

Chris Roe

Chris Roe is professor of psychology at the University of Northampton and director of its Centre for Psychology and Social Sciences, which includes a research group devoted to Exceptional Experience and Consciousness Studies (EECS). Roe's research interests are focused around understanding the nature of anomalous experiences, including the psychology of belief and self-deception. He has utilized experimental approaches to test psi abilities, in particular those involving psychological factors. Most recently, his focus has shifted to investigating unconscious measures of psi and correlating these with behavioural and personality measures.

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Biography

Chris Roe was awarded his BSc and PhD degrees by the University of Edinburgh, and was a member of the Koestler Parapsychology Unit under Prof Robert Morris. His PhD explored ways in which psychic effects might be simulated using more conventional psychological techniques, known collectively as 'cold reading'. He left Edinburgh to teach research methods in the psychology department of St Andrew's University and in 1995 moved to the University of Northampton (at that time known as Nene College). His research at Northampton has continued his interest in the psychology of anomalous experience and has concerned topics ranging from spirituality and well-being, psychic deception, correlates of paranormal belief and experience, phenomenology of paranormal experience, and experimental tests of claimed phenomena of extrasensory perception and psychokinesis.

Roe served as president of the Society for Psychical Research from April 2018 to May 2021 and has previously served as president of the Parapsychological Association, council member of the Society for Psychical Research, and as chair of the BPS Transpersonal Psychology Section. He served as editor of the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* from 2003 to 2018.

Research

Psychic Readings

One of Roe's earliest studies into psi was carried out as part of his PhD and tested the hypothesis that clients of psychics might psychically influence the psychic in such a way that the reading is accurate. Twenty-seven subjects took part in what they were told was a consultation with a psychic over the Internet, although the reading for each was in fact either created by a random number generator randomly selecting elements or chosen from a pool of control readings.

Subjects rated each element for accuracy. The live RNG-selected items were rated by volunteers as more accurate than control items, although the difference failed to

reach significance ($p = 0.097$), giving some support to the client influence hypothesis.[1](#)

Dream ESP

Roe investigated the role of experimenter and sender in dream-ESP research. Forty participants acting as receivers recorded their dream mentations, with varying conditions on alternate nights. In the 'no-sender' variation, a video clip was randomly selected as target and played repeatedly in the early morning. In the other, a sender would watch the clip and try to attempt to communicate its content to the receiver. Although both sender and no-sender conditions showed above-chance scoring (30% and 35% respectively), neither reached statistical significance ($p = 0.14$).[2](#) He recently summarized the series of dream ESP experiments that have taken place at Northampton[3](#) reporting that 57 of the 183 trials had been successful, giving a 31.1% hit rate where 25% would be expected just by chance.

Ganzfeld

In other research exploring the relationship between mild altered states of consciousness and ESP, Roe considered the role of the sender during ganzfeld telepathy experiments.[4](#) A random number generator placed near the receiver acted as a proxy receiver during a ganzfeld sending period, randomly picking statements. Independent judging gave a hit rate of 35% to the human receivers and 32.5% to the RNG-generated 'mentation', suggesting a distant influence of psychokinesis on the mentation and utterances of the receiver in a ganzfeld experiment.

In another ganzfeld experiment – in which sender, no-sender conditions were used and the receiver was unaware which applied – the results indicated no difference in scoring.[5](#) To gain more understanding of the nature of the sender-receiver relationship, the experiment was repeated in which the degree of randomness of the target systems altered, from low random sources (random number tables) to intermediate (pseudo-random number generator) to high randomness (true random number generator). Additionally the trait of stability of the sender was measured. Roe found a very significant 3-way interaction effect ($p = 0.001$) between target randomness (otherwise known as 'lability'), the degree of the sender's psychological stability and psi scoring: the most positive outcomes were produced by highly stable senders influencing highly random (labile) systems.[6](#)

In a replication study that was extended to explore sending strategies (active/willing versus passive/absorbed) and feedback type (delayed versus immediate), a significant interaction was found between target lability and sender lability. As before, however, the interaction effect between sending strategy and feedback type on psi scoring was not significant, although a significant effect of only feedback type on psi-scoring was found.[7](#)

In 2020, the *Journal of Parapsychology* published three remote viewing/ganzfeld comparison studies carried out by the Northampton team, comprising 118 trials. Some subjects [remote viewed](#) a distant location after undergoing a ganzfeld induction procedure and their scores were compared with those obtained by others

who did not undergo an induction. The overall ganzfeld induction hit rate of 39% was highly significant by the conservative first choice method ($p = 0.0007$), while the more appropriate sum-of-ranks method gave yet more convincing support ($p = 0.000012$). Remote viewings without induction gave a hit rate of only 27.5% – modestly significant ($p = 0.036$).[8](#)

