

Investigation of the phenomenology and impact of spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs)

CASES

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Have you ever felt the presence of a deceased loved one?
Did you hear them? Did you see them at the foot of your bed at night?
Was there a characteristic smell that indicated their presence?
Did you communicate with the person while sleeping?
Not in an ordinary dream but in a clear and coherent head-to-head
that seemed perfectly real?
If this is the case, you may have experienced what scientists have called an
After-Death Communication (ADC).

What are ADCs?

A spontaneous and direct after-death communication, or ADC, occurs when (bereaved) persons (called experients) unexpectedly perceive a deceased person through the senses of sight, hearing, smell or touch. Very often, experients simply feel the presence of the deceased or perceive a contact or a communication during sleep or when falling asleep or waking up.

ADCs are:

- **Spontaneous**, seemingly 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**.

Contacts made on the initiative of the bereaved through a spirit medium, which are much better known to the general public than ADCs, are not the subject of the investigation presented and will therefore not be discussed.

1 A device consisting of a small board, or planchette, on legs that rest on a larger board marked with words, letters of the alphabet, etc., and that by moving over the larger board and touching the words, letters, etc., while the fingers of spiritualists, mediums, or others rest lightly upon it, is employed to answer questions, give messages, etc.

2 Instrumental TransCommunication is the name that has been given by Professor Ernst Senkowski, a German physicist, for the technique of contacting spirits, using any electronic means to capture the images of spirits (ITC), and to record their voices (EVP: Electronic Voice Phenomenon).

A (hidden) major social phenomenon

ADCs occur frequently, with an estimated 40-50% of people, in particular mourners, having experienced one or more spontaneous ADCs. Accounts collected on all continents and for centuries suggest this phenomenon to be *universal* and *timeless*. Despite their widespread occurrence, ADCs, paradoxically, have been little researched and are absent from the media and public discourse. As a consequence, experiencers usually have no frame of reference in terms of which to understand, integrate and fully benefit from this experience, which does not appear to match mainstream conceptions of reality.

An international research project for a better understanding of the nature and impact of ADCs

The time had come to study these experiences, so common and yet so little investigated, in order to better understand their nature and their impact. Thanks to a generous grant from the Salvia Foundation, an ambitious research project entitled *Investigation of the phenomenology and impact of perceived spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs)* was conducted from February 2018 to January 2020.

The questionnaire was presented in English, French, and Spanish using a secure online survey platform.

By collecting information about how ADCs are experienced, when and under what circumstances they occur, and by analyzing their impact on individuals' lives, we aim to make these results accessible to people who face the death of a loved one, as well as to anyone sensitized to the finite nature of human existence.

Sharing an ADC with others is not always easy, as these experiences seem to be contrary to the materialist conception of reality of Western societies. Experiencers often face skepticism, even rejection, when they describe their experience to those around them. It is painful and frustrating because they cherish the ADC and wish to share their joy of having experienced this unexpected contact.

Here are some accounts from people who have experienced an ADC illustrating the difficulty of sharing them with others³:

3 All accounts presented in this booklet were taken from the questionnaires in English

"It's hard to explain to people, they don't understand but will when they pass over."

"I know that not everyone has the same beliefs as me so I only share it with certain people."

"Where I live, people wouldn't believe me."

"Too many people who have never experienced or wanted to learn about the afterlife. I think those people would perceive me as being unbalanced."

"Some members of our family believe me, but most don't. It has caused an awful lot of problems for me personally."

"I didn't think anyone would believe me, that they would think it was just another sign of my grief."

One can imagine the relief of the experiencers if their interlocutors were already aware of the phenomenon of ADCs and listened to the account of their experience in the knowledge that these are quite a common feature of the grieving process, without having to accept that the ADC necessarily implies survival of consciousness after bodily death. A shared knowledge of this common but paradoxically little-known phenomenon would allow people a safe space in which to make sense of this experience according to his or her own sensitivity. Our goal is precisely to disseminate current knowledge on spontaneous after-death communications as widely as possible, so that everyone has the information they need to form their own opinion.

Data collected

To meet the objectives of the research project, we needed a very detailed questionnaire. We developed **194 questions** presented in a questionnaire available online – in English, French, and Spanish – over a period of six months. Two to three hours were necessary to fill in the questionnaire, with the possibility of completing it in several goes. Despite this significant investment in time, very few participants dropped out along the way. We concluded that experiencers appreciated being able to describe their ADC and its impact in a safe and nonjudgmental space.

The number of completed questionnaires far exceeded our expectations.

English: 416 | French: 440 | Spanish: 148

A total of 1,004 completed questionnaires

**Largest multilingual collection of spontaneous
modern-day ADCs worldwide**

Presentation of survey results

The results presented in this booklet refer to the totality of the collected data, namely the combination of the replies of the 1,004 questionnaires completed in English, French, and Spanish. The purpose of this publication is to present some of the *quantitative results* of the survey. The thematic analyses of the collected data will be the subject of individual papers.

There was a clear sex difference in the number of responses, with 853 women having completed the questionnaire, compared to only 144 men (7 persons checked “other”, e.g. transgender). However, literature shows that men and women have ADCs in roughly the same proportion, but women report them more. This important difference in the gender of participants may simply mean that women are more comfortable sharing personal and emotional experiences than men.

**> 85.0% of female participants, compared with only
14.3% of male participants**

Spontaneous and direct contacts with a deceased person can occur at any time in our lives. Children can have ADCs in the same way as adults. Unfortunately, they are often not taken seriously by parents and are not supported to give meaning to this experience. This is one of the many reasons that make the widespread dissemination of the ADC phenomenon significant.

Our database includes ADCs described by adults but experienced in their childhood or adolescence.

The age of participants ranges between 18 and 89 years, with a median age of 51 years.

Religious beliefs and spirituality

Religious beliefs only increased slightly after an ADC. The group was very moderately religious before the ADC, with only 94 persons of our sample who “strongly agreed” in considering themselves a religious person before the ADC, compared with 123 after the ADC. 396 participants had a neutral position on the subject before the ADC, with a small variation of 370 participants who remained neutral on the religious issue after the ADC (partially transcribed responses only).

> **9.4% considered themselves religious before the ADC, compared to 12.3% after the ADC; 39.8% were neutral before the ADC, against 37.2% remaining neutral after the ADC**

Literature indicates that being a believer, agnostic or atheist does not influence the nature of the experience or the probability of having it. The belief in the survival of consciousness or the firm negation of this hypothesis does not seem to increase or diminish the probability of experiencing a spontaneous contact with a deceased person. The *interpretation* of the ADC, however, is individual since it is linked to the belief system and to the specific life experience of the person.

Spirituality, on the other hand, is strongly reinforced by these experiences. While only 362 participants “strongly agreed” that they considered themselves spiritual before the contact, this rose to 635 afterwards. This shift is statistically significant. 202 persons had a neutral attitude before the experience, while only 82 remained neutral after the ADC (partially transcribed responses only).

> **36.4% of participants considered themselves spiritual before the ADC, compared to 63.6% after the ADC; 20.3% were neutral before the ADC, compared to only 8.2% after the ADC.**

Multiple ADCs

A large majority of our participants had multiple ADCs. Slightly more than a third perceived the same deceased each time, while more than half experienced a contact with different deceased persons. This was a surprise to us since the literature does not suggest such a high number of multiple ADCs.

> **79.8% experienced several ADCs and 9.6% were unsure, compared to 10.6% who had only one ADC**

> **34.4% always perceived the same deceased person and 7.1% were unsure, against 58.5% who perceived different deceased persons**

Types of ADCs

Different types of contact with the deceased have been identified which can be perceived by sight, hearing, touch, and smell. Often, several sensory organs can be involved simultaneously. Experiencers report for example that they could hear a deceased loved one tell them that she was well and that they should not worry about her, while smelling the perfume she used to wear.

Sensing a presence

> 34.4% felt the presence of the deceased

Experiencers sense 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”. The identity and personality of the deceased clearly emanate from this presence and allow for immediate identification.

Here is an account of an experiencer who sensed the presence of her fiancé:

“ My fiancé had died suddenly and unexpectedly. I was 30, he 43. I was naturally distraught and staying with friends who had known him well. We spoke of him a lot. I talked to him all the time, thought about him but had no sort of ADC. Some of my books and records etc. were at his house, so I went to collect them on my own. I not only longed for an ADC from him but ‘expected’ one. But there was nothing. I wandered round his house, looking at and touching his things, but no sense at all of him or his presence, just overwhelming sadness. I left. A couple of days later, I had eaten supper with the family I still stayed with. We had not talked of him; conversation had been of totally different things. The friend asked me to take a bag to the dustbin. This was in a narrow covered way outside the kitchen door. It was windy so I closed the door behind me and took the bag. As I did so, I stopped in absolute shock and amazement... because he, David⁴, was there, waiting for me. I didn’t see him, hear, or smell anything... but beyond any doubt in my mind, he was there. I spoke to him. I felt unbelievably comforted and loved and relieved. And astonished – when I had expected him, in the place where he was somehow likely to have been, he was not there, it was empty of him. Now, he was there, in front of me, close to me. Hard to convey it but anyone who has had the experience will know at once.

”

4 All names have been changed to protect the identity of participants

The presence seems to have a certain density, almost physical, though invisible, and the experiencers often know exactly where the deceased is positioned in space (e.g. at their left side, in front or behind them).

> 68.3% could localize deceased, 13.8% were unsure, and 17.8% could not localize them

Here some accounts:

"I felt that he was behind me. I noticed my cat staring at the space."

"I went to the cemetery several months after my dad died. It was summer of 2004. I was standing at his grave and it was just turning dark. I probably shouldn't have gone that late, but missed him so much, still grieving heavily. Suddenly, I was aware of someone standing behind me, and I knew it was him. He would have been concerned at me being there in the dark."

"I strongly felt my grandfather (my mother's father) behind me in the room when my mother was dying."

"There was a real, and unexpected, sense of her presence beside, and slightly above, me."

It is an unexpected and brief perception that has a clear beginning and end.

> 64.4% knew exactly when the deceased came and left, 12.9% were unsure, and 22.7% didn't know

"There was a sense of someone walking into the room. A witness sensed it at the same time. [...] When he left, the air felt different and I knew he was gone."

A feeling of love and solicitude emanates from this presence.

Experiencers say they felt the energy of the deceased and mention physical sensations. A drop in ambient temperature or a draught sometimes accompanies these perceptions.

"I was infused with my dad's energy throughout my whole body. It ended as soon as he stopped. It was real physical energy."

"My whole body felt as if I was in a 'zone' or 'magnetic field'."

"This was her energy that I felt. There was no question because I wasn't thinking about her at those times."

We asked whether the impression of the deceased's presence was the same or different from the times when participants thought about them or felt that they were always "by their side" or "in their heart". For a majority of our sample, the experience was different from a thought.

> For 60.7% presence was different from a thought, 16.3% unsure, and for 23.0% same as a thought

The following accounts illustrate how the presence was different from a thought:

"My thinking of her is quite different than knowing her connection in that when I have a connection, it's a complete knowing of her, her personality, the cadence of her speech, the way she moved. It's as if she was with me physically and spiritually."

"I felt my dad physically present. My cat literally doubled in size with all her hair sticking up."

"I was not thinking about her. I felt that she came to me."

"I felt and thought about him all the time but I knew those were thoughts and feelings. The only time I knew his presence, it was quite different. A certainty beyond doubt. He was there."

