

# METAPHORS AND LAY THEORIES OF PSI EXPERIENCES

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**ABSTRACT:** Within the parapsychological literature particular metaphors seem to be employed to convey different views of paranormal experiences. Three main metaphors seem to be used by psychical researchers and parapsychologists, Williams (1996) termed these: *intrusions* (focused on the idea of entities), *transmissions* (viewing psi as a signal), and *connections* (where psi is a result of the fundamentally interconnected—holistic—nature of reality). To explore this idea further, three open-ended questions concerning explanations of different paranormal phenomena (ESP, Ghosts and PK) were put to a sample of experimental participants. These participants were asked to explain in their own words what they thought might be occurring in each of these kinds of experiences. The results of a content analysis indicated that respondents, like parapsychologists, frequently employ these three core metaphors. The frequency and type of core metaphors, as well novel metaphors and non-metaphorical explanations are reported.

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The contemporary view of metaphor is far removed from one of decorative rhetoric, rather it is seen as the fundamental experiential ground in which cognition is embedded. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) exemplify the modern approach to metaphor. In their research they point to cognition being largely characterised by metaphorical activity rooted in the imagination and deriving primarily from the experience of embodiment.

The ubiquity of metaphor in everyday discourse and the prominence of myths in all cultures provide good evidence for the thesis that human thought is fundamentally constituted by such figurative schemas as metaphor (Gibbs, 1994). Metaphors are important because they indicate how we as organisms structure one kind of experience in terms of the domain of another. So a love affair can be described in terms of a journey and an argument in terms of a war. These metaphorical constructions of our reality inform on how we interact with and construe our world. Metaphors are not simply subjective poetic efforts; they are instead experiential, shared, (because we are all embodied organisms with similar

kinds of experiences) and so objective to a certain degree (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). It could be argued that this form of objectivity is all we can aspire to as creatures reliant on our own particular perceptual and cognitive perspective.

Metaphors are of obvious importance in understanding and communicating scientific concepts (Kuhn, 1993). Metaphors have been used to describe the structure of atoms (e.g., THEY ARE SOLAR SYSTEMS); the human constitution (e.g., IT IS A MACHINE); and the nature of the mind (e.g., IT IS A COMPUTER). Collins and Gentner (1987) explored how metaphors and analogies can be used to understand concepts, construct mental models and arrive at new inferences. Analogy and metaphor are invaluable in permitting the mapping of structural relations between a source domain (e.g., the computer) and target domain (e.g., the mind). The rules which describe the functioning of one domain can be projected to another and be used to predict behaviour and functioning in that domain.

Metaphors are employed much more frequently in ordinary discourse than we might expect. Gibbs (1994) notes that between 5 and 6 metaphors are introduced per minute of discourse. Analyses of the use of metaphors in television debates and news commentary programs showed that speakers use one unique metaphor for every 25 words (Graesser, Mio & Millis, 1989; cited in Gibbs 1994). In addition, novel metaphors were employed about every 2-3 minutes of discourse by U.S. senators during the debate in January 1991 on the use of military force in the Persian Gulf (Voss, Kennet, Wiley & Engstler-Schooler, 1992; cited in Gibbs 1994).

Metaphor has been the subject of a growing number of empirical investigations. McConnell, Bill, Dember & Grasha (1993) were successful in measuring personality attributes such as optimism, pessimism, locus of control and sensation-seeking by studying the metaphors which people generated. Another study which looked at metaphor usage among participants who were trained in psychology or who had little or no formal training revealed that the experienced participants tended to generate more metaphors particularly with respect to abstract areas of discussion where literal explanations were not available (Cooke and Bartha, 1992).

Quinn (1987) examined the usage of metaphor in general discourse of Americans about marriage. She found that only eight classes of metaphors occurred when people discussed marriage. Amongst these were metaphors of *sharedness* (I FELT THAT MARRIAGE WAS JUST A PARTNERSHIP); metaphors of *mutual benefit* (THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING WE GOT OUT OF MARRIAGE); metaphors

of *effort* (SHE WORKS HARDER AT OUR MARRIAGE THAN I DO); metaphors of *risk* (THERE ARE SO MANY ODDS AGAINST MARRIAGE). The eight classes of metaphor seem to reflect the conceptual elements which characterise the model of marriage held by most Americans. This analysis reveals the way in which metaphors are used to construct and understand the abstract realm of marriage.

