

SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH 47TH SPR INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**November 8 - 10, 2024
Mickleover, Derby
UK**

ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS

Introduction From the Programme Chair

Welcome to the 47th Annual International Conference of the Society for Psychical Research. This year we are based in the East Midlands, at the Derby Mickleover Hotel. We hope you find it comfortable and relaxing, with all the facilities you require under one roof. It seems some time ago now that we would regularly use universities for conferences, and perhaps we will return to some in the future.

However, hotels with conferences facilities bring immediate convenience and less walking from halls of residence to the lecture rooms for presentations. This year, we are also very close to the University of Derby (UOD); colleagues from the parapsychology team there are attending. One of the invited speakers and our guest after-dinner speaker are also from the UOD. At the last count, there are more than a dozen UK universities offering taught modules of parapsychology within degree programmes, which bodes well for the SPR.

We had more abstract submissions than we could fit in this year. Alongside the invited speakers and, of course, a guest after-dinner speaker, narrowing down such abstracts and the work people have put into preparing them is no easy task, when even in a strict packed schedule we can only accept two-thirds of them in the time available. We have invited those not included in the programme to share a poster to discuss with all the delegates face-to-face at the event. We will cover a wide range of topics from history and legacy to the latest laboratory research, experiences surrounding death, and much more. We encourage all contributors to take feedback from their talks and consider writing for the SPR Journal and/or the Magazine and share the data and ideas much further to our worldwide membership.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Conference Programme Committee for their useful feedback on the abstracts submitted, which helped in the selection process. Thanks also, to our current president, Prof. Adrian Parker, for exploring invited speakers. And to our Secretary, Peter Johnson – for all his work on this event. He once again has been the backbone of helping make the conference possible and piecing together the fine details. Everyone's hard work has been with the aim of making sure you get access to the latest research and ideas, and above all, have an enjoyable and memorable time at the SPR conference.

I look forward to welcoming you all, both familiar and new faces!

Dr Cal Cooper,
Programme Chair

Setting the camera traps - what it may take to capture the divine

Christof King
christof.king@yahoo.co.uk

Proponents of parapsychological naturalism [1] believe that the best way to observe the paranormal is in 'wild' spontaneous events. But if the work of the Amazonian zoologist is difficult, we must expect this expedition to be nearly impossible: as individuals with 'small c' consciousness, we must be prepared for 'Big C' to put on the mask of Pan in a game of hide and seek! But mythology aside, how should we approach this?

Mediumship comes in many forms, from seance phenomena and automatic writing to other 'inspiration' [2]. One thing these manifestations have in common is a suppression of the conscious mind. In the seance room, researchers are more interested in phenomena developed under trance – what could be called the product of the subliminal mind (which William James also felt could be the door to the divine [3]) - rather than the conscious personality of the medium.

If we accept that all people are subject to inspiration from the subliminal then we may be able to communicate with this mind by manipulating an individual's environment using sensory deprivation to reduce conscious influence. This parapsychological naturalistic approach may be appropriate to a socially isolated individual immersed in externally manipulated electronic media. Extreme caution would be needed to select a mentally tough but 'sensitive' participant and continual psychological support must be offered from afar. To maintain the illusion, a participant must never be offered direct human feedback and any patterns developing within their life should be continuously monitored by those able to conduct extensive surveillance.

If the work was carried out correctly, the subject, while immersed in their wider environment, may feel that they were the recipient of messages from a non-human consciousness. By utilising patterns of these 'signs,' it may be possible to generate further novel effects, such as natural synchronicities and other paranormal phenomena, like those of Batcheldor [4] and Owen [5].

References

- Braude, S.E. (1986). *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science*. London: Routledge.
- James, W. (1890). *Mediumships or Possessions. Principles of Psychology*. New York: Henry Holt (2 vols.), 393-400.
- James, W. (1902/2018). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Musaicum Books.
- Batcheldor, K.J. (1984). Contributions to the theory of PK induction from sitter-group work. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 78, 105-122.
- Owen, I.M. and Sparrow, M. (1976). *Conjuring up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis*. New York: Harper & Row.

Visualising Exceptional Human Experiences through Photographic Art

Corrine Gretton-West, Callum E. Cooper, Haley Morris-Cafiero & Jose Neves

Exceptional Experiences and Consciousness Studies, University of Northampton, UK
 corrine.gretton-west@northampton.ac.uk

This presentation examines historical spirit photography and the environmental context of ghost sightings, offering a contemporary reinterpretation of these phenomena through experimental photographic techniques.

My PhD research explores the origins and evolution of spirit photography, a practice that emerged in the late 19th century, aiming to capture the presence of spirits through photographic means. Therefore, this was of direct interest to psychical research and survival, particularly for figures like Sir William Crookes (Crookes 1874). By analysing these historical images, my work seeks to uncover the cultural, technological, and psychological factors that contributed to the widespread belief in their authenticity and the fascination with ghostly imagery. Part of that exploration includes examining those images not so easily explained and replication attempts.

In addition to this historical analysis, my research explores the significant role of place in the occurrence and perception of ghost sightings. I investigate how specific locations influence the likelihood of reported ghostly encounters. This includes a study of how environmental factors—such as architecture, light, and atmosphere—contribute to the creation of these experiences, shaping both the individual and collective perception of haunted spaces (Jawer et al. 2020).

Through my participatory research, I employ experimental photographic methods to create visual representations of ghost-sighting experiences. These methods include the Wet Plate Collodion

process; the process used by many spirit photographers in the 1800's, and emulsion lifts; a process whereby you extract the emulsion from a Polaroid film, and place it onto another surface.

The resulting images aim to bridge the gap between historical and contemporary understandings of ghosts, offering viewers a visual narrative that resonates with both past traditions and modern sensibilities.

This research contributes to the field of psychical research by recontextualizing historical spirit photography within the framework of contemporary artistic practice and environmental psychology. It provides a deeper understanding of how place and perception interact in the creation of ghost sightings.

References

- Alvarado, C. S. (2018). 'William Crookes'. *Psi Encyclopedia*. London: The Society for Psychical Research. Retrieved 31 August 2024.
- Crookes, W. (1874). The last of "Katie King:" The photographing of "Katie King" by the aid of the electric light. *Spiritualist Newspaper*, June 5, 270–271.
- Doyle, A.C. (1922) 'THE CASE FOR SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY', p. 146.
- Glaw, X. et al. (2017) 'Visual Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Autophotography and Photo Elicitation Applied to Mental Health Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917748215>
- Jawer, M Massullo B, Laythe B, Houran J. (2020) 'ENVIRONMENTAL "GESTALT INFLUENCES" PERTINENT TO STUDIES OF HAUNTED HOUSES', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 84, pp. 65–92. Web links
- 'The Crisis of Faith in Victorian England – Monsters & Madness' (2016). Available at: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/secretlives/2016/03/26/the-crisis-of-faith-in-victorian-england/> (Accessed: 27 November 2022).
- The Rise of Spiritualism in 19th Century America (2021) *History is Now Magazine, Podcasts, Blog and Books* | Modern International and American history. Available at: <http://www.historyisnowmagazine.com/blog/2021/10/18/the-rise-of-spiritualism-in-19th-century-america> (Accessed: 26 July 2023).

