



## What the Deceased Communicate, What we Learn About Their State of Mind, and how this Impacts Grief

### Mixed Methods Analysis of a Multilingual Case Collection of Spontaneous After-death Communications (ADCs)

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**Abstract**<sup>1</sup> – A spontaneous and direct After-Death Communication (ADC) occurs when a person unexpectedly perceives a deceased person. These contacts, which appear to be initiated by the deceased, are perceived through the senses of sight, hearing, touch, or smell. Often, the experient simply senses the presence of the deceased. ADCs occur while awake, asleep or falling asleep (in a hypnagogic state of consciousness) or waking up (in a hypnopompic state of consciousness).

Since 2018, the authors have been conducting a long-term international research project on the circumstances, phenomenology and impact of spontaneous and direct ADCs. To date, they have conducted a mixed-methods survey in six languages, which has resulted in 1,311 completed questionnaires. In 2022, the authors published a paper in the *Journal of Anomalistics (JAnom)*, presenting some of the findings from their initial surveys in English, French, and Spanish with 1,004 participants (Elsaesser et al., 2022, pp. 36–71). The current complementary analysis includes data from a German language version of the survey,

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1 A German version of the article is available online at [https://www.anomalistik.de/images/pdf/zfa/JAnom25-2\\_242\\_Elsaesser-et-al\\_de.pdf](https://www.anomalistik.de/images/pdf/zfa/JAnom25-2_242_Elsaesser-et-al_de.pdf)

conducted from August 2022 to March 2023, which produced 235 responses. The current analysis, which combines quantitative and qualitative data, pays particular attention to the state of mind of the deceased as perceived by the participants and the impact of these perceptions on the grieving process.

Among the participants who were able to sense the state of mind of the deceased, the vast majority reported positive moods. The contact was centered on them, and the deceased had conveyed their intention to assist and support them. The minority of participants who perceived the deceased's state of mind as (rather) negative reported that the contact was focused on the deceased and the difficulties they appeared to be facing. These contacts did not seem to serve to comfort the participants. This type of contact is difficult for partners, family and friends and can complicate the grieving process.

The positive effects of ADCs on the grieving process are discussed, which can be attributed, among other elements, to: 1) the unexpected and unsolicited perception of the deceased and the experiencers' conviction that the experience was real; 2) the resulting belief that the connection to the deceased continues and has survived the death of the body; and 3) the perceived messages.

*Keywords:* After-death communication (ADC), ADC, Phenomenology, Impact of ADC, Bereavement, Grief, Coping with grief, State of mind of perceived deceased, Emotional state of perceived deceased

[...] I sense this all, *intensely*, when I speak to experiencers who tell me about discarnate beings “coming into” their room and consciousness, effortlessly transcending any and all boundaries of self or mind. Such superintelligent beings become perfectly physical. And then they disappear, seemingly into nothing. They move at will in and out of this three-dimensional world, our so-called reality.

Jeffrey J. Kripal<sup>2</sup> (2024). *How to Think Impossibly*, p. 226.

## ***Introduction***

A spontaneous after-death communication (ADC) occurs when the experient unexpectedly perceives a deceased person through the sensory organs of sight, hearing, smell or touch (Wool-lacott et al., 2021; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Arcangel, 2005; Wright, 2002; Schwenke, 2014). Not all ADCs involve fully developed perceptions – it is quite common to merely feel the presence of the deceased person. ADCs occur while awake, asleep or falling asleep (in a hypnagogic state of consciousness) or waking up (in a hypnopompic state of consciousness). These experiences occur in very different forms and under a variety of circumstances. The perception of a synchronistic event that seems significant and representative of the deceased

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to the experients and which they attribute to them, as well as seemingly inexplicable electrical or electronic phenomena (e.g. via mobile phones, televisions, music devices, luminaries), are very common (Elsaesser, 2021, pp. 114–142).

Induced contacts that are brought about, for example, by the intervention of spirit mediums, EMDR<sup>3</sup>, hypnosis, psychomanteum (mirror observation technique<sup>4</sup>), the use of devices (e.g. Instrumental Transcommunication, ITC<sup>5</sup>) or other procedures do not belong to the spontaneous and direct ADCs that we are investigating in our research project.

Research has shown the universal and timeless nature of ADCs. Perceiving the deceased seems to be an inherent human ability. Reports of spontaneous ADCs have been collected on all continents and apparently go back as far as historical records can take us into the past. Perhaps the earliest of all recorded ADCs, in this case an apparition that purportedly occurred in 1963 BCE, is presented by Bourke (2024). Amenemhat I, the founder of the twelfth dynasty of ancient Egypt, appeared to his son Senwosret at a time when he was still unaware of his death:

In a rather dramatic monologue, Pharaoh Amenemhat returns as a ghost to explain to his son and his loyal followers what has happened during their absence from the palace. Senwosret's father gives a detailed account of his assassination during a palace coup. "And look what has happened, a heinous murder," the pharaoh's spirit called out to his son, explaining that they had killed him during the night. (Bourke, 2024, p. 8)

This phenomenon is widespread: An estimated 30 to 35% of people report one or more ADCs in their lifetime, with this proportion rising to 70 to 80% for the bereaved (Streit-Horn et al., 2022).

The positive effects of spontaneous or induced ADCs on the grieving process have been the subject of a number of studies (see, for example, Beischel et al., 2017; Beischel, 2019; Botkin & Hogan, 2005; Cooper et al., 2015; Elsaesser et al., 2021; Elsaesser et al., 2022; Elsaesser et al., 2023; Kamp et al., 2021; Steffen & Coyle, 2011; Steffen et al., 2017; Steffen, 2021).

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3 Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a form of psychotherapy designed to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It was devised by Francine Shapiro in 1987.

4 Raymond Moody worked with a mirror viewing technique originally used by the ancient Greeks to make contact with the dead. He described these experiments and the results in his 1993 book "Reunions: Visionary Encounters With Departed Loved Ones."

5 Association for Transcommunication Research (VTF) e.V. [www.vtf.de/](http://www.vtf.de/): "Instrumental transcommunication (ITC) is an objectively verifiable para-phenomenon based on a hitherto unexplained anomaly in the function of electronic communication systems."

Jahn and Spencer-Thomas (2018) conducted a survey of 1,301 people who had lost a loved one to suicide. The aim of this study was to qualitatively explore descriptions of continuing bonds through spiritual experiences after suicide. They conclude, “suicide bereavement can be complicated for many, and spiritual experiences such as a sense of presence of the deceased may help provide meaning-making and continuing bonds. These spiritual experiences may help in the bereavement process. By examining the qualitative responses of a very large sample of people bereaved by suicide, this research reaffirms that spiritual experiences have deep meaning and are often regarded as positive in many individuals bereaved by suicide.” (Jahn & Spencer-Thomas, 2018, p. 248)

In a small survey of 13 participants, McCormick and Tassell-Matamua (2016) investigated the nature of ADCs, how participants felt about it and how it affected their grief. They conclude:

Communication with deceased others can occur, and when it does it is a largely welcome and beneficial experience. It brings comfort to the bereaved who come to feel they have not lost their loved ones for good. It also brings a sense of continuity: The bereaved not only feel that their relationships with the deceased have somehow persisted post-death but that they too may enjoy consciousness post-death. It also leads to existential benefit in the form of personal and spiritual growth, including a loss of fear of death. ADC has important implications not just for the bereaved but also for humanity as a whole. (McCormick & Tassell-Matamua, 2016, pp. 167–168)

The state of knowledge of ADCs has been advanced in recent years, notably through the collection of more than 3,300 first-hand accounts from people who believe they have been contacted by a deceased loved one (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995). With over 1,300 accounts collected, the authors have expanded this body of data. However, vast areas remain relatively unexplored and unknown. In particular, we have very little information about the presumed existence of the deceased in another dimension (or state of consciousness) and, more specifically, about their state of mind.

The research question addressed in this paper, which has not yet been discussed in the literature, concerns the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the apparent state of mind of deceased persons, based on data provided by participants in our surveys. If this state of mind is perceived as positive, it may facilitate the grieving process, as the bereaved are reassured about the well-being of their family members or friends. If this state of mind is perceived as (rather) negative, it may complicate the grieving process, as the bereaved are concerned about their loved ones. Where respondents report extended or multiple ADCs there is scope to explore whether that state of mind remains relatively stable or changes (perhaps evolves) over time. In posing these questions we acknowledge that perceiving the deceased, and in particular making

inferences about their state of mind, is inherently a *subjective* experience, and may be susceptible to distortion over time, but the primary concern here is not to establish the ontological status of the experience but to note its effects on the witness.

### ***Our research project***

Since February 2018, we have been conducting a large-scale, long-term multilingual research project entitled “Investigation of the phenomenology and impact of spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs).”<sup>6</sup>

The research project has three objectives: 1) description of the circumstances of occurrence and the phenomenology of ADCs; 2) analysis of the impact of ADCs on experiencers; and 3) dissemination of research results to the general public and the scientific community.

