

AN ANALYSIS OF EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES INVOLVING TELECOMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: This preliminary investigation set out to act as a revised edition of the original study conducted some 30 years beforehand by Rogo and Bayless. Both projects were produced in book form, surveying a variety of strange experiences people claimed to have had with telecommunication technology. These included seemingly impossible phone calls from the living that suggested the caller was in two places at once, and calls from people known to be dead. It was requested in 1979 by Schmeidler that such a study should be written up and presented for peer review, outlining the methods that took place and the exact findings. A sample of spontaneous accounts involving the telephone ($N = 50$) was analysed using a thematic analysis. The methods and results are presented here to fulfil the requests of several peer reviewers, regarding the two previous books/studies of anomalous telecommunication experiences. Findings suggest that the majority of calls centre around bereavement, which could present arguments for both natural psychological phenomena and/or psi being involved—supporting previous studies of bereavement. Suggestions are made as to the progression of this research and approaches to obtaining as reliable accounts as possible.

Keywords: telephone, survival, death, bereavement, dreams, psychokinesis

Following the completion of the study into anomalous telephone call experiences carried out by Rogo and Bayless (1979), it was requested by Schmeidler that the next step for the researchers should be to publish the study, with its full methodology and findings explained, in a peer-reviewed journal. However, this was never done.

Following an elaboration of the original 1979 study 30 years on (Cooper, 2012a), Matthew Colborn provided a positive review of the study with some important constructive criticism. In discussing the analysis chapter, Colborn (2013, p. 102) states that “Although the analysis is welcome, I must admit that I found it hard to tell sometimes whether Cooper was analysing old cases from Rogo and Bayless’s archives, new ones that he had collected himself, or a mix of both. This chapter needed to be better signposted, and it might have been a good idea to have included a detailed account of the sources, methods used and results as an appendix.” This criticism was also recently echoed by Boccuzzi (2013), with both reviewers sharing the opinion that telephone anomalies are a neglected area of research worthy of further study. Previously, the methods and results of this study have been presented only via conference and guest lectures (Cooper, 2012b). Rogo and Bayless (1979) mentioned that they had used a content analysis but gave very little description of what this involved. Cooper (2012a, 2012b) discussed the use of a content analysis via the qualitative method of thematic analysis. It was these methods—and outcomes—that Colborn (2013) and Boccuzzi (2013) requested further information on, regarding their application, the data used, and the findings.

Taking the suggestions of Colborn (2013) and Boccuzzi (2013) into account, and to honour the request of Schmeidler, this paper addresses the methods used for data collection, the analysis, and the findings, thus finally providing a clear published record of the process that took place in the book/study entitled *Telephone Calls From the Dead: A Revised Look at the Phenomenon Thirty Years on* (Cooper, 2012a).

No mention of the electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) will be given in this paper, as it is generally considered a sought experience, whereas the telephone calls are spontaneous phenomena that are rarely anticipated and subsequently digitally recorded.

When people report spontaneous exceptional experiences, we could define the event as follows, “[Appearing] as unusual to the person having the experience or in the sense that the processes involved in the experience appear to be ‘non-ordinary’” (Smith, 2010, p. 1). Thus, in such situations, parapsychology is typically dealing with

a variety of phenomena that could involve some form of apparition (e.g., Tyrrell, 1953), death-bed visions with sights and sounds attributed to the dying (e.g., Rogo, 1974), poltergeist activity (e.g., Roll, 1976), and hauntings (e.g., Fontana, 2005, pp. 55–90), to name but a few.

Thirty years ago few parapsychologists had heard of people reporting exceptional experiences regarding the telephone (Rogo & Bayless, 1979, p. 10), specifically incidents of receiving calls purportedly from someone known to be dead, or a strange call from a living person who was later confirmed to be elsewhere when the call was made. Nothing was published specifically on such telephone experiences—in any field of research—from the mid-1980s until 2010 (see Cooper, 2012a, p. 18). And yet, such events have been reported to occur, and more commonly than most people would care to believe.

In 1979, D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless presented what was to be the first publication of a 2-year investigation into the collecting and analysing of accounts of spontaneous anomalous telephonic experiences (Rogo & Bayless, 1979). The data came from a variety of places (worldwide): people wrote to them, some accounts were passed on to them by other parapsychologists (who weren't sure what to do with them), and some had already been published in related parapsychology periodicals and books. The majority of accounts—where possible—were followed up by extensive interviews, typically carried out by Bayless. This led to a healthy sample for analysis in this preliminary study ($N = 50$), even though it was presented in the form of an academic and yet publicly accessible book rather than a research paper.

A content analysis was carried out on the case collection. This is assumed to be a thematic analysis, though they never stated it as such. They found several types of call characteristics. The majority of the calls were reported to be communication with the dead—as interpreted by the recipient from specific information mentioned by the caller and/or their recognisable voice characteristics. The categories of call types found by Rogo and Bayless (1979) are as follows:

1. Type 1: *Simple Calls*—These are the most commonly reported phone calls from the dead. Typically, the dead caller says only a few words and is unresponsive to any questions asked. At this point the caller may say nothing at all and the line will go dead without any sound of the caller hanging up the phone or being cut off.
2. Type 2: *Prolonged Calls*—These calls last for some time (30 min or so) and involve a conversation like any other telephone call. The recipient does not realise, until after the call, that the caller was in fact dead at the time. Due to the recipient of the call not knowing the caller is dead, this somehow seems to allow the conversation to last longer. Simple calls show that the shock of knowing the caller is dead somehow leaves the conversation short, or the dead caller unresponsive.
3. Type 3: *Answer Calls*—These are cases where a living person makes a call to someone they do not realise is dead (or someone who simply wasn't home at the time the call was made) and yet they get an answer from what seems to be that very person. These calls are usually prolonged.

