

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IN FINNISH FIRST-PERSON
SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTER NARRATIVES**

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the narrative construction of self in Finnish first-person supernatural encounter narratives. Modernity promotes the idea of a subject who is capable of self-regulation, self-surveillance, and self-control. Having supernatural experiences shows a lack of these capabilities. Nevertheless, we hear personal experience stories about people encountering beings such as angels, extraterrestrials, guardian spirits and ghosts. My work uses this contradiction as a starting point and asks how narrators attempt to organize their baffling experiences through narrative for themselves and others, how narrators attempt to normalize the supernatural, and how narrators recognize and combat the stigmas related to the supernatural?

My work follows the narrative turn in social sciences and humanities, and applies the social constructionist approach to narrative and self. This research is interdisciplinary by its nature and draws its theoretical sources from folklore studies, cultural studies, narrative studies and social psychology. Applying the method of theme writing, I placed an inquiry in Finnish newspapers in late 2003 and early 2004 and got around 470 responses. I apply descriptive statistics to show the common traits of the research material, and I do a detailed narrative analysis on a subset of nine narratives.

This study shows that the selection of narrative means that the narrators employ when talking about supernatural experiences is wide. They use comparisons, direct and

embedded evaluations, overlays and detailed orientations; they call to witness, address the reader, use internal dialects to balance between the traditions of belief and disbelief; and their narrative voices fluctuate between close and distant.

The narrators construct rational, yet emotional, and social, yet independent selves. They present themselves as valuing knowledge, yet understanding its limits. They show they are able to differentiate between the ordinary realm and the supernatural realm. They describe their social attachments and dependencies, but they also defend their unique experiences even if the experiences set them apart from others. Even though the supernatural is stigmatized, it is valuable when it makes the experiencer feel special, chosen, or gifted. Narrators' attempts to normalize the supernatural are twofold. First, narrators negotiate and/or deny the stigmas related to the supernatural, and second, they express emotions. Narrators know that supernatural experiences may be explained as hallucinations, illusions or dreams resulting from intoxication, or mental disorders. They either deny these issues or explain that they do not account for the supernatural event. Second, the narrators offer an entry to their inner realm through emotion discourse. They describe a wide range of emotions, from fear to peace and joy. In brief, narrators tell us they are normal human beings with human reactions and feelings.

Dedicated to my family

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Fields of Study

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INTRODUCTION

“I experienced something truly real. But no one has to believe it, and there is no way to prove it either. I have a feeling it is my duty to tell this story. It is like I have been given a gift that I need to pass on even in this form, as a story of my own experience” (A woman, born in the 1930’s, writing about seeing her deceased mother).

The supernatural is a category that interrupts the general scheme of the modern western world and the order that world is supposed to possess. Modernity promotes the idea of a subject who is capable of self-regulation, self-surveillance, and self-control. Having supernatural beliefs and experiences shows a lack of these capabilities. It carries a set of stigmas which make it a dangerous thing to experience and tell about. Nevertheless, we hear personal experience stories about people encountering beings such as angels, extraterrestrials, guardian spirits and ghosts. Given this cultural understanding that experiences of the supernatural are not “normal,” how do narrators present themselves as reliable and normal people when telling about exceptional and abnormal experiences?

In order to pursue this question in Finland, I placed an inquiry in Finnish newspapers in late 2003 and early 2004. In my inquiry I defined the supernatural experience as an experience that the person considers as out of the ordinary world, and I gave a set of questions and asked people to tell me about their experiences about encountering supernatural beings. I received around 470 responses, letters and emails

from all around the country. This study not only presents my analysis, interpretations and arguments concerning the collected material, but it also attempts to provide the reader with an introduction to modern-day Finnish stories about the supernatural.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Although the supernatural may sound peculiar and unordinary, both as an experience and a topic of research, it tells about interests and concerns of ordinary Finns. My experience is that the supernatural reflects the issues of truth and authority. From my childhood I remember how my mother and grandmother debated over what tales would be the right ones, the true ones, to tell me: fairy tales or Biblical tales. Eventually, I heard both. Later, in the elementary school, I used to talk and argue with my friend whether the world would end by an apocalyptic war between good and evil or by a space alien invasion. In these both examples, the question was about who was right, who was wrong, and who had the power in the given group to be right. In one word, authority; whether granted by age, social status or louder voice. The relation between authority and belief intrigued me and after I graduated from high school, I considered studying Theology. On the other hand, I was very interested in figuring out what makes people think and act as they do and I thought about choosing Psychology – and what gives more authority over people than being able to explain why they behave as they do.

Then, I learned about Comparative Religion, and later about Folkloristics, and I knew I had found what I was looking for: Scholarships where I can study how ideas,

beliefs and behavior transfer from one generation to another, from one place and context to others, and how people express their negotiation, acceptance and rejection of beliefs and actions. I soon began to learn the complex world of research. When I was working on a research paper on urban shamanism, I joined a shamanistic circle. All was fine until I tried to make a spirit journey to the underworld. I couldn't go into trance. Right that moment I was too embarrassed and disappointed to understand what a great chance it was to learn about expertise knowledge gained through experiencing and seeing the supernatural as natural, positive and approachable, and how insider/outsider categories are formed. This did not frighten me away from doing fieldwork, though. I loved it. I wrote my MA thesis in Folkloristics on UFO contact people in Finland. I observed the UFO groups and interviewed people who told about having contacts with extraterrestrials. My understanding but mostly my confusion about authority and normalcy expanded. I learned that the supernatural was natural to my informants. I learned that certain kinds of contact experiences are more valued than others; that questioning the modern science and religion was accepted among the informants but questioning authoritative figures in the field was problematic.

I graduated (MA) in 2002 and began my doctoral studies in Turku University, at the department of Folklore Studies in 2003. My very first Ph.D. research plan was to expand my focus to supernatural experiences in general, interview the UFO contact people again, and then look for more people to interview, all the while asking people to send me written narratives about supernatural experiences. I knew people who knew

possible interviewees, and I started contacting them, mainly in the Turku region. I interviewed two people. Gathering interview material all around Finland started to look unrealistic, and I decided that I wanted to both focus on written material and cast the net wider over the whole country. That methodology worked out well, and this study is the result of my research interests meeting the interests and concerns of the Finns who replied to my inquiry. The methodological concerns and questions of this work discuss how to collect material on a sensitive topic, and what forms and functions the stories of the supernatural have. The analytical starting point is twofold: I want to tell about the whole material and give a general picture of the great collection of stories I got. On the other hand, I wish to show the details of some stories and share my interpretations of them. Thus, also my analysis is twofold: it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The theoretical point of departure of this work is the contradiction that even though supernatural experiences are not normal in modern Finland, people still tell about these experiences. Thus, my work concerns itself with the following questions: How do narrators attempt to organize their baffling experiences through narrative for themselves and others? How do narrators construct a coherent self using narrative? How do narrators attempt to normalize the supernatural? How do narrators recognize and combat the stigmas related to the supernatural? What is the role of emotions in the construction of self in narrative? To discuss these questions, I bring together my training as a folklorist

with theoretical and methodological approaches of the fields of narrative studies, cultural studies and social psychology.

Normalcy

“My husband died in X (the late 1990’s). I felt like my life ended. I grieved beyond measure. In X (early 2000), I was on my way home from a store, and standing in the yard of the apartment house, carrying the bags. It was dark and raining wet snow, and I stood there looking around. There was a light in every window. Only my windows were dark. I thought I would never go home again. Then, suddenly, the sun came up, and it became bright, the birds began to sing, and a warm wind blew. I thought how this could be possible. At that moment, I felt my husband standing behind me. He said to me: “Don’t grieve so much. I will walk with you, and help you when you have troubles.” Then he pressed my shoulders three times. Since then, it’s been easier for me. And when I have troubles, I say, remember what you promised, and indeed, he guides me. I have talked about this to some of my friends, but they have advised me not to talk about it because people might think I have become mad. I told a grief support group about my experience as well, but the priest looked askance at me, and couldn’t explain my experience. It was so real. (...)” (Woman, over 70 years old).

As I familiarized myself with my research material, I learned that normalizing him/herself is the key concern of the narrator-experiencer. (S)he aims to locate

her/himself in the category of sane, coherent people by using narrative techniques to differentiate between natural and supernatural realms, such as direct and indirect evaluation of the events and characters, and expressing emotions that make a rationally sensible story of coherent and understandable reactions.

I am discussing normalcy as a keyword in literary and cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams' sense. (See *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 1976) A keyword is a fighting word that travels between many uses and picks up baggage. Keywords are categories of values and imprecise by nature; they refuse to be defined as x, y and z. The ideological power of a keyword is its multivocality. A normal person is rational no matter what happens; is able to control her/his life; does not have social or health or wealth problems; and is considered being right. A normal person is someone outside of the narrator, someone different who would not understand her/him, even if this person were in her/his own family. Yet, normalcy is not necessarily what the narrator wants. There are narratives in which narrators express positive feelings and statements about the experiences and at the same time say that normal people would not approve of or understand or have these experiences. Normalcy is a set of traits, and it acts as a twisted mirror which the narrators look at.

Historian and philosopher Michel Foucault has studied the notions of normal and normative and the creation of new science of measurements and statistics that was required to maintain the normal and normative. According to him, modern society witnessed punishment and discipline becoming privatized and directed toward the

constitution and rehabilitation of social subjects. Instead of public displays of punishment, individuals began to watch and regulate each other. This was done by employing certain techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. As a result, rules and regulations were internalized, and the social control of normality now penetrates society and individual life: “The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements” (Foucault 1977: 304). Foucault discussed deviances such as sexual deviance and madness, whereas I am focusing on knowledge and belief; the proper ways of knowing and experiencing. David Hufford, when discussing the question of sleep paralysis as spiritual experience, argues that “conventional modern views of spiritual experience, combined with medical ideas that labeled ‘direct’ spiritual experience as psychopathological, and mainstream religious views of such experiences as heretical if not pathological, suppressed the report and discussion of these experiences in modern society” (Hufford 2005:11). The modern secular view of spiritual beliefs being metaphysical and not empirical is rooted in the understanding of science that emerged from the Enlightenment. Hufford points out the continuity from Enlightenment skeptics such as David Hume, who considered supernatural belief as inherently irrational, to Freud, who saw religion as neurotic defense, and finally to modern protestant theology, which maintains the split, originating

in the Protestant Reformation, between spiritual beliefs and observational claims (2005:12-26).

Hufford states that these two powerful cultural trends in the modern Western world, Protestant Christianity and Enlightenment skepticism, have tried to eradicate supernatural belief by anathematizing it, explaining it away, diagnosing it and describing its demise, and thus, it has been one of the great surprises of the past century that belief in the supernatural has persisted, even among well-educated Westerners (Hufford 2005: 26). Supernatural experiences contradict both the scientific and religious categories since they break the natural laws, are observable to the experiencers and have ambiguous relations to believing. Following the idea of regulated self and normality, I will ask: What are the standards of normality, and who are the gatekeepers of normality in these narratives?

Self

I follow the social constructionist approach to self, and argue that even though individuality is emphasized in our modern society, self is always socially constructed. Folklorist Laura Stark writes that “‘Self’ is a personally-appropriated theoretical concept used to organize subjective feelings, beliefs and understandings.” Self is not a thing, but a set of strategies, a ‘self activity’ which is conducted around the constructive forces of social experiences, relationships and language, in the public and collective domains of talk and conversation (Stark 2006: 27, 84; Harré 1983: 21). I find psychologist Donald E. Polkinghorne’s definition of self useful for my work as well. According to him, self “is a

construction built on other people's responses and attitudes toward a person and is subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent, change in their character. In order to come to a unified and concordant self concept and personal identity, then, the person needs to synthesize and integrate the diverse social responses he or she experiences" (Polkinghorne 1988: 150). Furthermore, I agree with his view on the narrative's role in the construction of self. Polkinghorne argues that people achieve personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, by understanding their existence as a developing story. Just as events are organized by the plot into a unified story, so is the experience of self organized along the temporal dimension: "The realization of self as narrative in process serves to gather together what one has been, in order to imagine what one will be, and to judge whether this is what one wants to become" (Polkinghorne 1998: 152, 154).

Narrative

Narrative has been examined in relationship to many terms and in many fields: existential, cognitive, aesthetic, sociological, and technical. (See Ryan 2004 for a review.) My work follows the narrative turn in social sciences and humanities and applies the social constructionist approach to narrative. Briefly, my research is an inquiry into the narrative construction of self.

According to literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan, inquiry into the nature of narrative can take two forms: (1) a descriptive approach, which asks what narrative does

for human beings; and (2) a defining approach, which tries to define the distinctive features of narrative. I prefer applying the descriptive approach and in accordance with Ryan's review of this approach, I see the narrative as a way of organizing human experience and as a tool for constructing models of and for reality rather than reality itself. Furthermore, I consider narrative as a means of creating and transmitting cultural traditions and building values and beliefs that define cultural identities (Ryan 2005: 345).

I find literary scholar H. Porter Abbott's definition of narrative useful and applicable to my work: Narrative is the representation of an event or a series of events. Representation refers to the feeling that the story somehow pre-exists before the narrative, even though this may be an illusion. Event refers to the internal time sequence that is needed to create narrative continuity and coherence. Without an event, you may have a "description," an "exposition," an "argument," or a "lyric." Finally, I want to clarify the difference between narrative, story, and narrative discourse. Story is an event or sequence of events (the action). Narrative discourse is those events as represented. Narrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse (Abbott 2008: 13-16).

METHODOLOGY

In Northern European folklore research traditions it is common to collect research material by sending out inquiries and asking people to write about certain themes and answer a set of a theme related questions. For example, the Folklore Archives at the

Finnish Literature Society collects materials by organizing collection campaigns across the country and maintaining their own respondent network. In autumn 2009, the Folklore Archives had five theme writing campaigns going on, focusing on themes such as “*Travels to Estonia*” and “*Self-educated Writers.*”¹ The first collection campaigns like these took place in the 1930’s. Since the 1960’s, they have become one of the most common ways to collect folklore research material.

Collecting the Research Material

I followed this collection practice and sent out an inquiry, published in Finnish newspapers in fall 2003 and winter 2004, asking for written experience stories about encounters between humans and supernatural beings. I revealed in the inquiry that I am doing doctoral research in Folkloristics at the University of Turku; I submitted a set of questions for people to answer; and I added that the answers would be kept anonymous and archived in the Archives of the Turku University School of Cultural Research, TKU Archives.

I judged that print media would be a productive way to reach people because Finns are active print media readers. Finnish Audit Bureau of Circulations conducts National Readership Surveys, which provide data on the size and structure of the readerships of the country’s most important newspapers and periodicals. According to their latest survey (2008-2009), 99% of Finns read at least one newspaper/periodical and

¹ For more information, see http://www.finlit.fi/english/kra/coll_guide.htm

approximately seven periodicals and two newspapers in the survey period. Finnish Audit Bureau of Circulations survey covers 180 newspapers and periodicals, and they remind that altogether there are around 4000 newspapers and periodicals published in Finland.² Furthermore, the literacy rate in Finland is 100% and my inquiry reached also freely available newspapers. Thus, use of newspapers does not skew my data towards the educated.

I started sending out the inquiries to the newspapers in September 2003, and I sent a total of 79 inquiries. I mailed my inquiry to 20 magazines, 30 national newspapers and 28 local newspapers, and one email list. I got confirmation from four magazines saying they would not publish my inquiry and two magazines saying they would publish it; three big newspapers saying they ~~do~~ would not publish it and 12 newspapers saying they would publish it, of which five were national and seven local. There were also several newspapers that published my inquiry without notifying me. The complete list of media from which I got responses is attached as an appendix. Below is the research inquiry I sent out to collect my research material. The original was in Finnish. The following is my translation.

Have you encountered a supernatural being?

Many Finns have experiences about encountering supernatural beings. A supernatural being can be, for example, an angel, a ghost, a guardian spirit, a demon, an extraterrestrial or any other being that is not from this world. I am doing dissertation

² http://www.levikintarkastus.fi/mediatutkimus/KMT_Lukijatiedote_syyskuu_2009.pdf

research in Folkloristics, and I am interested in examining what kinds of supernatural beings modern day Finns encounter. If you have encountered a supernatural being, even an unidentified one, I am asking you to write about your experience. You can attach a drawing, too. I will handle the letters anonymously. Please tell me the following details: your gender, year of birth, place of residence and education/vocation. Please, tell also where you saw the request. If you wish, you can send me your contact information so that I may contact you if I have further questions. Letters will be archived in the Archives of the Turku University School of Cultural Research, TKU Archives. In your letter, you can discuss for example the following questions. The length of the letter is open.

What happened, when and where?

What kind of a being did you encounter, how did it look like and what was its nature?

Did it have a message for you?

Where did the being come from?

What was your state of consciousness?

Why did the encounter happen?

Did the encounter surprise you, or had you somehow tried to make it happen?

Did the encounter affect your life somehow?

Have you told anyone about your experience, and how have people reacted to it?

How did it feel to encounter the being, and how does it feel now when you think about it?

What else would you like to tell me about your experience?

Letters and any questions you have may be sent to the following address.

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When I sent out the inquiries, some reporters got interested in my research topic, and my interviews were published in ten newspapers and broadcasted on five radio programs. I got 407 responses, emails and letters, of which I am using 382. I have excluded the respondents that expressed that the letters are not meant for research use, but only for me to read, and the respondents whose age I do not know or those I suspect could be underage. In addition to approaching media, I cooperated with the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. They sent out my inquiry to their respondent network, and I got 58 responses that way. Altogether, my material consists of 440 responses. All the responses are written in Finnish, and the translations that I use in this work are mine. I have tried to be true to the narrator's word choice and keep her/his tone, but naturally, in each translation, the end result is a combination of the narrator's voice and my interpretations of how to translate it.

There are people, both among my respondents and in the general public, who think that supernatural experiences are "not normal," but signs of mental health problems or drug or alcohol use. Furthermore, it is possible that participants addressed personal information regarding their mental or physical health conditions, alcohol or drug use, or religious views when discussing their experiences with the supernatural. For these reasons, the data is not associated with any names, and all participants will remain anonymous in the presentations and publications of this research. When analyzing the narratives, I describe the broad demographic data of the respondent; for example, I might reveal that the respondent is a female, 41-50 years old, lives in Southern Finland, has

secondary level education and is a manual worker. I withhold names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, dates of birth and any other identifiers.

Theme Writing

The method I described above is called theme writing. The term was introduced in Finnish in 1995 by Satu Apo, who drew an analogy between theme interviewing and theme writing (Apo 1995: 173-174). In practice, this method means that a researcher writes an inquiry, including a brief introduction to the research and research practices, and a set of questions (s)he would like the respondents to write about. Often the collection process, including the formulation of the inquiry, is carried out by a researcher and an archival institution together. The researcher or the institute sends out the inquiry to newspapers, a respondent network, research theme related Internet discussion groups, bulletin boards – where-ever the target respondents can be found. The responses are then collected, used for the current research purposes, and archived for later research purposes. Essential to theme writing is that people are asked to write about a certain theme and produce new text; it is not about collecting pre-existing written narratives, such as personal letters and diaries (Pöysä 2006: 224).

This methodology calls for discussion on differentiations between fiction – non-fiction, oral – literary, and private – public. Theme writing can be broadly defined as life writing. Life writing is an umbrella term that includes all kinds of self-referencing literary works such as diaries, journals, notebooks, letters, travel books, epistolary narratives, and

autobiography (Marlene Kadar 1992: 20). It involves the autobiographical pact which guarantees the reader that the text is non-fictional, that it is written with references to real people, real life events and experiences. (See Lejeune 1989.) Folklorist Jyrki Pöysä has extended this definition to theme writing and proposed the concept of the “theme writing pact” according to which the respondent answers the suggested questions without lying and prioritizes facts over style (Pöysä 1993).

Yet, the theme may require the narrator to provide extra reassurance of the narrative’s non-fictional nature. Such is the case in many of the supernatural first-person narratives. This is understandable given that narrators often fear being labeled as mad, alcoholic, drug users or liars. In addition, the popularity of fictional supernatural narratives, which often center on the same themes as those that are non-fictional, urges the narrator to emphasize the true nature of the story. The differentiation between fiction and non-fiction raises another question, one that is often asked from me: How do I know whether the respondents are being sincere or not? What if they are making up the stories for fun? It is possible that people tell me fictive stories but in my research even faked narratives work as evidence for my questions. If a person makes up a story about the supernatural, (s)he needs to be aware of the story telling conventions and themes of the supernatural stories in order to write a convincing story. Incorporating her/his views and opinions of the supernatural in a narrative tells about the social-cultural environment where (s)he has learned about the supernatural and how this environment conceives the supernatural.

Theme writing as a method has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the strengths is the private and uninterrupted nature of writing. Theme writing is practical when collecting information about sensitive issues, such as sexuality or drug abuse – or supernatural experiences. Characteristic of theme writing is the narrator's ability to choose the place and time for writing, to store, review and correct the text before sending it, or even destroy it. Furthermore, the narrator feels encouraged to reflect on his/her thoughts when reading them on the screen or on the paper (Pöysä 2006: 229-230). Using theme writing helped me to collect a large sample of narratives in a relatively short time and without big financial investments.

The disadvantage of the method is that there is no dialogue between the researcher and the narrator. There is no face-to-face discussion with chances to ask details, ask more information on interpretations, others' reactions, feelings and so on. Furthermore, the exchange is unequal. The narrator is telling me personal experiences whereas I am the silent, unknown reader whom the narrator knows only by the name, the institution and the information given in the inquiry. On the other hand, this can be seen as a benefit too: Although the inquiry and the set of questions guide the narrator in her/his writing process, writing allows the narrator to expound upon the theme from his/her point of view without conforming responses to those of a potential interviewer (Apo 1995: 176; Pöysä 2006: 230).

Yet, there is a researcher-addressee, and in every study that employs theme writing, it is important to ask, who are the possible addressees for the narrator, and why.

Sociologist Pertti Alasuutari reminds us: “Individuals do not have their readily narrated life-stories in their back pockets or at the back of their minds, waiting for a researcher to collect them. Any account of one’s personal past (also when told to a researcher in a *life-story interview*) makes a point and serves a function. A particular case of life-story narration must be related to its local setting in order to see what it is needed or used for” (Alasuutari 1997: 6). Alasuutari discusses interviews, but his point applies to writing as well. The following narrator reveals her motivations for writing to me:

“I saw your inquiry, and you are looking for people who have “supernatural” experiences. I have had a need to talk about my experience for a long time. Some people know about it, but it is difficult to say what they really think about all this. (...) If this had been the only time I encountered the lights, I probably wouldn’t have told anybody. I have seen the lights afterwards as well. They have always warned me about something, or then somebody close to me has died. I am not afraid of the lights, just the opposite, I am convinced that we are being guided and looked after every day. I would like to know if other people have similar experiences. It was a good experience. I have a deeper understanding of the nature and life in general. It felt good to tell this after a long time. I don’t know if you figured the right order of the events, but this is how it went. (...)”
(Woman, born in the 1950’s, telling about seeing unidentified lights.)

FINLAND



Figure 1. Map of Europe and Finland

If not otherwise noted, I cite the thisisFINLAND webpage created and maintained by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.³

³ <http://finland.fi/public/>

Finland is located in Northern Europe, and its neighboring countries are Sweden, Norway and Russia. Finland has been a European Union member since 1995. Finland has 5.3 million inhabitants, of which 71% live in towns or urban areas, and 29% in rural areas. About 1.25 million people live in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Other principal cities are Turku, Tampere, and Oulu. Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Finnish is spoken by 91.5% and Swedish by 5.5% of the population. Finland has a Sami (Lapp) population of 8,700, and Sami (Lappish) is the mother tongue of about 1,700 people.

In 2004, around 84 % of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. One percent of Finns belonged to Finland's other national church, the Orthodox Church. One percent of the population belonged to other registered religious denominations, and 14 % were unaffiliated. On the membership basis, Finland is the most Lutheran country in the world. The proportion of the population that belongs to the Church⁴ has gradually decreased. For example, in 1980, 90% of the population belonged to the Church. However, membership does not necessarily mean that a person considers her/himself religious. According to the World Values 2000 survey, 65% of the Church members consider themselves religious. In addition, according to the Gallup Ecclesiastica 2003-survey, 73% of the Church members consider the Church a part of the Finnish lifestyle. The majority of Finns are Lutheran and Christian by identity, which means that Lutheranism is part of the national identity rather than an expression of faith. Religiosity

⁴ When I write "the Church", I refer to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

in that context is often described as “belonging without believing,” but, on the other hand, also as “believing in belonging,” as church membership per se is important. Furthermore, according to the survey, for Finns the fact that “*belonging to the Church distinguishes the natives from immigrants*” is a much more meaningful reason for belonging to the Church than for the population of the other Nordic countries. Thus, religion has been and still is important in the creation of nationality (Kääriäinen, Niemelä, Ketola 2005: 82-88).

Finland’s location between Russia and Sweden has had a defining impact on the country’s history. Finland became part of the Swedish realm in 1155 as a result of the crusade by the Swedes. In 1323, Finland was divided between Sweden and Russia (Novgorod): Western and Southern Finland became parts of Sweden, and thus Western culture, whereas the Eastern part of Finland, Karelia, became part of Russian culture. Uniform Swedish rule was extended to Finland in the 17th century. Yet, when Sweden lost its position as a great power in the early 18th century, Russian pressure on Finland increased, and Russia conquered Finland in the 1808-1809 war with Sweden. Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy, enjoying, at first, extensive privileges, but later suffering oppression. On December 6, 1917, the Finnish Parliament approved the declaration of independence, and Finland declared independence. At the same time, the breach between the parties of the left and the right culminated. The ensuing civil war took around four months. The war ended with the victory of the government troops, and Finland became a republic in the summer of 1919. World War II reached Finland as well.

At the end of 1939, Russia attacked Finland. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Finland entered the war as a co-belligerent with Germany. The war ended in armistice in 1944. During the war, Finland lost areas to Russia, the most important of which were large parts of Karelia.

The modernization of Finland happened rapidly, from around the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. It included the constructions of projects such as the elementary school system that promoted secularization and materialistic-scientific education; the creation of medical science and practices; social activism aimed at enlightening ordinary people; rapid migration from the countryside to cities; and changing means of livelihood.

STRUCTURE OF THIS WORK

The first chapter of this work focuses on its scholarly context. I present a review of how the supernatural has been studied Finnish folklore studies from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century. More specifically, I focus on the research conducted by folklorist Leea Virtanen. The second chapter describes the quantitative aspects of this study. I describe the demographic data concerning the people who responded to my inquiry. I identify what kinds of beings the respondents tell of encountering, where and when the events took place, how the experiences were interpreted and how they were described. In brief, I attempt to answer the questions I presented in the research inquiry. The third chapter discusses genre theory in folklore studies and explains my choices regarding

genre. The fourth chapter is the key chapter. In that chapter I explain what analytical tools I have used to examine the narratives. Then I analyze nine narratives in order to illustrate how and what people reveal when they write about supernatural experiences, that is, how they present themselves in the narratives. The fifth chapter discusses the stigmatization of the supernatural. I describe what kinds of stigmas are related to the supernatural in the narratives and how narrators recognize and combat the stigmatization. Finally, in chapter six, I discuss the role of emotions in the narratives of the supernatural. I present story examples and attempt to show how narrators express normal emotions towards abnormal experiences.

CHAPTER 1: FINNISH FOLKLORE SCHOLARSHIP AND STUDY OF THE SUPERNATURAL

In addition to her/his current socio-cultural environment, every researcher reflects, discusses and negotiates the traditions and values of her/his academic discipline. Bearing that in my mind, and inviting the reader to do the same, I will discuss the ambiguous meanings of folk and the supernatural that Finnish folklore studies has constructed, and the different research methods and analytical tools through which these meanings have been reached.

Definitions of words such as folk belief, folk religion, magic and superstition, and the ways these definitions have been used in the field of folklore studies, reflect the individual, social and political motives in academia and in society in general. Patrick B. Mullen notes, when writing about belief and American folk, that genres of belief not only influence images of the folk, but are influenced by pre-existing assumptions about the folk. He states that in American folklore scholarship in the last 100 years, folk belief has been used to justify both romantic images of the folk as wise and natural, and scientific rationalistic images of the folk as pathological (Mullen 2000: 199). These tendencies to romanticize and pathologize the folk can be recognized in Finnish folklore scholarship as well. However, the current scholarship both in Finland and in the U.S. holds the view that

folk belief is found among all socioeconomic classes, both genders and all levels of education.

Definitions of folk belief, folk religion, magic and superstition often overlap. This is particularly true of folk belief and folk religion on the one hand, and magic and superstition on the other hand, which tend to be used interchangeably. The study of folk religion includes both the study of oral and literal representations of folk beliefs and the study of rituals (Jauhiainen 1999: 26; Honko 1989: 13-28). Characteristic of the definitions of folk and magic is that they have been considered to be local and/or unofficial. Laura Stark provides one current definition: folk religion refers to practices, such as incantations and forms of divination, and beliefs, in which the sacred is defined by the local community rather than by a religious institution. She continues to state that folk religion is characterized by an emphasis on reciprocity and exchange between humans and divine or sacred agents (Stark 2002: 30).

Importantly for my study, contemporary scholars of belief understand it as separable from religion: that is, it can exist without an idea of the sacred, devotional practices, or collective identities. It can also exist in the absence of a tradition (Hufford 1982a). Insofar as supernatural experience has typically been devalued or ignored as a part of modern Lutheranism, the concepts of belief and experience allow me to approach my narratives without having to fit them into pre-existing conceptions of either religious orthodoxy or folk tradition.

HISTORY OF THE SCHOLARSHIP

Folklore had been widely collected both by academics and others interested from the early nineteenth century on, and as a discipline folklore has been represented at the University of Helsinki since 1888. However, from the sixteenth century on, before the emergence of folklore as an academic discipline, people were interested in vernacular tradition for its religious, medical, linguistic, historical, and archeological implications. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study of folk belief from the mid-sixteenth century to the twenty-first century, and while doing so, I trace back some trails of the stigmatization of the supernatural.

Protestant Reformation and Orthodoxy of the Church

The Reformation had a major impact on the differentiation between magic and religion. Finland, as a territory of the Swedish Kingdom, witnessed the Protestant Reformation from 1527 on. The best known and most significant Finnish reformer was Mikael Agricola, who studied in Wittenberg under the guidance of Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. As a foreword to his translation of the Psalms of David in 1551, Agricola published a list of pagan gods of Häme and Karelia. This became the first written description of Finnish folk belief. The list of deities has been widely adapted, studied and translated, and it remained the most important, and only, source of Finnish folk belief for about 200 years (Hautala 1954: 26-30; 1969: 11-12). The list contains twelve Karelian

gods and eleven deities from Häme, under the subheading of *piru*, the devil. After listing the deities and their duties, Agricola continues to state that instead of worshipping God, Finns worshipped - under the Pope's reign - bones, water, trees, earth, salt and eggs. Some scholars interpret "bones" as referring to relics peculiar in the Catholic Church, yet some interpret them as referring to pagan practices, as the rest of the list does. (See Issakainen 2002.)

The rise of Sweden-Finland as a political and economic power followed in the seventeenth century. This included both the strict orthodoxy in the Church, and an interest in ancient time of greatness, visible in language and poetry of the people (Hautala 1969: 12-19; 1954: 35, 52). The magical powers of the Finns and Lapps were well-known and feared by their more developed Scandinavian neighbors. Colorful stories regarding Finnish witches reflected the reality of people's perceptions of the Finns: Between 1520 and 1750, at least 2,000 Finns were accused of practicing sorcery and dealing with magic. The trials in Finland took place within the normal legal proceedings in secular courts, and more than half of the accused were men, as well as were the majority of those convicted. The most common punishment to receive was a fine. Yet, 103 of the accused were killed. (See Nenonen and Kervinen 2006.) The fear of being accused of practicing magic silenced people, and thus made the study and collection of folk beliefs and magical practices difficult. In the end, it assisted the stigmatization of the supernatural, and people learned to keep quiet to the authorities.

Spirit of the Enlightenment

The spirit of the Enlightenment dominated the eighteenth century, although the ideas of great ancient times lived alongside the newer emphasis on reason and utility. The University of Turku was established in 1640, and the academic interest in folklore grew in the eighteenth century. The ideological background of the origins of Finnish folklore as an academic discipline can be related to J.G. Herder's argument that a nation could exist only if it possessed a distinctive cultural identity founded on the native language and oral literature of the ordinary people. The scholars at the Academy in Turku, in the late eighteenth century found this idea very appealing and dedicated themselves to cultivating national identity and Finnish language, between the two alternate ruling states, Sweden and Russia. The scholars saw the collection of peasant folklore, including belief legends, magic practices and incantations, as a means to construct the history of the Finnish people, and to create and publish something concrete that could be compared to other European masterpieces. The active collection of oral literature began in the early nineteenth century. The young educated Swedish-speaking Finns identified the "ordinary people" as the Finnish speaking population of the remoter parts of Finland and the Karelians of Archangel Province just across the frontier in Russia.⁵ This tendency dates back to Herder's project to locate the authenticity in the old, wild, simple, innocent and natural folk (Bendix 1997: 36-40). Still, not just any kind of folk possessed authenticity.

⁵ See for example <http://www.finlit.fi/kalevala/index.php?se=y>.

Herder had already distinguished between idealized and rural folk, and the new urban lower classes (Bendix 1997: 46-47).

Henrik Gabriel Porthan, Professor of Eloquentiae, expressed particular interest in folk poetry and the mythical past of the Finns, and thus aspects of Romanticism entered the field. Porthan himself, though he was interested in the folk, did not write about folk belief, but his pupils did. Christian Lencqvist and Fredrik Johan Rosenbom both worked closely with Porthan and under Porthan's guidance, and it is difficult to say how largely their theses should be considered Porthan's work (Hautala 1969: 12-19; 1954: 35, 52). Lencqvist's thesis *De Superstitione Veterum Fennorum Theoretica et Practica* (1782) is, after Agricola's list of gods, the first presentation of Finnish folk belief. The ethos of the Enlightenment is visible in Lencqvist's views of Finnish superstition: Superstition and magical practices are irrational, ridiculous and childish foolery. Yet, superstition is part of Finnish history, and thus worth studying. Lencqvist states that Devil does exist, but he considers the magic-prone folk lost and ignorant, rather than followers of the Devil. Lencqvist's wish is that the Enlightenment will eradicate residual pagan beliefs and practices (Hautala 1954: 70-73, Kajanto 1982: 44-115). The aim of Rosenbom's thesis *De Fama Magiae Fennis Attributae* (1789) was to show that the reputation the Finns had as superstitious and magic-prone folk was exaggerated. Instead of the Finns, it was actually Lapps that early Scandinavian written sources pointed to as superstitious folk. Furthermore, Rosenbom argued that Finns did not invent their superstitious traditions by themselves, but that the traditions were borrowed from other peoples, mainly from the

Swedes, and via them even from classical period (Hautala 1954: 73-74; Kajanto 1982: 116-126).

Christfrid Ganander, a priest and a colleague of Porthan, was the most productive collector of oral traditions in eighteenth-century Finland. In his first publication about riddles (1783), Ganander wanted to show that Finnish riddles are old and connected to the Bible and Gothic culture; he also wished to prove that Finns are as clever as other people, and his practical aim was to improve literacy by providing entertaining reading to the folk. These two tendencies, the one of the Fennophiles (pro-Finnish) and the second one of the Enlightenment, are visible in his most important publication, the *Mythologia Fennica* (1789), which was meant to be an appendix to his dictionary, and which served for a long time as the only work of reference in the study of folk belief. The *Mythologia Fennica* is an encyclopedic compilation of names and words that Ganander considered part of Finnish mythology. His source material included oral poetry, incantations, folk beliefs and early written sources such as Agricola's list of gods, and Scandinavian sagas. The *Mythologia Fennica* includes references to gods and other supernatural beings, feasts, ancient kings of Finland, magical practices, sacred places, and seers and other magic-possessing people. Though it was not the most up-to-date view in Porthan's time anymore, Ganander still considered the Finns as descendants of Magog, Japhet's son, a people that arrived at its present places of settlement soon after the Flood. Ganander argued that Finnish mythology was closely connected to Scandinavian mythology on the one hand, and to Greek and Roman classical mythology on the other hand. The other

tendency, the ideas of the Enlightenment, is evident in Ganander's explanations of mythological phenomena, which he considered products of a primitive mind, metaphors, allegories or conjurors' tricks. Whenever possible, he tried to unveil and debunk these delusions and tricks (Hautala 1954: 76-82; 1969: 18).

Finnish scholars presented the anxiety about Finland's national status within European modernity, and how to deal with the supernatural and the emerging modernity. This national anxiety is still visible. Satu Apo analyzed the public EU discussion (newspapers, seminars) in Finland 1994-95, and concluded that the Finnish people consider themselves uncivilized and rural compared to older cultures. Repeating characteristics included rudeness, over-seriousness, lousy oral communication skills, and pathological tendencies to alcoholism, homicides and suicides. Drawing on Goffman's work on stigmatization and spoilt identity, Apo argues that Finns are carrying a self-spoilt identity. According to Apo, self-stigmatization of Finns is a result of the juxtapositioning of elite and folk in the construction of the nationality between 1810 and 1945. (Apo 1998: 83-86.)

Emphasis on Fieldwork

The Finnish Literature Society was established in 1831, and its foundation records include the encouragement to collect ancient Finnish traditions, such as mythology (Haavio 1967: 4-6). After working intensively with Elias Lönnrot on his project of compiling the national epic of the Finns, the Kalevala, The Finnish Literature Society

announced its first public guide for collecting Finnish folklore in 1850. This announcement included the recommendation to collect folktales about giants, elves, guardian spirits and “para” (Jauhiainen 1999: 31). In 1885 the Finnish Literature Society published its first guide for collecting superstition, called *Taikanuotta eli Opas taikojen kerääjille* (Web of Magic. A Guide for Collecting Magic). The guide was meant for anyone interested in studying and revealing the past and the superstition of the Finns. Interestingly, it was no longer the academia that collected information about the magical practices of the folk, but the educated folk itself.

The guide included a general list of genres, a very detailed list of themes to be collected, and practical guidelines suggesting how to ask questions and how to make notes. It was mentioned that the collector should begin with “some everyday magic or with some droll magic trick” and then, when informants are in a good mood, move on to ask questions about serious magic (Mustonen 1885: 3-6). The possible folklore items that were looked for included, for example, the omens of death, information about seers, and the magic of harming others and defending against harm. Additionally, the list included questions of how to spoil food during a feast; how water, beer and coffee are used in divination; and how to control the supernatural beings of forests and lakes (Mustonen 1885: 79, 84-86).

On the one hand, the aim of the collection was to eradicate the superstition. On the other hand, the attempt was to save the remnants of the folk tradition:

“Superstition is, thank God, vanishing in the most parts of our country. Still, people do remember magical tricks, even though they do not believe in them. This era between superstition and the Enlightenment is very favorable to a folklore collector because he now can uncover the magic since it no longer is secret knowledge. Now is the time to start collecting magic because after a generation, there most probably will not be anything left to collect. Studying the superstition that restricts the human beings is a valuable thing to do for a follower of the Enlightenment. Based on the knowledge thus collected, and after writing them down on the paper and filing them and giving them their historical merit, one can efficiently eradicate all the irrational delusions” (My translation) (Mustonen 1885: 4).

The Finnish Literature Society has continued organizing collections from 1885 on. The most productive times were between 1935 and 1958. Altogether, The Folklore Archives at the Finnish Literature Society contain approximately 110 000 belief legends (Jauhiainen 1993: 31-33). As part of my research material was collected through the Finnish Literature Society’s respondent network, and as the whole of the research data will be archived in a Folklore archives at Turku University, my project joins the long tradition of collecting and archiving Finnish folk belief.

Emphasis on Comparison

Julius Krohn, the founding father of the geographic-historical method, began to examine and compile information on the pagan religion of the Finno-Ugric peoples, but died unexpectedly in 1888 before finishing his work. His son, Kaarle Krohn, continued, and edited his father’s works; *Suomen suvun pakanallinen jumalanpalvelus* (The Pagan

Worship of the Finnish Peoples) was published in 1894. Research material consists of reports of Finnish and Russian explorers and ethnological and historical accounts. The book explores sacred places, heathen idols, sorcerers and priests of sacrifice and sacrificial rites. Thus it works as a presentation of Finno-Ugric mythology. The disposition of the book is geographic-evolutionistic: Each subject is discussed by starting from the ideas and customs of the peoples at the most primitive pagan state, then proceeding to higher states of development until it reaches the Finns (Hautala 1969: 93-94).

The Finnish Literature Society and the publisher Werner Söderström started the publishing of series of works on comparative religion, called *Suomen suvun uskonnot* (The Religions of the Finno-Ugric Peoples) in 1914. Kaarle Krohn joined the editing committee and also wrote a book, *Suomalaisten runojen uskonto* (Religion of the Ancient Finnish Poems) that was published in the series in 1914-15. The research material consists of ancient poems and incantations, and the book discusses for example beliefs concerning the dead, the world beyond the grave, saints, and animate and inanimate nature. Krohn argues that the material, namely poems and incantations, presents the union of paganism and Catholicism in the Christian Middle Ages. The only authentic part of the old folk belief that makes its appearance in the poems and incantations deals with worship of dead, and not on nature being animated (Hautala 1969: 115-116).

Matti Waronen published three-part series *Suomen Kansan Muinaisia Taikoja* (Ancient Magic Practices of the Finnish People, 1891, 1892, 1912) based on the large

collection of material from the folklore archives of the Finnish Literature Society.

Waronen's thesis *Vainajainpalvelus muinaisilla suomalaisilla* (Worship of Dead among the Ancient Finns) in 1895 compared items of information received from Finns, from the peoples related to Finns and finally from other peoples according to language groups.

Waronen held the view that belief in the spirits of the deceased explains the emergence of religions (Hautala 1969: 140-141). F.A. Hästesko follows Krohn's method in his thesis *Länsisuomalaiset tautien loitsut* (The West-Finnish Disease Incantations, 1910) but differs from previous and above-mentioned studies in that he makes systematic tradition-psychological observations. He continued this trend in his later publication, *Hiukan loitsujen ja taikojen psykologiasta* (On the Psychology of Incantations and Magic Practices, 1923), in which he examines the psychological prerequisites for the origin, usage and spread of incantations and magic practices, focusing primarily on the powerful effect of suggestion (Hautala 1969: 144-145).

Source Criticism and the Supernatural Tradition

The twentieth century classic pieces of Finnish folklore studies of folk beliefs often explain supernatural experiences as hallucinations taking place inside a religious frame of reference. Seeing guardian spirits was explained as hallucinations caused by, for example, intoxication, exhaustion, hunger, lactation or sickness. Well-known studies applying this approach are Martti Haavio's comprehensive work about Finnish household spirits, *Suomalaiset kodinhaltijat* (1942), and Lauri Honko's study on Ingrian folk beliefs,

Geisterglaube in Ingermanland (1962). Even though the starting point in this approach is that the experience is real to the subject, it is assumed that a rational explanation will be eventually found. For example, Honko explains how natural environment (darkness), physical condition (tiredness) and social obligations (taking care of the fire in the barn) of the experiencer, combined with his knowledge of the supernatural tradition (guardian spirit will guard the fire and punish if someone lets the fire die) will steer the experiencer to interpret a signal (vision) as a supernatural experience (guardian spirit apparition). David Hufford calls this kind of approach Cultural Source Hypothesis (Hufford 1982: 14). According to Cultural Source Hypothesis, experience can be explained through the principles of perceptual psychology, the social values, norms and roles that form the person's social frame of reference and the models that tradition offer for experiencing and interpreting the unexpected events. The main point is that the tradition steers both the experiencing process and the interpreting process (Honko 1964: 9-19; 1972: esp.99-105; 1980: 79-88, 90-97, 100-104). I will return to the discussion of the genres of supernatural narratives in Finnish folklore studies in Chapter three, but right now it is important to note that my data shows that even the current modern narrators in our well lit, nutritionally rich and technologically advantaged environment recognize and negotiate the concerns of the physical and mental condition and the environment.

Leea Virtanen: “That Must Have Been ESP!” An Examination of Psychic Experiences

Leea Virtanen’s studies on the supernatural experiences of common Finnish people are close to my research traditions, and inspired me when I was a folklore undergraduate student. The fundamental difference between Virtanen’s and my approaches on the supernatural is that Virtanen studied experiences, whereas I study narratives. I am going to review Virtanen’s work here in a more detailed manner in order to illustrate how my research questions, methods, and results differ from hers, and how they are alike. In her work *“That Must Have Been ESP!” An Examination of Psychic Experiences*, Virtanen focused on simultaneous experiences. A simultaneous experience usually conveys information about another person’s death, accident or fright, but it may also convey a feeling of closeness to someone. The information is received through means other than the normal sensory channels. It may be obtained in a dream; as a hallucination, an impression, or an intuition; or in a form of some change in the surroundings. What differentiates this from other supernatural experiences is that a simultaneous experience corresponds to some actual event, and the relation of the experience to reality can be estimated. Virtanen emphasizes that these experiences may reveal a form of psychic activity that is natural and essential to human existence. To give background information of the study of regularities observable in the experiences, and to facilitate further study, she incorporated the ideas of parapsychology in her research. Instead of collecting and

comparing different versions of story accounts, Virtanen says that “I have found the interest of the material I collected to lie in the experiences themselves, which are reported in the narratives with varying degrees of literary skills” (Virtanen 1990: 1-15, 38).

Her research material was collected in the 1970’s, and the book *Telepaattiset kokemukset* was published in Finnish in 1977, and was later translated into English and published in 1990 in the Folklore Today series. The research material was collected mainly by means of written questionnaires published in newspapers, and partly by interviews. Over half of the material was collected in 1973, exactly 30 years before I collected my research material. Altogether, Virtanen’s material consists of 1,442 reports. The main body of her research material consists of 865 reports. (Virtanen 1990: .24) The same material and the same themes are also discussed in Virtanen’s earlier book *Kun kello pysähtyi, tavallisen suomalaisen yliluonnolliset kokemukset*, but in a less detailed manner.

Virtanen’s Research Results

Since Leea Virtanen’s and my research approaches and questions differ, it is complicated to do comparisons, but in some questions, such as the sense and the state of consciousness, it is possible. Firstly, it should be reminded that Virtanen studied simultaneous experiences. I, on the other hand, have interpreted simultaneous experience as a possible meaning given to the experience by the experiencer. In my data, there are 25 cases like that.

In Virtanen's research, 49% of the reported simultaneous experiences took place when the experiencer was awake; 29% when asleep; and 23% in the state between sleep and wakefulness. There is a big difference compared to my data which shows that 65% of the respondents that told their state of consciousness said they were awake, whereas only 7% said they were asleep.

Around half of the waking state experiences in Virtanen's research were intuitions, and the percipient may as well be alone as with company. Hallucinations were the most typical type of experience, forming 35% of the corpus. They were followed by dreams (28%), intuition (28%), physical change (5%), and signs in nature (4%). Virtanen divides hallucinations into visions, auditory sensations and olfactory sensations (smells). Auditory sensations make up the largest group of hallucinations, and the largest auditory groups are human voices, contact sounds (steps etc.) and noises (rattles etc.). (Virtanen 1990: 27-32, 39.) In my data seeing was the most common way to sense the supernatural, followed by the combination of several senses.

The second largest group in Virtanen's research were visions which happen between dream and wakeful states. In visions, people usually encounter their children or parents, siblings or neighbors. Death is the dominant theme in visions: 78 % of the visions relate to the death of the agent. Smell as a form of simultaneous experience is rare. If it occurs, it is usually a smell of smoke or a smell of death. (Virtanen 1990:38-58.)

Most of the dreams are symbolic, meaning that, for example, death is presented in the form of a symbol, such as a graveyard or a ship. Less of the dreams are realistic, depicting a scene where the agent gets harmed. (Virtanen 1990:40-46.) Intuitions are experienced in the waking state, and they occur as mental calls to action – to help the person in danger, for example. Intuitions may be received as inner voices; as obsessive thoughts and actions without the experiencer really knowing who the intuition concerns; as perception mistakes; as physical symptoms such as feeling pain when someone you know is ill; and as emotional states such as bursting into tears of sorrow when a dear one dies. (Virtanen 1990:58-69.) Virtanen notes the abundance of reports of physical phenomena, especially poltergeists, in her collection. These phenomena, including the stopping of a clock and the breaking of falling of an object, are experienced as omens of death, or happen in the presence of the person dying, or occur after death. (Virtanen1990: 69-76.) Stories of poltergeist were very rare in my data: There were only six of them.

Death was the most often occurring theme in the experiences in Virtanen’s data. Virtanen herself says that “The Finnish simultaneous material is exceptionally negative”. Of all the collected simultaneous experiences, death is the subject of 62 % of the reports; accident or distress 20%; illness 12%; and other subjects 5%. Even the latter-mentioned “other subjects” consists mainly of negative aspects such as war-time experiences, funerals and infidelity. (Virtanen 1990:80-91.) Death of a family member, relative or another familiar person was a common theme in my data as well, among other crises.

Yet, the interpretations of the experiences in my data were not only negative. Dead relatives could visit and comfort or save from danger.

According to Virtanen, the simultaneous experiences fall into two groups: 1) those negative in character, such as omens of death, and 2) a subgroup of everyday experiences linked to another person's thoughts, dreams and actions – the “everyday telepathy.” This everyday telepathy includes knowing the arrival of a visitor, knowing who you are going to meet, shared dreams, and thought transfer. (Virtanen 1990: 92-103.)

Virtanen writes that many people are afraid to reveal their supernatural experiences, fearing they will be ridiculed or thought insane. This is evident in my own research material as well. Virtanen also wonders if there are certain personality types typical of people who report having supernatural experiences. Her students conducted 94 interviews of people having “inexplicable or supernatural experiences” in 1974-1976, and students were asked to briefly describe the informants' personalities. Informants were typically described as open, happy, spontaneous, talkative, sociable, peaceful, optimistic, and temperamental. Also in the letters written by the informants themselves, a greater than normal sensitivity is stressed. (Virtanen 1990:104-106.)

Most of the informants in Virtanen's research were women: Women accounted for 81% of experiences and men for 19%. Virtanen notes that this is opposite to the older records in the Folklore Archives from the Finnish Literature Society. Why the difference, she asks, and then suggests that strange experiences do not conform to the modern male

role under the more rigid social attitudes. Many informants point out that supernatural experiences seem more suitable for women, but they are damaging to a man's image. While in traditional Finnish agricultural society men generally held the prestige position of a seer or a wiseman (*tietäjä*), having supernatural experiences in the modern world makes a man seem "like an old woman" (*akkamainen*). The clearest gender-related distinction in Virtanen's material is that experiences related to people outside the family circle, such as neighbors and coworkers, are more common to men than to women, whose experiences are linked to the home environment. (Virtanen 1990:106-109.) Also in my data most of the respondents were women, although the difference is a bit smaller than in Virtanen's research. In my data women accounted for 74 % of experiences and men for 26%. Unlike in Virtanen's data, I did not find narrators stating that the supernatural experiences are more suitable to women than to men. Why the difference then? It can be that the supernatural experiences do not conform to the modern male role, like Virtanen suggests. On the other hand, perhaps men are not as willing to respond to research inquiry and/ or write about their experiences.

