

**The Nature, Incidence, Impact and
Integration of
Spontaneous Parapsychological
Experiences:
An Exploratory
Mixed Methods Research Study**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Education**

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Abstract

Anecdotal reports of paranormal experiences abound. In addition to the numerous books, films and media articles, there is a growing body of personal narratives which is readily accessed through online websites, blogs and chatrooms. By comparison, there is a paucity of documented research on spontaneous parapsychological phenomena in the academic literature. The current exploratory study sought to redress this imbalance by addressing the research problem: what types of paranormal phenomena do people spontaneously encounter, and are there unifying themes in the reports of these experiences?

This research followed the Mixed Methods Research model. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via an online survey instrument, which was written in English. Over three thousand (N=3194) self-selecting respondents completed the questionnaire and in total, 59 countries were represented. The majority of the paranormal experiences were from the United States of America (N=1979), Australia (N=485), United Kingdom (N=252), and Canada (N=228). More women (62%) than men participated in the survey, and while the dominant age group was the 18-35 year olds (45%), this was closely followed by the 36-55 year olds (43%). The survey gathered information on ten categories of paranormal experience, namely *deja vu*, apparitions, near-death episodes, out-of-body experiences, psychokinesis, premonitions, auras, mediumship, reincarnation, and telepathy. The survey gathered statistical data on the type, frequency, and age at onset of each type of experience. Respondents were also invited to reflect on the possible causes and the personal impact of their own parapsychological experiences.

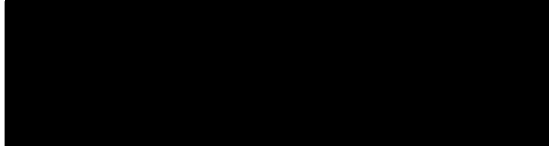
Several significant themes were identified in the data. These included: variations in the levels of incidence of the different types of phenomena; gender differences; national variations; and the trend for paranormal experiences to have a marked impact on the experiences, their values, and the way they lived their lives. The research outcomes also supported the notions that spontaneous parapsychological experiences are universal, and not limited to adulthood. The majority of first encounters, of eight of the ten types of paranormal phenomenon, occurred in childhood (<18 years), including a small number of pre birth experiences. In addition, the narratives offered numerous references to the perceived significance that race, genetics, and the female bloodline play in the paranormal experience.

The current findings both support the existing literature and suggest new research directions. At the personal level, for those charged with the mental, spiritual, and educational welfare of the individual, particularly the young, this exploratory study highlights the need to take spontaneous parapsychological experiences, and their experiences, seriously. At the broader level, the findings confirm the ubiquitous nature of the paranormal and suggest both unifying and independent themes in the nature, incidence, impact and integration of parapsychological phenomena. Additional research is indicated and a catalogue of eleven recommendations for future study is proffered.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:



Dated:

29 / 9 / 08

Ethics Approval

The research for this thesis received the approval of the Monash University Standing Committee for Ethical Research on Humans (Reference Number 2006/695). A copy of this document is contained in Appendix B.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

The motivation for this study of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena springs from the personal desire of the researcher to reconcile her own experiences, and those of her family, with what is currently documented in the academic literature on spontaneous paranormal experiences. As Broughton (1992) muses:

people often think that it is the more flamboyant phenomena of parapsychology - the ghost stories and poltergeists, people who work miracles, and the like - that keep researchers hammering away at a subject matter that at times seems very reluctant to give up any secrets. Not so. The driving force behind our efforts can be found in the unusual experiences of thousands upon thousands of quite ordinary men and women (p.9).

There are two markedly different aspects to the paranormal, the scholarly and the popular. The first is the world of laboratory-based parapsychological experiments, rigorous lines of academic enquiry, measured statements by experts in academic journals, and the occasional introductory class on the pseudo-sciences. It is the world in which university centres, foundations, professional organisations, and government agencies dominate. While this is the contiguous setting for the current study, it is in the lowbrow world of the psi that most students of the paranormal begin their quest for information and explanation. It is here that Broughton's "flamboyant phenomena" are to be found. It is the world dominated by media reports and frequented by inflammatory extremes of opinion. On the one side there are the paranormal devotees and on the other there are the sceptics. Members of both groups use the media to advance their cause, confirm their stance, exchange information, and even to find solace, camaraderie and a meaning for life, based on a paranormal theme. However, somewhere in the middle of these extremes lies the less vocal majority which is unsure, not interested, or reserving judgement on the paranormal. It is this group that the current study sought to reach.

1.2 The Public Face of the Paranormal

From an historical perspective, the earliest reports of paranormal phenomena are found in the ancient spiritual texts such as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the

Zohar, the *Talmud*, the *Upanishads*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *Bible*, the *Koran*, and *Kabbalah* (Mishlove, 1997), and in the writings of philosophers such as Homer, Socrates, and Aristotle. In the Christian faith, accounts of the extraordinary lives of Moses, Jacob, Isaiah, Elisha, Elijah, Noah, and many others are punctuated with paranormal themes, often described as miracles. According to Radin (1997), while these ancient texts are viewed by many as containing “dramatic illustrations of divine power” they may also be regarded as “encyclopaedic repositories of stories about psi effects - telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, mental healing, and mind-matter interactions” (p.295). Rao (1997) supports this line of thinking when he declares that “prophesies, prayer, and spiritual healing practices have their counterparts in parapsychological phenomena - precognition, telepathy, and bio-PK” (p.80). In the Common Era, prominent reports of paranormal experiences, often beginning in childhood, are linked to the lives of mystics such as Buddha, Ramakrishna, Jesus, Yogananda, and Muktananda. The enduring nature of these accounts is not only testimony to the abiding acceptance of such manifestations, it is also suggestive of psi being a fundamental part of human nature (Broughton, 1992; Cardena, Lynn, Krippner, 2000; Inglis, 1977; White, 1982).

The list of prominent people, on record as experiencing paranormal or mystical experiences, includes the scientists and philosophers Descartes, Pascal, Swedenborg, Bucke, Jung, Teilhard de Chardin, and Maslow, the writers Blake, Tennyson, and Keller and notables such as Ghandi and Buckminster Fuller. The body of spontaneous parapsychological research which covers the experiences of ordinary people stretches from the first formal study, *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886) to the more recent classics, *Hidden Channels of the Mind* (Rhine, 1965) and *Limits of Influence* (Braud, 1991). Overall, this collection of data is small, but it is growing and, as Greeley (1987b) asserts, those who have experienced the paranormal “whether they accept it intellectually or not, are anything but religious nuts or psychiatric cases”. Furthermore, his own research leads him to contend that paranormal experiencers are “somewhat above the norm in education and intelligence and somewhat less than average in religious involvement” (p.226).

To complete the outline of the context for the current study informal reports of spontaneous parapsychological experiences, which are a matter of public record, need to be considered also. While such accounts do not hold the cache of the ancient texts, what they lack in age they make up for in volume. There are numerous, personal accounts

of paranormal experiences including visits to psychic mediums, images of encounters with ghosts and haunted houses, tales of unexplained flying objects, snapshots of mysterious glowing orbs in family photos, and voices from the grave that use white noise to communicate with the living. The quantity of these documented experiences and the diversity of publicly reported phenomena has grown exponentially, with the proliferation of global communication networks. This explosion of interest in the paranormal is also reflected in the vast array of new book titles, movies, television shows, radio programmes, and magazines. Furthermore, a search of the internet confirms that the paranormal is talked about openly in cyberspace. The paranormal is central to many dedicated websites. It is the major topic of conversation in some online chatrooms and it is blogged on social network sites, such as YouTube and MySpace. In Australia, the list of recent free-to-air television programmes with a paranormal theme includes *Medium*, *Charmed*, *Ghost Detectives*, *Afterlife*, *Supernatural*, *Haunted*, *Crossing Over*, *Powers*, *X-files*, *Threshold*, and *Ghostwhisperer*. Other contemporary, subscription-based television programmes include *The Dead Zone*, *Ghost Hunters*, *Most Haunted*, and *Ghost Encounters* and at the cinema, films in the paranormal genre include *The Frighteners*, *The Mothman Prophecies*, *The Shining*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Haunting*, *The Sixth Sense*, *What Lies Beneath*, *The Others*, *Below*, *The Ring 2*, *The Amityville Horror*, *Field of Dreams*, *Chances Are*, *Ghost*, and *The Skeleton Key*.

An internet search on the website Amazon.com (2006), using the keyword 'paranormal', reveals a list of over 9,000 separate titles for sale. Enter the word 'paranormal' on Google.com (2006a) and in excess of 24 million links to other webpages become available for perusal; key in the less familiar, but more technically correct word 'parapsychology' and Google.com (2006b) presents over two million links to explore. Even with the inevitability of duplication, these numbers are impressive and the list grows further when the search is broadened by using colloquial words such as 'psychic' and 'ghost'.

The current study is based on data gathered via an online survey. A review of the literature on the usage of the World Wide Web (WWW) for such purposes indicates that, while this is a new research method, on balance, it is regarded favourably. While the anonymity of the cyberworld fosters honesty and openness, at the outset the researcher wondered if paranormal experiences would contribute to an academic study, for no reward and do so, without inhibition and personal censorship. Would paranormal

experiencers be willing to put aside their bravado to give their own experiences an academic voice? When the current survey was initially released onto the internet the answer to this question could only be hinted at for, as far as the researcher could ascertain, this was to be the first time a large-scale, academic study on spontaneous paranormal experiences, had been conducted on the WWW. Ultimately, the high response rate was very heartening and, with the exception of the occasional expletive, the abiding impression was one of sincerity and an apparent absence of egotistical outpourings.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

In the past, reports of paranormal experiences were limited to books and the media. However, this body of reports is now supplemented by a huge number of anecdotal reports to be found in the chatrooms, blogs and webpages of the internet. In this readily accessed public forum, paranormal reports abound. By comparison, relatively few academic studies on the nature and impact of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena exist. What types of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena do paranormal experiencers encounter, and are there unifying themes in the reports of these experiences? This is the current research problem.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

A review of the academic literature uncovered disparate bodies of information on different aspects of the paranormal. The widespread belief in the parapsychological phenomena is well documented. However, surveys of spontaneous paranormal experiences are uncommon and studies on the impact of paranormal encounters are scarce. The current study examines the nature, frequency, cause, timing, and effect of parapsychological experiences. What are children and adults encountering in everyday life? How frequently do these paranormal events occur? At what age do they begin and how are these experiences dealt with? How do experiencers rationalise their experiences and what do they consider triggered them? Do paranormal phenomena have a positive or detrimental effect on the experiencers? The purpose of the current research is to explore these gaps in the literature.

Quantitative, qualitative and demographic datasets were gathered on spontaneous parapsychological experiences and the experiencers, using an internet-based questionnaire. This study followed an embedded mixed methods design; the information was gathered

concurrently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007); and this allowed the strengths of both types of datasets to be relied upon to scope contemporary paranormal experiences and build a profile of the experiencers.

1.5 Rationale for the Research and the Thesis Statement

The findings of a small number of surveys with a parapsychological theme are documented in the literature and two of these are of particular relevance to the current study. A single question which first appeared in the work of McCready and Greeley (1976) and has since been replicated in other questionnaires was included in the current study. Furthermore, the original survey instrument documented in Palmer (1979) was used as the basis for the current project. In the early seventies, Palmer conducted a postal survey on paranormal experiences among the permanent residents and members of the student population in the American town of Charlottesville, Virginia. Thirty years have passed since this study was conducted, and the findings remain widely, and frequently cited. However, in the intervening years this research has been replicated, in part or in its entirety, only a few times. In addition, while Palmer notes that studies which involve preselected samples are “atypical of a broadly representative population” he may have erred by drawing part of the survey sample from a student population, a group that is atypical of the mainstream populace (Smart, 1966).

1.6 Research Questions

The research questions evolved directly from the previously stated research problem and are as follows:

- What is the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena?
- How do paranormal experiences impact on the experiencers?
- What personal meaning do experiencers ascribe to their paranormal experiences?

1.7 Significance of the Research

Lack of understanding and empathy for those who experience the paranormal can leave these experiencers feeling isolated and unsupported (Noble, 2000; Piechowski, 2001a, 2003; Ring, 1984). The current study is a window into the world of spontaneous parapsychological experiences. It gives an academic voice to paranormal experiencers, and provides insights into the type and frequency of these experiences, and their impact.

1.8 Definitions and Terminology

In the current context, the word spontaneous is defined as unplanned and, although strictly not synonymous, the words psi, parapsychology, and paranormal are used interchangeably to describe the exceptional human experiences under review. The following definitions are taken from *Glossary of Terms Used in Parapsychology* (Thalbourne, 2003). The word:

- parapsychology comes from the Greek *para*, (beside, beyond); plus psychology, from the Greek *psyche* (soul, mind) and *logos* (rational discussion);
- psi is an umbrella term, first developed by Wiesner and Thouless in 1942, which encompasses paranormal processes and paranormal causation; and
- paranormal refers to any phenomenon that exceeds the limits of what is deemed physically possible on current scientific assumptions and it is often used as a synonym for *psychic*, *parapsychological*, or *psi*.

The word spiritual is also utilized in this study to quote paranormal experiences and to cite pertinent authors. In the latter instances, the word spiritual is used to reflect the author's primary area of interest, as evidenced by the context and the language used in the overall work quoted.

1.9 The Academic Side of Paranormal Research

1.9.1 Historical

There are numerous measures of spiritual and transpersonal constructs available. In MacDonald, LeClair, Holland, Alter, and Friedman (1995) seventy psychometric instruments are reviewed and, in Hill and Hood (1999) over one hundred standardised measures of religiousness, grouped according to seventeen classifications including religious beliefs and practices, and spirituality and mysticism, are outlined. Arguably, within academia, the most comprehensively researched aspect of parapsychology is the belief in it (Clarke, 1991; Dudley, 2002; Goritz & Schumacher, 2000; Haraldsson, 1981, 1985; Irwin, 1985, 1991; Lester & Monaghan, 1995; Randall & Desrosier, 1980; Rice, 2003; Tobacyk, Miller & Jones, 1984). Belief in the paranormal is also frequently polled in public opinion surveys and consistently, the results indicate that people believe in at least one aspect of psi (Karr, 2001; Lyons, 2005; McCrone, 2004; Moore, 2005; Newport & Strausberg, 2001). The existing database of information on paranormal beliefs is also multinational. In the 1980s, a comprehensive review of a number of discrete, national surveys conducted in Sweden, United States of America,

Iceland, and Great Britain, and the findings of a major survey administered across sixteen countries in Western Europe and parts of Asia, reveals that there is “widespread belief” in parapsychological phenomena (Haraldsson, 1985). In addition, the author notes that over half of the respondents from Britain and the United States report personal spontaneous experiences and he concludes that the “rejection of psychic phenomena by elite scientists has not managed to sway public opinion far in this matter” (p.150).

The study by Tobacyk and Miller (1983) establishes the structure of paranormal beliefs as multidimensional. This diverse range of correlates includes: the link between paranormal beliefs and age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, political beliefs, and marital status (Banzinger, 1983; Emmons & Sobal, 1981; Lester & Monaghan, 1995; Sheils & Berg, 1977); other personal beliefs including religious beliefs and locus of control (Allen & Lester, 1994); cognitive variables such as education level, intellectual reasoning, and creativity (Grimmer & White, 1990, 1992; Smith, Foster, & Stovin, 1998; Thalbourne & Delin, 1994; Tobacyk, Miller, & Jones, 1984), and personality traits, childhood trauma, and fantasy proneness (Irwin, 1991, 1994; Lawrence, Edwards, Barraclough, Church, & Hetherington, 1995; Lester & Monaghan, 1995; Sparks & Miller, 2001; Sparks, Nelson, & Campbell, 1997). While the findings remain inconclusive, the research continues with more recent studies exploring links between paranormal beliefs and new areas of research including the thinking styles of teachers and teachers-in-training, superstitions, false memories, and the avowal of prior scepticism (Genovese, 2005; Lamont, 2007; Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007; Wilson & French, 2006).

Parapsychological research is carried out at a number of academic institutions and community-based organisations. The latter includes Boundary Institute, The College of Psychic Studies, Institute of Noetic Sciences, Cognitive Sciences Laboratory, Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research, Parapsychological Association, International Remote Viewing Association, Foundation of the Society for Psychical Research, Parapsychology Foundation, and Rhine Research Center. Within the academic environment, the research units include Koestler Parapsychology Unit, University of Edinburgh; Veritas, University of Arizona; Anomalous Cognition Program, University of Amsterdam; Global Consciousness Project, Princeton; Mind-Matter Unification Project, University of Cambridge; Parapsychology Research Group, Liverpool Hope University; Consciousness and Transpersonal Research Unit, Liverpool John Moores

University; Division of Perceptual Studies, University of Virginia; Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit, Goldsmiths College; and smaller units within University of London, University of Hertfordshire, and University of Utrecht.

Today, the scholarly literature on the paranormal is widely, but thinly spread throughout academia. Parapsychological phenomena are studied in academic schools as diverse as anthropology, parapsychology, physiology, anaesthetics, physics, sociology, education, philosophy, biology, neurology, psychology, religion, theology and even systems theory. This division is oftentimes arbitrary and can lead to conflicting viewpoints. In a review of his time at university, the cofounder of parapsychology reflects on this dichotomy and notes that:

in my course on religion we talked about man's soul as if it were the most real thing in the world, and over here in psychology we talked about brain reactions as if that is all we know about human beings ... In one classroom I am a living soul; in the other, a brain machine. Now these two do not parallel; they are divergent (Rhine, as cited in Rao, 1997, p.69).

This contradiction is also referred to by Rao (1997). He notes that

the divinity school and the medical school, for example, situated as they are side by side in the same campus, teach different and often contradictory things about who we are, where we come from, and what happens when we die. The chaplain and the physician in the hospital setting have functions that are based on conflicting assumptions concerning human nature (p.68).

While there is a rich diversity of approaches to the study of the paranormal the existing body of research derives predominantly from two opposing worlds, one inhabited by mind-oriented disciplines such as clinical and transpersonal psychology, and the other, the world of matter-oriented disciplines, including cognitive science (Radin, 1997). These divergent approaches have produced libraries of research which are variously disjointed, disconnected in language, or impede interdisciplinary exchanges. It is within this academic framework that the current study is set.

1.9.2 Personal Beginnings of Paranormal Experiences

Childhood experiences of a spiritual or paranormal nature can give rise to later quests to find meaning in life. They may also play a part in building personal resilience

(Noble, 2000; Piechowski, 2003). However, be they child- or adult-based, little is known about these spontaneous parapsychological experiences. As the writer reflects in Sheldrake (2003):

some fields of research, for example medicine, rely heavily on anecdotes but when the stories are published they literally cease to be anecdotes; they are promoted to the rank of case histories. Such case histories form the essential foundation of experience on which further research can be built. To brush aside what people have actually experiences is not to be scientific, but unscientific. Science is founded on the empirical method, that is to say on experience and observation. Experiences and observations are the starting point of science, and it is unscientific to disregard or exclude them (p.5).

Various reasons are put forward as to why there are few references in the literature to the impact of parapsychological phenomena. According to Radin (2005), this apparent reluctance to explore this aspect of spontaneous paranormal experiences may be due to the perception that while it is “marginally acceptable” to pursue psychological and sociological lines of enquiry about belief in psychic phenomena, and anthropological studies of psychic practices and rituals in indigenous societies, the study of the paranormal is regarded as off limits. Indeed, in Sheldrake (2003) it is referred to as the “Cinderella of the sciences”.

One of the most significant studies of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena is the previously mentioned survey by Palmer (1979). In this work the researcher concludes that, while less than 10% of the survey respondents stated that their paranormal experience saved them from an accident, death or crisis, most participants indicated that their attitudes, feelings, and lifestyle choices had been influenced by their encounters. Similarly in Noble (2000), the writer observes that paranormal experiences provide experients with insights into the multidimensional nature of self. This supports the findings in Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer (1994), in which 59% of the survey sample report their parapsychological encounters to be positive experiences. Further, in Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995), most participants indicate that they experiences an improvement in their sense of well-being as a result of events which they describe as parapsychological or spiritual. Paradoxically, in the same study 45% of the respondents also describe their paranormal experiences as frightening. This mix of sensation, in particular anxiety and happiness, is commented on elsewhere in the literature (Targ,

Schlitz, & Irwin, 2000), and as Piechowski (2000) observes, while many transcendental experiences are “joyous, reassuring and blissful” some are also alarming and unnerving. Furthermore, he warns that experiencers of psi can be left feeling isolated because they are either not able to share their experiences, or are told that “one should not talk about such things”. In similar research, Noble (2000) emphasises that, left unacknowledged, paranormal encounters can bring about spiritual loneliness and induce severe psychological stress. Conversely, in Ring (1984) the writer cautions that while recounting parapsychological experiences may help the informant, it can also place a huge mental and emotional strain on the listener. Regardless of whether the impact of the paranormal is positive or negative, it is important to consider the far-reaching implications of parapsychological experiences that “may contribute to significant changes in the experiencer’s sense of identity and choice of life path” (Targ, et al., 2000).

While there is a paucity of research on paranormal experiences, what is on record is, nonetheless significant and compelling (Greeley, 1987a; Hay & Morisy, 1978). There are testimonies from adults about their own childhood experiences (Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 1998; Hoffman, 1992; Robinson, 1977; Young, 1977). Furthermore, there is a limited number of reports by some children about their own involuntary, paranormal experiences. One such repository, which contains several hundred letters from minors, is a part of the L.E. Rhine Collection. This anthology of narratives provides insights into paranormal experiences which are unverified, but “written in good faith and by apparently sane individuals” (Rhine, 1961, as cited in Drewes, 2002). In a recent re-examination of these accounts, Drewes (2002) reveals that 17% of the letters from children refer to parapsychological events that took place before the age of five. This finding corroborates the earlier work of Robinson (1977), in which 15% of the adult respondents gave accounts of spiritual events from their childhood, and more recent investigations into childhood parapsychological experiences (Armstrong, 1984; Feldman & Goldsmith, 1991; Harrison, 2000; Lovecky, 1998; Noble, 2000, 2001; Piechowski, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003).

There are also a limited number of studies on specific types of paranormal phenomena. These include the near-death episode of a seven year old child and seven out-of-body experiences described by members of a non-selective group of children, aged between three and sixteen years, who survived critical illnesses (Morse, 1983; Morse, Castillo, Venecia, Milstein, & Tyler, 1986). Overall, the body of verified evidence on paranormal

experiences in childhood is limited and, according to Piechowski (2003), may be as small as 1,000 cases. Nonetheless, this is sufficient to suggest that children do encounter parapsychological and spiritual experiences and that these seem to “occur in (an) inexhaustible variety” (Piechowski, 2000).

1.10 Survey Instrument

The current study reports the findings of an internet-based survey of paranormal experiences which was conducted over a period of three months. While the use of the internet to gather academic data is still in the embryonic stage, the literature suggests that using this method has numerous benefits and few disadvantages. At the time of publishing, a report on the ethical and scientific issues related to internet-based research has not been undertaken by the Australian Psychological Society. However, the outcome of a study by the specifically convened subgroup of the Board of Scientific Affairs (BSA), which is the principal advisory group to the American Psychological Association Science Directorate, is available for consultation. Among its many findings, this report states that “internet research is inherently no more risky than traditional observational, survey or experimental methods” (Kraut, Olson, Banaji, Bruckman, Cohen, & Couper, 2004, p.105). Furthermore, the report declares that using the internet means researchers can “observe new or rare phenomena online and can do research on traditional psychological topics more efficiently, enabling them to expand the scale and scope of their research” (p.105). This report, and in particular, its enthusiasm for the “great opportunities” that the internet delivers, provided the necessary fillip for the researcher to conduct an international survey, using the World Wide Web.

For the current study, the original pen and paper method used by Palmer and the costly omnibus survey method employed by McCready and Greeley were set aside in favour of contemporary methods and technology. A survey design, ideally suited to internet application was developed and the resultant questionnaire was in three sections.

The first section:

- defined the current area of research and helped participants familiarise themselves with the paranormal phenomena under investigation;
- used a layout which was aimed at minimising the dropout rate;
- collected quantitative data which both supported, and was supported by, the qualitative and demographic information gathered in the latter sections; and
- aimed to establish rapport with the unseen, unknown, online audience. To do

this the questions were carefully worded, and ordered to empathetically awaken memories of personal paranormal experiences, which could then be proffered in the second section of the survey.

This second part of the survey was quantitative. It was designed to:

- elicit open-ended, self-reports of significant paranormal experiences; and
- gather additional information on these incidences, using a small number of closed questions.

The final section of the current survey was used to collect demographic data.

In the original American survey, the writer specifically makes reference to God, religion, and paranormal beliefs (Palmer, 1979). That survey also collected data on the political leanings, income, employment, marital status, and levels of academic achievement of the participants. However, in the current study, to reduce the risk of alienating the internet-based respondents these items were omitted from the online survey.

1.11 Structure of the Thesis

The next two chapters comprise the literature review. In Chapter 2, current research on the use of the internet to collect academic data is examined. This is followed by an interdisciplinary examination of the research on spontaneous parapsychological phenomena. In Chapter 4 the research design and method are presented and in subsequent chapters, the results of the current study are detailed. Chapter 5 presents the data as they relate to the first research question on the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena. Chapter 6 addresses the second research question on the impact of the paranormal on the experients. Chapters 7 and 8 proffer the findings on the personal meaning of parapsychological experiences. In the final chapter the overall conclusions of this study are presented and the implications of these findings for future research are discussed.

1.12 Summary

In Chapter 1 the current body of research was outlined and the foundations laid for this study. The research problem and research questions were identified, the gaps in the literature highlighted, and the chosen research method justified. Principal terms were also introduced and defined, and the structure of the thesis specified.

Chapter 2

Using the World Wide Web to Collect Research Data

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on using the World Wide Web (WWW) to collect research data. While this mode of data collection is gaining acceptance within parts of academia, misconceptions and some unresolved issues concerning the method remain. In the first part of the chapter an overview of the development of the internet is presented. This provides the background for the decision to use the WWW to gather data in the current study. In the subsequent sections the literature on the strengths and weaknesses associated with this mode of data collection are outlined.

2.2 Historical Perspective

The origins of the internet can be traced back to the 1960s, when the United States Department of Defence constructed a network of university and military computers to assist with the defence effort. In the first instance only four computers were linked but from this initiative the email function was launched. During the seventies, computers located in other countries joined this network but because of the cumbersome nature of the programming process the initial connections were awkward and unreliable. However, slowly, new computer networks were developed and, in the early eighties, the internet as we know it came into existence (World Book, 2004). By 1984 two million computers and the world that had once been only the domain of academics, scientists and large corporations became accessible to millions of people.

