

ALLEGED ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD: THE IMPORTANCE OF VIOLENT DEATH IN 337 NEW CASES

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ABSTRACT: Personal encounters with the dead are reported by 25% of Western Europeans and 30% of Americans. Three hundred thirty-seven Icelanders reporting such experiences were interviewed at length. Ninety percent of them reported sensory experiences (apparitions) of a deceased person; 69% were visual, 28% auditory, 13% tactile, and 4% olfactory. Fewer than half of the experiences occurred in twilight or darkness. In half of the cases the experiencer was actively engaged or working. Disproportionately prominent were apparitions of those who died violently and crisis apparitions observed close to the time of death of the person who was perceived, although in the majority of cases, the percipient did not know that the person had died. Reported mode of death and the identity of the deceased persons were verified by checking official records. A fair number of collective experiences were reported, some of which were verified by other witnesses.

Keywords: apparitions, encounters with the dead, surveys, Iceland, violent death, crisis apparitions, hallucinations, after-death communications

Over a century ago the founders of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) conducted the first large systematic study of apparitions (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886; Sidgwick and Committee, 1894). In their meticulously thorough investigation they found that apparitions were reported by so many persons that they concluded that they are experienced by people who are normal and sane.

Their second major finding was that some of these “hallucinations,” or phantasms, as they were called, seemed to have some factual basis. Some of them apparently coincided with events that were taking place somewhere else. Such “veridical hallucinations” were distinguished from the bulk of hallucinations that correspond to no factual event or situation.

These “veridical hallucinations” seemed to be more than “just hallucinations.” They were related to an external event and hence meaningful to the percipient. In cases of this kind people have a vision of someone they know, and they learn later that this person unexpectedly died at the time of their vision or impression. In veridical hallucinations some information unknown to the percipient is apparently passed on to the recipient in an inexplicable manner. Some veridical hallucinations are apparently collective, that is, experienced by more than one person at the same time.

Since the early SPR studies, veridical hallucinations have remained a cause of debate and speculation. Researchers as well as theorists have

argued about how they should be interpreted and how much faith can be placed in the accuracy of the case reports (Myers, 1889a, 1889b, 1903; Podmore, 1889). The best of the cases involving persons at the time they are dying or shortly after their death have remained intriguing. Some researchers have seen in them a possibility for empirical research into the question of continued existence after bodily death (Gurney & Myers, 1887–88; Stevenson, 1982).

In 1975 I included the following item in a representative survey in Iceland ($N = 902$) dealing with paranormal and religious beliefs and experiences: “Have you ever perceived or felt the nearness of a deceased person?” Of the respondents, 31% replied yes (36% of the women, 24% of the men).

A representative U.S. survey ($N = 1467$) by McCready and Greeley (1976) showed that this high percentage of reported contact with the dead is not specific to Iceland. McCready and Greeley asked: “Have you ever felt that you were really in touch with someone who had died?” Twenty-seven percent responded in the affirmative. Later this item was included in the European Human Values Study (Haraldsson, 1985; Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1991). In Western Europe, about 25% of the respondents reported having felt contact with the dead. In the U. S. in 1987, the figure had risen to 41% (Greeley, 1987). Even in Communist China, 40% of university students reported experiences of contact with the dead (McClenon, 1988). None of these surveys, however, describe the content of the experiences.

Since the early British researchers made their pioneering and monumental studies, no major attempt has been made to collect a large number of cases of apparitions of the dead in such a way that they would lend themselves to detailed analyses. There have been studies of specific groups, such as the Rees’s (1971) study of widows and widowers, and the Osis and Haraldsson (1986) study of terminally ill patients. Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1995) collected a large number of encounters with deceased relatives or loved ones. Arcangel’s (2005) large-scale survey of “afterlife experiences” emphasizes their effects on percipients.

This paper deals with a project that took several years to complete. In 1974 we conducted a representative survey of psychic experiences in Iceland ($N = 902$) using a random national sample (Haraldsson, 1985). Thirty-one percent reported encounters with the dead. An earlier paper (Haraldsson, 1988–1989) deals with 100 cases of encounters with the dead from this 1974 survey. The cases were from persons living in the Reykjavik and Akureyri areas and the conclusions were based on face-to-face interviews. The present paper reports 337 additional cases.

What is the nature of these encounters reported by a substantial part of the population? How are the deceased persons perceived? What sensory modalities are involved? Do these experiences mostly occur in dark and gloomy surroundings, as folk theory implies? Do they primarily occur when people are grieving their loved ones, as Rees’s data suggest, or when resting or not fully awake, as suggested by Tyrrell (1953)? Who are the deceased?

Do they share specific characteristics? Do we find veridical apparitions? How strong is the evidence for collectively observed apparitions?

METHOD

Participants

We obtained cases from 307 experiencers. In addition, we included 30 cases from the 1974 random survey; these are of persons who lived too far away from Reykjavik and Akureyri to participate in face-to-face interviews in the earlier study.

Among the total 337 percipients, 186 were men and 151 were women; 29% had attended only primary school, 58% had attended high school, and 13% had attended college. Their ages varied greatly: 11% were 29 or younger, 11% were 30–39, 17% were 40–49, 25% were 50–59, 18% were 60–69, and 17% were older than 69. Sixty-four percent of the participants were from the greater Reykjavik area, 21% from towns in other parts of Iceland, and 15% from rural areas. These divisions reflect the approximate population of Iceland around the time the original data were gathered.

Questionnaire

Thirty questions dealt with the content and circumstances of the experience: the sensory modality through which the deceased was perceived, whether the deceased was perceived partially or fully, how the deceased appeared and disappeared, the lighting conditions, the time of day, how long the experience lasted, how long ago it occurred, how real the occurrence seemed, and so on.

Twenty items dealt with the perceived entity: whether the apparition was identified by the experiencer, whether the apparition was related to the experiencer, what were the sex, age at death, cause of death, and life circumstances of the deceased, and so forth.

