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**The school Of Human & Health Sciences**

**An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Post  
Bereavement Apparitions (PBAs).**

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**Word Count:26,655**

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### **Abstract**

Post bereavement apparitions (PBA's) have been reported throughout time and culture. Traditionally, PBA's are seen as somewhat contentious within the research. Although, newer theories surrounding bereavement focus on individuality and continued bonds PBAs are somewhat stigmatised. Additionally, research that explores the experience of PBAs is limited. To address this an IPA approach was undertaken to provide a detailed, personal and contextual view on the phenomenon and to explore individuals' personal experiences and their individual interpretations of PBAs. A small homogenous sample of eight individuals was selected and interviewed on the basis of meeting the criteria of having a PBA. After thorough analysis six overarching themes were identified: *Initial nature of loss, bonds individuals share within life and thereafter, the absolute certainty and 'realness' of the apparition, the endeavour to understand an intricate experience, positive attributes provide by the experience and one's own view of the external world's perceptions*. Overall, the main significant finding was that PBAs are positive for individuals and provided an important aspect to the individual's life, as well being experienced as very real regardless of external perceptions. The importance of normalising these experiences has been highlighted. These findings are discussed in relation to previous research and theory. Following on from this reflexivity was presented, as well as strengths and limitations and future research directions within the area.

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## **Introduction / Literature Review**

### **Rationale & interest**

Research that has been executed with an aim to add to knowledge and understanding of post bereavement apparitions (PBAs) is limited, meaning that very little is known about the phenomenon. Additionally, the lived experience is of great importance within this topic due to the meaning and understanding witnesses give to it, opposed to a general overview of the experience. The former provides an in-depth account that maintains individualism. Arguably, added knowledge may have the potential to provide more understanding and awareness to assist the reduction in stigma and the embarrassment attached to experiences. Finally, it may provide a better understanding of individual responses to bereavement.

The researcher's interest in this topic derives from a fascination with understanding humans' relationship with the concept of death and the afterlife. This has been part of the researcher's history from being a child. To exemplify, the researcher is particularly interested in how humans deal with the loss of an individual and how they construct some form of conclusion for loss, such as an afterlife. Furthermore, the researcher is interested in the concept of death in relation to the fear it induces in humans', all be it that it is inevitable and natural.

PBA's will be defined and their prevalence and characteristics of individuals whom experience them will be outlined. Additionally, the general wider perception surrounding PBA's will be highlighted. The nature of apparitions in general will be discussed in relation to apparition types, prevalence and the characteristics of experiencers as well as theories that attempt to explain the phenomenon. There after bereavement will be explored in relation to the development of theories concluding with more modern perspectives such as continuing bonds.

### **PBAs**

Post bereavement hallucinatory experiences have been reported throughout history. Some of the oldest reports emerge from the Old and New Testament in the Bible. Terms that describe this unique experience range across literature, with a common argument that they are either hallucinations, suggesting that these are sensory experiences that do not exist outside of the individuals mind - or an illusion, whereby an individual misinterprets a sensory experience. Both of these may be associated with mental health disorders (Fish, 2009). Thus, widely these experiences are categorised as a sensory event or experience after the passing of a loved one that involves the perception of something which is not present (Blom, 2009). Interestingly, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) considers that events like these are symptoms of a Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (APA, 2013). The symptoms include reports of hallucinations of a deceased person by a bereaved individual with no prior mental disorder. Additionally, the prevalence of this disorder is considered to be approximately between two and five percent of the population (APA, 2013). However, taking into consideration the negative connotations attached to describing these experiences as hallucinations or illusions, the term ‘post-bereavement apparition’, a common term within parapsychology literature which is defined as an instance of something appearing will be utilised to describe the experiences witnessed by participants throughout this study

**Prevalence of PBAs and characteristics of those who witness them**

It would appear that PBAs are reported by a significant proportion of the populations across all societies and cultures worldwide (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973, Haraldsson, 1988, 1989, MacDonald, 1992, Bader, Mencken & Baker, 2011). Experiences are well documented across medical, counselling and psychological literature (Bennett & Bennett, 2000). Recent research has suggested that 56 percent of the population experience this phenomenon, or one in six people have heard or seen a loved one post death (Hastings, 2012, Castelnovo, Cavalotti, Gambini & D'Agostino, 2015, Kamp & Due, 2019). Additionally, research has indicated that approximately 80 percent of widows and widowers report experiences (Rees, 1971, Haraldsson 1988, 1989, Berger, 1995, Barbato, Blunden, Reid, Irwin & Rodriquez, 1999, Castelnovo et al., 2015), while research has also indicated that approximately 80 percent of parents who lose their children also report experiences (Wiener, Aikin, Gibbions, & Hirschfeld, 1996). Overall, literature indicates that these experiences are not exclusive to one demographic, which includes genders, age, religion, education, or to the period of time after death or cause of death, suggesting that they are commonplace (Houck, 2005).

However, due to the negative connotations of reporting an experience, including the risk of being diagnosed with a psychological disorder, the prevalence already stated may be only the tip of the iceberg. Additionally, most of the research in the area has taken a pathological approach with conclusions including that the experiences are similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Castelnovo et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, research is demonstrating that a high number of people report that the experiences are pleasant and comforting (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973, Wiener et al., 1996, Datson & Marwit, 1997, Gariglietti & Allison, 1997). Research is also indicating that the experience has a



significant impact on reducing the symptoms of grief (Botkin, 2000, LaGrand, 2005, Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009, Kwilecki, 2011, Hastings, 2012). Some individuals report the experiences to be transformative and healing, through this re-connectivity with the love one (Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009). Furthermore, participants report an effect on belief systems, reinforcing the belief in an afterlife and thus attaching a new purpose to the loss (Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009, Kwilecki, 2011). Bennett and Bennett (2000) explored the discourse surrounding the phenomenon and found that scientific discourse holds the assumption that the experiences are indicative of a mind in chaos. However, they suggest that the experiences are real and natural to the witnesses, to some extent evidencing the aspect of continuing links with people they have lost. Bennett and Bennett (2000) argue that regardless to what discourse a person draws on to give meaning to their experiences, it should be considered to be traditional and rational.

Overall, the literature presents some important points for consideration, including the issue of treatment for bereavement, such as counselling. The fact that there are negative connotations to experiences suggests that the phenomenon is not openly discussed. This could be problematic for individuals seeking help, as they may not benefit fully from any treatment offered. To exemplify, individuals may not disclose the full extent of their experiences due to the conscious awareness of other opinions relating to this topic, which may not be helpful in terms of working through their grief. Moreover, the prevalence and the positive reported outcomes suggest that people who experience apparitions may not seek or need treatment in the first place. Furthermore, apparitions appear to be highly suggestable in that, once such an experience is suggested, an individual may have that experience (Lange & Houran, 1997, Terhune & Smith, 2006). This could suggest that individuals who are struggling with bereavement, may benefit from Avatar Therapy to facilitate healing. Avatar Therapy has been developed and utilised for individuals

struggling with auditory verbal hallucinations stemming from psychosis (Craig et al., 2018). To date this is providing strong evidence that it aids management and could be suggestive that some aspects may be applied in this area. It could be argued that the concept of PBAs should be normalised and accepted, with each individual taking their own meaning from their experiences, without assumptions being made. This latter point renders this research as being of considerable importance. PBAs are just one type of apparitional experienced amongst several that are defined in the literature. This wider research is discussed in the next section.

### **Apparitions**

Apparitions have been reported for hundreds of years across many cultures, with little understanding of what they are. The term '*apparition*' is derived from the Latin word '*apparere*' which means 'to show oneself' (Williams, Ventola & Wilson, 2010). Apparitions are defined in different ways: to some extent this differentiation is based on individual, philosophical beliefs. However, they all retain the idea that they are recognised as a presence by way of the human senses (Irwin, 2009). Thalbourne (1982, 2003) defines an apparition as the experience of the presence, primarily but not exclusively seen, of a person or animal that is physically *not there*. Defining an apparition has proved difficult and is made complex by differing philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, the overarching common belief is that an apparition is the soul or spirit of a deceased entity that can be sensed by the living (Tudor, 2017). Notwithstanding, each individual appears to formulate their own meanings and ideas of what an apparition is and what experiencing an apparition entails (Baker, 2002).

### **Apparition Types**

Already, Tyrrell (1970) suggested there was four types of apparitional experience reported: experimental, crisis, post-mortem and ghosts and hauntings. This has been extended to include a deathbed vision and by-standing type (Williams et al., 2010). The experimental apparitional experience occurs when the apparition is purposefully manipulated by participants (Tyrell, 1970). Crisis apparitional experiences are suggested to occur when the apparition represents an individual in some form of crisis at the time of death such as an accident. Accounts claim that this type of apparition can be mistaken for the real person (Stevenson, 1995, Feather & Schmicker, 2005). Post-mortem experiences are reported to happen after a death and can occur hours or even years later. This type of apparitional experience is said to account for nearly two thirds of experiences (Haraldsson, 1985). Deathbed visions have been recorded since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rogo, 1978). When death is imminent, reports from dying people have described experiences involving seeing places and people that refer to the afterlife. Many healthcare workers have report incidents of this type of experience throughout the years (Arcangel, 2005). Hauntings are classified as apparitional experiences in which the same apparition is seen at the same location by more than one witness on several occasions (Tyrrell, 1970). By-standing apparitions are classified as being associated with a person rather than a place, as in hauntings (Williams et al., 2010).

### **Apparition prevalence**

The incidence of seeing apparitions varies considerably (Baker, 2002). American data demonstrates that approximately one fifth of a sample of 808 have seen or felt an apparition with approximately 45 percent of the American population believing they had experienced one at some point in their lives (Alfano, 2005, Spiegel, 2013). British prevalence indicates that, out of a sample of 721, 40 percent believed in ghosts and 37 percent had had experiences (SUN, 1998). Overall the statistics suggest that apparitional experience has been persistent across time and is widespread. However, prevalence exploring both belief and experiences in the general population remains hard to quantify. This could be due to it being a very complex topic. Some people may not disclose their beliefs or experiences due to assumptions held by society and they may be unsure as to what they are classing as an apparition. Research into wider paranormal experiences has demonstrated that individuals are reluctant to disclose (Palmer & Baurd, 2002; Davis, Lockwood & Wright, 1991, Braud, 1985). However, apparitional experiences are among one of the most documented paranormal beliefs within the normal population, with the characteristics of the reported experiences generally fitting some common patterns. .

Physical appearance characteristics of apparitions are described as being solid, life like, as opposed to classic ghost descriptions being misty and translucent (Irwin, 1994, Roll, 1982, Tyrell, 1953, 1961). Often apparitions are mistaken for the real person (Morton, 1892).

Additionally, the literature reports that many apparitions demonstrate physical features such as shadows and reflections (Feather & Schmicker, 2005). Many apparitions have demonstrated an ability to pass through doors and walls as well as appear and disappear (Stevenson, 1982, Tyrrell, 1953, 1961). Apparitional experiences have been reported to include sensations of cold, wind and touch, or can be simply auditory, all of which reflect human activity (Roll, 1991).

Apparitions have been shown to be, more often than not, a close family member of the witness rather than a stranger (Persinger, 1974, Osis & Haraldsson, 1977, Haraldsson, 1988, 1989, Arcangel, 2005). However, later studies have demonstrated that half of the 357 apparitional cases in one study were relatives and 29% of those seen were unfamiliar entities (Haraldsson, 1994). Additionally, Stevenson (1982) found that 78 percent of cases were perceived by a witness who had strong emotional ties to the person.

### **Characteristics of experiencers**

Research has explored the characteristics associated with individuals who experience apparitions. Strong imaginations and fantasy proneness are suggested to be common amongst these individuals (Wilson & Barber, 1983, Cameron & Roll, 1983, Osis, 1986, Irwin, 1990, Parra, 2007). Furthermore, this research concluded that these characteristics could be applicable to 4 percent of the general population (Wilson & Barber, 1983). Another characteristic that is suggested to be associated with witnesses of apparitional experiences is a concept known as absorption. Absorption enables an individual to immerse their attention in the experience completely, ignoring the external world (Osis, 1986, Parra, 2007, Hastings et al., 2002). Experimental research has indicated that apparitional witnesses have a certain personality profile which includes characteristics that give more importance to emotions rather than logical thought. They favour intuition over sense perception (Arcangel, 1997, Hastings et al., 2002). Interestingly, these characteristics have been established in predominantly female samples or female case studies. Therefore, it is possible that females harbour these traits and also report apparitional experiences. However, although reports are predominantly female, males also report witnessing apparitional experiences.

**Theories that attempt to explain the phenomenon**

Theories that attempt to account for apparitional experiences are perspectives which include survival, place memory and hallucination. Survival assumes that the soul, personality or consciousness survives bodily death, remaining in the environment of the living, but in spirit form. This is the essence of the spirit hypothesis (Irwin, 1999). A key issue with regard to this is generating support that the spirit harbours some intelligence or motivation to communicate. Much research has found that this intention is considered to be shared equally by both apparition and witness (Rhine, 1960), which counters the argument that the desire to communicate is one way. However, this perspective is generally utilised to explain apparition by the lay person (Baker, 2002).

Alongside the idea of survival, extra-sensory perception (ESP) and telepathic communication is also put forward as an explanation for such contact. Extra-sensory perception is the concept that individuals who have the ability are able to receive information through an additional sense to the main five physical senses (Irwin, 2004). Within ESP more widely, telepathic communication is the transference of information from one individual to another without the utilisation of traditional methods of communication, generally, suggested to be done with the mind (Irwin, 2004). There have been many variations of these concepts and their involvement in apparitional experiences over time (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, Myers, 1903, Rhine, 1957, Tyrell, 1963, Green & McCreery, 1975, Irwin, 1994).

One explanation for haunting apparitions is a concept known as 'place memory'. (Price, 1939, 1940). This idea suggests that memories of people are in some way imprinted in places and locations and are seen as apparitions. Research has indicated that this is a psychokinetic process and is an interaction between people and place (Heath, 2004). Additionally, Parapsychology

research has found some support for mind and matter interaction as well as lingering psychokinetic energy (Bösch, Steinkamp, & Boller, 2006, Radin, 2006, Williams & Roll, 2006).

However, the methodology employed using rolls of dice and random number generation could be argued to have produced the results based on chance which is signified by the small effect size.

The final perspective considers apparitions to be pure hallucination. Rather than being negative and pathological, the term within parapsychology refers to psychological or physiological changes which may induce hallucination (Williams et al., 2010). A consideration is that they are induced by a person's own imagination, which are suggested to reflect their expectations, conditioning throughout the life course and their memories (Rawcliffe, 1959). Research has demonstrated how suggestive the power of this phenomenon can be (Lange & Houran, 1997, Terhune & Smith, 2006). Specifically, experimentation in the *psychomanteum* whereby participants are placed in a darkened room and asked to gaze into a reflective surface, is particularly interesting and stems from Greek mythology. Many experiments using this methodology have indicated individuals reporting apparitional experiences with prior priming (Moody, 1992, Moody & Perry, 1993, Radin & Rebman, 1996, Arcangel, 1997, Hasting et al., 2002, Roll, 2004, Terhune & Smith, 2006). At the same time, the studies demonstrated a successful rate of reduction in grief symptoms by participants (Roll, 2004, Hastings et al., 2002).

More biological explanations relate to the brain regions, specifically the amygdala and hippocampus which are associated with memory and emotions. It has been shown that, when stimulated, these brain regions can induce vivid memories and strong emotions (Gloor, 1990, Gloor, Olivier, Quesney, Andermann & Horowitz, 1982, Halgren, Walter, Cherlow & Crandall, 1978, Weingarten, Cherlow & Holmgren, 1977). The Earth's magnetic field has been suggested to have some effect on brain activity (Persinger, 2001, Reiter, 1993). Persinger (1974, 1988)

suggested when geomagnetic activity is high, melatonin levels in these areas may be affected, inducing neuro-electric mini-seizures. Furthermore, comparisons of reports of apparitional experience and geomagnetic data also seems to support this notion (Persinger, 1988,1993, Wilkinson & Gauld, 1993). Persinger, Tiler & Koren (2000) replicated brain stimulation in one particular case study, finding a strong negative emotional response along with visual apparitions similar to other experiences previously reported. Persinger (1988) also suggested that neurological chemical changes in the brain may alter when in a state of grief and bereavement. However, Persinger (1993) offered an alternative explanation for reports that relate to the sensed presence, arguing the conscious aspect of self is an element of language processing which is positioned within the left hemisphere of the brain, and that the right hemisphere harbours elements of this process as well. Based on this, it was suggested that individuals who have apparitional experiences should see or feel the entity on their left-hand side. However, occurrences do not offer support (Irwin & Watt, 2007). Although, support has been offered via simulated presences replicated in the lab (Palmer & Neppe, 2003, 2004), suggesting that the Phenomenon happens due to issues that arise within the said brain regions associated, which may be induced by factors such as social isolation, oxygen deprivation or high altitude (Arzy, Idel, Landis & Blanke, 2005). Although the sensed presence differs somewhat from the experience of a PBA as it is more of a psychological “feeling”, rather than a direct sensory impression, it is sometimes incorporated in experiences of PBAs.

More traditional survival assumptions are seen as non-falsifiable or hypothesis generating, which is problematic for researchers to provide supporting evidence (Baker, 2002). Moreover, explanations of this type are considered unreliable or false in the scientific community (Stanovich, 2004). This shift in ideas could be suggested to demonstrate the transition seen in



society from more of a religious governed society to a scientific one (Burr, 2015). The potential impact is reflected in more contemporary theories and research surrounding apparitions favouring a position which is based on scientific clarifications. Additionally, apparitions fit under an umbrella term known as paranormal experience, which arguably harbours its own stigma (Berkowski & MacDonald, 2014).

### **Paranormal Belief**

The word 'paranormal' is used to categorise experiences that are considered to violate the known laws of the universe and lack empirical evidence (Wilson, 2018). There is a body of research which explores beliefs in paranormal Phenomenon. One aspect explains that beliefs stem from socio-cultural influences such as the parents (Baker, 2002), an individual's peers (Schriever, 2000), culture (McClenon, 2000), the media (Clark, 2003) and the educational system (Barrett, Pearson, Muller & Frank, 2007). Additionally, there is the suggestion that people who are socially disadvantaged are potentially likely to hold these beliefs, including the under educated and unemployed (Irwin, 1991). Aarnio & Lindeman (2005) found that individuals with considerable educational experience have an ability to think analytically and this ability makes them less likely to hold or accept paranormal beliefs. Cognitive deficit hypothesis suggests that the thinking is different: Paranormal believers are 'normal people whose normal thinking has gone wrong' (Shermer, 1997, p.45.) This has been supported by research that demonstrates issues with reasoning (Roberts & Seager, 1999) and misinterpretation of chance (Dagnall, Drinkwater, Parker & Rowley, 2014).

Research has suggested a potential association between paranormal belief, experiences and an individual's psychological health (Schofield & Claridge, 2007, Cella, Vellante & Preti, 2012). However, this research exclusively explores belief as opposed to actual experience. Nevertheless,

it is an important acknowledgement by research in terms of understanding the assumptions held about believers as being illogical, irrational, uncritical and foolish (Alcock, 1981). Arguably, it further reinforces the idea that there is a level of perceived stigma and embarrassment attached to experiencing and believing in these types of phenomena. This perhaps relates to the perception given by western society when discussing sensitive topics associated with death.

### **Taboo**

It is often argued that modern Western society exhibits a “death taboo. However, taboo is now considered to fall into two categories: social and psychological (Seale, 1998). Leget (2017) argues that societal taboo has broken down in modern society, with death being all around us, predominant in all forms of media and in political discourses, for example, discussion around the issue of euthanasia. However, it is argued that psychological taboo is still very much apparent. To some extent assumptions are made by humans that as long as they are discussing death as a concept, they do not have to confront their own mortality or the inevitability of death (Leget, 2017). This allows humans to distance themselves from death. Seale (1998) adds that to some extent, we socially try to control death, placing it in a more positive framework. Ways of doing this include, being part of groups such as those of a common religion, using the idea of an afterlife as a positive outcome, science, in order to prolong life. Humans also utilise grief as an opportunity for growth and development and a means of reframing death as successful, a positive - a good death. However, deaths that are considered bad deaths which include death as a result of illness are ignored due to a lack of desire to confront the truth. To some extent, this psychological discomfort makes people aware of the appropriateness of discussion around death. In terms of apparitional experiences, arguably due to the link to paranormal phenomenon and the experience being considered pathological in bereavement. It could be suggested that this

harbours a psychological discomfort for witnesses. This is due to the supposition that psychological well-being is being questioned and the assumptions and perception of others are being applied.