The next significant leap in the development of the web occurred between 1989 and 1992. British computer scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, while working at CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research), developed a new, easier and more accessible computer language called hypertext mark-up language (HTML). Shortly afterwards, in 1993, the first browser (Mosaic) was released and with it came the ability to present pictures, words, and sounds on webpages. Of particular relevance to the current study, in 1994 HTML 2.0 was launched, thereby giving the readers of web documents the ability to communicate with the internet servers through input or fill-out forms (Reips, 2001).

By 1996 several WWW studies had been posted online (Weigend, 1994; Welch & Krantz, 1996) but the take up rate for this new research method was very slow. Today, the rate at which online studies are posted on the internet is both high and growing exponentially (Birnbaum, 2004).

The internet is the fastest growing element of electronic technology in history. It took only seven years for the internet to reach 30% of America's households (Lebo, 2000), and according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, a United Nations specialised agency for telecommunications), by 2004 one in every two residents of the G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States of America) used the internet regularly. While it remains impossible to accurately quantify internet penetration, the ITU estimates that a similar number of people (between 429 million and 444 million) living in non G8 countries were also accessing the internet in 2004. Such numbers are impressive but as the literature reminds us, the digital divide remains. It is evident in Africa where approximately 3% of the population have access to the internet; in Central and South America, internet penetration into the 42 constituent countries is estimated to be only half that of the United States; in the Asia-Pacific region, estimates of internet usage vary from 1% of the population in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Laos to over 65% in Australia and Republic of Korea (ITU, 2004). According to a later report (ITU, 2006), by early 2008 an estimated 5.2 billion people were not using the internet. Thus, while the internet is internationally accessible, it is still unavailable to many people and, as a consequence, web based samples cannot be regarded as representative of the World's population.

According to Sears (1986), prior to the internet revolution there were two distinct periods of social research. The first phase covered the 1940s and 1950s and social research involved a wide cross-section of adults, who were predominately interviewed in personal settings that were familiar to them. The second wave of social research began in the early sixties and was overwhelmingly "based on college students tested in academic laboratories on academic like tasks" (Sears, 1986, p.515). Indeed, in Smart (1966) a review of the previous studies published in two psychology journals shows that over three quarters of those investigations used college students, the majority of whom were males enrolled in introductory psychology classes. Since the internet revolution of the 1990s, student-based social research has been supplemented by the broader-based web studies. This latter method offers better opportunities to recruit large, and diverse or

specialised population samples and, as is noted in Kraut, et al. (2004), the internet has “democratised” data collection, with academic researchers no longer needing to coerce undergraduate students into contributing data (p.106).

The earlier proliferation and domination of student-based research lead Krantz and Dalal (2000) to declare that “the overwhelming majority of traditional psychology studies make no effort whatsoever to ensure that the samples used are randomly selected” (p.48). While this practice of sampling students remains widespread it has not gone unchallenged. Nearly forty years ago Converse (1970) observes that “the absence of research on the general population in natural situations can leave the experimental social psychologist ignorant of the actual mainstream”. Indeed, according to Sears (1986), change is not forthcoming because “the consensus of the field certainly appears to be that such a heavy reliance on college student subjects does not have major negative consequences” (p.519). Furthermore, he asserts that researchers who use student samples either mistakenly overlook the rest of the population or assume that the phenomena under investigation “are so ubiquitous and universal that it does not matter much what subjects are used” (p.519). In pursuing this line of enquiry, Sears considers what is the typical developmental profile of a student group, and suggest that a study based on such a sample reflects those who “have incompletely formulated senses of self, rather uncrystallized socio-political attitudes, unusually strong cognitive skills, strong needs for peer approval, tendencies to be compliant to authority, quite unstable group relationships, little material self-interest in public affairs, and unusual egocentricity” (p.527).

While the first major shift to use the internet for data collection began in the mid-nineties, prior to this concerns were voiced about the appropriateness of utilising the WWW for such purposes (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986). The arguments for and against using the internet for research are well documented and, as with all modes of data collection, there are identifiable strengths and weaknesses, and some of the latter cannot be overcome easily (Reips, 2002).

There are minimal risks and great opportunities inherent in using the internet for research purposes and as noted in Kraut et al. (2004), “internet research is inherently no more risky than traditional observational, survey, or experimental methods” (p.105). Indeed, Spyridakis, Wei, Barrick, Cuddihy, and Maust (2005) are so enamoured with

the internet as a tool that they propose:

the involvement of the uncontrolled natural world with all its complexities (e.g. differing computer platforms, connection speeds, and browsers, and varying types of participants with different levels of motivation, interest, topic familiarity, and computer expertise) is a boon (p.254).

Early research on the utilisation of the internet indicates that initially the principal users were white males of high socio-economic status. However, since the rapid expansion of the WWW and the speedy adoption of the technology, the findings of utilisation studies point to a demographic shift (Kehoe, Pitkow, Sutton, Aggarwal, & Rogers, 1999). This result is supported by the work of Reips (2001), which cites the demographic datasets collated on participants, who completed online surveys accessed via (<http://www.psychologie.unizh.ch/sowi/Ulf/Lab/WebExpPsyLab.html>), the website of the Web Experimental Psychology Lab. The data supports a shift in the internet usage gender balance in favour of females.

Finally, to critics of any type of self-report Pekala and Cardena (2000) contend that the limitations of introspective reports, including lying, are equally relevant to those studies which involve observable data. Furthermore, they assert that “when people are asked to describe the content (the what) of their subjective experience, their reports are much more accurate than when they are asked to describe the cause (the whys) of those experiences (p.50).

2.3 Advantages of Web-Based Data Collection

According to Reips (2002), the benefits of using the internet to collect data include:

- ability to easily perform consistency checks;
- absence of time constraints;
- high voluntary participation;
- reduction in the experimenter effect because fewer people are required for the administration of the study; and
- subject to the limitations of language, online surveys offer access to participants who are typically more demographically and culturally diverse than those reached using traditional methods.

Furthermore, provided the pre testing is rigorous, the instructions clear and concise, and ambiguities eliminated, the benefits of an online survey outweigh the most frequently cited disadvantage, that of not having a supervisor to hand (Birnbaum, 2004). The other advantages include: an online survey raises the profile of the sponsoring organisation; is relatively simple to implement; and, the return datasets can be collected efficiently, 24 hours per day, seven days a week, stored in electronic form, and automatically processed, filtered and encoded ready for analysis. If the online data are lost or corrupted the information can be downloaded again.

Furthermore, from the respondent's perspective, the online survey is convenient. The study is delivered to the individual, not the converse and participants prepare and send data at times, and from the places, that suit them (Davis, 1999). As Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, and John (2004) note, online surveys foster rapid "access to samples beyond the reach of methods typically used in psychological research" (p.93), and those groups include previously hidden or hard to access populations. The web-based research interface also facilitates higher levels of self-focused rumination and self-disclosure (Davis, 1999; Joinson, 2001) and, as Pasveer and Ellard (1998) note, there is "potential for greater honesty and openness because of guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality" (p.309). The significance of the role that anonymity plays in gathering dependable data is discussed in Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002), where the researchers note that "to be relatively anonymous ... enables one to express oneself and behave in ways not available in one's usual social sphere, both because one is free of expectations and constraints placed on us by those who know us and because the costs and risks of social sanctions for what we say or do are greatly reduced" (p.35). This anonymity is attractive to members of marginalised groups who are more likely to participate in online surveys, safe in the knowledge that their contributions will not attract negative personal or social consequences. Indeed, as Rhodes, Bowie, and Hergenrather (2003) reflect, the World Wide Web "may be the only research tool able to reach some previously hidden population subgroups" (p.68). This theme is expanded in Gosling et al. (2004) where the writers conclude that "physically handicapped, shy, and disorganised individuals with internet access have as great a chance of being included as able-bodied, extraverted and conscientious ones who might be over represented in community volunteer samples recruited by newspaper ads or the undergraduate student samples typical of much current psychological research" (p.99).

In addition, self-selecting respondents in web-based surveys are more likely to provide answers that are comprehensive and lucid (Pettit, 1999). Such responses may also be less socially desirable or acceptable than those given by volunteers from undergraduate classes (Booth-Kewley, Edwards, & Rosenfeld, 1992). Further, a meta-analysis of computer-administered questionnaires, traditional surveys, and interviews studies spanning the thirty years to 1997, shows less distortion on computerised measures of social desirability (Richman, Kiesler, Weisband, Drasgow, 1999). The voluntary nature of internet studies may also inspire more authentic responses at every stage of the response process and, in Reips (2000) it is argued that, even a decision to dropout of a study should be regarded as positive reflection of human nature at work. Participation in internet surveys is not only voluntary, it is seen to be voluntary and as such, those who contribute data are generally better informed and more interested in the subject being researched. Against this, there is the possibility that the motivations of the volunteers may inequitably influence the survey findings (Groves, Singer, & Corning, 2000; Wu & Weaver, 1997). However, this same criticism can be levied at those surveys that rely on undergraduate students who may be, consciously or unconsciously, pressured into participating (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Oakes, 1972; Sears, 1986).

From the researcher's perspective, using the WWW to collect surveys ensures more complete sets of data. Computer programmes alert participants, in a timely manner, to missing or invalid data. Furthermore, internet surveys are more cost effective than other methods, with much lower marginal costs per participant. Expenses such as postage, paper and printing are eliminated entirely and equipment, stationery and staff costs are significantly lower compared to those associated with manually administered questionnaires (Kraut et al., 2004). Further, using an internet survey reduces the number of person hours needed for error-prone tasks such as survey administration, data entry, handwriting decoding, and interviewer interpretation. All these cost-saving measures are significant and may be of particular relevance to student research projects (Rhodes et al., 2003).

Several misconceptions have persisted about internet-based questionnaires but recent findings may help lay these falsehoods to rest. Studies show that internet users are no more socially isolated, depressed or maladjusted than nonusers. There is consistency between the results of online research and data obtained through traditional methods. Furthermore, in the absence of direct human interaction, it is still possible to motivate

participants to complete the research surveys using design markers, such as feedback (Gosling et al., 2004; Krantz & Dalal, 2000).

2.4 Challenges and Counterbalances

Protecting the welfare of participants is a perennial concern for researchers, and using the internet to conduct studies brings new challenges. Kraut et al. (2004) list two potential sources of risk for online respondents: “harm resulting from direct participation in the research (e.g. emotional reactions to questions or experimental manipulations) and harm resulting from breach of confidentiality” (p.111). With web-based research, control of the contexts in which the data are gathered and an overseeing of the mindset of the participants is impossible. The researcher is not available to clarify questions for participants and there is no opportunity to monitor the respondents for undesirable side effects. However, the upside of this is, the bias caused by the experimenter effect is either reduced or eliminated completely (Spyridakis et al., 2005). The risk of causing emotional harm to participants is usually addressed by posting debriefing material on the website, along with links to appropriate counselling organisations. In Kraut et al. (2004), the researchers also note participants can withdraw from online surveys immediately and at any time, and “this freedom to withdraw is no trivial benefit, given the strong pressures to continue in face-to-face studies” (p.111). The second major risk to online survey participants is the potential breach of confidentiality but, generally this is avoided by not requesting personal information that may identify participants.

Other consistently cited disadvantages of using web-based research are the inappropriateness of responses, multiple submissions, participant dropout, and sampling and response bias. These drawbacks are not insurmountable and “problems in conducting research online can be mastered” (Kraut et al., 2004, p.105). The concerns that people may respond frivolously, maliciously or untruthfully are not unique to online surveys and are equally relevant to other data collection modes, including pen and paper questionnaires.

Further, while the issue of multiple submissions attracts ongoing debate in the literature, one source of statistics, gathered by the Web Experimental Psychology Lab, shows that 80% of visitors to that site made only one visit within the 22 month period under review (Reips, 2001). Not only does this finding refute the assertion about multiple

submissions, it also goes some way to debunking the misconception that online surveys attract “techies or nerds” (Gosling et al., 2004). In addition, findings by Krantz and Dalal (2000), and Reips (1997, in German, as cited in Reips, 2002) indicate that repeated participation is not a threat to the validity of online studies and, as Pasveer and Ellard (1998) suggest, multiple submissions are generally unintentional. There are numerous ways of guarding against deliberate multiple submissions (Birnbau, 2004) and such remedies are now common practice. They include: instructing people to participate only once; removing any incentives or rewards; filtering data to remove repeat submissions; putting checks in place to identify repeat Internet Protocol (IP) addresses; placing cookies on subjects’ computers; filtering identical survey; and sending messages of receipt to the participants.

According to Musch and Reips (2000), the average dropout rate for internet research is 34%, and the quoted range is from 1% to 87%. There are numerous suggestions in the literature about how to prevent attrition including only requiring participants to click on the Explanatory Statement page to show consent, and not asking for personal information in the first part of the survey. However, as O’Neil, Penrod, and Bornstein (2003) point out there is a trade-off and “reducing dropout increases sample size and, thus, statistical power, whereas provoking early dropout increases the remaining sample’s motivation for participating sincerely” (p.217).

This matter of whether to deliberately influence the dropout rate of an online survey is addressed at the programming stage by using or avoiding techniques such as high-hurdle, seriousness check, and warm-up, that are known to reduce dropout levels (Reips, 2001). The warm-up technique incorporates practice trials and pilot studies into the final investigation. The high-hurdle method requires that participants be alerted about the seriousness of the research at the outset and given an estimate of the time commitment involved. Further, participants’ patience and dedication can be deliberately tested by using texts in the early part of the survey that are much longer than those found in latter sections, and by requesting personal information upfront. The seriousness check requires participants to indicate at the outset how determined they are to be involved in the research. All these methods are designed to precipitate early attrition, leaving potentially keener participants to complete the survey.

While both response and sampling bias are inherent in all modes of research, the degree

of their impact on online surveys is inconclusive. Some studies indicate that survey responses are influenced by the online input device offered, the size of text boxes and the number of characters permitted, the presence of yes/no check boxes, and whether the survey instrument is set up correctly (Birnbau 2004). Markers are built into survey programmes to prompt participants to respond to all questions and all these elements are addressed at the programming stage. In addition, online surveys are more conducive to soliciting open ended responses, than traditional survey instruments.

Some issues, including those related to online sampling are difficult to resolve. As there is no central register of internet users, there is no mechanism for applying the principles of random sampling to the total online population. On the one hand, some studies argue that participants in web-based studies are the only true volunteers, and others contend that self-selection research introduces another element of bias (O'Neil & Penrod, 2001). This duality is reflected on in Eysenbach (2004) where it is noted that "every biased sample is an unbiased sample of another target population" (article 34) and in Kraut et al. (2004), where the researchers suggest that, for those who value "internal validity over generalizability, the large and diverse samples online are preferable" but for "others who attempt to track the pulse of the nation or to generalise to broader groups beyond the subjects, the nature of internet samples makes generalizability problematic" (p.107). At the heart of the matter is how to adequately define the group represented.

The results of internet-based questionnaires are comparable to those achieved using paper and pencil equivalents (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Davis, 1999; Pasveer & Ellard, 1998). This conclusion is supported by the comprehensive review in Gosling et al. (2004) which concludes that internet samples are "relatively diverse with respect to gender, socio-economic status, geographic region, and age" and "not adversely affected by non serious or repeat responders, and are consistent with findings from traditional methods" (p.93). Further, Birnbau (2004) concludes that "many Web researchers are convinced that data obtained via the Web can be 'better' than those obtained from students" (p.825), a judgement supported by a poll of internet survey designers which indicates that 70% of the respondents declared outright that they intended to use internet surveys again (Musch & Reips, 2000).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter an overview of research on the use of the internet for gathering

data was presented. An examination was made of the small but growing body of literature that supports and promotes the internet survey as an efficient and effective way of gaining access to a large, demographically and culturally diverse group of people, including those individuals previously regarded as difficult to reach. The benefits and limitations of using the internet for this purpose were examined, from the viewpoint of the researcher and the participant. In the following chapter the literature on the main topic of this study, the paranormal is reviewed.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 the body of literature on using the WWW to collect data was reviewed. In this chapter the relevant literature pertaining to parapsychological experiences is examined under three broad headings:

- ‘nature’ which deals with the issues of definition and terminology, and research difficulties that arise as a result of the multidisciplinary nature of paranormal experiences;
- ‘incidence’ which examines the current evidence on spontaneous paranormal and spiritual experiences; and
- ‘impact and integration’ which reviews what is currently known about the effects of paranormal experiences on the experiencers.

In the final part of Chapter 3 the findings of past surveys on parapsychological experiences, including those that form the basis of the current study, are introduced.

The issue of whether the paranormal is proven or not is outside the scope of the current study but as Feldman and Goldsmith (1991) assert, “one should not necessarily dismiss a phenomenon as untrue simply because it cannot easily be explained” (p.191). Indeed, three decades ago, the frequency with which these experiences were being reported provoked Greeley (1975) to suggest that “any phenomena with incidence as widespread as the paranormal deserves much more careful and intensive research than it has received up to now” (p.7). The current study and this researcher are inspired by the small number of specialists in the field of parapsychology, including Radin who asserts, “scientific evidence for some forms of psi is indeed persuasive. By the same standards used to establish proof in other areas of science, we can say with confidence that psi does exist” (Radin, 2007b, ¶4).

3.2 The Nature of Parapsychological Phenomena

The most extensively researched aspect of psi is paranormal beliefs and repeatedly, academic surveys conclude that people believe in parapsychological phenomena. The list of studies that explore the correlations between the paranormal and

personal qualities is extensive and includes: personality traits, proneness to mental illness, political convictions, child abuse, religious beliefs, income level, education levels, and the demographics of age and gender. While no enduring link or causation between these correlates and parapsychological beliefs is known, given the volume of research involved it seems reasonable to conclude firstly, that people do believe in the paranormal and secondly, that researching paranormal beliefs is academically acceptable (Allen, 1994; Banzinger, 1983; Emmons, 1981; Grimmer 1990, 1992; Karr, 2001; Linderman, 2007; Lyons, 2005; Newport, 2001; Rice, 2003).

Central to the research on the nature of parapsychological phenomena is the issue of consciousness, and while this is not the main theme of the current study, the findings of this investigation will ideally make a contribution to this underdeveloped field of study. As Radin (1997) notes, “after a hundred years, psychology has not produced even the crudest model of how processes in the brain are transformed into conscious experience” (p.211). To advance the discussion on the relationship between psi and consciousness Radin (1997) hypothesises that consciousness is a manifestation of psi which extends beyond the physical body. Further, he contends that psi is capable of injecting order into physical systems and is created by persons acting alone or in groups. There is a small group of scientists which foresees a time when the scientific community will be forced to take paranormal phenomena seriously and then, “our ideas about minds and brains, about animal nature and human nature, and about space and time” will be revolutionised (Sheldrake, 2003, p.2). In Greaves (2004), the author documents her own telepathic communications with a deceased friend and, according to Piechowski, such accounts are evidence that the boundaries of consciousness extend beyond the current lifetime, thereby suggesting that “extraordinary abilities and talents are developed, in part, between lives” (Piechowski, 2001a, p.10). On the reasons why not all individuals are conscious of the realms beyond the physical world, some researchers suggest that while the paranormal may be open to all, awareness of it may be triggered in only a few (Piechowski, 2001b; Radin, 1997).

Interest in the paranormal is extensive (Sheldrake, 2003) and while it is the parapsychological studies which show the most sustained lines of enquiry, to encompass the rich diversity of insights that come from the many disparate paths of enquiry, the current study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the literature. While this “cross-disciplinary complexity” (MacDonald, 2000) broadens the context of the

current research it also exposes the problem of definition in an area of discourse that is “difficult to specify” (Hay & Morisy, 1978). Interestingly, some researchers question whether definitions and labels are required. They can be limiting, as the following example illustrates. Originally, the author Tart attempted to title his anthology of paranormal works *Spiritual Psychologies*. However, his publishers informed him that the title was regarded as too controversial for one of the highly influential American psychology book clubs, which refused to promote the publication under that moniker. Market forces prevailed and the work was published under the title *Transpersonal Psychologies*. As Tart (2002) muses “the word transpersonal was so new then that most psychologists had no idea what it meant, but it sounded positive and academic. I stopped waving the red flag of the word spiritual, in front of the bull of established prejudices” (p.37). In the current context, this anecdote is enlightening and pertinent, and supports the tenet that the lines of division between religious, spiritual, anthropological, philosophical, and parapsychological definitions and research are blurred, even arbitrary.

A multidisciplinary review of the literature on the paranormal and psi phenomena produces a plethora of synonyms including spirituality, self-actualization, mysticism, peak experiences, psychic phenomenon, Christianity, relational consciousness, revelations, transpersonal experiences, moral development, existentialism, religious experiences, grace, ecstatic states, spiritual consciousness, mystical experiences, spiritual concerns, overexcitabilities, religious trances, parapsychological experiences, enlightenment, transcendental experiences, cosmic consciousness, spiritual sensitivity, miracles, spiritual self-awareness, metaphysical, and faith. Thus, there are as many words for the paranormal as there are aspects to it and, according to Lovecky (1998):

the sparseness of literature on spiritual development may be due, in part, to difficulties of definition. For one thing, the same examples that exemplify the highest states of moral development are also used to define the highest stages of spiritual development. Discussions of spirituality also may range from discussions about religion to discussions about self-actualization (p.4).

To resolve this dilemma, the current study embraces the multidisciplinary nature of the paranormal and includes experiences which either violate scientific laws or are scientifically inexplicable (Karolyi, 2003) and are the result of “interactions between consciousness and the physical world” (Radin, 1007). Specifically, these phenomena

include:

- telepathy which is defined as mind-to-mind communication;
- precognition or premonitions in which information about the future is obtained without the use of the five senses;
- clairvoyance or remote viewing by which information is obtained without using the five senses (ESP is a general term which encompasses telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance);
- psychokinesis (PK) which refers to the impact of the mind on animate and inanimate objects;
- near-death episodes (NDE) which are reported by those who have been brought back from the brink of death;
- out-of-body experiences (OBE) in which the mind's awareness is external to the physical body;
- reincarnation which applies to the recall of events and people from previous lifetimes;
- hauntings including apparitions, sounds, and the movement of objects which may be associated with particular locations; and
- poltergeists, which are a type of PK that may depend on the presence of certain individuals to unwittingly produce the disturbing effects. More recently, poltergeists have become specifically linked to adolescents and children (Greyson & Stevenson, 1980; IANDS, 2006b; Radin, 2007a; Thalbourne, 2003).

The ancient and modern history of humanity is awash with accounts of psi. From antiquity to the seventeenth century, formal and informal interest in the Western world tended to focus on ordinary people and their extraordinary experiences, which included poltergeists, apparitions, and spiritual healing. However, a few intellectual studies of these spontaneous experiences were undertaken (Inglis, 1977). During the eighteenth century the focus of psi inquiries shifted to mesmerism, the prolific work of the psychic Emanuel Swedenborg, and events associated with the rise to prominence of modern-day Spiritualism (Irwin, 1988).

In nineteenth century Australia, psychical groups were convened under the banner of the newly formed Parapsychological Society. These meetings commenced in the 1870s in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane (Irwin, 1988). Concurrently, in the Northern

Hemisphere a group of individuals dominated the informal paranormal forums, including the French psychic Helene Smith, the American trace medium Leonora Piper, and Daniel Dunglas Home, the Scottish spiritualist who levitated in full view of others and was never found to be cheating (Radin, 2006).

Furthermore, in Britain, the first formal attempts to employ scientific methods in the investigation of parapsychological phenomena were made. These lines of enquiry were instigated by a group of English scholars which, in 1882, formed the extant Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Immediately after, the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was established (Beloff, 1994). From the outset, both the SPR and the ASPR were highly credible (Irwin, 2004). They drew their presidents and vice-presidents from the ranks of Nobel Prize winners (the French psychologist Charles Richet who received the award for his work on anaphylaxis; Lord Rayleigh who discovered argon gas; and the French philosopher, Henri Bergson), politicians (British Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour; and his brother Gerald Balfour) and eminent philosophers and scientists (Sir William Crookes, vice president of the Royal Society in Britain; Sir Oliver Lodge, who worked on the development of the wireless telegraph; the Harvard-based psychologist William James; James Hyslop, professor of logic and ethics at Columbia University; the astronomer Nicolas Camille Flammarion; and the ethicist and philosopher Henry Sidgwick). Over a century ago the latter luminary, who was the first president of the SPR, wrote, that it is

a scandal that the dispute as to the reality of thought transference should still be going on, that so many competent witnesses should have declared their belief in them, that so many others should be profoundly interested in having the question determined, and yet the educated world, as a body, should still be simply in the attitude of credulity (Sidgwick, 1883, cited in Radin, 2005, p.11).

During the nineteenth century, the early investigators began to formally study the paranormal by recording, analysing and occasionally witnessing spontaneous experiences, and by testing the psychic abilities of some experients, using probabilistic experiments, such as dice-tossing and playing card guessing. A scientific leap forward occurred in the 1920s when the study of psi was widened to include statistical tools and laboratory-based experiments. Since that time, scientific and mathematical methods have dominated the field of enquiry, and the emphasis has been on proving the existence of psi, rather than understanding the personal implications and impact of parapsychological encounters.

A review of the literature on paranormal phenomena reveals that the majority of disciplines with a vested interest in the manifestations of psi have developed their own vocabulary and academic approach to the subject, with few interdisciplinary exchanges. As a result, the relevant body of literature is highly fragmented; the lines of enquiry are disjointed, even under-explored; and paranormal investigation are often discharged in an isolated, ad hoc manner. As MacDonald observes in his study of spirituality:

when a close examination of the existing literature is undertaken . . . it becomes readily apparent that one is not dealing with a coherent and identifiable body of theory and research. Instead, one encounters largely unrelated clusters of work spanning several disciplines including anthropology, comparative religious studies, sociology, medicine, nursing, philosophy, as well as from a number of subareas of psychology, psychology of religion, clinical psychology, and transpersonal psychology (MacDonald, 2000, p.155).

As is observed in McCready and Greeley (1976), “*religion* is not limited to dogma, doctrine, devotion, or ritual, but rather it is a set of cultural convictions concerning the individual’s, or the society’s, perception of transcendent reality” (p.6). Dossey contributes to the discussion on semantics by insightfully and convincingly arguing that the lines of jurisdiction between scholarly disciplines are capricious. Specifically he questions, “what, for example, is the connection between prophesy and precognition? Are miracles just another name for psychokinesis? Is hearing the voices of God or the angels the same as clairvoyance?” (Dossey, 1998, p.153). In Sheldrake (2003) this line of enquiry is widened considerably when the author declares that “telepathy, the sense of being stared at and precognition occur both in non-human animals, such as dogs and cats, and in people. They are not ‘paranormal’ or ‘supernatural’. They are normal and natural and part of our biological nature” (p.2).