Thirty-six questions concerned the experiencers directly: what they were doing at the time of the encounter, their physical and mental state, whether they had been grieving over the deceased, whether they were alone or with others; if others were present, whether they made the same observations, what effect did the encounter have on the experiencers, what was their prior belief in the paranormal, and so on. For an English translation of the 86-item questionnaire, see the author's homepage ([www.hi.is~erlendur](http://www.hi.is/~erlendur)).

Procedure

In 1980–1981, a short one-page questionnaire and a self-addressed envelope were placed in five popular magazines: two for fishermen, sailors, and the fishing industry (5,800 subscribers); two for people interested in

spiritualism, spirituality, theosophy, and new religious movements (3,000 subscribers); and one that is widely read by people living in the countryside. We asked: "Have you ever in a waking state personally perceived or felt the presence of a deceased person?"

If the answer was yes, the respondents were asked if they had ever seen an apparition, heard the voice of a deceased person, sensed a smell, felt a touch, or in some other way felt the presence of a dead person. Then we asked for name, address, and phone number.

We received about 700 questionnaires with positive responses. Some of the questionnaires dealt with cases that obviously did not meet our criteria, such as dreams or experiences visiting mediums. They were immediately excluded. If respondents had more than one experience of the dead, they were asked to report which one seemed to be the most impressive. Some secondary cases were recorded, but they are not included in the present analyses.

In-depth interviews were conducted over the telephone and tape-recorded; most of them were in 1980–1981, but they continued up to 1986. The participants were interviewed in the order in which their questionnaires came in, until our resources were exhausted. First, we asked each respondent to give a detailed description of his or her most memorable experience, and then we went through all the relevant questions in a longer questionnaire we had developed for the interview. Our plan was to get an approximately equal number of cases from men and women. A final review of the individual cases revealed that more cases from women had to be discarded than from men, because after the interview these cases were found not to fulfil our criteria. Thus we had more cases reported by men than by women for the analyses.

Checks for Accuracy

Survey data are prone to several weaknesses, because often few or no attempts are made to check the accuracy of the respondents' statements. Furthermore, reports may be distorted for reasons such as faulty observation or recall, and changes in memory over time. We used three methods to check for accuracy:

1. At the University of Iceland, excellent records have been kept for over a century concerning the whole Icelandic population, including dates of birth and death and the cause of death. We obtained permission to check against these files the names of the deceased, as well as their year of birth and death as it was reported to us. We found no evidence of fictitious persons or other signs that we were being purposely misinformed.

2. From the same records we checked the accuracy of the participant's report of the cause of death. If the respondent did not know whether the person had died from disease or suffered a violent death, the cause of death was inserted into our data file.

3. Whenever our interviewees reported that another person had been present and had shared their experience, we spared no effort to trace and interview the second observers, and we carefully compared the independent testimonies.

Otherwise, we accepted the statements of our respondents at face value.

RESULTS

Sensory Modalities of the Experiences

The alleged encounters with the dead came in a great variety of forms. Ninety percent of them were sensory: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or multiple modalities. In 10% of the cases there was only a vivid sense of presence (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
SENSORY MODALITIES OF REPORTED ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD

	Number of cases		Total	% of N = 337
	One modality	More than one modality		
Visual	167	67	234	69
Auditory	36	57	93	28
Tactile	12	32	44	13
Olfactory	13	1	14	4
Only vivid sense of presence			33	10

Visual apparitions dominated, as they were 69% of the cases. The content varied widely. Four examples follow:

This happened three years ago. I sat in a chair in my room and was reading. Then I looked up and saw my deceased grandmother standing in front of me, as fully alive. I told my mother about this the following day. She said, "That is nice, it was her birthday." I had not remembered it. (5018)

I had recently started working in a factory when one day I see a man walking at the further end of the machine at which I was working. He walks up to a wall near which the machine was placed and back. I went to see who the man

was but found no one. When I told my coworkers about this experience and described the man to them, they were sure that this had been a ghost which some others had also seen. It was the former director of the company who had committed suicide. (822)

I brought my wife to the hospital in February 1960. She had been sick for several weeks. I visited her that same evening again and she was dressed in a blue nightgown. I had expected to see her again the following day but she died in the night. The next day my daughter-in-law comes to select a gown for her burial. A day later I come home late and take out the psalm book to select the psalms to be sung at her funeral. Then the astounding thing happened. My wife suddenly stands in front of me, bathed in white light of an oval form. I see her very distinctly and vividly as she holds both hands around the collar of her nightgown, not that one I saw her in when I saw her the last time, but a pink fancy gown she used only rarely. She held the collar together with both her hands under her cheek. I became startled and then she disappears. I had not known what gown my daughter-in-law had selected for her but discovered later that it was exactly this dress. (2172)

In 89% of the visual cases, the apparition was seen through open eyes. In a few cases (7%), the percipient saw the deceased person as if by the mind's eye, as a vivid image in the mind. In a few other cases (4%), the respondent was not sure if the apparition was perceived internally or externally, as in the following:

As a young girl I rented a room here in Reykjavík. It had been a storage room for fire wood and no one had lived in it before me. I am not psychic, but bit by bit I began to realize there was a person in the room, someone friendly and it was a man. As winter came I could detect what he looked like, slowly it became clear to me. It did not happen suddenly.... The man was pleasant and I felt he was always asking me to pray for him. Then one rather cold evening, I had turned the lights off and faced the wall ready to go to sleep. Sometimes I would cover myself with two blankets, but now I distinctly felt that I was being covered, just like a mother covers a child. It was the man tending to me, but at the same time he constantly asked me to pray for him. I didn't hear any words; it was rather like a message was being pressed into me; that is how I sensed it.

