

Wanted: The Poltergeist¹

Description and discussion of a collection of 54 RSPK reports of the years 1947–1986, kept at the Freiburg Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health²

MONIKA HUESMANN, FRIEDERIKE SCHRIEVER³

Abstract – 54 RSPK reports of the Freiburg Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health (IGPP) from 1947 to 1986 were analyzed quantitatively-statistically. A specially developed questionnaire was used to collect the most detailed information possible on the reported phenomena, the poltergeist victims, the focal person, the witnesses, and the investigation and documentation. While Part 1 of this evaluation is devoted to the phenomenology of RSPK phenomena in general,

1 This article is an English translation of the original German article from the *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie* (1989, 31: 52–107). It is reprinted with the kind permission of the editors of the ZPGP. The translation was done by Friederike Schriever.

The translation is based on terminology such as that last published by Thalbourne in 2003. Following Pratt and Roll we use the term RSPK (= *Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis*) “to refer to *paranormal* physical effects which occur repeatedly over a period of time, especially used as a neutral description of poltergeist disturbances” (Thalbourne, 2003: 106). When poltergeist disturbances are associated with a particular locality (especially a building), we use the terminus haunting (see Thalbourne, 2003: 50). The difficulty of defining and translating the terms can already be read in Goss (1979).

2 The present joint work comprises two parts: Part I and the appendix were written by Friederike Schriever, Part II by Monika Huesmann, the “General Introduction” by the authors jointly. – A first version was presented at the IVth Workshop of the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Parapsychologie e. V. in Offenburg (October 16–18, 1987) (Eberhard Bauer, Editor *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 1989).

3 **Monika Huesmann** is a teacher, school psychologist and psychotherapist for children and youth. She studied education science in Essen and psychology in Bochum. She completed courses of practical work at *The Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health (IGPP)* in Freiburg. Previously she worked in the pharmaceutical field.

Friederike Schriever is a psychologist and teacher. She studied mathematics, biology, education science, and psychology at the Universities of Bielefeld and Freiburg and worked as a research assistant at the IGPP from 1985 to 1987. She was research associate at the Department of Education Science at the Free University of Berlin from 1988 to 1993 and at the University of Gießen from 1999 to 2001. She obtained her Ph.D. in 1998 with a thesis on cognitive structures behind paranormal beliefs. She has been the owner and head of a private institute for dyslectic children since 2002.

Part 2 focuses on poltergeist victims and focus persons (FPs). The comparison to the phenomenology of RSPK in existing case collections revealed clear similarities, but also striking differences, e.g., regarding the average duration of poltergeist phenomena. Two factors were found via a factor analysis, which were confirmed by a subsequent cluster analysis. The first factor was called the “novelty factor” or “structure factor,” since it only includes items that point to something that is novel, adds to an earlier situation, or introduces structural changes (e.g., “apports,” “penetration,” “graffiti”). The second factor is called “modification factor” or “behavioral factor,” because it is defined by items that describe modifications in the state of objects present (e.g., “objects suddenly disappear,” “cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves”). The analysis of the data on poltergeist victims and FPs showed that they come from all parts of the population. Subjectively, they feel very much burdened by the poltergeist occurrences. Frequently, they are socially isolated after the outbreak. Once the phenomena have faded away, they strongly tend to repress related recollections. 56% of FPs were male. At the time the phenomena begin, a large number of the FPs are in puberty. One third of the FPs report bodily and psychological peculiarities during or immediately prior to RSPK phenomena. With unusual frequency, they complain about conversion-neurotic symptoms (such as psychologically caused paralysis, narrowing of consciousness, etc.) as well as about “absentes” of psychogenic or neurological origin). There is insufficient documentation to allow decision on the question as to whether these peculiarities are reactions to the RSPK occurrences that might be found in other poltergeist victims as well. FPs are exposed to many social and psychological stress factors. Relatively many of them live with only one parent or with grandparents. Some of the FPs confess to having used fraudulent manipulation. This does not normally imply that presumed paranormal phenomena did not occur. Our data about FPs largely correspond to the ones Roll (e.g., 1977) found in his investigations.

Keywords: RSPK – poltergeist phenomena – focus person – factor analysis – effects of RSPK on poltergeist victims

Steckbrief des Spuks Darstellung und Diskussion einer Sammlung von 54 RSPK-Berichten des Freiburger Instituts für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene aus den Jahren 1947–1986

Zusammenfassung⁴ – 54 RSPK-Berichte des Freiburger Instituts für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP) aus den Jahren 1947 bis 1986 wurden quantitativ-statistisch ausgewertet. Mit Hilfe eines eigens entwickelten Fragebogens wurden möglichst detaillierte Informationen zu den berichteten Phänomenen, den Spukbetroffenen, der Fokusperson, den Zeugen sowie zur Aufklärung und Dokumentation erhoben. Während Teil 1 dieser Auswertung der Phänomenologie des Spuks allgemein gewidmet ist, fokussiert Teil 2 auf Spukbetroffene und Spukfokuspersonen (FP). Der Vergleich zur Phänomenologie des Spuks in vorhandenen Fallsammlungen erbrachte deutliche Übereinstimmungen, aber auch markante Unterschiede z.B. bezüglich der durchschnittlichen

4 Eine erweiterte deutsche Zusammenfassung findet sich am Ende des Artikels.

Dauer des Spuks. Über eine Faktorenanalyse wurden zwei Faktoren gefunden, die durch eine anschließende Clusteranalyse bestätigt wurden. Der erste Faktor wurde „Novum- oder Strukturfaktor“ genannt, da in ihn nur Items eingehen, die auf etwas Neues, Hinzukommendes, strukturell Veränderndes weisen (z. B. „Apporte“, „Penetrationen“, „Graffiti“). Den zweiten Faktor bezeichneten wir als „Veränderungs-“ oder „Verhaltensfaktor“, da er durch Items definiert wird, die beschreiben, dass etwas Vorhandenes Veränderung erfährt (z. B. „Gegenstände verschwinden plötzlich“, „Schränke, Türen, Fenster öffnen sich von selbst“). Die Auswertung der Daten zu Spukbetroffenen und FP ergab, dass sie aus allen Bevölkerungsschichten kommen. Sie fühlen sich subjektiv durch die Spukereignisse stark belastet und werden sozial oft isoliert. Nach Abklingen der Phänomene verdrängen sie ihre Erinnerung daran in hohem Maße. 56% der FP war männlichen Geschlechts. Ein großer Teil der FP befindet sich beim Beginn der Phänomene im Pubertätsalter. FP berichten zu einem Drittel über körperliche oder psychische Auffälligkeiten während oder unmittelbar vor Spukphänomenen. Sie klagen ungewöhnlich häufig über konversionsneurotische Symptome (psychogene Lähmungen, Einengung des Bewusstseinsfeldes usw.) sowie über psychogene oder neurologisch verursachte „Absenzen“. Inwieweit diese Auffälligkeiten Reaktionen auf das Spukgeschehen sind und auch bei anderen Spukbetroffenen vorkommen, ist nicht genügend dokumentiert. FP sind vielen sozialen und psychischen Stressoren ausgesetzt. Relativ häufig leben sie nur bei einem Elternteil oder bei den Großeltern. Ein Teil der FP legt ein Geständnis über Manipulationen ab. Dies bedeutet in der Regel nicht, dass keine paranormalen Phänomene existierten. Die Übereinstimmung der Daten über FP mit Ergebnissen einer Untersuchung von Roll (z. B. 1977) ist groß.

Schlüsselwörter: RSPK – Spukphänomene – Fokusperson – Faktorenanalyse – Auswirkungen des Spuks auf Spukopfer

It is about an occult jugglery of organic life, about processes whose abnormal reality seems to me undeniable, sub-human-deeply confused complexes, which, at the same time primitive and complicated as they are, with their little dignified character, their trivial trappings, may well even repel the aesthetic-proud sense, but whose undoubted reality must excite the scientist's instinct for knowledge to the point of passion.

(Thomas Mann: "Drei Berichte über okkultistische Sitzungen, 1922" [Three Reports on Occultist Sessions, 1922], in: *Gesammelte Werke [Frankfurter Ausgabe]*, Vol. 17. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1983: 210)

Overview

Part 1: Phenomenology of the poltergeist. Results of a Statistical Evaluation – Here an attempt has been made to evaluate quantitatively-statistically 54 RSPK reports of the Freiburg Institute from the years 1947 to 1986. With the help of a specially developed questionnaire, the most detailed

information possible was collected on the reported phenomena, the poltergeist victims, the focal person, the witnesses, and the investigation and documentation. In order to compare the phenomenology of these cases with the case collections presented in the literature (e.g., Roll, 1976; Gauld & Cornell, 1979), simple frequency counts are first performed. Here we find clear similarities with respect to the phenomenology; however, striking differences are also noticeable. For example, 20% of the person-bound cases available to us last for more than one year, some even for two or more years. According to previous observations, a person-related RSPK case was characterized by its short duration (a few days or weeks).

Using cross-tabulations with χ^2 as the test variable and the phi coefficient as the correlation measure, relationships between the phenomena have been searched for. Relationships worthy of discussion can hardly be demonstrated, nor do significant differences in phenomenology show up when cases with versus without a focal person or cases of different duration are compared. It should be noted, however, that we have only one data set with a strikingly large number of “missing values.”

In order to uncover overarching structures in the cases, the multivariate methods of factor and cluster analysis were used after the high number of variables of $N=123$ had been reduced to the 15 essential items on the basis of the frequency count and an item analysis. From these 15 variables, two factors can be extracted: The first factor, which accounts for 30% of the total variance, is called “novelty factor” or “structure factor” because it only includes items that refer to something new, added, or structurally changing (e.g., “apports,” “penetrations,” “graffiti”). We refer to the second factor as the “change” or “behavioral” factor, since it is defined by items that describe that something existing undergoes change (e.g., “objects suddenly disappear,” “cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves”). It explains 12% of the total variance. This factor structure is fully confirmed in the cluster analysis.

The extraction of the factors “structure” and “behavior” as determinants of RSPK events can be seen as an empirical confirmation of the explanatory model of Pragmatic Information for Psi Phenomena (MPI) by Lucadou and Kornwachs (1982).

A statistical separation of person-bound and place-bound cases, as Gauld & Cornell (1979) achieved with a cluster analysis, was not to be expected with the small number of only 54 cases available to us, of which 46 alone are to be counted as person-bound.

Part II: Poltergeist victims and focus persons. – Data on poltergeist victims and focus persons (FPs) from a questionnaire evaluation of 54 RSPK cases are presented. Persons affected by the poltergeist come from all walks of life. Subjectively, they feel strongly burdened by the RSPK events and often become socially isolated. After the phenomena have subsided, they repress their memories of them to a great extent. 52 FPs were the focus of the RSPK cases studied, either

singly or in pairs; of these, 56% were male. A large proportion of FPs are in the age of puberty at the onset of the phenomena (modal value for boys 13.5 years, for girls 12.5 years). One third of the FPs report physical or psychological abnormalities during or immediately before RSPK phenomena. They complain unusually often about conversion neurotic symptoms (psychogenic paralysis, narrowing of the field of consciousness, etc.) as well as about psychogenic or neurologically caused “absences.” The extent to which these abnormalities are reactions to the RSPK occurrences that might be found in other poltergeist victims as well is not sufficiently documented. FPs are exposed to many social and psychological stressors. Relatively often they live with only one parent or with grandparents. Some of the FPs make a confession of manipulation. This usually does not mean that paranormal phenomena did not exist. The agreement of the data about FPs with results of an investigation of Roll (e. g., 1977) is great. On the question of the occurrence of person-related RSPK phenomena, a diathesis-stress model is postulated. It is suggested that a systematic rather than an individual-centered approach be taken in the elucidation of RSPK cases. The current state of scientific RSPK research in the Federal Republic of Germany is discussed.

General introduction

The purpose of this study is a comparative evaluation of 54 “RSPK cases” in order to arrive at more differentiated statements about phenomena and poltergeist victims. We used case files from the “Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Mental Health” in Freiburg im Breisgau. The files contain information which the director of the institute, Professor Hans Bender,⁵ and his co-workers have collected in four decades.

We defined “RSPK cases” as those in which repeatedly recurring noises, usually knocking, and/or movements of objects are reported, which are classified as inexplicable by the persons concerned. Several persons must have experienced these phenomena. In parapsychological parlance, the abbreviation RSPK for “recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis” has become established for this complex of phenomena since Pratt & Roll (1958).

Originally, we assumed 67 cases, of which 13 could not be evaluated for various reasons. In most cases, the information was too sparse, and other cases did not meet the RSPK definition. For this reason, 54 cases were left to be evaluated. They occurred mainly in the area of the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West), in five cases in neighboring countries (four

5 At this point we would like to thank Professor Dr. Dr. Hans Bender (†), Director of the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, both for the suggestions and encouragement to evaluate this material quantitatively and for making this extensive case collection spanning four decades available to us without restriction.

times in Switzerland, once in France). For reasons of personal and data protection, we do not add the formerly customary listing of cases with names, places and the year.

A major problem in recording the cases was to distinguish so-called “genuine” from “tricked” ones in order to be able to exclude the latter. We came to the conclusion that a completely safe exclusion of fraud is not possible. Experts today believe that in almost every “genuine” RSPK case there are also phases of fraud (cf. Müller, 1980 and Lucadou, 1983). We have included in our survey all cases from the Institute’s material which, in our view, showed predominantly paranormal phenomena. This compromise may disappoint some readers, but the alternative would have been to dispense with a quantitative evaluation altogether, since there is no RSPK case that is documented without gaps from the first to the last day. Thus, there is only a relative weighting of the parapsychological hypothesis – not to mention the epistemological difficulty of defining “paranormal.”

To collect the data from the available poltergeist reports and interviews with affected persons, a questionnaire was developed by Monika Huesmann, comprising 106 items; plus various filter questions, a total of 123 variables were quantified. In the construction, among others, the “Questionnaire for Poltergeist and Haunting Investigations” (1976: 208–215) presented by Roll was used, which consists of 34 questions. The survey questionnaire presented here is more differentiated and contains above all detailed questions about the persons affected by the poltergeist and the focal persons (FPs), that is, those persons who are in the center of the events and without whose presence phenomena usually do not occur.

With the help of the questionnaire we collected information about the phenomena (52 items), the poltergeist victims (seven items), the focus persons (25 items), the witnesses (seven items) as well as about the clarification (ten items) and documentation (five items). The majority of the questionnaires were edited by the authors, and some were graded by other staff members⁶ of the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health. Through intensive contact of the raters we tried to achieve the highest possible objectivity in filling out the questionnaires. Professor Bender supported us in many questions of doubt.

Part I deals with all questions concerning the phenomenology of the poltergeist and the statistical procedure, while Part II contains evaluations of poltergeist victims and focus persons.

6 We would like to express our sincere thanks to Dipl.-Psych. Gisela Veith and Dipl.-Psych. Christian Stephan for their helpful support in classifying the extensive case material.

Part I

Phenomenology of the Poltergeist Cases: Results of a Statistical Evaluation

Problem Description

If one looks at the literature on the subject of “poltergeist” or RSPK, one finds for the most part extensive collections of cases⁷ in which individual historical cases as well as cases from more recent times are compared according to their phenomenology and basic patterns are worked out that characterize the poltergeist occurrence.

Besides the purely phenomenological considerations (which phenomena are observed and which are typical e.g., for so-called place- and person-bound poltergeists) only sporadically psychological (mental and psychodiagnostic characteristics of the poltergeist agent) and structural characteristics (time-space boundness [focusing], temporal course of events etc.) are examined. Specific attention is given, for example, to the personality of poltergeist agents in Mischo (1970), to the socio-psychological characteristics in Burger (1973), and to the structural-law characteristics in the theoretical expositions of Lucadou (1983).