Roe together with PhD student Michael Daw are testing the idea that veganism is a psi-conducive lifestyle by running vegans through ganzfeld testing. This project is in its infancy but early results suggest a clear advantage over non-vegans (47% hit rate where 25% is expected by chance and 31.5% is the ganzfeld average).[9](#)

Camouflaging ESP and PK

Roe explored the relationship between ESP and PK performance, testing for both and using a common protocol to control for expectancy and experimenter effects. Forty volunteers completed a computer-based game in which half the runs were presented as PK and the other half as ESP, while actual ESP and PK runs were randomly selected in each category. Overall scoring was at chance: no firm conclusions could be drawn from the lack of significant relationship between performance in the four conditions (actual and camouflaged ESP and PK runs) and psi scoring. Of all the psychological measures, only anxiety showed a relationship.[10](#)

I-Ching

In a further investigation of the effect of lability (propensity to randomness) Roe conducted a study using the ancient Chinese I-Ching divination procedure. Thirty-four volunteers were measured for lability and then decided upon a personal question to ask the I-Ching. Answers were chosen randomly, either by a RNG (true randomness) or random number tables (low randomness). As with the earlier research, the most labile systems (RNG) gave more accurate descriptions, although not at a significant level. This relationship was repeated when looking at participants, with the most labile groups performing the best, although not reaching significance.[11](#)

Morphic Resonance

Sheldrake's theory of Morphic resonance states that patterns of behaviour are shared by members of a group or species through a shared morphic field. To test this experimentally, Roe has utilized a word-based study design aimed at discovering whether the collective understanding of Chinese characters shared by billions of Chinese people could be 'transmitted' through morphic resonance to Westerners who did not speak or read Chinese. Sixty volunteers were exposed to five genuine Chinese characters and five false characters and asked to identify any characters (false and real) they could remember from a sheet consisting of those symbols and a number of decoys. Overall, volunteers accurately recognized more of the genuine than false characters ($p = 0.020$), giving some support to Sheldrake's ideas.[12](#)

In a second such study, carried out with [David Vernon](#) and [Glenn Hitchman](#) and published in 2021,¹³ a sample of 154 participants completed an implicit preference task and an explicit identification task online, with task order counterbalanced. In each task, participants were shown, in a random order, 12 pairs of characters (one real and one decoy). In the implicit task they were required to identify which of the characters they preferred and in the explicit task they were asked to identify which of the pair was the real character.

The results showed that, contrary to prediction, participants significantly preferred the decoy Chinese characters. There was no difference in explicit identification rates and no correlations between performance and belief in psi. Roe and coworkers concluded that these findings failed to support the idea of morphic resonance and are more parsimoniously accounted for in terms of an aesthetic preference for the decoy characters.

Non-Intentional Precognition

Roe has explored non-intentional precognition, where unconscious drives influence performance on psi tasks. This study tested the question of whether latent inhibition (the ability to filter out irrelevant extraneous stimuli) can predict an individual's sensitivity to psi stimuli. Fifty volunteers completed auditory discrimination tests to measure their latent inhibition, together with binary precognition tests camouflaged as non-psi tasks. Overall, the volunteers scored marginally significantly ($p = 0.06$), but latent inhibition was found to be unrelated to precognition performance.¹⁴ A second non-intentional psi task found a small non-significant psi effect overall; however, there were significant correlations between relaxation, perceptions of positive interactions with the experimenter and psi performance.¹⁵

Paranormal Belief

Testing the hypothesis that exposure to the paranormal causes an increase in belief, a thousand residents of Edinburgh, randomly drawn from a representative sample, were questioned about their interactions with psychics. A surprisingly high proportion (29.5%) reported having attended a reading at some time. Their impressions were generally favourable: many viewed their reading as having been accurate, specific and of value, but high appraisals failed to translate into increased belief in the paranormal.¹⁶

In another study, Roe tested the hypothesis that paranormal beliefs are motivated by feelings of anxiety, helplessness and lack of control. In this hypothesis, the perceptions of order and self-importance that some paranormal beliefs engender cause a reduction in anxiety and afford feelings of control in an unpredictable world. Sixty-five participants completed psychological measures of anxiety, paranormal belief and perceived control over stressful events. No relationship was discovered between perceived control over future life events and paranormal belief. However, anxiety correlated significantly with both perceived control and paranormal belief, offering qualified support to the hypothesis.¹⁷

