

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Assisted After-Death Communication: A Self-Prescribed Treatment for Grief

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Estimates reveal that almost a third of American adults have had contact with the deceased (LaGrand, 2005; Newport & Strausberg, 2001). These spontaneous after-death communication (ADC) experiences include sensing the presence of the deceased; visual, olfactory, tactile, and auditory phenomena; powerful dreams; hearing meaningfully timed music associated with the deceased; lost-things-found; communication through electric devices; symbolic messages; synchronicities; and other phenomena seemingly unexplainable through the prevailing Western materialist, reductionist worldview (e.g., Barbato, Blunden, Reid, Irwin, & Rodriquez, 1999; Conant, 1996; Daggett, 2005; Dreyry, 2003; Haraldsson, 1988; Houck, 2005; Klugman, 2006; LaGrand, 2005; Normand, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Nowatzki & Grant Kalischuk, 2009; Sanger, 2009; Sormanti & August, 1997). Many

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experts have asserted that these experiences are ubiquitous: They are not limited to specific socioeconomic groups or types of deaths or to particular times after the death (Dannenbaum & Kinnier, 2009; Houck, 2005; LaGrand, 2005). They appear to be a natural part of the grieving process (e.g., Barbato et al., 1999; Klugman, 2006; LaGrand, 2005). Several researchers have specifically examined the effects of spontaneous ADC experiences on the bereaved and found that they fulfill specific psychological needs and positively impact the grieving process (e.g., Conant, 1996; Drewry, 2003; LaGrand, 2005; Parker, 2005; Nowatzki & Grant Kalischuk, 2009; Sormanti & August, 1997; reviewed in Krippner, 2006). Similarly, induced ADC experiences have also been shown to positively affect the resolution of grief (Botkin, 2000; Hastings et al., 2002).

This extensive body of research implies a potential for similar effects after assisted ADCs, the experience of hearing from deceased loved ones during readings with mediums. Mediums, individuals who regularly experience communication with the deceased, are often stereotyped as charlatans based on the historical prevalence of such characters in their profession. However, the phenomenon of mediumship has been examined scientifically since the 1880s by researchers including William James and Oliver Lodge. Modern mediumship research includes studies of the accuracy of mediums' statements under controlled conditions (e.g., Beischel, Boccuzzi, Biuso, & Rock, 2015; Beischel & Schwartz, 2007; Kelly & Arcangel, 2011; Roy & Robertson, 2004) as well as examinations of their phenomenology (e.g., Beischel & Rock, 2009), psychology (e.g., Roxburgh & Roe, 2011), physiology (e.g., Beischel, 2013), and neurobiology (e.g., Delorme, Beischel, Michel, Boccuzzi, Radin, & Mills, 2013; Hageman, Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Caixeta, Wickramasekera, & Krippner, 2010). The three types of content commonly found in mediumship readings include information identifying of the deceased, information about events in the life of the bereaved that have occurred since the death, and direct messages. In general, this information assists the grieving in recognizing that their relationships with the deceased still exist, thus falling within the continuing bonds model of grief (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996).

Many bereaved individuals are presently receiving readings from mediums, though little is known about the effects of this self-prescribed treatment option. For example, assisted ADCs may be more preferable to people fearful of unexpected contact from the deceased and may also be useful for those who desire contact but have not yet experienced it. Work with a licensed mental health professional (MHP) in

combination with a mediumship reading may be beneficial in addressing the acute grief experiences of the bereaved. In those cases, MHPs may wish to convey to clients that deciding to receive a reading should be done with significant forethought and intention, and they should consider providing resources to clients to create appropriate expectations of the mediumship process.

Initial case studies and exploratory survey data demonstrate profound effects on grief after readings with mediums (Beischel, Mosher, & Boccuzzi, 2015), though no systematic studies have been performed. The Bereavement And Mediumship (BAM) Study is a randomized clinical trial examining the potential benefits of personal mediumship readings. Its aim is to effectively determine if receiving mediumship readings is helpful, harmful, or neither. Due to the controversial nature of this line of research, traditional routes of funding do not exist, and the investigative team is relying on crowdfunding to complete the study (www.AfterlifeScience.com).

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