The above is particularly pertinent when a further element associated with bereavement, mourning, is considered. This element is more culturally influenced and is characterised as a highly complex set of behaviours, prompted by cultural expectations (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993, Parkes, Laugani & Young, 2015). Within westernised cultures, especially in the United Kingdom, mourning and funeral traditions are very subdued and take place at either a church or crematorium. (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993). Furthermore, it has long been the tradition that black is worn to the funeral as this is seen as the colour of mourning and demonstrates respect. These practices stem from the Victorian era (Leget, 2017). To some extent it is a code of conduct with regard to how a life should be celebrated and how the bereaved should mourn and grieve. This also reinforces the idea that appropriate behaviour is embedded into culture, regulating the appropriateness of the narrative of death, which is incorporated in what is appropriate and what is not in relation to behaviour when an individual loses someone they love.

### **Bereavement**

Death is a concept that is a natural part of human existence. Humans develop an awareness of death and dying as they grow. The majority of individuals experience the loss of someone they love at some point in their life. Statistics show that on average, around 533,253 deaths were registered in England and Wales in 2017 (Office for National Statistics, 2017) and it is estimated that 55.3 million people die each year worldwide (Ritchie & Roser, 2018). These figures

exemplify a very common natural human occurrence. Therefore, bereavement is a central life experience that the majority of a population will have within a life time (McGoldrick, 2004).

The term bereavement is generally associated with the death of a loved one. However, the term also applies to many other life experiences where there is an attachment and a loss. These include objects, values and statuses (Freud, 1917). Bereavement due to the loss of a loved one is seen as a major psychological trauma and is considered to be one of the most stressful life events an individual can experience (Dejonckheere, & Fried, in press). Additionally, the experience of bereavement has a multitude of impacts on the bereaved person and can include, psychological, physiological and social impacts. The psychological process is known as grief.

Archer (1999), states that grief is a normal human reaction to the loss of an emotional and /or physical bond. The process is believed to provide the individual with some form of meaning for the event and experience (Schaefer & Moos, 2003). Grief can be felt physically, emotionally, cognitively, demonstrated through behaviour and through spiritual manifestations. Furthermore, it is stated that the process may force individuals to question life purpose and who they are (Jung, 1959). Grief is considered to be a very individualised and complex experience. The experience can alter from day to day or even moment to moment (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). However, the concept of mourning also guides bereavement and is dictated by an individual's cultural background.

### **Theories**

In 1917 Freud published *Mourning and Melancholia* which was the first study that explored grief and loss. Overall, Freud suggested that the emotional energy the bereaved individual has for the lost person or object needs to be withdrawn from the deceased, known as 'decathexis' and

reinvested in the living. Freud maintained that the end goal of the process was for a bereaved individual to have complete detachment from the existence of the lost one. He considered failure to achieve this was negative or harmful to the bereaved individual, potentially resulting in the onset of complications and illness (hallucinatory/psychosis). Although evidence from parental grief has countered this argument, as has evidence from personal letters that show that Freud himself valued ongoing connections to his daughter (Davies, 2004, Rando, 1995). Freud introduced the concept of 'attachment' which has influenced research, theories and counselling method in bereavement. These are still used today. Later grief theorists also formed the concept that grief proceeded along stages, phases and tasks and this has dominated the area. Worden (1991) developed concepts which were similar to that of Freud, basing his assumptions on the notion that individuals work through grief, undertaking four tasks. This also focused on breaking bond with the deceased. However, more modern theorists oppose this position, including Klass, Silverman & Nickman, (1996). Nevertheless, Freud's work was influential and the corner stone in early grief work.

Similarly, but from a different perspective Kübler-Ross (1969) explored the stages of death and dying, developed through her work with dying patients, exploring the thoughts, feelings and expectations that applied to them. A five-stage model was presented to account for the process which individuals experience on being diagnosed with a terminal illness. This transferred into the five stages of grief that were widely applied to losses of all types. However, Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) publication argued that the original work had been misunderstood and thus, inappropriately applied. Rather than placing categories around the process of grief, her intention was to add some foresight to the process as a guide, whilst acknowledging that the process was unique and individualistic.

Bowlby (1969) proposed attachment theory which has been very influential and is still utilised and applied today in many areas. Bowlby proposed that attachment was a psychological connection to a meaningful person, which offered pleasure, comfort and safety. Later, Bowlby (1973,1980) explored breaking attachment and the impacts related to this. He suggested that the style of attachment previously formulated would influence the impact and the severity of the loss experienced by the person. This was demonstrated in adults dealing with grief and loss, during a study of widows and widowers (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991). Again, Bowlby (1980) like Freud, makes the important point that it was in the best interest in terms of well-being for the bereaved individual to work through the stages as outlined. Failure to do so would result in the bereaved individual becoming either psychologically or physically ill, with both suppressed or unresolved grief being problematic. However, Bowlby (1980) arguably influenced the shift from having to detach from the deceased completely to a more continuous connection perspective (Klass et al., 1996).

A consistent theme within the majority of older theories is whereby complete detachment from the deceased is necessary or there will be negative consequences. However, Neimeyer (2000) found a large number of individuals involved in grief treatment became worse rather than better. The concept that people have to break bonds in order to move on is significantly debated. Stroebe (2002) highlights that there is little empirical evidence to support this assumption. Research has found that parents who lose children, rather than detaching, continue bonds, with a new evolving relationship emerging (Rando,1985, 1986, Klass, 1993). These findings suggest that their experiences are unresolved, and an abnormal process of grief ensues.

As further knowledge and understanding of the issue has developed, grief has been understood as not being rigid as set out by past theories, with no set-in-stone path or process. However, these

theories have given rise to more up to date theories due to it being difficult to compartmentalise people and use the controversial stage theories to explain an *individual's* experience. The majority of earlier theories concerning this process fail to explain the complexity and individuality of the experience and fail to identify the deeper complexity of the experience that more recent theories attempt to embrace. Alternative perspectives account for individual responses to some degree such as coping, growth, resilience (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, Schaefer & Moos, 2003, Bonanno, 2004).

The dual processing model introduced by Stroebe & Schut, (1999) was the first that offered no defined stages of grief, but rather a coping process. Thus, grief is considered to be a process of oscillation between two modes of functioning: loss-orientation and restoration orientation, with the former mode focusing on dealing with the loss and the latter focusing on daily life. The main focus was that individuals will alter from moment to moment, in grief, out of grief, remembering the deceased and forgetting, focusing on the past to living in the present. Research has found this represents the lived experience (Didion, 2007). Schaefer & Moos (2003) refers to grief as a process for potential positive personal development. Bonanno (2004) suggests that individuals are unique in their level of resilience. Individuals who have components of resilience are able to adapt well to loss whilst functioning in life, appearing to be unaffected. This signifies just how individualistic both coping and the response to the loss of a loved one can be.

However, Parkes (1971, 1993, 1996) explores the experience of readjustment after a loss, suggesting that when individuals are faced with life changing events, major revisions need to be made to their assumptions of the world. These can have lasting implications for one's life. These events happen sporadically without time to prepare. Parkes (1971) termed these psychosocial transitions, whereby every individual holds an internal model of the world, built on previous

experiences which reflect their expectations and assumptions of that world, an organised schema. When faced with situations or experiences, individuals utilise their internal working model to provide understanding and appropriate responses to situations. When a loved one is lost, their assumptions are affected in unique and diverse ways, dependant on the nature of the loss. This process is suggested to be complex both psychologically and socially, with smaller changes easier to navigate than larger changes. Individuals often resist change due to the impact or implications of changing their inner world, as well as forming a new identity. Furthermore, to some extent the true nature of implications involved in changing the inner representation are unclear to the individual experiencing them, as well as to an observer. Based on older theories on bereavement, as an individual rearranges their assumptive world they must remove and detach themselves from the person lost, creating a new world without them (Freud, 1917, Bowlby, 1969, Worden, 1991). By contrast, newer theories in bereavement would suggest that people can transition through this process whilst remaining connected to the individual they have lost, transitioning to a new identity without complete detachment (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, Klass et al., 1996, Valentine, 2006, 2008). Arguably, due to the prevalence of apparitional experiences amongst bereaved individuals, this experience may be embedded in the process of rearranging their assumptive world, allowing them to transition to a new world through presenting them with an experience that questions their inner working model, allowing them to navigate to a new identity while still connected to the loved one lost. This can be accounted for by the contribution made by Klass, Silverman and Nickman, (1996) in their theory of continuing bonds.

### **Continuing Bonds**

The ideas of continuing bonds, developed by Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996), challenge the general ideas surrounding bereavement and grief, which suggest that, after the loss of



someone, the goal of grieving is 'letting go'. Continuing bonds offers an alternative model of grief, recognising that death is the end of life but not of a bond or a relationship that people develop with each other. With the grieving person adjusting to the loss and redefining their relationship with the deceased, this allows a continuous bond throughout the life course (Klass et al., 1996). This is considered normal, healthy and an important aspect to the grief process, which does not prevent individuals moving on. This idea of continuation of a bond after death did not become a main component within grief and bereavement theories until Continuing Bonds was proposed by Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996). In their publication they collated different studies that supported their belief and ideas surrounding this continued connection to the deceased.

Over the years the theory of continuing bonds has been developing and studied. There have been many contributors to the theory (Moss & Moss, 1996, Contant, 1996, Rubin, 1996, Marwit & Klass, 1996) and it is now considered to be more of an umbrella term for a number of psychological, behavioural and interpersonal developments that individuals use to remain bonded with the deceased. It can be defined as ways the bereaved remember, internalise and sustain an involvement psychologically with the deceased (Rubin, Malkinson & Witztum, 2012).

The way in which individuals continue a bond with the deceased has been demonstrated through many different modes of behaviour. However, this is highly individualistic and the ways the bond is kept intact are diverse. Types of continuing bonds which have been identified by Klass, Silverman and Nickman, (1996) include, using the deceased as a role model, turning to them for guidance and reassurance, talking to them, re-locating them after death in places such as heaven or with others that have passed away (Silverman & Nickman, 1996), dreams, visiting graves or places of significance (Christensen & Sandvik, 2013), memories, feelings and behaviours. These

construct the deceased as an inner representation, allowing those still living to remain in a relationship with them. More recent research has found that human ashes evoke a unique physical and intense relationship, providing both a reminder of memories and the comfort that the lost person is near (Mathijssen, 2017, Heessels, 2012). Furthermore, ashes are being utilised in a many different way including urns, jewellery, art and tattoos (Heessels, Poots, & Venbrux, 2012). All these continuing bond types have been exhibited in both adolescent and adult populations (Shuchter, 1986). Arnason (2012) found that individuals can imagine and feel the presence of the lost individual in certain places, including chairs they used to sit in and holiday places they may have visited. Many behaviours have been found to have induced positive outcomes such as reminiscing over events with the deceased offering comfort and reducing isolation (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004). Recalling memories and sharing them facilitates the grief process (Dunn, Otten & Stephens, 2005). Visiting the grave offers comfort and connection (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Nevertheless, some forms of expression of grief, such as apparitional experiences, are met with negativity.

Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) identify that like all relationships, continuing a bond with the deceased can be adaptive and maladaptive. Part of a healthy adaptation to the loss includes developing the relationship with the deceased. Grief may involve a process which allows the bereaved individual to make meaning from their loss which can influence their adaptation to that loss (Park, 2010). Furthermore, it may also allow acknowledgment that they may have physically lost them, while not internally allowing them to account for the physical loss and integrate the deceased into their lives on a psychological platform (Neimeyer, Harris, Winokuer, & Thornton, 2011). Additionally, Rubin (1996) stated that this is a continuous and life long process and terms its resolution, with the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased always evolving

(Silverman & Klass, 1996). For the continued relationship between the bereaved and the deceased to attain this state of resolution the bereaved needs to resolve any apparent conflicts, disruptions or disturbances with their internal relationship with the representation of the deceased. However, not every bereaved individual is able to reach this resolution of their relationship, resulting in unresolved grief. This will be discussed later.

For bereaved individuals who are able to reach the point of resolution, it has been demonstrated that this relationship acts positively, allowing them to continue with their life. One important role of continuing a bond is to sustain our sense of self. Furthermore, it has been suggested that continuing a bond can also act as a secure base, providing a sense of grounding, security and comfort for the individual (Rubin, 1996). This secure base provided by the continuation of the bond is argued to be crucial in the process of adapting to the loss. As aids the individual to continue to face the challenges met by the loss (Field & Wogrin, 2011). Additionally, the internalisation of the deceased can also act as an object of identification with the bereaved internalising values and beliefs and providing a sense of guidance or inspiration to continue their lives with the deceased living on through them in some respects (Field & Wogrin, 2011).

However, with continuing bonds, like any form of relationship, aspects of that relationship can swing from healthy to unhealthy and problematic. In the case where the bereaved individuals are unable to create meaningful and adaptive relationships with the deceased, this consequently causes unresolved grief (Park, 2010). Additionally, it has been suggested within further research that unhealthy continuing bonds are composed of rigidity, denial and avoidance (Field, Gao & Paderna, 2005; Normand, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). However, research has illustrated that the effects of continuing a bond in relation to the positive and negative connotations, are inconclusive (Boelen, Storebe, Schut, & Zijerveld, 2006, Field, Nichols, Holen, & Horowitz, 1999, Field, Gal,

Bonanno, 2003, Field & Filanosky, 2010). Neimeyer, Balldwin & Gillies (2006) identified that higher levels of continuing bonds were associated with greater levels of complicated grief. However, this was only when the participant was incapable of developing meaning from the loss. It could be suggested that any form of continuing bonds which inhibits an individual to form an understanding and meaning from the loss additionally interfering with the acceptance of the death is unhealthy, as opposed to the type of bond that is continued in isolation. Moreover, some forms of continuing bonds are viewed as relatively normal within the early stages of grief, but in later stages they are viewed as a possible failure to adapt. Examples of these include hallucinations and delusions (Field et al., 2005) and these can be applied to PBAs.

Also, different types of continuing bonds could potentially be more acceptable depending on the given culture of the individual. It has been illustrated within research that individuals have a continuing bond with the deceased find it hard to openly discuss what that continuing bond is and how it fits into their lives (Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Valentine, 2006, 2008). Furthermore, research conducted by Conant (1996) identified that a continuing bond that was described as a sense of presence was associated with insanity and individuals felt that this is how the wider population of their culture would view their experience of a continuing a bond. This, consequently, makes individuals reluctant to discuss openly their personal experiences of bereavement and continuing bonds (Valentine, 2006, 2008).

Research suggests that PBAs are often stigmatised, in part through their alleged ‘paranormal’ nature. This is demonstrated in the inclusion in the DSM-V of PBAs as a symptom of pathological grief. Furthermore, when exploring the elements that relate to bereavement, older theories predominantly focus on stages that individuals must move through to heal as well as espouse that one must detach to move forward. In terms of PBAs older bereavement literature

considers individuals experiencing these to be struggling with grief. Although, the much-needed focus on individualism and continuing bonds within bereavement appears to come more recently, the literature still considers PBAs to be problematic. However, PBAs are reported throughout history, widespread and considered to be common and not exclusive to one demographic. Also, reports from experiencers suggest that the experiences of a PBA may have many significant positive aspects rather than negative. This research aims to provide in-depth knowledge and understanding of experiencing PBAs from an individual perspective which currently is limited.

## **Methodology**

### **Philosophical underpinnings**

The main concern of phenomenology is to examine the nature of first-person experience in its own terms, without the application of any pre-existing theory (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Many strands of phenomenology have developed over the years, each having its own variations and emphases. However, all have stemmed from the work of Edmund Husserl (1927, 1970) who is considered to be the founding father of Phenomenological philosophy. Husserl developed his work in response to failings he saw in the scientific method used in the natural sciences. He believed that the scientific method was affected by preconceptions and inappropriate for the correct examination of the nature of human experience. Also, Husserl believed that real knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon was grounded in concrete experiences. He used the term 'Lifeworld' which is a fundamental concept and refers to the world of lived experience inhabited by individuals as conscious beings (Reeder, 2010). This concept is considered pre-reflective in that it has an existence that precedes our conscious reflection on our lived experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Husserl was particularly concerned with identifying the means by which individuals come to know and understand their own experiences in relations to a phenomenon, as well as the essential qualities or distinctiveness of that experience, which he termed ‘essences’ (Husserl, 1927). He argued that the attitude Epoché, sometimes referred to as ‘bracketing’, was necessary to achieve this. This indicates a need for suspending all preconceptions and judgements on the Phenomenon to allow a clean and clear view of the lifeworld. However, humans have a desire to be orderly and to fit everything into pre-existing categories, which makes this difficult. Ideally, focus should be given to each thing in its own individual right, in order to truly understand it.

This stance of phenomenology requires ‘reflexivity’ in that we need to step away from what Husserl called the ‘natural attitude’ and turn our focus to our own perception of objects, instead of looking at them through lenses influenced by the world and taking things for granted. Complete disengagement from this ‘world’ perception allows a truer, clearer look at our experience in isolation (Smith et al., 2009). However, the ability to truly disconnect from perceptions that an individual hold that are influenced through wider assumptions was then and still is, debated as it can be argued that we can never truly disconnect from these (Murray & Holmes, 2013)).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) argued that humans are connected to the world in which they live and exist. Achieving Epoché is therefore problematic as the social preconceptions are so engrained in humans from a young age that they cannot ever be totally separated from these preconceptions. Additionally, one may not be aware of these preconceptions until faced with the phenomenon.

However, Heidegger contributed to the area of phenomenology further and developed Husserl’s ideas to construct the theories surrounding hermeneutics, as will be discussed below (Eatough &

Smith, 2008). Heidegger argued that it was more important to focus on exploring individual experiences in term of understanding what it means to live in the world, rather than Husserl's focus on what we can know about the world. Furthermore, in terms of understanding reality, individual experience is as important as its context. Gadamer (1960) referred to contextual elements that influence experience: the language, history and the culture in which individuals are embedded. The 'hermeneutic circle' refers to the understanding that emerges from reference to both experience and context.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was influential in terms of challenging dualist opinion. He argued that humans are 'embodied' beings, in that mind and body are interconnected and should not be separated or studied separately. The major part of his work derived from empirical research, which laid the foundations for qualitative methods in Psychology such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

### **Introducing IPA**

IPA focuses on examining experiences as they are lived, in the moment, by the individual. It has become a more commonly used qualitative methodology especially within the UK (Sullivan & Forester, 2019). It also furthers the knowledge and understanding of the area to which it is applied and thus provides a richer account of participants' experiences, understandings, views and perceptions of the phenomenon in question (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Additionally, IPA focuses on examining and understanding an individual's lived account from the personal lived experience and how it is interpreted, giving the experience meaning rather than applying theory or investigating casual relationships, as is the primary goal of quantitative approaches (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, Smith, 2011). In this sense, IPA maintains the philosophical

assumption that individuals instinctively seek meaning and interpret their experiences through the process of self-reflection and questioning their existence (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

IPA, rather than having a dominant philosophical foundation, utilises and draws on a range of philosophical thinking. Three fundamental underpinnings of IPA are: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Each one of these elements brings something different to this particular methodology. IPA draws on the idea put forward by Husserl, in that to understand the phenomenon in question it must be explored in isolation, with pre-existing conceptions moved aside. Nevertheless, it assumes that the process is also interpretive and is thus influenced by Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology, given that language is crucial to understanding experience and how that experience is lived. Inner thoughts (psychological) and external expression (language/grammatical) both need to be considered (Schieiermacher, 1998).

