory research question, semi-structured interview questions were used (see Bains (2014) for the original interview schedule). All interviews were pre-arranged and conducted at the interviewee’s home, except one who preferred the location of a coffee shop. Most interviews were conducted at a kitchen table with a computer tablet on the table between interviewer and interviewee to record the interview which was later transcribed. Interviews were typically twenty-five minutes to an hour in duration. All personal information was changed for pseudonyms.

Findings and Discussion

The chosen method of analysis for this study was thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), which is not defined as a specific method, but rather a tool to be used across different methods of analysis in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998). The versatility of thematic analysis made this an appropriate method to use for this research.

Themes Generated

A total of five superordinate themes emerged from the data set, with these being: “growth after trauma,” “belief systems,” “meaning and authenticity,” “hope and resilience,” and “protective barriers.” There were a further 19 sub-themes identified, all of which are discussed in full in the original report (Bains, 2014).

Theme 1: Post-Traumatic Growth

| Self-Mastery | Answers Surrounding Death | Sadness Reframed |

*Figure 1: Post-traumatic growth sub-themes*

This theme emerged in relation to PTG and how interviewees had reported that having an experience of a sitting had allowed for them to feel they were able to experience growth and positive emotions again – despite in two cases having experienced significant trauma,. Interviewees felt that they had grown after facing
their loss, gaining the strength to move forward after catastrophic loss – such as in two examples the suicide of a close relative.

Interviewee 2 said in relation to having perceived contact from her mother whom she had a difficult relationship in life “mostly all the contact I’ve had from her has been some sort of confirmation that she is sorry for the way she was with me and that she did love me.”

**Theme 2: Belief Systems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Someone Watching</th>
<th>There is Something Else</th>
<th>Good Evidence in Names and Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“Belief systems” also formed a theme after being mentioned several times, yet not necessarily being needed before a client had seen a medium. What also emerged was that belief in the medium stemmed from sitters’ perceptions of evidential feedback rather than a preconceived belief. Existential feelings of a continued bond, a sense of a having a protector, and life after death also emerged. When asked about afterlife beliefs, interviewee 4 reported having had no beliefs prior to visiting one particular medium: “My brother passed away last year and I went to see a medium in a church, and she couldn’t pick anybody out. Then the second lady I saw hit the nail on the head and she was telling me stuff that was just like him and so then I believed it a bit more.”

**Theme 3: Meaning and Authenticity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curiosity</th>
<th>Binary Responses</th>
<th>The Medium Couldn’t Have Known</th>
<th>Sense of Presence</th>
<th>A Vague Medium is Not Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A sense of curiosity as to content given to the sitter was mentioned several times with themes emerging as to how the medium could have known salient things personal to the deceased if they weren’t communicating with them. From this, the theme of ‘meaning and authenticity’ emerged from the data. Answering minimally with yes or no were also reported several times as a means of controlling both belief in authenticity and feeling like nothing was being given away which could feed the medium with information.

Participant 4 had no afterlife beliefs prior to visiting a medium and spoke of a powerful sitting where he received what he felt was information that he could only have got from his deceased brother. He stated, I hadn’t spoken to anyone about it, I was with a friend when we went to go and get his van from his house and I didn’t even mention to my mum or family about it. It was a white van, which the lady (medium) also knew, and there was this very loud music playing. The only way to describe it was like angel music, but very, very hard like drum and bass but with a classical almost influence to it, which made me automatically think that he was thinking about what he was going to do whilst he was sat in the car. But she said he wasn’t thinking about it then… there was no way the lady could have known that.
Theme 4: Hope and Resilience

Of all the emerging themes, “hope and resilience” featured significantly in recounting meaningful experiences within a sitting. Several interviewees described how the sitting and perceived contact allowed for a sense of completion where previously they had struggled with features of grief, particularly around acceptance of death circumstances. This was described as offering coping strategies. Interviewee 2 gained a belief in life after death that had not been there previously. Interviewee 4 spoke about coping with bereavement after seeing a medium and said “It makes it easier, it makes you feel better to talk to someone that knows things it’s not possible to know. You don’t feel so deflated, it gives you enthusiasm that you can actually get on with your life and it doesn’t just stand still.”

Theme 5: Protective Barriers

Feeling a sense of control by not giving away any information was separated out from sticking to yes or no responses and added something to this theme due to appearing to offer a sitter a feeling of protection from possible deception. Three interviewees described a perceived contact suggesting that they needed to move away from dwelling on the circumstances of the deaths, which had traumatic impact. This naturally fit within this theme as it seemed that the perceived advice offered a boundary against dwelling on the painful events surrounding death. Participant 5 who is sceptical spoke of a powerful experience in a spiritualist church which he felt gave irrefutable evidence and said, “I mean that (evidence) was absolutely gob smacking and everyone in the room clapped and I was absolutely... I wasn’t surprised but I was absolutely pleased to get the information.”

One of the key themes explored within this study was PTG and whilst the entire sample had not experienced a loss of someone where the actual death could be described as traumatic, it is still a significant feature. Participants reported an increase in coping ability day-to-day after the mediumship with a definite decrease in trauma associated with the death. This was reported most when the information brought about by the medium was felt to directly affect and reduce the trauma level. This was when the perceived contact gave evidential features about their death and words of comfort to reassure that nothing could have been done differently. This in turn reduced feelings of guilt which were reported as feelings of trauma or responsibility about the death particularly in the case of suicides.

Several participants spoke of the deceased providing information about their own death, which seemed to reduce trauma associated with the death for the bereaved. Interviewee 3 talked about how her deceased son gave her advice in order to reframe the sadness she felt after his suicide and gained comfort knowing he didn’t suffer. She explained that she had often found herself thinking over circumstances of his death before her sitting with the medium. Here mediumship could be seen as a protective factor against avoidance outcomes such as ruminating, where mediumship allows the bereft to face to issues in a different light than avoid them altogether.

Existing beliefs appeared to be strengthened, while lack of belief became a much more robust feeling that there was an afterlife, which again pointed to prior belief not being necessary in order to gain benefit from
having a sitting with a medium, thus supporting the findings of Cooper (2017) with regards to any kind of post-death phenomena the bereavement may encounter.

Issues surrounding “meaning” and “blame” where noted within the data, in cases where there had been difficult death circumstances. The belief that spirit contacts will provide some form of protection to loved ones from the afterlife was demonstrated in several of the responses. The data also show that the more interviewees felt that substantive evidence had been given, the more meaning they appeared to place on their own lives moving forward. Existential well-being, that is, well-being associated with feeling at peace with thoughts on life and death and feeling satisfied with life (Smith, Range & Ulmer, 1992) could also be said to be impacted on by the experience of having a meaningful sitting with a medium due to the reported increase in well-being feelings after perceived contact. Interviewee 4 described his experience with a medium as making him feel better, and not so deflated, he visited a medium after the suicide of his brother. Resilience was reported as increased after perceived contact had been given by a medium, and interviewee 4 described his coping levels as better than before, although this “comes in waves.”

It appeared easier for participants to come to terms with what had happened to the loved one when specific information was given and this was the most profound finding from the research. Interviewee 3 had lost her son to suicide and described feeling ‘lighter’ after her experience of seeing a medium, as well as it bringing her comfort. Interviewee 4 described how the medium gave him clarity after accurately describing how his brother who had committed suicide had left really loud music on in his car, causing him to feel that his brother had been driving around thinking of taking his life. He explained that the medium was able to reassure him that this was not the case through accurately describing this without prompting, which gave him feelings of hope in moving forward.

Existential isolation was a topic which also emerged, with the feeling that mediumship offered some form of buffering against this feeling by allowing for a sitter to experience healthy enduring bonds with someone who had died. Whether there was a prior belief system or not did not seem to alter the perception that the mediumship and positive effects experienced were genuine. The findings began to explain why mediumship is so actively sought after bereavement, even when outside of an individual’s faith system of beliefs.

Findings suggest that when mediumship was experienced by the participants who had undergone bereavement it appeared to aid resilience and adaptive coping. For this to happen the sitter has to have a belief that afterlife communication is being given, or the experience loses significant value. Interviewees also spoke of “real mediums” versus fake ones, suggesting the capacity to differentiate despite grieving. It is also important to recognise that not all experiences with a medium would offer the benefits described by the interviewees of this study and mediums are not trained in dealing with grief.

Reduction in rumination was noted as salient, which appeared to lead to better coping strategies. It also became clear that ‘evidence’ is as important to someone having a sitting as it is to the parapsychological community – though such standards obviously differ greatly between the two. Both reassurance and a sense of comfort were reported by interviewees. Distinguishing characteristics such as names and ages were useful evidence, as were health conditions the perceived contact had. Cause of death was also described as meaningful. There appeared to be several instances where sitters needed to hear that a death had not been traumatic, for peace of mind. It is this validating evidence which enables the receiver to gain reassurance which leads to a reported sense of comfort. Sense of presence also featured quite strongly as a means of comfort as well as personal evidence, leading to better coping with symptoms of loss.

