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*Invited Article*

## Telepathy in Connection with Telephone Calls, Text Messages and Emails

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**Abstract:** Telepathy in connection with telephone calls is the commonest kind of apparent telepathy in the modern world. It usually occurs between people who have strong bonds or emotional connections with each other, such as parents and children, husbands and wives, and good friends. In experimental tests in which subjects had to identify who, out of four callers, was calling, the average scores were very significantly above the 25% hit rate expected by chance. The callers were selected at random, and the subjects made their guesses before answering the call. These positive results were replicated independently at the universities of Amsterdam, Holland, and Freiburg, Germany. Similar telepathic phenomena seem occur in connection with emails and SMS messages. Experimental tests using all these methods gave significantly above-chance results. Versions of telephone and SMS tests designed to detect precognition, as opposed to telepathy, gave results at the chance level, suggesting that the positive results in the telepathy tests were indeed a result of telepathy rather than precognition. Automated telepathy tests using mobile telephones now enable anyone to participate in this research. These forms of telepathy have evolved in connection with modern communication technologies and probably occur because people's intention to call or send a message can be detected telepathically before the call has been made or the message sent.

**Keywords:** telepathy, telephone call, email, SMS, short message service

### 1. Introduction

Seemingly telepathic experiences in connection with telephone calls are common. Many people have found that they start thinking about a particular person, then the phone rings and that person is on the line. Or else when the telephone starts ringing they have an intuition about who is calling, and turn out to be correct. Indeed, such experiences are the commonest kind of apparent telepathy in the modern world.<sup>2,6,7</sup> Surveys in Britain, Germany, the United States and Argentina have all shown that apparent telephone telepathy generally occurs between people who are closely bonded, like family members and best friends.<sup>7</sup>

Could apparent telephone telepathy merely be a matter of coincidence? Perhaps people often have thoughts about others for no particular reason. By chance, these thoughts may be followed by a telephone call from that person. If people only remember the times they are right and forget the times they are wrong, an illusion of telepathy may be created by a combination of coincidence and selective memory.

Alternatively, a person may be expecting a call

around a particular time from a particular person, but may be unconscious of this expectation. So when the call comes there is no need to invoke telepathy because an unconscious expectation could explain it instead. The trouble is that unconscious expectations are elusive. Indeed, this may be an untestable hypothesis, because if the expectations of telephone calls are unconscious, how can anyone prove that they are really there? And if they are really there, then might they be a *result* of telepathy, rather than an alternative to it?

The only way to resolve these questions is by means of experimental tests that can be evaluated statistically, as described below. These tests gave positive, statistically significant results. So did experiments to test for similar forms of telepathy in connection with emails, SMS (short message service) messages and messages sent through the Internet, as described below. These results raised the further question as to whether telepathy or precognition might be involved. I return to this question towards the end of this article.

### 2. Experimental tests of telephone telepathy

I have developed a simple procedure in which participants receive a call from one of four different



callers. They know who the potential callers are, but do not know which one will be calling in any given test, because the caller was picked at random by the experimenter. They have to guess who the caller is before the caller says anything. By chance they would be right about one time in four, or 25% of the time. In many of these trials, the participants were videotaped continuously to make sure that they do not receive any other telephone calls or emails that could give them any clues. They had to state their guess before picking up the telephone. These videotapes were examined by an independent observer to make sure that there was no possibility of cheating.

My colleague Pam Smart and I conducted hundreds of trials using this method. In our initial series of unfiled tests with 63 different subjects, in a total of 570 trials, the average hit rate was 40%, very significantly above the chance level of 25% ( $p < 1 \times 10^{-15}$ ).<sup>12)</sup>

We then retested four of the most sensitive subjects under more rigorous videotaped conditions. In a total of 271 trials the average hit rate was 45%, again extremely significant statistically, again with astronomical odds against chance ( $p < 1 \times 10^{-12}$ ).<sup>13)</sup> I also carried out a similar experiment for a British TV show, in which the participants were five sisters, members of the Nolan sisters group, a girl band popular in the 1980s. In this experiment the hit rate was 50%, twice the chance level ( $p = 0.05$ ).<sup>11)</sup>