Heidegger's idea of 'appearing' encapsulates this idea. It is the task of the researcher to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon through 'detective work' and for them to make sense of what comes forth. Gadamer (1960) stated that during this interpretation process the interpreter and the text are involved in a 'fusion of horizons'. This is achieved through the medium of language which belongs to both researcher and participant and it is this 'belonging to' that makes developing an understanding through interpretation possible and allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to form (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, it recognises the importance of the fact that the participant and the researcher are both meaning seekers, known as 'double hermeneutic' where the researcher is making sense of the participant's making sense of the Phenomenon in question (Smith & Osborn, 2003).



Finally, IPA is ideographic, in that an in-depth review is needed of each case, in its own right, prior to moving on to the next. This approach results in a detailed account with the attached meaning of participants' accounts seen in isolation, as well as the connection with each other, to illuminate the lived experience.

Overall, these essential aspects of IPA, taken collectively, try to encapsulate what it is to be human and how experiences that are consciously attended to play a role in shaping one's life and the world they lived in, through interpretation and perception.

This methodology makes no attempt to construct an objective idea about individuals' experiences. Furthermore, it does not seek to test hypotheses as might experimental approaches. Rather, IPA takes an approach with an ontological understanding. To exemplify, the object is to understand how someone attaches meaning to their 'being' in the world, their reality and existence via personal feelings and opinions that are not influenced by outside concepts. The main goal is to reveal the 'taken for granted' meanings which constitute our experience.

### **Rationale for a Qualitative IPA approach**

Qualitative research is becoming more widely used, particularly in human and health sciences (Smith et al., 2009). Although, quantitative methodology develops an understanding of patterns and relationships to variables on a given topic, it is limited in that it fails to capture the direct detailed experience of the phenomenon and does not produce a deep understanding of how individuals make sense of and internalise an experience, as does a qualitative approach.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach offers a more personal and contextual view on a topic, in this case, apparitional experience in bereavement. It allows the researcher to investigate the area as well as individuals' experiences in some depth.

Due to the nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny, IPA was selected as the most appropriate methodology to utilise. Arguably, the phenomenon has been problematic in terms of developing an understanding direct from research, and this is due to the lived experience not being explored. Considering that the lived experience is of primary interest for this research the three main underpinnings that derive from IPA aid this exploration of the phenomenon in question. The concept of phenomenology allows this research to consider participants' perceptions as well as how they understand and attach meaning to their unique PBAs. In terms of Hermeneutics collecting the data via interviews allows the researcher to explore a detailed account in relation to the participant's experience. Additionally, this will allow the research to examine how the participant uses speech to demonstrate their understanding of their experience. Idiography allows the researcher to focus on the individual and analysis each individual experience in isolation. Therefore, the use of IPA for this research project is well suited as IPA is focused on examining and exploring how individuals make sense and interpret their life experiences within its own context. Thus, offering an enhanced knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon in question. The majority of research demonstrated in the literature review within this particular area is currently quantitative with often a positivistic orientation, which presents an argument for why a more qualitative approach such as IPA is appropriate.

## **Method**

### **Sampling**

Sampling was considered in relation to IPA methodology in that the characteristics of IPA consist of the intense analysis of individual experiences and the examination of meaning. This is generally achieved through a small homogenous sample (Smith et al., 2009). For this reason, a sample of eight individuals was used. Inclusion criteria included individuals 18 years or over who had had at least one experience of a PBAs that was consistent with the definition provided by Blom (2009). He describes PBAs as a sensory event or experience after the passing of a loved one that involves the perception of something which is not present. Additionally, participants had to be willing to talk about and provide detail of the experience without anticipating that it would cause them any significant distress. Participants who were receiving medical or psychological treatment for bereavement-related issues were advised not to participate.

Consideration was also given to the time period in which a participant had lost a loved one. Initially it was felt that a period of approximately six months after the loss would be appropriate for participation. However, after reflection it was felt that this was not necessary as long as individual was willing to give their consent and were expressing their experience. It was felt that exclusion may have been an ethical consideration as it would be unjust to exclude individuals who had, had PBAs experiences that were willing to and wanted to share with the researcher. Additionally, a time limit was not necessary providing the participant could recall their experience in some detail and discuss it without it causing too much discomfort.

### **Recruitment**

A detailed poster was utilised [Appendix A] via social media and public places to encourage participation. Once an individual demonstrated a potential interest in participation via email, a full information sheet was sent [Appendix B] and a detailed written account of their experience was requested, this gave the researcher indicative overview of the participants experience/s. consequently allowing the researcher to ensure the participants experience/s was right for the research project. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to highlight aspects of their experience that may have been of particular interest to the researcher. If participants met the criteria detailed above, then a suitable date and time for interviewing was negotiated. It must be noted that there was a difficulty in recruiting male participants despite attempts to recruit more than the one who was recruited. However, bereavement research has indicated that males are less willing to participate and share their experiences of bereavement for a variety of reasons (Strobe & Strobe, 1991).

### **Participants**

Below is a short biographical account of each participant to give some characteristics and contextual background for each participant. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure anonymity.

#### **Nicky**

Age: 56

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of PBAs.

Time since bereavement: 3 years

Relationship to the deceased: Niece

Educational level: University

Occupation: Teacher

*Nicky is a middle-aged mother who has had a few experiences with apparitions. The main focus of the interview was related to an experience with her aunt, which happened in her home.*

### **Trisha**

Age: 25

Time since bereavement: 2 years

Relationship to deceased: Granddaughter

Education level: University

Occupation: Call centre operative

*Trisha is a young single woman, who has also had several experiences with apparitions including those of deceased family members and pets. The primary experience given related to her post bereavement apparitional experience of her grandfather when she was a teenager.*

### **Pat**

Age: 60

Time since bereavement: 30 years

Relationship to deceased: Goddaughter

Education level: University

Occupation: Academic Support Worker

*Pat is an older woman, who has only had the one visual post bereavement apparitional experience which was related to her godfather when she was younger.*

### **Gillian**

Age: 45

Time since bereavement: 20 years

Relationship to deceased: Granddaughter

Education level: Secondary school

Occupation: Waitress

*Gillian is middle aged woman, with quite an extensive range of experiences and some experience with mediumship. The focus of post bereavement apparitional experience for this account was her grandmother.*

### **Bethany**

Age: 50

Time since bereavement: 24 years

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of PBAs.

Relationship to deceased: sister

Education level: Secondary school

Occupation: Carer

*Bethany is middle aged woman, with a several previous auditory experiences within her home. For the account the visual experiences were in relation to her post bereavement apparition experience of her brother when she was a teenager.*

### **Sarah**

Age: 21

Time since bereavement: 7 years

Relationship to deceased: Granddaughter

Education level: College

Occupation: Carer

*Sarah is a young woman with several experiences of previous PBAs and apparitions with no connection to a bereavement. The primary focus of her account was an experience with her grandmother.*

### **Natalie**

Age: 73

Time since bereavement: 4 years

Relationship to deceased: Wife

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of PBAs.

Education level: College

Occupation: Retired

*Natalie is an older woman with visual and auditory experiences related to her deceased husband. For Natalie these experiences were an ongoing occurrence. For her account Natalie focused on her experience within her home.*

## **Josh**

Age: 27

Time since bereavement: 6 months

Relationship to deceased: Grandson

Education level: University

Occupation: Supermarket Manager

*Josh is a young male with a few experiences of PBAs. The focus of his account was on his experience with his grandmother whilst in a hotel.*

## **Data collection**

Interviewing was the most appropriate method for data collection and selected because I felt that it would enable me to hear the accounts unfold to decide in real time where to explore; an approach which is in line with IPA. An indicative interview schedule was constructed using guidelines and recommendations proposed by Smith and Osborne (2003) and Smith, Flowers and Larking (2009), and following the review of the literature (see Introduction/ literature review) [Appendix C]. Using an indicative interview schedule allowed indication of questions that



needed to be covered, without including rigid inflexible questions, enabling the participant to guide the interview to an extent, talking about what they felt was important to them. This approach to interviewing worked particularly well allowing each interview to provide very detailed accounts; particularly when participants were asked about the details of their experience it appeared participants really wanted to engage in conversation about their experience. This also demonstrated that they felt comfortable with me as an interviewer as it could be considered a sensitive topic. The interviews were designed to: gain insight into bereavement on a personal level, to gain insight into the experience of apparitions and, through IPA, to develop an understanding of the subjective process and the achieving of meaning by individuals who have had this experience.

Once the participant confirmed their willingness to participate and accepted the appropriate date and time for interview, the research began. All interviews were conducted by me at a place of convenience and comfort for the participant, normally at their home. Prior to any interview the researcher greeted the participant, explained once again the purpose of the research and answered any questions the participant might have had. Furthermore, it was explained to the participant that the interview would be recorded for transcription purposes, but their identity would be protected throughout. All interviews were digitally recorded using a password protected Dictaphone. The duration of each interview ranged from approximately 35 to 60 minutes. Prior to each interview, a full consent form [Appendix D] was completed by the interviewee. The recording device was set up and the interview commenced.

On completion of the interview, the participant was thanked for their time and attention was drawn again to the information sheet and appropriate contact details for support.

### **Analysis**

On completion of the interviews, I began the transcription process, removing any identifiable feature to ensure the participant's anonymity. An example of a full participant transcript can be located in [Appendix E]. The original recordings were then held on a password protected removable hard drive that could be placed in a safe for security reasons. On completion of all transcriptions, the analysis began.

Generally, research that is in the format of IPA uses a range of frameworks to help guide the process of analysis, as no one single method for working with the data is prescribed (Smith et al., 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend following six main steps of analysis. The first step is the reading and re-reading of the data. This involves the reader immersing themselves in the data, allowing the participant to become the main focus of analysis. They should slow down habitual quick reading and summarising and take time to familiarise themselves with the data. This step can also include making some initial notes on recollections from the interview and preliminary observations about the transcript itself. Step two of the analysis is the most time consuming and detailed. This step involves exploring the meaning within the language that is used, allowing the researcher to begin to identify certain ways in which the participant thinks, speaks and comprehends. It is important that the researcher maintains an open mind throughout, while taking note of anything of particular interest. There are no set rules which dictate what is to be commented upon throughout this process and the aim of this step is to produce a set of detailed and comprehensive notes on the data. There are three ways in which this exploratory commenting can be done: descriptive comments relate to a description of content said, linguistic comments explore language used and conceptual comments focus on questioning and interpreting what is being said. After step two has been completed the data set will have grown and the researcher will be closely acquainted with the data and additionally have provisional, but

important notes which allows progression on to step three, developing emergent themes. In step three the researcher is shifting from working with the transcript to working with the initial notes, managing the data to reduce the initial notes but maintain the complexity and essence of what is being said.

Once a set of themes have been recognised, step four consists of searching for connections across emergent themes. This involves the researcher developing a chart or map as to how themes fit together. There are several different ways to identify patterns within the emergent themes, for example: abstraction, polarization and function. It should be noted that not all emergent themes have to be incorporated into this step.

The fifth step involves moving onto the next participant's transcript. Here it is important that the next participant's transcript is treated in isolation to previous transcripts, bracketing off previous ideas and themes that emerged from other transcripts. However, to some extent it is unavoidable, as the researcher will inevitably be influenced by the findings in previous transcripts in some way.

Once all transcripts have gone through this process, the final step can be taken. Step six involves identifying patterns across all cases. During this process the researcher needs to be thinking about what connections are evident across the cases. How does a theme in one case match or compliment a theme in another? Which themes are most powerful? During this process, the re-labelling of the themes identified can sometimes change to the more theoretical concepts that these connected themes share. The final result of this stage is collating everything to allow main themes to be presented. Themes can be presented in different ways. The most common form is a master table of themes.

Additionally, as part of the IPA research process, it is important to note that reflexivity is a vital aspect of the process. Heideggerian influence is within the method with a focus of being in the world (Dasein). Therefore, each participant's account being analysed needs to be explored within the context of their happening. This is why reflexivity is important: to allow the researcher to inter-reflect on the 'self' during the process. As Heidegger argued, as we as humans encounter things, we interpret and experience them with a fore conception that is made up and influenced by the world which surrounds us (Bruner, 1990). So as the researcher, identifying our own perceptions and beliefs surrounding a topic throughout the process, we are able to identify the relationship between ourselves and the analysis process, enabling analysis from a more neutral point of view. Heidegger however stated that putting aside one's perceptions and beliefs can only be achieved to a certain point (Smith et al., 2009) but doing reflexivity can offer a way to manage these potential issues. For a discussion of reflexivity for the current study see (Discussion section).

### **Researcher's process in the current study**

During the transcription process of my interviews I kept notes of any first impressions and points of interest that I identified from the data. Once all transcriptions were complete, Natalie's transcript was chosen for first analysis as I found Natalie's particularly engaging with the level of detail and richness of her experience. I began by reading the transcript several times, allowing myself to become familiar with the data and ensuring that the participant was the main focus for the analysis. During each reading of the transcript I recorded the most notable points of the interview, those that appeared to address the focus of my research, and also made initial observations in a notebook. Notes were also jotted down on the left-hand side margin of the transcript, merging the first two steps together. Richer examples throughout the interview

brought about more commentary. Different types of commentary included descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Examples of such notes are demonstrated in [Appendix F].

Once this point had come to a natural end, I read the transcripts again, this time moving away from note taking to the development of higher-level themes which were written on the right-hand side margin of the transcript. At this point it was essential that this higher level of themes authentically represented what was found in the text (Smith & Osborne, 2003). For example, the preliminary notes mentioned above later developed into early themes demonstrated in [Appendix G]. This procedure was repeated for each of the transcripts, all producing a table of themes.

Finally, after all transcripts were fully analysed, a master table of themes was produced (see Findings section). This table consists of line and page number references, supplemented with a text extract that supports and demonstrates each theme. This allows each theme to be tracked back to the raw data. This was then detailed in the findings section.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was applied for and granted based on University regulations. During this process, a risk and management assessment was completed [Appendix H]. A full ethical application was provided [Appendix I] which included posters for recruitment purposes [Appendix A], information sheet [Appendix B] and consent form [Appendix C]. Throughout the process of this research special attention was given to ethical concerns such as: the well-being of participants, confidentiality, security of data and research safety. In regard to the well-being of participants, great consideration was given to fact that the topic could be potentially distressing to participants when discussing their own accounts. To safeguard for distress during interviews, if the participants were showing any signs of distress, they would be offered breaks, or if they

wished, to terminate the interview. However, during interviews although some participants demonstrated some distress they wanted to continue with their interviews.

Furthermore, all research was carried out and adhered to the BPS code of ethical practice and conduct (APA, 2019). Additionally, these ethical considerations were reflected upon on completion of the research. Firstly, to ensure the researcher had indeed adhered to everything set out originally and secondly to consider any issues raised by the research to grow and learn from them. This is detailed in the reflexivity section (see Discussion section).

## Findings

Six main themes developed from the analysis which characterise the participants' lived experience with PBAs and the density required to evidence each theme followed the guidelines set out by Smith (2011) with the use of at least three quotes from different participants to demonstrate each theme. The main themes were: *Initial nature of loss, bonds individuals share within life and thereafter*. Within this theme there were two sub-themes: *sharing memories* and *talking with the deceased*. Further themes identified were, the *absolute certainty and 'realness' of the apparition*, and *an endeavour to understand an intricate experience*. This theme also contained a sub-theme, of *rationalisation of the experiences*. Further main themes included positive attributes provided by the experience and finally *one's own view of the external world's perceptions* please see Table 1, below. For a full detailed table of themes and subthemes, please see Appedix J. The first three themes demonstrated provided a rich contextual account that aid the apparitional experience. These themes demonstrate the relationships and bonds surrounding the individual experienced in the apparition by participants. The sub-theme 'talking with the deceased' connects the aspects of loss themes and the apparition itself. The participants were talking and communicating with the deceased as if they had not lost them completely and were still very connected to them.

The themes will be highlighted individually and direct quotes from the transcripts will be used to illustrate the theme.

Table 1:

<b>Superordinate themes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subordinate themes</li></ul>
<b>Initial nature of loss</b>
<b>Bonds individuals share within life and thereafter</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing memories</li><li>• Talking with the deceased</li></ul>
<b>The absolute certainty and ‘realness’ of the apparition</b>
<b>An endeavour to understanding an intricate experience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rationalisation of the experience</li></ul>
<b>Positive attributes provided by the experience</b>
<b>One’s own view of the external worlds perception</b>

**Initial nature of loss** This main theme encapsulates the participants’ experience over the loss of their loved one and just how significant the impact can be, both physically and mentally during this process. Specifically, the theme relates to individual discomfort caused by the death of a loved one, initially and thereafter. The analysis demonstrated that each individual displayed some level of distress straight after the death and also throughout their experience of loss. This was regardless of the apparition experience. However, it is important within context as the experiences are not in isolation. The experience of losing a loved one impacts on how an individual experience, and takes meaning from, an apparition. This is demonstrated by the linkage between apparitional experience and the loved one making the apparitional experience more emotional. Participants experienced intense feelings of grief and low mood. However, participants were found to display acceptance and actively talked about the experience. This theme is distinct in itself in that it refers to the physical loss of someone and how that has impacted on the participants’ world and is distinct from the continuing bonds shared between the lost one and the bereaved (discussed under the following theme).

For some participants the loss was sudden and unexpected. Pam says;



*Absolutely devastating for me, absolutely devastating. To lose both of them within four days! I mean I was grown up and had a child of my own by then, but I was still very close to them. (lines 42-45).*

Pam lost her Godmother and then four days later she lost her Godfather. The loss of her Godfather was unexpected, although during her account she did say that she felt it was a good thing, as they had been together for 58 years. However, even though she felt this, the loss of her Godfather was still very distressing for her, as even though she had her own family and life, her relationship with her Godparents, particularly her Godfather, was still an important aspect of her life.

Similarly, Bethany's loss of her brother was also unexpected as he had died in a car crash when Bethany was younger.

*She told me they had just both been killed, and I went "no they haven't. I said, 'Our Andrew shouted me earlier on.' so I just as calm as you like just turned around went back upstairs and went back to sleep. And my dad came back upstairs later on after the police had gone, about an hour and a half after, and just said: "It's real, it's happened". (lines 51-58).*

Bethany was in a state of shock and somewhat disbelieving of the death of her brother. She had mentioned earlier in the account that she had heard him but makes it clear that she now recognises what she heard was part of her apparitional experience. Later she states;

*I just could not believe it. Couldn't believe it, what had happened? How can this be real? Mean he can't be dead. That took me a long time to come to terms with, I'll be honest. (lines 61-64).*

Here Bethany is dismissing the information that has been confirmed to her. It is a form of not acknowledging the reality of the situation. She is in a state of denial over her brother's death and she takes time to come to terms with it.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the death of their loved one, be it expected or unexpected, all participants were affected in more than one way by the loss. Participants demonstrated reactions and emotions whilst recounting the stories and also discussed them with reference to the process.

Natalie's experience of losing her husband recalls;

*I don't really know Hannah because you are grieving that much. I mean I still cry over him now [participant gets upset.] ..... No, it's just that when it first happens, your just like erm, I don't know. I just didn't function. Not at all. But I can't explain to anybody what it's like. (lines 25-26, 28-30).*

Natalie's experience suggests that the time of the loss, or immediately afterwards, is a period that is so absorbed by grief and intense feelings, it is incredibly painful and stops you from continuing with life, for Natalie this was in relation to her everyday activities. Additionally, she highlighted that these strong feelings and emotions were still very raw, which was demonstrated through the emotions she displayed to me at several points in the interview. However, she did acknowledge that grief is a process which is different for everyone. This makes it difficult to explain what it is like to anyone, due to its being personally distinctive.

For Pam her experience is somewhat different;

*I became rather ill, because maybe, of the way I dealt with it. I mean I got through my finals, and passed my finals, then became quite ill and I'm sure it was all that accumulating and just like my body, my mind saying enough is enough, can't take any more. (lines 348-352)*

Initially after the death, Pam believes carrying on as normal and not acknowledging the pain is the best way to deal with it. However, later she becomes ill and feels that the illness is her body's way of accepting and acknowledging the loss.