Here we will attempt a quantitative statistical analysis of the present collection of RSPK cases. In this we take up with Roll (1976) and Gauld & Cornell (1979), although these collections differ in the following. Roll (1976, 1977, 1978) collected 116 RSPK cases published, with few exceptions, in what he emphasizes as the parapsychological literature from 1850 onward, concentrating on those which, first, had been published by a serious author and, second, in which at least *one* physical event had occurred in the presence of the author or a witness which apparently could not be explained in conventional terms. Gauld & Cornell (1979), on the other hand, collected 500 cases over a period of five centuries (16th–20st centuries) from the literature. They deliberately did *not* limit themselves to the relevant literature, however, on the grounds that they wanted to minimize the likelihood that overarching patterns in this collection would be distorted by the preconceived opinions of respected researchers and editors (cf. Gauld & Cornell, 1979: 224). Thus, the sources of the case collections are quite variable and so is the reliability of the testimony. Roll has made the credibility of the RSPK report virtually the selection criterion for his cases, whereas, in their evaluation, Gauld & Cornell have taken into account the quality of the witness reports. They came to the surprising conclusion that first-hand and second-hand reports do not differ significantly in their statements. In the quantitative analysis, Roll limited himself to frequency counts of characteristic features (absolute and percentages),

⁷ Carrington & Fodor, 1951; Tizané, 1951; Thurston, 1955; Cox, 1961; Owen, 1964; Zorab, 1964; Roll, 1976, 1977, 1978; Bender, 1977, 1979, 1980a; Moser, 1977 (1st edition 1950); Gauld & Cornell, 1979.

whereas Gauld & Cornell subjected all 500 cases to a comprehensive rating. They first tried to determine the value of the testimonies, then the accuracy, the detail of the reports, and finally each case was checked for the occurrence of 63 different characteristics. These data were then compared according to various categories using chi² analysis: older versus newer cases, European versus American, those with better versus worse testimony, and many more.

By using cluster analysis, they were able to separate the 500 cases into two classes that appear to correspond to the traditional categories of person-centered and place-centered RSPK cases – although Gauld & Cornell distance themselves from this “two-factor theory” of RSPK.

This successful and astonishing analysis was the reason for us to carry out a statistical analysis of the case collection.

Problems With Data Collection

Several difficulties arose in classifying the cases according to the questionnaire we constructed. First, the material rarely provided information *on each* of the questions at hand. Since it is sometimes impossible to determine the missing information up to 40 years after the events, we introduced the answer option “unknown” in addition to “yes” and “no.” Even though in some cases the correct answer may be “no,” we could not decide, as Gauld & Cornell (1979: 225) did, to answer the corresponding question with “no” in case of missing information, because this would bias the results in one direction. All “unknown” answers were included in the calculation as “missing value.”

Sometimes the information content of the reports was not precise enough, and individual questions could not always be answered exactly; for example, the question about possible penetrations: Is there information in the report about whether all windows and doors of the room in question, into which an object is said to have penetrated, were really closed? If this is unknown, we have answered this question with “no” and the question about apparitions, the unexplained appearance of objects, with “yes.”

If we take into account the high proportion of missing information, the data on the frequency of occurrence of the phenomena and especially on the question complex concerning the focal person(s) must be regarded as minimum figures. Special difficulties arise for the rating of the question complex “Direct witnesses of the phenomena.” The rating of the credibility of the witnesses proposed here (“very credible,” “credible,” “not credible”) is difficult to carry out in retrospect for the rater who has not personally met the parties involved. An assessment based solely on the reports and protocols seems possible to us only in exceptional cases. In the future, this should be assessed directly by the investigator in the course of case processing. We have therefore not evaluated this complex, since only isolated concrete statements are made regarding credibility.

Research Questions

The following questions are in the foreground of this part of the investigation:

1. Can our case collection be compared with earlier collections in terms of so-called classical characteristics of RSPK cases? Are there parallels and/or serious differences? Here, the frequencies of occurrence of each phenomenon in this sample are compared with those from previous case collections (e. g., Cox, 1961; Roll, 1976; Gauld & Cornell, 1979).
2. Can particular patterns be detected among the phenomena, i.e., are there correlations between individual phenomena, do clusters of phenomena occur, or are the events observable under certain external criteria – such as a certain time of day or depending on the proximity of certain persons?

Here we subsume a number of questions:

- Are there phenomena that preferentially occur along with others? Apart from a few phenomena mentioned in most RSPK cases such as unexplained movement of objects or mysterious knocking and/or mimicry noises, the cases can be very different in their phenomenology. Thus, it is not obvious to us whether any phenomena are related at all, and if so, what they are. Therefore, we will check the question of correlation for all recorded items with respect to the phenomena and their external criteria.
 - Are there correlations between the existence of a focal person (FP) and the phenomenology? That is, do individual phenomena occur primarily in dependence on an FP?
 - Is there a relationship between the number of FPs and the phenomena?
 - Does the phenomenology differ depending on the duration of the RSPK occurrences?
3. In addition to the search for specific correlations between the phenomena and their occurrence characteristics, our further interest is to uncover overarching structures in the collected data of the RSPK cases – both those between the cases and those between the variables. Here, we follow the results of Gauld & Cornell (1979), who used a cluster analysis to separate so-called person- from place-centered cases, that is, to investigate which cases show a large similarity. Since we find only a few cases of non-personal and locational haunting in our collection, we extend the set of questions to look not only for clusters of cases but also for clusters of variables, that is, to elucidate structures that in a sense constitute a RSPK case.

Quantitative Analysis

With a few exceptions, the available data are binary scaled variables. Thus, the analysis is not based on a higher level than the nominal scale.

Statistical Data Preparation

To address the above questions, we used the following statistical procedures:⁸ First, simple frequency counts were performed to compare our case collection with existing ones (Cox, 1961; Roll, 1976, 1977, 1978; Gauld & Cornell, 1979).

To test specific correlations, we calculated the phi coefficient according to the dichotomous data structure, which corresponds to Pearson's product-moment correlation for binary scaled data (Bortz, 1989: 276ff.); in addition, cross-tabulations with chi²-tests were created as test variables.

To uncover a pattern common to the cases, we first reduced the number of variables from $N = 123$ and retained only those variables of interest to this question. These are only items from the question complexes "phenomena," "persons affected by the poltergeist" and "focus person." Of these, all those that are marked as "missing" in 35% of the cases and also those that do not occur in at least 10% of the cases ($N = 6$), that is, have been answered with "yes," are omitted. The remaining 46 variables were subjected to an item analysis in which they were tested according to discriminatory power and difficulty index and then selected if necessary. The items selected with the help of the item analysis – in the end there were 15 – then enter into a factor analysis (principal axis analysis with communal iteration and subsequent orthogonal varimax rating).⁹

Since the conditions for performing a factor analysis are only conditionally well met, it seems appropriate, in order to verify the results obtained by factorizing to apply another heuristic method for the systematic classification of the variables. Here, cluster analysis is a suitable

8 All calculations were performed using the statistical program packages SPSS 9 and SPSS X at the university computer centers of the University of Freiburg i. Br. (UNIVAC) and the Free University of Berlin (Siemens BS 2000).

9 Here, we should recall the conditions for conducting a factor analysis with respect to the available data material. According to Überla (1977: 359), the number of cases should be larger than three times the number of variables. Clauß & Ebner (1977: 370) set as lower limit a sample size in no case smaller than 50 to 60 and furthermore a sample size which is larger than the number of variables by at least one. Gaensslen & Schubö (1976) require a sample size of at least 100 subjects and a variable number of $N > 10$. Thus, statisticians do not agree at all. Thus, with 54 cases and $N = 15$ items, at least Überla's rule of thumb should be fulfilled. Although no quantitatively measurable output variables are available, the use of factor analysis is justified because, according to Überla's (1977: 284ff.) simulation studies, the factorization of alternative data by no means leads to serious biases.

method. According to Schneider & Scheibler (1983 a, b), in the social sciences hierarchical cluster analyses (agglomerative and divisive) are the most common. We chose agglomerative cluster analysis, based on Euclidean distances, and applied Ward's algorithm.^{10,11}

Results and Discussion

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the lack of data means that the questionnaire, which serves as the basis for a statistical analysis, has to be significantly reduced. For this reason, the present investigation can only be regarded as a pilot study.

10 The agglomerative method chosen here starts from n elements and gradually fuses the individual elements into clusters, formed clusters into ever larger clusters. With each fusion step the number of clusters is reduced by one, until finally the total quantity N is contained in a cluster. In each case, those elements are merged into clusters which have the smallest distance to each other or the greatest similarity. The choice of the distance measure depends on the variable quality and the aim of the investigation (the content concept). We used Euclidean distances, since these are calculated for binary scaled data (Bortz, 1989: 697) and are also a prerequisite for Ward's algorithm of cluster analyses – the generally preferred evaluation technique for psychological questions according to Schneider & Schiebler (1983b: 355). This procedure creates clusters that are as homogeneous as possible (that is, cluster fusion with the smallest increase in the total error sum of squares), which have proven to be quite stable.

11 Special problems in data analysis: As already mentioned, we do not have any quantitatively measurable output variables, but only alternative data (a phenomenon is present or not present). Furthermore, we have 54 cases, but 97 variables of interest for statistical analysis from the three question complexes: "phenomena," "affected persons," "focus person." These conditions alone are extremely unfavorable for a multivariate analysis. If we now consider the fact that for some variables no information was possible in more than 35% of the cases and for the remaining items the necessary information is missing in approx. 20% of the cases, we have to assume (even after eliminating those variables with a high proportion of "missing values") a considerable amount of missing data, which can then be quite problematic for the execution of statistical procedures. Since in our case the used computational program for the cluster analysis does not allow an adequate processing of the missing data (only case-wise but not pair-wise exclusion), we chose to solve this problem by recoding all "unknown" answers according to Steinhausen & Langer (1977: 17). The "yes"-answers are coded as 1, "no"-answers as 0; all "unknown"-answers are now given the mean value 0.5, an auxiliary variable which leaves both directions of answer open in terms of content and offers the simplest possibility mathematically.

The following considerations must be taken into account in this approach: If for all "unknown" answers the theoretical mean value of the answer options is included in the calculation, there is a risk that the boundaries between the clusters are not so clear if there is a high number of missings. Clusters can be formed at all based on the incoming mean values, that is, it cannot be excluded that a cluster is formed based on these fictitious values.

Frequency of Occurrence of the Phenomena

We have arranged the reported phenomena according to their frequency of occurrence and contrasted them with comparative figures from the aforementioned collections by Roll, Gauld & Cornell, and Cox (see Table 1). Since all three collections consist of RSPK cases that have already been published – Roll collected 116 cases from the years 1612–1974, Cox 46 cases from the years 1858–1958, Gauld & Cornell even collected 500 cases from the year 530–1975, it must be assumed that overlaps exist between the collections (e.g., the cases of Roll and Cox are to a large extent included in the collection of Gauld & Cornell). For this reason, the comparative figures should agree. However, since some cases in the collection we have were already published by Bender, these may also be included in the comparison figures. Thus, eight of the 500 cases of Gauld & Cornell are included in our 54 (that is, 1.6%); this proportion is too small to be reflected in the comparative figures. At most nine cases may be in Roll's collection (7.8%), so here the influence on the overall result may be significant in individual cases. There is no overlap with Cox's collection. Not all three collections offer comparison possibilities for the same questions, therefore they are all used here for comparison, the collection of Cox, however, only if we do not find any data in Gauld & Cornell and Roll, since Cox has taken an even smaller number of cases as a basis than we have ($N = 46$).

Phenomenon	Frequency of occurrence (%)	Comparison values (%)
Unexplained movement of objects	87	90 (R)
Movement of light objects	56	64 (G&C)
Movement of medium-heavy objects	85	
Movement of heavy objects	37	36 (G&C)
of which movement in unusual trajectories	45	41 (R)
Unexplained noises	72	70 (C)
Noise independent of object movement	46	
Noise during object movement	22	
Simple sounds	50	
Mimicry	54	43 (G&C)
Raps	57	54 (R), 48 (G&C)
Raps answer questions	11	
Items suddenly disappear	55	
of which reappear later	48	
of which not reappear later	39	
Cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves	50	12 (G&C)

Phenomenon	Frequency of occurrence (%)	Comparison values (%)
Body phenomena	46	
Phenomena with liquids	43	
water	37	2 (R), 5 (G&C)
other liquids	15	
Penetrations	37	
Disturbances in the power grid	35	
Apport	31	22 (G&C)
Total disorder	28	
Optical phenomena	26	17–23 (R), 29–41 (G&C)
Bombardment	24	
Stones play a role	22	
Fire occurs	19	11 (G&C)
Graffiti	19	
Cold breeze is felt	19	4 (G&C)
Clothing is torn	17	6 (G&C)
Odors	17	2 (G&C)
Discrepancy between energy and effect	17	
Objects seem to form in air	17	5 (G&C)
they feel warm	9	
Smearings	15	
Fragile objects don't break	13	
Persons are locked in	13	
Cold/heat phenomena	13	7 (R)
Disturbances in water supply	11	
Objects which move inexplicable feel hot	11	5 (R), 4 (G&C)
Mysterious phone calls	9	
Phone disturbances	6	

Table 1. Percent frequencies of observed phenomena in $N = 54$ RSPK cases, with comparative figures from: Cox (1961, $N = 46$ cases [C]), Roll (1976, 1977, 1978, $N = 116$ cases [R]), and Gauld & Cornell (1979, $N = 500$ cases [G&C]).

Further the question arises whether the authors use the same conceptual understanding of the individual phenomena. For example, in our questionnaire an “optical apparition,” which here includes all kinds of apparitions like ghost seeing and light appearances, is only signed if it is reported by at least two persons. Roll writes of 27 cases (25%) in which: “apparitions were seen, representing human figures, animals, demons, hands, fingers, or amorphous shapes” (1977: 397). We do not know exactly in how many cases the FP was the only person who had these apparitions. However, Roll states that in eight out of 33 cases in which visual and/or auditory apparitions are reported, they are experienced by the FP alone, that is, in at least 17% and at most 23% there are two or more witnesses to a visual apparition. In the collection of Gauld & Cornell (1979) there is no all-inclusive category “optical phenomena;” these authors differentiate according to the following three classes of phenomena: “Phantasms (human)” (29%), “Misty figures etc. seen” (2%) and “Luminous effects” (10%). Considering that in some cases two or all three phenomena occur, the possible range of all affected cases is 29% to 41%.

Even if – as in the example described – the authors do not agree in detail in all cases of the feature descriptions, comparisons are certainly possible.

If we now look at the frequencies of the reported phenomena as listed in Table 1, the agreement between the case collections is striking especially for the most frequently mentioned phenomena (“unexplained movement of objects” and “noises”).

According to Gauld & Cornell (1979: 4), the poltergeist-defining features (1) “percussive sounds” such as raps, thuds, crashes, noises, and bangs, and (2) “object movements,” such as shifting, overturning, or propelling, are also prevalent in our collection. “Striking sounds” here include the categories “raps” and “simple noises,” at least one of which has been signed in 70% of all cases. Phenomena of object movement are repeatedly reported (in 87% of cases), e.g., curtains blowing when windows are closed, lamps swinging for no reason, dishes falling out of cupboards by themselves, and light bulbs falling out of their sockets.

The first time, I was still in training – subject teacher – my girlfriend and I were studying for a chemistry paper, and we were both sitting, neither one talking, each one cramming, we were sitting on our couch. And I had such a [cloth] animal standing on the edge, and suddenly the animal hopped down; it was a very long room like a tube; down on the floor it made a few jumps and was in front by the door. At first I thought I was crazy. Real jumps, that was the first time. (case 63)

In another case, the following is reported:

I [...] was going to join the children in the bedroom. All of a sudden a towel flew out of the toilet towards me. That was the first time that something was seen moving in front of our eyes, or rather in front of my eyes. The toilet was empty. You could directly feel the breeze as the towel was thrown. (case 51)

Very rarely are there witnesses like these who claim to have *directly* observed the inexplicable movement. Often objects are found in strange places, books lie in front of the shelf, glass lamps lie undamaged on the floor, furniture is sometimes in other rooms. In one case, police officers locked an apartment where no one was staying and waited outside. Sounds were heard, and when the door was opened, various objects that had previously been in their usual place were lying on the floor (case 42).