When looking at the impact of mediumship on hope, resilience and post-traumatic growth in the bereaved, this study has addressed some of the phenomenology around why mediumship may be providing something in the way of cognitive nutrients to the bereaved. Whether there was a prior belief system did not seem to alter the experience negatively. Resilience and adaptive coping appear increased after a meaningful sitting. Mediumship also appears to facilitate hope, which in turn seems to enable people to cope better.
The results appear to concur with the studies of Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013), Beischel, Mosher and Boccuzzi (2015), and related research by Cooper (2017), in that mediumship is able to provide as much comfort as counselling might – if not more so. When exploring the effect that mediumship has on sitters, it is important to note that some people will have endured extreme trauma before they see the medium. It appears that there is enormous potential to help recipients come to terms with their grief and reframe their experience within bereavement by seeking spiritual counsel. This is a relatively unique area in an otherwise extensive proof and process orientated field of research, therefore it adds something to the area of mediumship research and builds on the Evenden, Cooper and Mitchell (2013) and, Beischel, Mosher and Boccuzzi (2015) studies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From these findings we can conclude that there is a comprehensible explanation for why there are so many people who seek the services of a medium during bereavement or attend a spiritualist church despite holding different religious beliefs. The interviews carried out within this study further support the notion that mediumship is able to positively impact on resilience, hope and PTG. It could also be suggested that mediumship may help individuals experiencing grief to move through the stages of grief (Kastenbaum, 1989; Kübler-Ross, 1969) quicker than those devoid of such experiences, and transition through the stage of acceptance with greater ease, particularly where an individual is held in trauma or contemplating the death. Mediumship appears to provide robust positive psychological coping mechanisms to people who have been bereaved via attributes of hope, resilience, and PTG.

Revisiting the research question of whether there is some positive mental and existential effect caused by visiting a medium has further demonstrated the therapeutic gains the bereaved may obtain from the process. A larger scale study of a similar nature is required if we are to understand a broad range of these experiences and alternative outcomes. For example, what are the consequences of any negative experiences with mediums? Though rare, they still happen and have not been explored in any depth or single study. The question of ethics should also be considered, as whilst this study addressed positive therapeutic benefits, mediums with no training in thanatology have potential to cause harm, and this may point towards the industry of mediumship becoming better regulated. In summary, it is clear from the present analysis that mediumship appears to act in much the same way as counselling, though offers an alternative perspective where continued bonds with the deceased are promoted.

References


**Biography**

Caralyn Cox BSc (Hons) Psychology, MSc Applied Positive Psychology is an Associate Fellow of the BPS, and an associate member of the APA. She undertook the MAPP programme at Bucks New University and has a research focus on both positive and transpersonal psychology. She is currently Director of Positive Psychology with Precipeace, inc, an online mental health provider.

*Bucks New University*  
c / o Dr. Matthew Smith  
Department of Psychology  
Queen Alexandra Road  
High Wycombe  
HP11 2JZ  
caralyncox.cc@gmail.com
Diagnosis, Prophylaxis, and Treatment of the Evil Eye in Greece: A Critical Approach

Marilena Avraam-Repa

Abstract

According to the “evil eye” superstition, an intense envious glance can lead to several instances of misfortune or physical discomfort. The Greek folk tradition abounds in related diagnostic, prophylactic and healing “remedies.” The author presents a theoretical approach that gives weight to anthropological, psychological and parapsychological explanations.

Keywords: evil eye, superstition, envy, Greece, explanation

Widely known as “matiasma” in Greek, the evil eye refers to a primarily Mediterranean (Roussou, 2005), intuitive or superstitious belief, claiming that the energy that stems from powerful emotions, including jealousy and admiration, can be transmitted thought a malevolent glare of a purported sender and afflict the victim’s health, wealth, well-being, or good fortune (Roussou, 2011; Siettos, 1995).

Senders and Receivers

In line with the folk wisdom, both intentional and involuntary evil eye manifestations are fairly common (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2014). In practice, any envious, jealous or upset agent, also known as “matiastis,” may consciously or unintentionally use their eyes in order to harm the receiver, or “matiasmenos,” through an ostensible negative-energy transmission (Roussou, 2011).

Within that context, Greeks believe that people with blue eyes and/or thick brows are to be feared the most (Hardie, 1923; Murgoci, 1923). The latter warning may be explained in terms of facial distinctiveness, given that light-colored eyes are generally rarer in Greece (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2015). By the same token, thick eyebrows, which enhance the intensity of the look (Hardie, 1923), may convey a hostile impression to the beholder (Lundqvist & Öhman, 2005). Lastly, social outcasts, “doomsayers,” old, childless women, etc., are also commonly considered as probably envious and thus dangerous or, simply put, “jinxes” (Siettos, 1995, p.166).

On the other hand, some typical triggers of envy are claimed to be the outstanding social status, beauty, or uniqueness of the victim (Roussou, 2011). Therefore, new mothers, their new-born children, but also animals and inanimate - yet fancy - objects are usually framed as highly susceptible targets (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2005). Practically, the latter overemphasis on this vulnerability-factor may indicate an attempt to ascribe meaning and causality to tragic and uncontrollable events, as in the case of a sudden child-loss, by appealing to a superstitious, albeit culturally-acceptable, explanatory framework.

Diagnosis

Functionally, the evil eye might be better understood as a multilayered phenomenon that builds upon several distinct components and includes a diagnosis, a treatment and a prevention phase. In terms of a diag-
nosis, several unexpected and causally inexplicable adversities or physical symptoms (i.e., stomachaches, headaches, yawning, nausea, mood swings, irritation, etc.) are often ascribed to evil eye enchantments (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2014; Schoeck, 1955). Apart from a superficial - prima facie - evaluation there are also a few traditional diagnostic tools. According to an old and quite widespread remedy, for instance, the healer should fill a glass or cup with water and then drip three drops of oil. If the oil-drops float, the person isn’t afflicted. If they dissolve, the person has the evil eye and a curse-undoing ritual should take place (Siettos, 1995, p.58).

Healing

“Ksematiasma” is a Greek umbrella-term standing for any evil-eye-related healing rituals, including religious evocations, secret prayers, powerful mantras, or other, more sophisticated practices that make use of water, ash, coal or wax, in order to remove the purported negative energy (Siettos, 1995). With regards to the healer’s identity, these are usually lay-specialists (Roussou, 2011); neighbors, friends, or relatives, who are familiar with the relevant rituals, and are not supposed to disclose them thoughtlessly, or else they might lose the ability to cast away the evil eye (Hardie, 1923). Sometimes, people do also resort to a priest for religious blessings (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2011), and rarely they might also pay some so-called “experts” for more elaborate anti-curse practices. Interestingly, Greeks also believe that face-to-face or long-distant ksematiasma can be equally effective (Roussou, 2011). Eventually, yawning is generally considered as an indication of a successful healing process (Roussou, 2005).

Prevention

In addition to the treatment process, there are also several prophylactic or apotropaic measures that can be taken in order to ward off the alleged impact of the evil eye (Roussou, 2011; Siettos, 1995). These include the use of talismans and other, semi-magical, sacred or religious objects, such as salt, red threads, blue beads, or the holy cross (Hardie, 1923). Less widespread is the use of specific plants, like rue or garlic, that are believed to guard against all sorts of negative energy (Roussou, 2005). Some folklorists believe that it may be due to their repulsive odor or caustic properties (Hardie, 1923; Roussou, 2005), which are expected to discourage any spiteful onlookers.

Of particular interest is the use of the Greek anti-evil-eye amulets called “matakia,” which translates into little eyes (Roussou, 2015). These talismans consist of blue glass with an eye painted on them, which are supposed to guard against the evil eye by absorbing and eventually reflecting off the negative energy (Roussou, 2015).

Lastly, when people express their admiration out loud, usually they also perform some compensatory actions in order to neutralize the power of an unintentional spell-casting. Most often they spit out three times (Roheim, 1952), and say out loud something like “Evil eye go away!” (Siettos, 1995, p. 105-106). Functionally, this apparently random and quite peculiar practice could be an intuitive health-prevention attempt, which relies upon the antiseptic properties of saliva (Siettos, 1995).

Why the Eye?

In accordance with several anecdotal accounts and legends, witches can kill their victims through a fierce glare (Gross, 1999). Similarly, Medusa, a terrifying Greek mythological Gorgon, was said to turn people into stones by her terrifying looks (Gross, 1999; Roheim, 1952). Evidently, the oculus is not just another organ, but also a meaningful, sacralised or even demonised entity. Therefore, given its crucial involvement in the processes of facial expression and emotional decoding (Lundqvist & Öhman, 2005), the emphasis on the eye, as a sine qua non for the evil eye phenomenon, seems fairly accurate and purposeful (Gross, 1999; Roussou,
On the other hand, another explanation can be traced back to the old - yet persistent - extramission theory of vision, which holds that “vision depends on light that streams out of the eye and detects surrounding objects” (Gross, 1999, p. 58). Accordingly, this fire-in-the-eye schema, which implies that some sort of energy comes out of the eye, could probably account for several intuitive beliefs, including the evil eye phenomenon and also the feeling of being stared at (Gross, 1999).

Anthropological Explanations

From an anthropological standpoint, several irrational or primordial beliefs denote an overarching socio-moral code that serves both normative and interpretative purposes (Abu-Rabia, 2005). Roussou (2005) for instance, likens the evil eye to a “collective oculus” (p. 6), that scrutinizes, judges and eventually rewards or dismisses all forms of human conduct. Under such close examination, people might be further prompted to comply with any given social norms (Roussou, 2005). Reversely, those who are disobedient, hostile, envious or deviant may be considered as taboo-breakers and eventually jinxes (Herzfeld, 1981) - the scapegoats, in other words, that are to blame for every inexplicable misfortune.

On the other hand, this and other folk beliefs and rituals may be understood as an early attempt to comprehend and eventually take control of adverse events that, in turn, gave rise to some non-scientific, metaphysical explanations (Frazer, 1990; Irwin & Watt, 2007; Keinan, 2002). Undeniably, the latter suggestions aim to shed light on the original cause and dynamics that encouraged the development and dissemination of varied superstitious beliefs. However, these cannot easily explain why the fear of the evil eye is so deeply entrenched to this day, despite the radical changes in the social fabric.