However, for Sarah;

*Then she went, I mean I couldn't go into the house after. I mean, as soon as she had left, I was like "I can't go in there I can't do it". I just felt wrong going into her house because she wasn't there. (lines 30-32)*

Sarah actively avoided her Nan's house after her death, as it felt wrong with the house being empty. In a sense, being there meant having to acknowledge her Nan was not there anymore. This for Sarah was a a major change to her routine as prior to the death she used to go and visit her nan on a daily basis.

All participants here demonstrated that their daily lives changed somewhat after the death and that the loss of these relationships that had developed impacted their lives. However, it is evident from the participants accounts that even after the death of their loved one there was a continuation of these bonds that had developed throughout the life course.

### **Bonds individuals share within life and thereafter**

This theme emphasises that throughout the interviews, the majority of the participants account the development of a strong bond with the deceased, both prior to death and afterwards. All

participants demonstrated that the individuals who had departed had a very strong connection to them, and whilst present, were involved significantly in their lives in different ways. Sub- themes identified within this theme include sharing memories, which demonstrates the desire the participants indicated to need to talk about their memories of the deceased, either when they were alive of their other experiences of them after their passing. A further sub- theme was talking with the deceased, which highlights the continuation of a connection with the deceased, illustrated by the participants through direct speech.

Pam reminisces about life and time she spent with her Godparents;

*I went to my Godmother. She didn't have any children of their own and I used to spend a lot of my time with them and in some ways, they were like my parents really. (lines 28-31)*

Pam clearly demonstrated throughout how close she and her Godfather were, and how their relationship remained close, constant and positive throughout her life whilst he was living.

Josh talks about life and his relationship with his grandma prior to the loss. For Josh his grandma was part of his daily life as after his grandad passed away his grandma came to live at his house. He talked about them having the same interests regarding sport and film genre Josh says;

*.....used to watch action films together, we like the same sort of stuff. Whereas my mum would run out of the room like "I'm not watching this", erm and me and my Grandma would sit and watch. (lines 175-179)*

For Josh the relationship was not considered in terms of a parental figure until the bond developed after his Grandad passed away and his Grandma became part of his daily life. This development of their relationship appeared to offered Josh something different to the relationships he had already developed within the household. This demonstrates the closeness

with his grandmother that he had in life which consequently suggests the loss delivered a significant impact to Josh when she died.

Natalie also demonstrated the impact of sharing a life with someone, in terms of intimacy and companionship. Natalie's reminisces about her husband;

*I do talk to him. I talk to him a lot. But as I say, when you have been married to someone for 58 years you can't just forget about them just like that, can you? (lines 78-80)*

Natalie's close relationships with the ones she has lost feels to her like that loved ones cannot just be simply removed from her daily life, especially when they had had such a big influence. She still wants this close relationship with her husband, as she continues to talk to him. It also demonstrates that after death individuals still feel this strong connection and emotional tie to the deceased. Natalie also demonstrates this when she says;

*I don't think you ever get over it. You don't. They have been part of your life for so long, living with them for so long, and then just forget about them, just like that. (lines 91-94)*

Natalie is demonstrating that the loss has impacted on nearly every aspect of her life. She demonstrates how much her husband and their relationship meant to her. Throughout Natalie's interview I got a real sense that as a couple and a partnership they were really close. This is demonstrated throughout the interview as it appeared the importance of the apparition seemed very tied to the way she presented her experience of loss. Natalie talks about grief and bereavement in her interview but also talks about these feelings she still has for her husband regardless, as if they go on further than the grief itself. He is always there with her she says at one point in the interview. A demonstration of these feelings is captured by;

*I loved him. Well I mean, I love him now you know. (lines 152-153)*

One-way participants showed this continuation of connection and allowing the deceased to “live on” was through sharing their memories.

### Sharing memories

This sub- theme captures how the individuals like to talk about and share the memories they have of the deceased. It appears that for most of the participants memories and talking about memories is something they want to do. Throughout the interviews it felt that, although it was about their apparitional experiences, participants felt that sharing their memories added important stature to their experience. Participants also discussed other apparitional experience in connection to the deceased that they had. Talking about their memories of the deceased allowed them to feel that they are still with them and that the deceased were not completely gone. Additionally, it allowed individuals to feel the deceased was still close to them. However, this can evoke a strong emotional response from the individuals as can be seen in Sarah;

*So many, lots of memories, but even though they are only small things, it can be quite emotional really. (lines 134-135)*

Even though it was only little things that were remembered, they still brought on a strong emotional response from Sarah. It would seem that throughout Sarah’s transcript, she talked about memories or things that reminded her of her Nan. To exemplify, Sarah talked about her cooking during the interview, I could see this brought positive memories and emotions back for Sarah and as she was talking about it, to some extent it felt as though she was re-living the memory.

Natalie also demonstrated that there was an inner desire, a want and a need to share with me facts about her husband, as well as memories that were specific to family members' experiences with him. She says;

*.... kids never say much about him, but then I think maybe they are frightened of upsetting me. I mean it would be nice, but they only make mention of him. (lines 94-97)*

Natalie stated that sometimes her family seem reluctant to talk to her and share both her and their own memories of her husband. I got the sense that Natalie would really like to share both her memories and her experiences with her family about her husband. However, she does feel that they are reluctant because of her emotional state. Throughout the interview, Natalie demonstrated a real sense of rawness over the loss of her husband which at times led to emotions being re-awakened. This suggests to me that the whole situation is still quite upsetting for her, so her awareness regarding why her family do not discuss him is quite accurate.

As has been mentioned, the participants like to share memories and talk about them. Bethany found that doing so helped in dealing with the loss of her brother. She recounts;

*I think I dealt with it pretty well, because straight from the offset I wouldn't stop talking about them. Because I always think that to stop talking about them etc., it's like they had never been here and they had been here. So we would sit. I mean there would be tears, but we would sit and have a laugh. You know, remember things they did, or particular things he did to me as a kid. (lines 70-77)*

Bethany felt that sharing these memories with people around her helped her deal with the loss her brother. Also, she felt that not participating in this memory sharing was wrong, as it indicated that they never existed in the first place. Throughout the participants' accounts there was a sense

of a fear of forgetting their lost ones. This was seen in subtle behaviour and the way they felt they had to share memories with me and others. The majority of memories were of good things.

### *Talking with the deceased*

This sub- theme captures another way in which individuals seem to have a continuing communication and maintain a connection with the deceased. Participants demonstrated doing this via speaking to the deceased directly. This theme demonstrates a continuation of a level of communication that the participants had and also gives the feeling that these individuals felt they could not just give up their relationship with their lost loved one. This aspect of these experiences for participants was happening their heads rather than an audible experience. The most common way to continue this relationship found in the transcripts was talking to the deceased. Sarah also demonstrates this natural conversation, and recounts;

*I mean, there was time where we would talk. It was weird just like conversation. (lines 83-84)*

For Sarah, this conversation was very natural. However, there was also an unnatural aspect to the experience as she describes it as ‘Weird’.

Natalie recounts;

*I know it sounds daft, but I keep... I mean, I’m talking to him all the time. (lines 15-16)*

Natalie made clear this is not something she does occasionally, but is actually a routine everyday thing, as if her husband is still there with her and he has not passed. This demonstrates that there is a continuation of communication between them, even after death. Natalie mentions that when the towel was on the floor in the bathroom, she blamed her husband as it was a common thing she would do when he was alive. It appeared that Natalie felt that her husband was still in the



house. The continuation of him still being around coupled with the communication appeared very important to her. However, she demonstrates that her awareness of how other people may think of her with regards to talking to her husband.

Josh describes this communication as if it is in his head, but it feels as real as an open conversation in everyday life, also stating that the experience is “strange”. Josh demonstrates this by recounting;

*I mean it was just strange. It felt like she had, well we had had a conversation almost, but without actually having that conversation. It's not like it was there, like someone, but more like feelings my brain processed that as that. I know it's sort of strange. (lines 67-72)*

It appears that to Josh this internal conversation is very real for him but still felt the need to explain to the researcher that ‘it’s strange’ suggesting that he anticipated that the researcher may find it hard to understand.

Sarah recounts how her relationship dynamics with her Grandmother have not changed even though she is not physically present anymore;

*It's like she's here, but she's not. Not like much has changed really. Sometimes it's like my nan hasn't died because our relationship hasn't changed that much. I know it's weird because she isn't here, but I still have that contact with her like she is always there when I need her. Always there to sort of see her and feel her. (lines 158-162)*

This demonstrates that the unique dynamics of the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased remain the same even though the deceased are not physically present. However, Sarah also mentions that it is “weird”.

The majority of participants talk about this experience in this way suggesting that it is understood by them that the connection is not normal or maybe it is anticipated that these experiences will be negatively perceived by the interviewer (I will return to this point later, under the theme of “Perceptions”). Throughout accounts it was noted that participants used words like; ‘weird’, ‘strange’ and ‘uncanny’ throughout when describing their experiences.

### **The absolute certainty and ‘realness’ of the apparition**

This theme encapsulates how real these experiences are for the individuals and how, when they are talking about their experiences, they really provide detailed accounts of what was seen. The focus on the experience is that of being real, detailed, and vivid whilst being intense. There is also an element of certainty for the individuals, in that they are definite about what they saw and experienced as being the deceased in connection to their bereavement. Participants demonstrated a real need to grasp the experience itself, away from all the feelings and emotions that are brought with it, needing some form of validation, at times, from the researcher. However, it was an intense experience for some participants. Sarah recounts her experience she says;

*...Yer I see that all the time, well every time I experience her visually. There was only one time that I saw her when she was ill, but that was because a memory came into my mind and she came up. But I feel like that was just a memory, not the same as her really being there. You know what I mean? (lines 144-148)*

Sarah clearly expresses the felt difference between what relates to recollected images (i.e. of her Grandma as old) and the actual apparitional experience. Participants provided highly detailed accounts when talking about visual experiences. Additionally, the accounts demonstrated that the participants felt a need to be believed. Natalie recounts;

*Well, it's just it's just like... he just seems to stand on the landing. It's just like him standing on the landing. It's not like a ghost or anything that you can see through, its like you sat there, you know its him just standing there. (lines 43-47)*

Natalie utilises me sitting across from her as a comparison to the experience. My real physical presence is exactly how the experience felt at the time. Additionally, Natalie appears to be drawing on assumptions surrounding what a ghost would look like, that is, transparent. However, the experience did not fit with her perception of the popular understanding of what a “ghost” is.

Similarly, Sarah accounts;

*It's like a full erm person, like she's there, like you know how people say you can put your arm through a ghost kind of thing. It's like, if you do that, it stops like. I can feel her, so it's like I can feel. I can talk. I mean I know there is days where my Nan is really there. (lines 103-108)*

Again, Sarah appears to be drawing on pre-conceived ideas about ghosts and their transparency and the ability to pass through them. Nevertheless, the experience was very unlike popular assumptions, the experience being more physically present and real. Furthermore, all three accounts above demonstrate participants seeking a form of validation from the researcher, in relation to the researcher expressing that it was understood what was experienced and witnessed by the participant.

Additionally, Josh demonstrates his beliefs regarding the experience;

*Whilst I don't try and understand it myself, I kind of believe that those experiences are real. (lines 270-271)*

Josh feels that he can never fully understand the experience and does not attempt to. However, he still believes that, whatever the explanation for the experience, it was real for him. Participants attempted to clarify the ‘realness’ of the experience through the amount of detail they provided in the accounts. For some participants they could clearly describe what they saw. This was mainly detailed in relation to clothing worn by the lost one. Nicky recounts;

*Yer, I was crystal clear, mad, like she was just stood there. She had her hair tied up, just looked, looked normal. She didn't look dead or anything. I can remember what she was wearing. She had this t-shirt on. [laughs] Always wore same t-shirt. It had like, a slogan across the chest. Dark grey it was. Always wore it. Army print jacket with her combat trousers on. You know the ones, with all the bloody pockets. [laughs] They were cool in that era. That is what she was wearing, and she was just stood there. (lines 87-94)*

For Nicky when she has this experience, she remarks how crystal clear it was. However, she also expresses that its ‘mad’ with regards to how real it was. Interestingly, she refers to the apparition looking normal rather than dead, which demonstrates this pre-conceived idea of how her aunt should look to her. She takes joy in detailing what she was wearing and reminisces about how she would wear it in life, illustrated by her laughter.

Trisha also recalled during her account vivid details about the apparition of her grandad she experienced. Trisha recounted;

*I could see this physically blue woollen cardigan he used to wear with these big brown buttons. [moving her hand as if touching the buttons] With this tweed jacket over the top that he would wear on the dog walks, and erm, I could definitely see him there. (lines 85-89)*

Trisha, when recounting her experiences, was able to provide vivid details throughout. The clothing she saw her Grandad wearing was something that he would wear all the time, or the coat he would wear when Trisha and her Grandad were spending quality time together. As Trisha was talking about this detail, in particular the cardigan her grandad used to wear, it was as if she was reliving this quality time. For Trisha, there is the certainty that it was her Grandad the she was seeing in her bedroom. This certainty surrounding what they saw and who they saw was demonstrated by the majority of the participants throughout their accounts.

For Natalie there was not a focus on details of what she saw but more of a certainty to what she experienced. Natalie recounts;

*I don't really know to be honest. It's just sort of there. I mean sometimes I just waken up and he's there. I feel, well no, I know I can see him there on the landing. (lines 109-111)*

Natalie demonstrated throughout that she was unsure of the experiences. She was not sure what they really were. However, she states that she knows what she sees and does not question it. For her it is her husband who has passed away.

For Pam again there was this certainty when talking about the experience. What she was seeing was real. It was her godfather and she was not mistaken. Pam says;

*I know it was him. I know. I absolutely know it was him. It wasn't someone that looked like him. It was him. (lines 75 -76)*

Pam explained that the likelihood of her being mistaken was small, due to experiencing the apparition in a relatively non-busy place. Clearly the participants felt and knew that, to them, the experience was real, with no other explanation other than it was their lost loved one. Participants

seeming to reject alternative explanations such as mistaken identity or imagination. However, they appear to be uncertain as to what they are feeling and how they are feeling it.

### **An endeavour to understanding an intricate experience**

This theme captures participants' inability to understand their feeling and experiences, a sense that individuals have an inability to really grasp and explain what they were experiencing, or comprehend the feelings surrounding the experience. Interestingly, the majority of the interviewees were fluent in their accounts until they were trying to explain the experience and the feelings that come with it. The explanations became very disjointed and participants struggled to express themselves. At times this was demonstrated through participants being unable to find a way to articulate their experience. Josh says;

*Um, it's sort of difficult to describe the actual sort of feeling in terms of what I felt. Um er um, yer so my grandma had passed away. um I can't remember exactly the times, but I think it was about six weeks previous erm to it and it just, um, initially it just felt like someone was there. You know, um you know. (lines 29-34)*

Later he continues;

*Um I've thought about this before. It's a strange one because I've thought, what is that feeling and how can I put that into words? (lines 104-106)*

Josh here is trying to make sense of his feelings and trying to pinpoint exactly what he is feeling. But he cannot quite put the feeling into words. Additionally, throughout his interview he

demonstrated that he had gone over it several times in his mind but had not quite come to any conclusion as to exactly what it was. Josh indicates in a sense, that it a normal feeling and implies that I must understand the feeling, as he expects I will have felt it too.

Natalie recounts;

*It's funny, I know it is. I mean I've always had this sense erm peculiar [laughs]. I don't know, I can't... erm I don't really know what it is. It's not something that I can like... erm that I'm thinking about all the time. (lines 115-118)*

Again, Natalie demonstrates that there is a continuation of thinking about the experience in order to comprehend the feelings experienced. In terms of understanding the experiences itself Nicky says;

*I felt like something had just come over to me and um [pause] ... um like really strong. Oh I can't describe it to you...um I don't know. (lines 69-71)*

So, finding it difficult to understand this feeling is part of the experience, Nicky found it difficult to understand what was happening.

Participants demonstrated that they all had unique and individual experiences. Although they could detail what was witnessed without hesitation, providing an explanation of what it actually was became difficult. Josh says;

*Um, just like erm it was her face and it wasn't her in that room. It was just like her, but it makes zero sense, but that's exactly what it was like. (lines 188-190)*

Throughout all accounts participants felt that, at first, they were aware of who the apparition was before physically seeing the apparition and later the visual experience confirmed the identity of who it was. Trisha recounts;

*I would just get the depression in the bed and just this feeling of who it was. I don't know. Its weird right? But I just felt like it was him. (lines 120-122)*

Bethany stated;

*.... the bannister... leaning over... looking at me. Right eerie feeling and it weren't. And it's hard to describe because you're probably not going to get it, but it was strange. because it was like I knew this person, but I didn't. It was bizarre, but I knew this person was. (lines 108-112)*

The accounts above demonstrate that participants had a feeling that they knew the presence they were experiencing prior to visually seeing the apparition, and this often occurred. In a sense it was an instinctual feeling about who it was. To some extent the experience provided an element of familiarity for participants. However, the words utilised such as: 'weird' and 'bizarre' indicate that they are still not able to fully understand their experience and to some extent potentially hold the belief that these experiences are not recognised as 'normal'. Josh says;

*I don't think there is a way to understand them. So, I don't try is sort of how I look at it. I mean I have thought about it. I can't say I haven't thought about it. But erm, yer yer I don't see a way in which I can make sense of it all or understand it. So, I I don't try. (lines 230-236)*

Here Josh is demonstrating that, regardless of how much thought he has given to his experience, he still cannot understand what he experienced or how feels about it, so he prefers an approach that avoids it. For Bethany it is different. She recounts;



*Couldn't take it anymore. I thought I was losing my mind, I really did, and I said to my mam.*

(lines 159-160)

Bethany demonstrated that the lack of understanding regarding her experience and her feelings surrounding it, led her to feel overall that she was losing control of her mind and thought processes.

### *Rationalisation of the experience*

This sub-theme represents participants' rationalisation of their experience. It appeared that this was done, in part, to help the understanding of the experience and provide reassuring reasons as to why it might have happened. Firstly, participants appear to be 'rationalising away' by offering non-paranormal explanation for the experience. They then moved on to exploring a loved one's motivation for appearing, which suggests implicitly that participants have already accepted that a paranormal explanation may be more appropriate. To exemplify, participants believed it could have been a way for the deceased to say goodbye or give reassurance that they are well, following their death. The reasons presented always appear to be deceased motivated. The majority of the participants are demonstrating that they are rationalising their feelings and experiences. Trisha says;

*I mean sometimes I think, maybe it's just like the implant of a memory, you know, of where ever you are, like in the house. (lines 113-114)*

Trisha experienced seeing her Grandad doing the things he normally would around the house. Questioning what is happening and giving the experience an explanation, provides her with some understanding of her experience.

In relation to developing an understanding of the experiences Natalie does not seem to be able to understand why she is experiencing her husband recounting;

*Yer I mean, it's not even like I'm not even thinking about him, you know? (lines 48-49)*

And Natalie says;

*I mean like, I said, I see Mark standing on the landing and I wasn't even thinking about him. I mean, if you were thinking about somebody, then tend to, or you would think that you would see them. But it wasn't that. I mean he is just there, stood on the landing. I've woken up and seen him there too. (lines 145-149)*

Natalie's is explaining here that if she was actively thinking about her lost one, then she could rationally explain the experience. However, she emphasises that she is not actively thinking about her lost one, so the experience confuses her somewhat.

Also, Natalie says;

*I mean, could it be that, like, we soak information up and then as you remember stuff, you sort of think you see them, or something like that? (lines 135-137)*

Here Natalie's is offering another rational explanation to herself: that actively thinking about them and remembering memories may induce the experience and, in a sense, you may mistakenly feel that you have seen them, due to this thinking.