I neither heard nor saw anything. I sensed it like this ... I don't know how to describe it. I understood the message although it was not put in words. Once when paying the rent the landlord asked jokingly if I had ever noticed anything in the room. There was a silence, so his wife scoldingly said to him that one should not ask questions like that. I thought it best to tell it like it was and let them have a laugh on me and said, "Why yes, there is a man in my room, a young man, but he isn't unfriendly." The landlord seemed startled and said, "Why do you say that?" "Well I'm not quite sure ... but he is friendly, he looks after me more than anything, there is no hostility between us." The landlord asked if I could describe this man and so I did. He was rather distinct, had curly hair and unusual characteristics. Although they were not outstanding he was easy to describe. The landlord was very surprised, and looked stunned. He asked if I knew what had happened in the room. I said I had no such knowledge but asked if the room had not been used for storage of firewood. The landlord answered, "Yes it was, but a man committed suicide in that room a long time ago and your description fits him perfectly..." My description was in accordance with what the landlord had been told about the man when he bought the house. I wasn't upset by all of this. I felt he was friendly, pleasant and pleading, and that he was grateful that I had prayed for him. (2172)

Auditory cases were the second most common: 28% of the experiences were auditory and 66% of these were of human voices. Voices alone without other modalities were rare, but here are two such cases, both reported by fishermen who were being warned of impending danger:

This happened when I was a teenager. I was alone fishing on a small boat. Suddenly I heard a voice that says I should leave the fishing line and row ashore. I heard this quite clearly. It was said to me in a commanding tone. I do as ordered, I do not know why, but I found it so odd. Just as I am about to arrive at the harbour, suddenly there sweeps over a violent storm. I barely managed to dock. I did not recognize the voice, but later I connected it with my brother who had recently drowned. (7028)

I was on a fishing boat from Stykkisholm. We were out in the bay in the storm and rain and had just laid our nets and should be wakened at six the following morning. I slept in

the narrow cabin with the others and one man was on duty in the deckhouse. About five in the morning I and some others wake up as someone calls "rise." I went up to the cabin door and called to the man in the deckhouse and asked if he had been calling. No, he said, it was not time for that. I went back to my bunk, and was not yet asleep when again there was a shout, "rise, are you not going to get out of bed?" It was as if someone was calling loudly from the cabin door some two meters away. Everyone woke up and jumped out of bed. That surprised me; generally the crew was not that quick. I told the machinist to run aft and start the donkey engine to haul in the nets. As the machinist went down to the engine room he saw the dynamo catching fire. He barely managed to disconnect from the electricity so that it came to a halt. I am convinced if he had gone later we would have caught fire and there would have been a fatal explosion in the engine room. I did not recognize the voice. It called in a typical seaman fashion. I had reasons to suspect that it was my deceased grandfather. (7542)

Fairly common (30%) among the auditory cases were noises from various human activities that had been typical for a particular deceased person.

Shortly after our father died I came to his house with my brother. We knew that there was nobody in the house and then we heard the old man at his desk. He was walking around, opened the door and closed it again. Both of us stopped and listened when we entered and then I remarked, "I guess there is no doubt who is up there." "No there is no doubt about it," my brother replied. Both of us went upstairs, no one was there. We had heard this so clearly. He was 85 years when he died, walked slowly you know, had the typical old man's way of walking. (2198)

We contacted the respondent's brother, who said he remembered clearly that this event had taken place, but he could give no details. When we read the above account to him, he said it all came back to him, and he confirmed everything in his brother's account.

Thirteen percent of the cases were tactile, involving a touch sensation. Three quarters of these tactile cases involve two or more modalities. Here is one involving only the sense of touch:

My mother and my father-in-law died only a few months apart and I sensed one of them, I think it was my mother. I sat at a table and was working when I felt someone come up behind me, bend down and tightly grab my shoulder. At first I naturally thought it was someone in the household, I looked back but did not see anyone. Then I realized what it was ... it was a cold and tight grip, and it was not from anyone in the household. In a strange way I was astounded, sort of jumped up when I realized what it was, and I thought this would intimidate the person who was trying to comfort me, someone who was trying to get close to me because I was probably a little depressed. I felt as if someone had come to comfort me.... I never had an experience like this again. (2062)

This case combines vision, hearing, and touch:

The night after my husband died I could not sleep, was at home in my bed and very lonely. Suddenly I sensed him standing by my bed. He seemed to be covered in something like mist. I saw him and felt his hand as he stroked my head and he recited part of a well-known poem that was about how good it was to rest and then wake up one day surrounded by eternal joy. I felt quite differently after this. (2090)

The olfactory cases were the fewest, only 4%. Some olfactory cases have very interesting features, although they have generally not been given much attention in the literature. Here are three olfactory cases:

I lived in Sandgerdi where we had just bought a house two months ago. I was alone in the house. My husband was out working. Suddenly I see that a man enters through the front door and goes to the kitchen. This happened suddenly and was over. I then felt a strong smell of liquor. I never use alcohol. Well, then my husband comes home, and he says, "Who has been here?" Nobody, I tell him. "Oh, there is such a strong smell of liquor." Yes, I say, but nobody has been here.... The next day my husband comes home for supper and says, "No wonder there was a liquor smell here yesterday.... Erlingur from whom we bought the house was missing in Siglufjord yesterday...." He had been quite drunk and it was feared that he had fallen into the harbour and drowned. Two weeks later his body was found floating in the harbour. When this incident occurred, we

had no idea about what had happened. My husband is now deceased. (2116)

I was getting out of bed and then smelled a particular perfume that my wife always used. She had died some time back and this smell had no normal cause or explanation that I was aware of. My wife was making me aware of her to comfort me. (6001)

My niece died from lung cancer. Most people with serious lung or digestion diseases have a bad odor, the smell of something rotting. One Sunday morning, some time after she passed away, I smell this stink very clearly in the kitchen where I was working. I look around to see if something in the kitchen could cause this but found nothing. Not an hour had passed when her husband comes unexpectedly to visit. I considered this clearly to be her odor. I was not thinking about her, because some time had passed since her death. I do not remember the date, but I presume it was close to a year between these events. I felt it was exactly the smell she had after she became very ill.... I only first thought of her when her husband arrived. (5058)

About 10% of the experiencers reported a case that consisted solely of a vivid sense of presence and hence does not technically fall under the category of apparitions. They were included because our purpose was not only to study apparitions but also to uncover what kinds of experiences tend to be interpreted as encounters with the dead. Three such cases follow:

I have had this kind of experience a few times. One of them is especially memorable. My eye had been bothering me for quite some time, I had something in my eye and I was quite uncomfortable. Then one morning, I was awake with my eyes closed when I felt my mother, who was deceased, standing at my bed. She bent over me and I thought I could feel her breathing. I was well awake but did not want to open my eyes because I felt sure I would not see her. I am sure she was there and was checking how my eye was. I felt her bend down all the way to my face. (2000)

I had just woken up. A deceased woman, whom I knew very well, came to me and took me in her arms. This perception only lasted a few moments. When I was talking about this

that same morning, my daughter said, “I also dreamt about her last night.” (2013)

I was out in the country and going to visit my grandfather. I was having a pleasant trip, stayed at Blanda for two nights, or rather was going to. I was not in any hurry. All of a sudden I sensed my grandfather right there with me. I instantly knew that he had passed away, went to the post office and called. It was confirmed that he had died the day before. (2015)

It is evident that some of the cases in this section involve more than one modality; in fact, 22% of them do: visual and auditory (10%); visual, auditory, and tactile (6%); visual and tactile (4%); and auditory and tactile (2%).