Virtanen does not present differences between age groups, but she notes that children have more visions than adults. Childhood experiences have been recounted as the narrator's own memories or recounted by a parent. Typical children's visions include angels, pictures in the sky, and the appearance of deceased relatives. (Virtanen 1990:109.)

What or who, then, are the most typical objects of the simultaneous experiences? More than half of the experiences relate to close family members, especially the ones of the childhood environment. Most typically the experience relates to the parent or child (31%); then to other relatives (16%); siblings (13.5%); neighbors or coworkers (12%); spouses (11%); friends (10%); and events (non personal) (6%). The usual explanation of an experience where a family member appears is the confirmation of the warmth and depth of the relationship between the parties. Furthermore, experiencers frequently get the impression that the appearing agent is the active one, bringing hope or making an appeal or a request. As was noted, events form only 6 % of the objects. Usually the objects are fires, domestic animals, and great catastrophes. Virtanen was also interested in knowing the interpretations of the experiences. In the sample of 60 reports, telepathy/thought transference was the most common given explanation (43%) followed by God's guidance (23%), unexplained (18%), deceased person or spirit (10%) and other (6%). (Virtanen 1990: 120-125.) In my material, the most common interpretation was support, followed by omen.

The overall non-academic interest in Virtanen's work was vast, including both positive appraisals and harsh criticism, but the Finnish academic folklore community silenced the research completely; only one review of her two books was published. The most problematic issue was that Virtanen took seriously the research possibilities that parapsychology might offer, and the stigma that followed that was hard to avoid (Enges

2004). Thus it can be argued that a person dealing too closely with the supernatural category may become contaminated by the stigma that the category carries.

CHAPTER 2: QUANTITATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTER NARRATIVES

To familiarize myself and the reader with my research material, and to sort out its themes, I have applied quantitative analysis to my qualitative research. I have turned qualitative material (texts) into variables, and given these variables values. For example, ‘a supernatural being’ is a variable, and ‘ghost,’ ‘angel’ and ‘spiritual guide’ are values. Next, I have applied descriptive statistics: first, to describe the frequency distribution, which shows the number of observations falling into each of several ranges of values, and second, to perform cross tabulation, which shows the joint distribution of two or more variables. I describe and summarize the data, and use tables to present the information in a reader-friendly way. I do not attempt to reach conclusions that extend beyond the data; I do not propose correlations or suggest probabilities. Nevertheless, I do hope that the data might provide hypotheses and raise questions for future research.

DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

My research material consists of 440 narratives. The material includes 285 letters and 96 emails that I received as responses to my research inquiries, and 59 letters from the Finnish Literature Society's Folklore Archives. Most of the respondents are women. There are 319 women and 112 men. Nine respondents did not disclose their gender.

Three-hundred thirty-one (331) of 440 respondents mentioned their age. I have not included answers from people under 18 years old, and there were no identified ages between 18 and 20. Likewise, none of the letters in which respondents identified their age included age 91 or over. The largest age group was 61-70 years (78 responses). The table 1 shows that the ages of 51-80 years form the largest group, Rest of the age groups are distributed as follows: ‘Percent’ means the percentage of the whole data, and ‘Valid Percent’ means the percentage of the replies that answer the question at issue. “Missing System” means the replies that do not address the question at issue.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid 20-30	34	7.7	10.3
31-40	30	6.8	9.1
41-50	34	7.7	10.3
51-60	63	14.3	19.0
61-70	78	17.7	23.6
71-80	61	13.9	18.4
81-90	31	7.0	9.4
Total	331	75.2	100.0
Missing System	109	24.8	
Total	440	100.0	

Table 1. Age Groups

In the overall material, there are nearly 3 (2.8) female respondents per 1 male.

When comparing the gender and age of respondents, we see that the gender difference in

writing activity decreases in the age groups 51-60 and 61-70. The difference is biggest in the youngest age group, 20-30.

	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Age group 20-30	32	2	34
31-40	24	6	30
41-50	22	12	34
51-60	42	20	62
61-70	53	25	78
71-80	47	14	61
81-90	23	8	31
Total	243	87	330

Table 2. Age groups and Gender

Gillian Bennett studied the beliefs about foretelling among women, in 1980's in Manchester, and her study suggests that younger women are more apt to believe in different forms of foretelling than elderly women. Elderly men, on the other hand, are less apt to believe than either younger or older women. (Bennett 1995: 140-141.) This gender distribution also conforms to the studies of Leea Virtanen⁶.

Finland consists of six provinces⁷, and I used the division into provinces to examine the geographical distribution of the inquiry replies. Altogether, 390 respondents disclosed where they live. Most of the respondents live either in Western Finland (162

⁶ See Chapter 1 for more details.

⁷ Source for the map: Wikimedia Commons

replies) or Southern Finland (128 replies). Fifty-two (52) respondents were from Eastern Finland, 24 from Lapland, 18 from Oulu and 6 from outside Finland. When the number of replies is compared to the population/province, we see that Lapland has the most active writers (0.01% of population replied); followed by Western Finland and Eastern Finland (both 0.009%); then Southern Finland (0.006%) and finally Oulu (0.004%). Lapland is the most rural province of the Finnish provinces, so this finding could suggest that people in the rural areas either have more supernatural experience or are more active in answering research inquiries about their experiences. Yet, Oulu is rural as well, and it has the least active writers. Finally, Western Finland is urban, Eastern Finland is rural, and they both share the same percentage value. It is also worth of remembering that Lapland has been a popular field of ethnographers and it is possible that that has paved way for active participation in research projects.

Southern Finland (1) – population 2206 523 in September 2009 ⁸

Western Finland (2) – population 1887 993 in September 2009

Eastern Finland (3) – population 570 088 in September 2009

Oulu (4) – population 470 909 in September 2009

Lapland (5) – 27 681 in September 2009

There were no replies from Åland (6).

⁸ Source: Väestörekisterikeskus/Population Register Center, 10/12/2009. Thus, this does not tell the population in 2003, the time of the data collection, but it is plausible to argue that the populations per province have not changed significantly.

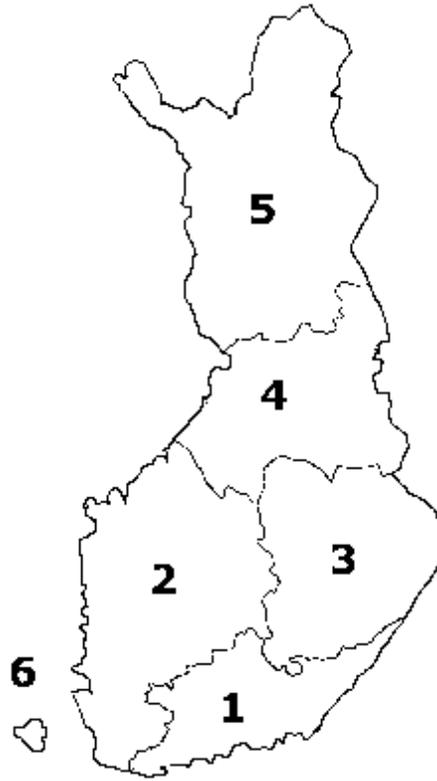


Figure 2. Counties of Finland

One-hundred sixty-seven (167) respondents told their educational level. Sixty two (62) of them had an upper-secondary/post-secondary non-tertiary education. Fifty (50) had the first stage of tertiary education; 33 had primary education; 15 had lower-secondary education; 5 had the second state of tertiary education and 2 had other education.⁹

	Education level						Total
	Primary education	Lower secondary education	Upper secondary education/Post secondary non-tertiary education	First stage of tertiary education	Second stage of tertiary education	Other	
Age group							
20-30	0	0	11	13	0	0	24
31-40	0	0	9	5	1	0	15
41-50	2	3	12	5	0	0	22
51-60	4	1	10	8	3	1	27
61-70	8	5	15	11	0	0	39
71-80	14	5	2	5	0	0	26
81-90	5	1	1	0	1	1	9
Total	33	15	60	47	5	2	162

Table 3. Education Level and Age Group

⁹ The classification follows ISCED (Unesco International Standard Classification of Education) and its application on Finnish educational system.

When we compare the education level of the biggest respondent age group (61-70) to the education level of the similar age group (60-74) in the whole country, we notice that the respondents of this age group are better educated than the general age group. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the general age group has upper-secondary/post-secondary education, whereas 38% of the same age group of respondents has upper-secondary/post-secondary education. Also, 28% of the respondents of that age group have tertiary education, whereas in the general age group the percentage is 22%. If we take a look at the education level of the Finnish population aged 15 or over, we see that the respondents' upper secondary/post secondary education level is the same as that of the general level (37%), but higher when it comes to tertiary education: 24.6% of the general population has tertiary education, whereas 32% of the respondents have tertiary education.¹⁰ This brief look at the statistics suggests that the people who reveal supernatural experiences are better educated than the average people in Finland. These results are suggestive, and a more detailed examination discussing all the age groups would be worth carrying out.

Nevertheless, what my analysis suggests contradicts the thought that people who are poorly educated are more likely to have supernatural experiences/talk about the experiences than well-educated people. Lindemann and Aarnio, Finnish researchers in psychology, conducted a study of paranormal beliefs, education, and thinking styles focusing on the question of whether length of education and intuitive analytical thinking

¹⁰ Source: Statistical Databases of Statistics Finland, available online. The education statistics discussing age group 60-74 relate to year 2007, and the population aged 15 or over statistics relate to year 2003.

explain the relationship between education and paranormal beliefs. Previous studies in the field had already indicated that a higher educational level and education in certain disciplines are related to skepticism toward paranormal beliefs. Their study included students from vocational schools and universities, and results showed that university students had fewer paranormal beliefs than vocational school students. The study indicated that university students were more analytically oriented compared to other students, and that the lower analytical thinking among vocational school students explained the differences in paranormal beliefs. Furthermore, it suggested that women were more intuitive and less analytical than men, and these differences in thinking styles appeared to be generative mechanisms for women's higher support of paranormal beliefs compared to men (Lindemann & Aarnio 2005: 1233-1235). In my research data, the age group 20-30, the most typical student age group, consists almost entirely of women (32 of 34), and thus, it conforms to Lindemann's and Aarnio's study. Yet, my data shows that this group is well-educated. All in all, it is good to bear in mind that the methodology and research questions of my study and those of Lindemann's and Aarnio's study differ, and comparisons should not be drawn too hastily.

I was also interested in examining the socio-economic status of the respondents. A socio-economic group considers the person's stage in life, occupation, and nature of work. Following the classification system used by Statistics Finland, I have differentiated between following socio-economic groups: self-employed persons; upper-level employees with administrative, managerial, professional and related occupations; lower-

level employees with administrative and clerical occupations; manual workers; students; retired from each group; and others.¹¹ The data shows that the three largest socio-economic groups are lower-level employees, upper-level employees, and retired upper-level employees. This is in accordance with the previous discussion of well-educated people talking about supernatural experiences. The following table 4 shows the frequency distribution.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Self employed	13	3.0	5.9
	Upper-level employees	27	6.1	12.2
	Lower-level employees	34	7.7	15.4
	Manual workers	21	4.8	9.5
	Students	12	2.7	5.4
	Retired self employed	19	4.3	8.6
	Retired upper-level employees	28	6.4	12.7
	Retired lower-level employees	23	5.2	10.4
	Retired manual workers	23	5.2	10.4
	Retired, no information of prior occupation	1	.2	.5
	Other	20	4.5	9.0
	Total	221	50.2	100.0
Missing	System	219	49.8	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 4. Education Level and Age Group

¹¹ Finland's Classification of Socio-economic Groups 1989 is based on the statistical recommendations issued by the UN (1990) although it does not fully comply with them.

I sent a total of 79 inquiries to 20 magazines, 30 big newspapers, 28 local newspapers and one email list. When I sent out the inquiries, many reporters became interested in my research topic, and my interviews were published in 10 newspapers and aired on 5 radio programs. Three-hundred thirty-two (332) of 440 respondents revealed their source. The complete list, including data for the number of replies I received, is attached as an appendix. I am also using 59 letters from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society, which comprise 13.4% of all the replies. The sources that brought most responses were *Turkulainen* (29 replies), a free local newspaper in Turku delivered to all the households that receive advertisements, and that also published my interview; *Kotimaa* (25), a church-related nation-wide newspaper that published my inquiry in its free sample; *Tamperelainen* (22), a local free newspaper in Tampere; and a magazine called *Nykyposti* (20).

Finally, I have examined if the narrator explicitly states that (s)he is religious. Forty people of the 440 explicitly stated that they are religious. Thirty (30) of the religious respondents revealed the source, and fourteen (14) of them responded to my inquiry published in a church-related newspaper. The distribution of the supernatural beings that the religious people talk about encountering does not differ from those talked about by the rest of the respondents.

	Religious	Total
Primary story Angel	15	15
Ghost of a family member, relative	1	1
Other identified ghost	1	1
Guardian spirit	1	1
Devil	2	2
Jesus	7	7
God	2	2
Unidentified human shaped being	1	1
Poltergeist, haunting	1	1
Other	6	6
No supernatural being involved	3	3
Total	40	40

Table 5. Religiosity and the Supernatural Being Encountered

ENCOUNTER DESCRIPTION

I began analyzing the experiences by looking at how people interpret the nature of their experiences. “Supernatural experience” means the narrator labels his/her experience supernatural. That group formed the biggest set of the answers, 386 responses. In 16 replies the narrator expressed that the event could be explained by natural causes. In 36

cases the interpretation was left open. Two of the letters dealt with issues other than those that had been in the inquiry.

In most of the replies (382) the narrator is the experiencer. There are 14 cases where the narrator tells about someone else experience, and 38 cases where the narrator tells about his/her experience plus someone else's separate experience. In 6 cases the replies either dealt with other issues than those explicitly inquired about, or the experiencer was not clear.

Most of the narrators tell about more than one supernatural experience. One-hundred sixty-two (162) narrators tell about three or more experiences, and 82 tell about two experiences. One-hundred eighty-three (183) tell having one supernatural experience. Eleven (11) of the replies either dealt with other than those issues inquired about, or discussed the supernatural in general. If the person, in addition to telling stories, mentions that (s)he has other supernatural experiences in his/her life, I have included it in the category "mention of more experiences but no stories." I wanted to include this information in order to show how common, or uncommon, it is for a narrator to mention supernatural experiences other than those that they explicitly describe. There were 124 answers in that category.

The focus of the inquiry was on the supernatural encounters. The material is rich, and I want to show the variety of supernatural beings people tell about. That is why I have included in my analysis the 1-3 most important beings occurring in each narrative. I

have categorized the encounter stories as primary, secondary and tertiary. The criteria for placing the stories in order are: the length of the story, amount of details, and the amount of evaluation. In brief, the question is what story gets most attention and focus from the narrator. Yet, as the overall focus here is elsewhere, namely on the question as to whether there is a typical encounter narrative, I have limited the rest of the variables to refer only to the primary story in cases where the narrator tells about several experiences.

In the primary stories, the most common encountered supernatural beings are angels (88 replies), unidentified human shaped beings (83) and other beings (72). In my inquiry I gave examples of supernatural beings and included angels, ghosts, guardian spirits, demons and extraterrestrials. In addition to these beings, people told about meeting God, Jesus, animals, identified or unidentified human shaped beings, UFOs without mentions of their travelers, and poltergeist phenomenon. Then there is the category of “Other” which includes for example doppelgänger¹², Big Foot, troll, harbinger and objects such as light balls and pillars that the narrator describes as beings. Many replies discuss supernatural experiences without supernatural beings involved. These stories tell about telepathy, clairvoyance, and omens that come true and. For example, some narrators told about having a dream about a big ship wreck the night when MS Estonia shipwrecked in Baltic Sea, in 1994. Others mention sensing or knowing beforehand the murders of president John F. Kennedy and the Swedish prime minister Olof Palme. This category involves also stories about mysterious events, such as writings appearing on the floor and

¹² Doppelgänger means a double, a look-alike.

people being able to move objects by their mind. The table below shows the distribution of the encountered beings.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Angel	88	20.0	20.4
Ghost of a family member, relative	43	9.8	10.0
Other identified ghost	16	3.6	3.7
Unidentified ghost	12	2.7	2.8
Extraterrestrial	12	2.7	2.8
Guardian spirit	14	3.2	3.2
Devil	10	2.3	2.3
Jesus	11	2.5	2.6
God	7	1.6	1.6
Animal	5	1.1	1.2
Unidentified human shaped being	83	18.9	19.3
Identified human shaped being	9	2.0	2.1
Poltergeist, haunting	6	1.4	1.4
Other	72	16.4	16.7
No supernatural being involved	28	6.4	6.5
Spiritual guide	3	.7	.7
UFO	11	2.5	2.6
demon	1	.2	.2
Total	431	98.0	100.0
Missing System	9	2.0	
Total	440	100.0	

Table 6. Supernatural Beings in Primary Stories

In the secondary stories, the biggest category consists of stories that do not involve supernatural beings (45 replies). The most often encountered supernatural beings in secondary stories are other supernatural beings (43) and ghosts of family members or relatives (35).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Angel	25	5.7	10.8
	Ghost of a family member, relative	35	8.0	15.1
	Other identified ghost	7	1.6	3.0
	Unidentified ghost	4	.9	1.7
	Extraterrestrial	4	.9	1.7
	Guardian spirit	7	1.6	3.0
	Devil	5	1.1	2.2
	Jesus	4	.9	1.7
	God	2	.5	.9
	Animal	11	2.5	4.7
	Unidentified human shaped being	23	5.2	9.9
	Identified human shaped being	9	2.0	3.9
	Poltergeist, haunting	2	.5	.9
	Other	43	9.8	18.5
	No supernatural being involved	45	10.2	19.4
	UFO	4	.9	1.7
	demon	2	.5	.9
	Total	232	52.7	100.0
Missing	System	208	47.3	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 7. Supernatural Beings in Secondary stories

Also, in the tertiary stories, the biggest category consists of stories that do not involve supernatural beings (33 replies), followed by categories of other encountered supernatural beings (29 replies) and ghosts of family members or relatives (20 replies).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Angel	15	3.4	9.7
	Ghost of a family member, relative	20	4.5	12.9
	Other identified ghost	11	2.5	7.1
	Extraterrestrial	4	.9	2.6
	Guardian spirit	2	.5	1.3
	Devil	2	.5	1.3
	Jesus	4	.9	2.6
	God	3	.7	1.9
	Animal	6	1.4	3.9
	Unidentified human shaped being	15	3.4	9.7
	Identified human shaped being	6	1.4	3.9
	Poltergeist, haunting	3	.7	1.9
	Other	29	6.6	18.7
	No supernatural being involved	33	7.5	21.3
	Spiritual guide	1	.2	.6
	demon	1	.2	.6
	Total	155	35.2	100.0
Missing	System	285	64.8	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 8. Supernatural Beings in Tertiary Stories

184 narratives ¹³ (41.8 % of all the responses) mention the gender of the encountered supernatural being. In 111 cases the respondent identified as male, in 65 cases female, and in 7 cases both genders are represented. Female narrators are more likely to see male beings: 83 women tell about encountering male supernatural beings; 51 women tell about encountering female beings and six stories involve both male and female beings. Twenty-seven (27) men tell about encountering male supernatural beings, 11 men tell about encountering female supernatural beings and 1 tells about encountering both.

In the cases where the gender was identified, unidentified human shaped beings (47), ghosts of family members or relatives (42) and angels (23) are gendered. Angels are usually female, ghosts of family members or relatives are usually male, and unidentified human shaped beings are usually male. Here, it needs to be pointed out, that Finnish language does not have gendered pronouns, and thus, it is impossible to tell the gender, unless the narrator directly states that.

¹³ I wish to remind that I am discussing only the primary narratives here.

		Gender of the being		
		Female	Male	Both male and female
Primary story	Angel	16	7	1
	Ghost of a family member, relative	16	26	
	Other identified ghost	10	2	1
	Unidentified ghost	3	3	
	Extraterrestrial	0	4	
	Guardian spirit	1	6	
	Devil	1	2	
	Jesus	0	11	
	God	0	1	
	Animal	0	0	
	Unidentified human shaped being	12	35	4
	Identified human shaped being	3	4	1
	Poltergeist, haunting	0	1	
	Other	3	5	
	No supernatural being involved	0	0	
	Spiritual guide	0	0	
	UFO	0	3	
	demon	0	1	
Total		65	111	

Table 9. Gender of the Supernatural Being/-s in the Primary Stories

Interaction tells the level of communication, or whether there is any sort of communication. The supernatural being can communicate to the human; the human to the supernatural being, and there can be dialogue between them. The interaction can be also physical, even sexual. One-hundred fifty-one (151) narrators reveal that there was

communication between the experiencer and the supernatural being. In most of the cases (82) the supernatural being communicated to the human. In one case an angel told a name to a young woman who was pregnant. Later the woman regretted she did not give that name to the baby. In another story a woman's father came appeared and called her name the moment when he died in a hospital. In 10 cases the human being communicated to the supernatural being. For example, an elderly woman wrote how she was very afraid of a poltergeist spirit that caused mayhem in her home, and how she ordered the thing to leave. It did leave, banging doors. In 32 cases there was dialogue involved. One narrator tells he met another man in a forest when picking up berries. They chatted a long while, about berry picking, and it was not until after the encounter the man realized he had met a forest guardian spirit. In another case a young woman suffered from depression when her child was a toddler. They were walking on a street when they suddenly met an older, friendly woman who encouraged the young mother and talked nicely about the child – and then suddenly disappeared. The narrator interpreted the woman as an angel who came to support her when she was having a rough time.

In 25 stories the communication was physical and in 2 cases it was sexual. One elderly woman tells how an angel appeared to her, touched her and healed her aching back. Another woman tells she is having a sexual fair with a supernatural being, and how happy that makes her. On the other hand, an elderly man told that he often feels that somebody or something is touching him, and that makes him very confused.

One-hundred ten (110) women and 37 men revealed they had communicated with the supernatural beings. Thus, (as we remember we have 3 women narrators per one man) it was as usual for women as for men to tell about communication. Yet, there is a difference in the form of interaction: It was relatively more common for men (13 cases) to have a dialogue with the supernatural being than it was for women (19 cases), but it was relatively more common for women (21) to have physical interaction with the supernatural being than it was for men (3).

It is explicit in most of the narratives (422) how the experienced was sensed. I have included the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) and intuition, by which I mean “the sixth sense” that narrators describe when they say, for example, feeling something’s presence or knowing things beforehand. Finally, multiple senses means that the narrator mentions more than one sense. (S)he, for example, hears the steps, and feels someone touching him/her. One narrator told that her dog was killed but later she both smelled him and felt his touch on her leg. Seeing forms over half (59.5%) of the reported ways to experience the supernatural. The rest of the cases distribute as follows:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Sight	251	57.0	59.5
	Hearing	33	7.5	7.8
	Touch	14	3.2	3.3
	Extra-sensory perception, ESP	28	6.4	6.6
	Multiple senses	96	21.8	22.7
	Total	422	95.9	100.0
Missing	System	18	4.1	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 10. Sense

Over half (64.9%) of the encounters occur when the narrator is awake. The rest of the cases distribute as follows:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Awake	266	60.5	64.9
	Asleep	28	6.4	6.8
	Between awake and asleep	113	25.7	27.6
	Other altered state of consciousness	3	.7	.7
	Total	410	93.2	100.0
Missing	System	30	6.8	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 11. State of Consciousness

I have analyzed the narratives based on where the event takes place. The supernatural may manifest itself at work, at home, or in a free-time related place outside the home, for example, at a summer cottage, in church, a hospital, or a forest. For example, a middle-aged man told that he met a ghost of a dead family member at his summer cottage. Work related stories included for example a story of a nurse who heard steps in a hallway but did not see anyone. Place is mentioned in 386 stories, and in half of them, the encounter takes place at the narrator's home. A free-time location is mentioned in 149 cases (34%), and work is mentioned in 20 cases (5%). Considering the three largest groups of encountered supernatural beings, the research shows that the unidentified human-shaped beings are encountered slightly more often at home (45 cases) than outside the home (36);¹⁴ angels, on the other hand, are clearly more often encountered at home (47) than outside the home (29); and finally, other beings are encountered at home (32) as often as outside home (31).

Two-hundred eighty-four (284) women and 97 men reported the place where their encounter occurred. In the women's stories, it is around 40% more common to encounter the supernatural being at home (179 cases) than outside the home (105 cases), whereas in men's responses, it is around 40% more common to encounter the being outside the home (60 cases) than at home (37 cases). This conforms to Leea Virtanen's research which showed that women's simultaneous experiences were home and family related, whereas men's were related to environment outside the home.

14 Outside home here combines both the work and the free time related place.

I have sorted out three life phases in the narrators' lives when the experiences occurred: "childhood," which means people under 18 years old, "adulthood," from 18 to 65 years and "old age," meaning over 65 years. The age was explicit in 319 responses. Most of the narrated encounters took place in the narrator's adulthood (208 cases), followed by childhood (92) and then old age (19). When compared with the age groups of the material, we can see that it is more common for the young respondents (20-30 years old) to tell about childhood experiences. In the older age groups, it is less common for people aged 61-70 to tell about childhood experiences than in the next two older age groups.