"This was not a passive thinking. In fact, when it started my mind was occupied connecting a computer to the phone line."

"One feels like a memory, a sort of nostalgic thought. The other is as though they're physically there."

Were the deceased trying to communicate something by their sheer presence? The accounts show that the feeling of a presence, in itself striking, is only the support for the essential element which is the *information* that is transmitted.

> For 73.6% there was a communication, 15.3% unsure, and for only 11.1% there was no communication

"Yes, he was saying goodbye as we never got a chance as he passed away suddenly."

"I felt that I was being comforted, that she was telling me that she was ok."

"It seemed to me [she] wanted to convey that she was now very, very well, and that she was relieved and happy to have this difficult life behind her. She probably wanted to tell this to all the mourners present, possibly not just specifically to me."

"They stopped me from doing something that I doubt they would have approved of."

"I am here. I know how you are feeling. I am close to you. Everything is all right."

"I'm here, your right in your thinking."

"[That] he loved me and even though I was extremely depressed and my heart was shattered that I'd be ok."

Hearing a voice

> 43.3% heard the deceased

430 participants had auditory ADCs.

“

About 3 months after my daughter died, I heard my mom's voice in my head. My mom died in 2007. My daughter died in 2017. I had been horribly sad and grieving since my daughter's death. My husband was working nights, so I was alone in the apartment. It was quiet, just me and my sadness. I was standing in the kitchen when suddenly my mom spoke to me and the words were inside my head, but in her voice, which I can't recreate, so I know it was real. She said, "Don't be so sad, Cutie, Ellie's here with me." (My mom and dad were the only people who called me "Cutie"). I was shocked, because I was always told that those things don't really happen. I meekly answered, "Ok mom" and then looked around but nobody was there. I didn't tell anyone for a couple of weeks. I was unsure about accepting this even though I knew it was real. Finally, after learning that ADCs really do happen, I realized that my mom was trying to comfort me and my daughter is safe with her and I began to heal.

”

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, or they perceive the communication without an external sound. In this second case, they speak of a message “deposited in their

consciousness”, while specifying that the origin of the communication lies outside them and that it is not a thought. It would therefore be a telepathic communication. Communication can be one-way or two-way. For both types of contact, the deceased are generally recognized without hesitation by the intonation of their voice and by a certain way of expressing themselves characteristic of him or her.

To those who had heard an external voice, we asked if it was the same or different from the one the deceased had in his or her lifetime. For the majority of respondents, the voice was the same.

> For 67.8% the voice was the same, 17.3% unsure, and for 14.9% the voice was different

The following accounts illustrate how the voice was different:

“It was the same as when he was healthy before the stroke – he had aphasia after the stroke, and so that was not the version of him I interacted with.”

“Same voice just in a whisper type.”

“A neutral, neither male nor female voice.”

“More robust, as if younger... stronger.”

“She sounded as if she was talking under water.”

How can one differentiate a perceived communication without an external sound from a thought? For a large majority of our participants, there was no doubt that they did not generate the communication themselves.

> For 87.2% the communication was different from a thought, 6.1% unsure, and for only 6.7% it was the same as a thought

In the account to follow, the experient did not hear a voice but footsteps:

“Some days (~10) after my father died I was at his house. I was in the kitchen and the house was quiet (late afternoon). I heard him come through the door and do a walk through the house. It was his gait, his movement up the steps. I heard the footsteps through the house, room by room. It was immediately obvious to me that he was doing a final walk through his house. After a couple of minutes, he exited the front door. It was clear that there was a shift in energy, a release. The experience was audio. It did not frighten me because the pace and movement of the sound was so like him.”

Feeling a physical contact

> 47.7% felt a physical contact

472 of those surveyed experienced a tactile ADC. During this type of ADC, experients 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 experients 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”.

How can we imagine such physical contact?

“

About a month following the sudden death of my mother, I was alone in the house in my bedroom. I was sitting on the side of the bed, extremely distressed, howling with the pain of my loss and raging at the God I had put my faith in because he hadn't come to my help in my hours of need and darkness. I just couldn't stop crying, and had never felt more alone. I then “felt” my Mother sit next to me and wrap her arms around me. I know it was my Mum in the same way that you can feel someone you know well physically near you – I could even smell her. As she hugged me I was aware of being totally enveloped by her love, and as she soothed me I felt an intense warmth and a calmness I hadn't felt since she died. I felt her stroking my hair, and I recognized the feeling of being comforted by my Mum. I am 100% sure that my Mum came to comfort me – I recognized her essence and energy. Although I shed many more tears in the months following her passing, I never again experienced the despair that I felt that morning. The experience, along with many others that followed, caused me to completely reconsider my traditional religious beliefs, and explore my own spirituality. I believe that I am more at ease with myself as a result of her contact that day.

”

In order to better understand tactile ADCs, we asked participants in which part of their body they had felt the contact and how it had occurred:

“A hand on my leg. This was at a time when I was talking to my children. It was a reassuring hand.”

“He cuddled me and nuzzled my neck.”

"Same as a physical hug."

"My brother tapped me on the shoulder and told me to slow down whilst I was driving. Very clear."

"I felt my father touched my hands one night when I was in bed."

"I was at my mums house and I felt a hand on my hand."

"Like someone was stroking my cheek."

For a small majority of our sample, the contact was familiar to them since it was characteristic of the deceased.

> For 54.8% contact was familiar, 11.0% unsure, and for 34.2% contact was not familiar

We asked respondents what this contact felt like.

"Very normal. Loving, familiar."

"It felt so good, it was like being wrapped up with love. But also overwhelmingly heartbreaking."

"It was almost indescribable. It was his touch, his sense of humor, everything I remembered about him that I had forgotten came rushing back."

"Very soft and comforting."