In the field of parapsychology there has been relatively little attention paid explicitly to the metaphors used to describe paranormal phenomena, although many models and theories have been proposed that might be considered as metaphors in the sense used here. Hillman (1971) identified a number of fantasies involved in the study of parapsychology; these included the notion of will, intimacy and a general spiritual or anti-matter fantasy. Hess (1988) adopting a similar approach which focused on the discourse of parapsychology found a hierarchical structure built upon foundations of *hard* and *soft* approaches which equate with the *masculine* and *feminine* approaches to science in general. Ullman (1984) has indicated how psi seems to be woven into dreams which suggests that psi, like dreams, has a metaphorical form. These approaches indicate two levels of metaphorical analysis: 1) a surface level which focuses on the construction of a subject and the ways in which discourse and narratives represent the paranormal and psi; and 2) a deeper level which concentrates on the form of the phenomena and suggests that psi itself may derive from a metaphorical state of mind. This is a state which involves low focus thought (see Gelernter, 1994) which is more experiential and imaginative than rational and analytic (Epstein, 1994) and more related to emotion and creativity than to logic and problem solving.

Jahn and Dunne (1988) explored this second level by examining metaphorical projections from the quantum to the human realm (popular sources such as Zohar's (1990) *Quantum Self* have also explored this metaphor). They offer a fascinating in-depth coverage of the quantum consciousness metaphor. They explored the metaphor of the human particle/wave, mapping the qualities and characteristics of wave particles onto human cognition and experience in an effort to understand and speculate upon the process influencing the demonstration of psi. They adopt a method similar to that used by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) where they pay particular attention to the clues offered in everyday speech regarding changes in orientation and movement in mental space. For instance:

We speak of "spheres of influence," of "far-ranging" minds or thoughts of "penetrating" insight; we acknowledge the advantages of "positive attitude" or the detriments of "negativity;" and we

ask "what's his angle?" or "what's the point?" to ascertain someone's perspective or orientation on a matter. (p. 247)

According to a traditional objectivist position this is simply a matter of figurative speech embedded in subjectivity, however from the perspective of the contemporary metaphor theorist this is indicative of actual deep experiential gestalts, which are structured and communicated metaphorically by relating them to the experience of physical movement and orientation in space. Amorim (1994) extended Jahn and Dunne's work more formally by showing how cross-mapping attributes of quantum systems permits predictions regarding psi phenomena. He does this by assuming an isomorphy between quantum and psi phenomena drawing on the observational theories to penetrate the intentional states of the psi experient or operator. These analogies permit certain testable hypotheses to be generated, in a sense this kind of approach makes explicit what has been largely implicit and unrecognised in any kind of creative scientific theory formation.

Adopting the first level of metaphor analysis, Williams (1996) reviewed the apparent use of three different metaphors in the parapsychological literature. Although these might be taken for literal entities, it is worthwhile postponing judgement and treating each as a way of relating to the experience of psi. This process permits a reflective and creative space in which to consider the meaning of these concepts, and the opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation of which aspects are useful, and which are not, with respect to a particular phenomenon. Williams (1996) proposed that different metaphors reveal and conceal particular aspects of the reality they are directed at; it is therefore important to realise that there are no justifiable reasons for choosing one metaphor over another in an effort to find the 'truth'. It is not possible however, to avoid responsible judgement in the exercise of choosing metaphors. Metaphors are the most appropriate tools for describing a world that is inherently multifaceted and in which we and our perceptions are inextricably bound.

Three broad categories of metaphor seem to exist in the literature of parapsychology and psychical research (Williams, 1996). Firstly, *intrusions*, a metaphor that describes psi as occurring through the intervention of entities (usually the spirits of the deceased); secondly, an information transfer metaphor which describes psi as a communication process (like a radio signal) and PK as force or energy; and finally, a more holistic metaphor (which relies on notions of interconnected nature evidenced in Jung's notion of synchronicity and the abstruse realm of quantum mechanics but also perhaps in lay

conceptions of family bonds). These metaphors might be briefly referred to as *intrusions*, *transmissions* and *connections*.

The term *intrusion* is borrowed from Evans (1980). The term is not intended to imply a negative experience but simply the presence, appearance or visitation of some nonmaterial other. It might be replaced by the term *entities* but this would distract from the *intrusion* as a process and almost seem to literalise the event. The term *transmission* is evidenced in everyday ‘lab-speak’ where *senders*, *receivers* and *targets* are regularly discussed. *Connections* are a much subtler affair and relate to ideas of systems and wholeness, whether at the level of individuals or more generally in terms of a view of the world from the perspective of the new physics. There is no reason why these three cannot overlap, or for one, such as *connections* to subsume and account for the others at a more general level of explanation.

It is important that we attempt to understand the folk models and metaphors that people generate and employ to describe ostensible paranormal experiences. It will help to describe the kinds of models and expectations that people have of these experiences and how these are used to construct possible instances of psi. It may also provide clues about the situations in which certain experiences may arise; e.g., one of the signs of having an ESP experience might be the sense of foreignness of the information, that it does not seem to belong to the individual and that they have no recognition of having generated it themselves. It seems reasonable to assume that it CAME IN or was TRANSMITTED in from the outside. Most importantly, it is valuable to examine people’s metaphorical accounts of experience and explanation because it offers ways in which to envisage how psi might operate; this is of course something we are still far from being sure about (Morris, 1975).

In this study, informal interviews were carried out in order to assess the use of these three core and other metaphors and explanations of paranormal experience in people’s everyday discourse.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Thirty eight participants, mostly undergraduate students from the University of Edinburgh and Napier University, Edinburgh, took part in the study. The few remaining participants were gathered

from a participant pool held at the Koestler Parapsychology Unit. Ages ranged between 18 and 45. The participants showed a range of opinions and beliefs on acceptance of the paranormal.

### ***Procedure***

In most cases, each participant had taken part in an experimental task and was briefly interviewed following the task. In some cases, participants were interviewed after a longer period of time had elapsed since they undertook the task. Each participant was initially asked to relate any paranormal experiences that they might have had. Upon completing their account of these experiences they were asked three questions regarding paranormal phenomena, always presented in the same order (shown below). Participants were not informed of the actual questions but they were informed that the interview would involve them offering explanations for paranormal phenomena.

- 1) How might you explain what is involved when someone says that they have an experience of ESP (e.g., telepathy)?
- 2) How might you explain what is involved when someone says that they have seen a ghost?
- 3) How might you explain what is involved when someone says that they have an experience of PK? (e.g., a mental influence on matter)

Each participant was encouraged to answer the question as fully as possible. They were not interrupted but were encouraged to continue if it seemed that they had more to say. In the early part of the study the PK question was not included, as a result nine participants did not provide answers for this. All interviews took place in the privacy of an experimental cubicle and lasted between 10 and 45 minutes depending entirely upon the wishes of the participant. Paranormal belief scores were available from a subgroup of these participants since they had participated in a previous study where they had completed a number of questionnaires, including the Australian Sheep-Goat Scale (Thalbourne, 1981).

### ***Analysis procedure***

Interviews were transcribed by the first author for the 38 participants, the full transcripts were not checked in their entirety but in specific instances where some ambiguity was involved the second

author examined the relevant tape and transcript. The interviews were divided into 'idea units' or 'meaning units', these were oriented around a single theme, metaphor or explanation; units varied from sentences to parts of a sentence or occasionally a number of sentences. An example response divided into idea units is represented below.

e.g., Response 9b:

(unit 13) I'm not so sure about this idea of them having a reason, I think that's maybe a human thing that's been imprinted on it

(unit 14) I think they exist everywhere in a sense.

(unit 15) it's just that we don't pick up on it much, something like that.