Psychological Explanations

Superstitious thinking builds upon ambiguous ideas, including a misguided attribution of biological properties to inanimate entities and an overreliance on the concept of energy (Keinan, 2002; Lindeman & Sacher, 2007). In psychological terms, the notion of the evil eye seems to rest on a similar, false, biased or superstitious reasoning, which could result from an underlying thought-action fusion (TAF) process; namely, an erroneous equalization of actions and thoughts or emotions (García-Montes, Álvarez, Sass & Cangas, 2008), leading to the illegitimate assumption that negative intentions or envious feelings may have a literal negative impact on a physical being. When further strengthened by the aforementioned extramission theory of vision, the latter fusion might eventually turn into a fallible - yet meaningful - conviction, which can assist both the interpretation of unease or misfortune (Abu-Rabia, 2005) as well as processes of anxiety regulation (García-Montes et al., 2008).

Next, with regards to the healing phase of ksematiasma, any ostensibly mysterious or paranormal cure could be a purely normal phenomenon in disguise. Given the vague nature of any related somatic symptoms (e.g., agitation, headaches, etc.), for instance, their resolution is highly likely to be random or due to a parallel stress-reduction process. Consequently, ksematiasma resembles a placebo condition that requires a persuasive healer and a suggestible healee (Hardie, 1923), with a biased tendency to ignore any ineffective sessions and only recall the successful ones.

Eventually, those allegedly curative rituals tend to give fresh impetus to the overarching superstition and also to various “preventive” strategies, commonly relying upon the precarious efficacy of an amulet. In line with Frazer’s (1990) theory of sympathetic magic, similar aversive practices may originate from a primitive homeopathic principle, which states that misfortune can be avoided when using a symbolically-equivalent object, like the eye-effigy. Along the same lines, these archaic copying-behaviors may provide people with a comforting illusion of control (Irwin & Watt, 2007; Keinan, 2002).
Clearly, the latter psychological model could demystify the evil eye phenomenon to a great extent. Nevertheless, it does not easily explain a few related issues, including the casting and removing of the evil eye from non-suggestible targets, like animals or objects. Additionally, the stress-reduction model cannot readily account for the original cause of any physical discomfort, especially in those cases lacking in obvious stressors. Prompted by these and other peculiarities, it might be enlightening to review some alternative suggestions.

Parapsychological Explanations

Angelos Tanagras, naval doctor and prominent scholar of parapsychology, was probably the first contemporary Greek scientist who formulated an expanded theoretical model for the evil eye, back in the early twentieth century.

According to his theory of psychovória, people possess a certain energetic imprint, which may be amplified under specific conditions, including pregnancy or fasting (Siettos, 1995). Subsequently, this aura or energetic field may be literally projected outwards and further affect other inanimate or living entities (Koumartzis, 2017). Thereupon, the evil eye could be understood as a byproduct of such an intentional or unconscious energy transmission (Koumartzis, 2017).

Similarly, any curse-undoing rituals could be treated as some sort of deliberate spiritual energy-exchange between the healer and the victim (Roussou, 2005), that requires entering a suggestible, altered state of consciousness (Siettos, 1995). Closely related to the notion of psychic healing, ksamatiasma may then involve a psychokinetic component. That is, a tangible - yet, possibly, non-local - effect of the healer’s positive intentions on the healee’s bodily condition, without utilizing any other conventional means of intervention (Roussou, 2011). Should this be the case, it would be easier to explain any long-distance curative practices, and also those addressed to non-human targets, which are not expected to form any health-improvement expectations (Irwin & Watt, 2007). The main difficulty, though, lies in the identification and measurement of the latter undiscovered, elusive energy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to an ancient and pervasive folk belief, envious people can harm others via a malevolent glare. Within that context, bad luck and bodily distress are often diagnosed as workings of the evil eye, and consequently prevented or treated in ritualistic ways. An in-depth examination of the latter phenomenon might be valuable for a number of reasons. First, a belief in the evil eye might have a functionally significant impact on human action, by reinforcing both avoidant (secrecy or behavioral distancing, for instance, in order to keep away from jealousy) and comfort-seeking practices (e.g. mental or physical rituals, etc.). Taken to the extremes, these behaviors might affect individuals’ psychosocial functioning. Second, given the fair amount of related anecdotal experiences and testimonies, this “raw material” might eventually correspond to an actual phenomenon. In that case, future research could investigate any underlying processes and –hopefully- identify their normal or anomalistic nature.

In conclusion, the empirical and strictly scientific study of the evil eye manifestations, beliefs and practices could deepen our understanding of the possibilities, limitations and consequences of human interaction.

References


Biography

Marilena Avraam-Repa is a licensed psychologist (BSc), specialized in “Transpersonal Psychology & Consciousness Studies” (MSc) and “Behavior Therapy for Anxiety Disorders” (PgDip).

Marilena Avraam-Repa

05 Ippomedontos Street, Pagrati, 11635
Athens, Greece
marilena_arpen@hotmail.com
Apparitions and hauntings have been reported in all countries and at all times, and their cultural transformation is well known (see Schneider, 2011). At the end of the 1970s, parapsychologists Scott Rogo & Bayless published a collection of testimonies by the recipients of unexpected telecommunication calls that had apparently come from deceased friends or family members. British psychologist Callum Cooper updated this collection in 2012, while last year French sociologist Laurent Kasprowicz launched a local and then a national survey of similar instances after having himself experienced comparable phenomena following the loss of his dog. We review here five of the latter’s published cases and ask: How, as clinicians, might we counsel such challenging experiences? Since they involve material channels such as telephone calls, text messages and emails, they play a central role in balancing out the conventional tendency towards reductionist explanations which conceive of them purely in terms of subjective or even pathological experiences. These reported experiences are sometimes associated with poltergeist activity. They also often occur in the context of mourning, sometimes anticipating the death of the “caller” and sometimes following it years later. We suggest these experiences may be related to what von Lucadou has called embodiment disorders or complex environmental reactions, and may therefore be conceived as lying on a continuum between purely psychosomatic disorders, at one extreme, and such phenomena as poltergeist activity at the other. Science currently lacks research data in this area and we therefore call for more research.

Keywords: telecommunications, ghosts, calls from the dead, bereavement

The geographic and historical ubiquity of apparitions and hauntings is well attested (Schneider, 2011). We can trace the beginning of the scientific study of what Houran and Lange (2001) have called entity encounter experiences (EEEs) to an extensive study by Gurney, Myers & Podmore (1886) entitled Phantasms of the Living, which investigated “apparitions occurring soon after death.” The authors were aware that the experience of sensory stimuli associated with deceased friends and relatives was common but its explanation was ill-informed. These early researchers did not consider such experiences were necessarily subjective hallucinations, especially where there were additional witnesses to the phenomena, or when the apparition conveyed veridical information known to the deceased but unknown to the percipient until later.

Although these experiences usually appeared spontaneously, they were sometimes intentionally sought out by people who developed instruments of detection appropriate to the experiences. In the mid-nineteenth century, the spiritualism movement was born after the Fox family were believed to have communicated with a ghost using Morse code (Moreman, 2013). Several communication technologies have been used in attempts to enhance this kind of contact (Baudouin, 2015). The possibility of communicating with the dead even seems to have crossed the minds of several pioneers of telecommunication technologies (see Noakes, 1999). During the mid-twentieth century, as sound recording became more widespread, there was a new wave of interest in electronic voice phenomena as attempts were made to communicate with the dead through portable recording devices and modern digital technologies (Cooper & Parsons, 2015).
Historically, therefore, the earlier reported cases of spontaneous EEE, and which did not involve electronic technology, have since been augmented with cases involving telecommunication systems. In some cases contact with the deceased was intensely wished for by the recipient and therefore may potentially have been induced. The present paper focuses on Spontaneous Telecommunication EEEs, where contact with an entity is not consciously intended (see figure 1). These EEEs may be considered as a subtype of the larger category of anomalous telecommunication experiences, a topic which has recently attracted experimental investigation (Schmidt et al., 2009; Sheldrake, 2014).

Figure 1: Subcategories of Entity Encounter Experience (EEE)

People who report spontaneous telecommunication EEE may seek clinical counselling because of the phenomena’s apparent inexplicability, which may be quite disturbing to the client owing to the highly significant meaning of such events. To contribute to the development of a specialized clinical counselling strategy adapted to anomalous experiences, this paper reviews some phenomenological studies of them, discusses reported cases collected by the author and others, and raises some clinical issues relative to these singular experiences.

The Phenomenology of Anomalous Telecommunication Experiences

The spontaneous and persistent contact with deceased people, along with the associated imagery and beliefs in ghosts and the afterlife, has been reported in all cultures (Moreman, 2013). In France, the first appearance of the term *psychology*, which in French literally translates as “science of the soul,” was in a book on ghosts and other paranormal phenomena published towards the end of the Renaissance (Taillepied, 1588); but the real psychology of ghost experiences is still in its infancy (Houran & Lange, 2001). It was not until the publication of a longitudinal study conducted as part of a medical doctorate by Rees (1971) that such experiences began to be taken seriously in the ‘mainstream’. Rees’ study was entitled *The Hallucinations of Widowhood*, and appeared in the *British Medical Journal*. The term *hallucination* was used very loosely, referring to anomalous sensory experiences ranging from a sense of presence, through to: smells, touch, voices, and full visual apparitions of the dead. Rees’ study led to further but unpublished doctoral research being conducted in the same area focusing on the commonality of such experiences, their purpose, and their impact upon individuals. These studies have found anomalous post-death experiences to be a perfectly natural part of the grieving process and to have therapeutic value (Burton, 1980; Conant, 1992; Devers, 1994; Hayes, 2011; Knight, 2011;
In 1979, American parapsychologists Scott Rogo and Bayless published 50 testimonies of anomalous experiences involving telecommunication technologies. In Italy, Massimo Biondi (1984) collected around 40 cases after a one-year study. More recently in the UK, Cooper (2012, 2014) has reviewed and updated this study with new cases and a more systematic approach. His data collection was similar to previous methods, in that radio and newspaper articles were used to encourage people to come forward with accounts of “exceptional experiences involving the telephone.” This wording is designed to avoid any bias in data collection and therefore addresses the attitudes previously expressed by critics who have naively assumed that reports have only been collected from sources who already interpret the communication as coming from a discarnate entity. One hundred cases were investigated in total and a specialized typology was developed:

**Type 1: Simple Calls.** These are the most commonly reported of phone calls from the dead. Typically, the deceased caller says only a few words and is unresponsive to any questions asked. At this point the caller may lapse into silence as the line goes dead but without the customary sound of the caller hanging up the phone or being cut off.

