

82/10 – “An investigation into the prevalence and phenomenology of synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting”

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Duração prevista/*Estimated duration*: 2011/03 - 2012/04

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Objectives: The purpose of this research was twofold. Firstly, to investigate how common synchronicity experiences are in the clinical setting and whether there are any differences between clinicians in the reporting, interpretation or explanation of synchronicity experiences. Secondly, to explore the phenomenology of synchronicity experiences, focusing on how clinicians make sense of these experiences.

Methods: The research used a mixed-methods design. The first stage of the research involved a nationwide on-line survey which was completed by a representative sample of clinicians. The second stage involved a qualitative study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists who reported synchronicity experiences in their therapeutic sessions.

Results: Preliminary analysis of the closed items from the survey suggests that clinicians are more likely to have experienced a synchronicity event if they are female, if they practise as a psychotherapist and have been working within their profession for ten years or more. Additionally, psychologists are more likely to report that synchronicities are chance coincidences that individuals ascribe meaning to, whereas psychotherapists tend to report that synchronicities occur because the client needs to discuss important unconscious material. A thematic content analysis on the open ended data is in progress and a more sophisticated quantitative analysis will be conducted on the closed item data once the survey has closed. Themes from the IPA study will be reported at the conference alongside participant extracts to illuminate how they are grounded in the data.

Conclusion/Discussion: An overwhelming outcome of the research is that synchronicity experiences are seen as a useful tool for therapy. Therefore, on a therapeutic level, it is necessary to explore what implications any reported synchronicity experiences have on the therapeutic relationship and clinical outcome of the client. Findings may support a more integrative approach to therapy that acknowledges anomalous experiences, such as synchronicity events, as subjectively real for the client. On a parapsychological level findings might shed some light on whether ESP is involved in synchronicity. If so, it would be an example of how psi might operate in a real world setting.

Publications: Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11*(2), 261-271.

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Keywords: Interpretative phenomenological analysis, synchronicity/meaningful coincidence, clinical setting/psychotherapy, on-line survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews.

139/10 – “Mobile Consciousness: Developing a Smartphone Application for REG Exploration and Distributed Consciousness Research”

Synchronicity Experiences in the Clinical Setting

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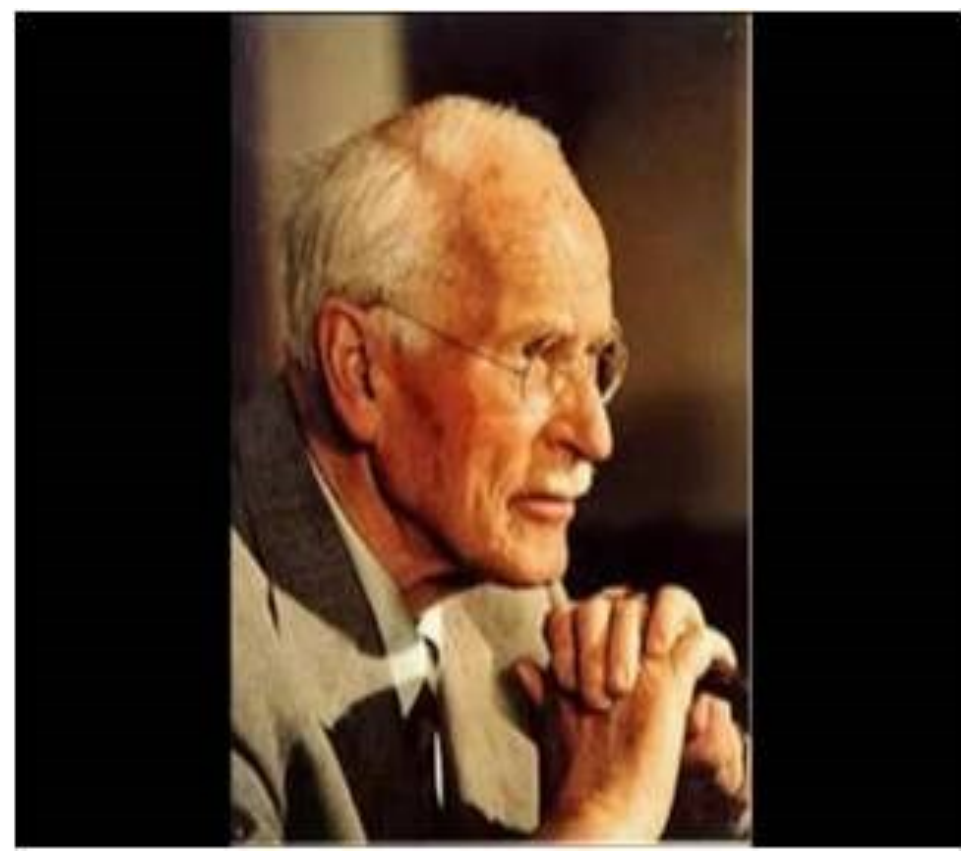
1. Research Objectives