3.3 The Incidence of Parapsychological Phenomena

In the 1880s, the SPR supported the publication of one of the earliest and largest compendiums of spontaneous paranormal experiences. This book, *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886) marks the beginning of early attempts to systematically document and classify hundreds of self-reports of encounters with spontaneous paranormal phenomena. Subsequently, other important studies which documented the observational data gathered on the work of the celebrated American and British mediums Leonora Piper, Mrs Willett, Eileen Garrett, and Gladys Leonard were

documented (Ehrenwal, 1978; Radin 2006). By the turn of the twentieth century, William James concluded one of his lectures on mysticism with the assertion that “no account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded” (James, 1902, p.379). Yet, as noted in Radin (1997), a century has passed since this statement was made and still a definition of consciousness is proving illusive. As Herbert (1985) notes:

science's biggest mystery is the nature of consciousness. It is not that we possess bad or imperfect theories of human awareness; we simply have no such theories at all. About all we know about consciousness is that it has something to do with the head, rather than the foot (p.249).

Furthermore, fundamental differences remain between Western and Eastern thinking. In the West, the consensus is that the life journey starts from the body up, with childhood being “a time of emerging from an undifferentiated sea of unconsciousness” (Armstrong, 1984, p.208). An alternative belief system, which maintains that a “child comes into life with a rich storehouse of innate knowledge which may be the result of having experiences, previous lifetimes or existences” (Armstrong, 1984, p.221), remains largely underexplored. However, there are exceptions. Piechowski (2001a) speculates that “perhaps some channels we ignore are open early in life, only to close later” (p.13). Furthermore, he contends that “a significant spiritual experience in childhood is often the foundation for the unfolding of a person’s spiritual development” (p.13) and he also notes that “childhood spiritual experiences often initiate spiritual search later in life and endow a person with strength to endure life’s reverses and tragic losses” (p.2).

Several specific incidences and different aspects of children’s spiritual experiences are examined in the literature and consistently, such qualities as healing, harmony, oneness, timelessness, a sense of enduring power, and entelechy are noted. However, as Thomas and Cooper (1980) observe, most of these studies do not offer insights into the personality, disposition, or the mental state of experiencers before and after their paranormal experiences. In the current study the same proviso applies, as all the anecdotal evidence was gathered post experience and no information or insights are offered on the personalities and dispositions of the experiencers. The issue of childhood paranormal experiences is explored in Piechowski (2001a), where the writer draws attention to the earlier works of Hoffman (1992) and Robinson (1977) which he maintains demonstrate that “children are capable of having genuine spiritual experiences

of divine presence, oneness and interrelatedness, energy pulsating in living and nonliving objects, self as not physical, (and) a sense of continuity between life and death” (p.2).

Even the size of the body of anecdotal evidence supporting childhood reports of paranormal experiences is in dispute. Drewes (2002) observes that most researchers shun the study of childhood spiritual experiences, while Piechowski (2001a) declares that childhood spirituality is “a terra incognita in transpersonal psychology”. He cites about 1,000 cases of anecdotal evidence but, through adopting a multidisciplinary approach to the paranormal, this database can be expanded considerably.

The most extensive repository of paranormal self-reports is the Rhine collection, established by Louisa Rhine, a cofounder in the field of parapsychology. This cache holds in excess of 30,000 letters and 14,000 accounts of psi (Feather & Schmicker, 2005), including several hundred reports written by children (McClenon, 1991). According to Rhine, the reports of spontaneous paranormal experiences were written “in good faith and by apparently sane individuals” (Drewes, 2002). This blithe observation, and the fact the reports in the Collection have not been investigated or verified, suggests a certain lack of academic rigour. However, Rhine refutes this criticism and maintains that, as the dominant purpose in collecting the personal accounts was to record experiences, not prove or disprove the existence of psi, then subsequent investigation is not required.

Another source of children’s accounts of paranormal experiences documents instances of children between the ages of six and nine years encountering non physical sightings, such as lights, nature spirits in the woods, and auras, and in one case, a child did not pay attention to these manifestations because “he just figured everyone else saw them too” (Peterson, 1976). The writer continues, “what is important is that this boy truly believes he perceived entities that are not of a physical nature” and “if these perceptions are common to certain sensitive children, I feel it is about time for psychologists and educators to recognise their reality” (p.315). As is noted by Piechowski, “the content of childhood experiences has the same character as the accounts of adults transcendental experiences which reveal that behind our ordinary reality is a larger unseen reality” (Piechowski, 2001a, p.13).

Other sources of information, referred to in Armstrong (1984) are accounts by adults of

their own childhood experiences. The English theologian Robinson (1977) unwittingly brought together a large collection of personal accounts of paranormal experiences, with many of the adults reporting experiences that began in childhood. The experiencers were asked if they felt they had ever been affected by a power beyond themselves and 15% of the 4,000 respondents in Robinson's study answered in the affirmative, with some proceeding to relate experiences that occurred before the age of three. Similarly, a later study by Hoffman (1992), which investigates the incidence of "mystical or intensely spiritual" experiences reveals that 23% of the adult respondents answered in the affirmative, with some experiencers citing instances from as early as the age of four. With such reports suggesting that children can, and do, recall experiences that happen early in life, the question returns once again to when does consciousness begin. Both Robinson's research and the Rhine Collection contain accounts of paranormal events that occurred very early in life, and these reports are backed by the clinical findings of psychiatrists and psychologists, including Chamberlain (1982, 1983), Verny (1981), Wambach (1979), and Shettles and Rorvik (1983).

Armstrong (1984) notes that there is sufficient evidence to support the notion of a "sophisticated consciousness before, during, and shortly after birth" (p.222). Furthermore, there is evidence for a telepathic link between mother and child, as witnessed in the 'let-down' reflex in breast feeding (Ehrenwal, 1971; Mackenzie, 1969). Indeed, in Sheldrake (2003) the author concludes that the "physiological and emotional links between mother and baby, built up in the womb and continuing through nursing, often seem to establish psychic bonds that persist as the child grows up" (p.60).

There are numerous other cases of paranormal incidences involving children and many, particularly those in the Eastern tradition, involve reincarnation. In Feldman (1991), the case of a male prodigy who offered accounts of his previous lives, prenatal and neonatal encounters, and psychic experiences is cited at length. Other examples of childhood psi experiences are reported in single studies, such as Harrison (2000) in which the writer refers to the "psychic awareness" of the child, and in the prolific work on reincarnation by Stevenson (Keil & Stevenson, 1999; Stevenson, 1977; 1983, 2000; Stevenson & Keil, 2000). These studies are both persuasive and suggestive of children retaining memories from previous physical existences.

In her work on the spirituality of gifted children Lovecky (1998) notes that little has

been written about the “spiritual concerns” of children in general, and even less about the manifestations of spirituality in gifted children. Similarly, in his work with gifted children Gardner explores “crystallizing experiences” in which children describe a deep connection with something that engages their curiosity and stimulates them to further exploration. In Lovecky (1998), the writer describes transcendent or mystical moments as “spiritual sensitivity”, and in Piechowski (2001a) the writer muses “that children are capable of having genuine spiritual experiences and that these are neither extremely rare nor exceptional (p.10).

Similarly, in her work with gifted children, Noble (2000) suggests that spirituality is an innate part of human nature, and like any other talent or gift, the degree to which it manifests itself in the individual is unique. Further, in his work with childhood spirituality Piechowski (2001a) asserts that “children’s spiritual experience cannot be reduced to the status of lower-level spirituality just because they were had by children” (p.12). He also maintains that “the recollections of childhood spiritual experiences show that a larger reality opens up to some children spontaneously, and that they can find their own way to enter a state of transpersonal consciousness” (p.12).

The relatively new subject of spiritual intelligence is addressed in Emmons (1999) and Noble (2000), with the latter suggesting a set of attributes that define spiritual intelligence, namely: the capacity to transcend the physical and material; the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness; the ability to sanctify everyday experiences; the ability to utilise spiritual resources to solve problems; the capacity to be virtuous; the conscious recognition that physical reality is embedded within a larger, multidimensional reality with which we interact, consciously and unconsciously, on a moment to moment basis; and the conscious pursuit of psychological health, not only for ourselves but also for the sake of the global community.

In an earlier study of adults’ recall of their own transpersonal experiences in childhood the researchers suggest that “childhood and late adulthood are the times of life most open to nonconflicted, spontaneous expressions of spirituality” (Hunt, Gervais, Shearing-Johns, & Travis, 1992, p.1149).

The issue of memory recall and how it pertains to salient childhood events must also be considered. In one creative study, which does not refer directly to the paranormal, the

accuracy of memories of children and youths, aged 4 to 20 years is examined. All participants were about four years of age when their siblings were born and from this study the writers conclude that “four-year-olds can remember an impressive amount” (Sheingold & Tenney, 1982).

3.4 Impact and Integration of Parapsychological Phenomena

In Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) the authors note that “virtually no research has been done in parapsychology on the effects (of psychic experiences) on peoples’ lives and worldviews”. Similarly, two decades previous, Carl Rogers (1973) is on record as posing the question “why is this whole idea of another reality so threatening to psychologists? I believe it is for the reasons given before, that we are one of the most insecure of the sciences. We do not *dare* to investigate the mysterious” (p.386). Even among those who study parapsychological phenomena, there are unresolved questions about what constitutes a paranormal experience and what, if any are the benefits of psi to humanity.

One formal definition of the paranormal embraces any phenomenon “deemed physically impossible on current scientific assumptions” (Thalbourne, 2003). This is both precise and general for, as Radin (1997) notes, “many effects that science cannot explain are generally not regarded as paranormal” (p.18). The talents of autistic savants, prodigies and those with photographic memories fall into this category and very few of these experiences tend to be studied through the paranormal lens (Feldman, 1991).

The body of research on the importance of psi is diverse. In Kennedy (2006), the writer suggests that “if psi fulfilled human needs as assumed for experimental research, psi would be expected to have evolved to a much more useful degree” (p.15). Others disagree and counter-argue that, on balance, paranormal experience are becoming more widespread, obvious, and relevant as humanity evolves through the higher levels of consciousness (Ring, 1984; Thalbourne & Storm, 2005). By way of establishing a middle ground, in Hay and Morisy (1978), the writers suggest that regardless of which line of thinking is correct it is prudent to assume that “anything which is universal to human culture has some survival value to the species” (p.265).

Those researchers who are more concerned with the personal impact of the paranormal argue that regardless of its origins, or purpose, it is a human experience which warrants

investigation. Braud (2005) suggests that “researchers, too, might concern themselves, to a greater degree, with the possible impacts of psi-related experiences upon the sense of identity, the values, the worldview, and the possible transformative changes of those who have had these psychic and other exceptional experiences” (p.57). In two separate studies by Kennedy, the writer first contends that “the great majority of spontaneous psi experiences do not change the outcome of events or have tangible, practical benefits” (2000, p.130). Later, he notes that paranormal experiences “tend to inspire an altered worldview and enhanced sense of connectedness, meaning in life, and spirituality” (2006, p.11), and they appear “to be optimised for directing attention to spiritual matters and away from material self-interest” (p.19). The founders of the ‘positive psychology’ movement contend that “psychology has become increasingly focused on mental illness and, as a result, has developed a distorted view of what normal - and exceptional - human experience is like” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.10). Furthermore, they have charged their new science with the task of understanding what makes life worth living. As Palmer (1979) notes, in his summary of the survey results:

a substantial number of our respondents were affected in some way by their experiences. Whether or not such experiences are valid in the scientific sense, it is evident that they have impact on people’s lives. If nothing else justifies greater efforts toward a scientific understanding of psychic phenomena, this fact certainly does (p.250).

This view is supported by the review of phenomenological studies that concludes that “psi appears to be extremely meaningful to the experiencer, and can have a significant impact on their life” (Heath, 2005, p.373). Furthermore, in Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) it is noted that “people who are actively interested in parapsychology and have had experiences they interpret as paranormal or transcendent report that these experiences have enhanced their spiritual beliefs and well-being” (p.258).

In Richards (1991) 32% of respondents state that their psychic experiences are a major source of inspiration in their lives, and nearly 50% report “they have generally been a positive experience, opening my perception to a wider view of life” (p.88). Similarly, in Milton (1992) the writer observes that while experiencers respond differently to paranormal phenomena “the most striking effect upon their mental lives comes across as a feeling of real excitement as their previous world-views are ripped apart and they are compelled to explore new ideas in order to understand what happened” (p.320). This is

supported by other studies of personal well-being including the survey in Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer (1994), which uncovers “significant, positive correlations between overall meaning in life and psychic and/or transcendent experiences” and leads the writers to conclude that the “meaning in life is increasingly recognized as an important factor for well-being and health” (p.16).

In Noble (2000) the role of spiritual experiences in building personal resilience is examined and the findings in Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995) indicate that 25% of respondents agree with the statement “one or more paranormal or transcendent experiences motivated me to make a major life change that I was not previously thinking about making” (p.256). Among the principal changes nominated are: a desire to achieve a higher consciousness; interest in spiritual or religious matters; sense of connection to others; belief in a higher power; sense of purpose or meaning for my life; feelings of happiness and well-being; motivation to maintain my health; and optimism about the future. Overall, while the current body of research on the impact of spontaneous parapsychological experiences is small, it is compelling and supports the notion that the paranormal has a positive impact on the experients, with themes of amazement, curiosity, elation, joy, bliss, comfort, and strength reported.

However, as Piechowski (2001a) notes, while all documented accounts of paranormal encounters are not favourable and “a certain number of such experiences are unsettling, sometimes even frightening ... they are usually later resolved”. There are reports about the burden that psi places on families (Ring, 1984) and some experients specifically trace their bouts of anxiety, profound loneliness, sense of isolation or conversely, the need to withdraw from society, back to their first paranormal experiences (Noble, 2000; Piechowski, 2001b, 2003).

Overall, the current body of evidence suggests that paranormal encounters leave a fundamental and enduring legacy. As the parapsychologist White reflects, in recalling her own near-death episode:

as a result of a near-death experience I experienced a major shift in values that served as the impetus for my becoming interested in parapsychology, and it is the recollection of that experience that still impels me in the direction I am taking. That's a pretty long-range effect! (White, 1990, p.11)

3.5 Surveys of Spontaneous Paranormal Experiences

National surveys of spontaneous paranormal experiences are rare and their international equivalents are even rarer. There have been only a handful of surveys involving specific groups and in some instances, only one general question is asked (Haraldsson, Gudmundsdottir, Ragnarsson, Loftsson, Johnsson, 1976).

3.5.1 National Surveys

A cautionary note on national surveys is made in Haraldsson (1985) where the writer observes “survey data may tell us something about the prevalence of psychic experiences, but primarily they reveal only how readily people interpret some of their experiences as paranormal in nature” (p.152). Having alerted the reader to this shortcoming, Haraldsson then proceeds to review the findings of national paranormal surveys that were carried out in Iceland and Sweden (Haraldsson et al., 1976; Haraldsson, 1985), United States of America (McCready & Greeley, 1976; Greeley, 1987a), and Britain (Hay & Morisy, 1978). He concludes that they “reveal not only that the majority of these populations believe in some psychic phenomena, but also that at least six people of every ten interpret some of their personal experiences as paranormal in nature” (p.154).

A high percentage of the randomly selected participants in the National Opinions Research Council (NORC) study (McCready & Greeley, 1976) indicate they have experienced paranormal phenomena - *deja vu* (59%), ESP (58%), and clairvoyance (24%), and 27% contend they had been in touch with the dead. The validity of these findings is supported by a subsequent NORC survey (Greeley, 1987a) in which the writer concludes that “more people than ever say they’ve had such experiences” (p.47). Specifically, reported incidences of *deja vu* increased to 67%, contact with the dead grew to 42%, those claiming ESP increased to 67%, and the number of experiencers reporting incidences of clairvoyance rose to 31%. In reflecting on the findings of both surveys, the Catholic priest and sociologist Greeley (1987a) concludes that “our studies show that people who’ve tasted the paranormal, whether they accept it intellectually or not, are anything but religious nuts or psychiatric cases” (p.48).

Questions in the NORC surveys were subsequently used in a pan-European study by the European Value Systems Study Group, and the results show lower incidences of paranormal encounters. Haraldsson (1985) suggests exercising caution in drawing

conclusions from this study as the results may reflect inadequate multiple language translations rather than cultural differences.

3.5.2 Surveys Involving Smaller Targeted Groups

A number of smaller, more targeted surveys of parapsychological experiences have been conducted. In the peak experience work documented in Wuthnow (1978), participants are asked if they ever felt “in close contact with something holy or sacred” and half of this group of northern Californians replied affirmatively. Haight (1979) reports on the spontaneous psi experiences of high school students and in Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer (1994) although the small response rate makes generalisations unreliable, 59% of the university students report parapsychological experiences which they describe as personally valuable. In another study (Thomas & Cooper, 1978), the same structured question analysed in Greeley (1975) is used and the findings are replicated. A more recent study of university students involving cross cultural analysis indicates “that moderate levels of anomalous experience exist within all surveyed groups (caucasian-American, African-American, Chinese, and Japanese)” (McClenon, 1994a). Further, the researcher contends that “the capacity to perceive these episodes is culturally universal” (p.130). A similar finding is made in Usha and Pasricha (1989a, 1989b) in the study conducted among university students in Bangalore, India.

In the early seventies, the publication *New Scientist* conducted a mail survey of its readership. This survey attracted a “very large” response rate, leaving the researcher to conclude that “parapsychology is clearly counted as being exceedingly interesting and relevant by a very large number of today’s working scientists” (Evans, 1973, p.209). Forty two percent of respondents (physicists and engineers were strongly represented) declare ESP to be “a likely possibility” and 25% regard ESP as “an established fact”. Furthermore, 40% state that their opinion is based on scientific reports and 51% indicate that their convictions stem from personal experience of the paranormal. The report concludes that the overwhelming majority of participants (88%) believe the investigation of ESP to be “a legitimate scientific undertaking” and furthermore, parapsychologists should stop trying to prove the existence of psi and “get on with finding out how it works”.

3.5.3 Seminal Studies

The studies by Palmer (1979) and McCready and Greeley (1976) are widely

cited. Specifically, the ISI Web of Knowledge database shows that the comprehensive study of paranormal phenomena by Palmer has been quoted in journals as diverse as the British and American Journals of Psychology, Journal of Parapsychology, Gerontologist, Omega, and Journal of Medicine and Philosophy. However this survey, originally carried out in 1974, has been replicated, to the current researcher's knowledge, only three times and typically with modifications (Haraldsson et al., 1976; Kohr, 1980; Usha & Pasricha, 1989a, 1989b). The original study was conducted under the administration of the Parapsychology Division of the Psychiatry Department at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine and was conducted by John Palmer and a colleague, Michael Dennis. The stated objectives of the study are "to estimate the proportion of Americans who claim to have had various kinds of psychic experiences, and to explore correlation between these experiences and other variables, including related experiences and activities, attitudes, and demographic factors" (Palmer, 1979, p.222). The analysis of the 622 usable surveys returned leads Palmer to conclude:

the most elementary, and perhaps the most important, conclusion that can be drawn from the survey is that a substantial percentage of the respondents considered themselves to have had interactions with their environment that cannot be accounted for by known physical laws (p.248).

While no attempt is made to verify the claims made in the survey, the writer reflects on "the large number of respondents who claimed psi or psi-related experiences", and he notes the uneven distribution of experiences across the various categories of psychic experience. Specifically, Palmer observes that the respondents "consisted of two rather distinct subgroups: those who claimed no or very few psychic experiences, and those who claimed a large number" (Palmer, 1979, p.248). This finding is supported by Kohr (1980), who used the same survey instrument to question member of the Association for Research & Enlightenment (A.R.E.), the organisation founded by the psychic, Edgar Cayce. Despite the obvious bias in the population sample Kohr also found two distinct subgroups, one with "a tendency to report many occurrence of a particular type of experience" and the other "to have more than just one or two type of psi or psi-related experiences" (p.395). Similarly, this finding is supported in Usha and Pasricha (1989a; 1989b).

Finally, on the issue of self-reports Pekala and Cardena (2000) note that the limitations of introspective reports (including lying) are equally relevant to those reports which

involve observable data. Furthermore, the writers assert that “when people are asked to describe the content (the what) of their subjective experience, their reports are much more accurate than when they are asked to describe the cause (the whys) of those experiences (p.50).

3.6 Summary

The contents of this chapter identified the key literature pertaining to the nature, incidence, impact and integration of spontaneous parapsychological experiences. These studies were drawn from a diverse range of academic sources including anthropology, comparative religious studies, sociology, the health sciences, and philosophy. In addition, pertinent paranormal surveys and their primary findings were introduced. In the next chapter the research framework of the current study is outlined.

Chapter 4

Research Design and Method

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant body of literature on paranormal phenomena. In this chapter the reasons for the choice of research method are outlined. Information is also given about the evolution of both the research questions and the overall project design.

4.2 A Mixed Method Research Approach

Historically, singular modes of research, and quantitative methods in particular, have dominated social, behavioural, and health science studies. However, recently a new movement, which advocates combining qualitative and quantitative datasets, has been formally established. Advocates of this mixed methods research design argue that, while it may be complex this is an effective model for gathering multiple perspectives and insights on many phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991). This model was used in the current study to collect quantitative and qualitative datasets concurrently, via an online survey. Subsequently, elements of the qualitative dataset were used to support the analysis of the statistical data and to address the research problem, namely:

- What types of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena do paranormal experiencers encounter, and are there unifying themes in the reports of these experiences?

4.2.1 Definition

Contemporary advocates of the mixed methods research model recommend that the issue of its definition be dealt with upfront, to avoid misunderstanding (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2006). Thus, the following description, which was devised by luminaries of mixed methods research design movement, is proffered.

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of the data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and

mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Originally, the term mixed methods research referred to the general process of collecting qualitative and quantitative datasets which were neither merged, connected nor embedded (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). However, in the current context this redundant practice was avoided and the contemporary Embedded Design format of the mixed methods research model was followed.

4.2.2 Rationale for Using Mixed Methods Research

According to Borkan (2004) the mixed methods research model overcomes the limitations of relying on one type of data, generates new knowledge and offers numerous benefits. In the current context, relying on only quantitative data would have prevented the researcher from:

- ascertaining the depth, meaning, insight and personal impact of paranormal experiences;
- hearing the individual voices of the participants; and
- declaring her own position and personal experience of the subject under review.

Conversely, using only a qualitative approach would have:

- opened the research to criticism that the personal biases of the researcher were allowed to dominate the research process; and
- yielded only a two dimensional portrait of a subject which was personal and significant, and also contentious.

By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches:

- the researcher was compelled to consider all paradigms, including the most applicable one, pragmatism;
- the complementary strengths of each research method were brought to the overall process to overcome the discrete weaknesses of the individual methods;
- depth and scope were added to the research database;
- the findings were brought to life making them clearer, more persuasive, and interesting;

- more research tools were available to the researcher;
- a richer picture of the paranormal phenomena under investigation was developed which provided deeper insights into the research problem;
- the reliability of the datasets was strengthened; and
- the researcher was able to contribute to the collaborative relationship between what are often viewed as oppositional approaches to research.

The researcher's choice of the mixed methods research model meant that "numbers and narratives, descriptions, hypothesis testing, hypotheses generation, and understanding of meaning and context (could all be used) to provide fuller discernment and greater transportability of the phenomenon under study" (Stange, Crabtree, & Miller, 2006, p.292).

4.2.3 Type of Mixed Method Research

Specifically, the current study followed the Embedded Design format, in which the qualitative data played a secondary role to the quantitative element of the research. The qualitative component was embedded within the survey instrument, and from the outset, the primary role of the quantitative questions was clear. Specifically, the statistical component was used to: establish rapport with the unsighted online participants; define the area of research; gather data; and awaken memories of the personal impact of any paranormal experiences in readiness for the more self-revealing, qualitative section of the survey. Both types of data were collected concurrently, in a single phase, and analysed sequentially, beginning with the quantitative data (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Morgan, 2007).

4.2.4 Philosophical Assumptions

At the outset, several paradigms were considered for the current study but pragmatism, the worldview typically linked to the mixed method research model was found to be the most appropriate. Pragmatism was an ideal choice for addressing the current research questions because it:

- emphasises the research problem and the outcomes;
- allows for multiple realities or perspectives;
- supports a methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative methods;
- encourages deductive and inductive thinking;
- permits both formal and rhetorical language;

- supports an epistemology of ‘what works’;
- is concerned with uncovering answers that have practical relevance; and
- has an ontology which allows for single and multiple realities and accordingly, is relevant whether survey respondents describe a real or a socially constructed world (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

4.3 The Research Instrument

To address the research problem, namely to uncover the types of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena that paranormal experients encounter and to reveal the unifying themes in the self-reports of those who have experienced elements of psi, it was necessary to find and inform the members of a potentially disparate group of paranormal experients about the existence of the survey. From the outset, the researcher was aware of the importance of establishing rapport with each survey participant. Yet, this posed a challenge. How could this be accomplished when the population was unidentifiable, unsighted, and as diverse as the world itself? The solution, although not entirely complete, came in the form of an online survey. The research questions were deliberately worded to be neither provocative nor intimidating. The initial questions were intentionally general and broad and, as the participants progressed through the online survey the questions became more intimate and personally specific. This new survey instrument, which was designed by the researcher, proved to be an efficient and effective way of reaching individuals with an interest in the paranormal.

The typical strengths and weaknesses associated with using the internet to gather data for academic research purposes were covered in detail in Chapter 2. A number of these advantages were evident in the current study. Using the internet:

- provided research data on a large, demographically and culturally diverse groups of people that may otherwise have been difficult to collate;
- allowed the data to be collected quickly, efficiently and economically;
- permitted the sample size to be regulated in line with computer capacity and within available time constraints;
- substantially reduced the number of administrative tasks involved and the attendant errors usually connected with manual tasks;
- promoted a sense of openness of the research process and allowed for a more equitable access to the study;
- was cost effective and convenient for all parties involved;

- reduced the experimenter effect;
- ensured more complete datasets because participants were alerted to missing or invalid data in a timely fashion;
- increased the perception of anonymity, which is known to encourage more open, honest, accurate, and comprehensive responses, and dissuade less socially desirable content; and
- was relatively simple to establish and use. The return data were collected efficiently, 24 hours per day, seven days a week, and stored in electronic form, processed, filtered and encoded electronically, ready for manual and computer-aided analysis.

In the current study, the researcher also encountered a number of the previously documented difficulties, many of which are linked to most research modes, including online surveys. In particular, using an internet-based survey:

- made it impossible to monitor the well-being of the participants;
- precluded some individuals from accessing the survey because it was only available online;
- meant the study was open to abuse by participants who could respond frivolously, maliciously or untruthfully, but this same point is equally applicable to pen and paper surveys; and
- invited multiple submissions, which subsequently had to be electronically set aside.