Mostly they are light (maximum one egg; in 56% of cases) to medium-heavy objects (maximum the weight of a chair; in 85% of cases), which quite often (in 45% of cases) move in unusual trajectories (flight in zigzag motion, around the corner or like a gentle floating down). Once two witnesses reported: “The cushion lifted vertically over the backrest and then flew horizontally to the kitchen door” (case 25).

Now, unexplained object movements are by no means always accompanied by noises. Simple noises (rumbling, clattering, banging) occur twice as often independently of object movements (in 46% of cases) as in connection with them (in 22% of cases).

Mimicry or imitation noises (in 54% of cases) always cause particular confusion among the persons concerned. As a classic example, clearly audible footsteps are mentioned here, without an originator being identified. One affected person reported:

It started in the hallway, the door to my bedroom was usually open. Then I heard footsteps on the carpeted floor outside in the hallway. That’s what you hear when someone is walking. So I ran out and looked to see if anyone was there, but there was no one. Then I went back to bed. That was for a while, and then it was the same again. (case 66)

But all kinds of other sounds are imitated as well: Dogs barking, scratching and pawing as if by animals, children whimpering plaintively, as well as the sound of the sea coming from a corner of the stove from which trumpet music was once heard. Also, sounds like wood chopping from a higher floor are reported at night.

As can be seen from Table 1, there are great similarities in the frequencies of the previously mentioned phenomena with the comparison collections, the difference is only 2 to 12 percentage points. The same parallels exist for other less frequently reported phenomena, e. g., “optical phenomena,” “fire occurs,” “clothes are torn,” “objects seem to form in air,” “cold/heat phenomena.” Phenomena such as the latter should be interpreted with caution, as the subjective scope is particularly high here. Comparative figures are lacking for other quite frequently reported phenomena. This goes for the in 55% of the cases “suddenly disappeared objects,” of which in 48% of the cases some are found again (for example food disappeared from the kitchen is found later in the bedroom closet) and in 39% remain traceless (as curtains and curtain rods disappear overnight without a trace). In the comparison collections, the authors

could have counted the unexplained disappearance of objects to object movements or possibly penetrations.

Further, Roll and Gauld & Cornell do not provide any data on bodily phenomena reported in this collection in 46% of cases, mostly involving focal subjects. These include main phenomena (unexplained scratch marks or redness) and catalepsies, as well as subjective sensations of being choked, held down, or shaken, often accompanied by object movements. Thus it can be read in an interview:

‘About 14 days after the first knocks, the couch started vibrating. I was sleeping on the couch. But the knocking continued, it was then all at the same time.’ – ‘How did one feel this vibrating?’ – ‘You were really shaken up on it. One literally flew up!’ (case 25)

Comparative figures are also missing for the phenomenon of penetration (“matter penetrates matter”) reported in 37% of our cases. Here it is to be assumed that such an event in the English-language literature corresponds to the “apport,” since this contains a penetration in the narrower sense. Thus, the standard definition of an apport according to Wolman (1977: 922) is: “An object alleged to arrive by paranormal means in a closed space, indicating the supposed passage of matter through matter.” In the material at hand we have recorded phenomena of unexplained appearance or disappearance of objects with and without presumed penetration of matter separately, because often it can no longer be reconstructed whether for an unexplained appearance (an apport) a penetration of matter (penetration) was necessary or whether a space (understood here as a living space as well as a lockable chest of drawers, showcase, cabinet or similar) was accessible by natural means. Thus, apports here include, for example, wrenches falling at night from the roof, onto the roof and from trees – these very tools had disappeared from a workshop on the same day in the afternoon. However, no one on the roof or in the trees could be found as the author. Among the penetrations is, for example, the reported phenomenon that films disappeared several times from a locked – and “sealed” with plastic strips – camera. The films were later found in highly unusual places such as behind a picture or on the wall in the bedroom and under a pillow (Bender, 1984a: 72).

At this point it must be emphasized that *the penetration itself* was never exactly seen, but in some cases (e. g., Bender, 1977: 370–371) witnesses were present who reported how suddenly certain objects appeared in one room, although they had been locked in another room before. If we now consider exclusively the number of cases in which an apport was accompanied by a penetration (this figure is comparable to that in Gauld & Cornell), this is true for 24% of the cases. Again, the agreement is very high (24% versus 22%). The total number of all reported penetrations in our material is possibly larger (37%) because here not only the “appearance” but also the “disappearance” of objects from closed rooms is added.

Not all missing comparative figures can be tapped in this way. There are also phenomena for which the available figures are not comparable. In Gauld & Cornell it can be read that in 3% of the cases the category “Electrical installations, switches, tampered with” was signed, but this is in no way to be compared with the number of our “power failures,” which concerns 35% of the cases, because nearly two thirds of the 500 recorded cases of Gauld & Cornell occurred *before 1900*, in these cases the phenomenon could not yet occur at all. This example shows clearly how the phenomenology of RSPK cases changes over time.

It seems astonishing to us that no figures on the frequency of “bombardment” are given in the comparative studies, since this phenomenon is also counted among the typical poltergeist features by some researchers, e. g., Tizané (cited in Bender, 1980a), and is reported in a quarter of the cases in our country.

Similarly, there is no information in other collections about the “discrepancy between kinetic energy and effect” phenomenon reported in 17% of our cases. Thus, in one case it is reported that a picture fell to the floor with a loud crash, but both the picture, the hanger and the hook in the wall remained completely undamaged (case 46). However, references to this discrepancy, which is “always striking,” can also be found in Sexauer (1958/59: 112–113), who cites this phenomenon as a characteristic of dynamic, person-related poltergeist. The question about the warmth of affected objects is obviously misplaced in the present questionnaire; it refers here exclusively to objects that seem to have “formed” suddenly in the air, but should also include retrieved, penetrated, and generally inexplicably moving objects, as Gauld & Cornell have done. Their characteristic is “Objects thrown or transported found hot” and occurs in 4% of the 500 cases. In Roll’s collection, moving objects are reported as noticeably warm or hot in 5% of the 116 cases. If we consider all objects in our collection that experienced unusual movement and were experienced as warm, we count this in 11% of cases, twice as often as in the comparison collections. However, since the subjective feeling of the reporter is in the foreground here as well, we do not want to overestimate this difference.

If we now ask for significant *differences* in the phenomenon frequencies between the case collections, these become apparent for the following four categories: (1) cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves, (2) water phenomena, (3) “cold breeze” is felt, and (4) odor phenomena. They all occur more frequently in our collection, with differences ranging from 15 to 38 percentage points. The largest difference concerns the former phenomenon. Self-opening cupboards, doors, etc., are signed in 50% of our cases and in only 12% of those of Gauld & Cornell. Since this phenomenon – according to Gauld & Cornell (1979: 178) – is one of the characteristics of RSPK cases, it is surprising to find it in half of all cases in our collection, which consists of 85% person-bound cases. In Gauld & Cornell it occurs only in the place-bound cases, the percentages agree (both times 12%).

Water phenomena are reported surprisingly often – in 37% of all cases. In most cases, the water phenomenon is only one among several phenomena, in only three cases (6%) are so-called “pure” water poltergeists. Roll (1977: 387) cites two such cases (2%), one of which is from Bender’s collection. Gauld & Cornell find the phenomenon in 5% of their cases “Indurations of water etc.” It remains unclear whether in these comparative collections – especially in those of Roll – the figures cover all occurring water phenomena. If we consider these phenomena in our material, they are in at least 20% as massive (beds are soaked, large amounts of water appear in the form of pools or “water suddenly splashing down”). In the remaining 17% smaller amounts of water play a role (e. g., water is splashed on walls or shoes are filled with water). In any case, compared to Gauld & Cornell, many more cases of striking water phenomena are characterized in our collection.

The frequency difference with regard to the category “Cold breath’ is felt” (4% versus 19%) should not be rated too high, since this phenomenon is very subjectively determined and can also occur, for example, in the case of anxious expectation. Olfactory phenomena can – probably – be recorded somewhat better. Here are two examples:

[...] that when I went to bed, it smelled quite strongly of a noodle soup in the bedroom, especially under the bed. The smell could not have come from outside, because nothing could be smelled at the window itself. The smell disappeared after some time. (case 67)

‘[...] we were all alone. [...] I went up to the room [and] there was a smell of cake.’ – ‘In the bedroom?’ – ‘Yes, as if I were standing in front of an oven and baking an apple pie. [...] I couldn’t explain it. No houses around ours and yet the upstairs smells like cake.’ – ‘Have you ever baked apple pie here?’ – ‘No, you can’t bake in that oven.’ (case 67)

In summary, one can speak – with the available comparative figures – of an overwhelming agreement in the phenomenology of the case collections, with major differences only in a few categories. Here the question arises whether these are genuine differences or whether they are due to more extensive research in our collection and finer categorizations in our questionnaire (Morris, 1988); for example, our questionnaire is many times more extensive than the one used by Roll. We have also based our analysis exclusively on original files, whereas Roll has taken part of the analyzed material from the literature in addition to cases he has investigated and published himself, and Gauld & Cornell finally rely solely on publications.

Other events, frequently reported in our country, are not mentioned in the literature at all. It must be pointed out, however, that over the centuries poltergeists have expanded to ever new areas in accordance with technical developments. With the discovery and wider use of electricity, electricity disturbances began, with the development of the telephone, telephone disturbances began, etc. Also already inexplicable, possibly person-dependent computer disturbances are reported (Morris, 1986).

Frequencies of Occurrence of Overarching Phenomenon Characteristics

If we look at the overarching characteristics of RSPK occurrences, the following picture emerges (see Table 2):

Phenomenon Characteristic	Frequency of occurrence (%)	Comparison values (%)
Highlights in RSPK phenomena	87	
Appearance of the phenomena daily for about one week	85	
Phenomena occur only in the vicinity of (at least) one particular person	85	79 (R)
"Intelligent" behavior of the poltergeist	54	
Aggressiveness in the phenomena	50	
of which FP and other persons affected	74	
only other persons affected	26	
Preferred time of day	50	
Evening/night	33	58 (G&C)
Evening and at another time	11	
Only during the day	6	36 (G&C)
Favorite places	41	
Religious ceremonies performed	41	26 (R)
of which: with lasting success	4	3 (R), 7 (G&C)
with temporary success	19	3 (R), 2 (G&C)
without success	17	18 (R), 3 (G&C)
Phenomena in expectant observation	44	
Phenomena when FP is in bed	31	
Phenomena when FP sleeps	9	0 (R)
Beginning of the phenomena from the outside to the inside	26	
Phenomena start with sounds	24	
Day of the first appearance has a special significance	22	

Table 2. Percent frequencies of overarching phenomenon characteristics in $N = 54$ RSPK cases, with comparative figures from Roll (1976, 1977, 1978, $N = 116$ cases [R]), and Gauld & Cornell (1979, $N = 500$ cases [G&C]).

Most RSPK cases (87%) have climaxes, escalations that occur suddenly one or more times, or that can mean the end of an increase in the occurrence. Sometimes such climaxes are observed on special church or family holidays.

Likewise, in most cases (85%), a repeated occurrence of the phenomena over a period of several consecutive days (for about 1 week) is observed. This continuity over time is significantly related to the existence of an FP ($\phi = .42$, $\chi^2_{\text{corr}} = 4.11$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) and thus supports the general observation that person-bound cases are active for at least a period of several consecutive days, whereas in the case of non-person-bound hauntings the phenomena occur very sporadically and sometimes no abnormalities are reported for years.

The dominance of person-centered cases in our material (at least 85%) confirms previous observations. Roll (1977) found 79% person-bound cases and Gauld & Cornell (1979) were able to describe only 12% of the 500 cases as house-centered, an observation which – even if mixed cases and those which cannot be clearly characterized in this respect are taken into account – also points to a predominant proportion of person-bound cases.

The remaining 15% (eight cases) in our collection are by no means exclusively “pure” place-bound cases, but have in common not to be clearly person-bound. Three of them (6%) can be described as “classical” place-bound, in them phenomena are reported over a period of 100 to 400 years. In another 6% no person could be clearly identified as FP, different persons were at the center of the events in the course of several years (for 3 to 13 years). In one case, location-centered hauntings are obviously activated by one person in particular – both before and after their time of residence, isolated hauntings are known from this house, so that there seems to be an interaction between location-centered and person-centered. Only in one case no statement can be made to this question on the basis of the available information. So we take 13% of our cases as non-person-bound.

A frequently observed characteristic of the RSPK occurrence is its *apparent meaningfulness*. Besides senseless destruction (creation of total disorder, fire or water phenomena), downright sensible or “intelligent” behavior of the poltergeist can be observed in 54% of the cases: Soup boils itself; knocks answer questions; only textbooks disappear from subjects unpleasant to the FP; objects previously unsuccessfully searched for suddenly appear; puddles of water appear at the exact moment when the observer looks to the side; a participant thinks, “I’m going out,” whereupon coat and gloves are said to have flown toward him; or objects appear which had previously been locked away – events reminiscent of hoaxes.

We agree with Gauld & Cornell (1979: 339) that it is often difficult to distinguish between “intelligent” and “non-intelligent” poltergeists, for it depends not only on the phenomenon itself whether it can be called “intelligent,” but on the judgment of the persons concerned. Thus

also destructive behavior can be quite “meaningful.” In one case, for example, the records of the RSPK phenomena made by the person concerned are suddenly crossed out and unreadable when they are presented to the parapsychologists.

Further, in 50% of our cases an aggressiveness is observed in the phenomena directed against persons, mostly (in 74% of these cases) against the FP, she is often the target of flying objects, she experiences body phenomena, or she finds dangerous objects like knives or needles in her bed. It should not be concealed here that in a few cases those affected by aggression also sustained injuries.

Only in half of the cases is the RSPK occurrence tied to a specific time of day, but then – as in Gauld & Cornell – evening and night are preferred, an observation that is particularly useful in the case of person-related poltergeist in which the events take place in the FP’s home, because in the evenings and at night the FP is predominantly at home, while during the day the fluctuation of their presence is high.

The preferred locations of the events in 41% of our cases are mostly a specific room in an apartment or house where the unusual events are observed.

In general we can agree with Roll when he says: “There are *generally* no disturbances when the focal person was asleep” (1977: 184; emphasis mine, F.S.). In 19% of the cases it could be observed that no phenomena occurred during the sleep of the FP or that they stopped when the FP went to bed, nevertheless it should be pointed out that in five of 54 cases (9%) phenomena (knocking and rumbling noises, object movements) were very well observed when the FP was presumably asleep. In a majority of the cases, the question had to remain unanswered for the following reasons: (a) The available material does not provide any information in this regard. (b) Since some phenomena, especially object movements and disappearances, are not always noticed immediately after their occurrence but at a later time, we cannot exclude the possibility that phenomena also occurred at the FPs sleeping time. (c) Often the FP remains unobserved during sleep, in which case the question cannot be answered.

Also the question of typical initial phenomena can hardly be answered satisfactorily. Tizané’s observation (quoted in Bender, 1979) that the phenomena rarely begin inside the house before a bombardment from the outside has taken place is extended by Bender: “In most cases, the events begin outside the home: stones are thrown against windows and doors, knocks make themselves felt, etc.” (1979: 135). In the 54 cases taken as a basis here, in 26% the events begin from outside (bombardment at windows or on the roof, knocking sounds or rattles at shutters, or mimicry noises outside the house). Bombardment in the sense of a shower of stones and drumming on shutters is recorded only in 11% of cases, knocking sounds in 7% and other phenomena outside the house also in 7% of cases. Just as often as the

RSPK phenomenon starts from the outside, it starts with knocking or other noises (in 24% of cases), but these often occur inside the house. The question of whether RSPK cases tend to begin with noises, which are then followed by object movement, has been suggested by Palmer (presented in Roll, 1978), who observed this in two cases. Both observations, each concerning a quarter of the cases, can probably only be judged as *tendencies*. In no way can regularities be inferred from the available figures. If we look at the entire material at hand, no particular sequence of phenomena can be determined, even if large parallels are apparent between individual cases.