Throughout the transcript's participants did attach explanations to their experience in order to offer some understanding. However, when these did not offer any meaning, they attached more reason as to why the lost one would visit. Trisha accounts;

*I feel like that was him sort of hanging around, making sure we were all alright. (lines 63-64)*

And;

*it was a case of him coming to say: “look I’m doing alright. I get that your sad but I’m fine now.”*  
(lines 90-92)

Here Trisha offers a reason for her experience in that the visit is to check on her and others affected by the person’s parting. Later, she suggests that actually his visit related to offering her some assurance regarding his death and afterlife. Trisha uses her experience as an explanation to offer her some meaning. However, Bethany utilises other sources to clarify her thoughts;

*.... thought I was crackers. Er, I think I then saw a programme on telly what did it. Where I think it was Panorama and all these people were talking about these experiences they had had. You know, like this one and near-death experiences, you know, with the light and I thought. Now then, is there something in this? Am I not going off my head?* (lines 318 to 326)

Here Bethany utilises the fact that, because others are saying, possibly within the media, that paranormal experiences are possible, then the more irrational explanation may be more accurate that assumed. However, Bethany also demonstrates that she considers if the experience is a symptom of a mental health problem.

Furthermore, although throughout her account Nicky seems to be open to alternative explanations to the experience but here also demonstrates to some extent a conflict simultaneously about her experience. She recounts;

*Science doesn’t like this sort of stuff. it doesn’t happen. I mean, it’s not supposed to happen. Death is death, done. It’s... [pause] Once you’re dead that’s it. But I mean, amongst the experience with my auntie I’ve had lots of different experiences with ghosts, apparitions,*

*whatever you want to call them. And its ....it is conflicting, but I definitely think there is something else.... these experiences. (lines 205-210)*

Here Nicky is demonstrating that she does have an active background in the scientific arena as a teacher. However, regardless of her assumptions regarding science, her personal experience appears to conflict with her initial assumptions which is causing much turmoil for her.

### **Positive attributes provided by the experience**

This theme relates to the support and comfort individuals feel that the experience provides. Additionally, it also connects with how the experience smooths the process of individuals coming to terms with the situation of losing a loved one. Overall, this theme gives the essence of what the individuals gain from the experience and how it makes them feel. Even though when talking about their experiences, individuals seemed unsure about what was really happening and this is demonstrated in other themes, it is apparent that, for the majority of individuals, the experience was positive and often came at a time of need, in terms of individual vulnerability, to offer the support needed. The timing of the experience is also important. When the individual is in need of support through bad times in life, even though they are aware that the lost one is dead, they still see them as a supportive figure within their lives.

This supportive impact that they feel from the lost one in some accounts has important implications and continues throughout the accounts, not just on the one occasion. Trisha recounts;

*You know, that's when I felt the grieving period really move forward a few steps and quite quickly after that, I felt that like I seemed to get to terms with the grief and the loss. (lines 94-97)*

Trisha was talking about this in terms of getting to grips with the loss after she had the experience. For her, throughout the account, she continually mentioned that she felt the experience was there to offer support and comfort Trisha later recounted;

*Erm, I mean, it always seems to be when things are hard. Like on particular bad nights, erm, my grandad would turn up normally. (lines 118-120)*

*Looking back on it, the overall outcome of it is positive, because I wasn't doing something that I would regret. (lines 134-136)*

Trisha mentioned that she had suffered from depression and other issues that she did not disclose. However, her supporting mechanism during the times when she was alone were these apparitional experiences of her Grandad. At one point in the accounts she also referred to this experience and the feeling of the presence of her grandad, in stopping her doing what she said she would later regret, in relation to self-harm. Trisha did not openly discuss her involvement with self-harm but made me aware that she had since received help for this.

Not all accounts were this strong, but participants all talked about their experience having some positive attributes to it and in the majority, they also gained support and comfort from the experience. Sarah talked about her Nan offering support during times she found hard. Sarah also recounted;

*At the funeral and I could feel her there. I mean I think the reason I didn't break down whilst I was talking about my nan and reading a poem, was because I could feel her. She used to do this thing where she would put her hands on my shoulders and squeeze them now and again, like a reassuring thing. And that's what I felt then. So, I was like right, I can get through this. My nan is here. (lines 38-44)*

Sarah demonstrated that she did struggle to come to terms with the loss of her Nan, mentioning that the funeral was hard for her. However, the feeling of support from her Nan there at this time gave her strength to get through it. Sarah also later talked of other times she felt her experience with her Nan offered support for her, recounting;

*She would be there if I was getting stressed out with college. I'd be like "Oh I can't do this, I can't do that" and she would come and give me a hug from behind, give me a kiss on the cheek and be like, 'You can do it. I know you can. Get it done. I know you can.' So, then I'd be like, "Right Nan, I can do it" and I'd feel like I had the power to do it you know. She would be there at other times where I had struggled you know. I could feel her standing next to me with her hand on my shoulder and I just felt like she was there, because she knew that I needed her right then and there. (lines 85-93)*

Even though this was not a visual experience of her Nan, it was similar to other experiences Sarah had. It also provided her with a sense of support and thus helped her. Sarah still feels there is this connection between her and her Nan and due to this, there is a sense that her Nan knows when Sarah is in need of support and that has been evidenced by Sarah on several occasions. Again, Sarah says;

*Like when I'm feeling depressed or something, I won't go to my mum. I know she always says I can. But my Nan's always there like. Sometimes she's not always in the room with me, but I can feel her and just that makes me stop crying. (lines 95-98)*

Again, this demonstrates that, to some degree, the awareness of her Nan makes her feel secure and that the relationship is depended upon by Sarah, which is why she turns to her.

Similarly, Gillian accounts;

*Yep, anywhere. It can be anywhere. A lot of the times, like I said, she comes through when I'm feeling a bit down. cos that's where I'm needing a bit of love you know. I need a part of me for comfort, so you know, thing is, she comes when I'm lonely or whatever. You know, when I'm staying at home on my own, feeling upset. But yer, she follows me everywhere. I mean, I sense her sometimes. I just don't see her, I just know she is there I suppose it's like right time right place. I just like it. I think sometimes I get scared that, one day I'll not be able to.*

*Like I'm not going to have this, and I'd had to think that. cos that's what keeps me going. (lines 316-325)*

Gillian again feels that her experiences are in relation to the situational context at the time, instinctively feeling that they happen to help and support her through the more vulnerable moments in her life. Interestingly, Gillian demonstrated that due to how sacred the experiences are for her, she fears that one day she will not have them, which demonstrates dependence on the experiences and the need for the continued connection to the deceased person.

Josh, he talked about how he feels the experiences he has had with his Grandma have helped him, stating that;

*It's going to sound silly this, but I think it's probably helped me. (lines 384-385)*

Josh here first demonstrates an automatic assumptive perception of the interviewer by saying this is going to sound silly, which is indicative of a fear of being mocked. This perception of the external world is discussed in the next theme. Josh admits to the experience helping him, although the connection is not a close comparison to other participants. He believed the experience related to his Grandma offering him advice. He also makes mention of the fact that he openly shares these experiences with his Mum, which provides her with some sense of

reconnection. So, Josh's experience not only provides Josh with elements of comfort, but this also extends to his mother. Josh has a sense that they significantly impact on his Mother and he feels that she would like him to have more of these experiences. This is demonstrated when Josh says;

*I think my mum would love me to have more and more of these, because it feels like she is reconnecting with her mum, essentially. (lines 349-352)*

### **One's own view of the external worlds' perceptions**

This theme relates to participants' consciousness of others views and perceptions in relation to their experience with grief, the appropriate behaviour towards that experience and the apparitional experience thereafter. Participants demonstrated that they were aware of contrary views to theirs within society and how they may be perceived in relation to both dealing with grief and loss of their loved one and the apparition. There was a sense of negativity that surrounded opening up about this to others, with the assumption that their understanding would be minimal. Pam accounts;

*My mum was one of these people that's like you do not cry you do not cry in public you do no show me up. I had a brother older than me and she was like, "if either of you cry at his funeral, you'll have it from me. (lines 268-271)*

Pam is demonstrating that there is an awareness of an appropriate way to deal with death that was firmly ingrained in her when she was a child. This element of being aware of others' perceptions of how to deal with death had been present from early in life, influenced by her mother. People around Pam impacted on how she reacted to death. She did not show her grief in front of her Mum, as it felt improper.



Participants viewed others around them and their behaviour which impacted on their understanding of their own experiences. To exemplify, Trisha viewed the external behaviours of others, concluding that everyone else was coping in a better way than herself, because their behaviour did not reflect her inner feelings. Trisha says;

*A fair few months down the line. I was still grieving and everyone else seemed to have gone through the um grieving state. They seemed to be doing alright you know and seemed to be where they needed to be with it, but, erm, I just wasn't recovering from it. I was still crying all the time. (lines 65-69)*

In relation to the apparitional experience of the loved one, participants' perceptions were made in relation to others either not believing them or understanding what had happened to them. Pam recounts;

*He was like "come on now. I know you are upset but you know things like that don't happen. Well he was he was there, obviously he was. I felt frustrated, I think. (lines 167-172)*

Pam suggests that her brother would utilise her grief situation and vulnerability to explain her experience, totally dismissing Pam's feelings about how real the experience felt to her. Later she says;

*no, he'd say "I always thought you were bonkers and now you've proved it. (lines 380-381)*

This was in relation to sharing her experience with her brother. Pam demonstrates an assumption of how she perceives her brother would respond if she did share the details of her apparitional experience with him. Pam appears to be very aware about her brother's perceptions and feelings in relation to her experience. Also, Pam recounts;

*Oh no, especially not to my mother. I mean, she would have just poo-pooed it. She didn't have time for things like that. (lines 375-377)*

Pam implies that her mother would have a very similar opinion to her brother, in that she would dismiss it. Pam never really shared her experiences with anyone due to these perceptions and assumption regarding others.

Other participants considered the wider perceptions of people other than close family members. Gillian recounts;

*You tell people and, because they don't understand, which is understandable because I didn't understand things right from the beginning. But the thing is, it's embarrassing, because people will turn around to you and say things like "oh what are you? Are you a medium or something? "I just think to myself why do you take the micky out of something that you might not understand? (lines 131-138)*

When Gillian was first having experiences, although they were positive for her and she really wanted to embrace them, she felt she had to keep quiet about them. As time went on, however, she felt she didn't have to, whilst still feeling that people were not accepting and did not understand her point of view. Additionally, she states;

*I would never judge someone that didn't believe, but I would give them my point of view if they asked for it. (lines 158-160)*

Gillian is against judging others and a couple of the other participants demonstrated this in their accounts. But being able to give people her point of view took time for Gillian and other participants demonstrated that they would never really feel comfortable about doing this.

However, these participants felt, even though judgement was passed on them by others, they themselves were tolerant of the points of view of others.

For Josh he states;

*People um will erm [pause]. People who don't understand things or people who don't have the experience of things, always look at them through the wrong lens so it can only.... unless they experience it for themselves, you rarely get a person who can understand or say something positive. You only tend to get negative and because it can't be explained, or yet to be explained, there is er [pause] er a stigma attached to it, I think. (lines 293-301)*

Josh feels that the perceptions of others are very much formulated by what is considered the 'normal view' within in society of the phenomenon. Additionally, if a person has not experienced them themselves, they would never attempt to explore alternative understandings. Josh is demonstrating his beliefs and experiences when discussing these ideas with people. They have a lack of understanding and he is faced with negativity regarding it. Additionally, because the topic lacks definition and a solid and clear explanation within society, it automatically has negative connotations. Because of this negative stigma, Josh also recounts;

*I try and avoid talking about it to most of my friends. I mean, my best mate I've talked to briefly about it, but everyone else, no. Erm I did talk to my ex-girlfriend about it a little bit, but generally just avoid it, because whilst I don't try and understand it myself, I kind of believe that those experiences are real and some other people don't understand that. And when people don't understand it's kind of only an adverse reaction you get. (lines 266-274)*

And later says;

*if it's a proper friend and someone that is actually, erm um, actually looking for some help or something, like they have had a similar experience, then, yer but if it was one of the others, then um, probably not. (lines 282-286)*

Josh avoids talking about his experience with people who have not had similar experiences due to the negative responses he had previously received. Additionally, he only shares with and confides in certain individuals, such as his Mum.

Nicky also demonstrates that she shares her experiences with select individuals;

*Um, honest don't think a lot would see it in an umm [pause] good way. Not normal. Well it is to me, but if I was if I was in a different family. I suppose to some it is normal, but I would have thought to a lot it's not normal. (lines 231 to 234)*

Nicky shows that although these experiences are real for her, she was selective about who she shared them with. This is due to her ideas on what perceptions are held in the wider population.

Josh discusses his views on the differences of perception in the wider world that relate to apparitions in isolation and apparitions in connection with a bereavement, and accounts;

*When you are bereaved, I think so maybe, doesn't seem as much of a scary experience. More positive and, in some respects, comforting and more acceptable. (lines 430-433)*

Josh seems to assume that when the experience relates to a bereavement, public perception and interpretation is generally more positive and accepting. Additionally, due to this more positive perception, the experience is interpreted as more comforting on a personal level. Here he is comparing this to other experiences of apparitions that are in isolation and not related to

bereavement, which he interprets as having more of a bad press from society in comparison to PBAs. However, overall, he still feels that these experiences are stigmatised to some degree.

Nicky also believes that these experiences are seen in a negative light and makes mention of a label of ‘mad’ being attached to individuals who have these experiences. However, Nicky did feel comfortable in talking about these experiences with her family, knowing that they were accepting of these. Nicky also says;

*Um, yer, well, not everybody. There are some people that would just think you’ve just fallen out of the mad tree and hit every branch. (lines 215-216)*

Here Nicky is making an assumption that people will believe she is mad in the extreme, due to the experience. This is demonstrated in many transcripts. Natalie’s perception is demonstrated in accounts;

*Our Dave doesn’t. He just doesn’t say much about it, but I think he thinks I’m off my head when I say anything about it. (lines 35-36)*

*And later says;*

*I don’t know what it is. Think they call it going off your head [laughs]. You know, you’re crackers. Think that is the general idea around it. (lines 138-140)*

Natalie’s view demonstrates that not only would a family member assume she was going mad, but. considering the wider context of her account, Natalie also held the assumption that wider perception on the topic and these experiences, is that people are losing their minds in general.

Throughout Bethany’s account she also demonstrates that her belief on others’ perceptions of these experiences is that they are associated with ill mental health. Bethany recounts;

*I know if anyone else was to listen to this, they world probably think I'm bat shit crazy. (lines 369-370)*

Here Bethany makes an assumption about what people would think if they heard her recounting her experience to me. This suggests that people would think she was mad. Initially in Bethany's account, she suggested that her experience had happened due to the fact she *was* going mad. Later in the transcript she also demonstrates how she feels she will be perceived by others. However, these perceptions do not seem to bother Bethany.

Overall, the findings have demonstrated that the relationships individuals share throughout the life course are important and when removed through death have significant implications. However, these individuals felt that these bonds they developed through life continued after death. Individuals demonstrated this continuation with the deceased through many different approaches. As well as felt that these continuations provided them with a sense of positivity. However, the bereaved were somewhat conscious regarding wider perceptions on their experience and to how they would attach meaning to it.

## Discussion

### *Introduction*

The main aim of this research was to explore individuals' experiences with PBAs in terms of what these experiences were to the individual and how they perceived and attached meaning to them. This type of experience appears based on the literature review to be common amongst all demographics of people who have experienced bereavement. However, there appears to be limited research on this topic especially from a stand point of the lived experience. This was the rationale for this project: to gain further knowledge and understanding related to individual experience.

The research has demonstrated the highly personal experience of loss for the participants in terms of how distressing and painful it can be to lose someone you love. Additionally, it has illustrated how individuals can be impacted and cope with, the loss and continue with life. The distress and coping strategies were determined by the relationship held with the lost person, in life and this unique bond was shown to be continued after the death of their loved one.

Participants utilised the sharing of memories of their loved one and also actively spoke to them to continue their unique bond with them. Participants appeared to go through a process in order to understand their apparitional experience, which allowed them to rationalise and add positive meaning to it. Finally, participants were conscious of others' perceptions (or assumed perceptions) regarding their experiences. However, participants expressed that their experiences felt real to *them* and were of great importance.

The main findings will be discussed in relation to existing theoretical concepts within the literature. Reflexively will be presented regarding my stance with regards to the research, before suggesting possible directions for future research.

### ***Impact of loss***

The highly personal experience of the loss of a loved one and the unique responsiveness of the bereaved individual is important when considering the PBAs associated with it. Firstly, the experience felt during a loss helps shape the sense and meaning of experiencing the apparition. Furthermore, outside the context of bereavement, the meaning and understanding of an apparitional experience would not have the same significance. Finally, apparitional research has suggested that, in the context of bereavement, there may be a motivation for wanting to want to communicate with a loved one in this way (Rhine, 1960).

Participants all exemplified the difficulty experienced when a loved one is lost. The way the loss impacts on individuals in a physical and mental sense, is truly unique and is influenced by relationships and bonds associated with those lost. When a loved one leaves this life, the relationship, in a physical sense, comes to an end and reshapes the life of who remains. This is the essence of the difficulty.

Literature has consistently demonstrated that the loss of a loved one is considered to be one of the most traumatic life events a person will face (Dejonckheere & Fried, in press), albeit a natural occurrence. Furthermore, it has become more established over the years that the process itself of losing someone you love and coming to terms with it is a very individual and complex experience (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, Neimeyer, Klass, & Dennis, 2014). This is in contrast to older theories that suggested that the process involved stages and phases that everyone must experience (Freud, 1917, Worden, 1991). This individuality of experiences consequently leads to a diverse range of coping mechanisms utilised to enable one to heal and move forward after a loss.



The individuality participants demonstrated in their experience of loss reflected the impact felt not only emotionally, but physically on their lives. For example, Natalie lost her husband, and this impacted how she led her daily life, as in life her routine involved her husband every day and after his death, she had to adjust to him not being there. Conversely, when Pam lost her godfather, although the loss was very painful, he was not involved significantly in her daily routine, so only mild adjustments had to be made. This demonstrates Parks' (1971) notion of psychosocial transitions whereby a person has to readjust their assumptive world in order to adapt to what they are faced with. Additionally, another view developed by Neimeyer (2004) is that losing a loved one challenges our self-narrative. In that our sense of self is established via a variety of stories that shape who we are (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Thus, grief is considered a process of self-reconstruction.

Another component that demonstrated individuality was the unique way individuals coped with the loss. To exemplify, some participants used avoidance tactics and denial. Bethany chose to deny the fact that the tragic accident that led to her brother's death had happened in reality. Additionally, Sarah avoided going to her grandmother's house. Pam was more accepting of the death, appearing to view it from a series of different angles. However, she still found it hard to carry on with her life. Gillian kept busy and pushed herself to focus on her occupation. All these reactions to the loss of their loved ones are different. Consequently, the experience of bereavement is highly personal and individualistic, thus, the experience of a PBA's apparition with said loved one is unique. However, the nature of the PBA's apparition harbours some similarities within experience.

### *Nature of the experience itself*

In relation to the apparitional experiences it appeared that there was some tension and ambiguity in participants' responses. Participants overall felt that the apparitional experience was very real to them. However, they questioned their experiences and rationalised over them. When asked to provide an explanation of what the apparition was individuals struggled to give a fluent description, if any at all. Participants appeared to struggle articulating what the essence of the experience really was and what they interpreted it as. At times, the participants wanted me to understand their experience but at the same time did not expect me to fully understand.

Older research exploring reported characteristics of apparitions demonstrates that individuals report apparitions to be solid and lifelike and often reflect a real person (Irwin, 1994, Morton, 1982). As well, familiar clothing expected to be worn by a loved one, that is detailed and vivid (Stevenson, 1995). Furthermore, individuals whom report apparitions express a certainty to what they have seen. This was supported by the present research findings individuals described in a significant level of detail their apparitions, clothing and features with a level of certainty as well as described it to reflect a real individual. The realness participants felt developed through this level of recognition in relation to their loved one, participants level of detail reflected just how life like the apparition was. However, the ambiguity and tension participants displayed can be suggested to have developed from what the apparition was, rather than what they actually saw.