Each separate idea unit was assessed independently for the occurrence of metaphors by the two raters using a content analytic technique. The number of occurrences of the three core metaphors (*intrusions*, *transmissions* and *connections*), as well as novel metaphors and explanations were identified by the two raters. All metaphors and explanations were recorded irrespective of whether the individual actually subscribed to that view or simply raised it as an explanation others might adopt. Essentially the metaphors and explanations of paranormal experiences recorded offer a glimpse of the ideas in current circulation.

The criteria for recording an instance of metaphor were that the respondent either directly employed a metaphor or that they answered in such a way as to suggest an underlying metaphor. For example, if a non-human entity such as a GHOST, SPIRIT, or SUPERNATURAL BEING was mentioned in relation to an experience this was recorded as an *intrusion* metaphor. Mention of the notion of some kind of transfer of information between two people (PICKING UP, RECEIVING or the SENDING OF INFORMATION) or the TRANSFER of energy between a human and environment (a MENTAL FORCE or ENERGY) was considered as an instance of *transmissions*. An instance of *connections* was recorded if any mention was made of some form of BOND, EMPATHY or CONNECTION between individuals or if the explanation involved some form of fundamental INTERCONNECTEDNESS (e.g., nonlocality in quantum physics). Novel metaphors were recorded if the explanation was judged to involve a metaphorical concept other than the three core metaphors. Explanations which were judged to be more literal than

metaphorical (this usually meant they were more conventional explanations) were recorded as literal explanations.

## RESULTS

Inter-rater reliabilities (based on the proportion of agreed identifications relative to the proportion of total identifications) between the two raters indicated that there was 87% agreement on identification of the *intrusion* metaphors, 93% agreement on *transmissions*; and 93% on *connections*. Disagreements on identification of a particular metaphor resulted primarily from the tendency for a degree of overlap to exist between novel metaphors and core metaphors. The overall pattern of usage of metaphors is shown in Table 1.

It can be seen from Table 1 that *transmissions* and *connections* were preferable in explaining ESP and *intrusions* in explaining ghosts. In answering the PK question participants seemed to rely on a variant of the transmissions metaphor which involved notions of force or energy.

[ INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ]

In addition to the three core metaphors, novel metaphors were also noted. Table 2 shows the kinds of novel metaphors used in relation to the three questions and their frequency of usage. It is noticeable that these novel metaphors might usefully compose two categories: one with the individual or personality as its locus, focused on internal factors and the other focused on external factors. For the ESP question the two most frequent metaphors related to an ability of the individual generally termed as an aspect of personality or as a gift. For the question on ghosts the metaphors generally had an external locus. The most frequent responses were related conceptually to the past occurrence of a traumatic event resulting in residual affect in the form of an *atmosphere*. In one instance, the respondent noted that seeing a ghost was probably "just a more intense form" of an atmosphere. These atmospheres were recorded in the physical materials of the location itself, for example in stone *tape recordings*<sup>1</sup>. The metaphor of *impressions* would also probably be related to this overall schema. The metaphors for the

PK question were most frequently allied to abilities of the individual and specifically to mental abilities such as having a *powerful mind*<sup>2</sup>.

[ INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE ]

As well as noting the frequency of novel metaphors, any explanations which seemed to be used in an overtly literal manner were noted. In the strong sense of metaphor some of these might arguably be included as metaphors since literal language develops out of metaphor (Soyland, 1994). The most frequent explanations for the ESP question were related to instances of *non-verbal communication* and *coincidence*. People sharing the same family history or similar knowledge (e.g., married couples) were viewed as being susceptible to misinterpretation of this in favour of the ESP hypothesis. The explanations used for the ghost question were mainly oriented around sensory mistakes involving *tricks of the light* or *illusions* as well as more cognitive errors associated with *hallucinations* and *dreaming*. Finally, for the PK question the most frequent explanations were based on assumptions of some fraudulent action and also on an imaginative tendency.

[ INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE ]

These results indicate that three core metaphors of *intrusions*, *transmissions* and *connections* are frequently used by people to explain paranormal experiences. These metaphors overlap to some degree with the novel metaphors; for instance the *powerful mind* metaphor is readily associated with the notion of some kind of TRANSMISSION OF ENERGY involved in PK or ESP. Examples of answers to these questions are displayed in Table 4. In addition it is worth noting that each of the core metaphors are not singular descriptions of one phenomenon; although they may predominate in one kind of experience, as *transmissions* do in the case of ESP, they may also feature in another; for instance, *transmissions* are also used to explain ghost or apparitional experiences. Also they may be used as complementary explanations, for example where *transmissions* are originated by spiritual entities (*intrusions*).

[ INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE ]

Finally, to further explore the data, the proportion of metaphors to the total number of idea units used in all answers was assessed and explored for possible relationships with paranormal belief and experience. Self-response scores for paranormal belief and paranormal experience were correlated with the proportion of metaphors used by respondents. Belief scores (as measured by the Australian Sheep Goat Scale, Thalbourne, 1981) were only available for 23 respondents, all correlations were based on this subsample.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between paranormal belief and the proportion of metaphors to idea units (metaphor use) used in answering the question<sup>3</sup>. Paranormal belief was significantly positively correlated with metaphor use in the explanations of paranormal experiences ( $r = .50, p < .02$ ). Interestingly, a negative correlation was obtained between the proportion of explanations (literal use) to idea units and paranormal belief ( $r = -.26, ns$ ). It is likely that these results reflect the different degrees to which convincing explanatory schemas are available for paranormal phenomena and experiences. Those with more experiences not only use terms appropriate for talking about those experiences but have developed a conceptual framework characterised by the core and novel metaphors presented here. Those individuals reporting fewer experiences were more likely to use literal explanations and avoid using the metaphors of paranormal experience. This probably derives from their lower levels of belief and reluctance to employ such explanatory systems, although they may indeed have access to them in the sense that they are culturally shared and available in common discourse. There is also the possibility that personal experience provides access to these terms and schemas which are not available to non-experiencers.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study provides support for the notion of common core metaphors which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but which may be used in combination or in isolation for structuring and communicating paranormal experiences. These metaphors have largely gone unnoticed in the work of parapsychologists; although ideas and theories have been raised within each of the categories formed by

the metaphors they have usually been treated as literal concepts. In a sense this is unsurprising, we tend to miss the metaphorical nature of most of our everyday discourse. This very fact has necessitated a reconsideration of the relationship of discourse and cognition of the kind exemplified by contemporary theorists such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The work on metaphor in the last couple of decades has initiated a surge in a number of disciplines (literary criticism, Turner, 1987; philosophy, Johnson, 1987; psychology, Leary, 1990; Gibbs, 1994; and cognitive science, Lakoff, 1987) taking stock of how our understanding of human cognition and experience is constructed. For parapsychologists, an examination of metaphor permits valuable insights into the domain in which experiences and accounts of the paranormal are fostered and communicated and the varieties of concepts of paranormal experience which are in circulation. This is extremely important in undertaking any validation of such experiences and understanding an individual's comprehension of and attitude to different kinds of paranormal phenomena.

The three metaphors (*intrusions*, *transmissions* and *connections*) which seem to characterise much of the writing in parapsychology were reasonably strongly represented in the discourse of the respondents in this study. References to these three metaphors were more frequent than any other single metaphor, supporting the notion that these are the three main metaphors employed in experiencing and constructing paranormal experiences. Both the *transmissions* and *connections* metaphors characterised ESP explanations and *intrusions* was most frequently used in relation to explaining ghosts or hauntings. Explanations of PK also relied heavily on *transmissions* metaphors. These were mainly descriptions of mental force or energy and were viewed as physical extensions of the *transmissions* metaphor. PK was also seen as an outcome of novel metaphors such as a *powerful mind* or imagination which through visualisation can influence the outcome of some physical event.

A deeper examination of these metaphors suggest that in the case of *transmissions* the signal is conceived as some form of ELECTRICAL ENERGY, with WAVELENGTHS, and are exhibited by brainwaves. This energy is SENT, PROJECTED or FOCUSED, and other people can TUNE IN, RECEIVE, READ or PICK UP on it. Interestingly, it was also noted by one respondent that a telepathic transmission would probably require more energy and focus to extend its reach to a number of people:

38-a if you wanted to contact a group of people I think that could happen too. I don't think if you're telepathic you have to put in so much concentration to the one person. I think you could transmit to a few people maybe not a large group but a few people at one time if you wanted to pass on the same message.