Experimenting with Ghosts: Empiricism, Stone Tapes, & Encounters; Lessons from My Early Ghost Adventures

Ciaran Farrell BSc GRSC

Independent Psychical Researcher
ciaran.farrell@consultant.com

Ghosts & spirits were well known in the ancient world and were associated with myth, legend, magic, superstition, and religions in early Mesopotamia, Egypt and Christianity (1,2). They were perceived as supernatural guides, helpers, magical beings, or as bad, evil or demonic entities to be controlled by those with specialist skill and knowledge (3). Western traditions feature troubled and troublesome earthbound spirits doomed by lack of resolution of unfinished business (4). This implies enough of their personality survives in order to do so, which may explain intelligent hauntings (5).

Non intelligent hauntings may be explicable through stone tape theory (6). Apparitions may be either (7).

Psychical researchers and paranormal investigators need an empirical guide to ascertain which side of the line a case falls to determine how to classify, document and handle such cases. The author will present an empirical means of doing so involving the parameters of contact, triggers, intentionality, mentation, and sense impression data, which will be put forward to form the basis of a new empirical ghostology.

References

- Budge, Wallis E A, Sir (1899, 1987). Egyptian Religion: Egyptian Ideas of The Future Life. Arkana.
 Hutton, Ronald, Gresham College lecture; The Western Magical Tradition - Ronald Hutton (youtube.com)
 Levi, Eliphas (1913). The History of Magic. Reprinted by The Lost Library, Glastonbury, England.
 Young, Francis (2016). A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity. Palgrave Macmillan.
 Myers, Frederick (1903). Human personality and its survival of bodily death. Longmans.
 Lethbridge, T. C. (1961). Ghost and Ghou. London: RKP.
 Tyrrell, G. N. M. (1943). Apparitions. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd.

INVITED SPEAKER

Fifty Years Among the RNGs, and why we know they are not consciousness detectors

Richard Broughton
 richard@intuitionlabs.com

The author will use his half-century of involvement with RNG research to review the key findings and controversies emerging from the use of this psi research tool. The story begins with Helmut Schmidt's foundational discoveries in the 1970s that PK and precognition were indistinguishable in RNG tests, the complexity of the RNG did not matter, and psi effects could be time independent. In those early days the influential Observational Theories and disturbing evidence that the experimenter's own psi abilities could determine results solidified a view that RNGs were revealing psi to be essentially a goal-oriented process.

In the ensuing years the micro-PK, or 'influence' interpretation came to dominate the experimental scene, but in 1995 the debate between precognition and PK interpretations was sharply focused by Ed May et al.'s Decision Augmentation Theory that showed all micro-PK research conformed to a data-selection or precognition model. Princeton's PEAR lab, one of the largest producers of PK research, countered that their data (at least) fit a force-like, influence model. About the same time some researchers began claiming that they were detecting 'field-effects' or 'implicit physical psi' that were said to be connected to small or large groups of people collectively experiencing strong emotions. Some

saw this shift from individual intentional influence to collective, unintentional and uninvolved influence as reinforcement for an influence interpretation of micro-PK, while others saw it as a perfect vehicle for experimenter effects.

In 1998, drawing on the emerging field-RNG research Roger Nelson began creating a global network of RNGs for the purpose of detecting field-RNG effects on a global scale. Its aim was to see if great emotional disturbances (positive, like celebrations, or negative, such as terrorist attacks) might register on these RNGs. Using a carefully specified protocol for identifying events and analysing data the Global Consciousness Project (GCP) amassed 500 formal event trials yielding massively significant evidence for Global Consciousness. The project of course drew criticism, much of which could be countered, and the inevitable suspicions of experimenter psi in action, but in 2017 Peter Bancel published an extremely thorough analysis of the GCP that left no room for anything but a goal oriented (GO), experimenter effect interpretation. Bancel's analysis, which will be reviewed in this presentation, revisits earlier technical criticisms but more importantly develops a model of GO effects that he tests against the GCP data. All of the tests favour the GO model. Nelson has attempted to mitigate these conclusions, but Bancel has left no room for manoeuvre.

The GCP did not have to end this way. If Nelson had taken this author's advice back in 1998 the GCP would have developed very differently. That same advice remains absolutely essential for anyone who still wishes to try to detect consciousness fields.

Testing the theory of 'First Sight' using a Retroactive priming task, Experiment 2: Situational factors

Deborah Patton¹, Matthew Hopkins¹, David Vernon² & Chris A. Roe¹

¹Exceptional Experiences & Consciousness Studies Research Group, University of Northampton, UK

²Christ Church Canterbury University, UK

We have previously reported on research at Northampton that is intended to replicate and extend the experimental work reported by Bem (2011) which was claimed to demonstrate precognition-like experiences under controlled laboratory conditions. Bem's experimental findings were surprisingly consistent, and despite some high-profile failures to replicate them, the general pattern from this database is that the effects can be reproduced in the laboratory to the same extent and with similar effect sizes as other, more mundane, psychological effects (Bem, Tressoldi, Rabeyron, & Duggan, 2016; see Roe 2022a, 2022b for general introductions). However, the experiments described by Bem (2011) represent an assortment of designs that seem to reflect practical expediency rather than any overarching theoretical perspective. Similarly, despite some honourable exceptions (e.g., Savva, Roe & Smith, 2005, Vernon, 2017) the majority of replication attempts have consisted of straight reproductions of those original experiments, intended to confirm basic effects rather than test particular hypotheses. This paradigm

therefore seems an ideal candidate for more theory-led research that could test the predictions made by theories of consciousness that incorporate psi.

We therefore planned a series of experiments that would use one of Bem's experimental protocols (focusing on priming effects) to help evaluate Carpenter's (2012) First Sight Theory (FST). FST represents a model of consciousness that incorporates psi phenomena as a fundamental feature of its *modus operandi*. It not only attempts to account for observations concerning conventional processes of memory and perception, but also the patterns of performance observed in research on ESP. It makes a series of explicit, testable hypotheses about who should perform well and under what circumstances (for more detail, see Roe 2019a, 2019b). We reported in 2023 on the first experiment in this series (Roe, et al., 2023), which focused on personality and individual difference variables that might moderate performance on the precognition task. In this presentation we will recap on the rationale for the research design and findings from experiment 1 before going on to describe experiment 2, which focuses on situational factors that are manipulated in accordance with FST.

