

Phenomenological Aspects of Out-of-Body Experiences: A Report of Three Studies¹

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ABSTRACT: A report of three phenomenology studies of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) is presented. Sheets with an OBE question were posted and circulated among classes held at John F. Kennedy University. Those who signed the sheet were mailed an OBE questionnaire asking for details of the experience, demographic aspects, and diverse other questions.

Usable questionnaires were obtained from 61 students. The first study explored frequency of general OBE phenomenology characteristics, finding several similarities with previous studies. The second study explored possible phenomenological differences between natural and enforced OBEs following Crookall's observations. It was hypothesized that natural OBEs would have a higher frequency of reports of specific characteristics than would enforced OBEs, and that mental, emotional, and perceptual aspects would be more positive in natural than in enforced OBEs. However, no significant differences were found.

A third study with a subsample of the previous studies ($N = 23$) explored possible differences in visual imagery vividness in relation to specific phenomenological reports, but no significant differences were found.

One of the most interesting aspects of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) is the variety of phenomenological characteristics which they present. Various aspects such as the sensation of getting out

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of and returning to the body, passing through a dark tunnel, finding oneself in an apparitional body or in no body at all, and travelling to distant places or dimensions have stimulated discussions on the nature of the OBE (e.g., Blackmore, 1982a; Crookall, 1964; Rogo, 1982). Detailed information on phenomenological OBE characteristics can be found in several case collections and reviews of published cases (e.g., Crookall, 1961, 1964; Hart, 1954; Muldoon and Carrington, 1951), as well as in some surveys (e.g., Green, 1968; Osiris, 1979). Perhaps the recent survey work on near-death experiences should be mentioned (e.g., Greyson and Stevenson, 1980; Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982), though it should be considered that not all persons having a near-death experience have OBEs. One of the studies reported here (Study 1) was concerned with descriptive information of OBE phenomenology.

While several surveys have tried to study the relation of the OBE to demographic variables (Kohr, 1980; Palmer, 1979), altered states of consciousness and related practices and experiences (Blackmore, 1982b, 1982c; Kohr, 1980; Myers, Austrin, Grisso, and Nickeson, 1983; Palmer, 1979; Wiedman and Haraldsson, 1980), and other psychological aspects such as psychopathology-related variables (Blackmore and Harris, 1983; Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones, 1982), needs (Irwin, 1981b), and diverse aspects of imaginal and attentional capacities (Blackmore, 1982c; Irwin, 1980; Myers et al., 1983), little has been done to correlate phenomenological aspects of the OBE with other conditions or variables. This was one of the main purposes of two of the studies here reported.

Qualitative and somewhat unsystematic attempts to show phenomenological differences in OBEs in relation to other variables have been presented by Crookall, who claims there are differences in comparisons of natural vs. enforced (to be defined later) OBEs (Crookall, 1961, 1964), and in the OBEs of psychics and mediums vs. the OBEs of nonpsychic or nonmediumistic persons (Crookall, 1965). Gabbard, Twemlow, and Jones (1981) have explored differences in OBE phenomenology of experiences occurring in near-death vs. non-near-death conditions, but practically nothing more has been done employing a phenomenological approach to OBEs.

This paper presents OBE phenomenology studies with a small sample of college students. An initial study was designed to: (1) obtain information on general OBE phenomenology, (2) compare phenomenological characteristics of natural vs. enforced OBEs, following Crookall (1961, 1964), and (3) study claims of ESP during OBEs in relation to belief in ESP and other variables (a report of the rationale and planned analyses of this last aspect will be published elsewhere, Alvarado, in press). A later study explored pos-

sible differences in visual imagery vividness between different OBE reports (e.g., presence and absence of the particular characteristic, different responses to the same variable). For convenience the general phenomenology, natural vs. enforced, and imagery studies will be referred to in this paper as Studies I, II, and III, respectively. Reviews of the literature and more detailed discussions of the purposes and hypotheses of Studies I and II will be presented under a single section, since both followed the same method and used the same questionnaire. Study III, done with a subsample of the first two studies but with a different method and an additional questionnaire, will be reported in a separate section.

STUDIES I AND II: GENERAL OBE PHENOMENOLOGY AND NATURAL VS. ENFORCED COMPARISONS

STUDY I: GENERAL OBE PHENOMENOLOGY

OBE case collections and reviews present data on OBE phenomenology. Bozzano (1911) gives particular attention to ESP and apparitional phenomena, while Rogo (1976) emphasizes different types of OB self-perception. Muldoon and Carrington (1951) mention several common characteristics in their OBE reports, among which were (1) sensations of floating and soaring, (2) seeing the physical body, (3) seeing a cord linking OB and physical body, and (4) repercussion (or shock) to the physical body when returning to it. Other lists of OBE characteristics have been presented by Crookall (1964) and Hart (1954; Hart and collaborators, 1956).