**Type 2: Prolonged Calls.** These calls may last for 30 minutes or so and involve a conversation like any other telephone call. The recipient does not realise until after the call that the caller was in fact dead at the time. It would appear that the recipient’s ignorance of the caller’s death somehow seems to allow the conversation to last longer. By contrast, simple calls suggest that the shock of knowing the caller is dead somehow cuts the conversation short or leaves the dead caller unresponsive.

**Type 3: Answer Calls.** These are cases where a living person makes a call to someone they do not realise is dead or to someone who was not actually at home when the call was made. The caller nevertheless receives a return call from the person they were trying to contact. These calls are usually prolonged.

**Type 4: Mixed Calls.** This category was added by Cooper (2012) to form a combination of Type 1 & 2, and is evident in the case below reported by Kasprowicz. In these cases percipients may be aware of the caller being dead yet report repeated calls and extended conversations.

**Type 5: Intention Calls.** These calls are intended to be made but are not actually carried out: nevertheless, the intended recipient insists they occurred. Scott Rogo experienced an intention call in 1975. Intending to ring a psychologist at UCLA, he decided instead to take a nap. Two hours later the psychologist rang him because a volunteer had taken note of the call and the request to ring back. The call was apparently received at the very moment it was intended to be made. After this experience Scott Rogo began his investigation of strange phone calls. Prosaic hypotheses may be applied to these cases, such as amnesia about calls made during a somnambulistic crisis.

In general, since all these experiences were spontaneous and their retrospective investigation was limited, they cannot be used as valid scientific evidence to decide between parapsychological or non-parapsychological hypotheses. Spontaneous cases do, however, allow phenomenological study and the formulation of hypotheses that are interesting in themselves, even if they are not confirmed by later experimental research (Alvarado, 1996). We should also be aware that, with a clinical approach, spontaneous cases from the parapsychological viewpoint are not equivalent to exceptional experiences from the clinical perspective (Evrard, 2014).

Cooper (2014) summarized other prominent phenomenological structures that emerge when we review...
Type 1 experiences were reported as occurring anywhere from between 24 hours to some 40 years after the loss of a close friend or loved one. 10% of the cases occurred on a significant anniversary or emotionally meaningful day. Regarding characteristics of the calls, in 34% of reported cases there were audible anomalies such as static on the line or the caller sounding faint, hollow, or distant in tone. 6% of calls appeared to display features of the caller giving a message of warning or emergency to help the receiver of the call avoid some form of impending danger. 10% were associated by the caller with other meaningful coincidences.

The phenomenological findings of the Cooper (2012) study appear to closely match the findings of Scott Rogo & Bayless’s original study nearly forty years ago now, despite the incredible advances in telecommunication technology since that time (Cooper, 2014). These results demonstrate that anomalous telecommunication events are being widely experienced and reported, which suggests a cross-cultural phenomenon. Biondi carried out a replication study in Italy in 1984, and encouraged further serious examination of telephone anomalies in 1996.

Examples of Spontaneous Anomalous Telecommunication Experiences

In France the sociologist Laurent Kasprowicz (2016) collected 17 new cases, including one of his own. Unfortunately we cannot compare his database with previous ones because of certain methodological biases, including an opportunist sampling protocol and a disclosure of interest regarding the afterlife hypothesis. However, we present descriptions of five cases published by Kasprowicz, in order to familiarize the reader with the subjective and objective complexities of such cases. Our five cases present distinct configurations, only two of which (Laurent, and Didier & Isabelle) received complementary investigation. The material reviewed here prepares for the discussion on what a clinician might do when approached for counselling after such experiences.

Case 1: A Recorded Mixed Call (Type 4) after Laurent’s Loss of His Dog

In October 2004, at 30 years of age, Laurent lost his dog after 16-years of companionship (Kasprowicz, 2016). During a car trip eight days later he exclaimed to his mother and brother: “I hope in paradise we get our dogs back. I would love to receive a sign.” The next minute he received a short text message on his mobile phone, reading: “Hello. My integration was fine. Everything is OK. Julie.” Since it was at the beginning of the academic year, he deduced he had received a wrongly directed message from a student named Julie, but began to wonder if it might also be the sign he had desired.

The next morning Laurent began receiving strange telephone calls on the family land-line, which we discuss below. Fifteen days later he and his brother drove over to see a famous medium in Paris in the hope of finding an explanation. On their way they stopped at a petrol station whose manager was standing behind the counter with her dog. Asking the dog’s name, he was told it was Julie: the same name as in the text message and a very unusual one for a dog. He interpreted these two peculiar events as a synchronicity or meaningful coincidence triggered by his dog’s death.

Describing them as phone calls from beyond, Laurent explained that the telephone rang day and night for several days, sometimes accompanied by the ringing of the doorbell. When he answered the phone no one responded to his questions and it hung up after a few seconds, only to ring again almost instantly. The answering machine recorded messages, sometimes even after the handset had been picked up. Two of the recorded messages contained laughter reminiscent of “a family meeting.” These phenomena were later interpreted as
soradic anomalous perturbations, which are typical of poltergeist experiences.

On one occasion Laurent had the distinct impression he was communicating on the phone with someone, possibly his recently deceased dog, who could only reply in Morse code. Quickly divining that one tap was for no and two was for yes, he began asking questions, some of them quite tricky. The more he interacted, the more convinced he became that this was not a prank call. The interaction was only with him but both his mother and younger brother witnessed the call.

With emotions running high, Laurent understood the meaning of the call to be that “his dog was living safely somewhere with his grandfather.” The whole conversation lasted more than 15 minutes, at the end of which he asked how his dog had died and clearly heard the sound of a dog panting quickly before the call ended. This confirmed his beliefs because he knew his dog had died of lung cancer, which had caused it to breathe in a labored manner towards the end of its life.

What is so peculiar about this experience is that Laurent was not alone during the call – it is corroborated by his mother and brother. This first degree objectivity allows him to reject certain explanations such as individual hallucination. Furthermore, he recorded the entire conversation with a small tape recorder, which he was using for his doctoral research in sociology. Laurent felt a pressing need to make me listen to all the evidence. He was very disturbed by this experience and tried to cope with it by looking for similar testimonies. Thus he began an uncritical exploration of the paranormal, seeking “the reality of reality.” These exceptional experiences seem to have profoundly upset his worldview.

Case 2: A Recorded Simple Call (Type 1) - Nicole

One day, Nicole noticed her answering machine was blinking, although she had not heard the phone ring. The vocal message said: “All is OK, don’t worry, I’m OK, all will be OK,” and was accompanied by deep breathing and a voice that seemed to trail away into the distance as the message ended. Nicole recognized the voice as belonging to her mother, who had died eighteen months ago aged 81. Nicole played the message to family members, all of whom confirmed it was her mother’s voice, after which the message erased itself. A few months later Nicole’s sister Isabelle died unexpectedly and Nicole made a link between these events.

Case 3: Simple Call (Type 1) - Didier and Laetitia, a SMS That Failed to Comfort

Didier, 48 years old, lost his boyfriend Jean-Pierre (whose nickname was JP), after an agonizing three weeks suffering from AIDS. Didier prayed for a sign. One week later he received a short text message at the exact same time of Jean-Pierre’s death and on Jean-Pierre’s birthday! The message, from an unknown telephone number, read: “Above all do not worry. I have arrived safely. Promise me you’ll take care of yourself. I love you. JP.” “Take care of yourself” had been JP’s signature phrase.

Didier was hysterical and took no comfort from the experience. At the time he was in a car with his friend Laetitia, who also read the message and told him to call it back. They tried 50 times but only received the automated reply: “This number is no longer assigned.” This was the only paranormal event in Didier’s life.

The author’s interview with Laetitia elicited further details of the story. In truth, Didier and JP’s relationship had been a troubled one as JP had been unfaithful, which was how he had become infected with AIDS and passed it on to Didier. So Laetitia was not a big fan of JP but did everything to give emotional support to her bereaved friend Didier, who was also suffering from a bipolar disorder.

At the time of the SMS Laetitia was taking him out for a drive to try and get him out of his depression. Her emotional involvement may be a key to the phenomena. In fact, she seems to have had numerous PK experiences in her life since childhood. She is now forty and still experiences regular anomalies with the TV-set, light bulbs, and watches, and has had to change her insulin pump 40 times in 12 years. Consequently I suggested to her that the SMS may have been a kind of PK by empathy, and that it was the best consolation message
she could have provided, even if it did not have the expected beneficial effect. She was very surprised by this interpretation.

**Case 4: Prolonged Call (Type 2) - Myriam: recorded and corroborated**

Myriam, 56 years old, received a call from her dad when she was 40, six months after his accidental death. His voice sounded quite metallic and the background noise was suggestive of the kitchen of a restaurant. He didn’t answer his daughter’s questions but made apologies for the bad things he had done in his life. The communication lasted two minutes. But the strangest thing about this case is that her two sisters received the same call at practically the same time, despite being thousands of kilometers away. The message was recorded on their answering machine but disappeared at the third listening.