	Age when experiencing			Total
	childhood, under 18	adulthood, 18-65	old age, over 65	
Age group				
20-30	13	16	0	29
31-40	6	20	0	26
41-50	10	23	0	33
51-60	18	41	0	59
61-70	16	46	4	66
71-80	12	30	8	50
81-90	6	13	6	25
Total	81	189	18	288

Table 12. Age When Experiencing the Supernatural

I have analyzed the meaning of the experience. Meaning refers to the meaning that the narrator gives to the encounter. It answers the questions “why did this happen” and “what was the point of the experience.” In some narratives, this is easier to trace than in others. Some narrators state it directly, stating, for example, that an angel came to save her from a car accident, or that Jesus healed her and made her faith stronger. Thus, this category also tells us about the different roles the supernatural beings have in the narratives. Some narratives, on the other hand, require more interpretation from the researcher’s part, and some narrators do not provide any answers to the “why” questions.

The encounter can function as a warning about something, for example, not trusting someone. It can be an omen about an event that happens later, such as hearing a name of a person who dies later. The experience can provide support and comfort after a loss of a loved one, guidance in a difficult life situation or in decision making, or evidence of another world, most commonly, life after death. The meaning can be about making things right, when the supernatural being appears to correct something gone wrong. The supernatural being can also save the narrator from danger, such as a car accident. The encounter can work as a sign of simultaneity, that something important to the narrator is happening elsewhere right at that time. If the narrator states that the experience made him/her find religion or made his/her faith stronger, I’ve called the meaning “religious.” This may collide with/follow from the roles and tasks of the beings, but I think this category is important to note separately. In addition, I have sorted the narratives that discuss the faith of the narrator.

I was able to interpret the meaning of the experience in 202 narratives. Support and omen were the most common meanings, guidance and correction the least common. Supernatural beings are no longer guardians of morals who start rampaging if the men folk plays cards or if the household members work on Sundays. These examples are common in old Finnish stories of the supernatural where the guardian spirits and the Devil watched closely how humans behaved.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Warning	10	2.3	5.0
	Omen	36	8.2	17.8
	Evidence	14	3.2	6.9
	Support	39	8.9	19.3
	Correction	6	1.4	3.0
	Guidance	5	1.1	2.5
	Saving	19	4.3	9.4
	Other	18	4.1	8.9
	Religious/Spiritual	30	6.8	14.9
	Simultaneous experience	25	5.7	12.4
	Total	202	45.9	100.0
Missing	System	238	54.1	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 13. Meaning of the Experience

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

When analyzing the narratives, I have constructed three different *narrative genres*. The first one is “report,” by which I mean a short, general level, report type of a story of what happened, where and when. Then, there is a more detailed “experience story” that, in addition to the above-mentioned information, discusses the narrator’s life and the background of the event. “Life story” refers to a narrative where the main focus is on the continuum of events in the narrator's life and where the focus is on how the experience was negotiated into the life story of the narrator. A discussion on the genre will follow in the Chapter three.

The most common narrative genre in my material was experience story, followed by report and life story. See the table for the distribution of my material into these narrative genres.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Report	84	19.1	19.3
	Experience Story	292	66.4	67.1
	Life Story	59	13.4	13.6
	Total	435	98.9	100.0
Missing	System	5	1.1	
Total		440	100.0	

Table 14. Narrative Genre

I have three values for the evaluation of the experience: positive, negative and mixed. Not every story involves evaluation. Positive evaluation is related to positive emotions, such as joy, happiness, relief, peace, and positive consequences of the experience. It can also be a direct statement, such as “it was a wonderful experience.” Negative evaluation, on the other hand, relates to direct statements about a horrible/bad/frightening experience, and expressed emotions such as fear, horror, and anxiety, felt during or after the encounter, or even a long time after.

I was able to analyze the evaluation in 199 cases. Most of the stories involving evaluation were considered positive (159 cases). Thirty-three (33) stories were evaluated as negative, and seven stories had mixed evaluations. There were no relevant differences in evaluation across narrative genre on how the experience was evaluated.

				Total
	Positive	Negative	Mixed	
Narrative genre				
Report	15	3	0	18
Experience Story	104	23	5	132
Life Story	39	7	2	48
Total	158	33	7	198

Table 15. Narrative Genre and Overall Evaluation of the Experience

I have also looked at whether the narrators have told their experiences to others, and if yes, what the response was like: positive, negative, mixed, neutral, or no response. Positive means the people believed in the narrator, and/or expressed support in some way. Negative means that the audience did not believe the narrator, or were afraid of what they heard which can refer to rejecting something that they considered possible. Two-hundred seventy-eight (278) narrators discuss this question. Two-hundred sixty-three (263) of them have told others, while 15 have not. Of those that have told others about their experiences, 175 discussed the response they received from those they told. Eighty-one (81) narrators received positive responses, 57 mixed and 31 negative.

Stories about angels got nearly 60% more positive responses than negative responses, whereas for stories about unidentified human-shaped beings and other supernatural beings, it was around 50% more likely for the narrator to receive a negative rather than positive a response.

						Total
	Positive	Negative	Mixed	No Response	Neutral	
Primary story						
Angel	18	5	13	2	0	38
Ghost of a family member, relative	9	3	8	0	0	20
Other identified ghost	6	1	0	0	0	7
Unidentified ghost	1	0	3	0	0	4
Extraterrestrial	2	2	1	0	0	5
Guardian spirit	4	1	2	0	0	7
Devil	2	3	1	0	0	6
Jesus	3	0	3	0	0	6
God	4	0	1	0	0	5
Animal	0	1	2	0	0	3
Unidentified human shaped being	13	6	9	0	0	28
Identified human shaped being	1	0	2	0	0	3
Poltergeist, haunting	1	2	0	1	0	4
Other	11	6	8	2	1	28
No supernatural being involved	2	1	2	0	0	5
Spiritual guide	1	0	1	0	0	2
UFO	3	0	1	0	0	4
Total	81	31	57	5	1	175

Table 16. Primary Stories and Other People's Responses

I am also interested in finding out why the respondents chose to write to me.

Some say they felt it important that I do research on the supernatural, and they wanted to take part in the research. Some are seeking explanations for the experience, and many

express the wish to share the experience with others. This variable applies to the whole letter, not just the analyzed story. The answer to this question was explicit only in 70 responses. Thirty-two (32) respondents wanted to take part in academic research, 27 respondents expressed a wish to share the experience, and 11 narrators asked for an explanation for the experience. The table below shows that women expressed the wish to share the experience more than men, whereas for men it was relatively more important to ask for an explanation and take part in academic research.

				Total
	Asking for explanation	Academic research	Sharing with others	
Gender Female	5	24	22	51
Male	6	8	4	18
Total	11	32	26	69

Table 17. Gender and Reasons Writing to Me

Many narrators discuss the emotions raised by the experience, including confusion, fear, joy, comfort and sorrow. If a narrator expresses several emotions, and none of them stand out from the rest, I've labeled it as a mix of emotions. Emotions were discussed and/or expressed in 200 narratives. The most commonly mentioned emotion was fear.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Confusion	20	4.5	10.0
Fear	91	20.7	45.5
Joy	17	3.9	8.5
Comfort, peace	49	11.1	24.5
Sorrow	4	.9	2.0
Other	5	1.1	2.5
Mix of emotions	14	3.2	7.0
Total	200	45.5	100.0
Missing System	240	54.5	
Total	440	100.0	

Table 18. Emotions in Narratives

In life stories, it was as common to express fear as to express comfort and peace, whereas in experience stories, it was 50% more common to express fear than comfort and peace.

	Narrative genre			Total
	Report	Experience Story	Life Story	
Expressed emotions				
Confusion	0	16	4	20
Fear	6	72	13	91
Joy	1	11	5	17
Comfort, peace	3	33	13	49
Sorrow	1	2	1	4
Other	2	3	0	5
Mix of emotions	0	8	5	13
Total	13	145	41	199

Table 19. Emotions and Narrative Genre

If a negative emotion is expressed, it does not mean that I interpret the whole narrative as negative. The narrative may contain the answer to my question, “how did you feel when it happened and how do you feel now when remembering it,” but the response to this question does not always imply an entirely negative evaluation. Only 34 of the 91 letters that mention fear involve overall evaluation. Yet, all the letters that mention comfort/peace involve overall evaluation.

					Total
		Positive	Negative	Mixed	
Expressed emotions					
	Confusion	5	0	0	5
	Fear	6	25	3	34
	Joy	17	0	0	17
	Comfort, peace	48	0	0	48
	Sorrow	2	0	0	2
	Other	2	1	0	3
	Mix of emotions	10	0	2	12
Total		90	26	5	121

Table 20. Emotions and Overall Evaluation

One of my interests in this project is stigmatization, and whether it is discussed in the narratives. Denial of stigmas is expressed, for example, by saying that drugs, alcohol or medication have nothing to do with the experience, or that (s)he is not really interested in the supernatural or doesn't believe in it. This kind of response is a negative confirmation of normalcy/ideal. Positive confirmation occurs when the narrator says, for example, that (s)he is healthy, educated, working, feet steadily on the ground. It also includes truth claims, direct statements such as "these experiences are true, they really happened." All this I have called the attributes of normalcy. Some narratives employ both strategies.

One-hundred thirty-three (133) narratives of 440 discuss stigmatization.

Attributes of normalcy is the most common way to discuss it (77 cases) followed by denial (36) and cases where both strategies were employed (20). It was more common for women to employ both strategies than for men, whereas for men it was more common to deny the stigma than for women.

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Negotiation of stigmas	Denial of stigmas; drugs, alcohol, medication etc	23	13	36
	Attributes of normalcy	57	19	76
	Both denial and attributes	17	3	20
Total		97	35	132

Table 21. Gender and Negotiation of Stigmas

It is relatively more common to younger age groups (20-50) to discuss the stigmatization than to older age groups (51-80).

	Negotiation of stigmas			Total
	Denial of stigmas; drugs, alcohol, medication etc.	Attributes of normalcy	Both denial and attributes	
Age group 20-30	5	8	5	18
31-40	5	4	3	12
41-50	7	7	4	18
51-60	2	15	1	18
61-70	7	13	2	22
71-80	4	10	1	15
81-90	1	5	0	6
Total	31	62	16	109

Table 22. Age group and Negotiation of stigmas

CHAPTER 3: QUESTION OF GENRE

Genre theory has traditionally held a strong standing in Finnish Folklore Studies. In Finnish research tradition, narratives discussing personal supernatural experiences have been called memorates. In order to understand why I am not doing so, I will briefly discuss some aspects of genre theory in Folklore Studies and then move on to discussing narrative genres of the supernatural.

Following C.W. von Sydow (1934) Lauri Honko argued that there are oral traditions that form distinct classes, and the task of genre analysis is to provide a basis for an overall classification of oral traditions. Genre analysis works as method of source criticism because it helps to differentiate between genres that reflect religious beliefs, such as a memorate, and genres that belong to other realms, for example a joke. In genre analysis, genres should be seen as ideal types: not to reflect the reality truthfully but to help the researcher to understand it. (Honko 1967: 129-144.)

Dan Ben-Amos criticized Honko's idea of ideal types arguing that Honko treats genres insufficiently as mere technical terms and not as real entities. It serves storing but is not enough for folklorists. According to Ben-Amos, genres are cultural cognitive categories of verbal expressions. They include the grammar of folklore communication and performance. They have distinct themes, structures, styles and capacities to set boundaries of interpretations of folklore expressions, for example between belief and

entertainment, and to place a new folklore utterance to an existing system of communication. (Ben-Amos 1976: 31-33, 40.) Honko answered this by stating that real and ideal genres are not opposite to each other but in interplay. Researches modify the ideal types according to new empirical observations. Most of genres are located in a continuum between the ideal types. (Honko 1980:23.)

According to Honko, genre analysis should start with term formation. One needs to consider content, form, style, structure, context, function, frequency, distribution, and origin. Any two terms can be either synonymous; one is a sub-category of the other; in mutual opposition; overlapping; or with no mutual relationship. Finally, the genre subordinates the theme to a specific use; the genre dictates the limits of communication; and the genre presupposes the existence of a generic system. (Honko 1989: 17-18.)

Honko's suggestion for genre coordination has been widely used in Finnish Folklore Studies. The coordination starts with Scott Littleton's scheme for classification of narratives and ads genres. At the centre of a fivefold square containing 20 genres is the legend, with the other genres grouped about it as follows: "factual and profane" (history, remembrance, rumour, chronicle, historical legend, joke), "factual and sacred" (sacred history, belief, gossip, memorate, belief legend, exemplum), "fabulated and profane" (anecdote, aetiological tale, fairytale) and "fabulated and sacred" (historiola, saint's legend, myth). As Honko himself notes, placing the humorous genres poses problems. (1989: 25-26.)

BELIEF LEGEND, MEMORATE AND PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Thinking about the content, form, style, context, and function of the supernatural stories have helped me to understand that the differences between the stories. First of all, I am focusing on personal experience stories, not on belief legends. Legend is a short, usually mono-episodic traditional narrative about people and places that are believed to have existed and/or events that are believed to have taken place. When legend discusses the supernatural, it is called a belief legend; when historical events, it's labelled as historical legend. Belief legends are deeply rooted in the social reality of the legend telling environment. Often a belief legend tells about someone breaking a norm which results in a punishment. Belief legends have been collected in Finland already since 17th century. The major part of the archived material is from 1850-1960 and the collection includes around 100 000 legend variants. According to that collection, the most common themes of belief legends discuss specialists in magic (tietäjä) and sorcerers (25%); death and deceased (20%); and devil (13%). (Jauhiainen1982: 56-60). If not belief legends, how should I call my material?

My intuition from the early reading on was that there is so much more than the supernatural in the narratives that I got. Thus, in addition to the supernatural content, I started paying attention to other topics the narrator discussed, scale and variety of emotions, and the narrator's distance to the event in the descriptions and evaluations. I soon began to see that some narrators briefly stated that this is what happened and that's

it, whereas others used “the supernatural” merely as a ticket to write about life crisis and review their personal life choices and experiences. This notion challenged my initial plan to collect and analyze the stories as memorates. Memorate is a story of a personal experience containing an element of the supernatural and they are told as true. The experiencer in a memorate can be the narrator him-/herself or a person close to him/her. The term memorate was first introduced by Carl von Sydow in 1948. Honko emphasized its importance in the study of folk beliefs. Before any generalizations about folk belief can be made, the researcher has to know what genre provides the valuable evidence and which is less important. Memorates told many times can evolve to forms of collective tradition, especially belief legends, which in their turn influence the actualization and the interpretation of the supernatural experience. When examining the interaction of memorates and legends, one should pay attention to the social control which directs and modifies the tradition. (Honko 1964: 5-19; 1972:88-105.)

The category of memorate has been used successfully in both research and archival purposes, and I agree that my material could be called memorates. So, why don't I do so? In brief, I am worried that if we direct the spotlight on the supernatural, it will cast shadow on other important issues. We may miss the issues narrators are more concerned, such as the worry about being a bad mother, sister or daughter, or the fear of being labelled mentally unstable. These worries tell us what is expected from a member of the group, what is accepted and what is not, and how to deal with abnormal experiences: how to turn them positive and empowering. The wide field of personal

narrative gives me more room to talk about the above mentioned issues. The product of personal experience narration, that is, telling about ones own experiences, has been called as personal narrative, personal experience story, personal experience narrative, every-day narrative and first-person narrative. Interest in personal narrative among folklorists was sparked in the 1970's, and the first questions dealt with whether personal narrative is folklore or not.

According to Sandra Stahl, personal narrative is based on a personal experience, but its formation is influenced by social and traditional models. (Stahl 1977a: 14-15, 22.) It is a prose narrative relating a personal experience, it is usually told in first person and its content is nontraditional. (Stahl 1977b:20.) Personal narratives are usually orally composed, based on real life incidents, and they “belong” to the tellers because they are the ones responsible for recognizing in their own experiences something that is “story worthy”. (Stahl 1983: 269.)

Linda Dégh criticized Stahl's definition by noting that personal narrative can be based on other person's experience, it can be told as 3rd person narration and it can be something else than prose. Finally, she stressed that personal narrative can not be untraditional in content. (Dégh 1985: 73-78.) Stahl continued later and wrote that the three features of personal narrative are (1) dramatic narrative structure, (2) consistently implied assertion that the narrative is true, and (3) the self-same identity of the teller and the story's main character. (Stahl 1989: 15.)

Leea Virtanen was the one to introduce the term personal narrative to Finnish folklore studies in 1982. Rather than defining what constitutes a personal narrative or narration, she suggested three elements that personal narratives share: (1) personal narrative is told as true, (2) it involves real life events and people, (3) it is influenced by personal ambitions of the narrator and thus by the larger social environment as well. She also lists 6 genres that are included in personal narratives: memoirs, memorates, chronicates, rumours, gossips, and stories. (Virtanen 1982: 174-202)

Finally, I follow Patrick B. Mullen's definition of personal narrative. He writes that personal narratives are based on individual experiences, but they are traditional in terms of their content and structure because people tend to make stories out of events that the environment defines as significant, and tell them in traditionally structured ways. The personal experience narrative shows both cultural, aesthetic and practical concerns as well as individual themes. (Mullen 1992: 4-5.) This reminds us of the significance of belief legends. Stories of the supernatural are culturally significant because they talk about things that should not exist. Traditional structures are revealed for example when angel narratives are interpreted positively. The quantitative description of my data showed that stories about angels got more positive response than negative response, whereas stories about unidentified human shaped beings and other supernatural beings, it was more likely for the narrator to receive negative than positive response.

MY APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF GENRE

The narratives that I have can be placed in a continuum ranging from distant sounding event descriptions to shamelessly revealing stories of personal life. To make sense with the differences and the similarities, I have constructed following categories, starting from the ones that sound most distant: report, experience story, and life story.

Report

When examining personal experience stories of Finnish women shipyard workers', folklorist Taina Ukkonen distinguished three story categories: 1) Very short, concise narrative summaries that are sometimes based on lightning-like recollections rather than being stories with a proper narrative structure, 2) Relatively short personal experience stories that are about one unique experience, and 3) relatively long stories consisting of several episodes, based on series of events or life phases and that include plenty of character description or analyses of the causes and effects of events. (Ukkonen 2000: 270) Ukkonen's story categories reflect mine, even though her material consist oral narratives, whereas my material consists written narratives.

I have short, summary kind of narratives in my material. These stories focus on the event, not on the experience. I call these short stories reports. By report I mean a story recounting what happened, where and when. The definition that comes closest to mine, is the one of Dell Hymes. Yet, he describes report as a style of narration that is generally

marked by excessive attribution as a means of distancing oneself, lack of any responsibility to the material, lack of emotional attachment, lack of obvious expression of belief, but ultimately, lack of adherence to the stylistic demands of the genre. Opposite to this is a full performance which accepts responsibility for performing the narrative, rather than merely to stand back and report what one has heard.” (Hymes 1981 (1975): 79-141; Mould 2003: 31-34.) Unlike Hymes, I am using the term report as a genre. In my work it serves as a tool to distinguish between forms and functions, not between stylistic features.

Life Story

Some stories about supernatural experiences are more stories about the narrator, the family, and the feelings and life changes than about the supernatural experience. When I was reading these stories, I noticed they resemble narratives that researchers call life stories. Life stories tie together a chain of events from an individual’s life by pointing out how they characterize the personality in question, thus constructing the personality. (See Alasuutari 2005.) Charlotte Linde takes a sociolinguistic approach to the life story, and defines it by saying that a life-story is all the stories told by an individual during his or her lifetime which (1) make a point about the speaker, not about the way the worlds is, and which (2) ‘have extended reportability’ – that is, they can be told over the course of a long period of time. (Linde 1987:34.) “Hence the life story is at once structurally and interpretively open; it is subject to expansion and contraction by the addition of new

stories and the loss of old ones, and furthermore the reinterpretation of old stories continually produces new evaluations of self.” (Linde 1987: 31)

Report and life story are the opposite ends of the continuum of personal supernatural narration. They have different forms and functions. Yet, there is a large middle ground between the opposite poles of the narrative continuum. These are stories that are more than reports but less than life stories. I am calling them experience stories.

Experience Story

Experience story involves more personal, temporal and geographical orientation, evaluation, and discussion on the causes and results of the event than report but there are less socio-cultural references embedded in there than in life stories¹⁵. It is still more focused on the event, not the experiencer. It may be that the narrator gives a detailed description of the experiences, but does not tell more than the minimal identifiers of him-/herself, as we will see in next chapter.

¹⁵ Citing my adviser Dorothy Noyes, these stories are less culturally cooked. I think that describes well the continuum from report to life story.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

ENCOUNTER NARRATIVES

In this chapter I analyze nine narratives, three of each genre, in order to illustrate how self is constructed in narratives about the supernatural. First, I will discuss the analytical tools I have chosen to examine the narratives.

Presenting Consciousness in First-Person Narratives: Differentiating Between Narrating and Experiencing selves

In her book *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978) literary theorist Dorrit Cohn examines techniques for portraying the mental lives of fictional characters in the stream-of-conscious novel as well in other fiction. She states that though her discussion of the modes for rendering consciousness will be more literary than linguistic in its attention to stylistic, contextual, and psychological aspects, she takes linguistic criteria for her starting-point in naming and defining three basic techniques. These narrative modes for presenting consciousness in third-person context are psycho-narration (the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness), quoted monologue (a character's mental discourse) and narrated monologue (a character's mental discourse in the guise of narrator's discourse). In a first-

person text, psycho-narration becomes self-narration, and monologues either self-quoted or self-narrated. (Cohn 1978: 11-15.)

According to the model proposed by Cohn, the relationships between the *narrating self* and the *experiencing self* in first-person narratives can be placed on a sliding scale between dissonance and consonance. In the dissonant mode, the wise, distant and discursive self, the narrating self (narrating I), can move back and forth in time, turn back to past self/selves, contradict, explain, evaluate and analyze the thoughts, statements and actions of the experiencing self (experiencing I, the I as character) and add information and opinions regarding past events. This narrating self sees the difference between ideals and realities, and moves between effects and causes. Opposite to this dissonant self-narration is the consonant self-narration where the narrating self reports what happened while adopting a vantage-point that is very proximate to the experiencing self, and where it can even be difficult to distinguish between the experiencing self and the narrating self at all. Event may be focalized exclusively through the experiencing I, leading to an almost complete backgrounding of the narrating I. In consonant self-narration, the psychological distance between experiencing and narrating selves is narrow and the narrating I does not draw attention to his/her opinions, judgments and hindsight. There is no self-exegesis, as Cohn puts it. Though differentiating between narrating I and experiencing I may sound straightforward, it

seldom is the case since narrators switch between tenses and quote their thoughts and speech during the past events. (Cohn 1978: 26-33.)

The Phenomenology of Narrative: Taleworlds and Storyrealms

According to folklorist Katharine Galloway Young, there are two ontological presentations of stories in conversation: taleworld and storyrealm. *Taleworld* includes the events in another space and time; the events the story is about. *Storyrealm* is the realm of discourse in the here and now. It means the presentation of the events in a form of a story. Experiencing I speaks in the taleworld and narrating I in the storyrealm. The storyrealm consists of recountings of events in the forms of tellings, writings and performances. The third realm is called the *Realm of conversation*. Storyrealm is a realm of narrative discourse within the realm of conversation. Events in the taleworld are framed by the story. The story itself is framed by the conversation. Both taleworld and storyrealm are potentially available, but only one will be apparent at a time. (Galloway-Young 1987:14-18.)

Frames direct attention from one realm to another. There are two sorts of frames: Frames that set the realm status of the events and frames that set an attitude toward the events in that realm. Young distinguishes among four narrative frames: (1) Story frames distinguish stories from other forms of discourse, other sorts of narrative events, and among genres; (2) Story evaluations characterize stories as good, bad, poorly told etc; (3) Frames of the events distinguish between events in the realm of the ordinary, which

might be thought of as real events, and events in other realms, which might be thought of as imaginary such as of dreams, of science, and supernatural; and (4) Evaluation of events qualify them for example romantic, dreadful etc.

Frames are transfixual; they qualify the events they span and inform. Frame can lie within the same realm as the event it frames, in some other realm, or along the border between realms. Frames are *frames-for* tellers and hearers as well *frames-of* events. There are two functional types of frames: those that mark boundaries and those that do not. Frames that are *Boundaries* locate the literal borders between realms. All boundaries are frames but not all frames are boundaries. Events are bounded, but realms are framed as to their realm status. Boundaries are positional; they open and close the realm. Boundaries lie between the realms they are frames-for and the realms they are frames-of. They point in two directions: toward the realm they frame and toward the realm they frame that realm for. *Beginnings* and *Ends* are frames-of the taleworld and frames-for the storyrealm. Where the sequence of events starts and finishes in the taleworld becomes the beginning and end of the story, but taleworlds themselves do not have beginnings and ends; they are realms experienced by their inhabitants as ongoing.

There is an ontological difference between beginnings and ends and *Openings* and *Closings*. Beginnings and ends are the points where the events are about to start and finish. Openings and closings are the points where the stories in the realm of conversation start and finish. Beginnings and ends bound the taleworlds they frame. Openings and closings bound the storyrealm they frame. *Prefaces* and *Codas* bound both realms off

from the realm of conversation, creating an enclosure for the alternate realities within the realm of ordinary. They lie along the edges of the storyrealm but on the side of conversation. Prefaces announce a new speech event for example saying “I want to tell something”. Codas link the taleworld, the realm of events, back to the conversation, and they bring the narrator and the listener back to the point where they entered the narrative. They follow on from the events in the taleworld. (Galloway-Young 1987: 20-46.)