### ***Collected data***

We did not pre-specify sample sizes for our databases. Rather, each survey version was made ‘live’ for prespecified periods of time. The English survey was open from August 2018 to January 2019 and resulted in 418 responses. The French survey was open from September 2018 to March 2019 and resulted in 440 responses. The Spanish survey was open from October 2018 to April 2019 and resulted in 145 responses. Research results were published in scientific journals and collective works (Elsaesser et al., 2021; Elsaesser et al., 2022; Elsaesser, 2022; Elsaesser, 2024; Evrard et al., 2021; Penberthy et al., 2021; Penberthy et al., 2023, Roe, C.A. et al., 2023; Woollacott et al., 2021) and published in a book (Elsaesser, 2021; Elsaesser, 2021; Elsaesser, 2022; Elsaesser, 2023; Elsaesser, 2025 [in press]). The German survey was opened later, from August 2022 to March 2023, and yielded 235 responses (Elsaesser et al., 2023; Elsaesser & Bieler, 2025 [in press]).<sup>7 8</sup>

Data collection is ongoing. The questionnaire in English is now available on the ADC project website.<sup>9</sup> Questionnaires in French, Spanish, and German will be relaunched soon.

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6 We would like to thank the Bial Foundation (awards number 169/2020 & number 396/2024), the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and a foundation that does not wish to be named publicly for their support.

7 All publications of the project are available on the project website: <https://www.adcrp.org/>

8 A Dutch survey (August 2022 to March 2023) yielded 17 responses and a Chinese survey (September 2023 to June 2024) resulted in 55 responses, with a total of 1,311 completed questionnaires in six languages.

9 <https://www.adcrp.org/>

In 2022, the authors published a paper in the *JAnom* entitled “Phänomenologie und Auswirkungen von spontanen Nachtod-Kontakten (NTK) – Forschungsergebnisse und Fallstudien” (Elsaesser et al., 2022, pp. 36–71), presenting some of the findings from their initial surveys in English, French, and Spanish with 1,004 participants. The participants’ demographics, types and modalities of ADCs, perceived messages, and their impact on belief systems and grief were discussed. The relationship between the experiencers and the perceived deceased, as well as the perceived state of mind of the deceased, were presented.

In this complementary paper, we present the German data to supplement the historical data already published. The data collected reveal similarities and some differences between the language groups studied, which are outlined in the following case studies. Special emphasis is placed on the ‘state of mind of the deceased’ and illustrated with qualitative material. It builds on Haraldsson’s survey, which asked participants “In what mood was he/she?” with a similar set of options to choose from (Haraldsson, 2012, p. 256). The responses to this specific question have not been published, therefore a comparison with his findings was not possible.

We examine what insights can be expected from this exploratory study and what hypotheses it could lead to.

## *Methods*

### **Study design**

Data were collected via survey that comprised quantitative and qualitative items in a retrospective cross-sectional design.

### **Materials**

A comprehensive questionnaire with 194 items (including follow-up questions after affirmative responses) was developed. The questionnaire begins with an initial description of the ADC in the respondent’s own words, to ensure that their account is not biased by the specific questions we subsequently asked.

Standard demographic data such as gender, age, marital status, educational level, occupational status, religious affiliation, etc. are collected. Detailed questions about the circumstances of occurrence, features of the experience as they related to each modality separately (including during sleep), and the messages perceived form an important part of the questionnaire. The circumstances surrounding the occurrence of the spontaneous contact were the subject of a

series of questions. The health and emotional state of the experiencers at the time of contact and the extent (or absence) of their grief were examined, as well as the emotions associated with the experience. A series of questions provides information about the identification of the perceived deceased, their profile, details of their passing, and the relational and emotional bonds that had connected them to the experiencer. Two important sections of the questionnaire concern the impact of ADCs on the experiencers' belief system and on the grieving process.

The hard-copy questionnaire was transposed into an online version, using the Online Surveys platform of the University of Northampton, UK (<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/online-surveys>). Online delivery was preferred because this enabled greater outreach to participants, who could be provided with a web link and allowed to complete the survey at their convenience.

### Participants

Participants were recruited with a purposive snowball sampling method by advertising the survey during public talks and through social media forums that specialize in ADCs and related phenomena. This clearly indicated that to qualify for the study the respondent must have had an experience that they regarded to be an ADC. Interested parties were referred to the principal investigator's web page that gave further information about the project and provided a link to the survey. In this analysis we considered responses to items that asked about the apparent psychological state of the deceased person as interpreted by the witness and also those that concerned the interpretation of the ADC and its effects upon afterlife beliefs and the bereavement process. This was intended to provide prevalence data and to identify prototypical case examples to illustrate types of experience.

### Ethics

The research project received ethical approval from the University of Northampton (approval number FHSRECSS00084) and was preregistered (reference: KPU Registry 1046) with the Koestler Unit Study registry at the University of Edinburgh (<https://koestlerunit.wordpress.com/study-registry/registered-studies/>). The survey landing page reminded participants of the nature of the study and of what participation would entail, including that data were volunteered anonymously, and that it was possible to withdraw data once submitted within seven days. Respondents confirmed that they consented to participate in order to progress to the questionnaire.

## Survey results

### Demographic data

There is a clear gender difference in participation, with 85% of women participated in the initial English, French and Spanish surveys, compared to 14% of men, and 1% other (e.g. transgender). The German survey includes 77% women and 23% men. This is not unusual. Literature indicates that women and men experience ADCs in roughly the same proportions, but women report them more (Castro, Burrows & Wooffitt, 2014, pp. 1–15.) Nearly half of those surveyed (D 44% = E/F/S 48%) had a university education, and a significant number of them had a professional activity (D 49% = E/F/S 58%). A minority (D 32% = E/F/S 21%) were retired. The civil status of the participants does not reveal any particular specificity. The number of participants who were widows/widowers is not very high (D 19% = E/F/S 13%). The demographic data collected and partially reproduced here show that, at several levels, the respondents do not differ from the general population. However, it can be observed that people with a high level of education are over-represented among the participants in our surveys.

### Data on bereavement

Our research findings confirm the positive effects of ADCs on the grieving process (first column: results of the German survey, second column: results of the English, French and Spanish surveys):

**Table 1**

*Emotional healing through ADCs*

Did the ADC bring you comfort/emotional healing?	D	E,F,S
Yes	80%	73%
No	9%	10%
Uncertain	5%	8%
I never mourned the perceived deceased	7%	8%

The effects of ADCs on grief are manifold and can be analysed from different perspectives.

The first element is the perception of the deceased and the deep conviction of the experients that this contact was real and not a misperception or an illusion caused by their grief. The participants in our surveys told us to what extent they were convinced of the authenticity of their experiences.



**Table 2***Impression of authenticity of the ADC shortly after the experience*

Shortly after your experience (a few hours/days after the contact), did you think that your ADC:	D	E,F,S
Was authentic beyond doubt	73%	77%
Could possibly really have happened	19%	14%
It was unlikely that it was authentic	2%	1%
Was certainly not authentic but rather an hallucination/illusion created by grief	1%	2%
I did not ask myself the question	4%	5%
Uncertain	1%	1%

The conviction of the authenticity of the ADC has deepened over time, perhaps due to reflection on the experience, reading relevant material or sharing with other people who have had similar experiences, etc.

**Table 3***Impression of authenticity of the ADC with hindsight*

Today, with hindsight, do you think that your ADC:	D	E,F,S
Was authentic beyond doubt	83%	90%
Could possibly really have happened	15%	8%
It was unlikely that it was authentic	1%	0%
Was certainly not authentic but rather an hallucination/illusion created by grief	0%	0%
I did not ask myself the question	0%	0%
Uncertain	1%	1%

The second element that arises from the perception of the deceased is the equally deeply felt conviction that the connection to the deceased continues and has survived the death of the body, which is a surprise for many experiencers (Elsaesser et al., 2021). The deceased seem to be communicating to their loved ones: I can manifest myself to you in exceptional, rare and precious moments. Our relationship continues, it is dynamic and reciprocal.

We asked our study participants how they assessed the continuity of the connection to their deceased loved one:

**Table 4**

*Relationship with the deceased*

How would you describe your relationship with the deceased?	D	E,F,S
My relationship ended when he/she died	2%	4%
I thought that the relationship ended with death but my ADC revealed that the bond continues	30%	34%
I believed that my bond with the deceased continued after death and my ADC deepened the connection	47%	49%
Uncertain	9%	6%
Other	11%	7%

The third element concerns the messages of the deceased perceived by a majority of our participants according to their statements. The following table lists the perception of messages by ADC type (first digits: results of the German survey preceded by the letter D, followed by the combined results of the English, French and Spanish surveys).

**Table 5**

*Frequency of messages by ADC type<sup>10</sup>*

Did you receive a message from the deceased during the ADC?	Yes	Uncertain	No
ADC of sensing a presence	D 67% = 74%	D 16% = 15 %	D 17% = 11%
Tactile ADC	D 76% = 80%	D 16% = 10%	D 8% = 10%
Visual ADC	D 83% = 80%	D 8% = 9%	D 10% = 12 %
Olfactory ADC	D 54% = 60 %	D 20% = 21%	D 25% = 20%
Was the perceived communication different from a thought?	Yes	Uncertain	No
Auditory ADC	D 78% = 87%	D 8% = 6%	D 14% = 7%

The most common message – and undoubtedly the most important for the experients – is: I am alive, I have survived the death of my body, and I am well (Elsaesser, 2021). Are these messages accompanied by a perception of the emotional state of the deceased? This is the topic of our contribution.