**Case 5: Simple Call (Type 1) - Nicolas: call by proxy**

Nicolas, 38 years old, received a strange call when he was 28. In the middle of the afternoon he was awakened from his nap by a call from a man with a Polish accent, an accent he was familiar with from having a Polish brother-in-law. The man told him he was in a coma in a hospital in Warsaw, and asked him to say goodbye for him to his daughter Manue. Manue is Nicolas’s friendly neighbour who returned from holiday 10 days after the call and grieving after her father’s death in a Warsaw hospital after suffering a coma. Nicolas was so terrified at not being taken seriously that it took him several days before he disclosed the telephone incident to Manue.

**Discussion**

Anomalous telecommunication experiences have been popularized through books with titles referring to the deceased, such as *Phone Calls from the Dead* (Rogo & Bayless, 1979; Cooper, 2012; Kasprowicz, 2016). They have also been mixed with after-death communication experiences and bereavement issues (Cooper, 2013; Cooper, Roe, & Mitchell, 2015). Although all the examples presented in this paper are associated with the loss of a human being or animal, we wish to keep open the possibility that the phenomena under scrutiny may also occur in a non-death context. Type 5 intentional calls, for example, exhibit similar phenomena to those involving living persons. They may occur before or several years after a death, and so these experiences are not always an immediate response to loss.

Further emphasis and consideration should be given to calls that are reported by living agents but which have anomalous features, such as instances of people assuming they have received calls from aliens (Cooper & Foley, 2012). “Spontaneous after-death communication” is not the correct term to use here, and “hallucination of widowhood” is not the only hypothesis. Further research should seek out and compare both death and non-death-related cases. These spontaneous telecommunication EEEs, as we call them, may be the psychokinetic counterpart of those extra-sensory perceptions through telecommunication systems which are already under study (Sheldrake, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2009).

Such cases raise several issues:

- What are the theoretical options for understanding these people’s experiences when they bring them to the psychotherapist?
- What kind of balance between empathy and challenge should clinicians strive for with clients such as these?
- What therapeutic techniques might be applied to help clients integrate these kinds of experiences into their respective worldviews?
These are important questions for which we seek opinions from clinicians with experience of these situations.

One response is to treat these cases skeptically and ask for the same rigorously documented verification for the clinical setting as we would expect for a scientific one. According to previous studies, it is not rare to find several witnesses observing and recording the same phenomena or gaining accurate anomalously acquired knowledge through their experiences. The materiality of the evidence seems to challenge reductionist psychological hypotheses. When someone reports such experiences in counseling, what can we do with this objective aspect? Should we avoid becoming a witness and appearing in the record, or should this be part of the therapeutic alliance? Is there a risk to being solicited as a scientist or technician rather than merely being consulted as a clinician? And should we suspend judgement and adopt a neutral position?

Let us now consider the events of Laurent’s case which, while not occurring in a formal psychotherapeutic setting, nevertheless illustrates the complexities of the relationship between someone who experiences an EEE and a clinical psychologist. Laurent initially asked the present author to contribute to his new book on phone calls from the dead. I accepted the request and therefore became privy to the strange conversation that had been recorded. Laurent is now using this fact to support his online struggle against critics who do not share his views.

Becoming involved helped me understand the kind of phenomena being dealt with and the emotional aspects raised by an alleged communication with a deceased animal. I can also better understand Laurent’s difficulties when confronted with so-called skeptics who seek either to deny his experience, prematurely reduce it to a prosaic hypothesis, or criticize him for adopting an enthusiastic attitude towards his experience. These critics have not heard, and sometimes do not want to listen to, the evidence of the recording.

It is not only a question of either remaining neutral or else adopting a stance subversive relative to the scientific consensus. Rather, it is about keeping open the possibility of working with the subjective part of the experience while the objective part is brought into the foreground. Being receptive to the “reality” which is proving problematic to the client may well be a necessary step in the therapeutic alliance. The other side of the coin is that the clinician may become drawn into a scientific controversy that goes beyond the clinical setting.

Another issue is the elusiveness of these anomalous experiences. In the cases of Nicole and of Myriam’s sisters, material recordings vanished in a strange way. In Laurent’s case the recording had not been investigated properly until now but remains ambiguous because it does not contain actual voices but only sounds and ostensible “rappings.” This elusiveness is very problematic for the experiencers because they fear not being taken seriously because of it. Consequently they are sometimes prone to exaggerated attempts to justify their evidence and may urge the clinician to contact other witnesses, etc. The clinician is caught in a scientific controversy and this position conditions the possibility of the therapeutic alliance.

A further important issue in regard to these cases is that classical signal-like parapsychological hypotheses are contradicted by this elusive nature of the evidence, and this reinforces the suggestion that an external intelligence or agency is behind the phenomena. This is a natural and understandable response which may be of clinical interest. Would the phenomenon have as much impact if the experiencer thought they were communicating with their own unconscious? It might be suggested that the clinician could try describing non-signal parapsychological models to the client which actually integrate elusiveness, for example the Model of Pragmatic Information (von Lucadou, Walach & Römer, 2007) or the Generalized Quantum Theory (Walach, von Lucadou, Römer, 2014). But is this really a practical possibility for a clinician? While it may favour the growth of new paradigms and the integration of such experiences into new models of reality, it may also freeze the clinical relationship at the level of a negotiation of knowledge.

These cases strongly suggest survivalist interpretations because the main actors are dead people who present themselves as if they were alive to the living. This interpretation may be reassuring in some cases of bereavement (Rees, 1971; Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015), but may also destabilizing the client’s worldview. Experiencing interventions from the dead completely out of the blue and without a proper belief system to explain them may sometimes trigger reactions associated with more external attributions and mental disorders.
such as paranoia and depressive isolation.

Poltergeist phenomena and synchronicities are frequently associated with cases like Laurent’s, which may strengthen the survivalist interpretation for the experiencer who may be experiencing a sense of loss of control or that they no longer have a place of safety. The endorsement of paranormal belief systems often leads them to seek heterodox offers of assistance (Mayer & Gründer, 2011). Psychics, mediums, spiritual groups, and cults, etc., tend to reinforce these interpretations and may even generate addictive behaviour (Grall-Bronnec et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, we should avoid too negative a view of these experiences. Naturally occurring positive emotions and resilience may develop following spontaneous anomalous experiences during bereavement (Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015). As in the cases of Nicole, Didier and Myriam, the explicitly positive messages seem to have an important consoling function. From a therapeutic point of view, these messages look very useful, so why promote scientific skepticism about their origin? The clinician faces the ethical dilemma of primum non nocere, and so it seems difficult, at this stage of the research, to provide generally valid counseling guidelines.

Beischel, Mosher & Boccuzzi (2014-2015) investigated the impact of sittings with mediums for the bereaved, along with other forms of induced perception of communication with the dead. Reviewing this material, they found that such experiences repeatedly diminish or even entirely alleviate grief and therefore compare favourably with traditional methods of bereavement counselling (Beischel et al., 2014-2015). Some research using the Psychomanteum achieved the same effect (Hastings et al., 2002). And what should we think about Induced After-Death Communication as a therapy? (Chambon & Belvie, 2012). There is a difficult epistemological choice between clinical pragmatism and the allegiance to an agnostic and materialistic worldview: how might we retain both for the benefit of experiencers? If such an experiencer seeks the help of a professional counselor, which kind of counseling or psychotherapy will avoid undermining the positive potential of their experience?

Conclusion

We have raised many questions for which we do not have the answers, and we hope further investigation into these largely unrecognized experiences will advance our understanding. These anomalous telecommunication experiences are still seldom investigated, despite their affinity with our societies increasingly connected modernity. They are quite probably part of von Lucadou’s embodiment disorders or complex environmental reactions. Because of the movability of the Cartesian Cut between mind and body, these experiences may theoretically be considered to lie somewhere along a continuum ranging from purely psychosomatic disorders to poltergeist phenomena. In fact, our modern environment is increasingly becoming an extension of ourselves, as with our smartphones, for example. Poltergeist cases and even anomalous telecommunication experiences may be understood as external psychosomatic reactions.

These experiences raise non-specific clinical issues which occur more or less with every client’s attempt to convince a therapist about the reality of their lives and the validity of their interpretations. Placing objective elements in the foreground, redoubling arguments against their elusiveness, and using interpretations to focus on external forces, are very common strategies used in other counselling situations involving exceptional experiences. The clinician has a great deal of difficulty authenticating these experiences so that they become meaningful but without perverting the possibly positive trajectory of the therapeutic outcome. In addition to ontological and phenomenological studies of anomalous telecommunication experiences, we require publication of more clinical cases to help us improve our counseling practices.
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References


**Biography**

Renaud Evrard is a clinical psychologist and associate professor of psychology at the University of Lorraine. He is leading the research team Clinical and Projective Psychopathology of the Laboratory Interpsy. He co-founded in 2009 the Center of Information, Research and Counselling on Exceptional Experiences (www.circee.org)

Renaud.evrard@univ-lorraine.fr
Personal Accounts & Art Work
Many people often have experiences that we, in the psychology community call “transpersonal,” “spiritual” or “exceptional experiences of consciousness.” Exceptional psychology is a field that studies these experiences and phenomena which are traditionally related to parapsychology. Some examples of these type of experiences may include extra sensory perception, survival after death, out of body experiences, and after death communications. Depending on the nature of the experience and the individual, one can find it to be very healing and positively transformative.

Unfortunately, some refrain from sharing with friends, family members, and “professionals” (such as clergy and mental health professionals,) due to ridicule, invalidation, judgement or even been labeled as a “brick short of a full load.” There is a prevalent lack of openness and understanding in regards to these exceptional experiences. I am a little different than many of my peers in the field of mental health. I approach my clients and others with a different perspective—one of a fellow experiencer, and one educated in transpersonal or “spiritual” psychology, as well as a psychotherapist.