Frames that are not boundaries do not mark the edges but are conceptual. They can exist together with boundaries. *Orientations* give information about person, place, time and situation that is needed to understand the realm of events. Orientations refer to taleworld, and they are frames-of the taleworld and frames-for the realm of conversation in the storyrealm thus interrelating the three realms. *Evaluations* present perspectives on, attitudes toward, or feelings about events and/or the telling. Evaluations can refer to either storyrealm or taleworld. Evaluations of storyrealm exist either in storyrealm or realm of conversation. Taleworld evaluations may exist in any of the three realms. Evaluations make explicit two separate points: the point of the story and the point of telling the story. In regard to my study, it is worth noting that in addition to evaluating the events, evaluations specify the ontological status of the realm where the events happen. In my analysis I am interested in locating the truth evaluations that identify the taleworld as a realm where events are understood to have or have had an instantiation in space and time. Such realities are diverse and can include the realms of past and present, work, play, dream, supernatural or the scientific and so on. I will examine what sorts of realms

the truth claims address. Understandings about which realms are fictitious and which are not depend naturally on differences in individual and cultural cosmologies. (Galloway-Young 1987: 47-60.)

Not all kinds of frames turn up in every story. Four kinds are essential: a preface, the beginning and end, and some sort of evaluation. Young states that frames that can be directed to both the Taleworld and the Storyrealm (prefaces, evaluations) are interesting in determining the realm shift. (Young 2004: 102.)

Drawing on Cohn and Galloway-Young, I have constructed the following model for analyzing the narratives. Realm of Conversation is the realm of my collection and research project. It consists of my published inquiries and interviews of me; respondents reading them, deciding to answer to my inquiry; possible hope for a dialogue with me; and a possible dialogue. In the narratives this realm manifests in references to me and to the inquiry, and in the instances of respondents leaving me their contact information. References to inquiries (where and when the narrator saw the inquiry) I see as prefaces. They function as tickets to tell the story. I asked narrator's demographic information (age, gender, education, place of residence) in the inquiry and thus I consider that information as a preface to storyrealm as well. When this information is in the end of the letter, I consider it as a closing of storyrealm.

Storyrealm is the letter or the email itself and the sphere where narrating I speaks. It is inside the social realm of my collection and research project, and it is a set up of the Taleworld and guides the reader's attention there. It is the here and now place and time,

separated from the events of the taleworld. Though it is the writer-narrator that masters this realm, it is part of the intersubjective world of sociality and communication as the narrator is telling the story to me/image of me, and the wider audience through me, the media, academia, and the overall society.

Taleworld is the realm of events and agents that share a place and time of their own inside the letter or the email, and it is here where experiencing I talks. Following my inquiry, this is the realm where the ordinary and the supernatural collide.

Narrative as a Discussion of Belief and Disbelief: Story Dialectic

In her book *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief and in Story and Discourse* (1999), folklorist Gillian Bennett examines the relationship between narrative and belief. She interviewed 87 elderly women in Manchester in 1980, focusing on the questions of life after death and contacts with the dead. She found out that people customarily answered to questions of belief with a memorate, that is, with a story about personal supernatural experience.

Discussion regarding supernatural experiences includes two competing sets of expectations and explanations: rationalist '*traditions of disbelief*' and supernaturalist '*traditions of belief*'. (Bennett 1999, first discussed by Hufford 1982.) The former refers to arguments that could be related to cultural source hypothesis. Bennett, for example, found out that some women whom she interviewed about supernatural experiences made derogatory assertions about people having supernatural experiences. They were said to be

manipulative, emotional, confused, or muddled. Opposite to traditions of disbelief are traditions of belief, manifested in arguments that are based on human testimony, on evidence drawn from personal experience, and the stories of friends and relatives.

What is going on in many narratives about supernatural experiences is a debate between the supernaturalist and rationalist traditions. Narrators are acutely aware that the audience may challenge them using arguments drawn from the rationalist set. Thus they answer to those challenges by employing certain narrative strategies. Bennett refers to the debates where the narrator argues with him- or herself with an imaginary audience, or to be more precise, the imaginary judge and jury, as internal dialect. Internal dialect can take many forms, but according to Bennett, the most obvious ones are the following: *Accusing I* presents challenges, such as social and philosophical challenges, and answers them. *Calling to Witness* means using other people's voices to support the experience. *Evidential Scene-Setting* carries weight because the reliability of the narrator will be assessed by the completeness and accuracy of the memory of the circumstances. Finally, the same effect can be achieved by replaying part or all of the story in accumulated layers of exposition, a strategy called *Overlays*.

Organization of factual discourse: Normalizing paranormal

Sociologist Robin Wooffit's study is an example of discourse analysis and conversation analysis. He has studied the way people produce accounts of paranormal experiences in interviews. (*Telling Tales of Unexpected: The Organization of Factual Discourse*. 1992)

(See also Potter 1996, discussing Wooffit's study). Wooffit states that when telling stories of paranormal experiences, people have to demonstrate the factual nature of the experience, and on the other hand, they have to show they are sane, rational, normal people. Wooffit suggests that narrator, in order to fall into the category of ordinary/rational, has to present having thoughts that any normal person would have. That is done using a format that Wooffit calls the X/Y format, that is, the format of "I was just doing a very mundane thing (X) when an extraordinary thing (Y) happened". Wooffit suggests that this is one way to normalize the extraordinary event. The form works as a contrast pair, contrasting the normal with the paranormal. Wooffit's aim is to show that the routine, mundane character of the speaker's environment is constructed through the speaker's description and not reflected in them (compared to flashbulb memories).

Wooffit observes that when people tell about paranormal experiences, they often use quoted speech. According to Wooffit, active voices can be used to demonstrate that the phenomenon was observable by others; to reveal that the consequences or effects of the phenomenon were observable by others; and to confirm that the experience was really anomalous.

In my analysis I combine Bennett's and Wooffit's analytical tools in my model to see how narrator defends the factual nature of the event and categorizes him-/herself in the category of normal. I have chosen the narratives below based on how well they present their genre categories. I also wanted to include different aged narrators and both

women and men narrators. If the narrator has given a title to his/her narrative, I use it. If not, I have come up with a title myself.

REPORTS

Report 1: A Supernatural Being That I Met

Narrating I

Taleworld Preface A supernatural being that I met.

Storyrealm Preface A notice about the research in Kotimaa magazine on 26.9.

Storyrealm Opening A nightmare in March 1998, around 4 am.

/Taleworld Orientation

Experiencing I

Taleword Beginning A being, around 120-150 cm tall, stood next to our bed.

The being wore a skirt, but it was neither a woman nor a man. Its face was swollen into a huge lump. It smiled a horrible, empty smile. It emanated something like a thirst for power and greed for gain and sarcasm, but the feelings coming off of it can't be compared to any human emotion. I

woke up and shivered in horror for several hours. My husband and I went to the emergency room, and I got sedatives. We decided that if this event happened again, we would

Taleworld End move to another apartment, but it did not happen again.

Narrating I

Taleworld Evaluation It was the most horrible night of my life.

Storyrealm Closing A woman Born in X (1960's)

X (place)

Education: secondary education

X (contact info)

There is a sketch of the being attached to the letter, but as I am not including visual analysis to any of the narratives, I am not discussing it here either. The reason why I am excluding the visual data is that I have not requested the permission to use the drawings. The analysis of the visual data will be a further research task.

The story has a brief but detailed temporal scene setting. The being is described in a detailed way, too, and the supernatural traits are compared to human ones, specifically where they are similar (*clothing, the smile resembled human emotions*) and where they differ (*no gender, swollen face, smile is not human in spite of the resembling*). There is calling for witness in the story as the narrator refers to her husband and the hospital. I-voicing changes to we-voicing when the narrator talks about the consequences of the event. The event had emotional and physical consequences (*horror, shivering*) that were observable to others (*husband, hospital*), that were treated (*sedatives*), and that affected the narrator's and her husband's thinking (*decision to move if it happens again*).

Narrating I begins and ends the narrative, yet Experiencing I dominates it. They are consonant, as they both see the event very negatively. The evaluation ("*It was the most horrible night of my life*") is presented by the Narrating I. Experiencing I reports the event in a distant mode, noticing the frightening elements and the consequences, but not staying in the event to evaluate them. Narrating I also fails to ponder the reasons for the event. The supernatural realm actualizes in sleep as a nightmare. Already the storyrealm opening/taleworld orientation reveals this. The supernatural nightmare breaks into the ordinary realm of sleep, and the narrator returns to the ordinary realm of a waking state by waking up. Yet, the supernatural has left its trace in the ordinary realm, which affects possible future decisions in the ordinary (*decision of moving if the event happens again*).

There are no questions or doubts about the experience and its supernatural nature. The story is effective because it calmly describes the horrible event and its negative

consequences, leaving the further interpretation to the reader. What is the self of the narrator like in this narrative? She is able to differentiate between ordinary and extraordinary realms and react accordingly to an unexpected negative event. She relies on the support of her husband and the help of the healthcare, and takes control over the supernatural by deciding to escape if she deems it necessary. For her, there is no question of the existence of the supernatural. In brief, she gives an impression of a normal person responding to an irrational, unorthodox, unordinary, unexpected event in a human, goal-oriented way.

Report 2: Guardian Angel Number Two

(Narrator's father's story "Guardian Angel" precedes)

.....

Narrating I

Storyrealm Opening/ The Guardian Angel Number Two

Taleworld Orientation

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation Over ten years ago, we took a bus trip to St.Petersburg,

Taleworld Beginning and the bus parked in front of our hotel. I got off the bus, and my under-ten-year-old daughter ran after me. At that very moment, a Russian cab came round the corner at a very high speed, and I became paralyzed with terror because the cab did not slow down and the accident looked inevitable. Right then, my daughter was

Taleworld Evaluation miraculously pulled back to the pavement, and the cab dashed by like nothing, hardly noticing. My daughter came to me, and it was like she hadn't noticed anything either;

Taleworld Evaluation it was like the time had stopped somehow.

Narrating I

Storyworld Closing Name X

Taleworld Evaluation These experiences are just experiences of the existence of something supernatural; we haven't seen anything.

Storyworld Closing My father was born in X, and he was X (occupation). I am X (50-59) years old and X by profession.

Taleworld Orientation We are not unusually religious, and we don't belong to any sect.

Coda Life feels somehow safe when you "know" that someone or something guides you.

The narrator talks about a miraculous escape from an accident. Interestingly, she hints in the title that the savior is a guardian angel, but does not talk about the angel later in the story. There were two narratives in the mail that included this example narrative: the narrator's father's angel narrative, and her own. Thus, "The Guardian Angel Number *Two*." The narrator does not discuss how often or to whom she has talked about her experience, but it is plausible to think that she and her father have talked about their guardian angel experiences and negotiated the interpretations over time.

The supernatural realm breaks into the everyday realm in the taleworld in a moment of a sudden crisis when humans are not able to function: "...*I became paralyzed with terror...*" It represents itself as an action, pulling the child back to the pavement before the cab hit her. It alters the natural realm: "...*it was like the time had stopped somehow.*" Yet, it does not manifest itself as an observable being. In my opinion, what makes this narrative a rich example is its discussion of the culturally valued ways of getting information. First, it is important to observe the cause of an effect. This sentence tells us a lot: "*These experiences are just experiences of the existence of the supernatural; we haven't seen anything.*" In addition, the narrator notes that neither her daughter nor

the cab driver noticed anything. Thus, seeing is a proper way of gaining information. Experiencing something that cannot be observed directly is less valuable. Second, knowledge has its limits. It is suspicious to know of the supernatural, but it is more acceptable to believe in it. I think that the narrator is aware of this, and thus uses quotes with the word 'know' in the coda. Yet, even believing, or rather, expressing, beliefs has its limits. As the narrator writes in the orientation: "*We are not unusually religious, and we don't belong to any sect.*" The Narrating I, in the storyrealm, thus recognizes and discusses the stigmatization of knowing of the supernatural and expressing the supernatural.

Report 3: Inexplicable Vision

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

X (place)

Kirsi Hänninen

The University of Turku

There was a text in Tamperelainen newspaper about encountering supernatural beings.

Storyrealm Opening/

Taleworld Evaluation/

This inexplicable vision took place sometime in the 1960's.

Taleworld Orientation

Experiencing I

Taleworld Beginning

It was autumn-like weather. I had cast a fishing net into the lake near the cottage, and I went to pull it up early in the morning, though there was a heavy fog on the lake. When the boat was around ten meters from the shore, I saw a white, two-meter-tall, sharp edged pillar on my left. The upper part of the pillar was curved, and along its left side there was a dark line – not black though – that ran along the shapes of the pillar. The pillar was so close that the oar almost touched it. Since the boat was moving and the fog was heavy, the pillar soon became invisible. For a moment I pondered whether I would paddle back to see the vision or whether I would pull up the net that was a couple of meters away. Anyway, I pulled up the net and rowed back quickly.

Taleworld End

There was no pillar there or anything else odd in that place.

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues) After several decades, I saw a TV program about angels. It was on TV before Christmas a couple of years ago.

Taleworld Evaluation Then I realized I had seen an angel. The program said that an angel can exist and appear in any given form.

Storyrealm Evaluation For several years, I've been waiting for a program that talks about angels. Kirsi, if you know if and when they'll rerun the program, give me a call.

Storyrealm Closing X (place)

X (contact info)

Born in X (the 1930's)

X (occupation)

Find a drawing of "THE ANGEL" as an attachment

The striking feature of this narrative is its transformation from an inexplicable vision into an angel encounter. The story does not have any of the conventional characteristics of a supernatural encounter, such as an accident, a death, or an illness; nor

does it present any religious framework. In addition, it has only little evaluation of both the taleworld and the storyrealm.

The taleworld is described in a detailed, picture-like manner. In addition, the narrator attached a beautiful, painted picture of pillar, but as I am not including visual analysis with any of the narratives, I am not discussing it here either. The everyday, natural realm consists of a cottage, a lake and fishing – a familiar environment to a Finnish man. The borders of the supernatural and the natural realms mix in the fog and water, and the narrator has access to both realms through his boat. He can decide which one to approach, and makes a decision to stay in the natural realm; he rows to pull up the net and only then goes back to see the pillar. The taleworld end reveals that the door to the supernatural had been closed in the meantime: *“There was no pillar there or anything else odd in that place.”*

It took decades for the narrator to arrive at the interpretation of the event. A TV program on angels offered him an explanation: An angel can exist and appear in any given form. Yet, the narrator is longing for more information and addresses the researcher and asks her to notify him if the program will be rerun. This, I think, is the point of telling the story – he wants to learn more and understand his experience better, and he is asking for my help.

EXPERIENCE STORIES

Experience Story 1: Encountering Angels

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Hello! I sent you a short description of an event that happened fifty years ago, and it feels as fresh as if it happened last summer. I wish you success with your research! X (Name)

Storyrealm Opening/

Encountering Angels

Taleworld Orientation

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation

It was June X (early 1950's) in a farmhouse in X (place). My grandma, who lived in the same household, had died eight days earlier. I, myself, was eight years old,

Taleworld Preface

and for some reason I was convinced that this was the day when she would rise to heaven.

Taleworld Beginning

I was alone in the garden, in the middle of the bushes, and it was a warm and a beautiful day. I was looking at the path to the sauna, the path along which my grandma was carried with sheets to the hospital the last time she left home. Right at that moment, I saw two angels who looked like the angels in the painting of guardian angels. The angels were walking along the same path down which my grandma was taken. They were chatting cheerfully while they were walking, and their skirts were waving, but I couldn't see any feet. At the corner of the sauna they became invisible and

Taleworld End

disappeared.

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

Taleworld Evaluation

The vision made me feel peaceful. An eight-year-old child, who herself had been in this world for such a short time, did not find death a sad thing from the beginning. I immediately told my family members, who themselves have seen supernatural things, about the angels, and those

family members have always considered this event normal as well.

Storyrealm Closing/ Over the decades, I have told many people about this, and I have

Storyrealm Evaluation never received any negative feedback. This is the first time I am writing about it, though.

Taleworld Evaluation It was a remarkable event for sure,

Coda but it only confirmed what I already thought.

Storyrealm Closing Female, X (name)

Born in X (1940's)

Place X (Western Finland)

Tertiary education

Source: Turkulainen newspaper, Kirkko ja me newspaper

This story introduces the encountered supernatural beings already in the title: angles. They walk and talk cheerfully and can switch between being visible and invisible. My interpretation is that the painting of guardian angels that the narrator refers to is the

Heilige Schutzengel/Guardian Angel painting that has a female angel with long blond hair and wide wings guiding two children crossing a bridge. The painting is well known, widely reprinted and easily available in Finland. There is no communication between the experiencer and the angels, and it is unclear to me how exactly the angels relate to the narrator's firm conviction that "*this was the day when she (her grandmother) would rise to heaven.*" Were the angels there to call for her grandmother? Were they there because the gate to and from heaven opened as her grandma rose to heaven? In both of the suggested interpretations, the two realms – the realm of the ordinary and the realm of the supernatural – co-exist, and the narrator is witnessing this dual existence. In this story, the supernatural can thus be seen (*angels walking*) and heard (*angels chatting*), but first and foremost, it can be known. Already in the preface, the narrator tells that she is convinced that her grandma is going to rise to heaven on the day she is telling about. Then, in the coda, she revisits this conviction by stating that the experience, no matter how remarkable, "*only confirmed what I already thought.*"

The narrator evaluates her experience in a positive manner. She considers it "*remarkable*" and says it "*made her feel peaceful.*" This evaluation is done by the Narrating I, the older and wiser voice, in the storyrealm. The narrator is the only one to witness the event, but her family members have seen supernatural things as well, and thus they believe her and consider her experience normal. That functions as an embedded evaluation of the experience. The rhetoric of calling to witness continues when the narrator says that she has told many people about her experience and never received any

negative feedback. Writing to me, taking part in my research, and having her story published means that the story will reach a larger audience, and thus, may open it to criticism. Maybe that is what she is considering when she notes: “*this is the first time I am writing about it, though.*” I also want to point out the X/Y format of doing something mundane when something extraordinary happens. In this story, the narrator is enjoying a beautiful summer day in a garden when she suddenly sees the angels.

All in all, the story tells about a positive supernatural experience that confirmed the narrator’s previous thoughts. Yet, I think the point of the narrative is the discussion of the cycle of life and death. A child is not afraid of death because her birth and inexistence prior to that is still so close to her. Death is just an ending of one period of existence, and another one will begin in heaven. The image of the sauna and the path to the sauna symbolizes the cycle of life and death in a manner that is familiar to Finnish agrarian culture: You were born in a sauna and got your first bath in there; if you got sick, you were treated in a sauna; and finally, when you died, your body was washed in a sauna.

Experience Story 2: A Peculiar Experience

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Hello. I read in a newspaper (IL 13.10) that you are collecting and doing research on ghost stories. Attached is my story “A peculiar experience,” a story of an odd

experience that happened to me, and its background information. If you want to have more information, please contact me. Best wishes, X (contact information)

Storyrealm Opening/

A peculiar experience

Taleworld Evaluation

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation

It was summer X (in the late 1950's). I was 11 years old, a young boy, and I had just gotten to my secondary school. We lived in a new house in XX (town and neighborhood) at the time. I had just gotten a new bike, and I rode it often to visit my friends and to get around the neighborhood in general. At the time, before the present X (block and neighborhood) was built on the west side of the railroad, the neighborhood looked like countryside because it consisted of the fields of X (institution). The area included the present X (neighborhood), and in addition to that, parts of X (second neighborhood) on its southern side. On the west side, the neighborhood was confined by the current small industrial area of X (third neighborhood), which at

the time consisted of only one small factory. Farther afield there was the big X (factory). Because of the vast field area, there were no roads towards X (second neighborhood) on the west side of the railway, but to get there, one had to go around X (neighborhood) or X (third neighborhood). That's why there was a shortcut on the west side of the fields, next to a forest and the current industrial area. The path was pretty potholed and clayey, but it was possible to walk and bike on it, especially in the summer.

Taleworld Beginning

It was a hot day in July, around 14 o'clock (2pm), and I had ended up biking in X (second neighborhood). Since I knew the aforementioned shortcut well, I decided to take it. The path began as a little alley from X (street) that soon turned into the path. I had already ridden halfway down the path when I saw two walkers coming toward me. Since I hadn't noticed them coming, and since there was a vast field on my right and a dense forest on my left, I thought they came from the forest. When the walkers came closer,

Taleworld Evaluation

I became very surprised as I saw two men, who, in addition to having weird appearances, were dressed very oddly.

Taleworld Orientation

Both men wore long, brown winter coats and boots; one man wore rubber or leather boots and the other one brown, old-fashioned boots. One of the men wore his jacket open, and he had a gray jersey under it. The other one wore his jacket buttoned up; he had a belt and there was a knife hanging on the belt. They were both bareheaded, and one of them had a dark hair, while the other one had medium brown hair. They had long and dirty-looking hair, and they both had messy beards. I guess they were 20-30 years old.

Taleworld Evaluation

I was so surprised that I stopped and stood there to watch them go.

They walked quickly, side by side, right next to me as I had stopped on the forest side of the path. They did not even glance at me, and they didn't say a word to each other either.

Taleworld Evaluation

In some mysterious way they were unreal, even frightening.

I was watching as they walked by, and after they had walked a couple dozen meters, I didn't see them anymore; they disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. It was as if they had evaporated, because I'm sure that I would have noticed if they diverged off the path to the forest since there were no visual obstructions there. When the men suddenly disappeared, I realized that I hadn't heard their steps.

Taleworld Evaluation

Then I got scared and quickly rode my bike home, which was a couple of kilometers away. At home, I immediately told my mother about the event, but she didn't believe me at all, and said

Taleworld End

weather.

that no one could walk in clothes like that in hot summer

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

Storyrealm Evaluation

Since then I haven't told anyone about this, except, recently, my spouse.

Taleworld Evaluation

This event is unforgettable to me, and I still remember it in a detailed manner over X (over 40) years later. It took years before I had the courage to go there again, even though the event itself was often in my mind.

When I got a motorbike in the summer X (early 1960's), I felt grown up enough to drive back and forth on the path, and I stopped for quite a while at the place where I had met the odd walkers five years before. The path was almost exactly in the same condition, and the nearby forest, too. Only the willows surrounding the forest were bigger and tighter.

Storyrealm Evaluation/

In general, I don't tend to believe in ghost stories, but in this case,

Taleworld Evaluation

I haven't been able to find any logical explanation even though I tried.

In my college years at the end of the 1960's, I met a girl whose home was located close to the X (factory). She had gone to the elementary school in X (second neighborhood), and she had walked along that short cut for four years. I

asked her in a vague manner if she had ever experienced anything weird there.

Taleworld Evaluation

I got a negative answer, and she related that she hadn't heard anyone else experiencing anything weird there either. There were no hobos bunking in those neighborhoods either. I examined different natural explanations as well, and some time in the 1970's I checked to see if someone had been shooting a film and having actors like the walkers, but nothing like that had taken place. I also visited newspaper archives; I flipped through the newspapers to see if they contained more information, but I got nothing.

Taleworld Orientation

Then, after twenty years had passed, I happened to read a book about the Reds' time in X (town) in 1918. I got somewhat interested in the topic, and as I read more, I paid attention to the descriptions of the fights between Germans and the Red Guards. In early April 1918, there were fights in X (neighborhood) and X (fourth neighborhood), next to the railway. The Reds were defeated, and the fallen are buried in the present X (park). This park is the forest that was next to the path I walked on in X (late 1950'). They

built a memorial there, dedicated to the fallen Reds, couple of years ago.

I didn't return to the place until I read about the events that took place in 1918. It was in 1982, if I remember correctly. The neighborhood had changed completely after the X (block) was built in the 1970's on the site where the fields used to be, and the small industrial area had grown bigger as well. I couldn't even find

Storyrealm Closing

the place where the path used to be.

Coda

Was it a case of ghosts? I don't know the answer.

This story consists mostly of orientations to and evaluations of the taleworld. In Bennett's terminology: The normalizing strategies of evidential scene-setting and overlays are emphasized. It is striking how rich in details the taleworld orientations are. On the one hand, the narrator describes thoroughly why the short-cut path was where it was, and why it was rational for him to take it. On the other hand, he pays a lot of attention to describing the appearance of the strange men he met on the path. He also uses the X/Y format of describing the mundane thing he was doing when something peculiar happened. These descriptions create a contrast between the familiar environment and the strange walkers. The familiar, everyday realm of a young boy is suddenly broken by

something that does not belong to his world and by something he can not explain. This fracture of his everyday world will haunt him for over 40 years.

The storyrealm exemplifies a debate between traditions of belief and traditions of disbelief that occurs in many supernatural narratives. The debate begins in the taleworld, when the narrator's mother refuses to believe a tale about heavily-clothed disappearing men, and explains why: "...no one could walk in clothes like that in hot summer weather." Later, the narrator says that he does not believe in ghost stories, but has not found any logical explanation – not that he has not although he has tried: He lists several possible explanations, and then states that none of them is plausible. Even the girl, who might have known or experienced something because they shared the same everyday environment, has no information to offer.

It is fascinating to follow the subtle means that the narrator uses to hint that he might have encountered ghosts. First, he picks up and writes down one aspect of my project; he says that I collect and do research on ghost stories. Second, he says he does not tend to believe in ghost stories. Third, he mentions that there are soldiers buried in the forest next to the path. Finally, he crystallizes the narrative in the coda: "*Was it a case of ghosts? I don't know the answer.*"

Thus, he leaves open the question of whether or not this experience was supernatural. Whether the event is supernatural or not, it is evaluated as peculiar, surprising, mysterious, unreal, unforgettable, and, most importantly, frightening. It is so frightening that it takes five years for him to return to the place where the event took

place. Interestingly, almost all this evaluation is located in the taleworld and expressed by the Experiencing I. Thus, the Experiencing I can afford to marvel at the event and have emotions, whereas the Narrating I, the analytical and logical one, is left with the quest for answers and explanations.

Experience Story 3: A Ghost Story

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Hello! You asked about supernatural experiences in Kotimaa magazine on 26.9. (September 26) Here is one.

