

THE ROLE OF INCONSISTENCY AND INSTABILITY FOR THE ORIGIN OF EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

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Results of numerous surveys show that paranormal phenomena and Exceptional Experiences (EE) belong to a common human body of knowledge (Bauer & Schetsche, 2003). So it is adequate to assume that for the understanding of the cognitive-emotional functioning of people with EE basically psychological models are relevant.

Paranormal phenomena may represent the surface structure of a broad spectrum of EE. Being able to describe these phenomena may be a necessary but not a sufficient precondition to understand the underlying intrapsychic and interpersonal processes related to the origin and development of EE.

What we know from the empirical literature as well as from our own data (i.e. results of N=858 advice-seeking persons reporting EE to the IGPP) is, that EE are often preceded by a state of substantial instability based on special life events, traumatic experiences or phases of change in life. From a neuronal network point of view this is a central factor for new experiences. The basic hypotheses we are testing are the following: Whenever people experience exceptional phenomena they are and remain in a very tense and instable state for a longer time than would be expected. Usually people fall from one state with strong tensions directly into another attractor. People with EE seem to differ from others just with respect to this point. As a reason we see their special ability to remain in a dissociative state of consciousness (Irwin, 1992) and their special style of information processing (Kuhl & Kazen, 1997).

In order to elaborate a better understanding of the dynamics involved in the structure and psychological functioning of people claiming EE, the so-called Plan Analysis (Caspar, 1995) was used. Plan Analysis is a method, which serves to analyse and describe conscious and unconscious instrumental strategies starting from the level of concrete behaviour up to superordinate general needs. Different aspects of psychological functioning like behaviour, emotion, cognitive schemata but also motivational conflicts can be clearly arranged and reflected as far as their significance in the dynamics is concerned. Then the generated typical plan structure is used as a basis for neural network (connectionist) computer simulations of these individuals. Network models can represent and illustrate the described phenomena and help to shed light on the underlying mechanisms. Simulations which are based on plan-analysis from intensive interviews with N=10 selected cases representing different patterns of EE, additional questionnaire data (SCL90; PSSI: Kuhl & Kazen, 1997; FAMOS: Grosse-Holtforth & Grawe, 2000) will be shown. They model EE from a reactive and instrumental point of view.

The use of such models and its implications for research, counseling and therapy will be demonstrated and discussed.

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THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES: AN ANALYSIS OF IGPP COUNSELING CASES

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There is a great variety of exceptional experiences (EE). Different kinds of specific phenomena often occur jointly and build up to a complex pattern. The purpose of this analysis was to explore if there exist systematic correlations between specific categories of such phenomena. Based on a sample of N = 652 clients who had contacted between 1996 and 2001 the counseling services at the IGPP, six basic patterns of EE could be extracted by using a principal component analysis:

1. *Internal phenomena/feelings of being influenced*: Somatic phenomena and/or voices are experienced. The phenomena are localized physically or inner-psychic, and are often attributed to influences originating from external powers (e.g. by magic, spirits or ghosts).
2. *Apparitions/altered states of consciousness*: Visible apparitions (e.g. light, shadows, figures) and/ or the presence of invisible entities, powers or beings (ghosts, deceased) are experienced in the external world. The phenomena sometimes happen together with sleep paralysis and altered states of consciousness described in terms of "trance" or as "mystic".
3. *Poltergeist phenomena*: Inexplicable kinetic phenomena (objects move, appear or disappear) and/or acoustic sounds (e.g. knocking, taps) are heard in the environment.
4. *Extrasensory perception (ESP)*: Past or present events (clairvoyance) are known without usual sensory information transmission, unpredictable future events (precognition), cognitions and emotions of other persons and living beings are known or foreseen.
5. *Mediumship*: Experiences connected with occult and spiritistic techniques such as automatic writing, glass sliding or channeling are experienced as contacts with external powers (ghosts, deceased).
6. *Precognitive dreams*: Dreams in which future events, unpredictable by existing knowledge, are more or less distinctly or symbolically anticipated.

Using these EE patterns specific types of clients can be characterized. A cluster analysis based on the Ward technique yielded six clusters:

1. *Internally influenced type*: 114 persons exclusively reported internal phenomena/influence, the first EE pattern listed above.
2. *Apparition type*: 146 persons reported apparitions/altered states of consciousness. About 50% of them were additionally affected by internal phenomena/influence, more than 40% reported poltergeist phenomena.
3. *Poltergeist type*: 102 persons with poltergeist phenomena. Approximately 30% of them described internal phenomena/influences in addition.
4. *ESP type*: 162 persons concerning ESP. More than 30% of them were also affected by internal phenomena/influences, almost 30% were affected by apparitions/altered states of consciousness, and more than 20% by poltergeist phenomena.