Another common feature in at least 20% of our cases is the individual significance of the day on which phenomena are observed for the first time: the unexpected return of the father from war captivity, the sudden prolonged visit of the grandmother, a newborn sibling – all situations, which severely disrupt the almost symbiotic mother-child relationship present in these cases. Other events, such as the withdrawal of a driver's license or a sudden falling out with a very familiar person, are, like the first-mentioned situations, those that cause anger, disappointment and great frustration in the FP.

In other cases, it is not the beginning day of the events that is of particular importance, but the entire social situation of the FP seems to be extremely tense and problematic (for more details on this point, see Part II).

Since the affected persons themselves are often not aware of the problem and they themselves would never establish a connection between the persons involved and the unusual events, they often attribute – in search of a possible cause – according to the spiritualistic hypothesis. Thus, the following events are associated with the beginning of the events: the anniversary of the death of the hated sister, a death in the same house (non-familial), the burning of the grave cross of the former owner of the house a few days before the outbreak of the events, the day when certain objects from an inheritance came into the house (including a crucifix), and many others. In these cases, the persons concerned themselves, with one exception, all give exclusively “dead and ghosts” as an explanation for the phenomena, while in other cases, without such attribution of meaning, very different explanatory hypotheses are expressed, including – but not limited to – “dead and ghosts.” [Multiple answers were possible for this question.]

As the victims search for causes and explanations for the poltergeist, they seek countermeasures, often requesting religious assistance before asking the parapsychologist for help. In 45% of the cases, religious ceremonies were performed; these included prayers and blessings of the premises, but also minor exorcism and magic rituals, all practices that rarely (in 4% of cases) led to lasting success.

In more than half of the cases (57%), experiments in “expectant observation” were performed by affected persons or parapsychologists, and phenomena are said to have occurred in 44% of the cases. However, this does not mean that in all these cases phenomena were observed *in vivo*, but that RSPK phenomena are said to have occurred during the investigation under conditions of varying degrees of certainty. For example, there is credible testimony that objects moved in a locked room where no one was demonstrably present, and in another case poltergeist noises have been provoked and documented. However, only a few of these events happened in expectant observation in the presence or under the control of parapsychologists.

The obviously most surprising difference when comparing these with other case collections lies in the results of the analysis of the duration of the RSPK occurrences. If we first look at the absolute duration, mean and median of our compared to Roll’s cases, the following picture emerges:

	N = 50 (53*) cases	N = 98** cases (Roll)
Duration absolute	3 days to 13 years (plus three times permanent haunting over generations)	1 day to 6 years
Mean	15.3 months	5.1 months
Median	5.0 months	2.0 months
Modal value	1.0 month	unknown
	* in 1 case the duration is unknown	** for 18 cases unknown

Table 3. Duration of the RSPK event in comparison.

It is noticeable that the RSPK cases we analyzed last on average three times as long as those from the comparative study. The difference in the mean may have arisen because of a few extreme values. However, since the median, the central tendency, is also two and a half times as large in our material as in Roll’s collection, we can assume a meaningful difference in poltergeist duration in the two collections. [Lacking knowledge of Roll’s raw data, we cannot perform a significance test here.]

If we now look at the duration of our cases in detail (see Figure 1), a decline effect can be observed. 24% of the cases last up to one month, another 35% up to six months (that is 59% in total). The number of cases in which the unpleasant event was active for longer than one year is 30%, shorter than one year is 69% of the cases. Here is a clear parallel to Gauld & Cornell, for whose cases 24% last longer than one year, 56% are shorter than one year.

If we look at the duration of the cases, taking into account the characteristics person versus non-person, the following picture emerges: all cases shorter than six months are person-related, even those shorter than one year with only one exception. Of the 30% of cases lasting longer than

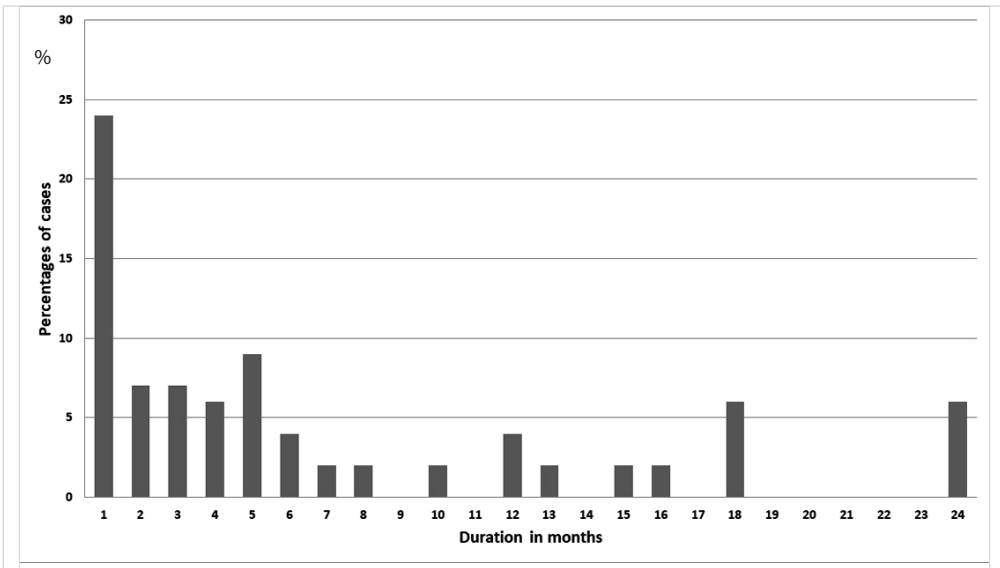


Figure 1. Duration of RSPK occurrence in 46 cases; plus seven cases lasting longer than two years (ca. 3 yr., 5 yr., 10 yr., 13 yr., three times „over generations“ [100–400 yr.]).

a year, more than half (9 out of 16) are person-linked. This result is very surprising, as it contradicts previous observations. Thus Roll writes: “Poltergeist disturbances are also generally of fairly short duration, rarely lasting more than a couple of months, and often less. Hauntings, however, may go on for years” (2004: 9). Gauld & Cornell make an even more limiting statement, “[...] classic person-centered poltergeists tend to be over in a few eventful days, or weeks [...]” (1979: 203). The sample on which we are based, on the other hand, shows person-centered poltergeists lasting longer than a year in 17% of cases – in one case more than 10 years. If we consider only the person-related cases, 20% of these cases last longer than one year. If we look for causes for this striking difference to previous studies, we can only speculate. The following possibilities come into consideration:

1. It is a particular feature of mainly German personal RSPK cases from the 20th century that they also last for many months and years.
2. Also in earlier collections there are not only isolated long-lasting personal RSPK cases, but these have not become known as such. This thought is by no means as far-fetched as it may seem at first, if one considers that also in our material just in the long-lasting cases after apparent conclusion of the event sporadically after months again individual

phenomena were observed. Possibly the knowledge of this at a later time again reported flare-up of the RSPK-phenomena comes solely from the catamnoses, which were carried out in many cases from psychohygienic points of view, especially in cases with complex problems. For example, these cases include all those in which an affected person has expressed suicidal intentions or even attempted suicide.

So this second explanatory hypothesis may be valid for historical cases, where the individual cases may not have been investigated so intensively. However, since no other parapsychologist who has conducted RSPK investigations during the past decades, partly with catamnestic interviews, reports of long-lasting personal cases, it seems to be more typical for the present collection.

3. Studies on the personality of the FP have repeatedly given indications of unresolved conflict situations (Mischo, 1970; Roll, 1976) as well as anxiety and neurotic states (Owen, 1964) and have led to the hypothesis that the destructions of the poltergeist seem to be the expression of inner tensions (cf. Roll, 1976: 180) or, in other words, “that the ‘poltergeist’ represents the conflict symptomatology in the external space” (Mischo, 1983: 190). – Now, can one based on the background of this hypothesis not also assume that an unusually long poltergeist duration represents the inability of the primary participants to resolve the conflict, although repeated RSPK occurrences repeatedly draw special interest to the poltergeist agents and their situation?

The present attempt to record the circumstances of occurrence, the so-called “external criteria” of RSPK phenomena, shows that this cannot be mastered by observation alone. Phenomenological *regularities* can hardly be proven, even if there are phenomena and characteristics, as can be seen in tables 1 and 2, which have been observed in a larger number of cases.

Concerning our first question, it can now be summarized that the phenomenology of the present RSPK cases shows many parallels as well as clear differences to comparative collections. The greatest differences appear in the duration and phenomenology of the so-called person-related cases. The classical appearance no longer does justice to these cases. In this we agree with Gauld & Cornell (1979), who, on the basis of their extensive analysis, conclude that the conventional distinctions between person-centered and location-centered RSPK-cases cannot be maintained.

Question of Possible Phenomenon Patterns

Due to the open question of possible correlations between reported phenomena, we first created a correlation matrix (phi coefficients or contingency coefficients C as measures of

correlation with χ^2 as test variable) of all 78 variables related to the phenomena and their occurrence characteristics as well as to the affected persons. This yields 3003 contingency coefficients, of which 124 are significant at the five percent level (4.1%), 33 (1.1%) at the one percent level, and 11 (.37%) at the one percent level. However, the correlations are both quite small (only 31% of the coefficients are greater than .5) and not very meaningful in terms of phenomenology, because a large proportion of the correlations are trivial and based on the construction of the questionnaire. This includes, for example, the highly significant ($p < .001$) correlation equal to $\phi = .57$ between the items “bombardment” and “stones.” This question about possible bombardment was included because stone bombardment is frequently reported in historical cases. Similarly, the correlation of $\phi = .36$ ($p < .05$) between “optical phenomena” and “phenomena occur only near a particular person” is trivial, because “optical phenomena” was signed only if more than one person witnessed the phenomena.

Other correlations can be explained by the fact that it is a question and a filter question as in the case of “liquid” and “water,” where water is one of the two subcategories to liquid. In other cases, the risk is quite high that the contingency is an artifact, since a large number of phenomena are mentioned in only a few cases and our total number of cases, $N = 54$, is very small; this includes, for example, the correlation between “water supply disturbances” and “fire” ($\phi = .59$, $p < .001$) – water supply disturbances occur only six times, fire occurs ten times. Thus, we cannot make any statement about a large number of such correlations.

Since in our chosen approach of creating a correlation matrix of all variables, some of the significant correlations will have occurred by chance, it is important to test the correlations that appear interesting in a different sample of RSPK cases.

It is not individual contingencies that seem to be of interest here, but rather the obvious accumulations of correlations of various items with a few. Thus, significant correlations with the following items are frequently noticeable: “unusual trajectory of moving objects,” “objects disappear,” “apports,” “penetrations,” “objects seem to form in air,” “bombardment,” “graffiti,” “noises,” “‘intelligent’ behavior of the poltergeist.” Moreover, there are for the most part (very) significant correlations between these phenomena. The mentioned phenomena seem to have a special meaning in the poltergeist. We hope to get more information from the structural analysis.

By means of four-field tables and χ^2 -tests we checked whether the phenomenology of the cases with focal person (FP) versus without FP differed, that is, whether we could differentiate so-called person-centered from non-person-centered cases on the basis of the frequency distributions of the phenomena. Here we should again recall the problem that only seven cases without detectable FP – which does not always indicate total person-independence – are included in the analysis. Significant differences on at least five percent level show up only for three items, two of which can be described as trivial relations:

1. For the duration of occurrence of RSPK phenomena the following picture emerges: There is no case without FP shorter than six months. So, in all short-lived RSPK cases there is an FP, this corresponds to the expectations. – This is contradicted by the fact that in 65% of the longer-lasting cases there is also an FP present.
2. For the item “phenomena occur daily for one week,” the two groups also differed significantly. In 98% of the cases *with* FP continuous poltergeist disturbances are reported, for 33% of the cases *without* FP the occurrence is more irregular. This also corresponds to the expectations – even if not in its hoped-for polarity – if we think of the reports of so-called localized hauntings, which occur quite sporadically. According to our expectations, all cases without FP should not have shown any temporal continuity.
3. The most curious separating variable is the item “Objects move in an unusual trajectory,” which does not occur in any case without FP and concerns half of the cases with FP. This means that the movement of objects, which occurs in both groups of cases, is different in cases with FP than in those without FP. Thus, in cases without FP, no completely free-moving objects such as a book flying around the corner are observed, but rather it is a matter of doors, cupboards etc. opening themselves, the moving of furniture or objects that find themselves in other places.

Thus, specific *phenomena* for RSPK cases with versus without FP cannot be demonstrated in the present sample with one exception. This contradicts the classical assumptions.

There were also no significant differences in the phenomenology of cases with one versus two or more FPs. This may support Rogo’s (1986) hypothesis that RSPK phenomena are not tied to a single person, but rather to the whole group involved, usually the family, but only the primary person seems to us to be conspicuous.

If we look at the phenomenology as a function of the duration of the event, we have seen in the frequency count that there is a clustering of cases with a duration shorter than one month (24%). However, chi²-tests did not reveal any significant differences in the phenomenology of cases with duration shorter and longer than one month.

In the diagram of the time course (see Figure 1), a larger jump can be observed at a duration of eight months. We chose this point in time as the cutoff for shorter and longer duration cases. [Previously, we had arbitrarily set the cutoff at six months.] For the following items, there are significant differences at the five percent level at least:

1. “Mimicry noises” occur in all cases lasting longer than eight months, but only in 60% of the cases shorter than also months. The frequency of occurrence of mimicry noises separates short- and long-term cases significantly, but, as the distribution shows, it can

no longer be regarded as a characteristic for long-term ‘haunting’ and place-boundness, as Gauld & Cornell present it (1979: 178).

2. The question about the “significance of the onset day,” the significance of the day when it all started, is answered in the affirmative by only 14% in cases shorter than eight months, and by 53% in cases longer than eight months. Long-lasting poltergeist occurrences are thus more likely to have an obvious reference.
3. As a third item, the question about the “existence of an FP” separates the shorter and longer lasting cases. According to the above-mentioned result for the question “Which items separate cases with and without FP?” this was to be expected, since the same four-field table is available here (with the only difference that here eight and there six months were set as the limit).

Structural Analyses

Structures Within the Cases

Our attempt to separate the cases of so-called person- and location-centered RSPK by means of a cluster analysis, in analogy to Gauld & Cornell (1979), failed. We assume that this fails on the one hand because of the small as well as different number of cases (7 versus 46). On the other hand, the available events from the frequency distributions and contingency tests within the cases show greater overlap of the phenomena defining person- versus location-centered RSPK cases, so that we, based on these findings, cannot expect a replication of the Gauld & Cornell results. However, this question should still be examined using a larger sample.

Structures Within Phenomenology

Now, before the cases can be analyzed for common structures, the differentiation performance of the items must be checked.

Item Selection

Since this survey questionnaire was used here for the first time, it is recommended that we first analyze the items. What use is an item that has been answered with “yes” or “no” in all cases in the search for structural conditions?

Taking into account our considerations for item selection given in the paragraph “Statistical Data Preparation,” 46 variables (see Table 4) are included in the item analysis, and after selection according to the difficulty index ($.20 < x < .80$) and discriminatory power ($r_{ig-i} > .30$) 15 items remain (Table 5).

Variables	
1 Inexplicable movement of objects	24 Odors
2 Movement of light objects	25 Sounds
3 Movement of medium heavy objects	26 Simple sounds
4 Movement of heavy objects	27 Mimicry
5 Movement in unusual trajectory	28 Noise independent of object movement
6 Objects suddenly disappear	29 Raps
7 Apports	30 Body phenomena
8 Penetrations	31 Smearings
9 Objects seemed to form in air	32 Cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves
10 Fragile objects don't break	33 People are locked in
11 Discrepancy between energy and effect	34 Phenomena only in the vicinity of certain people
12 Bombardment	35 Phenomena only in the presence of a second person
13 Stones play a role	36 Beginning of the phenomena from the outside
14 Phenomena with liquids	37 Phenomena in preferred location
15 Graffiti	38 Phenomena at preferred time of day
16 Clothing is torn	39 Phenomena in a preferred month
17 Total disorder is created	40 Day of first event has special meaning
18 Power disturbances	41 Duration
19 Disturbances in the water supply	42 Phenomena occur daily for about 1 week
20 Fire	43 Continuity/Highlights
21 Cold breeze	44 "Intelligent" behavior
22 Cold/heat phenomena	45 FP exists
23 Optical phenomena	46 Phantom voice

Table 4. Variable selection according to the criteria: relevance of the content to the structural analysis, missing value in no more than 35% of cases, positive response in at least 10% of cases.