<sup>10</sup> Different sensory modalities often occur simultaneously in the same ADC.

*State of mind of the perceived deceased*

When we lose a loved one, and if we believe in the survival of consciousness after physical death, we wonder if they are well, if they are suffering, or, on the contrary, if they are happy in their new form of existence. Messages from the deceased are mainly focused on the experients and seem to aim to reassure and support them, particularly during the painful period of mourning. They communicate that they are alive and well, but reveal nothing about their new form of existence.

Nevertheless, we tried to at least collect information about the emotional state of the deceased by asking our participants the following question (Q81): *Did you perceive the emotional state / mood of the deceased?* Several appropriate answers could be ticked.

We have compiled a table with the data of the participants who answered our question about the emotional state of the perceived deceased. The results listed indicate the number of participants and the percentages of the new German survey and the historical English, French and Spanish surveys, followed by the combined results<sup>11</sup>.

**Table 6***State of mind of the perceived deceased*

State of mind of the deceased	German 235	English 418	French 440	Spanish 145	Combined 1'238
<b>Q81 answered</b>	179 (76%)	314 (75%)	326 (74%)	107 (74%)	926 (75%)
<b>Calm / peaceful</b>	41 (23%)	160 (51%)	168 (52%)	50 (47%)	419 (45%)
<b>Radiant with bliss</b>	81 (45%)	85 (27%)	85 (26%)	25 (23%)	276 (30%)
<b>Eager to comfort</b>	78 (44%)	128 (41%)	192 (59%)	16 (15%)	414 (45%)
<b>Compassionate</b>	50 (28%)	84 (27%)	85 (26%)	20 (19%)	239 (26%)
<b>Sad</b>	15 (8%)	32 (10%)	37 (11%)	14 (13%)	98 (11%)
<b>Agitated</b>	16 (9%)	15 (5%)	20 (6%)	5 (5%)	56 (6%)
<b>Frightened</b>	5 (3%)	9 (3%)	14 (4%)	1 (1%)	29 (3%)
<b>Threatening</b>	2 (1%)	3 (1%)	8 (2%)	4 (4%)	17 (2%)
<b>Different state of mind</b>	44 (25%)	40 (13%)	45 (14%)	18 (17%)	147 (16%)

<sup>11</sup> We would like to inform our readers that some quantitative data concerning the emotional state of deceased individuals published in the 2022 article (Elsaesser et al., 2022, pp. 36–71) were incorrect. The current table reflects the correct data. We apologize for this error.

It can be clearly seen that the positive states of mind are more frequent than the (more) negative states of mind, which are indicated by grey shading. However, one limitation of the options offered is that “eager to comfort” and “compassionate” are less states of mind than intentions to act that stem from compassion. Compassion can be accompanied by different states of mind. This somewhat relativizes the marked difference between positive and negative states of mind.

### *Case studies with background information*

We will present the various perceived states of mind of the deceased, illustrated by accounts from our participants. Where possible, we have exemplified the different types using cases from our German collection. We have analyzed and included all the relevant responses from participants (e.g. “Did you perceive the emotional state / mood of the deceased?” “Did you perceive a message?”), not just their initial full description of the ADC.

The data show how prevalence of the discussed feature varies according to language groups.

### **Perceived state of mind of the deceased: Calm/peaceful**

We begin our presentation of the states of mind of the deceased with cases where they were perceived as calm and peaceful. These positive states of mind are reassuring for the bereaved and beneficial for the grieving process.

The German data are significantly lower than those from historical surveys conducted in English, French, and Spanish.

**Table 7**

*State of mind: Calm/peaceful*

German	<i>N</i> = 41 (23%)
English	<i>N</i> = 160 (51%)
French	<i>N</i> = 168 (52%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 50 (47%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 419 (45%)

### Spanish case S120<sup>12</sup>

This is the account of a 60-year-old man at the time of participation in the survey with a university degree.<sup>13</sup> The ADC occurred in a remote farm in the mountains outside Bogota, Colombia. The man was fully awake. He had switched off the light about 5 minutes before the event and was lying face up on his bed, lost in thought. He was in good health and described his emotional state immediately before the ADC as “balanced and relaxed.” The experience occurred 16 years ago.<sup>14</sup>

### Case study

I had a very powerful experience when my mother-in-law died of cancer.... I was on a farm in the mountains, in a room hermetically sealed because of the cold. At 0.34 a.m. (I immediately looked at the clock when the event occurred) a wind blew in and enveloped my face, the room was dark, I was lying in bed. The wind made a gentle swirl and you could tell it came through the inner door because it cracked, as if hit by the wind. I was amazed at this powerful breeze that couldn't penetrate from anywhere .... After 15 minutes, my ex-wife rang to say that her mum had died at 0.34 a.m.

In response to our question “*Did you perceive the emotional state / mood of the deceased?*” the participant replied: “Her state of mind was peaceful. It was very soothing, as if she radiated a deep peace.” He perceived a message: “She said goodbye and thanked me for my kindness.”

We also asked questions about the emotional state of the participant himself. He felt at peace during the contact. Immediately after the ADC, he felt that he had had “a strange and delicate experience, a very pleasant mystery or curiosity.”

We asked: “*Describe what you feel now [when completing the questionnaire] while remembering the ADC?*” He replied: “A very pleasant feeling.” He added: “I attach great importance to this experience.”

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12 Our survey is anonymous and is conducted by language group. We therefore do not know in which country our respondents live (e.g. in Spain or Latin America for the survey in Spanish). Sometimes the respondents' statements contain additional information that allow us to learn in which country they live.

13 We decided to mention the level of education because our survey shows that people with a high level of education are overrepresented among the participants in our survey. This result is interesting in that, together with the other demographic data we collected, it provides some information about the profile of the respondents.

14 This number of years refers to the time at which the participant completed our questionnaire.

### English case E104

The next case concerns a 74-year-old man at the time of participation in the survey with a university degree. He perceived his father, who had died of a cardiac arrest at the age of 93. The survey participant was in good health and asleep when the contact occurred. In the days/weeks prior to the ADC and with regard to the grieving process, he was a little sad, but he had already partially overcome the pain of grief. The contact took place 21½ years ago.

#### Case study

About two weeks after my father died, he appeared to me in a vivid dream. His appearance did not resemble my favorite pictures of him but as he appeared in his late 50's which I believe was for him the prime of his life. He was attired in a suit and wearing his favorite Stetson hat – not the kind that cowboys wear but the kind that Wall Street bankers do. He came to me and said, 'Son, being dead takes some getting used to, but you'll like it.' This vivid dream was comforting to me, although before the dream I had no doubt that my father was in a good place. In the years since that experience, I have often thought about his words, 'Being dead takes some getting used to ...'

This contact occurred while the participant was asleep. It should be emphasized that experiencers make a very clear distinction between an ordinary dream and an ADC during sleep. For them, it is obvious that it was a real experience and not a dream experience.

The survey participant described his father's emotional state as "calm and peaceful." He specified: "Dad was like he used to be, a friendly, happy person."

During the contact, the participant was "happy and excited to see dad" and immediately afterwards he felt comforted. At the time of taking part in our survey and remembering his experience, he felt: "Comfort – my father and I were very close."

#### *Perceived state of mind of the deceased: Radiant with bliss*

In this section, we present cases depicting the deceased as radiant with bliss. The deceased are sometimes seen in the prime of life and in excellent health, regardless of the age they were on the day of their death and the illness that may have marked their faces. In many cases, the loved one was last seen at the time of death if partners, relatives or friends were present, or later at the funeral. This is a sad image to keep in one's heart. Visual ADCs can sometimes replace this last distressing memory with a new, beautiful and soothing image. This type of ADC is valuable for the grieving process.

We observe a significantly higher number in the German data than in the English, French, and Spanish data.

**Table 8**

*State of mind: Radiant with bliss*

German	<i>N</i> = 81 (45%)
English	<i>N</i> = 85 (27%)
French	<i>N</i> = 85 (26%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 25 (23%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 276 (30%)

### French case F134

This participant is a 46-year-old woman at the time of participating in our survey with a University degree. Her mother, with whom she had an “extremely close and loving” relationship, died at the age of 61 in hospital after a short illness. The ADC occurred one year and a few months ago.

### Case study

I was half asleep, but I knew I wasn’t dreaming. It felt different. My mother was sitting on my bed, looking at me with eyes full of tenderness. She had the same facial features, but without the signs of age or illness. She had always been a beautiful woman, but now she was radiant with bliss. She was stunningly beautiful, more beautiful than ever. She was wearing a long white dress. She took me in her arms. It was something she loved to do when she was alive, but I used to shy away from it. This time, I really let myself go in her embrace. I could really feel her. We didn’t speak, but I felt that she didn’t hold it against me for not being there when she died, for saying my last words to her in a hurried and annoyed tone. It completely calmed me, and the feeling has lasted ever since.