"It felt like a weight on the bed next to me then a warm [sensation] round my hands... it was a calming presence and not at all frightening."

"Surprised me, but I was delighted. It felt like a physical pat or tap."

"Physically it felt like someone was holding my hand and hugging me from behind. Emotionally it felt comforting."

We enquired if participants had tried to touch the deceased. Not many had taken this initiative.

> 26.2% had tried to touch the deceased, 2.0% unsure, and 71.8% had not

Of those who had tried to touch the deceased, just under half could grasp them and felt a resistance or matter.

> 43.4% could grasp the deceased and felt matter, 14.7% unsure, and 41.9% could not

"When she grabbed me by the hand, I felt hers."

"I was in a hypnagogic state right before dozing off on the couch. I felt my deceased son wrap his arms around me from behind. I was able to kiss his left hand and then his right arm. I could feel the hair on his arms and told him that I loved him. Then he left."

"Felt his arms around me in a hug and his lips on mine in a kiss."

"We embraced and hugged. She was whole like a living person."

"I felt it. I touched my deceased sister's cheek with my right index finger."

Did respondents feel that the contact was transmitting a message?
A significant majority replied in the positive.

> For 79.8% physical contact transmitted a message, 10.2% unsure, and for 10.0% physical contact did not transmit a message

"Definite goodbye to me and my family with admonition to look after his widow."

"I think John was warning me about my relationship with my daughter."

"Yes, it's really me. See, it feels like it always did when he hugged."

"Letting me know she still exists."

"He was letting me know that he was there and I was not imagining it."

"A message of reassurance that my grandma is still there for me."

"Yes, letting me know he was still with me, just in a different form."

"The message was that she wanted me to know that she was still very near even though I could not see her."

Seeing the deceased

> 46.2% saw the deceased

460 of our participants had a visual ADC.

Visual ADCs come in a variety of forms. These apparitions can occur

indoors, for example at night in the bedroom, or outside, even in a car, on a plane, etc. Sometimes, experiencers report that they perceived an apparition they didn't recognize. Subsequently, on the basis of a photo, they identified them as being an ancestor or a deceased distant relative. Occasionally, apparitions are accompanied by a drop in ambient temperature, sometimes combined with draughts.

“

On June 12th 2012, I was awakened around 6am. I saw someone walking on my front porch through my bedroom window. I thought who would be here this early. I got dressed and went to the front door. I opened the door and saw a woman with her back to me on my left, crying. I asked if she was ok. She turned around and it was my grandmother from my father's side of the family. I was in shock to see her. She spoke and asked me for forgiveness and apologized for no longer talking to me after my father had passed away. I told her it was ok and I forgave her. She walked towards me and we hugged. I felt her frail body hug me and I hugged her back. I felt her clothes, her smell and she thanked me as we hugged. I felt this most intense feeling of love. I started to cry. She then started to turn into this bright white light. I had to close my eyes due to it being so bright. I could see the light fading away through my eye lids. The feeling of her started to slowly leave. I opened my eyes and she was gone. I was standing there with my arms still looking like I was hugging someone. I was in shock. I went back into the house and lay on my bed and my wife woke up. I told her what happened. [...] My grandmother had been dead for about 7 years.

”

The deceased can be perceived either as a whole or only partially (head and bust), with a graduation of sharpness. A majority of our sample perceived the deceased as a whole.

> 59.8% saw deceased as a whole, 25.3% only upper part of the body, 0.8% only lower part of the body, 1.8% unsure, and 12.4% other

“About 12 hours after our son's death, I saw his face (just his neck and face) appear sideways in a bedroom. He spoke to me and said “don't be angry, don't be mad”. It was him in the room with me and he slowly faded away.”

“In the first part of the experience, I saw his head and face only - strictly telepathic communication. In the second part of the experience, I saw his full body, and there was actual verbal communication.”

“I saw most of her body missing only her feet, ankles to mid-shins.”

"He appeared whole, but I could not really tell because I was sitting at my desk and could not see all of him below the level of the desk."

The descriptions of apparitions range from the vision of a vaporous and semi-transparent silhouette revealing the objects behind it to the perception of a perfectly solid body, passing through all the intermediate stages. Sometimes there is a dynamic evolution in the perception: a hazy form is perceived first which solidifies gradually passing through the silhouette stage to finally take the form of a solid person who appears to be alive.

What was the consistency of the deceased perceived by our respondents? A majority perceived them as they would see a living person.

> For 61.6% seemed solid like a living being, for 12.5% semi-transparent (objects behind deceased were visible), for 11.3% a foggy silhouette, and 14.6% were unsure

"Within a day or two after my father's passing, he appeared one night by my bed to say goodbye. I could only see him from the waist up. He was more of a silhouette but I could still see his piercing blue eyes. Just looking at me."

"When I just saw his face, his was to my left, large and high above me...he actually materialized right in front of my eyes...surreal. In the second part, he was a solid living being."

"He seemed solid like a living being."

"I don't think he appeared solid, but he was very close to that because when I looked up, he looked just like he always did."

Apparitions are sometimes surrounded by light. We asked if the deceased seemed brighter than their environment, in other words, if a light surrounded them or came from them. This was the case for just over a third of our sample.

> For 34.7% apparition surrounded by light, 11.2% unsure, and for 54.0% apparition not surrounded by light

Here are some examples of luminous apparitions:

"It looked like a photo of her surrounded by a circle of sun rays."

"Light filled body."

"Globe of light."

"Like a light body but not transparent."

"A silhouette filled with light which surrounded her."

"Luminous white plasma with blue inclusions."

We queried if the deceased seemed to be the same age as when he/she died.

> 51.5% same age, 31.9% younger, 0.8% older, 15.8% unsure

As our data show, the deceased are sometimes seen in the prime of their life and in radiant health, regardless of the age they were on the day of their death and the illness that may have marked their faces. They may choose to show themselves as they were in a happy and carefree time in their past life, still far from old age and illness that might arise later in their life. They would have this freedom if it were postulated that they enter the consciousness of the living by creating an image of their choice.