Several subjects commented that they felt more confident about their guesses at some times than at others, and were more often right when they were confident. In order to test this possibility, we asked one of our subjects, whom we tested repeatedly, to record how confident she felt about her guesses before she answered the phone. She did this in a total of 134 videotaped trials, and registered three grades of confidence: "confident," "not very confident," and "just guessing." She was most successful when she felt confident, with a hit rate of 85% ( $p < 1 \times 10^{-9}$ ). When she was not very confident, her hit rate was only 34% ( $p = 0.02$ ), and when she said she was just guessing, her hit rate of 28% was not significantly above the chance level of 25%.<sup>13)</sup>

Pam Smart and I also carried out a series of trials in which two of the four callers were familiar, and the other two were strangers, whose names the participants knew, but whom they had not met. With familiar callers, the hit rate was more than 50%, highly significant statistically. With strangers it was near the chance level, in agreement with the observation that telepathy typically takes place between people who share emotional or social bonds.<sup>13)</sup>

Experiments on telephone telepathy provide a good opportunity to test for the effect, or lack of effect, of distance. In the experiments conducted within Britain, we found no indication that callers who were closer were

more effective than those who are far away. But telephones permit experiments to be carried out with callers on the other side of the earth, up to 12,500 miles away. For these experiments we recruited subjects in London who had recently come to England from Australia and New Zealand, on the opposite side of the earth, and also from South Africa and other distant countries. We compared the subjects' success rates with friends and family members overseas with friends in Britain. The hit rate with callers thousands of miles away averaged 61%, compared with 36% with friends in Britain.<sup>13)</sup> Subjects were actually *more* successful with callers farther away than with those who were much nearer. Why? The most probable explanation is that the majority of the overseas callers were people to whom the subjects were particularly strongly attached, such as mothers and boyfriends, while the callers in Britain were mainly new acquaintances.

The lack of effect of distance on telephone telepathy is in general agreement with previous research on other kinds of telepathy. Telepathic influences did not seem to fall off with distance in experiments either with people<sup>1,3)</sup> or with animals such as dogs, cats, and parrots.<sup>8)</sup> These influences seemed to depend on personal closeness, rather than spatial proximity.

Our findings in telephone telepathy tests have been replicated at the universities of Amsterdam, Holland<sup>4)</sup> and Freiburg, Germany,<sup>5)</sup> with statistically significant positive results.

I have now developed an automated telephone telepathy test that works on cell phones. In this automated test, participants register online, giving the names and cell phone numbers of two family members or friends who can act as callers. One is designated caller 1 and the other called 2. The computer then picks one of these two people at random, and sends the chosen person a text message asking her to call the subject at a landline number connected to the computer. When she does so, she is put on hold while the computer telephones the subject. The caller ID on the subject's phone says "telephone telepathy test", and a phone message tells the subject that one of his two callers is on the line waiting to speak to him. He is asked to guess who it is by pressing number 1 or 2. Having guessed, the line opens up and he talks to the caller, thus receiving instant feedback. In this test the hit rate expected by chance is 50%. By January 2014, with more than 600 trials, the actual hit rate was 56%, significantly above chance ( $p = 0.001$ ). This automated test provides a simple way in which large numbers of subjects can be screened for their ability to achieve above chance hit rates, so that they can then be tested again under more rigorous conditions.



### 3. Telepathic emails and SMS messages

The evolution of telepathy is still going on. Email and SMS telepathy generally follows the same pattern as telephone telepathy. People think of someone they have not thought about for a while, and shortly afterward receive an email or an SMS message from that person.

In 2002, I started experimental research on email telepathy, with the help of Pam Smart, using a modification of the procedure we used in tests for telephone telepathy. Each subject chose four friends or family members to act as emailers. We selected one of the emailers at random, and asked him to email the subject at an exact time soon afterwards, for example at 10:30 A.M. This person duly emailed the subject, sending a copy of this email to the experimenter. The subject was told when the email would be sent, and was asked to email the experimenter one minute before, at 10:29, to say what her guess was. The times at which the messages were sent were automatically recorded on the emails.

As in the telephone telepathy trials, there was a 25% chance of being right by random guessing. Smart and I tested 50 participants in a total of 552 trials. Their average hit rate was 43%, very significantly above the chance level ( $p < 1 \times 10^{-18}$ ).<sup>14)</sup> We then retested 5 of the higher-scoring participants under filmed conditions, and their average hit rate was 47%, again very significantly above the 25% expected by chance alone ( $p < 1 \times 10^{-7}$ ).<sup>14)</sup>

I followed up this experiment with a new automated test in which the subjects registered online with the names and email addresses of 3 senders. A computer selected a sender at random, and asked him to send an email message to the subject via the computer. The computer then asked the subject to guess the sender's name, and delivered the message only after receiving the guess.

