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SPONTANEOUS CONTACTS WITH THE DECEASED:  
A LARGE-SCALE INTERNATIONAL SURVEY REVEALS THE  
CIRCUMSTANCES, LIVED EXPERIENCE AND BENEFICIAL  
IMPACT OF AFTER-DEATH COMMUNICATIONS (ADCs)

*By Evelyn Elsaesser. IffBooks. 2023. 352 pp. £17.99.*

*ISBN 9781803412283*

This important and fascinating book reports the results of an extensive international research project undertaken by an eminent team of researchers; Prof. Chris Roe, Dr Callum Cooper, and David Lorimer, with Evelyn Elsaesser

being the lead researcher. The research was further supported by the scientific committee comprising Profs. J. Kim Penberthy, Peter Fenwick, and Kenneth Ring.

The book is an in-depth report of the first phase of the research, which was undertaken between February 2018 and January 2020 and set out to investigate the phenomenology and impact of after-death communications (ADCs). At the time of writing, the second phase of this research process was still in progress (July 2021 to June 2024). This book fulfils the third research objective, which is to disseminate the findings. The first two research objectives are fulfilled within the text: (1) the description of the circumstances of the occurrence and the phenomenology of ADCs, and (2) an analysis of the impact of ADCs.

A mixed-methods approach was used, with the quantitative aspects consisting of helpful descriptive statistics while the qualitative aspects provided the rich descriptions of the experiences reported. The data comes from the most extensive multilingual ADC survey conducted worldwide, and consists of 1,004 questionnaires completed in the languages of either English, French, or Spanish. The book discusses a detailed and thorough analysis of these completed questionnaires. The categories of the data collected included sensing a presence, hearing a voice, feeling physical contact, seeing the deceased, smelling a fragrance, ADC during sleep, and ADC at the time of death, culminating in other forms of expression of ADCs.

The multitude of cases depicted in the text give good insight into the phenomenology and impact of these experiences. One example is that of a deceased grandmother of the participant who told her where a lost ring could be located. Another example was given of an apparent communication that occurred while the participant was speaking to someone on her mobile phone. As she approached the house of the deceased person, the line was interrupted by the type of breathing that the deceased person experienced in the time leading up to their death.

The messages conveyed during these experiences were summarized as the four Rs, these being: reassuring, resolving, reaffirming, and releasing. Some brief examples of dialogue between the participant and a deceased loved one include “Everything is well. Don’t be sad” (p. 193) and “The time had come for me to leave. Don’t worry about me. Everything will be fine for me. I love you and will love you forever” (p. 196).

Although the research focus was the phenomenology and impact of ADCs, participants were also questioned on their subjective impression of the reality of the experience. The participants’ perceptions of authenticity of the ADCs were shown to increase with time, from 77% a few hours/days after the experience, to 90% at the time of participation in the research. Interestingly, only 41% were convinced of the authenticity of ADCs prior to their own experience. Consideration is also given to these experiences being due to expectation or being self-generated (pp. 273–280).

The latter part of the book focuses on the impact of the ADC, where 49% felt that the experience was important, 36% believed the experience was life changing for them, and 9% felt it was moderately important. Interestingly, before the ADC, 63% of participants believed in an afterlife, but following the ADC this belief increased to 93%.

An important discussion was the impact that ADCs can have on the bereavement process. The evidence would suggest that ADCs have a very positive and beneficial impact on mourning the loss of a loved one. For example, “I have closure—no longer in the limbo state of having a missing brother. I’ve been able to grieve his physical loss but I’ve gained an ongoing, real relationship with him ...” (p. 292), and “The emotional pain dissolved. I have a new relationship with my dad. Different but closer now. He understands me and his love for me is complete” (p. 292). The experiences can console and support those undergoing the loss and would suggest they are beneficial and therapeutic. However, conversely, it is acknowledged that not having experienced an ADC can be a cause of sorrow if the participant expected to have some form of ADC.

The captivating testimonies of ADCs included in the book highlight the range and complexity of this phenomenon. Each testimony is unique, yet similar aspects are reported by the 1,004 participants, which also builds on earlier work undertaken in this field of research. The book is packed with fascinating accounts of ADCs that have been carefully analysed and scrutinized by the researchers. This is an important book that disseminates the findings of a team of scholarly researchers who are experts in this field of study. It is an excellent guide for future researchers, and I hope one that is referred to by many with an interest in this topic.

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