A fourth type of call was found in which people would intend to make a call but changed their mind at the last minute. However, the person they intended to call insisted that the call still took place. These were labelled *Intention Calls*. Below is a case that happened to Scott Rogo, during data collection for the original 1979 study by Rogo and Bayless (Rogo, 1986, pp. 116–117):

It was 4 o'clock on a bright Thursday afternoon, and I was lying on my living room couch thinking about making a phone-call to a psychologist I knew at the U.C.L.A Neuropsychiatric Institute. Although I intended to make the call, I never did. About six that evening, though, I got the shock of my life when a call came in from the Institute and from the office of the very psychologist I had thought about calling. The call was from her research assistant saying that he was “answering my message.” When I asked what in blazes he was talking about, he told me at 4 PM a call had come in to them from me. The caller had left my name, and had asked the call be returned!

Data collection was assisted by radio interviews, newspapers coverage, and articles published in specialist magazines/journals advertising the phenomenon (e.g., Rogo, 1977). Other cases were collected from previously published accounts in the historical literature, mainly dealing with psychical research. Percipients who came forward with personal accounts were interviewed where possible as were any other eyewitnesses. The authors specifically encouraged people to tell them about *any* unusual phone calls they had received or knew about (see Rogo & Bayless, 1979, p. 110). This was done to avoid sampling bias, as they believed that critics might assume that they encouraged people to report “phone calls from the dead” rather than any other form of paranormal call.

Aside from the categories of call characteristics, 10% of the cases occurred on a significant anniversary/emotionally meaningful day, and 22% occurred within 6 months to a year after the death of the caller. Type 1 calls outweighed Type 2 calls by 4:1, and calls from the dead outweighed strange calls from the living (i.e., some cases of *Answer* and *Intention* calls) by 8:1 (Rogo & Bayless, 1979, p. 110; Rogo, 1986, p. 118). The overall conclusion was that although many cases have potential conventional explanations, there are some that defy explanation and therefore offer support to the notion of psi and even survival of consciousness beyond death. Bayless (1980) later hypothesised that as technology advances, so too will associated reports of paranormal occurrences.

The research received mixed reviews. Some reviews were highly negative (e.g., Anderson, 1981; Hardy, 1979; Paul, 1982), suggesting that spontaneous cases have no scientific value due to being nothing more than anecdotes and completely explainable via rational means, to which Rogo (1981) replied and defended the research. A couple of reviews made it obvious that the methods and data were not clearly presented by Rogo and Bayless (1979), thus leading to the size of the collection being miscalculated and assumed to be $N = 100$ (Cox, 1980), or the case collection size was *presumed* not to have been included at all, among other methodological problems (Hardy, 1979). Other reviews were highly supportive of the research, arguing that the anomalous telephone calls must be taken seriously and the research continued (Clark, 1979; Cox, 1980; Foley, 1996; Tribbe, 1979). After considering the debate between Anderson (1981) and Rogo (1981), Chari (1981) highlighted the point that *Phone Calls From the Dead* was a preliminary study, and therefore negative criticism should be withheld until the researchers had the chance to “produce evidence of better quality and quantity in future experiments” (p. 227).

One person who gave a peer review of the phenomenon in the work of Rogo and Bayless (1979) was Gertrude Schmeidler, who suggested that the next step for the researchers should be to publish the study, with its full methodology and findings explained, in a peer-reviewed journal. However, this was never done, although further mention of telephone related phenomena was given by both researchers in further publications (McAdams & Bayless, 1981, pp. 129–133; Rogo, 1986, pp. 107–119). But no full discussions of methods and data analysis were provided.

A follow-up study by Biondi (1984) was conducted in Italy regarding anomalous telephone calls. This study took a year to carry out. Data collection was similar to the previous method, in that radio and newspaper articles were used to encourage people to come forward with accounts of “exceptional experiences involving the telephone.” This wording was once again used to avoid a bias in the data collection, due to critics assuming data collection included targeted accounts specifically interpreted as discarnate communication—which was not the case. Around 40 accounts were gathered. These accounts were then investigated by interviewing percipients and checking information with telephone companies. This was done to clarify the accounts and to rule out conventional explanations for the events as far as possible. This subsequently led to a smaller sample of accounts which presented few—if any—normal explanations for their occurrence ($N = 15$). The study found that the Italian sample of anomalous call cases could be fit into the categories of call types generated by Rogo and Bayless (1979) from their content analysis. Yet, as Rogo (1981) argued, these patterns do not suggest paranormality, but they at least demonstrate some form of internal consistency and suggest how such events occur. Biondi concluded that it is doubtful that such experiences present evidence for survival, as many conventional explanations could account for the calls. However, this still leaves room for the possibility of some form of psi process being present.