Often, we saw our loved ones the last time at their hour of death, or later during their burial. This is truly a sad picture to keep in our heart. Visual ADCs replace this last appalling memory with a new, beautiful and soothing image.

The data we have collected support this hypothesis. Just over half of those surveyed said that the deceased relative or friend looked different from how he or she had at the time of death.

> 55.0% deceased looked different, 17.5% looked the same, 7.4% unsure, and 20.1% other

"In good health, happy and younger."

"He looked young, he looked fit and healthy."

"He looked like he did when we were happiest."

"Although she died at age 82, in the vision I saw her as I had known her in her 30's, radiantly healthy."

"As dad was when a young man. No sign of the cancer."

How can experiencers identify the apparition? One could imagine that the deceased materialize in such a way that experiencers can recognize them, e.g. by wearing their favorite clothes and by behaving in a familiar way.

Our data show that for a large majority of those surveyed the deceased was immediately familiar to them.

> For 75.5% deceased was immediately familiar, 7.2% unsure, and for 17.3% deceased was not immediately familiar

"Didn't see him die but wore same clothing as he did when I last saw him."

"Saw her standing at the bus stop in clothes that she would wear, boots, her hair, jacket, back pack."

"He looked as he did in life; however he was wearing the shirt he had on the night he died. I was so happy to see him I almost dropped my cup of tea. It was totally unexpected and was a month or so after his passing."

"Looked like as she did when I last saw her. She was wearing her favorite London fog trench coat."

"He looked like he did before he got ill; he was wearing his grey cardigan he always wore before he got ill."

"I saw my deceased husband exactly one week after he passed away. He was standing in the doorway of our bedroom, wearing a dark blue sweatshirt and dark blue sweatpants. His hair was black like it was when he was younger. He didn't say anything and was gone within a minute."

"He was wearing clothes from his younger years like cuffed corduroy pants, thin belt, and flannel shirt."

Appearance and disappearance of apparition

The **appearance** of apparitions can take various forms:

- Experiencers wake up or are awakened at night by the apparition which stands before them, for example at the foot of their bed;
- Apparition is already present when experiencers, who are awake, suddenly become aware of it;
- Apparition is in motion and enters the field of vision of experiencers (e.g. a door is opened and the apparition enters and moves around the room);
- Apparition materializes before the eyes of experiencers, suddenly or gradually. Sometimes it is perceived as fog which suddenly takes shape and becomes recognizable.

The **disappearance** of the apparition is more abrupt than its appearance. Experiencers use verbs such as: evaporate, suddenly disappear, dissolve, dematerialize, erase, etc. Just blinking or looking away for a fraction of a second is enough for the apparition to disappear. In the case of perception of unknown deceased persons, experiencers say they took them for people in the flesh until their sudden disappearance made them understand that it was in fact an apparition.

We have asked those surveyed how the deceased appeared to them.

> **For 59.8% apparition already there when perceived, for 28.5% materializing right before their eyes, and 11.8% unsure**

We enquired how the apparition disappeared.

> **For 14.4% fading gradually, for 28.1% dissolving instantly, for 18.0% not there anymore when experiencer blinked, 10.9% unsure, and 28.5% other**

"She seemed to walk past the kitchen door."

"I was afraid and turned my head."

"At the time, I did not know who he was... he walked across the dining room and disappeared into a wall."

"She turned into bright white light as she started to vanish."

"Got up and walked through the wall."

"When I looked away he was gone."

"Simply turned and walked out of my sight."

Did experiencers feel that the deceased were conveying a message to them? This was largely the case. Again, we can see that the message – the information conveyed – is the essential element of ADCs, whatever the type of contact may be.

> **79.8% apparition conveyed a message, 8.6% unsure, and 11.6% no message was perceived**

We queried if the message was conveyed in words respondents could hear (like a conversation among living people), if it was perceived telepathically, by the expression of the face, or other.

> For 26.3% message conveyed in words, for 37.0% telepathically, for 16.3% by expression of face, 7.3% unsure, and 13.2% other

"We didn't speak in words. The conversation was totally telepathic."

"She spoke an answer to my question."

"He spoke telepathically and was very animated and happy."

"Both spoke to me and I recognized their voice."

"Just as if he were talking to me about five feet away."

"She gestured as the message was "voiced" telepathically."

"By the look in her eyes and face. By the feeling of being protective to me."

Smelling a fragrance characteristic of the deceased

> 27.9% smelled a fragrance characteristic of the deceased

276 of our participants had an olfactory ADC. Olfactory ADCs are contacts during which fragrances associated with a deceased person are perceived.

“

My son died very suddenly of pulmonary edema whilst we were on holiday. He was a smoker. Neither my husband nor I smoke. As my husband's job involved having clients in his car, it was a strictly nonsmoking zone, usually smelling of air freshener. The day before my son's funeral, we went to the local Cash and Carry to buy wine, beers etc. for the wake. We loaded our purchases into the back of the car and made our way home. As we neared our house I was aware of a strong smell of tobacco smoke in the car. My husband is extremely pragmatic, so I didn't mention anything, in case he thought I was imagining it. But when we parked on our drive, my husband remained in his seat staring ahead. After about 10 seconds the car was engulfed in the smell and my husband asked me if 'I could smell it'? He was due to take my other son and daughter to the funeral parlor to say 'goodbye' later that day, but used my car, as it had unnerved him so much.

”

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.

Here are some examples of fragrances smelled:

"It is a very strong aftershave or cologne he used to wear when alive."

"The smell of my parents' home mixed with a hint of her perfume – 'Mum'."

"It's a smell of my son's after returning home from work."