4.4 Context of the Study

The context of the current study may be defined on several levels. In the broadest sense, it comprised the physical and metaphysical dimensions of life, including cyberspace. At the narrower, more personal level the context encompassed every unique setting in which the parapsychological experiences originally occurred.

4.5 Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

As previously mooted in Chapter 2, the use of an internet survey minimises the influence of the researcher on the participants. This was found to be the case in the current study. From the outset, there were no opportunities for the researcher to interact with the respondents prior to their completion of the survey. However, once they had completed the survey, some individuals contacted the research team, via the

email addresses in the Explanatory Statement.

While the researcher aimed for complete objectivity, not unexpectedly, this was found to be impossible to achieve (Finlay, 2002; Mays & Pope, 2000; Thomas, 2003). The investigator influenced the study through her choices: the choice of language used in the questionnaire; the choice of which paranormal phenomena were covered and the definitions used; the choice of survey instrument used to gather the information; and the choice about which data was included in the final analysis. All these choices reflect the researcher's own values and beliefs and ultimately, these decisions must have impacted the outcome of the study.

4.6 Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher made a number of fundamental assumptions in the execution of this research. Specifically, these were that the participants understood and used the paranormal definitions outlined in the survey when answering the questions and that truthful answers were supplied.

The limitations of the study were principally connected to those factors which prevented or precluded individuals from accessing the survey and having their voice heard. These elements included:

- only responses from people purporting to be 18 years or older were considered in the final analysis;
- the survey was available only to those who had access to the internet during the last quarter of 2006;
- the existence of the survey was kept from some individuals, including the residents of China who had restricted access to the internet;
- the survey document was in English and only those who understood the language would have been able to answer it;
- some individuals may have found the survey topic too personal or confronting and may not have felt able to contribute to it; and
- some persons may have disagreed with the content of the survey and the definitions given.

Finally, while the research indicates that the paranormal is universal, and there is a word to describe psi experiences in "every language, from Arabic to Zulu, Czech to Manx

Gaelic” (Radin, 2006), the researcher acknowledges that the limitations of the study mean that the findings cannot be taken as representative of the world, in general, or any one population sample in particular.

4.7 Development of the Research Design

The current survey was based principally on the widely cited study in Palmer (1979), which was carried out in the United States of America in the seventies. The original questionnaire was comprehensive. It covered 46 primary items and in total, 111 questions were posed. The population sample, which comprised students from the University of Virginia and residents of the same town, was described as being “representative and random a sample as possible” (Palmer, 1979).

The copy of the original questionnaire, which was obtained from the author, was significantly modified and modernised for the current study. The original survey was a reflection of its time and while the methodology has become outdated, the findings remain relevant. In the past three decades technology has revolutionised our way of communicating and in turn, this has transformed the manner in which information is gathered. In response to this evolution, a contemporary research instrument was developed. The essence of Palmer’s original survey was retained; the categories of paranormal phenomena were consolidated into broader categories; and the language was simplified. The final product of this editing process became the first and third sections of the current survey (the quantitative and demographic components). The first section of the survey was designed to establish credibility and rapport with participants, and reduce the ‘drop-out-rate’. The third section gathered demographic data.

In the middle section of the survey participants were asked to express how they had changed as a result of their paranormal experiences. There were opportunities for both quantitative and qualitative responses in this section. In addition, the respondents were invited to offer insights into the possible causes of their own parapsychological experiences.

The overall process of devising the survey instrument served as the catalyst for the development of the previously stated research questions, namely:

- What is the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena?

- How do paranormal experiences impact on the experiencers?
- What personal meaning do experiencers ascribe to their paranormal experiences?

4.8 The Web Survey Design

The questions in the online survey covered the nature, incidence, impact, and integration of parapsychological experiences. In total, 69 questions were asked and because of the length of the survey, it was not feasible to establish internal consistency by using reverse items on any of the questions. The first section contained 10 forced choice yes/no questions and an additional 25 sub-questions covering the major classes of paranormal phenomena under review. A small collection of demographical data was gathered in the last section of the survey and, in the middle section, there were four optional, open-ended questions. One gathered suggestions and insights from the participants on the potential cause of their paranormal experiences. The other three essay boxes collected self-reports of significant paranormal experiences. In turn, each of these was backed by four sub-questions which collected specific quantitative data on the incident outlined. Overall, the volume of data amassed during the survey was unprecedented and to meet the current research guidelines it was necessary for the researcher to set some datasets aside. In particular, the self-reports which contain descriptions of parapsychological encounters have been omitted from the final analysis.

The survey was designed using the commercially available computer programme called SurveyMonkey. This programme placed a limit of 5000 characters, or approximately 800 words, on the length of the individual narratives. It also required the inclusion of a number of linking questions to eliminate redundant lines of questioning. Overall, the final questionnaire took a minimum of 10 minutes to complete.

4.8.1 Pre Pilot Survey

Prior to testing the pilot study, a series of email communications took place between the researcher and Dr Michael Thalbourne, a parapsychologist and Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Psychology at The University of Adelaide, in South Australia. Dr Thalbourne was given a full text of the draft questionnaire and he provided feedback that was both practical and insightful. One suggestion made by Dr Thalbourne, that it is possible for people to see their own auras in mirrors and on similar reflecting surfaces, was incorporated into the final survey instrument.

4.8.2 Survey Software Programme

The online questionnaire was created using software available from the website, SurveyMonkey.com. This design tool was recommended by the Web Development Manager in the Faculty of Education at Monash University as being appropriate for the current study. This advice was based on his own experience with the instrument, and use of the tool by other members of the Faculty. Furthermore, SurveyMonkey has a number of key benefits including flexibility of software licensing, competitive price/features ratio, easy-to-use data formatting which aids statistical analysis, the provision of interim and final results summaries, and it offers researchers the freedom to develop and control final survey layouts (Lowe, 2006).

A professional subscription to SurveyMonkey was bought and renewed monthly, throughout the currency of the survey. Among the software features used to create the online instrument were forced choice answers, descriptive text formats, one answer questions, multiple answer questions, open-ended essay questions, and where possible, the option to introduce randomised answer choices was used. The datasets were collected by SurveyMonkey, stored on the server as raw comma-separated-values data while the survey was 'live', and later downloaded and stored.

4.8.3 Pilot Study

A small sample group was chosen to test the survey instrument and its reliability was evaluated using the test-retest method. The issue of whether the indicators were valid was addressed in light of the guidance proffered in de Vaus (2002), namely, that there are three ways to assess validity and ultimately, none of them is entirely satisfactory. With this in mind, the current researcher agreed with de Vaus that "on the face of it (the elements of the instrument) seem to cover the concept" under investigation (de Vaus, 2002, p.54).

The title of the survey, the clear step-by-step directions, and the overall language and reading level were adjusted during the piloting of the survey but no fundamental design flaws were uncovered. For the pilot study (N=14), the hyperlink to the survey on the SurveyMonkey website was circulated, via email to friends and associates of the researcher, and to the research supervisor. The recipients of this email were informed of the purpose of the survey and their feedback was sought once the questionnaire had been completed. The pilot survey was successfully trialed in September 2006 and one

adjustment was made as a result of the feedback. This recommendation saw the removal of question numbers from the questionnaire, thereby avoiding any confusion arising from the built-in design feature, known as skip logic. This function, which eliminated redundant lines of enquiry, was included in the survey instrument thereby ensuring that only relevant questions, based on the participant's previous response, were posed.

4.9 The Online Survey

Both the pilot and the final online survey instrument, and ultimately, all the survey responses were in English. The link to the final survey was via a webpage on the Monash University, Faculty of Education website. This webpage contained the authorised Explanatory Statement and on completion of the survey, or upon early exit, participants were automatically directed back to the Monash University homepage.

The researcher aimed for a survey 'look' which was not intimidating but professional, appealing, uniformly consistent, easy to understand and devoid of jargon. The completion rate suggests that the survey instrument struck the right balance. On the one hand, it was sufficiently comprehensive to gather the data needed to address the research questions and on the other, it was concise enough to hold the attention and interest of respondents. Before the application of filters, such as those required to cull participants under the age of 18 years, a review of the completed surveys indicated that 86% of the individuals who commenced the survey, went on to complete it. While this may reflect well on the survey design, it may also reflect on paranormal experiences in general because even after the survey was closed, individuals continued to contact the researcher to express disappointment at being too late able to contribute to the study.

The survey went 'live' on the internet in late September 2006, and was open for three months. At the peak of the data collection period, over 200 valid surveys were lodged daily.

4.10 Research Sampling

The recent wave of advocacy to have mixed methods research viewed as a legitimate, stand-alone research design has brought several outstanding issues, including those associated with sampling, to the fore. What are the ideal sample sizes for the qualitative and quantitative arms of a study? Should these samples be the same, similar, or markedly different? Should random sampling be used to make both sets of data more

compatible? When should purposive sampling be used? It is early days in the development of contemporary mixed methods research design and the debate over sampling has only begun (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

In the current study, the use of the internet added a layer of complexity to the issue of sampling but, as de Vaus (2002) notes, “while internet samples are by no means adequate yet for general population surveys, we must not ignore the deficiencies of samples obtained with other methods of questionnaire administration” (p.80). Typically, these deficiencies include: postal surveys achieve poor response rates; the popularity of face-to-face interviews has declined as costs to administer them have increased; and opportunities for telephone surveys have dwindled with the introduction of technological phone blocks, such as the Australian ‘Do Not Call’ facility, which became operational in 2007 (de Vaus, 2002).

In theory, every English-speaking individual who had access to the internet during the survey period could have located the survey and completed it. However in practice, because the survey was promoted through the national and international media, the Monash University cohort, and online paranormal websites in the first instance and later by osmosis and word-of-mouth, sampling bias was introduced. Initially, the study was deliberately directed towards information-rich key informants but as word of the survey spread its online status meant everyone in the public domain could access it. Participants were self-selecting and were able to enter and exit the survey at their own discretion. While this methodology may invite criticism it should be remembered that fundamentally, all survey sampling methods are voluntary and do involve an element of choice.

Essentially, the target group for the current study were English-speaking individuals, who declared they were 18 years or older, had access to the internet during the data collection period, and had an interest in the paranormal, online surveys, or both.

4.11 Mixed Methods Research Data Collection

The study was carried out in one phase, and both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously. The quantitative data provided snapshots of the incidences. The qualitative research provided valuable firsthand reports about the settings and circumstances in which the spontaneous paranormal phenomena

occurred. It also gave the researcher the opportunity to gain insights into the personal significance and meaning of such experiences. As Borkan (2004) reflects in his editorial on mixed methods studies, “not only do these types of investigations have the advantages of the deep descriptions and entrée to subjects’ lived realities explored by qualitative methods, they also have the potential to contribute the generalizability and statistical reliability that is the strength of quantitative research” (p.4).

As previously noted, the use of online surveys to gather data for academic research is relatively new, and as such there were few precedents to guide the researcher, particularly in the areas of timeframes and response rates. While the literature contains numerous contradictory research reports on the yields typically produced by each type of data collection method, in the current study this was a moot point (de Vaus, 2002). Previously, in the Ethics Application the researcher indicated that the survey would be ‘live’ for three months, and this is the timeframe that was followed.

4.12 Using Specifically Chosen Websites to Promote the Survey

As previously mentioned, the survey was promoted online. Links were placed on paranormal websites, the logic being that the individuals who visited these websites already had an interest in parapsychological phenomena, which may have been sparked by a personal encounter with the paranormal. Through the search engine Google numerous paranormal webpages were located and a shortlist of the major sites was draw up. Approximately 100 webmasters were approached for assistance and 60 agreed to place a promotional link from their websites to the Explanatory Statement on the Monash University site. Links were also placed on two online psychology websites which host connections to scholarly research studies. Further, in a collegiate spirit, members of the Monash University community were alerted to the study through internal email and website links.

4.13 Limitations of the Research Approach

The weaknesses associated with the mixed methods research model have been outlined in this chapter are also well-documented in the literature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Other limitations of the current research approach stemmed from the self-selection aspect of the survey recruitment process, the usage of the internet for data collection, and the deficiencies imposed as a result of the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data. While this latter measure

proved to be an efficient and effective means of collating datasets, a number of practical and theoretical impediments were encountered. These included: the labour intensity of the technique; the additional expense of maintaining the survey online through the commercial website SurveyMonkey; intellectual issues associated with the quantitative qualitative research divide; and the academic background of philosophical and spirited debate on the fundamental questions of consciousness and the nature of truth and knowing (Borkan, 2004; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Radin, 1997).

4.14 Ethical Issues Related to the Research Approach

Participation in the current study was entirely voluntary. After the pilot study, no participant was approached to complete the survey and no identifying information that could link survey responses to the participants was collected. Thus, the confidentiality of the raw data was protected and the datasets were securely stored in accordance with Monash University policy.

All research involving human participants requires respect and rapport, and in the case of online surveys, this is particularly difficult to achieve and maintain. The strengths and weaknesses of using the internet to gather data were covered in Chapter 2 and while every effort was made to minimise the possibility of harm to participants, access to the internet is not limited by age and invariably online surveys runs the risk of attracting minors. The problem of corroborating the age of participants is pertinent to all methods of data collection and yet, this point is often overlooked in academic discussions about the protocols for face-to-face interviews and pen and paper questionnaires. In the current study, participants were required to declare that they were 18 years or older by clicking on the Explanatory Statement. However, logistically it was impossible to validate these declarations, or to prevent participants from completing the survey who were, according to Australian law, still of a minority age. A final filter was placed on the surveys to screen those who stated they were under 18 years of age in the demographics question and as a result of this filter, 79 surveys were eliminated from the final sample.

The tone of the survey was kept neutral and the description of each paranormal phenomenon was deliberately restrained, for two reasons. First, this reinforced the academic nature of the research, and second, it was designed to avoid inflammatory or emotive language, which may have distressed participants. For those who were unintentionally impacted by the survey, the Explanatory Statement contained a

comprehensive list of free telephone counselling services, for each country which has English as its first language.

4.15 Procedures Used to Enhance Credibility

The credibility of the current study was enhanced by:

- employing a mixed methods approach;
- giving respondents the opportunity to reflect on the causes or sources of their paranormal experiences;
- allowing data collection to continue for an extended period; and
- seeking guidance from the supervisor on a regular basis.

4.16 Summary

In this chapter the research design framework for the current study was outlined. The choice of the mixed methods research approach was justified; each step in the survey design process described; and the research approach limitations, assumptions and ethical issues associated with using the internet for data collection were presented. In Chapter 5 the first cluster of quantitative data is introduced and analysed.

Chapter 5

Results and Data Analysis: Nature and Incidence

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 an outline of the research design and method used in the current study was given. In Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive, the survey results are presented and an analysis of the data undertaken. Chapter 5 begins with the demographic details of the survey participants. This is followed by an examination of the quantitative data and the findings are used to address the first research question, namely:

- What is the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena?

Note: Figures and Tables

In Chapters 5 and 6, where the size of a statistical group was less than 30, the specific number (N=) is indicated in the figures and tables.

5.2 Overview - All Respondents

In total 4,024 questionnaires were submitted and of this group 3,460 surveys were completed. This represented a completion rate of 86% which, while it was much higher than that expected for a non-online survey, it was lower than suggested in the literature on internet-based research (Birnbaum, 2004).

Seventy nine surveys, or 2.3% of the total number of completed responses were set aside because the respondents were under the age of 18 years. Within the remaining group of respondents (N=3381), another 187 respondents indicated that they had not experienced any of the paranormal phenomena surveyed and their questionnaires were not included in the group for analysis. The final sample size comprised 3,194 paranormal experiencers.

A breakdown of the editing process is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1.

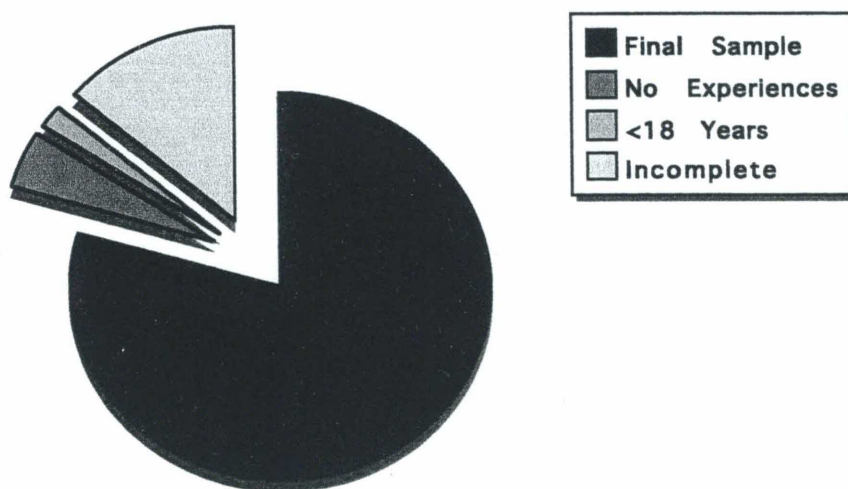


Figure 1: Analysis of Submitted Surveys

The aggregate number of YES responses given by these 3,194 experients, taken across all of the ten categories of paranormal phenomena surveyed, totalled 16,447 affirmative replies. Thus, the average number of different types of parapsychological experiences reported per experient was greater than five ($M=5.14$). This finding, that experients report multiple types of paranormal experiences, supports the results of earlier studies (Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979).

(Note: this average does not refer to the estimated incidence of each type of experience per respondent. The analysis of that set of statistics is located in Table 7).

5.3 Demographics of Paranormal Experients

The demographics of the final sample of experients were consistent with the findings reported in the literature (Gosling et al., 2004). The respondents were relatively diverse with regards gender, geographic region, and age. While the online questionnaire was marketed nationally and internationally from the outset, after the initial launch and publicity campaign the link to the survey was picked up and unilaterally promoted by numerous websites, including some which translated the promotional material into their native language.

5.3.1 Gender

The final sample of respondents who reported experiencing at least one type of paranormal phenomenon comprised more women ($N=1969$) than men ($N=1225$). In

the past, traditional thinking held that men dominated internet-based surveys but more recently, research has demonstrated a reversal of this trend, particularly in surveys dedicated to health and personal issues (Pasveer & Ellard, 1998; Reips, 2001). The current survey supported this demographic shift.

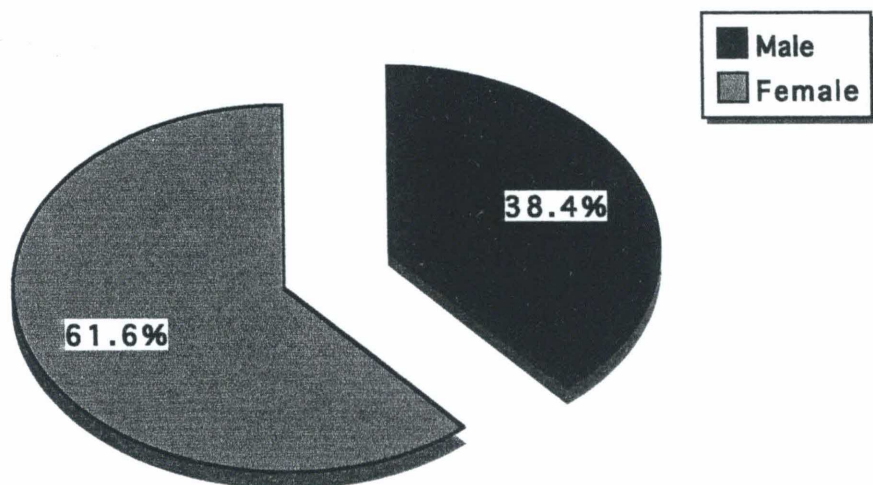


Figure 2: Paranormal Experiences by Gender

Females comprised 61.6% of the final sample and the aggregate number of their YES responses (across all ten paranormal categories) suggests that on average they experienced a larger number of the different types of paranormal phenomena than their male counterparts. The aggregate number of YES responses registered by the 1,969 female experiencers was 11,014. This equates to a mean of 5.59, indicating that on average each female respondent experienced nearly six different types of paranormal phenomena. Based on the 5,404 YES responses received from the 1,225 male experiencers the average number of different types of paranormal experiences reported was lower (M=4.41).

5.3.2 Age

In the demographics section of the survey, those respondents who indicated they were under the age of 18 years were excluded from the final analysis. Of the remaining sample, the dominant age group was the 18-35 year olds, which accounted for 44.7% (N=1427) of all the experiencers. This group was followed closely in size by the 36-55 years age group, which comprised 42.5% (N=1356) of the experiencers. The balance of 12.8% (N=411) were the Over 55s age group (refer Figure 3).

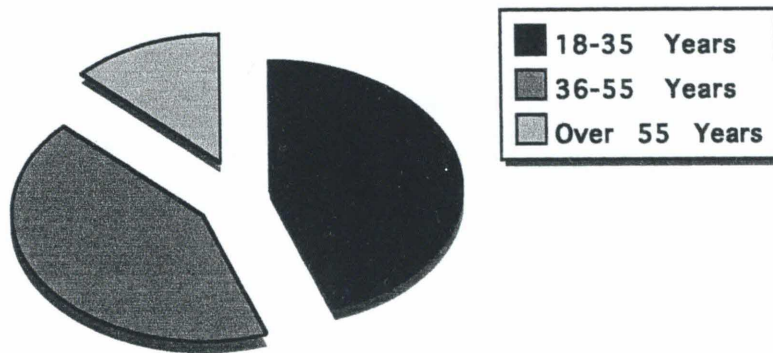


Figure 3: Survey Experiencers by Age Group

This division between the three age groups was broadly in line with the estimates suggested in the literature (Kehoe, et al., 1999). While women outnumbered men in every age group, across the age groups the male female ratio remained fairly constant (refer Figure 4).

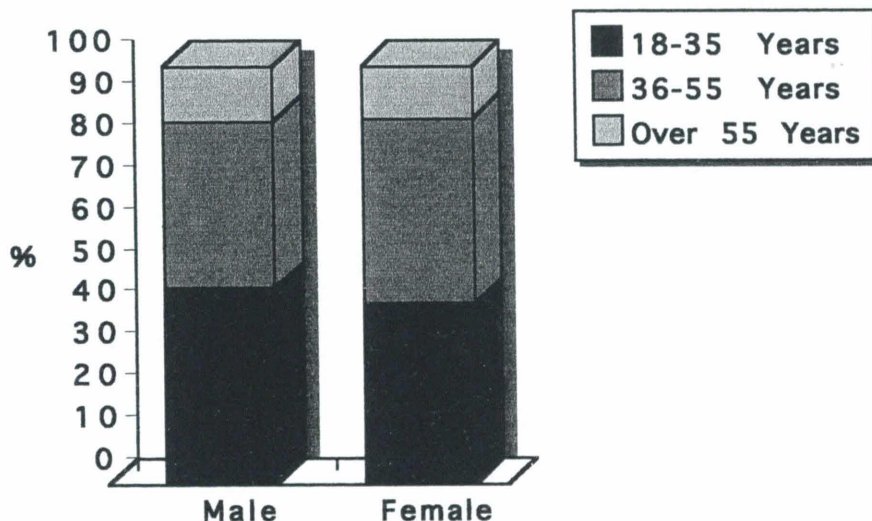


Figure 4: Gender of Experiencers by Age Group

5.3.3 Country of Residence

More than half of the experiencers polled were residents of the United States of America (N=1979). The second largest number of contributors came from Australia (N=485), and together, residents of the United Kingdom (N=252) and Canada (N=228) comprised a further 30.2% of the final sample.

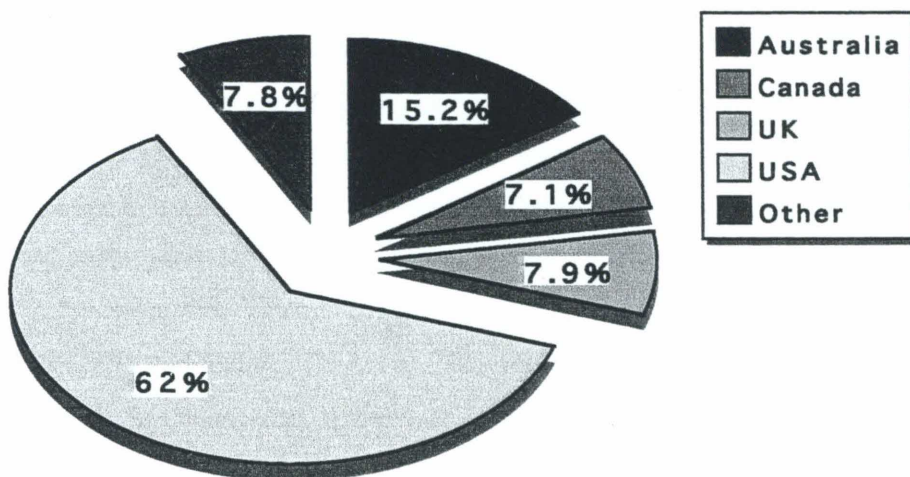


Figure 5: Current Country of Residence

As suggested in the literature, using the internet produced considerable demographic diversity within the survey sample (Birnbbaum, 2004). In addition to the four major contributing nations listed above, questionnaires from residents of 55 other countries were included in the final sample (refer Figure 5). A complete list of all the participating countries is presented in Appendix A.

The balance of the responses (N=250) from the 55 countries were grouped together under the heading ‘Other’. Within this composite group, those nations which contributed ten or more surveys were South Africa (N=18), Ireland (N=16), Germany (N=12), New Zealand (N=12), and India (N=10). Smaller numbers of contributions, of between five and nine surveys were submitted by residents of Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, and Zambia. One notable omission from the final survey was China but this was to be expected, given China’s record on internet suppression and human rights (Tai, 2006). However, the results of an earlier cross-cultural survey reported incidences of parapsychological experiences within the group of Chinese students (McClenon, 1994a).

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, while multiple factors and influences including language, internet access, government controls, and survey promotion impacted on what ultimately became the final sample, there were completed surveys from residents of all continents, except Antarctica, and the anticipated lower levels of representation from Africa, South America and parts of Asia were confirmed (ITU, 2004).