Biondi (1984) further noted that the majority of the calls he collected fell into the category of impossible calls from living people (i.e., *Answer Calls* and *Intention Calls*), rather than cases of communication with the dead. It was concluded that the evidence is too limited to verify that these calls are what they appear to be, owing to the numerous conventional explanations that could apply (e.g., misinterpretation, fraud, hypnogogic and hypnopompic states, electrical faults). However, Biondi still felt such phenomena were worthy of further study, in order to attempt

to identify the nature and origin of the calls. Just over a decade later, Biondi (1996) again encouraged a serious examination of telephone anomalies, but he doubted that further research would be carried out in the near future. This was for several reasons: (a) even though the study was advertised to thousands of radio listeners on mainstream stations no more than 50 respondents were recruited; (b) the study took time and effort, taking a year to collect the data and do follow-up interviews; and (c) the study required more than one researcher to gather more accounts, absorb the financial commitment, and produce serious and meaningful results.

Benefits of the Research

Telephonic anomalies are not often discussed in parapsychology and are relatively novel compared to other spontaneous experiences such as apparitions (see Cooper, 2011; Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886; Tyrrell, 1953). Nonetheless, the study by Rogo and Bayless (1979) presented some useful outcomes. At the very least, it led people who had experienced similar phenomena to realise that they were not delusional or emotionally disturbed, as Krippner (2006) pointed out. Even several psychologists and scientists contacted the authors and admitted they too had experienced similar events (see Rogo & Bayless, 1979, pp. 11–17). If the research had never been made public, those people may never have come forward and presented their accounts, typically due to fearing ridicule.

Since the publication by Rees (1971) regarding “hallucinations of widowhood,” more and more people have felt it increasingly acceptable to discuss exceptional experiences they may have had during bereavement (or indeed at any time in their life). Rees (1971) found that the vast majority of his participants believed a post-death experience to be comforting and beneficial to them, due to their establishing a continued bond with the deceased. These experiences can even occur several years after suffering a loss and the grief having passed (Rees, 2000). Such findings are consistent with telephonic anomalies, as people have reported these experiences occurring anywhere from between 24 hours to some 40 years after the loss of a close friend or loved one (Rogo & Bayless, 1979, p. 54).

Wright (1998, 2002, 2006) presented many examples of psychokinetic effects being reported during the bereavement stage. They include all kinds of electrical disturbances, especially with lights, radios, and telephones forming a system of alleged communications with the bereaved. These events allow a process of healing to take place for the bereaved, as well as provide therapeutic benefit from establishing a continued bond with the dead through such exceptional experiences (e.g., Cooper, 2013a; Drewry, 2003; Haraldsson, 2012; Krippner, 2006; Parker, 2004).

For these reasons—and more—anomalous telephonic experiences are worth researching. They are a relatively new form of anomaly for parapsychology to consider, and for many individuals such experiences can be highly beneficial in terms of a positive psychology, understanding bereavement, and understanding of personal life transitions caused by exceptional experiences (e.g., Cooper, 2013b; Evenden, Cooper, & Mitchell, 2013; Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995).

These issues, and the positive psychological effects of spontaneous experiences for peoples’ lives, reinforce the importance of spontaneous case investigation within parapsychology, as argued by Alvarado (1997). By investigating anomalous telephone experiences (and other relevant psi phenomena) we develop a greater understanding of the characteristics of such experiences and any personal transformations that may take place. Some parapsychologists have become keen to embrace these psi events and attempted to experience them for themselves, adopting an alternative subjective or “first-person” approach (Luke, 2011). Additionally, spontaneous cases allow us to continue the pioneering work of the Societies for Psychical Research and that of Louisa Rhine at Duke University (Irwin & Watt, 2007, pp. 32–37), acting as a useful alternative methodological approach to laboratory studies and giving more attention to the potential value of psi in the real world.

The New Research

Since previous publication of the initial studies and research into exceptional telephone call experiences (Cooper, 2010a, 2010b), a complete study was carried out and published to serve as a revision of the work of Rogo and Bayless (Cooper, 2012a). Although this second study is also in book form, the aim was to act on the feedback of the first study into telephonic experiences and make the book not only publicly accessible, but also to be scientific,

informative, and provide an outline of the study methods and findings step by step.

This new research (Cooper, 2012a), much like the original (Rogo & Bayless, 1979), received positive reviews from various scholars in relevant academic journals (Haraldsson, 2013; Martinez, 2012; Müller, 2013; Sewell, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Tilley, 2012). Gilbert (2013), in addition to making some mild criticisms of the research, desired a comparison of digital technology to analogue technology. However, it had already been explained that although cases of digital technology had been collected and previously discussed, there simply weren't enough cases involving mobile phones, text messages, and e-mails to allow a meaningful analysis. (To read further about this debate, see Cooper, 2014a, followed by Gilbert, 2014, and then Cooper, 2014b). Therefore, the sample that was analysed consisted purely of exceptional experiences regarding the telephone, including a mix of both digital and analogue cases (i.e., mobile phone and landline). This was then followed up with a paper exploring the psychological and parapsychological interpretations of anomalous telephonic communications (Cooper & Foley, 2012).

Method

Receivers of the Telephone Calls

A number of methods were used to acquire percipient accounts, which were then individually considered for inclusion. The primary method could be considered as “snowball sampling,” the collection of data from a group of people who believed that they had had spontaneous anomalous communications via the telephone. Some had heard about the author's previous work (e.g., Cooper, 2010a, 2010b), whereas others had heard about the research through radio and newspaper discussion. It was made clear by the researcher that *any* form of paranormal experience involving the telephone was sought—so as not to produce a bias of interest towards alleged paranormal calls from *the dead*. Following this, people made contact with the researcher to discuss and submit their accounts.