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation

I was around 12 years old in X (in the early 1980's). My family and I lived in the parsonage in X (place), right next to a medieval stone church and a graveyard. Only a small village road ran between our house and the graveyard. The parsonage house was built in the 1950-1960's, and it was really gloomy and big. I had a room of my own, and so did my sister and my parents. My room was located between my parents' room and my sister's room. All the rooms were located on the same side of the hallway. The kitchen,

bathrooms and saunas were on the other side of the hallway. Between my room and my parents' room there was a wardrobe with an access to both rooms. When I was little, I was afraid of ghosts. Also, both I and my mother had a weird feeling in the house. We lived there around four years, until X (early 1980's). I was a light sleeper, and I often woke up when my dad came to my room to wish me good morning. I often walked to school with my dad.

Taleworld Beginning

One night I woke up when someone came in to my room through the hallway door. I was under the blanket, my face against the wall. I thought my dad had come in, and I turned around towards the door. I was just about to say good morning to my dad, when I noticed the misty figure standing next to my bed.

Narrating I

Taleworld Evaluation

(Even now, after many years, I get cold shivers down my back when writing this mail).

Experiencing I

Taleworld continues The figure had a clear shaped head and shoulders but no face. I don't remember seeing arms either, and from the shoulders down, the figure got thinner. It was ice cold in my room, too, even though I had the blanket on.

Taleworld Evaluation Naturally, I got awfully frightened, and I ran through the wardrobe to my parents' room and jumped between them. My dad didn't really wake up, but my mom asked what was wrong. I replied, "I saw it." My mom asked what I saw, and I said "the ghost."

Taleworld Evaluation My mom said she believed me, and unfortunately for my parents, I never slept in my room or alone in that house again.

2nd Taleworld Orientation I once tried to sleep in the living room,

2nd Taleworld Beginning and I was just about to fall asleep at 11 pm. The grandfather clock that was in the living room started to strike 11 times. I was listening to it and counting the strokes. After 11, the clock struck 12, 13, and so on until

the weight of the clock set down. I was again between my parents by that moment. Who knows what was

2nd Taleworld Evaluation/ going on with the clock, but it did not strike after that night

2nd Taleworld End ever again.

Narrating I

Taleworld Evaluation My mom has told me that the next person to live in that house heard a noise from my room in the middle of the night; it was like someone had been kicking the wall,

Taleworld End but when (s)he checked the room, there was nothing in there.

Taleworld Evaluation The experience was really shocking to a little boy, but nowadays I enjoy having had that experience.

Storyrealm Evaluation I haven't told my kids about it, but I have told many grown up friends of mine. People are used to trusting me, and no one has ever questioned my story.

Taleworld Evaluation

That would be difficult, because the experience was real to me, whether it was a dream or a real ghost. I believe it was a real one, because in my opinion I was awake when I turned around in the bed.

Storyrealm Closing

If you want to have more background information or ask more, you can always call me.

Greetings from X (Western Finland)

X (name)

X (phone number)

X (email address)

This story has an appropriate setting for a good old conventional ghost story: There is a big, gloomy parsonage located next to a medieval stone church and a graveyard; there is a hallway with several rooms and a wardrobe; and there is a weird feeling in the house shared by a young boy and his mother. This experience story is normalized by generic conventions. In addition, the narrator describes himself as a light sleeper and afraid of ghosts. Thus, it does not surprise the reader when (s)he learns that the boy, in fact, encounters a misty figure standing next his bed. If the reader is still confused about the nature of the supernatural being, (s)he soon gets an answer from the narrator: *“My mom asked what I saw, and I said “the ghost.”*

The supernatural realm breaks into the everyday realm in the taleworld and manifests itself as a being that has a head but no face, and shoulders but no arms. Furthermore, the air in the room turns ice cold. There is no communication between the supernatural being and the narrator. Both the Experiencing I and Narrating I agree that the encounter is frightening. The Experiencing I is consonant in the expressed emotions; he is afraid and frightened. In addition, the Experiencing I normalizes the reaction by stating that getting awfully frightened is natural. The Narrating I expresses dissonance; he acknowledges what a shocking experience it was to a young boy, and he gets cold shivers when writing about the event, but on the other hand, he enjoys having had that experience.

The point of the story, in my opinion, is that the supernatural is real; it is not dream or fabrication. What narrative strategies does the narrator use to convince the reader of this? He uses the X/Y format and writes that he was just about to greet his father when he saw the figure. He calls for witnesses: He says his mother had the same weird feeling in the house that he had. His mother believes him when he sees the ghost, and later, she tells him that the next resident had an inexplicable experience in the house as well. Furthermore, he describes another weird, scary and inexplicable experience he had in the house. Finally, he says he has told the story to many people, and he has not been questioned.

LIFE STORIES

Life Story 1: My peculiar and unexpected experience

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Kirsi Hänninen

Kulttuurien tutkimuksen laitos/ Folkloristiikka

20014 Turun yliopisto

I saw your notice in Karjalainen newspaper on 20.9.2003, and I'm happy to reply to your inquiry. I'm a female, born in X (in 1930's), I live in X (place), and I'm a retired X (profession), X (education level) by my education.

Storyrealm Opening/

My peculiar and unexpected experience took place around

Taleworld Evaluation

20 years ago.

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation

I had been abroad with my children to celebrate my 50th birthday, and when I got back home, I had so much work to do that for couple of weeks I spent all my evenings

preparing for classes, grading exams and doing housework.

In the evenings, once I got to my bed, I fell asleep immediately.

Taleworld Beginning

One evening, I decided to go to bed a little bit earlier, since I had eight classes the following day. Yet, I couldn't fall asleep.

Taleworld Evaluation

I was worried and kept thinking about the classes the following day and my busy schedule in general – all the things that I had to do and the order in which I had to do them. It was 21.30 (9.30 pm), and

Taleworld Evaluation

I was annoyingly awake. I was frustrated, as I was losing valuable time while waiting to fall asleep, and so I decided to start reading. I turned around in my bed to reach the lamp. Right at that moment, I saw the figure of my mother around 1.5 meters from my bed. She wore a brilliant white, almost dazzling, dress, maybe some sort of a gown, and she looked very young and beautiful. Her hair

was longer and darker than I remember it ever being, and she had a warm and beaming smile. She had her arms open, and there she held a huge bunch of the most wonderful, big flowers, which she handed to me. I had never seen a display of colors like that. My mother didn't say anything, but in some incomprehensible way she communicated to me that she was there to congratulate me for my 50th birthday. She was radiating amazing warmth and love, and thus I didn't get frightened, even though I've always been horrified even by the theoretical possibility of having this sort of an experience.

Taleworld Evaluation

I noticed that I saw her figure clearly down until her knees, where her otherwise clear and bright figure sort of disappeared in a mist. I don't know how long the event lasted, maybe 20 seconds. When the vision disappeared,

Taleworld Evaluation

I was very calm on the one hand, but deeply moved on the other hand. It was like something from my mother's tender and loving nature had been transferred to me and in my emotional being. I sat

Taleworld End

there for a long time, wondering at this unexpected experience.

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

Afterwards, I wondered why she looked so much younger than I remembered her. She had died nine years earlier at the age of 77 and with a gray hair, whereas she now looked around 30 years old.

Taleworld Evaluation

I wondered why I didn't see her below her knees – that would have been much more natural. I also wondered why she didn't appear until two weeks after my birthday, but I then realized that I had been so busy and had fallen asleep in the evenings immediately, and this had been the first moment when I had been awake doing nothing. I also remembered that my mother used to bring me flowers on my birthdays, and thus this action was typical to her.

Storyrealm Evaluation

I want to emphasize that I had always been afraid of “ghosts” and I never, for any price, wanted to come face to face with a ghost. Even the mere thought of it was horrible.

Taleworld Evaluation

I had not wished to see her. Psychologically thinking, this experience could be seen as a fulfillment of an unconscious wish, as an appearance of a loving mother to fulfill my infantile needs.

Yet, I consider this explanation unsatisfactory. I had not been thinking of my mother for years, and she wasn't even particularly close to me. I was grown up, and she belonged to my past. I can't understand the possible physiological explanations either.

I haven't had any other experiences like this, even though I have hoped to. I would be ready for experiences such as this, but no one has appeared, not to congratulate me or for any other reason.

Taleworld Evaluation

The event had a revolutionary effect on me. I felt much more emotionally close to my mother, whereas our relationship before her death had been distant. I became convinced there is life after death, and all my fears of death disappeared. I am joyfully waiting for the moment when I get to see all my beloved ones who have passed away. I've

been thinking that it is a great favor to have an experience like this, because I have lived in peace ever since then, believing and trusting in the future. I have had nothing to be afraid of.

Storyrealm Evaluation

I have told about this experience to several people. Many of them consider it ridiculous, interpreting it as a hallucination, dreaming, or purely a physiological phenomenon.

Anyway, I know my self well enough, and I have a strong sense of reality, and thus I have the courage – paradoxically enough – to say

Taleworld Evaluation

I experienced something truly real. But no one has to believe it, and there is no way to prove it either.

Storyrealm Evaluation

I have a feeling it is my duty to tell this story. It is like I have been given a gift that I need to pass on even in this form, as a story of my own experience. Perhaps this way, someone could believe in life after death and thus find meaning in his/her existence. This is why I'm replying to your inquiry. It's good that you are doing your dissertation

research on this topic. Maybe someday people will have more courage to talk about these things.

Storyrealm Closing

In X (place) 12.10.2003

X (contact information)

The narrator skillfully utilizes different sorts of comparisons and contrasts to emphasize that “*The event had a revolutionary effect on [her].*” The most important difference she points out is that between her life before encountering her mother and her life after the experience. She begins her letter by explaining how worried she is about her busy work schedule. Second, she stresses that she has always been afraid of ghosts, and is frightened by the possibility of even seeing one. Third, she writes that she had not wished to see her deceased mother. Fourth, she points out that she had had a distant relationship to her mother. After seeing her mother’s ghost, her life changed. She writes that she is living in peace and trusts in the future; she is ready for further experiences like this, and has actually been hoping to have them. And finally, she shares that the experience made her emotionally closer to her mother. In addition to these comparisons, she compares her mother’s ghostly, young, appearance to the way her mother looked at her old age.

The supernatural realm opens and coexists with the ordinary realm for a purpose, and the supernatural being, the ghost of the mother, has a plausible reason to appear: She appears to the experiencer to congratulate her. The supernatural being looks human, has

human expressions, and communicates to the experiencer. Even the action of bringing flowers was something typical of the narrator's mother. Thus, even though the experience was unexpected and peculiar, it had familiar traits as well.

This story demonstrates the debate between the traditions of belief and the traditions of disbelief. It is also a good example of the narrative use of the Accusing I. The narrator challenges her experience by suggesting that maybe it was a case of a fulfillment of an unconscious wish to see her mother. Yet, she denies this possibility convincingly. She also abandons the physiological explanations, and denies the interpretations of the experience as a hallucination or dreaming. This exemplifies how a narrator recognizes and combats the stigmas related to a supernatural experience. In this story, it takes place in the storyrealm and is presented by the Narrating I. The Experiencing I focuses on describing the event and the being, and the positive feelings the being emitted on the one hand, and the positive feelings the experiencer felt, on the other hand.

Negotiation of the stigmas challenges the narrator to evaluate the limits, value and ways of knowing. What matters to her is that she knows herself, and she knows what is real. That gives her self-confidence to state that she has experienced "...*something truly real.*" Yet, it is not completely clear to me what is the nature of the paradox to which she refers. Maybe she is marveling at her courage to contest the socially-accepted reality. Maybe she is still trying to define what is real or what is reality – or the possibility that

there is more than one reality. What she does make clear is that there is no way to prove what she has experienced, and that no one has to believe it.

Finally, this story presents us with a narrator that has a strong inner call to tell her story – she has a mission. Understanding that there is nothing to be afraid of in life, and that there is life after death, is a gift she wishes to forward “...*even in this form, as a story of my own experience.*” I am possibly an ally on that journey, and that is why she is writing to me.

Life Story 2: Something happened --- something that I can't explain

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Kirsi Hänninen

Kulttuurien tutkimuksen laitos/Folkloristiikka

20014 Turun yliopisto

Source: Turkulainen 251003

X (contact info)

Greetings

When I saw your inquiry in Turkulainen, I immediately decided to answer you.

Storyrealm Opening/

This is a way to unburden myself without having to face

Storyrealm Evaluation

“understanding” looks and comments. My story is long, but you yourself said that the length of the writing is free. To give the general view, I will first tell you background information about myself and my life.

Taleworld Orientation

I was born out of wedlock in X (in the 1950’s).

Taleworld Evaluation

Looking back, I think my mother looked after me too much, and thus she became really important to me when I was a child. I couldn’t get free of that relationship as an adult, nor did I even try.

Taleworld Orientation

My father was a mere bank account. The grip my mother had on me did not loosen even when I moved away from X (place) to study at X (school and department). I came home every weekend, which my friends at college didn’t always understand. Well, anyway, I spent some time in the US, and my girlfriend there even visited my mother in Finland. That

relationship broke down, and I returned to X (place), and my mother was more than happy to get her son back.

Experiencing I

Taleworld Beginning

Then, destiny stepped in. ---- In October X (in the 1990's) my

Taleworld Evaluation

mother died suddenly and mysteriously.

It was like something switched her off, and they found nothing in the autopsy, not even when they examined the samples in the US.

Taleworld Evaluation

Suddenly, I was alone without any family members.

The only living relatives I had were my uncle far away in X (place) and couple of second cousins. ----

Taleworld Evaluation

Suddenly, at the age of 40, I was thrust into the real world.

No more did my fridge and freezer fill up by themselves, no more did my shirts wait for me ironed and organized by colors. My mother had had a key to my apartment, and she discreetly visited when I was away. That same year X (in

the 1990's) was rough in my work life as well. For the first time I became unemployed.

Taleworld Evaluation

Suddenly, I was all by myself, unemployed; no one was dependent on me.

I started to become frustrated. I got temporary jobs, but nothing really interested me. When my uncle died in X (in 1990's) I slowly but surely began to become depressed. Because I didn't realize I was becoming depressed, I didn't seek treatment. I began to fall deeper and deeper into depression, and I lost a good job in 2001, which made me contemplate suicide. I didn't leave my home, and I didn't take care of my bills or other obligations. I just slept and drank water or tea, ate whatever I found in the freezer, and went to the bathroom. This lasted for couple of months until the court ordered foreclosure and eviction proceedings due to unpaid rent and bills.

Taleworld Orientation

So, in 04.03.2002 (fourth of March) at 02.00 (2 am)

I decided to end my suffering. I went to the bathroom, a Gillette Blue razor blade in my hand. I took a bucket,

placed it in the shower, and opened the hot water faucet. I rationalized that slowly running hot water would flush blood to the floor drain and then, by the time I would be found, the floor wouldn't be covered with clotted blood. Easier to clean the mess. At random, I slit my right wrist ten times and my left wrists eight times. Then I just sat on the bathroom floor, hands in the bucket, blood running with the hot water down to the drain. I was waiting to die. I wasn't aware of the time passing by, but at the point when I had lost a lot of blood and my condition started to weaken, something happened --- something that I can't explain.

Taleworld Evaluation

I was suddenly awakened by my mother, who stood at the bathroom door as a shining, almost beaming misty figure, and said,

Taleworld Evaluation

“Stop that nonsense right now. Get up, open the cold water faucet, put your wrists in the running cold water, and close those horrible wounds by pressing them with your hands.”

I stood up with a lot of effort and did as my mother said, and

Taleworld Evaluation

to my surprise, the blood stopped running?!? I could not believe my eyes, but that is what happened.

As I knew that the officers were coming, I packed clothes in two suitcases and departed to Japan where I already had prepaid flight tickets. Another Finn who was going to the same event noticed my swollen wrists and understood at once what had happened. Without me knowing, s/he contacted our common doctor friends who intervened in my life after I got back from Japan.

Taleworld Evaluation

I will never forget the first time these friends examined my wrist and one of them, the pathologist, marveled at how amazingly carefully I had cut so that none of the main nerve paths had been cut. Another thing he marveled at was how well I had managed to heal the wounds since I had not sought medical help before I left for Japan.

They immediately arranged for me to see a psychiatrist, and from there I went to a psychiatric hospital.

Taleworld Evaluation

The event was discussed many times in the treatment meetings, and I noticed my psychiatrist, my therapist, and

my nurse playing down this event time after time, yet wondering at the healing of the wounds since they didn't find any note about me visiting first aid.

This is because I didn't seek any help. Why would I have, after my deceased mother guided me to help myself? I don't mean that they played down my depression or my suicide attempt, but they were

Taleworld End

doubtful of me having a vision of my mother.

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

Storyrealm Evaluation

I don't talk about this with people anymore because I can see people smiling their minus 40 degree smile of an adder. They feel pity for poor me, who doesn't anymore have that hypocritical, artificial social respect that I used to have. That was when I too was pretending it. Clearly, doctors don't want to comment on the apparition. They just say that it's good that you survived alive. The past 15 months, after getting out of the hospital, I've been seeing a therapist

regularly, but now we are about to bring it to an end, to coincide with the end of my course of medication. That's why I dared to take my pen and write my story --- I have now been labeled as a sane member of the society. It's difficult to guess if this story of mine will help you in your dissertation research --- I hope so. I, at least, find it easier to tell about this when I know that the reader (you) won't burst into a pitying laugh when reading this.

Taleworld Evaluation

Through my experiences I have become more and more convinced that the only truth in life is not what we normally see, hear, taste, smell or feel on our skin. I truly believe that someone, who is receptive and has a sincere and open mind, is able to experience greater dimensions.

Storyrealm Closing

Sincerely,

X (name)

This story offers plenty of fascinating narrative means and ends to discuss. Even though the narrator is the main character of the story, he presents himself as a bystander to his own life and to the actions shaping the course of his life. The story begins and evolves around the narrator's dependent relationship to his mother. He contrasts his

mother to his father, his college friends and his girlfriend. When one controlling power, his mother, that is, is suddenly gone, he faces other outside powers: destiny steps in and takes his mother away from him and throws him into the real world; he is perennially unemployed; he begins to fall into depression. Society requires him to fulfill certain duties, such as paying bills, which he is not able to do, and thus the court orders foreclosure and eviction proceedings. He is repeating how all this happens “*suddenly*,” thus making it even more evident that he is not controlling what happens in his life.

Finally, the moment comes when he takes his life in his own hands, literally, and decides to commit suicide. After a long presentation of powers out of his control, he presents this decision as his first independent act. In a distant voice, he describes how he proceeds to cut himself and waits to die. What happens next is the most interesting part of this narrative. One possible reading of the miraculous appearance of the narrator’s mother is that his attempt to become independent failed again. Another reading would suggest that the event started his healing, both from depression and from his artificial and hypocritical social environment. The latter interpretation is the one the narrator offers to the reader. Yet, even after this life changing event, the narrator confronts authoritative powers that direct his life: His friend contacts doctors without him knowing; the doctors arrange for him to see a psychiatrist and send him to a psychiatric hospital, where his supernatural experience is continuously doubted. Other people do not understand him either, and thus he stops telling people about his experience – until he sees my research

inquiry, and decides to address me, a researcher who will not “*burst into a pitying laugh when reading this.*”

The narrator is well aware of not only the stigmatization of his inexplicable experience, but also the stigmatization of mental health problems. He makes it clear that his doctors are about to end his therapy and medication to, meaning that he is healthy, sane and rehabilitated member of society.

It could be argued that the supernatural does not play an important role in this narrative, but functions only as an opportunity for him to write to me. The narrator does not use the word supernatural. He does not call her mother a ghost. There is little taleworld evaluation. He does not tell us how the event itself made him feel, but he focuses on its consequences. Nevertheless, I argue that the supernatural realm is the driving force of the narrative. The supernatural is something “...*something that [he] can't explain*” and something that happens to his own surprise. The supernatural breaks into the everyday realm in the taleworld, but its real power is visible in the storyrealm, where it functions as the mirror the narrator needs to see how he differs from everyone else. It is a greater dimension that can be reached if you have a sincere and open mind. The sincere and open mind sets him apart from the artificial, hypocritical people – the group of people that he used to belong to before his experience. The point of the story is that life contains more than one truth. Normalcy is one of them, but the supernatural is a greater one.

Life Story 3: In the Company of a Spiritual Guide

Narrating I

Storyrealm Preface

Hello! Here's a story, in case you're interested!

Good afternoon; it's snowing in X (place). I'm having a break between shows, and this gives me a nice way to spend it.

X (Narrator's contact information)

Kirsi Hänninen

Kulttuurien tutkimuksen laitos/Folkloristiikka

20014 Turun Yliopisto

Inquiry in Lapin Kansa 2.10.

HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED A SUPERNATURAL
BEING?

Taleworld Evaluation Here is my experience that will affect the rest of my life.

Storyrealm Preface If you use parts of it in your research, feel free to come up with a “stage name” for me. Greetings, X (name)

Storyrealm Opening IN THE COMPANY OF A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Experiencing I

Taleworld Orientation It was winter 1998 when I, who can take care of anything, had to

face a really tough challenge. I had been taking care of my old mother and my chronically ill brother for years. I live in the city; my relatives lived nearly 100 kilometers away in the countryside. I’m a worrying-type of person; I worry about other people’s issues more intensively than they themselves do. In the fall of 1997 I considered my home situation so alarming that I reserved my mother a place in a nursing home where she could go if and when my brother suddenly needs to go to the hospital. It became too

overwhelming – even for me – to be on alert all the time, keep the suitcase ready, and take fright at every phone call.

Taleworld Beginning

Then, in January 1998 it happened; my brother needed immediate hospital care. I told him and my mother that I couldn't come home because I had just started a computer course. Since I had already taken care of my affairs and their affairs, I followed my plans.

Taleworld Evaluation

My mother got angry, my brother got angry, and I had never felt worse. I was so afraid of what would happen back home, but I didn't back off.

There were no options, not anymore. My brother got his chance to let go once he didn't have to worry about our mother and our home, and he died two weeks later. Our home that had been inhabited by our family for nearly 100 years was suddenly empty. My mother was angry, sad, and very bitter in the nursing home close to our home. There was a deceased person to be buried and things to be taken care of. It was minus 40 degrees Celsius, and the house was uninhabited, which risked water-, electricity-, and whatever

other damages. I had to run all the errands related to the house, my mother and my brother.

Taleworld Evaluation/

A very rare moment came when I thought, “I’m not going

Taleworld End

to get through this.”

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

Storyrealm Evaluation

I have never been satisfied with easy living, and I have never waited for someone else to take action – when no one ever will. I’m always the one who is ready to work when everyone else is

Storyrealm Closing

lamenting this and that.

Experiencing I

(Taleworld Continues)

Taleworld Evaluation

Now it was Life itself asking how much is at stake.

I spent mornings making phone calls, afternoons visiting offices, evenings writing notes about things to do and remember and attaching them to tables and shelves. At midnight I laid down to sleep and told myself, "I must sleep, otherwise I can't make it." I closed my eyes and slept. About one week after my brother's death and a week before the funeral, I was sitting on the couch in the morning, telephone in my arms, and listing things that I had already taken care of and things that I needed to take care of. Suddenly, I became conscious that there was SOMETHING to my left, about one and a half meters away. I don't know how long IT had been there – immediately prior to my noticing it, more than an hour, that entire evening, or longer, but IT was very clear though there wasn't anything physical or concrete to observe. I knew IT was there, what IT was like and what IT was doing. IT reached the ceiling; it was about one meter wide, like a solid pillar, and IT emanated huge power, peace and trust. IT was very old, at least thousands of years, and omniscient. IT walked with me for the next one and a half month, 6-7 weeks that is, all the time. IT didn't go away or

change its being or location or its influence on me for a second. I could sense it when walking on the street, standing next to an office desk, taking a bath; IT was there – all I had to do was to “look.”

Taleworld Evaluation

I trusted IT completely, from the first moment on: I wasn't alone anymore and everything would work out just fine. “All the things in the world can be worked through, you just need to trust your strength and get to work.” That was the information IT infused me with.

Systematically I did all that needed to be done, without any mistakes, without any useless trip or phone call, and I didn't forget anything. My phone bills quadrupled for two billing terms; there was no moment in a day that I didn't think of some official issue that needed to be taken care of by this or that date...And I had everything completely under control. Grieving over my brother's death was the only thing that got postponed to two years later, but I took care of everything else during those two months. On the evening of my brother's funeral, I told my siblings, who all live 800-900 kilometers away from our mother's home,

about IT. I pointed to the place where IT appeared and described what IT was like and what IT communicated to me.

Taleworld Evaluation

One of my sisters cried out, “Eww, how horrible!” My brother, who can be almost labeled as an occultist, nodded and smiled in a self-assertive way. My big sister, who is very interested in weird things, enthusiastically asked more, and my little sister most probably closed her ears, thinking herself, “Well now she’s finally gone completely mad”.

The next week, I met an ex-colleague of mine, a museum assistant and yoga teacher, walking down the street. I told him/her my news, but motioned towards IT and gave a laugh, “But there’s SOMEONE over here, so things will be okay...” My friend had tears in his/her eyes, nodded and said, “Yes, there is!”

After around 6-7 weeks I realized that IT was gone. IT had left. IT is not here anymore. It was as clear a moment of consciousness as was the moment of ITs appearance.

Taleworld Evaluation/

I understood, accepted, and thanked IT aloud for the visit

Taleworld End

and the help, and I was sure I was never going to feel myself weak again.

Narrating I

(Storyrealm continues)

I have lived a real human life after that, with all the sorrows and delights, feeling strong sometimes and weak sometimes! I have called IT many times when I have felt lost, but IT doesn't come.