References

- Bem, D.J. (2011). Feeling the Future: Experimental Evidence for Anomalous Retroactive Influences on Cognition and Affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, 407-25.
- Bem, D.J., Tressoldi, P.E., Rabeyron, T., & Duggan, M. (2016). Feeling the Future: A Meta-Analysis of 90 Experiments on the Anomalous Anticipation of Random Future Events. *F1000Research*, doi: 10.12688/f1000research.7177.2
- Carpenter, J. (2012). *First sight: ESP and parapsychology in everyday life*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Roe, C.A. (2019a). *Psychological theory in parapsychology: PMIR & First Sight. Bridging the gaps: Building the Science*, Belambra Hotel, Paris July 2-3, 2019.
- Roe, C.A. (2019b). Space for psi from Psychology. Invited address, *Study Day: Making space for psi*. Society for Psychical Research, London, 16 Nov 2019.
- Roe, C.A. (2022a). Feeling the future (Precognition Experiments). *Psi Encyclopedia (online)*. <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/feeling-future-precognition-experiments>, January 26, 2022.
- Roe, C.A. (2022b). Remembering the future: Facilitating the recall of future events. Invited talk, *13th Symposium of the BIAL Foundation, "Behind and Beyond the Brain": The mystery of time*. Casa do Medico, Porto, 6-9 April, 2022.
- Roe, C.A., Patton, D., Hopkins, M., & Vernon, D. (2023). Testing the theory of "first sight" using a retroactive priming task: Individual difference factors. Paper presented at the *Society for Psychical Research, International Conference*, Woodland Grange, 10-12 Nov 2023.
- Savva, L., Roe, C. A., & Smith, M.D. (2005). Further testing of the precognitive habituation effect using spider stimuli. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: The Parapsychological Association 48th Annual Convention*, 163-170.
- Vernon, D. (2017). Exploring the effect of a contingent cash-based reward on the precall of arousing images. *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association 60th Annual Convention*, July 20-23, Athens, Greece.

Quantitative Language Analysis of Psi Ganzfeld Mentations

Abby L. Pooley

Koestler Parapsychology Unit, Psychology Department, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
apooley@exseed.ed.ac.uk

Introduction. In psi ganzfeld experiments, participants verbalise and describe their experiences, feelings, and sensations during the experiment. This verbal report, known as the mentation, primarily serves as an aide-mémoire for participants during the judging phase, helping with their assessment of the target clips. However, mentations are recognised as a potentially more sensitive indicator of psi information (Honorton, 1972), serve as valuable introspective reports (Wooffitt et al., 2010) and provide understanding of the experience of consciousness (Cardeña & Pekala, 2014). Recently, there has been growing interest in analysing mentation content using language processing software (Cardeña, 2020; Stanford, 2020). This report presents a summary of a quantitative language analysis of mentations from two precognition studies conducted at the Koestler Parapsychology Unit (KPU), University of Edinburgh.

Method. Mentation audio files from KPU Study 1039 and 1074 were transcribed and analysed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) 2015 software (Pennebaker et al., 2015). This lexicon-based tool compares each word in the text to its internal dictionary, calculating the percentage of total words matching each dictionary category. A total of 251 mentations were transcribed from 300 sessions.

Results. Participants demonstrated moderate-to-high levels of analytical and logical thinking during ganzfeld stimulation, often speaking tentatively and without confidence. Verbal reports, however, showed high levels of honesty with indications of ambivalence, anxiety, and sadness. Simple linear regression models found no relationship between word count or emotional tone and session z- score.

Discussion. The high levels of honesty suggest ganzfeld mentations are valuable introspective reports, providing accurate depictions of the participant experience. On average, participants found the ganzfeld experience neutral-to-negative, perhaps due to its novelty. Elevated levels of analytical thinking and uncertainty may indicate participants feeling overwhelmed by the unfamiliar ganzfeld stimulation.

References

- Cardeña, E. (2020). Editorial: Pieces of the Psi Puzzle and a Recipe for Ganzfeld Success. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 84(1), 5–7.
- Cardeña, E., & Pekala, R. J. (2014). Researching states of consciousness and anomalous experience. In E. Cardeña, S. J. Lynn, & S. Krippner (Eds.), *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence* (Second, pp. 21–56). American Psychological Association.
- Honorton, C. (1972). Reported frequency of dream recall and ESP. *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, 66(4), 369–374.

- Pennebaker, J. W., Booth, R. J., Boyd, R. L., & Francis, M. E. (2015). *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count: LIWC2015 [Operator's Manual]*. Pennebaker Conglomerates.
- Stanford, R. G. (2020). Ganzfeld-ESP: Pondering Three Reports and Looking Ahead. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 84(1), 14–20.
- Watt, C., Dawson, E., Tullo, A., Pooley, A., & Rice, H. (2020). Testing Precognition and an Altered State of Consciousness with Selected Participants in the Ganzfeld. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 84(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.30891/jopar.2020.01.05>
- Wooffitt, R., Holt, N., & Allistone, S. (2010). Introspection as institutional practice: Reflections on the attempt to capture conscious experience in a parapsychology experiment. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 7(1), 5–20.

Published as Watt et al. (2020)

Conducted with the support of the BIAL Foundation, grant number 190/18

Clarifying the solution... Phase 1 data update of an experiment involving sensory isolation in floatation tanks as a method of promoting psi phenomena

Kirsty L. Allan, Callum E. Cooper, Glenn Hitchman & Chris A. Roe

Exceptional Experiences and Consciousness Studies, University of Northampton, UK
kirsty.allan@northampton.ac.uk

Inspired by the insights and recommendation of John Lilly (1969), inventor and pioneer of the floatation tank as a means of inducing altered states of consciousness (by vastly reducing environmental stimuli), Cooper, Saunders and Hitchman (2020) conducted a pilot study exploring the utility of floatation in a psi task, funded by the SPR. This presentation will offer an update on a subsequent extended replication undertaken by the current team. Furthermore, we explore any significance of both the experiential qualities and contents of consciousness e.g., visual imagery, sense of time and also, any correlations with individual differences of participants i.e., transliminality creativity and sensory processing sensitivity (Hitchman, Rock & Roe, 2023).

Participants are enclosed in a 'tank' in which they lie on a body of Epsom salt solution, so dense it is buoyant enough to support them physically without any effort or technique. They are thus, suspended in a dark, quiet, 'weightless' condition that is also warmed to body temperature, encouraging the 'floatee' to relax deeply (Lilly, 1969; 1972). Consequently, participants may also experience a loss of environmental sensory influence, bodily orientation - and in some cases, their sense of Self completely. It is hypothesised that floatation as a Noise Reduction Model (Honorton, 1977) will eliminate external influences ('noise'), allowing the person to become more aware of their inner experience ("inperience", Lilly, 1972), intuitive feelings and extra-sensory or 'psychic' materials. Participants are given the goal of having imagery that will help them to identify a precognitive target video.

Post-float, participants were shown four video clips, which they rank in terms of similarity (or felt familiarity) to their float experience. After they had made their judgement, a random number generator then selected which clip was the designated target for that trial. Therefore, this protocol should yield a 25% chance of correctly 'guessing' which clip will become the target, by chance alone, a '1 in 4' chance.

In this presentation we will summarise the quantitative and qualitative outcomes from this experiment and reflect on their implications for further work.

References

- Cooper, C. E., Saunders, D., & Hitchman, G. (2020). Reconsidering sensory isolation in floatation tanks as a method of promoting psi-conducive imagery. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 84, 1-19.
- Hitchman, G., Rock, A., & Roe, C.A. (2023). Individual difference factors affecting ESP performance following ganzfeld stimulation: A meta-analysis. *Abstracts of presented papers: Parapsychological Association 65th Annual Convention, Oslo, Norway, August 3-6, 2023*. (pp. 31-34).
- Honorton, C. (1977). Psi and internal attention states. In B. B. Wolman (Ed.), *Handbook of Parapsychology* (pp. 435-472). Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Lilly, J. C. (1969). Inner space and parapsychology. *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association*, 6, 71-79.
- Lilly, J. C. (1972). *The centre of the cyclone*. Palladin.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Bial Foundation (186/20) and the Perrott-Warrick Fund, who have enabled us to conduct this research project.