More recent survey data complement the older analyses (most of which used more or less the same cases drawn from Spiritualistic and psychic research publications) and are more representative of OBE characteristics since new cases from different populations are analyzed (some of them randomly selected), together with information of incidence and demographic aspects of the experiences (Green, 1968; Osis, 1979; Palmer, 1975, 1979; Poynton, 1975; Twemlow et al., 1982; Wiedman and Haraldsson, 1980).

The purpose of this study was to collect additional information on OBE phenomenological aspects. However, it must be considered that some of the questions used here were not designed to obtain general OBE information, but to test specific hypotheses to be reported in Study II of this paper. Nonetheless, the general OBE study was planned from the beginning and so a few questions not used in Study II were included in the questionnaire to provide a more global perspective of OBE characteristics in the present sample.

STUDY II: NATURAL VS. ENFORCED OBE COMPARISONS

Crookall (1961, 1964) considers that phenomenological OBE characteristics depend, among other factors, on the circumstances under which the OBE occurs. They can occur under natural conditions such as exhaustion, illness, near-death states, sleep, hypnagogic and hypnopompic states, or while lying down, relaxing, praying or meditating, or during other normal activities. They can also occur under enforced conditions, such as those induced by drugs, suffocation, physical or emotional shock, hypnosis, or voluntary induction of the experience. For Crookall, "natural" means conditions in which the OBE presumably happens gradually and slowly, while "enforced" means the opposite: The OBE happens suddenly and abruptly. In general, Crookall claims that (1) persons reporting natural OBEs experience a higher frequency of phenomenological qualities than persons reporting enforced OBEs (e.g., going OB through the head, blackout of consciousness while going out of and returning to the body, seeing deceased persons during the OBE), and that (2) in natural OBEs the perceptual, mental, and emotional aspects of the experience are qualitatively better than those during enforced OBEs.

Although Crookall presents frequency data to support his claims (Crookall, 1964, pp. 134-136, 146), he did not use statistical tests to see if the alleged differences were significant. Hart (1967) claimed to have found highly statistically significant differences in Crookall's data, but as discussed elsewhere (Alvarado, 1981), he did not test for the same specific phenomenological differences mentioned by Crookall since he combined different OBE characteristics in his analyses without giving explanations or criteria for such post hoc groups of the original data.

My analyses of Crookall's data, with one exception, were not significant (Alvarado, 1981).³ However, I decided to formulate hypotheses based on Crookall's work anyhow because of the following considerations: (1) In my opinion, Crookall's work represents (conceptually, though not methodologically) an important process-oriented approach to the study of OBEs, one that employs systematic classification of phenomenological characteristics and different types of experiences. Since Crookall's methods consist of subjective interpretations of OBE cases and his reports are unclear and disorganized in several respects, it was thought that his ideas deserved to be tested with a more systematic methodology (e.g.,

³ In these analyses with the chi-square test I left six comparisons of natural vs. enforced OBE phenomenology undone due to low frequencies in the cells of the 2 x 2 tables (less than five). Recent analyses of that data using Fisher's Exact Probability Test have failed to find significant results.

clear operational definitions, statistical analyses, and use of the same questions for all OB experiencers). (2) Even if there are no significant differences, it may be of interest to see if future studies in this and other cultures find similar percentages of reports of specific phenomenological characteristics in natural and enforced conditions.

Accordingly, and considering the specific OBE characteristics mentioned by Crookall (1964, pp. 134–136, 146), it was hypothesized that the following OBE phenomenological aspects were going to be reported more frequently during natural than during enforced OBEs: (1) getting out of and returning to the body through the head, (2) loss of consciousness or sensations of going through a dark tunnel or place (elements included in Crookall's concept of "blackout of consciousness") at the beginning and at the end of the experience, (3) horizontal position over physical body at the beginning and at the end of the experience, (4) ESP (here defined as a narrative description of the experience consistent with positive [not contradicted by] responses to questions indicating that the pericipient travelled to a location distant from the physical body, obtained information not known and impossible to infer, and verified that the information was true in some way),⁴ (5) cord or beamlike connection between OBE location and physical body (defined as a positive answer to a question asking for awareness of a connection with the physical body, together with a written description of a connection in the form of a cord or beam of light), (6) encounters with deceased persons (religious, mythical, or unidentified figures not included), and (7) shock on the physical body on rapid return.