Item selection	
1 Movement of light objects	9 Graffiti
2 Objects suddenly disappear	10 Fire
3 Apports	11 Simple sounds
4 Penetrations	12 Body phenomena
5 Objects seemed to form in air	13 Cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves
6 Bombardment	14 Phenomena at preferred time of day
7 Stones play a role	15 "Intelligent" behavior
8 Phenomena with liquids	

Reliability coefficient: Cronbach's alpha: .77

Table 5. Item selection according to the item analysis.

Factor and Cluster Analyses

In order to examine all available cases for common structures or patterns, a factor analysis is performed on the 54 cases using the selected 15 items. The analysis, in which the number of factors to be extracted was determined by the eigenvalue criterion, yielded a five-factor solution, with these five factors explaining 68.2% of the total variance. According to the applied Fürntratt criterion (Fürntratt, 1969), according to which an interpretable factor must be defined by at least three variables, whose substantial loading on the factor a_i should be $> .30$ and which can be regarded as marker variables (thus fulfilling the condition $a^2/h^2 > .50$), only the first three factors are interpretable. Thereupon a three-factor solution was calculated, whose third factor now did not fulfill the eigenvalue criterion; only the two-factor solution meets all conditions, it yields the following solution (see Table 6).¹²

Factor 1		Factor 2	
Item	Factor Loading	Item	Factor Loading
6 Bombardment	.90	2 Objects suddenly disappear	.72
5 Objects seemed to form in air	.86	11 Simple sounds	.53
3 Apports	.68	14 Phenomena at preferred time of day	-.45
7 Stones play a role	.64	12 Body phenomena	.42
4 Penetrations	.60	15 "Intelligent" behavior	.38
9 Graffiti	.42	13 Cabinets, doors, windows open by themselves	.38

Table 6. Items of the RSPK survey questionnaire defining the factors in the level of their loadings (item numbering according to the 15 selected items, see Table 5).

The first two factors explain 42% of the total variance, with 30% accounted for by the first factor. The items that define this factor can be described together as follows: They are all items, which point to something new, added within an existing structure. There are anomalous structural changes or anomalous formation of new structures, so we call this factor "novum" or "structural" factor. The second factor is marked by items in which something existing undergoes change, the behavior of pre-existing objects is reported, and the *behavior is anomalous*, not the object itself. That is why we call this factor "change factor" or "behavior factor." The variable "phenomena occur at a certain time of day" is difficult to integrate; however, since it is an item with a negative loading, its content means that phenomena primarily do *not* occur at a certain time of day.

Except for the variables "penetrations" and "graffiti," which also have loadings greater than .30 in the first factor, the remaining variables are factor-free.

¹² See the original German paper for details (Huesmann & Schriever, 1989: 77-78).

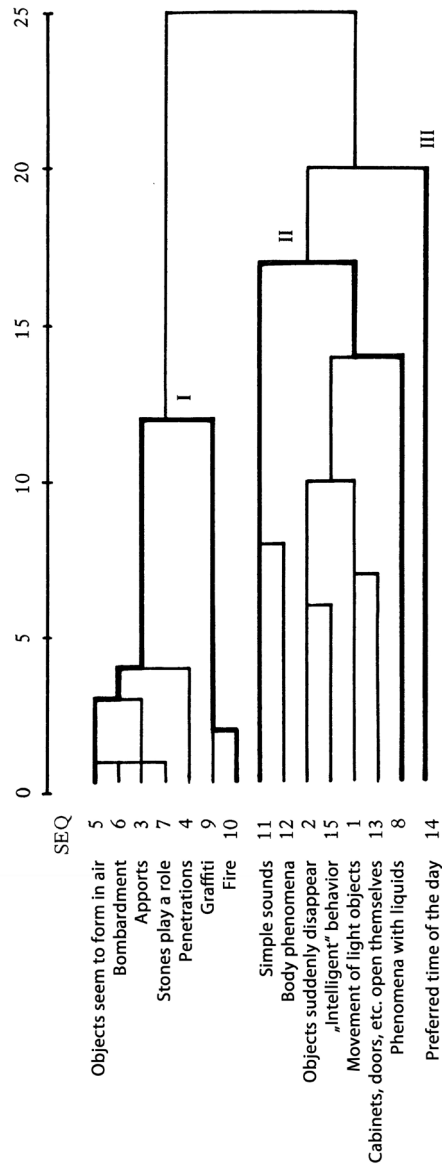


Figure 2. Dendrogram of the variable clusters (Display with relative distance information).

Since our data meet the conditions for a factor analysis only conditionally well (see paragraph “Statistical Data Preparation”), we used a second multivariate procedure for structuring the RSPK variables as a control, which is based on other mathematical principles: the cluster analysis. The results are (almost) identical. The same dimensions are represented in the three-cluster solution as in the factor analysis. However, in this analysis the variables that do not define a factor in the factor analysis are also included in the clusters (“fire” in factor 1, “liquids” and “movement of light objects” in factor 2). In addition, the variable “phenomena occur at preferred time of day” is added separately as the third cluster. Here, the otherness of these variables stands out, which we had difficulty integrating into the second factor in terms of content during the factor analysis.

Stage	Connected clusters		Coefficient	Level at which cluster first appears		Next stage
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
1	5	6	2.13	0	0	4
2	3	7	6.63	0	0	4
3	9	10	11.63	0	0	10
4	3	5	17.19	2	1	5
5	3	4	24.90	4	0	10
6	2	15	32.90	0	0	9
7	1	13	40.90	0	0	9
8	11	12	49.28	0	0	12
9	1	2	60.28	7	6	11
10	3	9	71.73	5	3	14
11	1	8	83.53	9	0	12
12	1	11	96.64	11	8	13
13	1	14	115.08	12	0	14
14	1	3	149.73	13	10	0

Table 7. Cluster analysis: agglomeration table according to Ward’s method.

Figure 2 and table 7 show clearly that two of the three variables mentioned which do not define a factor in the factor analysis, are added to the cluster in the cluster analysis only in the last agglomeration step. Due to the very detailed agreement of the results of both analysis methods, we can conclude that the factor or cluster structure is stable.

These results of the phenomenon analysis, the extraction of the factors “structure” and “behavior” as determinants of RSPK events – as one possible interpretation – can be seen as

an empirical confirmation of the explanatory Model of Pragmatic Information (MPI) for psi phenomena by W. v. Lucadou and K. Kornwachs (1982, Lucadou, 1987). In this model, “structure” and “behavior” of a system are regarded as its complementary components, complementarity being a property of the system. Now, one might object that these two categories are purely observer effects and not categories of the system, here of the RSPK event. However, since we have not factorized individual reports of different observers, but all observations of the different reporters on a case are included in the survey form, we can assume that the factors are categories of the RSPK event.

To satisfy the complementarity of the two categories in the sense of systems theory, our categories must satisfy the following conditions: (1) The information content of a system changes when the order in which the categories are measured is reversed. The categories cannot be measured simultaneously. (2) The measurement of the categories has the dimension of effect as defined in physics. (For more details see Lucadou, 1987, 1989.) Thus we have to show that our two categories of an RSPK event satisfy these conditions. An example from the Miami case investigated by Roll (1976: 121ff.) shows that in a RSPK case the behavior cannot be observed and at the same time a statement about the structure can be made and vice versa. After Roll had observed that RSPK occurrences were concentrated on certain objects and also on preferred places (focusing effect), in the experimental phase of this RSPK investigation he used objects as target objects (ashtrays, glasses, jugs) in certain target areas, placed them and controlled them as well as possible. In most cases, the target objects were on a shelf, and not directly on the edge, but they had been placed about 20–30 cm from the edge. Sometimes another object stood in front of the target object as an obstacle. In this way, the objects as well as their immediate surroundings were always closely examined by Roll, and he was able to make a statement about the structural nature of the objects. Several times during the course of the investigation, such target objects fell from the shelf without any apparent external impact, despite the best possible control. In several cases, Roll heard the impact of a target object on the floor but could not fully see the object movement itself. When he then got to the target object, he had to realize that the object he had placed in front of the target object as an obstacle was still there, while the target object itself was lying on the floor. So it must have moved over or around the barrier object.

In these examples, it was possible to accurately record the structure of the target objects, but there is poor information about the behavior. In none of the events in the Miami case could Roll or any other observer see the initial motion. Thus, structure and behavior were not measurable simultaneously.

In another case, Roll (1976: 156ff.) was able to observe object movements from the beginning, but never to detect the structure of the object before the movement, because here all kinds of objects were moving (e.g., pieces of furniture in different rooms, perfume bottles, ashtrays) and

no focusing effect suggested to the investigator the naming and observation of target objects. This example also shows the incompatibility of measurements of structure and behavior.

Concerning the dimension of the effect of a measurement, only the elusivity of the RSPK event is to be remembered. It has been shown during the investigations again and again that the events *do not* occur just when one waits for them and wants to observe them, for this there are many examples. In one of our cases (case 37), a puddle of water appears on the floor at the very moment when the observer turns his head away.

Thus, it does not seem implausible to assume that the conditions for the Pragmatic Information model are met.

Because the present work is a pilot study, it remains to be seen whether the categories depicted here that appear to condition an RSPK case can also be demonstrated in an analysis of a larger sample of RSPK cases and considering a more comprehensive set of variables.

Recommendations for Phenomenon Detection in Future RSPK Investigations

As has been emphasized several times in the previous chapters, the survey form for RSPK cases used here for the first time could rarely be completed satisfactorily due to insufficient information in the case files. In order to be able to verify the results of the structural analysis, a larger number of RSPK cases are needed in which the occurrence or non-occurrence of phenomena and phenomenon characteristics listed here (see tables 1 and 2) are specifically recorded.

Now, all those who have been involved in the investigation of an RSPK case know how difficult it is to collect data in this particular situation, where the people involved are usually under the impression of the inexplicable for them for several days or even weeks because the parapsychologist is usually the last to arrive at the scene of the event.

It is hardly appropriate to the situation to “interrogate” the multitude of possible phenomena directly, because, on the one hand, the persons concerned would be unnecessarily frightened by the idea of further new events, and, on the other hand, the danger of provoking novel phenomena would be too great. The parapsychologist or another scientific observer should, for these reasons, in the course of the investigation only ask about “unusual events” and not about specific phenomena. He himself should fill out the survey form completely during and after completion of the investigation.

It would also be advisable to document the sequence of phenomena in as much detail as possible in order to uncover any regularities in this respect.

There is no question that audio and/or visual documentation of the phenomena themselves is desirable.

Part II

Poltergeist Victims and Focus Persons

This second part deals with the results of the questionnaire evaluation concerning the persons affected by the poltergeist (*poltergeist victims*) and especially with the “focus persons” (FPs), which are such persons who are obviously in the center of the poltergeist occurrences.

The place where a poltergeist occurs usually does not play a major role. Rather, the poltergeist seems to attach itself to the heels of certain *persons*, whose presence is usually indispensable for something to “happen.” One speaks of “person-centered” as opposed to “location centered” poltergeist. For the most part, young people are at the center of the events. As we mentioned in the introduction, every poltergeist is full of imponderables up to tricks and fraud. Even if it cannot be proved, RSPK phenomena usually turn out to be “evasive,” that is, they are fleeting, eluding observation. Therefore, one could object that it would be obvious to do without the construct “poltergeist” or “RSPK” altogether and to assume right away that in all cases it is a matter of very human hoax. We don’t want to prevent anybody from such an attitude, although many facts oppose it. But even then it would be interesting to investigate which group of persons would actually have it psychologically “necessary” to resort to this – then psychologically conspicuous – way of reaction.

For the presentation of RSPK cases, the case report is the most suitable method. Such cases seem to elude a systematic quantifying evaluation because of the complexity of the matter. Important are questions of the individual family constellation and the psychological condition of the participants; also medical and sociological aspects should be recorded. The credibility of the reporters and witnesses should be taken into account. Nevertheless, one naturally wonders whether there are no “typical” haunted families or haunted situations, whether poltergeist victims differ from other people. Therefore, we made an attempt to collect and evaluate data on persons affected by the poltergeist and FP in addition to the phenomena.

Poltergeist Victims

We collected information about all the people involved in the incidents with seven items of our questionnaire. These people are exposed to many annoyances, often of a prankster nature. For example, in one case it was reported that milk was suddenly poured into shoes (no. 2). In another case (no. 40), a front door disappeared and was later found balancing in an apple tree. One result of our survey was that poltergeists seem to exist in all social classes. From unskilled laborers to professors, affected persons turned to the Institute. On average, between 4 and 20 people testified to having experienced some kind of phenomena. Affected people are by no

means predominantly people who have dealt with “paranormal” things before. Many are struck by the events as if by a bolt from the blue. A passage from the documents may clarify this:

I know that it can only be believed by the one who saw it. (...) Even at an age when I had already passed the middle 50s I had to overturn the whole theory of my life. (case 2)

Overall, 43% of those affected suspected a connection between the RSPK events and dead people and ghosts. 39% spoke of “poltergeist,” 11% believed in demons as the cause, 11% believed in fraud, 20% thought a natural cause was possible.

Outsiders often underestimate the stresses that persons affected by the poltergeist face. In at least four of our cases (7%), poltergeist victims had shown suicidal intentions. The intensity of the poltergeist in some cases may be illustrated by a quote from the case material:

Anyone who saw this man arrive here, frazzled, nervous, close to crying, with the recurring plea for help, knows how far people were in their despair. He told of last night, that they had not been able to find sleep, as they had for weeks, that when they were barely in bed, the contents of the wake-up jars (currants) were poured from the cupboard into the bed, and the empty jars were thrown through the window panes. Then the shoes that were in the closet flew through the window pane. As soon as the beds were cleaned, a bucket of water with contents flew into the beds, also a coal can; the sheets slipped from under their bodies and feces was smeared on their faces. (case 2)

Fortunately, things are not always so drastic, but a continuous exposure to RSPK phenomena of at least a week without a day’s interruption was present in 85% of our cases.

Quite a few of the affected persons resort to the deep psychological protective mechanisms of denial and repression: For example, one man had heard unexplained voices and barking in the presence of his wife and son without being able to find a cause for it. He had become so upset about this that he suffered a kind of heart attack. After a few weeks, he denied having heard anything unusual and accused his wife of having only told him these “fantasies” (case 38).

In another case, an old man had kept a log for weeks of hundreds of events in his home, including the bombardment of eggs, the independent ignition of paper, the fact that hat and gloves came flying on when he was only planning to go for a walk, etc. This did not prevent him from declaring, about a year after the phenomena had ceased, that everything had turned out to be a disturbance in the power system (case 40). Such reactions, called the “squid effect,” are psychologically understandable, since they restore the psychological equilibrium of the subjects. However, they complicate documentation and call into question the credibility of witnesses. Von Lucadou (1983), following Moser, speaks of the “conspiracy of concealment” in the “repression phase.”

This behavior is also a reaction to the environment. Whoever reports poltergeist experiences is “crazy” in the eyes of his fellow men and therefore does well to conceal such experiences. In fact, we came across a mother in our records who was declared “schizophrenic” by a doctor because of reported RSPK occurrences and was treated with medication accordingly. Such a procedure makes the presumably high number of unreported cases of poltergeist understandable. One can hardly describe the fears of those *not* affected by the poltergeist better than C. G. Jung in his preface to Fanny Moser’s book *Spuk*:

The prejudice prevailing in many places against the factual reports under consideration here exhibits all the symptoms of primitive fear of ghosts. Even educated people who could know better occasionally need the most nonsensical arguments, become illogical, and deny the testimony of their own senses. (Moser 1977: 11)

Sexauer (1958/59: 116) points out the special quality of feeling in RSPK phenomena, which can be described as “terrifying.” It contains a “hopeless and therefore paralyzing fear.” Comparable is reported from dogs, which should react to RSPK occurrences panic and “like paralyzed.” We found a detailed description in our records of a dog’s reaction to a location-centered haunting.