5.3.4 Principal Country of Residence During Childhood

Respondents were required to indicate which country they lived in, primarily, during their childhood. In the intervening period between childhood and when the survey was completed, it seems reasonable to assume that there would have been numerous residential moves between countries. However, overall only small resultant variations in population distributions were noted. The main countries in which the experiencers spent their childhood were the United States (N=1905), Australia (N=388), the United Kingdom (N=295) and Canada (N=210). The other main childhood nations (N=396), grouped together in Figure 6 as ‘Other’ included South Africa (N=23), New Zealand (N=22), Ireland (N=21), India (N=16), Malaysia (N=12), Zambia (N=11), Zimbabwe (N=11), Philippines (N=10), Argentina (N=10), Brazil (N=10), and Netherlands (N=10). Other nations with small numbers of nominations included Georgia, Saudi Arabia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Lithuania, Maldives, Trinidad, China, Bosnia, Lebanon, Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Serbia, Belarus, Venezuela, Czechoslovakia, and Belgian Congo.

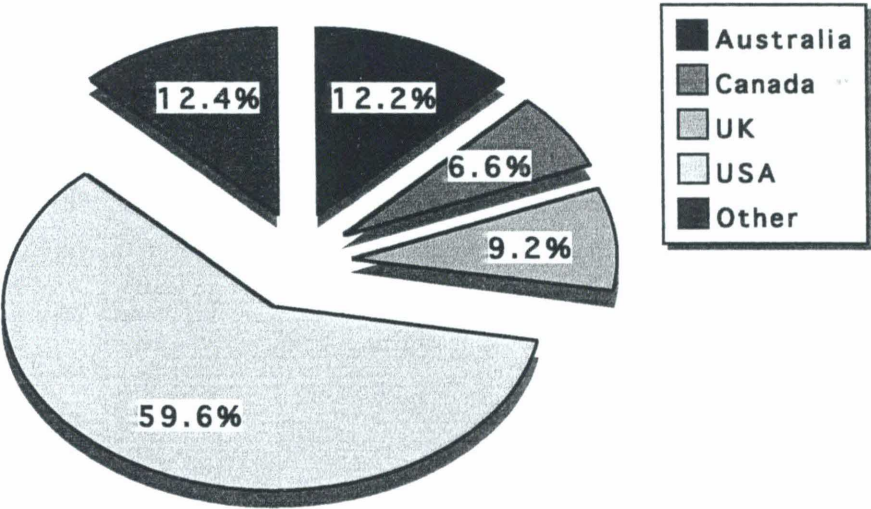


Figure 6: Principal Country of Residence During Childhood

The net migration of residents from the four largest groups of experiencers, between childhood and adulthood indicated an overall move away from the United Kingdom, towards the United States of America, Canada, and Australia. This information was collected to gain an insight into the diversity of the backgrounds of the experiencers. No further analysis was undertaken.

5.4. Incidence of Paranormal Experiences

The ten classifications of paranormal phenomena surveyed were déjà vu, apparitions, near-death episodes (NDE), out-of-body experiences (OBE), psychokinesis (PK), premonitions, auras, mediumship, reincarnation, and telepathy.

5.4.1 Overview

All types of parapsychological experience were noted within the survey sample. An overview of the results is displayed in Figure 7 and a detailed summary is presented in Table 1.

The most commonly reported phenomenon was déjà vu (N=2873). In descending order of frequency, this experience was followed by premonitions (N=2528), apparitions (N=2174), telepathy (N=2107), out-of-body experiences (N=1795), reincarnations (N=1396), psychokinesis (N=1163), auras (N=1090), mediumship (N=815), and the least frequently indicated experience was near-death episodes (N=476).

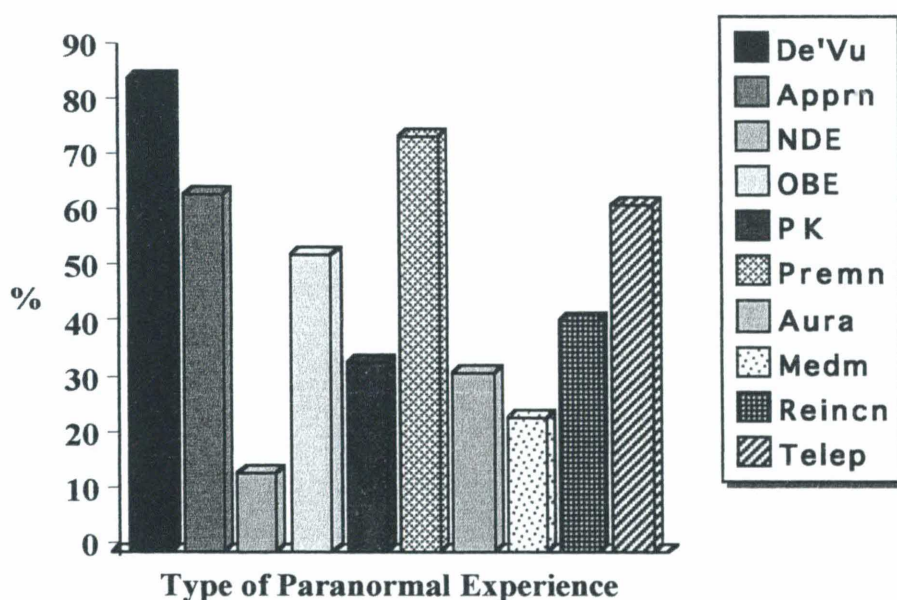


Figure 7: Incidence of Paranormal Experiences

5.4.2 Incidence of Experience by Gender

For each of the ten categories of parapsychological phenomenon, the percentage of female experiencers who reported paranormal experiences was higher than that recorded by males.

Table 1: Type of Paranormal Experience by Gender

Paranormal Experience	Number of Experiencers N=3194	Total Experiencers % N=3194	Male Experiencers % N=1225	Female Experiencers % N=1969
Deja vu	2874	90.0	87.6	91.4
Apparitions	2175	68.1	54.7	76.4
Near-death Episodes	453	14.2	13.2	16.0
Out-of-body Experiences	1795	56.2	49.1	60.6
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	1162	36.4	34.5	37.6
Premonitions	2530	79.2	70.4	84.6
Auras	1089	34.1	26.3	39.0
Mediumship	814	25.5	18.9	29.7
Reincarnation	1395	43.7	32.2	50.8
Telepathy	2108	66.0	54.3	73.3

While the survey sample included only those respondents who were paranormal experiencers, the high incidences of telepathy, clairvoyance and mediumship reported are supported by earlier studies, including the omnibus survey conducted by Haraldsson and Houtkooper (1991). The statistical significance of these gender findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Chi-square Analysis

	P Value	Number of Males - Yes	Number of Males - No	Number of Females - Yes	Number of Females - No
N=3194		N=1225		N=1969	
Deja Vu	*** .0005	1073	152	1800	169
Apparitions	*** .0000	670	555	1504	465
Near-death Episodes	** .0325	162	1063	315	1654
Out-of-body Experiences	*** .0000	602	623	1193	776
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	* .0690	422	803	741	1228
Premonitions	*** .0000	862	363	1666	303
Auras	*** .0000	322	903	768	1201
Mediumship	*** .0000	231	994	584	1385
Reincarnation	*** .0000	395	830	1001	968
Telepathy	*** .0000	665	560	1443	527

	KEY	
*	Marginally Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.1
**	Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.05
***	Highly Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.01

There were highly significant statistical differences between the reported experiences of males and females for eight of the ten categories of parapsychological phenomena, namely déjà vu, apparitions, out-of-body experiences, premonitions, auras, mediumship, reincarnation, and telepathy. The findings were also statistically significant for near-death episodes and marginally significant for psychokinesis. These results support the “statistically significant tendency” noted in Kohr (1980) and highlighted in Bader, Dougherty, Froese, Johnson, Mencken, Park, et al., (2006).

5.4.3 Paranormal Experience by Age Group

Table 3: Type of Experience by Age Group

N=3194	18-35 Years % N=1427	36-55 Years % N=1356	>55 Years % N=411
Deja Vu	90.9	91.0	83.2
Apparitions	62.5	74.4	66.4
Near-death Episodes	11.8	17.1	18.5
Out-of-body Experiences	49.8	62.5	57.9
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	33.6	37.7	41.9
Premonition	77.4	81.4	77.6
Auras	28.7	36.3	45.7
Mediumship	18.2	30.7	33.8
Reincarnation	35.8	48.5	55.2
Telepathy	57.6	71.8	76.2

For six of the ten categories of paranormal phenomena the highest incidence rates were reported by those in the Over 55 years age group. The exceptions to this were déjà vu, apparitions, out-of-body experiences, and premonitions. Previous studies have shown a tendency for more younger respondents to report déjà vu experiences but this was not evident in the current research (Kohr, 1980; McCready & Greeley, 1976; Palmer, 1979).

The frequency of occurrence of each experience is detailed in section 5.4.7.

5.4.4 Alone or Not?

Experiencers of apparitions or psychokinetic (PK) episodes were asked additional questions about these occurrences. Six predetermined responses were offered (Options A to F), and the findings are listed in Table 4. The majority of experiencers of apparitions (N=894) indicated they were usually alone at the time of their encounters (Option B). In contrast, most of the PK experiencers (N=481) indicated that they were usually with someone else and they experienced this too (Option C).

Table 4: Alone or Not?

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Apparitions N=2174	9.0	41.1	14.9	17.5	13.4	4.2
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK) N=1163	7.8	29.7	41.3	13.6	5.3	2.3 N=27

KEY

- A Usually I was with someone else but I DIDN'T asked them what they experienced
- B Usually I was alone
- C Usually I was with someone else and they experienced this too
- D I was always alone
- E Usually I was with someone else but they usually DIDN'T experience this
- F Usually I was with someone else but they NEVER experienced this

5.4.5 Right or Not?

Premonition experiencers were asked to consider their experiences and answer an additional question about whether they followed up on their presentiments, and if so, what was the outcome. Specifically, they were asked: did you tell anyone about this (premonition) at the time or shortly afterwards? The results showed that a significant number of experiencers did share their premonitions with others (refer Table 5).

Table 5: Verification of Premonitions

N=2528	Yes - every time %	Yes - sometimes %	No - never
Total Sample - Premonitions	20.8	66.4	12.8
Female	22.1	68.5	9.4
Male	18.2	62.5	19.3

5.4.6 Confirmation of Telepathic Thoughts

Table 6: Confirmation of Telepathic Experiences

N=2107	Yes - usually right %	Yes - sometimes right %	Never checked %	Usually not right %	Never right %
Total Sample - Telepathy	56.5	34.1	8.8	0.5	0.1
				N=11	N=2
Female	59.6	32.3	7.8	0.3	0
				N=4	
Male	48.8	37.9	10.9	1.1	0.3
				N=7	N=2

Those who indicated they had experienced telepathic incidences were asked if they followed up their experiences with the people concerned, and what was the outcome. The wording of the question was: have you ever checked your feelings with these people? The results of this question are presented in Table 6. The findings indicated there was a strong tendency for respondents to check their experiences with others and to find them to be correct. However, caution needs to be exercised in interpreting this finding as the veracity of these recount narratives was not established.

5.4.7 Type of Experience by Frequency

Paranormal experiencers nominated the number of times they experienced each type of phenomenon. Their responses are summarised in Table 7. With the exception of near-death episodes, which the majority of respondents experienced only once, the

overall trend was for experiencers of déjà vu, premonitions, auras, mediumship, and telepathy to report high numbers of incidences. Over 50% of the experiencers of each of these types of phenomenon had encountered six or more incidences, with 68.3% of telepathic experiencers and 54.8% of déjà vu experiencers reporting more than ten incidences each. The second highest incidence rate was 2 to 5 times, which was recorded for all remaining phenomena. While the frequency groupings used in the current study do not equate to those of earlier studies, the documented trend for experiencers to report either a very low number or a very high number of incidences of any particular type of paranormal experience was not obvious across all categories (Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979).

Table 7: Frequency of Paranormal Experiences

	Once % N=1717	2-5 times % N=5248	6-10 times % N=2419	>10 times % N=7063
Deja Vu	3.0	25.5	16.7	54.8
Apparitions	10.3	37.3	16.1	36.3
Near-death Episodes	64.9	33.0	0.8 N=4	1.3 N=6
Out-of-body Experiences	18.9	39.3	11.3	30.5
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	14.7	44.2	15.0	26.1
Premonitions	6.0	33.5	17.4	43.1
Auras	9.2	30.1	13.5	47.2
Mediumship	11.3	25.9	14.5	48.3
Reincarnation	13.9	41.5	16.5	28.1
Telepathy	2.2	16.6	12.9	68.3

5.4.8 Frequency of Experience by Age Group

Table 8: Frequency of Experience by Age Group

	Once % Age Groups 18-35 36-55 >55	2-5 times % Age Groups 18-35 36-55 >55	6-10 times % Age Groups 18-35 36-55 >55	>10 times % Age Groups 18-35 36-55 >55
N=3194				
Deja Vu	2.3 2.9 6.1 N=21	22.1 27.5 31.0	15.9 17.7 15.8	59.7 51.9 47.1
Apparitions	10.9 9.7 10.9	40.0 35.7 34.2	15.9 16.7 14.6	33.2 37.9 40.3
Near-death Episodes	67.8 65.9 55.2	29.8 32.8 40.8	1.8 N=3 0.4 N=1 0.0	0.6 N=1 0.9 N=2 4.0 N=3
Out-of-body Experiences	22.9 16.3 16.3	38.6 41.3 33.9	13.2 9.7 11.7 N=28	25.3 32.7 38.1
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	18.7 12.3 10.5 N=18	50.2 41.9 34.3	12.2 17.5 15.1 N=26	18.9 28.3 40.1
Premonitions	5.8 6.2 5.9 N=19	37.3 32.9 23.0	18.7 15.6 18.9	38.2 45.3 52.2
Auras	10.5 8.3 9.0 N=17	34.8 28.7 23.7	13.1 11.8 18.4	41.6 51.2 48.9
Mediumship	13.9 10.8 7.9 N=11	31.2 24.8 19.4 N=27	14.2 14.7 14.4 N=20	40.7 49.7 58.3
Reincarnation	17.2 12.5 10.5 N=24	43.4 41.3 38.1	15.8 16.1 18.9	23.6 30.1 32.5
Telepathy	3.3 N=27 1.6 N=16 1.3 N=4	20.7 13.7 15.3	15.1 10.9 13.4	60.9 73.8 70.0

As Table 8 shows, there was a general trend for the oldest experients to report many experiences (>10 times). However, the highest frequency was also the most common option indicated by all age groups for some phenomena, namely déjà vu, premonitions, auras, mediumship, and telepathy. These results support the findings in Palmer (1979), that age is a “poor predictor of psi-related experiences” and in Kohr (1980) that “age was generally uncorrelated with psi experiences”.

18-35 years

For half of the paranormal experiences examined, namely apparitions, out-of-body experiences, psychokinesis, reincarnation, and telepathy the most commonly indicated frequency was between two and five times. For four of the other five categories (déjà vu, auras, premonitions, and mediumship) the highest frequency indicated was greater than ten experiences per experient. The exception was near-death episodes which most experients encountered only once.

36-55 years

This group reported higher numbers of experiences (>10 times) for six of the categories, namely déjà vu, apparitions, premonitions, auras, mediumship, and telepathy. The highest frequencies reported for out-of-body experiences, psychokinesis, and reincarnation were two to five times and again, the exception was near-death episodes.

Over 55 years

For eight of the paranormal categories, the most regularly nominated frequency was >10 times. The exceptions were near-death episodes and reincarnation.

This overall trend for successively older groups of participants to report more experiences across more parapsychological categories suggests that paranormal encounters can occur throughout adulthood.

5.4.9 Type of Experience by Age at First Experience

The overwhelming majority of the survey respondents were in either of two age groups: 18-35 years age group (44.5%) and the 36-55 years age group (42.4%). The balance of 13.1% were those who lived the longest and had the greatest opportunity to experience the paranormal, from pre birth to Over 55 years. Bearing this in mind, the following figures need to be treated with caution. Each experient nominated the age at

which they had their first experience of each phenomenon (where applicable). Two age groups dominated. Table 9 summarises these statistics.

Table 9: Paranormal Experience by Age at First Experience

	Pre birth %	<2 Years %	2-5 Years %	6-12 Years %	13-17 Years %	18-35 Years %	36-55 Years %	>55 Years %
N=16447								
Deja Vu	N/A	2.3	15.5	46.3	24.1	10.2	1.4	0.2
								N=7
Apparitions	N/A	2.8	15.5	27.3	18.7	26.2	8.6	0.9
								N=19
Near-death Episodes	4.8	9.5	7.8	15.8	17.9	33.2	9.7	1.3
	N=23							N=6
Out-of-body Experiences	1.2	2.0	12.4	23.2	23.2	31.0	6.6	0.4
	N=22							N=7
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	N/A	1.8	8.7	20.4	22.3	35.0	10.7	1.1
		N=21						N=12
Premonitions	N/A	1.2	9.7	31.4	27.4	24.6	5.3	0.4
								N=10
Auras	N/A	2.5	8.2	14.9	19.4	38.0	15.8	1.2
								N=13
Mediumship	0.9	1.6	7.1	11.4	16.1	37.8	23.4	1.7
	N=7	N=13						N=14
Reincarnation	N/A	3.5	11.5	20.8	19.7	31.2	12.2	1.1
								N=15
Telepathy	N/A	1.9	9.9	22.6	26.0	31.7	7.5	0.4
								N=8

N/A - not asked

Many experiencers reported that their first experiences happened during the early part of life. The dominant time for first experiences was the seven years between the ages of six and twelve years. This was the period during which the majority of experiencers of déjà vu, apparitions, and premonitions experienced their first encounters. The second dominant age range for first experiences was the longer period of eighteen years between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This was the dominant timeframe for first experiences of the remaining seven parapsychological phenomenon.

Of interest is a small group of experiencers who reported they had first encounters with the paranormal very early in life. In particular, 2.7% (N=440) of all first experiences happened before the age of two, and a further 11.6% (N=1906) of first experiences were indicated between two and five years. Thus, overall 14.3% (N=2346) of all first experiences took place before six years of age and curiously, in the case of near-death episodes 4.8% (N=23) of first experiences occurred pre birth. At the other end of the timescale, only a small number (N=111) of oldest experiencers (>55 years) reported they had first experiences after the age of 55 years.

The statistics indicate that prior to starting school (which varies internationally from four to seven years, but nominally taken as aged 6) experiencers encountered a significant number of first experiences. These statistics support earlier findings on childhood paranormal experiences (Armstrong, 1984; Drewes, 2002; Harrison, 2000; Hoffman, 1992; Piechowski, 2001a, 2001b; Robinson, 1977). To examine this outcome further it is instructive to consider the cumulative figures for first experiences of each phenomenon and these are presented in Table 10.

5.4.10 Cumulative Totals By Age at First Experience

The majority of first experiences for eight of the ten phenomena happened before the experiencers reached adulthood.

Age at first experience: pre birth-5 years

Some first encounters were reported to have happened early in life. At least one in ten of every first experience, of each type of paranormal phenomenon, occurred before the age of six, and in some cases this figure was significantly higher. The highest incidences of first encounters in the pre birth to five years of age range were 22% for near-death episodes (N=105), and 18% for both déjà vu (N=510) and apparitions (N=398).

Table 10: Cumulative Frequencies of First Experiences by Age

	Pre birth	<2 Years	2-5 Years	6-12 Years	13-17 Years	18-35 Years	36-55 Years	>55 Years
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
N=3194								
Deja Vu	N/A	2.3	18	64	88	98	99	100
Apparitions	N/A	2.8	18	45	64	90	99	100
Near-death Episodes	4.8 N=23	14	22	38	56	89	99	100
Out-of-body Experiences	1.2 N=22	3	15	38	61	93	99	100
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	N/A	1.8 N=21	11	31	53	88	99	100
Premonitions	N/A	1.2	11	42	69	94	99	100
Auras	N/A	2.5	11	26	45	83	99	100
Mediumship	0.9 N=7	2.5 N=20	10	20	36	74	98	100
Reincarnation	N/A	3.5	15	35	55	86	99	100
Telepathy	N/A	1.9	12	35	61	92	99	100

N/A - not asked

Age at first experience: 6-12 years

Within this age range the incidence of first experiences of deja vu increased significantly, such that, by the time adolescence was reached 64% (N=2534) of first encounters of this phenomenon had happened. In contrast, the cumulative incidence for first experiences of mediumship before the age of 13 years was relatively low (20%).

Age at first experience: 13-17 years

With the two exceptions of auras and mediumship, more than half of the experiences of each of the other categories indicated that they had experienced their first encounter before the age of eighteen. This cumulative spread was uneven and ranged from 88% for déjà vu to 36% for mediumship.

Age at first experience: 18-35 years

The two exceptions to the trend to report first experiences in childhood were auras and mediumship. The majority of first experiences of these phenomena (i.e. >50%) did not happen until early adulthood, thereby suggesting that these forms of parapsychological encounter manifest later in life.

Age at first experience: 36 years and above

Over 80% of all first encounters occurred before 36 years of age, and in most cases this rate was even higher. The marked exception was mediumship (74%).

5.5 Residency

A breakdown of the incidence of phenomenon by current country of residency is shown in Table 11. Predominantly, the respondents were from one of four countries. The balance have been grouped together in the 'Other' category.

5.5.1 Incidence of Experience by Country of Residence

While the results displayed in Table 11 do not support the findings in Kohr (1980), in which a "general lack of statistical relationship" between the incidence of paranormal experiences and race was described, they do support other studies which highlighted marked variations between countries (Haraldsson, 1985; Haraldsson & Houtkooper, 1991; McClenon, 1994a).

The Americans dominated the survey in terms of numbers (N=1979). However, it was the relatively small Canadian sample (N=228) which dominated the majority of the parapsychological categories. Overall, the Canadian incidence rates were the highest of the four major contributing countries for every type of paranormal phenomenon, with the exception of déjà vu. At the other end of the spectrum, Australians reported the lowest incidence rates for five of the paranormal categories, namely psychokinesis, auras, mediumship, reincarnation, and telepathy.

These anomalies are highlighted below.

Table 11. Incidence of Experience by Country of Residence

	Australian Experients %	Canadian Experients %	UK Experients %	USA Experients %	Other Experients %
N=3194	N=485	N=228	N=252	N=1979	N=250
Deja Vu	88.0 N=426	89.0 N=203	85.3 N=215	92.2 N=1824	82.9 N=207
Apparitions	56.9 N=276	72.8 N=166	60.7 N=152	72.7 N=1438	56.8 N=142
Near-death Episodes	14.6 N=71	19.7 N=44	7.5 N=19	15.7 N=310	11.5 N=29
Out-of-body Experiences	52.8 N=256	65.4 N=149	52.8 N=133	56.3 N=1114	57.5 N=143
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	29.9 N=145	40.8 N=93	37.3 N=94	37.7 N=746	34.5 N=86
Premonitions	78.1 N=378	82.5 N=188	69.8 N=175	80.9 N=1601	74.2 N=185
Auras	27.2 N=132	50.4 N=114	36.1 N=91	34.3 N=678	29.4 N=73
Mediumship	20.2 N=98	46.5 N=106	28.2 N=71	24.4 N=482	23.0 N=57
Reincarnation	32.4 N=157	52.6 N=120	36.1 N=91	46.9 N=928	40.9 N=102
Telepathy	55.1 N=267	75.4 N=172	59.5 N=15	68.9 N=1363	63.4 N=158

5.5.2 Chi-square Analysis of Paranormal Experiences by Country

Table 12: Chi-square Analysis

	P Value	Australian Experients % N=485 Yes No	Canadian Experients % N=228 Yes No	UK Experients % N=252 Yes No	USA Experients % N=1979 Yes No
N=2944					
Deja Vu	*** .0000	427 58	203 25	215 37	1821 158
Apparitions	*** .0000	276 209	166 62	153 99	1437 542
Near-death Episodes	** .0012	71 414	45 183	19 233	313 1666
Out-of-body Experiences	** .0105	256 229	149 79	133 119	1113 866
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	*** .0031	145 340	93 135	94 158	774 1235
Premonitions	*** .0004	379 106	188 40	176 76	1599 380
Auras	*** .0000	132 353	115 113	91 161	678 1301
Mediumship	*** .0000	98 387	106 122	71 181	482 1497
Reincarnation	*** .0000	157 328	120 108	91 161	926 1053
Telepathy	*** .0000	267 218	172 56	150 102	1361 618

The combined ‘Other’ category of countries has not been included in this analysis.

	KEY	
*	Marginally Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.1
**	Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.05
***	Highly Significant	p-value of chi-square <0.01

The statistical differences between the four principal countries of residency are highlighted in Table 12. These differences are highly significant for eight of the ten types of paranormal encounter, and significant for the other two, namely near-death episodes and out-of-body experiences. The researcher is not aware of any research which focuses on national variations in the incidence of different types of parapsychological phenomena.

5.6 Survey Question: How religious or spiritual are you now?

Table 13: Incidences of Experiences by Degree of Religiousness or Spirituality

	Very Religious or Spiritual % N=1022	Fairly Religious or Spiritual % N=1029	Slightly Religious or Spiritual % N=636	Not at all Religious or Spiritual % N=507
N=3194				
Deja Vu	92.0 N=940	91.0 N=936	88.2 N=560	86.0 N=436
Apparitions	80.1 N=818	73.2 N=753	66.2 N=421	35.7 N=180
Near-death Episodes	19.1 N=195	14.6 N=150	12.7 N=80	10.1 N=51
Out-of-body Experiences	70.2 N=717	56.8 N=584	48.1 N=305	37.1 N=188
Poltergeists Psychokinesis Levitation (PK)	48.2 N=492	37.3 N=383	28.8 N=183	20.3 N=103
Premonitions	85.7 N=875	81.7 N=840	75.8 N=482	64.9 N=329
Auras	52.4 N=535	34.4 N=353	23.4 N=148	10.3 N=52
Mediumship	44.5 N=454	21.8 N=224	15.7 N=998	7.1 N=36
Reincarnation	59.4 N=607	46.4 N=477	34.6 N=220	18.2 N=92
Telepathy	82.2 N=840	70.6 N=726	56.0 N=356	36.6 N=185

Overall, the experients could be divided into two principal groups: the majority who described themselves as ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ religious or spiritual (N=2051)

and the remainder who portrayed themselves as being either ‘slightly’ or ‘not at all’ religious or spiritual (N=1143). Females (N=1776) outnumbered males (N=911) in all three of the religious or spiritual categories, and men (N=314) were dominant in the ‘not at all’ religious or spiritual category.

5.7 Survey Question: Have you ever felt a powerful spiritual, mystical, or religious force that seemed to ‘lift you out of yourself’?

The wording of this question directly replicates a line of enquiry pursued in earlier studies (Greeley, 1975; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Thomas & Cooper, 1978).