I have been present for many peers and clients while they have shared their accounts in transcendent realms, communications with deceased loved ones, and more. These accounts can be very powerful, but there are few words to fully describe the impact when you personally have one of these experiences. I listen, empathize, understand, and validate these extraordinary subjective experiences, because I too have had similar exceptional experiences and life changing encounters with loved ones who have passed.

Here is my story: I was raised in the south in a small college town called Milledgeville, Georgia, USA. Almost every Sunday, my parents would take me and my brother to go see our granny, Annie Dean Garner, after church. She had a quaint little house, with pictures of all the family members on the walls, and a turquoise blue couch that I often played on in her living room. She was a very sweet woman with long, brown and gray hair that she kept braided on top of her head. She always wore her glasses, and was warm and loving. I would spend the day hanging out with her playing and helping around the house.

Later on, during my early college years, we discovered that Granny had been diagnosed with colon cancer. This was devastating to our family. I remember my mom calling me and telling me, “you’d better go visit your granny.” I went to the local hospital to visit her, and I remember seeing her in the hospital bed. Although she was sick, she was smiling and very appreciative that I came to see her. That would be the last time I would see my granny alive.

A few days later, my mom and dad were notified by the hospital that Granny was in a coma. I received a call and rushed to the hospital. I ran into my father in the parking lot. He had a very concerned look on his face, and, without saying a word to me, kept walking towards his car. I quickly went inside, up the elevator and to the floor where my granny's room was located. I found my mother sitting there crying. My mom explained that she was holding Granny's hand when she took her last breath. My dad could not stand to be there to watch her pass.

Years later, I had an experience that transformed my life in a deep and profound way. One Sunday afternoon, I was feeling tired, so I chose to sit and meditate on my couch. I started to move into a deeper state of meditation and began to feel my body less and less as I rested with my eyes closed. I observed my thoughts, watching them subside. As I was meditating deeper and deeper, I felt my head nod. The third time I nodded,
my head jerked. I opened my eyes and just happened to look down at my couch. Something strange was happening. My couch was normally beige, but now it was turquoise blue! When I looked around, my vision seemed cloudy, but I could sense someone sitting across from me.

I heard a familiar voice in my head say, "focus." I decided to focus and my vision cleared and I saw someone sitting across from me in the room. It was my deceased granny sitting in her chair and smiling at me! I couldn’t believe what I was seeing!

I thought to myself, I am making this up. My vision became cloudy again and I heard the voice say, “It’s your own fear and doubt getting in the way. You need to focus.”

I focused on the figure in front of me and my vision instantly cleared. I saw my Granny sitting only a few feet away from me—she smiled and stared at me. Her brown and gray hair was still neatly braided and she wore her beautiful white gown.

I decided to go along with the experience and told her, "I miss you, Granny, and I love you.” She replied, “I love you, too.”

I asked, "How am I doing spiritually?" Granny replied, "You are doing well, but you should stay away from the theological debates." (At the time, I had been having a rather strong religious debate with a friend of mine.)

I acknowledged Granny. “I understand it is not my place to tell anyone their beliefs are wrong.” She said, "I love you. Take care of your father if he ever gets sick.”

I said “Okay, I will take care of Dad... Granny, I need you to give me validation that this experience is real and true.”

She said, “Okay,” and led me into the kitchen where she showed me squash and onions cooking on the stove. “Ask your mother about the squash and onions she cooked today.” I said, “I will Granny, and I love you.” I then felt myself coming out of my deep meditation and back to my waking awareness.

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I thought was that I needed to call my parents to see if what my granny told me was true. My heart was beating fast with excitement as my dad answered the phone.

I asked, "Dad, did you eat squash with onions today?"

He said, "Yes. What are you doing, some kind of mind reading?"

I replied, "No, but you wouldn't believe me if I told you." Dad put my mother on the phone and I asked her the same thing.

She said, "Yes, I cooked squash and onions today and your aunt did too. How did you know?"

I told her, "I saw Granny and she told me what you did today. Granny also told me to take care of Dad if he ever gets sick."

I am thankful to have seen my granny again after her passing, in a non-ordinary or altered state of consciousness and having what I believe was a face-to-face encounter. This experience had a powerful transformative effect on my life—I no longer feared death. For me, I now have certainty that there is an afterlife, and our loved ones are continuing their lives in another way. The knowing she gave me in this encounter is what parapsychologists and other researchers call “vertical evidence.” My granny shared corroborating information that I could then check, by telling me what my mom cooked that day.

My granny did not come back to give me the secrets of the universe or share the “right” religious beliefs. If anything, she urged me to stay away from religious debates, and instead, guided me in another spiritual direction. She came back to give me the simple message of taking care of her son --my dad. It was a simple message of love.

This profound experience helped me reconcile my emotions with not only the loss of my granny, but also with the passing of other family members and friends. While the encounter has never taken away the initial grief of saying goodbye, it has had the lasting effect of creating a stronger ability within myself to understand and better cope with the eventual passing of others close to me.
This experience served as a significant catalyst for my evolution, both personally and professionally. My biggest concern was no longer whether or not I was going to “continue existing” at the end of my life, but now, how can I live to my fullest potential? If I were to live to my fullest potential, I knew that my inner spiritual life needed to be congruent with my outer life. My previous corporate positions were not a good match for my newly-evolving spiritual life. I realized that I had to follow my heart now, and move into a healing profession.

My values shifted. No longer was I concerned primarily with achievement and financial success. I was now more focused on serving and helping others heal, grow, and transform in a deeper, more heart-centered way. This life changing experience awakened a deep spiritual need inside of me to become a Psychotherapist and Clinical Hypnotherapist, with a specialty in religious, spiritual, and transpersonal issues and experiences. I am now gratefully providing individual and group mental, emotional and spiritual support for those with similar exceptional experiences.

I send a very special thank you and I love you to my granny, Annie Dean Garner.

Biography

Shaye Hudson, MA, LPC, CH.t is a psychotherapist and clinical hypnotherapist in Atlanta, GA with a transpersonal orientation and training, who specializes in Spiritually Transformative Experiences. He is also a reviewer for the Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology.

Shaye Hudson
Shaye.hudson@gmail.com
This is my second article for the *Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology*. My earlier endeavor, “Five Exceptional Experiences,” appeared in the Summer 2014 edition and described psychic episodes I had roughly every 3 years from 2000 to 2012. Those five events presaged the sudden deaths of a friend and family members, as well as the Columbia disaster and the Aurora shootings, and I speculated as to what 2015 might have in store. This is what actually happened.

A recreational vehicle (RV) is now a personal necessity because of the backaches I get from soft hotel mattresses. In October 2014, Margaret and I bought a late-model Class A with a huge windshield that gives us a panoramic view of the world, and installed an adjustable air and foam mattress to alleviate my back problems. Powered slideouts increase the interior space by extending a section of room, including the floor, out to each side of the RV. The original seats, however, were uncomfortable on long trips. Another problem was the bathroom, which was not designed to accommodate left-handers or anyone weighing over 150 pounds. When we replaced the sink, however, a small metal washer fell onto the dark linoleum floor and lay unnoticed.

Accompanied by her sister, Margaret took the motorhome on August 28, 2015 for installation of new seats at an RV furniture dealer in Southern California. They stopped overnight at a shopping center with 24-hour security that was 80 miles from the dealer’s showroom, but then things started to go awry. Arriving after dark, they parked in the wrong area. Although I had called ahead to clear their stay, the security patrol initially found no record of it and knocked on the door a few times, even after midnight, to resolve the confusion.

At home, my night was no more peaceful than Margaret’s. I had stayed behind, perhaps because of an unconscious premonition, but could not sleep. I tossed and turned in unaccustomed solitude, got up several times to stretch, and again tried to doze off. Suddenly the house shook and there was a woosh like a giant breath of air being exhaled. A woman wearing a golden dress appeared in a brilliant halo of light by the bedroom door. She smiled, leaned forward and spread out her arms as if to say “Ta-Da!” I glanced for only a second, but she appeared to have Asian features and an ornate gold costume like a Balinese dancer.

I could not look death in the face. I pulled the bedsheets over my head and screamed at it to get out. After what seemed like eternity but was probably only a few seconds, the light disappeared and I was once again alone in the dark. Eventually I fell asleep and woke up exhausted.

Margaret soon called to say they were stuck. The metal washer had jammed under the slideout when she tried to close it. They were delayed several hours waiting for a technician, so it was late afternoon before they arrived at the dealer’s showroom where the new seats were finally installed. They had to spend another night camping and did not return home until the next day.

**Discussion**

This event continues the phenomena I described in “Five Exceptional Experiences.” Nobody died this time, so I was spared the sadness that connected me with those experiences. The event was not veridical, as there were no details that tied the apparition to the subsequent breakdown of the RV, but this was more than made up for by the special effects. The materialization of a beautiful gold-clad dancer in one’s bedroom leaves a lasting impression.

There are elements in common with my previous experiences: the three-year interval between events,
the association with a female as either a victim or herald, and the spike in entropy. As happened in 2000 and 2003, travel by either auto, aircraft or RV demonstrates how a chain of direct and indirect actions by many people can lead to a psychic experience that appears to be accidental but may have been predetermined in time. Travel can be very liminal.

I’ve spent two years thinking about possible explanations. Could I have created the apparition in my own mind? Suppose I got a fleeting glimpse of the metal washer on the dark floor of the RV before Margaret’s trip, but it only registered in my subconscious. Maybe I had recently watched a television show about Indonesian culture. When I started to worry about my wife, I responded by imagining a Balinese dancer complete with special effects, from which I then hid in panic. Interesting but unlikely.

Could this have been a dream or hallucination? Some of my experiences have been dreams, but this was not dreamlike. The scene never jumped around disjointedly and was neither vivid nor surreal; it seemed like a waking experience in every detail. My knowledge of hallucinations is limited, but I do not think they come unbidden; there is usually an underlying cause such as drugs, extreme sleep deprivation or hunger. But even if those terms somehow describe the event, its precognitive nature remains.