Another important facet of the discussion of ESP was the proposition that it was easier to communicate with people who are closer to the individual such as family or friends because they have a greater ability to TUNE IN, or because they are ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH, or because they have some form of mental connection by which they are linked (especially where relatives are involved). The form of these communications was considered to vary from vague feelings to visual and verbal images. The content was often an intention to inform of some event ranging from relatively unimportant events to much more important events such as accidents. These communication abilities were considered more often than not to be properties of the individual; they were considered to be due to a type of personality, people having certain characteristics such as a *powerful* imagination or mind, having some form of innate property such as a *gift* or developing a *skill*.

In answering the question about ghosts the respondents seemed to be less confident about the reality of the phenomenon. Those who had experienced an apparition of some kind tended to err on the side of caution:

5-b what I saw was a shape it was nothing really discernible it just moved in a manner which if I'd seen it from a distance I would think it was human I don't know if I believe in them or not but I don't know how I'd explain it.

12-b I'm not sure that I definitely saw a ghost I'd have to say I don't think it definitely was I don't really know what it was.

Some participants assumed that a person's spirit is brought back only in the sense of it being part of the subjective experience of the specific individual who experiences it. This clearly suggests that the personal subjective experience does not carry the weight of consensual or objective experience; this can be seen as a bias which is constantly employed in defining reality and downplaying inner experience.

Another respondent considered that there was a link between people who were close (in the sense of a relationship) which enabled a connection to be made between the two worlds in which these people lived. Yet another considered it possible for a deceased person to come back from the other world during a transitory period between death and reincarnation. Other respondents preferred to see an individual as responsible for the experience themselves, perhaps through desiring to see again relatives who had passed on and by generating the experience themselves in their imagination. Alternatively, the characteristics of the environment may create the experience of seeing a ghost; this was considered to take place in two main ways. It might result from some form of impact on the environment from stressful emotions or a situation which creates a *psychic impression, atmosphere, vibration* or mood, which may like a *tape recording* be played back occasionally to observers. It may also result from a continued presence or mind of a deceased individual which persists in the locale and can be detected by some sensitive individuals. More skeptical evaluations invoked explanations through *tricks of the light* and *illusions*.

The PK question seemed to meet with a good deal more blank stares and skepticism than the other questions. Ready comparisons with Uri Geller were offered by respondents.

31-c I would investigate strings and magnetic fields perhaps but I don't think I could explain it there is no basis in my understanding at the moment for that to happen.

Generally, respondents stressed that they would want to see PK before they would believe it and considered it to be more likely to be the result of an illusion or deception rather than reality. Where respondents did consider it possible they offered explanations based around *powerful mind* metaphors and special characteristics or willpower of people such as Geller. The reliance on *powerful mind* and *force/energy* metaphors links PK explanations with the *transmissions* metaphor as it is employed in discussing ESP. Instead of information being focused it is seen as some form of concentrated influence (possibly involving a vivid visualisation of the proposed outcome) which is directed upon some physical object. The *force* or *energy* involved was considered by one respondent to involve a *spiritual force*, possibly manifesting as heat, which bends metals but the respondent was puzzled as to how this would actually bend or move non-metallic objects. Another respondent considered it to be an electrical,

chemical or energetic influence. One rare explanation of PK involved the intrusion of a poltergeist. There was also some confusion between PK and the movement of the glass in ouija sessions that also called for the involvement of entities in the generation of PK.