Table 14: Sense of Being Lifted Out of Oneself

N=1292	Once %	2-5 times %	6-10 times %	>10 times %
Lift you out of yourself	15.1	37.9	14.5	32.5

Of the total survey sample of 3,194 experients, 40.5% (N=1292) indicated that they had felt this feeling. While this statistic does support previous studies, it is slightly higher than the findings in Greeley (1975), and Hay and Morisy (1978). The largest subgroup (N=491) comprised those who experienced this feeling between two and five times. The second largest group (N=421) consisted of those experients who had encountered this sensation more than 10 times.

Those who experienced this feeling of ‘being lifted’ out of themselves were asked if this sensation had had what they would describe as a ‘life changing effect’ and 76% (N=981) indicated in the affirmative.

Seventy one percent (N=917) of the experients of this sensation stated their experiences had taken place during prayer or meditation, with the balance (N=375) indicating this was not the case. The largest single group of experients (N=489) indicated that their first encounter happened between the ages of 18 and 35 years. However, nearly half (N=635) of all the experients of this sensation stated that their first experience was during childhood (birth - 17 years), and of this group, 10.2% (N=130) had their first experience before the age of six years.

5.8 Psychics, Clairvoyants, Tarot Card Readers, and Palm Readers

The survey asked experiencers 'have you ever SERIOUSLY sought information or help from a psychic, clairvoyant, tarot card reader, or palm reader?' Thirty nine percent (N=1235) answered in the affirmative. This figure was higher than the 18% reported in Usha and Pasricha (1989a) and significantly higher than the 3% recorded in the original survey (Palmer, 1979). However, no conclusions can be drawn from this significant difference as, not only did the previous surveys involve different methodologies, they also reported on experiencers and non-experiencers of parapsychological experience.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter the dataset pertaining to the first research question, about the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena, was examined. The online questionnaire generated data from 3,194 experiencers on the ten categories of paranormal occurrences under review and several themes were noted. All phenomena were reported by males and females, and by experiencers from each of the three age groups surveyed (18-35; 36-55; Over 55 years). There were trends for experiencers to register frequent encounters (>10) of the same type of phenomenon, and to report multiple types of different paranormal incidences (M=5.14). More than 30% of all first experiences, of eight of the ten categories of phenomenon were reported to have taken place before adolescence, with some incidences dating from pre birth or in the first two years of life. Furthermore, there were highly significant statistical differences noted. These were in the levels of incidence of experiences reported by males and females for eight of the ten parapsychological categories and in the level of paranormal phenomena reported by the experiencers from the four most highly represented countries in the survey. In Chapter 6, the second of the research questions is addressed.

Chapter 6

Results and Data Analysis: Impact

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 the research question concerning the nature and incidence of paranormal experiences was examined. In this chapter the survey data are examined to address the second research question, namely:

- How do paranormal experiences impact on the experiencers?

The analysis begins with an examination of the large body of information gathered on the effects of near-death episodes. This is followed by an examination of the data on the significance of other types of paranormal occurrences. There was a high degree of self-disclosure from the paranormal experiencers (Joinson, 2001) and, given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the subject matter covered, the current survey may have reached previously hidden or untapped populations (Rhodes et al., 2003).

6.2 Near-death Episodes (NDE)

In addition to the established questions on frequency and age of first experience, supplementary information was gathered on near-death episodes. In particular, the experiencers (N=476) were given three options by which to describe their experience(s). The first two descriptors were pre-programmed alternatives, namely 'pleasant' (27.3%) and 'distressing' (19.8%). These words mirror those used in the specialist literature on NDE (IANDS, 2006a, 2006b). A third response option allowed experiencers of NDE to choose the 'Other' category (52.9%) and then describe their experience(s) in their own words. The specific category of near-death episodes was not covered in the original survey by Palmer (1979). However, since that time, interest and research in this area of human experience has grown significantly. Specifically, in the current study experiencers were asked 'overall, how would you describe your near-death episode?'.

The open-ended and closed responses were collated into four groups. Of the two pre-set options, the most popular descriptor (N=130) of near-death episodes was the word 'pleasant'. Members of the other group (N=94) declared outright that their encounters had been 'distressing'.

An analysis of the open-ended 'Other' group of responses produced two other distinct groupings of replies.

First, there was the group of experiencers (N=70) who stated they had no memory of their near-death episode. This group, which accounted for 14.7% of the total number of NDE experiencers, was much smaller than previously reported in the literature (van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, & Elfferich, 2001). Generally, in the current study, age was cited as the principal reason for this amnesia, with responses along the lines of "to (sic) young to remember", "was a toddler, so don't remember", "almost all the experience were before i (sic) was 1 year old", and even "I don't remember. I was 10". This recurring theme about the significance of age at the time of the experience runs contrary to the findings of earlier research (Morse, 1983), and a more recent study which states some "very young children, as soon as they are able to speak, have reported NDE they had as infants or in the process of being born" (LANDS, 2006c, ¶1).

The remaining group of NDE experiencers (N=182) was comprised of experiencers who provided, usually brief descriptions of their episodes. The analysis of these descriptions showed broad themes which typically echoed those outlined in the literature (Ring, 1984; Sutherland, 1989). These narratives were examined according to the four, well-documented stages of NDE termed disassociation, naturalistic, supernatural, and return. These phases are generally not remembered, encountered, or experienced in a preordained order, and can be either recalled as being discrete, consecutive, or simultaneously occurring events (LANDS, 2006b). The findings pertaining to each of these stages are examined in the following section.

6.2.1 Pleasurable Sensations

Lopez, Forster, Annoni, Habre, and Iselin-Chaves (2006) report that 60% of the near-death experiencers described their experience as peaceful. This finding aligns closely with the 56% of experiencers in van Lommel, et al. (2001) who associate "positive emotions" with their NDE. While it would be incorrect to directly equate these earlier findings with the results of the current study this researcher noted that, in addition to the 27.3% of experiencers who explicitly nominated 'pleasant' as the single word descriptor for their experience, there were numerous references in the 'Other' section which suggested many more experiencers remembered their episodes in a positive light. Among these descriptions were references to feeling "calm", "peaceful", "blissful",

“ecstatic” and “serene”. Other experiencers referred to their episodes as “enlightening” or “transformative”; some were comforted by their NDE and were left with no fear of death; and experiencers even described their experiences as “sublime” or “awesome”.

Disassociated

Some respondents described their experiences in a detached way. They used neutral descriptors such as “unremarkable”, “no problem”, “impersonal”, and a “non-event”. Some described their episode as “informative”, even “boring”, while others reported that they felt “detached”, “ambivalent”, even “apathetic” about it. These dispassionate descriptions aptly align with what is often regarded as the first stage of a near-death episode, termed disassociation (IANDS, 2006b).

Naturalistic

In van Lommel, et al. (2001) 24% of the cardiac arrest patients report out-of-body experiences but in the current study reference to this phenomenon, solely in the context of NDE, was much lower. The actual term, out-of-body experience was not mentioned by any of the survey respondents but there were some indirect references including, the NDE was “bizarre, looked down on myself” and “I could feel myself floating”. One respondent alluded to a mix of the naturalistic and disassociated stages (IANDS, 2006b) when she wrote, I “could feel my body but was able to walk and talk, no emotional involvement or sensation of pain” (Australian female, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual). Another experiencer stated, I “could hear but not see, i (sic) was clinically dead 30 seconds” (American male, 18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual).

Supernatural

This is the third documented stage of NDE typified by: movement through a black tunnel or void; meeting with deceased loved ones or non-physical beings; entering the light; and completing a life review (Greyson & Stevenson, 1980; IANDS, 2006b; Ring, 1984; van Lommel, et al., 2001).

In the current survey, there was not one specific mention of a tunnel but some experiencers provided comparable descriptors of their own experiences such as “empty”, “cold”, “blank”, “dark”, and a “nothingness”. Others described their NDE as “a black out”, “soothing darkness”, and curiously “a lot of nothing”. One experiencer referred to the experience as “otherworldly” while another described his episode as an “extension of

existence (sic) on a different plane” (American male, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual).

There were several references to different qualities of light, but the statistic was markedly lower than the 23% quoted in van Lommel, et al (2001) who describe a “communication with light”. In the current study, one American experient (female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) wrote, “at first it was scary, due to a very high fever, there were hands coming towards me from a bright light, the brighter the light got the more relaxed I was”. This NDE happened between the ages of six and twelve years. In Greyson and Stevenson (1980) 49% of the experiencers report meeting other beings, including beings of light and deceased loved ones. In the current survey there were several references that fitted into this category including:

didn't want to come back, wanted to go with my Mum who appeared, she sent me back

(American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual)

There was also one reference which referred to the supernatural and return stages, namely:

I did not want to come back, but they told me i had too (sic). my heart began to beat again

(American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual)

Return

A definite sense of not wanting to return to this world was described by some experiencers. However, unlike the higher percentages noted in the studies by Greyson and Stevenson (1980), and van Lommel, et al., (2001), which are 27% and 13% respectively, only one experient in the current survey specifically mentioned a past life review. This experient, an American female (Over 55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) wrote that “my present life seemed to play before my eyes and all that was bothering me, (sic) this caused what I term an ego death enabling me to go on without the horrible encomerances (sic) and live free from them”. Another American female (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote that she was surprised to hear “a voice clearly telling me to choose whether to live to die and how to ensure each outcome. I chose to live, was unconscious in a hospital for 29 hours and woke up”.

6.2.2 Distressing Elements

The recent documented cases involving the distressing nature of some near-death episodes have lead to speculation about the prevalence of this quality in the NDE. Estimates of this vary from extremely rare, in a study of hospital-based near-death episodes by cardiac arrest patients (van Lommel, et al., 2001), to between 1% and 15% in a study by Bonenfant (2001). The findings of the current research suggest these estimates may be too low.

In addition to the 19.6% (N=130) of all the NDE experiencers who chose 'distressing' as the apt descriptor of their NDE, there was a small number of respondents who noted that they were neither able to explain nor understand their experiences. Others vividly described the torment they felt during their episodes using such words such as "scary", "frightening", "alarming", and "horrendous". Some spoke of their powerlessness and used terms such as "frustrating", "painful", "deeply painful", even "extremely painful" to describe their NDE. Other offerings, which clearly showed how upsetting or uncomfortable the experience was, included:

it suck to die

(American male, 36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual)

alarming - it was (as) if I was being warned back from the light/door/portal

(male, resident in Qatar, 36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) and

drop into nothingness where it was cold

(American male, Over 55 years, not at all religious or spiritual).

According to IANDS (2006b) there are four types of distressing NDE, variously described as feelings of powerlessness, nothingness, torment, and worthlessness. While not all these elements were identifiable in the current dataset, there were examples of an another element, bewilderment, which was inferred by the use of words such as "strange", "confusing", and "odd". Similarly, one experiencer wrote "DID NOT KNOW WAS DIEING (sic)".

6.2.3 Age of First Experience

All responses to the question 'overall, how would you describe your near-death episode(s)?' are summarised in Table 15. Following this, additional insights into

the impact of these episodes on the very young are offered, by way of a comprehensive review of the responses of experiencers who were preadolescent at the time of their first NDE.

Table 15: Near-death Episodes

N=477	ALL NDE %	Pleasant %	Distressing %	Other %
Pre birth	4.8 N=23	8.7 N=2	21.7 N=5	69.6 N=16
Under 2 Years	9.5 N=57	17.8 N=8	8.9 N=4	73.3 N=45
2-5 Years	7.8 N=51	18.9 N=7	18.9 N=7	62.2 N=37
6-12 Years	15.8 N=110	33.3 N=25	13.3 N=10	53.4 N=75
13-17 Years	17.9 N=130	29.4 N=25	23.5 N=20	47.1 N=85
18-35 Years	33.4 N=159	32.1 N=51	23.2 N=37	44.7 N=71
36-55 Years	9.7 N=46	23.9 N=11	19.6 N=9	56.5 N=26
Over 55 Years	1.4 N=6	16.7 N=1	33.3 N=2	50.0 N=3

First NDE: Pre birth

One curiosity is the occurrence of pre birth episodes. There is little documented research on this aspect of NDE and, in part, this may be because of the contentious nature of the subject and its wider implications. In the current study, 23 paranormal experiencers indicated they had experienced a NDE before their own birth. While more of this group of experiencers chose the pre-set option ‘distressing’ rather than ‘pleasant’ to describe their experience, when the relevant texts in the ‘Other - please specify’ section were

taken into consideration, on balance this group tended to regard their experience in either a positive or neutral light. This was evidenced by narratives such as “no stress to/about self but for others”, “formative”, “expectant”, “at peace”, and “void (sic) of time and space”. One experient, an American male (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) offered a much deeper insights into his own pre birth NDE, when he wrote that “the body died yet some cells/DNA remained intact/alive and when I awoke my physical features were different than before I died”.

First NDE: Under 2 years

A review of the responses from this subgroup indicated that most experients could not remember their first episode. However, one American male (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) seemed to shout about the transformative power of his NDE as he wrote in uppercase “I DO NOT REMEMBER THE EXPERIENCE, I WAS VERY YOUNG. IT WAS AFTER (THIS) THAT WAS REMARKABLE FOR ME (sic)”. Another experient (American female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual), who seemed to have some memory of the incident, showed concern for others when she wrote that “it was not about me, i (sic) felt sorry (about) the stress, they were under”.

First NDE: 2-5 years

Nearly half of the experients in this group (N=10) could not recall their experience. Of the remaining five experients, one confessed “I still don’t fully know how to explain it” and another experient, who indicated having between two and five episodes (American female, Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote about the full gambit of her emotions. In describing her multiple experiences she wrote that they ranged “from ambivalent to pleasant, distressing to unwilling to let go, distressing to peaceful, it never started pleasant”.

First NDE: 6-12 years

One Canadian male experient (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) described the first of his near-death episodes, which occurred when he was between the ages of 6 and 12 years, as a “life altering experience, (sic) I see more now than ever before and experience more than I ever thought possible”. Another experient (American male, 36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual) wrote that his near-death episode gave him “confidence that I’ll be able to face death with dignity”. Amen.

6.3 Survey Question: Has your experience of the paranormal changed your attitude to life?

More than two thirds (69.9%) of those who indicated they had experienced a paranormal event answered Yes to the above question. They also indicated that the principal impacts were on ‘myself’ and ‘life after death’. This finding support earlier findings (Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995; Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994; Milton, 1992; Palmer, 1979; Usha & Pasricha, 1989b). In the current study, the balance of the experients (N=962) did not answer this question. A summary of the pre-set responses is displayed in Table 16.

6.3.1 My attitude has changed towards: (multiple answers permitted)

Table 16: Impact of Paranormal Experiences on Attitudes

N=2113	Percentage of Experients Who Chose Each Option %
Myself	76.6
Life after Death	76.5
The Whole Meaning of Life Question	71.3
Death	69.7
The Whole World	63.3
My Family	51.0
My Friends	46.7
Other (please specify)	25.7

In addition to the principal impacts on ‘myself’ and ‘life after death’ many experients also indicated that their paranormal experiences had influenced how they regarded ‘the whole meaning of life question’ and their attitude towards ‘death’ itself. While the original pen and paper survey on which the current survey is based (Palmer, 1979) offered more options for this question (N=18), overall the results in Table 16 support the earlier findings that personal paranormal experiences impact on the attitudes to self, humanity, and the meaning of life, the most.

In addition to the pre-set options above, many experients took the opportunity, through the ‘Other please specify’ option, to write about the personal impact of their paranormal experiences. These recurring themes about how the paranormal has impacted on the experients is summarised in Table 17 and discussed in section 6.3.2.

6.3.2 Qualitative Themes

Table 17: Change of Attitude (Other - please specify)

Qualities referred to in ‘Other - please specify’ response option	Number of times Mentioned
N=542	
Universe, Everything	44
God, Creator, Higher Power	41
Paranormal Phenomena	37
Energy, Science, Quantum Physics	31
Perception of Reality	31
Life Purpose, Life Direction, Life Choices, Self Identity, Who am I?	30
Choice of Career, Life Calling, Recreational Activities, Work	24
Consciousness, the Mind	22
Animals, Nature	20
Time, Space	20
Religion	19
Personal Beliefs, Religious Beliefs	18
Spirituality	17
Peace, Letting go of Fear, Trust	12
Love	10
Intuition, Sixth Sense	10

Most of the additional insights into the personal impact of parapsychological experiences were expressed as either single words or simple phrases. Overwhelmingly, this subgroup of experients (N=542) indicated that they had been positively affected by their encounter with the paranormal.

In the narratives, the dominant theme was the sweeping change of attitude to the “universe” and “everything”. While these particular descriptors were similar to ‘the whole world’ pre-set option, the respondents seemed to want to emphasise the breadth and significance of their experiences. They wrote of “the interconnectedness of everything”, “the nature of life and oneness of the universe”, “the reality of the universe

and our existence”, “the entire cycle of the universe” and “everything - can't imagine it not being like this, now”. One experient seemed to scream that her entire attitude had changed towards “THE WHOLE UNIVERSE” (sic), while another was more phlegmatic: “my experiences have changed pretty much everything about my life” (American male, 18-35 years, slightly religious or spiritual). One Canadian male (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) stated that “everything I see, read, hear, touch, smell.....” was affected by his paranormal experiences. Others confided that their attitude to everything “grew to another level”; and that psi had changed their “perspective on everything”.

The second most frequent theme in the ‘Other’ narratives was based on a Higher Power. The next major group of descriptors had a scientific theme. Some experients simply wrote that their encounters had changed their attitude to “science”, “life sciences”, “quantum physics”, or the more complex “philosophy of science and epistemology”.

Members of another group volunteered information about the practical impact of the paranormal on their lives. Some wrote about its effect on their “health, career”, “goal setting” and “self-responsibility and self-control”; others noted there was an “improvement in attitude”, “self-esteem”, and a higher regard for “the importance of time”, and “living for the moment”. Some experients even attributed their career choice, choice of mate, and love of nature and animals to their paranormal experiences.

Some respondents knew the paranormal had changed their attitudes to life but because they had lived most, if not all their lives with an awareness of psi it was hard to discern the precise impact. “My past life experiences became apparent at such an early age (under 2 years)” wrote an American male (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual). “These experiences have occurred ever since I can remember being alive” wrote an American female (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), and another experient wrote that his experiences had “shaped” rather than “changed” him.

While only a few negative points about the impact of the paranormal were cited, this finding was in line with that noted in Kennedy, Kanthamani, and Palmer (1994). In the current study, experients wrote about being “confused”, “less social, I know more about people than I care to”, and I am now “more cynical towards life and death”. One of the more heart-rending submissions came from a British male who confided that he was

“totally lost now cause (sic) alot (sic) of crazy stuff has happened to me and my understanding of everything is destroyed cause (sic) i cant find answers” (British male, 18-35 years, not at all religious or spiritual). Another respondent poignantly wrote: “suicide is a powerful allure for me, I’d rather be ‘there’ than here” (American female, 36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual).

Finally, there was also humour and irony. An American female (Over 55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) noted that she could “peer through the barrier of life and death but never get a single lotto number right”.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, the dataset from the survey was used to address the research question on the impact of parapsychological experiences on the experiencers. Overwhelmingly, the majority of experiencers stated that their paranormal encounters had impacted positively on their attitudes in life. In the next chapter, the first part of the data pertaining to the final research question on the integration of parapsychological experiences is presented and analysed.

Chapter 7

**Results and Data Analysis: Integration
(Part 1)**

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 contained the results of the data that addressed the research question on the impact of parapsychological experiences on the experients. In this chapter, the first of two datasets are examined as part of the process of addressing the final research question, namely:

- What personal meaning do experients ascribe to their paranormal experiences?

In particular, this chapter reviews the data from the pre-set question on parapsychological studies, and the open-ended question on the possible cause of paranormal experiences. In Chapter 8, the remaining data on how the respondents regard their psi experiences, the meaning they ascribe to them, and the implications of these occurrences are examined.

7.2 Survey Question: Please choose one of the following statements that BEST describes what you think about the study of the paranormal

Table 18: Opinion on the Study of the Paranormal

	A	B	C	D	E	F
N=3194	%	%	%	%	%	%
YES	5.1	1.1	1.6	69.4	17.4	5.5

KEY

- A** The paranormal is nonsense and not worth exploring
- B** If the paranormal exists it is probably evil
- C** If the paranormal exists it is probably of little value to us
- D** The paranormal has existed for so long that is should be investigated
- E** I believe in at least one type of paranormal experience
- F** I have no opinion on the paranormal

This was the last question in the survey and it followed a similar line of

enquiry in Palmer (1979), but with slight modifications to the wording. As expected, given that only paranormal experiencers were included in the final analysis of the current survey, the majority of respondents chose Option D (N=2217) or Option E (N=554). The current findings support the generally “positive attitude” towards parapsychological research indicated in Palmer (1979) and the “open-mindedness” of 70% of the respondents noted in Usha and Pasricha (1989b). The current data are displayed in Table 18 above.

7.3 Survey Question: Do you have any thoughts or ideas about what may have caused your spiritual, mystical, religious or paranormal experiences?

Nearly half (N=1512) of the experiencers who completed the survey submitted an answer to this optional question. These responses generated a large volume of information and overwhelmingly, what was written was pro the paranormal. Given this inherent imbalance in the dataset, and to ensure that the voices of those in the minority were heard, the responses to the above question were collated according to the Option chosen in section 7.2 (refer Table 18). This analysis generated six subgroups and the five minor groups are analysed in this chapter. The narratives concerning the possible causes of psi which were submitted by the largest group of experiencers (Option D), are examined in Chapter 8.

7.3.1 If the paranormal exists it is probably evil

Not all the key words in the internet survey were defined, thereby deliberately leaving those in common usage open to personal interpretation. For example, the word evil may be perceived as having a religious connotation but, according to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary (online, 2008), evil is defined as “extreme wickedness and depravity, especially when regarded as a supernatural force”.

The ‘evil’ option was the least favoured pre-set option (Option B). It was nominated by only 1.1% (N=34) of all the experiencers and only a few members of this subgroup (N=11) lodged ideas on the cause of the paranormal. This group was atypical of the survey sample, more than half were males (N=18) and 50% were aged between 18 and 35 years (N=17). The residency mix, compared to the overall survey sample, was heavily biased in favour of America (70.6%). Half the respondents also described themselves as very religious or spiritual (N=17) and seven of the eleven experiencers who

submitted responses on what causes parapsychological phenomena, answered with references to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, prayer, the Holy Spirit, the devil, angels, Jesus Christ, and Christianity. There was a strong Christian element evident within this group, although the word 'God' was not mentioned (Bonenfant, 2001; Kennedy, 2006). A notable exception came from an experient who seemed tormented. He shouted that "SOMETHING IS TRYING TO COMMUNICATE BUT IT FREAKS ME OUT AND I BLOCK IT OUT (sic)" (American male, 18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual). In the current work, while 'evil' was substituted for the words 'sinful' and 'devil', which were used in both Palmer (1979), and Usha and Pasricha (1989b), the low incidence of this option choice reflects the findings of these earlier studies.

7.3.2 If the paranormal exists it is probably of little value to us

The second least chosen pre-set opinion on study involving the paranormal (Option C) was indicated by 1.6% (N=52) of all the experients, and of this group only a few (N=19) submitted narratives on the possible cause of their own parapsychological experiences. This group was also atypical of the total sample. Nearly 56% (N=29) of its members were male; 65.4% (N=34) were aged between 18 and 35 years; and 40.4% (N=21) described themselves as not being at all religious or spiritual. The trend was away from the overall American domination of the survey (40.4%) and there was also a higher representation of Australian residents (25%).

No single theme on the suggested cause of the paranormal was apparent in this group and the ideas posted ranged from statistical probability and Occam's Razor, to coincidence, and even a philosophical observation that "if strange things never happened, that would be the strangest thing of all" (British male, 18-35 years, not at all religious or spiritual). Some of the experients, who regarded the paranormal as having little value, mentioned God, prayer and meditation and overall, the low number of experients in this category supports the findings in Palmer (1979), and Usha and Pasricha, (1989b).

7.3.3 The paranormal is nonsense and not worth exploring

The third least favoured response (Option A) was selected by 5.1% (N=162) of all the experients and a small number of these (N=49) offered reasons for their own paranormal episodes. Given the final sample comprised experients only, it was not

surprising to find that fewer respondents chose this option than in previous surveys, where both experients and non-experients were included (Palmer, 1979; Usha & Pasricha, 1989b). This subgroup was atypical of the current sample. It was dominated by males (82.7%); an overwhelming majority described themselves as being neither religious nor spiritual (82.7%); the 18-35 years age group (51.2%) was more evident; and the residency mix moved away from American domination (42.6%) towards Australians (27.8%). Most respondents in this group regarded their experiences as neither paranormal, religious, nor spiritual in origin and the principal theme was that such occurrences were “common”, “natural”, “quite normal”, and even “perfectly normal” and as a consequence, no explanation was warranted. “Its (sic) humanity” suggested one experient. Others dismissed their experiences as “educated guesses”, “plain fantasy”, a “product of the mind”, “coincidental”, or “circumstantial” and thus, “not worth exploring”.

The remainder of the group tended towards science for explanations. There was a number of responses that specifically focused on “brain chemistry” and the notion that the paranormal was the result of “basic problems” with the brain. A sense of unwavering conviction emanated from this group that science has the answers. “I am certain there are scientific explanations for these experiences” wrote a British male (18-35 years, not at all religious or spiritual). Similarly, an American male with the same profile wrote: “I have experienced no events in my life for which I could not find a rational, believable explanation”. With equal certainty, from an Australian counterpart came this: “there are scientific explanations for these experiences. Ghosts dont (sic) exist, you cant (sic) speak to the dead, you dont (sic) go anywhere when you die and there arent (sic) any gods”. On a more moderate note, an Australian female (18-35 years, slightly religious or spiritual) suggested that “the laws of science are (not) really broken, we just think they are”.

The survey came in for some unsolicited and unfavourable feedback from a few members of this group. Various, the survey was described as “flawed”; the questions were “misleadingly phrased”; and from an Australian male (36-55 years, not religious or spiritual at all) came a word of warning that the researcher “will get many responses from people who genuinely believe they have paranormal power or have had paranormal experiences. Be aware that such responses in no way add to the probability that such experiences are *real*”.

7.3.4 I have no opinion on the paranormal

In the current study, while this was the third most popular pre-set opinion on whether paranormal studies should be conducted (Option F), this group was significantly smaller than in previous studies (Palmer, 1979; Usha & Pasricha, 1989b). This option was only nominated by 5.5% (N=175) of all the experients in the current survey. Ironically, while these respondents purported to have no opinion of the paranormal they did submit significant contributions on 'what may have caused' their experiences. As with the previous groups examined, this group was unrepresentative of the overall survey sample. It comprised more males (58.3%); there were considerably more respondents (55.4%) in the 18-35 year age range; overwhelmingly, the members were not at all religious or spiritual (41.7%); and, America was again relatively underrepresented (50.3%). While only a few members of this group (N=61) submitted ideas on the possible cause of their experiences, their answers were diverse. In the minority were references to God, interconnectiveness, childhood abuse and its attendant dissociation, and emotional distress. The main thrust of this group's ideas about the paranormal was scientifically based.