It should be noted regarding the radio and newspaper advertisements to the general public that a similar issue was encountered to that reported by Biondi (1984, 1996) regarding his data collection. Because the researcher reached out to such a large audience (especially through popular radio stations), a large number of people immediately came forward wanting to share their accounts. However, on average, for every dozen people that came forward, only one seemed to be prepared to follow up their claim by working with the researcher to construct an eyewitness account of the event, or be interviewed about their experiences. This in itself says a lot about the validity of reported paranormal phenomena that are just generally-accepted anecdotes that sometimes feature in popular books but are *not* necessarily authenticated accounts. If participants are not willing to follow up their claims, they should be avoided at all costs for inclusion and politely declined.

Other accounts were gathered from Rogo's archived files, which are housed at the California Institute of Integral Studies library. The accounts include percipient statements and follow-up interviews carried out by either Rogo or Bayless, depending who was presented the account first. Therefore, the analysis involved a mixture of Rogo's and Bayless's unpublished and researched accounts (from 1979–1982) and new accounts collected between 2010 and 2012 (roughly 20% old accounts and 80% new accounts). Mixing accounts to increase sample size (and statistical power) has been advocated by various spontaneous case investigators. For example, MacKenzie (1979) argued that second-hand data can help support first-hand data in helping us understand experiences of anomalous phenomena. This suggestion was also supported by Rogo (1981), which he called the “bundle of sticks approach”: many cases become stronger than a single case, and in a collection of cases, the stronger ones help balance out the weaker ones.

Accounts of spontaneous telephone calls in this present paper, which is a summarised and formal version of their first presentation (Cooper, 2012a), were submitted from Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, and Spain, although the majority were from Great Britain and the USA. All cases were followed up as far as possible in terms of available information, with interviews and long-term correspondence. In total, 70 cases were collected and submitted. After following the cases up—much like in the Biondi (1984) study—50 accounts were considered robust enough for inclusion.

The cases that provided adequate content for inclusion involved a detailed description of the call and what took place, some background information, and sometimes multiple witnesses. Cases that weren't included generally did not involve a telephone conversation. They may have been short and symbolic to the percipient, such as

“someone died and the phone rang just the once a week later.” This is still an interesting interpretation of events for parapsychologists investigating bereavement experiences, but not strong enough to meet the criteria for this study.

Procedure

Spontaneous case reports are qualitatively based, as the account is written by the percipient or typically an interview is conducted with the percipient by the researcher. This is no less valid than the quantitative approach: the qualitative documentation of human experiences—exceptional or otherwise—allows us to see the social issues involved on an objective level, from a first-person perspective (Kirk & Miller, 1986). In other words, we are provided with more naturalistic data and ecological validity and can investigate to what extent a certain feature is (or is not) present.

As soon as all percipient accounts had been gathered/constructed or transcribed from interview, coding of the cases was carried out using thematic analysis and a phenomenological approach. Creswell (1998) outlines five traditions of qualitative research, describing the phenomenological approach as allowing the researcher to become familiar with a personal experience of a particular phenomenon. Then the account/transcript is coded on elements of the experience that took place, recurring themes, and significant statements (horizontalization of the data); the statements are treated as equally worthy. This form of analysis is useful for investigating experiences and events that we are not generally familiar with, to explore the nature of their occurrence and common themes. This analysis was based on previously-employed methods, which can be seen in Louisa Rhine’s research (e.g., Rhine, 1957, 1963, 1978) on her spontaneous case collection primarily through the 1950s and 1960s (for a brief history, see Irwin & Watt, 2007, pp. 32–37) and subsequent related publications (e.g., Hanefeld, 1968).

Coyle (2010) argues that although a qualitative approach to parapsychological data might not provide any further validity to the *truth* of the claims; however, such an approach does allow us to examine how people make sense of such experiences and the additional features—humanistic or environmental—that may have contributed to the experienced phenomena. This qualitative aspect allows the researcher more freedom to approach, investigate, and interpret, spontaneous events from a variety of methodological standpoints (theoretical, historical, phenomenological, discourse/conversation analysis, etc.).

The content analysis involved reading through all of the accounts several times and becoming familiar with the types of experiences reported. Following this, the reports were read one by one with themes such as “did the percipient report hearing static on the line” or “was the voice hollow in tone or sound far away” being noted. Other themes that were explored were call duration and whether the percipient was or wasn’t aware that the caller was dead at the time of the telephone conversation. During this process, once an account was read and features of the experience were noted, the account was placed in a separate pile with other accounts containing similar themes. One pile was reserved for cases that did not seem to fit any pattern. The classification of call types was re-examined once all of the accounts had been placed into relevant piles. Additional significant features of the phone calls were identified, which provided quantitative information.

Results

The analysis demonstrated consistent themes regarding how the anomalous telephone calls were experienced, and related to the call types previously discovered in the American study (Rogo & Bayless, 1979) and Italian study (Biondi, 1984). However, there were some exceptions. For example, there were a few call types that displayed elements of both Type 1 and Type 2 calls: The percipient could be aware of the caller being dead and yet claim to have had repeated calls and extended conversations. This led to the development of a fourth call category involving the dead that was labelled *Mixed Calls*, thus moving *Intention Calls* up in the ranking due to no discernate contact (Type 5).

The telephone call characteristics and frequency remain fairly consistent with the original findings (Rogo & Bayless, 1979). For example, the original study found that Type 1 calls outweigh Type 2 calls by four to one, the new analysis found this to be around three to one. The original study also found that calls perceived to be contact from, or *to* the dead, outweigh calls from the living by eight to one, the new study found this to be seven to one.