Conditions Under Which the Encounters Occurred

Our collection of cases does not confirm the popular belief that apparitions are mostly seen in darkness or twilight. Half of the experiences (52%) occurred either in daylight (36%) or full electric light, 33% in twilight, 10% in darkness, and some 4% under variable conditions.

Another hypothesis, that of Gurney (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886), is that apparitions tend to occur when the mind is not actively engaged and in a restful state. He adds, however, that a telepathic impression may have reached the experiencer before the apparitional experience takes place. Thus, this hypothesis may be difficult to test. Others, such as Tyrrell (1953), have argued that apparitional experiences are more prone to occur in drowsy or dissociated states, when external stimulation is likely to be minimal.

TABLE 2
CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE ENCOUNTERS TOOK PLACE, BY %

Experiencer physically active	49	Daylight, full electric light	52
Resting	22	Twilight	33
Falling asleep	7	Darkness	10
Awakening	16	Varied, unknown	4
Unclear if sleeping or awake	5		

In half of our cases (49%), the experiencer was working or actively engaged in some way, which gives little support to the above speculations. An additional 22% were at rest. Still, a sizable number of the encounters (28%) occurred just prior to falling asleep or upon awakening, many of them quite impressive. The following case happened immediately upon awakening to a man working on a fishing vessel.

This happened during the summer of 1966. I was somewhere between sleeping and waking, when I get wide awake. I see a man at the stove of the cabin, a young man who was stooping over it. He was doing something there. I recognized that this man was not a member of the crew. I was going to check this further but then he disappeared. Later I got the information that he had got burnt inside the cabin. He did not get burnt to death, he suffocated in smoke. I remember so clearly that he was wearing a blue sweater and a scarf around his neck. My description fit what I later learnt about him. (7018)

In the thanatology literature, grief has been found to be a major cause, if not *the* cause, of apparitional experiences. Only 21% of our experiencers were in a state of grief when they experienced an identifiable apparition.

To sum up, apparitional experiences occur under a variety of circumstances, and there are indications that the state of mind of the percipient plays only a minor role in the occurrence. These findings give some support to the theories of Myers (1903), Hart (1959), and others that these encounters—mostly apparitions—may take place relatively independently of the state of the person who has the experience.

Who Were the Deceased?

Most of the encounters (84%) were with persons who were recognizable to the respondents. Almost half (46%) of the deceased figures were related to the experiencers, 24% were acquaintances or persons slightly known to them, and the rest (30%) were strangers, some of whom were identified through information received after the experience occurred (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
WHO WERE THE ENCOUNTERED DEAD?

	Number of cases	%
Relatives	155	46
Close friends	27	8
Coworkers	9	3
Acquaintances	45	13
Strangers	100	30

Unexpectedly, the apparitions were predominantly male (67%). This surprising dominance of males is remarkably uniform in

the experiences of both male (68%) and female (67%) experiencers. It confirms the results of our previous representative survey (Haraldsson, 1988–1989), in which 77% of both sexes reported encounters with males and only 23% with females. Has this sex difference been found anywhere else? It has. Schouten (1979) found in his analysis of the cases in *Phantasms of the Living* that involved death, 63% of the apparitions (target persons) were male and 37% female. Very similar figures are found for both male and female percipients. It is interesting that 67% of the cases in *Phantasms of the Living* are phantasms of the dead or dying. So why do men so dominate the scene? We will discuss this issue further below, when we look at another characteristic, namely, the cause of death of the perceived person.

This predominance of males is also reflected in the kinds of relatives that are predominantly encountered. For example, 43 percipients encountered their father, whereas only 22 encountered their mother; 21 perceived their grandfather and 16 their grandmother; 18 widows perceived their deceased husband, whereas only 9 widowers perceived their deceased wife. Regarding the last set of figures, it should be borne in mind that there are always more widows than widowers.

Encounters With Those Who Died Violently

First, a case of an encounter with a person who committed suicide:

Jacob was a patient in a sanatorium where I worked. He was sometimes depressed, and I tried to brighten his stay with a bit of humour. One day I had talked to Jacob that he should visit us because he came from the same county as my husband and they would enjoy talking about the people from there. He says yes to that, is glad, and I say to him: “You promise to come tomorrow.” “Yes, yes, I promise,” he says. During the night, I wake up, and all strength is like taken away from me. I am unable to move. Suddenly I see the bedroom door opened and on the threshold stands Jacob, with his face all covered with blood. I look at this for a good while unable to speak or move. Then he disappears and I felt as if he closed the door behind him. I became my normal self, call my husband and tell him about the incident: “I can swear that something has happened at the sanatorium.” I telephone in the morning and ask about if everything is not alright with Jacob. “No,” said the nurse, “he committed suicide this night.” (5076)

We interviewed the husband, who told us that his wife had awakened him in the middle of the night and told him about what she had seen. They did not

know Jacob's fate until morning. The percipient, whom we interviewed in 1982, did not know Jacob's surname. Through further inquiries in 2002, we were able to fully identify Jacob and know more about the circumstances of this incident. On the morning of October 8, 1962, Jacob was missing from his room. The police were called and a few hours later he was found drowned some hundred yards downstream from a walking bridge over a river close to the sanatorium. The post-mortem report declared the cause of death as "suicidium submergio," that is, suicide by drowning. In the report, it is written that there were "two large wounds on his head and the cranium much broken." This fits the percipient's description that she saw Jacob "with his face all covered with blood." The river is rather shallow, but it flows over sharp rocks of lava that must have caused the severe head injuries. A girl working in the sanatorium and returning home from a dance in the middle of the night had briefly met Jacob. He said he had gotten out of his room through the window. As he disappeared into the darkness, he asked the girl to give greetings to his wife.