There was a return to chemical-based explanations. These included neurological and chemical imbalances, brain seizures, recreational drugs, and sleep deprivation and paralysis. Some experients used colloquial descriptions such as "brain glitches in the temporal lobe", "wonky brain chemistry", and "my brain playing tricks on me". This chemical-based theme was offered by many experients in the largest subgroup, namely those respondents who indicated that the paranormal should be investigated (Option D: refer Chapter 8).

"Biological definitely rules the metaphysical" wrote an American female (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), while another American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) suggested that "perhaps it is in the chemical makeup of one's biological system that is genetically handed down through the generations". Similarly, a British woman (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) suggested that "each one of us carries the legacy of our ancestors - our genetic code" and, as if to emphasise this point she continued: "ants know when part of their colony have died or found some sugar". This theme, which was touched on by this subgroup, also emerged strongly in the narratives of the largest subgroup (Option D: refer Chapter 8).

Further unsolicited feedback, of a personal nature was proffered. “Why (do) you seem to think that ‘paranormal’ experiences are somehow abnormal?” (American female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) and from a British male (36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual), the survey was a “shameful piece of self-serving nonsense being passed off as research”.

In this group, there was a small number of experiencers who linked their own issues of abuse with their paranormal encounters. Psi was regarded as both an escape and a means of self-preservation. One experiencer used meditation and writing and from a very early age, she composed stories and dreamt up “magic games” (American female, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual). Another respondent wrote of her “constant need to feel safe” and questioned whether her paranormal experiences were the result of “paranoic (sic) fears” (Australian female, 36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual). Conversely, another victim of abuse reiterated what he had been told by his psychologist, namely that his paranormal experiences occurred because his “brain found a way to protect” him (American male, 18-35 years, not at all religious or spiritual).

7.3.5 I believe in at least one type of paranormal experience

The second most favoured pre-set option (Option E) was nominated by 17.4% (N=554) of all experiencers. From this subgroup 219 submissions were submitted on the possible cause of parapsychological phenomena. This group was typical of the overall survey sample in terms of the gender mix (62.3% females and 37.7% males), the residency representation (America 63%; Australia 17.2%), and religious or spiritual profiles. While the familiar themes of God and drugs were revisited by this group, a number of new themes were also introduced.

The practices of meditation and prayer were mentioned frequently in connection with paranormal occurrences. Experiencers wrote about “focus through prayer or meditation”, being in a “meditative state”, “a prayer had been heard”, and “I pray not to be shown anything I can’t handle”. Furthermore, the word energy was mentioned in several different ways including “spiritual energy”, “emotional energy”, “universal energy”, and even quantum physics and the interchangeability of energy and matter.

The major theme to emerge from this group concerned the individual’s genetic makeup or their ethnic race. “Our whole family has had paranormal experiences” wrote a Native

American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual). She continued, “we believe our abilities are passed down the family over generations”. While only one indigenous Australian experient was identifiable in the entire paranormal survey, her rationale for paranormal experiences was similar. She wrote, “I’m aboriginal and I think it is just part of our genetic make up” (18-35 years, very spiritual or religious).

Within this subgroup of respondents who attributed their own paranormal experiences to genetics, there was a marked bias towards the significance of the female bloodline. The words of the experients were different but the sentiment was the same. Two females, both fairly religious or spiritual and in the 18-35 years age group, were from different sides of the world but they offered similar accounts. The Australian wrote, “my mother, grandmother and great grandmother have all had premonitions or spoken to the dead”. Her American counterpart announced, in a matter-of-fact manner that “sensitivity to the paranormal runs through my mother’s bloodline”. Similarly, in reference to the continuing existence of the bond she had with her now deceased mother another female experient wrote that her own mother “had the same sort of experience when her mother died. I can only assume this kind of thing runs in the family” (Australian, 36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual). The list of statements in this vein was long.

This group also contained numerous references to paranormal experiences which occurred early in life. These included:

I think I've been this way since childhood but couldn't identify this as a 'sixth sense', if you will, until I was an adult, because it is so much a 'normal' part of my daily life.

(American female, Over 55 years, slightly religious or spiritual)

did chalk it up to God-related things, but now I've learned to live and work with these 'gifts' - though I don't really view them that way.

(American female, 18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual)

The idea that the paranormal is a taboo subject was introduced by this group. Some felt their experiences set them apart at an early age. “From the time that I was very little, as far back as my earliest memories I’ve always felt that I was different than most people” (American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual). Others knew, consciously

or unconsciously not to talk about their experiences. One reported that she “never really told anyone until I was 8” (American female, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual), while another experient (American, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) confided her experiences, but with disturbing consequences. “The one time I told my mother that I saw ghosts” she wrote,” she asked if I needed to go on medication”.

By contrast, many experients in this group regarded their paranormal experiences as commonplace and typically, this was because those around them regarded psi as normal. One experient (American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) reflected that “not being told ‘it’s just your imagination’ has probably made me open to accepting the continuance of the incidents in adult life”, while an Australian female (36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) wrote that she had “always considered it (even from a very young age) to be a completely normal thing to have happen”. She continued that “nobody taught me that, it’s a feeling that comes from inside me, if that makes any sense”.

Generalisations were offered. Some experients expressed empowerment because of their paranormal encounters. “I can only vouch for my personal life-altering experience” wrote a Norwegian male (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual). “I wish everyone could experience it for just one moment, but I have come to realise we all get the chance, it is just if we want to take up the offer” wrote another male (Canadian, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual). Others adopted a more pragmatic approach. “I don’t live my life according to these incidents” wrote an Australian female (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), “but I don’t discount them either”.

7.4 Summary

In the first part of the chapter, the opinions of the experients on paranormal research were explored. While the overwhelming majority thought that the paranormal should be investigated, other respondents either believed in only parts of it, had no opinion of it, or regarded parapsychological phenomena as evil, not worth exploring, or of little value. In the latter part of the chapter, the responses from five of the six subgroups of experients about the potential cause of the paranormal phenomena were examined. In the next chapter, the narratives on the possible source of psi, from the largest group of experients (Option D), are examined.

Chapter 8

Results and Data Analysis: Integration (Part 2)

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7, 23.7% (N=359) of the narratives written on the possible cause of paranormal experiences were examined. These opinions were submitted by those who chose one of the five, least favoured, pre-set options that best described their attitude towards the study of parapsychological phenomena. In Chapter 8 the results of the analysis of the final group of narratives (N=1153) are presented. These were submitted by the largest group of experiencers, namely, those who stated outright that the paranormal should be investigated, and the examination of these viewpoints completes the task of addressing the final research question:

- What personal meaning do experiencers ascribe to their paranormal experiences?

8.2 The paranormal has existed for so long that it should be investigated

This choice was the most favoured of the pre-set options (Option D) given in the last question of the survey. This sentiment is also the preferred choice of the majority of participants in previous studies (Palmer, 1979; Usha & Pasricha, 1989b). Understandably, given the size of this group, its profile reflected the overall profile of the current survey sample, with slight variations. The bias towards females (66.9%) and the two older age groups (59%) was more pronounced. Further, the distribution among the four principal countries was weighted further towards the United States of America (64.4%) and away from Australia (12.7%). In addition, there was a higher percentage of experiencers in this group who described themselves as being 'very' (36.5%) or 'fairly' (35.6%) spiritual or religious, than in the overall survey.

The majority of themes mentioned by experiencers from the smaller subgroups were also discussed within this group. However, some themes emerged strongly and before exploring them fully, some of the lesser suggested causes are revisited, this time from the viewpoint of those who indicated that the paranormal should be investigated. As was the case with the majority of members of the other groups, the tone of the responses from this group was sincere, honest, and moderate. The following narratives exemplify these qualities:

I am of sound mind, and am not prone to flights of fancy - or delusion! - I will state quite categorically, that there is some remarkable evidence available that needn't involve anything other than an open mind to investigate the sensible alternative to the 'once you are dead, you are dead' mentality. I am not interested in 'New Ageism' or other associated deviations from good, honest truth!

(British male, Over 55 years, fairly religious or spiritual)

Similarly, from a Canadian woman (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) came the frank assessment:

there is absolutely nothing wrong with my mental faculties - nor any of my family. I suspect that the millions of other people worldwide who have had the same kinds of experiences would say the same. We can't all be wrong.

Further, there were numerous expressions of appreciation including thank you “for asking”, “for listening”, “for doing this”, “for letting me ramble on”, even “thank you for understanding”.

8.3 Negative Impact of Paranormal Experiences

Unsurprisingly, there were many more accounts of the negative impact of paranormal experiences in this group, but they did not dominate. These included: “they just happened...and they scared me when they happened”; and “some of these memories are still so vividly frightening that I wish not to relive them, sorry”. There were deeply moving stories of childhood trauma and some respondents linked such events with their own paranormal experiences. Other adults reported being traumatised by their encounters with psi and these accounts were dotted with poignant phrases including “very rough childhood”, “lonely child with imaginary friends and guides” and, from one experient, came a single word of explanation for her own paranormal episodes - “suffering”. Another experient, an American female (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) offered an insight into the controllable nature of her paranormal experiences. She explained, “I do not always like seeing or hearing things, I get scared too, and when I close that part of me off then I can readjust and let it back in a little at a time”.

The detrimental impact of parapsychological experiences on the experients and the potential link between psi and trauma and abuse are documented in the literature (Irwin, 1994, 1996; Lawrence, et al, 1995).

8.3.1 Childhood Trauma and Abuse

There were references to unhappy childhoods. Some experiencers mentioned this in passing, while others saw their childhood problems as the catalyst for their paranormal experiences. One female considered her own clairvoyant ability was “rooted in childhood trauma” and added that “abused children learn to scan for signs of danger very early. I was incested (sic) as a young child” (American, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual). Another described how being a victim of sexual abuse “ripped open some normal psychic and psychological boundaries”. She continued:

to survive the abuse (which was ongoing), I learned to leave my body and watch from the ceiling. The ability to have an out-of-body experience at will seemed to tip me over into a more permeable, open state of consciousness (sic).
(Canadian female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual)

There were a few accounts of childhood physical trauma, including the following from an American woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) who explained she was

raised by a very unpredictable violent tempered temperamental (sic) father. This forced me to read the energy even before he showed up from work trying to figure out what mood he would be in so that I could seek shelter. It was like living on a live volcano. you got to be pretty good in predicting an eruption.

Not all traumatic paranormal experiences in childhood were linked to abuse. An American man (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) contributed the following account of a past life recall which was both graphic and disturbing. He wrote:

well, I was born this way this lifetime to help me work out some fairly negative things I did (in) my very last lifetime as one who got deceived or deluded into the 'Spiritual' aspects of Nazism and the SS. I literally translated languages for people to help decide to which death or labor camp to send them. I had let my 'fascination' with the spiritual and beliefs be compromised because I had an incredibly arrogant streak thinking (the because back then,) because I experienced 'psychic' and spiritual visions, that I WAS 'special' and 'others' were less than me. When I became aware of the horror in which I was participating then, I objected and was promptly shot in the head, killing me. I remember THOSE dreams from a VERY young age. Those and some lives as a Native American.

Another male (Australian, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual), who spent his boyhood in Central Australia, suggested that his psychokinetic experiences were caused by “some weird electromagnetic thing maybe. I don't know, but I do know that whatever it was - if there is a straight-forward explanation (sic) - it's not common”. He continued:

plenty of people live in deserts, not many of them spend three years of their childhood wondering if they'll wake up in the morning. When I did talk to people about it, they all mentioned the Pine Gap military base. I suppose it was on a lot of people's minds at the time.

From a Canadian man (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) came the report that when he was five or six years old he was “visited by a fiery red ball” in his bedroom at night. He used to watch it spinning and then suddenly “it would rush towards me and through/into my chest”. Further, he confided that “as a child this was frightening and I told noone (sic)”. Another experient wrote that her early paranormal experiences stemmed from her sense of being “born to the wrong family”. As a child she had an ongoing desire “to be back in the spiritual world” and later, as an adult the connection she felt to her son allowed her to “re-connect to the spiritual world” which she had not “witnessed for some time” (American female, Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual). One experient, the daughter of alcoholics watched others suffer and connected that pain with her own paranormal experiences while another respondent, an American female (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) wrote that she watched her mother die of cancer when she was 11 and it was this traumatic event that brought about her “shift in perception that differs from others”.

The following account is reproduced in full and it is heart-rendering. In considering what caused her own paranormal experiences, an American woman (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote:

I have many ideas but the baby dying lead to my life being surreal. So really I believe that my life will be filled with these things...I have walked away from the ghost stuff and the odd channellings (sic) but I am still hip deep in other spiritual activities that I would rather not talk about. The abilities were tough at first but with age, knowledge and help from other like minds...no HELP from the medical cimmunity (sic) and NO HELP from authority figures that doubt rather than believe. I deal rather well with what this universe or other universes

throw at me. I am still freaked out by Aliens like the gray ones and all that so I do not have much experience in that....but I have found a piece of mind in all of this and a strength (sic) that I extend to others whom have simlair (sic) experiences. I STILL BEILIEVE (sic) TAKING MONEY OR BRAIN WASHING OTHERS is BAD BAD BAD...so I stay clear of that...but others who do such well it is their drama. I also believe that life is more then we can explain...if it was easy to figure out we would have as a collective people figured all the mysteries out long ago...I allow belief and dreams to drive me and never allow disbelief to harm me. I enjoyed filling this out a friend told me about it and I felt I could share a postive (sic) if not bizarre undocumented experience with you. My life has been a journey of sorts and I feel I should share this with you....now I hope this project helps you find the answers you need or the open mindedness to understand these experiences.....maybe if one day you need more of my help...life will bring us together if not....make sure you do not condemn the people who respond to this because of these stories ...these experiences effect so many in the world that judging the people is wrong....in other words have a open mind to the knowledge you gain from this.

At the beginning of her narrative this experient was referring to the death of a six month old baby, who died while she was holding it, when she was eight years old.

Some experients described the suffering they endured as children. They wrote of the feelings of isolation that came from being “different”. They learnt from an early age to hide their paranormal experiences. One Australian female (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) reflected that as a young child she had an “inclining (sic) of sensing things differently to most people” and that she “had to go through a lot of loneliness to realise the truth within”. Another experient confided that she had a hard time growing up “having esp, premonitions, telepathy, seeing apparitions and many other experiences, and not knowing where to turn, knowing I would be looked upon as a freak or nuts” (American female, 36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual). A Canadian woman (Over 55 years, not at all religious or spiritual), who endured her experiences privately, came to realise that “there was something going on that other people didn't seem to know about” and as a result, she kept her experiences to herself and began to search for explanations.

Some experients considered their childhood illnesses were the reasons for paranormal

experiences. There were general descriptions such as “very sickly as a child” and “high fevers”, while others wrote about specific medical conditions including bipolar disorder and epilepsy. A South African woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) pondered whether there is a correlation between epilepsy and the paranormal while another female (American, Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) was convinced that such a link exists. She observed, “there does seem to be some connection between the hard-wiring (sic) of my brain and the ability to experience other types of phenomena”.

The narrative from another American female (36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) suggested that she viewed her paranormal experiences in the wider context of the other life-impacting events she endured. Her narrative was written with resignation and humour, “I have experienced two near death experiences as a child, had two severe head injuries, had a (sic) extremely dysfunctional (sic) family and home life, and was an extremely shy and withdrawn child. Take your pick!!! :-)”.

8.3.2 Adulthood Trauma

Some adults seek understanding and acceptance about their experiences but, as some experients discovered, confiding in others about paranormal events can destroy relationships. As one American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) explained:

at first they (paranormal events) drove me crazy, but now I have come to grips at a certain level. Whats (sic) hardest on me is my relationship with my family has been permanantly (sic) damaged as I shared my experiences and some, like my brother, turned on me. My life will never be the same again. I have experienced things with others so I know I am not crazy.

She continued that

alls (sic) I know, is this is a strange world. I had a large extended family, very loving, and held a respected position within it. Now, some don't trust me, are afraid of me or think I am crazy. Generally, people really don't like this issue.

8.4 Religious and Spiritual Meaning of the Paranormal

There were numerous references to the link between psi and religion and spirituality - a theme which is extensively explored in the literature (Bainbridge, 2004; Bader, et al., 2006; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Piechowski, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Thomas & Cooper, 1978).

Various the experients referred to their encounters as “God’s own creations”, “God’s powers”, “God’s way of calling me to service”, “God’s gifts”, even “God’s thoughtful intervention”. However, not all experients referred to God in a religious sense. Rather, they wrote of God in terms of the “life force God”, “The Universe/God/Light”, “forces/spirits/God” or “non-human life forms, eg God, aliens”. Most respondents did not refer to a conflict between their religious beliefs and their experience of the paranormal and surprisingly, one experient even noted that his paranormal investigations had deepened his “christian faith even more!!”. An American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) confided that ever since her childhood she had been “very religious, very conscious of Jesus IN BODILY FORM around me, with me”, while an Australian woman (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) noted that her “Christian counsellors acknowledged these experiences but generally advised me to acknowledge them as mysteries, gifts even, but not to delve too deeply in the 'supernatural' world”.

There were only a few references to spirituality in Nature. However, one experient (Canadian female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) regarded the paranormal as an extension of the physical realm and just as natural. She wrote that she was brought up to *accept psychic matters, dowsing, hands on healing, and God. For me, it is just a continuation of being taught as a child, living in a rural and bush situation, to ‘feel’ what is out there, apart from looking for tracks, bent grasses/bushes etc, scat (bears, cougars).*

A Canadian (male, 18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) also wrote about Nature and in doing so, he reflected the sentiments of many. He wrote that “the cause for life is the cause for my spiritual, mystical, and relegious (sic) or paranormal experiences. God doesn't seem to mind what we call it, it just is”. He added that “these experiences are as normal as the sun rising every morning. It is only the mental contructs (sic) that have us divide, the mystical, spiritual. The paradox is, the paranormal is far more normal; common. Religion, that is just the politics of God”.

8.5 Scientific Themes and the Paranormal

As with some respondents in the other groups, particularly those who indicated that ‘the paranormal is nonsense and not worth exploring’, a number of experients who supported paranormal studies turned to science in their narratives, but not always to explain their experiences. A few specific references were made to the various branches of science, including quantum physics and neurochemistry but

predominantly, the experients in this group seem to regard science as lagging behind in the investigation of psi. From these respondents came comments like: “science will explain this all one day” and “there must be some scientific or biological explanation. But I don't know what it is”. Another suggested that “eventually everyone will think of ghosts and healing themselves as normal everyday occurrences (sic) ... just like I do” (Canadian female, Over 55 years, not at all religious or spiritual), and from an Australian male (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), there was humour. He invited the survey developer to talk to him again in

200 Years and science might be able to shed some light on the paranormal experiences that seems to plague me and my dreams at least :-). Shame I wont (sic) be around to benefit from the science.....

Some experients cited examples from history to caution against putting too much faith in science and to argue that science had been found wanting in the past. “When electricity was first discovered” wrote a British woman (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual), “it was ridiculed in the way many scientists now ridicule the so called paranormal” and from another experient, “not long ago people believed germs were a fairy tale as well”. An American male (Over 55 years, very religious and spiritual), who was familiar with the difficulty of replicating paranormal phenomena in the laboratory setting, maintained that “science, for the most part, is blinded by its insistence that everything needs to have ‘logical’ proofs and MUST be repeatable in a laboratory”. There was even signs of paranoia from a British male (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) who maintained that “there are more entities out there than science will ever discover, because they don't want science to discover them”, and an element of hope from an American female (18-35 years, slightly religious or spiritual) who found it

very unfortunate that the academic world of science is so demonized (sic) by those who flaunt their experience of the "paranormal". Although it is true that dogma more often than rational objective scientific curiosity motivates the efforts of academic scientists today, I hope that in the future both "worlds" will learn from one another.

Numerous experients used the word energy in their narratives about the cause of their paranormal experiences, but the word was not used in the scientific sense. Rather, there were references to “pulsating energy”, “positive energy”, “higher energy vibrations”, “yin energy”, “universal energy”, “devine (sic) energy”, “energy fields”, even “intelligent energy” and “natural energy”.

The study came in for more criticism from experiencers who indicated that they supported paranormal studies but this opprobrium, while passionate, was also limited. “What a terrible load of shite (sic) this is. I cannot believe that a reputable university would allow this kind of ‘research’ to be conducted under its aegis” wrote someone, whose profile cannot be reliably quoted. The respondent continued:

I will be writing to the Vice-Chancellor, the head of your faculty, and your supervisor, stating that this research is terribly damaging to the University.... I have posted suggestions on various science and skeptical forums about this abomination, and have suggested they answer with a random set of answers - thereby nullifying this ridiculous event. I personally will be filling out this survey daily, with a variety of different nonsensical answers.

(Submissions such as the above prompted the researcher to manually scan the IP addresses, using one of the functions on the programme, SurveyMonkey. This exercise indicated that only one survey was lodged from the relevant IP address.)

8.6 The Normality of the Paranormal

Many of the experiencers who regarded the paranormal in a positive light were raised in supportive family environments that were conducive to experiencing and acknowledging such occurrences. From an early age these experiencers regarded the paranormal as normal. One wrote, “as a child I was told not to fear these gifts, but instead to embrace them” (American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual). and another commented that she knew “the invisible IS ever since I was a child ...”.

However, not everyone reported having the support they needed. For some experiencers there was outright denial from their families; others sensed a general lack of interest or surprise. As one Canadian woman, (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) observed, the paranormal “wasn’t fostered in my family, but it was (not) discounted entirely either, as members of my family (including grandparents and great grandparents) had experiences”. For those who grew up in a family that was relaxed about the paranormal their personal journey was a different one. One American woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) reported that she welcomed the

metaphysical and just about every person on my maternal side has seen, heard or felt spirits, or has the ability to divine in some way. Since it was accepted in my family, I came to understand and embrace the mystical at an early age.

Other examples of the normalcy with which the paranormal was regarded include the following extracts from an American woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), who wrote that “since it was accepted in my family, I came to understand and embrace the mystical at an early age”, and from a Canadian female (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) came a textbook account of her childhood and upbringing. It read:

I grew up in a very open, supportive and loving family. My mother is the wisest, most intelligent person I know, and has spent much of her life learning about all aspects of the spirit world, and world religions, and spiritual growth. I and my siblings were always very curious, and peppered her with many questions about all of these things. So, from a very young age, I knew about psychic phenomena, and understood it. When I saw my first spirit at age 5 or 6, instead of my mother telling me that it was my imagination, as most parents would do, she explained that I was seeing a spirit. So, right from the start, I was unafraid of what I saw and learned to be accepting of it. So, I think that had a lot to do with why I can still see spirits so easily now (I am 30). I never suppressed (sic) what I was seeing, and my family provided me with an encouraging environment to learn (sic) about and accept my abilities.

For other experiencers who grew up with the paranormal, in an open and accepting environment, it came as a shock to discover that not everyone felt the same. A South African woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) wrote that she grew up “accepting them (paranormal experiences) as normal. When I was a child I didn't realise that other children didn't have the experiences that I had”. Similarly, an American male (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) wrote:

I experienced paranormal events from childhood on & was never aware they were out of the ordinary until early teenagerhood (sic), when the death of my grandmother, and her subsequent reappearance in her house, led me to ask my mother what was happening, & she told me about our supernatural heritage, a feature I shared with her, at least one uncle, my grandmother, & two of her sisters.

His account concluded with the stark observation that his mother “is terrified of our ability to see and speak with the dead and hear the thoughts of others, and therefore (she) is reluctant to tell me much”.

8.7 Major Themes

There were three major themes evident in the data, namely references to ethnic groups, genetics and the female bloodline. Colloquially, these words are used interchangeably but, according to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary (online, 2008), ethnic pertains to a group of people with a common national or cultural tradition; genetics relates to inherited characteristics; and bloodline refers to a set of ancestors. However, to maintain the integrity of the data and to reflect the mindset of the survey participants, as reflected in their choice of words, these categories were not conflated.

Many experients wrote at length about the significance of patterns within their families, their bloodline, and their genetics, and overwhelmingly, there were many references to the importance of the female bloodline. From the 3,194 surveys submitted, only one experiент specifically stated that she was unique in their family. This American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote, "I am the only one in my family who seems to have these abilities. I discovered some abilities at a much younger age, but either feared or ignored them".

8.7.1 Ethnic Groups

Some experients turned to their ancestral lineage for the source of their own paranormal experiences. Two ethnic groups dominated these accounts, the Celts and the Native Americans. One American woman (36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual) wrote that paranormal abilities were "passed down from my mother who is a sensitive. My grandmother was a full bloodied (sic) cherokee indian. Also, a sensitive". Another experiент wrote that her "family (maternal) are of Irish descent and my great-grandmother often spoke of her 'second sight'". Likewise, another American female (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) explained, "my famiy (sic) is riddled with this sort of thing." She continued:

I know part of our heritage - one part is Shawnee indian (sic), one part is Scotsman. I am a direct decendant (sic) of St Margaret of Scotland (and her husband Malcolm III) and I understand she too had a lot of 'special' gifts and events in her life.

Similarly, another experiент with the same profile wrote that

in both my Mom & Dad's families, there have been people who have had premonitions, have had psychic experiences, and who have been able to foretell

the death of others. By way of explanation, she offered that “my Dad's family is Irish and my Mom's is Scottish, and they both hold that the Celts are very psychically open people.

Further, another female (Canadian, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote:

here are some guesses. I am of Native American and Irish heritage. Both of those cultures have traditions of shamanism & paranormal stuff happening to folks. Perhaps if it is such a desired or admired trait in those cultures, it got selectively bred into folks.

These sentiments were echoed by many other experiencers. In the words of an American woman (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual), her “gifts run through the bloodline ... My mother had a great aunt that was a medium and her father was as American Indian Shaman”. From New Zealand, a Kiwi male (18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) noted that he had a “long family history of having experiences that dates back many generations - family from Scotland (sic) and Ireland (sic)”, and another antipodean (Australian female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) linked both race and genetics. She wrote that “race memory has a lot to do with this. Our genes remember through generations”.