Are There Different Paranormal & Anomalous Experiences in Individuals with Epilepsy and Which Ones Do They Report?

Spiers*, L.N., Roe*, C.A., Hopkins*, M., Jolivald**, M., Evrard**, R.

*University of Northampton, UK, ** University of Lorraine, France

Corresponding author: Louise.Spiers@northampton.ac.uk

Research into paranormal experiences in individuals with epilepsy has been narrow, considering only temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) in relation to anomalous experiences (Persinger, 1984), diagnosed as pathological hallucinations and delusions (Devinsky & Lai, 2008). Consequently, these paranormal experiences are seen as undesirable, bad for well-being and in need of treatment.

Individuals do not discuss them, for fear that their experiences will be pathologized (Spiers, 2022). This study, supported by Epilepsy Action, UK and Epilepsy Ireland, provided a proof-of-concept for a more discriminating categorisation than has previously been undertaken. The research aims were to:

- a) Distinguish between types of epilepsy and explore if/how they give rise to different anoma-

lous experiences; b) Understand whether participants regard their experiences as spiritual, mystical or exceptional, or as a function of their condition; c) ascertain whether participants share these experiences with different groups of people and determine which factors influence that decision to disclose; d) Identify any additional anomalous experiences not previously listed. An English and French online questionnaire was distributed combining established measures that identify a range of paranormal and anomalous experiences (Fach, 2013; Greyson, 1983; Neppe, 1983) and attitudes towards sharing these experiences with others and the impact they have on an individual's life (Spiers, unpublished). Data collection is now complete (n=108) and has been analysed using a range of statistical approaches. In the presentation, we intend to share summarised findings supported by some qualitative comments, implications for the understanding of these experiences, and areas for future research.

References:

- Devinsky, O., & Lai, G. (2008). Spirituality and religion in epilepsy. *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 12(4), 636-643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yebeh.2007.11.011>.
- Fach, W. (2011). Phenomenological aspects of complementarity and entanglement in exceptional human experiences (ExE). *Axiomathes*, 21, 233-247.
- Greyson, B. (1983). The near-death experience scale: Construction, reliability, and validity. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 171(6), 369-375.
- Neppe, V.M. (1983). Temporal Lobe Symptomatology in Subjective Paranormal Experiments, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 77(1), 1-29.
- Neppe, V.M. (1983). Temporal Lobe Symptomatology in Subjective Paranormal Experiments, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 77(1), 1-29. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1984-08273-001>.
- Persinger, M. (1984). Propensity to report paranormal experiences is correlated with temporal lobe signs. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 59(2), 583-586. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1984.59.2.583>.
- Spiers, L.N. (2022). *A transpersonal exploration of spiritual experiences in epilepsy*. [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Northampton.

Computer Simulation of PK (Psychokinesis): New Experimental Tool for Psi Research

Simon X. Duan

Metacomputics Labs, London, UK
simon.x.duan@live.com

In modern science, computer simulation is accepted as a type of experiment and is extensively used for studying complex systems that are difficult or impossible to replicate in a laboratory setting. They are recognized as a powerful tool that allows for a level of control and repeatability that might be costly, challenging, or even impossible to achieve in the real world. For instance, in astrophysics, computer simulations are employed to study the formation of galaxies, stars, and other celestial bodies. Hypotheses about the evolution of the universe, the structure of galaxies, and the behavior of black holes

have been tested through computer simulations. Simulations in physics are used to test hypotheses about the behavior of particles and the properties of materials.

In the parapsychological study of PK, we are not able to reproduce the results on demand. It is also challenging or even impossible to impose an appropriate level of control on the mental states of PK agents. We, therefore, propose to use computer simulation as a supplementary experimental tool to study PK.

We will use computer simulation to test the hypothesis that PK is the processing output of the Platonic computer. The hypothesis describes a 2-stage causal chain of PK:

1. PK agent interacting with the Platonic computer causing parameter changes in the Platonic program.
2. Manipulating parameters in the Platonic program renders phenomena of PK.

We will report the work that simulate PK agent interacting with the Platonic computer, as well as manipulating parameters in the Platonic program causing a range of phenomena including levitation, apports, solid object passing through solid barriers, etc.

The talk demonstrates that comparable to the effective use of computer simulation in other well-established science disciplines, incorporating computer simulation into the toolset of parapsychological research will also be a hugely rewarding exercise.

Positive Possession States in Religious and Therapeutic Practitioners

TyLean Tuijl
tyleantuijl@gmail.com

Possession is a phenomenon that is nearly universal across human cultures and recorded history (Bourguignon & Ucko, 1969; McNamara, 2011). According to Cohen (2008), possession experience appears in two categories: positive possession and negative possession. Negative possession is a poorly researched and understood phenomenon, yet positive possession has received even less research, despite being more accessible to capture in a research setting.

Positive possession is explicitly employed as a method of counteracting negative possession by shamanic practitioners (Winkelman, 2018); however, spirit release therapists and religious leaders use comparable techniques (Hickman, 1994; McNamara, 2011).

The aim of this research was to determine if most of the participants described an experience of altered states of consciousness, dissociative and/or trance states during their practice and what meaning they placed on these experiences. In this qualitative study, three shamanic practitioners, three spirit release therapists and three religious leaders with experience of exorcism and deliverance ministry were

interviewed. Participants were recruited through internet searches to find their professional websites, word of mouth and snowballing.

Research is ongoing with the results being analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). By investigating positive possession practices in shamanic practitioners, spirit release therapists and religious leaders, inferences can be made about negative possession states and how to counteract them.

References

- Bourguignon, E., & Ucko, L. (1969). Cross-cultural study of dissociational states. The Ohio State University Research Foundation with National Institute of Mental Health.
- Cohen, E. (2008). What is spirit possession? Defining, comparing, and explaining two possession forms. *Ethnos*, 73(1), 101–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927558>
- Hickman, I. (1994). *Remote Depossession* (1st ed.). Hickman Systems.
- McNamara, P. (2011). *Spirit Possession and Exorcism: History, Psychology, and Neurobiology*. Praeger.
- Winkelman, M. (2018). Shamanism and Possession. In *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (pp. 1–12). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1651>

How Exposure to Death and Dying Impacts Beliefs about Death

Kelly A. Curtis

Manchester Metropolitan University
kelly.a.curtis@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Everyone is going to die. This amount of exposure to death and dying (ED&D) raises the question of how this exposure affects individuals, particularly in regard to belief systems about death, and how different types of exposure may impact people differently. While there has been some exploration into the psychological effects ED&D has on individuals, there was previously not a measure that adequately encompasses ED&D, greatly narrowing the breadth of research in this area. Accordingly, this study developed a new measure, the Exposure to Death and Dying Scale (ED&DS) and investigated how different types of exposure to death and dying, such as exposure in the professional sphere, in personal relationships, and with one's own death, were related to views and beliefs about death. While there are nuanced differences with how different types of exposure relate to views on death and dying, in general, the more exposure one has, the lower death anxiety, increased neutral views regarding death, and less fear about others' and one's own death and dying. Currently, this research is exploring additional beliefs such as religiosity, paranormal belief, and afterlife expectations, which will provide further insight into how various exposures shape beliefs surrounding death and will be completed prior to the conference. Additionally, interviews with those experiencing high exposure on the job, such as first responders, hospice workers, medical personnel, morticians, etc., are currently being conducted in order to examine the

impacts ED&D has in formulating and upholding belief systems when the exposure is repetitive and less emotionally tethered. Having a better understanding of the effects that ED&D has on those experiencing these exposures at high levels can inform mental health services for these individuals, how and when paranormal experiences occur, and when these experiences transform into paranormal belief.