During this visual contact, which began in a hypnagogic state and then woke her up completely, the participant perceived her mother as “radiant with bliss.” The apparition was within reaching distance and appeared semi-transparent (objects behind it were visible); “she was already there when I saw her.”

The participant offered additional information: “I was in her arms. I could feel her hands on my back.” She specified: “The contact with the deceased was physical; she was there. I have no doubt whatsoever.”

Also, she received a message: “I shouldn’t blame myself for not being there at the time of her death, nor for my last words, which I said in a hurried and tired manner, clearly showing my irritation. It was a wave of love. There was a sense of fulfilment, it was extremely soothing.” She described how she perceived the message: “Communication was telepathic, full of love and forgiveness; I didn’t hear the message, but I felt it in my heart.”

The participant was moderately sad and moderately grieving at that time. During the contact, she felt “a wave of love and forgiveness. A state of plenitude.” Immediately after the ADC, she felt a “sense of appeasement.” When filling out the questionnaire and recalling the event, she felt “still appeased and filled with joy at having been able to experience this gift.”

Like many experiencers, she received a mixed reaction when she shared her experience with others: “I tried to talk about it with the people who are suffering from her departure to reassure them and tell them how beautiful, radiant, and luminous she is. Many smiled politely without really believing me, except for my two daughters.”

### German case G018

This participant is a 66-year-old man at the time of taking part in the survey with a secondary school certificate. He experienced this comforting contact with his wife, who had died by suicide at the age of 41. They had a “very close” relationship. This experience occurred 20 years ago.

### Case study

My wife died in 2002. Our children were 3 months, 4 years and 16 years old. About six weeks after this event [the suicide], I was suddenly very tired at lunchtime. After the little ones had been looked after, I lay down on the sofa to have a little nap. However, I couldn’t fall asleep straight away, but was suddenly in a state between sleeping and waking. My body was paralysed. Suddenly a tunnel opened up in front of me. I could see clearly to the end, which was brightly lit. Suddenly my deceased wife appeared at the end of this tunnel. She had a cheerful smile and seemed very happy. She stood there and waved at me as if to say, „Look, I’m fine, don’t worry too much.“ This experience helped me a lot! I still have these images very clearly in front of me. Even after all this time! I’m certain it wasn’t a dream!!!

The participant described the emotional state of his wife who had decided to end her life as “radiant with bliss,” displaying a “cheerful smile” and looking “very happy.”

There are some interesting additional elements embedded in this case. We have a number of cases in our database where participants have been overcome by an overwhelming urge to lie down and take a little nap, even people who are not used to napping during the day. As soon as



they are in a hypnagogic state between wakefulness and sleep – which seems to be particularly favourable for the occurrence of an ADC –, the contact occurs.

This ADC is also very noteworthy and extremely rare, as it contains an element of the near-death experience (NDE), namely the vision of a tunnel with a bright light at the end of the tunnel, a characteristic and common element of an NDE.

Another quite remarkable aspect of this account concerns a temporary state of paralysis described by the participant (“My body was paralysed”). To our knowledge, one of the authors, Evelyn Elsaesser, was the first to identify this phenomenon as a component of ADCs and described it in her book *Nachtod-Kontakte: Spontane Begegnungen mit Verstorbenen* (Elsaesser, 2020, pp. 90–93). We took advantage of our survey to ask a series of questions about what we called ‘Partial temporary paralysis’. Our research results show that 10% of German participants and 12% of the historical English, French and Spanish participants actually experienced partial temporary paralysis during the contact (Elsaesser, 2021, pp. 198–204).

A series of questions enabled us to find out more about how exactly the survey participant perceived his deceased wife: she was several metres away from him, appeared solid as a living person and looked younger than on the day of her death. She was lively (gesticulating) and after a short time she instantly dissolved.

The participant described his own state of health at the time of the contact as “depressed.” He thought about his deceased wife several times a day. In the days/weeks before the ADC and with regard to the grieving process, he described himself as “extremely depressed and in deep grief.” He stated that it was “hard to say” what he had felt during the contact as it had been “a long time ago.” Immediately after the contact he felt “relieved, reassured,” and at the time of participating in our survey he felt “gratitude” for the experience, which he described as “valuable to me.”

Before his own experience, he was open to the idea that the deceased could contact the living, but he needed proof. Shortly after the ADC and at the time he took part in our survey, he described the contact as “undoubtedly authentic.”

### *Perceived state of mind of the deceased: Eager to comfort*

A significant number of our participants felt that their deceased loved ones were eager to comfort them. Perhaps the greatest source of solace comes from the deep conviction of the bereaved that their loved one has survived physical death and is still there to support them during the difficult period of mourning and beyond.

We note a significant difference with the much lower figures from the Spanish survey, which is also the smallest, with only 145 participants.

**Table 9**

*State of mind: Eager to comfort*

German	<i>N</i> = 78 (44%)
English	<i>N</i> = 128 (41%)
French	<i>N</i> = 192 (59%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 16 (15%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 414 (45%)

### German case G021

This report comes from a 38-year-old man at the time of participation in the survey with a professional qualification. He experienced an after-death communication with his grandmother, who had died at home at the age of 72 after a short illness. Their relationship was „extremely close and loving.” The ADC took place 16 years ago.

### Case study

I woke up in the night when I had to go to the toilet. I had to leave my room on the top floor (all without light, just a bit of moonlight) to get to the bathroom by the spiral staircase next to my door. At the top of the stairs, I looked down and a strong gust of wind caught me. My senses changed instantly and I almost blacked out at the same time as a unique smell hit my nose that I only had noticed in one particular place and nowhere else in the world: the smell of my grandmother’s home, who lived abroad and I could only visit every few years. It was as if I was there. I never had that smell in my nose again. She had died days before and said goodbye. It was neither dreamed nor imagined.

The participant stated that he was able to perceive the state of mind of the deceased, which he described as “trying to comfort me.” In a follow-up question, the participant specified that he “got dizzy because the gust of wind, the smell and her presence reminded me of her home, which was abroad. I only knew that smell from there. It is unique to me.” He explained the feeling of presence he perceived: “As if she was going to stand in person in front of me at any moment. I was waiting for it, but it was there without physically showing itself to me.” He described his state of mind at the time as “moderately depressed and moderately grieving.” He often thought about his grandmother. Shortly before the contact, however, his thoughts were not with her.

In his words: “At the moment I just had to go to the toilet. That was all.” During the contact he was in “shock, because it was completely unexpected.” Immediately afterwards, however, he felt “joy” and at the time of taking part in our survey he spoke of a “nice feeling. I am grateful for the farewell.” He added: “I knew she lived on somewhere else, but I still missed her for years.” He described the experience as “life-changing.”

#### German case G024

The following case concerns a 36-year-old woman at the time of survey participation with a university degree who experienced an ADC with her father, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of 73. The contact occurred almost three years ago, approximately 12 hours after his death.

#### Case study

My father died on a Friday morning. It was a very long, turbulent day and I ended up lying in bed in the evening, completely exhausted and full of grief. I couldn't find any peace at all and felt totally shaken up inside, even though my body was totally exhausted. Every time I closed my eyes, I suddenly saw my dead father lying in front of me. It was terrible. After about two hours of tossing and turning in my bed and being constantly startled by the image that was always before my eyes, I suddenly felt a finger gently stroking my cheek. Just like my father always did when he wanted to show affection, which was usually not very easy for him. He said goodbye to me in the same way when I saw him for the last time exactly one week earlier. A sense of calm suddenly spread through me and I felt comforted. It was as if my father wanted to show me that he was okay (because I was worried about that all the time – where he was now and whether he was okay where he was) and that we weren't really separated at all. I felt connected to him and somehow got a kind of strength that I could still go on with my life.

The survey participant described her father's emotional state as “trying to comfort me.” During the contact, she telepathically perceived a message from her father: “I shouldn't take his death so much to heart, as we were not really separated and would get through what had happened.” She herself felt “extremely depressed and in deep grief” and described her emotional state immediately before the ADC as follows: “I was totally shaken up inside, emotionally exhausted and overtired. I was afraid of falling asleep.” During the contact, she felt “surprise and joy that he contacted me, then calm and comfort. I was finally able to sleep peacefully.” Immediately after the experience, she felt “happiness and calm, peace. A bond with my father. As if I had received support.” At the time she took part in our survey, she described her feelings in relation to the ADC as “satisfaction and gratitude.”

When we asked whether she had perceived any previously unknown information, something she didn't know and that was new to her, she replied: "That relationships continue after death and that the connection to our loved ones will always remain."

*Perceived state of mind of the deceased: Full of compassion*

The compassionate state of mind of the deceased reported by participants is closely linked to their presumed eagerness to comfort the experients.

The data is fairly balanced across the different language groups, with the German data leading the ranking.

**Table 10**

*State of mind: Full of compassion*

German	<i>N</i> = 50 (28%)
English	<i>N</i> = 84 (27%)
French	<i>N</i> = 85 (26%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 20 (19%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 239 (26%)

**German case G131**

A 69-year-old woman at the time of participating in the survey with a professional qualification experienced this contact with her life partner, who died at home at the age of 80 after a short illness. Their relationship was "extremely close and loving." The contact took place 14 years ago.