"My brother smoked when he was alive. I did smell strong cigarette out of nowhere."

"It was the smell of the hospital room where she passed."

"His shampoo, the smell of his hair."

"Make-up and hairspray... particularly personal and unique."

A majority of respondents felt that the deceased was conveying a message to them by way of a fragrance.

> 59.9% perceived a message, 20.5% unsure, and 19.6% did not perceive a message

Here are some illustrations of messages perceived during the olfactory contact:

"She wanted to make sure that I knew it was her."

"Felt our son was assuring us he was still around and helping us through the dread of his funeral."

"Just a way of letting us know he was visiting."

"I felt as if she was trying to make contact to let me know that she was ok and still near, as well as trying to bring me comfort."

"Letting me know he had survived the death of his physical body. Giving me personal proof."

Sleep ADC

> 62.2% had a sleep ADC

618 participants had an ADC during sleep, when falling asleep or waking up. Sleep ADCs are very common.

“

My husband, Thierry, had been recently diagnosed with a rare and terminal form of cancer. I was staying at a [hotel] about two hours from home because I had started a new job about two months prior and we had not yet found a place to stay. Early one weekday morning, I was awakened by what felt like someone sitting down on the corner of my bed. (My mom used to wake me up for school every day by sitting down on the corner of the bed.) I sensed or heard her say, “This is going to be really hard.” This was in late 2011 and my mom had passed away in April of 1994. Somehow I knew she was talking about Thierry’s cancer fight. Even though I received that message, I was afraid to open my eyes. I was afraid that someone would really be sitting on my bed and that it wouldn’t be my mom. When I finally did open my eyes, no one was there. She was right. Thierry’s cancer fight was horrific and losing him just over a year later was even worse.

”

Experiences that occur during sleep are completely different from an ordinary dream and have the same characteristics as waking ADCs. These contacts are clear, consistent, memorable and felt to be real and do not take on the complex, symbolic and fragmented nature of dreams which are quickly forgotten when we wake up. Although experiencers often cannot tell whether they were awake or not during the experience, they systematically state *“It was completely different from a dream, it was much more real”*. Those who have had dreams of deceased loved ones and also an ADC during sleep make a clear distinction between the two types of experiences.

Here are some accounts illustrating how the ADC was different from a dream:

“Messages were given to me that I did not know about, but that made sense when given to the person I was instructed to give them to. Predictions were made that came true later.”

“A question was answered in a positive way that eased my grief.”

“The times I have been “visited” are totally different than a dream. Much, much more vivid and I remember every detail, even now - years later.”

"I woke up during the experience. I knew I was awake as I was in control of my body. The light continued to glow and I felt very peaceful and knew something positive was happening to me. I still remember the feeling and the color vividly."

"Visitations are clear, vivid, detailed. Dreams make no sense and are hard to remember after a while. Visitations you'll never forget. Not even details."

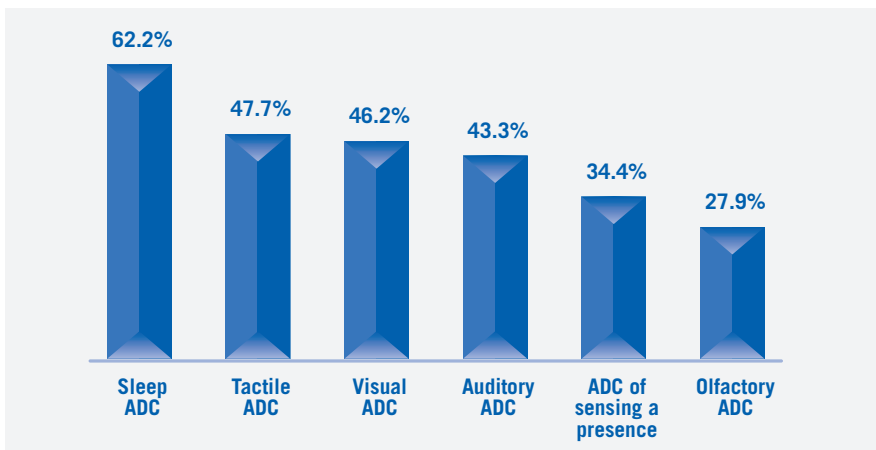
"It was a distinct physical presence, not at all like any dream I've ever had."

We asked participants if they were soundly asleep or just falling asleep or waking up when the ADC occurred.

> **61.2% soundly asleep, 9.5% falling asleep, 17.9% waking up, and 11.4% unsure**

Comparative graph by type of ADC

The following graph presents the number of occurrences by type of ADC of our sample.



Sleep ADCs top our ranking. There are three types of sleep ADCs:

- 1) contacts that occur while people are asleep, but which they very clearly distinguish from an ordinary dream;
- 2) ADCs which occur when falling asleep or waking up, during what researchers describe as a hypnagogic state; and
- 3) contacts that wake up the experiencers. Once they are awakened, their experience fits into one of the other categories (ADC of sensing of presence, tactile, visual, auditory or olfactory). More than half of our sample (51.6%) were woken up by the ADC.

It is also noteworthy that visual ADCs, which are very striking, rank higher than we expected since literature does not suggest such a high number of occurrence.

Message perceived

Regardless of the type of ADC, the very essence of these contacts is the message that is perceived.

As experiencers understand it, the very fact that the deceased seem to be able to communicate with the living implies that they seem to continue an existence – elsewhere – whose nature exceeds our understanding. The strongest impact undoubtedly comes from this apparent capacity for making contact, a revelation for some, the confirmation of a preexisting conviction for others (that a form of consciousness survives physical death).

Each message is obviously unique because it is addressed to a particular person and shaped by a common past and a common history. However, we can schematize the contents because, in their essence, the perceived messages are relatively homogeneous.