Are there any differences between clinicians (counsellors, psychologists, psychotherapists) in the reporting, interpretation or explanation of synchronicity experiences?

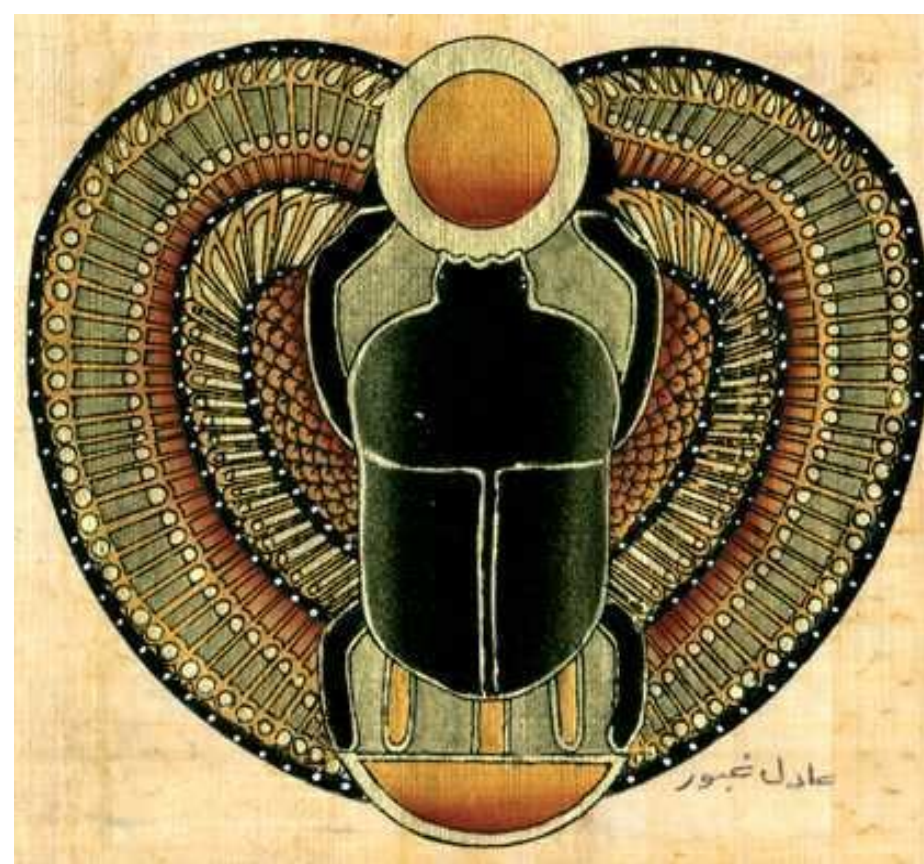
To explore the phenomenology of synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting. How do clinicians make sense of synchronicity experiences?

2. What are synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting?

Synchronicity is a meaningful coincidence between two or more events occurring simultaneously or at a future point in time (Jung, 1952; Main, 2007).



Research suggests synchronicity events occur in clinical settings and that they can promote personal growth (cf. Nachman, 2009). For example, therapists may dream information about clients which is later verified as correct (Ehrenwald, 1948) or the therapeutic session becomes part of the synchronistic event (e.g. Scarab beetle scenario)



However, we know relatively little about how these events are interpreted by clinicians.

3. Data was collected using a nationwide on-line survey and in-depth interviews

13. What is your explanation for why synchronicity events might occur in a clinical setting? Please indicate how much you agree/disagree with each of the following statements.