It was also predicted that some phenomenological aspects of OBEs were going to differ in natural and enforced experiences in the following way: (1) visual perception: natural OBEs, clear and bright; enforced OBEs, confused and foggy; (2) thinking and mental clarity: natural OBEs, improved; enforced OBEs, worse; (3) feelings and mood: natural OBEs, improved; enforced OBEs, worse.

Natural and enforced were determined in this study by the respondent's indication of the circumstances under which his or her OBE occurred in response to a question including as possible answers the circumstances mentioned earlier when discussing Crookall's classification criteria. Since, following these criteria, a

⁴ These should be considered as ESP claims, since they were not checked by further inquiries. It should also be noted that this ESP definition is different from and more strict than the reports of obtaining information during the OBE mentioned in Study I, since it also considered a written description of the experience which sometimes was different from or inconsistent with other aspects of the question (for more details see Alvarado, *in press*).

combined natural and enforced OBE is possible (e.g., illness and drugs, exhaustion and voluntary induction), respondents were instructed to circle more than one answer to the question if necessary. An experience was considered natural only if no enforced category was circled among the responses given; any other responses (i.e., enforced, enforced and natural) defined an enforced OBE.

METHOD

Sample

The sample in the studies consisted of students at John F. Kennedy University (Orinda, California) enrolled in the School of General Studies, the School of Management, the Graduate School of Professional Psychology, the Graduate School of Consciousness Studies, and the School of Law. The students of the university are adults who generally have their own families and established careers.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire of 42 items was used in the study (available from the author on request); some of the items had different sections, and occasional spaces were provided for descriptions of OBE phenomenology.⁵ Most of the questions were of the multiple choice type. Questions regarding attitudes, altered states of consciousness experiences, and related practices (associated with the time of the reported OBE) were included, but this report will present only data related to OBE frequency, previous knowledge of the experience, phenomenology, and some demographic factors.

Procedure

Sign-up sheets were posted at different places in the university and were circulated by Kennedy professors in their classes for students to provide their names and addresses if they thought that they could answer affirmatively the OBE question on John Palmer's (1979) psychic experiences survey. This question was as follows: "Have you ever had an experience in which you felt that 'you' were located 'outside of' or 'away from' your physical body; that is, the feeling that your consciousness, mind or center of awareness was at a different place than your physical body?"

⁵ Several questions have been adapted from questionnaires developed by John Palmer and Ian Stevenson.

Students signed up with the understanding that they would later receive by mail a questionnaire asking for information related to their OBE. The questionnaire, but not the sign-up sheets, specified that when in doubt the person should answer "no" to the OBE question and that in the case of persons with more than one OBE, the questionnaire should be answered in terms of the most recent experience.

Only one mailing per person was made due to lack of funds. Mailings were made from the beginning of November through the second week of December, 1980. Analysis of the data began after January 15, 1981; questionnaires that arrived after that date were not included in the analysis.

Frequency data related to Crookall's analysis were tabulated by a person blind to the study's hypothesis.

RESULTS

Return Rates

Seventy-three questionnaires were returned, from which 61 usable responses were obtained. Some questionnaires were not used because they were sent by non-Kennedy students (i.e., Kennedy professors, students from other universities, and other outsiders) and because they reported OBEs other than the most recent one.

Characteristics of Respondents

Seventy percent of the respondents were female, while 30% were male. Most belonged to the Graduate School of Consciousness Studies (51%), while the rest were from Psychology (28%), General Studies (10%), Law (6%), and Management (5%). The following information concerns the circumstances which obtained at the time when the respondent had the reported OBE. The age distribution of respondents was 10 and under (5%), 11 to 20 (22%), 21 to 30 (41%), 31 to 40 (30%), 41 to 50 (2%). Most of the respondents were unmarried (54%); the rest were married (29%), separated or divorced (15%), or widowed (2%). Regarding education, 59% had college degrees, while the rest had had a high school education (21%) or less than high school (21%). More detailed information is presented elsewhere (Alvarado, in press).

Survey Findings: Study I.

General OBE Phenomenology

This section will present the findings of Study I and will briefly compare them with the findings of previous surveys. (Percentages

from Crookall [1964] and Wiedman and Haraldsson's [1980] studies have been computed from their data.)

Table 1 presents percentage data of the OBE phenomenology of the respondents. For reasons of space, not all the data will be mentioned in the text, but it can be found in the table.