**Case study**

Visual contact: It was evening, I was already lying in bed reading when I happened to glance to the side and saw that my recently deceased partner was sitting on his bed, which was next to mine. He was sitting there leaning back on his elbows, wearing his favourite comfortable clothes that he always wore at home. He was sitting there with his back turned to me and it seemed to me that he was contemplating and marvelling at his current state. He obviously felt very comfortable. Although spiritualism actually frightened me, I wasn't afraid at all at that moment, on the contrary, everything was fine and I was happy. Another thing I noticed was that he was sitting on the mattress he had always been lying on before, but the mattress he was sitting on was slightly offset. It was just so clear and obvious.

The woman described the state of mind of her late life partner as “full of compassion, endeavouring to comfort me.” At the time, she herself was “extremely depressed and in deep mourning.” Since his death, she thought about him almost constantly, also a few minutes before the ADC. Immediately before the experience, however, she was “calm, relaxed, reading attentively.” During the contact, she felt “calm, peaceful, cosy, happy, as if everything was normal and in order.” When filling out our questionnaire and recalling the ADC, she wrote: “Beautiful – I would like to experience this moment exactly like this again, or more often if possible.”

The participant stated that her deceased partner seemed as solid as a living person. “He was probably somewhat marked by his illness, purely physically, but he seemed very lively.” He was already there when she noticed him, and after a few minutes he instantly dissolved. The appearance of her deceased partner was linked to a message: “He wanted to convey to me that we belonged together and that he was happy that I was there.” She explained how she perceived the message: “Through gestures and audible words in between.”

This experience had an impact on her beliefs: “The ADC gave me firm ground under my feet in the sense that affection and love are permanent, which was confirmed and that there is no destruction through death.” The bereavement process was influenced by this event: “The grieving went differently, in a different way, for example, I also felt enriched by the grief through the ADC.” She described this experience as “life-changing.”

### English case E092

A 68-year-old woman at the time of survey participation with a high school diploma experienced an auditory ADC with her mother, who died in a nursing home at the age of 84 after a long illness. The relationship between mother and daughter was „extremely close and loving.”

About three months after my daughter [Chrissy] died, I heard my mum’s voice in my head. My mum died in 2007 and my daughter died in 2017. Since my daughter’s death, I’ve been terribly sad and in deep mourning. My husband worked nights, so I was alone in the flat. Everything was quiet, just me and my sadness. I was standing in the kitchen when my mum suddenly spoke to me and the words were in my head, but in her voice, which I can’t imitate, so I know it was real. She said, “Don’t be so sad Toodles, Chrissy is here with me. My mum and dad were the only people who called me ‘Toodles’. I was shocked because I had always been told that such experiences could not occur. I meekly replied, “Ok, mum” and looked around, but there was no one there. I didn’t tell anyone about it for a few weeks. I was unsure if I should accept it, even though I knew it was real. When I finally learned that after-death communications really happen, I realised that my mum wanted to comfort me and that my daughter was safe with her, and I started to heal.

The participant perceived her mother's state of mind as compassionate and seeking to comfort her. At the time of the contact, the participant was "extremely sad and in deep mourning," but not (any longer) for her mother, but for her recently deceased daughter. She thought about her several times a day, even a few minutes before the contact. She described her emotional state immediately before the ADC as follows: "I had been crying, but at the moment I received the news, I wasn't crying." During the contact she was "surprised," shortly afterwards "stunned," and in retrospect "comforted."

The statement "I was unsure if I should accept it even though I knew it was real" is not uncommon. In our data collection, we have a number of cases where participants stated that they were sure that the contact was real, and yet they could not believe it. This at first glance incoherent statement is due to the materialistic view of our Western societies, which states that consciousness expires with the death of the body and that life after death is not possible. These people need confirmation from others, especially ADC testimonies, in order to be able to trust their own perceptions.

The information that was previously unknown to the participant and that was so important to her was the message from her mother "that my daughter is safe with my mum." She explained how exactly she had perceived the message: "The words were put into my head, but very clearly in my mum's voice. I heard my mum's voice."

The impact of the experience on her grieving process was significant: "The message from my mum was a great comfort to me. Although I knew it was real the moment it happened, I was hesitant to accept the message at first. After time, study and acceptance, I was finally able to visualize my daughter with my mom and I found comfort in that. I have hope that we really will meet again. [...] I would still be in emotional misery if I hadn't received the news."

This event set her on a path of exploration, as is often the case after an ADC: "So many different teachings and so many different religions confused me. Some people told me that my daughter was in my heart. What does that even mean? Hearing from my mum and then learning about after-death communications and near-death experiences helped me a lot." She added: "The complete surprise of hearing from my mom about my beloved daughter is comforting. They are kindred spirits, both very kind and love nature. It makes sense that they are together. I don't listen to all the rhetoric anymore, I hold my mom's words close and the memories of my mom and daughter closer." To our question "*Has your understanding of life and death changed after the ADC?*" she replied, "Yes, and I'm still learning."

Let us now turn to the (rather) negative states of mind of the deceased as perceived by the participants. As Table 6 shows, these states of mind are much rarer than the positive states of mind discussed so far.

### *Perceived state of mind of deceased: Sad*

A relatively small number of our respondents described the emotional state of the deceased as “sad.” The contact is focused on the deceased and their alleged difficulties. Based on the testimonies of our participants, we have identified the following reasons that may account for the perceived sadness: 1) the grief of their partners, family members, and friends saddens them; 2) they regretfully announce a sad event that will occur in the near future, often an illness or death (e.g. case G134: State of mind: sad, “My late father warned me that my sister would soon become seriously ill, which turned out to be true”); 3) Sadness stems from regrets for bad deeds and misbehaviour during the incarnated life. These reasons, among others, may be the cause of the presumed sadness of the perceived deceased, and not (necessarily) their alleged new form of existence. The impact of this type of ADC on bereaved individuals can be quite painful and may potentially complicate their grieving process.

We observe fairly similar data between the different language groups.

**Table 11**

*State of mind: Sad*

German	<i>N</i> = 15 ( 8%)
English	<i>N</i> = 32 (10%)
French	<i>N</i> = 37 (11%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 14 (13%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 98 (11%)

### **German case G090**

A 66-year-old man at the time of participating in the survey with a university degree described an ADC he experienced with his father, who died in a nursing home at the age of 93 after a long illness. Their relationship was extremely difficult, as can be seen from the account of his experience. The father was an atheist. The contact took place three days after the death.

### **Case study**

My father died on 16 April 2019 on a Tuesday. In the night from Friday to Saturday of the same week at exactly 00:00 (there was/is a lit clock by my bed), I suddenly woke up. Opposite my bed were two wax candles that are actually lit by batteries. However, the batteries had been removed a few weeks earlier. So, I woke up and opened my eyes, looked at the clock and at the same time the two candles started to light up. At the same time as waking up, the clock and the candles gave me the feeling of my father’s presence. Now, with

hindsight, I would say that I felt more than just the presence of my deceased father. It was more of a dominant feeling that emanated from my father throughout his life and always intimidated my brother and me. He then spoke to me, very calmly and with very precise words. People would probably tell me now that I was just dreaming it. No, I could hear him clearly and distinctly! In my father's monologue, he apologized for what he had done to us, to my brother and me, over the years. We didn't have a good childhood (alcohol, violence, financial problems, etc.). Several times during the last years of his life, I told him about my views on death and the afterlife. I always told him that his parents, his brothers and our mother would welcome him. But he always dismissed my conviction as nonsense and fantasy. But in this particular hour, on the transition from Friday to Saturday, he showed me with his „spiritual appearance“ that this idea probably corresponds to reality. It could even be that our mother was in the room in the background and helped my father with this apology, but I only realized this after some time when I reflected on the matter. The apparition, or whatever you want to call it, then lasted about an hour, which I could tell from the clock, and then the candles went out. It was a long time, but my father also brought up so many things from my past. Today, this event has softened my years of pent-up anger and resentment towards my father to such an extent that I can now be relatively neutral and, above all, no longer so negative towards him, not just in my thoughts. And it has strengthened my belief that there is life after death.

The participant described his father's state of mind as “sad.” He perceived the following message (through audible words, like an external voice): “The message that he is sorry for everything.” The participant concluded that the sadness stemmed from his father's regrets about his actions and behavior.

What immediately catches the eye is the unusually long duration of this contact – an hour – while our findings and other research show that the duration of the ADC is normally only a few seconds, a few minutes at most.

The participant was in good health and described his emotional state immediately before the contact as follows: “Balanced and happy about the peace that had come after my father's death.” He often thought about his deceased father, but stated that he had never mourned him. During the ADC, he felt “relief at hearing my father's words.” Immediately afterwards, he noted “a confirmation of my ideas about life after death.” At the time of completing our questionnaire and remembering this experience, he felt “a satisfaction at my father's apology. No fear of my own death.”