They are:

Reassuring: I'm fine, don't worry about me, the troubles I had at the end of life are now behind me;

Resolving: Settling old conflicts, allowing space for apologies, providing closure;

Reaffirming: Continuing bond, affectionate, I love you, I will always be by your side; We'll meet again one day;

Releasing: Don't be sad, pursue your life, don't hold me back by your suffering.

It should be stressed that the messages do not contain any information on the alleged new form of existence of the deceased nor do they reveal anything about their “new home”. Only the state of mind of the deceased relative or friend is briefly described (“I’m alive, I’m happy”).

The content of the messages is mainly centered on the experients and serves to comfort them and alleviate their sadness.

“Comfort. Reassurance. ‘I am here. I am with you. You haven’t lost me and I know now exactly how much you loved me.’”

“That she was ok and for me not to worry or be sad.”

“I will always be with you, I love you, and I’m not dead, just not in my body.”

“My deceased mom told me my deceased daughter is with her.”

“You are safe. I am with you. I’ll help you through this. You must go on. I’m okay.”

“She told me to stop crying. She was letting me know she was ok.”

“The message was about letting me know he was ok and that I should be ok too. Even though we were not able to say good bye and it was so unexpected.”

“Mainly thanking me for taking care of him. He didn’t want me to be sad. He loved me.”

“The knowledge that he is always just a thought away.”

Other messages are more centered on the deceased who inform their loved ones that they are still alive and well, like a traveler who informs his family that the trip went well and that they can be reassured.

“The message was my mum was still very much alive and happy.”

“That she was alive in a different realm.”

“Son, being dead takes some getting used to, but you’ll like it.”

“Message perceived was that she was still vibrant and alive, just not in the physical world. That she was still very close.”

“Death isn’t what we are taught to believe (religious).”

“That we could still communicate and he was ok.”

"That it was wonderful on this (her) side, that she was alright, and that I would be alright."

The following account, which is clearly centered on the deceased, is unusual and therefore particularly interesting: the deceased needs information on his passing. This contact meets the needs of the deceased, and does not serve to reassure the experient.

"The most dramatic one was the evening a friend fell and was in the hospital when he appeared in front of my desk where I was working. I looked up and saw Charles. I spoke first and said "Charles?" He responded: "Do you know what happened to me?" I explained that he had fallen and hurt his head and was in the hospital. Then I said, "Charles, if you are here talking to me, you must have died." He said, "I just wanted to know what happened to me" and he disappeared."

The deceased sometimes ask their loved ones not to mourn them too long and to let them continue on their path of which we know nothing, as if our sadness sorrowed them and hindered them in their development.

"To please not grieve for him and that he was OK. He was asking for permission to move on."

In the painful cases of suicide, the deceased sometimes explain their gesture during the ADC. In other cases, distressing or conflictual relationships that remained unresolved at the time of death seem to be resolved during these contacts. These messages suggest that a dynamic relationship continues beyond the death of the body and that it is never too late to ask for forgiveness. Death seems to have swept away everything that separated people – the ego, resentment, wounds that could never heal – to make way for the essential and authentic feelings that bond people. These messages show us that it is never too late to understand, repair, forgive and be forgiven, and to express love.

"She wanted forgiveness. I forgave her and she was able to move on."

"Came to me to say he was sorry for a misunderstanding that we had. Told me then that heaven was bliss and gestured with his face like he used to. He was full of bliss and his clothes were immaculate."

We enquired if respondents received any information unknown to them previously during the ADC.

> 24.3% yes, 7.1% unsure, and 68.6% no

Experients sometimes claim that they received information about events that will occur in the future. In other cases, the messages are very down-to-earth and practical and contain information that the bereaved need. These cases are of particular interest since they are evidential, given that the information thus collected can be verified.

The few accounts to follow illustrate this type of contact:

"My son told us how he had passed."

"A prediction of a future event that I was not expecting to see happen as there was nothing to logically indicate my dad would die that year."

"Lots of the information was unknown to me - such as how my brother died."

"She said that my son had something to celebrate. I later learned that he had secretly gotten married."

"How she came to be hit, that she was aware of what had been going on since she left."

"The location of items that I would not have known."

"My sister's pregnancy."

"A dangerous event was going to happen that would have caused significant injury..."

Impact of ADCs on the bereavement process

As previous accounts illustrate, ADCs reassure and comfort mourners. Beyond the brief but striking perception of the deceased, which is in itself quite remarkable, it is the **information** conveyed and the **emotions** perceived and felt by the experients which seem to be an essential element, even the very essence, of these experiences.

According to many experients, ADCs bring comfort, joy, assistance and strength to continue their life journey without their loved ones. We questioned participants what place they give to ADCs in the events that have marked their existence.

Data show that these experiences are clearly very significant. For more than a third of our sample, the ADC “changed their lives”, and for almost half, it was “important”.

Life-changing:	36.4%
Important:	49.1%
Moderately important:	9.0%
Not very important:	1.5%
Not important:	1.7%
Unsure:	2.2%

Some have speculated that ADCs are self-generated illusions, or unconscious compensations due to grief⁵. The data collected does not confirm this hypothesis since about a quarter of our participants were no longer sad and no longer mourning when they had the ADC, or they did not even know the deceased. This hypothesis is also not tenable for crisis ADCs. Crisis ADCs, which take place within a 24 hours window before and after death, are particularly interesting since experiencers claim that they have been informed of the death of a family member or friend *by the deceased themselves*. Obviously, experiencers are not yet in mourning when the crisis ADC takes place. Therefore, grief cannot be the trigger for ADCs in all cases.

A series of questions has allowed us to gain more insight into the impact of ADCs on the grieving process.