Both novel metaphors and literal explanations (like the core metaphors) seemed to fall into two main categories of internal and external causes. Novel metaphors were predominantly concerned with the metaphor of *power* as both an internal and an external attribute. For example possessing a *powerful mind* (internal), or sensing a powerful *atmosphere* (external). The *powerful mind* metaphor seems to relate back to the *transmissions* metaphor, this may also be the case for the use of the term *power* (although it is possible of course, that it could relate to the connections metaphor and mean more connectedness). All of these metaphors rely on the vague notion of *energy* or *power* existent in the personality or environment. This is not surprising when we consider that *energy* is itself a core metaphor which is used to describe cognitive, emotional and physical states. It also seems to have a great deal of currency in new age discourse as a means of discussing invisibles; in this case it possibly offers a sense of validity since it sounds scientific!

Literal explanations revolved around skeptical themes of distressed mental and emotional states in which people may deceive themselves. The respondents noted that this can occur in hallucinations, dreams and in bouts of imaginative activity. The environment also has a role to play, leading to misperception or *tricks of the light* and *illusions*. Other frequent explanations involved the experiences desiring these experiences or encountering coincidences (even if they are startling ones). A number of respondents adopted non-verbal communication explanations in the case of ostensible ESP.

It is also interesting to note the extent to which most respondents were cautious in their attributions of paranormal causality. They often indicated that they would attempt some form of testing of the experience and assessed other possible explanations prior to committing themselves to a paranormal explanation. As one respondent explained:

26-b

[a friend thought that a] poltergeist was stealing the biros and putting them under the er armchair and er the cat actually did it while I was there. I pointed this out that it's the cat [and he said] "Oh yeah right well there's other stuff happening as well"

Another respondent expressed some concern over the reliability of witnesses:

20-b

If they said "oh I saw a ghost last night?" erm first of all it would depend what medium it was in, as in someone was writing in a newspaper "I saw a ghost last night" y'know why would someone want to tell anyone that in the first place unless you wanted to draw attention to yourself?

This respondent felt that 'ghost' experiences point to a desire for attention, but raising the issue, even in the press, may be a result of an expressed need to share and communicate the experience with others. Overall there was relatively good agreement on metaphors used to describe the processes underlying ESP and ghosts and rather less so for the processes behind PK. This suggests that there is a reasonably robust collective representation, lay theory or folk concept of ESP which is structured around the notion of some form of transmission of information and involves focusing strongly on another individual or receiving unexpected information. For ghosts, the main metaphor involved the notion of an intruding entity. For PK, there is less agreement indicating not only the decreased social tangibility of these phenomena but also a decreased belief in their validity. It is easier to believe in ESP than it is to believe in ghosts or PK partly because the criteria for these experiences are fuzzier (and perhaps more easily met).

The images and metaphors presented here show some of the ways in which psi is constructed and imagined. From the perspective of metaphor, they illustrate our concerns and beliefs about psi. The images inevitably conceal as much as they reveal. Whatever the perspective we hold on a phenomenon it is unlikely to be exhaustive, there will always be numerous other vantage points possible. Using metaphor to understand psi does not limit it to certain vehicles but reminds us that it has many facets which can be seen by being sensitive to other possible viewpoints. This flexibility needs to be maintained in order not to push the limits of one perspective too far, resulting in singularity of investigation and explanation. Rich rewards might be attached to taking the paths less travelled.

Extensions of this work could include an examination of similar accounts of experiences in other non-Western cultures. The energy/transmission metaphors which seem to dominate the ESP and PK explanations are likely to be universal; some examples of common metaphors of human energy employed paranormally include: chi (Chinese), ki (Japanese), kundalini (Indian), baraka (Sufi), mana (Kahuna).

Metaphors are threads in a net woven by humans to surround and account for experience in general and they are primary modes of describing the case of unusual or exceptional experiences where literal (objective) descriptions do not exist. Cathy Wheeler (1987) has argued that all thought and language is ultimately metaphorical -- if there is a foundation, it is to be found expressed in relationships rather than entities (Edge, 1994). Soyland (1994) has argued that contrary to intuition, the literal is actually a subset of the metaphorical and not the reverse. By examining the metaphors used in relation to any domain of experience a good measure of the reality of that phenomenon becomes apparent. Although the case for the existence of paranormal phenomena continues to be debated by scientists, a working conceptual framework and language already exists for these phenomena from a lay theory perspective. By directing our attention towards the metaphors surrounding these exceptional experiences we may begin to clarify their nature and divest ourselves of the perception that these experiences are definitive objects. (Here we would argue that none of our experiences are definitive objects, instead, all of them result from the metaphorical interplay of the domains in which we construct them). We should also be able to move easily between the relationships generated by metaphor and the objects and literal terms which are created as the metaphor crystallises; as it becomes socially and culturally accepted. The approach we need is not unlike the complementarity of quantum physicists who must acknowledge that matter is both particle (literal-object) and wave (metaphor-relationship). It is in the fluxing, undifferentiated ground of experiential mind that metaphor flourishes and where we may occasionally note the strong roots of psi experience.