Perhaps the apparition was a projection from the unconscious of Margaret or her sister, both under duress from interrupted sleep in an unfamiliar environment. I was so frightened I didn’t look directly at its face. But if one of them created some kind of bilocation or doppelganger phenomenon, would she be in the mood to subconsciously smile at me and conjure up a gold costume with light and sound effects?

Six months after the event, I read Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces, and was struck by its parallels with my own experiences. I learned of “the spontaneous appearance of the figure of the herald in the psyche that is ripe for transformation.” This signals the call to adventure, celebrated in the legend of “The Four Signs”, where the sheltered Future Buddha first became aware of age, sickness, death and monkhood. As consciousness grows, “what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value”, marking a new stage in life’s journey.

My fourth experience in 2009 was a veridical dream characterized by temporary possession that spurred me to discover the riches of spirituality and psi. Campbell is right; the old pursuits no longer beckon, but those who do not refuse the call will find help along the way in overcoming the dangers. “One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear.”

Like family, ageless guardians tend to appear when least expected. They may in fact be family, as the apparition was most likely Margaret’s daughter, Mary, who died shortly after birth on January 28, 1976. That would explain the Asian features, although I didn’t take the time to look for a family resemblance. The appearance occurred on the 28th day of the month; possibly coincidental, but then two psychic events in a row took place on Mary’s birthday. She may continue to be a guardian for her mother, and a warning from her on this occasion would not be out of character except for the lack of bodies. Perhaps I temporarily appeased her by writing about my experiences.

According to Campbell, a meeting with the goddess is the ultimate adventure. The hunter Actaeon chanced to see the goddess Diana bathing, so she transformed him into a great stag who was then brought down by his own hounds. While he meditated in a grove, Ramakrishna, the 19th century Hindu mystic, witnessed both the beauty and horror of Kali as she ascended from the Ganges, gave birth to a baby whom she nursed, then devoured it and disappeared back into the river: “Only geniuses capable of the highest realization can support the full revelation of the sublimity of this goddess. For lesser men she reduces her effulgence and permits herself to appear in forms concordant with their undeveloped powers. Fully to behold her would be a terrible accident for any person not spiritually prepared.”

No wonder I ducked under the covers. Although not edifying, the path of least resistance may have been the most expeditious way to ensure my continued existence, and if the pattern holds, another chance may arrive when I’m ready. Campbell goes on to say — “Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initi-
ation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is capable of yet comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation…she is redeemed by the eyes of understanding. The hero who can take her as she is, without undue commotion but with the kindness and assurance she requires, is potentially the king, the incarnate god, of her created world.”

For me, the transfigurations have come as an ever-changing assortment of psychic experiences connected by a common thread. It began with rearranged pillows on the sofa, then progressed to precognitive dreams and fleeting possession by discarnate entities. The goddess was always there in symbolic form, signified by a date, an interval, or a surrogate. She has lured and guided me with just enough to see vague outlines, but never the totality of what can be known. There is much to learn, especially when it comes to kindness and assurance. Asked what spiritual practice he followed, Joseph Campbell replied, “I underline books.” That’s useful advice for someone like me.

Where this all leads remains a mystery, and no less perplexing for me is why I’m the focus. There has been a personal cost in bearing witness to what I’ve seen; most people find it difficult to accept, even though I think I have a better understanding of reality than they do. But then I’ve been in their position and acted the same way as them for most of my life. Worse, actually.

A possible explanation for my role is offered by Kenneth Ring. In The Omega Project, he describes a developmental theory known as the encounter-prone personality: someone “likely to register and recall extraordinary encounters” such as near-death experiences or contact with UFOs. These are individuals with a high capacity for psychological absorption and dissociation, possibly due to childhood abuse and trauma, or simply by being more psychologically sensitive than others. They also tend to be highly imaginative and visually creative, with lives “marked by a succession of unusual and paranormal events.”

I had a brief UFO encounter in 2010 that I described in my 2014 JEEP article. Ring also discusses the work of Jacques Vallee and Carl Raschke, who have suggested that these mysteries are a way to: “regulate belief systems, culture, and even human evolution…not merely to control us, but to confound us. That is, these experiences are visited upon humanity to loose it from the fetters of its encrusted habits of thought and action, freedom from which is absolutely essential if the next state of human evolution and the reclamation of the planet are to occur.”

This is comforting, although it’s probably a little early to call myself a harbinger of the future of human evolution. Since I’ve never had children, I may be more likely to win a Darwin Award. I also draw comfort from knowing that miracles and mystical experiences still occur in the putative age of science. These days one almost gets that feeling that Western religions are embarrassed by well-documented phenomena such as levitation, stigmata, incorruption and inedia. By ignoring their own history, churches may actually be contributing to the general decline in religious participation among people.

I still don’t know what to make of Mary. Is she the spirit of an innocent baby or something more, perhaps an old soul, goddess or archetype? I sometimes think of her as the adroit mastermind of an ongoing confidence game, where I play the unsuspecting mark who’s left to ask after a well-executed sting, “What just happened?”

References

Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology

Biography

Brad Fulton is retired and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial engineering and a master’s degree in business administration. He is a supporting member of the Parapsychological Association.

bradfult@gmail.com

Brad Fulton
In early August of 2016 I had a vivid dream in which I traveled outside my body to meet my future self. I had transported back in time through a spaceship to tell myself about the astral dimension and its relation to psychic phenomena. My future self expressed a great desire to tell me information of great importance that could change the world. An idea started to articulate in my mind about how I would communicate this information. I relayed to myself that I was to create a website to dedicate my life to the field of parapsychology, spiritual exploration, and research projects that could change science as we know it.

As I woke from this dream a vision stuck with me of the experience. A picture of my experience was engrained in my mind that I could not stop thinking about. This powerful dream was unlike any other I have had before. It was more than a dream to me it was a message; a guiding message that I believe shaped the future of my life.

I’ve created a piece of artwork that represents my dream experience as well as the website, TheAstral.com. My goal for TheAstral.com is to create a source of information and projects on parapsychology and scientific exploration. It is an open platform of communication to discover new information on paranormal subjects. The topics include: astral projection, ESP, lucid dreams, healing, PK, and near-death experiences. The website has the ability to create replications, additions, and response theories in an interactive format and gives users the ability to participate in the projects and provide both quantitative and qualitative research.

Biography

Tyler Stevens is an associate researcher at the Rhine Research Center. His current projects are in precognition, presentiment, and remote viewing. His education is in social science and media production. As a freelance professional in marketing, website development, graphic design, and parapsychology research, Tyler hopes to advance the methods of scientific exploration and create easy access to the information.
Due to the recent passing of my mentor – and friend – Dr. Graham Mitchell, I feel compelled to enlighten readers of JEEP with the support Dr. Mitchell gave to exploration within clinical parapsychology. Although not a parapsychologist himself, in the last five years he ignited new ideas for overlaps within positive psychology, health care, and parapsychology, working closely with Rachel Evenden, Prof Chris Roe, and myself, in the formation of this research before his untimely death.

Graham Mitchell gained a bachelor’s of educations from the University of Birmingham in 1971, and became a chartered biologist in 1981. During the early 1980s, in association with the Brain and Behaviour Group, he read for his PhD with the Open University and completed 1984. He later completed a bridging course, by studying for a diploma in psychology (social and cognitive psychology) again with the Open University, which gained him recognition and membership to the British Psychological Society in 1998. In 2012, he became a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine. He joined the University of Northampton as a lecturer in 1999, and from 2004 onwards, he was the subject leader for psychology.

His research interests typically fell into the areas of education, biological and cognitive psychology, and primarily, positive psychology. Among the number of research interests he listed, projects Dr. Mitchell was involved in included, “resilience associated with stressful experiences, cognitive styles, learned helplessness and depression,” “self-beliefs and its effects on academic achievement and health” (see Mitchell, 2002, 2008) and one of the most relevant to his involvement in clinical parapsychology was “the role of hope in achievement and recovery.” With his own association within the Christian church and its teachings (he was a Pastor of Grace Communion International), Dr. Mitchell was highly interested in the human traits of beliefs and hope, how they work, and the varying impacts they have on people in various situations. Certainly the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies and the Academy for Religion and Psychical Research have published on these overlaps (e.g., Badham, 1993, Habgood, 1989, Rose, 1999), but for more general literature on positive psychology developing from theology and philosophy, I’d direct readers to the works of Hume (1739), Taylor (1946), Marcel (1951), Lynch (1965), Snyder (1994), Kaplan and Schwartz, (2008), and Plante (2012). These are but a few relevant works that demonstrate strong links between the interests of Dr. Mitchell and myself, regarding human coping and development following times of personal hardship, which could include anomalous experiences being reported, or concepts of survival beyond death being discussed in relation to hope.

When I returned to the University of Northampton in 2012 to read for a PhD in psychology (see Cooper, 2017), I wanted to incorporate one of my key interests in parapsychology (that being the experience of apparitions) to the psychology of “motivation and emotion” – an undergraduate module I’d thoroughly enjoyed in my early studies. I approached Dr. Mitchell on this matter who summed up our entire conversation by saying “look at hope.” Sifting through the literature regarding apparitions and “sense of presence” experiences, my readings brought me repeatedly to issues of personal loss and bereavement, in which many
popular works cited “hope as a healer” following anomalous experiences of the bereft (e.g., Devers, 1997; LaGrand, 1999). And so a PhD project was born in which I began to read and collect data in order to understand the place and purpose of hope as a cognitive mechanism, following anomalous experiences associated with death and loss.