This potential confusion could be suggested to arise from being unable to really put into words how they understood the experience because of its paradoxical nature of seeming both very real and unreal at the same time. Furthermore, it could be an element of fear that may explain this ambiguity, firstly due to the negative connotations associated with concepts of paranormal entities and people opinions and secondly, a fear of having it confirmed that the experience was a

legitimate interaction with a passed loved one, It could be that the participants were still unsure with regards to the true nature of their experience, so still lacked understanding of it and were still in a process of trying to encapsulate its real meaning.

Many participants demonstrated some form of conflict. Nicky demonstrated this really well. She felt that her feeling regarding the experience true nature, didn't match with what was expected of her beliefs due to her occupation. Nicky works as scientist. This is demonstrated by cognitive dissonance whereby the internal beliefs don't match with external experience of which causes discomfort (Festinger, 1957). Arguably, some individuals never appear to reach a full explanation and understanding regarding their PBAs apparition experience with some suggestion that the Phenomenon is just beyond human comprehension.

### ***Positivity of PBAs***

For individuals in this study, their PBAs apparition provided them with a sense of positivity. This positivity was associated with a sense of reassurance, in that their lost one was found to be well after death, or that the lost one was providing ongoing support for the bereaved during a hard time. Trisha indicated that experiencing her grandad as an apparition gave her a sense that he was well after death. Sarah explained that she had continued support from her grandmother on many occasions, during particularly stressful times in her life, with Josh describing the apparition experience as being comforting. Furthermore, Trish felt that to some extent the apparitional experience helped her grief and also helped her to deal with the loss. Participants reported consistent themes supported by research which has shown consistently that these types of experiences are pleasant and comforting to a grieving individual (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973, Wiener et al., 1996, Datson & Marwit, 1997, Gariglietti & Allison, 1997) and has an impact on their grief symptoms (Botkin, 2000, Hasting et al., 2002, Roll 2004, LaGrand, 2005, Nowatzki &

Kalischuk, 2009, Kwilecki, 2011, Hastings, 2012). Additionally, the apparitional experience is perceived by some to be both transformative and healing (Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009).

It could be suggested that an apparitional experience is perceived in these positive ways due to the nature of the apparition being *reminiscent* of their lost loved one. Reflecting on apparitions more generally, experiences appear to be more positive when reported to be related to someone known to the experiencer, as opposed to someone unknown which is perceived as more negative (Irwin, 1999). When an individual loses someone, the complex nature of grief and adjustment to the loss may leave individuals with a sense of emptiness and individuals may feel a need to see them again. Bowlby and Parkes (1970) suggested as part of their stage model that bereaved individuals yearn and search for their lost loved one, to date this is considered to be normal up to six months after the loss, thereafter it is considered to be a symptom of complicated grief set out in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Therefore, if people have the opportunity to see their loved one again via an apparitional experience, they may feel more secure in moving forward, as they have some sense of closure regarding their loved one's situation after death. They were given a chance to say goodbye if they were not able to do so in life. Furthermore, this visitation may assist mortality considerations of their own in that they deliberate on the possibility that the apparitional experience indicates to some degree that death is not the absolute end of life, only the physical ending of someone, and something continues after life as they know it. Furthermore, it could be suggested that, as this readjusts their assumptions regarding the experience of death, it to some degree decreases their fear of it. Research has certainly suggested this to be the case (Legit, 2017). Overall, these explanations would allow an individual to gain a perception that apparitional experiences with a loved one would be positive, comforting, transformative and

healing as they offer an element of meaning to the death and closure due to its ability to reconnect the living with their lost loved one.

The perceived supportive nature to these experiences for individuals provides them with an emotional connection to the deceased. For many individuals the lost love one may have provided a supportive role in life. When a loved one who provides this role dies, it intimates that the person left behind may feel somewhat insecure and unsupported. Emotional support has been demonstrated to be of importance for children and, in times of crisis (Poon & Knight, 2013, Roets, Rowe-Rowe, Nel, 2012). A relationship a human share with someone is unique. Humans share their lives and experiences with each other which is in essence, part of human existence. This ultimately makes it very natural for them to develop attachments and bonds with each other within life. According to Bowlby's (1969) concept of attachment styles, attachment relationships provide individuals with a sense of pleasure, comfort and safety. When someone loses a loved one the attachment is fractured, having significant impacts on the individual who is left behind, the reactions are mediated by the attachment style that pre-existed (Kho, Kane, Priddis, & Hudson, 2015). This latter may feel insecure and unsupported. However, the reported supportive nature by participants of PBAs allows the individual to still feel the sense of security, comfort and supportiveness from their deceased loved one as they would have done in life. This has important implications, as in times of great need, it can change the course of negative consequences, for example, those who suffer from mental health conditions. However, a sense of support is important in many contexts and situations throughout the life course (Olpin & Hesson, 2013).

The fact that individuals reported that they remained attached with their lost relative rather than entirely detaching from them, suggests that total detachment is not necessary to deal with grief

successfully. This is counter to assumptions held by older theories of bereavement (Freud, 1917, Worden, 1991, Bowlby, 1973, 1980). Individuals reported that, although moving on in physical life was difficult after the loss of their loved one, rather than moving on and detaching themselves entirely, they readjusted their lives to the loss, remaining attached. This attachment to the lost relative allowed the individual to feel that they were still very much present with them throughout the rest of their life course which offered support. This is accounted for by more modern theories whereby it is suggested that the transition through the process of grief can be achieved whilst remaining connected to the individual they have lost (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, Klass et al., 1996).

### ***PBAs as a form of continuing bond***

Individuals demonstrated a continued connection in several ways Gillan, Sarah and Trisha all emphasised that they turned to their loved one for guidance or reassurance. Natalie actively talked to her husband as if he was still physically present. Bethany and Sarah concluded that their lost loved one was with previous deceased relatives in the afterlife. All participants expressed sharing memories of their loved ones. These are all commonly reported forms of continuing bonds developed by Klass, Silverman & Nickman (1996). A Continuing bond is considered to be a way a bereaved individual remains connected to the deceased. Additionally, PBAs experiences can be suggested to be form of a continuing a connection with a loved one.

Continuing bonds with a deceased loved one has been demonstrated to have positive connotations for the bereaved individual, such as offering comfort and reducing isolation (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004), aiding the grief process (Dunn et al., 2005) and enabling a feeling of connection and closeness to the deceased (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993, Heessels, 2012, Mathijssen, 2017). Additionally, continued a bond with a loved one is reported to provide individuals with a

sense of grounding, security and comfort (Rubin, 1996). Which is an alternative way to explore the positivity gain by experiencers due to the supportive elements being gained via a continued connection to deceased rather than attachment. Furthermore, it is suggested that this natural continuation of a bond with the deceased is vital for adaption to the loss of a loved one, as it allows bereaved individuals to navigate the challenges that accompany the loss of a loved one within life (Field & Wogrin, 2011).

Although, Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) suggest that the continued bond individuals demonstrate are individualistic and diverse. PBAs as a form of continued bond are met with an element of negativity. Literature has suggested that this form of continued connection is considered as a failure to adapt to the loss of a loved one and termed an ‘hallucination’ (Field et al., 2005). Simply, experiencers of PBAs are considered to be struggling to come to terms with the reality of the loss of their loved one. Thus, the DSM-5 categorises hallucinations of this type as a symptom of a persistent complex bereavement disorder (APA, 2013). Considering the influence of older bereavement theories on practice and the focus on complete detachment from the deceased and failure to do so would potentially lead to complications such as hallucination and psychosis (Freud, 1917, Bowlby, 1980). Alongside the connection PBAs have to paranormal Phenomenon and the negative perceptions within the scientific community that go with it (Alcock, 1981, Shermer, 1997, Schofield & Claridge, 2007, Cella et al., 2012). It’s not significantly surprising that although grief theory has come a significant distance in embracing individuality, it still conforms to popular opinion of the time. Overall, this would suggest the experience of PBAs is somewhat contentious and stigmatised. Although, many participants felt that their apparitional experiences was a part of their bereavement and grief process.

Additionally, research has demonstrated that some cultures are more accepting of these types of continuing bonds than others (Valentine, 2009).

***Social context of PBAs' experiences.***

Despite the positive connotations that participants report with regards to their PBAs there was a level of discomfort and uncertainty about how others may perceive their experience and their interpretation of it. Participants held an assumption that they would be labelled by people as *'fallen out of a mad tree'* and *'bonkers'*. Additionally, participants felt that people wouldn't believe them about their experience, and they would ridicule them for it. However, they did express that when apparitions relate to a bereavement it may be perceived as more acceptable. A further interesting comment was regarding terminology utilised pre-death and post death of which is somewhat expected by society. This related to participants expressing their emotions hadn't changed towards their loved one although the terminology utilised would suggest it has. This is in a sense that 'we love someone in life' and in death 'we loved them' The term love changes to past tense after death, participants involved in this study demonstrated that this is incorrect and that emotions remain the same both in life and death regardless of societies expectations.

One thing to consider is the influence society's views have on individuals. It could be argued that one aspect to it is due to the development and growth of science and the desire to be able to capture and explain everything, with medicalisation and diagnosis's which is common place in westernised society today (Benoit, Zadoroznyj, Hallgrimsdotti, Treloar & Taylor, 2010). Social constructionism demonstrates this, which proposes that humans' assumptions about reality develop from society (Burr, 2015). Individuals understanding is shaped by the period of history and culture they derive from. In western culture rather than religion being the most dominant



social system as previous, more contemporary, higher credibility is given to science. Considering PBAs social constructionism would argue that our perceptions with regards to them is shaped by our social world (Burr, 2015).

Considering apparitional literature developed from a scientific stance, apparitions more contemporary are viewed as deriving from within the individual. Explanation for individuals experiencing apparitions included suggestibility (Lange & Houran, 1997, Terhune & Smith, 2006), and chemical changes within the brain that are induced by situational factors such as geometric changes and bereavement (Persinger, 1988, 1993, Persinger et al., 2000). Furthermore, individuals whom report apparitional experiences are suggested to be more prone to strong imaginations and fantasy proneness (Wilson & Barber, 1983, Cameron & Roll, 1983, Osis, 1986, Irwin, 1990, Parra, 2007), absorption (Osis, 1986, Parra, 2007, Hastings et al., 2002) and personalities which hold more importance to emotions than logical thought (Arcangel, 1997, Hastings et al., 2002). IPA research does not seek to examine experience in terms of brain regions or personality characteristics, so this project cannot offer direct insights into such claims. However, it was not the case that my participants described themselves as particularly imaginative.

When considering this phenomenon's link to the paranormal, people who believe or experience entities of such nature are viewed to have thinking that has gone wrong (Shermer, 1997), as well as being perceived as illogical, irrational, uncritical and foolish (Blackmoore, 1992, Alcock, 1981) and finally, a link between paranormal belief, experiences and mental health symptoms is suggested as apparent (Schofield & Claridge, 2007, Cella et al., 2012). Overall, apparitional research alongside bereavement research views people whom experience apparitions somewhat

negatively. However, regardless to this perception there is somewhat of a significant interest demonstrated in the lay's person for this type of phenomenon.

The media has illustrated the fascination on this topic with ample documentaries available, whereby experiencers tell their stories, and these have significant audiences. Hill (2005) expresses that the shows are designed as entertainment for the curious rather than being scientific in nature. Although, these programmes attract many interested viewers, the programmes offer ambivalent messages with regards to how such experiences should be viewed. There appears to be an element of the experiences coming across as 'freakish' to the audience.

The participants demonstrated these influences in many ways throughout their interviews. Firstly, when considering participants trying to understand and attach meaning to their experience, they appear to rationalise what it was and why it may have happened. Trisha and Natalie felt that the apparition was something self-induced due to an aspect of their memories. Later, Trisha began to explore that maybe it was her Granddad, remaining close to her to make sure she was well. Bethany indicated that after she had seen a programme on apparitions it made her feel that there was more to her experience than she had first assumed, a view Nicky shared.

It could be argued that part of this striving to rationalise and gain an everyday 'normal' explanation is the product of the individual's conforming to social norms or expectations. This is due to the 'norm' within society, that indicates what is the appropriate way to interpret the said phenomenon. Arguably, people will be reliant on these systems to inform their understanding of the world, although these frameworks may not completely explain a person's unique experience with an apparition. Individuals would be more inclined to accept more rational frameworks set out within society as a form of explanation due to social desirability. Social desirability is a concept whereby individuals will report in a way that reflects being more preferable regardless to

internal thoughts (Fisher, 1993). Furthermore, Husserl (1927) through his phenomenological philosophy stated that individuals will strive attempt to use pre-existing category systems to help with the understanding of an experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants may feel that although a more rational explanation may not fully explain their experience, given the viewpoint on such experiences being somewhat negative that they need to appear to conform to more common frameworks in order to not stand out. However, another way to explore this is that an individuals rationalise as a process of elimination to ensure the correct meaning and understanding is taken from the experience. Judgement and decision-making research in cognitive psychology suggests that people match frameworks based on features as a process of elimination until all, but one explanation remains by providing probabilities and weights to each possibility to give understanding (Tversky, 1972).

Although the majority of individuals never stated the term ‘ghost’, they made it clear that they knew they saw their loved one and knew they were dead. Which suggested that they were certain a more controversial explanation for the phenomenon could explain it better for them.

Additionally, throughout the interviews most of the participants tried to gain a form validation of their interpretation of their explanations to their experience from the researcher.

Overall, it appeared that for most of the participants, the experience made them question their mental health. Given the negative meanings offered within the literature, it is not surprising that experiencers are conscious of others’ potential perceptions of them as well as of their own perception on the experience. This was demonstrated in that individuals were unsure about how they would be viewed by others and only really discussed the experience with those they felt understood and had some real interest and understanding of them. In fact, some had discussed their experiences with others prior and had faced negativity and ridicule regarding their

interpretation of their experiences. Furthermore, some such as Natalie had not discussed their experiences with anyone prior to my interview, and kept it as a very private, personal phenomenon.

### **Reflexivity**

Using IPA as a methodology aided me to encapsulate and explore individuals' lived experiences of PBAs through examining how they made sense of their experiences. Furthermore, it also captured my interpretation of their understanding of their experiences as well as how important these experiences were. The unique nature of the topic is difficult to investigate, but the research helped demonstrate not only the similarities shared by the experiences, but also the individualistic aspects. Additionally, the research has furthered my own understanding and thoughts on the topic. Originally when I started this research, I felt that my primary thoughts and preconceived ideas surrounding the topic of PBAs were open. However, to some extent, I did hold a belief that these types of experiences could potentially cause discomfort and in some respect hinder their bereavement and grief process. I also had and do still have neutral ideas on the topic as to whether these experiences could be in the minds of individuals who experience them, due to the situation they find themselves in when they lose someone they love, or whether there is more to the experiences than can be explained.

Furthermore, I also held the belief based on previous research, that the experiences were to some extent viewed negatively within our society. To minimise prior influences during the research process, I tried to suspend these judgements and preconceptions and not allow them to influence the research process as a whole. I did this by using a system of bracketing. This consisted of, dialogue, whereby I had open conversations with peers in relation to knowledge and opinions on the research topic, these were noted down prior to doing the research. I also kept a journal

making notes of any preconceptions that came to mind throughout the analysis process, allowing me to reflect throughout. On completion, I wrote the reflexivity to allow for reflection of these preconceptions within the project. I feel that I have achieved this due to my findings not reflecting these preconceptions.

Through this research I have developed a new understanding as well as ideas surrounding PBAs for myself, including the positivity individuals can gain from the phenomenon. Although I had previously researched apparitions, I did not have an in- depth understanding of PBAs. However, I have considered that the previous research I carried out gave me ideas as to what might come out of the research, such as the stigma surrounding these experiences which appears to be influenced by society. I don't feel this hindered or heavily influenced this research as I did bracket myself and used the previous research to guide me and develop ideas for my interviews.

It can be suggested that the use of IPA is very well suited to this area, due to its emphasis on the lived experience of the participants. Initially, being relatively new to IPA, gaining an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings took time. This was due to the nature of the writings and being conscious of the fact that I could be interpreting the philosophers' work in my own way and not in line with the original meanings. I referred to several key texts on IPA to improve my understanding and how it could be applied to the research method (Smiths et al., 2009, Reid et al., 2005), although it could be argued that these books are themselves the authors own interpretation of the underpinnings of IPA.

In relation to data collection, it must be noted that I am a relatively inexperienced interviewer. However, during the data collection phase, I felt the interviews were successful as they were led more by the participants and their stories rather than from direct questions, I wanted answering. This allowed me to understand what the participant felt was important to discuss in relation to

their experience. Notwithstanding, during transcription I identified areas which would have benefitted from further enquiry and which would have led to more insight into their experiences. However, the interviews went well, and all participants felt comfortable with me. This could be due to good rapport built up with participants prior to the interviews, established through good communication and a genuinely interested in this topic area. However, I did not give the participants too much advance information as I wanted to minimise response bias.

Using an IPA methodology meant that I had to plan and manage my time well. The whole process is time consuming due to the processes of interviewing, transcribing, analysing and reflecting. I consider the time allowed to do this is important as it is needed to extract the fullest possible interpretation of each individual experience. Developing themes during the analysis process and merging them together to capture a true reflection of the data I particularly enjoyed. I put a lot of effort into capturing what these experiences are like for the individuals who experienced them. Obviously, I remained mindful that during this process I had to be more vigilant with my pre-conceived ideas, not allowing them to influence my interpretation.

In relation to my ethical considerations set out prior to the research I feel I adhered to the ethical code set out by the BPS (APA, 2019) and the ethics application I submitted prior to the research taking place. I felt it was also important to reflect on the ethical practices to ensure I followed them as stated originally and if I met any challenges during the research process, I was able to deal with them effectively and grow and learn from them. In places where specific considerations were needed, I feel these were met. For example, during the interviews when participants showed signs of distress or were becoming upset, they were made aware that they did not have to proceed, that they could take a break or terminate the interview. All participants knew and fully understood the research before taking part.

Overall, I feel that my openness to the topic area with my previous beliefs and ideas bracketed, has provided good insight into some individual experiences of PBAs and has also made me come to alternative conclusions surrounding the topic to those with which I initially started. The main conclusion is that these experiences mean a lot to the individuals that have them and they can be comforting with some individuals feeling that these help in hard times such as bereavement. Also, especially on an emotional level, my research has identified that for humans, emotional attachment and support is important. Even death cannot, in some circumstances, remove that bond. Additionally, my final thoughts regarding PBAs is that they are very real to those that experience them and potentially, can happen to anyone.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study support the bereavement area and further the developing ideas that the concept is a very individualistic process. However, it also highlights the commonalities amongst the experiences. Therefore it offers some knowledge and understanding that may be useful from a counselling perspective as it offers real world relevance for individuals who experience apparitions post bereavement and their fear with regards to discussing it. The commonalities offer an initial framework for awareness and support techniques that can be then tailored to the individual. Support packages available to individuals should include an open perspective with regards to this phenomenon to ensure that it can be freely discussed which will help individuals through hard times with coping and coming to terms with the loss of their loved one.

The research also demonstrates that although disputed, there appears to be a perceived stigma attached to these types of experience. However, each and every individual experience or type of experience needs to be treated seriously in that professionals need to accept the reality of the

experience for their clients, regardless of preconceptions. This is due to possible complications that might occur during bereavement and even more so for those struggling with bereavement. Individuals in this period are vulnerable and applying labels to them could make things worse, instead of guiding and helping through the experience of bereavement. Individuals should be able to feel they are able to talk openly about their experiences and how they perceive and attach meaning to them. The implications of not being able to do so, could lead to them shutting down with regards to the acknowledgement of what has happened and prevent an openness to discussion. This could potentially impact on how they move forward from the loss of their loved one due to repressing issues that need exploration.

### **Strengths and limitations**

One strength to this study is that it provided an in-depth exploration into PBAs from individuals lived experiences. It has offered a variety of experiences, including different relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. Furthermore, the use of IPA in this area adds to current knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon, as there is very limited information on this topic to date. This is particularly true of the perspective of exploring the individuals' experience and how they interpret and attach meaning to them.