The cause of death was known in 79% of our cases and verified by checking official records. In 70% of the cases in which the cause of death was known, the person had died naturally; in 30% of the cases the person had died violently (accident 23.87%, suicide 4.49%, and murder 1.50%). Those who had died by accident, suicide, or murder, were much more likely to be perceived than those who had died by disease. A prominent characteristic of apparitions of the dead is the relatively large number of people who died violently.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF CAUSES OF DEATH OF 267 PERSONS
WHO APPEARED TO OUR PERCEIVERS

Cause of death	<i>N</i>	Apparitions %	Population 1951–1970 %
Disease	187	70.03	91.26
Accident	64	23.97	7.15
Suicide	12	4.49	1.51
Murder	4	1.50	0.08
Unknown	70	--	

Note. From the Icelandic population who died in 1951–1970; data from the National Registry

The median year of death of the persons who appeared to our percipients was around 1961. Hence, we compared our data with the causes of death for the years 1951–1970. During this period, 8.74% of all deaths had a violent cause: accidents 7.15%, suicides 1.51%, and murders 0.08%.

Table 4 allows a comparison between the cause of death in our collection of cases and in the general population. The percentage of violent deaths in our cases is 3.46 times the percentage of people in Iceland who actually die violently, according to official statistics. Evidently, the cause of death does matter when it comes to encounters with the dead.

Are there any comparable findings? Stevenson (1982) calculated the proportion of violent deaths among the 314 apparitional cases in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886). He found that the mode of death was violent in 28% of the cases in which the cause of death was known. This is remarkably close to our 29.97%. In both case collections, a violent death seems to make the appearance of an apparition more likely than a natural death. These findings raise important questions: Do apparitions of those who suffer a violent death have an invasive character? We will get back to this later.

The cases of violent death show some interesting and striking characteristics that seem not to have been duly recognized. Also, encounters with persons suffering a violent death seem more independent of the relationship to the percipient than do apparitions of those who die naturally. This is evident from the fact that appearances of those who suffer a violent death are significantly more likely to be of strangers or near-strangers to the percipient than appearances of those who die by disease, $\chi^2(4, N = 187) = 35.74, p < .001$. A glance at Table 5 reveals that the more remote the relationship between the percipient and the appearing person, the more likely it is that the appearing person suffered a violent death; and vice versa, the closer the relationship between the percipient and the deceased, the more likely it is that the deceased died by disease.

TABLE 5
CAUSES OF DEATH AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERCEIVER

	Disease	Violent
Relatives	127 (82%)	28 (18%)
Friends	20 (77%)	6 (23%)
Coworkers	4 (44%)	5 (56%)
Acquaintances	22 (54%)	19 (46%)
Strangers	14 (39%)	22 (61%)

$$\chi^2 = 35.74, df = 4, p = .0000$$

We also asked our interviewees if their relationship to the deceased was very close, somewhat close, slightly close, or not close at all. The data are presented in Table 6. The figures show that the closer the relationship, the more likely the appearer is to have died by disease;

conversely, the more remote the relationship, the likelier it is that the death was violent, $\chi^2(3, N = 187) = 18.23, p < .001$. This suggests that those who die violently appear to those close to them as often as do those who die naturally, but they *also* appear to many strangers or people who hardly know them, and they do so relatively more often than those who suffer a natural death. This suggests that those who suffer a violent death are stronger or more aggressive communicators. One would expect a person with little motivation to perceive a dead person who is a stranger, or—to put it differently—to involuntarily and unconsciously generate an image of a deceased person that the perceiver did not know or knew hardly at all. Hence, it is not inappropriate to assume that the deceased person is the motivational force behind the appearance or the encounter, that is, that the appearance is largely independent of the perceiver. This finding gives considerable support to the views of Myers (1903), Gibson (1944), and Stevenson (1982), as well as to the popular view that the dead person (the agent) plays an active role in the formation of the apparitional experience. This is in contrast to Louisa Rhine's (1957) hypothesis that only the percipient plays an active role in apparitions of the dead. From these data, one can argue that the apparitional experience is thrust upon the perceiver by the appearing deceased person. In short, the apparition is invasive in character. These findings have important consequences for the question of survival.

TABLE 6
CAUSE OF DEATH AND CLOSENESS TO PERCEIVER

	Very close	Somewhat close	Slightly close	None
Disease	91 (49%)	40 (21%)	25 (13%)	31 (17%)
Violent	18 (23%)	22 (28%)	13 (16%)	27 (34%)

$$\chi^2 = 18.23, df = 3, p < .000$$

Now we can come back to the striking finding that two thirds of the communicators were males. How can that be? In the relevant period of time in Iceland, 4.4% of women died violently compared to 12.5% of men. Thus, three fourths of those who died violently are males, and, as noted above, those who suffer violent deaths are the stronger communicators. If we take these strong communicators out of our calculations, a different picture emerges. If we consider only the encounters with those who died on their sickbed, we find the proportion of male apparitions reduced from 67% to 56%, and thus there is a comparable increase in the proportion of female apparitions from 33% to 44%. The predominance of encounters with males thus seems to be caused primarily by the fact that a much greater number of men than women suffered a violent death. In our collection of

apparitional cases, 41% of the males died violently compared to only 8% of the females. That is a huge difference.