“No fear of my own death:” this statement is not unusual. Our survey shows the positive effect of after-death communications on the fear of death, as indicated in the following table:



**Table 12**

*Impact of ADC on fear of death*

Following the ADC, did your fear of death:	D	E,F,S
Decrease	45%	31%
Disappear	29%	30%
Remain the same	23%	33%
Increase	0%	1%
Uncertain	3%	5%

When we asked whether the ADC had brought him comfort / emotional healing, the participant's answer was still somewhat hesitant: "The ADC probably reconciled me with my father," but he was certain that the experience was important for the grieving process: "I was able to give closure to the problems with my father."

He considered this experience to be "life-changing." Like so many people who have experienced ADC, he did not meet with much understanding from the people with whom he shared his experiences: "Only a few friends reacted favourably. Mostly, my experiences with it were just being laughed at and, as a result, I don't mention this experience as often anymore."

### French case F281

A number of cases suggest that the deceased seem to go through the grieving process together with their partners, family members or friends and are not only aware of their pain, but also feel and perhaps even share their emotions. Here is an interesting and rare case involving a young child.

A 57-year-old woman at the time of participation in the survey with a university degree experienced an ADC with her niece, who had died in an accident at the age of two. The contact occurred ten years ago, two months after the accidental death.

### Case study

One of my young nieces, H  l  ne, (2 years old) died in a traumatic way on 14 July. As I am very close to her parents and also specialise in supporting traumatic bereavement, I spend the first few days after H  l  ne's death with them in Toulouse. The summer passes and I return to my work as a psychoanalyst in Paris. I called H  l  ne's parents regularly. About two months after her death, around mid-September, at the end of the night, I find myself in a suspended state between the end of sleep and the beginning of waking up, which I expe-

rience regularly. It's a Tuesday morning. Hélène is there, next to me, in a little white dress. I can't tell if her image corresponds to her former reality, but I know that it is her. I ask her if she is all right where she is. She reassures me, but adds that she is very worried about her parents. I try to reassure her by telling her that I and other relatives are looking after them and that they will get better one day. The contact ends here. A few days later, I call Hélène's father and, before I tell him about the contact, I ask him how things are going with his wife at the moment. He is surprised at first, then tells me that they almost separated on Monday afternoon after a very stormy and painful session with their psychiatrist... the next day at dawn, Hélène came to see me...

The participant perceived the message: "I am fine, but I am worried about my parents." She explained how she perceived the message: "We talked, not with words, but telepathically." She described the little deceased's emotional state as "peaceful in herself and sad for her parents." We could also have presented this case in the category of peaceful states of mind, but it is precisely the apparent contradictory states of mind that are interesting: the niece was allegedly peaceful in her new form of existence, but at the same time sad for her long-suffering parents.

At the moment of the contact, the participant was still a little sad about the death of her niece, but had partly overcome her grief. She thought of her often, but not in the minutes before the ADC. During the contact she felt "gentleness, sadness and a responsibility in relation to the message." As soon as the contact was over, she felt "astonishment, temporary disbelief and the thought, 'what am I going to do with this message?'" She wondered why it was she who had experienced the contact: "I had already experienced several after-death communications, and I think this may have facilitated the connection, because why me and not her parents or grandparents directly?" When she took part in our survey and recalled the experience, she felt "peaceful, honoured and moved" about the experience.

The survey participant shared her experience with others: "I shared it with the parents, who were very touched by it and told me that it helped them on their grief journey. I have told my (adult) children about it to show them that such a thing exists... the same goes for close friends. I have no difficulty talking about death and after-death communications."

### *Perceived state of mind of deceased: Agitated*

In the cases collected in this category, the deceased appear to be suffering, sometimes in a state of confusion, and the contact is focused on their own difficulties. The perceived agitation may, however, concern the experient. Some of our cases suggest that the deceased were agitated, sometimes anxious, because they were concerned about the well-being of the loved one to whom they were appearing (e.g. case S017: State of mind: agitated, "Eager to learn about my

condition, she asked if I was okay”). Perceiving a deceased loved one as agitated – just like those who are perceived as sad – is a difficult, even distressing experience for partners, family members and friends which does not facilitate a serene grieving process.

The data from the various surveys are fairly similar across language groups.

**Table 13**

*State of mind: Agitated*

German	<i>N</i> = 16 ( 9%)
English	<i>N</i> = 15 ( 5%)
French	<i>N</i> = 20 ( 6%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 5 ( 5%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 56 ( 6%)

### French case F151

A 55-year-old woman at the time of participating in the survey with a university degree experienced an impressive ADC with her son, who tragically died in a plane crash at the age of 21. Their relationship was “extremely close and loving.” The ADC occurred six years ago.

### Case study

Two hours after I found out that my 21-year-old son had been killed in an accident at work, I saw him in the corner of my room and he said: “I love you, Mum. Mum, I love you!” He was insistent and a little panicked because he kept repeating ‘I love you mum!’, leaning forward slightly as if to make himself heard, because I was in shock and this vision didn’t grab my attention because I believed it was my imagination. A medium later told me that he didn’t want to follow the person who had picked him up to guide him into the light because he kept saying, “I have to tell my mum.” He was studying for his pilot’s licence and the student pilots were instructed to call their mothers as soon as possible to reassure them when a crash had occurred...

She described her son’s state of mind as “agitated and eager to comfort me. He insisted that I should see and hear him.” She emphasized this point in her description: “He was insistent and a little panicked because he kept repeating ‘I love you mum!’, leaning forward slightly as if to make himself heard [...]” She described her own emotional state immediately before the ADC as “depressed, devastated by the news” and “extremely sad and in deep grief.” When asked what she had done shortly before the contact, she replied: “I rocked myself and stared into the void.”

During the contact she thought “I’m just imagining it.” Immediately after the contact, she felt “sadness.” In retrospect, when completing the questionnaire, she stated “I now believe that he was there and that he wanted to calm me and himself down.” She specified how she saw her son: “The perceived image was a little transparent, like a hologram. He wasn’t wearing the same clothes he was wearing when he had the accident.” He materialized before her eyes, was quite animated (gesticulating) and vanished instantly when the contact was over. This experience is “very precious” to her and her sadness was “reduced” by the contact. When we asked her how she would describe her relationship with the deceased, she replied: “I believed that my connection with him continued after death and the ADC deepened that connection.”

Her view of the authenticity of the ADC has changed over time. Before her own experience, she thought it was “unlikely” that the deceased could make contact with the living. Shortly after her experience (a few hours/days after the contact), she felt that it “might actually have been real.” By the time she took part in our survey, however, she was convinced that the experience was “undoubtedly authentic.” This is a very common development of beliefs. Belief in the authenticity of after-death communications often increases considerably in retrospect. These contacts frequently lead experiencers to read up on the subject, to learn more about the phenomenon, its modalities and prevalence, and to share with others who have had similar experiences. Over time, this newly acquired information strengthens their conviction of the authenticity of the ADC.

### *Perceived state of mind of deceased: Frightened*

A small number of participants described the perceived state of mind of the deceased as frightened. According to some of our participants, the perceived deceased were frightened at the moment they became aware of their supposed change of state (e.g. case F182: State of mind: frightened, “I felt his fear as he began to understand that he had died”). Others allegedly had not yet understood that they had died (e.g. Case E138: State of mind: different state of mind, “Do you know what happened to me?” I explained that he had fallen and hurt his head and was in the hospital. Then I said, “Colin, if you are here talking to me, you must have died.” He said, “I just wanted to know what happened to me” and he disappeared).

The data are fairly consistent across the different language groups.

**Table 14***State of mind: Frightened*

German	<i>N</i> = 5 ( 3%)
English	<i>N</i> = 9 ( 3%)
French	<i>N</i> = 14 ( 4%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 1 ( 1%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 29 ( 3%)

**German case G153**

A 62-year-old woman at the time of taking part in the survey with a professional qualification had a frightening experience with her friend U., who died by suicide at the age of 23 (“She jumped off a high bridge”). The two friends were “quite close.” The ADC happened 38 years before participating in our survey, “almost exactly one year after the suicide.”