During the days/weeks preceding the ADC, and with regard to the grieving process, were you:

Extremely sad and in deep mourning:	35.5%
Moderately sad and moderately mourning:	14.4%
A little sad but having partially overcome the pain of mourning:	17.4%
Not sad and not mourning anymore:	13.1%
I have never been in mourning (of the person perceived):	13.9%
Unsure:	5.7%

⁵ Some suggested reading on this topic:

LaGrand, L.E (1997). After-death communication: Final farewells. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn. [see chapter 12]

Rogo, D.S. (1981). Author responds to book review. *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research*, 4, 75-80.

Rogo, D. S. (1990). Spontaneous contact with the dead: Perspectives from grief counselling, sociology, and parapsychology. In G. Doore (Ed.) What survives? (pp.76-91). Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

On a more personal level, the experiences seem to continue to be cared for, the loved one seems to watch over them from another dimension, love seems to have survived death. These elements are a great source of consolation. The sadness due to the physical absence of the loved one persists, obviously, but the message of hope is powerful.

We asked the participants if the ADC had given them comfort and emotional healing. This was indeed the case for a large majority.

Yes: 73.4%

No: 10.4%

Unsure: 8.0%

I was never mourning this person: 8.2%

This is what our participants had to say on this topic:

"Gave me hope for survival and comfort."

"I am at peace now."

"Brings me comfort to know my loved ones are around us."

"I was really struggling to cope and couldn't see any way through the fog of grief. I missed my mum so much and wanted to know she was ok and near... this did that."

"Knowing my son came to me...in a calm and loving way to comfort me...has made me carry on to help others that have lost their children. ...understanding the deepest loss imaginable, and truly believing we will see them again and they have just gone on ahead before us..."

"How fortunate am I... In the pain of losing a child, with the surrounding pain and grief having broken my heart...this death broke all of my family's hearts.... there came Light. The light and goodness came from our love that crosses over after death. I found complete peace and healing."

"I get great comfort from knowing my husband is alive in spirit and know he will be waiting for me when it is my turn to cross. I am devastated by the loss of my beautiful husband but his contact is helping me with my healing."

One would imagine that seeing the loved one, even for a few seconds, would bring out his physical absence even more cruelly. When the contact stops, the loneliness should be devastating. And yet, this is not the feeling of the vast majority of participants.

> For 80.4% contact did not make physical absence more painful, 7.8% unsure, and for 11.9% contact made physical absence more painful

At first glance, this result may seem surprising. The reason is undoubtedly to be found in the impression of the continuity of the bond which persists beyond the brief perception of the deceased. Apparently, the conviction of the existence and sustainability of this bond no longer needs to rely on a short perception to last.

Acceptance of the irrevocability of the loved one's physical absence is the essential – and most difficult to achieve - part of the grieving process. ADCs facilitate the acceptance of this loss. In this, these contacts are therapeutic by nature because they meet the needs of the bereaved.

> For 61.2% ADC made it easier to accept loss, 13.0% unsure, and for 25.8% ADC didn't make it easier to accept loss

We asked participants if they consider the ADC important for their bereavement process.

> 68.4% important, 11.4% unsure, and 20.2% not important

"It makes you know it is only a temporary separation in our spiritual journey."

"It allowed me to heal 20 years later."

"It helped me deal with anger and grief."

"Definitely. I'm bereaved in the physical sense, but life still goes on with him on another (soul) level... it's strange and quite difficult to explain. Bereavement has morphed into non-bereavement!"

"It was a turning point in my grieving process."

"I believe I would still be in my frozen moment of deep grief without having had this experience."

"Because of the circumstances of his death (overdose) people were not talking about it publicly and this made it even harder to come to terms with what had happened. I was trying to mourn privately but his death felt like a hole that could never be filled. After his visits all that was erased."

ADCs soften the sadness, but they do not spare experiencers to go through the grieving process – this long and painful journey which finally leads to the acceptance of the definitive departure of the loved one. Once the irrevocability of the loved one's physical absence is understood and accepted, the time has come to create a new inner bond with him or her, a new relationship that will last and that nothing can ever break.

Let us give the floor to our respondents:

"I have closure - no longer in the limbo state of having a missing brother. I've been able to grieve his physical loss, but I've gained an on-going, real relationship with him... it's like we're just in different rooms, but his influence on others, and myself, in this physical world is proof to me that he's alive still, just in another form."

"The emotional pain dissolved. I have a new relation with my dad. Different, but closer now. He understands me and his love for me is complete."

"The ADC has brought me comfort in that it has made me feel that another realm exists and that we will meet again and share our memories of this life. Our relationship is not lost, but continues in some way and will resume when we are reunited."

We asked whether the bereavement process would have been the same or different if the participants had not experienced an ADC.

A majority of respondents indicated that it would have been different.

> 21.5% the same, 21.2% unsure, and 57.4% different

The participants shared their feelings with us:

"There would always be doubt without personal experience."

"I think I would wonder if he is ok on the other side."

"I would not have been sure about life after death."

"I'd be in doubt and deeper depression. I miss his physical presence terribly, yet I know he is okay, that he is the same person and that we will be together again when it's my time."

"I feel that feeling him and being able to make contact brought me tremendous comfort. I truly believe he was trying to make sure I was ok. The level of compassion was amazing, so I definitely think it made a huge difference."

"The process would have been different, and perhaps extended and more severe, without the hope that comes from ADC."

"I would have thought death was the end and there was no hope."

"When a loved one dies you have the feeling of loss, but in addition, you feel abandoned by the person. When the loved one contacts you, the sense of abandonment diminishes because you feel that they still care about you, even though they left the physical world."

Finally, we asked how participants felt about having had the ADC. Results show that it is an experience that brings people joy and comfort since more than 90% "treasure" it or are "very glad" that they had it.

I treasure it:	71.1%
Very glad:	20.4%
I don't mind:	3.4%
Very unhappy:	0.4%
I wish it had never happened:	1.1%
Unsure:	3.5%

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