General aspects. Eighty-one percent of the respondents reported more than one OBE, 19% had only a single experience. A similar trend was noticed in eight surveys (Blackmore, 1981, 1982b, 1982c;

Table 1

OBE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N = 61)

Item	Percentage
<i>Getting Out of the Body</i>	
Awareness of getting OB	35
Aware of going OB by:	
Complete body	47*
Head	42
Navel	0
Others	11
Loss of consciousness going OB	11
Passed through dark tunnel, enclosure, or place going OB	22
<i>Observations Related to Surroundings and OBE State</i>	
Position of physical body during OBE:	
Lying down	41
Sitting up	37
Standing	9
Other	9
Did not notice or remember	4
Mention of cord or beam-like connection	0
OB location when respondents realized they were OB:	
Horizontal over body	31
Far away from body	20
Vertical along body	15
Vertical above body	4
Above body	4
Indeterminate/no recollection or awareness	7
Other	19
OB location at end of OBE:	
Horizontal over body	27
Far away from body	24
Vertical along body	20
Vertical above body	7
Standing in room	4
Indeterminate/no recollection or awareness/unclear	13
Other	5

* This study describes phenomenological aspects of the OBEs of 18 survey respondents. References to this research should be evaluated by bearing in mind the small sample size.

Table 1 (Continued)

Item	Percentage
Type of self-perception:	
Without any body	35
Other body, similar to physical body	23
Cloud, mist, ball of light, point in space	13
No recollection	8
Other	20
Mental Processes During the OBE	
Awareness of connection with physical body	23
Thinking and mental clarity:	
Improved	53
Same	40
Worse	7
Feelings and mood:	
Improved	66
Same	20
Worse	14
Recollection of earlier life events	16
Perceptual Aspects During the OBE	
Visual perception:	
Clear, bright	36
Same as usual	24
Confused, foggy	14
No recollection/no vision	7
Other	18
Travelled and obtained information	33
Claimed to verify that information was veridical	47
Deceased persons seen	7
Music heard	8
Described as beautiful	80
Described as orchestral, choral, or instrumental	40
Impossible to classify	60
Return to the Body	
Awareness of returning to body	42
Aware of returning through:	
Complete body	80
Head	10
Navel	5
Other	5
Loss of consciousness returning to body	18
Passed through dark tunnel, enclosure or place returning to body	11
Return was:	
Gradual	32
Sudden	68
Shock felt in physical body on return	34

Note: Sample varies from question to question due to unacceptable answers (e.g., more than one response) and nonrespondents.

^a Figures in this column are those of the percentage of respondents with claims of the basic experience, not the percentage of the total sample.

Kohr, 1980; Myers et al., 1983; Palmer, 1979; Twemlow et al., 1982; Wiedman and Haraldsson, 1980), though four other studies reported the opposite (Blackmore, 1982a, p. 61, 1982c; Green, 1968; Poynton, 1975).

Prior knowledge of OBEs was claimed by 64% of the respondents. This stands in contrast to Osis' (1979) 42% and Poynton's (1975) 33% of prior knowledge of OBEs before the experience.

Getting out-of-the-body. Awareness of sensations of getting out of the body were reported by 35% of the respondents. Blackmore (1982a, p. 61) and Wiedman and Haraldsson (1980) reported a similar observation in 36% and 22% of their cases, but both Green (1968) and McCreery (1973) reported that most of their cases did not show any transition between usual consciousness and the OBE.

Eleven percent lost consciousness while going out, whereas 22% reported passing through a dark tunnel, enclosure, or other place on their way out. Crookall's (1964) 27% of "blackout" experiences including loss of consciousness and tunnel-like experiences compares favorably with the combined 33% of both experiences in the present survey.

Observations related to surroundings and to the OBE state. The respondents didn't report any cord or beam-like connections between OB position and physical body. In comparison, others have reported such percentages as 3.5% (Green, 1968), 8% (Blackmore, 1982a, p. 61), 9% (Poynton, 1975), and 20% (Crookall, 1964).

In terms of self-perception during the experience, 35% perceived themselves without any body, 23% in another body similar to the physical body, 13% as a cloud, mist, ball of light, or point in space, while the rest either had no recollection (8%), or described themselves in slightly different variations from the above categories, or could not see themselves (20%). Green (1968) also reported a predominance of OBEs without any body (80%), but Blackmore (1982a, p. 61), Osis (1979), Poynton (1975) and Twemlow et al. (1982) found a higher frequency of reports of a second body. As in the present study, Osis (1979) reported that 14% saw forms like a ball of energy or a point in space.

Mental processes during the OBE. Awareness of a connection with the physical body was reported by 23% of the respondents. (This refers to feelings towards the physical body, *not* to visible connections in the form of cords, etc.) Four other surveys have reported comparable responses (Green, 1968; Greyson and Stevenson, 1980; Twemlow et al., 1982; Wiedman and Haraldsson, 1980), with percentages ranging from 21 to 39.

The quality of OBE thinking and mental clarity, as compared to how the respondent felt before the experience, was improved in

53% of the cases, was the same in 40%, and worse in 7%. Green (1968) also reported improvement in most cases, but Wiedman and Haraldsson (1980) reported no difference at all between the proportion of those who claimed improved thinking and those who had no change.

OB feelings and moods, compared to those before the experience, showed that 66% improved, 20% stayed the same, and 14% got worse. Twemlow et al. (1982) also reported a superiority of calm, peaceful, and quiet feelings (83%), characteristics included in the description of "improved" in the questionnaire of the present study.

Perceptual aspects during the OBE. Visual perception was reported to be clear, bright by 36%, same as usual by 24%, confused, foggy by 14%, no recollection or no vision by 7%, and other responses (8%). Results somewhat consistent (though difficult to compare) with these findings are reported by Blackmore (1982c), who used a seven-point self-rating scale ranging from "totally clear" (1) to "very vague and dim" (7), finding an average rating of 2.3 for the visual modality. However, other results with a slightly different scale showed less clearness with a rating of 3.5 (Blackmore, 1982b).

Thirty-three percent claimed to have travelled someplace away from the body and obtained information about events not possible to know if the respondent was awake and in the same position as during the OBE. Of these respondents, 47% considered that they verified that the information obtained was true. (This should not be taken as ESP since most respondents, as seen in written descriptions of the experience, answered the question without following the instructions [e.g., referred to experiences close to the body or to unverifiable information]. See Alvarado [in press] for examples and additional comments on this issue.) Palmer (1979) reported 15% and 12% of claims of OB travels with veridical information obtained with townspeople and student samples, respectively, which is less than half of the present study's findings. Poynton (1975) reported 28% claims of veridical information during OBEs, which again is less than, although more comparable to, the present study. On the other hand, Myers et al. (1983) found that 40% of their sample claimed to have obtained information during the OBE, which is also similar to reports by Blackmore (1982b, 1982c), with small samples (less than 20).

Seeing deceased persons during the OBE (religious, mythical, and unidentified figures excluded) was reported by 7% of the respondents. Twemlow et al. (1982) found that 19% of those who saw some type of being ($N = 121$) reported seeing deceased persons. Crookall (1964) and Hart and collaborators (1956) reported 25%

and 21% of observations of this type, but it seems that they included unidentified figures.

Returning to the body. Awareness of sensations of getting into the body at the end of the experience was reported by 42% of respondents. Wiedman and Haraldsson (1980) reported 67% of respondents as aware of coming back, but Green (1968) found no such sensations in most of her cases.

In the process of entering the body, 18% of the respondents lost consciousness, and 11% passed through a dark tunnel, enclosure, or other place during their return. Crookall's (1964) 17% of "blackout" return experiences, including loss of consciousness and tunnel-like experiences, is lower than the combined 29% of both experiences in the present survey.

Survey Findings: Study II. *Natural vs. Enforced Comparisons*

Forty-six percent of the respondents had natural OBEs, while 54% had OBEs of the enforced type. Percentages of reports of OBE phenomenology in natural and enforced conditions, together with the results of the statistical tests used to assess the significance of the possible differences, are presented in Table 2. Chi-square tests were used with analyses with frequencies of five and over, and data with frequencies less than five were analyzed with Fisher's Exact Probability Test. None of the analyses, as seen in Table 2, were significant.

After the data was collected it was decided to test for Crookall's (1964) observation that persons who have natural OBEs are aware of sensations of leaving and returning to the body more frequently than those who report enforced OBEs. These post hoc analyses, as seen in items 1 and 2, Table 2, showed no significant differences. The same table shows that out of 15 nonsignificant comparisons between percentages of natural and enforced OBEs, 8 (53%) were in the direction opposite to that predicted (that is, enforced OBEs had higher frequencies than natural OBEs), 5 (33%) were in the expected direction, and 2 (13%) indicated no difference.