You see: IT doesn't need to come. I am not lost, I am just lazy! I think, and I want to believe that IT is with me all the time, on IT's place behind my left shoulder. IT just wanted me to know that IT is always with me, and IT moved closer on my left side when I needed IT most. Now I just need to believe! And I do believe; I remind myself time to time of IT, and that thought gives me a huge feeling of strength and peace.

Experiencing I

2nd Storyrealm Preface/

You see: I once heard a story told by a member of a

2nd Taleworld Abstract parapsychology association who – to his regret – could not communicate with the spiritual world, but who had received strong evidence of its existence at a young age.

2nd Taleworld Opening He was leaving for a long trip to England, to a language class I guess, and a local “seer” had told him that the trip will go fine and there will be a spiritual guide travelling with him, an old shaman, behind his left shoulder. While in England, the traveler had dropped in on one of the local “spiritual churches” which are accepted and legal over there among the other denominations, and a local priest, or whatever they call them, said to this young traveler, “Your trip is going to be a success, and I can see your guide behind your left shoulder, an old Laplander.”

2nd Taleworld Evaluation His trip was perfect!

2nd Taleworld End/ This storyteller is a psychologist and a psychotherapist.

2nd Taleworld Orientation

Narrating I

Storyrealm continues/ Meeting my spiritual guide sealed my interest towards

Taleworld Evaluation weird things.

Taleworld Evaluation The spiritual world does exist, and there are beings there that have never been humans, and there are souls there that occasionally walk the earth in order to move towards perfect clarity of soul. And this dimension is not far away from us; it is next to our skin....The more convinced about this dimension I've become, the more convinced I've become by the fact that in this world one must focus on the issues of this world, with its given resources. One should not waste time and strength on the dimension whose time is not now. One shouldn't be impatient; the time will come to everyone.

Taleworld Evaluation The spiritual world will help us when we need help and IF we want to accept help.

Experiencing I

3rd Taleworld Orientation My father died 10 years ago.

3rd Taleworld Abstract I have encountered my deceased father once, in a similar way to that in which I encountered my Spiritual Guide.

3rd Taleworld Orientation/ I was totally desperate at our home, and my father
3rd Taleworld Opening appeared to say
3rd Taleworld Evaluation “there’s nothing to worry about, take it easy, don’t
worry...”

I do not have a gift to concretely see or hear spirits, but I
KNOW where they are and what they communicate. When
my father came to me, I knew he was standing between the
field and the yard, around three meters from me, and I
knew what he was communicating. He came and went like
any person having an errand to run.

3rd Taleworld End/ And like the being of my Spiritual Guide, my father’s visit
brought
3rd Taleworld Evaluation me a huge feeling of peace, strength and trust in everything
in this world.

Narrating I

Storyrealm Closing/ I consider myself, roughly speaking, sane as long as I have

Storyrealm Evaluation to remind myself of the events that I just narrated! I still know how to live this life, and that's what matters!

This life-story shares its main themes with the previous story, namely, the themes of power and control. In this case, the narrator's relation to her environment is the opposite of the relationship between the previous narrator and her environment. The narrator here is in control of her own life, and the lives of her mother and brother. She presents herself as a worrying-type of person, who can take care of anything, and does not wait for other people to act before she starts to take care of things. She is a strong person who can control weakness: "*I am always ready to work when everyone else is lamenting this and that.*" After her brother dies, she needs to run the errands related to the funeral, the empty house, and her mother in the nursing home. Now, she admits that she has a rare thought of losing control. Then, the supernatural realm reveals itself to her. She encounters her spiritual guide that convinces her that she is not alone, and that everything will work out. Gaining back her control over her life brings back her ambiguous relation to weakness: She keeps herself so focused on maintaining control that she postpones grieving over her brother's death for two years. Later, when she feels strong enough, the spiritual guide leaves, and she is sure "*[She] was never going to feel [her]self weak again.*" Yet, after this statement, she adds that she has felt "*strong sometimes and weak sometimes.*" Nevertheless, she points out that weakness is in fact, just laziness, and it can be fixed by believing in the spiritual guide.

The point so far is that infusing the everyday realm with the supernatural realm restores her control. The third story, the story of her encountering her deceased father, confirms the interpretation of the supernatural's restoring power. Thus, in this life-story, the supernatural does not disrupt the everyday realm, but makes it more complete.

The narrator is aware of the possible doubts people may have about her experience. Like some of the previous narrators that I have presented in this chapter, the current narrator also discusses the ways of getting knowledge. She says it was clear that the pillar was there even though there was nothing to observe. She *knew* it was there. Knowing does not require observing, but sensing, a different way to "*look*." She uses her friends' voices to confirm this. First, she says that her friend observed the pillar, in some way, as well. Second, she tells the story of a well-educated man who also *knows* of the existence of his spiritual guide without seeing it. Thus, in this account, other people's stories of the supernatural count as evidence of its reality. In Bennett's words, she is calling to witness. Even though the supernatural has greatly helped the narrator, she reminds the reader that there is a right time and place for encountering it, and this encounter should not be hurried. The supernatural is close to us; it is a dimension "*next to our skin*," and we can access it when we need, and are ready to accept, help. Thus, the narrator shows that her personal experiences with the supernatural have given her expert knowledge of it.

Finally, it can be argued that the narrator is afraid of being labeled as a bad daughter and a bad sister, even after telling the reader that she has been taking care of her

mother and brother for years. She is defending herself against possible accusations of abandoning her mother and brother for selfish reasons. She says she had already arranged hospital and nursing care, and her word choices stress the carefully-considered finality of her decisions: “*It became too overwhelming,*” and “*I didn’t back off. There were no options, not anymore.*” Thus, in addition to being aware of the stigmas related to the supernatural, the narrator is aware of what is expected from a female family member living near relatives in need.

To conclude, the narrators presented here are aware of the doubtful attitudes towards the supernatural and address it by direct and embedded statements. Yet, they also express their positive interpretations regarding the experiences, and tell how the events affected their lives, and even made them better people. They describe their social attachments and dependencies, but they also defend their unique experiences even if the experiences set them apart from others. Even though the supernatural is stigmatized, it is valuable when it makes the experiencer feel special, chosen and having a gift. Finally, these narrators construct Finnish selves: They value authorities (doctor, teacher, researcher), they are in danger in Russia, they fish and go to a summer cottage at a lake, they have sauna, they know the Christian traditions but do not express religious faith, they like to travel, and finally, they navigate between enjoying the welfare state services and feeling quilt for unfulfilling their responsibilities as citizens and family members. They constructed selves that learn from their experiences, and they can use even

abnormal, stigmatized experiences to enrich their lives. Even this small-scale set of narratives shows us how complicated and diverse phenomenon the supernatural is.

CHAPTER 5: RECOGNIZING AND COMBATING STIGMATIZATION

The research material provides several examples of narrators worrying about accusations such as being drunk, mentally ill, stupid or lacking education. These anxieties are shaped by everyday Finnish understanding of what it is to be a modern, normal Finnish person. What follows is a discussion of what stigmas narrators recognize as associated with the supernatural, and how they deal with those stigmas.

STIGMAS

In the folklore scholarship, there have been two main ways of looking at the relationship between tradition and supernatural experience. Tradition has been understood as either directing the experience or occurring independently of it. The classic pieces of Finnish folklore studies discussing folk beliefs often explain supernatural experiences as hallucinations taking place inside a religious frame of reference. Seeing guardian spirits was explained as hallucinations caused by, for example, intoxication, exhaustion, hunger, lactation or sickness. The main point is that in these studies, tradition steers both the experiencing process and the interpreting process (Haavio 1942; Holmberg (later Harva) 1923; Honko 1962, 1972, 1980).

Folklorist David Hufford calls this kind of an approach, where experiences are considered either fictitious products of tradition or imaginary subjective experiences

shaped or occasionally even caused by tradition, the Cultural Source Hypothesis (1982). This hypothesis refers to “that collection of social, cultural and psychological theories that are used to account for the empirical claims of believers” (Hufford 2001). In contrast to this hypothesis he proposes the Experiential Theory (first called the Experiential Source Hypothesis). The Experiential Theory states that (1) many widespread supernatural beliefs are supported by experiences that refer intuitively to spirits without inference or retrospective interpretation and that occur independently of a person’s prior beliefs, knowledge or intentions; (2) These experiences form distinct classes, *core supernatural experiences*, with stable perceptual patterns; (3) these experiences are normal, meaning they are not products of obvious psychopathology; and finally, (4) such experiences provide a central empirical foundation from which some supernatural beliefs develop rationally, that is, utilize ordinary rules of inference (Hufford 1982a; Hufford 2001; 2005).

This work does not attempt to find explanations for what causes supernatural experiences nor does it argue for or against the existence of supernatural experiences outside the narratives. Nevertheless, the Experiential Theory’s reliance on physical evidence raises the question of relativist vs. positivist evaluation of an experience. Many of the narrators are asking for confirmation and/or understanding and presenting the questions “Is it okay that I have this experience?” and “Can you explain to me what happened?” To a relativist any experience and interpretation matters, whereas a positivist would rely only on the physical evidence. Some narrators address a reader they think of

as relativist, whereas other narrators construct their narratives to address a positivist reader.

Hallucinations

One of the arguments of Cultural Source Hypothesis is that the supernatural experience is a hallucination. A hallucination is a false perception characterized by a distortion of real sensory stimuli. It may be caused by using substances, such as drugs, medication and alcohol, that alter the state of consciousness. The following example shows how the narrator uses both the denial of the stigma and attributes of normalcy:

Denial: I don't take any medication, and I am teetotaler. Attributes of normalcy: I am normal person living a healthy life. Now my experience amuses me.

The fear of being accused of being drunk becomes understandable when we place it in the context of the stigmatization of alcohol use. Satu Apo has examined the vernacular knowledge of alcohol consumption from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. She argues that Finnish folk was capable of controlling alcohol production and use itself. Nevertheless, social activists considered the folk uncivilized and uncontrolled, in need of institutional control over its “bestial characteristics.” As a result, Finland witnessed extremely stringent alcohol regulation until the end of the 1960s (Apo 2001).

Hallucinations may occur during extreme physical or mental stress, and denying the stress or explaining it can counter attributions of spiritual encounters to hallucinations:

“When these things happened, I was clear-headed, not, for example, sick or tired.”

“This happened pretty soon after my daughter was born. (...) My mood was naturally, due to the birth, a bit sensitive.”

Finally, hallucinations may be explained as signs of the experiencer being psychotic. The potential for the experiencer’s mental health to be called into question yields the largest set of defensive answers:

“I am a 56-year-old woman, and I am not mentally sensitive or weird in any way. I am a normal rational Finnish woman, feet steadily on the ground. I am not looking for or waiting for anything supernatural. These experiences I’m going to tell you, they just happened and surprised me. I didn’t look for them, and I couldn’t prevent them happening.”

“I am happy that I haven’t experienced anything supernatural since my childhood. The supernatural doesn’t belong to this world or to normal life. (...) I haven’t told about my experiences outside my childhood family, nor do I intend to. I am not interested in supernatural things.”

“I have been very interested in supernatural energy and astrology, and I have read many books about those things. I guess my continuous UFO dreams come from that. The most impressive dream I ever had was on Midsummer Eve. I am a shy person, and I don’t use alcohol, so it doesn’t explain that either.”

“I have my feet steadily on the ground. I don’t believe in UFOs but I investigate things first.”

“If you want to know more, I am happy to tell. Though I believe what I saw was real, I am not a lunatic.”

“Actually, I am not so interested in the supernatural. I am too ordinary, and I think that in many experiences a natural cause can be found. Imagination can make things happen. I haven’t read books about supernatural issues either.”

“I haven’t had any mental problems, nor do I use any sedatives.”

Illusions

Other scientific explanations of supernatural experiences include illusions, which are abnormal perceptions caused by a sensory misinterpretation and actual stimulus.

Narrators in my data set addressed this stigma:

“Later I thought that it was only a light phenomenon. However, it had to be a good one, indeed, because I could see the pleats in the skirt.”

“One could think, of course, that a child naturally considers the survival of the attack of an elephant as God’s protection and the sunbeam as an angel. It would be so according to the worldview of her parents and her social environment.”

Misinterpretation of a real world object is also suggested as an explanation of supernatural experiences. I have no examples of counter arguments for this explanation in my subset of the letters.

Dreams

Narrators lay emphasis on the notion that they were awake when the supernatural event happened, and that they can distinguish the different states of consciousness:

“I had time to reason and even pinch myself to check if I was awake and conscious.”

“I was sleeping, but I woke up and saw the time. (...) When I woke up next time (...) It happened to me, and I wasn’t sleeping because I knew the time and I knew my husband was at work.”

“I think it was real because I was awake when I turned in my bed and saw the ghost.”

Social Status

As was mentioned before, the support of paranormal beliefs is linked to already-devalued categories: lower education and women – although my material revealed that in this study, it does not apply:

“I don’t have any other education except elementary school. My parents had five children and couldn’t afford education for all of us. So I started to work when I was 15 and have been working 38 years since then.”

“I am in the caring professions. (...) I have a matriculation and I have several other educations.”

“I am 37 years old, an architect by my occupation and starting my graduate studies and research as well.”

DEVALUATION OF THE NARRATIVES

The reception that people get when they reveal their supernatural experiences varies from positive to negative. The quantitative breakdown revealed that 175 narrators discussed the response to their stories, and of those, 81 narrators got positive responses, 57 got mixed and 31 got negative. Here, I will focus on the negative and mixed responses.

The stigmas that the supernatural experiences carry become visible when experiences are described as “*stupid*,” narrators as “*mad*,” and listeners as “*suspicious*,” and “*laughing*.”

“I have told about these experiences to my mother, who took it okay. I tried to tell my partner, but I didn’t get far when he told me to stop saying these kinds of stupid things. Maybe he is afraid of weird things.”

“I told about this to my friends, and I could tell from their expressions that they thought I had been hallucinating or gone mad. However, when I mentioned that there were three of us girls in there, and we all saw the angel, they started to think my experience possible. It was nice that they didn’t consider me weird.”

“I have told this to couple of my good friends, but I’m not sure if they took me seriously. They did listen, but were somewhat suspicious. My mother told this to my grandmother, and I think she believed.”

“A doctor I know told me I had seen an eidetic phenomenon. Another friend of mine, a lecturer in mathematics, physics and chemistry, told me that people see what they want to see. In my defense, I can say that I didn’t want to see that blood-red oval.”

Some narrators defend themselves and combat the stigmatization by saying that they do not care what other people think:

“I have told about my experience, but people have laughed and considered me weird. But I don’t mind their opinions.”

“I have told about my experience at work, and people’s reactions have been different. I don’t care what they think.”

“I have talked about my angel experience to some people, and they have been interested in that. At least no one has said aloud I am silly... Of course, I can’t know what they really think, but actually, I don’t even care. Even if someone didn’t believe me, my experience would remain significant to me. And even if it were a product of my imagination, it would have the same importance to my peace of mind.”

Even narrators that have received neutral or positive responses, they may express a certain wariness in talking about their experiences:

“I haven’t told my experience to many people. Those whom I have told are religious people who I consider as understanding the existence of the supernatural realm.”

“I have told about the case to others as well, without hiding anything, and some people have said my experience is a fairy tale. Most of them have believed me, though.”

Finally, the fear of the negative response may prevent people talking about the experience:

“First, I didn’t tell what had happened, but waited for the doctor to diagnose my condition. (...) I was afraid to tell what had happened because I thought doctors didn’t believe in miracles, especially miracles like this.”

“This is an extraordinary topic, and people don’t understand that one can really experience these kinds of amazing things. If you tell about this kind of a weird experience, including issues that seem supernatural, people consider you a bit weird or strange. (...) I haven’t talked much about this since I haven’t found anyone who would take me seriously.”

“In the morning, I told my husband about the experience, but I didn’t bother telling the hostess or our traveling companions. I thought they would think me a bit silly”.

Categories and Danger

I suggest that Mary Douglas’ ideas about category boundaries help us to understand the suppression of and hostility towards the supernatural. When discussing the abominations of Leviticus, the dietary rules concerning clean and unclean animals, Douglas argues that the only way in which those rules make sense is to situate them within the larger set of ideas of boundaries and principles of power and danger. She notes that holiness, which is related to the rules, requires that individuals, besides being complete, conform to the class to which they belong, and that different classes are not to be confused. Borderland cases, those that are imperfect category members, fall out of the category and become unclean

and dangerous. On the other hand, a whole category can break the general scheme of the world and become dangerous (Douglas 1979, 149-152). Supernatural experiences contradict both the scientific and religious categories since they break natural laws, are observable to the experiencers, and have ambiguous relations to believing. Thus, there is a category problem, which the society attempts to solve by using arguments familiar from the Cultural Source Hypothesis.

High/Low Hierarchy

Furthermore, I suggest that the supernatural is one cultural category in the high/low hierarchy. Stallybrass and White propose that human body, psychic forms, geographical space and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low. They state, “Divisions and discriminations in one domain are continually structured, legitimated and dissolved by reference to the vertical symbolic hierarchy which operates in the other three domains” (Stallybrass & White 1986: 3). They remind us that it would be wrong to imply that ‘high’ and ‘low’ are equal and symmetrical terms, since history seen from below and history seen from above are different and set different perspectives on the question of hierarchy (Stallybrass & White 1986: 4). I have constructed the following table to show the high/low categorizations that are related to knowing about the world. This is my interpretation of the concerns that the narrators address combined with the modern thought of how the world is supposed to work. As we can see, the supernatural is closely related to the categories on the low side.

High	Low
PSYCHIC FORMS	PSYCHIC FORMS
Mind (Knowing)	Body (Experiencing)
Analytical Thinking	Experiential Thinking
Believing in Religion	Experiencing Supernatural
SOCIAL ORDER	SOCIAL ORDER
High Education	Low Education
Science	Pseudoscience
HUMAN BODY	HUMAN BODY
Man	Woman
(Mental) Health	(Mental) Sicknes

Table 23. Hierarchy of High and Low

Category Problem and Contamination

Finally, I wish to point out the problematic case of an academic researcher studying supernatural experiences. On one hand (s)he can be considered a border case between categories, and on the other hand (s)he can be seen as becoming contaminated from being too close to the dangerous supernatural category.

If a researcher does not attempt to explain the experiences or use the arguments from the Cultural Source Hypothesis, and if (s)he is even referring to his/her own supernatural experiences, or even showing interest to others' experiences, or if he does not explicitly pronounce his/her attitude towards supernatural, there is a category problem. First, (s)he is not a perfect member of either the Science, Religion or Supernatural categories. Secondly, that leads to restructuring the other above-mentioned domains. The next extract demonstrates the category problem I (the construction of me based on the notices in media, to be precise) present to some people who replied to my research notices.

“The topic of your dissertation is something that no opponent can successfully discuss. I mean, is there anything to debate, really? Some one has seen something he cannot explain, and someone has seen nothing and thinks he can explain that. (...) I cannot consider someone writing a dissertation and being involved with her authority in these kinds of supernatural things. One can, of course, be interested in whatever, but sure the education has gone for nothing if one’s heart is truly involved in these things. I do not have any ghost stories to tell, I just wrote you to warn you not to take seriously these wild stories. The wildest stories you will hear in detoxification centers. (...) I would recommend that you mention in your preface the humor of the content. Otherwise you will carry the stigma for the rest of your life – in case one’s dissertations will be remembered after a year, anyway. What I mean is, one could write one’s dissertation about something more noteworthy.” (A man)

Thus, besides people who tell about supernatural experiences, the researcher who studies them may get stigmatized. Bennett recognizes this and states, “Nevertheless,

serious scholars remain very wary about studying *supernatural* folklore”(Bennett 1999, 1).

INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND NARRATIVES ABOUT SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES

The fear of becoming labeled mad and thus stigmatized becomes understandable if we understand the common attitudes towards mental disorders/illnesses in Finland. There are about 200 stigmatizing words in the Finnish language that refer to a person suffering from mental illness/disorder. Besides being stigmatizing, many of these words are aggressively charged. Translating is difficult, but here are some examples: retarded, drip, mad, idiot, and moron (Kalemaa 1996).

According to research carried out by The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, an association for people dealing with psychiatric problems, people suffering from mental disorders are not considered fully competent members of society. Mental health care professionals, people suffering from mental disorders, relatives of those with mental disorders, and the general public were included in the research. When asked how well-integrated into society people suffering from mental disorders are, on scale of 1 to 10, the average value was between 5 and 6. Furthermore, 53 % of the relatives of those suffering from mental disorders interviewed said that their family member has been stigmatized. When the same was asked of people suffering from a mental disorder, the percentage was 29 %. The mental health care professionals considered the situation

worse: 74 % of them said that patients get stigmatized. Also, it was asked of the general public whether they would accept a person suffering from a mental disorder moving next door. Two-thirds answered no. On the other hand, it was widely stated that the people suffering from a mental disorder are not to be blamed for their condition; it's not their "fault" that they are ill (The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health 2006).

In another study conducted by The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, people considered mental illness frightening and dangerous, and they presented hostile or ambivalent attitudes towards it. In particular, they considered it unfair that mental illness is not visible; that mentally ill people are "allowed" to behave in an uncontrolled way; and that society is required to accept the mentally ill though s/he is not well-adjusted in society (The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health 1995).

Differentiating Between Categories of Normal and Mad

Besides having to convince their audience about the factual nature of their experiences, narrators have to manage two available identities, normal and mad, and position themselves in the category of normal. This can be done by denying the stigma, for example, by stating that "I am not mad/religious/weird in any other way." The narrators who do admit having a disorder, clarify that it does not explain the experiences.

"I don't have symptoms." (a person who revealed he suffers from schizophrenia)

"I believe my experiences are true, but I haven't become a religious nutcase."

“I have been prone to some kinds of hallucinations since childhood, but I don’t have mental disorders and these [hallucinations] don’t hinder me doing my grocery shopping.”

“I go to therapy because I suffer from depression...now I can talk about it and conceptualize my problems...my positive and negative emotions return...as supernatural experiences caused by the alternation of emotions and energies” (She states her experiences are thus real, but also supernatural)

“I thought, maybe I’m stressed, maybe I’m depressed, or maybe I’m going crazy, but in my opinion, I didn’t have more problems then than any other time. I also thought, maybe I should contact a mental health care provider or a priest. I didn’t.”

“I’m not a believer, though I’m a sort of a religious person.”

Many construct a difference between the categories and state that they are clearly normal and sane. These narrators admit that yes, they have these experiences, but add that they are *“clear-headed”*; *“in my right-mind”*, *“rational”*; *“moderately rational”*; *“ordinary”*; *“decent”*; *“mentally normal”*; *“a healthy person”*; or write *“My head is okay”* or *“I have my feet on the ground.”*

In addition, the evaluation can be passive, or expressed by someone else’s voice about the narrator him/herself:

“I have told this only to a couple of people, those who will understand this. Others would consider me mad.”

In one case, the narrator’s friend had stated that *“Many people have brought a guardian spirit with them to Helsinki, but usually they don’t tell about that in order not to make people question their rationality.”*

“Nobody has dared to call me goofy directly.”

“I haven’t been considered a nutcase even though I’ve told about my experience.”

“They mention my burn out [in a book], and of course that I seem to be clear-headed.”

The evaluation can be about people other than the narrator having supernatural experiences:

“The typical Finnish attitude is that ‘ghosts don’t exist and only mad people see ghosts.’”

“People tend to consider a person [having supernatural experiences] a bit weird or odd.”

There seems to be a specific stigma related to the medical treatment of disorders and mental institutions:

“You [addressing me] should check out if these people who answer you have been in some sort of a mental institution when they had those experiences (...) I’ve been dealing with psychiatrists only when working with them, when doing TV programs.”

“Here in Lapland people were, especially after the war, very superstitious...These stories are only old wives’ tales and products of foolish minds. The only cure for people who believe in non-existing things is psychiatric treatment ... I wonder how many people have lost their minds because of the supernatural?...I know people who own the Black Bible...and have lost their poor minds completely, they’ve even been in therapy for years! Poor them!....Believe [addressing me] only in reality and natural things!...You could, of course, study how many people believe in it [the supernatural]! And if they are in a need of some sort of treatment – that should be studied as well.”

Self-Controlled and Uncontrolled Nature of Mental Health

The modernization process in Finland included a state-run exercise of power and the construction of a nation-state. This process was related to the ideas of progress and the self-regulation of the folk. The ideal of the citizen included an internalized self-education and self-control. The disciplines and professions discussing mental health have constructed a secularized and socially-differentiated society (Komulainen, Rätty, Silvonon 2006: 5-6). The border between health and disorder or illness is fluctuating, and people have a responsibility to recognize it, and even treat themselves.

According to the Finnish Association for Mental Health, which is a non-governmental organization aiming to promote mental health, mental health is related to one's abilities and chances of finding her/his own place in the community and the meaning of her/his life. Mental health is not a steady state of being, but it fluctuates within one's life, as does physical health. According to the Finnish Association for Mental Health, you can support your own mental health, and you have a personal responsibility to take care of yourself in everyday life, a responsibility that is nowadays too easily offloaded onto society, the association notes. (Suomen Mielenterveysseura 2007).

Yet, according to the Mental Health Act, it is the state's and municipalities' responsibility to treat mental disorders and illnesses:

Mental health work means the promotion of the mental well-being, ability to cope and personal growth of the individual, and the prevention, curing and alleviation of mental illness and other mental disorders. Mental health work includes the social and health care services (mental health services) provided for person suffering from a medically diagnosed mental illness or other mental disorder. Mental health work also involves improving the living conditions of the population in order to prevent mental disorders, promote mental health work and support the organization of mental health

services (Mental Health Act, Chapter 1, General provisions, Section 1, Mental health work).

