THE OCCURRENCE AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF OUT-OF-BODY AND NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Craig Murray
Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YT, United Kingdom

David Wilde
University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, United Kingdom

Grant nº 85/06

Objectives: To elicit in-depth phenomenological detail regarding the lived experience of having either an OBE arising under a variety of circumstances or an NDE; To expand upon current psychological theories of OBEs/NDEs;

Methods: Fifteen participants took part in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The sample comprised of experients with a variety of OBEs (sleep-related (n=3), whilst feeling physically/psychologically threatened (n=3), meditatively achieved (n=3), and whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol (n=3)) and those who had an NDE (n=3). Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Results: Findings from three of the above groups of interviews are presented:
Sleep related OBEs: Participants’ OBEs were found to play an adaptive role in response to difficult life events. The process of integration was helped or hindered by the varying reactions from others to the disclosure of the OBE.
Meditative OBEs: Analysis highlighted the potential for the OBE to function as an adaptive psychological response related to participants’ efforts to discharge existing need-related conflicts. Also emergent was the transactive nature of the out-of-body environments themselves, which were seen as meaningful places that facilitated participants’ embodied, goal-oriented behaviours.
NDEs: Rather than being an overall influence on personal and spiritual growth, participants chose elements of their NDE which were most personally meaningful for them to take into their later lives. Also evident were the challenges the NDE, or elements therein, have on the individual’s sense of self and how they maintain and develop that self in the years succeeding the event.

Conclusions: The idiographic nature of this work highlighted the personal, social and environmental mediating factors that influenced how the OBE/NDE was managed and integrated. In addition, concomitant physical and psychological events can also intertwine in vastly complex ways, which may aid or hinder the individual’s resolution of the underlying meaning of the event.

Publications:


**Keywords:** Out-of-Body Experience, Near-Death Experience, Qualitative Methods, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis