

PAPER SUBMISSION:
**‘THIS OTHER SIDE OF REALITY’: EPILEPSY &
SPIRITUALITY**

Louise N. Spiers, Chris A. Roe, & Melinda Spencer
University of Northampton, Northampton, UK

Abstract

This paper discusses a study of anomalous experiences of individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy. Participant experiences include descriptions of spiritual entities, energy fields and near death and out of body experiences alike those described by non-epileptic populations. Participants also discuss psychic abilities developed as a result of their epilepsy. Neuropsychiatric literature pathologises these experiences and regards them as symptomatic of delusion and psychosis. The medical model assumes that individuals will find these exceptional experiences distressing, and if they do not, then this is also deemed to be a contributory factor of epilepsy-related psychosis, requiring medication. However, the likeness of the spiritual experiences in this qualitative study to other exceptional experiences suggests that, in fact, not all are merely undesirable symptoms of the condition. Most participants stated that they would rather keep their epilepsy and the perceived gifts the psychic and mystical experiences they afford, than lose their epilepsy and the spiritual experiences that come from it. This would suggest that the participants do not view their condition as an affliction, but rather a naturally occurring doorway to altered states of consciousness that some non-epileptic individuals go to great lengths to experience.

[louiseking2@northampton.ac.uk]