



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Shamans, Visions and Ghosts: Exploring spiritual and Religious Experiences

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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After Death Communication

- Different from NDE and other experiences
- Sometimes linked to mediumship and spiritualism but more frequent
 - Messages from the deceased
- Research Report by Evelyn Elsaesser, Chris A. Roe, Callum E. Cooper, David Lorimer
 - Text on Moodle

Definition of ADC

- "A spontaneous and direct After-Death Communication (ADC) occurs when a person unexpectedly perceives a deceased person through a variety of sensory perceptions, i.e. through sight, hearing, smell, or touch. Very commonly, persons who have an ADC (called experients) simply feel the presence of the deceased person or perceive a contact or a communication during sleep or when falling asleep or waking up. The deceased person is perceived in a manner that is interpreted as indicative of the continued survival of some aspect of that person."

Types of ADC

- ADCs are:
 - Spontaneous: contacts or communications allegedly initiated by the deceased, without initiation by or solicitation from the experients;
 - Direct: without intervention of other persons (e.g. spirit mediums), use of devices (Ouija¹, Instrumental TransCommunication, ITC²), or an otherwise mediated contact;
- Typically conveying a message: Reassuring, Resolving, Reaffirming, Releasing

Frequency

- According to the findings of the research, ADCs
 - occur frequently, with an estimated 40-50% of people, in particular mourners, having experienced one or more spontaneous ADCs
 - Testimonies collected on all continents and for centuries suggest this phenomenon to be universal and timeless.

Sensing a presence

- Experiencers feel the familiar presence of a deceased family member or friend, without seeing or hearing them, or feeling a physical contact, or smelling a fragrance characteristic of the deceased. **342** of our participants had an ADC of “sensing a presence”.

Hearing a voice

- **430** participants had auditory ADCs. These contacts come in two forms: either the experiencers hear a voice that seems to come from an outside source, in the same way that they would hear a living person (this was the case for 48.5% of our respondents), or they perceive the communication without an external sound (56.4% of our sample).

Feeling a physical contact

- **472** of those surveyed experienced a tactile ADC. During this type of ADC, experiencers feel a physical contact on a part of their body, for example a touch, a pressure, a caress, a kiss, a hand placed on the shoulder or a real embrace. The contact is comforting and the experiencers generally recognize immediately their loved one by the familiarity of the gesture. Some report that the contact was accompanied by an “electrical flow” or an “energy wave”.

Seeing the Deceased

- **460** of our participants had a visual ADC. These experiences come in a variety of forms. Apparitions can occur indoors, for example at night in the bedroom, or outside, even in a car, on a plane, etc. Occasionally, apparitions are accompanied by a drop in ambient temperature, sometimes combined with draughts.

Smelling a fragrance characteristic of the deceased

- **276** of our participants had an olfactory ADC, namely a contact during which fragrances associated with a deceased person are perceived. Typical scents are that of a perfume, after-shave lotion, soap or a characteristic body scent, but the range of odours reported is wide. It can be flowers, but also medicine, food, drinks, tobacco, etc. Fragrances appear suddenly, for no apparent reason and out of context, indoors or outdoors, without any source being detected. After a few seconds or a few minutes at most, the fragrance dissolves.

Sleep ADC

- **618** participants had an ADC during sleep, when falling asleep or waking up. Sleep ADCs are very common. We asked participants if they were soundly asleep or just falling asleep or waking up when the ADC occurred. 61.2% were soundly asleep, 9.5% falling asleep, and 17.9% waking up.

Crisis ADC

- **206** of our participants had a crisis ADCs. Crisis ADCs take place within a 24 hours window before and after death. They are particularly significant, and even evidential, since experiencers claim that they have been informed of the death of a family member or friend **by the deceased themselves**. In a waking state or waking up at night, experiencers hear or see the deceased who announce their death with serenity, sometimes even with joy (*“I came to say good-bye, I am leaving now”*). Incidentally, they often seem to use the verb *to leave*, as if they were preparing to embark on a journey.

Chris Roe

- professor of psychology at the University of Northampton
- director of its Centre for Psychology and Social Sciences
- President of the Society for Psychical Research



Research interests

- understanding the nature of anomalous experiences
- including the psychology of belief and self-deception
- experimental approaches to test psi abilities
- Study of unconscious measures of psi and correlating these with behavioural and personality measures

In a 2016 paper Roe shows that ...

- A high proportion of the general population believe in or experience anomalous phenomena such as after death communication (e.g. Haraldsson, 2011; Pechey & Halligan, 2012).
- ➤ Some find their experiences transformative, some are indifferent to them, but for others they are a source of concern, and are associated with fear, anxiety and distress
- ➤ Some even seek professional help (cf. Eybrechts & Gerding, 2012; Parra, 2012; Siegel, 1986)
- ➤ BUT traditional medical and psychological services do not take anomalous experiences (AEs) seriously and fail to address the existential questions that they raise (e.g. Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2016; Taylor, 2005).
- ➤ AEs are characterised as hallucinatory, abnormal, or as indicative of pathology (Pechey & Halligan, 2012)

Clinical Parapsychology

- “a new kind of profession with dual training in counselling, psychotherapy and clinical professional psychology to the point of licensure on the one hand, and training in the paranormal, including parapsychology, on the other” (Klimo, 1998)

1,465 cases recorded at the IGPP in Germany:

- •53% classified as poltergeist and apparition phenomena
- •41% as extrasensory perception
- •38% as internal presence and influence (e.g., spirit possession)
- •15% as external presence and nightmares (e.g., sleep paralysis)
- •10% as meaningful coincidences
- •7% as automatism and mediumship
- Belz & Fach (2012, 173-4)

- Eybrechts and Gerding (2012) report on a random sample of Dutch population contacted by phone:
 - • Out of 736 persons, 63% felt contact was possible, 40% of those reported having had an experience
 - • 70% said the experience had been supportive in the grief process

- Cooper, Roe & Mitchell (2016) reviewed the literature and found positive consequences of AEs included
 - •an assurance of their continued bond
 - •an opportunity to say goodbye
 - •a chance to repair damaged relationships

Roxburgh & Evenden (2016a)

- Interviewed 8 clients who reported AEs to therapists. They noted 4 themes:
 - •negative reactions of others (including friends and family members) to disclosures about their AEs made them guarded about sharing experiences with counsellors
 - •“It’s not mainstream and you know I think my experience with the early counsellors really hit that home that they didn’t have a clue what I was on about and it made me feel that the world of counselling was a little narrower than I had expected.”
 - •“I felt quite dismissed outwardly and I didn’t have the knowledge or the experience to challenge what she had said and erm so at that point I made a decision not to do it anymore.”
 - •it was helpful if their counsellors were open-minded, accepting and nonjudgemental about AEs, so they could explore the meaning of the experience with them.

Roe argues that ...

- Individuals who have AEs often fear they are going ‘mad’
 - •Importance of normalisation, validation, and context
 - •Importance of finding a personal experiential framework or explanatory model in which experiences are understood