Anomalous Experiences in the Funeral Industry

Natalia Lavin, Callum E. Cooper and Chris A. Roe

Exceptional Experiences and Consciousness Studies Research Group
University of Northampton, UK
talialavin@hotmail.co.uk

An anomalous experience is “an experience that is uncommon or deviates from ordinary experience and traditionally accepted explanations of reality” (Cardeña et al, 2014) and, according to literature, occur in a large number of the population (Pechey and Halligan, 2012). Existing research reports ostensibly anomalous experiences occurring in funeral settings (Wooffitt, 1991; Glazier et al., 2015; Cooper, 2017) but much of this focuses on funeral attendees rather than staff. When looking at staff perspectives, studies have been conducted to involve medical practitioners working in palliative care settings (Fenwick et al., 2007) as well as exploring the experiences of patients themselves who are in end-of-life care (Nosek et al., 2015). Given that a common feature of anomalous experiences is their connection to death and dying, the funeral industry provides an opportunity to explore the experiences of those working closely with the deceased. McMahon’s (1987) doctoral thesis is currently the only known research that has explored this. The data collection for the thesis takes place in the USA and involves 50 participants with the results of this research finding that 80% of the participants reported possible psi phenomena.

It is clear to see from the existing research that there is little academic information available in this area of research, giving space for the current project to be discussed. This presentation will consider existing academic literature in addition to anecdotal evidence in order to provide a rationale for the current project, alongside the onward plan for data collection. At present, the plan for data collection is split into two phases: an initial quantitative survey to establish prevalence, types of phenomena and demographic information, and a qualitative phase conducting interviews focusing on the individual’s direct experiences. It is hoped that, as the project progresses, new information regarding the prevalence and classification of anomalous experiences encountered by funeral industry personnel (and related staff) is established in a UK sample.

References

Cardeña, E., Lynn, S. J., and Krippner, S. (2014). *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*, 2nd ed. Washington: American Psychological Association.

- Cooper, C. E. (2017). Considering anomalous events during bereavement as evidence for survival. In *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement* (pp. 201-213). Routledge.
- Fenwick, P., Lovelace, H., & Brayne, S. (2007). End of life experiences and their implications for palliative care. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 64(3), 315-323.
- Glazier, J. W., Beck, T., & Simmonds-Moore, C. (2015). A phenomenological analysis of the relationship between grief, emotional stress and anomalous experiences. *Mortality*, 20(3), 248-262.
- McMahon, J. D. S. (1987). *Reported spontaneous psi experiences in the funeral industry* (Doctoral dissertation, Saybrook University).
- Nosek, C. L., Kerr, C. W., Woodworth, J., Wright, S. T., Grant, P. C., Kuszczak, S. M., ... & Depner, R. M. (2015). End-of-life dreams and visions: A qualitative perspective from hospice patients. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine*®, 32(3), 269-274.
- Pechey, R., & Halligan, P. (2012). Prevalence and correlates of anomalous experiences in a large non clinical sample. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 85(2), 150-162.
- Wooffitt, R. (1991). 'I was just doing X ... when Y': Some inferential properties of a device in accounts of paranormal experiences. *Text - Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 11(2), 267-288.

Grave Matters: Usage of Burial Spaces by Paranormal Investigators

Dr. Kate Cherrell
burialsandbeyond@gmail.com

This paper presents an interdisciplinary view of the changing usage of burial sites in regard to the unsanctioned and increased presence of paranormal investigators and internet paranormal content creators.

Burial spaces, whether graveyards, cemeteries or other locations of ritual remembrance, are sites of varying usage, both sanctioned and unsanctioned. Many of these larger sites are wholly open to local communities and promote visitors to their location and on-site venues through public engagement events and private hire. However, many of these sites are ultimately becoming victims of their own promotion. Due to both advertising and open access routes, many hobbyists, including paranormal investigators, are viewing burial spaces as viable platforms for their activities, both spiritual and financial.

Many larger British cemeteries with on-site chapels and larger buildings regularly advertise and host events for the likes of photographers, exercise classes, local history groups, artists, and talks, all of which are intended to encourage visitors and revenue to the site via authorised means. Cemeteries such as Bristol's Arnos Vale, York and London's famous 'Magnificent Seven' Victorian garden cemeteries all boast a diverse and dense programme of events and community engagement. The revenue generated from these paid events assists in the maintenance and insurance of these sites. However, one hobbyist group has dramatically increased its unauthorised usage of burial sites in recent years, namely paranormal investigators.

Following the UK Lockdown of 2020-2021, several cemeteries reported increased unsanctioned usage of their sites by investigators and paranormal events companies, seeking an open space for both investigation and self-promotion.

During this period of time, interest in paranormal entertainment saw a marked increase, as did the number of paranormal events companies registered at Companies House. As this hobbyist group grew in mainstream popularity, so did their use of burial sites, yet such usage continues to go unacknowledged by site managers, with no constructive dialogue between the two parties appearing imminent. With little public acknowledgement of activities and complicated legal issues of ownership and site usage, paranormal investigators and cemetery visitors view the burial space in different ways. While both may view the site as wholly publicly owned and not requiring of permission to visit, paranormal investigators may view the site on marketable aesthetics alone, and believe that prior permission for both investigation or recording was implicit or not required due to a perceived societal ownership.

This paper does not seek to vilify paranormal investigators or cemetery trusts, nor argue that one party should alter their action or inaction towards changing trends of site usage, but seeks to present an overview of cultural and societal developments, and offer an academic interrogation of cultural shifts.

This paper discusses changing views of 'respect', ethics and 'site suitability' within the paranormal investigative field, alongside the opinions of site organisations and visitors. Similarly, by addressing the importance of social media in the hosting, permeation and normalisation of ideas and activities, a hitherto unaddressed subculture is brought to the fore. This paper includes data obtained through active fieldwork, archival curation, and anonymous questionnaires completed by investigators and cemetery professionals. This paper discusses the motives and common threads within investigative groups, the prominence of social media in the business of private and public paranormal events and the lasting impact that such activities have on burial sites.

By presenting authentic voices and opinions of site usage and ethics, this paper speculates on the future of paranormal investigation in burial spaces, should the situation be left unaddressed.