	Please select one of the following				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
a. A collective unconscious exists and all minds are connected.	0	0	0	0	0
b. I believe in fate and that synchronicities are part of an underlying hidden design.	0	0	0	0	0
c. Synchronicity experiences are adaptive: they help an individual towards personal growth.	0	0	0	0	0
d. Synchronicities occur due to transference, countertransference and the therapeutic relationship.	0	0	0	0	0
e. Synchronicities occur because some important unconscious material needs to be expressed.	0	0	0	0	0
f. Synchronicities are chance coincidences that individuals sometimes ascribe meaning to.	0	0	0	0	0
g. Synchronicities are a sign of 'divine intervention' in the spiritual or religious sense.	0	0	0	0	0

14. Do you have a personal definition/explanation of synchronicity? Or any other opinions on the topic you wish to share?

Survey respondents

bacp 53 Counsellors
 Median age = 55, range 32-71
 Females = 39, Males = 14

The British Psychological Society 76 Psychologists
 Median age = 47, range 31-74
 Females = 51, Males = 25

UKCP 84 Psychotherapists
 Median age = 58, range 20-77
 Females = 53, Males = 31

Interview participants

- 3 counsellors
- 3 psychologists
- 3 psychotherapists

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee.

Response rate = 10% which is higher than surveys with similar samples (e.g. Dubrow-Marshall, 2010)

4. Findings from the survey identified differences between clinicians in their explanation for synchronicity experiences

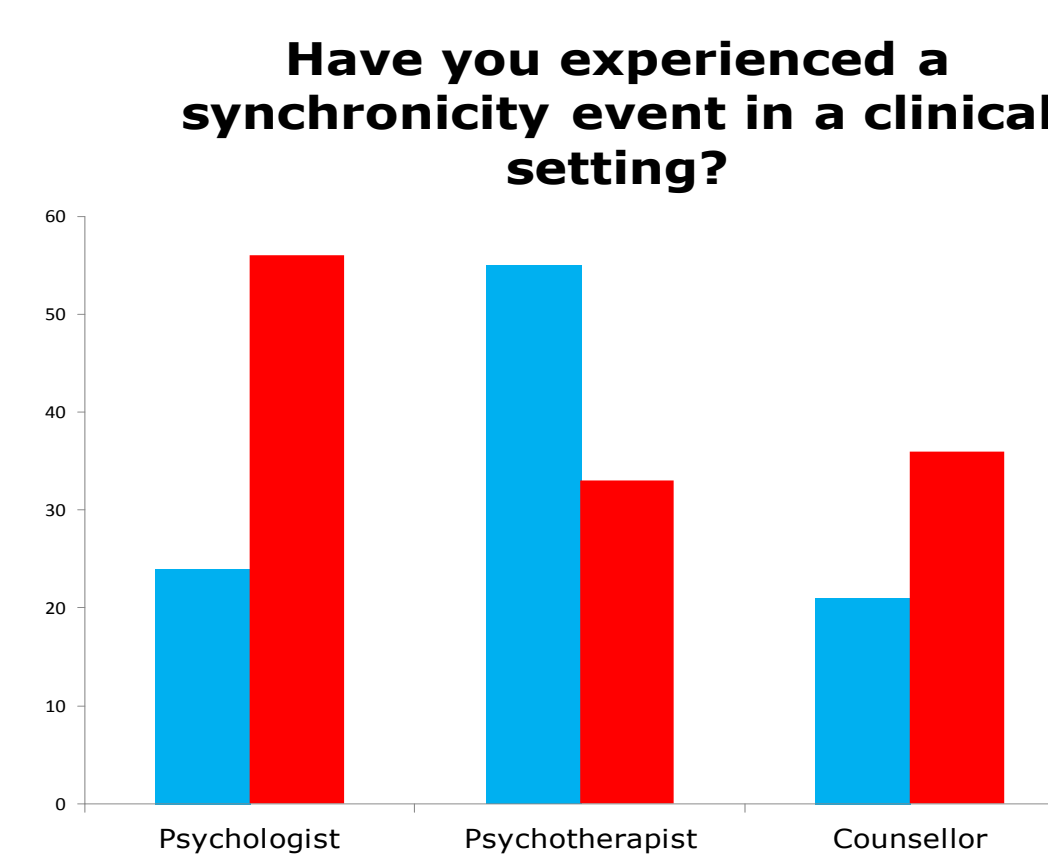


Figure 1. Number of clinicians that reported synchronicity experiences in the clinical setting

44% (N = 100) of the sample reported that they had experienced synchronicity in the clinical setting.