During this time, Dr. Mitchell took on a master’s student of integrative counselling. His interests in parapsychology through supervising me – alongside my other supervisor Prof Roe – had clearly grown, as I noticed through our frequent discussions on anomalous phenomena surrounding death. Rachel Evenden’s master’s dissertation was to focus on her personal interests in spirituality and overlaps with counselling, and personal psychological growth. Between them, a dissertation was developed in which Ms. Evenden was to explore the impact of mediumship as an alternative to bereavement counselling, on those who sought personal readings following a significant loss. I was brought in on this project as an advisor, and again, got to discuss parapsychology in greater depth with Dr. Mitchell, this time with regards to mediumship. Again the dissertation topic focused on the clinical implications of the parapsychological phenomena at hand, and not the ontology of mediumship.

JEEP had just seen the publication of its first issue by this point. Given the journal’s interests in more clinical matters surrounding anomalous experiences and/or the first person perspective, I suggested to the research time that the dissertation would do well being written up for publication. This was strongly praised by Dr. Mitchell, and so Ms. Evenden and I set about editing and re-writing the dissertation down to a suitable size for publication purposes. Thus, one of JEEP’s first and only publications surrounding clinical parapsychology to include Dr. Mitchell was presented (Evenden, Cooper & Mitchell, 2013).

Half way through my PhD, Dr. Mitchell had a life changing accident which resulted in paralysis. Even so, it was clear that he was still motivated as to the continued workings of the psychology department with many members of staff regularly visiting him, especially Ms. Evenden. On one of my visits to him, I took abstracts and publications we had achieved during the PhD process such as a book chapter (Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015), which is increasingly gaining in popularity as an overview of the topic of ‘anomalous experiences and the bereavement process’ since its publication. I also took conference presentation abstracts which achieved thanks and praise from those in the audience who could relate to the experiences through their own loses (see Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015a,b).

Dr. Mitchell frequently told students that when he asked prospective students why they wanted to study psychology, he said the most common reply was “because I want to help people.” Though many people might not be able to see the benefits initially of parapsychology, they have clearly shown through with the work we were doing on the bereaved. Just acknowledging anomalous experiences alone within the bereavement process and taking them seriously, was leading to audience members and readers of the work getting in touch and thanking us for doing this kind of research. It leads to reassurance, and comfort, in that people are not alone in these experiences and they are in fact quite common.

Following Dr. Mitchell’s interests positive psychology allowed me to find links and merge it with parapsychology, so much so that I was invited to Bucks New University to talk about our research and write an extended essay on the overlaps between positive psychology and parapsychology (Cooper, 2016). Without Dr. Mitchell’s inspiration and enthusiasm for positive psychology, and personal encouragement for finding overlaps to parapsychology, my journey would have been very different. Indeed, if things had been different for Dr. Mitchell, he might have still been around working closely on these projects and offering so much more to clinical parapsychology. Sadly, he passed away 2nd July, 2017.

His involvement as a ‘side-line’ supporter of clinical parapsychology will live on through the work we carried out at the University of Northampton. Prof Roe and myself have several more publications to work on regarding anomalous experiences, bereavement and recovery, which carry Dr. Mitchell’s name, wisdom, and inspiration, thanks to his teachings.
If you do not hope,  
You will not find what lies beyond your hopes.  
Clement of Alexandria

References


PRINCETON, New Jersey (USA). Robert G. Jahn, Ph.D. has passed away the morning of November 15, 2017 at the age of 87. Dr. Jahn was an award-winning American space propulsion researcher, Professor of Aerospace Science, and former Dean of Engineering at Princeton University. Jahn was also a founder of the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Lab (PEAR, 1979-2007).

Professor Jahn was a member of the American Society of Physics and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and was president of the AIAA Electrical Propulsion Technical Committee, associate editor of the AIAA Journal and a member of the NASA Space Science and Technology Advisory Committee. He was vice president of the Society for Scientific Exploration and chairman of the board of International Consciousness Research Laboratories. He was a member of the Board of Directors of Hercules, Inc. and chair of its Technology Committee, and a member and chair of the Board of Trustees of the Associated Universities, Inc. He Received the Curtis W. McGraw Research Award from the American Society for Engineering Education and an Honoris Causa Doctor from Andhra University.

Robert Jahn was mostly recently honored with the Portugal-based IAC Award for Scientific Contribution to the Science of Consciousness - Lifetime Achievement, alongside Brenda Dunne. The awards ceremony took place last May 20, during the 2nd International Congress of Consciousness. The IAC Scientific Award honors researchers who have achieved significant theoretical or empirical advances in the science of consciousness. Dr. Jahn also went on to spur the creation of applied consciousness science or “conscious tech” companies like Psyleron, Entangled and I-ACT.

The PEAR Laboratory is widely considered one of the most significant, innovative and validated programs on the history of non-dualist consciousness science. It was also a target of ridicule by scientists who do not accept the possibility of the mind affecting physical systems without the aide of technological interfaces.

In its three decades of data collection and analysis, PEAR has obtained large sets of empirical data on interactions between humans and machines or "engineering anomalies" that run counter to important notions of conventional science.

The laboratory produced one of the largest datasets on consciousness ever. The results that call into question widely accepted scientific assumptions are of very high statistical significance and power. They are also (statistically) replicable and have in fact been replicated independently.

Having addressed all the main criticisms generally directed to the search for "parapsychological" phenomena, Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne soon discovered that constructive criticism made the research more rigorous, but skeptics were not satisfied and few replication studies have been endeavored.

Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne have, for three decades, mentored a new generation of consciousness researchers, educators, and social entrepreneurs through PEAR lab internships and their educational work with
Books and Publications

Together, they published several books and hundreds of articles. The journal Fundamentals of Physics declared their first book Margins of Reality "a watershed book... a penetrating effort of erudition and insight". After the decision to close the PEAR laboratory 10 years ago, their work continues through the International Consciousness Research Labs (ICRL), which includes the ICRL Press. The work of the duo began modestly as an attempt to replicate a study by a Princeton student who suggested that the mind could have an effect on a random number generator. Jahn's initial goal was to determine what the student missed, as the result seemed unlikely. After all, Robert Jahn was an experienced scholar without tolerance for absurdities. The plasma physicist, aerospace engineer and Dean of the engineering college at Princeton University replicated the results, to his surprise. His last manuscript, co-authored with Brenda Dunne, will be published in 2018 as part of an anthology (Being and Biology, ICRL Press).

Studies and Investigations

In the late 1970s, Bob Jahn noted how particular aerospace technology became increasingly sensitive that needed to be shielded from passing cosmic rays. Thus, he obtained support from Douglas, a leader of the aerospace industry and other donors, Jahn set to explore the phenomenon. Although small, the effect could eventually worsen as operators worked with ever more miniaturized and delicate machines - perhaps as in cases of unexplained military breakdowns with stressed pilots (Gremlin cases).

Soon, Brenda Dunne joined the project. Before Princeton, she conducted remote perception research. Together, they risked their reputation and careers, facing even more ridicule and rancor than they ever expected. The editor of a prominent scientific journal once told the lab's founder and senior scientist, Robert Jahn, that he might consider publishing Jahn's recent article, if the author succeeded in transmitting it telepathically. Despite all this, they remained intellectually honest and scientifically rigorous and quite impartial. The fact that the program persevered for 3 decades, despite limited funding in this area and multiple unsuccessful attempts by the university to close the lab is in itself a remarkable achievement.

In 2007, the PEAR Laboratory decided that it was not likely that more data would change the rooted, scientific or theological opinions, because resistance was beyond reason and logic. They founded the International Consciousness Research Laboratories (ICRL) to operate beyond the university. Jahn and Dunne also spent years guiding the next generation of scholars and engineers of consciousness. They understand that mindsets change because new generations arise that have not been so indoctrinated, and that are willing to think outside the box. They also laid the groundwork for applications and discoveries for new technologies and startups.

The explanatory power of these discoveries has been explored in other fields, such as biology. The PEAR Lab has pointed out for decades that "normal" volunteers - not people who claim to have "psychic powers" - can actually influence the behavior of microelectronic and other devices with their mental and emotional states (with their consciousness) without any conventional way of influencing them. Almost a hundred volunteers performed 212 million random number generator tests. The survey shows a tiny but statistically significant result that is not attributable to
chance. Two-thirds of the volunteers were able to affect devices in the desired direction (with the intention of producing higher or lower numbers), while only half of them should have produced those results at random. Some of them obtained results that, when expressed in a graph, are so distinct that PEAR scientists could recognize the "signature" pattern of volunteers.

The PEAR laboratory discovered gender effects, larger effects for groups of operators with significant relationship or rapport. The results were less sensitive to parameters such as distance between operator and machine, time of the experiment (1 day before, 1 day after or at the same time as the formulation of the intention), or even the type of device - provided it was truly random or nondeterministic. The PEAR Laboratory has also developed new experimental projects and methods of analysis for remote perception experiments with aspects of remote viewing and telepathy. The size of the aggregate effect of the research program was surprising, especially when you consider how little evidence exists for many important claims in various "conventional" fields. Even the legendary science educator and skeptic of psi phenomena Carl Sagan noticed. The PEAR research program was one of the few studies he found difficult to ignore and he admitted it deserved further research.

Skeptics examined the lab instruments, data processing software, and protocols. Environmental influences, unrelated to consciousness, such as differences in temperature, passing traffic, earthquakes, and vibrations from a nearby machine shop, were discarded as the cause of the anomalies. Other scientists, in general, have been able to replicate the experiences of PEAR.

A fan of classical music and baseball, Dr Jahn passed away at home after a protracted serious illness, surrounded by his loved ones, comfortable and at peace. He is also survived by all those he has mentored and inspired to stay curious, in an ethical, rigorous and courageous way.

Nelson Abreu

nelson.abreu.ee@gmail.com