Violent deaths are almost invariably sudden. For this reason, some researchers have speculated that suddenness or unexpectedness may be more crucial than the actual mode of death. The correctness of this assumption is hard to check, because unexpectedness, as judged by the dying person, is not a category in the official statistics on the causes of death, and hence reliable information on the frequency of sudden deaths in the population is not available. Physicians are generally reluctant to even give estimates, so we do not have a baseline for reliable comparison. Nonetheless, we asked in our interviews if the perceived persons who died naturally also died suddenly and unexpectedly. This was the case in 14% of the natural deaths. Stevenson found in his analysis of cases in *Phantasms of the Living* that 25% were sudden death by disease and 28% were violent death. It follows that 53% of the appearing persons in that large collection had died unexpectedly. In our collection, the corresponding percentage is 44% (14 + 30). Perhaps sudden death was more common over a century ago when medicine was less advanced. Apparently, not only violent death but also sudden, unexpected death is more likely to lead to appearances of deceased persons than the more common gradual process of dying.

Encounters Near the Time of Death

Another prominent characteristic of reported encounters with the dead is how often they appear close to the time of death. In 14% of the cases in which the time of death is known, the encounter is reported to have taken place within 24 hours before and 24 hours after the time of death. In half of these cases (7%), they were reported to have occurred within an hour of the time of death. Even more startling is the finding that in 86% of the cases occurring within 24 hours of death, the person who had the encounter did not know that the perceived person had died or was dying. In the cases occurring within an hour of death, this figure increases to 89%. Let me illustrate this with two cases:

My wife and I had living with us a little girl about two and a half years old whom we fostered. One night I wake up and feel as though a woman were standing beside the bed. She says to me, "My name is Margret." Then she vanishes out the door. I look at the clock and see that it is exactly three thirty. The day after or the same day I learn that the girl's grandmother had died at that same minute, from a heart attack at Hvammstangi (a town in another part of the country). Her name was Margret. I knew nothing about her health, am not even sure I remembered her name. I had never seen her when she was living. (2180)

The wife of the percipient told us that her husband had told her about his experience immediately the following morning and before they had learned of Margret's demise.

The next encounter occurred to a well-known member of parliament:

I was a member of Parliament for 18 years and during that time I was in contact with many men who later became good acquaintances of mine. One of them was Karl Kristjánsson MP.... We were friends, and kept in touch on and off after we retired.... One winter's day I went out to the stable as I usually did after lunch. When I had been shovelling for a while, I suddenly felt Karl Kristjánsson standing in front of me in one of the stalls in the stable and he says something rather peculiar: "You were lucky, you did fine," and that was all; then he disappeared. That evening his death was announced on the radio. While pondering about the incident and trying to figure it out, I learnt that he had suffered a heart attack and been brought to the Reykjavik City Hospital where he died. I had been admitted to that hospital a year earlier after suffering a similar attack. I luckily recuperated and could go home, whereas he died. In that context I understood his words, "You were lucky, you had good luck." (7030)

The British founders of psychical research coined the term *crisis apparitions* for those experiences that occurred 12 hours before or after a person's death (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886). The frequency of reported crisis apparitions far exceeds what is to be expected if the timing of apparitional experiences is randomly distributed. This is confirmed in our survey, in which 14% of the encounters took place 24 hours before or after the person died (a longer time than in the British survey). Psychological factors, such as tending to remember striking experiences longer, may explain this effect to some extent, but they seem to be an insufficient explanation overall. It is also interesting that over half of all apparitional cases in our collection (51%) occurred within a year from the time the person died. In over one fifth of our cases, (22%) the percipient did not know that the perceived person had died.

Expressions of Purpose and Meaning

The previous case raises the question of how often a purpose is expressed in apparitional experiences. In our survey, a specific purpose is expressed in 28% of the cases. This is an example:

This happened shortly after my father died. I was in bed sleeping but woke up and felt there was something at my side. I saw my father there, I looked at him, reached out and felt him. He was just as he had been, wearing a blue shirt over his underwear.... He got out of the bed and walked to the room he had lived in and was across from mine. As he walked, he pointed to the wall without saying a word. On that wall there was a large clock that he had earlier asked me to deliver to his grandson in Reykjavík. (2010)

The percipient's father was reminding him to fulfil his promise.

In the great majority of our cases, no purpose was evident to the respondent, except perhaps to let the percipient know that the deceased person "is there." Osis (1986) describes an interesting case of purposeful action by an apparition.

Collective Encounters

In half of the encounters (167), another person was present, and in 85 instances the second persons were in a position that should have allowed them to perceive the apparition (e.g., awake, turned in the proper direction). Thirty-nine of these 84 respondents reported that their experience was shared by the others who were present. Seven of these 39 second observers had died and two could not be traced, which left us with 30 witnesses that we were able to interview. In three cases the witnesses did not remember the incident or refused an interview, and in six cases it was not clear or doubtful whether the new testimony should be considered confirmatory, or whether it was referring to the same incident. In 21 instances out of the 30, the witnesses verified the respondent's description of the case.

In the first example, two persons report seeing an apparition of the same person at the same time:

I was around twenty. My father and I sat in the kitchen around noon. Then I see clearly a woman coming towards us. I was not going to mention it but notice that my father also sees this. I asked him what he was looking at and he replied, "Surely the same as you." Then he said he knew this woman. She had died a while back. Three or four hours later there was a phone call for my father who was a clergyman. The husband of the deceased woman we saw had died. We had seen the woman around the time her husband had died. (5102)

We interviewed the father of the respondent, who described the incidence to us and thus verified his daughter's account.

Below is the case of a young man who was seen by more than two people at a time when he was living in a far away part of the country. However, the apparition was never seen by two people at exactly the same time and place.

I was skating on ice in the open when I felt I saw my friend Erik. I thought this was some nonsense and skated on. A little later I see him again and close to me, and think again this cannot be and I must be hallucinating and try to shake it off. I felt a strange feeling going through my body and I look behind and see his face. Then I felt sure he must have died. I went home and told them. They said of course that I was talking nonsense. The next morning there came a telegram announcing his death. We did not have a telephone. (7616)

Erik had been living at a tuberculosis sanatorium where he died at the age of sixteen. When we asked the percipient's half-sister Thora, she remembered that her brother had looked shocked when he had come home and told them that Erik had come, he had seen him, and that he had looked pale and miserable. Thora thus certified that the primary witness had told her about his experience before Erik's death was known. Thora told us that some other people had also seen Erik more than once after the incident, although it was never more than one person at the same time. One incident that she experienced herself is particularly interesting:

This happened in the winter. The sheep were out in the valley. I round them up and want to drive them into the barn. Whatever I do they do not go in and run to the side. Then I see where Erik is standing in the door. With his arm he points west to the farm where his mother was living. Erik then disappeared and I was able to get the sheep into the barn. Later in the winter his mother died of tuberculosis. (6026)

Thora believed that by pointing to the farm where his mother was living, Erik was expressing concern about his mother's health or indicating that she might soon die, which she did, although not immediately.