**Case study**

U. was exactly six months younger than me. She lived in the house next door and we spent most of our childhood and teenage years together. U. was a dear, gentle and loyal friend and I was glad that I wasn’t the only girl in our little neighbourhood. U. became ill at the age of about 16. She suffered from depression again and again. There were good times, but also more and more times when she was very unwell. At the age of 23, after spending several months in hospital, she voluntarily ended her life. In the first few weeks after her death, I could see U. in my dreams, but also in the middle of the day. I could feel her by my side, indeed she sometimes “disturbed” me while I was reading. About a year after she died, I was on a skiing holiday. I was getting ready for dinner in my hotel room and I knew that a friend was expecting me at the bar at 6pm. I sat on the edge of the bed and put on my socks. At that moment, I heard U.’s voice saying to me: “You do have a boyfriend.” (It was always important to U. during our youth to know whether I had fallen in love). I looked up, surprised but not shocked. U. was standing in front of the opposite wall. I saw the wall through U., but U. was clearly recognisable – somehow her outline was “flowing.” I knew at that moment that it was very special to see and hear U. like that. She really was in my hotel room a year after her death and I was actually in love... U. kept talking to me, but always stayed in the same place. She asked me to come to her, “she didn’t know exactly where she was, what she was doing, it was often dark and cold, ‘please come with me.’” These words more than frightened me. I told U. that I couldn’t go with her, that I was alive and didn’t want to die. She hadn’t been alive for a year, she had died. U. couldn’t believe that something was separating us. She almost begged me to come to her. I explained the situation to her again, namely that, unlike her, I was still alive. It made me very sad, as I

had comforted myself since saying goodbye to U. with the fact that she was better off where she was now than in her earthly life. Suddenly I felt a pull, a force, an incredible power acting on my body. I asked U. to stop. "I want to live!" I shouted to her... I felt the suction lift me off the bed. I was about 50 cm above the bed and I was afraid that the suction would throw me through the nearby window. I was really scared because I didn't realise what was happening to me. I sank back down onto the bed, held on to the sheet and once again I felt the strong suction lifting me up. Suddenly I heard my friend's voice and instead of waiting for me at the bar, he came to see where I was. He shouted 'what's going on' in horror, ran towards me and pushed me down onto the bed with all his might. I felt relieved that the suction stopped and U. was no longer standing by the wall. She was gone. I was exhausted, distraught and horrified by the tragedy of U. My boyfriend at the time saw me above the bed at a height of about 40 cm – he didn't notice U. – and although he was 190 cm tall and strong, he had to use all his physical strength to help me out of this situation (floating in the air). The holiday feeling was suddenly over. I struggled with my faith for a long time. Why was U. so unwell a year after her death that she said, "It's cool and dark here, I don't know where I am, please come to me...." 38 years have passed since then. I still have contact with my boyfriend from time to time. He is now 73 years old, but neither of us has forgotten this experience. I would like to emphasise that I was able to experience many more beautiful, deeply touching ADCs, e.g. with my parents. However, I never had any further contact with U. after this incident.

It is clear from this description that our participant was very frightened by this experience. The recollection of this fear still seems to be very much present 38 years after the ADC. However, according to her perception, the deceased also seemed frightened, as suggested by the message she conveyed: "It's cool and dark here, I don't know where I am, please come to me...."

The previously unknown information for the survey participant was the emotional state of the deceased: "It made me very, very sad to hear that she was not doing well a year after her death." She described the deceased's state of mind as "sad, anxious and threatening." She herself was in a cheerful mood before the contact: "I was looking forward to meeting my friend, who had his own hotel room, and to having dinner together." She had often thought about her friend since her death, but not immediately before the contact. In terms of her grieving process, she was still a little sad, but had partially overcome the pain of mourning. "Before the ADC, I imagined that U. was doing really well now, that she was 'in the light'. But then she told me just the opposite." During the contact, she felt: "SURPRISE, I can hardly believe you're here," and then "sadness and also fear when I felt this pull." Immediately after the ADC, her thoughts were: "Did I really just experience that?", questions upon questions, and why? I was exhausted and very sad and I felt like I was very lucky to have survived...." At the time of participating in our research, "Many questions from back then are still there. Who can you ask about this? I still don't have an explanation to this day." The contact had a negative impact on her grieving process: "The

grieving process became much more difficult for me because of the ADC. I didn't understand why my friend had to suffer in the afterlife, and I'll never forget the enormous pull that was supposed to lead me to her."

She has discussed her ADC with a few people, but she has not had very pleasant experiences with it either: "Firstly with my mum straight away, I received comfort and understanding from her. A few years later, among my closest friends, it was received very ambivalently. Some reacted fearfully, 'just stop', someone asked, 'what film are you talking about?' About 20 years after the experience, I spoke to a Catholic priest. I appreciated him and confided in him what I had experienced. He reacted very indignantly and said that such a thing was not possible. Then I didn't talk about it anymore."

### *Perceived state of mind of deceased: Threatening*

We have few cases in our database of deceased individuals perceived as threatening. A more detailed analysis of our data sets will be necessary to find out whether the small minority of deceased persons perceived as threatening were exclusively, or at least predominantly, deceased persons who were unknown to the experients.

Although the number of cases is very limited, there is consistency in the collected data.

**Table 15**

*State of mind: Threatening*

German	<i>N</i> = 2 ( 1%)
English	<i>N</i> = 3 ( 1%)
French	<i>N</i> = 8 ( 2%)
Spanish	<i>N</i> = 4 ( 4%)
Combined	<i>N</i> = 17 ( 2%)

### **French case F042**

Some ADCs are clearly associated with a location. This phenomenon is known under the term "haunted house." These contacts often take place in centuries-old houses and the apparitions embody beings who lived a long time ago and are therefore naturally unknown to the experients. These contacts can be frightening as the apparitions often appear to be suffering or angry.

A 57-year-old woman at the time of participation in the survey with technical training had experienced such an ADC 15 or 16 years ago.

## Case study

A few years ago, something very strange and not exactly pleasant happened to me. I experienced the phenomenon around 2002/2003, when my husband and I were restoring a very old house that was 200 or 300 years old. The event took place in the bedroom. The bedroom was the only room that hadn't been restored at the time, but we had taken it over anyway. One morning I was lying in bed, lost in thought, but I emphasise that I wasn't asleep! It's 8:15, I plug in my electric blanket because I'm a bit cold. At 8:20, several people at the end of the bed pull me by my feet, they are very angry and I can see them. In the foreground I see a woman with her mouth wide open, poorly dressed ... Full of rage. At that moment, I feel my body lift. I feel like I'm floating. I can't do anything, I can't speak, I'm completely paralysed, my eyes see as I saw the time when I woke up, but I just have to let it all wash over me and then it all stops. I get up without really being scared, but my heart beats a little faster anyway! One question in my head: „What was that?!” The obvious: These people wanted to chase me away. I feel like it happened to me yesterday, it's still very present and very strong in its intensity despite all the years that have passed... No doubt about it, I was disturbing!

The participant described the state of mind of the perceived beings as “threatening.” She defined the consistency of the woman in the foreground as “solid like a living person” and gave further details: “The woman standing in front had her mouth wide open. She was expressing very great anger. The others in the background showed their great displeasure, but were visually more blurred.” The perceived message was clear: “that I had to leave the place, that this was her home and that I had no business here.” When asked if she had perceived any information that was unknown to her previously, she replied: “I didn't know that such phenomena existed and that the house could still be inhabited!” She was quite frightened by the experience and feared that “they wanted to do something to me: I wanted to talk... I wanted to ask who they were and what they wanted ... But it wasn't possible with words.” Regarding the identity of the perceived deceased, she clarified: “They were not people from my family who had died. They were people I didn't know. People who lived in the house.”

Like some cases presented above, this account also contains an element of partial temporary paralysis (“I am completely paralyzed”). During the contact, which lasted only a few seconds, she felt “Surprise! Astonishment! Observation of what was going on.” Immediately after the ADC, she felt “a little scared, but no more than that, and then I hear myself say, ‘What was that?!’ Still, I left the room pretty quickly because the message was clear!” At the time of participating in our survey, she “still felt incredible surprise that such a phenomenon could occur that I didn't know existed until that day! Time has not blurred this encounter.”

Even though this experience was not very pleasant, and also a little frightening, she took something positive away from it: “As a little girl, I asked my parents what would happen to us



when we died, and they told me that we would turn back to dust. I cried my eyes out because I didn't want to become 'dust'. Because of these phenomena, I now know that we live on in a different way... In the form of energy... This is not a belief, but a certainty... I *know* it, even if I can't explain it!"

### *Are the states of mind of the deceased evolving?*

The following case illustrates what could be an evolution of the emotional state of the perceived deceased individual:

#### **French case F022**

A 44-year-old woman at the time of taking part in the survey with a university degree had a rather atypical experience with her partner, who died in hospital at the age of 56 after a long illness. She described her state of mind in this phase of her life as "full of fear and driven by enormous doubts about how my life should continue." The ADC occurred 17 months after his death.

This survey participant had experienced several ADCs with her deceased partner.

#### **Case study**

I should point out right away that it is difficult to describe in words what I experienced. About a month ago, I was going through a difficult time in my grief and had to make an important decision. I have doubts and fears and feel very lonely. I wake up in the night. I don't sleep. I close my eyes and suddenly I see myself in a room. This room is only sparsely lit, but it is not dark either. And at the same time, there is a "ribbon of light" in front of me that moves horizontally. This "ribbon" is alive. As soon as this apparition stands in front of me, I feel that it is an "emanation" of my deceased loved one. And as soon as this emanation is in front of me, my feeling tells me what I have to do. I feel and I do: I put my fingertips on the ribbon and it is as if my whole being is reading it, receiving it, absorbing it. This ribbon IS at this moment what my deceased loved once was to me when he was incarnate, but also a spark of what he is now. And in this "ribbon" is all his love for me, all his tenderness, and also the energy I need at this moment to move forward with my life, to make the right decision.

At the time of the experience, the participant was "extremely depressed and in deep grief." She thought about her deceased partner "almost constantly," also in the minutes before the contact. She described the perceived state of mind of the deceased as: "Happy, endeavouring to comfort me, full of compassion, sad, upset/agitated." She explained her choice of words: "There were

different ADCs, which is why I tick seemingly contradictory answers: Shortly after his death, my loved one was upset, then sad. I don't think he knew he was dead at the time. After that, everything I perceived was happy, full of love and compassion and with a strong determination to support me." This description implies indeed an evolution of the perceived states of mind of the deceased.