When I turn on the light, I see that he has ruffled hair and keeps looking in one direction. Then what he sees seems to move, and I see him chasing it with his eyes, with his whole head. (...) It is very uncanny. (case 14)

Younger people and children are usually less permanently shaken by RSPK experiences. Completely incomprehensible and even suspicious to outsiders, they can sometimes laugh heartily if, for example, the “knocking ghost” has just tapped a tune.

At some point, when even the priest can no longer help, the police are usually called in. For 50% of our cases this is known. In individual cases, police officers or firefighters also make a touching effort to help those affected, keeping watch and trying to expose the poltergeist. More often, however, those affected by the poltergeist are met with complete incomprehension, and are often met with ironic comments even on the phone. This increases their isolation, as one example from our material shows:

Now they’ve called the police, and of course they say that they’re doing it themselves, they’re crazy, and so on. Now nobody helps them anymore, they are desperate, the kitchen looks like a debris field every day. They find it scary. They tremble and no longer know what to do. They want to move out of the house because it’s haunted. (case 59)

In one of our cases, the prosecutor’s office played an inglorious role by believing suspicions of several rental parties among themselves and nonsensically ordered a search of the apartment

in the absence of a family to find objects with which the residents could have made knocking noises. They also found the *corpus delicti* in the form of a footstool, which of course was completely ridiculous. However, the suspected family was so defamed that they moved out of the apartment building a short time later (case 58).

Focus Persons

In the following, we turn to the focus persons of RSPK cases, about which we have collected quite a bit of data. According to a widely accepted theory, spooky phenomena can occur in a hitherto unexplained way when a person, usually a pubescent adolescent, is under great inner tension and aggression that cannot be adequately expressed or processed. Why this leads to such discharges only in relatively very few people is not known.

We called the person presumably central for a poltergeist event in this way a focal or focus person (= FP), if their relative proximity (at least presence in the house) was usually necessary for RSPK phenomena to happen. We recorded in our survey a total of 52 FPs, of which 29 were male (56%) and 23 female (44%) from a total of 43 cases. In 34 cases (63%) there was *one* FP, in nine cases (17%) 2 FPs. In three cases (6%) one group was to be considered the focus, in eight cases (15%) *no* FP could be identified. This includes reports of location-centered hauntings and those cases in which no FP could be subsequently identified.

All the following data refer to those who were, alone or in pairs, center person in a RSPK case.

*Age and Gender of Focus Persons*¹³

The age of the FP at the first appearance of the phenomena is shown – separately for boys and girls – in the following figure 3.

According to the theory mentioned above, it would be expected that pubescent adolescents would be far more overrepresented among the “triggering” FPs. Figure 3 shows that there is a peak in *girls* at age 12 and 13. The median¹⁴ is 12.5, and the modal¹⁵ is also 12.5 years (four times each 12 and 13). According to Klumbies (1980: 430), the most common menarche age, which could be defined as the peak of puberty in girls, is 13 years in Germany. Thus, the modal value of female focal persons is very close to this value. For *male* FPs, our curve shows a plateau at 13

13 Ages refer to $N = 51$ FPs only, because the age of one female FP was not known at the onset of the phenomena.

14 The median is the value in the middle of the measured values ordered by size.

15 The modal value is the most frequent value.

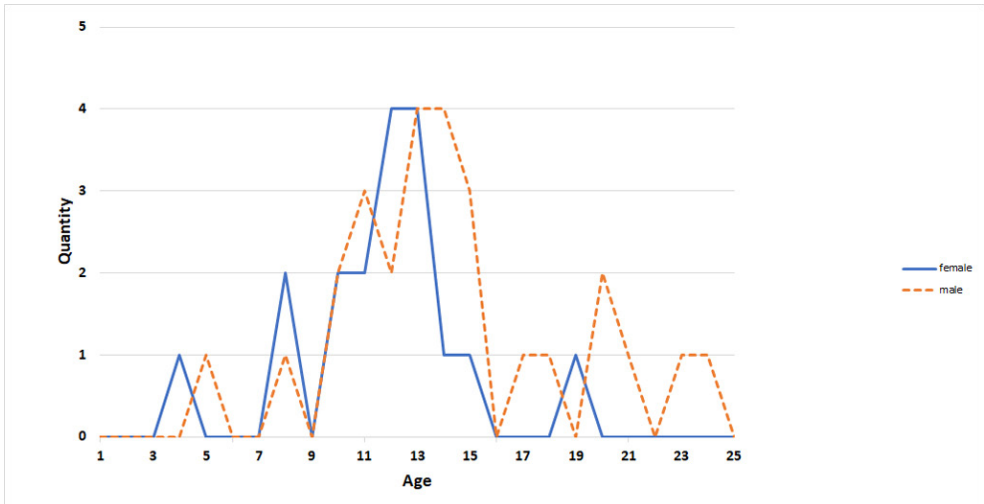


Figure 3. Age of the FPs at the onset of RSPK phenomena, separated by gender; plus six FPs over the age of 25 ($N = 51$).

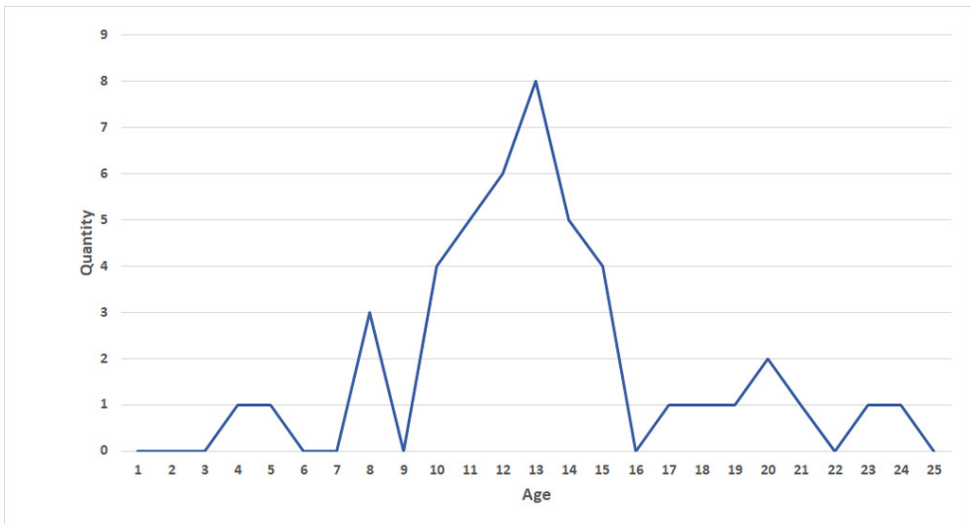


Figure 4. Age of the FPs at the onset of RSPK phenomena; plus six FPs over the age of 25 ($N = 51$).

and 14 years (four each), following an increase from age 10. Here, the median is 14, thus higher than for girls, the modal value at 13.5 years. According to Klumbies, the data on the pubertal peak, which is only inaccurately recorded with the ejacularche (first pollution), is 14 years for German boys. Harbauer and Schmidt (1984) give similar values. From a statistical point of view, one must of course be cautious with conclusions. Nevertheless, the age distribution could strengthen the above thesis.

The figures become even clearer if the values for boys and girls are plotted on a joint curve (compare Figure 4). There is a continuous increase from the age of 10, a clear peak of 13 and a clear drop after the age of 15. In fact, 63% of the FPs were at the beginning of the phenomena between 10 and 15 years old. The youngest FP was a 4 year old girl who, together with her 13 year old stepsister, was the focus of RSPK phenomena, and the oldest was a 75 year old woman who, together with her 11 year old grandson, could be identified as the FPs of a water poltergeist.

Medical-Psychological Abnormalities

The poltergeist researcher Roll (1977: 40ff.) speculates about the connection between epilepsy in FPs and the occurrence of RSPK phenomena. He believes to find an accumulation of evidence of connections in recent cases. He considers it possible that RSPK phenomena are direct projections of discharges of the central nervous system.

Rogo (1986: 189) rather believes in a common causation of both abnormalities by serious psychological shocks. In our subsequent evaluation of the cases we had the problem that, as a rule, neurological and psychological facts had not been asked for at all. Only in a few cases were specialist medical certificates available, so that we had to rely on the descriptions and statements of the persons concerned in the case files. In this respect, the following figures should be evaluated with great caution.

Seizures of an epileptic nature were reported to us in five cases (10%). In 20 cases, no more information was available. The average incidence of epileptic episodes in the general population is .5% to 5% (cf. Harbauer & Schmidt, 1984).

Absences were observed in 9 cases, equal to 41% of the cases for which data were provided, but only 17% of all FPs. It should be noted that because of the poor delineation of the term "absences," such brief "mental absences" are included that may have had psychogenic rather than neurologic causes.

For our FPs, four cases (8%) of *somnambulism* (night walking) were reported. Unfortunately, however, the majority of cases did not ask about it. Since *somnambulism* is an altered

state of consciousness and there are similarities to the states of individual FPs during the RSPK phenomena, this survey seemed interesting to us. For comparison with the general population: Müller (1973) assumes a prevalence in the adult population of 3.5% to 5%, in children the number is supposed to be higher. It is striking that all positive cases of somnambulism in our material are after 1976. Since then, more intensive attention has been paid to such abnormalities. In this newer material every fourth to fifth FP was or had been a somnambulist.

It is remarkable that at least a good third of the FPs reports physical or psychological abnormalities *during* or *immediately* before the RSPK phenomena. Here the unknown cases are evaluated as negative answers, so that the true value might be even higher. In detail, the persons report catalepsies (paralyses), nausea, headaches, twitching, restlessness or strange tense feeling, buzzing in the head, blackness before the eyes. This indeed seems significant, as it underlines the presumed connection between the RSPK occurrences and the focus person. In some FPs one registers a certain satisfaction and relaxation as a result of the phenomena. This is also reported by Roll (1976: 175), who quotes an FP as saying, “This thing [breaking the ashtray] makes me happy, I don’t know why” and “I am nervous now because nothing is happening.”

The affinity of many FPs to the *conversion neurotic* area is striking. According to the diagnosis key of the World Health Organization, ICD 9 (International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision), the term “hysterical neurosis” is still in use. Under it are summarized:

1. *Conversion symptoms*, which are psychogenic body dysfunctions, e. g., paralysis, blindness, tremor, seizures.
2. *Dusk states* with narrowing of the field of consciousness and selective amnesia. Forbis and Janes interpret conversion reactions in children as “ineffective effort to solve an intractable problem” (Kammerer 1980: 434).

There are consistent reports of an accumulation of hysterical cases during puberty, and there again among girls. Eggers (1983: 426) writes about the underlying conflict dynamics: “Hysterical symptoms can, however, also serve the defense of aggressive impulses, which are not admitted and therefore repressed from the consciousness and expressed in the distorted form of body language.” The same seems to us to apply to the “conversion” into RSPK phenomena, which in FPs goes partly parallel with a conversion into hysterical symptoms. In one of our cases (no. 58) a 10 year old girl, who lived with her grandparents, had an almost classic hysterical fit with arc-de-cerclé posture of the body. A witness spoke of “the spirit” throwing her up so that only her head and feet touched the bed. She had also jerked, which was interpreted as “being shaken through.” Because of the imprecise definition of hysterical symptoms, it is difficult to classify our FPs in this category on the basis of file material. We arrived at 12 cases (23%) even with a

narrow definition. The same percentage results for FP under 19 years of age. This seems a lot, considering that (according to Eggers, 1983) cases of hysterical neurosis in childhood affect between .05% and 1.5% of the age population.

Frequently, epileptic seizures can hardly be distinguished from psychogenic seizures with an epileptic appearance. Therefore, we consider it possible that the observed accumulation of epilepsy (see above) must be partly attributed to the account of psychogenic seizures. Indeed, EEG clarification is present in very few cases. EEG derivations were first performed in psychokinesis agents after Roll in 1961. A “hystero epilepsy” mentioned by Kammerer (1980: 436), which is characterized by a mixed occurrence of epileptic and hysterical parts, seems interesting in this context. He refers to a study in which 34 such “mixed” cases are described. The ages of those affected ranged from four to 16 years with a peak at 11 years.

Kammerer (1980: 437) also includes vaso-depressor syncope among psychogenic seizures. This is understood to mean a “short-lasting clouding of consciousness due to disturbance of the blood supply to the CNS.” Typical symptoms are “initial blacking of the eyes, flickering of the eyes, ringing in the ears, nausea,” etc. The same symptoms were reported by a 13 year old FP shortly before the onset of RSPK phenomena. Here, no more than a hypothesis can be made about the clustered occurrence of neurological or psychological abnormalities in FPs of poltergeists. It must be left to scientific investigations to prove this.

In statistical processing of our data, we paid attention to possible correlations between the occurrence of certain RSPK phenomena and variables of FP. The item “FP had absences” correlated with the item “objects suddenly disappear” at the level of $\phi = .65$ ($N = 19$, $p < .01$). This could support the conjecture that FP makes objects disappear in a brief state of absent-mindedness. Of course, this explanation is not compelling. In a number of cases, *skin phenomena* have been reported to us in poltergeist victims, e. g., strangulation marks. The classification of such phenomena is difficult, since it is possible that persons have taught themselves these signs. However, an effect on the skin directly caused by the poltergeist cannot be completely ruled out. Skin reactions are also conceivable as conversion symptoms. In total, 25 cases (46%) of “body phenomena” in persons affected by the poltergeist were reported to us. Among them we subsumed: choking sensation, being shaken, skin phenomena. According to our observations, psychogenic body dysfunctions do not only occur frequently with FP, but also with other affected persons, so that they may be a general *reaction to* the experience of so-called poltergeist. For example, an elderly man, in whose family many RSPK phenomena occurred, reported a “tunnel vision” which limited his normal vision for several hours (case 58).

In a more recent case (which was no longer part of our study), the “haunted family” included a mother with two daughters and a pair of grandparents. Pushed up by phenomena that were inexplicable to them, the daughters (12 and 16 years old) and the mother experienced scream-

ing episodes. The grandmother reported a globus sensation in her throat with shortness of breath and kidney pain, the grandfather had a kind of heart attack, one of the girls had hives-like wheals on her face, and the other had choking attacks. This example once again underlines the subjective consternation of people who are suddenly confronted with “poltergeists.” Data on hearing phantom voices (17% of our FPs) and seeing phantoms (12%) are difficult to assess, especially since it was not clear in all cases whether other persons were actually present who had no corresponding sensory perceptions.

With some FPs, but by no means with the majority, a tendency to exaggerate and partly inaccurate descriptions of experiences was observed. In these cases, we had the impression that the FP herself often did not know exactly whether she had tricked, e. g., tapped, in the individual case or not. Delbrück (1891: 27) coined the term “Pseudologia phantastica” for a mixture of “fantasy, boasting, lying, deceit, delusion and – if it is to be absolutely – also simulation and dissimulation.” He emphasizes that the transitions between intentional and unintentional deception are fluid. In one of our cases (no. 18) the FP was characterized by an obviously pseudologically colored fantasy and thereby also damaged the reputation of the investigating scientists (cf. Bender & Mischo, 1978). For the exploration of RSPK cases a remark of Delbrück (1891: 47) seems to us of importance: “In the first place, of course, the imagination, which is very active especially in these individuals, comes into consideration; secondly, however, the same will seize with joy everything that is brought to them from the outside.” Thus, symptoms can be virtually “produced” by suggestive questions. One of the RSPK cases we investigated lasted for several weeks without the hypothesis of a connection with a spirit being having been raised. After a neighbor had put forward this idea with great persuasiveness, the very next day a “rejected soul” answered the phone, and all sorts of hideous cawing noises occurred, which were obviously, like the phone call, sent by the FP and produced almost compulsively. Despite these examples it should be emphasized once again that by all means not most FPs are pseudologists.

Findings of Psychological Tests

Psychological testing and interviews were conducted with 22 of our FPs, but by very different practitioners. Often the results were not available to us. They were mostly personality tests, projective tests, and tests of family dynamics. The few usable documents support the picture that Mischo drew as early as 1970 after intensive study of two FPs: “The personality sets its sights too high and lacks the perseverance necessary to realize plans” (Mischo, 1970: 22). A tendency toward overadjustment became apparent in some of the FPs. This resulted in many responses in the direction of social desirability. In a medical report about two FPs it says: “Both children behaved completely adapted with us, seemed altogether very well-behaved and ‘well-bred.’ They were both extremely polite” (case 54).

Several times, conflict-avoidant behavior was noted, as well as omnipotent thoughts. In some cases, a very close symbiotic mother bond was found. Since in each case a comparison with the data of the total population is missing, these results are to be evaluated with reservation. In terms of intelligence, there is a scattering from weak to above-average aptitude.

To a 17 year old male FP the tests attested a “tendency to direct aggressive strivings inward.” This boy in particular – in addition to his grandfather, whom he experienced as a competitor for his grandmother’s love – was repeatedly the target of dangerous attacks by flying objects, which in one case led to his fainting. Psychologically, these attacks could be interpreted as self-aggressions of the boy. The case came to a head in a suicide attempt by the 17 year old (case 40).

One should beware of a blanket pathologization of focus persons, as this individual-centered view is no longer appropriate to our current knowledge of the cause of somatic and psychological disorders. The findings of modern systemic psychology state that mostly disturbances in a system, e. g., the family, are involved in the generation of conflicts, whereby the constitution of a family member can be decisive for whether and how he becomes a “symptom carrier” of the group.

Roll (2004: 188) states:

In general, poltergeist incidents seem to be symptoms of pathological interpersonal relations more than of pathological individual personalities. [...] Perhaps the poltergeist person is an individual who is unusually sensitive to interpersonal stress or a person in whose life such stress has been unusually severe.

Only in a few of our cases did the doctors and psychologists involved take this desirable systemic approach. An excerpt from the medical report of a child and adolescent psychiatry seems to us exemplary in this context: “Family difficulties are to be assumed, which are however not openly expressed, from which both the parents and the children suffer. Above all (...), who is likely to be particularly sensitive, seems to have a tendency to ‘sweep problems under the carpet,’ that is, not to deal with them adequately. Here a connection with the RSPK phenomena is to be suspected.” This is followed by the recommendation of a family therapy oriented treatment (case 54). According to our insight, this would be a suitable way to lower the aggressive potential in the environment of the FP in most cases. With the disappearance of the “affective field,” the poltergeist should then mostly come to an end!

Social and Psychological Stressors

In the following, let us consider data on social and psychological stress in our focus subjects. For example, we recorded whether or not the FP, if under 19 years of age, lived with both biological parents. This was *not* the case for 15 out of 39 children and adolescents, that is, 38% did not live

in a “complete” family at the onset of the poltergeist. According to the Statistical Yearbook 1985, the comparative figure from the total population is only 10% of all children (under 18 years of age). In a survey of a German child and adolescent psychiatric clinic, the figures were also much higher: 23% of the children lived without a father, 13% without a mother (cf. Höfer, 1984). 35% of the clients of a decentralized child and adolescent psychiatric service in Schwetzingen did not live with their parents (cf. Sundström, 1987). Grandparents or other relatives lived in the household in 36% of our cases, which can also be a cause of psychological tension. Overall, in at least 54% of the cases, the FP under 19 years of age either did not live in a family with father and mother, and/or there were still relatives living in the household.

Interesting parallels also exist here with children with conversion neuroses. Windlinger (1975) reports that in a good quarter of his cases of patients in the clinic the education of hysterical children and adolescents “mainly took place outside the family (foster parents, grandparents, homes).” According to Nissen, girls with psychogenic seizures are often father orphans (cf. Eggers, 1983: 343).

In one of our cases (no. 58), the female 10 year old FP lived with her grandparents. According to our observations, the grandparents showed an inconsistent educational behavior, which on the one hand demanded absolute obedience, and on the other hand spoiled the girl by showering her with material things. This behavior seems to have favored an over-well-behaved but also a dishonest behavior. It apparently led to subliminal aggression in the girl, which, however, was not allowed to be shown openly for fear of punishment. For example, the girl scratched the grandmother’s upholstered furniture with her fingernails, but strictly denied this. The grandmother reported that when she had taken the girl in, she had been very stubborn, but in the meantime she had “straightened her out.”

In some cases of male juvenile FPs an oedipal constellation is conspicuous: Thus in one case (no. 5) the RSPK phenomena began exactly in *the* night after the father of a 12 year old boy had come home from war captivity. The boy had previously lived alone with his mother and had not known his father at all. There were knocking and scratching noises as well as mimicry noises (wood chopping). Curtains, table and chairs moved. At the same time, the boy showed symptoms of the hysterical type, such as catalepsies, fainting, rolling around. Later he wrote “anonymous” letters, which he signed “the spirit of death of Stalingrad” and which reflected all his jealousy of the rival.

In another case (no. 38), the mother of an 18 year old boy, who lived separately from her husband, “had to” sleep in the same room as her son because of the poltergeist, as she was afraid to be alone. In this case, too, trance-like states and catalepsies occurred in the son. Of course, the area of sexuality in particular, but also of detachment from parents, is a subject of great conflict for children and adolescents.

Jealousy and “dethronement” of the FP also preceded the beginning of the poltergeist in another case (no. 59): A mother lived alone with her 14 year old daughter. Suddenly the grandmother arrived and settled in for several weeks. She took away the girl’s sleeping place next to her mother and took over her role in other ways as well. Soon after that the RSPK phenomena began and preferably the grandmother was pelted with eggs and flour. Here the thought of the wicked witch in Hansel and Gretel, who belongs in the oven, suggests itself. One can probably assume that fairy tales capture such fears and cravings of our unconscious very well, and in the poltergeist these unconscious and immature desires seem to celebrate a happy reign.

We wondered whether the *initial months* of poltergeists were statistically randomly distributed or whether there were clusters of certain months that would then need to be interpreted. In 50 of 54 cases, we were still able to determine the presumed starting month (in some cases, the month of the RSPK peak). The distribution among the 12 months of the year was surprising (see Figure 5):

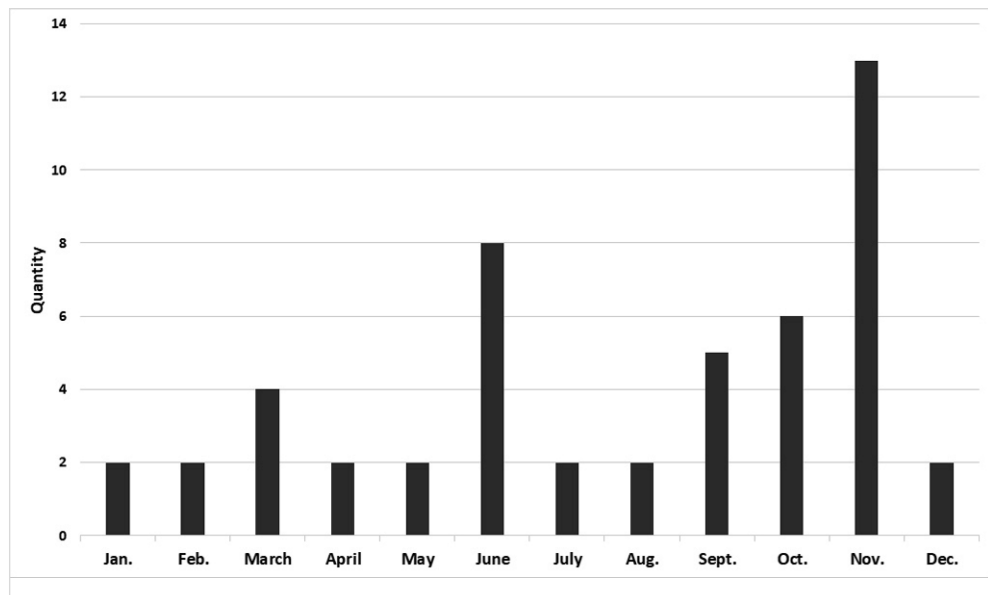


Figure 5. Month of poltergeist onset or poltergeist peak ($N = 50$).

A clear peak was seen in November with 13 cases, and a smaller peak with eight cases in June. The fall months of September and October were also still relatively high, with five and six cases, respectively. It is difficult to interpret these findings. We do not want to subscribe to the common cliché that November is a gloomy month of the dead, in which one could also most

likely expect poltergeists. From a psychodynamic point of view, another explanation suggests itself: November is likely to be the most unpleasant month of the year for children because it has short days, is cold and rainy, but usually does not yet offer snow to play in. This means children have to spend most of their free time indoors, and existing tensions can escalate. This tends to be true for the other fall months as well. December, on the other hand, which was represented as an initial month in our case with only two cases, often provides snow and also a lot of busyness and anticipation in preparation for Christmas.

This explanation does not fit the accumulation of the beginning of RSPK phenomena in June, which is a typical vacation month. However, we know from at least one case that this very fact created social stress, since a young woman who had an ambivalent attitude towards her husband became the focus exactly in the month when her husband started a three-week vacation that he spent at home. Thus, he was suddenly in her presence all the time. This example shows how individually the obtained data must be interpreted. Incidentally, our psychological view of the beginning of the poltergeist months is also supported by the experience of educational counseling centers, which report an increase in registrations in the fall.

*The Poltergeist as a “Riser of the Unconscious”?*¹⁶

The poltergeist often gives the impression that an immature personality seems to act. This manifests itself in an uninhibited destructive rage, in the fiendish character (cf. the term “poltergeist” commonly used in English), but also, for example, through obscene innuendos. Thus the thesis arose that “primitive” parts of a person’s personality could act subconsciously in the poltergeist, without him being aware of it himself. By the way, there are similar hypotheses for night walking. Holzschuher (quoted from Wilk et al., 1971: 619) understands night walking as “acting and reacting in pure primitive consciousness, while ego consciousness is switched off by sleep or hypnosis. In this state the primitive person acts quasi alone.”

Often the poltergeist seems to take over the role of the “naughty little girl” just as a substitute for the good focus person. As mentioned, it can happen that “the poltergeist” throws eggs at the grandmother, which the FP “officially” would never allow herself to do. “The poltergeist” acts aggressively, ripping and cutting clothes, setting newspapers on fire, putting dollies in sexual positions, or pulling condoms over rabbits’ ears. He calls the time announcer when the FP wants to go home from work. He hurls stones at the head of the rival and turns the living room of the fastidious grandmother into a mess. It is also he who repeatedly puts the beds of all family members under water during a water poltergeist. And finally, he even sticks needles through the

16 Term first used by Rudolf Tischner (e. g., 1921).

mother's picture and puts bread knives in the bed (all examples come from our case material). In short, he does everything that a well-behaved child is not allowed to do or that is even taboo.

A certain "sense" of the poltergeist for the psyche of the FP is often obvious. It shows up in a similar way in psychosomatic illnesses in the choice of symptoms or the time of the illness. Here as there, an appellative character becomes apparent, a running against life circumstances perceived as unbearable. In doing so, often unsuitable and childish solutions to problems are resorted to, since the person obviously has no "more mature" ones available. An example from our material may illustrate the downright infantile problem-solving behavior of an FP: A boy, already 17 years old, became annoyed at being constantly observed by an employee of the Institute for Frontier Areas. Thereupon he called the institute in a disguised voice and pretended to be a member of the highway patrol. He said that he unfortunately had to report that this employee had just had a fatal accident; an almost magical-animistic behavior. At the same time, he tried – also childishly – to drive the employee away by stink bombs (case 40).

While in most cases the poltergeist is noisy but still silent because it does not speak, occasionally poltergeist victims will attempt to get a reaction or response from the apparent "intelligence" by questioning the knocking sounds.

For example, one wishes it to knock not in the ceiling but in the door. With a code system via yes/no answers or spelling systems, more precise expressions can also be achieved. Most of the time, it can be seen that the responses are at the level of the focus person. For example, in one of our cases in the presence of the 10 year old female FP the "knocker" responded to easy, but not to hard arithmetic problems; likewise, he did not answer English questions (case 58).

Similar to psychomotor automatisms, e.g., the "automatic writing" of media, it becomes clear by the kind of statements, which are often primitive and silly, that probably actually independent parts of the unconscious of a present person act, if there is no conscious tricking. C. G. Jung speaks of "unconscious, autonomous complex[es] which appear projected" (Jung, 1967: 349). Bender adopts from Jacobi the term "autonomous partial psyches" (Bender, 1984b: 99–100). These "intelligent activities not directed by the waking conscious ego" seem to manifest themselves in the poltergeist processes. Indeed, there seem to be points of contact between the practice of psychic automatisms, e.g., glass moving, and the development of RSPK phenomena. One case in our collection (no. 67) developed in the wake of a spiritistically tinged glass moving. The psychiatrist Bjerre experimented at the beginning of the century with a young woman who had first engaged in automatic spelling and later became the focus of RSPK phenomena (cf. Lockowandt, 1963). Participants of "ghost interviews" by means of glasses or little tables are usually shocked, especially because they often assume deceased persons as the originators of the "intelligent" statements. People affected by the poltergeist also often have a tendency to personify the cause of the poltergeist. They speak of "our ghost" or "the knocker," thus giving

the impression that they are dealing with “someone.” This is also evident in the term “poltergeist,” which is hardly used in German, but is used literally (that is, German) in English for person-centered poltergeist. In 54% of the cases we evaluated, an “intelligent” behavior of the poltergeist was reported. This includes “meaningful” RSPK activities, such as tapped melodies or phenomena that are quasi-responses to previously expressed expectations or fears.

The Focus Person as Energy Supplier?

It is theoretically unexplained how the often massive physical effects observed in RSPK cases occur. In 37% of our cases, objects heavier than a chair are said to have moved, e. g., a table or a cabinet. Roll (1974, 1976) observed that phenomena become much less frequent with increasing distance from the FP. He concluded from it that the RSPK-triggering energy could decrease with increasing distance from the source – here the FP – as with a magnetic field (PSI field theory). Seemingly incompatible with this, however, was his second observation that objects farther away from the FP moved over greater distances. He concluded that the PSI field could rotate around the FP like the vortex in a water vortex (Rotating-beam-theory) with the consequence of a greater rotation speed at greater distance from the center of the field.

The data available to us did not allow us to confirm or refute this thesis, since the records of the movement of objects did not contain sufficiently accurate data. However, we found an interesting correlation between the variable “movement of heavy objects” and the variable “phenomena still at greater distance of FP.” It was $C = .47$ (for $N = 30$, $p < .05$). The clustered co-occurrence of these two variables is consistent with the notion of psychokinetic energy, which may have been particularly high in the relevant cases. Unfortunately, however, we do not know whether objects of equal weight behaved differently in their motion at greater distance from the FP than in its proximity.

We also attempted to relate certain emphases in RSPK phenomena to FP person variables. It would be conceivable, for example, that such a relationship could exist between a particularly aggressive poltergeist (bombardment with stones or other objects, fire, total disorder, and the tearing of clothing) and the age or gender of the FP. Such a relationship could not be demonstrated.

Deception and Confessions of Fraud

In some of the RSPK cases, there are confessions from those involved. This seems to close the case for superficial observers. Unfortunately, the real circumstances are often more complicated. Relatively often, children confess to having tricked parts of the poltergeist occurrences, which is usually credible. In the 54 cases we investigated, there were confessions in 14 cases (26%).

Of these, more than three quarters were partial confessions. Revoked confessions are included in these figures. In one case (no. 18), the FP obviously wanted to brag about the content of the confession. However, it did not stand up to investigation.