A close scrutiny of the cases reveals that collective observations often do not take place at exactly the same time. This is exemplified by the case below, reported by a well-known attorney in Iceland. It still seems reasonable to consider such a case collective.

It was just after graduation in 1939. I was coming home from a dance. I hadn't tasted a drop of alcohol. It was about four o'clock in the morning and full light as we were in the

middle of summer. I was walking over a bare hill on my way home from town. Then there comes a woman towards me, kind of stooping, with a shawl over her head. And I don't pay any attention to her but as she passes me I say "Good morning" or something like that. She didn't say anything. Then I notice that she has changed her course and follows me a bit behind. I got slightly uneasy about this, and found it odd. When I stopped, she stopped also. I started saying my prayers in my mind to calm myself. When I came close to home she disappears. I lived in a house on the compound of a psychiatric hospital where my father worked. I go up to my room. My brother Agnar wakes up and says half asleep, "What is this old woman doing here? Why is this old woman with you?" And I tell him not to speak such nonsense but to continue sleeping, although I knew what he meant. I did not see the woman at that time but my brother appeared to see her when he woke up. I go out to get me some coffee. When I return to my room, Agnar gets up again and says, "Why has this woman come back?" And I tell him not to act like that, that there is no woman in here, that he is confused and should go to sleep.

At lunch the following day I say to my brother, "What nonsense was this last night? You thought you saw a woman in our bedroom." "Yes," he said, "I felt as though an old woman came with you into the room." Then our father became attentive and said to me "Did you see something last night?" I told him that I had seen this woman. "That is strange," he said, "around three o'clock this morning old Vigga died." What I had seen fit her description perfectly. (2196)

We approached the respondent's brother. He reported that he remembered this incident and that his brother had told him what he had seen. When asked whether he had seen the woman himself, he replied, "I saw a vague image of a hag ... but not clearly. When I woke up there I saw a woman come in with him.... This was a patient and always kept inside, I think, if it was her."

Earlier in this paper I described an auditory case (2198) where two witnesses had the same experience of their recently deceased father—a scholar of great repute in Iceland—at exactly the same time. Both of his sons were academics.

DISCUSSION

What can we learn from the data in our new case collection of apparitions of the dead or, perhaps more precisely, alleged encounters

with the dead? First, how do they compare with the more than century-old monumental British surveys of apparitions, which have set the standard for such studies up to now?

We obtained results that are strikingly similar to those of the pioneering British surveys, and—*nota bene*—from a different country. This shows the generality of these experiences beyond particular time periods and locations. We found, for example, a number of crisis apparitions and a fair number of collective cases, as well as cases in which the percipients received correct information about a deceased person unknown to them at the time of the experience. Hence, our new case collection indicates that the prevailing academic attitude that experiences of this kind are “just hallucinations” appears to be as unsatisfactory today as it was to psychical researchers such as Myers, Podmore, Gurney, and the Sidgwicks more than a century ago. In our cases, we find ample data that reveal to us what can be seen as dramatic intrusions of meaningful imagery into consciousness. This meaningful imagery, in the form of apparitions, is of the same kind as that which has been put forward as evidence for survival (Myers, 1889a, 1889b, 1903; Stevenson, 1982), and thus the evidence for survival is further strengthened by the analyses of this case collection.

The crucial questions are: Where do these intrusions come from? Who initiates these “shadows of the dead”? Some of our cases point to an active role for the agent (the deceased person), for example, cases involving persons who have suffered a violent death. The best cases have features that many experiencers, as well as researchers, believe are best explained by accepting some form of survival, as the surveys clearly show (Emmons, 1982; Haraldsson, 1985; Haraldsson & Houtkooper 1991; Rees, 1971). Others may continue to argue that all of these experiences originate in the mind of the perceiver and that no external agency is needed to explain them. Such interpretations seem cumbersome in view of the presented data.

Could it be that our findings are biased and not representative, because of the self-report nature of most of our sample? This hypothesis can be tested. Of our cases, 307 are self-reports. The other cases include 130 cases from our random (and hence, representative) survey from 1974–75, 100 of which have already been analysed and published (Haraldsson, 1988–89). The main features of the 307 self-report cases can thus be compared with the same features from the 130 cases from our representative sample. Table 7 shows that the distribution of sensory modalities does not differ significantly in the two samples, nor does the cause of death or the relationship with the deceased. The only significant difference is the number of males versus females in the two samples; 78% of the deceased were males in the random sample and 66% were males in the self-report sample, $\chi^2(1, N = 411) = 5.52, p < .05$. The fact that there are more males in the random sample strengthens our conclusion about the preponderance of males in the apparitional cases. However, on the whole, the characteristics of the two

samples are comparable and indicate that the larger, self-selected sample is basically unbiased and representative of apparitional experiences in the population.