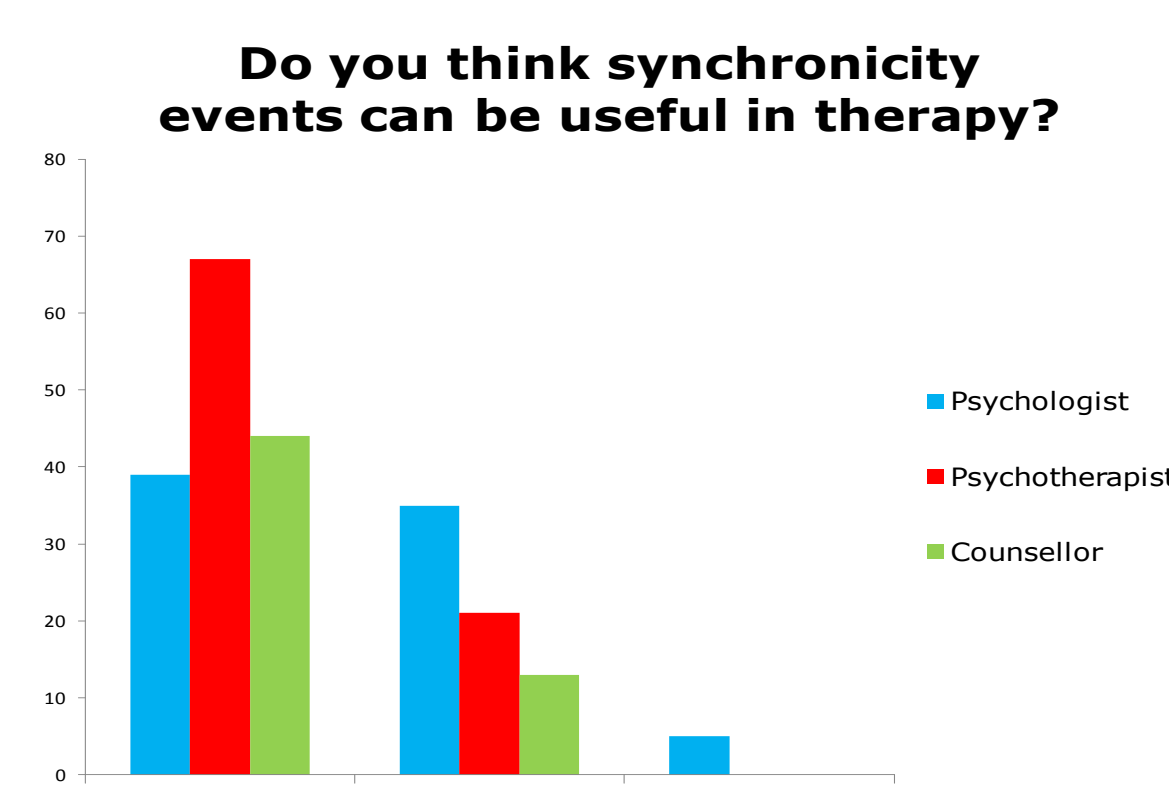


Figure 2. Number of clinicians that felt synchronicity events were useful in the clinical setting

67% (N = 150) of the sample felt that synchronicity events could be useful experiences in therapy and 31% (N = 51) felt that they might be useful.