This research is not without its limitations. The sample only included one male, which limits the exploration in terms of male perspective. Furthermore, on reflection, given that the interviews were conducted by a relatively inexperienced interviewer, the questions could have gone further, and probes could have been utilised to go deeper within areas. Finally, exploration into participants situational factors such as the death details, dynamics of the family, support available and personal philosophy, would have enhanced the richness of the data, in terms of giving a more contextual background to demographic aspects to one's own experience.



### **Future research**

Future research in the area of PBAs research could focus on attempting to destigmatising the experiences, making them more normalised and accepted. It could be suggested in order to achieve this, prevalence as well as demographics and the characteristic associated with the experience need to be explored with a larger data set. This would allow inferences to be made with regards to previous findings within the area, such as fantasy proneness being a characteristic of those who experience them. Furthermore, evidence that PBAs are wide spread and not exclusive to one demographic is suggestive that these experiences are common and could potentially happen to anyone, thus evidencing the need to 'normalise' them. Additionally, the research could utilise a more qualitative nature.

Potentially another phenomenological methodology to explore the components involved in the sense and meaning making aspect, when attaching meaning to the experience. Potentially, this could focus on utilising a grounded theory approach which will allow a flexible exploration into the processes and outcomes involved just after an apparitional experience whilst individuals are rationalising and attaching meaning to the event itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This would further knowledge and understanding in terms of the process individuals go through to gain and understand their experience. .

Utilising an IPA approach that explores the lived experience of individuals could explore how the emotional connection between the experiencer and the deceased shapes the nature of the experience itself. Additionally, the same methodology would be useful in exploring the work of experts in the grief sector, specifically, counsellors and therapist, focusing on their knowledge and their responses to being presented with experiences of this nature by their clients.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the reality of loss of a loved one for the participants. In terms of how distressing and individualistic the experience can be in relation to the impacts and responses to death. However, it has also demonstrated that an apparitional experience accompanied by that loss, harbours many positive aspects to the bereaved. Furthermore, it can be perceived as a way of continuing their connection to their loved one, which has important implications throughout the life course. However, it has also been demonstrated that participants were somewhat careful with regards being open about their experience and about how they may have interpreted it. This was due to the assumed perception that wider thoughts and opinions on it were somewhat negative towards this type of phenomenon. Consequently, the research surrounding these areas appear to frame the majority of its suggestions regarding the Phenomenon in a negative way which arguable provides a sense of ridicule to an individual whom experiences an apparition. However, considering the widespread prevalence surrounding PBAs, which are not exclusive to one demographic, amongst the positive aspects to experiencing one in a particularly vulnerable point of life harbours important considerations. These experiences should be treated with sensitivity and respect, being seen as a ‘normal’ way for someone to continue a bond with a love one after death, rather than as something connected with negativity and stigma as this itself could have potentially damaging consequences. Potentially, as we all have some experience of a death in our life time, anyone could have such an experience.

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## Appendix A

# GHOSTS & BEREAVEMENT



- Are you 18 or over?
- Have you ever experienced bereavement and ghostly phenomena in relation to it?

For my post graduate research project, I am looking to explore individual's apparitional experiences in connection to bereavement. Willing participants will be required to attend an interview.

If the above applies to you, please use the contact details below and participate in my study.

**Hannah Marsh**  
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University of  
HUDDERSFIELD

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## **Appendix B**

### **Participant information sheet**

#### **Study title**

Exploring meaning, in relation to bereavement and apparitional experience, using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

#### **Invitation and brief summary**

For this study I will be exploring individual's apparitional experiences in connection with a bereavement. I will be exploring how people make sense and individually understand the events that they experience. If you are willing to participate you will be interviewed on your personal experience.

I am inviting individuals over the age of 18, that have had at least one apparitional experience that you are able to talk about in detail that was in connection to a bereavement of a significant individual (family member or close friend). If you are currently receiving medical or other treatment for bereavement it is advised that you refrain from participation.

#### **What's involved?**

Bereavement is an experience that nearly every individual will experience at some point in their lives. Although, not exclusive to all, many individuals report continuing contact with the deceased. This includes apparitional experiences where people see a "ghost" or similar of their loved one. The purpose of this study is to explore this normal phenomenon of individuals having apparitional experiences in connection to a bereavement as there has been little exploration within the area.

#### **What would be taking part involve?**

If you chose to take part in this study once you have contacted me, you will be asked to provide a summary to give the researcher a brief understanding of your experience/s. I'd expect this to include information about your relationship to the deceased, circumstances of the death and finally a short overview of your apparitional experience (or the most memorable experience).

Once you have provided me with a summary, I will contact you to arrange an interview in a safe and convenient environment. There you will be asked to complete a consent form and give you the opportunity to ask any relevant questions you have. The interviews conducted will be recorded on a password protected device for transcription later. There will be no set questions for the interview only general topic areas of interest and some questions will be specific to you and your experience and will be dependent on the information you provide.

Once the interview has been conducted that will signal the end of your participation in this study. I will then transcribe the Interview, conduct analysis and report the findings. A summary of the study will be available to you upon request. Throughout the whole process your personal information will remain confidential and will be anonymised to protect your identity.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There are no generalised benefits of you taking part in this study, however, it is known that individuals can find it helpful and empowering to talk about these types of experiences. Research into this area may also help deliver wider benefits to society and areas within psychology such as bereavement counselling. Finally, it will aid the scientific knowledge and understanding of this type of Phenomenon which is rarely researched.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no anticipated disadvantages from taking part in this study. However, as a participant you must be aware that you may experience some discomfort or distress during or after the research procedure due to the nature of the topic. If this was to occur, you as the participant have the right to take a break at any point during the interview and continue if you feel ok to do so or you can withdraw completely from the interview without question. Also, you have the right to request that your interview data be withdrawn from the study up until 1st June 2018. Finally, if you do experience any issue after or during participation and feel that you require support, we encourage you to contact the professional services provided below.

## **Further supporting information**

### **Contact information**

#### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

For those who need help, Cruse offers free confidential support for adults and children, and this can be by telephone, email or face-to-face.

Helpline freephone on 0808 808 1677.

More information on this service can be found at:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/bereavement-services/get-help>

#### **NHS**

You can access bereavement support via the NHS speak to your GP regarding this service.

More information on this service can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Bereavement%20support/LocationSearch/314>

**University of Huddersfield counselling services**

Level 4, Student Central

University of Huddersfield

[wellbeingdisabilityadmin@hud.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeingdisabilityadmin@hud.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01484 472227

More information on this service can be found at: <https://www.hud.ac.uk/wellbeing-disability-services/wellbeing/counselling/>

Researcher:

Hannah Marsh: [U1459400@unimail.hud.ac.uk](mailto:U1459400@unimail.hud.ac.uk)

Supervisor details:

Professor Nigel King: [n.king@hud.ac.uk](mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk)

## Appendix C

### **Indicative interview questions**

As each individual participant will be providing a summary of their unique experiences probes that are tailored to the individual will be used throughout the interviews.

However, the below basic topics will be covered in each interview:

- **Background information about participant**
- **Their connection to the deceased**
- **Their experience or the most memorable experience**
  - where it took place, description of place, did this place have any significance.
  - When did they have the experience, time of day, how long after the death did the happen,
- **Visual description**
  - solid figure, shadow, could they identify it as the deceased person straight away, if not what made them believe it was the deceased person.
- **How the experience made them feel.**
  - during and after, affect them emotionally, how did they feel about themselves after the experience, their initial thoughts of what the experience was, did this change at all
- **Was the experience positive or negative**
- **More than one experience with the same, had any other experiences not related to the bereavement**
- **Did they discuss their experience with anyone, who, if not why not**
- **Do they hold any religious beliefs, did this change after the experience.**



## Appendix D

### CONSENT FORM

**Project title:** Exploring meaning in relation to bereavement and apparitional experience using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Please read carefully and indicate your full understanding and consent to the following statements below by ticking each and providing a signature. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me. Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored.

I have read and understood the information sheet.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study & they have been answered satisfactorily (if relevant)	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a right to not provide any answers to questions, take a break or terminate the interview, without having to provide an explanation	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can at any point withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation until 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2018.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to interviews being audiotaped and the contents being used for research purposes.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my identity will be protected, and that all data will be anonymous.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

**Researcher:**

Hannah Marsh: [U1459400@unimail.hud.ac.uk](mailto:U1459400@unimail.hud.ac.uk)

**Supervisor details:**

Professor Nigel King: [n.king@hud.ac.uk](mailto:n.king@hud.ac.uk)

## Appendix E

[H] so the recording is going

[P] ok so I have two experiences one where I herd something and the other where I saw something which one do you want?

[H] the seeing

[P] the seeing ok right so that's what you are going to ask about?

[H] right so yer if you can talk about the one where you were seeing that can be the focus the hearing you can make mention of too just gives some focus and you so um just to start with can you give me some back ground about yourself

[P] um ok

[H] yer

[P] ok my name is Pam and umm I I was brought up in Jersey in the channel islands

[H] oh its lovely there

[P] nice place to have a holiday

[H] yer that's only time I've ever gone

[P] but boring other wise (laughs) and um both my parents went out to work full time because at the time I was born and I was disabled they couldn't get any help national help

[H] right

[P] with with me so they envisaged that they would have to pay for anything they wanted um to do so they went to work as a result of that I when I wasn't at school I went to my godmother she didn't have any children of their own and I used to spend a lot of my time with them and in some ways they were like my parents really

[H] right yes

[P] now um er over the years they grew older and um eventually my god mother died quite um suddenly um she wasn't she wasn't um ill as far as we new she just died and then four days later my god father died I mean they had been married for 58 years and everybody said oh I'm glad that happened because they though well we though that my godfather wouldn't mangle with out her and the fact he went as quickly as he did after her was um lovely for them but absolutely devastating for me absolutely devastating to lose both of them with in four days I mean I was grown up and had a child of my own by then but I was still very close to them

[H] yer

[P] and um so when my god father died id hardly taken a deep breath after my god mother had died so and um so because they didn't have any children of their own my brother and I were left everything so we were left with the responsibility of sorting out everything the letters all that sort of thing and one day within about four days of my godfather been cremated my husband and I had been somewhere to do with the estate business stuff

[H] yer

[P] we were we um we were coming through the town a part of the town that had not been pedestrianised

[H] right

[P] I was sitting in the front of the car my husband driving and you know when you are not driving just sitting you are looking around

[H] yes taking in the scenery

[P] yes and there he was on my left hand side just walking at the side of the road right at the side of me we were pulling up at some traffic lights stopping at some traffic lights

[[H] hm

[P] so we slowed right down and he was there just walking parallel with the car just there and said I turned to say Ryan who was just sitting there um “uncle louie” that’s what we called him uncle louie and I said to him “that’s uncle...” and I turned back to where I had seen him and he was gone and I know it was him I know I absolutely know it was him it wasn’t someone that looked like him it was him I mean there were lots of people that could look like that I mean it was winter it was winter and he had a cloth cap and a rain coat and I mean there must have been lots of people that had cloth caps and rain coats but it was him it was him the shape of him he was quite a portly gentleman he had quite a tummy you know and he walked he had a solid sort of walk you know like “thump dump” he walked a bit like that and that’s how he was walking right next to me at the side of the car yer I was him and of course I told my brother in the car and he was like “don’t talk a load of nonsense there is lots of people who look like uncle louie” and he was absolutely right there are I mean even today there are lots of people that look like him and I mean

we are talking about 30 40 years ago but I can remember that evening as clear as I can remember what just happened just before I came into this library

[H] right so its ..

[P] and as I'm talking about it it's all coming back

[H] like what what's coming back

[P] well first first when it happened when I saw him I felt delight he's not dead that was the first thing he's not dead he's not gone even though I was pleased when when they told me cos when we went to pick up [pause] because as I told you at the start my god mother died and then my god father died and my god father died on the day of my god mothers funeral and my husband and I went round to pick him up and take him to the funeral and when we got there he wouldn't answer the door we had a key because we knew he was living alone and needed access to the house and my husband let himself in with the key and found him slumped over he'd had a heart attack and died so he never got to his wife's funeral and my husband came out and said "I'm sorry love but I've got something to tell you" and I said "he's dead isn't he?" and he said "yes" and I just said "thank god" because what I didn't want him to face was a long life without his wife he'd had her for 58 years devoted to her no children just them and I just thought wonderful and yet when I saw him and thought he's not dead I was delighted from my point of view he was still with me he was still there and then I looked back and he had gone no just he'd not just disappeared into a crowd or anything like that

[H] yer

[P] he'd just gone um

[H] so when you saw him it was just him?

[P] nobody else just him walking at side of the road yep just him

[H] did the place you see him have any significance to you or him?

[P] no just walking down the road just as him did I mean he used to take himself for a walk because he'd had a heart attack a few years before and they had said to him you're over weight and you don't exercise enough so he used to force himself to go out every day I mean he never had any where particular to go so he just used to walk around and that was it for the day but no it was absolutely him I mean its like I could almost touch him even now as im talking. I can almost feel him as im talking to you remembering it all

[H] can you describe that for me?

[P] I can almost feel it he had what they called in those days I mean when did he die I mean my daughter was 3 and she's now 36 so we're talking 33 years ago and he had a gabodine rain coat do you know what I mean?

[H] no sorry

[P] its blue it was blue not shinny like macs are now it was it was almost like a denim

[H] right yer I think I know what you mean

[P] and it was called a gabodien I don't know where they got that from (laughs) and it had a certain feel to it like a um I mean as im talking to you about this all now I can sort of feel that feel that that material you know cos I mean I must have given him a lot of hugs when he was wearing it so I mean I can still remember it still really like it was and

sometimes if I see a chap in a in a um a cloth cap as you do sometimes around here that would make me think "oo like uncle Louie" cos my dad never used to wear anything like that I mean he was quite a bit older than my parents a different era so yer [pause]

[H] so when you said to your brother

[P] yes when I said to him and looked back and um he'd gone and Ryan looked obviously "where" I was like "there just there" he was like "come on now I know you are upset but you know things like that don't happen"

[H] yer how did that make you feel?

[P] well he was he was there obviously he was felt frustrated I think

[H] so what were your initial thoughts when you saw him as to what was happening you know what I mean?

[P] I didn't think it wasn't a ghost not a ghost I thought it was me I thought id made a mistake and he wasn't dead no no not a ghost just him alive I was convinced

[H] what about now?

[P] um to be honest not sure ghost maybe or something like that when I realised after a while my hear sunk into my boots and Ryan was still like "I know you are upset and that's probably why you think you have seen him" and gradually I thought ok no I haven't seen him you know um yer so it all sort of changed of what I thought and that actually is the point I really started to grieve for him that's the point I definitely thought he's dead he's gone but that day he was definitely there.

[H] right



[P] because he died so suddenly there was a lot of uming and arring about it we had to have post-mortem and get doctors notes about it and history of it and so for a while I was caught up in all that and didn't really think much about it and hadn't really had time to get past the thank god when I was told you know the relief from his point of view that he wouldn't have to cope with life alone so when I did stop and think about it that's when I started to grieve.

[H] have you ever experienced any other like that?

[P] no never again never even sensed his presence I have with my father but never with uncle louie

[H] right can you tell me about that ?

[P] I often sense his presence even now to this day but yet I haven't ever seen my father ive only sensed and herd him am I ok to talk about this?

[H] yes yer sure

[P] yer I grieve for my father still because I was very close to him but I don't um my mum died errr [pause] 20 years ago and I don't um I grieved for her but I don't miss her I don't miss her but I do miss my dad and um I miss my god parents as well lots.

[H] why do you think that is?

[P] well we my mum was very good to me and I wouldn't be where I am now today if it wasn't for my mum because um er when I was born I was born at the end of the war in jersey and were anything considered welfare was 100,000 miles away you know

[H] right

[P] and you know if you were born disadvantaged it was tough basically and my mum um when I was born um er um I got cerebral palsy which involves brain damage erm um and birth you see my mum had problems in pregnancy you see at birth oxygen was cut off long enough to cause brain damage and um my mum was told that all I was really going to be was a vegetable so why didn't she go away and have another baby and forget about me and my mum wasn't like that she was a fighter and soon realised she had got quite an intelligent baby on her hands and um and fought for me to get a proper education and so on which I wouldn't have got if it had been left to anyone else and so its through her that I am where I am and she was always just like go do what you want and I have done you know so but on the way there has been a lot of antagonism on the way she was a very strong woman I am a very strong woman and sometimes she would want me to go one way and id want to go another so sometimes we would clash a bit so erm yer but we got on well maybe we were too alike to get close but my dad and I were really close and that's why I think my other experience happened

[H] you still ok to talk about that?

[P] yes (enthusiastic) yes please um my father died of cancer he took quite a long time to die and I was at university at the time and I kept saying to my mum "do you want me to come home?" you know just for the last few weeks so I could be with dad but she was like "no no no your dad wouldn't want that cos he was really proud that I'd gone to uni I was the first I was the first person in my family to ever go and he was really proud of that and I mean if he would have been born in a different era he would have gone I mean he was clever enough to go but um people didn't do it in those days I mean it was either Cambridge or oxford so he

was proud of me so I mean I was just coming up to my finals so I had my father ill and my finals so yer everything and um but then finally he did die and I was told so I got on a plan and went home because I was in kent uni then

[H] right

[P] and um got home went through all the motions you know letters and things that came and my mum was one of these people that's like you do not cry you do not cry in public you do no show me up I had a brother older than me and she was like "if either of you cry at his funeral you'll have it from me"

[H] why was she like that?

[P] because she had this thing about keeping up appearances I mean have you ever seen that programme?

[H] yes

[P] well that's my mum (laughs) she had this idea that you needed to be um in front of others you needed to be what you wanted them to think you were if you see what I mean

[H] yer

[P] so we didn't really mourn just sort of got on with it just got through the practicalities of some ones just died they need to be buried or cremated in fact I think my father was cremated um I can't even remember that really but he was um he was in the fire brigade and when we got to the church the fire service had organised a guard of honner for the coffin to go through and that cracked me up but I thought no I can't crack up" cos of mum and what mum says so we went through all that and I stayed for

a week after he was cremated and everything went to sort the will out and everything and then booked to come back to university because I only had about 4 weeks till my finals and in those days your finals were actually just finals just exams that's what you got judged on and so I thought I've got to go back so I booked my flights for the following day now that night I had a downstairs bedroom for obvious reasons and when I was a teenager and out as you do my father would never ever go to sleep until he knew I was home it didn't matter if I came home at 4 in the morning or what he would still be awake because he couldn't bring himself to be asleep whilst I was out because he absolutely adored me and um so so on the odd occasion id crept in and he had nodded off he would come down to my bedroom and be like "oh so you are home" you know that sort of thing or he come and tell me to turn my light off because I'd been reading well into the night so it was quite normal for me to hear his footsteps oh the stairs you know "oh here comes dad he's going to nag me cos I've come in late" you know that sort of stuff or what ever but on the night before I went back to uni I heard him coming down the stairs definitely herd him he was coming to tell me "put that light out" "get some sleep" or what ever it was but he didn't actually come in he just came as far as the door and then just stopped (laughs) and that was it and I mean I always used to leave the door slightly open just in case I needed to call mum for something you know or what ever so the door was slightly open yet he didn't come in

[H] how did that make you feel?

[P] it didn't bother me I was just glad that I had herd him it was a comfort

[H] when you first herd it what did you think feel?

[P] it didn't occur to me that it wasn't ok it dint um I didn't really think much of it really it was just dads coming down the stairs

[H] right yer

[P] then like oh hang on he's dead you know that cant be right be he was definitely coming down and because he did it so often when he was alive his footfall was you know always the same and you can tell when he got to the bottom steps and that night it was precisely that precisely that you know it wasn't mum coming down the stairs or my brother coming down the stairs it was dad but he just didn't actually come into the room

[H] did you experience anything else at the time?