STUDY III: OBEs AND VIVIDNESS OF VISUAL IMAGERY

There has been much speculation about mental imagery and OBEs. Out-of-body experiences have been related to hallucinations (Rawcliffe, 1959), imagination (Osty, 1930), disturbances of the body image (Hebb, 1960), and visual imagery vividness (Burt, 1968). More recent speculations and studies have drawn upon current concepts and knowledge of hallucinations and the growing

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Table 2

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS CLAIMING OBE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES IN NATURAL AND ENFORCED CIRCUMSTANCES

Characteristic	Natural OBEs N = 28 ^a	Enforced OBEs N = 33 ^a	Direction in relation to hypotheses	Chi-square Exact probability
1. Awareness of going OB	26	42	Opposite direction	2.58*
a. Awareness of going OB through the head	29 ^b	50 ^b	Opposite direction	.330**
2. Awareness of sensations of returning to body	42	42	No difference	.08*
a. Awareness of returning through the head	0	15	Opposite direction	.064**
3. Lost consciousness or passed through dark tunnel or place going OB	25	32	Opposite direction	.81*
4. Lost consciousness or passed through dark tunnel or place returning to body	30	22	Expected direction	.15*
5. Horizontal position over physical body at the beginnings of the OBE	42	18	Expected direction	3.28*
6. Horizontal position over physical body at the end of the OBE	31	18	Expected direction	.67*
7. Awareness of cord or beam-like connection between OB position and physical body	0	0	No difference	—
8. Visual perception was: ^c				
Clear/bright	42	31	Expected direction	.338*
Confused/foggy	12	17	Expected direction	.501*
9. Thinking and mental clarity were: ^c				
Improved	48	57	Opposite direction	.107**
Worse	7	7	Opposite direction	.152**
10. Feelings and mood were: ^c				
Improved	61	71	Opposite direction	.371**
Worse	21	6	Expected direction	.75*
11. ESP	0	9	Opposite direction	
12. Dead people seen	4	9	Opposite direction	
13. Shock felt with sudden return to body	56	35	Expected direction	

Note: Some percentage columns do not add up to 100 due to rounding error.

^a Sample size varies from question to question due to unacceptable answers (i.e., more than one response, answers that do not address the question) and nonrespondents.

^b Figures in this column are those of the percentage of the respondents with claims of the basic experience, not the percentage of the total sample.

^c Only frequency data used in the analyses are presented in the table.

* Nonsignificant chi-square values of one degree of freedom, corrected for continuity.

** Fisher's Exact Probability Test.

field of mental imagery research (for a review see Blackmore, 1982a, pp. 164–176).

Several spontaneous OBE studies have explored possible relationships of the experience with vividness of visual imagery with little success. Irwin (1980) reported less visual vividness in OBE-experiencers as compared to the general population, but a later study did not find any difference (Irwin, 1981a). Blackmore (1982c) also was unsuccessful in finding significant differences between visual imagery vividness scores between OB and non-OB-experiencers.

The third study to be reported here explored possible differences in visual imagery vividness in various phenomenological OBE reports. H. J. Irwin (personal communication) has followed this line of research in testing for possible differences in imagery control scores between different OBE variables, without significant results.

Several OBE aspects were selected from the responses of previous surveys to test for possible differences in visual imagery vividness. They were selected because of the high frequency of responses to the items in question and because of the item's possible dependence on or relationship to visual aspects of the human information-processing system, in my estimation. Tests were planned with the following variables: (1) natural vs. enforced OBEs, (2) 1–5 vs. more than 5 OBE reports, (3) body-like self-perception during the OBE vs. no body perception, (4) clear/bright visual perception vs. combination of confused/foggy and same as usual reports, (5) improved thinking and mental clarity vs. combination of worse and same as usual reports, (6) claims of travels to distant places where information was obtained vs. no such claims.

METHOD

Sample

The sample in this study consisted of a subgroup of the respondents of Studies I and II who had agreed in response to the first questionnaire to participate in further OBE research.

Questionnaire

The Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire (VVIQ), a sixteen-item questionnaire developed by Marks (1973), was used to obtain scores of visual imagery vividness in the survey respondents. The questionnaire is generally considered to be a reliable and valid test (for reviews see Irwin, 1980; and White, Sheehan, and Ashton, 1977).

The VVIQ was originally scored by Marks (1973) by rating its items twice, in conditions with eyes open and eyes closed. The

present study did not ask respondents to answer the questionnaire in these two conditions since, as discussed by White et al. (1977), the rationale for such a procedure is unclear and there is evidence that there is no significant difference between the scores obtained in both conditions. Accordingly, the respondents were left to themselves as to how to follow the visualization instructions of the questionnaire as regards eyes closed or eyes open, and only one scoring was done.