Because there were only 3 senders, by random guessing, subjects would have been right about 33.3% of the time. In more than 400 trials, the average hit rate was in fact 41.8%, significantly above the chance level ( $p = 0.0001$ ).<sup>9)</sup> This automated test differed from the earlier non-automated test in that subjects were being asked to guess who had sent them a message several minutes earlier, rather than thinking about them simultaneously, which may have weakened the effect.

I used a similar automated method to test for telepathy in connection with SMS messages. Subjects registered online on my website, and gave the names and cell phone numbers of three senders. The computer selected one of the three senders at random and asked him to send an SMS message to the subject via the phone number of the computer. The computer then asked the subject to guess the sender's name, and delivered the message after receiving the guess. By random guessing,

subjects would have been right about 33.3% of the time. In fact in more than 800 trials the average hit rate was 37.9%, significantly above the chance level ( $p = 0.001$ ).<sup>11)</sup> When high-scoring subjects were retested under filmed conditions the hit rate was 44.2%.<sup>10)</sup> Again, subjects were guessing who had already sent them a text message, and this lack of simultaneity may have weakened the effect.

### 4. Telephone precognition?

In the discussion in this paper, I have assumed that the results of the telephone tests, like those of email, SMS and messaging telepathy tests were indeed a result of telepathy. But this need not necessarily be the case. Perhaps they depended instead on precognition, or perhaps a combination of telepathy and precognition. The subjects may have felt in advance with whom they would soon be in contact, rather than picking up telepathic influences from that person.

I therefore carried out precognitive versions of the automated telephone and SMS tests in order to compare their results with the telepathic versions. In these precognition tests, the subjects were asked to guess who, out of three senders, was about to call them or send an SMS message. Only after they had guessed did the computer pick the sender at random, and send her a SMS message asking her to call or text the subject. With telephone calls, there were 240 hits out of 722 trials, or 33.2%; with SMS messages, 110 hits out of 339 trials, or 32.4%. These figures were not significantly different from the chance level of 33.3%, indicating that no detectable precognition was occurring under these conditions. This suggests that the results of the telepathy tests were indeed a result of telepathy rather than precognition.

### 5. Conclusions

As this discussion shows, the most frequent types of apparent telepathy in the modern world occur in connection with telephone calls, and with other technological forms of communication like emails and SMS messages. The development of these technologies has led to a great increase in the ease and frequency with which people communicate at a distance, and, as a by-product, has produced many more opportunities for telepathic influences. In order to telephone someone, or send her a text message or email, it is necessary first to have the intention to do so and then to think about that person while dialling her or writing her a message. These thoughts and intentions directed towards the person may then be picked up and cause that person to start thinking about the sender, or enable that person to feel whom a call is from when the phone starts ringing.



The experiments show that these seemingly telepathic effects are not simply a matter of chance coincidence and selective memory. They seem to involve psi effects that are probably telepathic. Tests for precognition showed no noticeable effects.

These statistical, multiple-choice tests are necessarily artificial and probably produce weaker effects than occur under more natural conditions, for at least three reasons. First, in real life, people call another person or send a message because they have a motive or a need. In these tests, motivations and emotions were minimized because the callers or senders were simply taking part in a randomized experiment. Second, these tests made the subjects self-conscious about their intuitions; they had to think about their guesses and consider which of the designated callers or senders might be contacting them. Thinking probably has an inhibitory effect on intuitions, which are not formed through rational discursive thought and the consideration of alternative possibilities. Third, subjects were sometimes afraid of guessing wrongly, and when they made wrong guesses, they became doubtful about their own abilities, emotions that may also have inhibited their telepathic abilities. Nevertheless, despite these problems, these tests still gave above chance, statistically significant results.

Animals like dogs and cats do not suffer from these human problems, and that may be one reason why their intuitive powers seem stronger and better developed than those of their human companions. Telepathy appears to be widespread in the animal kingdom, as discussed in my book *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home*.<sup>8)</sup> Humans are telepathic not because they are special, but because telepathy is part of animal nature, related to the interconnections among members of social groups. It is normal, not paranormal; natural, not supernatural.

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