INVITED SPEAKER

Consciousness, the brain and spiritual experience.

Prof Paul Gilbert. PhD, FBPsS, OBE

Centre for Compassion Research and Training
College of Health, Psychology and Social Care, University of Derby

The last 10 years has seen increasing interest in the ancient ideas that consciousness is the ground of all being from which the material universe emerges.

While there are of course debates about this it is also interesting to explore the implications if this were true, including for new forms of spirituality, and with compassion as a central dimension of consciousness.

Augustine's Skeptical View of Apparent Apparitions of the Dead

Michael Potts, Ph.D.

Methodist University North Carolina, USA
mpotts@methodist.edu

This paper explores Augustine of Hippo's views on apparent apparitions of the dead. In contrast to Gregory of Nyssa and (later) Gregory the Great, Augustine is skeptical of the view that putative apparitions of the dead literally are the souls of dead individuals. Exploring that Augustine holds this view involves the current situation in his diocese in North Africa, his Neo-Platonic metaphysics holding that the soul is entirely immaterial, and his views on the nature of dreams. His considered view is that apparent apparitions of the dead are dreams. In his view, this implies either that (1) the "apparition" is only a character in a dream, perhaps a vivid or lucid dream, but the cause remains in the mind of the dreamer, (2) angels or demons cause the dream through what today would be called psi processes. Augustine also accepts the possibility of out of body experiences (given God's permission). He believes that the apparent physicality of apparitions as well as in near-death experiences is due to the nature of dreams—that dream images of physical objects retain, from the point of view of the dreamer, properties characteristic of physical objects. Although he was far from being modern, Augustine's view on apparitions is more nuanced than his contemporaries because he associated belief in ghosts as the dead with the pagan cult of the dead that was reviving in North Africa, and which Augustine and the Catholics adamantly opposed. Augustine's skepticism does not stem from modern doubts about the preternatural, but from his philosophical and theological presuppositions. However, his argument on apparitions, dreams and what would be today called "the source of psi" problem sound surprisingly modern for their time.

The P.E.A.R. Legacy, the Technology and the Future of Syntropy

Wolfhardt Janu, Peter Merry & Kirsty L. Allan
Wyrd Research, gowyrd.org

We research mind-matter interaction and develop technology to support this exploration. Our project rests on the concept of 'Wyrd; the Anglo-Saxon word for 'fate' that best encapsulates the sentiment of fundamental interconnectedness. We operate within consciousness research with a multidisciplinary team sharing an ontological view of consciousness as a 'field' of interconnection, one that is not dependent on, nor emergent from, the material brain. The Wyrd project carries the legacy of the former Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (P.E.A.R) laboratory which saw 28 years of research into micro-PK and remote viewing studies. We have since developed new REG technology to better suit modern research criteria which directly addresses the problems identified by critics. The 'Wyrdoscope' (our dual REG device) tracks data anomalies by analysing correlations between two data streams of Random Event Generators. This approach highlights synchronicities in the data itself and addresses the earlier REG critique of 'start point bias' and interpretation errors - because our whole system is fully automated, and the resulting data is rich in detail. Such anomalies cannot be caused by any known classical fields, so we posit that they come from a different source – which we propose as 'the field of consciousness', or as close to such an understanding as we might conceptualise. We would like to present an overview of the legacy of this research, the current technology and where we are taking it including with SPR support. As such, we are delighted to introduce an exciting study of ours, funded by SPR Survival Research Committee: A New Bridge between the Physical and the Psychical: Detecting synchronicity in the field of consciousness during physical mediumship. Our study is an explorative examination of subtle physical evidence detected during physical mediumship. We will compare dual data streams of random bits (1s and 0s) to identify any anomalous structures in that data (synchronicities) which will be synthesised with an audio timeline of the medium-spirit interaction.

We would like to acknowledge the support of IONS Lynda G O'Bryant prize which has supported our recent work and, the SPR Survival Research Committee for supporting an explorative study into mediumship.

INVITED PRESENTATION

**Interactions with Non-Worldly Beings
During Meditation-Induced Near-Death Experiences:
Insights, Challenges and Future Directions**

Dr William Van Gordon

University of Derby (UK)
w.vangordon@derby.ac.uk

Communication with non-worldly beings is a commonly reported feature of near-death experiences (NDEs) and can be life transformational for NDE survivors. However, because NDEs typically occur unexpectedly, research into the nature of such interactions - and the wider neuropsychological processes that occur during NDEs - is often limited due to being retrospective. One approach to overcome this has been to explore means by which states of consciousness appearing to resemble NDEs might be voluntarily induced in a safe and pre-planned manner. One such approach is the meditation-induced NDE (MI-NDE) into which I led a three-year mixed-method longitudinal investigation involving advanced Buddhist meditators.

This talk will begin by discussing the key findings of the study, which demonstrated that compared to control conditions, the MI-NDE prompted significantly greater increases in NDE profundity, mystical experiences, and non-attachment. Furthermore, MI-NDEs were found to share many of the experiential features of conventional NDEs, including wisdom acquired from encounters with non-worldly beings such as recently deceased beings, demonic beings, and enlightened beings. Moreover, the advanced meditator participants reported being able to maintain a degree of volitional control over these encounters, which helped to deepen the profundity of the interaction as well as their understanding of death and after-death processes.

The talk will then explore how, in combination with related studies I and others have conducted into advanced meditative states, findings augment understanding of why interactions with non-worldly beings appear to manifest with greater ease during both voluntarily induced and conventional forms of NDE.

Finally, the talk will discuss some of the design challenges of studying MI-NDEs as well as plans for forthcoming research that aims to systematically explore the medium, content, and underlying intent of communications instigated by non-worldly beings during MI-NDEs.

Terminal Lucidity in Adults: A New Case Collection

Chris A. Roe

Exceptional Experiences & Consciousness Studies Research Group
University of Northampton, UK
chris.roe@northampton.ac.uk

One of the ‘basic limiting principles’ identified by C.D. Broad (e.g., 1962) as a central tenet of the materialist scientific worldview is that human consciousness is associated with specific neural correlates in the brain, such that consciousness is only possible if certain minimal levels of functioning pertain.

However, a number of spontaneous clinical phenomena seem to challenge that assumption, including evidence from near-death experiences in which dysfunction may be temporary, and also hydrocephalus cases that involve longer term severe brain damage and dysfunction. In this presentation, I will consider a third example, terminal lucidity (TL) in patients who are experiencing cognitive decline as a symptom of a degenerative terminal illness that has typically left them drowsy, forgetful, and unresponsive to their surroundings or even their own biological needs. Nevertheless, some patients experience sudden enhanced thinking and mobility, recover access to lost memories so that they are able to recognise friends and family, and can sufficiently appreciate their circumstances to be able to say goodbye and put their affairs in order. Quite commonly, TL episodes are relatively brief, and the patient reverts to their former state, often dying within the next few days. Such lucid episodes are challenging to account for given that the neurological damage caused by their terminal illness is deemed to be irreversible.