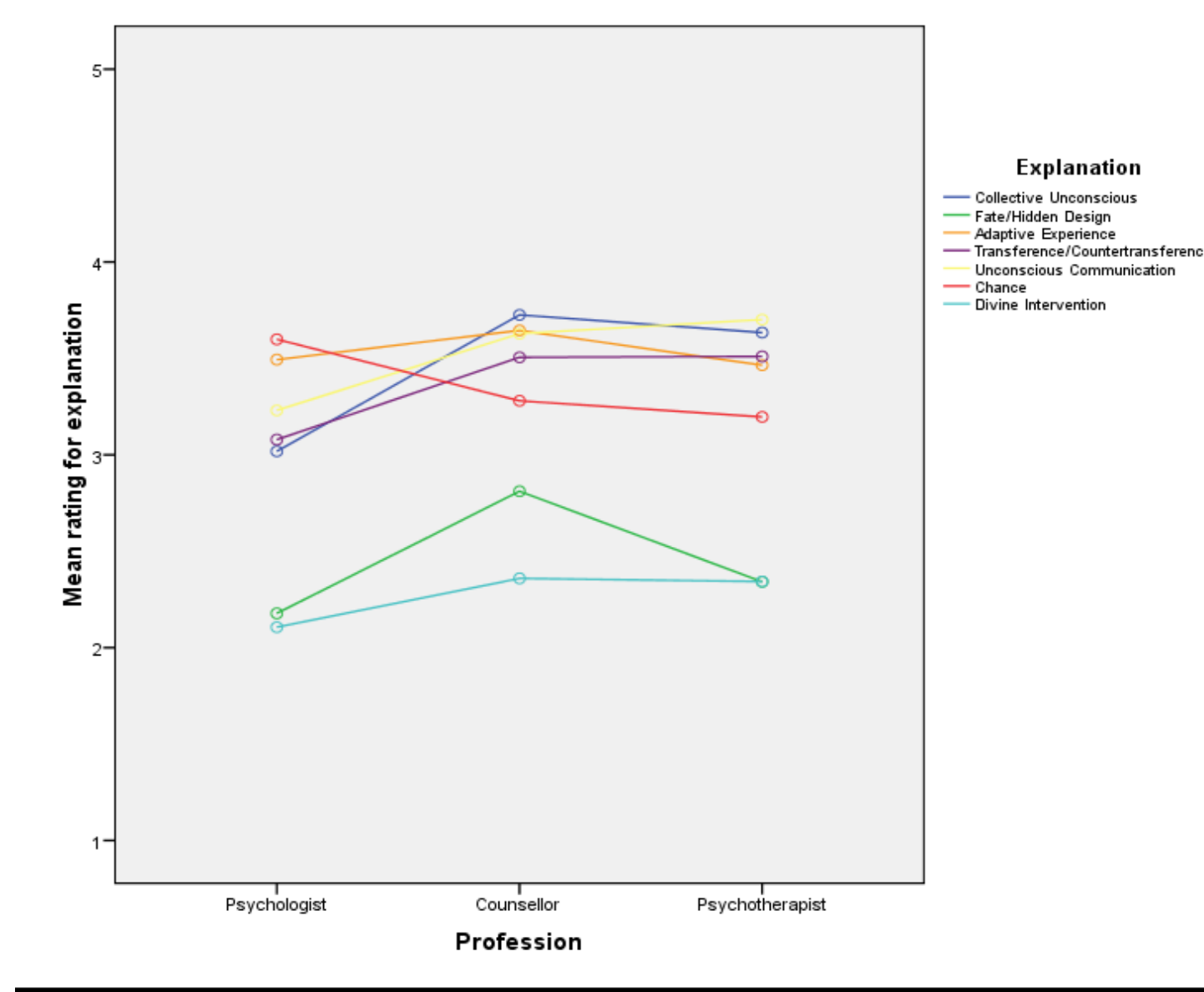


Figure 3. Line chart for 3 x 7 mixed factorial ANCOVA

As predicted, there was a significant main effect of synchronicity explanation type ($F(4.33, 809.07) = 10.71, p < .001$) and professional group membership ($F(2, 187) = 5.45, p = .005$) for the ratings of synchronicity explanation. There was also a significant profession x explanation interaction effect ($F(8.65, 809.07) = 2.86, p = .003$).

5. Interviews were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996)

Table 1. Preliminary master table of themes

Superordinate	Subtheme
Sense of connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moment of meeting • "Living the symbolic life" • Chance coincidence vs. anomalous linkage
Therapeutic process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication catalysts • Facilitates growth • Increases the therapeutic relationship
Professional issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on practitioner/clinician • "Trained to park it" vs. need to recognise • Disclosure decisions • Conceptual framework: The need for a paradigm shift

6. What are the implications?

Synchronicity experiences are perceived to be a useful 'tool' for the therapeutic process, which has important implications for training and supervision.

Further research could include an investigation of the personality characteristics of clinicians who report synchronistic experiences

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