She described what she felt during the contacts: "When that happens, it's so wonderful. I am no longer in the feeling of my grief, but in the feeling that is transmitted to me by my loved one. When that happens, I no longer suffer at all. I'm just happy." And this is what she has gained from the contacts: "I get the energy to keep going and an opening to a universe that I didn't know before."

### *Discussion*

In this paper, we have focused on the emotional state of the deceased individuals as perceived by survey respondents. Among those who were able to sense the state of mind of the deceased, the vast majority reported positive moods (calm/peace, bliss, eagerness to comfort, compassion). The contact was focused on the experient, with the presumed intention of the deceased to support and accompany them through the difficult period of mourning and beyond, in a manner that is broadly consistent with Kwilecki's (2009) overview.

A minority of the deceased were in a (more) negative state of mind, with moods described as sad, agitated, frightened, or threatening. The contact was focused on the deceased who appeared to be experiencing difficulties of some kind. These contacts did not seem to serve to comfort the participants. This type of ADCs is difficult for partners, family and friends and can complicate the grieving process. In the few cases collected where the deceased appeared threatening, this seems to be a different type of ADC, mainly, or at least often, involving deceased persons unknown to the participants and believed to belong to the phenomenon of "haunted houses."

However, a number of cases in our databases suggest a certain evolution in perceived emotional states. This evolution is always from a rather negative state of mind (sadness, agitation, fear) to a more content and peaceful state. We have no cases where a perceived positive state of mind turned into a more negative state of mind. This supposed evolution can only be detected if the experients have more than one ADC with the same deceased. This situation arises frequently. 77% of our German participants have experienced several ADCs with the same or different deceased persons. In the historical English, French and Spanish surveys this was the case for 80% of respondents.

We can only speculate about the reasons for the alleged changes in mood in the perceived deceased. Some of the messages perceived by our respondents suggest that the deceased were agitated or frightened at the moment they became aware of their supposed change of state, so their agitation or fear may only have been a temporary state. A number of cases in our data collection point in this direction, including the one presented above (F022), in which the deceased's state of mind is described as negative ("upset, sad") during the first contact, and as "happy, full of love and compassion" during subsequent contacts. We could therefore assume that the emotional state of deceased individuals is not constant, but that it could be evolving, at least in some cases. Hence, the figures presented in Table 6 could be nothing more than a snapshot of their state of mind at a given moment.

The cases presented, along with other accounts from our databases, shed some light on what we can learn about the state of mind of the deceased and its impact on grief. The findings reported here confirm that for many respondents, the encounter with their deceased loved one through an ADC is of great comfort to them and can enable them to transition from grief and loss towards a position of hope and connectedness. This is consistent with the findings of others (e.g., Jahn & Spencer-Thomas, 2018; McCormick & Tassell-Matamua, 2016). However, it is obvious that we have no direct testimony from those who allegedly have crossed into another dimension, or entered another state of consciousness. We can only rely on the point of view of our participants. The limitation of this case study is that the perception of the deceased, and in particular their state of mind, is a subjective experience, like all human experiences. We can assume that experiencers wish to perceive their loved ones as being content and peaceful. However, if that were the trigger for the perceived states of mind, then all deceased individuals would be perceived as content and peaceful, which is not the case for a small percentage of the discussed cases. The *evolution* of the states of mind presented also contradicts this hypothesis. However, it must be emphasized that the figures on positive and negative states of mind are by no means a representative survey of the allegedly perceived deceased, but rather of the perceptions of the experiencers.

As a further hypothesis, one could also assume that these perceptions reflect an evolution in the state of mind of the *mourners* and not of the deceased.

Nevertheless, it is evident from the accounts that the experiencers' perceptions are psychologically real to them and have tangible and positive effects, particularly on their grieving process, regardless of the ontological status of ADCs.

Another limiting factor is the snowball sampling method used to recruit participants, which does not allow for full representativeness.

### Conclusion

The research question addressed in this paper, namely the perception of the state of mind of the deceased by the experiencers and the effect on their grief, has enabled us to draw some initial conclusions. It appears that the state of mind of the deceased was perceived as predominantly positive by the participants in our survey, which facilitated their grief. Perceptions of a rather negative state of mind are rarer and complicate the grieving process. In some cases, a shift from a rather negative state of mind to a positive one was observed during subsequent ADCs. The beneficial effect on grief after perceiving the state of mind of deceased loved ones appears quite clearly from the cases presented.

The limitation of this qualitative and quantitative analysis lies in the fact that the subjectivity of the experiences reported must be taken into account, which is inherent in any human experience. We hope that further analysis of our data, data we will collect in the future, and research by other scholars, will provide us with more insight into the presumed emotional state of the deceased perceived during an ADC. Much more data is needed to enable us to deepen our understanding of this aspect of spontaneous after-death communications.

On a broader level, many questions are still unanswered. The very nature of ADCs remains unexplained, as does the manner in which experiencers are able to perceive the deceased. We hope that advances in consciousness research will provide answers to these fundamental questions.

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### *Deutsches Abstract*

#### **Was Verstorbene mitteilen, was wir über ihren Gemütszustand erfahren und wie sich dies auf die Trauer auswirkt: Mixed-Methods-Analyse einer mehrsprachigen Fallsammlung spontaner Nachtod-Kontakte (NTK)<sup>15</sup>**

Ein spontaner und direkter Nachtod-Kontakt (NTK) tritt auf, wenn eine Person unerwartet einen Verstorbenen wahrnimmt. Diese offenbar von den Verstorbenen initiierten Kontakte werden über die Sinnesorgane Sehen, Hören, Riechen oder Tasten wahrgenommen. Oft spürt der Empfänger (die Person, die die Erfahrung macht) einfach nur die Anwesenheit des Verstorbenen. NTK treten während des Wachzustands, im Schlaf oder beim Einschlafen (in einem hypnagogischen Bewusstseinszustand) oder beim Aufwachen (in einem hypnopompischen Bewusstseinszustand) auf.

Seit 2018 führen die Autoren ein langfristiges internationales Forschungsprojekt zu den Umständen, der Phänomenologie und den Auswirkungen spontaner und direkter NTK durch. Bislang haben sie eine Umfrage mit gemischten Methoden in sechs Sprachen gemacht, die zu 1.311 ausgefüllten Fragebögen geführt hat. Im Jahr 2022 veröffentlichten die Autoren einen Artikel in der *Zeitschrift für Anomalistik* (Elsaesser et al., 2022, S. 36–71), in dem sie einige Ergebnisse ihrer ersten Umfragen in englischer, französischer und spanischer Sprache mit 1.004 Teilnehmern vorstellten. Die aktuelle ergänzende Analyse umfasst Daten aus einer deutschen Version der Umfrage, die von August 2022 bis März 2023 durchgeführt wurde und 235 Antworten lieferte. Die aktuelle Analyse, die quantitative und qualitative Daten kombiniert, widmet sich insbesondere der von den Teilnehmern wahrgenommenen Gemütsverfassung der Verstorbenen und den Auswirkungen dieser Wahrnehmungen auf den Trauerprozess.

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<sup>15</sup> Eine deutsche Fassung des gesamten Artikels findet sich unter [https://www.anomalistik.de/images/pdf/zfa/JAnom25-2\\_242\\_Elsaesser-et-al\\_de.pdf](https://www.anomalistik.de/images/pdf/zfa/JAnom25-2_242_Elsaesser-et-al_de.pdf)

Unter den Teilnehmern, die den Gemütszustand des Verstorbenen wahrnehmen konnten, berichtete die überwiegende Mehrheit von positiven Stimmungen. Der Kontakt konzentrierte sich auf sie, und die Verstorbenen hatten ihre Absicht bekundet, ihnen zu helfen und sie zu unterstützen. Die Minderheit der Teilnehmer, die den Gemütszustand des Verstorbenen als (eher) negativ empfanden, schilderten, dass der Kontakt sich auf den Verstorbenen und die Schwierigkeiten konzentrierte, mit denen dieser offenbar konfrontiert war. Diese Kontakte schienen nicht dazu zu dienen, den Teilnehmer Trost zu spenden. Diese Art von Kontakt ist für Partner, Familie und Freunde schwierig und kann den Trauerprozess erschweren.

Es werden die positiven Auswirkungen von NTK auf den Trauerprozess erörtert, die unter anderem auf folgende Faktoren zurückgeführt werden können: 1) die unerwartete und unaufgeforderte Wahrnehmung des Verstorbenen und die Überzeugung der Empfänger, dass die Erfahrung real war; 2) der daraus resultierende Glaube, dass die Verbindung zum Verstorbenen fortbesteht und den Tod des Körpers überdauert hat; und 3) die wahrgenommenen Botschaften.

*Schlüsselbegriffe:* Nachtod-Kontakt (NTK), NTK, Phänomenologie, Auswirkungen von NTK, Trauerfall, Trauer, Trauerbewältigung, Gemütszustand des wahrgenommenen Verstorbenen, Emotionaler Zustand des wahrgenommenen Verstorbenen