Regarding characteristics of the calls, in 34% of cases reported there were audible anomalies such as static on the line or the caller sounding, faint, hollow, or distant in tone. Around 8% of calls occurred on significant anniversaries for the percipient, whilst the original study found this to be 10%. And 6% of calls appeared to display features of the caller giving a message of warning or emergency to help the receiver of the call avoid some form of impending danger. The original study also found cases of these “precognitive warning calls,” which were also low in number ($n = 2$; Rogo & Bayless, 1979, pp. 106–107).

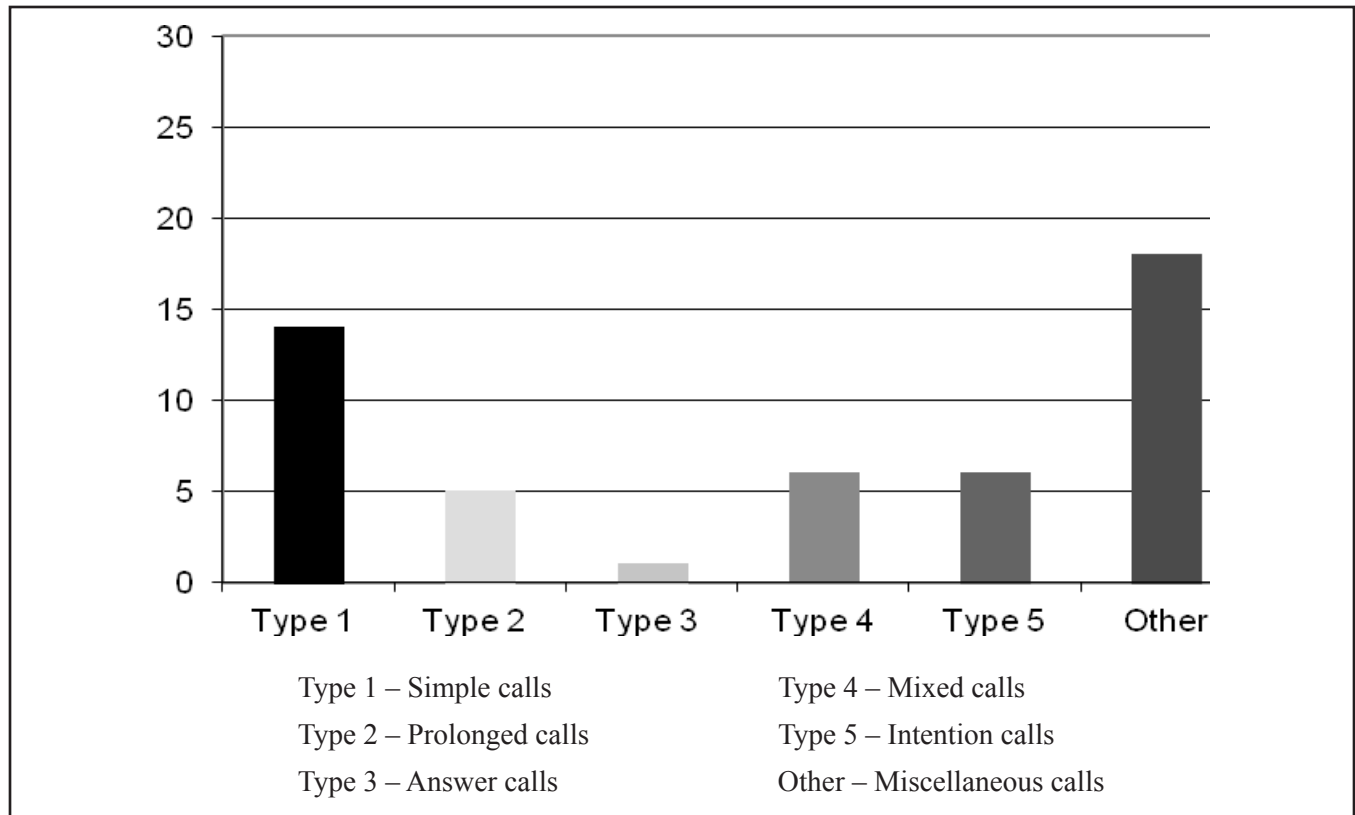


Figure 1. Frequency of call types from the current analysis.

In Figure 1 the frequency of call types within the current sample is displayed ($N = 50$). Type 1 calls appeared the most common ($n = 14$, 28%) then Type 2 ($n = 5$, 10%). Type 3 were the least common ($n = 1$, 2%), and Type 4 and Type 5 produced an equal number of accounts (both $n = 6$, 12%). Besides the exception of the newly labelled Type 4 calls, there were accounts that simply didn’t fit the pattern of the reported telephone conversations but still involved elements of perceived paranormal telephone communication. Purely because they were grouped together as miscellaneous accounts, they are responsible for a large part of the sample ($n = 18$, 36%).

Below are brief descriptions of the additional cases listed in Figure 1 as “Other.” Detailed accounts are presented in the original work (Cooper, 2012a, pp. 90–115).

Haunted Telephones

Eight percent ($n = 4$) of cases contained a haunting element. These typically involved a haunted location—which was not necessarily lived in—having a telephone which from time to time people would hear ringing. Upon answering the phone, strange voices would be heard, messages, static, and so forth.

Dream Accounts

Six percent ($n = 3$) of cases contained dream elements. These were percipients who submitted accounts of having dreamt a paranormal telephone call, and in all cases the account was described as the dead relaying messages.

Though not involving actual physical experiences, these cases are nevertheless interesting to consider, and the phone calls were typical of the ones reported in the waking state.