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**Table 1. Number of individuals using different metaphors in answering the three questions.**

Metaphors	Q. 1. ESP	Q. 2. Ghost	Q. 3. PK	Total
Intrusions	2 (4%)	19 (33%)	3 (10%)	24
Transmissions	15 (27%)	3 (5%)	9 (31%)	27
Connections	8 (15%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	10
Novel	9 (17%)	11 (19%)	8 (28%)	28
Explanations	20 (37%)	23 (40%)	9 (31%)	52

**Table 2. Examples of novel metaphors used to explain ESP, ghosts and PK with multiple instances of use in parentheses.**

ESP	Ghosts	PK
Personality (2)	Atmosphere (4)	Powerful mind (5)
Gift (2)	Stone tape recordings (4)	Willpower (2)
Vibratory planes	Vibratory planes (3)	Influence (2)
Evil	Impressions (2)	Personality
Ability	Mind survives	Magick
Sixth sense	Powerful mind	
Vision		

**Table 3. Examples of explanations used to explain ESP, ghosts and PK with multiple instances of use in parentheses.**

ESP	Ghosts	PK
Non verbal commun. (5)	Trick of the light (5)	Fraud (4)
Coincidence (4)	Desire (5)	Imagination (2)
Similar (2)	Illusions (4)	Coincidence
Knowledge (2)	Fear (4)	Illusions
Intuition	Hallucinations (4)	
Fraud	Dreaming (3)	
Luck	Memory (2)	

**Table 4. Examples of discourse involving the three core metaphors.**

<p><i>Intrusions</i></p>	<p>13-b in your mind that you've BROUGHT BACK THIS PERSON'S SPIRIT they've gone on somewhere else, errm either they're in heaven or hell or whatever.</p> <p>37-a I believe there's a place which isn't heaven and it isn't hell, that the SPIRITS SORT OF HANG AROUND, (laughs) for a while and they can communicate with people who are very receptive to them, and because these spirits exist in infinity which is timeless they know what is going to happen in our future.</p>
<p><i>Transmissions</i></p>	<p>15-a I always thought of it as TUNING IN TO somebody else's thoughts and actually, like language almost having a conversation with somebody except mentally you can just see what their thoughts are like.</p> <p>23-a I would think telepathy would be where, errm you PICK UP ideas out of someone's mind</p> <p>I suppose it might be like the radio, where that PICKS UP y'know that's always fascinated when you're young how the radio works and it sort of speaks (laughs) y'know PICKS UP SIGNALS</p>
<p><i>Connections</i></p>	<p>32-a Just a STRONG BOND between two people and that enables them like twins or something like that</p> <p>28-a ideas about NON LOCALITY AND QUANTUM PHYSICS appeal to me er but naturally everyone immediately says this means we can have telepathy and that's er a presumption that's hard to make since I find the actual physics pretty hard to believe and you have to take that all on trust anyway</p>

Footnote:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Stone tape recordings' have been posited as an explanation for hauntings. The physical surroundings, often buildings, absorb or record the events that have happened there in an analogous way to the way a tape records sounds or images and can play them back in the appropriate circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> The *powerful mind* metaphor is allied here with the *transmission* metaphor; it is also possible that this is not exclusively linked to this metaphor but may also be linked to the *connections* metaphor.

<sup>3</sup> The proportion of metaphors or explanations to idea units was calculated by simply summing the number of total metaphors (core and novel) across each question for each participant and dividing this by the total number of idea units constituting that individual's answers.