8.7.2 Genetics

From their responses, it was evident that many experiencers had given a great deal of thought to the source of their parapsychological encounters and independently, many reached the same conclusion that their genetic makeup was the key to their paranormal abilities. The survey narratives were dotted with statements that attested to this. Some experiencers offered short answers such as it “runs in the family”, “close family bond”, “runs in our blood”, “a family history of such things”, “inherited quality”, “from a line of psychic people”, “my family is like this”, and even “my family has always had these kind (sic) of experiences”. Other experiencers made sweeping statements and generalisations while making this genetic connection, including “my whole family constantly experience paranormal phenomena”, “all our relatives ... have had some kind of experience (sic)”, and an American woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) reported that she

came from a family that has accepted the metaphysical and just about every person on my maternal side has seen, heard or felt spirits, or has the ability to divine in some way.

However, most experients were more measured in their tone. One older experient (Canadian female, Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) wrote that she was “born into a family where my Grandmother and Father were spiritual as well as physic”. She continued, “it has always been a part of me”. Similarly, an Australian woman (36-55 years, very religious and spiritual) wrote of her “natural ability” which she concluded was the result of “genetics and family environment”.

Further, an American woman, (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual) contended that

there is a genetic pre=disposition (sic) to the spiritual/psychic in my family - grandmother (mother's side) had prophetic dreams, my mother was telepathic and prophetic, most of the family has experienced some sort of psychic phenomena.

“Many people in mother's family had ability” wrote an American female (Over 55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), while a woman from the Bahamas (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual) noted that “it seems to be in our family from my mothers side”.

8.7.3 Male Bloodline

There were very few references made to the male line and its link with paranormal abilities. However, one male experient wrote that:

it runs in the family from my father's side, although I like to ignore it, push it away, I still have this empathy thing, read people, see how they feel and think. But it seems to be inherited, or past along or anything. My mother's side does not have any of this, though.

(Dutch, 36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual)

Similarly, another male (American, 18-35 years, fairly religious or spiritual) noted, “it appears to be an inherited quality, more common in women than men, although I am one of two male known members of my family line to possess this faculty”. Two women (both Over 55 years) observed, in turn, that “my sons and I always know how we are feeling or if there is trouble, without being told” (Australian, not at all religious or spiritual), and from the other female:

as noted its genetic - goes back throughout the family history and seems to have manifested in different degrees with sons and now with a couple of young grandsons. From precog (sic) to ghosts.... its just part of life.

(American, fairly religious or spiritual)

8.7.4 Female Bloodline

Numerous experiencers mentioned their female lineage and the potential role it plays in experiencing the paranormal. One Australian woman (36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual) wrote she had “noticed that its mostly women who have these experiences. Maybe they are more willing to discuss them than men?” No matter what are the reasons for the paranormal, the narrative of an American female (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) epitomises the sentiments of many experiencers. She wrote, “well my mom said I inheretid (sic) the gift from the women in my family going back to my ancestor's. My father pretty much said the same thing to me and I agree with them 100%”. Another American woman observed that “most of the women in my mothers (sic) side of the family all seem to have alittle (sic) of this even my daughter. she's (sic) 9 and she has had experiences (sic) with her great grandma (fathers) just died a year ago” (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual). From a British female (Over 55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) came:

my mother used to give my sister and myself (sic) telepathy exercises when we were children. I don't know if these have helped. I had to give up my daughter at birth & met her finally last year, at age 37, only to find out that she has had many similar experiences and although she didn't know my mother's name, had frequent 'visits' from a warm and loving woman called Muriel & felt she was her guardian angel. She was amazed when i (sic) told her that Muriel was her grandmother. In our case it seems to run in the family. I think it is a skill that gets stronger the more you practise it, but your mind has to be open to it in the first place.

Some experiencers, such as the following American females (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual, 18-35 years, very religious or spiritual, and 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual respectively) regarded their paranormal experiences as peculiar. “I think the females of my family experiance (sic) strange things”, wrote the first. The second observed that “the women in my family have strange abilities and unexplained unique abilities. My great-grandmother told my Mother when I was small, she has sight...’. Similarly, the third experiencer asserted that “it comes from my mother's side of the family. She had a lot of strange experiences while she was growing up too”.

Some narratives were dotted with references to intuition, a theme that is briefly touched on in the literature (Mishlove, 1997). In the current survey one American woman wrote:

from my observations my maternal grandmother and my mother were highly

intuitive; able to know things without having a logical way to know these things. My best guess is that this higher level of intuitiveness is passed down generation after generation.

(36-55 years, very religious or spiritual)

Similarly, another reported:

my mother simply calls hers intuition, but she has dreams as well (so do I and my daughter). I am not sure why this vein should run thru (sic) the women in my family, but it certainly seems to.

(American female, 36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual)

From an Australian woman (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) there was an instructive account of the insightful way that her family handled paranormal occurrences. She wrote that:

women in my family (on my mums side) have generally had dealings with the 'paranormal'. I always find it interesting, because my mum never actually spoke to me of such things. It was only when I experienced something that I would come to her and ask my questions, and she would answer them openly, but never answer more than what was necessary. She always waited for me to discover things for myself.

A Canadian female (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual) contributed a lengthy submission which also touched on many of the subjects mentioned by others, and because of this her statement is reproduced in full below.

The force runs strong in my family as we all joke. 5 (sic) generations of women passed these gifts down genetically. I suspect because of that some of the stuff I saw and experienced as a child was not dismissed like with other children who get told to stop being silly etc. I never fitted in to the 'normal' roles as a child and so gave up long before I went to school and felt inclined to want to fit in. I tried at some point to ignore the gift (not really a gift as I feel we all have this ability some are just not utilising it). I have tried to remain open to experiencing stuff throughout my life and stuff has happened to make me realise that reality as we are taught it is much different. You truly do create it as you go. Being open minded and still slightly sceptical so you ask questions to find your truth is a big factor. Having similar minded friends you can talk to about those

experiences is a real boon. I have folks tell me all the time about odd stuff as they seem to feel comfortable with me, but some have carried these things for years being unable or not feeling safe to tell them to their family or peers. I have an inquiring mind, and ask a lot of questions. I have read a lot and taught psychic development a few times. I explored alternate healing techniques and such as well.

All my family have some sort of alternate healing skill which we were led to learn and use. This extends to all my cousins without exception. I guess having this as a part of my everyday beliefs helps. It's not like just going to church on a Sunday (sic). As a 5 yr old I asked my Mum how could God be down here at the Methodist church at 10.30 and also up at the Anglican Church at the same time? She explained carefully how he is omnipresent and could be everywhere at all times. My answer then was "well why do we have to sit on these hard seats when we could be at home and chat to him there?" No fooling kids is there? And I talk to God, which I am coming to suspect is merely a higher power on an hourly basis. Yes he even answers sometimes. I suspect he might answer every time but I don't always hear the answer LOL (sic).

8.8 Other Themes

There were a few references to witches in the family trees, although no definitions were offered. "I am a Celtic Witch by lineage and also a Shaman (Oglala Sioux Native American)" wrote one American (36-55 years, very religious or spiritual), with obvious pride. Similarly, another American woman (36-55 years, fairly religious or spiritual), in offering an explanation for her own paranormal experiences wrote: "we came from a line of witches. ... it may be plausible (sic) that the gifts were passed down to my mother's and father's families". In a more detailed account of her own ancestry, one American female (18-35 years, very religious or spiritual) reflected that in her family

it is normal to experience the paranormal. It is something that has been passed down through the centuries from the women. we have a few men who experience it, but not many. We have traced our lineage back to 1567 in Scotland to a woman named Bessie Dunlop (aka The Witch O' Dalry) She was burned at the stake for being a Spiritual Medium.

Another American female (36-55 years, not at all religious or spiritual) shared her family

lineage and wrote that she had a history of

'witches' that goes back over 1000 years. I assume we have a family tendency to empathy/telepathy that has been passed down genetically. I grew up surrounded by women who 'knew' & have many of the same skills that they have manifested.

Other experiencers referred to “water witches” from Appalachia, “wiccans”, and even a “kitchen witch”.

There were also references to spiritualism. Some experiencers referred to their own experiences as members of the Spiritualist Church, while others wrote about the significance of spiritualism in their ancestral lines. “I am the fourth generation of a spiritualist family” declared a British male (36-55 years, slightly religious or spiritual). “Therefore I suspect it was inevitable”, he continued. Similarly, “I come from a family of spiritualists, so these (paranormal) occurrences (sic) are second nature to me” (American female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual). One American female (Over 55 years, very religious or spiritual), shared her insight into the dynamics of the extended family. She explained that her

father's family contained many psychic aunts, going back to the 1800's and Spiritualism. We had a seance when my grandmother died (their sister-in-law) and many ancestors came through. I was around seven at the time. All through my life I have opened myself to such experiences.

(American female, 36-55 years, very religious or spiritual)

While several experiencers, including some already highlighted, referred to their paranormal ability as a “gift”, only one specifically linked intelligence with paranormal ability. This experiencer confided:

its my life, always been there. Like people in my head. Lost it once when my son died for 2 months thought I would go mad with the silence. I have a very high IQ and when my kids were tested, they did too and the testers said PSI factors go with IQs... I know my telekenisis (sic) only comes out now when I am angry or upset. I control who or what I read, and get exhausted in large groups blocking. Normal for me but I know not normal for everyone. I just want to know how it works and why do we have it in my family?

(American female, Over 55 years, slightly religious or spiritual)

This reference to the potential link between intelligence and giftedness is supported in the literature (Fasko, 2001; Feldman & Goldsmith, 1991; Lovecky, 1998; Noble, 2000; Piechowski, 2001a, 2001b; von Karolyi, Ramos-Ford, & Gardner, 2003).

8.9 Summary

This chapter was the second of the two-part presentation of the data which addressed the final research question on how experiencers integrate their spontaneous parapsychological experiences. In Chapter 8, this issue was examined from the viewpoint of the largest group of experiencers, namely those who indicated that because the paranormal had existed for so long it should be investigated. Several themes which were introduced in the previous chapter were revisited, including the negative impact of the paranormal, the role of abuse and trauma, and religious, spiritual, and scientific explanations of psychic experiences. New themes also emerged. These encompassed the normality with which experiencers regarded their parapsychological experiences; the suggested role that genetics plays in psi experiences; the importance of the female bloodline; and the ability of certain ethnic groups to readily display psychic ability. All the major recurring themes in the survey are reviewed in the next chapter, and their implications for the field of education, in particular, and future research in general, are presented.

Chapter 9

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

9.1 Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis established the context for the current research. In Chapter 1 the rationale for the study was presented. The literature review was covered in Chapters 2 and 3. Specifically, Chapter 2 contained an analysis of the relevant texts pertaining to usage of the WWW to gather research data. In Chapter 3 a comprehensive review of the parapsychological literature was given, which included examples from the illustrious religious scriptures that, according to Radin (1997), are “encyclopaedic repositories of stories of psi effects”. An overview of the vast contemporary collection of personal parapsychological accounts, and the role that modern modes of communication, including the WWW, play in disseminating these reports were presented. These cyber-based accounts, written by ordinary people about their own commonplace, though at times extraordinary experiences, point to parapsychological experiences being universal, and unfettered by language, cultural, social, and demographic divides. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 the review of spontaneous parapsychological studies highlighted the dearth of academic scrutiny of the paranormal side of life. This obvious gap in the literature was the inspiration for the current study and the research problem:

- What types of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena do paranormal experiencers encounter, and are there unifying themes in the reports of these experiences?

In turn, the research problem provided the impetus for the research questions:

- What is the nature and incidence of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena?
- How do paranormal experiences impact on the experiencers?
- What personal meaning do experiencers ascribe to their paranormal experiences?

In Chapter 4 an outline of the worldview, research design, methodology, and method used in the current enquiry was presented. In Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive the substantial databases of information were analysed. Specifically, Chapter 5 addressed the research question on the ‘nature and incidence’ of spontaneous parapsychological experiences and presented a comprehensive analysis of the types and frequencies of paranormal

phenomena reported. The ‘impact’ of the paranormal on the experients was examined in Chapter 6. In Chapters 7 and 8 the data was examined to address the research question on the ‘integration’ of parapsychological encounters. Chapter 9 completes this study. In sections 9.2 to 9.5 the findings, as they pertain to the research problem and research questions, are reviewed and summarised. In section 9.6, a statement about the contribution the current investigation makes to the existing knowledge base is proffered. This chapter concludes with a list of recommendations for future research.

9.2 An Overview of Findings as they Pertain to the Research Problem

Several trends were noted in the data. Specifically:

- all of the ten types of parapsychological experiences surveyed were reported;
- experients from a large number, and diverse range of countries reported paranormal occurrences;
- there were marked variations in the levels of incidence of each phenomenon;
- paranormal experients tended to report multiple encounters of the same phenomenon;
- experients tended to report multiple types of parapsychological experiences;
- a gender difference, in favour of females was noted;
- statistically significant variations were noted between countries; and
- experients consistently commented on the marked impact that the experiences had on themselves, their values, and their lives.

The quantitative database revealed that all of the ten categories of parapsychological phenomena were spontaneously encountered. The survey attracted submissions from residents of 59 countries and both the qualitative and quantitative datasets corroborated the existing research on the ubiquitous nature of psi. Thus, irrespective of what people believe about the paranormal, and whether psi can or cannot be scientifically proven, this study supports the view that parapsychological experiences are a fundamental part of the human condition and an everyday occurrence for some people.

The mean number of different types paranormal experiences equated to more than five per experient. Some parapsychological occurrence were more prevalent than others. In descending order, the top five most frequently cited phenomena were déjà vu, premonitions, apparitions, telepathy, and out-of-body experiences. The variations in the level of incidence ranged from 90% of experients reporting déjà vu through to the least

reported experience, the near-death episode, which was indicated by only 14.2% of the survey participants. Furthermore, over 50% of the experiencers of six of the different types of psi reported they had encountered that phenomenon six or more times, indicating paranormal experiences may be recurring, rather than one-off occurrences. In addition, the qualitative findings point to the significance and enduring impact of paranormal experiences on the experiencers and their families.

These findings are now examined in detail, according to the three research questions.

9.3 The Nature and Incidence of Spontaneous Parapsychological Experiences

There were four main findings pertaining to the 'nature and incidence' research question and they are summarised below.

Multiple Types of Paranormal Experiences

First, within the survey sample of 3,194 experiencers the prevailing trend was to report multiple types of parapsychological occurrences. On average, each experiencer reported more than five types of psi. This may indicate a specific ability or talent to experience the paranormal and have implications for the heritability of paranormal potential (McClenon, 1994b).

Early Onset of Paranormal Experiences

Second, both the narratives and the quantitative datasets revealed that many first encounters of paranormal phenomena occurred during childhood, with some first incidences happening before birth, or in the first years of life. The majority of first experiences, of eight of the ten phenomena under review happened before the experiencer reached adulthood. A small group of experiencers indicated that paranormal events occurred very early in their life, with 2.7% of all first experiences happening before the age of two, and a further 11.6% occurring between two and five years. While the implications of these very early experiences are markedly underexplored in the literature, it seems reasonable to suggest that any experience that occurs in the formative years may play a significant role in the development of the child and impact their health and well-being. Thus, the premature onset of paranormal experiences may have far-reaching implications, not only for parapsychological research but for pedagogy and child and adolescent psychology.

Similarly, the pre birth reports of out-of-body experiences and near-death episodes point to an area of human experience that is ripe for investigation. The possibility that consciousness predates birth has far-reaching implications. It has ramifications for the individuals concerned; those responsible for the physical, mental, and emotional welfare of children and adults; and members of some special interest groups, including the pro-life and pro-choice lobbies.

Gender Differences in Reporting of Paranormal Experiences

The third finding concerned gender. For eight of the ten phenomena covered in the qualitative section, there were highly significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in the number of females who reported experiencing them, when compared to the males. This result was supported by the qualitative data. There were numerous comments on the general heritability of paranormal abilities and the narratives were also peppered with specific references to the female bloodline. While the body of literature on the link between gender and paranormal experiences is small and variously referred to by Terhune (2004) as both “weak and fragmented” and “impressive”, the current study adds weight to the argument that some individuals may have an inheritable trait that renders them prone to “unusual experiences” (Linney, Murray, Peters, MacDonald, Rijdsdijk, & Sham, 2003). Further research on this link is needed.

Variations Between Countries of Residence

Finally, there were significant differences in the incidence of paranormal experiences reported by residents of the four major contributing countries, namely the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. These national differences were highly significant ($p < 0.01$) for eight of the ten phenomena under review, suggesting there may be an ethnic element to the ability to experience psi. This finding corroborates some earlier studies (Haraldsson, 1985; McClenon, 1994a).

9.4 The Impact of Parapsychological Experiences

Only 30% of the experients stated outright that they had not been influenced by the paranormal in any way. However, the majority of survey respondents reported that their encounters had influenced not only how they regarded themselves but also their attitudes to life after death, the whole meaning of life question, and death itself. There finding was supported by both the qualitative and quantitative datasets and it confirms previous research (Braud, 2005; Heath, 2005; Kennedy, 2006; Palmer, 1979).

While most of the reports by paranormal experiencers were of a positive nature, a small number of participants described personal difficulties that occurred as a result of their paranormal experiences. These instances, which were covered in section 6.3.2 and section 8.3, support previous findings in the literature concerning the adverse impact of the paranormal (Collins & Jones, 2004; Irwin, 1994, 1996; Lawrence, et al., 1995; Parnia & Fenwick, 2002; Noble, 2000; Piechowski, 2001a, 2001b, 2003).

9.5 The Integration of Parapsychological Experiences

Overwhelmingly and understandably, given that only paranormal experiencers were included in the current study, the vast majority of respondents indicated that ‘the paranormal has existed for so long that it should be investigated’. This finding is consistent with earlier studies (Palmer, 1979; Usha & Pasricha, 1989b). A large proportion of respondents rationalised their own parapsychological experiences by either referring to their own religious or personal beliefs, or by seeing their experiences through a broader spiritual lens. A small number of experiencers turned to science for an explanation of their episodes, others considered themselves endowed with special gifts or paranormal talents. However overall, the majority of the participants suggested that they had successfully integrated parapsychological phenomena into their lives.

Before considering the wider implications of the findings of this exploratory study on the nature, incidence, impact and integration of paranormal experiences, the limitations of the current research are presented.

9.6 Limitations of the Research

In addition to the restraints imposed by the language (English) and the mode of data collection (access to the internet), several paranormal themes were raised in the qualitative section that were beyond the scope of the current research. However, to maintain the integrity of the study, these subjects are placed on record. There were a small number of references to aliens and UFOs, and while Ufology is the subject of the first, recently conferred Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Melbourne, the topic remains largely underexplored (Sim-Jones, 2008). In addition, several participants in the current study referred the researcher to Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) and Instrumental TransCommunication (ITC). Both methods claim to receive visual or auditory communication from spirit entities, using technology such as radio, phone, video, television, fax, and computer.

9.7 Broader Implications of the Current Findings

The current study contributes to the small body of academically collated anecdotal evidence on the paranormal. The research findings are compelling and confronting, and they reveal that the impact and implications of spontaneous parapsychological experiences are far-reaching and enduring. The paranormal sits comfortably with most experients; it disturbs others.

Furthermore, it tests academia. At the broadest level, paranormal manifestations challenge the status quo of most disciplines including medicine, technology, military intelligence, business, and many branches of science including physics, biology, and psychology. At the most fundamental level, the results of laboratory-based parapsychological experiments documented elsewhere and the persistent reports of spontaneous paranormal occurrences, such as those contained in the current study, pose direct challenges to the theories and practices of those branches of knowledge concerned with the human condition. These include philosophy, religion, sociology, and education. Thus, while psi continues to be a lived experience for many people, it remains unexplained, and generally outside the comfort zone of those in academia.

This study corroborates previous conclusions about the universal nature of the paranormal. From the very young to the old, and irrespective of race and gender, people confront parapsychological phenomena in everyday settings and live with the impact of their experiences. Some experients reach out for help, and seek meaning and understanding via the public domain. The anonymity of the internet supports the proliferation of speculation, information and misinformation about psi, and members of the next generation of tech-savvy adolescents and children freely access and contribute to these burgeoning collections of research, narratives, videos, audio recordings and photos. To reflect this reality, the academic curriculum needs to embrace the field of parapsychology, in all its manifestations. Not only will this provide a framework through which knowledge can be imparted, it will provide the opportunity to hold and contribute to informed discussions on the paranormal. Furthermore, it may open a window into the private world of young paranormal experiences and even invite a sharing of confidences.

As the current study indicates, manifestations of psi go largely unnoticed by those who purport to be caregivers of people of all ages. Paranormal incidences may provide

plausible explanations for why some children feel different or isolated, and become withdrawn and silent. Some children may be drawing on their own encounters to inform their creative writing, acting and artwork. Others may use role-playing and games to make sense of their psi encounters. A seemingly innocent question asked in class, the personal stories shared during show and tell time, and confidences traded in the playground or the classroom, may reveal more about the private world of children, the extent of their resourcefulness and their personal resilience than previously imagined. As this study indicates, some children turn to their parents or caregivers for help, especially when they sense an openness to the paranormal, but what of the others? Psychologists, teachers and counsellors are ideally positioned to directly assist paranormal experiencers in dealing with their experiences, but if they are not adequately informed and personally able to deal with these issues, then their clients miss out.

As the qualitative and quantitative datasets in the current study indicate, there is a pressing need for spontaneous paranormal experiences to be taken seriously. All who have a duty of care to children - parents, guardians, teachers, counsellors, psychologists - need to be informed about the possibility, even the likelihood, that young people experience parapsychological phenomena. In the short term, paranormal encounters impact on the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the child. In the longer term, as this study indicates, no matter whether the paranormal is encountered in the earlier or later part of life, it does have a lasting impact on the experiencers. It impacts on beliefs and values, and how experiencers regard themselves, and life and death.

The prevalence of psi, as outlined in previous research and evidenced in the current study, suggests that it is a fundamental part of the human condition. For some people, experiencing the paranormal meets certain elemental human needs. It gives hope, comfort, direction, and meaning to life, and promotes mental well-being. Thus, the question of whether the paranormal exists is a moot one because, as noted in McClenon (1991), if people perceive phenomena as tangible, irrespective of whether they are real or not, the consequences of such circumstances are real in themselves. For many who participated in the current study, the paranormal is real and for some, the consequences are tangible and enduring.

Eventually, the cumulative effect of the small but growing body of laboratory-based psi experiments, the huge and ever expanding volume of cyberspace paranormal reporting,

and the occasional academic study, such as the current one will be sufficient to directly challenge the mindset found in traditional counselling rooms, psychology sessions, school curriculums, and classroom teaching. As Radin (1997) notes, when parapsychological phenomena are finally given the serious consideration due them, the implications will be far-reaching and intellectuals and laypersons alike will be forced to “reconsider their basic assumptions about space, time, mind, and matter”. In the meantime, individuals who are unfamiliar with the current status of paranormal research and those who reject the possibility of psi, may be unwittingly or otherwise denying those in their care the opportunity to fully explore their paranormal experiences.

9.8 Recommendations for Future Research

As is often the case with investigations, having stated the research problem, reviewed the relevant literature, and outlined and addressed the research questions, the researcher concludes the current study with a catalogue of unresolved issues and markers for future research. These are listed below. The modified survey instrument, which was the cornerstone of the current study, could be tested as part of the proposed studies.

Specifically, there is a need for:

- a comparative study that explores the relationship between gender and the incidence of paranormal experiences;
- an inter-nation comparative study which compares and contrasts differences in the occurrence rates of parapsychological phenomena;
- an exploratory study on pre birth experiences of psi;
- a survey of the attitudes of teachers and educational professionals, including psychologists, towards the paranormal;
- a comprehensive paranormal, fact-or-fiction type questionnaire for those involved in all levels of the education system;
- similar studies to the two aforementioned, to be conducted among health professionals, with a potential emphasis on near-death episodes;
- an exploratory study on the viability of a referral service database for paranormal experients;
- a study to investigate the timing of the onset of paranormal experiences. Do some types of phenomenon begin earlier or later in life?
- the new field of positive psychology to investigate the empowering nature of parapsychological experiences;

- a genetic study into the heritability of a 'psi gene'; and
- further research into UFO encounters and alien abductions, and scientific investigation of the veracity of claims by exponents of EVP and ITC.

9.9 Summary

This investigation is an exploratory study. It has given a voice to the thousands of experiencers who gave their time and shared their oftentimes private paranormal experiences, in the name of research. The findings indicate there is enormous scope and need for further investigations of spontaneous parapsychological experiences. Currently, while there are some researchers dipping into the realms of psi there are many other opportunities, for educationalists and psychologists in particular who are well positioned to research the experiential side of psi, to become involved.

However, to do so, may require a step into the unknown.

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Appendix A

Analysis of Survey Responses in 'Other' Category by Current Country of Residence

<u>Country</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Number</u>
Argentina	4	Nepal	1
Austria	6	Netherlands	9
Bahamas	4	New Zealand	12
Bahrain	1	Nigeria	1
Belgium	9	Norway	5
Brazil	8	Pakistan	1
Croatia	1	Panama	1
Cyprus	2	Philippines	6
Denmark	6	Poland	2
Ecuador	1	Portugal	3
Estonia	1	Puerto Rico	3
Finland	6	Qatar	1
France	7	Romania	3
Germany	12	Russia	5
Greece	6	Singapore	5
Hong Kong	1	Slovenia	2
Hungary	5	South Africa	18
India	10	South Korea	1
Indonesia	2	Spain	4
Ireland	16	Sweden	9
Isle of Man	2	Switzerland	5
Israel	3	Tanzania	1
Italy	5	Turkey	1
Japan	1	Ukraine	1
Kuwait	2	Zambia	5
Macedonia	1	Zimbabwe	4
Malaysia	5	<u>Major Contributing Countries</u>	
Malta	1	Australia	485
Mexico	5	Canada	228
		United Kingdom	252
		United States of America	1979



Dr Beverley Jane
Faculty of Education
Peninsula Campus

14 September 2006

2006/695 - The nature, incidence and impact of spontaneous parapsychological phenomena

Dear Researchers,

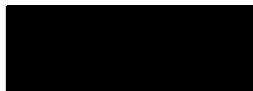
Thank you for the information provided in relation to the above project. The items requiring attention have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH). Accordingly, this research project is approved to proceed.

Terms of approval

1. This project is approved for five years from the date of this letter and this approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
2. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all information that is pending (such as permission letters from organisations) is forwarded to SCERH, if not done already. Research cannot begin at any organisation until SCERH receives a letter of permission from that organisation. You will then receive a letter from SCERH confirming that we have received a letter from each organisation.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by SCERH.
4. You should notify SCERH immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project:** Changes to any aspect of the project require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to SCERH and must not begin without written approval from SCERH. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. Please provide the Committee with an Annual Report determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. SCERH should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by SCERH at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

All forms can be accessed at our website www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html

We wish you well with your research.



LJ Mrs Lyn Johannessen
Acting Human Ethics Officer (on behalf of SCERH)