Individual clinical cases have occasionally been published (Nahm & Greyson, 2009; Nahm et al., 2012), and have also been reported for terminally ill children who are less likely to have absorbed cultural expectations around death and dying (Woollacott et al., 2023). A weakness of such cases is that they represent an unsystematic collection that may be missing key pieces of information that could enable us to identify patterns in the circumstances, phenomenology, and impacts of TL that shed light on their putative mechanisms.

In this presentation I will describe the design and implementation of an online survey tool intended to capture a range of details about the subject who is believed to have experienced a TL episode, including their underlying medical condition, treatment regimen (including recent changes), and their physical and mental capacities immediately prior to the TL episode, as well as a detailed description of changes that occurred during the episode itself, and finally to gather information about how witnessing such an episode has affected caregivers and family members. I will present initial findings both in terms of quantitative analysis and by providing descriptions of the phenomenon drawn from witness accounts. If time allows, I will end by reflecting on the adequacy of existing explanations to accommodate the data I have presented.

References

- Broad, C.D. (1962). *Lectures in psychical research*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Nahm, M., & Greyson, B. (2009). Terminal lucidity in patients with chronic schizophrenia and dementia: A survey of the literature. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 197: 942–944.
- Nahm, M., Greyson, B., Kelly, E.W., & Haraldsson, E. (2012). Terminal lucidity: A review and a case collection. *Archives of Gerontology & Geriatrics*, 55, 138–142.
- Woollacott, M., Greyson, B., Nahm, M., Roe, C.A., et al. (2023). Terminal lucidity in a pediatric oncology clinic. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, doi: 10.1097/NMD.0000000000001711

Lucid awareness in seemingly unconscious patients. A case report and its implications

Michael Nahm

Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, Freiburg, Germany nahm@igpp.de

It is generally assumed that nonresponsive people in comatose states are unconscious, especially when it is known that their neuronal circuits are not functioning normally, for example, due to severe anoxia and medically induced comas. Nevertheless, occasional reports suggest that sometimes, patients in such conditions can be fully aware of everything that happens around them.

In this presentation, I introduce a remarkable case of this kind. It concerns Gil Avni, a patient in Israel who was diagnosed with a cerebral oedema and suffered severe anoxic brain damage that had already affected his brain stem. He was put in an induced coma to minimize the brain's oxygen supply. Still, Gil was expected to die within hours. However, he recovered unexpectedly. It turned out he had been fully conscious throughout the 44 hours he was in this coma. As a result, Gil was able to describe in detail every occurrence and conversation that had been held at his bedside throughout this time. He was furthermore able to cognize occurrences happening outside of his room, apparently bypassing his biological senses.

The experience of being fully aware inside a non-responsive body had an utterly traumatic impact on the patient. As a result, guidelines for coma patient care have been adopted and improved in Israel.

Crucial elements of this case have already been described in a documentary film (Gross & Shamir, 2023). I am in contact with Gil, members of the medical team who cared for him, and the film producers. We are currently preparing a publication about this case in which we cover additional details of Gil's experience as well as the implications of such occurrences of "paradoxical consciousness" for coma patient care and for the advancement of our understanding of human consciousness.

References

- Gross, R., & Shamir, E.-H. (Producers). (2023). 44 Hours. Yes Docu; SWR (Co-Production); Arte (Co-Operation). Keren Makor Foundation.

Does Personality Survive Bodily Death? Identifying Best Practice in Investigating Claims of Reincarnation

Elaine Rycroft, Callum E. Cooper, Chris A. Roe
University of Northampton UK. elaine.rycroft@northampton.ac.uk

The Bigelow competition sought essay submissions presenting the best evidence supporting the premise that human consciousness survived beyond physical death. Michael Nahm's entry explored the merits of investigative sources of Survival evidence; and concluded that cases of the reincarnation type (CORT) were the most likely to produce supporting veridical data for Survival.

Building on this foundation, our four-phase research project aims to systematically review and critically analyse the investigative methodologies used in CORT. Our goal is to identify the most effective practices and develop a protocol incorporating modern technology and techniques to establish a standard for obtaining the strongest data.

The planned phases will consist of: -

- 1 - A systematic literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method.
- 2 - Extrapolation and analysis of data garnered from the review. Formulating an up-to-date Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for investigating CORT.
- 3 - Using the SOP to evaluate its efficacy against conventional methods when investigating new CORT.
- 4 - Peer review, revising and refining as necessary.

It is anticipated that resulting data will indicate several areas of improvement for CORT investigations including the use of social media and modern technology to source, collect and analyse the information.

The literature review so far has highlighted several areas that need careful consideration when planning a universal investigative framework. These include:

- New methods of sourcing cases due to the internet and the growth of social media and interest groups.
- The use of modern technology when gathering, researching and recording evidence and the supporting documentation and statements.
- Barriers to obtaining accurate information such as translation errors, religious and cultural bias, social construction, fraud and psychosocial factors.

- Contamination of evidence due to easy media, internet and literary access; whether conscious or subconscious.
- The interconnectedness of communities through modern travel and news channels, which can question the authenticity of cases.
- Ethical and safeguarding challenges encountered today.

These concerns underscore the complexities of researching CORT. The methodology devised by Stevenson for his extensive CORT research is regarded as the standard due to his meticulous and forensic approach. Updating his high standards of methodology is necessary for progress. In a world where information is easily accessed and CORT cases can be dismissed because of this, having an accessible SOP is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of findings.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Society for Psychical Research who have enabled us to conduct this research project.

Psychic or Spirit: Learning to Discern

F. Kinnersley^a, Prof. C.A. Roe^a, Prof. G. Hitchman^b, Dr. L. Spiers^a

^aUniversity of Northampton, UK

^bHeriot-Watt University Malaysia
fil.kinnersley@northampton.ac.uk

One of the criticisms of mediumship as evidence for the survival hypothesis is the issue of the source of a medium's information: it is argued that the medium could be accessing psychic information from a living person (Braude, 2003; Gaud, 1983).

Our qualitative longitudinal study into the experience and phenomenology of Spiritualist mediumship development shows that this is also a significant issue for novice Spiritualist mediums, in that their unfoldment process involves learning to discern between information that may be attributable to a discarnate source, and information that should be attributed to a psychic source.

This paper will summarise the research project and its aims, and present the results of the analysis. Initial results indicate that while the issues that the participants encountered were often similar, there was a notable degree of variation in both the process of learning to discern and the discernment strategies adopted by the participants.

Data and Methodology:

Data collection: A mediumship survey was used to recruit twelve participants who were in the process of developing as Spiritualist mediums; one dropped out after the first interview.

Data: A longitudinal series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with eleven participants, each of whom was interviewed three times over the course of eight months.

Method: Analysis using IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, (Smith et al., 2022)), presented as a set of themes and sub-themes evidenced by quotations from the data set.

We are grateful for the support of the Society for Psychical Research (Survival Fund), and the John Bjorkhem Memorial Foundation for this project.

References

- Braude, S. E. (2003). *Immortal Remains*. Rowman and Littlefield. Gauld, A. (1983). *Mediumship and Survival* (2nd ed.). Flamingo.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (2nd Edition). SAGE Publications Ltd.