Previous research has suggested an association between levels of narcissism and belief in the paranormal. Roe ran a study comparing more specific measures of paranormal belief and narcissism among 75 participants, who completed both the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and two measures of paranormal belief. Contrary to previous findings, there was no relationship between narcissism and one measure of belief; however, there was a significant positive relationship with another belief measure, the Australian Sheep-Goat scale. [18](#)

After-Death Communication

Roe and coworkers conducted an online survey on after-death communications (ADC) which was completed by 1004 English, French and Spanish respondents. Sixty-two percent of ADCs occurred during sleep; however, daytime cases involving the senses were also commonly reported with sight (46.4%), hearing (43.3%), touch (47.8%) and smell (27.6%) being registered as the dominant modality.

The feeling of a sense of presence was experienced by 34.3% of respondents. Women were more likely than men to experience an ADC during sleep ($p = 0.018$) but there were no gender differences with regard to experiencing an ADC with any of the sense modalities. There were a range of significant sense modality differences between English, French and Spanish respondents, suggesting marked cultural influences on the phenomenology of after-death experiences.

Of evidential importance, 24.4% of respondents reported receiving information from the deceased (usually in relation to the circumstances of death) that they had not known or could have inferred. After-death communications were generally regarded as meaningful and provided comfort, increasing a sense of spirituality. The authors caution against the psychologically adaptive outcomes of ADCs being stymied by skeptically inclined mental health professionals pathologizing the experience. [19](#)

Roe is currently running a large survey investigation of ADCs funded by a Swiss foundation (that wishes to remain anonymous). The aim is to investigate key features of the phenomenon, especially relating to the claim that it provides evidence of survival of consciousness after death. Roe is extending the survey to German and Dutch language versions and is about to launch a Chinese version. [20](#)

Pagan Healing

A paper published in 2020 with Charmaine Sonnex and Elizabeth Roxburgh describes a controlled study of pagan healing over distance. Forty-four participants were divided into two groups, to be treated consecutively. Each participant provided a photograph and personal item together with a written request for a significant life change to be used during the intervention in order to provide a focal point for the healer. Overall, there was significant improvement ($p = 0.025$) for both psychological and physical measures for the entire participant pool. However, no difference was observed between the two groups, suggesting any improvement is psychological rather than paranormal (pagan spell casting) in nature. [21](#)

Mediumship

A Swiss-funded project, still in its early stages, is exploring the experiences of neophyte mediums and their clients in the context of mental health / clinical parapsychology.

Meta-Analyses

Roe has carried out several reviews of the psi research literature.

Dream-ESP

Fifty dream-ESP studies for the period 1966 to 2016 were reviewed. Overall highly significant evidence of an effect ($p = 5.19 \times 10^{-8}$). No significant differences were found between different modes of ESP (telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition), nor between dynamic and static targets. Also, improvements in methodology over time were not correlated with effect sizes, contradicting an argument based on methodological flaws that is commonly made by sceptics.[22](#)

Non-Contact Healing

Fifty-seven human and 49 non-human studies were reviewed to estimate the efficacy of various healing modalities (johrei, reiki, therapeutic touch). Both sets of studies found highly significant evidence even after the low-quality studies were removed. The non-human studies gave larger effects than the studies of healing on humans.[23](#)

Spirituality and Wellbeing.

Roe contributed a chapter for the 2020 publication *Spirituality and Wellbeing: Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religious experience and health*. Here he discusses recent developments in parapsychology, arguing for the therapeutic benefits of developing an understanding of paranormal research that can be shared with mental health professionals.[24](#)

Michael Duggan

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Roe (1996)
- [2.](#) Roe et al. (2002)
- [3.](#) Roe (2016).
- [4.](#) Roe & Holt (2005).
- [5.](#) Roe & Holt (2006)
- [6.](#) Holt & Roe (2006)
- [7.](#) Holt & Roe (2007)
- [8.](#) Roe et al. (2020).
- [9.](#) Personal communication 28 March 2023.
- [10.](#) Roe et al. (2006).
- [11.](#) Roe (2014)
- [12.](#) Robbins & Roe (2010).
- [13.](#) Vernon et al. (2021).
- [14.](#) Hitchman et al. (2015)
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- [16.](#) Roe (1998).
- [17.](#) Roe & Bell (2016).
- [18.](#) Roe & Morgan (2002).
- [19.](#) Elsaesser et al. (2020).
- [20.](#) Personal communication 28 March 2023.
- [21.](#) Sonnex et al. (2020).
- [22.](#) Storm et al. (2017).
- [23.](#) Roe et al. (2014).
- [24.](#) Roe (2020).