Procedure

The VVIQ was mailed, together with a cover letter and a self-addressed and stamped reply envelope, to 42 persons in the previous studies who had expressed willingness to participate in further research. The VVIQ was sent in July, 1982, approximately a year and seven months after the last OBE questionnaires were mailed. A month later, a second questionnaire was mailed to those who had not returned the first one. No questionnaires arriving after September 30, 1982 were considered for analysis.

The cover letter tried to create the impression that the study was not related to the previous one by thanking each person for their cooperation in the earlier study and asking their help for a new study involving the enclosed questionnaire. It was hoped that this would reduce the possible effects of expectancy and other variables on the VVIQ scores.

RESULTS

Return Rates

Twenty-seven questionnaires were returned, from which 23 usable responses were obtained (some questionnaires were not used because they were not filled out completely or because more than one answer to each response was provided; a few questionnaires were returned as undeliverable by the post office). The Ns of some questionnaire items are less than 23 due to no responses or unacceptable responses (i.e., more than one answer, answers not referring to the item in question, etc.).

Characteristics of the Respondents

Sixty-one percent of the respondents were female and 39% were male. Most belonged to the Graduate School of Consciousness Studies (57%), while the rest were from the schools of Psychology (30%) and General Studies (13%). Age of the respondents at the time of the OBE ranged from 11 to 40 years; most fell in the 11-30 range (70%).

Survey Findings

Out of the six planned analyses, only four could be done due to low frequency of VVIQ scores in two variables (frequencies of two and three scores). As can be seen in Table 3, none of the analyses using independent mean *t* tests reach statistical significance. Post hoc analyses showed no significant differences between the VVIQ scores of male ($\bar{X} = 35.2$) and female ($\bar{X} = 35.4$) respondents ($t = -0.054$, $df = 21$, $p = 0.957$, two-tailed). An *F* test for variance differences was also nonsignificant ($F = 1.717$, $df = 13, 8$, $p = 0.449$, two-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Study I

One aspect that should be considered in assessing the importance of the OBE phenomenological data presented here is that of sample bias, since more than half of the survey respondents belonged to the Graduate School of Consciousness Studies, where interest in and experience with psychic phenomena and altered states of consciousness could be presumed to be higher than in the general

Table 3

MEAN VVIQ SCORE DIFFERENCES IN RELATION TO OBE PHENOMENOLOGY

Item	Mean Scores	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> ^a
Natural/Enforced OBEs			
Natural	38.3	1.47	n.s.
Enforced	33.1		
OBE Frequency			
1-5	36.7	1.39	n.s.
Over 5 Reports	30.5		
OBE Self-Perception			
Body Similar to Physical			
Without Body	37.1	.19	n.s.
Visual Perception	35.3		
Clear, Bright	36.2		
Same/Confused, Foggy			
Thinking and Mental Clarity			
Improved	33.1	1.47	n.s.
Same/Worse	38.5		
Travelled and Obtained Information			
Yes			
No	34.9		

Note: Sample size varies from question to question due to nonrespondents and unacceptable answers (e.g., more than one response).

^a All *p* values are two-tailed.

^b No means were calculated for variables with less than five responses.

population. However, the findings of this study do not seem to present striking differences with other OBE surveys with more representative samples, though there are a few minor differences. On the whole the results presented here are not atypical compared with other investigations of OBE phenomenology.

In this study 35% of the respondents were aware of sensations of getting out of the body, which is consistent with the findings of other studies regarding the low frequency (but by no means rareness) of this sensation as compared with greater percentages of absence of such reports (Blackmore, 1982a, p. 61; Green, 1968; McCreery, 1973; Wiedman and Haraldsson, 1980). This should be noted in view of the importance given by some writers to such reports in defense of externalization OBE concepts (Crookall, 1964) or in pointing out problems for psychological OBE models (Rogo, 1982).

The findings of this study suggest that the OB state is generally a positive experience as regards mental and perceptual processes, since there was a clear preponderance of improvement in thinking and mental clarity, feelings and mood, and visual perception as compared to more negative reports and also, to some extent, with "same as usual" reports. Other surveys have reported similar trends (Green, 1968; Twemlow et al. 1982).

One problem with all these comparisons is that few of the OBE studies mentioned in this paper have used the same definitions of the OBE and of its phenomenological aspects, nor have they used the same questions. It is to be hoped that future explorers of OBE phenomenology will coordinate their efforts so that different studies in the future will be more comparable. In this way our knowledge of the experience's characteristics and its incidence may be more solid, since at present we can only make superficial and perhaps unreliable generalizations.