It is noteworthy that Barrett (1991–1992) analysed the content of dreams within a group of bereaved individuals and found that the most common dream scenario reported was that of communicating with the deceased via the telephone.

Coincidence Calls?

Sixteen percent ($n = 8$) of cases contained questionable coincidental elements as *potential* conventional explanations for their occurrences. Three typical things would happen:

1. Someone would lose someone close and then immediately following this they would experience a long period of telephone calls day and night, whereupon answering they just heard static and faint voices.
2. Someone would lose a child through death and would receive a call from a childlike voice saying either “Mum” or “Dad” (depending on who answered the phone), and then the voice would fade out.
3. Someone would report burying a friend or loved one with personal items in the coffin, including the deceased’s mobile phone. Following the burial, the living received a (missed) call from the buried phone which resided with the corpse. The subsample also included cases of text messages allegedly being sent from the grave.

Voicemail Messages

Six percent ($n = 3$) of cases contained voicemail message accounts. Rogo and Bayless (1979, p. 138) received two such accounts, but one was instantly discovered to be fraudulent, so the remaining case was not included in their analysis. Several of these cases have been reported in the *ITC Journal*.

Discussion

The findings of this study appear to closely match the findings of the original study conducted some 30 years ago (Rogo & Bayless, 1979), in spite of incredible advances in telecommunication technology since the time of the original study. This merely supports the hypothesis set forth by Bayless (1980) that as technology advances, so too will reports of paranormal electronic communication. The results demonstrate that anomalous telecommunication events are being widely experienced and reported, and therefore we can assume them to be a cross-cultural phenomenon.

Although the psychological and parapsychological considerations pertaining to the interpretation of the telephone calls have already been presented (Cooper, 2012a), let us once again consider some of those key issues here, regarding the research, its weaknesses, and next steps.

Psychological Considerations, Misinterpretation, and Fraud

Anderson (1981) argued that patterns within a phenomenon do not suggest that any element of psi is present. This is true; however, no one ever suggested it is in any of the original work (Rogo, 1981). This study has found a consistent pattern of call types, and even some additional experiences that percipients felt relevant to submit (i.e., dreams, hauntings, possible coincidences, and voicemail message calls). Among the five types, Type 1 calls seem to be the most commonly experienced. It is possible that conventional explanations exist for these calls *if* the percipient was home alone when they took place. The percipient is typically in a state of bereavement and perhaps requires some form of contact to establish a continued bond with the dead. In such cases, the telephone call could be a relatively similar phenomenon to the hallucinatory experiences of widowhood discussed by Rees (1971). These experiences are perfectly natural, common, and potentially (but not definitely) the products of a grieving mind. Baker (1992) considered such experiences to be a psychological projection of grief. He believed the bereaved would

experience “selective amnesia” when a regular telephone call to the house came through; thus, upon answering, the bereaved assumed the caller to be whomever they desired (i.e., the deceased).

If the percipient was home alone in this state, and the telephone company had no record of the call taking place, without any form of recording of the event, we are stuck in a catch-22 situation. Either the call was a psychological product of grief, or the call was genuine. Separating one from the other is not so easily done, and we cannot just assume that because the percipient was in a state of grief that the experience was entirely psychological, nor can we say it was paranormal. In some cases of Type 2-5 calls, and rarely in Type 1, there were multiple witnesses to the calls, and yet, the phone company is found to have no record of the call taking place. Multiple witnesses add more weight to the evidentiality of the calls, much as in collective cases of apparitions (i.e., multiple witnesses; Gurney & Myers, 1898; Hallson, 2014; Tyrrell, 1953).

For people who have lost a child, receiving a potential “wrong number” from a young voice that simply says “Mum” or “Dad” leaves great potential for misinterpretation, which researchers must consider. Young callers might realise their mistakes and instead of apologising, they simply hang up, thus explaining the brief fleeting voice on the line.

And finally, fraud is something which must be considered. It is a possibility that someone might wish to play a prank on the bereaved, or pursue a personal vendetta for whatever reason, and creating such a prank call around the time of bereavement could be the explanation for the call. (It is wise to tentatively ask percipients if they have had any recent arguments or are generally on good terms with people they encounter in their day to day lives). As the late John Randall wrote to me some time ago regarding exceptional experiences involving telephones, “There is also the possibility of deliberate hoaxes although, as you say in your paper, that would be very cruel. Unfortunately some people *are* naturally cruel” (John Randall, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Dream Experiences

Other issues to consider are whether the person experienced the telephone call whilst in a sleeping state, or more specifically, while in an altered state of consciousness? In both the original and current study, someone claiming they awoke to a telephone call was rarely reported, but such cases were still noted. However, it is worth considering that if such instances are experienced, hypnagogic (falling to sleep) and hypnopompic (waking up) states of sleep could account for certain experiences and their interpretation (Klemperer, 1992), especially during a period of grief. In the present study, several cases which were *not* included in the analysis (from the original 70 cases collected) involved instances of a percipient suffering a bereavement and claiming they awoke to the sound of their mobile phone ringing. On checking the phone, it hadn’t actually rung at all. Even so, the percipient still interpreted the experience as attempted contact from the dead and the dead letting the bereaved know that everything was “OK.” However, in this study, such instances where the percipient was in a hypnagogic or hypnopompic state leans conclusions towards a psychological interpretation of the events, given that only a ringing was reported and *assumed* to be the deceased trying to call. This kind of data is useful for research on post-death phenomena and the adaptive grief outcomes of such experiences. For example, there are accounts published in the literature where the bereaved have reported telephones to ring at night and other electrical appliances to act out of the ordinary during the time of recent loss. This kind of phenomenon has been investigated by Wright (1998, 2002, 2006). However, as mentioned previously in this paper, such cases do not meet the stringent criteria for inclusion in this present study.

