



Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE)



Out-of-body experiences are defined as when the “center of awareness appears to the experient to occupy temporarily a position which is spatially remote from his or her body” (Irwin, & Watt, 2007, p 173.). This is sometimes referred to as an *autoscopic* experience.

OBE Phenomenological Characteristics

1. Sensations at Onset and Termination. Four types of general sensations are reported in OBEs:

- a. noises such as buzzing, roaring, clicking, or cracking noises when leaving the body
- b. vibrations may be experienced from vibrations to shaking
- c. lack of bodily sensation or lack of bodily control, with complete rigidity
- d. momentary blackout

About 40% of people report sensations when they return and exit their body. Some report that extreme emotion or panic will short out the OBE in some cases.

2. Visual Content

1. Seeing your own body, sometimes with a mirror reversal effect. Reports state that experience is visually realistic in 80% of samples, but wide-angle vision, seeing through objects, and seeing in the dark rarely, but occasionally occur.
2. Passage through a dark tunnel is reported with approximately 25% of cases, most often when OBEs are associated with a life-threatening context (see Near Death Experiences)

3. Physical Control

1. Physical control of the OBE is noted in about half of participants.
2. Some participants can travel. Adepts of this skill note directing attention takes you elsewhere.
3. Participants stated that objects could be manipulated and affected. However, females report better success than males with this technique.

General Characteristics and Terminology in OBEs

A lot of non-scientific work in the areas of occultism has been written on OBEs, often talked about as an astral projection or the astral body. Parapsychologists refer to the astral body as a Parasomatic form. Some other interesting facts and conditions about OBEs include:

1. Not everyone reports being in their current body, or even in their body. Some participants in studies report being in a sphere of energy or in a younger version of themselves.



Introduction to Parapsychology

2. About 20% of participants report connection with Para somatic body to the actual body with a cord. In occult literature, this is referred to as the astral cord. It is believed that the person will die if the astral cord is severed by paranormal means.
3. Generally, an OBE event is focused on the absorption (intense concentration) of the participant on the experience. Outside distraction will frequently disrupt the experience.
4. OBEs have been reported in both calm and emotional circumstances and conditions. However, emotional states of calm appear much more common for the experience. Research by Irwin reports that either extreme states of calm or excitement makes the OBE experience more likely. However, 90% of OBEs occur when resting with minimal stimulus.
5. Multiple training programs are available to generate OBEs. Training programs generally involve relaxation, meditation, visual imagery, absorption (focus) training, and developing belief or expectation in the event.
6. OBEs are estimated in approximately 8 to 15% of the population. The most frequent demographic for OBEs are university students. It is also common to have additional OBE experiences after the first one. Females have more success with OBEs than males.
7. There is no relationship between religious practice (religiosity) and OBE experiences.
8. Approximately 60% of the OBE population have their first OBE without previous knowledge or experience of OBEs.

Psychological Correlates of OBEs

Through various research over the years, similar to ESP and PSI studies, certain traits have been shown to be significantly correlated with OBE experience. These include:

1. Imaginative nature
2. Bohemian or radical attitudes
3. Magical or mystical thinking that is not associated with mental illness.
4. Personality, which is generally not predictive of an OBE
5. Training in an OBE method, which is a significant predictor of OBE experience
6. Visual imagery skills
7. Lucid dreaming (the ability to control dream content)
8. Absorption (a dissociation trait) along with meditation practice and hypnotic suggestibility
9. Fantasy proneness
10. Dissociation and somatoform dissociation (the ability to distance oneself from bodily sensations)
11. Need for introspection, and higher degrees of attention to mental processes

OBEs and Neuroscience



Neurological explanations for OBEs include demonstrated activity in the right angular gyrus (the temporal lobe). Other work by famed neuroscientist Michael Persinger has conducted multiple studies on the “sensed presence”. For 20 or more years, Persinger has used a helmet to subject participants to low-intensity magnetic waves over the temporal lobes. His research has consistently shown a variety of somatic sensations, including sensing a presence in a room, and in some cases, the reporting of seeing visual apparitions or entities. His



technique has generally produced some form of somatic effect in 80% of participants. Persinger's research is not a direct explanation for an OBE, but is highly suggestive that parts of the brain can, under the right circumstances, produce somatic effects that are relatable to the OBE experience. Also, see Watt's example of perceptual illusion for further evidence of the brain's ability to generate sensations and perceptions (St. Pierre & Persinger, 2006). On a final note, it is worth mentioning that Persinger's research has come under some criticism, and his findings are disputed.

General Content From Irwin and Watt (2007).