[P] no but it didn't bother me it didn't upset me I didn't think "oh shit why didn't he come in at tell me he was alright" you know I didn't feel him or sense him nothing just herd him coming down the stairs I mean I was very close to me like I said it didn't upset me or set of what I see as my bereavement process like it had done with my godfather that came later and I became rather ill because maybe of the way I dealt with it I mean I got through my finals and passed my finals then became quite ill and im sure it was all that accumulating and just like my body my mind saying enough is enough cant take any more in fact I convinced myself that I had what my dad had stomach cancer I mean I lost a huge amount of weight um and doctors investigated everything possibly wrong with me but I was fine nothing wrong with me but I couldn't eat and I had pains in my tummy and these were all things my dad had said when he was ill so I was just reliving that in a way but I got over it it just took a long while to deal with it all

[H] yer

[P] I mean looking back on the experiences yes I am an emotional person but also a rational one and so I could have explained it all away you know easily you know just like my godfather yer there are loads of people that could look like him but I know it was just one of those people it was him I know I know I know and same with my dad it was him coming down the stairs yer.

[H] What is it that makes you know its them?

[P] I don't know I have no idea I just know

[H] did you mention either of them to anyone apart from obviously when you were in the car with your brother?

[P] oh no especially not to my mother I mean she would have just poo poed it she didn't have time for things like that

[H] what about your brother? Did you mention hearing your dad?

[P] (laughs) no he'd probably say "I always thought you were bonkers and now you've proved it" (laughing) yer cos he expressed no emotion when my father died and as far as I've seen he never has now when my mother died err 23 years after my father um he was cut up I was so much more rational about it but he was completely cut up about it he didn't know what to do with himself for quite some time after yes but no we are very different my brother and I (laughs) its funny isn't it how um how different people um its like what we were talking about how can people say definitive things about it because you know even if you and I had been in my bedroom lets say and herd those foot steps your experience and interpretation would have been very different of it to mine you know

[H] yes

[P] we are all different people so how can people make definitive statements about these things

[H] so what are your beliefs surrounding death and experiences people have?

[P] well um I cant get bound up in the idea that I'm living here waiting to go somewhere else and that the more good I do the more chance I have of getting a place up there that doesn't appeal to me at all but I am a quaker now we actually believe that within everyone and I mean everyone without exception there is some good and the problem is its not showing or we are just not finding it and I think that gives me the optimism I have within the world today people making a hash of everything so I don't see it as that type of afterlife where you earn it but there also I don't conceive it to be just nothing you can only conceive it as nothing in relation to something err when you have an operation and you are put out and you wake up its like that period of time never existed its different to sleep is it

[H] yes I know what you are getting at

[P] erm you know the idea of nothing forever is just inconceivable I cant get my head around it but then again I don't see it in terms of you know you are moving on to another plane I can see that you know people talk about eternal life like the way I see it not as in you live forever but a part of you is passed down through out children etc so there will always be a part of me you see what im saying

[H] yer yer I do

[P] that's what I think I don't know its all just difficult to explain because you don't know people don't know.

## Appendix F

135 enough so he used to force himself to go out every  
136 day I mean he never had any where particular to go  
137 so he just used to walk around and that was it for the  
138 day but no it was absolutely him I mean its like I could  
139 almost touch him even now as im talking. I can  
140 almost feel him as im talking to you remembering it  
141 all  
142 [H] can you describe that for me?  
143 [P] I can almost feel it he had what they called in  
144 those days I mean when did he die I mean my  
145 daughter was 3 and shes now 36 so we're talking 33  
146 years ago and he had a gabodine rain coat do you  
147 know what I mean?  
148 [H] no sorry  
149 [P] its blue it was blue not shinny like macs are now it  
150 was it was almost like a denim  
151 [H] right yer I think I know what you mean  
152 [P] and it was called a gabodeen I don't know where  
153 they got that from (laughs) and it had a certain feel to

daily routine is  
go out for  
a walk

certainty of what  
was experienced

still strong  
memories  
very real - touch  
him

Real -  
sensory information

reliving memories  
strong memories  
memories = sensory  
experience

Real

real - touchable.

specific details about  
clothing

specific details  
about appearance/  
clothing.

distinctive

143



Strong connection to memory.

154 it like a um I mean as im talking to you about this all as talking about it bringing memory

155 now I can sort of feel that feel that that material you

156 know cos I mean I must have given him a lot of hugs — close relationship

157 when he was wearing it so I mean I can still

158 remember it still really like it was and sometimes if I remember the root as it was memories not pooled

159 see a chap in a in a um a cloth cap as you do

160 sometimes around here that would make me think

161 "oo like uncle Louie" cos my dad never used to wear see people that remind of him

162 anything like that I mean he was quite a bit older

163 than my parents a different era so yer [pause]

164 [H] so when you said to your brother

165 [P] yes when I said to him and looked back and um

166 hed gone and Ryan looked obviously "where" I was

167 like "there just there" he was like "come on now I convinced

168 know you are upset but you know things like that

169 don't happen" expectation of someone who is sad.

170 [H] yer how did that make you feel?

171 [P] well he was he was there obviously he was felt

172 frustrated I think feeling of frustration about not been believed.

upset - excuse  
just upset - that not real  
Things like that don't happen.  
frustration at not being believed when the evidence was real for her.

173 [H] so what were your initial thoughts when you saw  
 174 him as to what was happening you know what I  
 175 mean?

176 [P] I didn't think it wasn't a ghost not a ghost I — not a ghost  
 177 thought it was me I thought id made a mistake and he — questioned self  
 178 wasn't dead no no not a ghost just him alive I was — about situation  
 179 convinced — got it wrong — he'd not passed away — he was alive — he was dead

180 [H] what about now?

181 [P] um to be honest not sure ghost maybe or — not sure of what it  
 182 something like that when I realised after a while my — change in perception  
 183 head sunk into my boots and Ryan was still like "I — towards experience  
 184 know you are upset and that's probably why you — moment of — but  
 185 think you have seen him" and gradually I thought ok — this realisation of  
 186 no I haven't seen him you know um yer so it all sort — death hurts  
 187 of changed of what I thought and that actually is the — just puts it down  
 188 point I really started to grieve for him that's the point — to been upset  
 189 I definitely thought hes dead hes gone but that day — as the explanation  
 190 he was definetly there. — change to not  
 191 [H] right — seen him at  
 — all  
 — convince themselves  
 — Starting point  
 — for grieving  
 — upon this point  
 — questioned death — don't, painful  
 — to accept  
 — even though  
 — didn't think  
 — she'd seen him  
 — it confirmed  
 — his death  
 — always this questioning

*Handwritten notes on the left margin:*  
 Real.  
 questioning  
 change in perception towards experience.  
 realisation under emotional.  
 Give it a rational explanation.  
 understand.  
 change in perception.  
 change in thought.  
 Starting of grief.

Appendix G



## Appendix H

### THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD: RISK ANALYSIS & MANAGEMENT

<b>ACTIVITY: Interviews</b>				<b>Name: Hannah Marsh</b>	
<b>LOCATION: Safe location agreed with participant</b>				<b>Date: 01/01/2018</b>	
<b>Hazard(s) Identified</b>	<b>Details of Risk(s)</b>	<b>People at Risk</b>	<b>Risk management measures</b>	<b>Other comments</b>	
Interviewing in the homes of interviewees as a lone worker	Personal safety	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Log times, dates and place of set interviews with supervisor and responsible friend/family.</li> <li>If have any doubts about visiting the participant arrange for responsible friend/family member to accompany.</li> <li>Phone call to responsible friend/family once interview is over and safe.</li> </ul>	All arrangements for interviews will be made aware prior to the meet.	
Loss of data	Security of data	Interviewees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once in interviewees home make sure exit is clear if needed.</li> </ul>		
Distress or discomfort		Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All electronic data to be stored on password protected devices and secure networks will be used.</li> <li>All participants will have an understanding of their participation which will be provided on the information sheet.</li> <li>All participants will be made aware that they, have the right to not answer any questions they feel uncomfortable with, can take breaks during the interviews and can also terminate the interview.</li> <li>Contact details of the researcher and relevant help lines will be provided to all participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher will make sure the participants feel comfortable.</li> </ul>	

## Appendix I

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD  
School of Human and Health Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel

### APPLICATION FORM

Please complete and return via email to:  
Kirsty Thomson SREP Administrator: [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)

Name of applicant: Hannah Marsh

Title of study: Exploring meaning, in relation to bereavement and apparitional experience, using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Department: Health & Social Sciences-Psychology

Date sent: 2/1/2018

Please provide sufficient detail below for SREP to assess the ethical conduct of your research. You should consult the guidance on filling out this form and applying to SREP at <http://www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/research/srep/>.

Researcher(s) details	Hannah Marsh
Supervisor(s) details	Prof Nigel King, Dr Ruth Elliott
<b>All documentation has been read by supervisor (where applicable)</b>	Yes, please see attached supervisor report
Aim / objectives	To explore individual's apparitional experiences in connection to bereavement.
Brief overview of research methods	For this research study 8- 10 participants will be required, that have had an experience with apparitions in connection to a bereavement. All interviews will be recorded and then transcribed. A qualitative approach will be undertaken using IPA as a framework to analyse each individual transcript to explore how individuals interpret their own experiences. All research will be conducted in line with ethical practices.
Project start date	September 2017
Project completion date	September 2018
Permissions for study	Individual participants will give permission by signing consent form.
Access to participants	Individuals will be invited to participate directly using social media and posters placed around the university campus to advertise the study. Individuals currently seeking support for bereavement will not be actively recruited for this study, it will be advised to potential participants in the information sheet not to part take in this study if they are getting support at this time.
Confidentiality	All information of participants will remain confidential throughout the whole process.

Anonymity	All information will be anonymised throughout the transcripts, this includes changing the names of the participants, any other names that maybe mentioned throughout the interview and also any other information that may make the individual identifiable such as places.
Right to withdraw	Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study up until 1 <sup>st</sup> of June 2018, participants will be made aware of this prior to taking part. If participants withdraw from the study all information will be removed and destroyed.
Data Storage	All data collected will be sorted on secure network and password protected devices. Interviews will be recorded using a password protected phone. The interviews will then be transferred, transcribed and analysed using a secure network and saved onto a secure password protected device.
Psychological support for participants	Support services with contact information will be provided to all participants. This information can be found on the information sheet (please see attached).
Researcher safety / support (attach completed University Risk Analysis and Management form)	University Risk Analysis and Management form.
Information sheet	The information sheet that will be provided to all participants.
Consent form	The consent forms each participant will be asked to complete prior to interviews.
Letters / posters / flyers	The poster which will be utilised for social media advertisement and within public places.
Questionnaire / Interview guide	An indicative interview guide.
Debrief (if appropriate)	N/A
Dissemination of results	A full psychological report will be written in APA standards for academic purposes and shared with other interested researchers within the field. Additionally, a summary of the findings from the research will be written up and will be available to all participants upon request.
Identify any potential conflicts of interest	N/A
Does the research involve accessing data or visiting websites that could constitute a legal and/or reputational risk to yourself or the University if misconstrued?  Please state Yes/No  If Yes, please explain how you will minimise this risk	NO
The next four questions in the grey boxes relate to Security Sensitive Information – please read the following guidance before completing these questions: <a href="http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/oversight-of-security-sensitive-research-material.pdf">http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/oversight-of-security-sensitive-research-material.pdf</a>	

<p>Is the research commissioned by, or on behalf of the military or the intelligence services?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data</p>	NO
<p>Is the research commissioned under an EU security call</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data</p>	NO
<p>Does the research involve the acquisition of security clearances?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please outline how your data collection and storages complies with the requirements of these clearances</p>	NO
<p>Does the research concern terrorist or extreme groups?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, please complete a Security Sensitive Information Declaration Form</p>	NO
<p>Does the research involve covert information gathering or active deception?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p>	NO
<p>Does the research involve children under 18 or participants who may be unable to give fully informed consent?</p> <p>Please state Yes/No</p>	NO



Does the research involve prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)?  Please state Yes/No	NO
Does the research involve significantly increased danger of physical or psychological harm or risk of significant discomfort for the researcher(s) and/or the participant(s), either from the research process or from the publication of findings?  Please state Yes/No	Yes, although individuals currently receiving any help with bereavement have been excluded from this study there is a possibility due to the nature of the topic that participants may experience some distress or discomfort during interviewing. Participants will be made aware that at any point during the interview they are within their rights to ask for a break or terminate the interview without question. Additionally, they can withdraw completely after completion up until 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2018 without question. Participants will be provided with contact information of relevant services available if they feel they need support.
Does the research involve risk of unplanned disclosure of information you would be obliged to act on?  Please state Yes/No	NO
Other issues	N/A
Where application is to be made to NHS Research Ethics Committee / External Agencies	NO
<b>Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy</b>	

**All documentation must be submitted to the SREP administrator. All proposals will be reviewed by two members of SREP.**  
**If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to SREP's consideration of this proposal, please contact the SREP administrator (Kirsty Thomson) in the first instance – [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD  
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND HEALTH SCIENCES – SCHOOL RESEARCH ETHICS  
PANEL**

**SUPERVISOR REPORT**

**Please complete and return via email to:  
Kirsty Thomson SREP Administrator: [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)**

Name of student: Hannah Marsh

Title of study: Apparitional experiences after bereavement: an IPA study

Name of course (if not MPhil or PhD: M.Sc. by Research

Name of supervisor(s): Prof Nigel King, Dr Ruth Elliott

Date: 19.12.17

I confirm that I have (a) read all documentation submitted to SREP in respect of the above research project and (b) support its submission to SREP. I also confirm that a Risk Analysis has been conducted in accordance with University requirements.

Please identify all documents seen below:

Letters (specify)	Recruitment advertisement
Participant information sheet	Yes
Participant consent form	Yes
Interview schedule	Yes
Questionnaire	n/a
NHS REC form	n/a
University of Huddersfield Risk Analysis and Management form	Yes
Other	n/a

Signed (if submitting hard copy):



Prof Nigel King

**Please note:**

No application submitted by a student will be considered by SREP without a fully completed Supervisor Report

**If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or need any other information relating to SREP's consideration of this proposal, please email [hhs\\_srep@hud.ac.uk](mailto:hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk)**

## Appendix J

Main themes & Subthemes	Line numbers within transcript
<p><b><u>The unique experience of loss</u></b></p> <p><b>Natalie:</b> No, it's just that when it first happens, your just like erm, I don't know. I just didn't function. Not at all. But I can't explain to anybody what it's like.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Then she went, I mean I couldn't go into the house after. I mean, as soon as she had left, I was like "I can't go in there I can't do it". I just felt wrong going into her house because she wasn't there.</p> <p><b>Bethany:</b> I just could not believe it. Couldn't believe it, what had happened? How can this be real? Mean he can't be dead. That took me a long time to come to terms with, I'll be honest.</p>	<p>28 - 30</p> <p>30 - 32</p> <p>61 - 64</p>
<p><b><u>Bonds individuals share within life and thereafter</u></b></p> <p><b>Pam:</b> I went to my Godmother. She didn't have any children of their own and I used to spend a lot of my time with them and in some ways, they were like my parents really.</p> <p><b>Josh:</b> used to watch action films together, we like the same sort of stuff. Whereas my mum would run out of the room like "I'm not watching this", erm and me and my Grandma would sit and watch.</p> <p><b>Natalie:</b> I loved him. Well I mean, I love him now you know.</p> <p><b><u>Sharing memories</u></b></p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> So many, lots of memories, but even though they are only small things, it can be quite emotional really.</p> <p><b>Bethany:</b> I think I dealt with it pretty well, because straight from the offset I wouldn't stop talking about them. Because I always think that to stop talking about them etc., it's like they had never been here and they had been here. So we would sit. I mean there would be tears, but we would sit and have a laugh. You know, remember things they did, or particular things he did to me as a kid.</p> <p><b><u>Talking with the deceased</u></b></p> <p><b>Natalie:</b> I know it sounds daft, but I keep... I mean, I'm talking to him all the time.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> I mean, there was time where we would talk. It was weird just like conversation.</p>	<p>28 - 31</p> <p>175 - 179</p> <p>152 - 153</p> <p>134 - 135</p> <p>70 - 77</p> <p>15 - 16</p> <p>83 - 84</p>
<p><b><u>The absolute certainty and 'realness' of the apparition</u></b></p> <p><b>Josh:</b> Whilst I don't try and understand it myself, I kind of believe that those experiences are real.</p> <p><b>Pam:</b> I know it was him. I know. I absolutely know it was him. It wasn't someone that looked like him. It was him.</p> <p><b>Trisha:</b> I could see this physically blue woollen cardigan he used to wear with these big brown buttons. [moving her hand as if touching the buttons] With this tweed jacket over the top that he would wear on the dog walks, and erm, I could definitely see him there.</p> <p><b>Natalie:</b> Well, it's just it's just like... he just seems to stand on the landing. It's just like him standing on the landing. It's not like a ghost or anything that you can see through, its like you sat there, you know its him just standing there.</p>	<p>270 - 271</p> <p>75 - 76</p> <p>85 - 89</p> <p>43 - 47</p>
<p><b><u>An endeavour to understanding an intricate experience</u></b></p> <p><b>Nicky:</b> I felt like something had just come over to me and um [pause]... um like really strong. Oh I can't describe it to you...um I don't know</p> <p><b>Josh:</b> Um I've thought about this before. It's a strange one because I've thought, what is that feeling and how can I put that into words?</p> <p><b>Bethany:</b> .... the bannister... leaning over... looking at me. Right earie feeling and it weren't. And it's hard to describe because you're probably not going to get it, but it was strange. because it was like I knew this person, but I didn't. It was bizarre, but I knew this person was.</p>	<p>69 - 71</p> <p>104 - 106</p> <p>108 - 112</p>

<p><u>Rationalisation of the experience</u>  <b>Trisha:</b> I mean sometimes I think, maybe it's just like the implant of a memory, you know, of where ever you are, like in the house.  <b>Natalie:</b> I mean like, I said, I see Mark standing on the landing and I wasn't even thinking about him. I mean, if you were thinking about somebody, then tend to, or you would think that you would see them. But it wasn't that. I mean he is just there, stood on the landing. I've woken up and seen him there too.  <b>Nicky:</b> Science doesn't like this sort of stuff. it doesn't happen. I mean, it's not supposed to happen. Death is death, done. It's... [pause] Once you're dead that's it. But I mean, amongst the experience with my auntie I've had lots of different experiences with ghosts, apparitions, whatever you want to call them. And its ....it is conflicting, but I definitely think there is something else.... these experiences.</p>	<p>113 - 114</p> <p>145 - 149</p> <p>105 - 110</p>
<p><u>Positive attributes provided by the experience</u>  <b>Trisha:</b> You know, that's when I felt the grieving period really move forward a few steps and quite quickly after that, I felt that like I seemed to get to terms with the grief and the loss.  <b>Sarah:</b> At the funeral and I could feel her there. I mean I think the reason I didn't break down whilst I was talking about my nan and reading a poem, was because I could feel her. She used to do this thing where she would put her hands on my shoulders and squeeze them now and again, like a reassuring thing. And that's what I felt then. So, I was like right, I can get through this. My nan is here.  <b>Josh:</b> It's going to sound silly this, but I think it's probably helped me.</p>	<p>94 - 97</p> <p>38 - 44</p> <p>384 - 385</p>
<p><u>One's own view of the external worlds' perceptions</u>  <b>Trisha:</b> A fair few months down the line. I was still grieving and everyone else seemed to have gone through the um grieving state. They seemed to be doing alright you know and seemed to be where they needed to be with it, but, erm, I just wasn't recovering from it. I was still crying all the time.  <b>Pam:</b> Oh no, especially not to my mother. I mean, she would have just poo-pooed it. She didn't have time for things like that.  <b>Gillian:</b> You tell people and, because they don't understand, which is understandable because I didn't understand things right from the beginning. But the thing is, it's embarrassing, because people will turn around to you and say things like "oh what are you? Are you a medium or something?" "I just think to myself why do you take the micky out of something that you might not understand?"  <b>Josh:</b> People um will erm [pause]. People who don't understand things or people who don't have the experience of things, always look at them through the wrong lens so it can only.... unless they experience it for themselves, you rarely get a person who can understand or say something positive. You only tend to get negative and because it can't be explained, or yet to be explained, there is er [pause] er a stigma attached to it, I think.</p>	<p>65 - 69</p> <p>375 - 379</p> <p>131 - 138</p> <p>293 - 301</p>

### **Statement of Originality**

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the result of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in the footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.