From the accounts that were analysed, only 6% ($n = 3$) of cases involved percipients claiming they dreamt of a telephone call from the dead (or were daydreaming in one instance). In some cases of percipients stating they were in bed at the time of the event, it is not sufficient for one to assume that in every instance they must have dreamt the experience, as some critiques have casually concluded in the past (Anderson, 1981), nor does it invalidate the case. If the event can be recalled—whether dreamt or not—then meaningful information relayed by the dead (previously unknown to the percipient) could be verified—adding weight to the potential presence of psi processes involved. Such instances are no less important than Type 1 calls where the percipient may have been alone at the time of the call, and all too often critics have shrugged the experience off as a purely hallucinatory reaction of the grieving mind. This is not a sensible assumption to make. Not only do we understand the vast majority of such experiences to be therapeutic for the bereaved (although potentially damaging, if their interpretation was explained to them as something conventional or just psychological), but each case deserves careful consideration of details, circumstances, communication,

and other available information, whether experienced in the waking state or not. In keeping with Creswell (1998), each case was (and should be) treated with equal worth and respect to the percipient.

Parapsychological Considerations

Rogo and Bayless (1979) reported that around 50% of their cases could not be traced, and those that could appeared to be placed through a long-distance call. In this follow-up study, incidents of checking with the phone companies have been noted, but the exact figures of how many cases have been verified by phone companies has not yet been calculated. The main aim of this study was to follow up any developments of anomalous phone calls within the 30-year gap of absent reports and present the preliminary findings. Collective cases were also noted within the various call types, often reported as Type 1 or 2 calls. As the data collection is still ongoing, the exact figures will be reported at a later date, but at present no more than 20% of the cases appear to have multiple witnesses to the call taking place. Even rarer (accounting for no more than 4% of the cases) are instances such as the following case from an interview transcript, where the percipients passed around a handset so at least two people could speak to the alleged deceased caller (later discovering after the call that the caller had died 2 weeks previously):

Cooper: Were you actually having a two-way conversation with her on the phone then? Can you recall some dialog? Do you believe some of the things she was saying were out of the ordinary?

Sandy: Well yes, Aunty Lil doesn't usually ring up on your birthday, normally she'd send you a card or something, but she rang us both up and we were talking on the phone, both of us, because my Mum was living across the road. So, we were having this conversation and it was just sort of things she was saying which didn't sort of register with her really.

Cooper: Did you both share the phone? [Sandy and her Mother]

Sandy: Yes, we were talking in one conversation you see; she was talking to my Mum and then I was talking after.

[Following the call, Sandy called Aunty Lil's daughter]:

Sandy: I felt so bad when I phoned the family you see, and they said "well two weeks ago she died" and I thought "Oh my God," you know, "I'm sorry..."

With conventional explanations considered, now let us focus on the possibility of psi being involved in anomalous telephone calls, or even potential survival evidence. When we look at a telephone call we have two physical events taking place and therefore two objective elements involved: (a) the ringing of the phone and (b) the voices heard. If these calls were anything other than Type 1, or there were multiple witnesses, we are left with an increasingly difficult task in finding conventional explanations for the calls. If the "dead caller" relays information that would only have been known to the deceased, then we have the suggestion of the presence of psi and/or survival being involved. However, as John Palmer noted, "the demonstration of psi says nothing directly about the source of the psi—in particular whether it was a discarnate entity" (Cooper, 2012a, p. 171). To reach the stage of considering whether we are left with accounts presenting evidence for psi, or indeed survival, we need to develop a method of separating the calls that may be paranormal from all of the other possibilities, as Randall suggested (Cooper, 2012a, p. 167). We are left with two possibilities:

1. The call was created via a psychokinetic (PK) effect by someone alive making the telephone ring, in order for the percipient to be alerted to answer it. And then the caller's voice was either hallucinated or a further product of ESP and/or PK by someone living somehow acting on the telephone itself (which would explain why some calls were not registered with the phone company as having been made).
2. Whatever form consciousness may take beyond bodily death—if indeed it does continue—it is responsible for physically manipulating the telephone to (a) ring and (b) produce a recognisable voice.

However, even a thorough investigation would not lead to a solid conclusion as to the source of the psi, especially for an event that has passed that we cannot observe and have control over in present time. The issue of

separating psi from survival has been noted for a long time, and Roll (1980) noted this issue well in what he called the “catch-22 of survival.” We can only *prove* that the calls were created by the deceased if we can *disprove* that some form of psi from the living created the call. In follow-up investigations of spontaneous phenomena, especially with telephone calls, at best we are left only with evidence to suggest that some form of psi process was involved. Our best option, at present, is to ensure that the spontaneous case collections we continue to gather are not accepted as pure anecdotes and that every case is researched to its full capacity, with additional eyewitnesses, following up leads and alternative possibilities. It is the duty of any serious investigator to not leave any stone unturned before allowing such cases to be included in a file of collected cases for analysis.