This approach should be extended to OBE studies in cultures other than the American and British samples that have characterized most spontaneous OBE research. Comparison of OBE characteristics in different cultures or groups may also be of interest (see Winkelman, 1982 for a discussion of issues and methodological aspects to be considered in cross-cultural studies).

Study II

The results of the natural vs. enforced OBE comparison, together with the previously published analysis of Crookall's original data (Alvarado, 1981; see also footnote 3 of this paper), do not support Crookall's claims of significant differences between these OBE groups, though the small sample size of the present study and

of the enforced OBEs collected by Crookall (37 enforced vs. 214 natural OBEs) should be considered in assessing the quantitative analyses of the alleged OBE phenomenological differences. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the available evidence does not support the opinions of those who hold that this aspect of Crookall's work is an important discovery and a contribution to OBE research (Bayless, 1973; Rogo, 1978). It may be claimed, as Rogo (1978) argues, that there is still "a strong *qualitative* difference between these two groups of cases" (p. 31). However, a more exact definition of "strong" is needed (which is the purpose of using statistical analyses) and too much is made of research that has not been independently replicated so as to be sure that the qualitative trends represent consistent findings. The present study shows that the proportion and qualitative superiority of natural OBE reports over enforced ones is not as consistent as indicated in Crookall's data (see Crookall's [1964] data and items Nos. 1, 1a, 2a, 3, 9, 10, 11, and 12 in Table 2 of this report, which show an opposite trend), though the results may be a reflection of the small sample of cases used in the study. Further work on this topic should be done with larger samples.

The concept of natural and enforced OBEs itself may be questioned, since it is assumed that the first is gradual and spontaneous and the second sudden and induced just because the OBE is reported in specific conditions which are no guarantee of anything. A better approach may be to deal with gradual-sudden variables more directly by asking the respondents if they felt that their OBEs were sudden or gradual, or by using some type of objective criteria to define a sudden and a gradual OBE based on a description of the experience. A similar approach may be tried with comparisons of spontaneous vs. induced OBEs, OBEs happening in situations of stress and physical activity vs. OBEs happening in relaxed and inactive states, altered states vs. usual states of consciousness OBEs, drug vs. non-drug-induced OBEs, and many other possible comparisons. The recent work of Gabbard et al. (1981) comparing OBE phenomenology in near-death vs. non-near-death circumstances is a good example of this approach to the study of OBE characteristics as related to other variables.

Study III

The lack of significant differences in visual imagery vividness scores between different OBE variables is consistent with the lack of reliable correlations found between this type of imagery and OBE occurrence (for a review see Blackmore, 1982a). Perhaps this line of research exploring psychological correlates of phenomeno-

logical OBE differences may be more fruitful if other variables for which there is better evidence of a positive relationship with the OBE, such as fantasy-proneness (Myers et al., 1983; Wilson and Barber, 1983) and absorption capacity (Irwin, 1980, 1981c; Myers et al., 1983), are considered. Will high fantasy-prone persons report a higher frequency of reports of travels to different dimensions or locations during an OBE, seeing deceased entities or other beings, "paradise" sceneries, or panoramic memory review than persons with low fantasy-prone tendencies? Following Irwin (1981c), it may be speculated that absorption may be positively correlated with OB tunnel experiences, since the person's attentional resources may be focused on internal processes, thus rendering them relatively oblivious to the surroundings. The same reasoning may be applied to an OB-experient's observation of the physical body and OB form, and perhaps to other OB characteristics.

Other psychological aspects, such as belief, may also be considered. It may be hypothesized that encounters with deceased entities and travels to other "OB dimensions" may be related to the degree of belief in life after death that the respondents hold. The sheep-goat effect may be explored in ESP incidents during the OBE, as I tried to do elsewhere (Alvarado, in press).

GENERAL REMARKS

Though considerable frequency information of OBE phenomenological characteristics has been collected, almost nothing has been done to relate such data to other conditions or variables. This trend, however, seems to be changing in terms of the OBE as a single phenomenon (e.g., Blackmore, 1982b; Irwin, 1980; Myers et al., 1983; Palmer, 1979; Twemlow et al., 1982), but a similar approach to the study of OBE phenomenological aspects is also needed. This type of research not only will increase our knowledge of OBE phenomenology, but may possibly lead us to classify different types of OBEs and their relation to other variables, which may also help us to control the experience and to obtain further insights about its nature.

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