If one becomes familiar with the course and psychodynamics of RSPK cases, it seems almost natural that especially children and adolescents trick, that is, manipulatively produce RSPK phenomena themselves. This happens, as Lucadou (1983) points out, almost always in the decline or descent phase of the RSPK case. Children often enjoy the poltergeist because it enacts their secret desires and leads to a considerable loss of authority on the part of adults. If representatives of the media then appear in the family, or even the summoned police, few phenomena may still be happening at this point. In the meantime, the FPs have often long since lost their initial fear of the phenomena. Therefore, they now probably occasionally help out by knocking or throwing objects. Certainly, there are also cases where paranormal phenomena never occurred. The alleged chopper poltergeist that caused hysterical reactions in the public media in 1982 probably belongs in this category. In a dentist's office, inexplicable voices were repeatedly heard, mostly uttering foul or obscene remarks but also making declarations of love. After technicians had unsuccessfully searched for the cause for months, employees of the Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology uncovered the hoax of the persons involved in a few days. The presumably interesting psychological backgrounds for the staging of the poltergeist cannot be discussed in more detail here.

An example from our records (case 32) may illustrate how a deception develops: It was a pure knocking haunt which had already lasted half a year when one of two sisters (11 and 13 years old), who were to be regarded as FP, began knocking herself. The 13 year old stated about the beginning of her deception: "At the beginning it was really knocking and then we thought: let's imitate that now." At first she did it without the knowledge of her sister, who then interestingly remarked, "Now it knocks quite differently." About the mixing of real and tricked phenomena she said: "And then when I stopped knocking, it started knocking again properly. It started again very loudly."

The "taking part" in the poltergeist also seems to have an anxiety-relieving function. Thus, the same girl reported about the time when she herself began to knock: "Then I was no longer afraid" and "we just laughed while doing it." Children of course love pranks more than adults and probably feel sympathy for the poltergeist for that reason alone. If adults are also frightened in this way, all the better. The 13 year old continues in her confession: "And then I thought: 'She won't react at all if I just knock a little bit' (meaning grandma; author's note). And then I thought: 'I'd better scare her.' So I hit the mattress very hard with my fist. And grandma said: 'What's going on now?'" If one assumes that RSPK phenomena are exclusively tricked by children and adolescents, then it remains at least astonishing that the motivation of a manipulating FP is maintained over hours and days, even months. To illustrate the intensity and duration,

excerpts from the documents may serve: “The entire family, including the boys, made a shocked impression, because they had – when I got there – already been about eight nights without sleep” (case 36). “And this has been going on for 14 days now, and we don’t get a night’s sleep until five in the morning, when there is silence” (case 46).

Results in Comparison

In the following we would like to compare some of our results with those of Roll (1977, 1977/79, 1978) (see table 8). He refers to the evaluation of 116 RSPK cases with 92 FPs from four centuries.¹⁷

	Freiburg investigation (N = 52)	Roll (N = 92)
One or two FPs present	80%	79%
Female FP	44%	
– over all time periods		61%
– 1950 – 1974		48%
Age of FP (median)		
– male	14 years	14, 12, 15, 14 years (4 time periods)
– female	12.5 years	12, 13.5, 15, 13 years (4 time periods)

Table 8. Comparison of results on focus persons.

Twenty-four percent of Rolls FPs reported seizures, dissociated states, convulsions, twitching, fainting, or were diagnosed as epileptic. We refer to our figures and considerations above. The comparison of social data is also interesting: in Roll, 62% of children and adolescents under 19 years of age of whom there were data did not live at home. In our case, 38% did not live with both birth parents, so there were certainly fewer children who did not live at home at all.

This difference may be due to various reasons, such as different habits in earlier centuries, placing children with relatives, as well as moving out earlier due to occupation. Moreover, Roll’s data refer only to known cases. Especially in the cases with unknown social data, however, the “normal” family circumstances are likely to predominate. Of those under 14, Roll found 30% did not live at home, and he refers to the stress involved. He also noticed that the RSPK phenomena often started after a person moved home, or when the bed had to be shared with another person. In our survey we recorded the change of residence of the FP one year before or

¹⁷ Roll’s material also includes nine cases from our records; this is just under eight percent of his total.

after the beginning of the phenomena: this was positively known by 17%, but in many cases no information was available. Roll also found, as we did, a poltergeist peak in the month of November.

Conclusions and Outlook

To answer the question when a so-called poltergeist occurs in whom, a diathesis-stress-model seems to be suitable, as it is also used to explain psychosomatic and psychopathological suffering (cf. Davison & Neale, 1979). This means that the coincidence of (1) a stress situation in the psychosocial system, (2) the personal constitution of a potential focus person (in the neurological-psychological, possibly also in the area of psychokinetic abilities) is obviously the prerequisite for the beginning of an RSPK event. Why this occurs only extremely rarely is unexplained.

Relatively often, RSPK phenomena occur concomitantly with psychosomatic or conversion symptoms of an FP, whereby the RSPK phenomena express the group-relatedness of the underlying conflict more strongly than the physical symptoms. In this context, poltergeist symptoms often have a high symbolic expressive character.

The mentioned hypothesis has consequences for the “treatment” of RSPK cases: Detecting and addressing the psychosocial conflicts should result in an end to the poltergeist. As a rule, discussions would have to be held with the entire “system,” usually the family, in which the poltergeist occurred. New ways of communication should be opened. This procedure is also appropriate for pure trick cases, since they are to be evaluated psychologically similarly. Empirical data support this recommendation, since often a lasting improvement already occurs when, for example, the FP takes a vacation, a person leaves the system, or a “critical observer” becomes active (cf. also Lucadou, 1983) and provides a certain outlet for psychological tensions.

The connection of RSPK phenomena with the stress situation of an FP or extreme tensions in its family has been observed frequently, but it must not be the only possible “trigger” of a poltergeist. This “animistic” assertion is ultimately only a working hypothesis so far. Here we have to agree with Rogo (1986), who complains in his monograph that unjustifiably every RSPK case is pressed into this explanatory pattern. Also in our material there are cases where this connection is not compelling. Thus the location-centered haunting seems to obey partly other laws. Basically, the scientific RSPK research is still in its infancy.

It seems essential to us that the poltergeist must not be considered in isolation from only one point of view, otherwise one does not do justice to their holistic character. Bender has summarized this aptly in his essay “Spuk als wissenschaftliche Grenzfrage” (1985: 49):

Spuk [The poltergeist] is always a symptom of momentary disturbance and therefore not only an exciting scientific, but also a therapeutic problem. [...] It is necessary to free these

natural processes from the witchcraft psychosis and its complementary equivalent, the furious denial of everything irrational behind human nature, and to lead them into a space of prudence. The extraordinary importance of the poltergeist phenomena for our knowledge of man and of nature will then become clear.

On the background of this assessment, a systematic registration of RSPK cases, but also a sensitive care and education of poltergeist victims is required for the future. In view of the possible importance of the phenomenon of poltergeist or psychokinesis, which is located in the physical-psychological borderland, it seems frighteningly short-sighted that scientifically highly developed countries like the Federal Republic of Germany leave the research of this complex more or less to amateur researchers and unfortunately also to charlatans. Many RSPK cases drag on for weeks or months before someone gives a hint to the Freiburg “Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health” or to the Department of Psychology and Frontier Areas at the Psychological Institute of the University of Freiburg. But even then, often only the report can be registered, because neither sufficient personnel nor resources are available to provide even “first aid” on the spot for the persons concerned; there can hardly be any question of scientifically satisfactory processing of the case.

Our demand would therefore be for a generously staffed and financed research center, which could be made known to broad sections of the population through the media. Through interdisciplinary cooperation of natural scientists and psychologists as well as contact with foreign parapsychologists, research in this field could reach a high standard. There should be a university connection.

In the future, it would be desirable to collect information from *all* persons affected by the poltergeist several times through interviews and tests, in order to be able to follow the development of socio- and psychodynamics in an affected family longitudinally. This would also avoid an inappropriate fixation on the FP. In addition to continuous care, a catamnesis should always take place after certain periods of time. This happened extremely rarely in Germany so far, but could give information about the function the poltergeist has in a family and about the further development of the affected persons.

In order to be open to new explanatory approaches (cf. Roll, 1974; Lucadou, 1983, 1989), as much data as possible from the physical, but also from the psychological, the medical and the sociological fields should be registered in all reported cases, using the same survey methods or measuring instruments in each case. Indeed, a narrow theory-driven survey makes it difficult to see innovative approaches. It goes without saying that all data should, if possible, be collected in such a way that they can be processed by computer. So far, this has not been the rule either. It can be assumed that with greater publicity of a specialized RSPK research center, the number of reported cases would also increase greatly. In principle, it would be of importance to investigate

also cases of one-time spontaneous psychokinesis, which are certainly much more frequent numerically than RSPK cases. Maybe a worldwide forced research in this field could succeed in finding a “missing link” of our “world view”!

Appendix

Considerations for the Questionnaire

The work presented here is based on data collection using a newly developed questionnaire for recording RSPK cases. For structural-analytical calculations, all questions on the complexes phenomena, affected person, focus person plus fewer questions from the complex clarification would have been of interest (with filter questions $N = 101$ items). Due to the high number of missing values (for more details see paragraph “Statistical Data Preparation”) we could only consider 46 selected items (see Table 4). In the context of the item analysis over these 46 variables, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to determine the test homogeneity. The reliability coefficient of $r_{tt} = .77$ indicates acceptable reliability of the item pool. However, there are only 15 items that satisfy the criteria of discriminatory power and difficulty index. Thus, it is obvious to reduce the questionnaire to the items that are meaningful from a test-theoretical point of view. If we consider that more than half of the 101 items of interest here could not be answered satisfactorily solely due to a lack of information and were therefore already eliminated prior to item analysis and reliability testing, we recommend that the entire questionnaire be applied to approx. 200 RSPK cases prior to a final item selection. It must be remembered that the present analysis is a pilot study with this survey questionnaire.

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The reason for the translation were recurring requests – especially in recent years – from international colleagues for this first systematic evaluation/analysis of so-called poltergeist cases in the German-speaking world, which had been investigated by Prof. Dr. Hans Bender (see also Eberhard Bauer [2022] in his introduction to this translation).

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Steckbrief des Spuks

Darstellung und Diskussion einer Sammlung von 54 RSPK-Berichten des Freiburger Instituts für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene aus den Jahren 1947–1986

Zusammenfassung

Teil 1: Phänomenologie des Spuks. Ergebnisse einer statistischen Auswertung. — Hier ist der Versuch unternommen worden, 54 RSPK-Berichte des Freiburger Instituts aus den Jahren 1947 bis 1986 quantitativ-statistisch auszuwerten. Mit Hilfe eines eigens entwickelten Fragebogens wurden möglichst detaillierte Informationen zu den berichteten Phänomenen, den Spukbetroffenen, der Fokusperson, den Zeugen sowie zur Aufklärung und Dokumentation erhoben. Um die Phänomenologie dieser Fälle mit der in der Literatur dargestellten Fallsammlungen (z. B. Roll 1976, Gauld & Cornell 1979) vergleichen zu können, werden zunächst einfache Häufigkeitsauszählungen durchgeführt. Hier zeigen sich deutliche Übereinstimmungen bzgl. der Phänomenologie; es sind aber auch markante Unterschiede auffällig. So dauern z. B. 20 % der uns vorliegenden personengebundenen Fälle über ein Jahr an, manche sogar über zwei oder mehr Jahre. Nach bisherigen Beobachtungen war ein personengebundener Spukfall durch seine kurze Dauer (wenige Tage oder Wochen) gekennzeichnet.

Unter Einsatz von Kreuztabellen mit χ^2 als Prüfgröße und dem Phi-Koeffizienten als Zusammenhangsmaß ist nach Beziehungen zwischen den Phänomenen gesucht worden. Diskussionswürdige Zusammenhänge können kaum nachgewiesen werden, ebensowenig zeigen sich bedeutsame Differenzen in der Phänomenologie, wenn Fälle mit versus ohne Fokusperson oder Fälle unterschiedlicher Dauer miteinander verglichen werden. Hier sei aber angemerkt, dass uns nur ein Datensatz mit auffallend vielen „missing values“ vorliegt.

Um übergreifende Strukturen in den Fällen aufzudecken, sind die multivariaten Verfahren der Faktoren- und Clusteranalyse eingesetzt worden, nachdem zuvor die hohe Variablenzahl von $N = 123$ aufgrund der Häufigkeitsauszählung und einer Itemanalyse auf die 15 wesentlichen Items reduziert worden ist. Aus diesen 15 Variablen können zwei Faktoren extrahiert werden: Den ersten Faktor, der 30 % der Gesamtvarianz aufklärt, nennen wir „Novum-“ oder „Strukturfaktor“, da in ihn nur Items eingehen, die auf etwas Neues, Hinzukommendes, strukturell Veränderndes weisen (z. B. „Apporte“, „Penetrationen“, „Graffiti“). Den zweiten Faktor bezeichnen wir als „Veränderungs-“ oder „Verhaltensfaktor“, da er durch Items definiert wird, die beschreiben, dass etwas Vorhandenes Veränderung erfährt (z. B. „Gegenstände verschwinden plötzlich“, „Schränke, Türen, Fenster öffnen sich von selbst“). Er erklärt 12 % der Gesamtvarianz. Diese Faktorenstruktur findet in der Clusteranalyse voll Bestätigung.

Die Extraktion der Faktoren „Struktur“ und „Verhalten“ als Determinanten des RSPK-Geschehens kann als empirische Bestätigung des Erklärungsmodells der Pragmatischen

Information für Psi-Phänomene (MPI) von Lucadou und Kornwachs (1982) angesehen werden.

Eine statistische Trennung von personen- und ortsgebundenen Fällen, wie Gauld & Cornell (1979) sie mit einer Clusteranalyse erzielten, war bei der uns vorliegenden geringen Anzahl von nur 54 Fällen, von denen allein 46 zu den personengebundenen zu zählen sind, nicht zu erwarten.

Teil II: Spukbetroffene und Spukfokuspersonen. – Es werden Daten zu Spukbetroffenen und Spukfokuspersonen (FP) aus einer Fragebogenauswertung von 54 RSPK-Fällen, vorgestellt. Spukbetroffene kommen aus allen Bevölkerungsschichten. Sie fühlen sich subjektiv durch die Spukereignisse stark belastet und werden sozial oft isoliert. Nach Abklingen der Phänomene verdrängen sie ihre Erinnerung daran in hohem Maße. 52 FP standen einzeln oder zu zweit im Mittelpunkt der untersuchten RSPK-Fälle; davon waren 56 % männlichen Geschlechts. Ein großer Teil der FP befindet sich beim Beginn der Phänomene im Pubertätsalter (Modalwert bei Jungen 13½ Jahre, bei Mädchen 12½ Jahre). FP berichten zu einem Drittel über körperliche oder psychische Auffälligkeiten während oder unmittelbar vor Spukphänomenen. Sie klagen ungewöhnlich häufig über konversionsneurotische Symptome (psychogene Lähmungen, Einengung des Bewußtseinsfeldes usw.) sowie über psychogene oder neurologisch verursachte „Absenzen.“ Inwieweit diese Auffälligkeiten Reaktionen auf das Spukgeschehen sind und auch bei anderen Spukbetroffenen vorkommen, ist nicht genügend dokumentiert. FP sind vielen sozialen und psychischen Stressoren ausgesetzt. Relativ häufig leben sie nur bei einem Elternteil oder bei Großeltern. Ein Teil der FP legt ein Geständnis über Manipulationen ab. Dies bedeutet in der Regel nicht, dass keine paranormalen Phänomene existierten. Die Übereinstimmung der Daten über FP mit Ergebnissen einer Untersuchung von Roll (z. B. 1977) ist groß. Zur Frage des Auftretens von personengebundenem Spuk wird ein Diathese-Streß-Modell postuliert. Es wird angeregt, bei der Aufklärung von RSPK-Fällen systematisch und nicht individuumzentriert vorzugehen. Der augenblickliche Stand der wissenschaftlichen RSPK-Forschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland wird erörtert.