The Truth in the Light: Conducting a systematic analysis of the Fenwick NDE CASE collection

Ashlee Lewis-Earl & Chris A. Roe

Exceptional Experiences & Consciousness Studies Research Group
University of Northampton, UK

We recently completed a project, kindly funded by the SPR Survival Committee, to systematically analyse letters submitted to Prof. Peter Fenwick in response to a BBC QED documentary about near-death experiences that aired in January 1988 (Roe & Lewis-Earl, 2024). When we began the project, we were disappointed to discover that over 60% of the collection (219 of 359 letters) did not actually describe experiences but represented other kinds of correspondence. This was unexpected in a collection that was actively curated by the documentary producer, Tony Edwards. Nevertheless, the remaining cases include some interesting and detailed accounts of NDEs that have never before appeared in the public domain. Our analysis enabled us to document some interesting variations in NDE features under different circumstances, but these warranted further consideration using a larger collection of NDE letters that would enormously increase the statistical power and/or resolution of analyses that can be conducted. In particular, it would allow a more forensic coding scheme that would be data-driven by applying more powerful cluster analyses.

Serendipitously, Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick donated to us a larger collection of letters, some of which were included in their 1997 book, *The Truth in the Light*. These letters were received by the Fenwicks and by David Lorimer, then chair of the International Association for Near-Death Studies UK, after various media appeals. We have permission from both parties to use the letters and make public any discoveries, subject to appropriate anonymisation. The new collection comprises 446 letters, which have been read independently by CR and ALE, and reviewed as eligible for inclusion in the analysis. Letters were excluded from further analysis due to: complete lack of detail of the experience; dubious provenance (very likely a dream, sleep paralysis, or a result of psychosis); or a focus on other phenomena such as alien visitations, ADCs, etc. This left a set of 315 letters that have been transcribed and analysed. Although some of this material is already in the public domain, there is scope to learn more from these accounts by using a more systematic analysis method such as content analysis, as argued for in our JSPR submission. In this presentation we will outline the research project and report on our preliminary findings.

References

- Fenwick, P., & Fenwick, E. (1997). *The truth in the light: An investigation of over 300 near-death experiences*. Berkley Books.
- Roe, C.A., & Lewis-Earl, A. (2024). Glimpses of death: Analysis of letters submitted in response to a BBC documentary on near-death experiences. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 88(1), 1-17.

To Believe or Not to Believe: The Role of Personal Experiences and Other Psycho-social Influences on Belief in the Paranormal

Dr Anusnigdha

Birmingham City University
anusnigdha@bcu.ac.uk

Over the past few decades, psychological research has explored a variety of factors in considering how they may play a role in developing and maintaining a belief in paranormal phenomena, including cognitive styles, personality types, education, somatic tendencies, psychopathological traits, and more recently, socio-cultural factors such as religion and spirituality. However, research in the field has primarily been quantitative in nature, with a focus on measuring the extent to which these factors influence paranormal (or sceptical) belief. As such, there has been little emphasis placed on exploring the meaning or phenomenology of the belief (or lack thereof) in paranormal phenomena for the individual. There is also minimal research on the dynamics of subjective internalisation of socio-cultural beliefs which may influence the type of paranormal phenomenon (if any) one may believe in. Thus, this research uses a psychoanalytic framework to further understand the unconscious dynamics involved in developing and maintaining a belief in the paranormal, how these may influence *what* paranormal phenomenon one

may believe in, and the meaning of such beliefs for one's identity. The semi-structured interviews with a global, cross-cultural sample are analysed using psychoanalytically informed thematic analysis. Thus, the analysis focuses on understanding the meaning of the paranormal belief for the individual, rather than seeking an explanation for paranormal phenomenon or the beliefs. Exploring the unconscious dynamics in this manner allows for the consideration of individual experience within the broader cultural and social psychodynamics. It is expected that variation in implicit cultural norms, socially acceptable coping strategies and defence mechanisms, family dynamics, and unconscious social anxieties will play an essential role (either through symbolic manifestations or projection) in conscious and unconscious belief in different aspects of the paranormal.

Paranormal Perspectives of People from British Minority Ethnic Backgrounds: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Sabrina Davis

University of Derby

Supervisors: Dr Malcolm Schofield, Dr Chris Howard
sabrina3615@sky.com

Paranormal beliefs and experiences are inherent to many people's cultural, religious and spiritual philosophies. In Western society paranormal beliefs and experiences are considered undesirable, indicating abnormality in the individual. Western philosophy may prevent people with paranormal beliefs or experiences from being open about them. This study aims to explore whether this is the case for individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds living the United Kingdom by (1) understanding paranormal beliefs and experiences of people from minority ethnic backgrounds, (2) exploring the role of paranormal phenomena on people's psychological wellbeing and how this impacts their daily functioning, and (3) whether people from minority ethnic backgrounds disclose their paranormal beliefs and experiences and how they interpret other people's reactions.

Seven participants took part in semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The overarching theme was paranormal beliefs and experiences fill a gap in which the scientific-rational model fails to satisfactorily account for people's understanding of situations. Three themes emerged: engaging in the paranormal is dangerous - I need to protect myself; reincarnation is real - there is life beyond mortal death; and I cannot share my paranormal beliefs with others, unless they believe in the paranormal too.

Findings indicate participants found paranormal phenomena relating to witchcraft, spirit attachment and magic to be negative resulting in feelings of terror leading to avoidant behaviours. Belief in reincarnation was deemed positive which helped participants cope with grief, death anxiety, and facilitated meaningful life goals. Participants talked about the paranormal within family, friendship and religious circles which allowed them to be their authentic selves however they refrained from disclosing paranormal beliefs or experiences outside of their trusted circles due to fear of ostracism.

This study demonstrates the complexity and diversity of human belief and experience and how personally constructed paranormal narratives impact people's psychological functioning.

Is there any factor that indicates to us that the perception of certain anomalous inclusions goes beyond pareidolia?

Alvaro Alvarez & Vicente Salvador

Independent Researchers, Spain
alvvlaiba@gmail.com

Introduction: What factors can influence the perception of people who hear or see these types of recordings created by unconventional methods? Does the perception depend on some sociological or demographic factor that is decisive in its interpretation?

Methods: Two surveys were carried out, which were active for 15 days to collect data. In the case of the survey on the perception of psychoimages, it was designed by dividing it into two clearly differentiated parts: in the first part, demographic and sociological data of the person participating in it were collected in the second part of the survey, the psychoimage was shown and several questions were asked again: if they saw something recognizable, if so, to describe it.

Results: A decrease in quality is observed with the age of the interviewee. This fact may have a physiological explanation associated with the fact of presbycusis, or loss of hearing acuity associated with age. These results show that the perception of this type of recording has the same behaviour as a sound of non-anomalous origin.

Discussion: The importance of this finding is that this anomalous type of recording behaves in the same way as a non-anomalous recording: this decrease in the quality of the audio associated with age would not exist, and we could even say that it would have an effect opposite to that observed, since the component that we could call "internal imaginary" would be enhanced by the difficulty of hearing the recording: in the case of a pareidolic type of origin, we therefore think that this graph would have an inverse distribution to that shown in this study.