The educational system also recognizes the potential and responsibility to understand one's mental states. Psychology is one of the optional subjects to be studied at the senior high school level. In addition to general psychological knowledge, the curriculum stresses the importance of recognizing and understanding the student's own individual and social psychological phenomena, and investigates how this subjective knowledge can be employed in maintaining and developing mental health. One of the goals is that the students understand what factors affect mental health (Opetushallitus 2003: 166-169).

Every year, 1.5% of the Finnish population is diagnosed with a mental disorder. Every fifth Finn suffers from a mental disorder. Depression is the most common reason for disability pension among people under 55 years old (Suomen Mielenterveysseura 2007; Duodecim 2007). Sociologist Lotta Hautamäki has studied Finnish self-help books written for people suffering from depression, and she writes that depression has been defined as a severe threat to public health. That is the most common aspect in the definitions of the depression in the guidebooks, she notes. Everyone is a potential patient, and everyone is at risk of becoming depressed. When guidebooks discuss this risk, they use a cautionary tone and emphasize the individual's own responsibility for being aware

of the risk, recognizing the symptoms, seeking help and helping her/himself (Hautamäki 2006, 214-215).

Duodecim, a scientific society involving nearly 90% of Finnish doctors and medical students, brings to the discussion the idea of controlled emotions. According to their “health library” website, which is directed to the general public, the dividing line between mental health and illness is sliding. Different kinds of disorders are categorized based on their symptoms. Emotional disorders, cognitive disorders and behavioral disorders are common to psychiatric disorders. What lies behind these disorders are usually unbearable emotional states of fear, anxiety, sorrow or anger. When a person learns to control the unbearable emotions, her/his disorder is relieved or heals (Duodecim 2007).

On the other hand, Duodecim reminds us that mental illnesses are not voluntary, and they require support and treatment. They are as much illnesses as are physical illnesses. Duodecim also notes that the use of the word “illness” has been criticized. For example, the above-mentioned Finnish Association of Mental Health criticizes the use of the word “illness,” suggesting that instead of “illness” we should be talking about a person’s different relationship to her/his environment, a relationship that is not socially accepted. Furthermore, the Association points out that the word “disorder” is a more accepted word, and when using the term, the cause of the “disorder” is usually located outside the individual and it is easier to fix, whereas “illness” is seen as something

dangerous, deviant and possibly caused by the individual her/himself (Suomen Mielenterveysseura www site 2007; Duodecim www site 2007).

That leads us to the question of language. According to linguist Ulla-Helena Kapiala, who has studied the language of psychiatry, psychiatrists and patients employ the same vocabulary, but the meanings of the words differ. A large part of the vocabulary that psychiatry employs is based on vernacular language. On the one hand, this gives the impression of familiarity, but on the other hand, it causes misinterpretations and uncertainty. To laypeople, it is difficult, nearly impossible, to understand these disorders as medical concepts. A mental disorder, for example, depression, can be seen as a diagnosed, statistical illness in medical discourses, whereas a patient may see it as a problematic life situation, and eventually even give positive meanings to it. The medical theories, institutional knowledge, are not discussed outside the discipline, and if they are, they prove to be contradictory and difficult to understand. This can be resolved when the psychiatrist understands the empirical/experiential expertise, and the layperson accepts the professional expertise (Kapiala 2004).

So far we have seen that institutional knowledge requires people to understand the controlled and uncontrolled nature of mental health and the individual responsibility to recognize the symptoms and seek help. People telling about their supernatural experiences seem to recognize the same discourse that institutional knowledge stresses: Everyone is at a risk of having a mental disorder, and a disorder is what it says – a DISorder, deviant, abnormal and not wanted. These narrators have learned that having a

mental disorder is an individual, social and economical (on both the individual and state level) problem. Thus, they have to narratively situate themselves in the category of normal: a healthy, clear headed person. I use here the term of communicability, the productive capacity of communication. According to Charles L. Briggs,

“Communicability is a central dimension of self-regulation in that individuals structure their schemes of self-surveillance and self-control by interpellating themselves as producers, disseminators, or receivers of particular types of discourse – or as not being “in the loop,” and furthermore, “We thus need to ponder not just the content of messages but how the ideological construction of their production, circulation, and reception shapes identities and social “groups” and orders them hierarchically” (Briggs 2005: 274-275).

In this case, at least three groups are produced and ordered hierarchically: Institutional experts, healthy folk, and folk with disorders.

CHAPTER 6: EMOTIONS IN THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF

Supernatural experiences cause a wide range of emotional reactions in the narratives. Some people are scared to death, others calm and comforted and some express excitement and joy. In this chapter I argue that emotions in the supernatural narratives work as normalizing strategy.

I consider Keith Oatley's definition of emotion useful for my purposes: "An emotion is a psychological state or process that functions in the management of goals. It is typically elicited by evaluating an event as relevant to a goal; it is positive when the goal is advanced, negative when the goal is impeded" (Oatley 1999: 273). One can distinguish emotional states based on their duration: a conscious emotion lasts minutes or hours, and a mood has similar bases to an emotion but lasts longer. When they last even longer, they can be seen as dispositions and personality traits, which last for years or even a lifetime. (Oatley 1999: 273-275.) Both shorter and longer emotions are signals to ourselves and others. They steer people towards things they evaluate as worthwhile in their projects and away from what would be deleterious. They are also signals to others since even though people can not notice inner feelings of each others, they notice the emotions. (Oatley 2004: 16.)

Emotions, their origins and their expressions can be approached from several directions, for example biological, neurophysiological, philosophical and cognitive. I

consider the social-constructionist approach most suitable for my research. According to this approach, culture determines what emotions can be expressed and what kinds of expressions are acceptable. In addition, culture influences which situations lead to particular emotions. The social-constructionist approach to emotions does not reject the idea that there is at least some innate component in emotions, but it emphasizes that each culture has its own evaluations that call forth emotions and its own emotions that match its social practices. (Johnson-Laird and Oatley 2000: 467-472.)

DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND EMOTIONS

When discussing the narrative construction of emotions, I draw on ideas from the field of discursive psychology, which deals with how people talk about emotions, how they use emotion categories when talking about things, and how emotional discourse performs social actions.

Emotion Discourse

From this perspective, emotions should not be thought of merely as physiological reactions to stimuli nor abstract entities, but as actual moments of emotional feelings and displays in a definite cultural setting. Each vocabulary expresses a local taxonomy and theory of emotions, an emotionology, that is, the way people identify, classify and recognize emotions. Emotion displays and feelings are discursive acts, based on bodily reactions but meanings defined by their role in the discursive interactions of members of

particular culture. (Harré and Gillett 1994: 148, 160-161.) Thus, according to Derek Edwards, “Emotion discourse is an integral feature of talk about events, mental states, mind and body, personal dispositions, and social relations” (Edwards 1997: 170). Discursive psychology is broadly compatible with social constructionist work. No clear distinction is made between emotion ‘discourse’ and emotions ‘themselves’. What emotions are is relative to what emotions are taken to be, how they are conceptualized, talked about, and interpreted. Emotions ‘themselves’ are socially and historically defined. (Edwards 1997: 179-180.) Thus, translation emotion discourse, emotion words, presents challenges.

Discourse of emotions refers to the use of verbal formulae for actions, feelings and motives, with regard to interpersonal judgments and attitudes, located within local moral orders of authority and responsibility. Edwards notes that a key feature of emotion discourse is its deployment inside narrative and rhetoric. Emotion terms emerge not only as unique descriptions of certain acts or reactions, but as parts of interrelated sets of terms that implicate each other in narrative sequences and rhetorical contrasts. Both narrative sequences and rhetorical contrasts are ways of talking about how discourse performs social actions at the moment of its production. These social actions include: constructing the sense of events, orienting to normative and moral orders, to responsibility and blame, and social evaluation. Emotion categories should not be considered merely as individual feelings or expressions. Neither is their discursive deployment reducible to a kind of detached, cognitive sense-making. Edwards concludes that emotion categories are

discursive phenomena and need to be studied as such, as part of how talk performs social actions. (Edwards 1997, 187.)

In order to suggest how emotion discourse works in stories, Edwards presents a set of rhetorical positions and contrasts that can structure narrative discourse. For example, emotions can be seen irrational versus rational; cognitively grounded and/or cognitively consequential; event-driven versus dispositional; passive reaction (unaccountable feelings) or controllable actions (what you accountably do); internal states (private feelings) versus external behaviour (expressions); spontaneous versus externally caused; honest versus faked and natural versus moral emotions. (Edwards 1997, 193-194.)

Emotions and Construction of Whole Mind

I extend Edwards' work by synthesizing his account with a narratologist Alan Palmer's research on the importance of the emotions in the construction of fictional minds. I am referring to his book *Fictional Minds* (2004). Palmer emphasizes the need to examine how fictional minds work within the contexts of the storyworlds to which they belong. For Palmer, narrative fiction means the presentation of fictional mental functioning. Although Palmer focuses on the fictional mind, he uses real-mind discourses to investigate fictional minds. Palmer argues the importance of the emotions in any analysis of the whole of the fictional mind. He states that a lot of research has been done within narrative theory of fictional consciousness, but very little specifically on the emotions. He

argues that emotion is one of the more obvious ways in which our thoughts can become public. In general, Palmer examines how the fictional minds of characters are constructed by the narrator and the reader. That construction is essential, because narrative is the description of fictional mental functioning. (Palmer 2004: 12-26, 115.) He writes, “Readers create a continuing consciousness out of the isolated passages of text that relate to a particular character. In this way, we assemble what I call an embedded narrative: the whole of a character’s various perceptual and conceptual viewpoints, ideological worldviews, and plans for the future considered as an individual narrative that is embedded in the whole fictional text” (Palmer 2004: 4-8, 15).

For Palmer, the whole mind includes emotions, as well as other functional aspects. “Emotions, cognitions, goals, action, context and so on, they all flow into one another until, the distinctions are difficult to maintain,” Palmer states (Palmer 2004: 117). The whole mind is a social mind too, since thoughts take place in a social context of action and interaction with other. The thoughts have purposive nature: They have motives, intentions, and they result in behavior and action. Palmer sees the thought report as the most suitable mode of presenting thoughts of the fictive characters because most characters’ thoughts take place in a social context of action and interaction with other. (Palmer 2004: 14-16, 77.) Thought report is the mode that Dorrit Cohn calls psycho narration in 3rd person narration and self-narration in 1st person narration. Palmer argues that thought report is especially suitable for presenting emotions, and he shows that analyzing thought report enables us to see that feelings are visible and public; emotions

are inextricably linked with cognition; presentation of emotion plays a vital part in the creation of character and emotion passages have important teleological value. (Palmer 2004: 81, 113.)

EMOTIONS AS RATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As I argued in the chapter 5, supernatural experiences and experiencers are stigmatized, and narrators recognize that. In Western discourses, emotions too have been considered 1) irrational, 2) unintentional and uncontrollable, 3) dangerous, 4) physical, 5) natural, 6) subjective, 7) female, and 8) value-laden. (Lutz 1988; White 1993: 31.) When constructing a narrative about one set of devalued experiences (the supernatural), why mention another devalued category (the emotions)? Perhaps because I asked them? Still, would not it be better to brush aside the irrational, the emotion descriptions? Here Edwards reminds us that “emotions are not just irrational, they are an integral part of rational accountability” (Edwards 1997: 194). Emotion descriptions can provide a contrast to rational thought but also a rationally sensible story of coherent and understandable reactions (Edwards 1997: 171). I agree with Edwards, and I use the following narrative excerpts to show how emotions are used to construct a coherent self in the supernatural narratives. I point out the differences between and/or similarities in the voices of Experiencing I and Narrating I to illustrate what emotions narrator attaches to the experience and what to the interpretation. Narrators recognize what are the appropriate emotional reactions that any normal person would have and show them.

Narrative Excerpt 1

“I met a supernatural being in X (in the late 1990’s). I had just divorced my husband, who is the father of my children. I was 25 years old then. The divorce was amicable and “easy” as such, but my parents’ reactions caused me trouble and sorrow. One night, when my children were visiting their father, I went to bed alone. I was somehow restless and couldn’t fall asleep right away. After I had fallen asleep, I woke up around 2 a.m. because somebody was watching me next to my bed. I knew he was there, even though I couldn’t see him. I turned over to see what was going on. I opened my eyes, looked up, and saw the most beautiful male being standing next to my bed. He had a long, amber hair, and he wore only a waistcloth. His skin was beautiful and brown, and he had a clean-cut beard. When I realized what I was looking at, my pulse rose and I got little scared. Still, I wanted to look at and listen to this vision, and I had courage to keep my eyes open. He was transparent, and I could see the light switch behind him. He looked at me with the most loving eyes that have ever looked at me. He smiled at me in a restful way, as if he tried to tell me that everything will be okay, and I don’t have to worry about anything. After this, I looked at him for another moment and felt like smiling. I waived at him as if I were asking him to leave. As I watched him, I saw him slowly vanish. My heart hammered awhile; then, I turned over, smiled, and fell asleep. I have never been as spirited and happy as I was the following morning. I think he was my guardian angel. My grandmother had died a couple of years earlier, and there were times I had wished so much that she were here to support me. That night, my grandmother wanted to comfort me, and thus she sent me my angel. My grandmother believed in angels, and her last words were: “Stay always as an angel.” This memory confirms my experience of her presence. I remember seeing angels as a child, especially when I had rough times. I still believe in angels, but I haven’t seen them since then. Nevertheless, I am ready to meet them. (...) Encountering the angel is one of the greatest experiences of my life. Thinking about the encounter makes me smile, and I feel special and blessed. I believe that if I ever

need help from the next world, I will certainly get it somehow..." (Woman, born in the 1970's.)

The Narrating I and the Experiencing I have equally strong voices, and both voices talk about emotions and reactions. The Experiencing I constructs the connections between cognition (*when I realized*), physical reactions (*my pulse rose*) and psychological states (*I got little scared*). Furthermore, the will (*I wanted*) to continue the experience leads to courage. The Experiencing I stresses the physical reactions during the event: "*I felt like smiling, my heart hammered, I smiled.*" But she also presents her psychological states: "*I have never been as spirited and happy as I was the following morning.*" Even thinking of the encounter makes her smile. The Narrating I connects the cognition and emotion as well: "*Thinking about the encounter makes me smile and feel special and blessed.*" In the beginning of the letter she discusses her parents' reactions to her divorce, writing "*my parents' reactions caused me trouble and sorrow.*" This is a good example of how emotions take place in a social context and through interaction with others.

Narrative Excerpt 2

"My father died in July X (the early 1950's) in X (place). He was still unburied, and I was sitting in his chair. (He had had his own chair at the table.) My mother, my brother and his girlfriend started to laugh, and they had fun. It didn't make me laugh. I thought how dare they laugh when father was at the mortuary. While I was having that thought, we heard a loud noise around the front door. We went to see what was happening, and saw

that the heavy front door had been lifted off its hinges. The laugh ended, indeed. My brother said that if it had happened during the night, he would have had a heart attack. It was a beautiful July evening, not windy at all. Second case: My mother died in X (the early 1970's) in X (place). I had a really bad argument with my eldest brother and his family on the day of the funeral. I arrived home, still wearing the funeral dress, and thought about how sad it had been. Suddenly, there was like a whirlwind around me, and something very cold went inside me. I felt that something is trying to contact me, but I am afraid and have no courage. I don't want to see or experience these supernatural things." (Woman, born in the 1930's.)

This example illustrates the challenges of "reading" emotions in narratives. I have taken the liberty to interpret the first part of the excerpt expressing emotions, even though she does not directly express how she feels/felt. The Experiencing I dominates the narration. Her first account deals with the death of her father, and she describes being irritated by her family, who laughs and has fun though her father has just died: "*I thought how they dare to laugh when the father is at the mortuary.*" Her reaction is constructed as a rational and honest social judgment. The narrator then reveals that they suddenly heard a loud noise and noticed that the door was lifted off its hinges. "*The laugh ended, indeed,*" she writes. Satisfaction? Maybe. In the second account, she expresses sadness, a normal emotion related to the funeral of a family member. The change of voice from past tense to present tense is interesting: "*I felt that something is trying to contact me, but I am afraid and have no courage. I don't want to see nor experience these supernatural things.*" The latter sentence particularly puzzles me: Does it refer to the experiencing or

narrating self or both? Which one is afraid? Which ever it is, the reaction is understandable.

Narrative Excerpt 3

“I have met Jesus. Or maybe I should say that I have had a religious experience of meeting a person who was a lot like Jesus. When I was abroad in X X (place, the late 1990’s), I met somebody in a bar. He was a human being for sure, but through him, I felt something supernatural (trance), and thus I can say, he was something supernatural to me at least. I was X (in her early 20’s) years old then. We were in a bar, and I started to talk to a man who sat next to me. We discussed, for example, poetry and Kalevala, which he knew about. My friends met him too. He was a really charismatic young man and handsome in a transcendental way. I felt in perfect harmony with him. Maybe it was a transcendental and even supernatural experience of love, a trance, a feeling of being a child again. He was calm, and he didn’t say anything disturbing or pointless. (...) I met him four times when I lived in X (place). We took long walks and went to a rock concert. (...) The message I got from this encounter was that I am important. I had been a fearful and emotionally “beaten” person. My inner change began after this experience, and it is still going on. (...) On the other hand, this experience gave me strength, and allowed me to at least have something I could smile at. I guess there aren’t too many people who have gone to a ZZ-Top concert with “Jesus.” Now that I think about that encounter, it feels a bit funny, but on the other hand, the experience is still sacred to me. I would say that maybe I hope the man really was all that I thought he was. Maybe I hope that I won’t meet him anymore, in this life at least, in order to keep my puzzle together. Now, the idea of the puzzle and keeping it together makes me think that I transformed this experience into something “perfect and wonderful” that would compensate for my previous painful experiences. I created a “perfect parent” to support me, and to give me inner strength. I

have found examples of similar experiences of encountering Jesus in the Bible and in literature, for example, in the poems of Eino Leino and some other poets (maybe it was Ihalempi, I don't remember). In those examples, a woman who is considered and who considers herself unimportant is called, and she experiences a transformation. It broadened my mind and inspired me. Even if I met this man again someday, and saw he was a normal guy, I would still have something that I wasn't looking for: this experience and this story of mine." (Woman, born in the 1970's.)

Here we are introduced to a wise and discursive Narrating I, who almost constantly analyzes what the experience meant to the Experiencing I, and what it means to the Narrating I. She moves along a wide temporal scale, referring to her painful past, her trip abroad, her returning to Finland and her current state. The Experiencing I states that when meeting the man, she *"felt perfect harmony with him," "transcendental and even a supernatural experience of love, a trance, a feeling of being a child again."* The Narrating I continues to feel a *"new kind of harmony"* and *"spiritual independence."* She points out that the experience feels a *"bit funny"* now, soon after writing *"I guess there aren't too many people who have gone to a ZZ-Top concert with "Jesus"."* This is not a culturally approved way of picturing Jesus, so labeling the whole encounter irrational may save the narrator from the harsh critique. Thus, though emotions are labeled irrational, they can be seen as an integral part of rational accountability. The Narrating I constructs difficulties as well: She had *"difficulties with dealing with the experience"* and felt *"depressed."* Soon she returns to evaluate the positive effects and the psychological meaning of the experience. The supernatural event is constructed as a starting point for

emotional events, which lead to moods and finally changes in personality, changes that the Narrating I states are still occurring.

To conclude, the fact that the narrators chose to share their supernatural experiences with a researcher can be viewed as a decision to enter the public realm and the public debate on the reality of supernatural experiences. Both the emotions felt during the event and afterwards are portrayed as coherent and understandable reactions to supernatural experiences. The construction of emotions becomes the proof they offer up to the debate. For it is one thing to argue against the reality of a supernatural vision, but it is quite another to contest someone's emotional reactions to such an experience.

CONCLUSION

The starting point of this study was the contradiction that even though supernatural experiences are not normal in modern Finland, people still tell about them. I received 440 personal narratives about supernatural encounters: meetings between human beings and beings such as guardian spirits, ghosts, and angels. Many people told about several experiences. Furthermore, many wrote about their supernatural experiences that did not include beings. The large number of replies shows that there is a strong interest in telling and sharing personal supernatural experiences. It was surprising and exciting to notice that even though the supernatural is stigmatized and many narrators worry about their reputation, they were willing to participate in my research. Some were looking for people with similar experiences, others were asking for explanations. In my project I learned that the supernatural narratives have dual function. They combat the stigma but they also assert a positive, special status. Experiencing something out of the ordinary gives authority to talk about that “other world”. It might be a scary world, and a dangerous, stigmatized world, but for the narrator, it is a world where most of the people do not have an access. It sets them apart from the ordinary people.

In the Introduction I discussed the theoretical, methodological and analytical points of departure. Now I wish to draw together the theoretical, methodological and

analytical benefits my work offers to the field of folklore studies. To start with the theoretical benefits, in brief, I learned that supernatural experience is a rupture in ordinary world, and this rupture can be either positive or negative. Personal narrative fixes that rupture and/or widens the boundaries of the modern ordinary world. And how does a narrative fix the rupture? The selection of narrative means that the narrators employ is wide: They use comparisons, direct and embedded evaluations, overlays and detailed orientations; they call to witness, address the reader, use internal dialects to balance between the traditions of believe and disbelief; their narrative voices fluctuate between close and distant; and finally, they use the X/Y format when explaining they were doing something mundane when something weird happened.

In this study I argued that narrators construct coherent self using narrative. Based on the analysis in chapter 4, the narrators construct rational, yet emotional; and social, yet independent selves. They present themselves as valuing knowledge, yet understanding it has limits. They show they are able to differentiate between the ordinary and the supernatural realms, and between mundane and miraculous. Then, how do narrators attempt to normalize the supernatural? Answer to this question is twofold: First, narrators negotiate and/or deny the stigmas related to the supernatural, and second, they express emotions. Thus, this question relates to the remaining two questions I presented in the Introduction. Narrators know that supernatural experiences may be explained as hallucinations, illusions or dreams resulting from intoxication or mental disorders. They either deny these issues or explain they do not explain the supernatural event. Second, the

narrators offer an entry to their inner realm through emotion discourse. They describe a wide range of emotions, from fear to peace and joy. In brief, narrators tell us they are normal human beings with human reactions and feelings.

My work shows that theme writing as a method works well in a sensitive topic such as mine and it produces texts that have different forms and functions. Understanding that diversity of narratives calls for genre analysis. In this project I came to a conclusion that memorate, though it is suitable, is not the best possible term to call the narratives I have. If researcher's interpretative focus of these stories was fixed on the supernatural, we would have missed other issues, such as questions of authority, normalcy, and stigmatization. Instead of calling the narratives memorates, I categorized them reports, experience stories and life-stories. Especially life-stories made me to see the turn to therapeutic interpretations instead of warnings and instructions. Writing and reviewing your life to a stranger can be very therapeutic.

This work was analytically both challenging and rewarding. I hope managed to show the value and limits of descriptive statistics. Coding the data took a long time but the enlightenment that I felt when doing the descriptive analysis made me forget the difficulties. I learned that some intuitive presuppositions I had were correct, such as the big number of angel experiences, and some surprisingly not. For example, I did not expect people to tell supernatural experiences that did not include beings but they did. In fact, it was the most common theme in secondary and tertiary stories. Another benefit of the quantitative approach is that once the coding is done the data is ready for further

research. Narrative analysis of the subset of nine narratives was the part that I enjoyed most. This is also the part where the first-hand understanding of Finnish culture came to play. I probably see the meanings of sauna, lake and summer cottage differently than non-Finnish people. On the one hand, reading the narratives gives a dark picture of Finns: so many replies discussed depression, concerns of alcohol consumption, suicides, and unemployment. On the other hand, we see a group of well-educated, analytical and literally talented people who are not afraid of telling their personal experiences to a researcher. I enjoyed learning about each and every person that I met in a narrative and I hope that the reader has enjoyed this journey to Finnish supernatural narratives as well.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF INQUIRY SOURCES

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Aamulehti	6	1.4	1.9
	Aluesanomat	1	.2	.3
	Anna	17	3.9	5.3
	Etela-Saimaa	6	1.4	1.9
	Henkimaailma	2	.5	.6
	Hameenlinnan kaupunkiutiset	6	1.4	1.9
	Ilkka	9	2.0	2.8
	Iltalehti	7	1.6	2.2
	Kaleva	2	.5	.6
	Karjalainen	7	1.6	2.2
	Keskisuomalainen	13	3.0	4.0
	Kirkko ja Kaupunki	11	2.5	3.4
	Kirkko ja Me	8	1.8	2.5
	Kotimaa	25	5.7	7.8
	Kouvolan Sanomat	6	1.4	1.9
	Kymen Sanomat	6	1.4	1.9
	Lounais-Lappi	2	.5	.6
	Maaseudun Tulevaisuus	2	.5	.6
	Matkaan	3	.7	.9
	Mina Olen	2	.5	.6
	Nykyposti	20	4.5	6.2

Pohjolan Sanomat	1	.2	.3
Turkulainen	29	6.6	9.0
Turun Sanomat	2	.5	.6
Vihrea Lanka	1	.2	.3
Ultra	3	.7	.9
Yle X	1	.2	.3
Tamperelainen	22	5.0	6.8
Lapin Kansa	8	1.8	2.5
Savon Sanomat	9	2.0	2.8
Uusi Rovaniemi	3	.7	.9
Vantaan Seutu	4	.9	1.2
Karjalan Heili	2	.5	.6
Lalli	1	.2	.3
Viikko-Savo	1	.2	.3
Seutu Sanomat	1	.2	.3
Alueviesti	5	1.1	1.6
Itäväylä	7	1.6	2.2
Vapaa Sana	1	.2	.3
Uusi Vaasalainen	1	.2	.3
Folklore Archives inquiry	59	13.4	18.3
Total	322	73.2	100.0
Missing System	118	26.8	
Total	440	100.0	