TABLE 7
COMPARISON OF FEATURES OF THE DECEASED IN THE RANDOM SAMPLE
(129) AND THE SELF-REPORTED SAMPLE (307)

	Random sample (%)	Self-reported sample (%)
Sensory modality		
Visual	48	50
Auditory	13	11
Olfactory	4	4
Touch	4	4
More than one modality	17	23
Feeling of presence	15	10
Cause of death		
Disease	70	72
Violent	30	28
Relationship to deceased		
Family relationship	46	49
Friends	11	7
Coworkers and acquaintances	14	14
Strangers	29	30
Sex of deceased		
Male	78	66
Female	22	34

Violent death plays an important role in several kinds of survival-related cases. First, there is a much higher percentage of persons suffering violent death in apparition cases compared to the general population. Second, the incidence of violent death is also very high—between 60 and 70%—in children who claim memories of a past life (Stevenson, 2001). Third, in a disproportionate number of trance mediumship cases we find communicators who suffered a violent death. For example, an

examination of a small sample of Mrs. Piper's sittings shows that a third of the communicators had died violently (Hodgson, 1892, 1897–1898). In 1972, when I was an observer at over forty sittings with the Icelandic medium Hafsteinn Björnsson, I noticed a high incidence of violent deaths among the communicators (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1974). Regrettably, no systematic record was kept of the relative number of violent deaths among direct communicators, except for one séance. In this séance, nine direct communicators appeared, six of whom revealed how they had died: four in accidents and two from disease; thus, two thirds had suffered a violent death. I remember quite clearly that the preponderance of direct communicators who had suffered a violent death was very striking in these sittings.

Finally, whereas apparitions of persons who suffered a violent death often have been found empirically to have an invasive character, “drop-in” communicators in mediumship cases are invasive by definition. These are cases in which communicators that are *unknown* to both the sitters and the medium appear in the séance. Hence, it is hard to attribute motivation for their appearance to the sitters. I found two drop-in cases in Iceland, both of which involved violent death (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975a, 1975b). Stevenson independently published reports of four drop-in cases, two of which involved violent death (Ravaldini, Biondi, & Stevenson, 1990; Stevenson, 1965, 1970, 1973).

What is needed is a more thorough analysis of the mode of death of direct communicators in sittings with mediums of repute. This could strengthen or weaken the generality of the findings given above about the preponderance in trance mediumship of communicators who suffered a violent death.

In short, persons suffering a violent death feature predominantly in cases of apparitions of the dead and in cases of the reincarnation type, as well as in mediumship, including both direct communicators and drop-ins. The cases tend to have an invasive character, in that the deceased persons are frequently unknown to those who experience them and thus seem to assume an active role in their appearance. All of these findings tend, in my view, to support the survival hypothesis.

In conclusion, it is extremely important to conduct further research along all these lines to learn more about the role of the deceased agent in apparitional experiences and in mediumistic cases with direct as well as drop-in communicators. This further research is also important because of its implications for the question of survival after death.

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ABSTRACTS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Spanish

SUPUESTOS ENCUENTROS CON LOS MUERTOS: LA IMPORTANCIA DE MUERTES VIOLENTAS EN 337 CASOS NUEVOS

RESUMEN: Encuentros personales con los muertos son informados por el 25% de los europeos occidentales y por el 30% de los americanos. Trescientos treinta y siete islandeses informaron sobre tales experiencias y fueron entrevistados en detalle. El 90% de estos informaron tener experiencias sensoriales (apariciones) sobre una persona fallecida; el 69% fueron visuales, el 28% auditivas, el 13%, táctiles, y el 4% olfativas. Menos de la mitad de las experiencias ocurrieron en el crepúsculo o en la oscuridad. En la mitad de los casos la persona estaba ocupada o trabajando. Una alta proporción de los casos fueron de apariciones de personas que murieron violentamente y apariciones de crisis observadas cerca del momento de la muerte de la persona percibida, aunque en la mayoría de los casos el percipiente no sabía que la persona había muerto. La forma de la muerte y la identidad de los difuntos fueron verificadas inspeccionando los registros oficiales. Un buen número de experiencias colectivas fueron informadas, algunas de las cuales fueron verificadas por otros testigos.

French

RENCONTRES ALLEGUEES AVEC LES MORTS: L'IMPORTANCE DE LA MORT VIOLENTE DANS 337 NOUVEAUX CAS

RESUME: Des rencontres personnelles avec des morts sont rapportées par 25 % des Européens de l'Ouest et 30 % des Américains. Trois cent trente sept islandais rapportant de telles expériences furent longuement interrogés. 90 % d'entre eux ont rapporté des expériences sensorielles (apparitions) d'une personne décédée ; 69 % étaient visuelles, 28 % auditives, 13 % tactiles et 4 % olfactives. Moins de la moitié des expériences sont survenues dans la pénombre ou l'obscurité. Dans la moitié des cas, la personne était activement absorbée dans une tâche. Il y a une disproportion importante des apparitions de ceux qui sont morts violemment et des apparitions de crise observées à proximité du moment de la mort de la personne perçue, bien que dans la majorité des cas, le percipiente ne savait pas que la personne était morte. Le type de mort rapportée et l'identité des personnes décédées ont été vérifiés en consultant les registres officiels. Un bon nombre d'expériences collectives ont été rapportées, dont certaines ont été vérifiées auprès d'autres témoins.

*German***BEHAUPTETE BEGEGNUNGEN MIT DEM TOD: DIE BEDEUTUNG
DES GEWALTSAMEN TODES BEI 337 NEUEN FÄLLEN**

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Persönliche Begegnungen mit dem Tod werden bei 25% der Westeuropäer und bei 30% der Amerikaner berichtet. Dreihundertsiebenunddreißig Isländer, die solche Erfahrungen berichteten, wurden ausführlich interviewt. Neunzig Prozent von ihnen berichteten von sensorischen Erfahrungen (Erscheinungen) einer verstorbenen Person; 69% waren visueller, 28% auditiver, 13% taktiler und 4% olfaktorischer Art. Weniger als die Hälfte der Erfahrungen wurde in der Dämmerung oder Dunkelheit berichtet. In der Hälfte der Fälle war der Berichtserstatter mit etwas beschäftigt oder bei der Arbeit. Unverhältnismässig häufig vertreten waren Erscheinungen solcher Personen, die eines gewaltsamen Todes gestorben waren und Krisenerscheinungen, die in zeitlicher Nähe zum Tod der wahrgenommenen Person berichtet wurden, obwohl in der Mehrzahl der Fälle der Perzipient nicht wusste, dass die betreffende Person gestorben war. Die berichtete Todesart und die Identität der verstorbenen Personen wurden anhand offizieller Unterlagen verifiziert. Eine beträchtliche Anzahl kollektiver Erfahrungen wurde berichtet, darunter solche, die von anderen Zeugen bestätigt wurden.