Conclusion

In presenting this preliminary study into anomalous telephone calls and the scientific methods applied, the request of Schmeidler has now been answered and fulfilled. Now that three initial studies have been carried out into *what* anomalous telephone calls are, and *how* they are experienced (Rogo & Bayless, 1979; Biondi, 1984; Cooper, 2012a), there is still great potential for taking the research forward. One further step could be to take the existing samples of accounts—or indeed new accounts—and target particular cases that show potential for psi (owing to limited conventional explanations for their occurrence) and approach them one by one as case studies. By doing this, complete attention can be given to a single case, following all possible avenues of alternative explanation. If conventional explanations can be ruled out, then we are left with few options but to accept the presence of psi at the very least—and survival at the very most. This will be costly, time consuming, and require dedication, as Biondi (1996) pointed out, but it is a perfectly acceptable next step in the research. It is also a further step in expanding the available research on exceptional experiences involving the telephone, which is a seldom-considered phenomenon.

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Abstracts in Other Languages

Spanish

UN ANÁLISIS DE EXPERIENCIAS EXCEPCIONALES CON TECNOLOGIA DE TELECOMUNICACIONES

RESUMEN: Esta investigación preliminar es como una edición revisada del estudio realizado hace 30 años por Rogo y Bayless. Ambos proyectos vieron la luz en forma de libro, como encuestas de una variedad de experiencias extrañas que algunas personas afirmaron haber tenido con la tecnología de telecomunicaciones. Se incluyeron llamadas telefónicas aparentemente imposibles por personas vivas que sugerían la persona que llamaba se encontraba en dos lugares a la vez y llamadas de personas muertas. En 1979 Schmeidler pidió que dicho estudio fuera escrito y mandado a revisión por otros pares, esbozando los métodos que se habían utilizado y las conclusiones exactas. Usé una muestra de relatos espontáneos en el teléfono (N = 50), utilizando un análisis temático. Los métodos y los resultados se presentan aquí para cumplir con las peticiones de varios revisores en relación a los dos libros/estudios previos de experiencias anómalas en telecomunicaciones. Los resultados sugieren que la mayoría de las llamadas tienen que ver con el duelo, lo que presenta argumentos tanto para fenómenos psicológicos naturales como para psi, en apoyo a estudios previos de duelo. Hago sugerencias para el progreso de esta investigación y la obtención de cuentas lo más fiable posibles.

French

UNE ANALYSE DES EXPERIENCES EXCEPTIONNELLES IMPLIQUANT UNE TECHNOLOGIE DE COMMUNICATION

RESUME : Cette investigation préliminaire se veut une version révisée de l'étude originale conduite 30 ans plus tôt par Rogo et Bayless. Les deux projets furent publiés sous la forme d'un livre analysant diverses expériences étrang-

es impliquant des technologies de télécommunication dont les gens avaient pu témoigner. Parmi elles, on trouve des appels téléphoniques impossibles par des personnes vivantes, venant suggérer que l'appelant se trouvait à deux endroits en même temps, et les appels de personnes que l'on sait décédées. Schmeidler avait recommandé, en 1979, qu'une telle étude soit soumise à un comité de lecture, soulignant les méthodes employées et les résultats exacts. Un échantillon de tels témoignages impliquant un téléphone (N = 50) a été analysé en utilisant une analyse thématique. Les méthodes et les résultats sont présentés ici pour s'accorder avec les requêtes des nombreux pairs ayant eu connaissance des deux premiers livres/études des expériences anormales associées aux télécommunications. Les résultats suggèrent que la majorité des appels se concentrent autour d'une thématique de deuil, ce qui peut fournir des arguments tant pour un phénomène psychologique naturel que pour un processus psi, ou les deux, ce qui vient renforcer des études antérieures sur le deuil. Des suggestions sont faites pour que cette recherche progresse et sur les manières d'obtenir des témoignages aussi fiables que possible.

German

EINE ANALYSE AUSSERGEWÖHNLICHER ERFAHRUNGEN UNTER VERWENDUNG DER TELEKOMMUNIKATIONSTECHNOLOGIE

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Diese vorläufige Untersuchung wurde in der Absicht unternommen, eine ursprünglich vor 30 Jahren von Rogo und Bayless veröffentlichte Studie einer erneuten Auswertung zu unterziehen. Beide Projekte wurden in Buchform vorgelegt und enthielten eine Übersicht außergewöhnlicher Erfahrungen, die Personen mit Telekommunikationstechnologien gemacht hatten. Diese umfassten offenbar unmögliche Telefonanrufe lebender Personen, die den Eindruck erweckten, als befände sich der Anrufer gleichzeitig an zwei Orten, und Anrufe von Personen, von denen bekannt war, dass sie verstorben waren. 1979 hatte Schmeidler gefordert, dass eine solche Untersuchung aufgeschrieben und Gutachtern vorgelegt werden sollte unter Angabe der verwendeten Methoden und der genauen Ergebnisse. Eine Auswahl von Spontanberichten mit Telefonbeteiligung (N = 50) wurde mit Hilfe einer thematischen Analyse ausgewertet. Die Ergebnisse und Methoden werden hier vorgestellt, um den Forderungen mehrerer Gutachter in Bezug auf zwei frühere Bücher / Studien zu anomalen Erfahrungen mit der Telekommunikation nachzukommen. Die Ergebnisse lassen vermuten, dass die meisten Anrufe mit Todesfällen zu tun haben, was Argumente für natürliche psychologische Phänomene und/oder Psi-Beteiligung nahelegt und frühere Studien mit Todesfällen bekräftigt. Vorschläge zur Verbesserung dieser Forschung und von Verfahren zum Erhalt möglichst zuverlässiger Berichte werden gemacht.